

Media Release

23 March 2022

Hells Gates Dam – wilful economic and environmental recklessness

Highlights:

- Previous feasibility studies have not found Hells Gates Dam (HGD) to be economically viable.
- Environmental studies have shown that HGD would lead to increased river turbidity, water table rise and salinity and increased nutrient flows to the Reef – the PM’s promise to “cut green tape” could have disastrous environmental consequences.
- Public funds would be better spent supporting sustainable, innovative solutions for growth in North Queensland, such as renewables, green manufacturing, ecotourism and modernising irrigation practices to support existing agricultural activity.

Earlier today, the Prime Minister announced \$5.4bn of funding to progress Hells Gates Dam if re-elected. This 80-year-old pipe dream has undergone several feasibility studies over the years, none of which have found it to be economically viable (including Townsville Enterprise Ltd.’s very own study from 2018). Along with being economically unviable, building Hells Gate Dam will cause substantial adverse environmental impacts such as increasing the turbidity of the river, loss of critical habitat for vulnerable and threatened species from land clearing and exacerbating water quality decline in the GBR from the increased sediments and nutrients in runoff from the irrigated agriculture that’s facilitated by the dam.

The PM’s promise to fund this monster dam if re-elected comes with a promise to “cut green tape”. North Queensland Conservation Council’s (NQCC) Coordinator Crystal Falknau says this should be a cause for massive concern for individuals, community groups and landowners who have been doing their bit to protect the Burdekin River and the Great Barrier Reef, as well as all who currently depend on the Burdekin River for irrigation. Opening up the Upper Burdekin to irrigated cropping would involve large-scale vegetation clearing and an increase in the runoff of fertilisers and pesticides that will be washed downstream to the Great Barrier Reef.

“An inconvenient fact which the PM and the proponents of the dam are ignoring is that there is simply not enough water in the Upper Burdekin catchment to fill such a large dam”, said Nigel Parratt, Water Policy Officer from the Queensland Conservation Council (QCC). “Due to the lack of available water, building Hells Gate Dam will reduce inflows to Burdekin Falls Dam which will reduce the reliability of existing water entitlement holder’s allocations.” Parratt concluded.

Instead of funding economically unviable and environmentally destructive projects, NQCC and QCC are calling upon leaders of all political parties to pledge funding and support for economically viable projects that will support North Queensland communities in the long run and won’t destroy the region’s unique ecological values that make it so special.

“We would love to see the kind of money the PM has announced for building Hells Gate Dam invested in sustainable, innovative solutions for growth in our region, such as renewable energy and green hydrogen production, green manufacturing, ecotourism, conservation and the modernisation of irrigation practices to support current farmers in North Queensland. There is great potential to grow jobs in North Queensland without digging up ideas from early last century.” Ms Falknau stated.

--- ENDS ---

CONTACTS

Crystal Falknau (NQCC): 0406 421 061

Nigel Parratt (QCC): 0417 752 546

John Connell (NQCC): 0424 899 623