



Wheezer  
the lungfish  
says, "Save the  
Mary River!"

# Dam the Mary River? Save the Mary River!

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Save the Mary River Coordinating Group  
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## Submissions for Senate Inquiry

### **WHY SEND A RESPONSE?:**

Because of the structure of Queensland's parliament, the federal government provides the only layer of independent checks and balances against poor decisions made at the state level in Queensland. It is important that there is an appropriate level of federal involvement to protect the rights of the people of Queensland.

We believe that a Senate Inquiry will show that there are other alternatives to building Traveston Crossing Dam which are more cost effective, lower risk and with far less social and environmental impacts. Your comments will help to ensure that this process is informed, fair and transparent.

### **WHO DO I ADDRESS THE LETTER TO/HOW DO I START THE LETTER?:**

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Inquiry into Additional Water Supplies for South East Queensland - Traveston Crossing Dam Information**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this letter is to provide information for the Senate Inquiry.

*(Insert the Text of Your Letter)*

### **WHAT DO I SAY IN THE LETTER?:**

Tell your story - share your local knowledge of potential impacts, ideas for alternatives, lack of involvement in the decision making, how poorly you have been treated, how your family has suffered or how you have been bullied if you have been in that situation. This is your opportunity to step forward and to tell your story.

### **About the Inquiry**

On 26 February 2007, the Senate referred the following matter to the Rural and Regional Services and Transport Committee for inquiry:

**the examination of all reasonable options, including increased dam capacity, for additional water supplies for South East Queensland, including:**

- (a) the merits of all options, including the Queensland Government's proposed Traveston Crossing Dam as well as raising the Borumba Dam: and**
- (b) the social, environmental, economic and engineering impacts of the various proposals.**

The submissions can be sent by mail but the Committee prefers to receive submissions electronically as an attached document - email: [rrat.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:rrat.sen@aph.gov.au)

### **The closing date for receipt of submissions is 4 April 2007.**

- Submissions become Committee documents and are made public only after a decision by the Committee.
- Persons making submissions must not release them without the approval of the Committee.
- Submissions are covered by parliamentary privilege but the unauthorised release of them is not.
- Following consideration of submissions, the Committee will hold public hearings.
- The Committee will consider all submissions and may invite individuals and organisations to give evidence at the public hearings.

Inquiries from hearing and speech impaired people should be directed to the Parliament House TTY number (02) 6277 7799. Adobe also provides tools for the blind and visually impaired to access PDF documents. These tools are available at: <http://access.adobe.com/>. If you require any special arrangements in order to enable you to participate in a committee inquiry, please contact the committee secretary.

*For further information, contact:*

*Committee Secretary Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee*

*Department of the Senate*

*PO Box 6100*

*Parliament House*

*Canberra ACT 2600 Australia Phone: +61 2 6277 3511 Fax: +61 2 6277 5811*

*Email: [rrat.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:rrat.sen@aph.gov.au)*

[http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/rrat\\_ctte/traveston\\_dam/info.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/rrat_ctte/traveston_dam/info.htm)

**Note – there is a new website about potential downstream impacts of the Traveston Crossing Dam proposal visit [www.ourgreatsandy.com](http://www.ourgreatsandy.com)**

## **QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT ACTIONS -TRAVESTON CROSSING DAM AND MARY RIVER WATER RESOURCES**

This information relates to the actions of Queensland Water Infrastructure Pty Ltd (QWIPL) and the Queensland State Government with respect to the Proposed Traveston Crossing Dam and the Water Resource Plan for the Mary Basin. Due to the way the Queensland Government has approached all aspects of the dam proposal, the community has no confidence in the honesty, integrity and transparency of Queensland Government processes.

The communities represented by the Mary River Council of Mayors (500,000 people from Maroochydore to Hervey Bay) expect a totally transparent and public inquiry for the following key reasons:

The Queensland Government has only referred Stage 1 of the proposed dam under the EPBC Act, however it is proposing to build the dam wall to its full height as part of Stage 1 and is now acquiring all the land for both stages 1 and 2. As a result, the referral is fundamentally flawed in that the Queensland Government has only referred Stage 1 of the proposed dam for assessment, when it is clear that the proposal must be assessed in terms of its total and ultimate impact. The huge social impacts of inundating such a large amount of class 1 agricultural land and the thousands of people and businesses that it supports need to be fully assessed at the first stage of the proposal. The proposal will leave three entire townships upstream of the dam wall living lower than the crest height of the dam.

The proponent, Queensland Water Infrastructure Pty Ltd (QWIPL) and the Queensland State Government are effectively one and the same. QWIPL has only one \$1 shareholder (a State Government employee – Premier Beattie) and the majority of the Directors are Queensland Government employees. Further, QWIPL has been granted State Government powers to progress the proposal. The possible future non-government corporate interest in profits resulting from the project casts some doubts as to the validity of the compulsory acquisition of land for the project using government powers. The Queensland Government must not be sole assessor of the impact of this proposal put forward by QWIPL. In effect, this is the proponent self-assessing its own project on behalf of the State and Federal Governments.

The formally appointed Community Reference Panel associated with the development of the Mary Basin Water Resource Plan has advised that they were “profoundly deceived” by the State Government during the formulation of the plan and have publicly withdrawn their support for the process. Subsequent to the Community Reference Panel’s involvement, the Queensland Government made substantial changes between the draft and final Water Resource Plan to accommodate the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam without any further consultation.

Environmental flows in the Mary River will be severely impacted by the proposed dam, with large impacts on the communities along the 200km of river downstream of the dam and surrounding the Great Sandy Straits. References to the maintenance of 85% of mean flows at the river mouth are deliberately misleading as the Mary River is characterized by occasional and extreme flood events which provide most of this flow. Most of the time the river has low flows that will be severely impacted by the dam. The same State Government hydrological modelling of the dam proposal that produced this figure also predicts that with the dam in place, the Mary River will cease to flow to the sea for a considerable periods of the time, something which would have occurred in it's natural state only once in the 110 years of data used to formulate the Water Resource Plan. In addition, the WRP now allows for discretionary interim licences which could allow the dam operator to stop all flows in the Mary River for arbitrary periods of time as the need arises.

The principal people involved in this project are the same principal people responsible for the design, construction, licensing and operation of the Paradise Dam on the Burnett River. The water resource, economic and environmental outcomes promised to the people of Queensland from the Paradise Dam have not been delivered, and we do not wish to see the same mistakes repeated on a much larger scale with the Traveston Crossing proposal.

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of all is that the impacts of climate change on streamflows has not been taken into account in the water planning used to justify this dam. If a conservative approach is used, such as suggested to the Federal Government by the Marsden and Jacobs report to the Federal Government in November 2006, then it becomes clear that the proposed dam would not provide anything like the yields used to justify the proposal economically. In fact, analysis of recorded streamflows suggests that if a dam with the full stage 2 storage capacity had been built in 1997, it would have failed by late 2006, and if a stage one-sized dam had been built in 1997, it would have failed in the 2002 drought.

For these and many more reasons, it is essential that the proposal is fully examined in an independant forum such as may be provided by an appropriate form of federal enquiry. Because of the structure of Queensland's parliament, the federal government provides the only layer of independent checks and balances against poor decisions made at the state level in Queensland. It is important that there is an appropriate level of federal involvement to protect the rights of the people of Queensland.

**Why a thorough investigation of the TRAVESTON CROSSING DAM PROPOSAL is a Federal Government responsibility (in addition to its responsibility to administer and enforce the EPBC Act).**

S. Burgess Feb 2007

Research Officer

SaveTheMaryRiver Coordinating Committee

In addition to the Federal Government's legal obligation to administer the EPBC Act fully and appropriately with respect to the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam, the proposal falls clearly within the scope of at least 4 other major federal policies under which the Federal and Queensland governments have mutual obligations in the form of signed bilateral agreements.

These joint Federal/State policies are

- the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAPSWQ)
- National Water Initiative (NWI)
- National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan (NBCCAP)
- National Agriculture and Climate Change Action Plan (NACCAP)

Since the announcement of the proposal in April 2006, even with the limited amount of specific technical information made available to the public, there has been enough information released and enough time for sufficient analysis to support an argument that the proposal can only result in outcomes that are directly opposed to the objectives of these 4 National Plans. This would suggest that a full investigation of the proposal and the likelihood of it producing a set of outcomes in direct opposition to the intent of these plans is warranted on behalf of the federal government. The Queensland Government is effectively the proponent in this project, and therefore has a clear conflict of interest in the administration of its responsibilities under these National Plans. What follows is a very brief summary supporting this argument, with respect to each National Plan.

**NAPSWQ:**

The Mary River catchment is a Priority Catchment under the NAPSWQ and has already been identified as being at high risk of increased salinity. The intent of this priority listing is to allocate federal funding to projects designed to slow, halt or reverse the trend in increasing salinity and decreasing water quality in the catchment. As such, the NAP identifies community consultation and involvement as a 'cornerstone' of the plan, and ties the catchment into specific provisions under the NBCCAP and the NACCAP to incorporate climate change scenarios into the hydrological modelling and water resource planning in the catchment.

There is compelling scientific evidence that the Traveston Crossing Dam proposal could have no other possible outcome than to increase salinity and drastically reduce overall water quality in the catchment, particularly in the 200km of river downstream of the proposal. In times of low flow, the river already exceeds Queensland water quality guidelines for electrical conductivity, and has dissolved oxygen levels consistently below the guideline standards. Removing a great deal more freshwater from the catchment and drastically reducing the regular minor flushing flows in the river can only make these trends worse. It is also clear that community consultation with respect to the proposal has been absolutely unsuccessful within the catchment. For example, the entire community reference panel appointed by the State government in developing the draft Water Resource Plan for the catchment formally withdrew all support for the plan following the announcement of the dam proposal, prior to the plan becoming legislation (after being greatly amended with no consultation).

**NWI:** Some of the stated objectives of the NWI are to "bring about more profitable use of water and more cost-effective and flexible recovery of water to achieve environmental outcomes" and "more sophisticated, transparent and comprehensive water planning that deals with key issues such as the major interception of water, the interaction between surface and groundwater systems, and the provision of water to meet specific environmental outcomes". In Queensland, this is reflected in a commitment to achieving a consistent set of water resource planning outcomes as reflected in the legislated Water Resource Plans produced for catchments throughout the State.

The final result of the Water Resource Planning procedure for the Mary River has been anything but transparent, and has resulted in legislation which does not adequately protect environmental flow

outcomes in the 200km of river downstream of the proposal. A comprehensive economic analysis of the Traveston Crossing proposal by Professor Stuart White of the Sydney University of Technology and Cardnos Consultants clearly shows that the proposal is the least cost-effective means of providing urban water security for SE Qld of all the options they considered, by a large margin. It also pointed out that the water resource planning process has resulted in an outcome where approximately half the strategic reserve identified in nearby catchments in SE Qld (where the urban demand used to justify the project is located) would be preserved, while the entire strategic reserve of the Mary catchment would be utilized and transferred out of the catchment. In fact, analysis of the IQQM modelling used to formulate the Water Resource Plan for the Mary suggests that the total amount of water that would be removed from the Mary catchment by the proposal far exceeds the 150GL/year strategic reserve identified in the WRP.

There is ample data and analysis available to show that the Mary system already struggles with low flows and poor water quality, and if current allocations were fully utilized, it could not meet water security expectations and reasonable environmental flow objectives. The Traveston Crossing Dam proposal can only result in the significant further over-allocation of the system and severe degradation of environmental values within the catchment. When there are significantly more cost-effective means of providing a similar level of water security to SE Qld, this outcome is in direct opposition to the objectives of the NWI.

**NBCCAP:** In catchments identified in the NAPSWQ, there is an obligation under the NBCCAP to specifically examine the effects of development projects on the ability of species and communities to move and respond to climate change. There is an added obligation to incorporate climate change modelling into the planning of water resource management in these catchments. The principal effect of climate change in the Mary system is likely to be the effect on stream flow regimes. The hydrological modelling used to investigate the impacts of the Traveston Crossing Proposal to date has specifically ignored the impact of climate change on streamflows. The impact of the proposal on biodiversity in the catchment is much greater in a climate change scenario. For example, the yield performance of the dam proposal is doubtful and its impacts on streamflow are far more severe if based on streamflow data from 1997 to 2007, rather than the climatic information over the period from 1890 to 1999 used in the state government modelling to date. Under this sort of climatic scenario, the impact of the proposal on the complete disruption of riparian and in-stream habitat corridors for extensive lengths along the stream (hundreds of kilometres), both in the proposed inundation area and in the downstream reaches of the river would seem to be in direct opposition to the intent of this National Plan.

**NACCAP:** Most of the proposed inundated area is class one agricultural land, in a favourable climate, with access to irrigation and in close proximity to transport and markets. The soils of the valley floor are extremely deep and fertile. The massive impact of the land use change over such a large area to a periodically inundated swamp is a significant loss of an extremely valuable resource in the context of future societal requirements for a viable agricultural production base under future climate change scenarios. In addition, the change that this will bring about to the carbon and nitrogen cycling in the ecosystem will potentially have significant greenhouse impacts on a national scale, because of the sheer amount of organic carbon and nitrogen tied up in this massive soil volume and associated surface vegetation. This is a depositional landscape, where soil and associated nutrients in the inflow will be continuously added to a eutrophic, fluctuating anaerobic/aerobic soil/water/biomass system. The greenhouse implications of this gross land use change need to be investigated, as specifically outlined under the NACCAP. This work has not been conducted by the proponent.

**Conclusion:** Both the Queensland State Government and the Federal Government are parties to high priority national agreements that are directly relevant to the Traveston Crossing Dam proposal. As the effective proponent in the proposal, the Queensland Government has a clear conflict of interest in the satisfactory execution of its responsibilities under these national agreements. This places the burden of responsibility on the relevant Federal government agencies involved in these agreements to ensure that the objectives of these policies are achieved with respect to the outcomes of the Traveston Crossing proposal. On face value, it appears the proposal can only have outcomes that are in direct opposition to the objectives of these 4 national plans and initiatives.