

Submission
No 169

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

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Submission re the:

Rationale for, and impacts of, new dams and other water infrastructure in NSW

For the proposed new dams and other water infrastructure there is a high need to examine the reasons for why they are being proposed to be built and more in depth and better understanding of the impacts.

Only focussed on providing more security and reliability for General Security (GS) irrigation licences and economic benefits resulting from this. The main rationale for these dams and other water infrastructure appears to be to provide better water security and reliability for General Security licences and by doing this to provide some improvements to local economies from this increased irrigation water. Need to look at if are going to be capturing more water in upstream dams or regulating structures, that these will have impacts on downstream users and environments and these need to be more thoroughly understood and the impacts considered.

More issues from more dams and infrastructure for environment and downstream communities. Large headwater dams and structures, irrigation development, along with the way water is shared and managed has already created many issues, many of which are yet to be fully dealt with or are in the process of being looked at, including under the Murray Darling Basin Plan (MDBP) that is trying to bridge the gap to bring level of take back to sustainable levels and sustain the environment. Existing negative impacts on native fish including fish passage, irrigation pump screening and cold water pollution, delivery constraints, are all examples that are yet to be addressed from existing dams and irrigation development.

No new water – just changing patterns and distribution. New dams and regulating structures do not create new water, they just create new patterns of distribution of the existing water, and in this case would be mainly to benefit one section of community at a disbenefit to other sections of communities and for the environment.

Increasing usage of water when already at BDL and impacts on Planned environmental water From the documentation seen, all work and justification for new dams and structures has been focussed on improving reliability of General Security (GS) licences, when in most valleys irrigation take is already at or close to Baseline Diversion Limits (BDL). No consideration re other water dependent needs such as downstream water users and communities, environments or other values.

No consideration of critical human, critical environmental needs, or town water supplies Given the issues with town water supplies, and effects on communities along rivers, especially the lack of water in the Barwon-Darling system and resulting environmental issues such as large losses of native fish, mussel, snail and riparian vegetation, and effects on many other species that rely on rivers and wetlands, strongly suggest that instead of looking to improve irrigation take, would think it is more important to be looking at how to support critical human and environmental need during extended dry periods, especially these are going to be further impacted by climate change. This may include looking at changing how existing structures are managed and how water is shared. Part of this is that need to look at how existing water captured in dams and structures is managed during extended dry periods to better provided for critical human and environmental needs. This is instead of focussing in how to get more water security and reliability for GS licences.

WaterNSW captured by irrigator interest and business interest – not independent. WaterNSW as a business is captured by both irrigator interest and self-interest. As part of this WaterNSW are focussed on ways to capture more flows for their customers (i.e. irrigators) and these projects are

providing work and funds for WaterNSW, and if constructed then have the benefit for irrigators and for WaterNSW lead to there being more assets to manage and water for WaterNSW to sell, so supports WaterNSW business.

First Nation access to water and Aboriginal communities along the Barwon-Darling and in other catchments still have no ownership, no access and have no real say in water or its management. New dams and infrastructure will negatively impact even more areas and values for First Nations people.

Social justice and equity issues of using even more taxpayer funding to improve the security of GS for irrigation, a sector that already has benefitted greatly (at the cost for many others – First Nations, wetland and floodplain graziers, Barwon-Darling system towns and communities, environment) from past building of dams and infrastructure and from rules and management practices. Irrigation is already partially funded in the Government operating funding provided to WaterNSW. Works and dollars used to provide more water to irrigation need to be considered in choices made to support this and not to support other sections of communities interests in water such as downstream areas of affected catchments and the downstream connected catchment, this includes Aboriginal people, towns, landholders' stock and domestic, wetland and floodplain graziers productivity, and environmental values that are traded off to provide more water to irrigators.

Investigations of the alternative to building dams. Need more investigation and support for efficiencies and alternative water supplies not just default to building large dams to 'improve GS reliability'. Local large off-river storages (like Nyngan) for water supply storages from high flows, underground water storages, greater water efficiency, such as recycling, grey water, water wise towns, etc

Environment would be even further impacted by new dams and infrastructure. The environment is already severely impacted by irrigation development and existing infrastructure. More dams will further reduce the remaining natural flows and their characteristics, impact downstream flows in the Barwon-Darling (which is already highly impacted). (WaterNSW has been making claims that Mole River Dam would potentially benefit the Barwon-Darling but has no indication on how this could be supported by a new dam when it is focussed on providing more water for GS licences. New dams would capture mostly what is currently planned environmental water (PEW) in order to provide more water to improve reliability and security for GS entitlements. This will reduced both PEW and downstream access to supplementary (un-supplemented in QLD) and possibly floodplain harvesting take. It will negatively impact on targets for improving the environment under the MDBP.

Potential increase in take. If new dams and infrastructure are used to increase GS take, there would need to be a way to decrease other forms of take. This may be possible for supplementary (un-supplemented) take but it will be very difficult to control with the proposed frameworks for floodplain harvesting take in the north. It is highly likely that overall there would be an increase in take from flows in catchments that would then have to be reduced, down the track, post the years with it occurring. While it is good that FPH will be licenced and measured, it appears likely that it may potentially allow great take than anticipated because of the rules proposed using a long-term average to measure it.