

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

Dear Sir,

Hereunder is my Submission to the SENATE INQUIRY

Upon

The Queensland State Government proposal to build a

DAM AT TRAVESTON CROSSING

ON

THE MARY RIVER

Submitter: Mrs. Jan D.Mulholland,  
298 Widgee Crossing Road,  
MS 483,  
GYMPIE 4570

4 April, 2007.

Ph/Fax 07 54 821871

## Foreword

I was born in Gympie in the 1940s having lived the early part of my life in the City of Gympie and since 1970 held residence on the Mulholland property on the Mary River at Widgee Crossing Gympie. The Widgee Crossing property lies approximately 4 kilometres downstream of the City of Gympie straddling the River to just upstream of the Fishermans Pocket Gauging Station at AMTD 170.4.

The Widgee Crossing property has been in the Mulholland family since first settled in 1868. Over the years, smallcrops, beef and dairying have been the main farming activities on the now aggregated 1,000 acres. My two sons and I continue beef and dairy production and we rely upon irrigation from the Mary River.

**THE MARY RIVER THEREFORE HAS BEEN PART OF MY WHOLE LIFE AND I AM JUSTIFIABLY CONCERNED FOR ITS FUTURE SHOULD A MAJOR DAM BE CONSTRUCTED ACROSS IT.**

Of greatest concern is that individuals of this generation, yours and mine, usurping power unto themselves would destroy an ancient river system, that this generation would be responsible for the demise of ancient species of fauna, and that this generation would be responsible for destroying an unacceptable and inordinate amount of first class agricultural land that we, each one of us, have a duty to preserve for future generations.

The dictatorial behaviour of principally the Premier of Queensland towards the people of the Mary Valley has been the worst of its kind. Instead of carrying out full investigation of the proposal and seeking public comment first, he has chosen to announce outright that the dam will proceed no matter what. For over nine months the people of the Mary Valley were given no opportunity to formally contest the proposal. These families have been living through this nightmare, knowing that the proposal was grossly wrong but that Beattie insisted their homes and properties would go, either by agreement now or taken from them later on. Some have succumbed to this form of blackmail, no longer being able physically or mentally to cope with such all consuming anguish, and considered it as a business decision accepting the relinquishment of their properties. They had no avenue provided to them to formally express their disagreement. Public meetings were in no way adequate. It has been torturous for them, some even verging on suicide. There should not have been any attempt by the Government to purchase any of these properties until a full and comprehensive investigation was completed, public submissions sought and considered and only then a decision made as to whether to build a dam or not.

It is only just in February that formal submissions could be made and these upon the Terms of Reference for the Environmental Impact Statement, which submissions may or may not be taken notice of. But now, we are so grateful that a Senate Inquiry is proceeding with all hope that this will flush out the truths of the matter.

The following are my opinions and recommendations made in relation to the Draft Terms of Reference for the Environmental Impact Statement.

#### THE MARY – A UNIQUE AND ANCIENT RIVER

The Mary River was formed some millions of years ago. Exposed waterwashed rocks from the bed of the river of that time indicate the river to have been some 50 metres or so higher than that currently.

We have waterwashed rocks high up on our property. We visualize a river of enormous capacity in ancient times, and see before us now the stream as we know it today, this stream that still to this day nurtures the remnants of ancient species of life that have made this river their home for millions of years.

Where other rivers rush from the mountains directly to the sea or their waters are muddied or saline, the Mary meanders along giving sustenance to all those along her way both within her banks and beyond and is full of incredible and precious life.

A recommendation has been made for the Terms of Reference for an Environmental Impact Statement to include – that a study be undertaken investigating the history of this Ancient River so that we have a better understanding of its remnancy in these more recent times of evolution and of its unique ability to have nurtured ancient creatures over such an incredibly long time.

#### ANCIENT CREATURES SURVIVING TO THIS DAY IN THE RIVER AND ITS ENVIRONS

That a number of very ancient and unique species still happily exist in the Mary River and its environs is itself hugely significant. I refer to the Lungfish, the Platypus, the Mary River Turtle and the Echidna. Such an occurrence invokes an investigation as to why these extraordinary species have survived for such a long time in the same environment and what would be the consequences for this unique situation should a dam at Traveston Crossing occur.

A recommendation has been made for inclusion in the TOR for the EIS – that an investigation into the significance of the survival of these ancient species in the Mary River system be undertaken.

#### GOOD QUALITY CLASS ‘A’ AGRICULTURAL LAND

In referencing a report dated June 2006 on Potential Dam Sites prepared by consultants GHD upon which the Beattie Government chose the Traveston Crossing site for a megadam, it is clearly evident that this desktop investigation was inadequate for the purpose intended.

3.

Of significance is one aspect that GHD published therein a map outlining “Class A” and other good quality agricultural land.

Like a previous desktop analysis prepared by another consultant for the Beattie Government in relation to the Cooroy-Curra Main Road By-pass, the report ( as stated therein) was so “secret” that GHD could not approach the Cooloola Shire Council to ascertain if there was in fact any good quality agricultural land within the footprint of the proposal. The resultant map therefore showed NO good quality agricultural land in existence within the footprint of the Traveston Crossing Dam proposal except for a small section in what appears to be the Noosa Shire.

In real fact, whether the land intended to be inundated is listed as Class A in the DNRMs land classification system or not, it is absolutely Class A Agricultural land. The State Planning Policy 1/92 for GQAL indicates that in the interests of protection of good quality agricultural land from developments that lead to its alienation or diminished productivity, planning schemes are to identify good quality agricultural land. Policy Principles include

1. Good quality agricultural land has a special importance and should not be built on unless there is an overriding need in terms of public benefit and no other site is suitable for the particular purpose
2. The alienation of some productive agricultural land will inevitably occur as a consequence of development, but the Government will not support such alienation when equally viable alternatives exist, particularly where developments that do not have very specific locational requirements are involved.

The Planning Guidelines associated with the State Planning Policies outline provisions for determining “Overriding Need” and Section 4.13-4.14 of the Guideline states that:

Determining “an overriding need in terms of public benefit” depends upon the circumstances of the particular proposal...major infrastructure (for example roads, railways, aerodromes and dams) usually have specific siting/location requirements that might require the loss of some good quality agricultural land”.

Notwithstanding this, Section 4.15 of the Guideline states that:

“These examples should not be regarded as a justification for every proposal involving such developments. Each proposal should still be assessed on its merits to determine the degree of community advantage”.

The Planning Guidelines of the Policy recognise that there will be cases of ‘overriding community need’ where planning grounds justify the use of or fragmentation of good

4.

quality agriculture land for other purposes. The Planning Guidelines of the SPP identify that the location of a dam, where no other viable alternative exists, is a sufficient community need justifying the alternative use of good quality agricultural land.

We all are aware and it will be proven that there ARE other viable alternatives to the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam.

The GQAL that will be destroyed should this Dam proceed, would have to be considered to be some of the very best in the State of Queensland.

Although this land is presently in the main being used for dairying and beef production, in future times it is likely also to be required to produce essential fruit and vegetable supplies for the population. This can be expected to occur due to the effects of Global Warming and the reduction of rain rendering other food producing areas unviable for production. With at least the proximity to surface water or groundwater in the River this GQAL can and will be utilised. If for no other reason, THIS DAM SHOULD NOT PROCEED SO THAT THIS EXTENSIVE TRACT OF GOOD QUALITY AGRICULTURAL LAND CAN BE PRESERVED FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

It has been recommended that the TOR include that a study be undertaken to determine the DEGREE OF COMMUNITY ADVANTAGE both present and future of a DAM as proposed at Traveston Crossing on the Mary River, and also

The DEGREE OF COMMUNITY ADVANTAGE both present and future of the GOOD QUALITY AGRICULTURAL LAND that will be destroyed if the dam proposal goes ahead, taking into account in both instances Climate Change.

#### FLOOD IMPACT ON DAM STRUCTURE AND DOWNSTREAM AREAS

Of greatest concern is that the planners of the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam UNDERESTIMATE the might and power of the Mary River in flood. The same concern was expressed when this Government was considering crossing the Mary River twice with the proposed Cooroy-Curra Main Road By-pass. Fortunately this latter plan was abandoned and a more suitable route is now being considered, quite as a result of allowing the public to express their opinion on the proposal.

Flooding of the Mary River in recent years included -

In 1989 two large flood events occurred within twenty-three days of each other.

In 1992 two large flood events occurred within twenty-three days of each other.

In 1999 a major event occurred that registered just under a 1:100 year event.

Serious consideration therefore must be given to the potential damage that could occur downstream of the dam in the event that the dam was FILLED BY A FIRST EVENT AND A SECOND EVENT FOLLOWED SOON AFTER.

In both the flood events of 1989 and 1992 mentioned above, considerable erosion, as observed on our property and others, occurred to the softened riverbanks during the second floodings.

With changes occurring in climatic conditions around the world at this present time, we cannot know what lies ahead. Although design criteria for the dam would be expected to be based on 1:100 or greater flooding of the river, an outpouring over the dam wall of the order of a second event of that magnitude is very likely possible and is of greatest concern.

The Mary River is characterised by typically very low flow rates and periodic flood events. It would only be the latter that would have any consequence of filling a dam at Traveston Crossing. However, once filled, or near-filled, a second event of major proportions soon following would be the catalyst of a disaster never before experienced. A freeboard of 15 metres would be totally insignificant and the spillway as if non-existent. The outpouring over the dam wall would result in massive turbulence in the downstream parts. Bed and banks of the river and adjacent river flats would be eroded and damaged. The City of Gympie lying a short distance in its path would suffer flooding and colossal damage as never before experienced – its very own Tsunami. The effects upon these reaches of the river would have a domino effect on parts further downstream. The ability of the river to cope with the effects of a natural disaster would be overridden by a manmade disaster.

Viewing aerial photographs of the 1999 flood, commissioned by DNR and taken at the height of the flood, provide a stark perception of the colossal amount of water that would pour over that dam wall if a second flood event of that magnitude occurred in close succession. I hold copies of these photographs – enlarged to large poster size and available on loan to you if you so desire.

A dam across the Mary River at Traveston Crossing may at time alleviate flooding in Gympie, however it will in the event described above cause flooding of a different nature, resulting in unprecedented and colossal damage.

It has been recommended that the TOR for the EIS should include

A study specific to the effects as a result of the occurrence of one extreme flood event following soon after on another extreme flood event on –

1. the adequacy of the Dam Structure itself
2. the effects on the Downstream Environment

### 3. Upstream of the Dam precinct areas

and that local residents along the river who are familiar with the Mary River in flood should be interviewed and local knowledge of the behaviour of the flooded river be inputted into the engineering calculations and modelling, for example the turbulence of and how fast the river flows in full flood, as compared to computer data that may not reflect the truth of the matter. What is at stake here are people's lives.

#### WATER QUALITY

Studies by others conflict with the Government's analysis of the resultant stream flows downstream of the proposed Dam. It has been recommended that the TOR should provide for a study to assess how much streamflow is required to flush and diffuse the influx of the Sewerage Outflow from the Gympie Sewerage Treatment Plant so that water quality environmental values are protected downstream.

If the City of Gympie is forced to further upgrade its treatment processes to meet an even higher standard of effluent, as a result of a Dam being built upstream on the Mary River then the cost of such upgrading should be met by the State Government.

#### GROUNDWATER REQUIREMENTS TO SUSTAIN BOTH LOW AND CANOPY RIPARIAN VEGETATION

It has been recommended that the TOR for the EIS should provide for a study to assess how much streamflow is required to sustain groundwater for both low and canopy riparian vegetation.

#### WATER RESOURCES HYDROGEOLOGY

It has been recommended that the TOR should include downstream groundwater and water tables in reference to effects upon banks and riparian vegetation and rising salt as a result of any decrease in groundwater.

#### DOWNSTREAM IRRIGATION

Others suitably qualified dispute the Government's estimation of downstream flow implications of the Dam.

It has been recommended that the TOR should include a clear and detailed statement of how downstream irrigation allocations will be effected as a result of the dam. If reduced, or no flows are expected will the Government provide compensation to

7.

upgrade irrigation/pump sites along the downstream affected regions to ensure a guaranteed water supply (e.g. excavated pump holes). Details of financial compensations to be offered in the event allocations are to be reduced should also be made.

**CLIMATE CHANGE WAS NOT CONSIDERED IN THE Draft Terms of Reference and should be included as a matter of critical importance. Reference to the National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan should also be included in the TOR.**

It was recommended that the Environmentally Sustainable Development (ESD) Charter should be referred to in the TOR, in particular the need to adopt the “PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE” where the environmental impact of actions is not fully known.

The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment (IGAE) and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality was not referenced in the Draft TOR. The Mary Basin Catchment is a priority catchment under NAP for salinity and recommendation was made that consideration must be given to this in the TOR.

The TOR should refer to a comprehensive **HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT** of public health risks associated with the project such as mosquito borne diseases, water borne diseases, blue green algal toxins, manganese and other heavy metals, and the potential impact of the transfer of toxins and pathogens between catchments (through proposed water pipeline).

The TOR makes no reference to the risk of extinction to rare and threatened species. **THE ONUS OF PROOF IS ON THE PROPONENT TO DEMONSTRATE THAT SPECIES WILL NOT BE AFFECTED.** This will require a proper population viability analysis and detailed modelling of the base case (no dam) and in the inundated area and downstream disturbance regime (with dam). The impact on threatened species must consider:

Loss of habitat, connectivity and fragmentation.

**The Environmental Impact Statement is to be based on a FLAWED WATER RESOURCES PLAN with UNACCEPTABLE DOWNSTREAM LOW FLOW OUTCOMES.**

The EIS should be based on flows that are required to ensure the continued viability of threatened species and habitats and adequate supplies for downstream usage including town water schemes and irrigators. Current Government modelling uses long term historical rainfall and streamflow data. The use of this data and method of



8.

calculation it would appear is flawed and should be reviewed. Modelling should include data that better reflects climatic change impacts.

The EIS should contain a demonstrated program of implementation of mitigation measures with CONSEQUENCES FOR NON-IMPLEMENTATION AND FULLY DOCUMENTED PERFORMANCE CRITERIA. It is evident that this was not put in place for the Paradise Dam and many of the proposed mitigation measures either do not work or have not been implemented.

The TOR should include for a full examination of how poorly the FISHWAYS have worked at PARADISE DAM.

The TOR should include for a statement of the FULL POTENTIAL IMPACT OF ACQUATIC WEEDS ON THE IMPOUNDED AREA AND UPSTREAM AND DOWNSTREAM AREAS.

The TOR should include an assessment of the proponent on basis of track record of staff, directors and contractors. Key staff, directors and contractors associated with QWI were responsible for the Paradise Dam. The environmental performance of that project should be assessed to determine whether the proponent is capable of performing to a satisfactory standard on this project. Under the EPBC, the Federal Minister can take into account a person's environmental history in determining whether to approve a controlled action.

ONLY STAGE 1 of the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam has been referred to the Federal Minister under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBCPA) yet the STATE GOVERNMENT IS PROPOSING TO BUILD THE DAM TO FULL HEIGHT IN STAGE 1 and ACQUIRE ALL THE PROPERTIES FOR STAGES 1 AND 2 IN STAGE 1.

I am to understand this constitutes a split Referral under Section 78 of the EPBC Act. The State Government should assess the FULL IMPACT OF Traveston Crossing Dam STAGES 1 AND 2 together, including pipelines, distribution and water treatment in the EIS . The proponent should advise the Federal Minister that the referral was made in error and refer the FULL PROPOSAL for assessment under the EPBC Act.

#### ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

The section in the TOR relating to ALTERNATIVES lacks any substance and could in no way be considered to offer a real assessment of the alternatives.

**ONLY A FULL COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS OF ALL OTHER OPTIONS WILL BE ACCEPTABLE.**

The SOCIAL and ECONOMIC IMPACTS as referred to in the Draft TOR are inadequate and these require far greater and proper consideration and assessment and should cover the effects of both Stages 1 and 2.

Following consideration of public comment into both the TOR and the EIS, the final draft should be circulated for critical public review prior to the TOR being sent to QWI and the EIS being sent to the responsible Federal Minister.

The comments made within this submission are just a small indication of the immense inadequacies of the State Government's investigations into its proposed Traveston Crossing Dam.

It is totally inappropriate for the Premier to claim that the Dam will proceed when there are so many aspects that have not been properly investigated.

The attitude of the Premier towards the people of this district in regard to the Traveston Crossing Dam has been totally out of order and someone has got to put things into proper perspective. It is hoped the Senate Inquiry will achieve that.

Thanking you,

Yours most sincerely,

Mrs. Jan D. Mulholland.



