

Would we destroy a rainforest so councils can waste water?

by Annie Kia

The Rous *Future Water 2060* plan proposes spending around \$240 million to flood 253 hectares of rainforest and farmland – but there is something missing in their plan.

There is no analysis and costing of an investment in system-wide water efficiency. Without this analysis and costing, Rous County Council cannot possibly make a decision that the dam is the ‘best option’.

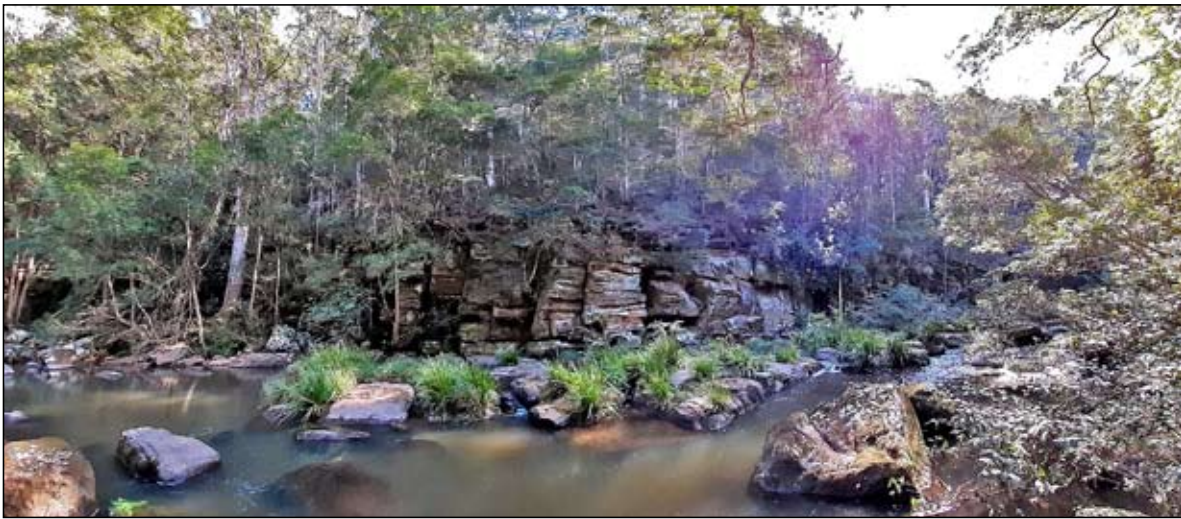
But this kind of investment has proved effective in achieving supply-demand balance. Sydney Water did it. Remarkably, they were able to supply an extra 950,000 people, while maintaining water use at levels 25 years before the investment project.

Think about that! By optimising water use, close to a million people were accommodated, with no increase in consumption (*Metropolitan Water Plan, Water for Life*, NSW Government 2006).

System-wide water efficiency involves an audit of every part of the reticulation system. Every school, hospital, every large user and facility.

This audit assesses water loss in council long pipes, and then at every part of water’s journey including appliances and fixtures, processes and behaviours. Then comes the tech retrofit. Needless to say, retrofit and tech intervention at this scale generate many jobs.

I appreciate that Rous councillors are acting in good faith. And I can see there are “wicked problem” aspects to our system. For example,



The exceptionally rare sandstone rainforest in The Channon gorge would be destroyed by the dam. Photo: David Lowe

Rous is the bulk supplier, but Byron, Ballina, Lismore and Richmond Valley councils own most of the infrastructure, control pricing and determine how water is either optimised (good), or lost and wasted in our system (bad). Unfortunately there is quite a bit of the latter.

Instead of dealing with these issues, I can see the appeal of a Big Dam. But the Big Dam is expensive. And not just in eye-watering dollar terms... the \$240 million price tag that would increase the cost of water to consumers and industry.

21st century water is about a suite of smart water options including water efficiency; water harvesting (rain tanks, urban run-off etc); water re-use (eg purple pipe re-use and purified recycled water); and council policies and investments that

optimise water use. Contingency plans for drought are an integral part of this.

By sinking all our resources into one Big Dam, we can kiss goodbye to a portfolio of smart water options that would make our system fit for the 21st century. What an opportunity lost! This would be a huge price to pay for reaching back to last-century thinking.

The Big Dam has another cost: it would be an incentive for councils to continue on with business-as-usual. It would flush future innovation down the drain, because innovation happens when constraints push organisations to find new ways of doing things. Lismore City Council’s waste system shows us how this works: the state government said “You’re about to experience financial

pain for every tonne of landfill,” and suddenly LCC came up with really good innovations in waste recovery.

In facilities large and small across our region we use high-quality drinking water to flush poo down toilets, while failing to harvest water that falls on the roofs of these buildings. This is just one example of how we fail to manage water sensibly. We can do better than this. Let’s not lay waste to farmland, or flush an endangered rainforest down the toilet because we chose not to embrace new ways of doing things.

Please send Rous County Council an email before 9th September, to: council@rous.nsw.gov.au

Make clear you object to the dam, then list your concerns. You’ll find tips on writing your email here: <http://bit.ly/no-dam-submission-points>

Ecological impacts

by Nan Nicholson

The proposal for a large 50 ML dam at The Channon-Dunoon has resurfaced after having been effectively ruled out in 2013.

At that time, the presence of an Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) was considered one of the main reasons the dam should not go ahead.

The *Dunoon Dam Terrestrial Ecology Impact Assessment* (2011), commissioned by Rous County Council, found that significant impacts would occur because of:

- the loss of 34 ha of Lowland Rainforest EEC including 7 ha of Warm-temperate Rainforest on Sandstone. This type of rainforest on sandstone is extremely rare in this region as it mostly occurs on rhyolitic soils up in the mountainous zones, eg in upper Terania Creek.
- the loss of nine threatened flora species
- the loss of habitat for 17 species of threatened fauna, including koalas
- the severance of local wildlife corridors

Aquatic plant and animal species, including platypus, would also be adversely affected by the dam and its construction, and by changes in the amount, velocity and timing of downstream flow.

This destructive dam is not necessary. The resistance to this dam will not end with the close of submissions.


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