

CASE STUDY: The History of Water Supply on the Central Coast

16. The Political Processes in the Mangrove Creek Dam decision

In Australia, there are three levels of Government responsible for decisions about water supply: Federal, State and Local government. In the case of the Mangrove Creek Dam decision in the mid seventies, Federal Government played only a minor role; it was mainly a matter for the NSW State parliament and the councils of Gosford and Wyong. Much of the debate occurred in the Chambers of the two Councils and amongst the public at large. Not everyone was happy about the decisions taken:

*"Sir,
Because of pressure from minority groups with a loud voice and a strong lobby, the proposal to dam the Colo River was abandoned.... The price for retaining this wilderness is now being paid by the people of the Central Coast who are desperately short of water...."*

(Letters to Editor, Sydney Morning Herald, 4 Oct 1980.)

*"Sir,
There is no doubt that the Central Coast is desperately short of water, but I doubt the reason given is the cause....Planning for the Central Coast, urged on by local councils has stepped on the treadmill of development... Despite the deliberately encouraged expansion of industry and urbanisation, the Mangrove Creek dam is unfinished and still to demonstrate its capacity to satisfy the imaginations of developers.... so why blame the Colo wilderness enthusiasts?..."*

(Letters to Editor, Sydney Morning Herald, 14 Oct 1980.)

ACTIVITY: The Role of State Government

Read the following account, along with Appendix 9. Then complete the activity below.

NSW State Parliament and the Mangrove Creek Dam decision

- During the 1970s, investigations by the NSW Department of Public Works into the need for new water supply infrastructure and the planning for the possibility of a dam on the upper Mangrove Creek began during the period of the Liberal-Country Party governments of Askin (1965-1975) and Lewis (1975-1976) and continued in the period of the Wran Labour government (1976-1986).
- Within State Parliament, one or two concerns were raised by individual members during the planning stages (see Appendix 9) but there was little substantial parliamentary debate concerning the various alternatives put forward by the Department Of Public Works.
- Support for the decision by the Wran government to provide for construction of the Mangrove Creek dam appears to have been bipartisan - i.e. neither major parties nor minor parties were opposed to its construction according to the record of the parliamentary debates of the time.
- On 14th August 1979, in his address to parliament, His Excellency the Governor, Sir Arthur Roden Cutler announced the appropriation of \$25 million for a 'dam on Mangrove Creek, near Gosford, for domestic water supply purposes'. The decision was met with approval by the opposition in parliament; the member for Young, The Hon. George Fraudenstein, representing the opposition, in his reply to the Governor's address, noted: 'the \$25 million water storage at Mangrove Creek near Gosford is one of the really desirable developments mentioned in the Governor's Speech.'
- By mid 1982, the dam had been completed and the Member for Tuggerah, Mr Harry Moore, representing the government benches, noted in parliament on 26 August:
'At the foot of the ranges, we have the new Mangrove Creek dam ... This dam has one-third the capacity of Sydney Harbour and it should ensure that in future we are not confronted by the dramatic situation of having to inform residents of drastic water restrictions. This was a joint venture of the Gosford City Council, the Wyong Shire Council and the State Government, at a cost of \$56 million, \$ 28 million of which was funded by the State Government for which I thank it.'

("NSW Parliamentary Debates")

QUESTION - The Debate

Assume that you were member of the NSW State Parliament in the late 1970s. Your task is to draft **two** "Questions Without Notice" to put to the Minister of Public Works concerning the planned Mangrove Creek Dam. One question should be written attacking the proposed dam. The other question should support the dam.



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