

The ACT Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission

Dear ICRC members,

Proposed Enlarged Cotter Dam Water Security Project investigation

I attach a letter of mine, pertaining to this matter, published in edited form in *The Canberra Times* recently. Apart from the very real concerns about the cost of the project related to the form of contract for its delivery *, the letter briefly argues the hydrological case for scrapping the Cotter Dam expansion.

By way of background, I've been following this matter since before the '03 fires including walking down the Cotter below Bendora then, and noticing that the Bendora to Mt Stromlo gravity pipeline did not appear to be in use. I was later told by a senior engineer at Actew, who sadly, has since died, to the effect that the Treasury's on-going deferments of the Mt. Stromlo filtration plant upgrade work caused the corporation to draw on the then nearly full Googong Dam excessively, reducing the overall storage level significantly, and precipitating significant water wastage from the Cotter system (over and above the legally-required but drought- and urban-modified environmental outflows). The Mt Stromo plant has since been upgraded, but Googong is taking a long time to refill.

I believe these matters and those in the attached letter should be fully investigated and a recommendation made that the Cotter Dam expansion be scrapped in favour of the full Lower Molonglo waste water recycling system.

In comparison with the dam expansion project which has already exhibited many cost inflation problems for the usual reasons of "unforeseen circumstances" (with more to come no doubt), the treatment plant solution seems imminently more containable both in scope, as well as financially, and from many technical, scientific, and ecological viewpoints.

As well, such a water purification plant for the National Capital would demonstrate to the Australian and international communities that new dams with their environmental, ecological, agricultural, social, monetary cost, high-embodied-energy, silting-up, etc. problems are yesterday's solutions, and that recycling, using renewable energy, generally is the most responsible way forward in today's world and for the future of the planet.

* The proposed "Alliance" method of contracting (or very similar) was used on the National Museum of Australia/Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies project on Acton Peninsula in Canberra several years ago, and the method was resisted by members of the then Commonwealth Works Committee, to which I had given evidence on behalf of Canberra Community Action on Acton Inc. Committee members were concerned that under the Alliance method, the financial security of the head construction contractors was apparently regarded as more important than the delivery of a project as originally designed, that the Commonwealth would be the party to pay for any shortfalls in that regard, and that the project itself could be compromised to "stay within budget" under those protecting

circumstances. I know for certain that several important physical characteristics and elements of the NMA/AIATSIS complex were either performance- and/or quality-compromised, or deleted, to the detriment of the two institutions, and the National Capital ethos.

Yours faithfully

Jack Kershaw FRAIA
details below

Subject: Cotter Dam

Date: 6 October 2009 12:56:34 PM

To: letters.editor@canberratimes.com.au

Dear Editor

Apparently fearing that the enlarged Cotter Dam may not fill, Actew's Mark Sullivan, in "Actew's major projects will ensure water is on tap" (*The Canberra Times*, Oct. 2, p. 17), informs us that the Cotter Dam's very expensive enlargement is to prevent existing overflows and create a water "bank", and that the Cotter Pumping Station will generally only draw Murrumbidgee water.

We already do have a drought proofing water bank in the form of our four existing dams/resources (excluding the recently installed draw well in the Murrumbidgee near the Cotter Reserve), their combined capacity (207.4 gigitalitres) being enough for about three years normal unrestricted use of about 190 megalitres per day (Actew data).

The dams are only approximately 50% full at present, not so much because of drought, but because our main back-up supply, Googong Dam, was apparently excessively drawn upon due to delays in upgrading the upper-Cotter-served Mt. Stromlo filtration works before the '03 fires. The fires exacerbated that situation.

The major component of our water bank, Googong, is admittedly slower to fill than the others, but it is apparently to be boosted by another pipeline from the Murrumbidgee, and more Snowy Mountains water, anyway.

Clearly, it's time to abandon the environmentally damaging, intrusive, counter intuitive 3-wall Cotter Dam enlargement, in favour of the full Lower Molonglo waste water recycling system, using Brisbane's extremely rigourous testing regime, with the resultant water "shandied", if necessary, into Googong using the linked-up Cotter pumps powered by Green Energy.

Clearly, the community has not rejected such recycling which would dramatically accelerate the refilling of our fine existing water bank, and which would be a more environmentally responsible way to be certain about drought proofing our city and region.

Jack Kershaw