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Regional Water Strategies – Far North Coast
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Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Draft Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy

I have lived in the Northern Rivers for 20 years and have owned land here since the mid-1970s. With my husband, I live in a rural area where we are reliant on tank water, nevertheless, in the light of the continuing pressures on our region of an expanding population and increasing extreme weather events brought about by the climate crisis we have created, I commend the government for addressing the on-going necessity of healthy and resilient water resources.

By and large we agree with the objectives and vision of the Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy (the Strategy), the information and modelling used to develop it and the opportunities and challenges for water management underlying the very long list of options that could be included in the finalised Strategy.

We are concerned however about the credence that may be accorded to Rous Water's *Future Water 2060* and its reliance on the contentious proposal of a new Dunoon Dam on Rocky Creek in the Lismore local government area. I am a long-standing, active opponent of that proposal. We do not support a new dam on Byrrill Creek in Tweed Shire either, however admit to not having participated in the public debate on that proposal.

I hope that government is aware of the regional community's widespread condemnation of the Dunoon Dam which is Rous Water's preferred option, on grounds of its destructiveness. The community is also concerned that Rous Water has failed to plan for water resilience utilising innovative, modern technologies and is down-playing the anticipated fourfold increase in the cost of supplying water if the dam proceeds.

Our personal concerns focus around the extinction pressure that will be imposed on native fish, platypus and in particular the koala, as well as the unacceptable destruction of Aboriginal heritage and of The Channon Gorge and its endangered ecological community of lowland rainforest - Big Scrub Rainforest - and its threatened species. Enough to say that should it proceed Dunoon Dam will result in the inundation of some of the most significant regional wildlife corridors and threatened species habitats south of the Nightcap Range.

Over the past 20 years we have worked to protect and manage koala populations across the Northern Rivers as individuals and as active members of Friends of the Koala Inc. The area of the proposed Dunoon Dam is an acknowledged koala hotspot and lies within the Far North-east Hinterland Area of Regional Koala Significance (ARKS)¹.

¹ ARKS are defined as regional scale areas of currently known, moderate to high density of koala occupancy.

The *Dunoon Terrestrial Ecology Impact Assessment* (SMEC Australia, 2011) prepared for Rous Water identified 72 ha of koala habitat of Tallowwood and Flooded Gum forest, a third of which would be destroyed outright by inundation or by construction of the dam wall, and fragmenting the remainder.

It noted in no uncertain terms that the proposed works for the study area would result in a *Significant impact likely* assessment for 23 recorded threatened entities including the Koala (pp.135-136). Specifically:

“The dam would remove important habitat features and local linkages for threatened fauna species. In particular, movement pathways for the threatened Koala will be impeded from the installation of the dam wall, spillway, and the inundation area”. (p.i)

It went on to say:

“While these impacts will be mitigated utilising the measures outlined in this report should the dam proceed, **there are likely to be residual impacts that cannot be mitigated**”. (p.136)

Keeping in mind the dire findings of the NSW Legislative Council's Report on *Koala populations and habitat in New South Wales* (June 2020) and the even more recent study of the impact of the 2019 spring-summer bushfires on koalas in three fire-grounds in our region (Wardell 70% decline, Busby's Flat at Royal Camp State Forest 72% decline and Busby's Flat at Braemar State Forest 47% decline)² it is clear that every koala is precious if our Northern Rivers koalas are to survive in the wild.

For this reason alone, the Dunoon Dam should no longer be an option in the Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy.

Thank you for the opportunity to make these brief comments.

Yours sincerely

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² ABC Mid North Coast, 7 September 2020: *WWF report finds 71pc decline in koala numbers across northern NSW bushfire affected areas* by Kirstie Wellauer & Kerrin Thomas.