

Submission  
No 53

**INQUIRY INTO RATIONALE FOR, AND IMPACTS OF,  
NEW DAMS AND OTHER WATER INFRASTRUCTURE IN  
NSW**

**Organisation:** Macquarie River Food & Fibre

**Date Received:** 22 September 2020

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Portfolio Committee No 7  
Planning and Environment  
Legislative Council  
Sydney NSW 2000



Committee,

**RE: Inquiry into rationale for, and impacts of, new dams and other water infrastructure in NSW**

***Macquarie River Food and Fibre (MRFF) is an industry body representing water licence holders who are ground and surface water users in the Macquarie Valley Catchment. We represent and support over 500 water entitlement licence holders and their communities.***

***MRFF members are food and fibre producers contributing to the economic, social and environmental health of the Macquarie Valley.***

We refer to the call for submissions by this committee in relation to the proposed Macquarie River re-regulating storage project (**MRRR**) at Gin Gin, NSW under the above enquiry.

We have been consulted directly by Water NSW regarding the project and are supportive of it proceeding as proposed subject to the conclusion of the appropriate planning, environmental and engineering assessments. The project will provide a new piece of infrastructure to replace a dated and failing weir that will provide;

1. Greater sustainability in the Macquarie River system through improved water operations and environmental outcomes as the focus of the project;
2. Contribute to long term water security in the system for all users, agriculture and communities alike;
3. Provide Water NSW with an effective piece of infrastructure to mitigate drought conditions into the future;
4. Provide a positive contribution economically and socially through improved river operations resulting in greater reliability of productivity along the river supporting local communities.

Below we note the specific terms of reference we would like to address and provide the following commentary to support the position reached by Macquarie River Food and Fibre (**MRFF**);

- a) ***the need for the projects, including the historical allocation of water and consideration of other options for ensuring water security in inland regions;***

1. The project was identified and initiated following Infrastructure NSW recommendations in the 2014 State Infrastructure Strategy;
2. The project is required to replace an existing structure that was built over 100 years ago that is failing and no longer serviceable for regulating river flows;
3. An option was considered to attempt to remediate and augment the existing structure however was deemed costly and ineffective from an engineering point of view given the outdated construction methods and existing condition of the weir;
4. We note that the proposed weir does not alter or change the allocation of water for users which is controlled by the Water Sharing Plans (**WSP**) that are in effect;
5. We note that the existing Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) in the Macquarie – Cudgegong WSP is approximately 27%, of which are not, and have not been achieved for some time (currently approx. 15-17%). The SDL will not change under this proposal, however more efficient river management with reduced losses may help industry get closer to the SDL as required under the MDB Plan.

***c) the environmental, cultural, social and economic impacts of the projects, including their impact on national or state water agreements, or international environmental outcomes;***

1. Subject to the environmental studies to be concluded, we believe the project will have a positive impact on the environment through modernisation of a failing piece of infrastructure;
2. The proposal will provide a fish passage not in existence currently and unable to be added to the existing damaged weir;
3. Provides for tributary flows to pass through the weir and not be captured providing water downstream to the environment. This is not possible in some circumstances with the existing structure;
4. The proposed weir enables Water NSW to improve river operations through a reduction in rainfall rejection and transmission losses. This should contribute to an overall improvement of water availability for all water users including the environment and agriculture;
5. The proposed weir will contribute to Water NSW ability to mitigate drought conditions more effectively into the future;
6. Greater reliability of supply of water to all users results in more reliable productivity and positive economic and social contribution to agricultural based communities and economies along the river;
7. Greater reliability of supply benefits all environmental user of water, but specifically provides greater reliability to the RAMSAR wetlands in the Macquarie Marshes;
8. As we understand it there is no change to any existing water agreements or the way that water is allocated or managed other than a greater reliability of supply to meet those targets under the agreements through improved management;

***d) the impacts of climate change on inland waterways, including future projections, and the role of dams and other mass water storage projects in ensuring security of water supply for social, economic and environmental outcomes;***

1. We understand this to be a temporary storage facility for limited periods of time to regulate and improve river operations;
2. We have outlined above some of the benefits which would include greater reliability of water to all users;
3. We note that inundation levels remain a concern of the broader community, but remain confident this will be managed appropriately once the appropriate environmental and engineering studies are concluded.

**e) *water infrastructure technologies that may promote enhanced environmental outcomes;***

1. The proposal is a modern approach to weir technology that provides greater environmental outcomes through the inclusion of the fish passage way and passage of tributary flows not possible under the existing conditions;
2. The proposal also includes a much lower “low water flow level”, providing water in extreme drought conditions for longer to the environment, including the RAMSAR wetlands.

We trust that the above provides a concise and objective opinion of the impacts of the project. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require more information or wish to discuss the matter further.

Sincerely,

Michael Drum  
Executive Officer  
Macquarie River Food and Fibre