

Dorset EDG Article for Examiner Newspaper, Head To Head column November 2008

In the wake of the Simplot vegetable processing factory closure, a community task force (later incorporated as Dorset EDG) was formed to investigate employment opportunities in Dorset. The clear direction this group received from community input and academic research was that agriculture and forestry represented the best areas to invest in if Dorset's economic decline was to be reversed.

To most thinking people in the area, that answer was stating the obvious.

In achieving agricultural growth, the limiting factor was overwhelmingly identified by the district's farmers as water. So in late 2007 Dorset EDG put forward the beginnings of a proposal for a major new irrigation scheme.

Coupled with this was the timely acknowledgement by Government in Australia that development of water storages around the nation was essential to drought proofing food production. \$220 million in State and Federal funding has been allocated to Tasmania specifically for this purpose.

Over many years, farmers in the North East have advocated the idea of harnessing winter rain for summer irrigation.

That makes perfect sense in Tasmania, where we receive more than 12% of the nation's rainfall over only 4% of the land mass. The case is particularly strong in the North East, where we have good farming land close to our highland water catchments.

Over the last 2 years, Dorset EDG has worked with the Tasmanian Government to investigate the basic feasibility of its proposal. Using independent expert advice, it has now been established that construction costs, farm economics, land suitability and environmental sustainability all pass preliminary tests.

The project has recently been handed over to the Tasmanian Irrigation Development Board (TIDB) for more detailed investigation.

The potential for environmental impacts as a result of building dams is an important issue, and so it should be.

The Assessment Committee for Dam Construction (ACDC) conducts extensive and detailed scrutiny of environmental management plans submitted as part of a dam application. Environmental issues are also subject to approval under state and federal legislation in place to protect threatened species. It is an exhaustive process which can take years to complete, and many individual farmers seeking to build dams give up because the compliance required is such a mammoth task

The dam approval process is hard but fair, it is exhaustively detailed, it is independent, expert based and robust in every way possible. If any site doesn't meet the requirements of this process, it will rightly be rejected.

The decision of the expert based ACDC to approve a dam should not be influenced unduly by vested interests, or by political pressure from its promoters. And neither should it be influenced by objectors over-stating the importance of manageable issues, or by opposition on frivolous or philosophical grounds.

Security of water is desperately needed by our farmers, and providing such security will bring massive economic benefits to the North East. Government assistance never seen before is on the table, and may never be repeated. A rigorous process is in place to protect the environment.

There is no good reason why we should not give these dams the opportunity to be independently assessed for approval.

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