

A. B. Townsend
8 Grevillia Avenue
Yamba NSW 2464

Phone: (02) 66 46 8188

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

The Inquiry into Additional Water Supplies for South East Queensland - Traveston Crossing Dam

Please find attached my submission to the Inquiry into Water Supplies for South East Queensland. My submission is made in accordance with the provisions of the readvertised date for the lodging of submissions of 8 June 2007.

(Reference: http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/rrat_ctte/traveston_dam/info.htm)

Yours sincerely

Allan Townsend

A. B. Townsend
8 Grevillia Avenue
Yamba NSW 2464

1 June 2007

Dear Senators

The Inquiry into Additional Water Supplies for South East Queensland - Traveston Crossing Dam

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.

Firstly, I seek to introduce myself. I am a former Fisheries Officer with the NSW Department of Agriculture who has had a lifetime of experiences on NSW waterways, including 1 ½ years in charge of Fisheries matters in the Clarence – Mann River areas.

I have resided on the Lower Clarence River for the last 16 years.

Also during my career I spent 3 ½ years in the Snowy Mountains during the construction of the Snowy scheme. I have a good idea of its impacts, both good and bad.

I remember farmers and residents of the lower Snowy River, particularly in nearby Victoria, complaining about the scheme and its effects on downstream users. In return, the Snowy Mountains Authority and some politicians promised 28% of River Flow to remain for these people. **This promise was not kept and reflects badly on the credibility of the Authority and the report they have compiled for the Clarence system.**

Information on the inquiry into the Traveston Dam and the Clarence system is minimal in my local area and many local people were disappointed to find that advertisements and information generally about submissions to the inquiry was not placed in our local newspaper.

Consequently, we had little warning or advice until we found out that the time for making submissions was almost expired.

At this time there are at least four proposals to take water from the Clarence system. These are listed at the end of this paper.

Before going on I would like to say that most people don't realise that photographs taken of the Clarence River are invariably those of the massive saltwater estuary which is very wide and extends some 50 miles from the sea and the River only becomes fresh upstream of Copmanhurst.

In fact, the freshwater parts are not exceptionally big at all except for rainy periods, but when it rains here it usually rains in Queensland as well and there is no need for water supplementation at those times.

The Clarence Estuary contains vast areas of acid sulphate soils. As an example, I have seen estimates that the Shark Creek tributary in the Lower Clarence area alone releases up to 50 tonnes of acid water per year. It is only the flushing effect of the main River that nullifies this to some extent.

During the 16 years I have lived on the River I have watched it degrade and partially die. Fish such as Bream and Luderick were previously in the River in massive numbers and used to attract many hundred of people to the area each year. Now, those fish are almost gone and more than 60% of the River's weed beds have disappeared.

So, the drought has affected our River as well.

Most people are not aware of the fact that River water, that is fresh water, is not wasted when it runs into the sea. There is a species of algae living in the oceans that provides us with oxygen just as the leaves of the trees do. I have heard learned people say that this contribution amounts to 75% of the oxygen we consume.

At a recent dedication of a surfing reserve at Angourie a speaker from Southern Cross University warned the audience that the particular species of algae I referred to above is in serious decline and blamed us, the human race, for this.

Some days earlier I had heard another Professor from the University of Tasmania on ABC radio say the same thing.

It is my belief that the sea needs a brackish mix to survive in its present form and I am confident that learned people support my view.

As I stated previously, I am aware of four proposals for the Clarence River.

1. The Cataract River is a tributary of the Clarence near Tenterfield. The Mayor of Tenterfield has proposed a diversion westwards near the town to provide for rural enterprises.
2. On February 22, this year, the Premier of Queensland placed an official advertisement in *The Australian* newspaper proposing two options; one for the Tully/Burdekin region in northern Queensland and a second for the Mann River, which is a tributary of the Clarence, in northern NSW.

The second option has been supported by a Mr. White who is said to be a mining engineer. I have been told that Mr. White has mining interests, and of course mining is a big player in the water debate.

3. Another proposal is to dam the Clarence River near Duck Creek upstream from Tabulam/Bonalbo and send water to Queensland.
4. Locally we are building an offstream storage to harvest high flows from the Nymboida River, which is another tributary of the Clarence River.

This is designed to meet the future needs of two ever expanding areas - The Clarence Valley and Coffs Harbour. Coffs Harbour is a large tourist, agricultural and service centre with plans to double its resident population in the near future.

I reside on the Clarence in Yamba. When I came here the population of the town was less than 4000. Now it is approximately 8000 and rises to more than double that during peak holiday times.

Soon, Yamba and other towns on the Clarence River will be recycling our effluent to a very high standard. I am sure that this will be the norm in future all over Australia.

Summary

1. The writer is 75 years old and has a lifetime on NSW waterways, much of it as a Fisheries Officer.
2. He saw the Snowy Scheme being constructed.
3. Clarence Valley people have not been kept informed on this matter.
4. There is more than one proposal for this River.
5. There was a very major promise about river flows on the Snowy River which was broken and the writer does not trust the expertise of the Snowy Authority.
6. Nearly all of the photographs seen of the Clarence River are of the saltwater estuary and the River proper is far smaller.
7. Acid water is a serious problem in the River and the flushing effect is extremely important. Any mismanagement of it or too much extraction from it would be a disaster.
8. The writer has seen the River degrade to a serious level with a loss of important weed beds and some fauna such as Luderick.
9. Fresh water running into the sea is not wasted.
10. There are at least four proposals to take water from the Clarence:
 - Cataract River near Tenterfield
 - Mann River
 - Duck Creek near Tabulam/Bonalbo.
 - Nymboida River.

Final Comments

- Queensland has not stopped developing although they have water shortages.
- Queensland is still issuing irrigation licences (for example, on the Warrego River).
- Queensland has caused major problems along the Darling at Bourke and elsewhere by allowing their irrigators to take more than a fair share.
- If climate change is indeed upon us, then the figures used by The Snowy Mountains Authority engineers may not be correct in future.
- Water usage by miners should be addressed.
- Off stream storage by irrigators should also be addressed.
- Over extraction from the Clarence River will destroy it and the industries that rely on it. The Snowy experience exemplifies how arrangements can be altered for the sake of expediency.