



Social and eco concerns



COSTLY: An impression of the proposed Tillegra Dam. Dungog Council says community costs have been ignored.

Dam the impacts

ENVIRONMENTAL economist Geoff Wells has waded into the Hunter's Tillegra Dam debate, saying the \$380 million proposal would be ethically and technically deficient without a comprehensive assessment of social and ecological impacts.

His call for a benefit-cost analysis mirrors a Dungog Shire Council decision on Wednesday night which asks the State Government's Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal to have Hunter Water recognise "overlooked" community costs associated with the dam.

Dungog Mayor Glenn Wall said Hunter Water representatives had used flawed logic to justify the dam and ignored more than \$10 million in annual costs for which the community should be compensated.

No Tillegra Dam group chairman Sally Corbett welcomed the stand taken by the council and Dr Wells.

Hunter Water spokeswoman Angela Felton said a full environmental and economic assessment of the Tillegra project was scheduled to be handed to the State Planning



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Department in October.

Ms Felton encouraged debate on the dam and said the community would have an opportunity to make formal comment when Hunter Water's assessment documents were publicly exhibited.

Dr Wells is an expert in the economic valuation of catchments and directs South Australia University's sustainable business graduate program.

"River basin ecosystems provide a range of values that people following international best practice typically look at when evaluating the total economic value of a project such as the Tillegra Dam," Dr Wells said.

"The values often don't involve monetary transactions but nonetheless have a real benefit to local people and the broader community like ... resources for future generations."

Dr Wells said "to exclude such analysis cannot be justified technically or ethically".