

TAMBORINE MOUNTAIN PROGRESS ASSOCIATION INC.

“Protecting the quality of living on Tamborine Mountain”

3rd March, 2015

Hon. Anthony J. Lynham,
Minister for Natural Resources and Mines,
P.O. Box 15216,
CITY EAST, Qld. 4002

Dear Dr. Lynham,

Water extraction on Tamborine Mountain.

Tamborine Mountain, atop a relatively small plateau and close to the two largest cities in Queensland surprisingly has no reticulated water. Since the mid 1800's successive generations of residents have relied on rain water from roofs which is topped up by bore water. Today, all residential buildings require a minimum tank size for roof water collection.

As far as water is concerned, the community is self reliant. To most residents (an estimated 90% of whom have arrived for a particular lifestyle), this state of affairs is satisfactory. It underpins the desired “semi-rural” expected lifestyle and answers a broad and long held concern for a population cap.

The mountain is home to nearly 7,000 residents and attracts approximately a million visitors each year. Our relatively small businesses are geared for tourists who expect a relaxed “non-urban” experience from otherwise busy and different lifestyles.

Surveys and questionnaires etc. bear out the expectations for both locals as well as visitors.

The mountain has approximately 1,000 bores, not all of which are currently active. Up to the mid nineties there were several small bore water extractors (with small haulage tankers) and these serviced the local and catchment areas with water, especially in times of drought.

These extraction sites have changed hands over time and together with other bores have become the source of an ever expanding commercial water extraction industry.

Nearly two decades ago residents began to express concerns that water was being extracted and sold off the mountain. This concern increased, especially during the recent seven year drought when residents were lining up for top up water deliveries. Families with children were most affected.

Today we have about six commercial water extractors. Several have only Minor Public Utility permits. Two extractors do service local needs.

About a decade ago, the then Beaudesert Shire Council permitted conditions for a number of the extractors to remove large commercial quantities of water for sale. A variety of individual conditions (for Minor Public Utility permit holders and others) was allowed. These set out tanker movements per week, etc.

After much pressure from the community, the Scenic Rim Regional Council is currently checking that compliance has been occurring and just what all the operators have been doing.

This has come about after local residents did a 24/7 one week monitor of tanker movements on and off the mountain. The result suggested that a great deal more water was being shipped off the mountain than would show up on Council's books.

To compound the whole problem, the mountain has been involved in a long running court case involving proposed industrial sized commercial water extraction in a quiet leafy residential street.

In 2009, in response to complaints from residents about loss of amenity, noise and road damage, Council moved to close down the Gillion Pty. Ltd. operation as being unlawful. In the Planning & Environment Court, Council was granted a declaration that the use of the land was unlawful (Court Application 2608/2009).

With the granting of about twenty extensions, Gillion Pty. Ltd. was able to continue trading for several years.

In 2011 Gillion Pty. Ltd. submitted a Development Application seeking to declare an unlawful operation to be lawful. Council subsequently refused the Development Application and the matter went on to the P & E Court. (Appeal 4506/2011).

In May 2013, The Gillion appeal was refused, mainly on planning grounds.

An appeal to the High Court was also lost, with the judge supporting the grounds in the judgement of the P & E Court.

In 2014, basically the same Development Application has again been lodged with Scenic Rim Regional Council with emphasis on “economic need” and planning scheme compliance. (D A MCBd 14/070)

During the initial gazettal stage of the 2011 application, over 900 residents lodged objections to the Development Proposal. Currently, the community is again gearing up to respond in the new gazettal period, 5th to 27th March.

Anecdotal evidence suggests the other large commercial extractors are being kept in the loop and residents are reporting that further bore owners, as yet not operating commercially, are waiting in the wings for the Gillion water case to be finally decided. Needless to say, big money is at stake.

Meanwhile, people are getting crankier, there is talk of civil disobedience and there is general dismay at the lack of regulation by relevant government bodies.

Sustainability - In Federal law there is something called the “precautionary principle”. This maintains that people should not be denied a basic resource, the threat of which is not necessarily proven.

Gillion Pty Ltd proposes to withdraw approx. 28 million litres per annum. This is approximately the amount to fill a 7.9 acre lake one metre deep. This is just for one business alone. Some other extractors remove even more. Reportedly it takes 26 years for rainfall to reach the aquifer contained in the mountain’s five layers of volcanic basalt with unknown pockets of unknown quantities of water.

Whilst the horse has bolted to some extent, it is important to curtain any further expansion of an industry situated in the wrong place. At the base of the mountain, east, north and west, there are ample supplies of spring water quite close to the surface. This is not to mention other areas not critical to the survival of large populations, especially if they have reticulated water which the mountain does not have.

This organization asks the State Government to support the Tamborine Mountain community in its herculean struggle to protect and maintain a much valued and essential natural resource.

Yours sincerely,

Jeanette Lockey,
Hon. President, Tamborine Mountain Progress Association

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cc: Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk, MP
Premier, Queensland