

Dear Editor

I write in response to your letter in the last issue, 'The Dunoon Dam – An "Expert" Opinion'.

You wrote, "Overall, let's place value on the opinions of the experts – and critically analyse who is actually a real expert for our situation."

I fully agree.

I'm not sure if any of the technical experts who investigated the Dunoon Dam specifically recommended it. However, those who prepared the most recent Terrestrial Ecology Impact Assessment for Rous in 2011 did say that more information would be required prior to building the dam. They wrote;

"In order to reach a stage where the overall potential impacts of the proposed dam can be understood in the context of the functioning of the ecosystem as a whole, and how this area fits into the catchment, it would be useful to review this report... as well as previous reports and develop a conceptual model of the ecosystem. This may also benefit from input from **experts and those with specialist local knowledge, as well as the community to integrate the current knowledge of this area and determine how it fits into the catchment as a whole.**"(1)

After Rous put their Future Water plan (including the dam) on display in 2020, additional information became available. Rous listened to experts such as Professor Stuart White (now Director of the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney). Prof White was involved with developing the first Rous Council Regional Demand Management Strategy. He emphasises the importance of implementing system-wide water efficiency.(2)

Rous listened to Professor Stuart Khan, Professor of Civil & Environmental Engineering at UNSW and Member of the Advisory Body to the National Water Grid Authority. He said, "A diversified water supply portfolio based on rainfall independent supplies offers the opportunity to provide resilience against drought as well as other potential water supply problems."(2)  
Dams are **rainfall dependent** water supplies.

Rous listened to those with specialist local knowledge (ecologists, economists, engineers, landcare groups, and the real cultural heritage experts of this area, the Widjabul Wia-bal traditional owners. The WW have said no to the dam when it was proposed (and rejected) before, and have now said it again.

You wrote, "It was a complete surprise to me that the recent decision-making process to remove the dam was in the hands of elected councillors, and that they could overturn the recommendations of the experts through a simple vote."

Why was this a surprise? The decision-making process IS in the hands of elected councillors. Their job is not simply to vote for or against an issue, according to numbers of "votes" from the community. It is to make the best decision possible, based on the available information. And rather than overturning the recommendations of experts, Rous took new expert information into account.

When Rous placed their Future Water plan on display in 2020, they invited submissions from the community. The point of submissions is for Rous to gain information to help them make decisions. Information was provided to Rous via submissions, and by other experts as mentioned above, which showed that a new dam was no longer the best option, due to our changing climate, and many other

reasons including the huge upfront cost which would be added to our water bills. Thus, Rous council voted to remove the dam.

Then, Rous's new Future Water plan (without the dam) was placed on display. Rous again called for submissions. A group called "Our Future Northern Rivers" (OFNR) which includes Austin Curtin, ex-Nationals candidate and Big Rob, Lismore Council hopeful, was formed. One of their methods was to go door to door, asking people to sign a petition to "save our dam". I'm sure I would have signed too if I had never considered the issue before and someone came to my door telling me that there would be a water shortage, or that my water would come from toilets, unless the Dunoon dam was built.

To summarise, Rous already had input from a wide range of experts. OFNR ran a well-funded campaign which they say was to "support the recommencement of work on the proposed Dunoon Dam option, so that reports may be completed which may result in the dam proposal being identified as a new water supply source to ensure long-term water supply security for the region." (3) However, no new information was provided to demonstrate why this should be done. The information which resulted in the dam being removed from the Future Water plan had not changed, and so the dam was not put back into the plan.

- (1) SMEC Australia, Dunoon Dam Terrestrial Ecology Impact Assessment, 2011, page 142  
[https://waternorthernrivers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Dunoon\\_Dam\\_Terrestrial\\_Ecology\\_Impact\\_Assessment.pdf](https://waternorthernrivers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Dunoon_Dam_Terrestrial_Ecology_Impact_Assessment.pdf)
- (2) <https://waternorthernrivers.org/what-the-experts-say/>
- (3) <http://www.ourfuturenorthernrivers.com/getinvolved.html>