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Monday, April 02, 2007

The Secretary
Senate Rural & Regional Affairs & Transport
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Submission to the Senate Inquiry to the Traveston Crossing Dam

Purpose

My submission will question the social, economic and political ramifications of the proposed dam at Traveston crossing.

Disclosure

I own a Veterinary Practice based in Cooroy where clients in the affected part of the Mary Valley form a substantial part of our client base. My practice employs 4 other veterinarians and 7 nursing staff. My wife owns a property in the affected area that will be inundated by Stage 1 of the proposed dam.

History

I have practiced as a Veterinarian based in Cooroy since December 1990. In that time I have spent a large part of my professional life in the Mary River Catchment. I have become extremely aware of the social and economic factors that drive this community

Political Appearances

From the perspective a local resident, the announcement, in April 2006 to dam the Mary River at Traveston Crossing was a hasty politically based decision prior to an election so that it would appear that the Government was 'doing something' to provide water for the South East corner. No prior community consultation was provided, and the decision, which came out of the blue and devastated the community, was announced through the media. The political gain in Brisbane was effective. The political loss was nil, since the electorate in the affected area, and all electorates downstream of the dam were non-government held seats.

Socio economic Effects

In my opinion, the social effects of this proposal are the most devastating. Any proposal that affects as many properties and families as is proposed, and effectively obliterates an entire community is a travesty. Many of the affected properties are family run farms. They are born and bred farmers who farm well. Their displacement will



not only lose them to this area, but most likely lose them to farming altogether. Families with school-aged children will have to sever them from their friends and start again elsewhere. Those not directly affected by the dam will find their communities are physically divided by the dam. I cannot adequately explain the first hand evidence I have of the total psychological devastation that this proposal, and the methods used by the Queensland Government and Queensland Water Infrastructure (QWI), have had on the community. The flow-on effects extend to all communities that draw from the Mary Valley. Businesses in the entire region will be affected adversely. Since the voluntary acquisition process has proceeded, properties are now coming into state government ownership. It is my understanding that houses that have subsequently become government owned are being rented out in a housing commission style. This further aggravates the social upheaval of the community.

Agricultural Effects

Needless to say, if this proposal proceeds to fruition, some of the finest agricultural land in Queensland will be lost forever. It is high production land that has associated specialised farmers. Downstream effects will be greater than that stated by the government. I doubt that the government will commit to their proposed downstream release percentages, and this will have devastating socio-economic effects on the downstream communities involved, not to mention the environmental effects.

Environment

The effects on the environment of damming major river systems are well understood and are being investigated by independent consultants. For anyone to believe that this dam will not devastate the local ecosystem would be naive in the least.

Logistical and Practical considerations

Traveston Crossing is a poor site for a dam. Mid stream damming of a large river system on an alluvial flood plain absolutely defies logic. Add to that the need to acquire large numbers of properties and displace their occupants. To make things worse, other families will have their properties affected by the re routing of local roads and highways to accommodate the dam. To that, then add the economic cost of re routing high voltage power lines and telephone lines. The government has underestimated the fury of the Mary River in flood. Whilst the flood mitigating effects downstream may have at least some short term merit, the effects of flooding upstream I believe will be far greater reaching than what has been modeled.

Alternatives

The community would be much more accepting of this proposal if it were the only possible option of providing water for the south east corner. But ironically, this water conserving community must sacrifice their homes to allow a politically biased agenda to proceed. There are a number of decent alternatives to this project. Raising the wall at Borumba dam must surely be a quicker and more cost effective way of meeting the immediate demands of the south east. Since pipelines are already entrenched as being a part of the water grid, why is it necessary to build yet another mega storage dam? Can't the yield of the Mary be transferred via pipelines to existing storage facilities? Or better still, look at alternatives that are closer to the Brisbane supply such that pipeline distances and pumping costs are minimised. However, is a dam the best way to go ? There is widespread worldwide condemnation of dam building, and in a country surrounded by water, why aren't we investing 1.7 billion dollars into making desalination more efficient? Why are we not investing 1.7 billion dollars in recycled water infrastructure? Or perhaps 1.7 billion dollars could go into educating people that water is a precious commodity. I honestly believe that by decreasing consumption, then it is unlikely that another dam will be needed at all, and in times of drought crisis, desalination should be used to top up the existing water storage facilities. No one from the Queensland State Government nor QWI have been able to adequately explain why this is not feasible, except to say that desalination is too expensive. A 1.7 billion dollar (which will blow out) environmental catastrophe is a much better option it seems.

Conclusion

The Traveston Crossing Dam is an ill-conceived and politically motivated disaster in the making. It has already had significant social and economic effects on the community. The community deserves an explanation as to why this site, which is so glaringly obvious in its faults, was chosen over other alternatives. This senate inquiry is to be applauded for its' desire to unravel the series of politically motivated decision making that led to the nomination of Traveston Crossing as the premier site, and the preferred method of water provision. The community will hope that politics are set aside and that the truth will surface so that there will be recognition of the social, economic and environmental catastrophes that will occur if the dam proceeds.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Poole". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B".

Ben Poole