

Objection to the Macquarie River to Orange pipeline project

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Submission: KB & PS Freeland

KEY POINTS:

1. The pipeline is not justified because it has been designed to supply an artificially high water demand. The proposal is based on an average personal daily water use that is much higher than current usage in Orange.
2. The upper Macquarie River is significant habitat for the nationally endangered Trout Cod. Other threatened fish species found in this river reach include Murray Cod, Silver Perch and Catfish.
3. The proposed extraction of water from upper Macquarie River at low flows will disrupt fish passage and degrade important habitat values.
4. The pipeline route will destroy good condition roadside vegetation that provides important wildlife corridors and habitat in a highly cleared landscape.
5. The pipeline route with associated access road and power line will cause disturbance to highly unstable soil structures in very steep terrain, threatening landslides into the river.
6. A regional water supply solution needs to be developed using state and federal grant monies in an ecologically sustainable manner.

BACKGROUND:

Orange City Council (OCC) has proposed to construct a 37km pipeline from the upper Macquarie River to Orange to supply up to 12 million litres (ML) of water per day to Suma Park water storage dam.

The water to be provided by the pipeline is based on an average use of 404 litres per person per day (L/p/d). Recent domestic water use in Orange has been around 200 L/p/d. A more realistic water demand, inclusive of business and industry use, is between 300-350 L/p/d.

The Federal Govt has granted \$20m and the NSW Govt, \$18.2m, towards the pipeline. This money would be better invested in a regional water supply project that is ecologically sustainable.

It is in my opinion that human nature will dictate that if more water is supplied, more water will be consumed and wasted. A far better option would be providing incentives and assistance for households and businesses to harvest their own additional water for their needs.

Fish impacts

The proposal plans to pump from a waterhole in the upper Macquarie River. The final site has not yet been determined. This reach of the river provides good condition habitat for a number of threatened fish species and other water dependent species such as platypus.

The section of the Macquarie River just upstream of Burrendong Dam is very environmentally sensitive and deserves high levels of protection. Native fish populations are abundant and diverse and the section is known as an important native fish breeding nursery site for the upper Macquarie River system. This section of river is home to large numbers of Murray Cod (Vulnerable species), Trout Cod (Endangered species), River Blackfish (Endangered population), Eel-tailed Catfish (Endangered population), Silver Perch (Vulnerable) and is a site for re-introduction of Macquarie Perch (Endangered). Golden Perch are also common in this section of River.

Most importantly this stretch of the Upper Macquarie River is a Trout Cod recovery area with the year 2011 being the third of a five-year program to stock these waterholes under the National Endangered Trout Cod Recovery Plan and the NSW Trout Cod Recovery Plan. Orange City Council fail to acknowledge the Trout Cod Recovery Plan in the Environment Assessment.

The upper Macquarie River is one of three areas left in Australia where Trout Cod populations are surviving and is a significant site for the success of the national Trout Cod recovery plan. The proposal to extract water at low to very low flows of 38ML per day will disrupt fish migrations for breeding and feeding purposes.

Flora and Fauna impact

The final route has not been determined. Therefore, the environmental assessment of the pipeline proposal is incomplete and should not be approved on the information provided.

The proposed pipeline route is through the highly cleared central tablelands where all remnant vegetation is significant, particularly for declining woodland bird and mammal species.

Slope Instability

The final pipeline route will have to ascend very steep, unstable terrain directly above the river. There is a history of natural landslides in the area. The easement will include an access road and power line to supply electric pumps. The threat of landslide and increased sedimentation in the river has not been adequately assessed.

Urban Water Planning

OCC has not met the National Urban Water Management Principles adopted in 2008.¹

Particularly Principle 3: Adopt a partnership approach so that stakeholders are able to make an informed contribution to urban water planning, including consideration of the appropriate supply/demand balance.

¹<http://www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/urban-reform/nuw-planning-principles.html>