

Re: dam safety submission regarding Jounama pondage

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write in relation to Jounama Pondage, the lake that is adjacent to the small but beautiful town of Talbingo, surrounded by the northern Kosciusko National Park.

Before it was closed off to swimming and boating in the early 1980s, Jounama was a popular family recreation asset for Talbingo, given its immediate proximity, beauty, sheltered location and closeness to accommodation and facilities. Despite what the signs posted on the shore of the pond now say about "extremely dangerous conditions due to the sudden rise and fall of the water levels", the real reason it was closed to the public was that untreated effluent from the town was going into the water and it would need to be closed until a sewage treatment plant could be built. This was completed many years ago but the Snowy Authority as it was then, decided it would be easier for them if it were just kept off limits, citing "safety concerns".

Many of the town's residents and property owners contend that these safety concerns are unfounded and that the continued closure of this waterway is contributing to Talbingo's death as a viable town. At present, virtually all the town's businesses are up for sale including the supermarket, caravan park, restaurant/lodge and Talbingo Holiday retreat. The town's country club is suffering and the service station is just holding on thanks to a young couple who have taken it on after it almost closed for good a few years ago. Allowing non-powered small boats such as canoes, kayaks and windsurfers on the pond as well as a sheltered area for swimming would greatly increase the attractiveness of the town to holidaying families who presently have to camp on the shores of the much larger, deeper, less sheltered, more remote and much more dangerous Blowering dam. They also have to put up with all the speedboats and camp in areas that are hopelessly inadequate in terms of facilities to cope with the large crowds that use them in holiday times.

SnowyHydro, via their public relations officer, contend that Jounama is far too dangerous a waterway, especially when water is released from Tumut 3 power station. We contend that for 99% of the time the pond lies still as one of the safest waterbodies in the state and that when the water is flowing, the pond rises and falls at a rate no greater than the tides do on the coast. The water seems to flow into the wide section of the pond at a rate far less than any any of the rivers in the area and the danger involved is vastly overstated.

This waterway is far safer for small recreational boating than the neighbouring large dams (Talbingo and Blowering). For what it is worth, the local maritime water inspector agrees.

Together with a local resident, I met with Snowy's public relations officer and the local manager a year ago to discuss this issue. The meeting was arranged with the help of local MPs. Unfortunately, the discussion was disappointing in that despite presenting no real life hydrology or engineering reports, we were simply told it was too dangerous and would remain closed. A request for a practical on-water assessment of the risks was summarily dismissed. It was obvious that the Snowy representatives were not aware of the history of this waterway nor the actual risks involved and that whilst they were responsible for management of the pond, it would remain closed, solely it would seem because of the risks of potential litigation.

This stance seems inconsistent and illogical given the far greater risk of mishap on the larger, more remote waterways and the fact that the exact same situation exists at Khancoban, where their open dam has a power station at one end and a dam at the other. I feel if SnowyHydro are not prepared to open the pond themselves, they could hand over the responsibility for this to Roads and Maritime services who are currently responsible for policing the other dams.

I would ask at least that the State Government try to persuade SnowyHydro to look at the possibility of opening Jounama, beginning with an on water assessment that could be verified by community representatives such as myself. I am sure that opening this waterway will ultimately benefit this small town immeasurably and actually offer a SAFER small boating option than currently exists.

Yours Sincerely

Clayton Barnes
319 Miles Franklin Drive Talbingo

Mail: 54 Docker St Wagga Wagga NSW 2650
0428229453