

WARRAGAMBA DAM WALL RAISING PROPOSAL

Protect Our Water Catchment, (POWC) inc. are a group of concerned citizens whose aim is to conserve the natural values of the Greater Sydney water catchment. We watch over development proposals, subscribe to expert evidence and contribute to the review process.

POWC object to the NSW government proposal to raise the Warragamba dam wall.

Submissions to the 2019 Enquiry to Raise the Warragamba Dam Wall contended that flooding the upstream Burragorang valley will not reduce risks to life, property and community assets downstream. The rainfall event of March 2021 demonstrated that raising the wall would not have reduced the downstream damage done by the flood.

Raising the wall will increase the footprint of inundation behind the dam. Areas of pristine natural value will be drowned for months while the dam drains. After the floodwater subsides the landscape will be altered, plants that have not died will struggle to cope with an altered soil, animals that have not drowned will return to a tangle of dead muddy debris. Over time a noticeable line around the catchment will form, like a ring in a bathtub, below which the exposed rock will dominate as soil is stripped away by successive flood events. Added soil and carbon will be mixed into the drinking water of Sydney creating further cost and health risk with added need for disinfection of the water supply.

Impounded water creates a permanent impact on the catchment. Gone will be the breeding areas for a suite of rare and endangered birds, including the critically endangered Regent honeyeater. Gone will be remnant habitat for a wide range of mammals and reptiles now thriving in close proximity to Sydney. Also gone will be the land and the sites that form a living connection to aboriginal culture.

POWC draws attention to the many expert objections raised against the scheme. Some voices directly employed by WaterNSW in environmental assessment and others in academic posts who have developed specialised knowledge in ecology, hydrology and engineering of water infrastructure. We note also the assessment of the Insurance Council does not support the scheme.

We note the failure of the EIS process to fairly represent the findings of researchers attempting to work within the highly flawed offset methodology established by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. Once again there is a demonstrated failure of DPIE to treat environmental concerns with seriousness, due in part to politicians seizing the moment and shifting the goal posts when assessments are not favorable to development.

POWC supports the Traditional Owners of the Gundungurra who have not given consent for the Dam proposal to proceed.

Perhaps most concerning is the forgotten aim to conserve natural areas. The upstream flooding will affect land protected in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. The Australian government is committed to increasing natural areas under protection to 30% by 2030. NSW currently has 10% of natural areas under protection. Targets are meaningless unless they are followed by action.

There is broad acceptance that the natural environment needs protection. There is universal acceptance that water catchments are best left in their natural state. This scheme is an example of needless development in a protected area of great natural significance.

POWC urge a swift and unambiguous closing of this ill-conceived development proposal.