

# WARRAGAMBA DAM RAISING - COMMENTS ON PROPOSAL

(by Col Grant – 12/12/2022)

## 1. Introductory remarks

### A. *Setting*

I have been privileged to have had a lifelong attachment to the Blue Mountains, along with an associated sense that the Blue Mountains are part of a highly important wild area. This appreciation developed during the time I lived in Sydney and Orange, and subsequently while in Brisbane, with many regular visits to the Blue Mountains.

### B. *Position on Warragamba Dam wall proposal*

I am able to state that I oppose the raising of the wall of the Warragamba Dam, for reasons outlined below.

## 2. Reasons

### A. *World Heritage values*

Any World Heritage Area is incredibly important for its key value(s), be they natural or human. In the case of the Blue Mountains, there are attributes that make it unique and worthy of note on a wider context. Particularly striking is the proximity to a major city, which is an advantage for those who live nearby to access its features, but a disadvantage in that there is increasing pressure to retract its boundary and develop portions of it for what are essentially economic reasons. It goes without saying that when a wild area (along with its habitats and species) suffer degradation, it is difficult (if not impossible) to ever bring it back to its former state. To me, both the reality and the perception of it being a wild area is vital.

It is almost certain that few cities the size of Sydney have a magnificent wild area of such size and high quality in close proximity to the urban mass. As such, the Blue Mountains (and its features) should be perceived as a gift of nature - and appreciated as such.

### B. *Offsetting*

While there are proposals to consider biodiversity offsets, I am unable to see how that can, in any way, give rise to legitimate trade-offs. My view is that the current individual members of a species are important in the context of where they are located, that is, within their current habitats. In other words, they are intimately associated with their geography.

I also believe that aboriginal story-telling places, works of art and artifacts are also intimately connected to their locations, and that no amount of off-setting could be successful, and thus should not be permitted within the proposed project area (ie upstream of the raised wall).

The project, according to documentation, is meant to *sustain and improve ecological processes*. It is not made clear how that could possibly take place; in fact, just the opposite will occur, as sites of biodiversity and aboriginal heritage are lost.

### *C. Embedded carbon*

To understand the full impact of any new infrastructure, it is also necessary, among other things, to consider the level of embedded carbon. For the project under discussion, it is difficult to see how such an amount of direct and indirect carbon could be offset or satisfactorily accounted for.

Concrete is renowned for requiring a high level of emissions, both in mining, production and transportation. In addition, a project of this nature will also be a major user of other resources, including other materials, water, as well as energy for transportation and construction. The project itself will add to the risk of climate change – a much more important factor than wondering how climate change may impinge on the project itself. Thus I suggest that a transparent and itemised accounting of carbon emissions should be presented prior to any intention to proceed with the project, as part of the full costing of the project.

To say that the project reaches a “commendable” (or higher) rating of the IS Rating Tool v1.2, fails to give actual details of where the project stands in absolute terms regarding embedded carbon, or carbon production during construction, along with amounts of other waste products produced (including dust and noise).

### 3. Personal statements

#### *A. View from outside the Sydney region*

Living in Brisbane it would be impossible to be unaware of the various flood episodes of the Brisbane River, with associated impacts upon parts of the cities of Brisbane and Ipswich, along with adjacent areas. I note that the Wivenhoe Dam serves the region well as a water storage, and partly as a device to reduce, but not fully mitigate, flooding issues. During times of extreme rainfall over the catchment there is too much water in the system for the dam to cope, and as a result, as the dam reaches capacity, severe flooding along the floodplain below occurs when releases are necessary. Not surprisingly, such future events are predicted to worsen.

As a result of such ongoing events along the Brisbane River, there is social and political momentum for retrofitting existing properties undergoing refurbishment, greater resilience in new replacement constructions, and offers of buyback (or relocation) of those at greatest flood risk. It would also seem that reassessment of new urban development in the Brisbane River floodplain would be wise, along with efforts to ensure the floodplain itself is able to deal with flooding events (eg establishing greenspace and improved drainage).

I believe that the Brisbane River – Wivenhoe Dam situation contains lessons applicable to other locations, including the Hawkesbury-Nepean River and the Warragamba Dam.

#### B. Personal viewpoint

The Blue Mountains area has been important to me for all my life. As a child in the late 1950s and early 1960s, my family would travel to Katoomba annually during the winter holiday. Walking along clifftop tracks, or descent by stairs and ladders to exploring the old coal mine workings or hiking Federal Pass, and riding the Scenic Railway and Skyway brought great enjoyment to all, and left a lasting love of the area. Adding to this, as a young adult, and then a teacher at schools in Sydney and Orange, I would visit frequently with a backpack on my back, with mates and school students –

heading to Mt Solitary, along Narrow Neck, to the Grose Valley and parts of the Six-Foot-Track. I developed a gratitude to those who worked hard to raise awareness of the area, its vital importance as a place with wilderness values, and as a space close to Sydney that could be readily accessed (and also from Orange).

In particular I also developed an appreciation of the area as a site for gaining enhanced understanding of Earth Sciences (geology, geomorphology, sedimentology, tectonics, weathering and erosion), while appreciating both photography and the feeling of space and peacefulness. I later moved to Brisbane, while continuing to visit the Blue Mountains regularly, undertaking walking, sightseeing and photography. I was able to broaden areas and viewpoints accessed through use of my four-wheel-drive vehicle – Megalong Valley, Kanangra Walls, Yerranderrie, and the highlight of all, descending to the Kowmung River and taking in the feeling of remoteness and accomplishment. In other words, the Blue Mountains and the sense of a special and wild place has been a lifelong opportunity for me – and I should also say, for others. Several of my best friends who live closer than I do still visit regularly and feel the same way.

#### 4. Concluding Statement

In conclusion, I strongly believe that the Blue Mountains is even more magnificent than the sum of its components: the plateaus, valleys, rivers, vegetation, animals, ecosystems and aboriginal heritage. It truly is an area of incredible significance. It is vital that **this special area should be seen as more than a flood mitigation opportunity**. It is part of the permanent heritage of the Greater Sydney Region, Australia and the world, and hence it should be protected from all threats to its integrity, including raising the wall of Warragamba Dam, and the expected resulting impacts.

Submitted by: Col Grant  
Email: colcoochie@gmail.com  
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