

Conondale Range Committee

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... still watching over the Conondales and Mary Valley.

Formed in 1976 to press for a significant National Park in the Conondales, the Conondale Range Committee has worked with successive state governments on the Conondales Consultative Process, the Agricola Mine Rehabilitation Process, the South-east Queensland Forest Agreement and the recent establishment of the Conondale Range Great Walk. In 2004, we published "Walking on the Wilder Side .. in the Conondales" and our work has been recognised with two Sunshine Coast Environment Council awards.

December 14 2012

Comments to the Senate Inquiry: "The Effectiveness of Threatened Species and Ecological Communities Protection in Australia."

Our comments in relation to the above relate principally to the retention (and not devolution) of federal powers under the EPBC Act and we intend to make a submission to that separate inquiry also.

We of the Conondale Range Committee have witnessed two extinctions in the Conondales in the last few decades though none at the time realized it. The Gastric-Brooding Frog *Rheobatrachus silus* and the Southern Day Frog *Taudactylus diurnus* have not been reported for some time and are now thought to be extinct.

The experience we refer to in this brief submission, however, is not about the frog species whose demise took place apparently gradually and certainly without warning, but rather about Threatened Species of the Mary River and the role that federal EPBC legislation played in coming to their defence, in 2009, against the Queensland Government project, the Traveston Crossing Dam.

This organisation joined many others in opposing the dam. Although our initial charter had been to press for improved protection of the impressively biodiverse forests of the Conondales, we could not stand to one side while a proposal with drastic impacts for the river at the center of our catchment, was actively promulgated.

We were deeply grateful that the federal EPBC legislation provided a third party to examine the impact of the proposal on federally-listed threatened species.

One should be able to have faith in state –based agencies to do a scientific and impartial assessment but we found this not to be the case.

We found in the lead-up to the federal assessment that many state government reports (that contained information damaging to the proposal) became "unavailable". It was only the holding of a federal Senate Enquiry that forced the tabling of these documents, and made them available for public scrutiny.

Many statements in the dam's EIS were shown to be flawed or misleading and we were grateful that we had the presence of a "third party" in a decision-making role to point this out to.

This would not have been the case had the federal power been devolved to the state.

There was an incredible conflict of interest as it was. The State Coordinator General was charged with advancing the project and simultaneously assessing its environmental impact.

(It should be pointed out that this situation is even more critical in Queensland with its unicameral parliamentary system and the absence of any house of review.)

The other thing for which we have been very grateful to the federal government, is the decision to draw up a Threatened Species Recovery Plan for the Mary River.

By not approving the dam and by drawing up a “whole of river” recovery plan, we effectively have been granted a reprieve for the Threatened Species of the Mary River.

We are optimistic that these two actions, coupled with the heightened public awareness that fuelled and informed the campaign against the dam, will lead to a more secure future for the Lungfish, Mary River Turtle, Mary River Cod and the Giant Barred Frog.

Ian Mackay
(President)