

September 29, 2021

Warragamba Dam EIS release next step in farcical process

Today's 4,000 page [release of the environmental impact statement \(EIS\) for the raising of Warragamba Dam](#) is "simply the latest act in an ongoing political farce", Harry Burkitt, General Manager at the Colong Foundation for Wilderness said.

"After four years in which we have seen prolific government leaking, opposition from the Australian insurance industry, protest from Traditional Owners, condemnation by expert consultants, hostility from UNESCO and objection from the Deputy Premier, the NSW Government has now allowed Minister Stuart Ayres to proceed with the exhibition. The project would nevertheless greatly benefit [Stuart Ayres' plans to develop large swathes of the Hawkesbury-Nepean floodplain, as seen in this Nine News piece located at Penrith Lakes.](#)

"Raising Warragamba Dam is the most profound attack on Australia's World Heritage in decades. This was acknowledged by Planning Minister, Rob Stokes in his [decision to down-grade the State planning significance of the project yesterday.](#)

"The EIS released today is a document littered with mistruths and undercooked figures attempting to justify the destruction of priceless Indigenous heritage and some of Australia's most threatened species.

"Last year the Commonwealth Environment Department expressed the view that the dam project was likely to have 'extensive and significant impacts' on the national and World Heritage values of the Blue Mountains. Nothing has changed.

"The company that was paid over \$10 million by WaterNSW to write the EIS, SMEC Engineering, has an extremely poor record of working with Indigenous people. It [has been previously banned from working on World Bank projects in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.](#) In one instance it was [accused of using a tank to 'consult' traditional owners in Myanmar about a major dam project.](#) Yet WaterNSW thought SMEC Engineering were fit consultants to assess impacts to Australia's World Heritage-listed Blue Mountains and advise on the treatment of Gundungurra cultural sites in the Burratorang Valley."

The EIS is fundamentally flawed in key areas. Some examples include:

- Just three hours was spent surveying for koalas and one day spent surveying for platypus across 65 kilometers of watercourse that will be intermittently inundated by the raised dam wall.
- The extent of the inundation that will occur in the pristine Kowmung and Kedumba Rivers is seriously understated. This means that the certain environmental and cultural damage that would be done in their catchments is not admitted.
- Impacts to threatened species from dam inundation have only been considered for one quarter of the impact area (1,400 hectares of the 6,000 hectare impact area).

- No experts were engaged to undertake studies of the impact of the dam project on the Outstanding Universal Values for which the Blue Mountains national parks were originally placed on the World Heritage list.
- The NSW Government has refused to obtain the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of the Traditional Owners, the Gundungurra People, to the dam project.
- Just one quarter of the impact area has been surveyed for its Aboriginal cultural significance -- which alone found over 300 significant cultural sites.
- Eighty percent of the Blue Mountains World Heritage area was fiercely burnt in 2020. This has damaged the ecology of the area but no new field surveys have been conducted to understand the present condition of threatened species.
- The official responsible for the assessment of biodiversity offsets [had a conflict of interest with the proponent, WaterNSW](#)

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