



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES
Ms Tara Cheyne MLA (Chair), Miss Candice Burch MLA (Deputy Chair), Mr James Milligan

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the supply of water to the Tharwa Community

Submission Number: 20

Date Authorised for Publication: 05 December 2019

2019 Tharwa Water Supply Submission

Myles Gostelow



Tharwa ACT 2620

2 December 2019

The Rural Village of Tharwa is in desperate need of a reliable water supply. No question about that.

It is our hope that this inquiry will go a long way to seeing that Tharwa Village is delivered a vital piece of infrastructure that has tangible benefits to its residents.

To date the delivery of this proposed infrastructure by the ACT Government has been nothing short of shambolic.

There are people from the various Government departments who have been given a job to do. This job was to assess and establish the need for, then deliver, a Reliable Non Potable Water Supply for Fire Fighting purposes to the Tharwa community. More than two years on we find ourselves no closer to having this essential infrastructure in the Village while we face yet again another frighteningly bad summer fire season.

People need to be held accountable if their actions, inactions or incompetency lead to death or injury in a work place, on our roads or any other place for that matter and I believe the same applies here.

People involved with the project have had ample opportunity to take on board advice from the community who's safety is directly affected by the effective provision of the proposed infrastructure.

I have had several detailed and sometimes robust discussions with TCCS employees about what infrastructure we need as much as I have said what we don't need. These types of conversations and views have also been clearly articulated by other community members at several so called community consultation meetings.

It seems that these views, sound logical and practical advice from myself and the Tharwa community have not been given the consideration they deserve. If they had we would not be in a situation where more than two years on we are no closer to having the infrastructure we need and a considerable amount of public money has been wasted in the process of getting here. We are currently in danger of being delivered water supply infrastructure that is flawed on many levels for the purpose to which it is supposed to serve and it would have a negative impact on the Tharwa Village according to the guidelines set out by the TMP.

I would like the committee to ask questions as to why this has happened.

Was the brief given to the project team too restrictive, if infrastructure was only permissible on government land?

Has the consultation process and sharing of information been conducted in an open transparent way?

What is stopping the government from leasing land (the land owner is willing to do this) and installing gravity fed water tanks on the community's preferred site on the hill behind the Village out of site?

Should the Government be planning for the future and considering a potable water supply for Tharwa residents? Was this something that should have been addressed in the Tharwa Master Plan (TMP) a few years ago?

We recently had a community meeting where the ESA's Five Year fire management plan was explained and one of the key points that was discussed around bushfire and asset protection was the suppression of embers and reducing fuel loads and ignition points around the house. I made a point of asking that this be repeated, as a resident needs a reliable supply of water to do this. Fire protection is not just about hydrants and trucks.

This year the country has seen more and more devastating wild fires and there is no doubt that a lack of water for firefighting and moisture in the vegetation are huge contributing factor to the asset losses that have occurred.

Tharwa and its residents has been in bad fire situations before and we know what actions we need to take and the planning needed to help ourselves.

Tharwa Water Supply

Tharwa residents currently used water from the Murrumbidgee river, rain water tanks, bores or have it trucked in.

These are some options that I think should be considered, keeping in mind that any development of infrastructure needs to be consistent with the Tharwa Master Plan in retaining the rural village look and feel.

- Large water tanks should be positioned on the hill above the Village and behind the current fire shed. These can be filled with water pumped from the river which will then be gravity fed to the community and fire shed. If work needs to be done in the river to reduce the problems presented by sand and silt this can be achieved. I see no advantage in the proposed primary use of bore water for the Village water supply. It should be a back-up supply only and this is just because the bore has already been sunk, right in the middle of what was our Village green.

The Bore water is hard and contains too many minerals, salts and calcium which will result in unnecessary costs in maintenance for firefighting pumps taps and fittings. It is also far less potable than the non-potable river water which can be filtered clean.

- The only other option is to pipe town water from Banks or the high pressure water main on the Western side of the river at Point Hut. The Point Hut option could see the inclusion of water fill points on Tidbinbilla road closer to where Canberra's fire threat is likely to come from. This would give units quicker access to water and return times back to any fire to the West.

The main fear I see with using the town water option is that it will only be justified by the Government if they saw further residential development follow.

Whatever the water supply we end up with it can be metered and fairly distributed to the residents so we can actually use it to **prepare our homes and assets for and defend them in the event of a bush fire.**

As I understand it, the project outcome was destined to fall short from the start. Apparently his brief from the Government only permitted infrastructure to be

developed on Government owned land. The problem with this is that it places all potential sites for the water tanks on the river flat or as is currently proposed smack bang in the middle of the Village. As a designer maker who works to a brief regularly I suggested at that start that his brief needs to change or he will be unable to deliver what is in the best interest of his client, (the Tharwa Community).

This didn't happen and as a result Tharwa Village stands to be negatively impacted if the current proposal were to go ahead. This would leave a large modern industrial piece of infrastructure right in the middle of our small Village.

The available sites on Government land are inappropriate for the delivery of the infrastructure needed for a number of good reasons.

First and foremost the use of any water from storage tanks at these sites would require a pump of some sort. Electricity is often the first service to fail in the event of a fire as we know from experience. This leaves a diesel pump which has its own issues from an environmental, point especially for residents who would have to put up with the noise and smell.

The current proposed infrastructure will not supply water directly to the residents which flies in the face of recommendations by the ESA who say this is one of the keys to asset protection.

There is also the issue of being cost effective to use.

The TMP recommendations state that we need to enhance and preserve the rural character and feel of the historic village. \$26m + was spent to rebuild the Historic Tharwa Bridge and keep it like for like, in doing so preserving the Village green and the main entry into Tharwa. We are keen to see that this is not spoiled by the building of poorly located modern infrastructure.

There is a great deal of value in keeping some of our rich rural history in tact this was why the Lanyon basin was established in the early 80's.

The best option for Tharwa is to have at least 2 Large storage tanks on the hill above the fire shed, which can be filled and gravity would do all the work from there. New pipelines could be laid to distribute water to all residents and the firefighting outlets.

A response put by TCCS to this suggestion was that it would not meet the standards for water pressure needed for urban tankers. To counter this if the pressure was an issue, it could be remedied by installing an electric/diesel pump that was gravity fed which could be used by the urban fire trucks if they ever needed to tap into one of the proposed fire hydrants. The local brigade will have no problem using a quick-fill standpipe to fill trucks and units as we did in 2003. This would be done at the shed where you check gear change over crews and gather information during a fire situation.

Another argument given against this site was that it is in a more vulnerable position for a fire threat. This is an insult to the integrity of our brigade and is a week excuse at best.

There are many more points that I could put in favor of the site above the Village but I feel I would only be repeating on the main ones I have already put.

This is an issue that is extremely important and needs to be resolved promptly. We are already 2 years behind where we could be and I would guess a couple of hundred thousand dollars down the drain but fortunately we have not had a fire to deal with again YET.

Fire management and environmental issues are areas we could all spend a little more time thinking about before, rather than after the fact. I for one do don't what to see entire communities placed in a position where their only option is to leave and come back once their homes have burned just because poor decisions have been made by authorities on their behalf.

**WE ARE ALL RESPONSIBLE AND HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR OUR ACTIONS IN THE
END**

I attach a recent letter to Minister Chris Steel that I wrote prior to learning that there was to be an inquiry. I hope this goes some way to demonstrating how strongly we feel about our Village and the importance of having the water infrastructure we need to protect ourselves.

From: Myles Gostelow [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, September 16, 2019 12:36 PM
To: 'steel@act.gov.au' <steel@act.gov.au>
Subject: Tharwa Water supply for Fire fighting purposes.

Good Afternoon Minister Steel,

Firstly I would like to say thank you for your presentation at the City of Trees Synthesis Workshop at the ANU on Thursday.

I was sitting next to you and as a local Fine Furniture Designer Make I am very keen to see that many of the good ideas and discussions had over the two days can result in a much better use of what is a valuable natural resource.

Unfortunately I didn't get the opportunity to discuss the issue of Tharwa's proposed water supply with you in person. I didn't think it was the appropriate time to do so.

I did speak briefly with your colleague Shane Rattenbury on Friday and he was intending to discuss it with you at a meeting later that afternoon.

So in short here is the story to date;

Canberra Transport and City Services have been charged with delivering a non-potable water supply and associated infrastructure for Firefighting purposes for the Tharwa Village.

This project would see the biggest spend of tax payers money in Tharwa since the \$26m rebuild of the Tharwa Bridge.

This infrastructure is much needed and is crucial to our communities ability to defend our homes and the wider community from the ever present threat and increasing risk of bush fires.

I am a member of the Southern Brigade and was actively involved with local efforts in the 03 fires. I also have a rural background, am a very practical person and my occupation as a designer maker requires working to a brief and problem solving almost every day. I consider myself well qualified to raise a number of serious concerns I, and the Tharwa community share, relating to the manner in which this project is being handled and what it stands to deliver.

From the very start the community have been insistent on the need for the Water tanks to be placed on the hill above the Fire shed and Village (current location).

This is for a number of very good reasons.

*Firstly this enables the system to be gravity fed. Pump the water once to the tanks from the River or the (newly installed bore) and it can be accessed without the need for power or a diesel pump. Power is one of the first things to go in a bushfire situation. A pump can still be fitted if greater pressure is needed to meet Urban Tanker standards.

* This location is out of the public view and fits with the Tharwa Master plan guidelines to retain and enhance the rural heritage feel of the Village. This is something we consider very important and have consistently tried to keep. For example the fight to retain the look of the Tharwa Bridge.

*The landholder of our preferred site is willing to negotiate the license or sale of the required space to the ACT Government for the infrastructure.

*This site would also make it much easier for residence to be connected to a reliable water supply in order to maintain gardens and wet down assets in preparation for a fire threat. Tharwa has no potable water supply.

There have been several community engagement sessions where the views and wishes of the community have been very articulately put to the Project manager Jason Hunter. I have also had several discussions with Jason over the past two years to try and help him see the delivery of a truly worthwhile project on behalf of the government.

Unfortunately given the latest update the Tharwa Community Association have had from City Services and seeing the works being conducted in the Village it is clear that we are in danger of being delivered infrastructure that will be of very little use for its design intent and will have great negative impacts on the village, at great cost not only in dollar terms to the Canberra tax payer but also to Tharwa.

The main concern that I have is that the ACT Government is in danger of missing an opportunity to deliver a great piece of much needed infrastructure to our community and instead we will get a substandard solution with negative impacts to our community at great cost to the tax payer.

There was an article in the Canberra Times on Sep 15 by Jasper Lindell that gives you some sense of the frustration that we as a community feel.

From the two days I spent at the City Tree Synthesis Workshop talking with and listening to a wide range people from the private and government sector it was clear that in order to solve some of the challenges we face it requires a strong working relationship between all members of the wider community.

The value of meaningful interaction and transparency with members of the community, is so important for the government to deliver positive and value for money outcomes.

Tharwa Village is unique and needs to be valued as such.

Our community feel we have the solutions to the current situation and are willing to help see the best use of public money deliver the best possible outcomes.

We just need our voices and concerns to be listened to and acted on by the team that are coordination this particular government project.

We feel that they are taking the easy option and do not want to extend the design brief to include securing private land to build vital infrastructure and get the best possible results..

I would like to invite you out to Tharwa on behalf of the Tharwa Community to discuss these concerns and give you a better idea of what we are talking about if you are able to make yourself available.

I appreciate your time and look forward to your response. If you would like to call and talk directly with me first my number and contact details are below.

Thanks again.

Regards Myles