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Dams condemned by farmers, environmentalists and scientists

The Queensland Coordinator General has last Friday released draft terms of reference for Environmental Impact Statements for increasing the size of the [Burdekin Falls Dam](#) and construction of a new [Urannah Dam](#) both of which are in the Burdekin River basin in North Queensland.

The projects have become increasingly controversial, with farmers, scientists and environmentalists raising serious concerns about the consequences of reducing the flow of water in Australia's second largest river basin.

A Queensland Government owned corporation, Sunwater, has proposed to raise the height of the Burdekin Falls Dam by up to six metres which will reduce the volume of water flowing downstream to the river mouth.

This week, a prominent farmer, Mario Barbagello, [called on the Queensland Government to fund water efficiency improvements](#) rather than raising the dam wall. He said that the cost of creating a bigger dam would be borne by farmers already struggling with low sugar prices.

Farmers are also worried that a bigger dam would reduce the number of high flow events that are essential for recharging groundwater that farmers rely upon.

[James Cook University scientist, Dr Eric Wolanski, also spoke out this week](#) about the impact dams are having on the internationally important wetlands at Bowling Green Bay south of Townsville. The sand spit that protects the bay is being eroded because of the lack of sand replenishment from the Burdekin River. He said that increasing the size of dams or building new ones will lead to even more rapid decline of the Ramsar listed wetland.

The Urannah Dam, west of Mackay, has been put forward at least 19 times since the early 1960s but has never been supported by a sound economic case.

This month, Mackay Conservation Group released [a reassessment of the preliminary business case for the Urannah Dam](#) which shows that [the dam will generate as little as 26 cents for every dollar it costs](#).

Environmentalists, Terri and Robert Irwin, owners of Australia's Zoo, have called for the Urannah Dam to be scrapped because it will destroy the most important habitat of the unique Irwin's Turtle.

The turtle was discovered by the famed naturalist Steve Irwin and his father Bob in 1990. [Ongoing research is being conducted](#) to find out more about its population and range. [Robert Irwin said that "out of respect for Dad"](#) who spent his life searching for and describing the turtle, the dam should not go ahead.



North Queensland Conservation Council

... the voice for the environment in North Queensland

North Queensland Conservation Council Campaigns Manager, Simon Cheers, said “These are just two of the four dam proposals that are currently being touted for the Burdekin River basin. If all of them are built, we won’t see a drop of water flowing at the river mouth.

“We could easily see another disaster like the Murray-Darling in Northern Australia. It’s essential that there is a thorough assessment of the capacity of the river system to support life, especially with the uncertainties that will arise with climate change.

“In our view, more water could be made available for farmers if the government supported water efficiency investment rather than building new dams.”

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More information about the Urannah Dam can be found at <https://www.mackayconservationgroup.org.au/urannah>, <https://urannah.com.au>, and https://www.nqcc.org.au/burdekin_basin

Contacts

Simon Cheers (Townsville) 0474 293 839

Peter McCallum (Mackay) 0402 966 560

North Queensland Conservation Council Inc.

Street Address: 114 Boundary St, Railway Estate Qld 4810

Postal Address: PO Box 364 Townsville City Qld 4810

Ph: (07) 4700 4978 | Mob: 0428 987 585 | www.nqcc.org.au | ABN: 55 903 033 286