



Branch: Upper Lachlan

Date: [REDACTED]

Regional Water Strategy Team
 NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
 Sydney NSW

Dear Team,

Re: Response to the Draft Regional Water Strategy: Lachlan September 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft strategy and we note that the deadline for submission has been extended to 13 December 2020.

We are concerned that the strategy lists a proposed \$650 million investment to raise the Wyangala Dam wall as an existing Government commitment; or possibly a commitment to complete the business case study. The wording used in different sections of the draft strategy is somewhat ambiguous. As expressed during our submission to the 'Parliamentary Inquiry into the rationale for, and impacts of, new dams and other water infrastructure in NSW', the NSW Farmers' Upper Lachlan Branch would like to express three major concerns relating to this proposal given that our members live and operate in the catchment area. We worry that the proposal to raise the Wyangala Dam wall:

1. will not yield significant increases in available water downstream for critical human needs given the very limited number of times the current dam has been filled to capacity since the wall was last upgraded,
2. does not address problems with siltation of the current dam¹ which has reduced and continues to reduce its useful life, and
3. appears to have been made without access to robust hydrological data, benefit-cost analyses (including economic losses due to inundated agricultural land) and environmental studies and engagement with local communities. Absent detailed costing of all necessary civil works, including both dam reconstruction and construction works in the LGA's surrounding the dam, the risk of significant under budgeting of the final project is high.

In Cowra on 5 December 2020, a meeting of individuals and groups concerned by the proposal to raise the Wyangala Dam wall, including land managers who are both irrigators and land custodians below the Dam, indicated that:

- improving irrigator water use efficiency by repairing leaking water channels would be a much more cost-efficient strategy to increase available water supplies; and
- flooding of the flood plains and wetlands are vital to replenish ground water supplies and ensure the ongoing existence of nationally important wetlands, including the Booligal wetlands and the Great Cumbung Swamp in the Lower Lachlan. The Lachlan is an intermittent river that only connects to the Murrumbidgee at its lower end when both the Murrumbidgee and Lachlan are in flood. The Lachlan lower river wetlands depend on occasional flooding for their health, so further retention of occasional flood waters by a raised Wyangala dam wall must, as a matter of simple logic, risk further environmental damage to that section of the river.

¹ https://archive.ils.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/495486/archive-lachlan-catchment-action-plan-2013-2023.pdf

The NSW Farmers Upper Lachlan Branch respectfully suggests that for a fraction of the cost of raising the Wyangala Dam wall, taxpayer money would be better invested in activities that support improved land management in the catchment area that would yield multiple benefits, including:

- Improved water quality entering the dam;
- Decreased siltation of the dam;
- Increased farm resilience to drought and bushfires; and
- Increased sequestration of carbon into soils as outlined in the Federal Government's Technology Investment Roadmap.

We would welcome an opportunity to engage with the relevant sectors of the NSW Government to advance the design of a land management program for Wyangala Dam catchment area in collaboration with the Mulwaree Aboriginal Community and Landcare groups. We would like an opportunity to view the methodologies being employed to conduct the associated hydrological, environmental and business case studies along with the community engagement strategy. We wish to contribute to sustainable land management, sound biosecurity, improved human and animal welfare, improved agrodiversity and biodiversity and support enduring production of high-quality food and fibre in the Upper Lachlan Shire.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted signature block]