

Objection to the Proposed Raising of the Warragamba Dam Wall

I wish to register my objection to the proposed raising of the Warragamba Dam wall.

This proposed project, and the associated objections that you are receiving, can be considered from two perspectives. These are in relation to Above the Dam Wall and Below the Dam Wall matters. There will be many objections to the proposal, such as in relation to the inundation of, and damage to, the World Heritage National Park, its flora and fauna (some endangered). These are overwhelmingly in the 'Above the Dam Wall' category.

I wish to focus on issues relating to 'Below the Dam Wall'. Rather than these aspects being consequential to the extended area of inundation, they concern the invalid justifications for the proposal. And, reflective of the processes that led to where we are now, there is a political element.

The dichotomy of aspects of the objections also reflects the supposed cost-benefit analysis. The costs are borne upstream, while the supposed benefits lie downstream.

The NSW government, via its mouthpiece Stuart Ayres, Member for Penrith, has stridently asserted that this proposed dam wall raising is to make people already living on the floodplain safer from major floods, and nothing more. They assert that it has nothing to do with further development. Yet Mr Ayres has, on national television, breathlessly explained how tens of thousands of people will be able to move onto this same floodplain once the dam wall raising is complete.

How do we explain this breathtaking contradictory positioning? It is difficult to accept that Mr Ayres has had a monumental memory malfunction. To the contrary, this is a clear deception, probably underpinned by a faith in the voting public having only a short-term memory. This is the politics in the matter, and that political subterfuge is directly attributable to the government. In layman's terms, the government is lying; the justification is dishonest.

If one is to believe the government, simply raising Warragamba will solve the problem of floodplain flooding. That is, to make the flood plain not a flood plain. Yet it is widely understood that such an assertion has two major flaws. Firstly, depending on where the rain falls, much flood water enters the Nepean, between the dam wall and the Sackville 'bathtub' constriction, from many sources. Secondly, the dam is a water supply dam, not a flood mitigation structure. As such it behoves the operator to keep it as full as possible, and so it is reasonable to assume that, on occasions, floodwater will enter Lake Burragorang when the expanded capacity is already taken up. In that situation, any inflows will be automatic outflows, and the dam wall will be irrelevant. Of course, with the ill-considered rampant expansion of Sydney, the demands of Warragamba's water become more constrained, with the options of desalination or purification being small and expensive alternatives.

An equivalent situation is manifested in sea level rising as a consequence of global warming. As King Canute demonstrated, it is folly to fight the ocean, with the only solution being retreat. As such, intelligent and responsive coastal communities around the planet are starting to take appropriate action. Relocation to higher ground is the only long term feasible course of action. So too for Penrith. A government with even minimal foresight would see that past expansion of Sydney's urban sprawl onto the Hawkesbury-Nepean floodplain was ill-advised. Hence, the proper reaction would be to prepare for, and activate, a long term plan (say 100 years plus) that would involve the gradual relocation of Penrith's major infrastructure elements to higher ground to the east. Infrastructure renewal is an ongoing process, and a prescient government policy would undertake

the replacement of old infrastructure with relocation onto that higher ground rather than where it is. We already see a reflection of this awareness, with key facilities like the Nepean Hospital, Ambulance Superstation, Police Station, University of Western Sydney, Penrith High School, Penrith Christian School, St Dominic's College and various Primary Schools already sited above long term flood peak levels. In the shorter term, the obscene amount of money allocated to raise the dam wall would be re-allocated to progressively purchase the most flood-prone properties. Why engage in an ultimately futile fight with nature? Riverine flooding and sea level rise require the same response. We might even save some farmland and public spaces as a beneficial consequence.

The odious politics of this proposal are even more murky in the light of the infamous Eastern Creek land sale. Media reports have revealed that, almost immediately after the dam wall raising announcement, a Chinese property developer sold a large parcel of land for a huge profit. That land was apparently flood-prone. An unsavoury aspect of this financial activity is that the developer in question had previously been a generous donor to the Liberal National government. This does not pass the 'pub test'. In fact, one wonders why ICAC hasn't investigated.

One might wonder why I would bother to object. After all, this state has a record of community feedback/objections being solicited for major projects, then being ignored; a customary 'tick-and-flick' process, at best a charade; at worst an insult and a dereliction of duty on the part of government. As I said, why bother?. Firstly, as a science graduate, I tend to be motivated to expose flawed interpretations of science being misused in order to benefit commercial vested interests. The property development industry stands out in this regard. Secondly, I am passionate about conservation and a sustainable society. The urban sprawl of Sydney over the Nepean-Hawkesbury food bowl is plainly wrong, on so many levels, and it is idiocy to persist. Thirdly, we seem to regularly be made aware of corrupt conduct by politicians, at both state and federal level. With its tight links to development, this proposal reeks of such malevolent interference. Fourthly, as a State Emergency Service floodboat operator, I could be one of those volunteers putting themselves in harm's way in order to assist those who should never have been in those circumstances in the first place. Finally, I was born in the Blue Mountains and have hiked in wild places all my life. Unlike many in government and their financial backers, I value wilderness highly; it has a value above money.

Of course, underpinning the whole ludicrous proposal is the stupidity of governments and their financial supporters chasing the fantasy of endless growth within a finite system. When is enough? Our society is already wreaking havoc on our environment, our life support system. But that, perhaps, is a whole other matter. After decades of "growth is good" propaganda, Australians are starting to appreciate the costs of population growth such as housing, extended commuting times, congestion, huge infrastructure demands, loss of precious farmland, extinctions of flora and fauna, and general environmental degradation. No wonder a large majority now reject population growth. As well, growth has links to climate change and pandemics. Surely a civilised society should respect the will of the people, provide for a sustainable future, manage the demand side as well as the supply side and, above all, protect the natural and managed ecosystems that provide our life-support.

So, I repeat that I most strongly disagree with the proposal to raise Warragamba dam wall.

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