

**Submission
No 45**

**INQUIRY INTO RATIONALE FOR, AND IMPACTS OF,
NEW DAMS AND OTHER WATER INFRASTRUCTURE IN
NSW**

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Good afternoon Committee Members and Representatives,
Thank you for the opportunity to furnish a submission ahead of the NSW Legislative Council's Portfolio Committee (No. 7)' Inquiry into the Rationale for, and impacts of, new dams and other water infrastructure in NSW.

I can't imagine the predicament of shoring up water security, particularly inland water security on the driest continent on earth, in a state declared 100% in drought, is an especially easy prospect. Your careful, conscious and wholistic consideration is appreciated.

I want to tell you a little about the Clarence River, or Biirrinba, Boorimba, Breimba, as our three indigenous nations respectfully call the mother, and why interfering with this river system via damming or diversion or other interference, is a mistake I urge you to refrain from making.

In 2017 I kayaked solo from the source of the Clarence at Rivertree, high in the Great Dividing Range, to the mouth, where it empties into the sea at Yamba, in northern NSW. The almost 400km journey took me 14 days, of scratching, climbing, crawling, dragging and a little bit of paddling, to complete. It was a journey of connection and belonging. It changed my life, and I never changed back.

In 2019 I tried to paddle the river again, and I had to keep going lower and lower and lower down the river to find any water at all to paddle. I don't have to tell experts such as yourselves, how devastating the drought has been.

In saying this, our resilient river folk, and the broader Clarence Valley, engaged in various agricultural pursuits, are seasoned for such times. We know eventually the rains return, when we leave nature to her own devices.

The Clarence Valley LGA has 2186 farms and 3847 registered businesses. 1000 of these are primary producers and they employ 1128 full time employees. Diverting or damming the Clarence River catchment would directly threaten these industries :

Cattle: \$33,882,653 million = 1,700 cattle producers

Dairy: \$10 million = 6 farms

Sugar: \$95 million = 300 growers

Fishing: \$17 million = 182 licensed fisherman

Blueberries: \$20 million = 30 farms

Macadamias \$15 million = 18 farms (one farm is the world's largest)

Soybeans: \$10 million = 400 growers

Prawn and Fish Farms: \$12 millions = 5 farms

Clarence Valley Primary Producer exports: \$142 million

We rely on downriver floodplain farming here on the Clarence. Since we started marking time here, it has been the jewel, literally of life, on its banks and beyond.

This is why it is difficult to reconcile the concurrent mining prospects, on ridgelines that angle immediately down to the river, threatening to poison the river, with the discussion around damming and diverting its waters, threatening to choke the river.

It is further baffling, to have learned that the NSW Government has signed a Co-Funding agreement with at least one of the mining companies, prima facie in support of such activities.

It is not merely socially and environmentally negligent, but if we "extract" the emotion from it, bankrolling toxic mining on a river while damming or diverting its waters, particularly for human consumption, is wholly unconscionable. Further, when we know how valuable water really is, it's just bad business.

The Clarence Valley community is determined to not have failed lessons of mining and damming re-learned on our home-river. We reject the rolling of the dice, and support the Clarence Valley Council in its numerous resolutions opposing such plans.

Thank you for your time. I trust you will exclude the Clarence River Catchment from your planning.

Yours sincerely,

Hayley Talbot

NSW, CLARENCE