

**GYMPIE UNITING CHURCH**  
**19 RED HILL ROAD, GYMPIE, 4570**  
**PHONE 5482 6967 OR 0419 025 150**

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

Dear Secretary

RE: SENATE INQUIRY INTO ADDITIONAL WATER SUPPLIES FOR SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND – PROPOSED TRAVESTON CROSSING DAM

I thank the Committee and the Senate for the opportunity to make a submission to the above Inquiry. It is somewhat ironic that a few years ago I would have been sitting on the other side of this Inquiry from where I sit today. Since leaving the Senate in 2001 my political activity has been fairly limited. However, this proposal by the Queensland Government is so flawed and has already had such a devastating effect on the social fabric of the Mary Valley, that I feel compelled to support my colleagues in bringing this devastation to the attention of Honourable Senators:

The Rev Iain Watt, who is part of the Ministry Leadership Team of the Gympie & Cooloolool District Uniting Church, has particular responsibility for the Mary Valley. He has made a substantial submission to the Inquiry and I support his submission. The Rev David Pitman, Queensland Moderator of the Uniting Church, has made the concerns of the people of the Mary Valley his own and I believe that he, also, may have made a submission to this Inquiry. He has visited the Mary Valley on at least two occasions and made a number of public statements about the despair of the people affected by the proposal to construct the dam at Traveston Crossing and flood much of the arable land in the valley. Lifeline, an agency of the Uniting Church, has been funded to provide counselling support.

If possible, Revs Iain Watt and David Pitman and myself are willing to give verbal evidence to the Inquiry. We are prepared to appear together as witnesses for the Uniting Church on this matter. In January this year I joined the Ministry Team at Gympie so I have been made aware in the last three months of the distress caused to the people of this valley. Whilst the Church has legitimate environmental, economic and engineering concerns about the viability of this proposal by the Queensland Government, there are others more technically qualified who will make substantial submissions on these aspects of the proposal. And, although there are strong theological and biblical grounds for comment, especially about humanity's responsibility to care for the earth (Genesis 1, 2 & 3, Genesis 9: 1-17, Psalm 24: 1-6, John 1: 1-5, Romans 8: 18-25) this submission is more about the social impact that the Queensland Government's decision is having.

With respect to the social impact of this proposal, it is the Church's business to care for people and especially to care for those being oppressed by the powerful. There are many examples in the Scriptures of the prosperity and survival of nations being dependant on the treatment of the poorest and most marginalised within those nations. In Liberation Theology, Catholic theologians have coined a phrase which encapsulates the message of the biblical prophets: "God's preferential option for the poor". This phrase expresses the anger of the Almighty towards those political and religious leaders who treat the weakest of their citizens with contempt (Ezekiel 34 & Matthew 25: 31-46).

An interesting sidelight from Scripture which is a sobering comment on the current drought in Australia and which comes out of the experience of the Hebrew prophets is the story of Elijah and of the drought which affected Israel for a number of years during the reign of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Elijah made it very clear that it would not rain until the King and Queen put behind them the injustice and oppression of their people and the false religion which they had been practising (I Kings 17,18 &19 ff).

Whilst I realise the Senate is not equipped to deal with evidence based on Scripture, never-the-less history is replete with examples of the veracity of the principles given above, which come from Scripture. The Uniting Church is constrained and shaped by these principles and operates within the contemporary world on the basis of these principles. Not only that, but most Australians, even those with no religious affiliation, believe that the mistreatment of the weakest of our people and the forcing out of those living on the edges of society is unjust and not the Australian way.

It was Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jnr. who said on one occasion: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere". The injustice being perpetrated on the people of the Mary Valley is not mitigated by the claim of the Deputy Premier that the people of the Mary Valley must sacrifice their homes, land and livelihood for the sake of the larger good – the provision of water to the increasing population of South East Queensland. The larger good is never served by the oppression of a minority for the sake of the majority. Indeed, this excuse has often been used to justify the most appalling oppression by political and religious leaders. Even if the proposition was true in some cases, that the larger good is served by the sacrifice of the few, in this instance that proposition is manifestly false.

There are many alternatives to constructing a dam where the Government has proposed and part of the disillusionment of the people of the Mary Valley is that they do not believe these alternatives have been fairly or properly investigated.

I know that the Committee and the Senate will listen to the cry of the people and I believe will act with justice and integrity on behalf of the marginalised in the Mary Valley.

Rev John Woodley  
19 Red Hill Road,  
Gympie, 4570  
Phone 5482 6967 or 0419 025 150  
3 April 2007