



Hon Andrew Powell MP  
Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection

Ref CTS 19088/13

5 SEP 2013

Mr Neil Laurie  
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Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to your letter of 8 August 2013 enclosing a copy of Petition No. 2057-13 lodged in the Queensland Legislative Assembly.

The Petition draws to the attention of the House the Newman Government's decision to approve the release of 10,000 megalitres of mine water into the Fitzroy River during the 2013 Queensland floods. The Petitioners therefore request the House to immediately launch an independent assessment of mine water releases, which is steered by local representatives, including water experts.

I would like to acknowledge the petition and all of the signatories attached for raising this matter with the House.

Last year the Newman Government began a pilot mine water release program in conjunction with the Fitzroy Basin Association to address a longstanding issue of legacy water in mine pits. The pilot was underpinned by rigorous science to protect downstream water quality and water users as a priority, by setting strict conditions and implementing a comprehensive monitoring system.

During the pilot, water quality was constantly monitored using a network of 23 live data stations throughout the catchment. The most sensitive of these was located at The Gap near Rockhampton. The total volume of mine affected water releases equated to 0.22 per cent of the 4,500 000 megalitres of water that flowed past The Gap monitoring station between 24 January 2013 and February 4 2013.

Regardless, the Newman Government commissioned an independent review of the pilot mine water release program. This study was conducted by Gilbert and Sutherland and was completed in May 2013.

The independent review concluded that mines involved in the pilot were able to reduce their legacy water, without adversely impacting downstream water quality and without impacting the existing rights of other mining operations across the basin to release mine affected water under their existing environmental approvals.

A second independent assessment of mine water releases is therefore not supported.

It is important to note that under existing environmental approvals, mines have been allowed to release water into the Fitzroy system for many years, including under the previous government. In 2010-2011, under the former Labor Government, the department

investigated 56 breaches of environmental authorities by 22 coal mines in the Fitzroy Basin. By comparison, there have been 25 non-compliant mine water releases from 12 mines during the 2012-2013 wet season.

By allowing limited, controlled mine water releases which are closely monitored the Newman Government is working with industry to deliver better environmental outcomes.

The data from the pilot, supported by the independent review, provides a scientific basis to support the long term, environmentally and economically sustainable management of legacy mine water. This is an environmentally responsible approach to balancing industry with the environment and ensuring Queensland's four pillar economy continues to grow.

I hope this information has been of assistance to you. Should you have further enquiries, please contact my Chief of Staff, Mr Troy Collings on 3239 0844.

Yours sincerely



**ANDREW POWELL MP**  
**Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection**