

# Who Needs It?

---

In the second edition of the “Williams Valley Voice” Dungog Shire Council’s General Manager, Craig Deasey spoke to NTDG’s Chairman, Warwick Thomas about the proposed dam. Here is the interview in more detail.

Q. How long have you worked in Local Government?

A. *19 years.*

Q. And how long have you been G-M in Dungog?

A. *I became G-M at Dungog in May 2005.*

Q. In all that time have you ever known of a community being put in the situation that Dungog has — a major project, in this case a massive dam, being imposed without any consultation or warning?

A. *Never ever! I have never experienced a community put in this position without warning.*

Q. Hunter Water has had a dam proposal on the books for years but didn’t believe it would be needed for at least 20 years, so Council must have felt safe in building new concrete bridges and improving roads in the Tillegra to Salisbury area?

A. *Yes, we felt safe about spending money on bridges and roads in the area. That was based on correspondence with Hunter Water which indicated that we were safe in spending this money for at least 20 years. That was the time horizon of the possible re-look at the dam proposal.*

Q. How much of the ratepayers’ money, recent spending, could have gone to other projects if Council had an inkling of the government’s plans?

A. *The financial figures concerning Council’s road and bridge network: total capital expenditure in the past 5 years has been \$1.304 Mil funded by grants and loan borrowings. Loan borrowing outstanding on Tunnibuc Bridge is \$254,458 with borrowing in place until 2015.*

Q. Do the people of Dungog, or even the Hunter, need this dam?

A. *Not on the evidence produced to date. Nothing has been done which justifies the need. The Hunter has not had water restrictions for over 15 years and with storage capacities running at over 97% full it must beg the question of the validity of the need.*

Q. There was no mention of a proposed dam in the State Plan, released in draft in August, and in its final version on the day after Mr lemma’s dam announcement, so how

can it be seen as anything but a political rabbit pulled from a hat full of Labor pre-election embarrassments?

*A. We too were shocked and taken by surprise. The State Plan was meant to be the bible for State Government action and no mention was made of Tillegra or the need for the source. Agreed the State Plan made no mention of Tillegra. In fact when we were asked for our input into the plan there was no mention, so like the community we too were taken by surprise.*

Q. The Central Coast Councils say they don't need the storage now and a Council paper by Greg McDonald says the lemma Government won't be putting in any money, so who would have to pay for the proposed Tillegra Dam?

*A. It will be the customers of Hunter Water. As Dungog Council purchases water from Hunter Water it will mean the residents of Dungog, Paterson, and Clarence Town will be among those hit with the additional cost to pay for the dam.*

Q. The planning process adopted by the lemma Government would seem to leave Dungog Council with no say over the project, so what can the Council do?

*A. Dungog Council must meet the Director General of Planning's process under part 3A of the Planning Act. Council has arranged for its consultant, Planning Workshop Australia to conduct a series of workshops to provide the guidelines for all parties to have an input into to the process. This will include social and economic considerations but time is running fast. It is planned that Hunter Water will be making its preliminary application to the Dept of Planning in late September /early October, 2007 at which time Council must have its list of issues clear. This will lead into the Planning Focus Meeting which has been allocated one day to consider these issues and the inclusion into the Director General's Terms of Reference for the ongoing process. At this stage we do not know when this might occur.*

Q. Hunter Water gives the impression that nothing will stop the proposed dam, it doesn't even use the word "proposed". Do you think it is unstoppable?

*A. It is unstoppable in the current political climate. As quoted by Minister Rees "the dam shall be built".*

Q. What can the people of Dungog do? (Can they go to Council with their concerns, and what will Council do?)

*A. Yes, come to Council ASAP. Council will then be able to include all the community issues and concerns and be able to include them in its submission into the Planning Focus Group Meeting.*

Q. Do you think the people of Dungog are concerned about the proposed Dam, are they aware of the huge size of this proposed dam and the concerns about its safety and that they can have a voice?

A. *This is difficult to answer as the culture of Dungog going back as far as 1915 records would indicate a degree of apathy on these types of issues. This apathy does not seem to exist in other Dungog Shire towns such as Paterson, Gresford or Clarence Town. I believe that until the people start to see the heavy haulage trucks arriving in Dungog will they realise something of major significance is about to happen in their community. One must bear in mind this dam has been threatened now for over 50 years and the last time anything physical was done on the dam site was in the 1950's. There are not too many people in Dungog who may remember what happened then. One should also remember this will be the first dam of this size to be built in the state for at least the last 30 years. So there are not too many people of the more recent generations who might really understand what disruption is likely to be inflicted upon Dungog. Maybe this will become more evident when the drilling rigs start to roll into town.*

Q. There appears to be a view that a dam would bring tourists flooding into Dungog, giving a boost to local businesses — is there any evidence to suggest this would happen?

A. *There is no current evidence to suggest this. There maybe some flow on in the early days such as day-trippers coming to "stickybeak" at the construction. But I am concerned with the impact on the local business community from the loss of local farming businesses in the Valley.*

*We recently visited Lake Keepit located midway between Tamworth and Gunnedah. It is quite different terrain to that around Dungog. It is much flatter and further inland. It is an irrigation dam not a domestic water dam, and has a captured user market due to distances to other facilities. It was clear several businesses had had to change the way they did things as businesses. This had taken time, but the facilities still looked run down except for the sport and recreational facilities. These looked very functional but it still did not enthuse one with ongoing confidence that this model would work any better at Tillegra. I could not recommend to Council that it should be investing in infrastructure at the dam based on Lake Keepit. Tillegra will be competing against already existing and proven recreational facilities of more natural origin, i.e. Port Stephens, Lake Macquarie and the Myall Lakes and of course our own existing Barrington Tops World Wilderness Area.*

The General Manager of Dungog Shire Council, Craig Deasey speaking to the No Tillegra Dam Group Chairman, Warwick Thomas in September, 2007.