

Chapter 7

Committee comments

7.1 The committee undertook this inquiry, aware that its ability to affect change and influence the management of water resources in Queensland is significantly restricted. However, the committee recognises that an important outcome of the inquiry process has been to give a voice to many people, organisations and communities in South East Queensland affected by the proposals under consideration in this inquiry.

7.2 The committee heard from many different people during this inquiry and would like to thank those who took the time to prepare written submissions, attend public hearings and speak to members of the committee during site inspections. The fact that members of affected communities have been so forthcoming with details of their personal situations is very much appreciated by all committee members. The committee has, through this evidence, gained an insight into how communities are feeling, and in particular, the impact the proposed dams have had on community strength and spirit.

7.3 The Queensland Government has been very cooperative during the inquiry process and has attended public hearings and provided substantial amounts of information to the committee. The committee would like to express its appreciation to each of the government agencies and authorities in Queensland who contributed. The committee is also grateful for the opportunity to undertake a site visit to the Traveston Crossing Dam site and the Borumba Dam site which was organised by the Queensland Government.

7.4 The committee acknowledges the commitment of the Queensland Government to develop and implement solutions to the State's water crisis. It is widely predicted that South East Queensland will continue to experience a significantly high rate of population growth. It is imperative that strategies and initiatives are developed and implemented in the short, medium and long-term to meet the water demand requirements of the region. The government's current water supply strategies are diverse and include both demand management elements and supply source initiatives. The committee would particularly like to acknowledge the trend in urban water reduction levels indicating that Queensland residents are actively committed to water management solutions and reducing their demands on an already strained water supply.

7.5 Initiatives like the proposed transportation of water from the Northern Rivers area of New South Wales to South East Queensland remains a state government issue which can only be progressed with the cooperation of both state governments. The Commonwealth has no role in progressing this proposal and the committee notes that the NSW government did not contribute to the desktop study. The evidence received during this inquiry clearly indicates that there is significant work to be done on each

of the options identified in the desk-top study undertaken by SMEC. A detailed assessment of environmental, social and other impacts must be undertaken before any of the options could be given serious practical consideration.

7.6 The committee is concerned at the volume of evidence it received criticising the Queensland Government's engagement with the community in relation to both the Traveston Crossing Dam and the Wyaralong Dam projects. The committee notes that members of the affected communities felt poorly prepared for the announcement. This appears to be symptomatic of a politically expedient decision made in a tense political environment and in the face of burgeoning population growth and a reducing water supply. The committee received evidence suggesting that members of affected communities may have been able to reconcile themselves to this decision if the proposals had been supported from the outset by detailed scientific analysis. The Queensland Government's belated attempts to address this deficit appear to have done little to gain community support.

7.7 Significant concerns were raised about the lack of communication and information provided to communities and stakeholders from the initial announcement of the projects and through the early planning phases. It is clear that members of the communities affected by these projects do not feel that they were adequately prepared for the initial announcement or effectively included in the planning process. The poor level of community engagement and consultation appears to have been exacerbated by the fact that information, when sent out, was at times incorrect or misleading, and led to much confusion, uncertainty and stress within the community. The inability of the affected communities to access technical information such as drilling and hydrological studies further compounded an already tense situation.

7.8 However, the committee acknowledges that the Queensland Government has implemented many strategies intended to resolve these issues and assist members of the community to understand and engage with the process. Some of these initiatives include: the One-Stop-Shops, the Community Futures Taskforce, public meetings, newsletters and fact sheets. If these processes had been implemented soon after the announcement, the expectations and anxiety levels of the communities may have been better managed. The continued uncertainty and inability to access information over a long period of time has created much tension and anxiety in the affected communities.

7.9 The committee received a significant body of evidence expressing concern about the environmental impacts of the dams, particularly in relation to a number of threatened species. The Commonwealth Government does have a role to play in the assessment and approval processes of 'controlled actions' under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The proposed Traveston Crossing and Wyaralong Dams have been determined as 'controlled actions', and as such will be subject to the approval of the Commonwealth Minister for Environment and Water Resources. The approval process was discussed at length during this inquiry. Evidence was received from members of the community, indigenous representatives, the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Water Resources, the Queensland Government, academics and other experts in the field.

7.10 The committee notes with concern the evidence received relating to the Paradise Dam and statements indicating that conditions placed on the approval of this initiative by the Commonwealth Minister have not been met by the Queensland Government. The committee is particularly concerned that mitigation strategies for endangered species do not appear to have been effectively implemented. The committee acknowledges that an audit of the approval conditions for Paradise Dam is being undertaken. While it is unfortunate that the results of this audit will not become available before this inquiry concludes, the committee remains concerned about this issue and will seek a briefing on the results of this audit when completed.

7.11 As stated previously, the committee is clearly aware of the limitations it faces in respect of this inquiry. The committee notes that the approval process for the Environmental Impact Statement through the Commonwealth Minister for Environment and Water Resources will not be finalised for a number of initiatives in South East Queensland before the conclusion of this inquiry. The committee hopes that the Minister will allow relevant evidence gathered as part of this inquiry to inform that approval process.

7.12 The committee makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1

7.13 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Minister for Environment and Water Resources, when exercising authority under the EPBC Act, considers the evidence received on the potential environmental impact of the Traveston Dam on the Mary River and the species of the river. The committee also recommends that the Minister reviews the results of the audit on the Paradise Dam approval conditions to mitigate any potential effect on threatened species.

Recommendation 2

7.14 The committee recommends that the Queensland Government continues to:

- instigate strategies that will inform, engage and consult with members of the affected communities;**
- ensure that businesses affected by the proposed dams are adequately compensated and offered appropriate assistance; and**
- where possible, facilitate the timely release of copies of reports and information to members of the community to achieve a transparent and open process.**

