



Media Release

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For immediate release

Opinion Piece for Newcastle Herald By Ron Robson, Chairman of Hunter Water

It is another long, hot, cloudless day in summer. You turn to your kitchen tap for a cool drink of fresh, clean Hunter Water. Imagine what your life would be like if, instead of water, your tap gave a gasp and a splutter and stayed dry.

Only last week The Herald reported that exact situation had become a reality for thousands of people in the Upper Hunter. They had already run dry and were relying on trucked water supplies.

While the Christmas gift for much of the state was soaking rains every summer the dry, dusty grip of drought brings into much clearer focus the need to protect the Lower Hunter's water supply from the worst effect of a prolonged dry.

The reality of life in the sunburnt country is that the gift of rain from above can never be relied on and the impact of climate change could make our dry land, drier still.

While running out of water might not be something on the top of everyone's mind, as chairman of Hunter Water that terrible prospect is never far from my thoughts.

As stewards of our region's water supply, our duty is clear. We must ensure the people of the lower Hunter never run out of water.

We know that in a drought our water supplies drop rapidly, so waiting until we are in trouble to take action will be way too little, way too late. Simply hoping and praying we never suffer a drought in this rapidly growing area will not work.

More than 40 years ago, we started work on plans to ensure our water security and the future of our children and grandchildren. In 2005, Hunter Water accelerated those plans in earnest as drought gripped Australia and uncertainty about the impact of climate change came to light.

Continued over page...

We determined that building Tillegra Dam, in conjunction with more recycling and increased water efficiency, is the best and most cost effective way to drought proof the lower Hunter for another 50 years.

Some people continue to kick up a stink about Tillegra Dam, but where is their rational argument and their better, cheaper solution? The small number of demonstrators who perform for the media outside Hunter Water's office claim they know what is best for us. If we run out of water, where will many of the anti-dam protestors be then? Long gone.

Should we ever run dry, the line of angry, people queuing up to complain will stretch from my office door all the way to Dungog.

We know something those against the dam rarely mention. If we don't build Tillegra Dam, the alternative is desalination. Almost every other water authority in the country is building a desalination plant right now because they are not fortunate enough to have a good dam site. Desalination will plunge Hunter Water customers into a whirlpool of construction costs, perpetual running expenses and significant environmental impacts.

Hunter Water has a proud tradition of leadership in water conservation and for investing wisely to meet our customer's long term interests.

I welcome a debate on Tillegra but I deplore the distortion of facts and selective use of quotes from documents, often unsigned or unauthorised. The latest, outrageous "spin" is that Hunter Water has hidden the cost of the dam.

Hunter Water's prices are transparently set by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART). In a year-long public process Hunter Water has always been open about the costs of Tillegra. Tillegra Dam is responsible for 8% of this year's water price increases to cover costs already incurred including land purchases, geotechnical surveys, environmental studies and design. It will represent 15% of total increases in 2012/13, about \$32 per year or 60 cents per week on the average bill.

Hunter Water bills are less than those of our neighbours on the Central Coast and in Sydney. The reality is they will be much higher if Tillegra is not built. Even the most conservative review will see the costs of making our region drought secure, double under the burden of desalination.

Hunter Water's expert staff and Board are not pursuing this dam because it is an easy option. No other practical alternative provides the same level of long-term drought security, for a reasonable cost.

Now is the time to get behind Tillegra Dam, so our children can grow up in a world with a secure water supply, confident in the knowledge that the hard decisions taken early in the 21st century set us up with enough water capacity to give those kids jobs, houses and a secure future.

As the days lengthen and the sun beats relentlessly, there will be relief - fresh Hunter Water, only as far away as your tap. Long may it be so.

-ENDS-

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