Submission No 61

INQUIRY INTO ADEQUACY OF WATER STORAGES IN NSW

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Date received: 2/08/2012

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As a member of a community who has been placed in the position of being severely affected by a dam proposal I welcome the opportunity to place a submission to the Inquiry into Adequacy of Water Storages in NSW.

The recent Tillegra Dam proposal in the Hunter Valley, NSW, has disrupted a whole community and caused undue distress and suffering to many families, my included.

The fact that a dam proposal could be thrust upon a community without a thorough analysis of all water supply options nor proper community consultation, was inexcusable. For this reason I am severely disappointed that the NSW parliament has launched a narrow inquiry into Water Storages and not all water augmentation methods.

Many lessons have been learnt by the Tillegra Dam proposal such as:

- the need for proper community consultation,
- Necessity of a proper independent Cost Benefit Analysis
- Necessity of a complete independent analysis of all water supply and demand management options

Addressing the Terms of Reference of the inquiry:

a) the capacity of existing water storages to meet agricultural, urban, industrial and environmental needs,
b) models for determining water requirements for the agricultural, urban, industrial and environmental sectors,

- proper and ongoing independent analysis needs to be continually done on all water storages in relation to environmental needs to ensure that no further damage is inflicted on our natural assets, as has occurred in the past. Dams have detrimental impact on rivers – both physical and biological, by altering the rivers natural flow thus effecting ecosystems, which can led to the extinction of many fish and other aquatic species, the disappearance of birds in floodplains, huge losses of forest, wetland and farmland, erosion of coastal deltas, and many other immitigable impacts. We have ignored these problems for too long as is reflected in what is occurring in the Murray system.

c) storage management practices to optimise water supply to the agricultural, urban, industrial and environmental sectors,

- Evaporation is a major problem on large dams and should be looked at before further environmentally damaging dam options are considered. In the Hunter approx 30,000 megalitres are lost per annum. Maintenance costs on dams compared to demand management, recycling cost analysis.

d) proposals for the construction and/or augmentation of water storages in NSW with regard to storage efficiency, engineering feasibility, safety, community support and cost benefit

- Dams are old technology. Basix, recycling and other such sustainable initiatives will reduce the need for large water supply storages in the future. Water conservation

and demand management strategies are often more cost effective, socially, economically and environmentally.
Community's are showing they are prepared to accept permanent 'water wise' rules. Surveys around the country have shown that low-level water restrictions have very high levels of community support, making dams unnecessary.

With climate change there is an over reliance on rainfall dependent storage systems.

e) water storages and management practices in other Australian and international jurisdictions,

Dams are outdated technology which cause significant economic, environmental and social costs. According to The World Commission on Dams (*Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-Making. The Report of the World Commission on Dams, 2000)* large dams have been at best only marginally economically viable with the average cost overrun of dams at 56%.Dam costs cannot be compared to comparatively low cost water conservation and demand management strategies.

Since 1998 the number of dams in the US has been falling and their rate of commissioning has fallen behind that of their decommissioning.

In view of the large-scale problems and risks associated with large dams, the current trend is towards the decommissioning of large dams. According to the World Commission on Dams (WCD), momentum for river restoration is accelerating in many countries, especially in United States, where nearly 500 dams, mainly old small dams have been decommissioned. Since 1998, the decommissioning rate for large dams has overtaken the rate of construction in the United States (WCD, 2000). In the United States, where its 5,500 large dams make it the second most dammed country in the world, the building of large dams has been stopped and a huge amount is being spent on trying to fix the problems created by the existing dams. In fact the social and environmental benefits in removing dams outweigh the costs of maintaining them. In the US 200 dams were removed in 1990. These statistics need to be heeded by policy makers in Australia.

The *World Commission on Dams* research also shows that as soon as a dam is decommissioned, the river that it dammed can be restored to its former natural health. This is particularly relevant in the Australian context with so many rivers now regulated to their detriment.

The Inquiry into Melbourne's Water Supply (June 2009) found that: '*Given the current climate change predictions and that over 80 per cent of Melbourne's water supply is rainfall dependent, the Committee believes that there is an urgent need to diversify the city's water supply rather than invest in the construction of new dams. On this basis alone the Committee does not support the option of supplementing Melbourne's water supply with new dams.'*

f) any other matter relating to the adequacy of water storages in NSW.

- Dams are contrary to the Water Management Act 2000, which places priority on the protection or restoration of water dependent ecosystems as well as protecting,

preserving, maintaining or enhancing the important river flow dependent ecosystems of the catchment's water sources.

Large infrastructures such as dams can inflict a large financial burden on water rates payers, as well as a debt burden on a State owned enterprise. The WCD's conclusion as to the record of the dam industry was unequivocal: *'In too many cases, an unacceptable and often unnecessary price has been paid to secure the benefits of large dams. Moreover, the burden had fallen disproportionately on the poor, other vulnerable groups and future generations, causing the impoverishment and suffering of millions.'*

- Large dams also can have a negative effect on communities and flood precious agricultural land which is becoming a rarity in Australia.

- Community and stakeholder consultation has shown that consumers/industry's are prepared to accept water conservations measures and demand management in lieu of large dams

- Industries should be encouraged to use recycled water not potable water. Major water users should be encouraged to create and adhere to a water conservation plan.

In closing the evidence is overwhelming that dams are outdated and have detrimental environmental and socio-economic impacts. Australia is one of the driest continents. For this reason we need to learn to conserve and utilise our water supplies to the best of our scientific knowledge. With the evidence of climate change we must not become over reliant on rainfall dependent storage systems. We need to look towards more sustainable water supply options whilst preserving our remaining river systems.

It's high time we learned to adapt to our land of droughts and flooding rains, rather than failing time and time again to try to make it adapt to us. Richard Kingsford

Carol Pasenow