



Wheezer
the lungfish
says, "Save the
Mary River!"

Dam the Mary River? Save the Mary River!

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Community forum melt-down

BEATTIE Government DNR boffins lost half their audience in the first half-hour of the Imbil landowners forum to sell the proposed Traveston Crossing dam to the constituents of the Mary Valley

If they didn't walk out, they simply tuned out to the planned independent facilitation.

The process faced a melt-down as Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water personnel tried to conduct the forum amid pure outbursts of frustration and anger.

A throw-away comment that the issue was not about winning was immediately jumped upon by one resident who asked how it could not be a fight to be won or lost.

"You will be dragging me off my property in handcuffs, and I won't be the only one," she declared as she carted her two children home when the meeting disintegrated.

One of the first speakers called for a walk-out after realising there was to be no information sharing, just a collection of "issues" for the Government to take into account.

The Imbil Public Hall hosted a full crowd of attendants on Monday night, invited "to talk with DNR staff and provide feedback on issues they felt must be considered under the proposal" to dam the Mary River.

It was the first of a planned 18 forums, the majority for directly affected landowners, with four open to the public.

And unless Water Minister Henry Palaszczuk comes up with a personal written guarantee that the process is not merely a "snow job" on Mary Valley residents, the forums could fold all together from a lack of attendance.

That was the ultimatum Rick Elliot gave DNR project director Scott Smith early in the discussion.

The leader of the Save the Mary River Coordination Group – the action group opposing the proposed dam – demanded a written guarantee from the Minister himself.

"I want an assurance from him – no-one else – that this is a worthwhile process and that the people will be listened to," he said, saying that without the guarantee he would publicly urge people to give up the process.

His second demand was that DNR establish trained support networks in the Mary Valley immediately to assist people facing business, legal and employment stress.

Laying the group's platform on the line in plain English, he said they would fight the dam proposal "to the end" and prove that the Government's plan was a benchmark for worst practice across the world.

He said DNR had already said it was modelling the dam on the success of Paradise Dam in the Burnett, which had the unfortunate claim of being the only Australian dam to fail international guidelines for dam building.

As well, Mr Elliot sought to have a "properly resourced" task force sent to the Mary Valley immediately to offer a "meaningful package" of employee and small business support for people losing their jobs and their livelihoods as a result of the April 26 shock announcement.

While the DNR's Mr Smith sought to clarify what resources were needed, Imbil property agent Nick Smith described how he had put off staff because his "office" – the Mary Valley catchment, not the building – was going under water, like that of earthmoving contractors, milkers, fencing contractors and so on.

Again Mr Elliot urged people to channel their anger into fighting the dam proposal and not doing anything "silly" to give the Government the ammunition it needed to brand the valley as a "mob of red-necks".

He said "we are going to stop this dam and we are going to extract maximum pain from the Government" by demanding all the services they can throw at the Mary Valley.

"We will ensure the Government never, never forgets the people of the Mary Valley.

Mr Beattie "got it the wrong way around" – he should have started his consultation before declaring the dam would go ahead whether it was "feasible or not", Mr Elliot said.

Other issues raised before the meeting folded:

- Premier Peter Beattie's initial claim that the proposed dam would flood-proof Gympie – but at the expense of flooding Imbil and Kandanga;
- Lack of accessibility of the Imbil area to Gympie, the Sunshine Coast and Brisbane via changed road networks;
- Change to school infrastructure with the possible closure of Kandanga Creek, Kandanga and Federal schools – would there be one big school for the remainder or two smaller ones;
- Emotional impact on children as seen by school staff;
- People asking "where are we going to live now?"

The forums were initially set to continue from this week through to mid-July, in each of the following centres: Imbil, Kandanga, Amamoor, Pomona and Kenilworth.