

## Media release

12 May 2020

### No drought-proofing from new dams

National Party plans to build new dams and expand others will enrich irrigators, degrade river ecosystems and will not protect communities from climate change and drought unless the government changes Water Sharing Plans to reflect our drying climate, environment groups have warned.

“The projects the Nationals outlined today will not provide more water security and drought-proof communities,” **Nature Conservation Council CEO Chris Gambian said.**

“Bigger dams will just mean more water for irrigation and less for the river and other users.”

Deputy Premier John Barilaro and Water Minister Melinda Pavey announced this week that \$245m would be spent building the business case for three dam projects:

- raising Wyangala Dam on the Lachlan River
- building the Dungowan Dam on the Peel River
- building a dam on the Mole River near Tenterfield

The Nationals claim the dams will store water that can sustain communities during dry spells,<sup>[1]</sup> but water allocations from dams in these river systems will not be based on the most recent drought.<sup>[2]</sup>

“Time and again, the Nationals have shown their water policy is to provide maximum water to the irrigation industry,” **Mr Gambian said.**

“This is reflected in the new Water Sharing Plans, due to commence on 1 July, 2020. Bigger dams will mean more water taken from our river systems, not more water stored for drought protection.”

**Inland Rivers Network President Bev Smiles said:** “The new Water Sharing Plans do not use the most recent drought of record and were bound to over-estimate the volume of water available for irrigation.

“For the Lachlan River, the lowest inflows on record are based on those before July 2004. The Millenium Drought and the current more severe drought are being ignored.”

This issue was confirmed by Water Minister Pavey in Parliament last November where she said:

*“To include a rule that automatically requires the water supply system to adjust to new record drought would potentially result in significant quantities of water being locked away from productive use.”<sup>[3]</sup>*

“The new Water Sharing Plans will cause the same problems to arise with each new drought,” **Ms Smiles said.**

“In 2016, all NSW dams were full. By the end of 2018 they were empty because all the water had been handed out, not stored for drought protection.

“This is what will happen again with these new projects if we don’t change the Water Sharing Plans to reflect the scarcity of water in our drying climate.

“The Water Sharing Plans need to be changed so the most recent drought is considered when making annual water allocations.

“We don’t need more, bigger dams. We need water sharing rules that provide water security for severe drought conditions.”

**MEDIA CONTACT: James Tremain | 0419 272 254**

## **BACKGROUND TO WATER SHARING PLAN RULES**

### **Wyangala Dam**

*Water Sharing Plan for the Lachlan Regulated River Water Source 2020*

Part 10 System Operation Requirements

Division 4 General System Operations Rules

58 Maintenance of water supply

(1) In this clause, the period of lowest accumulated inflows to the water source is identified by flow information held by the Department prior to **1 July 2004.**

(2) The operator must operate the water supply system in such a way that water would be able to be supplied during a repeat of the period of lowest accumulated inflows to the water source,

### **Dungowan Dam**

*Water Sharing Plan for the Peel Regulated River Water Source 2020*

Part 10 System Operation Requirements

Division 2 General System Operations Rules

52 Maintenance of water supply

(1) In this clause, the period of lowest accumulated inflows to the water source is identified by flow information held by the Department prior to **1 July 2010.**

(2) The operator must operate the water supply system in such a way that water would be able to be supplied during a repeat of the period of lowest accumulated inflows to the water source

## **Mole River Dam**

### *Water Sharing Plan for the NSW Border Rivers Regulated River Water Source 2020*

#### Part 10 System Operation Requirements

#### Division 3 General System Operations Rules

##### 57 Maintenance of water supply

(1) In this clause, the period of lowest accumulated inflows to the water source is identified by flow information held by the Department prior to **1 July 2009**.

(2) The operator must operate the water supply system in such a way that water would be able to be supplied during a repeat of the period of lowest accumulated inflows to the water source

---

<sup>[1]</sup> Media Release Deputy Premier and Water Minister, 10 May 2020, STAGE 1 BEGINS ON STATE SIGNIFICANT DAMS

<sup>[2]</sup> See attached briefer: Water Sharing Plan rules are not based on the most recent lowest inflows on record

<sup>[3]</sup> <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardFull.aspx#/DateDisplay/HANSARD-1820781676-80754/HANSARD-1820781676-80801>