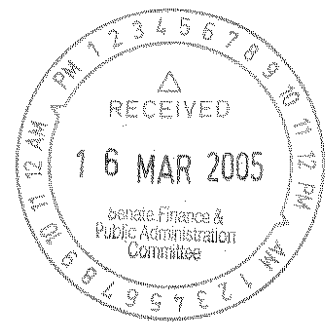


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11 MARCH 2005

COMMITTEE SECRETARY
SENATE FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
COMMITTEE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SENATE
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir

**SUBMISSION – SENATE COMMITTEE INQUIRY
REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM**

SELECTED REGION: ATHERTON TABLELANDS QLD.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: MAREEBA

LOCAL COMMUNITY: DIMBULAH Q

SUBJECT OF ASSESSMENT: SUB-STANDARD RETICULATED WATER
SUPPLY

INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIRED: GRANT ESTIMATE TO CONSTRUCT
MINIMUM AUSTRALIAN STANDARD RETICULATED WATER SYSTEM –
\$2.5MILLION

REASON AND HISTORY FOR SUBMISSION REQUEST-

With the announcement by Federal Government authorities in 2001/2002 that the tobacco industry in the Mareeba/Dimbulah irrigation area was to be abolished created huge social and economic hardships for the existing farmers and the communities of Mareeba and Dimbulah.

The tobacco industry of Mareeba/Dimbulah Irrigation area created a very strong economic climate for all in the district that ultimately had flow on to all retail outlets and employment.

The Australian Federal Government for some 30/40 years had a massive windfall in billions of excise tax on all tobacco products produced in this region and particularly Dimbulah, being the central community hub of the northern tobacco industry.

It is still very obvious today in 2005 that there are only two areas that the Federal Government provided funding of any significant quantity in the Mareeba/Dimbulah tobacco growing area and these are:-

- \$10 million to construct Tinaroo Dam back in 1952
- The bitumen main road from Dimbulah to the tobacco sales floors in Mareeba. Constructed in the late 1950's

With the sudden closure of the tobacco industry by the present Federal Government has created huge physiological and economic hardships of communities such as Dimbulah.

RE-BUILDING THESE COMMUNITIES

Back in 2001/2002 the Australian Federal Government realised that rural regional areas across Australia were going through difficult and challenging times which no doubt were and still are causing extreme hardships for these communities.

I was involved in the initial workshops set up by the Sustainable Regions Committee for the Mareeba/Dimbulah areas. The meeting was attended by Federal/State and Local Government officials and a large cross section of the community.

One of the main infrastructure issues raised in this forum was the sub-standard reticulated water system in Dimbulah and that if this community was to move forward the system must be improved.

FOCUS FOR THE FUTURE

If the community of Dimbulah is to focus on the future then it must be provided with the very basic infrastructure of an efficient/adequate water supply that will allow the existing community to function fully as a town should and thus existing residents will not migrate to the large metropolitan areas simply because the water infrastructure is inadequate for their needs.

The climate in Dimbulah is pristine and being only 1.5 hours drive from Cairns the potential for future housing and retirement development strategies is enormous but it will not happen without the very basic infrastructure of an efficient reticulated water supply that has the potential and capacity to meet the strategic development opportunities I have mentioned.

OBLIGATION OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO DIMBULAH COMMUNITY

For the past 30/40 years Federal Governments of all denominations have utilised the Dimbulah Tobacco growing area as a major revenue base to collect tobacco tax in the multi billions of dollars.

Through no fault of their own the community of Dimbulah has had their tobacco industry shut down and consequently their major revenue base removed with no real prospect of a sustainable primary industry to replace it for some time to come. If the Federal Government is promoting assistance to communities such as Dimbulah to assist in developing infrastructure and industries through the Sustainable Regions Program then this submission for basic community infrastructure of "A MODERN RELIABLE RETICULATED WATER SUPPLY" would surely have to score very high on a priority list against existing approved projects.

- A2 Milk - \$12million
- Mareeba Wild Animal Park - \$500,000

- Eden House - \$186,000
- Atherton Hotel - \$500,000
- Cloning of Eucalypt trees - \$500,000

The community of Dimbulah has received no infrastructure support from the Federal Government in the way of substantial grants since the early 1950's. They are now pleading with the Federal Government to return a small portion of the billions collected in tobacco excise to fund the Design and Construction of a modern water supply which will allow them to live normal lives and to focus on the future development of Dimbulah and its surrounding district.

Is this not a reasonable request from a community that has contributed so much in monetary terms directly to the Federal Government?

RISKS AND INADEQUACIES ASSOCIATED WITH EXISTING RETICULATED WATER SUPPLY

- Senior Fire Service staff has provided reports to local government for the past 25/30 years outlining inadequacies in-
 - Volume
 - Pressure
 - Storage

Attached is a plan of the township of Dimbulah which shows pressure and volume tests that were taken back in 2000 – the minimum standard required by the Fire Department is 20 litres per second at 3.5 Bar pressure flow.

As can be seen from the tests on the map, most hydrant points have a 5 litre per second flow with an average pressure of 1.5 Bar which is totally unacceptable for fire fighting purposes and has caused major physiological and practical problems for the local volunteer Fire Service.

- With pressures and flows of the magnitude outlined previously it is quite obvious why every commercial building and private residence in the community of Dimbulah is having water problems.
- The existing pipe work under the ground is also made of asbestos cement or cast iron which is now some 40/50 years old and has deteriorated to such a stage that to put a new reservoir supply in place with the minimum required standard of pressure would result in continual pipe failure – thus the requirement for a new complete reticulated supply.
- The local butcher has to transport water from Atherton to process his meat products as the local water does not meet quality assurance standards – local water is only used to wash out his shop floor.
- Washing machines can take up to 3 hours to fill up before the washing cycle commences.
- Giardía is quite common in the town and residents are boiling all water for drinking purposes.

- The local police officer has to wait until 9pm to have a bath as there is simply not enough water to shower before this time, (lives close to outlet of reservoir).
- School urinals do not flush correctly which create health issues.
- Discolouration of water for lengthy periods.

EXISTING ISSUES WITH FUNDING FROM MAREEBA SHIRE COUNCIL

A recent meeting in the Dimbulah Shire Hall clearly indicated that the local government has not planned sufficiently over the past to provide the necessary funds to upgrade the Dimbulah reticulated water supply. (See attached flyer from Mareeba Shire Council).

Even with extreme warnings in reports from Senior Fire Service Officers for the past 20/30 years warning of the consequences in the event of a fire occurring in the main town proper or a private residence.

- The Mareeba shire Council has put the cost of any upgrade squarely back on the residents of Dimbulah and they simply cannot afford these costs when their tobacco industry has been destroyed and they all in the stages of re-building their lives and livelihoods.
- All proposals Mareeba Shire Council has put forward to improve the existing reticulated water supply are short sighted and are only aimed at the immediate existing population and in no way reflect the strategic view of the majority of the residents who want to see development occur within the town over the next 15/20 years.
- Mareeba Shire Council has no plans to upgrade or allow for depreciation of the 50year old pipe infrastructure that is in the ground.

SUMMARY

That the Senate Review Committee seriously consider this submission for a grant of \$2.5 Million to provide the basic infrastructure and construction of a modern "Reticulated Water Supply" for the community of Dimbulah to allow-

- The community to live a normal life
- To develop their community in line with any future migration and new primary/secondary industries in the Mareeba Shire
- As some small return of the billions of dollars taken by the Federal Government over the past 30/40 years in tobacco excise tax
- To comply with basic Fire Safety regulations.

CONCLUSION-

It is really sad to see this struggling community pleading to Governments of all levels to provide the very basic commodity of "water" for which most of us all take for granted. How this community has put up with this sub-standard reticulated water supply for so long is in itself amazing.

I believe it is time the Federal Government adopted the proverb of "Charity begins at home" and through this committee to start assisting remote rural communities such as

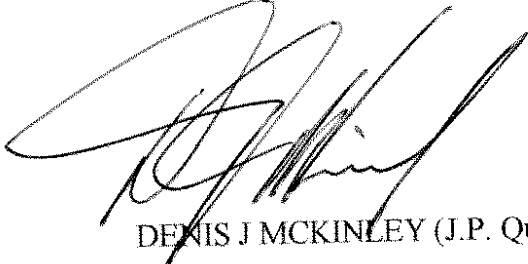
Dimbulah to provide the very basic commodity of a community "water" by providing grants to build the necessary infrastructure for efficient reticulated water supply for sheer sustainability of such communities and also to improve any future prospects of development.

The community of Dimbulah would welcome the opportunity of a delegation to your committee hearing in Cairns during the month of April 2005 to further clarify any issues you may have with this submission.

As the spokesperson for the Dimbulah Reticulated Water Supply Action Group I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Senate Finance and Administration Committee on behalf of all the residents of Dimbulah for allowing us to submit this important submission at late notice.

This submission has been prepared and submitted to the Review Committee in the interest of the wellbeing of the community of Dimbulah.

Yours sincerely



DENIS J MCKINLEY (J.P. Qualified)

DIMBULAH RETICULATED WATER SUPPLY ACTION GROUP

The Cairns Post

THURSDAY, MARCH 10, 2005 • \$1

| NEWS |

Our say

The Cairns Post
Thursday, March 10, 2005

Dimbulah due

DIMBULAH residents have a compelling case for a complete upgrade of their town's water supply.

They point out that successive federal governments have used the district's tobacco industry as the basis for billions of dollars in tax revenue, yet residents have trouble taking a decent shower, much less fighting a fire.

Although their staple crop is now banned, townspeople say they are ready to rebuild their community's economy but will have trouble attracting any new industries given the town's abysmal water supply.

Having milked this particular cash cow dry, are governments willing to send it to the meatworks, or will they assist the town in providing a decent water supply? It's the minimum of services Australians expect.

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12 The Cairns Post, Thursday, March 10, 2005

Tobacco tax drained away

Steve Gray
Tableland reporter

DIMBULAH residents say their town has delivered billions of dollars in taxes to the Federal Government through the now-defunct tobacco industry, but their water supply is still inadequate, dirty and dangerously deficient.

Local volunteer fireman Frank Diacovo illustrated the point yesterday by holding up a \$10.65 packet of cigarettes and explaining that local tobacco growers were paid 6c for growing the tobacco, before the crop was banned in 2004. Of the other \$10.59, \$6.60 went in taxes to the Federal Government.

Yet for all that tax money Mr Diacovo is terrified the local volunteer fire brigade won't have the water to contain, much less extinguish, a major fire.

A few years ago they watched a two-storey house burn to the ground and nothing's improved since.

Dimbulah residents said the problem had been plaguing them for more than 20 years. Currently, the pressure and supply shortages forces



Water worries: Butcher Ian Gannon and lifelong resident Joyce Ericson want a decent water supply in their Tableland town. Picture: STEVE GRAY

residents to wait until 9pm for a shower, while filling a washing machine can take hours, toilets won't flush properly and there are problems running four drinking bubblers at the local school.

The water is also dirty.

"You put your nappies in NamiSan and they're white. Then

you wash them and they're yellow," resident Amy Pryce-Davies said.

"Sometimes at night it's like having a bath in Coca-Cola."

The problem stems from the limited supply available from the reservoir, inadequate pumps and filters and ageing infrastructure underground.

Residents blame all three tiers of government including Mareeba Shire Council which has plans to upgrade the capacity to Bibbohra to attract new residents while they cannot not even get a basic supply.

They also wonder why none of the \$18 million funding from the controversial Sustainable Regions scheme has reached them, even though it was originally designed to help the region recover from the shutdown of Dimbulah's staple tobacco industry.

Resident Margaret Carroll said her years working in a doctor's surgery convinced her the Dimbulah water was responsible for the parasitic organism disease, giardia.

Dimbulah butcher Ian Gannon also has health concerns and insists on importing all the water used in his food preparation.

Our Say Page 12



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TO DIMBULAH TOWN RESIDENTS

Our Ref: W10/3
Your Ref:

Dear Sir/Madam

21 January 2005

Poor water pressure and the lack of adequate storage capacity has been a source of frustration to residents of Dimbulah and Fire and Rescue Authority personnel alike.

30/40 YEARS

Council has been aware of the poor service for some time and has determined that the matter must be discussed in a community forum as the provision of an improved water supply service meeting Department of Natural Resources & Mines Water Supply Guidelines can only be delivered by a significant Capital Investment in new infrastructure.



A number of residents signed a recent petition requesting Council provide an improved water supply service. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information as to the likely costs and benefits of the proposed water supply infrastructure.

It is proposed to construct a 500kl concrete reservoir on ground and to install a pressure pump station complete with a standby generator set to maintain design guidelines pressure to the existing reticulation network. The pump station will have the capacity to meet Fire Fighting flow demands and maintain the supply of reticulated water to the community at the same time. The storage capacity requirement is driven primarily by the need to be able to supply a flow rate of 30l/s for 4 hours for a commercial premises fire.

It is estimated that the Capital cost to construct the reservoir and supply the pressure pump set complete with control equipment and alarms will be \$460,000.00.

Annual operating, maintenance and depreciation costs are dependent upon total consumption but are expected to be an additional \$16,000.00 per annum.



State Government funding for the project is available for 40% of the Capital expenditure but the balance must be funded by the Dimbulah community and the shire. If 100% of the shire's contribution was funded by increased rates from the Reticulated Water Area in Dimbulah, then the additional charges that would need to be levied are estimated to be \$282.00 per Access Charge per annum making a total Access Charge of \$437.00 per annum.

P 155 229 262 291

The additional operating, maintenance and depreciation costs are expected to add 9cents/kilolitre to the consumption charge making a total of 19cents/kilolitre.

167M 1900 ←

It is proposed to conduct a public information meeting mid-February regarding the above project. Ample opportunity for feedback will be provided so that the community's expectations and views can be assessed.



Council holds the view that an adequate water supply, capable of meeting fire fighting flows and the community's expectations of water quality and supply pressure is essential for the long term future of the community.

Please feel free to contact the Manager Water and Wastewater, Mr Trevor Adil on 4030 3984 during business hours should you require any further information.

Yours faithfully

Trevor Adil
MANAGER WATER AND WASTE WATER

Mareeba Shire - a great place to live.
Mareeba - biggest town on the Tablelands of the Cairns Hinterland.