

Fact Sheet

Warragamba Dam Raising: What's at stake?

The NSW Government proposal to raise the wall of Warragamba Dam in the interests of urban development of the Hawkesbury-Nepean floodplains would potentially allow flooding of up to 4,700 ha of land and 65 km of wilderness rivers and streams.

We are looking at the irreversible destruction of Aboriginal cultural values and heritage; the extinguishment of Native Title; loss of our UNESCO World Heritage listing; the extinction of numerous species of plants and animals; the last wild rivers in NSW gone and our quality of life forever damaged.

1. Native Title

Native Title has not been extinguished in the area to be flooded and the State Government is required to negotiate with Traditional Owners under the Native Title Act 1993 before taking any action that might extinguish Native Title. This has not been done, despite being required under both the Native Title Act 1993 and the Gundungurra Indigenous Land Use Agreement. The State Government is a party to the agreement, which was registered by the Native Title Tribunal in 2015

2. Aboriginal cultural values

Hundreds of Aboriginal sacred sites are at risk of being flooded in the southern Blue Mountains, which is an extensive and rich cultural landscape belonging to the Gundungurra People. The area, including the Coxs and Wollondilly Rivers and Burragorang Valley, is a highly significant part of their Country, being the living embodiment of the creation stories about the formation of the landscape by ancestral beings. The rivers, waterholes and mountains of the Blue Mountains landscape tell one of the most intact and documented Dreaming stories in Australia.

When Warragamba Dam was built in 1960 it resulted in the flooding of a large proportion of the cultural heritage and Dreaming stories of the Gundungurra

people. If the dam wall is raised the remaining sites of this story - including Aboriginal cultural sites, creation waterholes and art - will be destroyed.

Even the draft Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment Report which forms part of the Environmental Impact Statement, and which only surveyed 26% of the relevant area, identified 300 sites of Indigenous cultural significance.

An application by the Gundungurra Aboriginal Heritage Association and other Gundungurra descendants to have their ancestral lands protected under section 90 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act as a place of special significance to Aboriginal culture is still to be determined and would also be compromised by the proposal.

3. UNESCO World Heritage listing

Flooding the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area is a direct contravention of the UNESCO World Heritage convention.

There is a very real threat that raising the Warragamba Dam wall may result in the de-listing of the Greater Blue Mountains from the UNESCO World Heritage List, because it will impact on the outstanding heritage values for which the park was listed. The Australia

Credit: Taylor Clarke



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International Council on Monuments and Sites, an Australian Committee for the body which advises UNESCO, has warned of the potential for the Blue Mountains to be placed on the World Heritage in Danger List if the dam is raised.

4. Threatened plants and animals

The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area is listed on the World Heritage Register partly due to the 48 threatened species and rare communities it supports. This includes its "exceptional representation of major eucalypt groups... exceptional diversity of habitats... of the Australian fauna within a single place... and outstanding ecological integrity."

The proposal would mean the destruction of habitats supporting at least 26 threatened species that will potentially be driven closer to extinction. For example, the area is the breeding site for the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater and the largest wild population of the nationally threatened Camden White Gum.

It would include destruction of the Birrigooroo Waterhole in the Kedumba Valley, home to one of the rarest Eucalyptus species in the world, *Eucalyptus benthamii*.

5. The last Wild Rivers in NSW

The proposal to raise the dam will cause irreparable damage to extraordinary wilderness areas and wild rivers that are protected under legislation.

This includes significant areas of the Kanangra (122,072ha) and Nattai (41,867ha) Wilderness areas, declared under the Wilderness Act 1987, and parts of the Kowmung River, a Wild River declared under the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act 1967, which would be irreparably silted over.

6. Quality of life for residents

Any threat to our City's cultural and natural values, and in particular the loss of our World Heritage status, would have a serious effect on our local economy, which depends heavily on our 4.7 million annual visitors.

Blue Mountains natural areas provide a significant recreation resource for our 80,000 residents as well as those of Greater Sydney and the world. They also play a significant role in providing high quality drinking water to Sydney, as much of the City, south of the highway, drains into Lake Burragorang. Any threat to these natural areas puts our quality of life at risk.

Acknowledgments

Information sourced from Gundungurra Traditional Owners, Give A Dam and from submissions lodged by: Assoc Prof Jamie Pittock, Australian National University; Dr Anthony Green, University of Wollongong; National Parks Association of NSW; Nature Conservation Council; Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Advisory Committee; The Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd; Public Service Association; Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee; Gundungurra Aboriginal Heritage Association Incorporated; Kazan & Taylor Brown; Wollondilly Shire Council; Blue Mountains City Council; and Michael Jackson, Jackson Ward Archaeology Cultural Heritage Consulting.

Credit: David Noble

