



# Dam the Mary River? Save the Mary River!

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### **Wong Address gives Mary Hope**

A speech given to the 4th Annual Australian Water Summit by Climate Change and Water Minister, Senator Penny Wong has raised the hopes of campaigners fighting the Traveston Crossing Dam on the Mary River in south-east Queensland.

**Senator Wong outlined the Rudd Government's "Water for the Future" Plan, a vision that has healthy waterways, sustainable water use and recognizing the likely impacts of climate change as vital ingredients.**

"Climate change is a major threat," said Senator Wong, "For much of Australia it means more droughts and less rain."

"In our towns and cities, we must secure water supplies for current and future needs, including from a range of new sources that rely less on rainfall given the clear threat climate change poses to traditional water sources."

Critics of the Mary river dam have had the same message since the day the dam was announced.

Murray/darling kayaker and long-time water engineer Steve Posselt, who has just paddled the entire length of the Mary as part of his "Don't Murray the Mary" trip strongly shares her view.

"As a past president of AWA, the Australian water association, we could see this water crisis coming," he says, "but it's all brought about by our total dependence on dams. Climate Change has meant a lot less inflow into dams, anything from 30 to 60 percent less, and suddenly the same "water crisis" pops up all around the nation."

"The problem in Queensland was that the government hastily announced a couple of dams on the eve of an election and even though the science and the economics is coming in against them, they're unprepared to back down from that decision."

Senator Wong plainly shares his view.

"A key element of Water for the Future is to work with the States to develop new sources of water that do not rely entirely on rainfall," she says.

"By working with state and local governments and the private sector, this Program will provide funding towards new and innovative water supply projects in desalination, recycled water and stormwater harvesting in areas with a population of 50,000 people or more."

President of the Save the Mary River Group, Kevin Ingersole says his group "has spent the last two years trying to convince the Queensland government of the need for, and viability of, such alternatives."

"The question really is how strong the federal government will prove to be in its aim of 'seeking to set a new standard in national leadership' in water management," he says.

“Senator Wong identifies that ‘the most pressing challenge is to ensure all Australian governments are responding to the impacts of climate change on our water supplies and the health of our rivers.’”

But when it comes to Healthy Rivers, Mr Ingersole says his group and Ms Wong could have been reading from the same page.

“For too long, we have treated our rivers and groundwater systems as ‘magic puddings’; as limitless supplies of water,” says Senator Wong.

The last word on this lies with Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett. Without his approval, the dam cannot proceed.

“The Traveston Crossing dam proposal will really be a litmus test for the Federal Government,” says Kevin Ingersole. “Water for the Future is an excellent document. It shows that healthy rivers and sustainable, reliable water supplies are not mutually exclusive.”

“It’s hard to see that the Federal Government could espouse such noble aspirations and then cave in to the Queensland Government’s misguided determination to build this dam,” he says.

“The proof, though, will be in the pudding.”

**For further comment :**

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