Submission No 101

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

Organisation: Water Northern Rivers

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WATER Northern Rivers

To the Committee N0. 7 – Planning and Environment

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission towards your Enquiry into the rationale for, and impacts of, new dams and other water infrastructure in NSW.

We (WATER Northern Rivers) are an alliance of citizens concerned that our region and others in NSW can benefit from the suite of water options made possible by modern technologies, in particular rainfall-independent options such as purified recycled water, and, for communities on the coast, desalination.

Our interest has been sparked by a proposal for an additional 50GL dam in the Northern Rivers at Dunoon without sufficient analysis and costing of options that confer resilience on a water system, including investment in system-wide water efficiency. We object to the proposed Dunoon Dam because it would divert us from developing a resilient water system that combines complementary water supply and management options, and because the dam would destroy rare lowland rainforest, endangered ecological communities, and important Aboriginal Heritage.

The context for water planning is changing rapidly. Just in the last few weeks, two important documents have emerged that propose we re-orient the way we think about water. Both documents recommend that we embrace a suite of water management options to ensure water security. We would like to encourage the members of this committee of enquiry to read them and embrace their recommendations:

> **All Options on the Table** (Water Services Association of Australia, August 2020).[1]
> This report advises water authorities to invest in a "diverse portfolio of water supply sources, multiple rainfall dependent and independent sources to balance security, cost and other network constraints".
>
> **The NSW Productivity Commission green paper.[2]**
> Draft recommendations include: Improve water governance and planning; Unlock efficiencies and opportunities through coordination and collaboration; Address the barriers to using new water sources; Improve the performance of local water utilities in the regions; Keep improving efficiency in our day-to-day water usage

We are concerned that dams are diverting expenditure away from the effective solutions proposed in these documents. Of particular concern is the fact that dams are a high risk investment because they are rainfall-dependent in regions becoming hotter and dryer due to climate change.

We encourage the NSW Government to grasp the opportunity afforded by contemporary technologies to ensure water security in regions by:

- Governance reform, where this would assist water utilities to deploy a suite of smart water options.

[1] All Options on the Table, WSAA, 2020 https://www.wsaa.asn.au/sites/default/files/publication/download/FINAL%20Urban%20water%20supply%20options%20for%20Australia.pdf

[2] NSW Productivity Commission Green Paper 2020 http://productivity.nsw.gov.au/green-paper/water-energy

- Funding for innovative technologies that are not rainfall-dependent.
- Investments in system-wide water efficiency and strong demand management. Analysed, costed and deployed, creating jobs. Using this approach, Sydney added an additional 950,000 people without a rise in consumption.[3]
- Water reuse in various forms, including Purified Recycled Potable water. A wealth of global research and experience already exists regarding potable reuse of water as set out in Water Research Australia's report, *Potable Water Reuse: What can Australia learn from global experience*?[4]
- Water harvesting via urban runoff & rainwater tanks: Water tanks on all new (and existing) developments. The Australian government advises that: "Depending on tank size and climate, mains water use can be reduced by up to 100%. This in turn can help: reduce the need for new dams or desalination plants; protect remaining environmental flows in rivers; reduce infrastructure operating costs." Rainwater harvesting also decreases stormwater runoff, thereby helping to reduce local flooding and scouring of creeks.[5]
- Groundwater, where this is environmentally safe.

Dams have a massive impact on biodiversity, areas of high environmental value, habitat and indigenous cultural sites. The proposed Dungowan Dam, the Mole River are examples of areas of high environmental value.

With regard to the proposed Dunoon Dam we are also very concerned about

- Desecrating Indigenous culture: Dunoon has an extensive and rich cultural landscape belonging to the Widjabal-Wiyabal People of the Bundjalung nation. Should the dam proceed, important Indigenous archeological sites, burial grounds, creation waterholes and artefacts would be destroyed.
- Destruction of the Endangered Ecological Community of Lowland Rainforest, comprising part of the 1% that remains of the Big Scrub Rainforest that once covered the Northern Rivers. This lowland rainforest is of outstanding national and global significance, being a biodiversity hotspot, and with rainforest lineages stretching back to Gondwana flora assemblages.
- Destruction of habitat of threatened flora and fauna species[6]. .
- Destruction of the regionally rare rainforest on sandstone in The Channon Gorge, a refugium that has been minimally disturbed
- Flooding of half of the popular Whian Whian Falls recreational area and in high rainfall periods the dam would make the main Falls unusable.
- The proposed Dunoon dam would accelerate extinction of vulnerable species. Extinction level pressures on 3 vulnerable fish species due to destruction of 6kms and genetic islanding of over 18 kms of migratory native fish habitat. Extinction pressure on 9 threatened plant species, and 17 threatened fauna species[7].
- The proposed dam would destroy koala habitat and movement pathways connecting Whian Whian, Dunoon and The Channon, increasing extinction pressure on koalas.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our submission in your enquiry.
We look forward to hearing the outcome.

Annie Kia
On behalf of WATER Northern Rivers

[3] Metropolitan Water Plan 2006, NSW Government
[4] https://www.waterra.com.au/publications/document-search/?download=1806
[5] https://www.yourhome.gov.au/water/rainwater
[6] Rous County Council, Dunoon Dam Terrestrial Ecology Impact Assessment, 2011
[7] Rous County Council, Dunoon Dam Terrestrial Ecology Impact Assessment, 2011