

Department of Water and Energy disregards the facts on decommissioning Mowamba Aqueduct.

A senior representative of the NSW Department of Water and Energy recently stated on ABC Radio Southeast NSW (Bega) that the NSW government was not considering releasing water for the Snowy River through the Mowambah weir or decommissioning the weir.

The reasons given by the Department of Water and Energy for not decommissioning Mowamba showed an astonishing disregard for the truth.

DWE stated that reconnecting Mowamba to permit environmental flows to be released over the weir would be at the expense of providing flushing flows to the Snowy from Jindabyne Dam; that compensation would be triggered; and that it would reduce the capacity of Snowy Hydro to generate electricity from the mini hydro at the Jindabyne outlet.

Firstly, if Snowy River environmental flows were anywhere near the legislated target of 15% flows by 2009, flushing flows could be provided via larger releases from Jindabyne dam (and run the mini hydro) together with a smaller portion of total releases via Mowamba weir to provide the environmental benefits of natural variability and connectivity. After all, the Mowamba River flow is only 3-4% of the legislated 28% Snowy River environmental flows.

Secondly the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Act clearly states¹ that compensation would not be triggered if the Snowy Water Licence were amended (to permit environmental releases via Mowamba) following the first Five-Year Review of the Licence, which is currently underway.

Thirdly, DWE has justified the diversion of 99% of the Mowamba River on the basis that it will increase the generating capacity of the tiny 1.1 MW mini hydro at Jindabyne dam, an accredited Green power generator! The diversion of the Mowamba River back into Jindabyne Dam has compromised the integrity of Snowy River environmental flows for a piddling amount of electricity.

In fact, progress on increased Snowy environmental flows has been so slow (currently at 4%) that the mini hydro is now inoperative as the January releases of less than 90 megalitres per day is insufficient to drive the generator.

The Snowy Scientific Committee report on the adequacy of Snowy environmental flows, including the environmental benefits of Mowamba, was submitted to the NSW government in early October 2008.

Why is this report still not publicly available?

Despite statements to the ABC regarding decommissioning Mowamba, DWE cannot preempt the recommendations of the Five-Year Review of Snowy Water Licence. This report has to be endorsed by the review committee comprising representatives from Victoria and the Commonwealth as well as NSW.

¹ Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Act 1997, clause 30(2)(b).

It appears that senior sections of DWE continue to push their barrow a little too close to Snowy Hydro's.

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