3 April 2007

The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary and Committee Members

Re: Inquiry into Additional Supplies for South East Queensland – Traveston Crossing

In short, we are faced with tremendous social, environmental and economic uncertainty as a result of a Dam that is NOT NEEDED[1] and in addition, would NOT MEET THE STATED YIELD[2] required by Brisbane due to insufficient rainfall, evaporation and seepage. Whilst these two facts alone ought to be sufficient to stop the Dam proceeding, this has not been the case.

Consequently I am moved to bring to your attention several other aspects of the Traveston Crossing proposal. The focus of this remainder of this submission is primarily on the decision making process and on the social and economic impacts downstream of the wall of the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam. This is in part because this is the stretch of the river I know best, but also because voices from downstream have been relatively silent and you will no doubt have received numerous other submissions on the impacts in the inundation area and on the environmental impacts on the river us a whole.

I am from the Mary River Catchment, though have not lived there continuously since I was a teenager. In recent years I have been fortunate to spend more time there and I have rediscovered the beauty and potential of the area, that is often easy to take for granted when you are child. The Mary River has taken on special significance for my husband and I as we met in the foothills of the Mary and were married by its' banks on my parents property in Tiaro. We even planted a "cluster fig" seedling as part of our wedding ceremony. The fruit of this species is one of the foods of the endangered Mary River Turtle. My family and I have spent many, many hours enjoying the river, getting to know its moods and its patterns. We watch for platypus, the elusive lungfish and Mary River Cod and turtle, the kingfisher and numerous other birds and animals.

Like many other residents along the Mary, my parents have invested considerable time and money into fencing the river bank to exclude their cattle, installing alternate

[1] This was the firm conclusion of the Council of Mary River Mayors Report
[2] The government calculations which suggest that it will are simply inaccurate and inappropriate. I am an environmental engineer with limited experience in hydrology and it is evident to me at a cursory glance that these calculations are wrong. Similar criticisms apply to the environmental flow calculations.

water sources for the cattle, controlling cats claw creeper and planting trees and lomandra by the River. They did not have to do this. They chose to because they know they are watching over something precious in the Mary River ecosystem and they wanted to do their part to help it be a healthy. However, this may all be wasted if the Dam goes ahead, and at the very least their enthusiasm and commitment will be sapped by bad government decision making.

When I found out about the proposal to Dam the in April/May last year my reaction was one of utter dismay and disbelief. At the time I was in Vietnam doing field work for my PhD in Sustainable Futures and I could not believe that such an unsustainable "decision", had been made in Australia, with no prior consultation of the public. This highlights one of the key issues – that it was a "decision" as far as the Government is concerned, not a proposal. They have been unwavering in their stance on the issue, making announcements like " the dam will go ahead, feasible or not" and "the people of South East Queensland will not be very happy if the dam is delayed by the inquiry", even though they have not consulted with the people of South East Queensland. Not only have they not consulted with the people of the Mary Valley, but they have not consulted with the residents of Brisbane, in whose name the dam is being built. In response to criticism the Queensland Government had belittled and demoralized people, rather than providing justifications of their stance. They have been disingenuous by including Dams as part of their strategy for the current drought. The way the Government has handled this issue – the lack of transparency, the lack of accountability to voters and the creation of a company which has since gone on to bully of landholders in the dams footprint– is nothing short of appalling. Everyone I talk to is overwhelmed by the undemocratic and nonsensical nature of the entire decision making process.

The downstream section of the river has been ignored by the Queensland Government and the assessment process proposed in the Draft Terms of Reference for the Environmental Impact Statement. The exception to this is the consideration of impacts on endangered and vulnerable species, World Heritage listed areas, RAMSAR wetlands and migratory species. However, in the draft Terms of Reference to the Environmental Impact Statement there is ***no mention of the social or economic impacts on the downstream areas***. Consequently a significant affected population has been entirely excluded. Neither the Government, not Queensland Water Infrastructure have provided any information to downstream residents regarding future access to water allocations, future impacts on the river ecosystem or future impacts on important local industries. In addition there has been no discussion of compensation for these impacts or offers of support forthcoming from the Queensland Government. Please find attached extracts of a fact-sheet summarizing the potential downstream impact. A quick glance will tell you that the potential impacts are numerous and they amount to ***a very uncertain future for the downstream area of the Mary River***.

The fact that this Dam would resume a large area of prime agriculture land, would dislocate up to 900 families and deprive the Mary Valley of it's precious water resource on which future growth of the region depends highlights the ***total inequity of the decision***. If the dam goes ahead, residents of Brisbane will be provided water from the Mary Catchment so that they can, for example, water their gardens with treated drinking water. This sounds ridiculous but unless water restrictions are in place, it will happen. At the same time, the Mary River will stop flowing for

considerable periods of time[3], which will not only impact on the ecology of the river and the Great Sandy Straits, but will deprive communities of their drinking water, important regional industries of irrigation water and riparian landholders of an important source of water for their livelihood. Another major implication is the availability of water for future growth of the Mary River catchment. As is becoming ever more apparent, water is a limiting factor for the viability of regional Australian communities. Goulburn provides a case in point. The Mary Catchment can implement many of the strategies suggested as alternatives to the dam (and already does) to support future growth, but why wait? Why not introduce these alternatives now and save the Mary Valley much heartache and the residents of Brisbane considerable amounts on the weekly water bill[4]??

The sugar industry is one important industry that will be affected by the proposed Dam. Recently I talked with two key representatives of the sugar industry in Maryborough and they both indicated that they are concerned about the impact of the dam, but that no-one has given them information about what the impacts of the dam would be. Given that there was a certain level of skepticism about the impact the of the Federal inquiry expressed, it may be that no-one from the sugar industry will make a submission to your committee. However, it is inevitable that their irrigation allocation will be affected as they are the primary irrigators in the lower catchment and approximately 50% of the land under sugar cane is currently irrigated from the Mary River. There is already an effluent reuse scheme in Hervey Bay and at Island Plantation near Maryborough as well as some on farm dams. Therefore the scope for the industry to find alternative irrigation sources has largely been exploited. Dryland cane farms have been going out of business in the area. In addition, the Maryborough Sugar Mill has indicated that it needs to process 1,000,000 tonnes of cane and the industry has been working hard to increase productivity over recent years so that the Mill remains viable. 2006 was the highest production year yet, and they fell short of the target by 25,000 tonnes. This is despite the Mary River irrigators almost always having access to their full allocation from Sunwater. The inability of the region to meet the processing target of the Mill under such favourable circumstances raises huge questions regarding the future viability of the Mill when flows in the Mary are reduced by the Dam. If the Mill were to close the flow on impacts to the local sugar industry and the communities it supports would be considerable.

As the Council of Mary River Mayors report has found, ***all of the suffering, social, economic and irreversible environmental impacts would be for nothing***. The Traveston Dam is not necessary to meet the future water needs of SEQ. A diverse, and therefore lower risk response, incorporating some increases in supply, decreased in demand and drought response strategies, will ensure supply for South East Queensland at least until 2050.

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[3] Revised calculations of actual river flows which are based on the Median Flow of the Mary River rather than the misleading and inappropriate Average Flow have found this. I am assuming that you will have received many other submissions which highlight and detail this fact.

[4] As you would be aware, the Council of Mary River Mayors found the water from the Dam would cost twice as much per kilolitre as water from the alternative strategy they proposed.

Although the Wyaralong Dam is not officially included as part of the Inquiry, I submit to you that, though the Dam are located in different areas, and were proposed to provide water to different populations, many of the inconsistencies identified in Traveston Crossing proposal are also present in the Wyaralong proposal. For example, the conclusion of the Council of Mary River Mayors Report indicated that no big dams were needed to supply future water needs of Queensland. Evidently, this means that Wyaralong Dam is also unnecessary. The same flawed decision making process led to the decision to build both Dams and the people affected by the Wyaralong Dam deserve the same justice as the people of the Mary Valley. Therefore, I request that the Committee acknowledge, where appropriate, the relevance of your findings on the Traveston Dam, to the Wyaralong Dam.

How the Committee deals with the Traveston Crossing issue may set the standard for negotiation of future conflicts over how governments ought to engage with society, and how society as a whole should make decisions about the management, use and protection of natural resources. The challenges of ensuring social and economic equity, preventing decline of rural areas and shifting toward more sustainable lifestyles are at the heart of this issue. I trust that you will pay this matter the attention it deserves.

Thank you for your consideration of my submission. I hope that it has provided some assistance in the extremely important task the Committee has been charged with. Please contact me if you require further clarification of my submission or additional information.

Yours sincerely,

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Extracts from

"Fact Sheet Regarding Potential Impacts of Traveston Dam on the Lower (Northern) Catchment of the Mary River

Version 1.3, 3 April, 2007"

This fact sheet provides a summary of potential downstream environmental, economic and social impacts between the proposed dam and the river mouth.

This fact sheet addresses impacts on: pattern and volume of river flows, bank instability, water quality, local industries, floating aquatic plant populations, local endangered and vulnerable species and the exclusion of the downstream lower catchment from assessment & consultations processes. It will be updated as new information becomes available.

Summary of downstream impacts

1. Pattern and volume of river flows

> ***Flows in the Mary River will be severely impacted by the dam, particularly at times of low flow. Flooding and flushing patterns will be severely disturbed. These facts have implications, not only for the river ecosystem and the current water needs of the region, but future water needs as well.***

Here are some of the reasons why the claims the government has made about maintenance of river flows don't add up:

- The Mary River is already overallocated and Sun Water has been unable to supply full allocation to paid customers in the past. In times of high irrigation demand, water is transferred from the Mary River to Tinana Creek, channels and pipelines. There is little or no consideration of any environmental impacts when water is extracted at high volumes in short periods of time from the ponded reach of the river. There is no management plan that can be enforced for providing for environmental flows to occur downstream of the proposed dam wall to Fisherman's pocket, to the upstream limit of the ponded area nor downstream of the tidal Mary River Barrage to the river mouth.

- Calculations have been based on the average annual flow of the Mary River. This is inappropriate basis for the calculation because, as residents of the area are well aware, the Mary River has highly variable flow. As a result the average is biased by the years that the floods occur. This means that the calculations based on the average present an overly optimistic view of what the flow in the river would be if the dam is built.

- The environmental flow regime proposed (outline in Mary Basin Water Resource Plan) has no scientific basis and does not provide sufficient flow at critical points in the river, such as at the area immediately below the proposed dam wall or the Maryborough barrage [1].

- Estimates of the quantity of water that can be extracted from the dam (ie yield) have not accounted for loss of water through evaporation (estimated to be 1.4m/a which equates to 28% of stage 1 volume) and have underestimated seepage by a factor of 3-30 (this means between 6% and 60% of the stage 1 volume will be lost by seepage).

- Calculations by the Save the Mary River Co-ordinating Group (STMRCG) which use the Government's estimates of evaporation, seepage and use actual stream flow data measured at Dagun Pkt (about 2 km downstream from Traveston Crossing) show that

if the dam had been built in 1997, filled up in the big flood of 1999, the stage 1 dam (70,000ML yield) would have experienced yield failure by 2002 and Stage 2 would have failed by the end of 2006 [2].

- Estimates of the volume of water the dam will catch have not taken into account last 6 dry years of rainfall, the potential impact of climate change or climatic cycles on future rainfall patterns.

- Until the rainfall in late February/early March increased water levels in the Mary River, Tiaro only had three weeks of town water supply left. This is without a dam upstream extracting up to 150,000ML/year (under stage 2). Decreased flows in the river will put at risk these water supplies, extractions by downstream users and flow volumes and patterns required for the health of the river ecosystem. There are major implications for future growth in the communities that currently depends on the Mary River for their water.

2. Bank Instability

Loss of riparian land as a result of bank instability reduces land area as well as jeopardising investment of time and money into riparian zone rehabilitation and protection. It increases the risk of excessive sediments adversely affecting downstream seagrass beds and dugong populations after flood events.

Reasons for increased bank instability:

- The banks have still not stabilised since the barrage was built 20 years ago. Slip circle bank failures, bank slippages and un-natural undercut banks continue to occur including sites where the banks are covered in riparian vegetation [3]. No compensation has ever been offered to landholders to assist them in rehabilitating and stabilisation of their riverbank resulting from the construction of the Barrage.

- Modelling by STMGCG shows that building a dam at Traveston Crossing can lower the flood height downstream but will increase the duration of high flow by at least double.. This will saturate the river banks and expose these banks to high flood flows for longer causing huge impacts on river bank stability for kilometers downstream and resultant the sediment to be carried to the Ramsar Wetlands with potential adverse impacts. In the case of the Baroon Pocket Dam, a relatively small dam in comparison at the headwaters of the Mary River, this erosion of bank impact extended over 30km down Obi Obi Creek [1].

3. Water Quality

It is likely that the reduced incidence of flushing and flooding events and lower water level will contribute to increased algal blooms, and reduced flushing of sediments and various pollutants from the river. Salinity in the river may also increase. These possibilities have implications for river ecosystems, domestic water supplies of Tiaro and Maryborough and users who rely on the river for irrigation, stock watering and domestic purposes.

Facts about Mary River water quality and usage:

- The water quality in the Mary River already fails to meet the Queensland Guidelines for Water Quality during times of low flow for dissolved oxygen and salinity.

- The catchment area of the Mary River has already been identified as having high salinity risk under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (A federal government initiative released in 2000). The dam wall itself will also disrupt groundwater flows, which may in fact be saline. The impacts of this disruption are uncertain [4].

- Tiaro obtains its' drinking water from the Mary River. If Maryborough supply becomes critical they have an agreement that 2,000 ML can be pumped from the Maryborough barrage to the Teddington Weir.

- If the quality of the river water further deteriorates, particularly at times of low flow, there are implications for the quality of town supply and potentially the cost of treating this water to meet drinking quality standards. Research by STMRCG has suggested possible accumulation of metals that occur naturally in the catchment and have been released by past mining activities (eg manganese, arsenic, mercury). Lake Borumba and Amamoor have already experienced problems with algal toxins and manganese [1].

- In 2003 there was a blue green algae outbreak in the ponded reach of the Mary River upstream of the tidal barrage. This was caused by high water temperatures and low water levels. Blue green algae outbreaks are a serious concern as it is a threat to stock and domestic water supplies. With the extraction of an extra 150,000 ML of water from the proposed Traveston Crossing dam, such events are highly likely to occur more frequently. The financial and physical hardships on our farming operations and township water supplies are likely to be significant.

4. Local Industries

Many local industries rely on the Mary River. It is inevitable that if you rely on extracting water from the Mary for domestic, stock watering or irrigation purposes that there is going to be less water available and it will be least available when you most need it. This has major implications for the local Sugar Industry. In addition, sedimentation in the saline section of the river will have impacts on the status of Maryborough as a port and the industries that rely on an open navigation channel.

Facts about local industries and the Mary River:

- Maryborough is still a designated port, the reach of which extends to Hervey Bay. As such, boat building and repair and other activities associated with marinas are important sources of employment for the Maryborough area. The Maryborough City Council is currently developing the Port Maryborough Marine Industry Park at Lesley Reach about 15km south of Maryborough. This facility will enable Best Practice in boat building and repair. The reduced fresh water flows and reduced incidence of flushing events resulting from the Dam will cause increased siltation in the river. Maintenance of the navigation channel is already difficult, particularly at Horse Shoe Bank near River Heads and it can only become more problematic if the Dam is constructed. Consequently the Dam places the new Marina development, the boat building and repair industries of Maryborough and the future status of Maryborough as a port at risk [5].

- The sugar, beef, horticulture, dairy and hobby industries use the river water for irrigation. Reduced water levels will likely mean that irrigators will need to upgrade their pumping infrastructure. Current pumping systems have usually been designed to pump from the present barrage height and pumping from below this height reduces

efficiency. There is also the impact of variations in the bank slope and how this impacts on the viability of extending the pump suction. This is all assuming that irrigators and riparian landholders are permitted to use the water. It is also assuming that the water is in a fit state to use. As far as we know, the analysis of the impacts the dam would have on current extractions of water for irrigation and other purposes has not been done, other than calculations by STMRCG [6].

- The barrage has already had a major impact on fisheries in the Mary River. Since the construction of the barrage, the Maryborough Fish Board has closed[7]. Commercial fishers are also concerned about the impact of the Dam. The Independent Trawler Association Inc. in a statement about the dam have indicated that *"[W]e expect a major collapse in marine productivity from the removal of the large flood events, from scallops, prawn, crab and fish species plus spawning larval recruitment failings."[8]*

- Currently the river provides water to lower catchment users that flows from the upper catchment where annual rainfall is higher. This will be reduced if the dam is constructed and the lower catchment will become much more reliant on local rainfall to support water needs.

Facts about the Sugar Industry:

- In 2006, approximately 6,361 ha (or 50%) of the land under sugar cane in the Mary River Catchment is irrigated from the Mary River and approximately another 10% is irrigated from other sources such as the Eli Creek Wastewater Reuse Scheme in Hervey Bay, the Island Plantation Effluent Reuse Scheme in Maryborough and on farm dams. Given that cane farms typically use between 3-4 ML/ha, depending rainfall [9], irrigation of this area requires between 19,083 ML/annum and 25,444 ML/annum.

- A detailed study of water use by the sugar industry in the Mary River Catchment was conducted in 1999 and it found that 50% of land under sugar at that time was irrigated. This was equivalent to approximately 25% of the water extracted from the river for irrigation and totalled approximately 15,700 ML/annum [10]. Unfortunately, more recent figures regarding the sugar industries' portion of the total water extracted for irrigation are not available however it may have increased due to the closure of numerous dairies [9].

- In this 1999 study, almost 50% of growers surveyed indicated that they needed more water and the authors suspected that any increases in efficiency would be transferred to increases in productivity, rather than water savings. In 2006, the number of growers is less than in 1999 (157 compared to 187) and the total area in the district under cane has increased from 10,754 ha to 12,722 ha [11].

- The 1999 study also found that in the Mary Catchment, each ML of irrigation water adds $1,000 of production value to a cane farm [12]. Individual cane farms would lose this value if their ability to irrigate decreases.

- The Sugar Mill has indicated that it needs to process approximately 1,000,000 tonnes of cane per annum. In 2006 it came the closest it has to this target with a processing level of 985,230 tonne [11]. Therefore, the Mill has not yet met it's target despite the reliability of the irrigation from the Mary River (cane growers almost always have access to 100% of their allocation from the Mary River). Reduced access to irrigation water and the corresponding decline in productivity of the industry could place the continued operation of the Mill at risk.

- On 15 March 2007 Maryborough Sugar announced a proposed merger with Mulgrave Cental Mill Company [13]. This merger could potentially reduce the impact on company shareholders if the Maryborough Mill closed. However, the impact on cane growers and surrounding communities in the lower catchment would be considerable.

5. Floating aquatic plant populations

An increase in populations of floating aquatic plants is likely to occur due to stagnation and reduced frequency of flow over the barrage. As the recent bloom of hyacinth illustrates the cost of removing the plants, impacts of this on water quality, increased evaporation (through evapotranspiration of the plants) and reduced ability to access the river impact on local communities.

Facts about water weeds in the catchment:

- Due to the river not flowing over the barrage as often, it is expected that both the volume and frequency of water plant infestations will increase along with the corresponding detrimental impacts on water quality and habitat for aquatic species. To date, the dominant species have been *Salvinia molesta* (a weed of National Significance) and *Eichhornia crassipes* (water hyacinth). In 2003, a single raft of aquatic plants was estimated to be at least 800m in length and covered the river bank to bank. The weeds backed up and choked many creeks and gullies. The only control measure occurs when the river height overtops the barrage and the plants are carried into the salty downstream waters. It is expected that the river will overtop the barrage less frequently and the impacts of huge volumes of water weeds will continue over a longer period and more frequently. Threats exist from other water weeds including *Cabomba caroliniana (*Cabomba) and *Egeria densa* (dense waterweed) [11]. The Mary River catchment contains 40% of Australia's Cabomba infestation. At present chemicals which control Cabomba are not used in sites which supply potable water.

6. Jeopardise the survival of Local endangered and vulnerable Species

As well as the Mary River Cod and Mary River Turtle there are five other endangered species in the Mary Catchment. In addition to the Queensland Lungfish, there are ten other vulnerable species in the Mary Catchment.

Some facts about these species and their ecosystem:

- There is limited data available on the impacts of the changes to the river that the dam would cause. The Mary River Cod, Mary River Turtle and Lungfish are all very long lived species and the majority of their nesting areas will be flooded by the dam [14]. We may not know the impact on their population for decades.

- The other endangered and vulnerable species include a quoll[5], a frog, various plant species, several birds and the green turtle.

- The proposed action will construct a barrier (dam wall) with the planned height being 71 m in Stage 1. The combination of the barrier and associated modified upstream and downstream habitats will isolate the existing mid and upper catchment populations of the endangered Mary River turtle (Elusor macrurus), the endangered Mary River Cod (Maccullochella peelii mariensis) and the vulnerable Australian lungfish (Neoceratodus forsteri) from the downstream populations. There is no evidence of these species using fishladders or fishways. During the existing dry weather, many downstream pools are

[5] a carnivorous marsupial

connected by very shallow runs of water. A reduction of a few centimetres of water depth will further isolate pools. The reduction in water flow which will occur throughout the downstream reach, will further add to the isolation of populations resulting in gene pool segregation and loss of genetic diversity. Mitigation action such as artificial breeding is not a viable long-term solution to maintain a healthy wild population

7. Exclusion of the downstream landholders from assessment & consultation processes

The opinions and concerns of downstream residents and the impacts on their environment and communities have been ignored by the Queensland Government and Queensland Water Infrastructure Pty Ltd.

For example:

- Our community has been ignored by the Qld Government in relation to advising us as to any downstream effects of the proposed dam. They have not provided us with any facts or figures on any changes to river heights, flows or water quality. If Traveston Dam is constructed our community will have to live with the impacts forever and yet no information sessions, brochures, fact sheets or letters have been sent to landholders. [15]

- The economic or social impacts of the dam for the people living downstream of the proposal in the lower catchment have not been mentioned in the assessment process to date [16]. The draft terms of reference for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (which are due to be finalized by April 2007 by the Co-ordinator General, with public comments included) currently do not require the impacts of the dam on the lower catchment to be considered. Endangered and vulnerable species that live in the lower catchment and the World heritage area and RAMSAR wetlands of the Great Sandy Strait and migratory species that frequent the Great Sandy must be considered in the EIS.

- There has been no mention by the Government of compensation or support for downstream communities and industries to help them cope with the impacts of the dam.

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