

**THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS MET IN
THE DELORAINE COMMUNITY COMPLEX, DELORAINE ON FRIDAY
8 NOVEMBER 2002.**

MEANDER DAM PROJECT

MR NEIL ATKINS WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND
WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Harriss) - I declare this adjourned session of our hearing open, and apologise for the short delay in getting started. Mr Atkins, you are welcome to make your submission however you see fit, and we will allow half an hour for the total presentation, both your presentation and questions to you.

Mr ATKINS - Thank you very much. I did not submit a written submission. I asked Shane and he assured me it was not necessary. I probably should have been with the other people from the Dam Committee but, as I have probably had a bit more involvement with the river and to some extent the history of trying to get this dam built, I just felt as though there were one or two points that I felt pretty strongly about that I wanted to make on a personal level. I farmed at Exton originally with my brother and father for a year or two, but with my brother, after my father retired, for quite a number of years before we eventually went our own ways, but it is about 40 years since we first started to irrigate out of the river, and water from the river has become an essential part of the farm network, even though I have a lot of other water supplies - I have good bores and I have built farm dams. So I believe that a continuation of irrigation is an absolute must. I do not believe modern agriculture can exist without it, and I do not see how we can exist without a dam, inasmuch as the Hydro appear now to be wielding the muscle that they left sleeping for years as regards ownership of the water, and we get this cry to have an environmental flow in the summertime that is probably greater than nature would have put there in the first place. So I just believe there is no option but for the dam to be built, and I believe there are many side benefits.

As far as I go, I have never used large quantities. Because I've got, I think, one of the biggest quotas on the river, I have managed to get by with just the allotment. I can continue watering even when some restrictions are put on, and only have to stop when there is a total ban. Originally, and I do not know whether it is still the case, I saw dairy farming as being the biggest demand, and water for dairy farming, for watering grass, if this type of management keeps on, I believe has to be economical, probably much cheaper than other people would indicate that it has to be, but this depends to some extent on the distance that you have to pump the water from the river. Many farmers that are right on the river bank could afford to pay more than those that have to pump further, but I have been very conservative about what I believe the water should cost, and I believe the only way that can be achieved is by the farmers owning their share of the dam. So if in the initial years the capital cost may appear high, their ongoing cost is

really only the real cost of interest on the money that is tied up. With the dam, I believe you are talking about 43 000 megalitres at the moment. We have seen old plans that indicated it was much greater than that, but it probably is more water than is needed in the foreseeable future, but I believe that the farmers should be able to finance the proportion of water which they require, and that that should be isolated from the other issues.

I am disappointed to see, with the Labor Government in office in this State, there is nobody here represented on the committee as I see it at the moment, and I want to make that point. I believe the Government should be taking more responsibility in that we have had a sort of a hidden message that they are quite happy to step out of it and hand responsibility to private enterprise to run the whole show if necessary, and I believe that is totally unacceptable. Public assets like this must be kept for the benefit of the whole public and under some sort of government control, and I believe it can be done quite simply, but the user-pays principle is right to a point and it should be applied to a point, but they've got to know where to draw the line. So consequently if we were to proceed and have this dam built, owned and managed by one individual company, it would lead to it being owned by speculators when, surely, as farmers we are about producing food. It is as simple as that. So the bottom line is that if the Hydro want water out of the dam or demand that they use the water we've used for the last 40 years or we pay for it, they must be involved financially in the situation.

There are huge benefits not only from creating perhaps an environmental flow, but in the flood mitigation. Our farm is at Exton but a percentage of it is on the Eastern Flats and we haven't been able to use those flats to their advantage for the past 40 years because of the risk of flood and erosion. Now I did not think the soil perhaps had the potential to grow some of the crops, but my neighbour has proved in the past five years that they can grow, so I believe that the dam itself will have an added benefit of creating a fairly big chance that our floods will be cut to a minimum and that we can take the risk of cultivation on those flats a lot more than we have over the years, and probably lead to a totally different land use from what we thought was possible.

I was one of the few people, probably if not the only one that has pumped the water from this river a long distance from the river, probably up to two miles because it suited me to do it. And I believe that that's another advantage of the scheme - in areas like Hagley where there are farmers not on the river with existing dams they will be able to top those dams up during irrigation season. The main benefit of that is - and it is a point that I should have made earlier - that from a philosophical point of view I am totally opposed to covering up good farm land with shallow water to create onfarm irrigation schemes. There are a lot of instances where people can build dams in gullies that are no good or on swamp land. But in many instances we've seen beautiful land covered with water which is relatively shallow, virtually worthless for pastoral irrigation because of the vast quantities you need and to think that you can store it on ground that is of very low value at many times the depth and then run it to the areas where the soil is more valuable just makes a lot of sense.

I said this 20 years ago at a meeting at Hagley when we almost had the dam going then, that I see this scheme as a top up for all the infrastructure that we've already got in the valley without covering up any more farm soil. I just want to reiterate that I did say at that meeting 20 years ago that I thought there would always be a limited use of water

between Deloraine and Westbury largely because of the soil type. But what I've seen happen on the neighbour's farm, with underground drainage and so on - I have been underground draining for 30-odd years myself, but I didn't think it would work - who knows what the demand will be for food in 10 or 15 years time? I believe there is a lot more potential just in this area that I'm talking about. I'm not commenting on the Meander area where there's always been more potential in the first place but I believe there's a lot more potential locally than I even realised myself a few years ago.

Just in summary I'd like to say that I believe the dam must be built, that farmers must get the opportunity to both own a section of that dam and have full control of the cost of the water in that particular section and that under no circumstances should this Government have the philosophy that they can hand it to private enterprise to control because it will end up a disaster.

CHAIR - Just before inviting questions I would like to welcome John Loone in the audience today. John will be known to many people here and during his parliamentary career took a very keen interest in the Meander dam. So welcome, John, it is nice to see you here.

Thanks, Mr Atkins, for that presentation. Committee members, any questions for Mr Atkins?

Mr HALL - You touched on the financing of the dam and of course that's a separate process to the one that we're looking at today, it's a separate process down the track. But what would your view be if there was a combination of both local ownership and private money?

Mr ATKINS - I believe that private money should only ever be on the basis of a repayable loan and not permanent ownership. No private ownership of any portion of the dam whatsoever - if I understood the question right.

Mr HALL - Yes.

Mr ATKINS - When I say private, that of course conflicts with farmers owning it individually, but private as an outside company-owned.

CHAIR - If I can pursue that a little bit, Mr Atkins, you mentioned in the introduction to your submission that you could have joined another group yesterday in their presentation. So that I can understand clearly your view there, you are not opposed to a local consortium being part of the management operation ownership process.

Mr ATKINS - No, not at all. In fact I think I've led the debate that it should be locally owned and controlled and originally we were looking at the whole dam, not a portion.

Mrs NAPIER - I think we covered most of the questions yesterday. In our submission we're being told there is 17 000 hectares of land that is suitable for various levels of irrigation, so when you're talking about the Exton Flats and the land down further to Westbury and beyond is included in that 17 000 hectares?

Mr ATKINS - Yes, definitely.

Mrs NAPIER - So that is in that figure?

Mr ATKINS - Yes it is. What I was saying was that I always had personal doubts about the land use capability of the Exton Flats. But what I have seen in the last five years has altered my view. They might have been there for 60 years but I am not too dumb to change my view on something when I see that I've had it wrong. So that land is capable of different uses to what I thought it would be under different management procedures. I never had any doubts about the dam itself in total but this was a fairly large amount of area to have some doubts about and only some parts of that land, never all of it. I am not making a sweeping statement from Deloraine to Westbury. But large areas of that land I thought there was a question mark over. But what I've seen in the last five years I've removed the question mark, over virtually any of it. With modern methods it is possible to utilise it for purposes we would never have envisaged, particularly if the dam is used for flood mitigation and we can eliminate the risk of soil erosion from floods which has been an additional problem.

Mrs NAPIER - We are told that it will probably alleviate one in three floods within a year. So is that -

Mr ATKINS - No I don't agree with that at all.

Mrs NAPIER - No?

Mr ATKINS - The flooding situation has totally changed and again you can never be totally sure. But we used to receive anything up to six and seven floods a year in Exton, ranging from minor to major. What I mean by major, virtually 80 per cent of farms would be totally covered. The river was straightened about 40 years ago and over a period of years there was what you would class as massive erosion, the rate of which has slowed down. But this has meant that most of those smaller floods are not floods at all now. The river is carrying water that it never did. But three years ago we did have proof that we can still get large floods. We had one very big one in September, as I say, about three years ago. So we can't ever rule them out. But I believe the dam, handled properly would have to help eliminate up to 80 per cent of what we would consider nuisance floods.

Mrs NAPIER - Except the really big ones?

Mr ATKINS - Yes.

Mrs NAPIER - So are you suggesting that more of that land can be swung from dairy into intensive cropping?

Mr ATKINS - Yes a lot of it is only used for second grade grazing at the moment, not even for dairying. It's even been a bit unsuitable for that. But I believe that from what I'm seeing on the neighbours place that it can be used for intensive cropping with underground drainage and there's no more land being used. I mean there's only so much land on the planet and, whilst we are getting very severe ups and downs in our agriculture economy, there seems to be a continuous growth with the cropping side of it. I mean, I would have to be blind not to see what the neighbour has achieved in the last five years there by doing things a little differently.

Mrs NAPIER - So in your view the salient objective of doubling agricultural production in the area, if not better, is achievable?

Mr ATKINS - Without any doubt. You have to have somebody to buy the commodity at the price that they can afford to pay and we can produce it for. But as far as producing it, we have the capability of producing two, three and four times of what we are producing if you get into intensive agriculture away from the livestock industry.

CHAIR - Mr Atkins, at the commencement of your presentation you mentioned that you'd been conservative in what you thought was a reasonable price for the water. Is that something you want to mention to the committee or is it something you would rather keep, from a commercial point of view, to yourself?

Mr ATKINS - Yes. I just look on it this way. I turn over a fair bit of money on my farm; at the end of the day there is never a lot left. And if I add on a significant water bill there would be even less left. Unfortunately, farmers are human beings. I have a very good friend who is a very wealthy man who deals with farmers all the time. He says: 'They never would like to admit when they are going broke.' I think that sums up this water thing. People do not like to say they cannot afford to buy it. But when you talk price per megalitres there is a lot of confusion; we compare it with the mainland. The mainland has of course various types of irrigation, but in the case of dairying the water is flood-irrigated onto their farms at no pumping cost. So they can afford to pay a significant amount. Until this year that has been about \$25 or \$30 per megalitre for the water. The other thing is that industries like the grape industry and so on would use very small quantities of water. So they can afford to pay a lot for it because a little bit of water gets quite a lot of results. I believe the only way that farmers can achieve - to harp back on the point of ownership - is ownership of their percentage of the dam. And then if they view it as a small annual running cost, they are only looking at the interest on the capital that is tied up in putting the money into the dam.

CHAIR - Is \$55 per megalitre reasonable?

Mr ATKINS - No, I consider it far too much for watering grass for dairying. If you are right on the riverbank it may be right. If you have to pump it any distance, it is too much. I believe that we can achieve a lot less than \$55 with local ownership of that percentage of the water.

If I can just harp back onto something else. In 1983 when I moved the motion that the dam be built - and this was prior to other events that have happened since - I said I did not think that there would be sufficient water usage in the valley to afford the dam and that the water should go into Quam by Brook and the Rubicon - if it is economically possible - to spread the water over a bigger area. At this point there are problems with that. But the thing that helps the economics out, quite frankly, is the fact that the Hydro - for whatever reason - has shown an interest in generating more power with water that we thought was ours and we have this push for environmental flow. So, rather than spreading the water into other valleys, if we spread it across three different requirements it means that the farmers can afford - I believe, at the right price - a percentage of water which, I believe, they should be allowed to finance. Finance without any other ongoing

costs. But once it gets into some sort of private ownership control goes right out the window.

CHAIR - You also mentioned that you have been in a fortunate position on your farm. You have been able to irrigate most times, except when there is a total water ban. How often in the last five years would you have been subjected to a total water ban?

Mr ATKINS - If I flick right back to 1983, actually; that is the first year the river stopped running. We had to stop pumping in 1983. I think I would have only had about three years since. I am going more than five years, but I would think that I have actually only had to turn the pump off under the conditions that I am allowed to pump, because of the quota that I have. That is because my quota is about double, or more, than average and that I have pumped less. I do not know what figures you people know, but in the old language I pump a million a week legally. I am only stopped from pumping that when there is a total ban. But that does not apply to many other farmers. Most of them have to reduce. In the last few years, quite frequently, they have had to reduce for critical periods.

Mr HALL - So you are saying you have the biggest allocation?

Mr ATKINS - One of the biggest. I have been told it was the biggest but according to the records I think there is somebody else with about the same. But also because I pump the water so far and supplement the other water that I have on the farm. I am pumping one million gallons per week - roughly 4.5 megalitres per week. But it has been very handy. Without that top up on the rest of my farm I would have been short of water, without any doubt. I have used it fully.

I have found the river fairly reliable in the past but as each year goes the demands on it are such that it is getting less reliable, simply because the first stage of cut-off has come quite frequently to some people. I cannot tell you what it was, but for a total ban there have not been that many of them.

CHAIR - Thank you. Any further questions? Thanks very much, Mr Atkins. You're welcome to say if you want to for the rest of the hearing.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.

Mrs KERIN BOOTH WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Harriss) - Mrs Booth, our process today is one, as you would be aware, of gathering information so that we can appropriately assess the government proposal for funding of this project. We are happy to spend half an hour examining your evidence. We have had your submission provided to us.

Mrs BOOTH - That was actually just an interim submission -

CHAIR - Yes, to a previous process.

Mrs BOOTH - - so I do have another one today. I printed these out at 3.30 this morning. I intend to read it out but if you have any other process -

CHAIR - That is fine; go right ahead. You present your evidence however you feel comfortable.

Mrs BOOTH - In opening, I would like to offer you a quote from *Sustaining Rivers and Livelihoods*: - an excerpt from the World Commission on Dams Report:

Rivers, watersheds and aquatic ecosystems are the biological engines of the planet. They are the basis for life and the livelihoods of local communities. Dams transform landscapes and create risks of irreversible impacts. Understanding, protecting and restoring ecosystems at river basin level is essential to foster equitable human development and the welfare of all species.

Hello and welcome to this wonderful Meander Valley area. Thank you for showing interest in our region by taking part in this committee. Appreciation is also due to the members of the community who have expressed their interest and their concerns about this large infrastructure project that has been proposed for our river and our region. Our region is made up of a diverse range of people living and working in our community: from farmers to educators, from timber workers to artists, from foresters to conservationists. Our interests are many and varied and our income is derived from many different occupations. Whilst agriculture, together with forestry and fishing, is a major industry within Tasmania, other industries, such as manufacturing, health and community services, education and so on, rate above agriculture in contributions to GSP. The top three industries - as far as actual wages and salaries are concerned - are manufacturing, health and community services and education and so on. Agriculture, forestry and fishing rank only fifth place in the number of employees. These current figures were from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Being a rural area, the Meander Valley region may have higher figures in the agricultural sector and the supporting industries that service agricultural needs. However, we should not think that agribusiness is the only stakeholder when it comes to our natural resources. Don't you think a project of this size and nature should be a whole community decision? We are all stakeholders in the flow of our river, which is the lifeblood of our community.

Just imagine if there was a \$10 million government subsidy across the spectrum of industries in our region. What a diverse and thriving community we would have.

The figures do not stack up well for the Meander dam. The crude estimates for the cost of water to the potential irrigators on the river who have expressed interest in purchasing water are based on \$55 per megalitre, when the previous projected cost was \$90 per megalitre. The remaining off-river potential irrigators will either need further subsidisation to reticulate water to their farms or they will be paying much more to use the water. The huge cost of the dam, the on-going maintenance and life-long monitoring - which has not yet been factored in - will mean that the cost of water will, in all reality, be likely to be much higher. The cost of water from another cheaper Tasmanian scheme is in the order of \$90 per megalitres from the Craighourne dam. I understand that on the Murray-Darling scheme water trading is up to \$1 000 per megalitre. What amounts will we be looking at in 10 years time? What crops will be viable to grow at that price?

Jeff Gilmore, of the Department of Primary Industries, Water and the Environment, said at a public meeting at this complex that we can expect farms to be amalgamated as smaller farmers get out of farming at sell off their water licences to large-scale agribusiness. Is it justifiable for farmers to be able to sell off their water licences after being subsidised by the taxpayer? Will foreign investors be able to purchase water licences and trade in them in commodities? What if we have to eventually buy back water licences to restore environmental flows in the future? This could cost the taxpayer millions of dollars.

We have enough evidence that resources around the world have been exploited at the cost of irreparable environmental damage and destruction. There are many instances where the damming of rivers has been regrettable to say the least. I am sure that you have all done some private research on the impact of dams and if not, I suggest that you do so with great urgency before you make such a major decision to allow this huge taxpayer funded project to go ahead. Whilst the government agency and the dam lobby group, who have vested interests in convincing you on the merits of the dam proposal, may bamboozle you with lots of statistics, you cannot expect volunteers from the community to come up with in 14 days all of the information you need to look at before making a decision of this magnitude.

The Tasmanian technical report on surface and groundwater management, availability, allocation and efficiency of use on the Australian natural resource web site indicates that there is a lack of information on water use, that makes it difficult to estimate natural catchment flows and sustainable yields. The difficulties in monitoring environmental flows arise from the problem of unaccountable water use. I believe that there is an urgent need to install water meters immediately and monitor current water use for a number of seasons to get a realistic assessment of water use. We may be able to achieve environmental flows without the dam, if a realistic price was charged.

Farmers may also lose interest in the dam and find alternative farming practices, instead of paying heavily to irrigate crops and dairy farms. I believe that we are only at the infancy stage of effective environmental monitoring. There is no certainty that there will not be any negative impacts to water quality, riparian flora, aquatic and amphibian fauna and terrestrial fauna. Even with all the best monitoring and application of the conditions

of this project, the damming of the Meander River may be proven in the long term to be a significantly threatening process. Honourable members of this committee, you would bear this on your shoulders if this were found to be so.

I wish to bring to your attention that alternatives to dams do exist. Have these alternatives been explored? Oh, yes, the desktop review by the Hydro in September 2001 recommended that farm dam option should not be considered further even though the DP and EMP considers the on-farm storage to be the better option economically. I put it to you that there has been a distinct lack of government funding for thorough research into what is the best use for our rural land. Where is the evidence of any comprehensive studies to explore the alternatives?

The community were not invited to participate in this process apart from a crude survey to gain expressions of interest from potential irrigators. Many concerned people felt intimidated by rather hostile DPIWE staff and some were turned away from a meeting at this community complex to discuss the dam. There was obviously a lot of controversy about the dam which has not yet been dealt with. Don't you think that there should rightfully be a properly conducted and facilitated community consultation process.

There is excellent regional planning going on in some parts of New Zealand. Have you researched the topo-climate based report from Canterbury entitled 'Canterbury Regional Economic Development Strategy' maximising the potential of the region's diversified resource base. Their regional vision is that Canterbury will have a diversified resource-based economy, where products are grown which provide the highest economic return for an area's climate, topography and soils and where value-added processing is carried out within the region.

To be in line with these best practices in New Zealand, our needs for water, food and energy should be assessed and objectives clearly defined. The appropriate development response should be identified from a range of possible options and selection should be based on a comprehensive and participatory assessment of the full range of options. As an example, I will point out that organic farming, with little or no irrigation, can give maximum returns in a rapidly growing world market. By building up the soil humids, maintaining natural forests on hillsides and steep slopes, growing windbreaks to avoid evaporation and choosing the most suitable crops or livestock for our climate, we can see the possibilities for the future.

Have any of you been in touch with Gretschnmanns, from Elgaar farm with their award winning dairy produce? There are a range of organic producers involved in TOPS - Tasmanian Organic Producers - who could provide a wealth of information about good farm management. The Government should invite TOPS and other interested groups and individuals to participate in a community consultation process before the dam proposal takes effect.

In the assessment process, social and environmental prospect should have the same significance as economic factors. Some of the issues raised in my submission to the DP and EMP regarding the Meander Dam proposal still have not been adequately dealt with in the Meander Dam assessment report, hereafter referred to as the reports. I offer them to you for your consideration.

There are questions regarding the interests of the leading dam proponents. Has there been open and fair accountability of all interest groups and individuals who intend to benefit from the proposed Meander Dam? This should be declared and the names of all potential irrigators and investors should be made public. It appears that only current irrigators and potential irrigators have been consulted and only in a very superficial way. The farmers were not charged water rates in the years leading up to the dam proposal and the survey. They had no practical experience of paying for their irrigation water and may have been unrealistic in their estimates of how much water they would be likely to use or afford. Alternative methods of agriculture and cropping without the use of irrigation water from the proposed dam have not been looked at adequately in this study. Land capabilities, salinity issues and long term sustainability of soils have not been adequately addressed in the reports. Neither have the ecological or social problems or encouraging the expansion of the opiate industry been adequately addressed.

There has been no process to ascertain that increasing irrigation potential from the proposed Meander Dam is the best way to invest money in the area. There may be other industries that would potentially benefit from this amount of government funding but would stimulate similar economic benefits to the area without damming a river and having such a huge environmental, social and economic cost. Landslips and other erosion factors are not adequately dealt with in the reports. Where is the detail in the reports on how much sediment and log debris moved down the Meander River in previous landslips? The potential of landslips increasing nutrient levels in the dam storage is not adequately dealt with in the reports.

The three-month flow monitoring period in 2001 was not adequate to assess potential extreme weather event effects. Questions remain as to the long-term maintenance and cleaning of the filtration system. Who will deal with that and at whose expense? Has the risk of impact of changed water quality and the cost to downstream domestic users been factored in? The run off down stream from a potential contaminant, particularly during the construction phase, has not been adequately addressed. Once again, has the cost of compensation for inconvenience and damages to domestic users been considered? Is the planned filtration system going to adequately filter out chemicals used in the Upper Meander catchment by Forestry Tasmania, logging companies and farmers? Will recreational users be allowed to have outboard motors on the dam? Is there going to be any plan against sabotage of the dam by deliberate attempts to pollute the body of water? These issues are not adequately addressed in the reports.

Is the dam proponent going to charge the forest industry operating in our water catchment above and surrounding the dam for the uptake of water by their plantations? According to research figures this may be quite significant. It is acknowledged in the reports that riparian floral communities will be inundated. The reports fail to explain how increasing vegetation from irrigating downstream will offset this potential loss of vegetation. The reports also state that there will be a reduced ability for riparian propagills to be transported by riverine processes. The strategy mentioned to deal with this aspect is not dealt with properly in the reports.

The reports do not address the loss of vegetation from increased roading and other environmental and social impacts from rerouting the access roads in the vicinity of the Huntsman. There is no study on the net loss of carbon sequestering potential in the dam site area. There is mention of five buildings and two bridges that would be affected by

catastrophic event. I believe that my son's residence at 89 Main Road, Meander, and others not included in the reports will be affected in the event of a dam wall collapse. The impact that this potential threat will have on the health of those living and working in the area is not yet determined. The consequences of living with added threats may require compensation for loss of lifestyle, land value and potential livelihood. What costs have been factored into the project for personal claims for loss of value and damages? This issue has not been dealt with adequately in the reports and there has been no community consultation process on this issue.

The proposed dam will inundate Aboriginal sites of heritage value. These sites will be lost for ever. There is no offsetting of this loss. What does the Aboriginal community feel about this loss or have they not yet been consulted? There have not been adequate independent assessments of the social economic and environmental impact of increased industrial activity in the area of Meander. The increased movement of vehicles on the roads leading into Meander will have a huge impact on the people living in the area. The increased load on roads and bridges will be an extra cost to consider and this cost should not be borne by the ratepayers. Has there been an impact assessment study on the effect on the community of the extra traffic movements on narrow country roads?

The routing of transmission lines may also affect the amenity of some property owners. Current and potential recreational use is not adequately dealt with: in particular, the loss of swimming, kayaking, rafting, horseriding, bushwalking and fishing in the area will have a huge social impact on the community and affect tourism potential in the area. In the summer when the dam is low the report states that there is the potential for large exposed mudflats. There is also an increased danger from water releases for recreational users and tourists. The recreational use of the dam will not offset the loss of the existing recreational and tourism values. The commitment to consult with recreational users should have occurred during the proposal stage. The wider community does not yet know whether there will be free access available for recreational use.

What will be the visual impact of the dam site landscape? There is no mention in the reports if there will be any restrictions on recreation above or below the site during the construction phase or afterwards and how these will be controlled. There should be broad community consultation with all stakeholders on this issue before a decision is made on the proposed Meander dam. People in the community are feeling very disaffected by the lack of consultation allowed for in the reports. Not everyone has the skills to write a submission or make a presentation at a hearing. Will those who do have their submissions considered seriously? It is unfair to create such major changes to a community without proper consultation.

It is recommended in the reports that the spotted tail quoll, listed as vulnerable by the Commonwealth EPBC and protected under the Tasmanian Threatened Species Act, be protected. To ensure this the proposed dam must not proceed. I submit that we follow Heather Hestermann's recommendations. In addition, I point out that there have been huge sums of money spent on researching how to bring the thylacine back from extinction. We have a potential extinction of a species to be concerned with here and we should follow the recommendations of the experts in this field. We should not add to the threats to the existence of this species, such as exists with the use of the 1080 poison in the area - which should cease immediately whether or not the dam proposal goes ahead. There are potential benefits to tourism, education and the State economy by preserving

intact this prime spotted tail quoll habitat, hunting ground and wildlife corridor for this species. The proposal to set aside a smaller area of less appropriate habitat and hunting ground is ludicrous for this vulnerable species. Impacted flora and fauna surrounding the proposed dam site - especially in its construction phase - have not been adequately addressed. Blasting, heavy machinery and increased human activity will scare off some fauna - including eagles, which are known to be living in the area, despite the proposed conditions.

What will be the formalised operating agreement of the proponent? What will be the time-bound licence period in the case of a replanning or re-licensing process, indicating that major physical changes to the dam are needed or a decommissioning may be advantageous? Is there any plan in the proponent's budget for this? What regulatory measures are there to ensure compliance with the proposed commitments by the proponents and construction companies and operators of the dam? Are the costs of establishing compliance commitments built into the project budget? Compliance should be subject to independent and transparent review. Is this compliance monitoring budgeted for?

The World Commission on Dams (WCD) states that its framework for decision-making is based on five core values. These are: equity, sustainability, efficiency, participatory decision-making and accountability. In conclusion, I implore you all to look at the report by the World Commission on Dams and ask yourselves: 'Are we reaching all of these core values?' The Meander dam proposal should be brought into line with the WCD strategic priorities and principles. All stakeholders should be brought together to consider the Meander dam proposal and all of the issues raised by the community.

CHAIR - Members, any questions for Mrs Booth?

Mr HALL - I note Mrs Booth has raised a lot of issues that already been brought forward. Just a couple of questions in related to you Kerin: first, you note a concern regarding water quality. Now, hypothetically if a dam was built would not then an increase summer flow improve the water quality?

Mrs BOOTH - Not necessarily. I believe that water temperatures down low in the dam will affect the water quality and they will be trying to take a mix of water just to try to create what nature already creates. It is most unlikely that our water quality will improve by the dam because we have the run-off from landslips above and also potential chemical run-off from the surrounding forestry areas. The potential for sabotage is a lot greater. I believe that all these are serious considerations. At the moment, we have flowing water that will discharge the contaminants fairly frequently and continuously. Where you have a body of water sitting, there are all sorts of problems and, yes, they have said that there will not be any algal blooms and mosquitos and what not. I am sure that they have done some research to the effect of our cooler climate but the potential is there in a number of years. What if the world climate does increase a few degrees and it is looking awfully like that? Is that going to effect the potential for algal blooms to form in the water?

Mr HALL - Just a second question: you talked about the ecological and social problems regarding expansion of the opiate industry. Could you expand on that please?

Mrs BOOTH - When the poppy industry started in Tasmania, I was led to believe that it would be really secure and there would be no potential for trafficking in drugs. I do not know if there has been any trafficking in drugs. There is potential there I guess if they are not secure. Hopefully, they will do that, but my main distress is when I see them growing as weeds on the roadside. Now they have herbicide resistant strains but possibly our roadside spraying won't kill them off. Out on the Meander Road, I have seen several of them - actually I have not seen them much this year; I haven't been out there much and I don't even know if they are flowering. But certainly last year I saw them and the potential is there for deaths. We have had several. I don't know how many. I think there have been five or six deaths in Tasmania, since the poppy industry started. There are concerns and there many be long-term problems with the poppy industry finding markets. We might reach a stage where other natural products come -

Mr HALL - The deaths that you were alluding to were people illegally taking capsules and then making a concoction of them?

Mrs BOOTH - Yes. This is a concern, we cannot be unconcerned because it could be anybody's children or teenagers.

Ms HAY - Do you believe that farmers in this region could continue to operate without the dam?

Mrs BOOTH - I believe so, yes, if they manage them really carefully. They have managed up until now and they have been using very poor practices some of them. I have seen some appalling -

Ms HAY - What are the alternative farming practices that you have been mentioning?

Mrs BOOTH - Well, just by not clearing so much land, they can save a lot of water by reducing evaporation. If they have windbreaks around their farms and around smaller paddocks, rather than going into these broad-acre farms that they need for these huge irrigators - they tend to wipe out all of the standing vegetation so that the irrigators can move through. Whereas, if you have smaller paddocks surrounded by your windbreaks, not over grazing so that there's more humus left in the soil. If you have more pasture or whatever growing up above you have more humus and root systems down below. Once you over graze that right down you're losing the humus in the soil and also evaporation can occur. So just simple techniques for better farming practices, but there are also niche markets that I believe haven't been fully explored.

Ms HAY - Do you believe that the current farming practices are because of a lack of understanding or education on the part of the farmers or because it is just not economically viable to do as you say?

Mrs BOOTH - I think it's both. I know that farmers in Meander surrounding our farm don't realise that once their soil has washed away that the soil doesn't come back. They can build up humus but they're not going to bring that soil back up the hill. A lot of farmers unfortunately aren't really aware about managing their soils. I'm sure there's a lot of farmers here who are and you all know farmers that do manage them well. I am not criticising the ones that don't, no. But I certainly think more education is needed and that is something that the Government could be funding.

Ms HAY - You mention here, what if the farmer's lost interest in the dam and decided to use or find alternative farming practices, are you aware that there is a large group of farmers themselves who have already put in an expression of interest for the dam?

Mrs BOOTH - I thought it was \$55 but I just heard Sue say \$43 and I 'm not sure why -

Mrs NAPIER - There are several figures ranging between \$100 and \$43.

Mrs BOOTH - It is not a huge number. They're only expressions of interest I believe. They haven't had to really pay very much for their water so far, so when it comes to the crunch are they going to be able to afford it and are the crops that they plan to grow going to be viable at that price? What is the price going to be in the future? I think that some farmers will baulk at that commercial price and certainly in the future will be unable to -

Ms HAY - But these expressions of interest is not just to buy the water afterwards, it's to own part of the dam.

Mrs BOOTH - Right, yes.

Ms HAY - Were you aware that they've put that?

Mrs BOOTH - Yes, I was aware that there were a few. I didn't know how many and I don't know the figures. I'd like to see those figures if they're available.

Ms HAY - Because it is part of the tendering process.

CHAIR - Just to clarify that, nobody knows that because the tenders haven't yet been opened.

Mrs BOOTH - Right.

CHAIR - There are expressions of interest from a number of consortia or individuals for the ownership and operation of the dam. So nobody knows that yet.

Mrs BOOTH - I wonder if they will be able to sell them off, too - that was something I raised in the paper.

Ms HAY - I just asked this yesterday as well but because you've allocated a bit of concern to it, have you spoken with the Aboriginal community regarding the five sites that we lost or do you know anything about those sites?

Mrs BOOTH - I am out of touch. I have been studying this year and no I haven't made any attempts to advise them.

Ms HAY - You are not aware of the general feeling that the permits have already been granted?

Mrs BOOTH - No, I think that, if they knew, there would be concern but it wouldn't be up to me to advise the Aboriginal community.

Ms HAY - Because the permits have been granted now and the Aboriginal community are aware and apparently the sites are not of a high significance to the culture of the Aboriginal people, so there has been no fall-out.

Mrs BOOTH - Is that the local Aboriginal community?

Ms HAY - I believe so. I believe that would be the Aboriginal community who would be negotiating with this but I will look into that as well. But to set your mind at ease there, that's what we've heard.

Mrs BOOTH - Yes, just check that out if you wouldn't mind because in the past there hasn't been a lot of communication with the local Aboriginal community.

Mrs NAPIER - Just a couple of questions. You raised the question of on-farm storage about page three of your submission. Are you aware that a number of farmers have been unable to get water for dams already built?

Mrs BOOTH - Because there is not enough flow?

Mrs NAPIER - Correct.

Mrs BOOTH - Yes, I guess in the winter there would be the possibility wouldn't there? But even in the winter they cannot -

Mrs NAPIER - They cannot get a licence. Do you agree with building shallow dams on good arable land, that could otherwise be used for growing crops?

Mrs BOOTH - There are problems with on-farm dams and I have seen lovely little wetland areas that were converted to rather sterile dams. That would have to be looked into. I am no scientist and that is an issue, but we are talking about a major project here. The smaller dams, I would have thought, would have a less significant environmental impact.

Mrs NAPIER - Ms Hay touched on this issue. You indicated that you believed that because farmers have no practical experience of paying for their irrigation water they might be unrealistic in their estimates. What evidence do you have that farmers in this area are not good small business people?

Mrs BOOTH - I was at a public meeting at this complex where the department of rivers and waters tried to bring in water meters and suggested \$20 per megalitre. There was a huge uproar. One farmer even said he would go to prison rather than pay anything for his water. Water meters were just out of the question because it was too late in the season. I cannot remember what month it was; it must have been in spring. I am not quite sure where they are at with their metering and their water charges at the moment but I do not imagine that it has advanced very much since last year.

Mrs NAPIER - Did you see that as an indication of lack of business sense or a disagreement on the value?

Mrs BOOTH - They have had a natural resource, they have been used to it and nobody likes change. The market probably does not quite allow for that cost. We might need to increase the price of commodities if farmers have to pay more for their water.

Mrs NAPIER - You raised a couple of questions about sabotage. What evidence do you have that this dam more than any other dam would be susceptible to sabotage?

Mrs BOOTH - I am not saying that it has any more risk than any other dam but I do think that it is going to be reasonably difficult security-wise. We have had people going up the Huntsman on motorbikes trailing fire rags with kerosene, blazing the hillsides there, which caused a huge bushfire. It only takes one idiot to throw in a drum of some sort of pretty nasty chemical for that to sit there in the water and be a potential contaminant for a long time to come, once it gets mixed in that larger body of water.

Mrs NAPIER - Why would you see this dam as being more susceptible, given that that has not happened to any other Tasmanian dam?

Mrs BOOTH - I am not saying that it is more susceptible than any other dam. It would be, I imagine, a security problem. Certainly security is going to be an issue, which I do not think has been addressed. I have not seen it addressed anywhere.

Mrs NAPIER - You raised the concerns, as did a representative of the Meander community yesterday, about the impact on people proximate to the area of dam wall collapse. What example in Tasmania do you have of dam collapses?

Mrs BOOTH - There have been dam collapses around the world; I am not saying there has been any in Tasmania. I experienced an earthquake in Meander that was quite significant. I cannot remember what it measured but it was enough to crack walls and so on. I would not like to be in another earthquake below the dam, wondering, hoping that the technical people have their understanding of the geomorphology and everything correct.

Mrs NAPIER - We actually asked that question yesterday and we received evidence that there is no dam in the world that has been brought down by an earthquake.

CHAIR - With this form of construction.

Mrs BOOTH - Right.

Mrs NAPIER - We actually asked this question, just to reassure you. The other point you raised - and the committee spent some time asking questions around this issue - is associated with the spotted-tail quoll. Are you aware that Heather Hestermann was consulted in relation to the mitigation measures that have been proposed?

Mrs BOOTH - Oh yes.

Mrs NAPIER - We were told that she did not raise any concerns about the inadequacies of mitigation procedures -

Mrs BOOTH - Well, I was contacted by her only a few days ago hoping that she could come to this hearing but she was unable to attend. She said that it should not go ahead. It is ridiculous - 'absolutely ludicrous' were her words - to think that the area that they have planned to set aside would in any way compensate for the area that would be lost.

Mrs NAPIER - Thank you. They were the main questions that I wanted to ask.

CHAIR - Thank you, Mrs Booth.

Mrs BOOTH - I do have something else to say - it could be a useful tool if it does go back to a proper development process.

CHAIR - So do you want us to take that into evidence?

Mrs BOOTH - Yes please, with my submission. Sorry, I did not get a chance to print it for you.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.

MR JOHN HAYWARD WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Mr Hayward, we have the submission which you have made to us, of course, and likewise we are happy to take some further verbal contribution if you wish. We will likewise allocate half an hour for your presentation and the associated questions, so we are in your hands and you proceed as you see fit. If you want to elucidate on any area of your submission to us, then we are happy to listen to it.

Mr HAYWARD - I will just summarise it for those who may not have read it. My submission was mainly to do with what wasn't in the development proposal, and the disparities between the content of the studies and the appendices that supposedly went into making them early on from the proposal itself. I was particularly alarmed at the lack of any rigorous analysis of how these great economic benefits can be achieved. There were just no calculations there whatsoever. A very large amount was looked at by Naomi Edwards, of course, the actuary, who did find no economic justification for it. There is no analysis of the cost of the drainage work that would be required on what is generally poor soil. We worked out that something like 77 per cent of the soil that was likely to be the beneficiary of the increased irrigation was class 4M or worse, and it seemed to be an enormous expenditure on very marginal soil. Now the bulk of the funding perhaps will come from the Federal Government, but it is going to go on Tasmania's ledger and it is going to be weighed against contributions for any other projects in the State. I am quite worried that because it is a big-ticket construction item that it has a lot of political glamour that will not translate into real benefits for the State.

I was also struck by the lack of analysis of the increased eutrophication of the river as a result of three times or twice the amount of water being thrown on poorly-drained soils with drainage systems having to be applied. There was no discussion of the fact that logging on a lot of the steep catchment was not analysed in terms of its deleterious impacts on the dam and the quantity of water. No discussion of the complex priorities between hydro and irrigation needs. I was also worried about the lack of discussion on the management. When you have vested interests controlling the distribution of this water, I think there is the potential for enormous problems because, in listening to their testimony yesterday, they plainly saw themselves as virtually owning the river and wanting the suspension of competition policy in regard to cost recovery.

All these things left me with a great deal of unease as to the validity of the whole proposal, and particularly from an economic sense. I was also bothered by some of the environmental evidence introduced, particularly the quoll and so forth. Much of the discussion of that has been, I believe, utter nonsense. That essentially is the bulk of my questioning: where is the substantiation of such a large project?

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr HALL - You talked about the cost of the drainage works that would have to be done, but surely the drainage works would have to be borne by the landowner, not by the public purse?

Mr HAYWARD - Yes, but will they be able to support it? The previous speaker mentioned that even the \$55 a megalitre charge, which is well below cost recovery - cost-recovery is going to be \$200 or more - was excessive. Now dairy or pasture irrigation is the probably the least efficient use of irrigation water you can think of, and it probably has one of the highest potentials for eutrophication because it is continuous, and of course that means that the water is leaving continuously as well, carrying nutrients with it.

Mrs NAPIER - In the notes you provided you refer to a \$65 million investment, yet we have been told that the figure for construction is \$24 million - \$9.5 million or thereabouts of which is government money. Where does the \$65 million come from?

Mr HAYWARD - It is mentioned - I have forgotten the page number now, this was a while back - towards the back of either the development proposal -

Mrs NAPIER - So your figure includes farmer investment and other -

Mr HAYWARD - Yes, the reticulation which the main report indicates is not feasible but yet it is mentioned as a figure that would be involved if it did go ahead.

Mrs NAPIER - I must admit the main focus of this committee is to look at the construction of the dam and the use of public dollars in the construction of a dam and the justification of that. It really is up to the private land-owners. You raise the question whether there would be sufficient land-owners who would be able to make use of the water. On what premise do you do that?

Mr HAYWARD - Well, it was mentioned that there were something like 102 properties that were interested, but perhaps only half of those would realistically be expected to subscribe.

Mrs NAPIER - Are you aware that in the evidence we have been given the analysis was actually only done on 43 users in order to be able to deliver water at \$55 a megalitre?

Mr HAYWARD - Yes, I believe that is misleading.

Mrs NAPIER - You don't agree with that?

Mr HAYWARD - No.

Mrs NAPIER - And why wouldn't you agree with that?

Mr HAYWARD - Because the analysis done by Edwards and so forth is extremely low for the amount that would be expended.

Mrs NAPIER - You indicated in your submission that in the proposed irrigation area there were no class 1 or 2 soils. What percentage of Tasmanian soils are class 1 and 2?

Mr HAYWARD - Oh, it is quite small. It is rare, flat and lovely stuff. But this area is going to be competing with that sort of land where it is available. Class 3 is also largely absent from the proposed irrigation area.

Mrs NAPIER - You raise the question of the quolls. Do you have any evidence to question the mitigation steps that have been proposed for dealing with the quoll population?

Mr HAYWARD - The idea that you can take paddocks and throw some logs around it and turn it into quoll habitat is preposterous. They are extremely territorial and they are extremely thinly distributed. A female quoll has an exclusive territory of over 500 hectares. The males are a bit more tolerant of each other and they need a rich year-around source of food which include birds, frogs, all sorts of things. Simply to give them land and say, 'It's yours' is inadequate. It is an animal that is expected to go extinct within 50 years on the mainland unless there is some fairly drastic recovery program. It has been estimated that there may be as few as a couple of thousand in Tasmania and they're diminishing all the time. Their habitat is under extreme stress.

Mrs NAPIER - So you don't agree with mitigation in fact?

Mr HAYWARD - No.

CHAIR - Mr Hayward, if I recall correctly you made a comment during your submission to the committee that the bulk of the funding for this project will come from federal sources. If my recollection of your saying that is correct, what do you base that comment on?

Mr HAYWARD - Because the State Government, as I gathered from reading the press and so forth, is not prepared to come up with anything close to the construction costs.

CHAIR - But are you aware of the principles on which this project is proposed as far as the funding is concerned?

Mr HAYWARD - In so far as I can work it out from the different reporting of it and that tends to be rather nebulous at times.

CHAIR - So are you aware of the intended funding or the processes upon which this project is expected to proceed? The funding mix?

Mr HAYWARD - Roughly, yes.

CHAIR - So back to your comment that the bulk of the funding will come from the Federal, do you still subscribe to that view.

Mr HAYWARD - Ultimately, yes. Whether it is granted by the State for these sort of purposes or not, is immaterial. If it's coming out of the pockets of somebody on the mainland it doesn't make it any more justifiable to spend it irresponsibly.

CHAIR - So can I assume from that, then, that you don't see this project will in fact proceed on the basis which has been established for it to proceed? That is, a mix of financing for the project? You don't see it as proceeding that way?

Mr HAYWARD - It can, but I think that the mix of funding can be a bit illusory. If you're granting, as they suggest, that some investors will have their investment secured and

others not, that is not in fact achieving a real mix. The public, I imagine, the taxpayer would be the loser in this.

CHAIR - You mentioned that in your view cost recovery for supply of water from this dam is at least \$200 per megalitre. Can you indicate to the committee what you would base that on?

Mr HAYWARD - That was largely on Naomi Edwards' report.

CHAIR - So you're happy with Naomi Edwards' report which had been provided.

Mr HAYWARD - Also, if you look in appendix E, they admit that \$55 is not viable.

CHAIR - The committee of course has that copy, that analysis by Miss Edwards, and that was provided to the Tasmanian Conservation Trust. So you're confident about and happy with the content of that report of Edwards?

Mr HAYWARD - I am also relying on appendix E, that economic analysis.

Ms HAY - You say there hasn't been any examination of the effects of great fertiliser use and also run-off. What are your concerns there?

Mr HAYWARD - As I mentioned before, if you are throwing a lot of water and fertiliser on land you're going to get much greater run-off. Particularly, as I said, on poor soils where the drainage is not good, where you have to provide a drainage system. A drainage system only runs down hill and that's toward the river.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, Mr Hayward.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.

Mr PAUL RANSON AND Mr IAN HOWARD OF MEANDER VALLEY COUNCIL, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Harriss) - Thank you both and welcome to the hearing. As we have mentioned to other witnesses, we have your submission and we have had an opportunity to at a previous time to go through that and satisfy ourselves of the areas that we might wish to question you on. We would be happy for you to make your presentation in addition to that or to elucidate any points that you wish to draw to our attention. We will allow half an hour for the whole process, if that is okay.

Mr RANSON - It should be more than adequate. Council is coming from two key perspectives. Essentially, it has a vital interest in the economic prosperity of the region and secondly, it is a keen participant in the management of the environmental issues within the Meander Valley. I am going to cover the economics side and Ian will just talk in broad terms because obviously you have the submission about the environmental issues.

Meander Valley is driven by agriculture. It is the major industry within our region and on our economic profile we have estimated its value back in 1997 at \$68 million. We think that has grown considerably since then, but we can only get those figures when the statistics are released from time to time.

The DP and EMP identified a number of issues related to the economic factors within the Meander Valley and the likely outcomes that are going to be driven by the potential from the dam use and we look at that from, I guess, two perspectives. One is the dam providing the opportunity for ensuring that the current irrigation take from the catchment can be, as a minimum, maintained. This is obviously important to keep the current base there and the opportunity for a higher take over and above the present utilisation from the catchment which we think will then turn into more agricultural production with its flows then coming through the other sectors of the community and economy. So in essence we see that the dam will be a positive effect from the economic considerations. From council's point of view, one of the key elements we want to pick up on is that obviously we also have a responsibility under LUPA for planning issues and I think that probably under the RMPS system that we will be looking very closely and carefully at trying to protect the irrigation area in terms of the changes to our current planning scheme. We are currently in the process of doing a new scheme strategy to be released probably within the next three to four months and new scheme within 18 months. Then we will be looking at ensuring that the integrity of the potential would be protected under that process.

Mr HOWARD - I will just very briefly touch on some of the environmental issues. The Council is of the view that there are three main areas environmentally. One is the effect on the river system itself. The Meander is a fairly highly stressed river at the moment, especially during summer, and we believe there is a considerable advantage in the dam being able to provide an environmental flow during summer. That also has a positive effect on town water supplies at the moment. Especially the Deloraine water supply does rely on putting a sandbag weir in the river each summer just to hold enough water back for the town. It does get that low. So there are considerable positive benefits for the

security of those town supplies in a higher summer flow in the river. Similarly for Exton and Westbury, both of which draw their supplies directly from the river. So we believe there's a positive benefit there. As to the winter time benefit, I think the DP and EMP says there should be approximately a 50 per cent reduction in major floods. That's a significant benefit because at the moment major flooding over the last few years has caused significant damage, both to Council's infrastructure and also to agricultural infrastructure. If that can be reduced that's certainly a net positive effect. One area it does affect is the low lying area through Deloraine especially. So if the frequency of those events can be reduced there's a benefit there.

Our submission does highlight a couple of management issues which Council are well aware of. One of them, which is fairly topical at the moment, is salinity. If there is increased irrigation then that has to be managed. But again, it can be managed to make sure we don't end up with the negative impacts of that. That's probably about all I need to say about that.

So I guess in conclusion with our submission we just want to make fairly clear the Council has been, for a number years, a very strong advocate for the dam. We have been involved in a number of public and community processes to try to bring to dam to fruition. But the actual decision the Council made for supporting the current proposal was made after having been provided with the full DP and EMP. They were satisfied that had gone through a very rigorous process and reached a strong majority around the table to support the current proposal.

CHAIR - Thank you very much gentlemen.

Mrs NAPIER - I have a small question for a start. In the section under 'Management', you talked about stream bank stability. I was under the impression that a lot of the Meander River had been fenced off so that stock couldn't walk into the river and access the water. Is it your observation that there is still a problem there?

Mr HOWARD - I wouldn't say a lot has been fenced. Some has been fenced, with the emphasis on 'some'. More hasn't than has. But it is still an area that needs to be managed.

Mrs NAPIER - So is there an active program in the area doing that?

Mr HOWARD - Under the Natural Resource Management project, which is federally funded and which is winding up, there has been a lot of work done on fencing stream bank reserves but, as I said, that project is almost complete. In fact no new projects have been taken on. It is winding up over the next 12 months. So I don't know what will come after that - it depends on what the Federal Government wish to do I imagine. Fencing stream banks is fairly important.

Mrs NAPIER - Is it your observation that, where there is increased flow, more of the river bank basically caves in as that occurs? It was certainly raised in the context of the Upper Meander or near the Meander community. They had concerns about the widening of the river as a consequence of the increased river flows.

Mr HOWARD - The major damage to the river bank occurs during floods and normal seasonal flow does not cause exceptional stream bank erosion. Flooding is what does the major damage. As long as the summer flow is regulated so that it is not excessive, I do not believe that it would cause undue damage.

Mrs NAPIER - What would your communities need to do in relation to domestic water supplies if this project did not proceed?

Mr HOWARD - Probably continue as we are at present, which is time-manage the little bit of water that is in the river in summer very carefully, and make sure that restrictions are applied as they are at present before flow drops to a critical level. Basically continue as we go at the moment.

Mrs NAPIER - You indicated to us that people who have temporary irrigation licences would be unlikely to be able to use those with the onset of the new environmental flows. Have you calculated the loss of employment that would bring about in the area? We appreciate the tables of information you have provided about what the current level of employment is but if, as a consequence of reduced irrigation that would occur within the area - both technically illegal irrigation and also the loss of temporary irrigation licenses - what is the loss to the community, both in jobs and in the economy?

Mr RANSON - Probably one of the problems is the lack of data. Some of the usage has been greater than technically what the temporary licence rights were. So it is very difficult without good data to be able to assess the likely economic impact, other than probably to indicate just with the quantum of agriculture as a percentage of our overall economy that the effect would be quite significant. You only need to look at the effects on the towns - particularly like Deloraine, which are driven a lot by the state of the rural economy - in the last few years. That has been positive and has flowed through the whole health of the district. But that is not a question that I think I can answer with any degree of accuracy.

Mrs NAPIER - If this dam did not proceed, what alternative industries can you identify would be needed to compensate for the loss of those jobs?

Mr HOWARD - We are presently in a partnership agreement, talking with the State about future economic opportunities, but without a significant number being identified. I suppose we do need to recognise, for instance, that Tasmanian Alkaloids is a major employer and is the key downstream processor in our region. We would be very concerned, I suppose, about the loss of potential for increasing or maintaining present alkaloid production if the dam did not come about. That obviously has a major impact in the area, but we have not been able to identify with any great certainty any increased major growth areas. Tourism has been there and is on the rise but its actual overall economic benefit is significantly less than agriculture. You only need to look at the size of the current tourism industry or businesses that are around. Most of them are very small businesses. We have very few major tourism activities: even though we see it as an area of potential, we would never see it as being the panacea to any significant decline in the agricultural sector.

CHAIR - Thank you, gentlemen.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.

Mr GILMORE AND Mr JANSEN WERE RECALLED.

CHAIR (Mr Harriss) - I ask Mr Gilmore to join us at the table for one final time. Mrs Napier has raised the matter of the spotted tail quoll and the various information we have heard throughout the hearing as to Heather Hestermann's input. Mr Gilmore, you may in fact be able to clarify this without any other officers, but if you feel you need them to join you, by all means do so.

Mrs NAPIER - I must admit I thought we had resolved this one yesterday when you indicated that there had been consultation with Miss Hestermann as to the mitigation procedures that had been taken to try and enable the 12 spotted tail quolls that we have identified that could well need to relocate to another area. I acknowledge the evidence yesterday that there are a hell of a lot more quolls around than people might otherwise admit, but let's deal with the 12 that have been identified in that area.

CHAIR - Seven.

Ms HAY - Seven to twelve.

Mrs NAPIER - Well, take the maximum number, 12, if you like. I don't really mind. Now when was the last advice received from Miss Hestermann? Do you have any evidence as to the fact that she has changed her mind about her views on the mitigation plan?

Mr GILMORE - We last met with Heather - I would have to check the date - in about April or so this year and prior to the final supplementary DP & EMP being presented for assessment and, while I acknowledge Miss Hestermann would have preferred a whole lot more activities on a statewide basis to solve the quoll, our task was quite specific to the project and to the impact the project was going to have. As I indicated yesterday, we did reach agreement about the package that we were going to put together. I might add it was always clear that Miss Hestermann opposed the project, so there was never any doubt that her view was that the quolls need to be protected, and the only way they could be protected was by stopping the project. We were never in any doubt about that, but we working on the basis that, okay, if the project is going to go ahead, how can we best manage this problem. Certainly since we last met with her there have been a number of occasions where either she herself or someone else has quoted her as going further than we had reached in our discussions. I just take that at face value and get on with dealing with the tasks that we have to carry out.

Can I just be very clear, though: I think the issue about the quolls and one of the difficulties that people have in comprehending what is happening is that all of our considerations are based on the quoll population, however big or small it is in the area and, as with most Australian native animals, those populations go up and down quite quickly depending on the seasons and the availability of food and so forth. So the ecology of the quoll is based on its population rising and falling quite quickly depending on the circumstances. When the dam site was cleared back in 1989 there were no indications of measures taken to look after the quolls in any way. It was just cleared. And what we are seeing is in 12 or 13 years subsequent to that we now have this hot spot of quoll activity. I am a biologist by trade, and it seems to beggar some belief that

somehow that can't be mimicked again. That is what our approach is based on, and the practicalities of the quoll management issue are that the quoll population in the area will decline in the short-term after the dam. Now that short-term may be a number of years, and it will depend on how long it takes for our rehabilitation of new habitat to start to have an effect before the quoll population starts to increase again. The quoll breeding program produces a lot more young each year than there are territories for and for those for which there are no territories, those baby quolls die as part of the natural cycle of quoll breeding. When there is new habitat available, those quolls will move into that new habitat and hopefully be successful. Our approach has been on that population basis - it is using something that has already happened and is based on the best information that we can pull together at present. That is not to say that in 10 years time with another 10 PhDs on these quolls we might not know more but I think that intuitively you can grasp the sort of situation that we have, where a limited number of individuals are going to be affected. We think that we are going much further than would typically be required for somewhere between seven and 12 quolls and we think that the measures that we have put in place will have a positive impact over the medium term and that is what we are aiming for.

At the same time, that will also provide a much better habitat for a whole range of other flora and fauna than would otherwise have been the case. So the benefits are much broader than just the quoll from our point of view.

Mrs NAPIER - Thank you. Can I ask one more question? In relation to recreation users - and this is an issue raised by a couple of people, but particularly by Mrs Booth - what provisions are being made for recreational use? I can see that being a potentially significant additional boon to the community to have an area of water that can be available for kayaking or whatever, I don't know. It mightn't be big enough to put a power boat on to it!

Mr GILMORE - We have no fixed plan for what should or should not happen.

Mrs NAPIER - So it is not precluded?

Mr GILMORE - It is going to be essentially a community asset and it will be managed accordingly.

Mrs NAPIER - Does the topography of the lake allow for being able to get to the lake even though we have those few days when there is going to be mudflats?

Mr GILMORE - Well, you drove down to the edge of it yesterday. The construction road will mean that access to that construction area will also be easier.

We have had discussions with a range of recreational groups. We have not, as Ms Booth said, we have not sat down formally and consulted every single person in the community. But we have had a broad range of discussions with different sorts of recreational groups. As I understand it, the professional fishers - the trout fishing fraternity - are quite happy with the proposal they see benefits downstream with better summer flows and they also see the potential of pretty healthy trout population in and above the dam itself. As to the opportunities for canoeing and kayaking downstream from the dam, our estimation is that they would be substantially increased, particularly in

summer when the irrigation flows are at their peak and access will be easier. That will be an increased opportunity. We have deliberately not used the recreational benefit, if you like, as an economic argument. We know it is there but we haven't tried to pursue that. We see the community benefits as being more than meeting the Government's requirement under National Competition Policy principles and all of these other benefits like recreation and so forth will be in addition to that. We are not precluding any of those things; we are not precluding power boats. We are not saying that it is a good idea or a bad idea. The Craighourne Dam has been mentioned a few times over the last couple of days. The Rivers and Water Supply Commission built a boat ramp into the Craighourne Dam and it gets quite a lot of use. It is an actively used recreational facility and that is supported by the dam owners. We would expect our community decision making to cover what was feasible and what people were interested in and manage it accordingly.

Ms HAY - Would there be a cost with recreational use?

Mr GILMORE - We wouldn't anticipate a cost. I don't see that as the sort of thing that's going to add value to the project. The reality is the dam needs to be managed to provide secure irrigation water and recreation does what's best with what's left.

Ms HAY - Just lastly, just to clarify for everybody. Have the local Aboriginal community been consulted regarding the inundation of the five sites?

Mr GILMORE - We did not contact the local Aboriginal community directly. We heard some feedback early in the piece that some were opposed or one individual was opposed. Our consultation was always through the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land Council. We met with them on a number of occasions. We met with their officials. We put a proposition to their council and that was the basis on which we were engaging with the Aboriginal community. So no, we haven't done it directly here with individuals in the community but also we have not either been contacted by anyone like Leigh either.

Mr JANSEN - Mr Chairman, is it possible for me to make a small comment regarding the local Tasmania members in Deloraine - just for one minute. The dam committee has had a meeting and invited the representatives from the Deloraine Aboriginal community and we have had a conversation with them. The very pleasant meeting went on for some time, very early in the piece, and they have been fully aware that this project was in the offing.

Ms HAY - And that those sites would be in there?

Mr JANSEN - No we didn't get into sites with them. We just conversed with them. But certainly nothing about sites, no. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thanks, Mr Jansen. Thank you very much again Mr Gilmore we do appreciate your forbearance and your contribution. Ladies and gentlemen, that brings us to the conclusion of the process where this committee takes evidence. In public we thank you all once again for your participation. We would now need to sit in deliberation of the evidence which we've heard and that needs to be done in camera. So if we could thank you and ask you to leave us to deliberate, thank you.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.