



April 16, 2024

## **Update on threat to Wilcannia's long-term water security from weir redesign**

Council is continuing lobbying activities in an effort to ensure the new Wilcannia weir will be built at the right height to guarantee long-term water supply for the town. An update on the situation is provided in a report to the April Council meeting by the General Manager.

The Wilcannia weir project is being undertaken by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment (DPIE) and funded by the federal and state governments.

The community has been waiting almost 50 years for a new weir. Residents endorsed the original weir design some two years ago. Funding of \$30million was allocated for the essential infrastructure in 2019, from both the federal and state Coalition governments with expected completion in 2021. However, it took so long for work to start that by 2022, with still no sign of any work taking place, the forecasted cost for the project was to be \$45million.

Now in 2024 the community is being told that construction on the new weir and fishway will start early next year. Unfortunately, there is community anxiety and scepticism surrounding the project because of the shock redesign which, among other things, reduces the weir height by one metre and will make a substantial difference to water security in a drought.

While there is talk that the new design will be safer with less impact on the environment the Council General Manager, Greg Hill, said this was not something that Council agreed with. "Council considers the additional height increase, originally agreed to by the community, should not be considered as an environmental impact, especially during high river or flood events, as this section of riverbank is inundated naturally," Mr Hill said.

"If the NSW Government is worried about the environmental aspects you have to wonder why the Water Minister is publicly stating that the new design allows for the weir to be modified in the future if required, including raising its height or adding a gate," Mr Hill said.

The redesign also excludes gates and the bespoke concrete castellated ridge fishway, and it will be a manual vertical slot fishway. The community believe this will be more dangerous and is unattractive.

Last month the Council Administrator, Bob Stewart, and Mr Hill met with the NSW Water Minister, Rose Jackson, and Local Member Roy Butler, at Parliament House in Sydney. They outlined the community and Council's rejection of the revised proposal.

"Council was told the redesign was necessary because the original design would cost approximately three times more than originally proposed. It is disappointing that when we asked if the federal government had been approached for further funding support, we were advised that they had not been," Mr Hill said.

"It is obvious that the government knows the weir redesign will not be up to scratch and that is why they are publicly admitting that the design has scope for further upgrades, including raising the weir wall down the track if needed. The community has been waiting for water security for almost 50 years and people deserve to have infrastructure built properly the first time without the need to factor in further upgrades. We have already seen the cost blow-out over the years from when the project was first funded. Imagine the future cost and likelihood of upgrades, which will become necessary because of the redesign," Mr Hill said.

Lobbying continues. Ends

Media Contact: Gabrielle Johnston 0472 787 022  
Administration Centre – 21 Reid Street Wilcannia  
Mailing Address – PO Box 165 Wilcannia 2836  
Email [council@centraldarling.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@centraldarling.nsw.gov.au)  
Phone 08 8083 8900