

Nathan Heath
Planner
Department of Planning and Environment
PO BOX 404, PARRAMATTA NSW 2124

By email: nathan.heath@planning.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Heath

Notice of Exhibition of application for Wilcannia Weir Replacement (SSI-10050)

Thank you for your referral dated 18 July 2022 inviting comments from the Heritage Council of NSW on the above State Significant Infrastructure (SSI) proposal.

The proposed development involves construction and operation of a new weir and fishway and partial removal and decommissioning of the existing weir on the Darling River (Baaka) in the township of Wilcannia in western NSW.

The proposed SSI does not impact any State Heritage Register (SHR) items; however, is located in close proximity to *Wilcannia Post office & Post Master's Residence* (SHR 02033). The proposal impacts s170 Register Items *Wilcannia Central School Building* (Department of Education), *Wilcannia Courthouse and Residence* (Department of Justice and Attorney General), *Wilcannia Official Residence 2* and *Wilcannia Police Station* (NSW Police Service).

Three items from the NSW maritime heritage database have also been identified – *Paddle Steamer Moira* (Site ID 836), *River Port, Wilcannia* (Site ID 2152) and *Wilcannia Bridge* (Site ID 2749). The proposal also impacts several locally listed items on the Central Darling LEP 2012.

It is noted that documentation lists several 'potential heritage items' along and in close proximity to the study area. These were identified in previous studies and during the field survey conducted as part of this proposal.

The following reports were considered in our assessment:

- *Environmental Impact Statement including Appendices*, prepared by Water Infrastructure, dated July 2022
- *Statement of Heritage Impact*, prepared by Jacobs, dated 5 July 2022

As delegate of the Heritage Council of NSW, I provide the following comments:

Underwater Cultural Heritage

- A number of historically identified wrecks are known to exist in the Wilcannia Region. Most of these are currently unlocated and there is a potential that they may exist within the proposed works area. There is potential that the project may impact historically known but currently unlocated wrecks within the proposed works area.
- It is also likely that a Rotten Row existed somewhere in this region, an area where hulks of disused vessels were abandoned, and that is likely to exist within 1- 5km of the township. Vessels in these areas would also be considered historic shipwrecks under the *Heritage Act 1977* if over 75 years old.
- Although the study references heritage listings for the Port of Wilcannia, it states that this is not a physical heritage item. However, in addition to the main town wharves, there are numerous, locally known, other vernacular piers and jetties, all of which are associated with

the former Port. These structures which have large associated relics deposits have not been previously documented as archaeological sites, nor have their significance been assessed. These sites have not been investigated as part of this report, and they may be inundated and possibly damaged when the new dam is built and water levels rise.

- It should also be noted that shipwrecks and riverine infrastructure in this area also have significance to the local Aboriginal community due to their extensive reliance on and interactions with local shipping in this region. The existing Wilcannia weir is a Registered Aboriginal Place and therefore any removal of the existing weir may result in significant impact to Aboriginal heritage.
- Aboriginal lore also details that the remains of a shipwreck may be present at Steamers Point, but this area has not been previously investigated archaeologically.
- Submerged Aboriginal sites and relics associated with past use of the river, or which have collapsed into the river during riverbank erosion may also be present on the riverbed and may possibly include stone artefact scatters, canoes, scarred trees or human remains.

Recommendations

- **A Statement of Heritage Impact** be undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced maritime archaeologist to investigate all **Underwater Cultural Heritage** in the proposed works areas, including:
 - The affects of the disturbance/ excavations being undertaken at the site of the new weir, including surveys of the proposed areas of disturbance.
 - The effects of the planned removal of major sections of the current weir, along with input from local Aboriginal groups.
 - The geomorphological effects of inundation and/or change in river direction/ current etc. on any other previously unrecorded maritime/ riverine sites that may be present in the area (including ship/ boat wrecks); and historic riverine infrastructure (i.e. piers/ wharves/ jetties/ ship maintenance sites etc) and/or associated relics; underwater cultural heritage sites (e.g. submerged Aboriginal sites and relics such as the fish traps and potential submerged relics) and other terrestrial heritage sites that may later become submerged as a result of any future inundation associated with the installation of the weir.
 - The works should consider the effects of the weir and river damning on the Wilcannia historic bridge, and specifically in regard to any future stabilisation works and/or increased corrosion of the structure.
 - This work should include inspections/surveys of currently unrecorded archaeological sites in the study area, especially sites associated with the former Port of Wilcannia (e.g. riverine infrastructure in the Darling River) using archaeological inspections/ remote sensing techniques.
 - The results of this study should be included in an interpretation strategy for the proposed project, especially to recognise and explain previously exposed sites that will no longer be accessible after inundation of intermittently dry river areas.
 - An Unexpected Finds Policy should also be developed which addresses the steps to be undertaken in the event that underwater or riverine cultural heritage sites / submerged skeletal remains are discovered during works, including the survey of sites; conservation, restoration, interpretation and long term storage of any relics discovered during works.
- The riverine/ UCH SOHI should be submitted with sufficient time for review and comments to be provided prior to the works being undertaken.

Non-Aboriginal Archaeology

- The potential items identified during the field study indicate that the length of the study area has archaeological potential. While some initial information has been provided by the report, a more detailed and rigorous impact assessment should be undertaken to determine the extent of archaeological potential, assessment of significance and impact of the proposed works.

- As mentioned previously, the proposed works area may also include several other sites of historical archaeological importance that may have ability to demonstrate the early occupation of the site, its associated communal and economic activity as well as everyday life at the township of Wilcannia and its Port. It is considered that impact of the proposed works and any possible future inundation of the surrounding river area may result in the permanent loss of these sites.

Recommendations

- Further detail be provided in a **historical archaeological assessment** prepared by a suitably qualified archaeologist in accordance with the guidelines Archaeological Assessment (1996) and Assessing Significance for Historical Archaeological Sites and Relics (2009).
- This assessment should identify what relics, if any, are likely to be present within the study area, assess their significance and consider the impacts from the proposal and any resultant inundation of the riverbank on this potential archaeological resource. Where harm is likely to occur, it is recommended that the significance of the relics be considered in determining an appropriate mitigation strategy. If harm cannot be avoided in whole or part, an appropriate Research Design and Excavation Methodology should also be prepared to guide any proposed excavations or salvage programme.
- If there is an indication from the historical archaeological assessment that there is a potential for archaeological sites and relics to be extant, a **phase of archaeological testing** shall be undertaken across areas of proposed harm as soon as possible to inform the detailed design for this site. The testing shall be **guided by an appropriate research design, excavation methodology** and be directed by a suitably qualified and experienced excavation director who fulfils the Heritage Council's Excavation Director Criteria. The testing results shall guide the next stage of development. Areas of substantially intact archaeological evidence shall be appropriately managed.

As the site contains a local heritage item, and other local items are in the vicinity, advice should be sought from the relevant local council.

If you have any questions regarding the above advice, please contact Mariyam Nizam, Senior Assessments Officer, at Heritage NSW on 88376375 or Mariyam.Nizam@environment.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Rajeev Maini

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Manager, Assessments South

Heritage NSW

Department of Planning & Environment

As Delegate of the Heritage Council of NSW

15 August 2022