

Submission  
No 132

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

**Organisation:** Upper Lachlan Landcare

**Date Received:** 22 September 2020

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Upper Lachlan Landcare  
September 2020

DRAFT – Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry (and other representations)

The Water NSW Proposal to Expand Wyangala Dam on the Lachlan River, NSW

This response to the NSW Government proposal to raise the height of the Wyangala Dam wall by some 10 metres is submitted on behalf of the Upper Lachlan Landcare.

Upper Lachlan Landcare has been actively involved in an area covering much of the catchment for Wyangala Dam. We are a community organisation made up principally of landholders looking at natural resource management issues on private and public land. Our focus is on repairing the damage done to the landscape, regenerative & sustainable agriculture practices, protecting remnant vegetation patches and endangered species, and generally looking to increase eco-literacy and build the strength, diversity and resilience of local ecosystems.

We have liaised with our Landcare members, their landholder neighbours and other stakeholders to prepare this response.

To date we have limited information on the proposal by NSW Water on behalf of NSW Government. Even our Landcare members who are directly impacted by the proposal have had limited contact. We have many concerns which focus on:

- weed control,
- feral animal control,
- transparency,
- benefit of the scheme,
- lack of work on water compliance in our area,
- dramatic changes as the area we are in (the catchment for Wyangala Dam) becomes more peri urban in its land use with greater water harvesting resulting in less water in flow to the dam,
- continuing erosion – specifically sheet erosion – and its impact on siltation of the river and the dam.

Many of our members remain perplexed by the rationale behind the dam wall increase. We would urgently like access to the data showing the return on investment and likely water yield of the higher wall. Particularly in light of lower rainfall expectations in the years and decades ahead.

Reduced rainfall in the last 20 years, most likely due to climate change, is set to continue. The dam was at 4.5% in 2009. A higher wall does not make it rain more.

Then there is a lack of confidence in the people who manage water in this state. Over allocation has been a hallmark of the Lachlan irrigation water (and NSW irrigation water more generally) for many decades. Who benefits from this wall lifting? Local or international players? Almond farms or those producing fodder in a drought? A water expert characterised water management in the Lachlan as driven by two things; “ignorance and greed”. We are yet to be convinced, given the scant information on offer, that this has changed. Please convince us otherwise.

Many landholders are sceptical of the benefits of more drought feed being available given the obvious corruption and mismanagement of irrigation water in the Murray Darling Basin. We

require clear signs of who the beneficiaries of this proposal are. Professor Peter Cullen once described the Lachlan River as the most over allocated and politically corrupt river system in Australia. We would like confidence that this is not a further waste of public money and an ill conceived plan by people ignorant of the big picture complexities of landscape & water management.

Meanwhile, other pressing issues are ignored or glossed over. We require information about the whole-of-landscape approach.

How is it that the parliamentary enquiry is not due until 2021 yet construction commences in Oct 2020. Likewise the EIS due mid 2021 yet construction commencing 2020. Cart before the horse. Or is this a rubber stamping process in the political/planning realm now? Community consultation has been light to say the least and left until the politicians have had their "Utopia-like" sod turning moments. Is this a purely political exercise?

Water mismanagement has become systemic and corruption has followed. Already there is a lack of transparency here. More information must flow. Are there any connections of the decision makers to the beneficiaries?

We suggest greater assistance for catchment landholders to address erosion and to manage their lands in ways to optimise runoff of clean water into Wyangala Dam and the Lachlan river system;

Additionally increased support for local communities and relevant research agencies to better understand and manage the broader Lachlan catchment environment. In particular silt flows and erosion rates. At a time when both federal and state funding to our local Landcare groups has been dramatically reduced, it is of great concern that we will potentially be expected to do more as a result of this project, whilst operating with fewer resources. This should be addressed.

Water NSW has not been a good neighbour for feral animal control. Goats and pigs pose the greatest threat both to the environment and the agriculture sector not to mention their ability to be vectors of exotic disease spread. Both species along with foxes are in abundance around the dam currently. What is the plan to control them now and into the future?

Weeds are a concern. The area around the dam is characterised by 3 weeds. Serrated tussock. BlackBerry and Coolatai Grass. Increasingly this insidious weed, Coolatai, is becoming prevalent in this part of our area. There are concerns that, particularly Coolatai Grass, that is located on the northern end of Foggs Crossing Rd, has the potential to be spread along the Foggs Crossing Rd where roadworks will be undertaken. Contractors undertaking the work will need to put protocols in place to minimise the spread of weeds from one area to other areas around the dam. ie. Cleaning down machinery and spraying out weed infested areas before earth-work commences. What measures have been allowed for here? The biosecurity threat posed by the dam workforce and construction equipment is of concern to Landcare and local landholders.

The current dam surrounds are notorious for rampant blackberries and Serrated Tussock both problem weeds in the Upper Lachlan Council areas as well as surrounding local government areas.

Traffic. No information is available on traffic flow, heavy vehicle traffic flow, associated with this construction. These roads are inadequate for this purpose now. What is planned (if anything!)? What about the extremely valuable trees on the road edges? Are they certain of being spared? These old (150-450 years) trees are essential for any number of fauna species as both habitat and feeding resources. Are they being assessed, protected and by whom and how?

Raising the wall raises the water level of the dam and trees will be lost. How many? What are the Impacts? Clearly this decision would not have been made without access to such information. What is it not shared before now?

In conclusion, the members of the Upper Lachlan Landcare would be pleased to assist the Review in any further way including expansion on the concerns or issues raised above, or provision of supplementary information.

Yours sincerely,

Vince Heffernan  
Chair  
Upper Lachlan Landcare

September 2020