

Ms Sally Mackay
PO Box 115
KENILWORTH 4574

The Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

April 3, 2007

Submission for Inquiry into additional water supplies for southeast Queensland—Traveston Dam/
Mary River.

Dear Sir /Madam

Environmental impacts.

SEQ dams, to date, have manifestly failed to avert the current “water crisis”. The Mary River is the only river left in southeast Queensland, which remains free of a major impoundment. For future scientific research and review, it is essential that it remains undammed. Millions of dollars of State and Federal funding, not to mention countless hours of community labour and goodwill, have been expended on the restoration of the river’s ecology with an emphasis on staving off the extinction of its unique denizens.

Respected authority on the Queensland Lungfish, Prof. Jean Joss of Macquarie University, has alleged that the Queensland Government ordered documents pertaining to the Lungfish to be shredded prior to the dam announcement. Persistent reports of Paradise Dam’s failure to ensure safe passage of the Lungfish and the project’s short life have deepened pessimism that the government can maintain a viable breeding population of this species. This is a view shared by the international scientific community.

I am told that impounded Lungfish are being enthusiastically fished by members of our Asian community and that Lungfish swept over impoundment walls are scooped up by excavators and restored to their upstream confines. Hearsay, of course, but profoundly disturbing, when we are told that Paradise is the model for the Mary dam.

I am satisfied that Lungfish can survive in an impoundment, but can they thrive, can they spawn? Current research clearly demonstrates one thing- more research needed. A time frame way beyond the scope of the present EIS is essential for this.

We have seen photographs of turtles killed and maimed at Walla Weir on the Burnett River, and heard reports of Lungfish failing to negotiate the fish elevator at Paradise Dam, or worse, being guillotined in the process. These dismal accounts are unlikely to find their way into any EIS commissioned by QWI.

I take this opportunity to strenuously urge this Inquiry to focus attention on the fact that the EIS is confined to just Stage 1 of the proposal. Construction of the dam would so compromise the ecological

values of the Stage 2 inundation area that an EIS would be an absolute travesty. The environmental impacts of the entire proposal need to be assessed at this stage, rather than incrementally as is currently envisaged.

In the guidelines for the Draft ToR, the implications for climate change were not even addressed. The generation of greenhouse emissions from a dam subject to fluctuating water levels over an area comparable to Sydney Harbour must be factored into both the cost and impact of this proposal.

Social Impacts.

I have served as a volunteer at the Kandanga Save the Mary Infocentre since May 2006. This makes me singularly well-placed to assess the social impacts of the proposal and its level of acceptance in the wider community.

The Infocentre was hastily established as a crisis centre following Premier Beattie's media announcement of a "megadam on the Mary River south of Gympie". The mass incredulity that ensued, and that persists to this day, is well-founded upon local knowledge that a farm dam in this valley is liable to fall short of one's expectations, that is, that water will "find its own level" due to seepage. And no-one, but no-one would contemplate constructing a dam on the alluvial floodplain.

The absolute conviction of this valley that this proposal is doomed to fail underpins the frustration and despair which has translated into physical and mental health impacts.

Time and again. I hear the endless refrain, "Maybe I could cope with this if I knew it would work". Now that the University of Technology, Sydney, and Cardno Engineering's Report, in tandem with the negative prognoses of a raft of experts have upheld their claims, the community's frustration has intensified.

Anna Bligh has airily dismissed the report as "flawed and selfish", and the community's resistance as "a classic case of NIMBY". This trivialization of the issue bears the hallmark of psychological warfare, which has claimed casualties.

I can attest to encountering a substantial number of people who have resorted to anti-depressants, sleeping tablets, are exhibiting out of character behaviours (viz rowdy conduct at rallies), manifesting first-time hypertension, matrimonial breakdown, suicide attempts, anxiety, hospitalisation, the list goes on.

Schools in the valley have been particularly challenged as children struggle to deal with the ramifications of the proposal.

The government did not respond as speedily as Kandanga did to the community crisis.

It was not until July 2006, that the OneStop Shop was set up in Kandanga and Lifeline services were made available. Housing the Department of Natural Resources under the same roof conferred upon Lifeline a taint of association with the government, which Lifeline has found itself challenged to dispel.

A sequence of maps placed people in, then out, of the dam footprint, while on the ground government personnel visibly engaged with the unfamiliar topography and geology, flanked by burly security guards. Their incursion into private property further eroded people's psychological equilibrium.

Suspicion that no preliminary investigation into the proposal's feasibility was resoundingly confirmed. The conduct of QWI employees in their zealous efforts to secure sales of properties lent weight to a widely-held belief that they were working on a commission basis. The formation of QWI, wholly owned by the State Government, its personnel drawn from DNR, deepened the prevailing scepticism that government transparency was ever on the agenda. Indeed, government opacity had become the order of the day.

Community Futures Task Force.

The Community Futures Task Force was appointed, at its head, Major General Peter Arnison. His previous job description at the helm of Velocity One, formed to promote growth in southeast Queensland, considerably hampered his acceptance here, as untrammelled growth has been a considerable factor in precipitating southeast Queensland into its "water crisis".

An exhausting round of community consultation meetings then ensued. They were characterised by the evasion of direct answers to the community's concerns although rather unsatisfactory answers were subsequently delivered in bound form, some months later. By then it was late December 2006.

In the meantime the government continued to acquire property for both Stages 1 and 2, many people making their decision to sell based on a firm belief that they would be financially disadvantaged if they delayed, or worse, face compulsory acquisition. Presentation of the dam as a *fait accompli* has reinforced this belief. The inexplicable acquisition of some properties which lie outside the dam footprint, has nurtured a speculation that there is a "hidden agenda", deepening anxiety levels immeasurably.

The people of the Mary Valley should not be dismissed as lacking in courage or resilience on the basis of the trauma they are manifesting. Rather, the question needs to be asked - have they been subjected to a concerted campaign of psychological warfare? This question has prompted researchers, such as Robert Hayles of Griffith University, to release a no-punches-pulled discussion paper on the social impacts of the proposal, whilst the Medical Faculty of University of Queensland is conducting ongoing research into the physical and mental health impacts.

It is now just over 11 months since the Premier announced the decision to construct "a megadam on the Mary". Property purchases began under the guise of relieving hardship but rapidly morphed into active pursuit of sales, generating anxiety and stress.

That a host of authorities share our concerns about the dam, that all the river's councils oppose it, gives us strength, but none of these appear to dent the determination of the State Government.

It surely isn't unreasonable to expect a government to make sound, well-considered and well-researched decisions and to treat people with honesty and fairness and transparency.

Yours

Sally Mackay