

ALARM BELLS SHOULD BE RINGING

No Dam For Rathdowney Action Group has raised serious questions about the yields being quoted by the Beattie Government for the proposed dam at Rathdowney. The original projected yields for dams in south east Queensland have been drastically reduced over recent years. Some reductions are so great that the dams are not viable, and therefore remain unbuilt or failures. In his push to be seen to rectify years of inaction, it seems that the Premier is happy to overlook the potential that Rathdowney will never contribute significantly to Queensland's water needs.

If discussions by locals with Department of Natural Resource staff are anything to go by, it seems instructions from the government are that this project will proceed without regard for factors such as cost, environment, social, heritage or even yield. If these aren't "fatal flaws" it seems nothing short of the need for a nuclear power plant on the site is.

This is obviously why there appears to have been no detailed reassessment of the yields contained in the January 1991 Appraisal Report. The yields in that report of approximately 50,000 megalitres pa were based on the maximum size of dam possible to build on the site and assumed an annual rainfall of 900mm pa. And yet The Department of Natural Resources website shows average annual rainfall for the Logan River at Rathdowney as 653mm and only 355mm for the 2004/05 year.

An article by Mark Girard, the Executive Officer of the Queensland Water Directorate states that "It is clearly evident that average annual rainfall in the eastern parts of the state has fallen dramatically, particularly around the central parts. Predictive climate modeling is suggesting Queensland can expect 15 percent less rainfall by the year 2030 and 40 percent less rainfall by 2070." There is a very real possibility that this "drought" isn't a drought. That it's now "normal". That makes any past studies even less relevant. Concurrently evaporation will increase (National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan 2004–2007) which will also decrease dam yield.

Rainfall aside, in the past few years there have been significant changes in the modelling that forecasts dam yields.

The South East Queensland Regional Water Supply Strategy Stage 1 Report prepared in 2004 admits that "Some of the key parameters used to calculate yield have been challenged over the last few years"

That document refers to reductions in projected yields for Stages 2 and 3 of Hinze dam by 22% and 36% respectively, and that "The assessed yield of possible future storages, including Wyaralong Dam and Glendower Dam, has also reduced as a result of the most recent modelling."

The document later quantifies the reduction as being almost 55% when it states "With respect to the Glendower Dam yields, preliminary State Government reassessment has resulted in a decrease in yield from 128mL/d to approximately 58mL/d." and concludes that "Consequently, the Glendower Dam no longer appears to be a viable short to medium term option". This is, of course, after the site acquisitions that displaced residents.

Given that Wyaralong was to be the answer to Glendower's failure, why is it suddenly no longer in favour? The Ministerial Portfolio Statement of the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines in the 2005/06 State Budget includes Wyaralong in its announcement of the "\$243 million for new State water infrastructure."

A quick scan of ABC News Online the day after the announcement of Wyaralong dam reveals “Premier Peter Beattie says the dam is essential.” while the displaced residents say “goodness knows when it is going to be built or if it was going to be built.”

Interesting that the 2005 Gold Coast Waterfuture, Southern Regional Pipeline document refers to Wyaralong yield as 96mL/day or over 35,000 mL per annum. On 21 April 2006, Local Government Minister Lesley Boyle refers to Wyaralong dam as supplying 70mL/day. That’s a 27% reduction. But if we believe the SEQ Regional Water Supply Strategy Stage 2 Interim Report quote of 55 mL per day we’re actually talking about a 43% reduction.

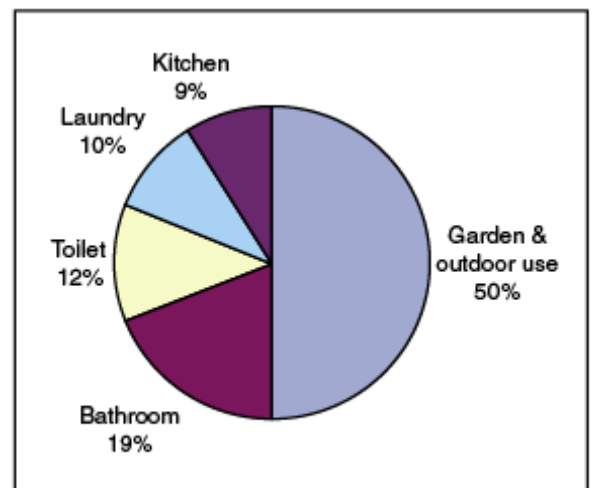
Given the dismal performance of Maroon dam (at only 22% of capacity without any use by irrigators for over 18 months) whose catchment forms one fifth of the catchment of the proposed Rathdowney dam shouldn’t alarm bells be ringing at some level of government or bureaucracy about the viability of this proposed dam.

At best the most optimistic yield figures the Rathdowney dam would provide only 9% of Queensland’s 560,000* megalitre annual 2026 water needs. (* Ministerial Statement Premier Peter Beattie 23 May 2006) At worst it’s another blunder costing hundreds of millions of dollars.

Based on the graph of water usage 72% of domestic water is used for garden and outdoor and laundry and toilet. Surely a significant portion of this could be supplied by domestic rainwater tanks.

According to the SEQWater and Councils of SEQ factsheet on Regional drought strategy only 2% of water is consumed as drinking water.

And while we still have the example cited in the Courier Mail on 20 May of a Brisbane business using 6 million litres a DAY of potable water, when recycled water is their preferred alternative, and over one billion litres of water unaccounted for each year surely Queenslanders will not be convinced by the “dam smokescreen” that promises a supposed solution over a decade from now.



Source: We All Use Water, Australian Water Association

We urge the Queensland people not to be misled that hurriedly acquiring poorly researched dam sites leads to any water supply solutions. Beattie wants the appearance of doing something, rather than doing the hard yards to supply real solutions. Neither has the Opposition provided anything other than a backward step with regard to their supposed dam solutions. In the meantime hundreds of millions of dollars will be wasted and the lives and livelihoods of hardworking Queenslanders will be destroyed, as well as the irreversible environmental impacts.

No Dam For Rathdowney Action Group
John Robinson
07 55 441176/ 0429 802 773
nodamforrathdowney@hotmail.com
www.rathdowney.org.au