



Healthy Rivers Dubbo

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Media Release

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Foolish dam plan risks catastrophic flooding

Healthy Rivers Dubbo, a leading local community group providing a strong voice for our local rivers, warns of serious risks if Burrendong Dam's full supply level is raised into the flood-mitigation zone.

Healthy Rivers Dubbo is calling for immediate reconsideration of proposals to increase the full supply level of Burrendong Dam by encroaching into the flood-mitigation zone, warning that the move would pose unacceptable risks to communities and the environment, including downstream creeks and the Macquarie Marshes, while not providing additional water security.

"Using flood-mitigation storage for permanent water supply is dangerous, short-sighted, and would be environmentally devastating," said Mel Gray, Convenor of Healthy Rivers Dubbo.

"This proposal puts towns at greater flood risk while delivering no real improvement to long-term water security."

Increased flood risk for downstream communities

Raising the full supply level would mean flood water would be released earlier and at higher volumes during flooding events. This significantly reduces the buffer intended to protect towns such as Dubbo, Wellington, Narromine, and communities along the Macquarie/Wambuul River.

Healthy Rivers Dubbo highlights several key dangers:

- Earlier and larger flood releases, increasing the chance of downstream flooding.

- The dam loses the ability to absorb and delay natural flows.
- Less time for emergency response, reducing the capacity of emergency services to protect communities.
- Greater risk of concurrent flood peaks from the Talbragar, Bell and Little Rivers exacerbating river levels.

“Burrendong Dam’s flood-mitigation zone exists for a reason,” said Ms Gray.

“Disasters in Lismore, Eugowra and the Lockyer Valley show us the danger of not taking flood risk seriously.”

Severe environmental consequences

The creeks around Warren and the Macquarie Marshes — one of Australia’s most significant and internationally recognised wetland ecosystems — depend on big, episodic flood pulses for their survival. These floods recharge wetlands, sustain reedbeds and marsh vegetation, and trigger essential ecological booms of insects, frogs, fish and waterbirds.

Using part of the dam’s flood-mitigation storage for permanent supply would shorten natural flooding events, and:

- Cut short mass waterbird breeding events. Hundreds of thousands of Spoonbills, Nankeen Night Herron, Cormorants and Ibis would abandon their nests if the water suddenly dropped.
- Reduce the extent and duration of floodplain inundation.
- Accelerate ecosystem decline and hasten species toward extinction thresholds.
- Undermine the natural flood-pulse processes on which the creeks and marshes depend.

“Already, the marshes have shrunk from over a million hectares of inundation in a flood to about two hundred and thirty thousand hectares (fig1).

“So much has already been lost and there’s simply no more water to give.” Ms Gray said. “We cannot trade away their survival.”

A poor solution to water security challenges

Healthy Rivers Dubbo argues that the proposal fails even on its intended objective to improve water security, because:

- Additional stored water would be allocated under a two-year planning framework that does not ensure supply in prolonged drought.
- It would not meet the needs of communities downstream of the Macquarie Marshes, which rely on unregulated flows.
- Benefits would only favour large-scale cotton irrigation, not towns, industries, or the environment.

"Tampering with the flood-mitigation zone won't fix fundamental flaws in the water-sharing system," Ms Gray said.

A better alternative—creating a drought reserve

Healthy Rivers Dubbo supports the implementation of a drought floor in Burrendong dam - a dedicated reserve to secure up to three years of critical supply for towns, stock and domestic users, high-security licence holders, and basic river flows.

"A drought reserve is a responsible, evidence-based way to improve resilience without putting people or ecosystems in danger," Ms Gray said.

"Dubbo came within months of evacuation in the 2017/20 drought, we would still be putting our communities back together if that had happened. (figure 2)

"The risks of not prioritising critical needs by implementing a drought floor in Burrendong dam are incomprehensible."

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Figure 1 - Macquarie Marshes inundation area in flood events
Floods are smaller since the dam was built

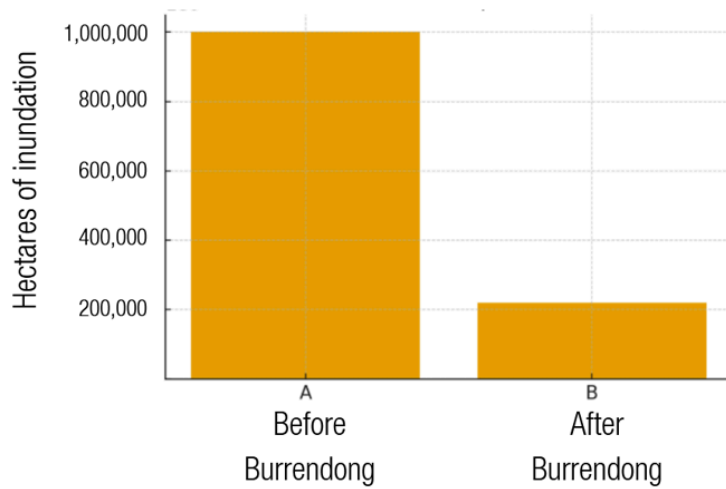


Figure 2 - water is released from Burrendong dam at an irresponsible rate. A 2 - 3 year 'drought floor' would protect Dubbo Region from catastrophe

Figure 12: Burrendong Dam historical storage volumes

