

Notice of Motion

Council meeting 19 February 2025

Acknowledging correspondence from Widjabul Wia-bal and local First Nations people on the Dunoon Dam

I hereby move the following motion:

That Council:

1. Acknowledge that the Widjabul Wia-bal Native Title determination covers 11,700 hectares of Bundjalung Country, including the proposed Dunoon Dam site
2. Acknowledge the receipt of 85 letters signed by Widjabul Wia-bal and local First Nations people, stating:

"I am writing to make clear to you and the Rous Councillors that any plan to build a dam near Dunoon is not acceptable under any circumstances to me, to the Widjabul Wia-bal, or the broader Bundjalung Nation. The land that would be drowned contains sites which are sacred to us. For thousands of years we have lived on this land and protected it while it protects us. The land connects us to our Ancestors and provides learning grounds for future generations. There has been too much destruction of our lands and culture through ignorance. Do not further destroy our living culture. Do not construct the Dunoon Dam. Return the land to the Traditional Custodians."

3. Express profound gratitude to the Widjabul Wia-bal people for their steadfast leadership and their millennia of caring for Country and Waters
4. Consider these submissions when making decisions about Rous' Future Water Strategy

Background

The Widjabul Wia-bal people were granted Native Title on 19 December 2022. Their determination covers 11,700 hectares across the Northern Rivers region, bounded by Bagotville and Tuckean Nature Reserve in the south, Bungabee State Forest and Cawongla in the west, Nightcap National Park in the north, and Wollongbar and Alstonville in the east.

On Widjabul Wia-bal Day, a local event commemorating the Native Title determination held in Lismore on 19 December 2024, 85 Widjabul Wia-bal and local First Nations people signed letters to Rous County Councillors and General Manager, expressing their unequivocal opposition to the Dunoon Dam proposal. This includes community leaders such as:

- Tracy King, chair Bundjalung Tribal Society
- Naomi Moran, NSW Treaty Commissioner (formerly CEO of the Koori Mail)

- Ashley Moran, Heritage Conservation officer with OEH, director Widjabul Wia-bal Gurrumbil Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (Registered Native Title Body Corporate).
- Noel King, director Widjabul Wia-bal Gurrumbil Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC.
- Nicole Roberts, daughter of Uncle John Roberts, senior Knowledge holder for the Widjabul Wia-bal
- Queenie Speeding, director Widjabul Wia-bal Gurrumbil Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC.
- Reg King, one of the Native Title applicants
- Michael Ryan, one of the Native Title applicants
- Barrie Claude Roberts, eldest of the Roberts family, brother of senior knowledge-holder Murray John Roberts

The Widjabul Wia-bal people have consistently expressed opposition to the Dunoon Dam proposal since its inception, citing the cultural significance of sites that would be inundated. These sites were formally identified in cultural heritage studies conducted in 2011 and 2013.

As the statutory authority responsible for water supply in the region, Rous County Council has obligations under the Native Title Act 1993 and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2023 to consider and protect Aboriginal cultural heritage in its planning and operations.

These letters represent a significant formal communication from Widjabul Wia-bal and local First Nations community members, expressing their opposition to development within their traditional lands. The volume and consistency of these individual submissions demonstrates the depth of concern within the Widjabul Wia-bal community regarding the proposed Dunoon Dam.

Councillor Elia Hauge

Date: 03 February 2025

Signature



Staff Comment

1. Management and staff are aware of the Federal Court's decision of 19 December 2022 regarding the Widjabul-Wia-bal Native Title claim. It is confirmed that the decision is factored into and informs planning and decision making as and when it is applicable to the circumstances.
2. Public representations including letters and petitions were received and acknowledged by Council in 2021 in response to the public exhibition of the Integrated Water Cycle Management Strategy (Future Water Program 2060).