



The Dambusters

Newsletter of the Save the Mary River Coordinating Group Inc.
May 2009
The Anniversary Issue

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This Dambusters we celebrate the endurance and sacrifice of every person involved in this campaign...three hard years and still going strong.

RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP YET?

If not, you can download the form at www.savethemaryriver.com or visit the Save the Mary Info Centre in Kandanga. Full, Associate and Junior memberships available.

From the President

Well with good autumn rain and yet another minor flood to flush the river's nutrients and fresh water to the sea for the fisheries at Hervey Bay, the Mary River was at a perfect level for our Anniversary "floatilla". It was so encouraging to see hundreds of canoeists floating down the river, a multitude of colourful water craft and families with a determination to overturn this decision to dam the Mary River. For some special photos of the day go to Arkin's Stop Press website www.stoppress.com.au/ and click on the front page link. A big thankyou to all who celebrated the resilience of our community and made this a special day to remember our milestones in this Battle for the Mary River.

As we continue to wait for the Coordinator-General's report, there is a constant flow of visitors through our Save the Mary River Information Centre at Kandanga wanting to see for themselves what is being proposed for the Valley. Many comment on the absurdity after learning of the facts and seeing the beauty of the countryside that is at risk of being lost. Our volunteers, who man the center 7 days a week, always welcome help particularly on Valley Rattler days when things get really busy with sometimes over 300 visitors getting off the train.

An initiative started in Victoria a couple of years ago has now spread nationwide, and may be an interesting way of bringing city families to the Mary Valley, to better understand why the battle for the Mary continues. Farm Day 2009 will take place on the weekend of 30th/31st May. Basi-

Saving the Mary River?

It takes people power!



cally, a farm family hosts a city family for a day or for the weekend, to provide hands-on experiences. Participation is by registration, is free to all parties, and there is some insurance cover offered as part of the registration. Please have a look at this initiative as there are a number of Brisbane families that are looking to visit a farm family: www.farmday.com.au

The fund raising thermometer is now set up at the Info Centre in support of the Wide Bay Burnett Conservation Council's court challenge to Sunwater over ineffective fish passage for the Australian Lungfish at Paradise Dam. The four week Federal Court hearing starting on 7th September will have flow on effects for our campaign as it challenges the fish passage that is modelled as the state of the art for the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam. The special Paradise Dam donate button is at wbbcc.wordpress.com/donate/ so please give generously and, yes, they do gladly accept "Rudd" money.

The Qld Govt is looking for assessment approval with conditions for the Traveston Crossing Dam. We are not interested in approval of the Traveston Crossing dam with conditions. There are no conditions that could mitigate the likely impacts on the Mary River and the Great Sandy Strait.

We owe it to the next generation to hand this river system in a better condition than we have experienced and the dam would make that an impossibility. The EPBC Act requires the Minister to take the precautionary approach to environmental protection and we urge the Qld Government to forward the assessment on to the federal government for a decision now. **Be prepared for a public submission period of 10 days if Minister Garrett grants the opportunity - have you summarised your issues that the supplementary EIS has not addressed?**

A nearby campaign, closely linked closely to ours, needs support - submissions are due on May 13 about the proposed Powerlink project in Eumundi. Please read more and write a submission: www.saveeumundi.org/2009/04/draft-eis-submission-template/.

For those not sure how to become involved in the Save the Mary campaign, we encourage membership (either full or associate) to be more informed. Committee meetings are held fortnightly every second and last Thursday of the month and members are encouraged to attend.

Glenda Pickersgill

To do this month...volunteer at the Save the Mary Info Centre...see more "floatilla" pics on the Stop Press website...donate to the Paradise Dam court case...get ready for a possible EPBC public submission period...shop for merchandise...volunteer for the Art for Earth dugong event in early June...watch Flow...drink from a Save the Mary mug...spot the differences in *Love, Mary*

Hervey Bay Lights Up Again

After the spectacular success of the Dok'ku Candle Installation Event at Tandora Homestead last year, the 'Art For Earth' organisation, in association with GMA and the Fraser Coast Regional Council, will be doing it all over again on June 6 to coincide with World Environment Day.

If you missed Dok'ku, or would like to refresh your memory of that event, check out our photo gallery: <http://s183.photobucket.com/albums/x51/wwwwatch/Dokku/>

On June 6, 4,000 candles will once again be used, this time to create a giant image of a Dugong family feeding on seagrass to raise awareness about the threats now facing these gentle creatures that call our precious Great Sandy Strait and Hervey Bay home.

The Jan/Feb edition of Dambusters included a story about Dugong and the possible impacts the proposed dam would have on them, and particularly on seagrass, their main food source.

We invite you to be part of this special event and help show the decision makers that we care about our Dugongs.

Volunteers are needed to help install the paper bags and candles on the day from 10 am onwards. Your help would be greatly appreciated! Displays by conservation groups, wildlife artists and photographers are welcome. If you would like to get involved please email greatermary@gmail.com or contact Art for Earth by calling Erica on (07) 4128 7225.



The Dokku Candle Installation Event in 2008 (E.Berry).

Where: Dayman Park, Urangan, Hervey Bay

When: Saturday, June 6

Program: Environmental displays from 10 am
Street Theatre and Live Music from 2pm
Butchulla and Torres Strait Islander
performers 4.00
Environment Guest Speakers - 4.15pm -
4.40pm
Candle lighting ceremony - 4.40pm
(Sunset at 5.15pm)

There are all new letters on the online letter generator at www.stoppress.com.au. We've done the thinking for you and your friends to write to Anna Bligh, Kevin Rudd, Peter Garrett, Colin Jensen, Penny Wong and Kate Jones. You can even write to all six at the press of one button!

While you're there, check out online shopping, photos of key campaign milestones and plenty more.

Paradise Dam Court Case a Key to Saving the Mary

Readers are probably aware of the forthcoming Federal court case into the failure of the much-touted fishway at Paradise Dam on the Burnett River near Biggenden.

The fishway consists of two parts; a large mechanised "cage" which should transport fish from below the dam wall up into the dam, and a downstream passage where fish enter a slot near the top of the wall and are carried to the base of the wall through internal plumbing.

The downstream passage hasn't been able to operate for most of the dam's life due to low water levels and the upstream passage would appear to have operated quite infrequently. One of the conditions under which the Paradise Dam was approved was that it must "install a fish transfer device on the Burnett River Dam suitable for the lungfish. The fishway will commence when the dam becomes operational".

The Wide Bay Burnett Conservation Council initiated this case with the support of peak

environment groups, the Environmental Defender's Office and Save the Mary. After various preliminary hearings, the case has been listed for a 4-week trial in the Federal Court in Brisbane commencing on 7 September 2009.

The outcome of the case will prove critical for the Mary as the Paradise fishway was always proposed as a model for the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam.

The cost of mounting such a case is daunting for small environment groups. With the hearing expanding from two to four weeks, the costs have increased even though the barrister and EDO have capped their costs. Here is one of those times where the wide net of those who care for our environment has to be tapped into, in the hope of financial assistance. For many who warmed to both the Greens and Nick Xenophon's stance that some of the government's stimulus package should go to environmental matters, here is your chance. At a very personal level, some

of your "Rudd Money", your personal stimulus package, could be sent in the direction of the WBBCC.

Dr Chris McGrath - barrister for "Team Wheezer" - has set up a website where we can follow the progress of the court action: www.envlaw.com.au/paradise.html. Further details and comment can be found at <http://savethemaryriver.com/forum/>

At the recent 3rd anniversary celebrations, many people made donations to the legal case, understanding that this case is a powerful opportunity to stop the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam in its tracks.

If you'd like to donate tax deductible funds to help Wide Bay Burnett Conservation Council with this case, contact Emma-Kate Currie at wbbconservation@bigpond.com, call (07) 4123 3361 or go to <http://wbbcc.wordpress.com/donate/>.

- Ian Mackay

Flow: The Movie

"An astonishingly wide-ranging film. An informed and heartfelt examination of the tug of war between public health and private interests." - New York Times

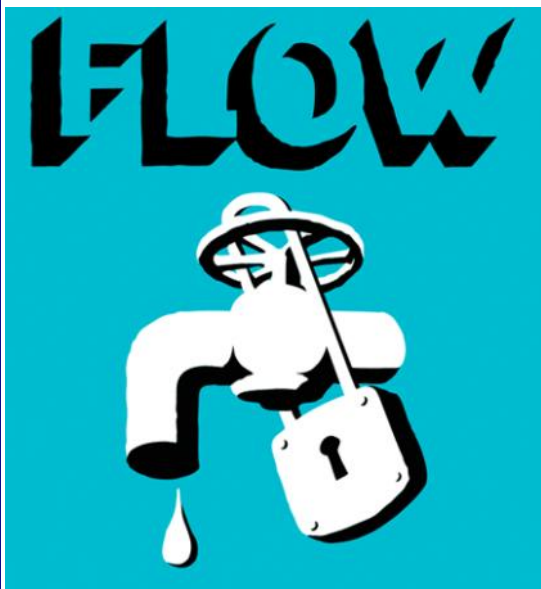
"Lively and engaging...Smartly Done" - Los Angeles Times

Irena Salina's award-winning documentary investigation into what experts label the most important political and environmental issue of the 21st Century - The World Water Crisis.

Salina builds a case against the growing privatization of the world's dwindling fresh water supply with an unflinching focus on politics, pollution, human rights, and the emergence of a domineering world water cartel. Interviews with scientists and activists intelligently reveal the rapidly building crisis, at both the global and human scale, and the film introduces many of the governmental and corporate culprits behind the water grab, while begging the question "CAN ANYONE REALLY OWN WATER?"

Beyond identifying the problem, FLOW also gives viewers a look at the people and institutions providing practical solutions to the water crisis and those developing new technologies, which are fast becoming blueprints for a successful global and economic turnaround.

- an extract from the film's promotional; website
<http://www.flowthefilm.com/>



More Qs than As on ABC TV Show

When "interactive" TV Program Q&A announced a panel that included Minister Peter Garrett and Senators Barnaby Joyce and Sarah Hanson-Young, Tanzi Smith and Anne Stephens leapt at the opportunity to get the show's website awash with Save the Mary questions. In just four days, over 100 text and video questions were posted about the Mary, adding up to 35% of all the questions submitted. As well, there were a lot of questions from fellow campaigners fighting Tillegra Dam in NSW and the North-South pipeline in Victoria.

Water issues got ignored on the program, but our efforts were recognised by the Australia Water Network who posted a message to all members: "On the bright side, it shows how well organised the Mary River people (in particular) are, but also the Plug the Pipe people.". The range of questions and the enthusiastic response to the opportunity is testimony to the high level of interest and support in our campaign.

You can read and watch the questions that were posted by going to www.travestonswamp.info/forum/viewtopic.php?t=4547.

Why are Labour Day and the Number 6 Important?

The Save the Mary Brisbane Group represented the cause at the Labour Day March in Brisbane.

Campaigners, decked out in Save the Mary T-shirts, were warmly received, made good connections with fellow marchers and distributed plenty of No Dam info. They especially appreciated the Save the Mary signs provided by Victor and his team.

Recall the state government's pre-election rhetoric about looking after its public servants. With key unions like teachers and nurses using the march to draw attention to the fact that the government is now crying poor and pleading hardship rather than improve pay and conditions.

A major flaw in the government's case is that there appears to be no such constraint on the funding for the Traveston proposal, indeed it seems it seems to be modelled on something akin to the Magic Pudding.

So why 6? Remember when Traveston was a "mega dam", when it was going to

provide 215 000 megalitres of water a year to Brisbane, when the Premier assured Queenslanders that the bulldozers would be rolling by Christmas. The cost was to be just over a billion dollars. Cutting the dam to a two-stage proposal to try to lever it past EPBC legislation means that the present proposal is much smaller, its anticipated yield cut back to just 70 000 megalitres per year, reduced by a factor of 3. In the meantime the cost rose steadily to \$1.7b then stopped growing. Now it's estimated to be well over \$2b.

This means our government is intent on building a dam that provides one third as much water as the original and that costs more than twice as much, spends an inordinate amount of money on glossy brochures extolling its 'smart state' virtues and shows the linings of its pockets to the state's teachers and nurses, the most poorly paid in the nation.

Something in there just doesn't add up.

- Ian Mackay

Mary in the Polls Again

The dam has been the focus of a couple of polls recently and the results have to throw some doubt on QWI's assertion that the community is "coming to accept the dam".

In late April the Gympie Times asked: "Are you opposed to the Traveston Crossing Dam?" with the results coming in at 94% Yes and a tiny 5% No. In Maryborough, WIN TV asked viewers: "Do you think the Traveston Crossing dam should go ahead?" 94% voted no dam and 6% were pro dam.

A few previous polls of interest:

- Does south-east Queensland need another dam?: 77% No 23% Yes (ABC 2006)
- Should rainwater tanks be compulsory in all Queensland households?: 76% Yes 24% No (ABC 2006)
- Should Traveston dam be built?: 87% No 13% Yes (SCD March 24 2007)

And of course there was the great election poll of March 21 2009 where anti-government sentiment, largely fuelled by the insistence on building Traveston, "feasible or not", resulted in the defeat of all Labor members from Caboolture to Bundaberg.

- Ian Mackay

Aerial Surveys

In 2008 Professor Richard Kingsford (University of NSW) conducted an aerial survey of the Great Sandy Strait. An extract from his report is included here.

“The Great Sandy Strait at Hervey Bay is one of the more important estuaries in Australia, a place where migratory shorebirds collect in their thousands. They roost on sand spits and in the mangroves during high tides and then feed on the mudflats during low tide. We spent the day surveying the entire

area including Fraser Island and its wetlands. The water bird community here is dominated by migratory shorebirds. One of the major inputs of nutrients, freshwater and sediment is the Mary River contributing to the system’s importance. The Mary River Dam soon to be built will jeopardise the supply of nutrients and sediments into the bay and could ultimately affect its current ecological status.”

- Observers : Richard Kingsford, John Porter. Pilot : Richard Byrne; contributed by Dawn Forrer



An aerial view over the Great Sandy Strait (Photo: Nikki Michail)

Reflections on the Mary River Festival

A few months back when speculation raged as to whether or not there’d be an early election and, if so, just when it might be, we jokingly quipped that it was sure to be on March 21, the date already earmarked for the Mary River Festival at Nelson Reserve in Gympie.

And that’s exactly what happened.

Neither that nor the couple of heavy downpours that swept through just before starting time, came anywhere near dampening (literally) the spirits of those attending and it turned out to be a delightful day. Joolie Gibbs and her dedicated band of helpers had put together a feast of both music and food and had attracted some excellent displays.

Land for Wildlife’s Marc Russell produced a visual treat with his collection of plant pods, flowers and seeds and this, combined with his considerable knowledge, made his display one of the best at-

tended. Gympie Landcare, Save the Mary, Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee, City Farm were all there ... with trees, information and merchandise.

There was great food, particularly the Philipino stall and the Hare Krishnas.

The threatened species were there, as were several dubious characters involved in a panel discussion on land use by the river.

The festival has grown in just a couple of years to be a joyous celebration of the river that runs through our midst. It was about far more than just opposing our governments ill-conceived notion to dam it, but served to inform, to educate and to assist us to take better care of our natural resource.

Big thanks to the organisers.

- Ian Mackay

Mary River Campaign Joins National Network

The campaign to save the Mary River from the controversial proposed dam has joined with the newly launched Australian Water Network. The Network has linked up community groups, activists and academics from around Australia to expose Government water policies which are driven by private markets and environmental degradation.

“The Australian Water Network will fight for the public control of water, and do all in our power to ensure waterflows for threatened ecosystems”, said Maude Barlow, senior advisor on Water to the President of the United Nations General Assembly and keynote speaker at the Network Launch this week in Sydney.

“This new voice will turn the tide in Australia’s water crisis,” declared Barlow, who knew about the campaign to save the Mary River.

Maude was presented with a copy of the campaign book ‘Love, Mary’, in which her comments are quoted: “Rivers have rights and needs to natural flows. Moving water from where it’s needed to where we want, draining rivers dry before they reach the ocean, the mass movement of water by pipeline and diversion will create huge new swaths of desert.”

Many other groups from Victoria, NSW and South Australia shared

experiences and strategies at the Network launch, and there was great interest in the Mary River campaign.

Common themes were poor government decision-making based on profit motives rather than sustainability, and violation of community rights to be heard. Discussion was held on the crisis of politics in Australia about water issues and the need to call on political leaders to be accountable and expose the basis of their inappropriate decision-making.

Save the Mary Coordinating Group is represented in the Network’s campaign working group. President Glenda Pickersgill said she was delighted to make links with the new group.

“We’ve already had involvement with international groups,” Ms Pickersgill said. “It’s helped us place the Mary in a worldwide context and it’s given us great strength to fight the ill-advised proposal to dam the Mary River at Traveston Crossing”.

“As the dam fight is poised to enter its third year, we’re heartened by the continually widening circle of support and attention the Mary river is receiving,” she said.

- STMRCG Press Release

April Flood Events Bust Mitigation Myths

The two April flood events in the Mary River have clearly illustrated the dubious nature of claims made by Queensland Water Infrastructure (QWI) about flood mitigation benefits of the proposed dam at Traveston Crossing. Two intense localised weather systems a fortnight apart caused very rapid flash flooding in some of the major creeks, most notably Six Mile, Deep and Tinana Creeks. These creeks flow into the river well downstream of Traveston Crossing, and were the major cause of the river flooding around Gympie and further downstream (please note, all those creeks already have dams on them, supplying water for the Sunshine Coast and Maryborough).

Even if a magic mainstream dam was in place and no water at all was allowed to flow under the Traveston Crossing bridge, the impacts in the Gympie and Maryborough regions from similar April rains would have been much the same.

In addition, QWI has predicted that a dam at Traveston Crossing would have been full after the rain in the first week in April. This raises two points about what would have happened if much more rain had fallen in the catchment of the proposed dam. First, no supply storage space would have been available to mitigate downstream flooding if the dam was already full from the first rainfall period. Secondly, what would have happened to the people living upstream of the dam, whose concerns about being flooded out in such circumstances have not yet been addressed?

Any attempt at downstream flood mitigation by using the spillway gates would back water up in the dam above the spillway level (71m above sea level). QWI proposes to build the dam wall to 90m above sea level and to allow communities to continue to live within the dam at elevations less than 90m. If the dam were to proceed, numerous residences and businesses, including 3 schools would remain below the 90m height and therefore within the dam footprint.

Perhaps the government assumes the spillway gates will always operate properly and they will always be able to predict and control the legendary Mary flood flows accurately without putting people at risk? Last year's experience with Lenthalls Dam on the neighbouring Burrum River clearly demonstrated that brand new dam spillways and gates designed and built by the Queensland Government DO fail, right when they are needed the most. These very serious concerns regarding upstream flooding risks have been raised again with the Coordinator General by representatives of Save the Mary and the Greater Mary Association. Communities much further downstream on the river also experienced minor floods recently. QWI still claims the dam would have exerted worthwhile flood mitigation as far downstream as Maryborough. Yet the figures presented in the Environmental Impact Statement showed only a barely discernable reduction in high flood flows in the river at Maryborough as a result of the dam (in contrast to the much greater impact of reducing dry-season and decreasing valuable flushing flows).

In April, Maryborough experienced a localised flash flood event which caused a section of the newly developed Fraser Coast marina in Maryborough to break away, putting lives and boats at risk. The bulk of the water causing the damage in Maryborough fell very locally and much of it came from the Tinana Creek catchment. The proposed dam could not have changed this pattern of events.

QWI would have us believe that by its sheer existence, the proposed dam would greatly mitigate floods downstream in Gympie and even further downstream, in Maryborough. However, our experiences in April show that flooding severity mainly depends on where the rain falls. Even on the occasions where the flood rain falls within the proposed dam catchment, flood mitigation depends a little on the available capacity of the proposed

dam at the time and a great deal on the religious faith of spillway designers and operators who have a demonstrated local record of failure.

It is really important to realise that the supply storage capacity of Traveston is very, very small compared to the volume of water carried by the Mary during a major flood event. Even if the proposed dam was completely empty at the start of a major flood, it would fill to the spillway level and overflow very quickly. Most of the promised flood mitigation comes from the operation of the spillway in slowing down the flood pulse, not from reducing the volume of water carried by the flood.

If you have been thinking the dam might be good news because a few silver-tongued government spinners promise that it will stop all the floods, please consider what happened in April and think again.

- Tanzi Smith and Steve Burgess



Flood levels at Traveston Crossing Bridge (Photo A. Mackay)

Reflections from Steve Posselt

This fight is not just about the trials and tribulations of those directly affected. This fight is about species that are fundamental to the world. It is a fight against poor governance, against bully tactics, against obsequious public servants, against sycophantic industry.

For the residents of the Mary Valley and the Great Sandy Strait it is a wake up call. We didn't realise the importance of what we had until someone tried to take it away. And now we have experienced the sadness, the depression, the anger.

When we win this fight, for win we will, please think about the importance to the world. Please be supportive of other fights. Being involved in this one surely gives us the empathy to understand the enormous challenges that confront us. Our rivers must live. They are fundamental to our very survival.

Steve Posselt's new book 'Cry Me A River' documents his epic kayak journey from Brisbane to Adelaide to see first hand the state of the Murray River.



Photos by Arkin Mackay. See more at www.stoppres.com.au

In the News

April began with fellow campaigners in Mount Larcom taking inspiration from our highway sign campaign (Gladstone Observer, 4/04/09). Let's just hope they don't suffer a government cleanup like we did in the lead up to the state election.

Steady rains caused a lifting of Queensland's "water crisis" status, but Premier Bligh remained immovable about the need for Traveston Crossing Dam (CM 06/04/09).

Highway safety stayed in the news, with the RACQ weighing in on the unacceptable dangers in the Coory-Curra stretch of the Bruce Highway (Where I Live News 11/04/09). The roads issue broadened to include the safety of Gympie-Brooloo Road, where Councillor Julie Walker was seriously injured in a head on collision in February (GT 14/04/09). In both instances, the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam is being cited by government as the reason roadwork is not a priority.

On whether the proposed TCD is a good idea, a Courier Mail blogger got it right, saying "the Mary River is far more useful to future gen-

erations as a functioning river than a white-elephant lump of concrete in the wrong place can ever hope to be" (CM online 20/04/09).

Further afield, it was reported that water levels in some of the world's most important rivers have declined significantly over the past 50 years due to climate change and dams (BBC 21/04/09).

Three year anniversary celebrations (26/04/09) attracted significant media attention, with stories on Channels 7 and 9, the ABC, the Fraser Coast Chronicle, Gympie Times and the Sunshine Coast Daily.

This month ended with a huge number of TCD questions submitted to ABC program Q&A featuring Minister Peter Garret and Senator Barnaby Joyce (30/04/09), with not a single one of them getting to air. So much for the show's promise of democratic telly.

In the News is collated from postings to the Media Watch forum (www.travestonswamp.info/forum/). If you have a media snippet you'd like in this Dambusters column, please post it to the forum and alert Tilly Hinton.

Contacts List

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 email: savethemaryriver@gmail.com
 Web: www.savethemaryriver.com
 Forum: www.travestonswamp.info/forum/

Save the Mary Info Centre - Open 7 days

Visit: Kandanga Railway Station, Kandanga
 Phone: (07) 5488 4800

Greater Mary Association (GMA)

email: greatermary@gmail.com
 Web: www.ourgreatsandy.com/

Save the Mary River Brisbane Group

Phone: David 0403 871 082 or Gaby 3395 5028
 email: savethemaryriverbrisbane@yahoo.com.au
 Web: www.savethemaryriverbrisbane.wordpress.com/

The Dambusters Newsletter is published monthly and Dambusters Bulletins are released if there is big news that can't wait until the next edition. All Dambusters can be accessed online at www.savethemaryriver.com.

Contributions and feedback to The Dambusters are welcomed and can be sent to the Editor, Tilly Hinton: tillyhinton@hotmail.com or 5456 2910 (a/h).

The Dambusters is distributed by email to Friends of the Mary - everyone on the Save the Mary River mailing list, all members and associate members of the Save the Mary River Coordinating Group and fellow groups involved in saving

