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Promoting Effective Sustainable  
Catchment Management

Ken Schmidt  
Chairman Mid Brisbane River Irrigators

Fernvale QLD 4306

The Hon. Stephen Robertson  
Minister for Natural Resources, Mines & Energy  
Queensland Government

Dear Sir

The Mid Brisbane River Irrigators (MBRI) wish to express their concern about the management of recent water releases from Wivenhoe Dam and their effect on the mid Brisbane River (from Wivenhoe to Mt Crosby).

The approximate 700,000 megalitres of water released during the flood event beginning on 10 October 2010, combined with the flow from tributaries below Wivenhoe, have resulted in major riverbank slumping & vegetation loss along the entire 60 kms, tons of soil washed into the river thus into Moreton Bay, damage to irrigation/stockwater pumps and fences with ongoing financial costs to those on the river & the broader community.

This damage could have been significantly reduced if not avoided altogether by the relevant authorities by:

1. Using Wivenhoe Dam as a buffer to control the effects of heavy rainfall in its & Somerset Dam's catchment eg during the wet season hold it at 80% rather than 100% FSL thus not creating panic water releases
2. Ceasing the practise of rapid increases & decreases in water releases from Wivenhoe Dam. The major cause of riverbank slumping is hydraulic drawdown caused by the rapid decrease of water releases.
3. Recognising the amount of water that is included with the flow from Wivenhoe Dam. It appears that there is no understanding by the authorities that the mid Brisbane River is not a body of water that comes exclusively from Wivenhoe Dam. This fact has been put before the Department of Environment and Resource Management many times during the drought years by the MBRI committee in meetings with the then Minister and his various advisors including Departmental heads. It appears there has been neither any recognition nor appreciation of the amount of water flow that is involved.

The MBRI have been working with SEQ Catchments to develop Property Management Plans with the objective being to ensure a high level of water quality in the mid Brisbane River by the implementation of best management practices and erosion rehabilitation projects. The MBRI has been the recipient of substantial amounts of funding for workshops and field days that educate mid Brisbane River landowners on these issues.

At the Healthy Waterway Awards 2009 the MBRI won the Rural Award sponsored by SEQWater for Property Management Planning & Environmental Rehabilitation.

More recently, MBRI has been granted \$19,375 from the Federal Government 'Caring for Our Country' for lantana control of riparian areas along the mid Brisbane River – note that this is the key urban water corridor. The aim of this project is to improve riverbank stability by vegetation rehabilitation thus contributing to water quality for a significant proportion of the population in South East Queensland.

It is extremely disappointing for this organisation, that while it continues to receive recognition for its contribution to the environment, the Department is directly responsible for the environmental vandalism caused by its management of Wivenhoe Dam releases.

It is evident that since the 1989 water release from Wivenhoe Dam which caused bank slumping, scouring and personal property damage, which ironically was promised by the Government would never happen again, no procedures have been put into place to prevent this happening again. Sadly, for those along the mid Brisbane River, it has.

It appears that the FOC (Flood Operations Centre) is more concerned with reopening the low bridges along the mid Brisbane River after water releases. None of this would be necessary if the Government had held good to their promise during construction of Wivenhoe Dam that all low bridges would be rebuilt to a higher level. MBRI suggest that you do this.

Throughout the recent drought years this organisation consulted on an ongoing basis to work with the Department to ensure that, despite the Department's initial stance, this region continued to operate as a food producing region for South East Queensland.

While this organisation may not agree with the Department's policy of poorly managed & often unnecessary water releases, it is hoped that the Department will consult with the MBRI and will inspect the damage that has recently occurred along the mid Brisbane River so that water releases will not be a repeat of the damage that has occurred in October and December this year. For the Department to do otherwise is, in our view, a sad indictment of the Department's attitude towards both the river environment and the landholders who live and work along the River.



Chairman  
Mid Brisbane River Irrigators  
23.12.10