

Question on Notice
No. 1431
Asked on 7 October 2009

MR WELLINGTON asked the Premier and Minister for the Arts (MS BLIGH) –

QUESTION:

With reference to the Coordinator-General's report on the Traveston Crossing Dam Stage 1 acknowledging that if this dam goes ahead it will reduce the Mary Valley River catchment area of 3,827ha of good quality agricultural land –

Will the government better protect lesser quality agricultural land to secure future agricultural land as compensation?

ANSWER:

The Environmental Impact Statement for the Traveston Crossing Dam Project found that Stage 1 of the project will inundate 1.7 per cent of the good quality agricultural land in the Mary River catchment.

The Coordinator-General has sought, through conditions included in his evaluation report, to put in place initiatives that will improve agricultural output from agricultural land in the Mary River catchment and deliver environmental benefits.

I draw the Honourable Member's attention to Condition 31, Schedule C, Appendix 1 of this evaluation report which is available on the website of the Department of Infrastructure and Planning.

Under this condition, a Community Economic Development Program will be established to mitigate the expected loss of agricultural output and underpin sustainable farm practices.

As explained in the Coordinator-General's evaluation report, this \$20 million Community and Economic Development Program will include, for example, descriptions and design specifications, timing details, cost estimates and implementation plans for:

- the extension of the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Industry's existing Food & Fibre Strategy, targeted at the Mary Valley as a whole, for an additional four years and commencing in 2009-10;
- assisting up to 200 property owners in the Mary Valley to develop Property Management Systems;
- assisting the implementation of these property management systems through funding of at least \$4 million for beneficial capital investments such as fencing, off-stream watering points, and planting to optimise catchment water quality and riparian vegetation outcomes; and
- funding of \$3.45 million for the provision of an Innovation and Incentive fund to accelerate the establishment of new agribusinesses in the Mary Valley.

Advice to the Coordinator-General is that based on experience with a similar program managed by the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Industry, “the level of support proposed is likely to lead to an increase in the value of agricultural output that exceeds the expected loss in agricultural output associated with the Project.”

Further, there is an anticipated cost benefit ratio in the region of 1:6 for gross farm output as a result of the proposed Innovation and Incentive program.

The Coordinator-General has also found in his evaluation report, that there will be positives for the local area and wider Mary Valley catchment associated with proposed mitigations and conditions. As detailed, these positives include:

- agricultural programs that will offset lost agricultural output and create new industries to replace declining ones;
- establishment of a timber plantation for the area;
- establishment of tourism and recreation opportunities;
- increased business activity resulting from construction;
- increased job opportunities and training for local workers involved in the construction activity;
- flood mitigation benefits for Gympie;
- an extensive farm management planning program; and
- extensive increases in terrestrial and aquatic habitat quality.