

Submission  
No 60

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

**Organisation:** Environmentally Concerned Citizens of Orange  
**Date Received:** 21 September 2020

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To whom it may concern,

This submission concerning the above project has been lodged on behalf of the Environmentally Concerned Citizens of Orange (ECCO). We are a group which advocates for environmental values at local, regional and state levels. We thank you for the opportunity to express our opposition to the above project which seeks to further divert environmental water from the already stressed Macquarie river system for the use of sectional and vested commercial interests.

Water allocations and the basis for justifying this project is based on flawed data. Information used to justify this proposal has been obtained from 2004 data, and as such has not taken into account the worsening of conditions caused by the ongoing drought and the ever increasing influence of climate change. If we are to retain a healthy river system we must work within the constraints of the above influencers and model future water management strategies taking into account climate change and the problems it causes.

The project pays little heed to the impact it would have on the environmental flows from the Macquarie river tributaries such as the Talbragar and Bell rivers. Increasing the capacity of the Macquarie re regulating weir has the potential to capture more tributary inflows, diverting more water from the environment. A significant portion of the inflows will be environmental water. The result will be more water available for general security use at the expense of the environment.

The inflow from the upstream tributaries of the Macquarie are of critical importance for the survival of aquatic life in the Macquarie river system. The benefits of natural flows, which include the transportation of nutrients will be interrupted by the weir to the detriment of the riverine ecosystem. Of particular concern is the impact the project would have on the iconic Ramsar listed Macquarie Marshes. Further extraction from the system will result in drier conditions in the marshes, thereby reducing their capacity to support wildlife and reduce their connectivity to the Barwon-Darling river system.

The Macquarie Marshes are recognised as one of the most important waterbird breeding sites in Australia. We are under a legal obligation to protect this site, not contribute to its already diminished state. There has been a notice of "change of character" issued in 2010 because of the alarming deterioration of the condition of the Macquarie Marshes. Change of inflow rates was identified as the cause. If this project proceeds flow rates will be significantly impacted, adversely affecting the habitat of 14 species of migratory birds, 10 colonial nesting species, and a total of 233 species of native birds including 77 species of water bird, some of which are listed as critically endangered. The Marshes also provide habitat for species of native fish, reptiles, mammals, amphibians and endemic plants.

Of particular concern is the impact the re regulator would have on the native fish that inhabit the affected area of the river. Some of these are listed as endangered, and in some instances critically so. A short distance downstream of the proposed site is one of the few remaining breeding river stretches of the endangered Murray Cod. The impact of the proposed weir will make the area unsuitable for spawning. The newly created zone will drastically alter and remove conditions and habitat necessary for the survival of this iconic fish.

Additionally increased inundation caused by the permanent increase in river height will permanently submerge the old growth river red gums that grow along the affected stretch of the river. This will cause them to drown, thereby removing a vital part of the riverine ecology.

It is obvious that the purpose of the project is to make more water available for sale to water security customers. As the water is purchased from New South Wales government agencies it would be a conflict of interest if New South Wales was allowed to assess this project, as in this case it is also the

proponent .As this is the case and because of the fact that it will have a significant impact on water management at a national level, it should be assessed Federally.

The Macquarie Re-regulator is one of several major NSW dam projects that are being hastily fast tracked, and are currently the subject of an Upper House inquiry. Each of these is part of a process which lacks due diligence and proper process when it comes to environmental assessment. If this lack of due process is permitted and these projects are allowed to go ahead, the consequences for the western rivers and the Murray Darling Basin are dire. We will once again be faced with drying rivers and mass fish kills.

Nick King  
Secretary  
Environmentally Concerned Citizens of Orange  
September 21, 2020