

Submission re: Draft Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy

My name is [REDACTED] I was a Councillor on Rous County Council for 4 years and a Councillor on Lismore City Council for 8 years including 2 years as Deputy Mayor. I have been a resident of the Far North Coast for nearly 50 years and for most of that time I lived in Terania valley that adjoins Rocky Creek Valley. I am very familiar with the extraordinary beauty and unique bio-diversity of this country.

I appreciate the work done by the Department. I attended the briefing on the draft report given by the Department in Lismore. It was very informative and staff were very helpful.

Rous County Council's Future Water 2060 Project is a deeply flawed document because of its reliance on the Dunoon Dam and should not be relied upon for North Coast Regional Water Strategy.

Proposed Dunoon Dam

Contrary to your draft document this dam is highly contentious. 91% of the nearly 1,300 submissions from Rous' own consultation opposed the dam. In addition the dam proposal is totally rejected by the elders of the Widjabul Wia-bal tribe who have refused to have anything further to do with Rous and its dam proposal (see media release and petition appended).

The financial cost of the dam in no way reflects the cost in terms of the loss of habitat for koalas, native fish and platypus all of which are under ever increasing threat of extinction. Nor does it take into account the destruction of prehistoric Aboriginal burial grounds and other special sites of significance to First Nation people. Additionally the destruction of nearly 60 hectares of endangered lowland rainforest 6% of the remaining 1% of the 'Big Scrub' does not have monetary value and is not seen as part of the dam's cost.

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This is one of my photos of where the wall of the proposed dam is to be located. The level of destruction of this pristine, extremely beautiful and unique environment does not bare contemplation. The fact that Rous' reports talk of "offsetting" the Endangered Ecological Community of Lowland Rainforest would be laughable, except it is not written in jest. Even more chilling is the reference to "fauna salvage" to rescue wildlife, one hates to think what the end result of this activity might be. **The ecological impacts of the Dam are totally unacceptable.**

"All Options on the Table" published by the Water Services Association Australia (WSAA) states that new dams are a high-risk investment because they are rain dependent. Rous has no mix of complimentary supply options that ensure resilience as advocated by WSAA (WSAA, All Options on the Table, 2020). Nor does Rous have a plan B should the dam fail which is totally predictable in a rapidly warming climate with the prospect of decades long droughts.

Prof. Stuart Khan (UNSW) has stated that a resilient water system needs 30-50% of its supply from non-rain dependent sources such as desalination powered by green energy and purified recycled water (ABC North Coast 22-11-20).

The Dunoon Dam's proposal is highly questionable in terms of projected demand. NSW Planning population projections

(<https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/-/media/Files/DPE/Factsheets-and-faqs/Research-and-demography/Population-projections/2019-Byron-Bay.pdf>) show that Byron, the fastest growing LGA in the region in the 25 years from 2016 will grow by an average of 0.5% pa and there will be a net increase of 50 people in that period with migration of 4,500. These are not figures that would justify a huge dam.

The dam's cost of water is another contentious point. Professor Stuart White (UTS) pointed out that Rous' costings are based on the total water holding of the dam which is very unlikely to be used and a more accurate and much high costing would be achieved if the projected average demand for water were to be used as a basis for the marginal cost of water from the dam.

Note that there is no mention of Demand Management and more efficient use of water the two cheapest options for improving water security in Rous' list of options in its Integrated Water Cycle Management document. Rous consistently maintains that it has 'done' Demand Management, yet it has been without a dedicated officer for this task for nearly two years and only recently appointed a part time person. When Rous quotes its significant improvements in demand management it includes figures from its introduction of metering and extreme water restrictions which gives a very biased picture.

Another significant omission from this list is roof water harvesting. Warnambool has had a very successful project of this nature (see <https://www.wannonwater.com.au/news-projects/projects/warnambool-roof-water-harvesting-initiative.aspx>) This type of water harvesting is very appropriate to new developments which developers can fund and it actually places the responsibility where it belongs rather than on charging general consumers.

Perhaps most damning (pun intended) of all is the fact that Rous' Future Water 2060 does not mention system resilience. Nothing more clearly illustrates the fact that Rous' thinking is firmly in the 20th century and it is not up to date with current thinking and technology. This is confirmed by the fact that Rous has only seriously considered the options of groundwater and the Dunoon Dam. (Rous County Council, Future Water Project 2060, 2020.)

Appendices 1 & 2

**Statement from the Traditional Custodians about the proposed Dunoon Dam.
December 2020**

We, Custodians of Widjabul Wia-bal lands of the Bundjalung Nation and neighbouring tribes, want you to know that the area to be affected by the proposed Dunoon Dam is significant to us, to our people. We need to protect this land. It is important for the connection to our Ancestors and for our future generations to be able to connect to their Ancestors and traditions.

This land holds our relationship with our living heritage and our culture.

For thousands of generations we have lived on this land and protected it while it protected and fed us. To destroy this land is to destroy the environment which sustains us. The proposed dam would destroy the learning grounds for future generations.

The suggestion to drown our sites to protect them (as stated in the 2013 Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment) is deeply offensive to us.

Additionally, the valley to be drowned by the dam at the end of Fraser Road is the site where we were moved to after we were dispossessed just over 100 years ago. It is important as part of our survival journey.

We, the Traditional Custodians of this land, will not accept its destruction. No compensation will replace its importance to us and our following generations.

We call on Rous County Council to return the land that it controls to the Traditional Custodians.

Do not construct the Dunoon Dam. Do not destroy our living culture.

Name	[Redacted]	Signature	[Redacted]
Address	[Redacted]	Tribe	[Redacted]
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Address	[Redacted]	Tribe	[Redacted]
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Media Release 14 December 2020

Traditional owners tell Rous not to follow Rio Tinto with the Dunoon Dam.

Widjabul Wia-bal Traditional Owners have told Rous County Council General Manager, Phil Rudd, that they do not accept the building of the proposed Dunoon Dam. The dam would inundate ancient burial sites and extensive evidence of occupation in the past and in recent times.

John Roberts, a senior Elder of the Widjabul Wia-bal said, "I was one of the stakeholders consulted in 2011 about the impact of the Dunoon Dam on cultural heritage. In the 2011 Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment prepared for Rous, we stakeholders said with one voice that no level of disturbance was acceptable to us. We still say that. Nothing has changed. There is no need for another study. Our opinion has not changed."

"Our cultural heritage is a direct connection to our ancestors. We have been here for thousands of years. These sites provide us with a link to our traditions, our land and our living heritage. They allow us to educate our young ones in their history."

A unanimous decision of Elders and Widjabul Wia-bal people was given to the Rous General manager last Tuesday 8th December. The group insisted that Rous County Council abandon plans for the Dunoon Dam. "So many of our cultural sites have been destroyed. To destroy more is unacceptable to the Traditional Owners," said Mr Roberts. "We are tired of being 'consulted' and then ignored. Enough is enough".

The Widjabul Wia-bal collective insisted that Rous County Council no longer deals with individuals. In future Rous must consult with the whole stakeholder group. Rous agreed to provide all correspondence between Rous and the Widjabul Wia-bal representatives since the dam was first mooted in 1995.

Barry Roberts, John Roberts' elder brother, said that Rous County Council's plans for the Dunoon Dam are the same as the Rio Tinto's actions at the Juukan Cave in Western Australia. "We believe that

the Australian people will not allow this destruction of our heritage to go ahead.”

The Widjabul people acknowledged the importance of walking together with the WATER Northern Rivers Alliance to protect the land and develop alternative water options.

Contacts:

[Redacted contact information]

