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State commits to consult over Burdekin Water Plan review

The state government says it will review a North Queensland water plan that hasn't been looked at in more than 15 years.

Tony Raggatt Follow

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Nationals Senator Matt Canavan says the way in which residents of the Pioneer Valley found out about the nearby pumped hydro project is "absolutely unacceptable". "I've spent my political career looking for dams and sites and we've never heard, no one had ever heard of this Burdekin-Pioneer pumped hydro project until waking…

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- Burdekin dam overflows for third time in 2022

A critical review of a water plan to underpin the future of water resource projects in North Queensland has been committed to by the Labor state government.

Water Minister Glenn Butcher told the Bulletin a review of the Burdekin Water Plan would commence soon and that it would include public consultation.

The plan covers the huge 130,000 sqkm Burdekin Basin from Greenvale in the north to Alpha in the south, including the Burdekin, Campese, Cape, Belyando, Suttor, Bowen and Bogie rivers, and regulates the allocation and management of water in the area.

It comes as the plan in its current form effectively blocks both the Urannah and Hells Gates dam projects, as well as any raising of the Burdekin Falls Dam beyond 2m, and a United Nations agency warns water resource development could harm the Great Barrier Reef.

“The Burdekin Water Plan expires 1 September, 2023, and review of the plan will commence soon,” Mr Butcher said.

Water flowing over the Burdekin Falls Dam.

“The review will include public consultation, as is the normal process for all of Queensland’s 23 water plans when they are approaching expiration.

“I am proud of the Palaszczuk Labor Government’s strong record of water investment in North Queensland, which includes funding for Big Rocks Weir, investigating raising Burdekin Falls Dam and both stages of the Haughton Pipeline.”

The fact that the Hells Gates dam cannot be advanced within the allowable water development limits set in the 2007 Burdekin Water Plan has been raised by the state government in an addendum to the dam’s detailed business case.

It described the plan in its current form as one of the constraints to the scheme.

The proponents of the Urannah dam also say the plan needs to be amended for its project.

An Initial Advice Statement into the Burdekin Falls Dam Raising by state-owned Sunwater says modelling for a 2m raising predicts a 14% increase in capturing of sediments or a reduction of about 132,000 tonnes per year in sediments passing the dam.

By contrast, representatives of UNESCO who this week revealed they want the Reef placed on the World Heritage in Danger list argue against water resource development.

They say the proposed development of the Hells Gates and Urannah dams threatens to counteract progress, both through their construction and subsequent industrial and agricultural expansion plans.

Poor water quality from land-based run-off is one of the key threats to the Reef.

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