

COMMUNITY ACTION KIT

QLD'S ICONIC WALSH & MITCHELL RIVERS NEED YOUR HELP!

Support the campaign to stop the Walsh River from being dammed

Prepared by the Wilderness Society (Queensland) Inc.

March 2008



The Walsh River, photo taken by Steven Nowakowski

www.stevennowakowski.com

This Action Kit provides you with an easy-to-use guide on what you can do to stop the Walsh River from being dammed

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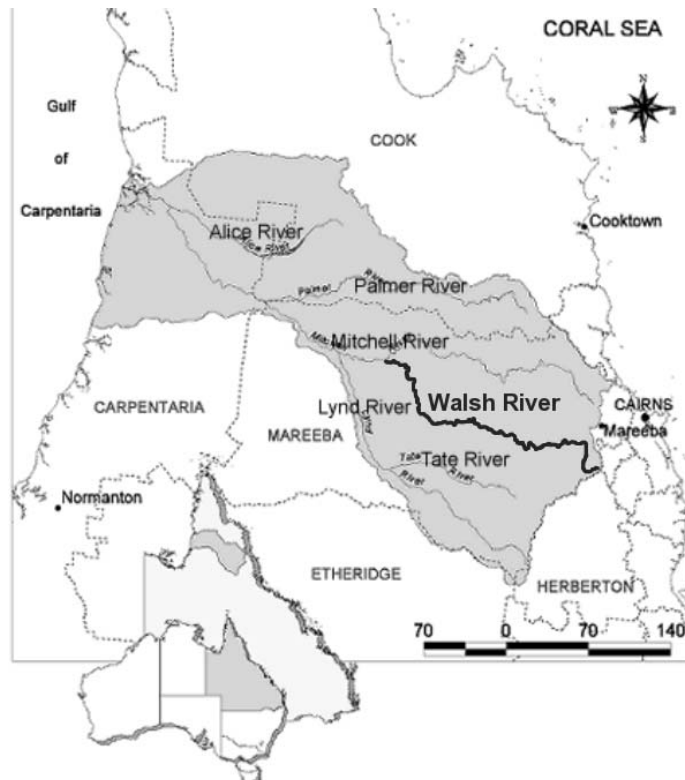
1. The Walsh & Mitchell Rivers

Rising in the mountains of the Wet Tropics and flowing west to the Gulf of Carpentaria, the mighty Mitchell River is located in the northern Gulf region of far north Queensland.

The Mitchell is one of Queensland's most impressive rivers with more water flowing down it annually than any other river in the state. It is also a river of significant conservation value with high biodiversity, including a large variety of freshwater fish species and a diverse range of habitats, and feeding nationally significant wetlands in its lower reaches. According to the Mitchell River Water Management Group, *The Mitchell River, though poorly studied, may possibly contain the most ecologically diverse aquatic system in the country.*¹

The Walsh River is a major tributary of the upper Mitchell and is largely responsible for sustaining the environmental flows of the Mitchell River during the long dry season. Maintaining the flow volumes and frequencies provided by the Walsh is vital for ensuring the health of the Mitchell River because the headwaters of the Mitchell are already greatly restricted by the large and privately owned South Edge Dam.

Here is a map of the Mitchell and Walsh River catchments.



Source: Mitchell River Watershed Management Group Inc,
http://www.mitchell-river.com.au/about_the_catchment.html

¹ www.mitchell-river.com.au/about_the_catchment.html

2. The Problem

At the moment, the majority of Cairns' water comes from two sources: Copperlode Falls Dam and Behana Creek. However, Cairns is growing and this is leading to a number of Government-led assessments looking at how to provide water services to meet predicted future growth.

Principle among these is the *Far North Queensland Regional Water Supply Strategy* (FNQRWSS) being developed by the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Water. A draft of this strategy was released in September 2007 for public comment with a final due for release in mid 2008.

The strategy highlights a shortfall of water supplies to Cairns in the next decade or so and has identified the construction of Nullinga Dam on the Walsh River (mid-way between Atherton and Dimbulah) as a potential source of future water supply.

Dams are politically popular, particularly during election campaigns. The inclusion of Nullinga Dam in the FNQRWSS follows an announcement made by the current Government during the 2006 Queensland election for \$6 million to begin design work on the dam.

Nullinga has been rejected by the Queensland Government in the past for being unnecessary, unsustainable and too expensive. In February 2004, the Queensland Government wrote to the Wilderness Society confirming that ... *a new dam on the Walsh River is not justified. Building an expensive new dam ... is not seen as sensible or sustainable.*

Nullinga Dam will cost over \$300 million to build and will store approximately 364,000 megalitres of water. That is equivalent to almost $\frac{3}{4}$ the volume of Sydney Harbour, or over 80% the volume of Tinaroo Dam.

Nullinga is proposed to be an irrigation dam to provide water to irrigators near Mareeba-Dimbulah. This would then 'free up' irrigation water from Tinaroo Dam to be diverted to supply Cairns' future urban needs.

Within this context, it is important to recognise that Cairns' water use is very high, particularly when compared to water use in Southeast Queensland. This is mainly due to large amounts of water being consumed by particular industries.

3. The Solution

The Queensland Government will soon be finalising the *Far North Queensland Regional Water Supply Strategy*, including deciding whether Nullinga Dam will be prioritised as the Government's preferred water supply option for Cairns.

Conservation groups believe that dams should be the last option when considering future water supplies. Dams are expensive to build and maintain and are very environmentally destructive. They change and restrict natural, healthy rivers flows, permanently changing habitats, destroying the breeding cycles of native fish and causing serious water quality problems.

The issue of supplying water to Cairns in the future needs to be separated out from plans to build Nullinga Dam. Nullinga Dam is proposed to provide water to irrigators near Mareeba-Dimbulah. It is not being built for urban use.

Irrigators in this area have only ever used 60-70% of the water available to them from Tinaroo Dam. This means that there is significant water already available in Tinaroo for irrigation that is not being used, suggesting that there is no actual demand for new irrigation water and therefore no need for a new dam to be built.

In terms of urban supplies, Cairns should be water winners not water losers. As a thriving, tropical city, we have the chance to be national leaders in water use and management. But to do this we need to get smarter about the way we use the water we have.

Even with predicted growth in Cairns, a new dam is not needed. Implementing sensible and sustainable demand management and efficiency initiatives is a much smarter way of supplying our future urban needs, which will also help preserve one of our great river systems.

Here are some smart ways of supplying future water to Cairns, many of which have already been successfully implemented in south east Queensland:

- Reduce our consumption - *save water for future use.*
- Community education – *water saving tips for householders.*
- Fixture efficiency code for new development – *mandating water efficient design for new buildings and houses as well as for major renovations.*
- Showerhead and rainwater tank retrofit program – *providing free water-efficient showerheads to householders and assisting with rainwater tank purchasing.*
- Non-residential water audits – *helping industry identify the areas where they can improve water efficiency.*
- Non-residential external audit program – *saving water loss in supply delivery infrastructure e.g. fixing leaks in supply pipes.*
- Mandatory fixture labelling – *a five star system much like on electrical appliances where consumers can choose to buy water efficient items.*
- Minimum performance standards for water using fixtures and appliances – *removing outdated or inefficient products from stores and encouraging the stocking of modern / efficient items.*
- Establishment of Pressure Management Areas and District Metering Areas – *reducing the water pressure is an easy way of reducing the amount of water lost to leaks, while water metering allows residents and businesses to keep a tab on just how much water they are using.*

4. How You Can Help

Thank you for taking the time to help protect Queensland's iconic Walsh and Mitchell Rivers.

Here are some simple and easy things that you can do to stop the Walsh River from being dammed and to help Cairns become water winners.

Perhaps you can encourage your family and friends to do these things as well.

a. Contact your local Mayor and your local Queensland Government representative

One of the most powerful actions that you can take is to talk about the issue with your local Mayor as well as your local Queensland Government representative. Politicians need to hear that you care about a particular issue and that you want them to take action.

Here are the contact details for the local Queensland Government representatives around the Cairns region.

If you are unsure of which electorate you are enrolled in and therefore who your representative is, you can find out at the Electoral Commission of Queensland's website <http://www.ecq.qld.gov.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=188>.

The Hon. Desley Boyle
Member for Cairns
PO Box 1259
CAIRNS QLD 4870
Cairns@parliament.qld.gov.au
Ph: 07 4051 2868
Fax: 07 4051 6760

Steve Wettenhall MP
Member for Barron River
PO Box 1014
SMITHFIELD QLD 4878
Barron.River@parliament.qld.gov.au
Ph: 07 4038 2800 or 1800 811 825
Fax: 07 4038 2801

Jason O'Brien MP
Member for Cook
PO Box 2080
CAIRNS QLD 4870
cook@parliament.qld.gov.au
Ph: 07 4051 3849 or 1800 816 264
Fax: 07 4031 2437

And here are the contact details for the Mayors of the Cairns and Tablelands Regional Councils:

Val Schier
Mayor of Cairns Regional Council
PO Box 359
CAIRNS Qld 4870
k.james@cairns.qld.gov.au
Ph: 07 4044 3044
Fax:

Tom Gilmore
Mayor, Tablelands Regional Council
PO Box 154
MAREEBA Q 4880
ceo@msa.qld.gov.au
Ph: 07 4030 3900
Fax: 07 4092 3323

There are a number of ways you can contact your Government representative or Mayor including talking to them by phone, meeting with them directly, or writing to them.

Phoning or Meeting

Phoning or meeting with your representative is an effective way of raising an issue. When talking to them, remember to

1. politely state your key issues and concerns;
2. ask them to act on your behalf by raising this matter directly with their colleague, the Minister for Natural Resources and Water, who has overall responsibility for the issue; and
3. ask to follow up with you directly on the outcomes from their discussions with the Minister.

Send a Letter or an Email

Writing letters and emails to your representatives is another very important thing to do.

A sample letter is shown below.

Please note that a letter has more impact than an email and a personal letter has much more impact than signing a form letter.

[Insert Your Address/Email]
[Insert Date]
Dear [Insert Recipient],
The mighty Mitchell River in Queensland's northern Gulf region is one of Australia's largest and most iconic rivers. It is also under threat from plans to build Nullinga Dam on one of its most significant tributaries.
The Walsh River is a major tributary of the upper Mitchell River and is largely responsible for sustaining its environmental flows during the long dry season. This is particularly important given that the Mitchell's headwaters are already greatly restricted by the large and privately owned South Edge Dam.
The Queensland Government is currently finalising the <i>Far North Queensland Regional Water Supply Strategy</i> . The draft strategy has identified the construction of Nullinga Dam on the Walsh River as a potential source of future water supply.
Nullinga Dam will cost over \$300 million to build and will be very environmentally destructive to both the Walsh and Mitchell Rivers, storing approximately 364,000 megalitres of water (equivalent to almost ¾ the volume of Sydney Harbour).
As a thriving, tropical region, far north Queensland has the chance to be a national leader in water use and management. But to do this we need to get smarter about the way we use the water we have, not just build more dams.
I strongly believe that Nullinga Dam should be the last option when considering future regional water supplies.
Please protect the mighty Mitchell River by ensuring that the final <i>Far North Queensland Regional Water Supply Strategy</i> prioritises sensible and sustainable demand management and efficiency initiatives, not Nullinga Dam.
Yours sincerely,
[Insert your signature]
[Print your name]
Cc The Honourable Anna Bligh, Premier The Honourable Craig Wallace, Minister for Natural Resources and Water

It is a good idea to also send a copy of your letter to the Queensland Minister for Natural Resources and Water and to the Premier so that they can also respond to your concerns.

Their contact details are:

The Hon. Anna Bligh
Premier
PO Box 15185,
CITY EAST, QLD 4002
premier@ministerial.qld.gov.au
Fax: 07 3221 3631

The Hon. Craig Wallace
Minister for Natural resources and Water
PO Box 15456,
CITY EAST, QLD 4002
NRW@ministerial.qld.gov.au
Fax: 07 3210 6214

b. Write a Letter to the Editor of your local newspaper

Letters to the Editor are an effective way of raising the issue in your community. Try to keep your letter short (100-150 words is a good rule of thumb) and to the point. This will help to ensure your letter gets published.

Contact Details for Newspapers

LOCAL PAPERS:

The Cairns Post
Fax: 07 4052 6633

Email: letters@tcp.newsltd.com.au

Port Douglas and Mossman Gazette
Fax: 07 4099 8544

Email: gazette@tpd.newsltd.com.au

The Tablelander
Fax: 07 4091 2913

Email: tablelander@tat.newsltd.com.au

The Tablelands Advertiser
Fax: 07 4091 2988

Email: letters@tma.newsltd.com.au

STATE & NATIONAL PAPERS:

The Australian
Fax: 02 9288 2824

Email: letters@theaustralian.com.au

The Courier Mail
Fax: 07 3666 6690

Email: cmletters@qnp.newsltd.com.au

Sunday Mail
Fax: 07 3666 6787

Email: smletters@qnp.newsltd.com.au

c. Call your local radio station or Talk Back program

Calling your local radio station or Talk Back program to discuss the issue is another very effective way of raising the issue in your community. Remember to state the issue clearly and include examples and if possible, use facts to back up what you are saying.

Radio – Call your local radio station or Talk Back program

ABC – Far North

9 – 11am: Call presenter Pat Morrish on 1300 801 222

2 – 4pm: Call presenter Ingrid Just on 1300 837 222

Radio 4AM

Ph: 07 4092 4558

4CA FM 102.7

Ph: 07 4042 8000

Hot FM & Sea FM

Ph: 07 4050 0800

4KZ & Kool FM

Ph: 07 4061 6677

Radio Port Douglas

Ph: 07 4099 5543

4KIG 107.1FM

Ph: 1300 301 171

d. Become a member of the Wilderness Society

The Wilderness Society is a national, community-based, environmental advocacy organisation whose purpose is protecting, promoting and restoring wilderness and natural processes across Australia for the survival and ongoing evolution of life on Earth.

To become a member call 1800 030 641 or visit www.wilderness.org.au.

If you are already a member, thank you for your ongoing support.

e. Join our Wilderness Action Group

The Wilderness Action Group (WAG) meets every second Thursday at our Cairns Campaign Centre.

WAG members assist in areas such as campaign strategy, event planning & coordination and community education & outreach. It is a fun and sociable way of becoming actively involved.

If you would like to come to the next WAG Meeting in Cairns, or for more information please send an email to di.horsburgh@wilderness.org.au or call the Centre on 4041 6666.