



2 April 2007

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

Re: Additional Water Supplies for South East Queensland – Traveston Crossing Dam

Dear Senators

I'm sure that you will have received many submissions that address a variety of areas and concerns relating to the proposed dam at Traveston Crossing. I fully support the detailed submission made by the Queensland Coalition however I felt it was appropriate to make an individual submission as the local State Member for the electorate of Gympie.

Social Impacts

Much will be said about the water crisis, about the environmental impact of this proposed dam, the geotechnical problems with the site and the alternative water supply options that are available. I recognise that there are those far more qualified than myself who can make informed comment in these areas so I will restrict my remarks to the social impact.

Robert Hale from Griffith University released a discussion paper in January 2007 which provided an in-depth examination of the social impact assessment and management of the Mega Dam project on the Mary River to evaluate how the processes and actions of the Queensland Government have affected the people in the region.

In his assessment the Queensland Government passed only 2 out of 34 internationally recognised criteria of social impact assessment and management. This is nothing short of appalling. In this new millennium the public has certain expectations as to how governments across all areas should undertake the planning and implementation of major infrastructure projects. It would not be unfair to say that on this project there has been a monumental stuff up and as a result ordinary people have suffered unduly.

A clear example of this is the failure of the Beattie Labor Government to undertake any form of Social Impact assessment until February 2007, 10 months after the announcement of the project.

It is generally conceded that the timing of the announcement of the proposed dam was made for political considerations in the lead up to a State election. However what has occurred since that date has eroded public confidence in the democratic and administrative processes surrounding major infrastructure projects.



David GIBSON MP
Member for Gympie

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The Queensland Government actions have contributed to excessive adverse impacts through failing to release supporting documentation, and arrogant and insensitive remarks such as:

- *“this dam will be built feasible or not” (Peter Beattie),*
- *“the dam is an irreversible and irrevocable decision” (Peter Beattie),*
- *“this good news” (Anna Bligh)* in reference to a question regarding the proposed dam

Sense of Uncertainty

It is acknowledged that the construction of any large infrastructure project will always have an adverse impact if there is a large population in the impacted area. However, the affected people in the Mary River Valley have experienced impacts in excess of what would normally be expected if robust democratic and administrative processes had been implemented right from the very beginning. One of the most difficult impacts has been the ongoing sense of uncertainty experienced by a wide range of people in the valley.

This sense of uncertainty has displayed itself in various manners over the past 10 months it ranges from:

- School age children experiencing bedwetting again.
- Suicidal thoughts from middle aged farmers unsure what the future holds for their families.
- Simple changes in shopping habits reported by local businesses where by residents now only purchase what they require rather than buying in bulk.
- Low business confidence resulting in reduction in staff numbers.

I recognise that the Government did establish the community task force after a realisation that the social impacts were significant. However the modelling of the Task Force on cyclone disaster relief has failed to account for the impacts caused by the way in which the Queensland Governments has managed the project. This limitation has resulted from inadequacy of directives and problematic frameworks set up by the Government. The result is the creation of a problematic climate for effective community consultation.

There is a consensus amongst residents in the Mary River Valley that the Government has utilised this sense of uncertainty to achieve strategic advantage in implementation of the project. It certainly appears that this has occurred in particular with relation to the negotiation of property sales.

I have over the past 6 months raised with both the Deputy Premiers office and with the management of Queensland Water Infrastructure concerns relating to perceived abuses of process. The processes being used are not consistent nor are they fair for all concerned. The most vulnerable residents in the Mary Valley, those with limited educational experience and coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds are placed in the most disadvantaged position and are getting less for their properties than better educated and more aggressive negotiators.

There has also been displayed a distinct lack of professionalism in comments and conduct of QWI staff that is interpreted by residents as psychological bullying and intimidation specifically to drive down prices.

Release of Supporting Documentation

The failure of the Queensland Government to make publicly available supporting documentation that was the basis of their decision to site the dam at Traveston Crossing has been a major factor in raising community ire about this project. Right from day one the community has had an expectation that there was a report which would clearly indicate the suitability of the site. Indeed I've had many locals tell me that if Beattie could provide them with the facts that showed this was the best site and that no other alternative would provide the water for Queensland that they would walk off their property tomorrow. The Queensland Government's actions so far have not generated any assurance that the decision to locate the dam at Traveston Crossing was based on anything more than political considerations.

Indeed the comments made by the former ALP Member for Noosa, Cate Molloy, that the decision was discussed in Labor's caucus and comments were made by various ministers about the electorate being National Party heartland rang true in the ears of many residents in the Mary Valley.

This failure to release documents has also applied to any previously published documents relating to the Mary Valley. I requested from DNRW a copy of a 2004 report relating to the Mary Valley Turtle and was told it was 'under review' and the Minister would not release it. A request for the Hydrological modelling data was delayed for over 6 weeks and was only provided once a member of my staff travelled to Brisbane to sit in the Ministers office until the data was provided. These strategies limit public access to information have only achieved greater distrust of the whole project.

Assessment of alternatives

The proposed dam at Traveston Crossing is yet to have any serious assessment against alternative water supply sources on a cost benefit analysis. Many recommendations and suggestions have been made that could provide the necessary water required not only for the current water crisis but also for the future needs of South East Queensland. Water sources that can provide for the regions needs with acceptable outcomes in terms of social, environmental, economic and engineering impacts for the regions affected.

This Senate inquiry provides an opportunity to step back and review the complete process that has surrounded the decision to site a dam at Traveston Crossing and the communication and implantation of that decision.

I would therefore request that the inquiry makes specific investigations into the following areas:

1. A full cost benefit analysis of the proposed dam at Traveston Crossing compared to alternative water supply sources.
2. Review of the social impact assessment of the proposed dam.
3. Seek independent assessment of the project by various academics and experts in the social, environmental and economic impacts of the proposed dam.

On behalf of the people of the Mary Valley and the electorate of Gympie I thank you for your interest in this matter and ask for your support in our quest to stop the travesty that is the Traveston Crossing Dam.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry. I look forward to meeting with you at the hearings scheduled for later this month.

Yours sincerely,



David Gibson MP
Member for Gympie