

## **The Forgotten River**

Level 5 water restrictions loom for Brisbane but we are not addressing the basics. The delivery system for Brisbane's water is rotten and no-one seems to care. Ever wondered how water gets from Wivenhoe Dam, how it is delivered to the water treatment plants at Mt Crosby? Don't care? Well maybe you should. Let me explain about what we saw last week in a kayak trip from Wivenhoe dam.

Water is released from Wivenhoe dam by SEQ Water. Let's assume that it is of fairly good quality because it certainly looks and tastes pretty good. It then starts its journey down the Brisbane River to Mt Crosby. One would think in these dire times that all of the released water would end up at the treatment plants. Certainly none is allowed to flow over the weir. That's why the mud crabs are doing so well at the Moggill ferry but that's another story.

On the way there are lots of pumps. Not pumps that are closely monitored but some pumps that only the farmer knows about. There is at least one location where the amount of water pumped through the giant irrigator is so great that it won't even soak into the ground. It runs back into the river. But it seems it must be OK to waste this water, pumping in the heat of the day, because it is free. In Brisbane we might pay a dollar a tonne for it but here its cost is only the value of the power to the pump.

Some pumps are not electric. Some pumps are diesel. They are not small either. A six inch pump can power a pretty big spray. Bare paddocks all around, it is a sad and sorry sight. But near the giant spray, the grass is green, and the air feels cooler. A farmer can survive these tough times with river water access. He must do what he must do and whilst there is water for Brisbane there will be water for his grass, because it all flows past his property.

Then there is the Lowood water treatment plant. Of course the people of Lowood and Fernvale need water too. And naturally, what goes in must come out so three star water (not six star like the recycling plants under construction) flows back from the sewage treatment plants. The one at Fernvale must be OK though, because it is painted green and you wouldn't know what it was if you weren't in the business.

A bit of moderately treated human stuff is relatively unimportant in the scheme of things. The big faecal load comes from the cows. Cows shit in the river. In fact lots of cows shit in the river. It is interesting to watch a cow walk into the river. The cool water starts to cover the udders, then the lower belly and then the expected happens - a good gush of urine into the water to wash down the poop that you are going to drink.

Birds, ducks, geese, swans, goats, the list of what shits in your water is quite long. But that's not all. There is the biological degradation; the smelly, stinking underbelly of the water hyacinth. It looks pretty on the top with its luxuriant green colour and the wonderful purple flowers. But underneath it goes black, dirty and rotten. In places this can be a full kilometre long with no water to see, just the verdant green. But hey, guess what, this green comes at a cost. It uses lots of water. So not only is it polluting the water that is there, it is sucking it up like it is going out of style. You can watch these rafts growing. Give it another year or so and there won't be a river that you can see. It will just be all hyacinth and we will just have to hope that there is some left at the end for us.

It is not all negative of course. Brisbane City Council cleans up this water for us. They manufacture a product from it equal to any bottled water you can buy. They do this and

deliver it to the inside of your home for about a dollar a tonne. But for how long? Will it run out? Will it just cost more? How much more would we still have in Wivenhoe dam if we looked after the delivery system. We are currently at about 20%. Could it have been 21%, 25%, 30%? Could we have had more certainty that we could last until the Tugun desalination plant and the recycling plants come on line? I really don't know but I think it begs the question: what are the State Government and the Water Commission going to do about the pollution and wastage of water along the delivery route, and why did they let it happen?