

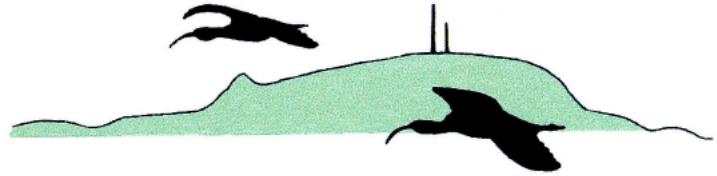
**INQUIRY INTO RATIONALE FOR, AND IMPACTS OF,
NEW DAMS AND OTHER WATER INFRASTRUCTURE IN
NSW**

Organisation: Orange Field Naturalist and Conservation Society
Date Received: 22 September 2020

**ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST
& CONSERVATION SOCIETY INC.**

PO Box 369

ORANGE NSW 2800



NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into New Dams in NSW

In particular the proposal to raise the wall at Wyangala Dam

Dear Sir/Madam

On behalf of the Orange Field Naturalist and Conservation Society (OFNCS) I am writing to strongly object to the proposal to raise the Wyangala Dam wall on the Lachlan River. A 53% increase in the dam's capacity will have significant impacts on downstream environments and endangered species due to reduced and changed flows. The raised water level and resultant inundation will also impact upstream environments, Endangered Ecological Communities, and threatened species.

OFNCS is composed of community members, amateur and professional naturalists, conservationists, and scientists who have a keen interest in the future of the environment. It has been an advocate for the environment in the Central West since its inception in 1974. Some of the headwaters of the Lachlan River are in the Orange area.

It is inappropriate that this proposal is being fast tracked without an adequate Environmental Impact Statement and limited consultation. The preliminary EIS was inadequate. It only considered the immediate area of impact. This EIS stated that *'The Lachlan River endangered ecological community is located downstream of the Wyangala Dam. Any changes to operational requirements associated with the raising of the dam wall may reduce the amount of water that is available for environmental flow release and ecosystem maintenance.'* However, no detailed assessment of this impact was undertaken. The increase of the dam's capacity by 650 GL will significantly change the natural flows, and amount of water in the Lachlan River downstream of the dam. These changes will affect the health of the river.

The raising of the dam wall will capture flood water and flows that are critical to the Lower Lachlan Wetlands. These include the Great Cumbung Swamp, Booligal Wetlands and Lachlan Swamp. They are listed in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan as some of its 18 key environmental assets. The flood water, which is important to sustain the wetlands and allow bird breeding events will no longer reach the wetlands. It will also impact Lake Cowal, Lake Cargelligo and the regulated Lake Brewster. All these wetlands support threatened species of birds and migratory birds that are included in significant international Flyway agreements with Japan, Korea, and China.

Little consideration has been given to the affect of regulation and changes in flows on native fish species, their movement and breeding. The species include the critically endangered Silver Perch, endangered Macquarie Perch, and vulnerable Murray Cod.

These wetlands, endangered species of birds, fish and plants are already being affected by capture of water in the existing dam and are in decline. Reduced rainfall and higher temperatures are

forecast impacts of climate change and should be considered as they will speed up this decline. If it doesn't rain, there will be no water for anyone

The raising of the dam wall will deny usual water flows to communities in the lower Lachlan. The subsequent change in river health will also impact downstream stock and domestic users who do not have licences. In the proposal to capture 53% more water a key justification is to provide an extra 21.05 GL per year to general security water license holders. This is not critical and will only benefit a few in downstream communities. This is against the objectives of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. Increasing the capacity of the dam will create the expectation that the water will be there to be used from General Security licences and when it is not industry and the environment will suffer. No alternative water saving measures have been considered. Nor has using the \$650m for alternative regional investment strategies to support these communities.

Above the dam there will be significant impacts on Endangered Ecological Communities, threatened plant and fauna species and Aboriginal Heritage due to the raised water level and inundation. Table 5.1 acknowledges this. It seems these EEC's, especially the Box Gum Woodland community, where almost 95% of it has been disturbed or cleared, are suffering from 'threats by a thousand cuts'. This is a project that will destroy even more of the EECs and continue their significant decline. It will be extremely unlikely, if not impossible, to find suitable offsets of an adequate size.

Another concern of the Society is that no business case or cost benefit analysis has been released for the use of a significant amount of taxpayer money on this project. In addition, the aim to increase the amount of water available under licence creates a conflict of interest for Water NSW. They are the proponent but also the seller of the increased water licences available so their income will increase.

Other ways of improving water security are available and should be investigated and implemented. This includes a more effective Water Sharing Plan for the valley and a move away from industries that rely on high water usage in a drying climate.

Regards



Rosemary Stapleton,

Secretary

Orange Field Naturalist & Conservation Society

22nd September 2020.