

Damming the Clarence - Daily Examiner April 2007

The Federal government's plan to dam the Clarence river system and pipe our precious water to Queensland has galvanized the people of the Clarence Valley.

I said it after Malcolm Turnbull released his report, and I'll say it again. Your Council is totally opposed to any diversion of the Clarence and we will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the community to fight the proposal.

Clarence water is a resource for its catchments, its environment and ecology and for growing our region. Clarence water is not merely a resource to be exploited. It is part of a complex ecosystem.

Environmental health of the largest river on the biggest floodplain in eastern Australia is of paramount importance. It is vital to the local economy, especially tourism and our \$40M fishing industry.

Malcolm Turnbull has made mention of a 'feasible plan'. But I ask feasible for to whom? The cost to the Clarence would be enormous. It is neither fair nor equitable that the health of the Clarence be damaged to fuel the unsustainable growth of South East Queensland.

Experts have already said that any diversion will have a negative impact on fisheries. And building a pipeline a couple of hundred meters to the Logan River cannot be constructed without causing substantial environmental damage along the way.

The release of the government's report, which lists the Mann and Clarence rivers as four of the five preferred options was alarming enough. But what got my hackles up even more was the fact that there has been no consultation with Clarence Valley Council or the community in general. Mr. Turnbull has not once visited our region to explain any merits of the proposal and no details have been provided of economic, social and environmental considerations.

Mr. Causley has wrongly said that the water diversion issue is for discussion between state and federal governments, not local government. Your council as your local representatives rightly has a unanimous policy of total opposition to any river diversion which deserves proper respect and consideration.

Soon after the announcement of the dam proposal, I was inundated with calls from local and Sydney media outlets. Surely that's an indication that

Clarence Valley Council's input on the subject is important and worthy of reporting to the wider community.

Mr. Turnbull's report was based on a study announced just four months ago. The study was carried out by the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation. We have all seen what has happened to the Snowy River – it has been reduced to nothing more than a sad trickle.

For over twelve years we have been planning the Shannon Creek dam in the Clarence valley to provide Clarence and Coffs Harbour communities a safe, secure water supply. Many studies were necessary and eventually a 30000 megalitre capacity structure was imposed with mandatory water efficiency and water savings measures applied.

There is plainly no such thing as excess water in a river system. It is the lifeblood of the Valley and every drop is needed, for example by fishermen who need the flushing effect and by farmers who need the alluvial floodplain soils.

The water is not merely a resource for human exploitation. And let's never forget we are its custodians for future generations of Australians.

A multi-million dollar engineering structure that may or may not work is not the answer. It is a knee-jerk political reaction in the lead-up to a federal election, and people in the Valley are rightly extremely skeptical of the announcement. The proposal smells of politics.

I have no doubt whatsoever that the Clarence Valley community will rally to oppose this hasty and dangerous proposal and respond with a fair measure of justified hostility.

History has shown that people power can be a mighty weapon against projects like what is proposed for our backyard. Tasmania's Franklin Dam is a case in point. Is the Clarence to become the next Franklin?

The answer to the water problem is education so that we all reduce our water consumption. All Australians must be a part of the solution to our water problems.

Ian Tiley
Mayor
Clarence Valley Council
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