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FileNet
GR-cyh
maroochy@maroochy.qld.gov.au

Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

TRAVESTON CROSSING DAM SENATE ENQUIRY SUBMISSION

Introduction

As the Division 1 Councillor for Maroochy Shire, I wish to express my concern about the process used by the State in arriving at their decision to proceed with the construction of Traveston Dam. This decision was made prior to the completion of the South East Queensland Regional Water Supply Strategy. Much of the planning and investigation work needed to arrive at any informed decision appears to have commenced only after the decision was made. My concern here is that important issues relevant to this dam have not been given due consideration.

On behalf of the Maroochy Shire community and in particular the residents in the Mary Valley, I wish to table a range of issues I would like to see addressed in the Senate Enquiry. They include environmental, engineering, social and economic concerns. Each is discussed briefly below;

Environmental

Fauna

The dam poses real threats to the fauna of the Mary River Catchment, including a number of endangered, threatened and vulnerable species:

- Mary River Cod (endangered)
- Mary River Tortoise (endangered)
- Giant Barred Frog (endangered)
- Cascade Tree Frog (endangered)
- Coxen's Fig Parrot (endangered)
- Tusked Frog (vulnerable)
- Queensland Lung Fish (vulnerable)
- Richmond Birdwing Butterfly (vulnerable)
- Honey Blue Eye (fish) (vulnerable)
- Illidge's Ant-blue Butterfly (vulnerable)
- Giant Spiny Crayfish (vulnerable)

representing "The valued green behind the Coast"

The above species are expressly identified by one of the following legislative instruments:

- Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999
- The Queensland Nature Conservation Act 1992
- The IUCN system (International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources)

Flora

The dam, with its inundation and alterations to the downstream flow regime has the following potential:

- Inundation of the reservoir area will cause substantial loss of native vegetation and wildlife. Since many species prefer valleys, establishing reservoirs ultimately eliminates many unique wildlife habitats and can affect rare or endangered species (as above).
- Inundation of the reservoir area will have affects on many agricultural land uses. It will also render a lot of the good agricultural lands proximate to the Mary River valley unusable.
- Changes in flow regimes downstream of the dam, particularly the release of water in normally low flow periods, will lead to flushing of Epiphytic Algae & Phytoplankton essential in the food chain and important for juvenile Cod.
- Stable base flows will create far more favourable conditions for exotic algae and weed species.

Ecosystems

The location of the proposed dam contains areas of Endangered Regional Ecosystem protected by the Vegetation Management Act 1999. Ecosystem concerns relate to:

- Habitat destruction and associated degradation are considered to be the most severe threat to freshwater species. The dam will change spawning capabilities and remove many spawning areas for Mary River Cod and Queensland Lungfish, and remove primary habitat for many species including the Mary River Turtle. The dam will impede Giant Barred Frog breeding.
- Fish transfer technology such as fish ladders and fish lifts could be used. However, it is widely recognised that fish passage, genetic distribution and migration for spawning will not return to natural states after construction of a dam.
- Thermal Pollution from the release of cold waters from the dam will adversely affect the plant and animal populations downstream of the dam. It will directly impact on spawning triggers for endangered species such as the Mary River Cod.
- The dam will restrict the flow of woody debris essential for the habitat of Cod and Lungfish.

Desired Outcome – That the environmental impact of the dam be assessed in detail, and that decisions about whether or not the dam should proceed be made only when such impacts are identified and understood.

Engineering

Flooding

I am concerned that no detailed studies or investigations have been presented illustrating the impact of the proposed dam on upstream flood levels. Communities who live upstream of the proposed dam are entitled to more than verbal assurances from the dam constructors that flood levels will not be affected.

Desired Outcome - The results of detailed flood studies, including methodology statements, need to be provided to Council in a format suitable for presentation to assure interested constituents in Maroochy Shire. This should include longitudinal and cross-sectional profiles of the Mary River under flood conditions, both with and without the dam.

Access

There are a significant number of properties which – if Stage 2 proceeds – will have their existing access inundated. Alternative access to some of these properties will be problematic, given that they will now be bordering the dam with steeper terrain at the rear. It may eventuate that it is not viable to construct an alternative access into these properties.

The direct impact of the dam on all of the properties in the Mary Valley was clearly not assessed prior to the decision to proceed being made. Nor, subsequently, has their been adequate consultation with those property owners who now find themselves unsure if their property will have access provided, or if their property is ultimately to be resumed.

Desired Outcome – The full impact of the dam on the bordering properties and those properties which will have their access inundated, be identified and included in the decision making process.

Social/Economic

Catchment Management

There has been no consideration to date of catchment management issues that will undoubtedly arise as a result of this dam. Catchment management, and its associated practices, will impact on upstream landowners. As a water supply source, the catchment of Traveston Dam will need to be managed and protected in order to secure water quality. Catchment Management may well include:

- Restraints on the types of agricultural activities permitted within the catchment.
- Restrictions on certain activities, such as application of fertilisers, use of pesticides, clearing, etc.
- Loss of riparian rights, river access, etc.
- Loss of development potential

To date no consultation or consideration has been given to the impact the dam will have on upstream property owners within the dam catchment. Note, this catchment is large, and sustains a considerable number of people.

The restrictions of living in a major water supply catchment will undoubtedly adversely impact on the economic sustainability of this region.

There has been no discussion, or consultation with Council, as to what this might entail for our ratepayers.

Desired Outcome – That a draft Catchment Management Plan be prepared and circulation for comment. This Plan would identify the possible constraints that would need to be imposed on any agricultural and land development activities within the upstream catchment. The impact of these constraints would be assessed and included in any final consideration of the dam impacts.

Loss of Amenity

Although we can accept that water bodies generally enhance the visual amenity of the adjacent landholdings, this assumes that levels in the water body are relatively stable. Frequent drawdowns of dam levels is unsightly and can be odourous, particularly if the dam is subject weed infestations. This is thought to be likely at Traveston.

These issues are of genuine significance to Maroochy Shire property owners, who typically boarder the shallow upstream extremities of the proposed dam. These property owners are entitled to be advised of the likely operation of the dam, including the potential this might have on their loss of amenity.

Desired Outcome – That information be provided to property owners boarding the dam illustrating the likely operation of the dam, and in particular, the frequency and extent of drawdown. Any potential loss of amenity should be included in the overall assessment of the dam impact.

Loss of Service Industry Potential

The loss of approximately 900 properties plus residents from the Mary Valley will undoubtedly have a flow on effect to locally based service industries. Ultimately, the impacts will affect small rural communities such as Kenilworth.

Whilst inundated property owners are compensated, there is no compensation for those residents of small rural communities whose livelihood depends on established agricultural activities within the Valley.

Maroochy communities - such as Kenilworth - will be seriously affected by the proposed dam. No consideration has been given to these impacts in the decision to proceed with the dam.

Desired Outcome – That the social and economic impact of the dam on rural townships within the Valley – arising from the overall reduction in agricultural and development activities, resident population, etc - be included in the overall assessment of the dam impact.

Summary

Environmental concerns associated with the decision to proceed with Traveston Dam are clearly substantial. It is apparent that these concerns have not been addressed in sufficient detail to enable any informed decision to be made by the State Government.

In addition to the environmental concerns, there are social and economic impacts arising from this dam. Again these impacts have not been assessed, and as a result formed no part in the determination made by the State to proceed with this dam.

I agree that the State are entitled to make decisions about the regions long term water supply future. However, both the environment and the affected community are entitled – at the very least - to have issues of genuine concern investigated and included as part of the decision process. This hasn't happened, and as a result the decision making process is widely seen by the community to be flawed.

I trust that my comments above will be given due consideration by the Enquiry.

Yours sincerely



CR GREG ROGERSON