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Pumping water river to river 'a failure'

The Eurobodalla Shire Council's attempt to supplement water shortages by pumping from the Mongarlowe River was a failure, because the pumped water was not reaching its destination, according to three leading conservationists.

The conservationists, who include poet Judith Wright, have claimed little or no water from the \$100,000 scheme was reaching its intended destination in the Buckenboursa River, because it was being soaked up on its journey over 37 kilometres of dry river bed.

A spokesperson for the Conservation Council of the South-East Region and Canberra, Ms Rosemary Walters, said the decision to pump the water bypassed normal procedures.

"People who walked down the stream recently found that, after seven kilometres, the water disappeared up a fault area, and even the shire engineer estimates that only 10 per cent of the water could be arriving," Ms Walters said.

Poet Judith Wright, who lives near Braidwood in the affected area, said that, when residents living along the Mongarlowe first heard of the council's scheme to pump water from the river to the top of the coastal range, it seemed impossible to believe that the idea could really be accepted.

"We knew that it was an unprecedented and untested idea, that no proper research had been done into whether any of the water taken from the Mongarlowe would actually reach the storage.

"We also knew that neither the then Shire President nor the Chief Engineer thought the water would really make a difference to the water crisis or would commit themselves to saying any of it would get to where it was supposed to go.

"It was reported in 1980 that the estimate of costs for the installation of the pump and its related services was \$100,000 without flood-proofing — which would add a lot more to the expense," she said.

Dr D. Ingle Smith, senior fellow at the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies at the ANU and a geographer specialising in water-flow studies commented that taking three megalitres of water a day from the Mongarlowe in most years would have little effect on its flow or on users downstream.

"But, in drought years, such as the present one, the flow itself fell well below three megalitres of water a day — the implications are obvious," he said.

He said a sensible water management strategy would set a minimum flow level below which there could be no removal of water by pumping.

"Such a level might be six megalitres a day," he said.

Jurors discharged



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