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Sunday, April 01, 2007

The Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport  
P.O. Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms. Radcliffe,

Thank you for inviting me to make a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport.

I am pleased to accept this invitation and am willing to personally appear before the Committee if this is desired.

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## **SUBMISSION**

### **Preamble:**

- ❖ I am an Elder of the Gubbi Gubbi (Indigenous Australian) People whose traditional lands encompasses the Mary River across which the building of the Traverston Dam is proposed. My mother and many of my ancestors were born near the banks of the river when the area was covered in dense rainforest. We were known by many other Indigenous Groups as the “Dala People”.
- ❖ The reason for this name is that we hold sacred “Dala”, the Queensland Lung Fish, (*Neoceratodus forsteri*). For over thousands of years the duty of our people has been to care for this creature. As small children we were taught to not kill or eat it and to protect it and its breeding places from harm. This has been part of our cultural duty.
- ❖ It is my people’s concern that the building of the Traverston dam will condemn to extinction this creature which has been on the earth for 380 million years and for which our people have cared for many thousand of years. Its only viable habitat in the world is the Mary River (called “Mumabulla” by us). Throughout the submission I shall refer to *neoceratodus forsteri* as “DALA”.

## **1. The Uniqueness of Dala.**

- i. Obviously through their edicts and directives to protect Dala, over thousands of years, my people have always recognized the uniqueness of Dala through their knowledge of anatomy physiology, and breeding habitats of creatures – knowledge which was necessary for survival in a world reliant on hunting skills. It has only been recently that we learned of its importance to the rest of the world.
- ii. Professor Per Ahlberg<sup>1</sup> refers to “***the extraordinary scientific importance of Neoceratodus***”. He says that with two other living lungfishes, the Queensland lungfish is the closest living relative of land vertebrates such as ourselves. However as the other two lungfish are “larval

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. P Ahlberg, Subdepartment of Evolutionary Organismal Biology, Evolutionary Biology Centre, Uppsala University, Sweden.

looking animals” – they have two lungs. Dala’s uniqueness lies in how archaic it is, having only one lung. “,with the Queensland lungfish we can examine the anatomy, genetics, development and behaviour of a living animal. **“It is quite literally, a scientific treasure beyond price”**. If it dies out, many questions about our early evolution will have to remain unanswered forever.

- iii. It is my (Eve Fesl’s) view that an opportunity to study the development of the on-going life of Dala, may provide answers for the correction and treatment of spinal ailments in human beings. An opportunity that may save much suffering and pain for afflicted and injured persons.

## **2. Effects of a Dam on Dala**

The Traverston Dam will have a direct effect on Dala because:

- i. Dala cannot breed in the deep water of a dam.
- ii. It needs shallow areas in which to feed and spawn amongst aquatic weeds which grow towards the edges of the rivers and streams.
- iii. The reduction in flow to waters below the dam will damage areas now used for spawning.
- iv. The Premier of Queensland publicly answered when questioned by me that the flow reduction will be **“only 15%”**. This is sufficient to damage the spawning/feeding sites and hurtle Dala on the path to extinction. Global warming has not be taken into consideration in this estimate – nor is it measurable, thus adding to the danger. The effects of salination also have not been tested, even if considered.
- v. As adults Dala needs long stretches of shallow fresh-water riffles in which to swim – these are **not** present in dams.

## **3. Arguments**

- i. Arguments that Dala is still living in the Burnett River after the building of the dam there, have been proposed as evidence that dams do not effect Dala. This could be an important indicator but **only after 15 years of serious data gathering on spawning success**. Studies to date are useless in predicting breeding success. All that the studies indicate is that there are adult lungfish still alive after the building of the dam. Lungfish live up to 100 years of age, therefore it takes up to 15 years to be able to determine if their spawning in an area has been successful.
- ii. Dala is already on the endangered species list.
- iii. It should be noted that after the building of the small Walla weir on the Burnett River, a study by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries showed that **spawning success fell sharply**.

## **4. Water Shortage in Brisbane**

- i. Brisbane usually receives a much higher rainfall than the Mary River catchment area. Storms over the last few months have deluged Brisbane, the water runs off the roofs, into the gutters and is lost.
- ii. Little rain has fallen at Traverston and other areas with dams (which are almost dry). This month I observed that feeder streams in the Mary River area are bone dry.
- iii. I wonder why the money set aside for the Traverston dam is not diverted to providing the citizens of Brisbane with rainwater tanks? This could be more cost effective and save the ageing population from the heavy work that level 5 water restrictions imposes. A tank installed last month by my cousin was filled over night with runoff from his roof – he said he could have filled 3 tanks if he’d had them.

## 5. Queensland Legislation

Through its *Integrated Planning Act (1997)* now embodied in the *South East Queensland Regional Plan (2005)*, the Queensland government committed itself to “recognise, protect and conserve Aboriginal values in land, water and natural resources (section 7.4). It also recognises the *principles* and *policies* to “conserve and manage the region’s biodiversity values” and “ensure land use planning and development activities “..respect identified biodiversity values” in order to “protect, manage and enhance areas of ,, biodiversity significance: (section 2.1).

## 6. Duty of Care

I contend that the Queensland government in deciding to build the Traverston dam has abrogated its commitments under section 7.4 of the above Act specifically in relation to protecting and conserving Aboriginal values.

## 7. Conclusion

- i. My people and my culture have suffered considerable destruction of our natural world by non-Indigenous people. However, this current matter is one which can impact upon all Australians.
- ii. Australia, correctly, criticizes the Japanese whalers for killing endangered species, the whales, in the southern ocean.. Yet aren’t we just as bad, or even worse (as we can do something immediate about it) when we can halt the threat to the “endangered” listed, Dala by exploiting other methods of harvesting water for Brisbane residents?
- iii. The places where Dala lives and breeds are our **cultural heritage places**, ignored by administrators of the Queensland legislation. Can they be considered for protection under National Cultural Heritage?

Thank you for inviting me to make this submission.

Eve Mumewa Doreen Fesl, OAM, CM, PhD  
Gubbi Gubbi Elder

By Eve Mumewa Doreen Fesl, OAM, CM, PHD. – GUBBI GUBBI ELDER  
On behalf of my people.

## **MUMABULA**

(English name -- The Mary River)

**She is the artery pulsing life through the veins of Gubbi Gubbi Dyungungoo, touching our birth places, the sacred pools, and spiritual places as she flows.**

**She gives succour to the rainforest and special trees that cradled the bones of our past generations. She is home to the totems of the present within and beside her – instilled in our memories through bestowed personal names.**

**In her womb she bears Dala, who, like a whisper from a long forgotten past, symbolizes the wisdom of our Elders, directed by the Ancestral Beings to bring life from the sea for the creation of all vertebrated creatures.**

**Flowing through time, our duty “Care for Mumabula!” Care for Dala!”**

**She is the symbol of our past, our present and our future – she is MUMABULA, MOTHER OF THE SACRED!**

**GARWUN MUMABULA!**

