

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

Madam/Sir

The proposed diversion or damming of the Clarence River should be opposed for cultural, environmental and economic reasons.

CULTURAL: This river is of deep spiritual significance to the Aboriginal people of the valley. That includes Githabul, Bundjalung, Gumbaingirr and Yaegl people whose Dreamtime stories tell of the forming of the river. The legend of Dirrangan is told the length of the river and the reef at the mouth of the river is the climax of the story. These people have had their way of life destroyed and their culture mocked since the arrival of whites. Surely it is time for whites to arrive at understanding and the knowledge that to dam and divert the river is an insult to Aboriginal beliefs and spirituality. The time has come for respect to be shown to their values.

The Clarence River is also an essential part of the history of this area since white settlement. The river was the highway and the means of connection with the rest of Australia and the world. By the river exports went. Much needed imports came in. It was fundamental to the social life of the people for communication and entertainment. Cane was transported along the river to the mill, cream was brought to the butter factories by vessels moving up and down the river at a time when there were over 1000 dairy farms on the Clarence many of them farmed by soldier settlers after World War 1. Fishing both commercial and recreational is a vital part of life here.

ENVIRONMENTAL: Below Copmanhurst (60 miles from the sea) where there seems to be an abundance of water, the river is tidal and therefore subject to salt intrusion. Any diversion would therefore need to come from the headwaters of one of the streams of the catchment. At times these can be reduced to a trickle. Any draining of water could severely affect flow below the diversion point. Already the river is stressed by the pipeline from the weir at Nymboida which drains water to the dam at Karangi near Coffs Harbour. This Karangi dam is already draining the headwaters of the Orara River another major tributary of the Clarence. As well the river is supplying water to the towns of the Clarence Valley thereby serving a population when combined with Coffs Harbour of over 100,000 people, a population that is steadily increasing and demanding water.

Any reduction in flow will also impact on aquatic life particularly the endangered Clarence River cod as well as the water birds whose habitat this is. Impacts on vegetation also need to be studied. This Clarence Valley is a designated hotspot of biodiversity with many vulnerable, threatened and endangered species. As well it is the location of a considerable part of the World Heritage listed Central Eastern Rainforests Reserves of Australia (CERRA). What would be the impact on these? Have they been considered? The environmental impacts seem to have been given very little consideration in this ill-conceived plan. Remember we have droughts here too.

ECONOMIC: On the local scene many people would be affected economically, in particular the fishing industry. The species of our river have adapted to its flows and variations and need these for continued reproduction. Fishing both commercial and recreational contribute greatly to the economy of the region. The river itself is a tourist attraction for its beauty, its wildlife, and the amenity it provides for water sports and activities. Tourism like fishing is an essential part of our economy. We do not have a University, an adequate base hospital or factories. We need the things we still have. We have been divided on the electorate rolls with half of the valley thrown in with Lismore and half with Coffs Harbour. Divide and disappear has been a successful policy carried out. This is obvious from the fact that no advertisements about this Senate Enquiry and the need for submissions appeared locally in either newspapers or radio. This in itself is a disgrace and an insult to the people of the Clarence Valley.

The huge cost of a dam and pipeline, a pipeline itself which would have great environmental impact on vegetation and on highly erodible soils, cannot be justified when compared with the cost of installing rainwater tanks at every household and in charging a realistic price for water particularly for industry. This in itself would curtail usage. Sensible restrictions should be maintained at all times. Rampant development in SE Qld must be matched with adequate planning for the provision of water, electricity and the disposal of sewage and garbage. Finally a buyback of Cubbie Station and of other water rights foolishly handed out in the eighties would improve the situation on the Darling. Cotton and rice are both unsuitable agricultural products in the driest continent on earth.

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