

Submission
No 141

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

Organisation: Severn River, Ngarabal and Kwiambal Aboriginal Corporation
ICN9192

Date Received: 22 September 2020

PO Box 663
Inverell NSW 2360

22 September 2020

Dear Committee,

I firstly will introduce myself, I am Uncle Theo Buddy Wright. I am a Ngarabal Elder and Chairperson of the Severn River, Ngarabal and Kwiambal Aboriginal Corporation (Severn Aboriginal Corporation). The Severn Aboriginal Corporation strongly opposes the building of the Mole River dam. The Severn Corporation have written numerous letters to the Australian Governor-General, Prime Minister of Australia, NSW Premier, and other Ministers regarding my opposition to destroying Ngarabal sacred lands through this infrastructure.

I wish to complain about the Indigenous consultation process was during the COVID lockdown, where many Ngarabal people could not attend the consultation sessions as they had to travel through locked-down states. The zoom, skype, and telephone are not culturally appropriate ways of Indigenous engagement. In many Indigenous communities, there is a protocol that 'business' is in the country. At one stage, the consultants conducted business in Queensland, in another Indigenous nation's area. Again, this is not culturally appropriate consultation.

The area of the proposed dam site is significant to Ngarabal. There is an Aboriginal reserve, with at least one ancestral burial of 'Jacky'. It is reasonable to suggest the ancestor buried, Jacky, was a child taken from a massacre site. There are historical papers, given to EMM Consultancy that a pioneer, named 'Bates', took a child from a massacre. Bates was part of the Bluff Rock Massacre. Bluff Rock is situated a few kilometres west of the proposed dam. Under the Burra Charter, this area is a significant 'place'. The area is also part of the Ngarabal trade routes with other tribes. EMM Consulting, Archeologist, Alan Williams has been informed of the significance of the 'place'. Williams has been provided with historical data and viewed a significant map from 1849 where the Aboriginal trails were noted. A Gandangara Elder, Uncle Adrian Schaeffer, is a historical Indigenous mapping expert who has agreed the map includes Aboriginal tracks. These tracks go to the Mole River and the archaeological study agrees there was a lot of Aboriginal occupation in the area. The tracks are a part of our trading route. However, Mr. Williams does not agree that the map is Indigenous tracks.

There are arsenic mines are surrounding the dam site. Is the arsenic going to filter into the water systems? The arsenic reports were given to Mr. Williams at the second Indigenous meeting.

The flora and fauna species along with the health of the aquatic system will be affected by the dam. The Ngarabal rely on the river systems for hunting, gathering, ceremonial and it is a part of our society and culture. However, the health of the river system is our major concern! The dam will intrude in the Ngarabal society as it affects the biome and our culture. The United Nations Rights of Indigenous People's, Article 25 which states,

"Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard."

Ngarabal people cannot uphold our spiritual connection with this land if there is a dam built in the area. Today, many of our people camp, fish, hunt, and gather in this land, and it is also a place of reflection - and has been for generations. .

Furthermore, Article 31 states:

"1. Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

2. In conjunction with indigenous peoples, States shall take effective measures to recognise and protect the exercise of these rights."

The Severn Aboriginal Corporation believes the dam will affect our culture, society, the biome and we will not be able to maintain, express and manifest our spiritual connection to Ngarabal lands if the Mole River Dam proceeds. On behalf of the Ngarabal and the Severn River, Ngarabal and Kwiambal Aboriginal Corporation does not give permission for this dam to proceed.

Yours faithfully,

Uncle Theo Buddy Wright