

Submission - Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy

We are approaching 2021, and we are in the midst of the earth's sixth mass extinction crisis and as demonstrated by lengthy droughts and the Black Summer fires we are in the middle of a climate crisis. It is the abuse of nature and the environment along with every other living species on earth that has got us to this sad state of affairs. Wildlife are in catastrophic decline due to human destruction, fifty percent of the planet's land mass has been transformed for human use and forty percent of the planet's land is devoted to human food production. Of the water used by humans 70% is being consumed by the global agriculture sector.

Water is the essence of life and it is equally important to every other living being. But there is a difference between us and all other species on earth. We are the only species who wilfully wastes and pollutes water and threatens the supply of water for all. Clearly we need to change our ways and can no longer extract, destroy, take and plunder nature, they are not our resources to abuse and use. Every other living being only uses the water and the resources they need to survive, and they do not abuse and pollute the world they live in. Surely we humans can too. And here in the Far North Coast we have the perfect opportunity to lead the way by example. We need to be smart about our water use and reduce extractive pressures and wastage to a minimum, reuse, recycle, desalinate and in particular use water sustainably when it comes to growing our food. I do not agree that we need water security for industry I think industry needs to ensure water security for all including for the environment.

The answer is certainly not building dams by destroying yet more habitat and altering nature for a very short term and short-sighted gain that in a drought-filled future may not even work.

Millions of dollars are being spent on studies for proposals for dams such as the proposed Dunoon Dam, which would destroy an endangered ecological community, threatened flora and fauna species, aboriginal heritage and is causing outrage in the local community. Similar can be said for a dam proposed at Byrill Creek in the Tweed Valley which keeps being touted as an option despite having high biodiversity, threatened flora and fauna species and having already had hundreds of thousands of dollars of public money spent on regenerating this unique and biologically diverse water catchment which also has aboriginal heritage. We live in a biodiversity hotspot here in the Far North Coast and instead of destroying and covering these unique areas in dams which will evaporate at best and with forecast droughts be empty at worst, we need to start being smart about our water use instead of literally flushing it down the toilet, into

unsustainable mining and agricultural practices and polluting it. We need to start being proactive about water conservation at every turn, we need to re-use water, manage the demand of water and invest in water saving options for the long term. We need to value water wherever it is found and feel secure that we are doing everything in our power to treasure this precious resource for all species to continue to thrive.

The case against dams

I strongly oppose the building of new dams and in particular a new dam on Byrrill Creek and a new Dunoon Dam on Rocky Creek. Dams fail to provide security in a drought.

Reports show that the proposed Dunoon dam would obliterate significant Cultural Heritage, including burial sites which would be completely submerged. The dam would also inundate and destroy rare rainforests that comprise part of the Big Scrub Rainforest, of which only 1% remains. The Dunoon Dam would destroy 34 ha of the lowland rainforest on site, or 3.6% of what remains of the Big Scrub as well as destroying 6 ha of the 7 ha warm-temperate rainforest on sandstone which is even more precarious.

The 2011 Dunoon Dam Terrestrial Ecology Impact Assessment (TEIA) prepared for Rous County Council despite having many inadequacies and relying on desktop analysis establishes that there would be impacts that cannot be mitigated including:

- **Loss of Lowland Rainforest Endangered Ecological Community**
- **Loss of threatened flora species**
- **Loss of threatened fauna habitats**
- **Severance of local wildlife corridors**

Endangered Ecological Communities are regionally and state significant, so this would not just be a loss for the local community. These endangered communities and species can never be replaced including our iconic koala who is suffering the death of a thousand cuts all across NSW and Queensland thanks to the destruction of their habitat and the deliberate lack of protection of their habitat by Government. The proposed Dunoon Dam will destroy koala habitat despite a report commissioned by the World Wide Fund for Nature found the 2019/20 bushfires resulted in the loss of up to 71% of koala populations in fire affected areas across the north coast of New South Wales. Koalas were recognised as being on a path to extinction before the fires so any loss of koala habitat is totally

unacceptable. Important corridors as well as their habitat need to be retained and protected.

***Many Platypus can currently be found in the section of Rocky Creek to be inundated by the Dunoon Dam* and are also found in the Byrill Creek catchment area yet these iconic creatures renowned the world over are disappearing at an alarming rate. The loss of any threatened species by any dam building project is ecocide. Apart from our iconic koalas and platypus and numerous other wildlife the Northern Rivers is recognised as a hotspot for plant diversity with the Mt Warning caldera recognised internationally as having highly significant biodiversity. Many of the species in this area occur nowhere else in the world. We simply cannot be on a relentless and continuous path of losing flora and fauna species and destroying our precious environment. The loss of connectivity, like the loss of species, is cumulative and ultimately disastrous.**

Water experts say new dams are high-risk and do not provide drought resilience. We cannot depend on rainfall alone nor can we rely on historical climate data any longer. NASA reports on groundwater also show we are in dire straits yet industries are still extracting water and polluting water in our aquifers. The extraction of water in the water mining industry which then goes into plastic bottles should also be stopped as it has cumulative negative affects on our water security.

We need to give priority to the Environment and water security by re-examining our use of water and not allowing it's unnecessary extraction and usage for unsustainable practices. We need to consult with global ecological and climate experts There needs to be a complete audit of surface and ground water being used. Industries such as animal agriculture, coal and other extractive industries , water mining, and any intensive water use industries need to be examined and audited and those that are not sustainable need to transition to a sustainable business model. No industry should be exempt from paying accordingly for their water supply and it should never be presumed that there is an endless supply of water. All individuals and companies need to be held responsible for their water use and re-use and water conservation strategies. All houses and commercial buildings should be encouraged to collect rainwater. We need to systematically eliminate water waste. A resilient system would combine several options and also include water recycling, roof water harvesting and green-powered desalination. I have not had a

water flushing toilet for 25 years and these options should also be encouraged.

We need to investigate smart water options. When Sydney Water used a system-wide water efficiency approach, they were able to supply nearly one million more people without *any* increase in water usage.

In Warnambool, a roof water harvesting project collects 100% of the rain that falls on the rooves of a new housing development, a volume equal to the needs of the homes connected to the project. We need to encourage similar sustainable new developments and retrofit existing structures where possible.

The following are recommendations to improve water security in our region:

- **Stop wasting further spending on the Dunoon Dam. It is already known that the dam will destroy Aboriginal heritage, threatened species and ecosystems.**
- **Do not pursue the Byrill creek Dam due to the environmental significance of the area and Aboriginal heritage values.**
- **Adopt the recommendations and case studies presented in *All Options on the Table* to develop a resilient water system in our region.**
- **Invest in system-wide water efficiency as recommended by Professor Stuart White.**
- **Engage consultants who are expert in potable recycled water and desalination to analyse and cost how these might augment supply in our region, including how these could be scaled up as part of contingency planning.**
- **Investigate new technologies: roof water and stormwater harvesting, desalination and purified recycled water.**
- **Foster a collaborative approach to problem-solving across the Rous area.**

I would also support adopting the following options as outlined in the Draft Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy

5. Vulnerability of surface water supplies to sea level rise.

6. Remove impediments to water reuse projects

7. Indirect potable reuse of purified recycled water

10. Decentralised desalination

- 11. Regional desalination**
- 16. Provide purified recycled wastewater for industry and rural users**
- 17. Increased on-farm water storage**
- 20. Establish sustainable extraction limits for Far North Coast surface water and groundwater sources**
- 21. Establish and increase environmental water releases from major storages in the Far North Coast**
- 22. Convert low flow water access licences to high flow water access licences**
- 23. Improve stormwater management**
- 24. Bringing Back riverine and estuarine habitat and threatened species**

Thankyou for allowing me as a member of the community the opportunity to give input to the Far North Coast Water Strategy. The building of a dam on either Rocky Creek at Dunoon or at Byrill Creek would be catastrophic. We need to persue a range of water saving strategies that do not destroy our environment and that are also sustainable and actually increase water security for the environment. We on the North Coast are passionate about our environment and a sustainable future and would like to see our area lead by example.

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