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

### **Inquiry into Additional Water Supplies for South East Queensland – Traveston Crossing Dam**

As there is an excellent report available ( *Review of Water Supply-Demand Options for South East Queensland*, Institute for Sustainable Futures, Sydney and Cardno, Brisbane, February 2007) ) which analyses this issue, and recommends alternatives to Traveston (and Wyaralong) Dams which can be ready sooner, are cheaper, and more reliable, I am going to focus on the history of the Wyaralong Dam decision and its **social impact**.

In July 2006 the Queensland Government announced that it would build the Wyaralong and Traveston Crossing Dams in response to the “water crisis” in South East Queensland. This brought forward the construction date for the Wyaralong dam to 2009-2011, when it had initially been planned for 2060 or later – perhaps never. As usual, those most affected were the last to know. The following is the documentation of 17 years of first complacency, and then panic, from the Queensland Government, expressed from a landholder’s point of view.

#### **A personal chronology of Wyaralong Dam decisions, 1990-2007**

After coming to power in December 1989, the Goss Government moved swiftly to scrap the long-planned Wolffdene Dam – with a capacity of 1.1 billion megalitres, comparable to Wivenhoe - in the Gold Coast hinterland. In late **1990**, in the report on their urban water strategy for the next 100years, the Government announced that Wolffdene would be replaced by three smaller projects. These were:

1. Stage 3 of the Hinze Dam, to be constructed around 2000 or later
2. Glendower Dam on the Albert River and a downstream weir, to be built around 2015 or later, and
3. a dam on the lower Teviot Brook (then inexplicably called the Braford Hills Dam, now known as the Wyaralong Dam) and weir on the Logan River, to be required around 2060 or later.

Off the record, we were told that the Braford Hills (Wyaralong) dam would never be built. Devastating though it was to have even the possibility of a dam being built on our land in the future, it was something that would not happen in my parents’ lifetime, nor that of my generation. My 5 year old son’s photo appeared in the Courier-Mail – he would be at least 75 when this dam was built, if it ever happened.

In **July 1992** we received a letter from the South East Queensland Water Board, confirming that land for a dam on the Teviot Brook would not be required until approximately 2060.

In **October 2004**, the draft SEQ Regional Plan “all but rejects building new dams ..... in favour of a radical new approach to water management” (Courier-Mail, 29 Oct 2004). The Minister for Natural Resources and Mines released a media statement saying the draft “contains no specific plans or recommendations to build a dam in the Wyaralong Valley”. Why should it?

Another media release from the Minister, in **March 2005**, was titled “**No Decision made to build Wyaralong Dam**”. The Minister stated that “Wyaralong is simply one of a number of sites recommended by the SEQ Regional Water Supply Strategy Stage 1 report for ‘more detailed assessment’ of their suitability as a potential site for any future dam”.

The next month, **April 2005**, saw the release of the SEQ Infrastructure Plan and Program 2005-2026, which allocated \$149 million for “investigation, protection and potential land acquisition” for the Wyaralong Dam over the period to 2026. The Minister duly put out another press release to say “plans for a Wyaralong Dam would have come as no surprise to many local landholders”. How wrong he was. He was also wrong in stating that landholders affected by this decision had already been contacted by the State Government. Never mind, he just released another media statement the following week, “**Community being kept fully informed about dam projects**”, to say affected landholders should receive a letter later that week.

The Premier was also very wrong when he announced that the Government owned all the land for the dam, and it would be built by 2015. In fact they owned about 35%, all of it peripheral to the actual reservoir, and the figure would be fairly similar today. Perhaps the Premier confused Wyaralong with the Glendower Dam (originally planned to be built around 2015) where the Government does own 98% of the land. In any case, we were confused. Did the Government plan to build the Wyaralong Dam 45 years ahead of schedule, or had they just got the name wrong? Until we eventually received our letters with the dreadful news, we were completely dependent on the media for information.

We endured another 12 months of uncertainty and distress, with conflicting information on size of buffer zone, location of new roads, whether or not there would be landholder or public access to the dam, etc, etc. Then in **April 2006**, the Qld Government announced that they were investigating a site at Tilley’s Bridge, near Rathdowney, to replace Wyaralong, as well as a site for a large dam at Traveston Crossing on the Mary River, both to be completed by 2011. As the drought worsened, the Premier said it was “all about yield”. Tilley’s Bridge, on the Logan, was expected to yield 45,000ML/annum on its own, compared with a “system yield” of 21,000ML/a for the Wyaralong Dam and the Cedar Grove Weir. There was blanket full-page advertising in the newspapers showing the amount of water that would be provided by these more productive dams (Tilley’s Bridge and Traveston) and other water measures. The Government allocated \$50 million to a “hardship fund” for people at Traveston and Tilley’s Bridge in exceptional circumstances, but not available to people affected by the Wyaralong Dam. Drilling was undertaken at Tilley’s Bridge and Traveston to determine the suitability of the sites. The Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water provided written advice that “If Tilley’s Bridge proves to be the better site, Wyaralong Dam will not be built”. Their website stated “If the Tilley’s Bridge site is deemed satisfactory, it will replace the Wyaralong dam site as the government’s preferred option in the Logan River basin”. We began to believe

that Wyaralong would not be built (and were encouraged to think so by Departmental staff).

The Premier was due to announce the final decision on the dams in early **July 2006**. He claimed that he was not a coward, and would go to Beaudesert to announce his decision to the community face-to-face. As Wyaralong is nearly all in the Boonah Shire, this seemed like another indication that Tilley's Bridge would be chosen. Meanwhile, on the last weekend in June, three holes were quietly and hurriedly drilled at the Wyaralong dam site.

My aunt and cousin and I decided we would go to the public announcement in Beaudesert if we could find out when and where it was. With some diligent internet searching I found a contact number for the Rathdowney (Tilley's Bridge) action group quite late on Monday night, and my aunt was able to phone and obtain the time and location of the announcement on Tuesday morning. The group spokesman also told us that a delegation of six people from Rathdowney had been invited to a private briefing with the Premier, the Minister, local mayors, etc at 10.30am before the public announcement was made. As not one person from Wyaralong had been invited, this seemed like further confirmation that the dam was to be at Tilley's Bridge.

However, four of us decided to go to the public gathering in solidarity with the people of Rathdowney, as we knew how very stressful the whole process was. I spoke to the Boonah mayor on his way in to the private briefing. He said he didn't know what was happening, but would mention that there were Wyaralong representatives outside. About 11.00am, when the public statement was due, we were called in and walked up about four flights of stairs. (This included my 90 year old aunt and a pregnant younger relative carrying a toddler and associated paraphernalia.) Presumably this was so we wouldn't run into the politicians coming down in the lift, and also to get us off the street before the announcement so there would be no shock and tears in front of the cameras.

In spite of the Premier's protestations about not being a coward and telling the people to their faces, the only people he wanted to deal with were those who would go away smiling. (And the way we realised what decision had been made was by seeing the smiles on the Tilley's Bridge representatives as they filed out.)

When the politicians finally returned to the meeting table full of name cards for Rathdowney representatives and used water glasses - no provision for Wyaralong folk - it was clear that this was an ad hoc decision based purely on the number of people who would be affected, not yield or site suitability. The Premier didn't seem to have any real concept of where Wyaralong was or the details of the dam.

On the 29 June we were given a map of the proposed dam based on a level of 63.6m and an indicative route for the road diversion. On Tuesday 4 July a map was brought to Beaudesert showing a level of 68m but with no indication of buffer zones or road routes. That afternoon we were told by the Department of Natural Resources that the level would probably be between 63 and 66 metres. On Wednesday there was a map - dated 29 June 2006 - on the DNRM&W website (and also the Courier Mail website) which looked like the lower level but showed a possible road diversion miles away over the mountains. By afternoon the road had disappeared completely from the map.

Also on Wednesday 5 July we started receiving our letters from the Premier assuring us of fair and just compensation. Included in his letter was a 1300 number for a 24-

hour counselling service. One of my cousins rang the number saying she had concerns about the Wyaralong Dam. “Would that be Traveston or Tilley’s Bridge?” was the response. The counsellor had not heard of Wyaralong.

Another nine months of unbearable stress has passed. Investigations that should have been done before the dam decision was made are now proceeding apace. We are besieged by calls and visits from Queensland Water Infrastructure or a myriad consultants, investigating flora, fauna, soil, streambeds, geotechnical data, road routes, water quality, contamination, unexploded bombs. Last Friday (**30 March 2007**), a young environmental scientist rang to say he was coming out to investigate aquatic life. He said he knew the creek was dry, but he might be able to see evidence of where water had been. It would be funny if it were not so tragic.

We have asked for the material on which the government made its decision to go ahead with the Wyaralong Dam some 50 years before it was planned to be built. We were promised this, but have never received it. We were told by the Deputy Premier at a public meeting last November that the dam has a risk of failure, but they think it’s an acceptable risk. At that meeting we were also told that the dam will only capture “exceptional events”, that it will not have much water in it much of the time, and it is basically a back-up should the Logan River fail (another joke – the Teviot is an ephemeral creek, compared with the major Logan River).

The years of on-again off-again status of this dam have taken their toll on the health and vitality of the Wyaralong community. My parents and aunt, still farming in their 80s and 90s, and worried sick about the worst drought on record, are having to face decisions that we thought would be faced by their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Valuable time I would like to give to my family is spent dealing with bureaucrats and consultants, attending meetings, doing research, preparing submissions, and writing to politicians (most of whom don’t reply). Nerves are frayed and tempers are short.

Some properties that have been sold as a result of this dam proposal have been vandalised. People feel they can come onto all the affected properties and take things. There is no longer any feeling of security or privacy.

Younger generations of families have delayed moving back to properties or building new houses, as they do not know if there is any future there. This has resulted in an ageing population and a feeling of hopelessness amongst the community. Some people come into the district with the idea that they might as well overstock and overuse as the land will go under water anyway. This is at odds with families who have nurtured the land for generations.

As more up to date information on rainfall and climate change becomes available, the Wyaralong Dam looks more and more of a white elephant. It is hard to understand why the Government continues to push a project which will cost \$500 million (not counting distribution and operating costs, or the Cedar Grove Weir) for a small and uncertain yield. More water is currently being saved by Swanbank and Tarong power stations reducing their electricity generation than would be produced by the Wyaralong Dam using the most optimistic yield figure.

There are many options for replacing the small yield of the Wyaralong Dam (something under 17,000-18,000 ML/a): more demand management initiatives, recycling, catching stormwater, off-stream storages, water harvesting into existing

dams, desalination, allowing Maroon Dam to fill to capacity, building Glendower Dam. All of these are more cost-effective than building the Wyaralong Dam, and they do not have the major social impacts that it has.

The recent report prepared by the Institute for Sustainable Futures (UTS) and Cardno has found that with the current committed supply projects and demand management strategies there is no need for new infrastructure such as Wyaralong and Traveston dams to be built. At the very least there should be a moratorium on the construction of the Wyaralong and Traveston Dams until all other options have been considered and costed.

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