

## RATHDOWNEY CHALLENGES BEATTIE ENVIRONMENTAL FLOW CLAIMS

When referring to the proposed Mary River dam on 8 June Mr Beattie said “the Government would also put in place a number of stringent measures to minimise any environmental impacts of the dam”.

He said “environmental flows of water would be maintained at approximately 85% and water quality, and impact on fauna and flora would be closely monitored.”

However, the Beattie government’s history of environmental vandalism due to lack of adherence to environmental flow requirements is all too familiar to Rathdowney and Maroon residents.

Three and a half years ago, farmers downstream from Maroon Dam (part of the proposed Rathdowney dam catchment) were cut off from water, despite paying an estimated \$40,000 per year in water allocations. When a freak storm brought muddy water down Burnett Creek resulting in fish dying, residents begged Sunwater (a QLD Govt. owned corporation which owns and administers the dam) to release a small amount of water to save the fish. Sunwater refused. **The fish all died.** Then the creek became bone dry. Still no water was released. Platypus were seen crawling across paddocks, looking for water. Residents believe that **all colonies of platypus were wiped out**, along with fish and invertebrates. There has been no evidence of aquatic life since, on 12 km of Burnett Creek.

**This all happened during the term of the Beattie government.**

A government who has disregarded the 1996 “National Principles for the Provision of Water for Ecosystems” (NPPWE) prepared subsequent to a water resource policy review initiated by COAG<sup>1</sup>. The provision of water for the environment was a major component of the review and the underlying premise was that rivers need a certain amount of water to remain alive.

The Beattie government not only ignored the NPPWE, but it also failed to comply with the Environment Protection Act 1994, which provides a general duty to not cause environmental harm.

DNR’s<sup>2</sup> excuse for not allocating environmental flow from Maroon Dam is that there is no water resource policy for Burnett Creek! Not even the sight of **dying platypus** could spur them into action.

**In 2003/04 there was a period of 15 consecutive months when no water was released from Maroon Dam.**

Yet section 3.4.1 “Accountability” states that the agency responsible for allocating water for the environment should be clearly defined, and should be responsible to both the government and the community. Principle 2 also states that water should be allocated “on the best scientific information available”. No scientific information was sought by government, but even in its absence, the sight of fish and platypus dying in large numbers should have alerted Sunwater. The fact is that they simply ignored it. It was the dam owner’s responsibility to provide environmental flow, and DNR’s to monitor it. Both failed dismally, as did the Environmental Protection Agency.

<sup>1</sup> Council of Australian Governments

<sup>2</sup> Department of Natural Resources Mines and Water

In 2001, the Queensland government released its proposal to create a draft water resource plan for the Logan Basin (this proposal acknowledged that the environmental flow condition downstream from Maroon Dam was poor). After five years, there is no sign of progress on this plan. **How many more waterways will be destroyed before this government acts responsibly?**

The NPPWE are guidelines for the states, and are not legally binding. And yet the principles 3.3.1 states that “in order to ensure full protection for the aquatic environment, environmental provisions should have formal recognition under law”.

Within three years of publication of the National Principles, New South Wales had produced a set of environmental rules for rivers, designed to retain half to three-quarters of average annual water for environmental flow, and to replicate natural flow patterns. Why is Queensland so far behind NSW, and behind the United States, which stopped building dams 10 years ago because of the damage they did?

It is ironic that if the Queensland-NSW border were 20 kilometres farther north, Maroon and Rathdowney would not be suffering from past and future environmental disasters. A second dam 15 kilometres downstream from Maroon Dam will take the Logan River’s present D- report card to the bottom F rating, suggesting the eventual death of the river.

Unless pressure is brought to bear on an uncaring government to commit to the National Principles for the Provision of Water for Ecosystems, the Queensland government will continue to kill waterways with impunity.

A story has just come to light that farmers are able to make an application to DNR if they wish to dig a hole in the dry Burnett Creek bed on their properties in order to get to some water that has seeped underground. Farmers are so desperate they will go to the extent of making this application. DNR has not been forthcoming with information to all farmers on the availability of such an application process.



Current state of Burnett Creek, QLD  
Government’s failure to ensure environmental flows – June 2006



Dead jewfish in Burnett Creek June 2006

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Ministerial Media Statement **Premier of Queensland, The Honourable Peter Beattie** June 08, 2006  
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES TO BE A KEY PART OF NEW DAM PROCESS