

SUMMARY

The proposal to drain and restore lake Pedder raises matters that impinge on the future management of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and is therefore a matter for joint consideration by the Commonwealth and Tasmania. The Commonwealth is not under any legal obligation to act in this matter but has the power to act if it so chooses. Unilateral Commonwealth action would require the introduction of new or amending legislation.

The proposal to drain and restore Lake Pedder is sufficiently developed to be raised as a question for an in-principle decision but the detail and information currently available does not provide the basis for a commitment to proceed. Technically it is feasible to drain the present impoundment and restore the geomorphological features of the original lake.

If implemented, it is likely that the proposal would enhance the world heritage values of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. There would be risks involved and there would be a significant cost to the Tasmanian community.

More information would be required before an in-principle decision could be taken to proceed with the proposal and even then, there would be a need for research, planning and environmental impact assessment before a final commitment could be made to 'pull the plug'. A final decision would require governments to undertake further research, some site rehabilitation work, monitoring, and ongoing management. Governments would also have to provide new infrastructure and could become committed to costly intervention in the natural rehabilitation process.

Other significant costs could be involved in either breaching the Scotts Peak Dam or installing a spill way to achieve adequate drainage of the Huon catchment.

There would be a reduction in the capacity of the hydro electricity system. Lake Pedder is important to the integrated energy system in Tasmania and, in particular, to the drought proofing of that system. This could become significant in the long term if future demand for power approached the production capacity of the system. Comalco, the largest power consumer, has said that removing Lake Pedder from the system would have a negative impact on future investment decisions to be taken by them. It might also influence investment decisions of other companies. However, with current demand levels, the loss could be accommodated.

There was conflicting evidence given about the impact of tourism. At the very least, any benefits that the proposal might generate through an increase in tourism would be partly offset by the loss of the trout fishery and the costs of managing access to the area.

The most compelling reasons for restoring the lake are symbolic. There is no obligation in world heritage terms to proceed with the restoration proposal nor are there compelling conservation reasons to do so. The proposal does have some world heritage and conservation merit but it is the symbolic value which weighs most heavily with those in favour of proceeding. There is also substantial opposition to the proposal in Tasmania because of the symbolic significance of retaining the current lake. Many of those opposed to the proposal identified in Lake Pedder a representation of the State's history, including the debates about hydro development.

There are more compelling and urgent priorities and environmental goals that the Commonwealth and Tasmanian Governments need to achieve. Given these other priorities it is inappropriate to allocate Commonwealth resources to further development or detailed consideration of the Lake Pedder proposal.

The proposal is opposed by the government and the Opposition party in Tasmania, and under these circumstances has no real prospect of proceeding in the foreseeable future.

The Committee concludes therefore that, although the proposal could be implemented, it does not have either the priority nor the official support necessary to warrant the commitment of Commonwealth Government resources for further assessment.