

Submission
No 122

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

Organisation: Friends of the Earth Australia

Date Received: 22 September 2020



SUBMISSION

Inquiry into the rationale, and impacts of, new dam construction
and other water infrastructure in NSW

Introduction

Friends of the Earth is a member based organisation working for social and environmental Justice for 45 years. Our River Country Campaign have worked with groups throughout the Murray Darling since 2000, the campaigns mission is to “To see a flourishing Murray-Darling Basin where Traditional Owners enjoy sovereign rights to country”. Our interest in this inquiry is for the protection of sacred land; water and food supply; and ecosystems of local, national and global significance. The Murray-Darling Basin is in critical condition, and in recent years there has been too little water flowing through the system to maintain the environment, communities or supply family owned agriculture.

We are a member group of the Inland Rivers Network and the Lifeblood Alliance and we support the detailed submissions lodged on behalf of those groups. Friends of the Earth’s River Country Campaign is opposed to new dams in NSW as instream storage infrastructure presents a great risk to our rivers. Countries around the world are working to remove existing dams because of the growing awareness of the benefits of free-flowing rivers and the increased costs of maintaining old dams.

Dams don’t make water, they only take it from one place to another and store it. By rushing through large projects without proper scrutiny we face irreparable environmental damage, great risk to Aboriginal culture and way of life across the basin.

We request the following new water infrastructure projects adhere to best practice environmental and economic assessment and thorough community consultation is complete before any construction begins:

- Wyangala Dam Wall Raising
- Mole River Dam
- Dungowan Dam
- Macquarie Re-Regulating Weir
- Darling Rivers Western Weir Projects including changes to Menindee Lakes

We oppose the projects as they stand, for the following reason:

No Transparency

- Dams are being rushed through without due process.
- Business cases, Environmental Impact Studies (EIS) and hydrological reports are incomplete or not publicly available and or not even commenced.
- For example, the Wyangala Dam EIS only considers the area project not the environmental impacts downstream. The Darling River Western weirs project has no EIS.
- Many affected communities are deeply opposed to the projects and their concerns are been ignored to date.
- Construction will begin on some projects before public consultation is complete.

Expensive and unjustified

- Many new dams are economically irresponsible. The full cost for many projects is unknown as business cases are lacking, but the total bill will be in the hundreds of millions.
- The Wyangala dam expansion is estimated at \$650 million with a long term average yield of 21 gegalitres, up to 30 times the price of water on the water market.
- The business cases and hydrological modelling reports for Wyangala and Dungowan dams have not been made publicly available.
- Dams will damage tourism industries, downstream graziers and small irrigators.
- Many projects have no allocation to high security town water despite being pushed through as critical human need.

- There does not appear to be a feasibility study for Wyangala and Dungowan dams.
- The full cost of the Macquarie re-regulating weir is unknown, changes to credit allocations would improve water security without the need for new infrastructure.

Destruction of Sacred Sites and Aboriginal Culture

There's are 40 Indigenous nations in the Murray Darling Basin, all projects take place on sacred land where sovereignty was never ceded.

- Registered Aboriginal sacred sites will be destroyed at many project locations.
- All land is sacred, changes to hydrology, landscape and country without free, prior and informed consent from Traditional Owners is an act of ongoing colonisation.
- It is yet to be known if new dam projects comply with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984.

Environmental Impact

- The new dam projects will stop up to 770 GL of water from flowing downstream to RAMSAR wetlands, lakes and floodplains that provide habitat for migratory birds, native fish, turtles, frogs and other endangered species.
- Reduced flows impact river connectivity and water quality, which vital for the movement of native fish
- New dams inundate river channels that are not meant to be permanently flooded, killing centuries old river red gums and damaging habitat for small fish, insects and invertebrates.
- Environmental Impact Studies do not account for downstream impacts.

Potentially Unlawful

- These projects will undermine the outcomes that the Murray-Darling Basin Plan is trying to achieve.
- The Menindee Lakes and Yanco Creek projects are possibly unlawful under the Federal Water Act 2007.
- Some funding approvals may breach Government funding guidelines. For example, the Wyangala dam is partly funded by the Commonwealth Regional Investment Corporation. A loan of up to \$300 million has been announced, but it hasn't been approved.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this inquiry. We hope through this inquiry the public can access business cases, environmental impact statements and receive transparent public communication about the motivation to build new dams at this time. It's essential that free, prior and informed consent is granted by Traditional Owners before any construction begins.

The Murray Darling is the lifeblood of Australia and poorly administered new infrastructure could permanently damage our most valuable water resource.

I would be happy to be contacted with any questions regarding the above.

Sincerely,

Megan Williams, on behalf of Friends of the Earth Australia

River Country Coordinator

Friends of the Earth