

Submission
No 166

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

Organisation: Cowra Council
Date Received: 9 October 2020



Legislative Assembly Portfolio Committee No. 7 Impacts of, new dams and other water infrastructure in NSW

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Introduction

This submission has been drafted by Cr Bill West, Mayor of Cowra Council. It is noted that the Mayor and Cowra Council has been involved in many investigations of the past 12 years involving urban water security, health and sustainability of the Lachlan River and its tributaries and has had substantial input in the Wyangala Dam Wall project to date.

This is a critical project for the Cowra Shire and the Lachlan River which is to assess the vast amount of studies which have been completed to date and the future strategic planning for the River which is currently being undertaken. The vast amounts of data, and the emotional and political nature of water and river systems in the Valley need to be looked at in its entirety in a systematic and analytical way by all levels of government, local communities and users of the river systems.

Rivers are the life-blood of this area and of this country.

This is a complex issue and there are many differing views and competing factors when considering water and river systems, including basic community survival, the success of business and connection to country.

The Lachlan River is accepted to have some of the poorest levels of water security and reliability in the state which impacts all aspects of the system including irrigation and urban water supply as well as the environment. This region has historically been severely impacted by droughts and will be highly vulnerable to the predicted effects of changes to climate and weather systems.

There is a critical need to be innovative and creative when it comes to the future of water in terms of security, use and sustainability and this piece of work is critical to the further of the Lachlan River and all of the communities which it supports.

Cowra Council operates water utilities for the majority of the Shire which is a core business unit of the Council. Cowra Council is currently working on bore and pipeline projects to ensure sustainable water security for our Shire with the NSW State Government.

This submission is to be part of the Central NSW Joint Organisations response.

Whilst this Committee will examine the rationale behind a number of new dams and other water infrastructure projects, Cowra Council is only commenting of the issues relating to the Wyangala Dam and the impacts on the Lachlan River and Lachlan Valley.

Cowra Council has, as indicated, been involved with the water security issues in the region as well the Lachlan Valley. The process to select Wyangala has been a long one which has been open and transparent. Following the selection of the upgrade to Wyangala this Council and the Mayor and General Manager have been privy to the process.

Council has indicated support for the project and the process to date however we are aware specifically of concerns about the following:

- Continued whole of government approach to water management
- Water security
- Environmental benefits and flows, impacts on Lachlan River health and impact on the downstream environment. How much water reaches the lower parts of the Lachlan River system?
- The ability to support downstream communities water needs and the continued certainty of urban water along the Lachlan
- Although there is 'no new water' Council is working positively to secure economic benefits due to the potential additional water availability along the Lachlan River within Cowra Shire
- The requirements for community consultation especially with First Nations communities
- How is this review considering the Regional Water Strategies, the strategic planning project which is currently underway?
- Climate data and potential impacts on the Lachlan River and its catchment due to potential changes in weather systems.

These comments and support for the Central NSW JO submission acknowledge the Terms of Reference

- a) the need for the projects, including the historical allocation of water and consideration of other options for ensuring water security in inland regions,
- b) the economic rationale and business case of each of the projects, including funding, projected revenue, and the allocation and pricing of water from the projects,
- c) the environmental, cultural, social and economic impacts of the projects, including their impact on any national or state water agreements, or international environmental obligations,
- d) the impacts of climate change on inland waterways, including future projections, and the role of dams and other mass water storage projects in ensuring security of water supply for social, economic and environmental outcomes,
- e) water infrastructure technologies that may promote enhanced environmental outcomes,
- f) any other related matter.

Wyangala Dam

The Wyangala Dam project is being designed to improve the security of water supply in the Lachlan Valley. Council supports the comments by the CNSWJO in relation to the Wyangala Dam project however raises questions relating to the legislative requirements for the ongoing management of flood mitigation/flood protection in the Cowra Shire and further down the Lachlan River system. This question relates to the treatment of flood waters and the need to further define the use of the term 'flood mitigation'. This is an ambiguous term and further information is required as to its correct or its intended meaning. This relates to flood planning as defined under Local Environmental Plan throughout the state and subsequent mapping. The use of the term 'flood mitigation' etc may have impacts on the ability for urban areas to reap the economic benefits of the reduction in the estimated flooding impacts for development without the changes to the flood mapping in Local Environmental Plans. It is noted that if amendments are required individual Council will be required to pay for additional flood studies, to clarify the reduction in potential mapped flood areas throughout the Shire and this will be costly.

Draft Lachlan Regional Water Strategy

The Draft Lachlan Regional Water Strategy currently on public exhibition aims to partner with local government and NSW State Government to achieve better management and understanding of water for all communities as well as business and industry. Cowra and the Lachlan River Catchment are part of the 'Strategy Development Phase' of this project. However, this strategic planning project should be included in this Legislative Committees consideration. Some coordination is required between the historical data and studies completed to date as well as the proposed development of the Regional Water Strategies. The inquiry might like to consider appropriate mechanisms to align these in future planning initiatives.

Cr Bill West
Mayor
9 October 2020