



Australian Citizens Party

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Build Hells Gates Dam now!

The Burdekin River is Australia's largest river by peak discharge volume. It is upon this North Queensland river the nation awaits the construction of Hells Gates Dam, the centrepiece of a new Bradfield Scheme. Floodwaters diverted west of the Great Dividing Range will allow inland Australia to flourish, providing a genuine economic stimulus to address the now-deepening economic depression. Dam construction can start before the COVID-19 pandemic is over as construction workers' health will be far easier to protect than in other industries in busy cities with more person-to-person contact. The Federal and Queensland state governments need to announce that Hells Gates Dam will be built for a Bradfield Scheme and not as a downsized standalone dam. Shovels must hit the ground ASAP.

In his original plan, Dr John Bradfield proposed a 400-foot (122-metre) dam wall for the Hells Gates Dam with the intent to provide enough head of water for interbasin transfer and allow plentiful dam capacity to store the floodwaters. Such vision is now lacking in government. The Morrison and Palaszczuk governments are presently considering a downsized standalone Hells Gates Dam to provide water for a local irrigation expansion and water security for both Charters Towers and Townsville. While this limited proposal will provide economic growth for the region, a larger Hells Gates Dam would provide sufficient water for both sides of the Great Dividing Range. And it would generate hundreds of thousands of jobs.

The standalone Hells Gates Dam

The Commonwealth Government's North Queensland Water Infrastructure Authority (NQWIA) was established on 12 March 2019 to implement a \$5.35 billion Hells Gates Dam among other water projects. Townsville Enterprise Limited (TEL) and SMEC Australia Pty Ltd undertook a feasibility study into this dam and irrigation scheme in the Upper Burdekin catchment of Northern Queensland. The [Final Feasibility Report of this study, published 14 September 2018](#), considered a 2,110-Gl dam that could supply water to a 50,000-ha irrigated infrastructure scheme, while also providing long-term water security to both Charters Towers and Townsville.

A 1,200 MW pumped hydroelectric scheme and 20-MW solar farm is included in the project. The construction would support \$5.7 billion in total output and a \$2.3 billion contribution to the gross regional product, which would include \$1 billion in income for local workers. Over 12,000 jobs would be created for the construction phase and over 4,000 long-term jobs would follow from the new irrigation areas. This Hells Gates Dam proposal would have a full supply level (FSL) of 372 m AHD (Australian Height Datum, or elevation above mean sea level), and a concrete gravity dam was considered as the best option. The bed level of the dam at the proposed site is 315 m AHD.

The NQWIA reports that the Australian Government has committed \$54 million to this Hells Gates Dam Scheme (including the proposed Big Rocks Weir downstream on the Burdekin River). A \$24 million business case to test the findings from the 2018 Hells Gates Dam Feasibility Study will provide an opportunity for vested interests to direct a final policy. In July 2019 the Queensland Palaszczuk government committed to sign a bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth to progress further assessment of the \$5.35 billion Hells Gates Dam proposal. But even for this downsized dam, foot-dragging is more than apparent.

"We've listened and we will work with the Commonwealth to continue the investigation of the Hells Gates proposal", Queensland Natural Resources Minister Dr Anthony Lynham said in a 31 July 2019 media statement. "However the Palaszczuk Government's bottom line remains that any major investment like this needs to deliver value for money for Queensland taxpayers." Much of this 31 July statement was couched in cautious language rather than celebrating the regional economic potential.

Moreover, in the 2018 Final Feasibility Report, the authors state that "further investigation works are substantial—potentially exceeding \$24 million in drilling and study costs, and taking as long as 4 years to complete". Then environmental impact studies and cultural studies are estimated to take several years! The total delay could be "in the realm of 5-10 years", according to the Final Report.

How to build in a Depression

The federal and state governments must stop their dithering and get shovels in the ground this year or in 2021 at the latest. Can't be done? The Tennessee Valley Authority under the leadership of US

President Franklin D. Roosevelt proved otherwise, and was the inspiration which led to our Snowy Mountains Scheme and the great dams built by the Tasmanian Hydro-Electric Commission. Faced with the economic crisis of the early 1930s, unemployment jumped to 25 per cent by the time of Roosevelt's inauguration in March 1933. Dams meant jobs, and on 30 September Roosevelt authorised Bonneville Dam under the *National Industrial Recovery Act*. As millions of men sat idle, Roosevelt ensured survey, preliminary planning, and the letting of contracts was fast-tracked so construction work could commence. Amazingly, construction work began on 17 November!

This determination is needed now. Survey, engineering and drafting work must start now and ensure Bradfield's interbasin vision is realised. A downsized standalone Hells Gates Dam will not build us out of the depression, and even some mainstream politicians are starting to understand this reality. Deb Frecklington, Leader of the Liberal National Party in Queensland, is calling to build the [revised Bradfield Scheme promoted by Sir Leo Hielscher, former Chairman of the Queensland Treasury Corporation, and Sir Frank Moore](#). Under this plan, the height of the Hell's Gates Dam would be doubled to over 120 metres (similar to Bradfield's original plan), drawing water from the South Johnstone, Tully, Herbert and Burdekin rivers into a lake potentially twice the size of the Burdekin Falls Dam.

Hielscher and Moore's proposal would cost around \$15 billion and see water diverted to the Murray-Darling Basin via the Warrego River rather than Bradfield's plan to send water to Lake Eyre. There's also a 1984 Queensland government-commissioned report by Cameron McNamara et al., which considered a 76-metre high dam at Hells Gates. This [revised Bradfield Scheme \(long promoted by the Hon. Bob Katter MP\)](#) still fulfils Bradfield's vision of interbasin water transfer. With a \$2.49 billion net capital cost (1984 estimate), it would produce an annual gross revenue (value of production) of \$2.02 billion. Whichever version is adopted, a minimalist approach won't cut it in a depression, and decisions must be made now!

The Citizens Party and Katter's Australian Party have proposed an emergency repurposing of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) into a national investment bank, which could immediately invest in building the Hells Gates Dam. [Click here to sign and share the Citizens Party's new petition: For national survival, Australia needs a national bank—now!](#)