

Dear Committee

We make a submission to the Environmental Impact Statement because as concerned residents of NSW living close to this beautiful area, we must voice our opposition to the NSW Government's proposal to raise the walls of the Warragamba Dam in the foothills of the Blue Mountains. We strongly urge you to stop and reconsider whether this project is needed at all.

This issue is important to us because if the NSW Government approves the proposal, huge areas of World Heritage-listed National Park and culturally significant land in the Blue Mountains and thousands of hectares of Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater breeding habitat would be at risk of extended flooding and potential destruction.

It is an area of outstanding biodiversity. The grassy woodlands of Burragorang would be threatened by the proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall and flood more of the valley. The proposed raising of the Warragamba Dam wall by 14 m for flood mitigation will flood a further 4,700 hectares of the Warragamba catchment and 65 km of wild rivers. This falls within the Blue Mountains and Nattai National Parks, which are part of the World Heritage Area, and parts of the Yerranderie and Burragorang State Conservation Areas.

Flood experts, the International World Heritage Committee, and even NSW Government members continue to raise significant questions about the need for this project. Please heed their advice as they are the experts.

We oppose this proposal for the following reasons:

- Platypus and rakali inhabit the streams and rivers of the Wollondilly, Nattai and Kowmung. A landmark assessment by scientists at UNSW Sydney has recommended the platypus be listed as a threatened species under Australia's and NSW environmental legislation. In NSW, the number of **platypus observations declined by around 32 per cent in the last 30 years**, so their survival is already compromised.
- The Blue Mountains area is the home of many species ranging from ground and tree frogs, bush birds, swallows, swifts, kingfishers, parrots, waterway birds, birds of prey, nocturnal birds, geckoes, turtles, skinks, bandicoots, kangaroos, wallabies, possums, gliders, monotremes, koalas, wombats, fish and more and this proposal will affect their survival by changing their habitats.
- Populations of kangaroos, wallabies (including the endangered brush-tailed rock wallaby) and emu live in a natural equilibrium with their predators the wedge-tailed eagle, dingo, and spotted-tailed quoll. This proposal would disturb this natural balance.
- Much of the area to be flooded supports grassy woodland and dry open forest ecosystems identified as priority conservation habitats by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. There is concern for the loss of threatened woodland ecosystems, threatened species, wild rivers, declared wilderness, Aboriginal Heritage and World Heritage Areas.
- Of serious concern is the Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater. **The draft EIS concludes that the project poses potential significant impacts to contemporary breeding habitat for the Regent Honeyeater that "cannot be avoided or minimised."**
- **The Regent Honeyeater is listed as Critically Endangered at both a state and federal level, with as few as 350 individuals remaining in the wild.**
- **Regent Honeyeaters are one of Australia's most threatened species.** If this amazing bird is going to survive and recover, we must then obviously protect the precious places where they breed and raise their young. Considering this fact, we are utterly amazed that the NSW government would even consider this proposal.
- The water catchment area of Warragamba Dam is **one** of the most intact grassy box woodlands in south-east Australia, having revealed these rare and threatened woodland birds that breed here.
- These beautiful birds (Regent Honeyeaters) and many other animals are deserving of our attention. Under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016- the purpose of the Act was to effect biodiversity reform in New South Wales, and to provide better environmental outcomes. This proposal **will not** provide better outcomes for this already struggling species of bird and let alone the many other animal species that call this area home like the platypus, brush tail wallaby, eagle, and spotted-tail quoll.
- The Burragorang Valley, located within the Warragamba Dam-raising footprint, *was one of only three areas used for breeding across all of NSW in 2017, and is considered a key site for the conservation of the Regent Honeyeater into the future. The vast majority of the few remaining Regent Honeyeaters now breed around*

*the edges of the Greater Blue Mountains, and we must protect every breeding site, especially those situated inside a World Heritage-listed National Park.*

- **Modelling by BirdLife Australia suggested that up to 50% of contemporary Regent Honeyeater foraging and breeding habitat was burnt in the 2019/20 bushfires. Protecting remaining unburnt breeding habitat is of the highest conservation priority.**
- There are only a handful of contemporary breeding sites for Regent Honeyeater and during the assessment of the project a total of twenty- one (21) Regent Honeyeaters only, including active nests, were recorded within the impact area.
- **Any breeding habitat is considered habitat critical for survival of the species under the National Recovery Plan for Regent Honeyeater and it states, “It is essential that the highest level of protection is provided to these areas and that enhancement and protection measures target these productive sites”.**
- The destruction or degradation of a contemporary breeding site for Regent Honeyeaters would have dire consequences for the species as a whole.
- The destruction and degradation of breeding habitat for Regent Honeyeaters is incongruous with the time and money that the Federal and NSW Governments have invested into the recovery program, including the Regent Honeyeater Captive Breeding and Release program. **It is unacceptable and inconsistent with the National Recovery Plan for any avoidable loss or degradation of breeding habitat to occur.** This proposal is in complete contradiction to firstly the recognition of this species that it **is** critically endangered and accepted as so, by both state and Federal governments, and secondly the time and financial commitment that has already been invested in recovery programs.
- We strongly oppose the Project’s offset strategy for the Regent Honeyeater. Offsets are rarely an appropriate response to proposed biodiversity loss and especially for critical habitat for the survival of a species, in this case breeding habitat for the Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater. Offsets in this case to provide such a unique habitat to replace the loss of this habitat would be implausible, as this bird has become critically endangered because it has already lost its habitats and there are few if any surviving for this species. Destroy this last remaining habitat and you herald the extinction of this species.
- There is no evidence that breeding habitat for Regent Honeyeaters can be successfully offset, and any offsets would be unlikely to provide direct benefits for both the local affected population and the species.

We therefore strongly oppose the proposal to raise Warragamba Dam due to the project’s unacceptable potential impacts on the environment including to the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and threatened species, especially those listed above and the Regent Honeyeater especially. Please we urge you to carefully consider this proposal in light of the **irreversible damage** it will do to this complicated ecosystem, that supports a variety of different fauna and flora that is deserving of our continued protection.

Yours sincerely

Janice Haviland

Martin Derby

22 Perentie Rd Belrose NSW 2085

Other Signatories

Ruby Hardie Mandy Caple Kim Gambrill Courtney Evans Lucia Smith

Phoebe Laird Lisa Margetts Katie Wynter Marie Humphries