17 October 2018

The Hon Melissa Price MP
Minister for the Environment
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email: Melissa.Price.MP@aph.gov.au

Dear Minister,

Water NSW Amendment (Warragamba Dam) Bill 2018

Australia ICOMOS is writing to you to raise express our concerns in relation to the Water NSW Amendment (Warragamba Dam) Bill 2018, which is currently before the Parliament of NSW. We are particularly concerned about the longer term proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall by 14 metres, thereby allowing for periodic inundation of parts the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWHA) and adjacent areas that are currently being assessed for potential National Heritage values.

Australia ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation of cultural heritage professionals formed as a national chapter of ICOMOS International in 1976. Our mission is to lead cultural heritage conservation in Australia by raising standards, encouraging debate and generating innovative ideas. ICOMOS is also an Advisory Body to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee under the World Heritage Convention.

The areas that are affected by the proposed NSW legislation include a World Heritage property, a National Heritage place, two national parks, a declared Wilderness area, a declared Wild River, and the Warragamba Special Catchment Area. The subject area is recognised globally for its biodiversity and rare species and was also originally nominated to the World Heritage List by Australia, with the support of the NSW Government, for cultural and natural values in the 1990s. Parts of the area are currently on the Australian Heritage Council’s Priority Assessment List and are being evaluated for a range of potential cultural National Heritage values. It is inappropriate, as a matter of proper process, for the NSW Parliament to be considering enabling legislation that would impact upon established World or National Heritage values or potential National Heritage values.

The proposed dam wall raising could result in the periodic inundation of up to 1,000 hectares of the GBMWHA and 3,700 hectares of national park lands including impacts on eucalypt species, which contribute to the Outstanding Universal value of the GBMWHA, and both known and unknown Aboriginal cultural heritage sites. Australia ICOMOS understands that the cultural heritage survey undertaken as part of the impact assessment for the dam wall project comprised 25 days across a 354 square kilometre section around the shores of Lake Burragorang. This timeframe appears to be manifestly inadequate, either to identify the cultural heritage places which may be affected or to engage appropriately with, or to seek consent from, the relevant Gundungurra Traditional Owners.

Australia ICOMOS therefore advises that:

- The proposed raising of the Warragamba Dam wall has potential to affect the integrity of the GBMWHA and therefore to impact adversely upon the Outstanding Universal Value of this World Heritage property.
• Under Article 4 of the World Heritage Convention, Australia is obliged (among other things) to do all it can, using the utmost of its own resources, to identify, protect, and conserve the cultural and natural heritage of GBMWHA – neither the decision making process for the proposed raising of the Warragamba Dam wall nor the pre-emptive proposed NSW enabling legislation comply with these obligations.

• Best practice heritage practice, including the Burra Charter, (the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance), requires that the values of a place of cultural significance should be identified prior to decisions which affect those values, and that, while considering and managing other factors, a primary objective should be conservation of those values. The proposed raising of the Warragamba Dam wall, the process for decision making and the proposed NSW legislation do not meet this standard.

• A thorough cultural heritage survey and assessment process, articulation of ALL cultural (and natural) values and completion of the current National Heritage Values assessment should ALL precede any precipitative action in this matter, including particularly the proposed enabling legislation.

• The Water NSW Amendment (Warragamba Dam) Bill 2018, represents a potential threat to the GBMWHA, within the meaning of paragraph 179 (b) of the Operational Guidelines to the World Heritage Convention.

Australia ICOMOS therefore calls on you to intervene urgently to:

1. Advise the NSW Government that the proposed raising of the Warragamba Dam wall is likely to have a ‘significant impact’ on a World Heritage Property and national Heritage place and should therefore be referred to you as a ‘controlled action’ within the meaning of the Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cwth);
2. Request that the NSW Government withdraw the Water NSW Amendment (Warragamba Dam) Bill 2018, from Parliament;
3. Advise the NSW Government that alternatives to the proposed raising of the Warragamba Dam wall must be considered;
4. Ensure that any decision about the proposed raising of the Warragamba Dam wall be deferred until the Australian Heritage Council has completed the current Priority Assessment List process; and
5. Notify the World Heritage Centre of the proposed raising of the Warragamba Dam wall and the Water NSW Amendment (Warragamba Dam) Bill 2018, in accordance with paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines to the World Heritage Convention.

Please note that I have also written to the NSW Minister for the Environment and the ICOMOS Secretariat in Paris regarding this matter. However, Australia ICOMOS is always willing to discuss these concerns further if this would assist you in understanding our position.

Yours faithfully

IAN TRAVERS
President, Australia ICOMOS