

Proposed Scheme for Raising of Warragamba Dam Wall

Submission from Richard Wood

Introduction

I have been a resident of Sydney for most of my life of 72 years. Since my teenage years, I have been a regular visitor to the Greater Blue Mountains region engaging in activities such as bushwalking, rock climbing, canyoning, camping and general tourism. This has included activities along the Cox's and Kowmung Rivers and many of their tributaries, as well as the Wollondilly and Nattai Rivers. These areas have been a significant part of my life and that of my family.

But the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWhA) is not only a heritage for bushwalkers and the residents of the Blue Mountains but also of the world. The inclusion of the GBMWhA on the World Heritage Register in 2000 was a milestone event for lovers of the Blue Mountains who believed that the listing would protect the area in perpetuity. Sadly, the proposed scheme to raise the Warragamba Dam wall would result in the removal of these protections for some areas of the GBMWhA.

I am strongly opposed to the proposed scheme.

Objections

My specific objections to the proposed scheme are outlined in the following paragraphs.

- **Limited Scope of Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)**

Maps included in the Environmental Impact Statement for the scheme (EIS) indicate that significant areas of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area were impacted by the bushfires of 2019/20. However, the EIS does not include any information on surveys conducted after the fires.

The EIS does not adequately cover cultural heritage sites that would be inundated by the proposal.

The EIS does not adequately consider native species that would be further threatened by the proposal.

- **Further Restriction of Access**

Since the Warragamba Dam was built in the 1950s, there have been restrictions on access within 3km of the reservoir. It appears from the EIS that the restricted area will be expanded as the area of potential inundation is expanded. This will further limit access to popular bushwalking access routes in the Cox's River and lower Kowmung River areas as well as in the Nattai and Wollondilly valleys.

Lack of public access to areas affected by the scheme is used in the EIS to downplay the physical damage caused by the scheme on the basis that the damage is in a restricted area, so the public will not be able to see it. This is a rather cynical tactic but

lack of public access does not excuse damage to Aboriginal sites and increased threats to already threatened species.

- **Further Areas Impacted by Inundation**

Inherent in the design of the scheme is the intermittent inundation of areas that are currently above Full Supply Level (FSL), including frequently visited areas on the Cox's River above the Kowmung River junction, the lower Kowmung River, Kedumba Creek, Cedar Creek, the Nattai River and the Wollondilly River, and their tributaries.

While the EIS attempts to minimise the impact of this inundation, it will have a permanent impact on the landscape, threatened species and cultural sites therein, much of which has been inadequately assessed during preparation of the EIS.

- **Temptation to Use Extra Capacity for Water Storage**

In 1995, it was proposed to raise Warragamba Dam by 23 metres for dam safety and flood mitigation. That proposal did not proceed.

While the stated purpose of the current proposal is flood mitigation only, the infrastructure built by the scheme could equally be used to increase the long term storage capacity. This would only require a change of legislation to implement, rather than considerable project costs, and may present too strong a temptation for future governments which, in different circumstances and with a different set of priorities, may be looking to increase Sydney's water storage capacity.

Such potential for project scope creep should be avoided.

- **Risk to World Heritage Listing**

The declaration of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area has resulted in an international tourism bonanza for New South Wales. The scheme threatens the listing and the natural and cultural qualities of the area on which it is based.

The loss or compromise of the listing would have a serious impact on the economy of the Blue Mountains and would also be a major embarrassment for the New South Wales and Australian Governments. It must be avoided.

- **Warragamba Dam's Contribution to Flood Waters**

The Warragamba Dam is located such that it can capture only a little more than half of the water that flows down the Nepean River and causes flooding in Western Sydney. The balance is carried by the Upper Nepean River, Glenbrook Creek, the Grose River and other streams. The proposed scheme will do nothing to alleviate flooding by these waters.

- **Alternative Methods for Flood Mitigation**

Options such as release of stored water from Warragamba in advance of forecast high rainfall events and more restrictions on development in flood-prone areas should be considered as an alternative to the scheme.

This approach should also be applied to the four dams on the Upper Nepean River: the Cataract, Cordeaux, Avon and Nepean Dams.

- **Better Uses of Funds**

The Covid19 pandemic has been a huge drain on government funds. Some of the expenditure on the proposed scheme would be better allocated to alternative approaches to flood mitigation, long-term recovery projects and projects to alleviate the effects of climate change.

Conclusion

For the reasons outlined above, I strongly oppose the implementation of the proposed scheme and request that the government consider alternative approaches to flood mitigation.