

Media Release

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\$500 million flood mitigation strategy recommended for Hawkesbury Nepean Valley

A \$500 million flood mitigation plan to significantly reduce the potential risks to people and property in the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley is a key recommendation of the 20-year State Infrastructure Strategy released today.

The Strategy, prepared by Infrastructure NSW to help guide future infrastructure investment by government, identifies a need to protect the Valley's residents, homes, businesses and agricultural properties, as well as infrastructure.

The Hawkesbury Nepean Valley is one of the most heavily developed and at risk flood plains in Australia.

Infrastructure NSW has recommended that the NSW Government review all the major flood mitigation options available, including raising the Warragamba Dam wall, to significantly reduce the potential impact of major flooding.

If major flood mitigation is not provided, Infrastructure NSW said roads in the Valley will need to be upgraded to ensure safe evacuation.

It is recommended the mitigation measures are implemented within five years (2012-2017) and are likely to cost at least \$500 million, depending on the option approved.

A study commissioned by Infrastructure NSW has found that a one in 1,000 year flood in the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley similar to the flooding in some Queensland catchments in 2011 would cause \$8 billion in damages. It would potentially:

- Put 43,000 residents and 9,000 employees of local businesses at risk.
- Flood 14,000 homes above floor level and destroy 6,500 homes.
- Have many wider impacts including up to six months' disruption to the Main Western rail line affecting both Blue Mountains passengers and NSW coal exports.

Infrastructure NSW Chief Executive Paul Broad said the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley was of great economic importance to NSW, and the impact of a disaster would be felt across the Australian economy.

"Since the earliest days of NSW, we have known that the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley was prone to potentially devastating floods," Mr Broad said.

"The Western railway line could be disrupted for up to six months, which would affect coal and other freight exports from central and western NSW."

Mr Broad said investigations by NSW authorities in the 1990s had established that extreme floods could result in the river rising some 20 metres. They proposed lifting the Warragamba Dam wall 23 metres to temporarily store flood waters and reduce flood losses in the valley.

“Subsequent Government policy held however that it was more important to protect bushland around the Dam from temporary inundation. Based on the Queensland experience, it is appropriate to reassess priorities.”

As part of the study Infrastructure NSW commissioned on flooding in the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley, the option of raising the Warragamba Dam wall, recommended 20 years ago to mitigate significant flooding, was assessed. The project is one of the highest value projects recommended by Infrastructure NSW.

“Alternatively, Infrastructure NSW has recommended, if no major flood mitigation is provided that NSW will need to spend an estimated \$400-\$600 million removing capacity constraints from major flood evacuation routes including the M4 and Great Western Highway – although this will not stop a flood from affecting the area.”

The State Infrastructure Strategy 2012-2032 is Infrastructure NSW’s independent advice to the NSW Government on the priority infrastructure investments and reforms required to drive productivity and economic growth.

The Strategy’s recommendations have been provided to the Government for its consideration in developing plans for infrastructure investment. For further information, the Strategy can be found on www.insw.com

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