

## Lake Pedder – the Case for Restoration

Revised April 2010 by Pedder 2000 Inc., the Lake Pedder Restoration Committee (LPRC)

The proposed restoration of Lake Pedder is a highly significant project that would attract a great deal of positive international attention to Australia. By demonstrating that Australians are willing to make major environmental investments for their future and can undo mistakes of the past, the project would greatly enhance Australia's reputation and ability to speak authoritatively on environmental and cultural issues. The current global political climate is highly favourable to this type of transforming, "soft power" initiative.

Restoration is envisaged as a national project – funded nationally, located in Tasmania, drawing on the skills and enthusiasm of all Australians, benefiting all Australians

In addition to this national dimension, we outline in the following passages other key arguments that constitute the case for restoration.

### **Pedder is Australia's Outstanding Potential Eco-tourism Infrastructure Project**

The restoration of Lake Pedder would be a compelling news story throughout the duration of the project. Once the lake was again in a state where it could be opened to visitors as a natural world heritage site of global significance, it would therefore have been comprehensively publicised. From that point, we estimate its ongoing drawing power as an iconic landscape with an extraordinary history to be at least equivalent to Uluru, the Blue Mountains or the Kimberley.

There would also be pressure to make the site available for events of national cultural significance. In the long term, the potential of the project to continually draw tourists to Australia is huge.

Human visitation is of course, a threat to such a sensitive environment. A comprehensive management plan would need to be developed and substantial investment made in transport infrastructure, accommodation and visitor facilities outside the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area boundary but associated with the lake in order to maximize the potential for eco-tourism while protecting the natural values of the site.

### **Basslink and National Power Grid make Energy Loss a National Issue**

The 1995 Commonwealth House of Representatives inquiry was strongly influenced by the Tasmanian Government's high cost projections, predicated on energy loss calculations, an echo of the hostile reaction traditionally encountered whenever Tasmania's official economic strategy of hydro-industrialisation has been scrutinised:

"there would be a significant net cost to the Tasmanian community. It is opposed by the [Tasmanian] government and the major opposition in Tasmania and under these circumstances has no real prospect of proceeding in the foreseeable future."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From the Summary, Australian Government House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts, Inquiry into the Proposal to Drain and Restore Lake Pedder, June 1995

Today, a significant part of the electricity generated from the Gordon Dam and the "new lake Pedder", is provided as peak-load power that is exported to Victoria via the Basslink Interconnector, a seabed cable that enabled Tasmania to join the National Energy Market (NEM) in 2005. The NEM provides the foundation for a truly national approach to efficiently generating, distributing and selling electricity and funding electricity generation and distribution infrastructure.

In this context, a comprehensive and disinterested analysis is required to establish the amount of electricity generated by the waters drawn from the present Huon-Serpentine impoundment and its percentage contribution to the national electricity load, historically and estimated for future years

When the current and future energy losses and their costs are accurately identified, a case could be made for funding the required compensatory generation capacity, which may prove to be (surprisingly to some) quite low (possibly as little as 1% of Tasmania's capacity). The Commonwealth's Infrastructure Fund or Future Fund could, conceivably provide a dedicated wind power farm or geothermal power station (with pilot project potential) to offset the losses in a carbon-neutral manner.

### **Restoration is Technically Feasible and will Receive Positive Attention Globally**

(i) "All major features of the original beach and dune systems are intact. Accumulation of sediment over the original beach is slight, no more than a few millimeters."<sup>2</sup>

(ii) "Technically it is feasible to drain the present impoundment and restore the original lake."<sup>3</sup>

(iii) "We may reasonably expect that almost from Day 1, many of the best-loved scenes of Lake Pedder will again be on view. The lake basin itself is robust and almost certainly remains intact. Any intervention in the restorative process around the lake shore will have to be very carefully planned well in advance. The impact of two decades of ill-considered impoundment has been of little consequence to the landforms."<sup>4</sup>

If the current impoundment is merely drained, there will be a need for human interference in areas where erosion requires stabilization (such as the rim of the impoundment).

However it is realistic to assume that with its essential structures and landforms remaining *in situ* and relatively intact, the bed of the impoundment located as it is in the predominantly weed-free South-West wilderness, can be left largely to natural re-seeding and recolonisation.

The LPRC recommends that after they are breached, the three Huon-Serpentine dams be left *in situ*, thus reducing the cost of restoration.

The draining of the present impoundment, the rediscovery of the original landscape and its ecological restoration will be a most spectacular event that will be observed, studied, visited and interpreted by very large numbers of ecologists, other scientific experts and informed people from Australia and overseas. The project provides an outstanding opportunity to establish in Tasmania a world class Centre for Excellence in Ecological Restoration.

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<sup>2</sup> Professor Peter Tyler, Lake Pedder. A Geophysical Survey, May 1993

<sup>3</sup> From the Summary, Australian Government House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts, Inquiry into the Proposal to Drain and Restore Lake Pedder, June 1995

<sup>4</sup> Dr Kevin Kiernan, Geomorphological Report to Pedder Study Group, 1994

## **Subsequent Environmental Assessment has Verified the Significance of the Lake**

When Lake Pedder was flooded, no proper assessment was made of its environmental and aesthetic significance. Work done – at the time of its flooding by professionals excluded from the political process, and subsequently – has enabled a true assessment to be made of its extraordinary value. For example, the geomorphologist Dr Kevin Kiernan has written:

"There is nothing...that even approaches Lake Pedder in terms of morphology and genesis...it is a very, very special feature on a world scale..."<sup>5</sup>

In view of these findings, the flooding appears as a most serious error that could not be perpetrated in contemporary Australia, and restoration a highly appropriate and worthwhile response.<sup>6</sup>

## **There is a World Heritage Imperative**

Lake Pedder, regarded as the heart of South-West Tasmania, is considered to be "the jewel" of the South-West. For this reason the impoundment was retained within the TWWHA.

(i) "If implemented the proposal would enhance the world heritage values of the Tasmanian World Heritage Area."<sup>7</sup>

(ii) "The General Assembly of [International Union for the Conservation of Nature] IUCN CALLS UPON the Tasmanian State Government and the Government of Australia to investigate the feasibility of (a) the restoration of the original Lake Pedder and REQUESTS the Director General to make available relevant technical expertise and advice to achieve the restoration."<sup>8</sup>

(iii) "As it sits now the lake [the Huon-Serpentine storage] is an insult upon the land. We initially thought it should be excised from the existing World Heritage site but our 1989 evaluation foreshadowed the eventual prospect of restoration and on that remote (at that time) prospect we left it in. On earth in general and in Tasmania in particular it is time for healing. I would hope this process can begin with the successful restoration of Lake Pedder."<sup>9</sup>

## **The Huon-Serpentine Impoundment may be Unsafe**

The Edgar Fault underlies the Huon Plains in the vicinity of the Scotts Peak dam and was the site of major seismic activity in the 1880s. Professor Sam Carey (Geology, UTAS 1946-76) warned Hydro Tasmania before his death in 2002 that there is a real possibility of more seismic activity along this secondary fault line within 200 years of the last major activity. Well into this 200 year period, it is doubtful the Tasmanian Government has a contingency plan. To some degree, there is therefore, a public safety imperative to drain the water from behind this vulnerable structure.

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<sup>5</sup> From Chapter 3, Australian Government House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts, Inquiry into the Proposal to Drain and Restore Lake Pedder, June 1995

<sup>6</sup> Sharples C. (ed.) Lake Pedder: Values and Restoration. Occasional Paper No. 27 Centre for Environmental Studies, UTAS.

<sup>7</sup> From the Summary, Australian Government House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts, Inquiry into the Proposal to Drain and Restore Lake Pedder, June 1995

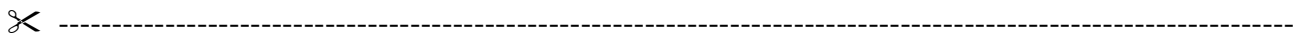
<sup>8</sup> (IUCN), 19th Session, Buenos Aires, Jan 1994

<sup>9</sup> Jim Thorsell Senior Advisor, Natural Heritage IUCN, 1995

### Environmentally Motivated Modification of Hydraulic Engineering Artifacts is Normative

Critics of the proposal to restore Lake Pedder may not be aware that there are many campaigns throughout the world aimed at modifying or decommissioning dams for a range of environmental reasons. Some have already succeeded and others are close to success. For example:

- in 1999, the Edwards Dam was removed from the Kennebec River in Maine USA after the Federal government ruled that the benefits of a free-flowing river outweighed the benefits of the dam and ordered its removal. This was followed in 2008 by the removal of the Fort Halifax Dam in Winslow, which blocked the mouth of the Sebasticook River, the Kennebec's largest tributary; see: [http://www.nrcm.org/issue\\_edwardsdam.asp](http://www.nrcm.org/issue_edwardsdam.asp)
- significant environmental flows (> 20%) previously dedicated to hydro electricity generation and inland irrigation have been withdrawn from Lake Jindabyne and restored to the Snowy River in New South Wales and Victoria; see: *Claire Miller. Snowy River Story: the grassroots campaign to save a national icon.* Sydney ABC Books 2005
- a long running campaign in the Pacific Northwest of the USA has led to a draft agreement that will lead to the removal of four large dams on the Klamath River by 2020 and the restoration of a 300 mile migratory route for salmon; see: <http://www.klamathriver.org/media/pressreleases/PR-092909.html>



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