

Submission FNC Water Strategy

My background

I have spent many years as an ecological consultant in SEQ and regional QLD, including several koala surveys and reports and former owner of [REDACTED] in Logan for 15 years. My combined skills facilitated completion of Degree in Adult and Vocational Teaching, which enabled me to work with young adults on a range of ecological projects, field surveys, species identification and compilation, weed management strategies and habitat restoration.

I am a resident since 2016 at Lynwood near Alstonville and have been involved in several environmental activities, talks by Friends of Koala, including open day, highway widening, fire assessment training field day, and stream management issues with local residents. My experiences include several years as [REDACTED] Brisbane Region Environment Council, that had indigenous involvement and connection to country through several elders, culminating in an air, land, water and sea aggregation. Their valuable knowledge of specific areas of concern assisted me with a range of proposed developments including large scale land clearing within Urban Footprints, wetland drainage and alteration, pipelines, highways and extractive industries.

As a result of this cooperation several ecological assessment reports were produced to assist environmental groups advocate, prevent or achieve better outcomes from local authorities and state government agencies to reduce loss of threatened and vulnerable flora and fauna species, habitat; water quality and stream integrity, and ecosystem reduction and degradation. We always found it breathtaking and alarming that government agencies and the EPBC Act fails to protect koalas or their preferred habitat, eastern quolls, platypus, gliders, wallaby and eastern grey kangaroo habitat required for their survival, and numerous bio-regional ecosystems including unique rainforest areas.

Principal Points of Concern

Governance

My passion for protection of our environment has endured many years of effort and struggle for some success, and watched successive councils, state and Federal governments continue to deplete natural resources. At the same time being told its progress, more jobs and growth, good for the economy and the country, a win-win... a never-ending narrative.

However more concerning to me is the jurisdiction of decision making for water confined to industry, hydrology and resource to commercial interests, Rous future Water 2060 project. Rous County Council also omitted water efficiency from its 2020 Integrated Water Cycle Management Development options for increasing supply and undertook no specialist studies on it. Rous and Lismore Council failed to provide the Department of Primary Industries and Environment with an accurate appraisal of Dunoon Dam, thereby muddying the waters, so to speak.

It is little wonder this flawed process and proposed dam is highly controversial, with 91% of 1290 written and online submissions to RCC **opposing** the dam option, and I am adding my voice to oppose the dam due to its destructive impact on **Endangered** Lowland Rainforest Ecosystem, Threatened species and specifically against the wishes of Indigenous people.

To continue with this departmental system of governance is a litany of failure, including the disgraceful state of the Murray-Darling and associated wetlands. Dams have degraded many river systems and result in disastrous species loss to most aquatic vertebrate and invertebrate species, which rely on natural system fluctuations and movement opportunities. The consequences are major stream decline, sediment loads and algae.

All options should have the primary focus on water efficiency, which is cheap and effective, including roof and stormwater harvesting (including tanks) and for more business to be responsible for their water supplies with rebates and incentives, and alternative to rainwater harvesting including purified recycled water and desalination.

New housing developments can have innovative water systems built in as cost to the developer and should include composting toilets. A disproportionate amount of fresh drinking water is wasted on old technology sewerage systems merely to flush urine and human waste.

Indigenous and Cultural Recognition and Protection of their Country

'I wish to acknowledge the traditional owners and knowledge holders past and present who have continuous connection to their homeland estates, language groups and clans and cultural management of their country through song lines, dance, ceremony, traveling and trading routes through neighbouring country.' The following recent article highlights what can be achieved with open hearts and minds, and cooperation between governments and First Nations people.

"On September 21, the Victorian Parliament delivered a major step forward for Victoria's traditional owners, by passing the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong) Act 2017. Until now, the Wurundjeri people have had little recognition of their important role in river management and protection, but the new legislation, set to become law by December 1, will give them a voice.... The new law recognises the various connections between the river and its traditional owners. In a first for Victorian state laws, it includes Woi-wurrung language (the language of the Wurundjeri) in both the Act's title and in its preamble. The phrase Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong means "keep the Yarra alive". Six Wurundjeri elders gave speeches in Parliament in both English and Woi-wurrung to explain the significance of the river and this Act to their people.

They highlight Aboriginal cultural values, heritage and knowledge, and the importance of involving traditional owners in policy planning and decision-making. Importantly, the Council does not have any government representatives sitting on it... So, although the new law will not give the Yarra River full legal personhood, it does enshrine a voice for traditional owners in the river's management and protection – a voice that has been unheard for too long."

By contrast, the destruction in May 2020, of 46000-year-old caves and rock shelters in Juukan Gorge, Western Australia by mining company Rio Tinto clearly shows the power imbalance and failure of imposed laws upon First Nations people. Ironically and perhaps deliberately this destruction occurred on National Sorry Day, yet another example of continued abuse of their cultural rights and connection to country and follows a long legacy since taking their land by force and subsequent colonisation. The Dunoon Dam proposal to indigenous people is just more of the same, lip service and flaky consultation processes. This is highlighted from 2011 Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment that "*Aboriginal stakeholders are of the opinion that the sites should remain undisturbed and that no level of disturbance is considered acceptable to them.*"

An Integrated Water Planning report in 2014 noted that although the dam was 'technically viable', it had '*significant environmental and social constraints associated with threatened and endangered terrestrial ecology and culturally significant Aboriginal heritage*".

Destruction of Endangered Lowland Rainforest

There are 62 ha of Lowland Rainforest Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) on the site, a significant component of the very low 1% of the Big Scrub Rainforest that remains; and as such has global significance.

It is also intrinsically linked to the Channon Gorge which highlights the biodiversity of this area with warm-temperate rainforest on sandstone, an even rarer occurrence that will be almost be completely destroyed if dam proceeds.

Threats to flora and fauna species

Nine threatened flora species would be severely impacted by Dunoon Dam. (2013 Terrestrial Ecology Impact Assessment Report).

There will also be detrimental impacts upon aquatic fauna species including platypus, stream movement and ecological disruption to frogs, fish species and numerous invertebrate species.

Koala and their preferred habitat, including critical connecting corridors would be severed by the Dunoon Dam (TEIA 2011); including efforts by Whian Whian Landcare planting almost 3000 koala food trees to rebuild corridors in the proposed dam area that link with tracts of forest to the north. This southern corridor would be destroyed.

Habitat loss and fragmentation lead to further decline in koala populations, increased stress-disease factors and higher mortality. Koalas are commonly seen and heard in the area of the proposed dam wall and The Channon.

Whilst I acknowledge the need for a water strategy, it is far more preferable to be in the jurisdiction of conservation, ecology and independent scientific scrutiny and cooperation separate from government control of agencies and affiliations. It is too critical an issue and vital for the continued survival of so many species for water not to be given the full respect and value it deserves, protection and wise prudent use.