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Submission – Draft Far North Coast Water Strategy

The Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition (CVCC) is a Northern Rivers community group which, since its formation in 1988, has been involved with environmental issues – locally in the Clarence Valley as well as in our broader region and further afield. Two of the major interests of the CVCC since its formation have been water issues and biodiversity protection – interests which are the reason for our comments in this submission.

This submission briefly discusses Rous County Council’s Future Water 2060 Project which is one of the options canvassed in this comprehensive Draft Far North Coast Water Strategy. The centerpiece of this project is construction of the Dunoon Dam on Rocky Creek. There is considerable local opposition to this proposal.

Like many community members in the Rous County Council (RCC) area, the CVCC opposes the proposal to build this dam as we believe it will have an unacceptable impact on biodiversity. Furthermore, we also believe that RCC has not given sufficient attention to meeting its future needs with less expensive and more environmentally sustainable alternatives to the dam proposal.

Dunoon Dam and Biodiversity

The Channon Gorge, which will be inundated if this dam is built, contains an endangered ecological community - an important remnant of the Big Scrub lowland rainforest which is now only 1% of its former size. Rainforest botanist Nan Nicholson said that about 55 ha of rainforest would be cleared for the dam. This is about 5% of the remaining Big Scrub. She said, “It might not sound much, but actually it’s incredibly critical, particularly because it’s in two large blocks, and most of the Big Scrub remnants are just tiny little patches.”¹

The CVCC understands that the Channon is a known hotspot for koalas and that the existing corridors they use will be cut by the Dunoon dam. With many of the region’s koalas killed in the severe 2019-20 bushfires and koala habitat extensively damaged by fire and logging, this development would add to the habitat stress affecting koalas. All of these cumulative effects are likely to hasten the species’ slide towards extinction.

The dam also threatens the local platypus population. There are breeding platypus in Rocky Creek. Their habitat and that of the species downstream from the dam will be impacted. A recent report – [A national assessment of the conservation status of the platypus](#)² – by University of NSW researchers highlights the decline in platypus numbers and supports the listing of platypus as vulnerable under the IUCN Red List and the EPBC Act 1999.

¹ <https://www.echo.net.au/2020/09/nan-nicholson-and-annie-kia-share-dam-concerns/>

² https://www.acf.org.au/landmark_research_finds_the_platypus_should_be_listed_as_a_threatened_species The full UNSW report can be accessed from this Australian Conservation Foundation media release.

The natural world in our region has been placed under increasingly severe stress in recent years. The CVCC believes that we cannot afford to continue on the current path where important ecosystems are destroyed and native fauna are pushed towards extinction. While supporters of the Water Project 2060 may argue that the proposal affects only a relatively small area, this view does not take into account the cumulative effect that this and other developments have on the natural world. It is not in humanity's long term interest to accede to the continuing degradation of the natural world as we all depend on the ecological services that the natural world provides humans and other life forms.

Water supply

There are a range of questions about the assumptions used to justify construction of the Dunoon dam. The relatively small predicted population increase from 2020-2060 does not justify the building of a large, expensive and damaging dam. Furthermore alternatives such as a suite of measures to improve water efficiency and demand management have not been properly considered as an alternative.

According to Professor Stuart White of the Institute for Sustainable Future (UTS), the need for the dam "has not been demonstrated by the available data and analysis". He said, "Amongst other concerns, committing to the construction of the Dunoon Dam option would represent a significant financial risk, and further, would waste an opportunity to demonstrate leadership in sustainable water management and to provide timely support for economic development and employment in the region."³

The Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition urges the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment to remove RCC's Future Water 2060 Project as an option from its Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy.



³ Prof Stuart White – Brief Review -Rous Water Augmentation 20200904.pdf