

In a 2004 ABC radio national talk back session Steve Austin spoke to a local resident ("A") and then to the then Minister for Natural Resources, Stephen Robertson. The following edited conversation should resonate with residents today.

SA How would you feel if you didn't know if you were on a limited water supply and you were watching people in your community, your neighbourhood selling off their water to big business? Well this is apparently what's happening at Mt. Tamborine. We're hearing this summer is gearing up to be a nasty bushfire season.Now Andrew is a Mt. Tamborine resident, one of a number relying on aquifer bore water. He's noticed his water supply is slowing down and is concerned about the amount of water being trucked off the mountain and he joins me this morning.

(to local resident).....what's happening? What do you use water for now?

A Well, people on the mountain including myself use it for personal use. We pump it from bores into tanks for personal use, drinking water, etc. but also it is used, certainly on my property, for irrigation of some small crops. I've got a four acre property up here and I have avocado trees and coffee as a plantation, and we use water for those crops.
.....

SA And is your water supply strong?

A Not from the bore it's not. It's certainly been very intermittent over the period of the last two to two and a half years, partly due to the drought I'm sure, but also due to the amount of water that is taken out off the mountain by various water contractors.

SA Now what's happening? - contractors are being allowed to come in and mine for water from the bores, and they're selling it onto a company like Coca Cola Amatl, as I understand it....

A That's as I understand it as well. There's certainly water contractors that supply local residents – they have a small truck, maybe a 10,000 litre truck that they go to top up those residents that don't have a bore on their property, for example. That's one step. That's the local supply if you like. But there is certainly a large amount of water that is trucked off the mountain for use in soft drink manufacturing, bottled water manufacturing, and also,, as I understand it, in a brewery.. ..

SA Now we've been told there's reports on Mt. Tamborine of removal of (*unclear*) of water each week going. Is that right?

A As far as I understand it that is correct. certainly everybody who commutes off the mountain to go to work, either on the Gold Coast or Brisbane, the number of times they get stuck behind a very large stainless steel container truck trucking water down the hill, either going up or down, is very frequent. There's no question about it; and these are large trucks, 20,000 to 25,000 litres a load.

SA Now Mt. Tamborine is a pretty lush green place.

A Yes, it is, and it's a beautiful place.....the first declared national park in Qld is on Tamborine Mountain.

SA It doesn't strike me as the sort of place that looks as if it is short of water.

A Well it certainly is short of water. There's no question about it. I've certainly been in touch with a number of people that live around the area I do, and live right across the mountain; and they're certainly finding that their water supplies are gradually drying up. Just before I came on your programme I went out to check the bore out the from of my place and it's down to an absolute trickle. Probably less than 100 litres an hour..

SA Have you raised this with your local councillor?

A Yes indeed, and I think one of the greatest issues with council is that they're trying as best they can to sort out how to get water into various residences. The population is growing up here. It's about six thousand at the moment. There are new houses being built every day. There are new people coming to the mountain every day, and the council has done something in the sense that they've mandated additional water supplies – so people when they build a new house have to put in additional tanks, but that's still not enough to be able to supply the requirements of the mountain, both in a personal sense and from the sense of the small agricultural industries that are up here.

Steve Austin then interviewed Stephen Robertson, Minister for Natural Resources, Mines & Energy.

- SA Stephen Robertson, is there anything that prevents people selling bore water in an area like that and selling it off to commercial enterprises - to a brewery, soft drink manufacturers, trucking it off the mountain?
- SR Good morning Steve. In the case of the Tamborine community there isn't at this stage anything to stop that kind of activity. The reason for that is that the Tamborine area is not a declared ground water area. If it was there would be appropriate monitoring in place and appropriate allocation provided to residents and similarly with people such as *(the man just interviewed)* who also needs water to irrigate their crops.
- SA So it's not a declared ground water area, so it's not being monitored by your department?
- SR There is some history to this Steve. In fact I'm aware a number of years ago my department met with the Tamborine Mountain Progress Association to discuss, firstly, declaring the area as a declared ground water area, and then a couple of years later, looking at putting in place a community based monitoring system to provide the data necessary that would inform the community and government about how much water is being used and the sustainability of the ground water resource.
- SA .It seems from the resident's anecdotal information as someone who does use ground water to water his trees, etc., that it's down to a trickle today. Have you heard anecdotally through your department that there's a diminishing water supply on Tamborine?
- SR Well certainly there's been a fair bit of correspondence over the last few years because as we all know, we've been through a pretty tough drought on the Gold Coast. So the resource has been under pressure principally because of the drought conditions and as we know, over the last number of months there's been very little to nil rainfall in S E Queensland. I imagine that the principle cause for the diminution in the resource is principally caused by those on-going dry conditions. But having said that, Steve, it hadn't been brought to my attention until today about this exporting of water for commercial purposes. And that is something I would like to have a look at, because I think a number of things come out of those activities that raise concerns similar to those expressed by the local resident.
- SA So you give a commitment to at least have a good look at the sale of water to soft drink companies, and the beer brewery, where the water is being trucked from Mt. Tamborine for commercial purposes?
- SR Well, I think that would be appropriate. You had a discussion yesterday with the Lord Mayor of Brisbane about my S
E Qld water supply strategy document and how we need to plan in the long term for sustainable water supplies right throughout SEQld. I've also just recently released, as you know, the discussion paper on appropriate water charges. So these two documents do set the scene, I believe, for us to have a look at what is going on up in Tamborine. I should say, Steve, that I have, or my department has, in place a quite detailed water resources planning process going on throughout Queensland. We haven't yet got to that part of SEQld; we will be doing that in the next couple of years. But the important part of that water resource planning process is to find out how much water is being used by whom and for what purpose, and how much do we need to keep to our rivers and our aquifers to ensure their long term health. An important component of that is gathering the right amount of data and I was really pleased to succeed in getting \$5,000,000 extra this year to put in place enhanced water monitoring, right across Queensland, and...
- SA Will you put some of that money towards Mt. Tamborine?
- SR Well, I was just about to say that, Steve, that I think that's something I really need to have a close look at, and I'd invite the local resident to get in contact with me or my office with his concerns and I'd be more than happy to have a look at them.
- SA Well, we might see if we can facilitate that.....Thanks for your time Minister *(Stephen Robertson, Minister for Natural Resources, Mines & Energy)*