

WARRAGAMBA DAM RAISING EIS TECHNICAL RESPONSE ABORIGINAL & EUROPEAN HERITAGE

Significant impacts downstream

The knock-on effect of dam wall raising will be development of land downstream. The EIS limits environmental impact modelling to a 7.2m rise *behind the dam wall*. This hides serious potential impacts downstream.

European heritage downstream was overviewed in the archaeological survey by Niche. Aboriginal heritage was considered not to be impacted, because areas downstream will not be flooded. But they can be flooded. Unforeseen extreme flood events are difficult to predict from past historical data. (An example of such an extreme event was the recent release of water from Toowoomba Dam).

The unintended results of dam wall raising may be potential massive loss of Aboriginal heritage through unlocking of land for development.

Land downstream currently protects Aboriginal sites and European heritage. The consequence of raising the dam wall will be development pressure on lands downstream, with accompanying loss of thousands of unsurveyed Aboriginal sites.

Additional impacts will also occur on upstream European heritage sites such as Yerranderie - quite a lot of European heritage has already been flooded by the original dam.

Aboriginal testimony

The testimony of a Gundungurra descendant speaks eloquently of her attachment to the area and concern for the Aboriginal heritage that will be lost through water rise above current full level. She also speaks of European as well as Aboriginal attachment to the Burratorang Valley. (**Attachment A: Statement by Kazan Brown**)

Impact area based on 1:20 year floodline

The EIS estimates an impact area on Aboriginal heritage sites on modelling for the 1:20 year flood level behind the dam wall (impact area of 7.2m rise above current full level).

As a result, Niche (the archaeological contractor) has carried out survey of Aboriginal sites behind the dam wall limited to the impact area of 7.2m rise above current full level.

The 1:20 year flood level projections should be used in a guarded fashion because of the possible effects associated with climate change.

Serious impacts above the 1:20 year flood projection

The full height of rarer floods has not been included in modelling. This means that hundreds of sites (possibly more than a thousand sites) above the 7.2m rise have not been properly considered.

Impacts to important known heritage sites such as the Jourilands Homestead, Kerswell Hill art site on Reedy Creek and the scar trees at Bourke Flat are not included in the survey, even though these places are going to flood.

Rock art sites are of high cultural and archaeological significance. Most are fragile traces on sandstone, extremely vulnerable to damage by any flooding, no matter how infrequent. One example of such fragile rock art is shown in the faded markings on two rock overhangs in the photos below. They are only a short walk through bushland from the Warragamba Recreation Area. One rock overhang shows fish in *Photo 4*. The very faded “dancing man” ancestral figure in *Photo 1* below was identified by archaeologist Michael Jackson in his paper *Gundungurra Cultural Landscapes* (Submission 72 for the Inquiry into NSW Water Amendment Warragamba Dam Bill 2018). This is very special type of image occurring across a widespread area of Gundungurra Country. The “dancing man” ancestral figure occurs in at least 30 rock art sites across the region. It shows this site is part of a network of related sites. Each vulnerable rock art site forms a significant part of the cultural landscape, linked by a creation story.



Photo 1 on the left, shows a fragment of the “dancing man” ancestral figure.

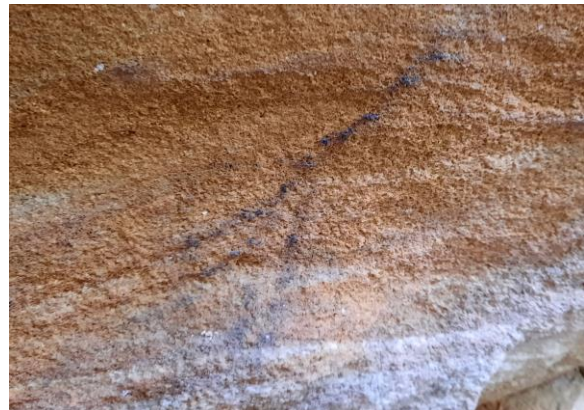


Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4 shows two fish

More fieldwork required

The archaeological contractor Niche produced a useful overview of Aboriginal and European heritage. The next essential step is to conduct rigorous and detailed ground-truthing by field survey.

The rock art study was a desktop study. Accordingly, it requires rigorous ground-truthing in the field. According to Aboriginal community member Kazan Brown, the

author's conclusions in the Niche study are based on one day in the field, of the 72 field days allocated. The conclusions were based on photos that the survey team took.

Most of the European heritage survey was treated as a desktop study. Almost no site work was done.

Alternatives

Dam wall raising is one possible solution to Sydney water supply. There may be others. An integrated approach could allow for the preservation of the Aboriginal and European heritage and the ecosystems services that provide for wildlife and agricultural production, especially downstream.

The right conclusion

The overall impression is that the archaeological consultant for the EIS is wanting to please (or not displease) the proponent. In light of the high/very high stated significance of the Aboriginal places identified in the archaeologists report, perhaps there should have been a recommendation that the development not proceed at all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Kabaila', with a stylized, flowing script.

Dr Peter Kabaila, Heritage Consultant, Black Mountain Projects Pty Ltd

18th November 2021

(Attachment A: Statement by Kazan Brown)

“My ancestors walked this land for many thousands of years. When the Burraborang settlement was evacuated, my grandfather and great-grandfather helped build Warragamba Dam and my immediate family remained in Warragamba.

In the 1950s Burraborang Valley was home to many families of settlers and Gundungurra people. They were relocated from the valley to make way for the construction of the dam. They had no choice in this.

The government reacquired the land, gave little compensation and displaced a generation of people. Many Gundungurra people have never and will never walk their land. Jim Smith, author of “Aborigines of Burraborang Valley” and many other notable works, remarked in an interview that when people in Sydney turn on their taps, run a bath or fill up their pools they should be aware of the sacrifice made by the Gundungurra people.

We are talking about an intangible network of dreaming trails, paintings, and carving sites, waterholes, grave sites and scar trees. The loss of this network is truly devastating for Gundungurra people.

We are talking about real people who made their lives in the valley for tens of thousands of years. A living, breathing history and culture hidden behind the dam wall and beneath the waters of Lake Burraborang.

In the past few years I have travelled to two of the sacred waterholes, Reedy Creek and Gungahlook. I’ve eaten oranges off my family’s farm at the Jouriland Homestead site and let the valley wash over me. The valley may appear as an untouched wilderness, but it has really paid the ultimate price of impact by man.

I have been told that I am the first Gundungurra woman in decades to set eyes on many of our sites and to walk on such a large part of the Gundungurra country. It seems that I will be the last. During one of our trips into the valley, the historian Jim Smith guided us through caves with rock art of animals, spirit people and handprints. Generations of my people left their personal mark on the wall of a cave, showing that this place was special. Some art was up so high on the wall that it was amazing they could reach it.

This experience for me seeing so many handprints, just like mine, then left behind by many generations of people who had been members of my tribe, was breathtaking and like finding a thread that ties me to my ancestors again. This was very deeply humbling.

When the dam was built there was no consultation process. It was forced on the residents that they would need to find a new place to live. From where I stand and where many of my brothers and sisters stand as contemporary Aboriginal people, we think we have lost enough. We have sacrificed enough and we will not lose the precious little we have left.

Today we the Gundungurra people are threatened again.” (Kazan Brown, October 2021).