

**Submission
No 164**

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

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I am strongly opposed to the new infrastructure projects being proposed because they will further interfere with the natural river systems which have already suffered so much damage. There must be more respect and care shown towards this remarkable country, by government entities, to sustain these precious ecosystems.

I am a member of a group called Water for Rivers and with them, travelled to towns along the Darling/Baaka last October, at the peak of the drought and before the fires. In Walgett, Brewarrina, Bourke, Wilcannia and Menindee, I saw first-hand the alarming consequences of inappropriate interference, over-extraction, water theft and water trading on communities that were left to struggle, without even decent drinking water.

The Barkandji, Gomeroi and many other First Nations people we met at the Yaama Ngunna Baaka corroborees held along the river during this journey, have had their access to cultural water flows diminished severely and were grieving the loss of river life and biodiversity. One local man said that in the past, guns had been used to commit genocide, while now it is government policies, removing access to water. Without water rights, places that have been inhabited for thousands of years are becoming virtually unliveable. It was tragic to hear the communities gathered at Wilcannia singing together the lyrics ‘ no Baaka, no Barkandji’.

It is concerning and unacceptable that following the recent environmental devastation, these dams and other projects, are being rushed through without due process. Where are the public to access the business cases, the Environmental Impact Statements and hydrological reports? These reports and assessments must be made available, with full transparency. The downstream impacts are not being considered, public consultation is inadequate and most people living in river communities, who have already been ignored, are deeply opposed for very good reasons.

These include :

The removal of adequate environmental flows into the RAMSAR wetlands, Macquarie Marshes, lakes and floodplains.

The impacts of reduced water flows on native fish, turtles, frogs, birds, insects and many endangered species, already affected by climate change.

New dams will be inundating river channels that are not meant to be permanently flooded, killing ancient old river red gums, damaging habitat for small fish, insects and invertebrates.

The construction of weir pools will have negative impacts on the food web for lengths of more than 30 kms because native fish need water movement for their eggs to be viable – otherwise the eggs just sink and are lost. Still pools of stagnant water facilitate algae blooms which contribute to biodiversity loss.

The Murray Darling Basin is in a critical condition - with too little water flowing through the system to maintain healthy ecosystems, community drinking water and family owned farming.

The poorly regulated water trading market is excluding smaller enterprises, indigenous communities and the viability of ecosystems - due to affordability issues which must be addressed. Expensive infrastructure will exacerbate the problem.

Dams don't make water – they basically take it from one place and store it in another.

Consequently these expensive infrastructure projects are likely to be quite unnecessary and will further degrade this vulnerable river system, if proper scrutiny and thorough environmental impact assessments are not conducted – or rushed through.

Maintaining environmental flows must be a priority to avoid turning this country into a dustbowl. It is essential we restore riparian zones, habitats and ecosystems, to create a sustainable system - rather than banking on future flows that don't exist.