

**Submission
No 136**

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

Name: Mr Andrew Paul
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WaterNSW
Parliament House 22 September 2020
6 Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Re: Macquarie River Re-regulating Storage Project Proposal 2020/8652

Dear Members of Parliament concerned with this proposal

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above matter.

Daroo Landcare is part of Central Tablelands Landcare and works particularly in the restoration and rehabilitation of Wentworth Reserve in Orange. Daroo Landcare also acts as advocates by making submissions on matters that may affect threats to landcare, such as inappropriate developments that do not work to preserve, protect and improve the natural environment.

Daroo Landcare is opposed to the above proposal for a re-regulating weir on the Macquarie River at Gin Gin for the following reasons:

The impact on the Ramsar listed Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve, also the Wilgara Wetland, will be significant despite referral to Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, in Matters of National Environmental Significance concluding otherwise.

Natural flows from unregulated Bell River, Little River, Talbragar River and Coolbaggie Creek will be captured behind the massive weir. These flows mimic the natural flow regime on which many ecological processes and organisms depend and are vital contributors to large floods that reach the Macquarie Marshes. The marshes provide habitat for a mosaic of different types of vegetation as well as for native reptiles, many species of native fish, small and large native mammals, native frogs, and hundreds of plant species.

Migratory species listed for consideration as Matters of National Environmental Significance use the Macquarie Marshes during migration; nationally threatened bird species will be affected by any loss of water as they rely on triggers and stimuli from these flows for survival, breeding and recruitment.

The site is extremely significant; it provides some of the most important breeding areas for waterbird populations in Australia. Straw-necked Ibis, Glossy Ibis, Intermediate and Great Egrets, Nankeen Night Heron, cormorants, ducks, grebes, wading birds, and the nationally endangered Australasian Bittern and Australian Painted Snipe that breed in the reed bed swamps, utilise the Marshes.

The facts mentioned above are well documented. Daroo Landcare does not comprehend why WaterNSW has put forward this re-regulating proposal that includes so little concern for the environment, and seems to consider many of the detrimental effects of the weir as 'insignificant'. These effects cannot be considered as 'insignificant'.

Water captured by the proposal will become essentially a 30km upstream weir pool. It will have devastating effects on the riverine environment; riparian vegetation will be killed, not only the River Red Gums *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* due to permanent inundation; but macrophytes that

help stabilise the river bank and prevent erosion, and provide shelter and food for macroinvertebrates, ducks and other water fowl.

Other effects will lead to deterioration in water quality as well as curtailing the passage of nutrients and organisms up and down the river.

The river regime will be changed to resemble more a lake habitat. The river's ecosystem is already in danger from the erection of instream barriers; a weir as massive as that proposed will prevent natural variability and essential flooding regimes required by different species and habitats along the river. Eventually its health will deteriorate so that even irrigation water will be of insufficient quality for growing of preferred crops. The proposal will be found to be completely unviable and must be rejected.

The native fish communities of the Macquarie River and Ramsar-listed Macquarie Marshes are in extremely poor condition, with nationally threatened Murray Cod, Cod Trout, and Silver Perch, along with River Mussels, among species that could be further affected. Conditions will become ideal for introduced species such as carp and gambusia.

A fish ladder promised in 2011 for the Gin Gin weir must be installed at the current site to halt any further decline of these species. Smaller freshes from the unregulated rivers top up deep pools along the river below Gin Gin weir and help keep the river connected and maintain the food web. Ideal atmospheric conditions at the time can also trigger spawning; however releases from the weir pool cannot mimic the same factors.

Slowing of the river's flow will be considerable. Already the Brian Egan weir below Warren has had this effect; with further slowing conditions will likely become conducive to blue-green algae outbreaks.

Of concern to Daroo Landcare is the inundation of a registered Aboriginal site known as Terramungamine Rock Grooves. This would be an infringement of rights of the Wongaibon clan who are charged with caring for cultural heritage. Other sites believed to exist along the river will be inundated and hidden.

The rights of the river itself, its aquatic animals; its native vegetation; and the river's relationship to all who know and love her, is to be sacrificed. This is too great a burden to carry, the destruction of a major watercourse for the benefit of a few?

The proposed action must not be assessed 'using an accredited process' in NSW, to prevent a clear conflict of interest. The significance of this development and the likely significant impacts it will have on Matters of National Environmental Significance must be assessed by an independent process by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment under the EPBC Act 1999. This is a national obligation. The Re-regulating Storage on the Macquarie River proposal 2020/8652 should be designated a controlled action under the EPBC Act 1999 and require assessment by public inquiry.

Recommendations Daroo Landcare strongly recommends that the proposal for a re-regulating weir at Gin Gin be rejected; and that the fishway promised since 2011 be installed at the present weir site.

Yours sincerely
Andrew Paul