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Submission to the Warragamba dam raising Environmental Impact Statement

Healthy Rivers Dubbo is a grass roots community network dedicated to providing a strong voice for our local rivers, aquifers and wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin for the benefit of wildlife, plants and people. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge that this land was never ceded.

Healthy Rivers Dubbo (HRD) is pleased to have the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Warragamba dam raising Environmental Impact Statement.

HRD strongly opposed the raising of Warragamba dam wall.

Environmental Impact Statement

The NSW parliamentary inquiry into the project allowed the airing of serious concerns about the integrity of the EIS. Ecologists claimed that the ecological assessments they had worked on had been watered down at the request of the proponent.

81% of the Blue Mountains Heritage Area was devastated by the 2019-20 bushfires, yet there were no post-bushfire field surveys done. Less than one third of the impact area has been assessed for Aboriginal Cultural Heritage.

Threatened species guidelines in the EIS do not meet the guideline requirements, and there has been no modelling of the perceived economic benefits of raising the dam wall.

HRD considers that the EIS for this project is no fit for purpose.

World Heritage Sites

Australia's obligations under the World Heritage Convention would be breached should this proposal go ahead, risking the listing of the Greater Blue Mountains as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

This project would put critical threatened species habitat at risk, including for the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater and one of Sydney's refuge koala populations. The threat to 65 kilometres of wilderness streams and rivers is unacceptable.

Australia's obligation to the World Heritage Convention negates entirely the feasibility of this project.

First Nations concerns

The Gundungurra Traditional Owners who speak for the Country potentially impacted by this project have been long relaying to the public the stress and anguish they are experiencing due to this proposal.

Over 1,500 identified Cultural heritage sites would be unreasonably put at risk and the Traditional Owners have told the NSW Government to stop this project.

The colonisation and destruction of the most significant Aboriginal Cultural values and sites seems to be accelerating in Australia. The deliberate destruction of Juukan Gorge has not slowed the continuation of acts of unholy desecration.

HRD asks the NSW Government to stop and consider how traumatic a proposal to destroy 1,500 churches so that land developers could profit would be to the community, and apply the same level of outrage to this circumstance.

The Traditional Owners have said to stop destroying their Culture – so stop it.

Alternatives

Floods are inevitable, and their severity will be increasing with climate change. Building higher dam walls gives the community a false sense of security to develop floodplains. It's the behaviour of humans in this scenario that turns a flood into a disaster.

It is far smarter, cheaper, safer and responsible to learn to live with floods rather than fool ourselves that we can control them.

Alternatives to this project that should be considered include:

- flood evacuation routes
- international best practice floodplain development controls
- a property repurchase scheme
- integrated dam management and climate forecasting

Recommendation

HRD recommends that the proposal to raise Warragamba dam wall be rejected.

For further information about this submission contact Melissa Gray, Convenor of Healthy Rivers Dubbo on healthyriversdubbo@gmail.com.

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