

Re: Submission to the EIS on exhibition

I am a Blue Mountains local of 18 years, and I am strongly against the proposal to raise the Warragamba dam wall.

My reasons are the following:

1. The clearing of native vegetation indicated by the EIS
2. The damage to areas of heritage listed GBMWH site, as indicated in the EIS
3. Cumulative impacts of other developments in Western Sydney / Sydney and concerns with water quality of Sydney's river systems.
4. Social impacts – impacts on the sense of place of Blue Mountains locals, including first nations and non-indigenous peoples, from the permanent and temporary loss/damage to ecosystems, species and heritage sites.
5. Misleading EIS – pushing the case in favour of the dam on the basis of climate change, when improvements to flooding management and water management are not and should not be pivoted on raising a dam wall, with all the other impacts

1. Clearing of native vegetation

It is stated numerous times within the EIS that the construction of the dam would require the clearing of 22 hectares of native vegetation. In the appendix for example it states:

*‘Approximately 22 hectares of native vegetation would be cleared including a small area of one threatened ecological plant, community. The native vegetation also provides habitat for flora and fauna species **potentially** including some threatened flora and fauna species.*

- (Appendix F6 page 2)

Although the EIS outlines various ‘mitigation’ mechanisms for the land clearing, including offsets and the development of a Flora and fauna ‘management plan’, the existing vegetation is irreplaceable. This is not just because of its legally defined heritage-value, but simply because it exists and has a place in the world irrespective of our actions. No vegetation elsewhere can replace what is already existing in any given ecological system. Since the wall's construction requires this vegetation to be cleared, habitats disturbed, it ought not to go ahead.

2. Damage to areas of the GBMWH as indicated in the EIS

In the EIS, this loss of vegetation has been considered minimal in comparison with the total area of the GBMWH site. In response, I would like to point out that the responsibility to protect the heritage area includes all the heritage area within the protected, defined boundaries, not a determined proportion of this area. Justifying the clearing of this vegetation with the mindset that it is relatively minimal is problematic because it dismisses the value of each individual site as part of WH area.

3. Cumulative impacts

Cumulative impacts are significant not because of immediate consequences, but consequences in conjunction with other impacts occurring elsewhere in the ecosystem. The proposal in lists concerning cumulative impacts of the dam on water quality, protected lands, aboriginal heritage, flooding and hydrology, and biodiversity. It also mentions positive socio-economic cumulative impacts. Considering that Warragamba provides water for 90% of Sydney, it is clear that socio-economic benefits are not comparable to the other cumulative impacts listed. I would imagine that pollution, sediment runoff from bushfires, debris from floods and 24-hour airplane pollution will surely change long-term quality of the water of the surrounding tributaries and water systems. Any positive

economic impacts, or improvements to flooding risk cannot justify these consequences. The dam should not be raised because the more we push its limits, the more we cause irreversible and unpredictable dire consequences to the water quality, us and the environment that relies upon it.

4. Social impacts

I've lived in the Blue Mountains most of my life, as my family first moved here when I was three years old. Recently, the bush down the road from the house that I have grown up in has been cleared to make way for a new estate. Every time I walk past, I have memories of the way it used to be. It's hard to explain this experience in words, but when I walk past, I realise that my sense of place has been altered, I feel disorientated, sad and at times distressed about the trees, paths and birds that no longer exist. This feeling has been acknowledged in academia and elsewhere as the experience of 'solastalgia', that is, feeling homesick in one's home. (Albrecht, 2012). My own connection to the Blue Mountains is an important part of who I am, and is an indicator that this ecosystem means something, has a purpose beyond my own comprehension and should be managed and preserved according to its intrinsic and irreplaceable value.

It has been established that the dam will destroy some sacred first-nations cultural sites. As I understand it, these sites are a part of the home of indigenous peoples, but importantly also a part of their story and teaching. As a non-indigenous person, I do not pretend to be able to imagine how the loss of these sites, and the changes to their country will impact them. All I know is what I have experienced myself, which is that my feeling of grief is actually difficult to identify and put into words. It is therefore important that the community, and locals who live here in the Hawksbury, Mountains, Nepean and Warragamba areas should be listened to carefully and not have their views glossed over. The assessment of impacts to first-nations people should never be assumed to ever be fully evaluated and understood within the western, science-based 'outsider' or 'independent' assessment process. It is my view that the dam should not go ahead at all if the community and particularly the first nations people of the area are opposed to it.

Reference

Albrecht, G 2012, 'The age of solastalgia', The Conversation, August 7, available at <<https://theconversation.com/the-age-of-solastalgia-8337>>.