

# How Nimbin's Mulgum Creek was sold down the river

by Catherine Macleod

In a very comprehensive submission to the Nimbin Development Control Review, five of the largest community groups in Nimbin stated that “the last two years have clearly demonstrated that we have insufficient water to support current usage levels” and “the supply of water from the Nimbin weir as it is currently operated is only possible if the needs of the environment (riparian zone) along Mulgum Creek are ignored.”

Yet Lismore City Council staff responded by writing in their draft report after submissions were received that “secure yield is available for existing properties connected to the water supply” and that “there is sufficient reserve capacity within the water supply to provide for an additional 45 ETs.” ET means ‘equivalent tenement’ which corresponds to the water demand from a typical detached dwelling.

This draft report will be voted on by councillors in the next couple of months after another round of community submissions and public meetings.

To me, this response does not indicate the “collaborative approach” with community



Mulgum Creek after good flows. Photo: Triny Roe

council has touted itself to be taking in its review of the Nimbin Development Control Plan. The concerns contained within this very big submission by NAG, Nimbin Environment Centre, Nimbin Neighbourhood and Information Centre, Nimbin Chamber of Commerce and Nimbin Community Centre were also echoed by other submissions and results of individual surveys.

Mulgum Creek has had a decline in flows over the last 12 years, and an attendant devastating effect on the riparian environment.

This was not just because of extra connections to, and increased draws on the system (although that definitely had an impact); it was because of climate change.

CSIRO's *State of the Climate* report “reveals a clear trend of declining winter rainfall

and streamflow with medium confidence and increased intensity of extreme rainfall events is projected with high confidence”.

In other words, long periods of dry followed by intense rain events which see water rushing off down the creek, never to be seen again. This has been going on for at least 12 years.

The Department of Environment, Climate

Change and Water states: “If future run-off is at the drier end of the range of estimates, inflows to water storages may decrease by 10-20% during drier periods. This will most impact on towns with small water storages.”

One of Council's better suggestions contained in the report is that of increasing storage capacity by increasing the size of the Williams Dam, duplicating the dam at a location close to the existing dam or construction of a new off-stream storage at a different location.

In my opinion, these would be the better options for increasing supply knowing that we must capture water from these intense rain events for dry times (of course it goes without saying that any dam should not be on a burial site or a location of ecological importance).

However, Council has not provided the community with any details in the report such as costings and whether these three options are even affordable for Council. A truly collaborative approach involves transparency as to process as well as outcomes.

In the meantime, Council has started (without community consultation) exploratory drilling for water

in the caravan park. This is intended to be an extra source of supply if viability checks out. This is despite a States' Regional Water Studies for Far North Coast survey deciding that “more work is needed to be done” to ascertain the viability of options such as these.

There could be concerns about effects on stream health and the water table, and also on vegetation cover.

Council's draft report will be put up for public exhibition for six weeks from 4th August, during which time submissions can be lodged.

There will also be a meeting with council at the Bush Theatre at 6pm on 18th August, registration required, numbers to be capped at 65, Covid permitting.

If you feel strongly about any of these issues (particularly regarding the effect the over-extraction of water has on Mulgum Creek and the idea of accessing underground water), it is important to lodge a submission, since the new Development Control Plan will affect the future of Nimbin and our water supply (and underground water) for the next 5-10 years.

> More on the DCP review, p.9

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