

**Supplementary
Submission
No 107a**

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

Organisation: Mole River Protection Alliance

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Supplementary submission of new information regarding Mole River dam proposal

Dear Ms Dowd, Ms Faerhmann and Committee Members,

I wish to advise you of two matters concerning the proposed Mole River dam that have become known since two representatives of Mole River Protection Alliance appeared at a hearing on 27 November 2020.

1. Both irrigation interests and Mole River Protection Alliance have expressed a desire or to see the final business case, so it should be made public not kept secret. Mole River Protection Alliance has written to numerous NSW politicians requesting that it be publicly released before any decisions are made concerning the proposal - before proceeding to prepare an EIS.

We understand that many irrigators are concerned that the proposal may adversely affect their businesses and therefore wish to see the business case. The Executive Officer of Border Rivers Food and Fibre, which represents irrigators across the Border Rivers catchment where the dam is proposed to increase security of irrigation supplies, said in an ABC interview broadcast on 19 February 2021 in the New England North West region:

“We’re waiting to see what the business case looks like before we come out with a definite position either way, but to be perfectly honest, we struggle to see that it can work in the way that it’s been foreseen that it might work.”

A recording of this and other interviews about the Mole River dam proposal broadcast on 19 February is attached.

2. The Mole River dam site is the first location west of the Great Dividing Range where Tusked Frogs have been found for over four decades. Tusked Frogs in the New England Tablelands and North West Slopes are a declared Endangered Population. They used to be common in the New England Tablelands or North West Slopes but rapidly disappeared in the 1970s. Tusked Frogs were severely affected by a pandemic of chytrid fungus, like many other frog species around the world. The species survived in coastal regions but were feared extinct in this region because numerous targeted searches were unsuccessful. However, the frogs were recently found by ecologists doing biodiversity surveys in the area proposed to be inundated by the dam. Another Tusked Frog was found a short distance downstream of the

dam site where river flow patterns and habitat conditions would be altered by operation of the dam. A subsequent search for any Tusked Frogs further downstream was unsuccessful.

A short biodiversity survey instigated this year by the Mole River Protection Alliance revealed a surprising diversity of native animal species in or close to the river. We have found 10 animal species listed as threatened in the dam inundation area plus other declining species such as Quolls. A Northern Brown Bandicoot had recently been found near the river further downstream – an exciting find because they are very rare in this region. One of the ecologists, Phil Spark of North West Ecological Services, commented “It seems the Mole River is an ark of conservation for species that are declining or have already disappeared elsewhere.”

Whatever species have been found by ecological consultants working for WaterNSW to gather data for the business case have not been publicly revealed. Their data could be used to calculate threatened species ‘offset’ payments. It is our view that it would not be possible to offset the loss of habitats and populations of threatened or declining species destroyed by the dam or regulation of downstream flows. These species need the existing habitats in which they have some chance of surviving climate change.

Members of the Mole River Protection Alliance were disappointed that your Committee did not find time to visit the site of this dam proposal before reporting on your Inquiry. If Members wish to visit in the future, you will be most welcome. We wish you well in writing a report of your findings regarding the terms of reference. We believe that the evidence previously provided, and the above information, warrant a finding that there is too little rationale for damming the Mole River and that it would have too many adverse impacts. Please recommend that the final business case be made public before any decision is made to prepare an environmental impact statement or spend any more money on this project.

Yours faithfully

Kate Boyd

On behalf of Mole river Protection Alliance