



DON'T 'MURRAY' THE FITZROY

Community concern about high salt loads in the Fitzroy River system will be heightened if plans to reduce the capacity for natural flushing by the construction of more dams and weirs are approved. The Fitzroy flows for 310 kilometres from the conjunction of the Dawson and Mackenzie Rivers into Keppel Bay and the Great Barrier Reef lagoon.

Capricorn Conservation Council Coordinator Michael McCabe said, “While the Fitzroy and tributaries have been significantly modified by weirs and dams for agricultural and urban water, the current proposals are for mining and industrial expansion, not food security and human consumption.” “With the construction of the Fitzroy Barrage in 1971 the natural length (~120k) of tidal estuarine influence was halved.”

“Despite the installation of a fishway to compensate for the major barrier to fish migration there is a significant ecological trade-off for achieving reliable urban and rural water supplies. Barramundi for example spawn in salt water and migrate upstream to streams and billabongs until reaching sexual maturity. Apart from big events like 2011 when floodplains and wetlands interconnect, migrating fish are limited to swimming up engineered fishways.”

“The construction of Eden Bann weir to supply Stanwell Power Station flooded almost 70k of riverine habitat, leaving only ~30 k of ‘natural’ pools, riffle zones and gravel beds west of Yaamba. Eden Bann created another major barrier for aquatic life and a significant hazard for freshwater turtles. A loch system is in place to provide fish passage but little is known about its effectiveness.”

“Several years ago there was a proposal to increase water storage along the Fitzroy mainly for increasing water security for industrial growth in Gladstone and possibly for several industrial scale cattle feedlots (15,000 head each) in the floodplain.”

“The plan was to raise Eden Bann weir and to construct a very large weir at Rookwood by 2011. Eden Bann storage was to be increased using an inflatable bag similar to the one which tragically collapsed at the Bedford Weir (Blackwater).”

“The surge of industrial growth in Gladstone has put these proposals, by Gladstone Area Water Board and Sunwater, back on the table. If approved under State and Federal planning and environmental laws, The Fitzroy will be ‘mighty’ no more. The Eden Bann pondage will consume another 70k on natural river system. Rookwood (stage 2) would rise to 49 metres ML drowning 150 k of riverine ecosystems, and backing up water into the Dawson and Mackenzie. (ML = modified level)

The ‘mighty’ Fitzroy for much of the time starts just a trickle though gravel beds below the conjunction of the Dawson and Mackenzie. While heavily impacted by earlier land use practices there has been a quiet revolution in sustainable grazing practices in recent decades. Better management of ground cover, installation of off stream watering for cattle, protection of riparian vegetation and biodiversity are now ‘stock in trade’ for regional land managers.”

“Will these efforts be lost if the Fitzroy becomes the next Murray with seemingly endless disputes over water allocation, and quality? Will the current industrial boom cause the loss of a health river system essential for our a sustainable landscape, reef and our food security? Will our vulnerable, unique Fitzroy Turtle *Rheodytes leucops* be sacrificed for short term economic gain?” <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/species/pubs/1761-conservation-advice.pdf>

“Will the reduced flows, especially if the Nathan and Connors River dams also go ahead, further limit natural flushing, resulting in even higher salinity following big wets like 1991 and 2011?”

“These dams will be almost exclusively used for mining, so will discharges from the ever increasing size and number of mines in the Fitzroy Basin continue particularly if the government continues to allow 100s of huge final voids to remain for centuries?”