

National NSW [Warragamba Dam](#)

NSW Coalition members urge alternatives to raising Warragamba Dam wall



By [Angus Thompson](#)

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Three NSW Coalition members are among a cross-parliamentary committee calling on the state to look at alternatives to raising the Warragamba Dam wall.

A unanimous report featuring the input of Liberal MLCs Shayne Mallard and Taylor Martin, as well as Nationals member Wes Fang, has recommended heightened scrutiny of the environmental impacts of the \$1 billion-plus project and seek the consent of local Aboriginal people before raising the wall by at least 14 metres.



Gundungurra Traditional Owners Kazan Brown (right) and her daughter Taylor Clarke, on land that will be inundated by the raising of the Warragamba Dam Wall. WOLTER PEETERS

The recommendations form part of an interim report resulting from a parliamentary inquiry into the government bid to reduce flooding risks to residents of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley, which critics say will endanger protected World Heritage bushland upstream and inundate hundreds of Aboriginal cultural sites.

Independent MLC Justin Field, who is chairing the inquiry, said the evidence heard by the committee cast significant doubt over whether raising the dam wall could minimise both downstream flood risks and upstream impacts.

“It is unequivocal that the project will have significant, if not devastating, impacts on upstream biodiversity, including on critically endangered species like the Regent Honeyeater and pristine wild rivers like the Kowmung,” Mr Field wrote

in the report, adding the committee recommended more fieldwork be done to account for the impact of the 2019-20 bushfires.

“It is encouraging that this report has unanimous support from both government and non-government members,” Mr Field wrote. Labor’s Adam Searle and Penny Sharpe, and One Nation’s Rod Roberts, are also on the committee.



A NSW parliamentary inquiry report has recommended alternatives to raising the wall of Warragamba Dam. BROOK MITCHELL

The committee has recommended lowering the full supply level of the existing dam, improved evacuation routes for Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley residents, and the consideration of buying back flood-prone land among alternatives to raising the wall.

The inquiry also heard evidence about the impact the project will have on Aboriginal heritage, including on sites that are part of the creation story of the Gundungurra People, with traditional owners airing frustration about the adequacy of the assessment of significant sites.

Kazan Brown, a Gundungurra elder, had told the inquiry that a member of a consultancy firm and a WaterNSW staffer had used a July 2019 meeting to imply their support would be rewarded. However, the government-owned agency conducted an investigation [concluding no wrongdoing had occurred](#).

The committee has recommended the project not proceed “without free, prior and informed consent” by registered Aboriginal parties, and that further cultural fieldwork should be undertaken.

An environmental impact study released last week said that, if the dam wall was raised as proposed, the water from the March 2021 floods would have peaked 3.6 metres lower in Windsor, and about 5 metres in Penrith, two of the areas the project is hoped to benefit.

Another of the committee’s recommendations was to increase the transparency of the development of that environmental study, following [questions over its accuracy](#).

NSW Minister for Western Sydney Stuart Ayres who is overseeing the proposal, has said the upstream impacts of the project “must be carefully measured against the social, economic and environmental impacts flooding can have on downstream communities in western Sydney.”

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