

Submission
No 131

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

Organisation: Western Paddlers NSW

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Western Paddlers NSW Inc. Committee
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Parliament House
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Submission: Inquiry into the rationale for, and impacts of, new dams and other water infrastructure in NSW

Western Paddlers NSW (WPNSW) is a recreational paddle club based in the Central West of NSW. While we are concerned about all of the projects in this inquiry, the Wambuul/Macquarie River is the river we are based on, therefore we will write about that project.

As recreational paddlers, we love paddling on the Macquarie River and the Macquarie Marshes. We are concerned that this project would impact on the Macquarie Marshes by capturing some tributary flows and extracting more water from the river, and impact on the Macquarie River from the weir pool to everywhere downstream of the proposed structure.

We are concerned that the project would be using public funds to benefit one sector of the community – the irrigation sector. The project is not to increase town water supply, and would be detrimental to recreational users of the river – paddlers (less flows to paddle on, and less water for the Macquarie Marshes) and fishers (further altering and capturing natural flows that fish require to sustain healthy populations, and impacting on breeding sites of Murray Cod).

We want environmental flows to keep our river healthy. This project will reduce Planned Environmental Water as fully defined in the Water Management Act 2000, against the objectives of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

The project will create a weir pool up to 30km long, destroying all of the vegetation and habitat in that section of river, including beautiful and ecologically important old river red gums. It will also lower the water quality in that section of river, and turn flowing water into stagnant water that favours carp over native fish.

The project will reduce the volumes of Planned Environmental Water in the Macquarie River (as fully defined by the Water Management Act 2000), meaning less flows to the Macquarie Marshes and less flows that reach and connect with the Barwon River.

WPNSW have been engaged in the public consultation process for this project since the first round in November 2019. By that time, we note that the project was quite advanced, and according to WaterNSW documents consultation with other stakeholders had begun in mid 2018.

Under this project, 6.3% of low and medium flows to the Marshes will be lost. The Macquarie Marshes have already decreased in size since the irrigation boom of the

1990s. Massive reed beds and stands of river red gums have already been lost. Wetlands support bird breeding, biodiversity, and are a filter for the river. They are ecologically and economically important and we cannot afford to let them decline any more. Australia also has a legal obligation to protect the resilience of the Marshes under the Commonwealth Water Act 2007.

The reduction of flows to the Macquarie Marshes will have a significant impact on the habitat of many migratory birds listed under international agreements.

The impact of this project on threatened ecological communities and their habitat will be significant, including 4 plant species and 6 ecological communities, including river red gum communities. The loss of centuries old river red gums cannot be offset.

Threatened species that will be impacted by this proposal include 9 species of birds, 5 species of mammals, a reptile species and two species of fish (silver perch and Murray cod).

The flora and fauna of the Ramsar-listed Macquarie Marshes is relevant to the project area, as low and medium flows currently reaching the Marshes and sustaining the core wetland areas will be captured or reduced. The Macquarie Marshes supports 77 species of wetland birds, 156 woodland birds (which need plentiful waterholes to drink from), 3 turtle species, 15 frog species and 12 fish species.

WaterNSW have had a legal requirement to build fishways at Gin Gin and two other sites on the Macquarie River since safety upgrades on Burrendong dam wall in 2011, and they have never been built.

The Macquarie Valley is over allocated, and the rules in the water sharing plan allow the dam to be emptied very quickly. Water is allocated for sale before it even falls as rain, as reported in the media. The Macquarie was cut off at Warren last year, and the river below dried up. It was a very distressing time for the community and lots of animals died.

As the climate becomes even warmer, we think a project that will increase the volume of water taken from the river is a bad idea.

Yours Sincerely

Kylie Field

Western Paddlers NSW