

WIDE BAY BURNETT CONSERVATION COUNCIL INC.

SUBMISSION TO NATIONAL COMPETITION COUNCIL APRIL 2004

Review of the National Competition Council's (NCC) 2003 assessment of the Burnett River Dam with regard to compliance with the CoAG Water Reform Framework

Wide Bay Burnett Conservation Council submits that the 2003 NCC assessment Volume 3: Water Reform August 2003, regarding submissions made relating to water infrastructure development on the Burnett River, Queensland, failed to seek and assess all relevant reports, documents, and facts provided. Further, the NCC appears not to have undertaken any independent assessment of those documents which have been cited in the report.

When reaching its conclusion (p 4.72) that "The Council therefore considers that the Queensland Government met its CoAG obligations to show the project is ecologically sustainable", the NCC appears to have relied on advice received from the Queensland State Government despite the fact that the Queensland Government is itself the proponent of the Burnett River Dam (Paradise Dam), and three other approved associated infrastructure developments on the Burnett River system.

- The State Government has been quite open in admitting that the Burnett River Dam would go ahead regardless of ecological impacts because it was an 'election promise'. In fact the Queensland Minister for Environment (at that time), Dean Wells, stated in July 2003 "I am a democrat, I am an environmentalist but I am a democrat before I am environmental and the election undertaking (to build the Burnett River Dam) and democracy overrides everything else." (ABC Bundaberg radio interview July 2003). The Minister for State Development (at that time), Tom Barton, when questioned about the environmental impacts, has repeatedly declared publicly that the dam was an election promise, and that it would be built.

The NCC appears not to have given any weight to information provided which clearly identified that the State Government had found it necessary to amend its own legislation under the Queensland *Water Act 2000* to allow a reduction in previously required environmental flows.

- One effect of this reduced requirement for environmental flows has already resulted in no flows being released downstream from the Ben Anderson Barrage, at Bundaberg, for the period September 2003 to January 2004. During this period the fishway was inoperable, and migratory fish species were unable to move upstream or downstream during this important breeding period.

The NCC failed to take into account the cumulative impacts of further infrastructure on an already fragile river system, and essential breeding habitat for unique Australian icon species.

It is incomprehensible that the NCC could come to the conclusion that a major dam on the Lower Burnett would be ecologically sustainable given that it will result in 71% of the Lower Burnett being inundated and turned into a series of deep water storages, and given the stated concerns of the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

- The Queensland Environmental Protection Agency calculated (Nov.2001) that the Burnett River Dam would increase inundation of the Lower Burnett from 43% to 71%, and that the cumulative impact would result in somewhere between 50% and 80% irreversible loss of critical habitat (IUCN ranking) for lungfish, (*already listed as vulnerable*) and the *Elseya sp.* freshwater turtle (*which is expected to be listed as endangered*). (source: attachment to correspondence from EPA Director- General, James Purtill to Mr Ross Rolfe, Coordinator-General, Department of State Development, 9.11. 01)

It is beyond our comprehension that the NCC considers the Queensland Government has met its obligations for ensuring ecological sustainability under the terms of CoAG, based primarily on the proponent's (Queensland State Government) own assessment of the impacts of a major dam, and associated infrastructure (2 new weirs, and raising an existing weir)., on what has already been identified as a stressed river system based on scientific data.

Support for Queensland Conservation Council submission to the Review April 2004

We fully support the Review Comments forwarded to the National Competition Council by the Queensland Conservation Council, and request that our brief submission be read in conjunction with QCC's submission.

Submitted by:

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April 2004