

Fred Haigh (Monduran) Dam



Lake Monduran Dam : bun01865

A popular fishing and recreation spot today, the Fred Haigh Dam/Lake Monduran was originally built in order to secure the Bundaberg region's sugar industry. The industry was too reliant on rainfall and on dwindling underground water supplies. As a flow-on it would also help to ensure the stability of local businesses.¹

Fred Haigh, Irrigation and Water Supply Commissioner (Qld Government), and Mr Ben Anderson, Chairman of the Bundaberg District Irrigation Committee, are credited with being the driving forces behind the building of the dam.¹

The dam is constructed on the Kolan River approximately 14 miles (23km) north of Gin Gin.²

Funding the project

The Queensland Government asked the Australian Government for \$47.1m in April 1969 - the total estimated cost for Stage 1 of the project. However, in September of the same year the Queensland Government decided urgent action was needed and allocated \$8.3m. This served to reduce the amount needed from the federal government to \$38.8m.³

The Australian Government agreed to provide only \$12.8m which, along with the Queensland Government's \$8.3m, would allow for the

completion of Phase 1 of Stage 1. Funds from the federal government would pay for the construction of Monduran Dam and a pumping station, a supply channel from the dam (to Gin Gin), and a diversion channel to connect to the Burnett River.³ The Queensland Government funds would provide for two tidal barrages and four irrigation systems.³

A non-repayable grant, under the *Queensland Grant (Bundaberg Irrigation Works) Act 1970*, was made available by the federal government in February 1970.³ When the costs of the project inevitably increased both governments input further millions of dollars in funding.³

The Dam was originally part of a larger Bundaberg district irrigation project. The \$47.1m scheme was designed to include irrigation and storage for the Gin Gin, Bingera and Isis areas (Phase 2).^{3,4} When the federal government elected to provide only \$38.3m these parts of the project had to be cut.⁴ Phase 2 was completed in 1993.⁵

Building the Dam

Things were moving along with construction by November 1971. The main supply channel from the dam to Gin Gin (the Gin Gin Channel) was almost underway with the approval of \$300,000 for the hire of private construction plant.⁷

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Construction on the dam itself would begin on Saturday 13 November 1971.⁷ Mr Swartz, Minister for National Development, officially began construction on the dam by pushing a plunger at the inauguration ceremony which blasted away tons of rock at the site.⁶ Mr Swartz also unveiled a commemorative plaque.⁸

The *News Mail* reported on 16 November 1971 the beginning of construction on the diversion tunnel. This tunnel would divert water from the Kolan River while the dam was being built.⁹

Fred Haigh Dam itself was finished in late 1974, but the adjoining parts of the project (tidal barrages and irrigation systems) were still being completed. The *News Mail* reported that on 1 November 1974 the project engineer, Mr G.J. Ward, had announced that the main contract (dam, spillway, and outlet works) was almost finished.¹⁰ Mr Ward also announced that the channel system was still under construction but water would shortly be released into the Kolan River from the dam. At the time the dam held 38,000 acre feet of water (46,900 megalitres) from a total capacity of 475,000 acre feet (586,000 megalitres).¹⁰

Water Flows

This first release of water occurred during the week beginning Monday 17 Feb 1975. The water had been released both to help farmers with irrigation needs and also to help counteract the diminished natural flow of the river.¹¹ By this time the amount of water in the dam had increased to 97,000 megalitres.¹¹

In March 1977 heavy rains caused flooding in the region and for the first time the dam filled up and overflowed.¹² It was estimated that at 4pm on Friday 11 March the water level was at 3 feet (1 metre) over the spillway crest and rising at about 3 inches (8 centimetres) per hour. Water was overflowing the spillway at about 20,000 gallons (91,000 litres) a second.^{12,13}

Minor Controversy

The slower finish on some of the related

Fred Haigh Dam

Type: Earthfill/rockfill

Height: Max. 166 feet
(50.5m)

Length: 2000 feet
(609m)

Storage Capacity: 586,000ML
(Megalitres)

Area Covered at Full Supply Level: 5.345 hectares
(13 acres)

Catchment Area: 1,310 square km

Source: ^{4,5,6,10}

infrastructure such as barrages and water reticulation frustrated some sectors who were eagerly awaiting the security of dam-supplied irrigation. Bingera Mill and Millaquin Mill both expressed concerns over the timeframes and allocation of funds.^{14,15} Millaquin Mill Suppliers Committee chairman, Mr M.J. Baker, wondered at the "...ridiculous situation...whereby water is stored but a big percentage is of no use because of lack of progress on the reticulation system".¹⁶

Gough Whitlam's almost-visit

Prime Minister Gough Whitlam visited Bundaberg on 8 November 1974 to inspect the Monduran Dam by air.^{17,18} He was invited by the Bundaberg and District Irrigation Committee.¹⁷ Unfortunately, he never flew over the dam due to stormy weather and a heavy downpour prior to the scheduled flight.¹⁹ Instead Mr Whitlam conferred in Bundaberg with members of the Committee.¹⁹

The Old Homesteads - Takilberan & Monduran

Takilberan Station was a cattle property established more than 100 years before the construction of the Monduran Dam.²⁰ It was originally part of the Kolonga Station but was

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sold off sometime prior to 1900.²¹ In 1926 Mr Eric Shaw of Shaw Pastoral Company acquired the station from Cr H.H. Innes of Innes Pastoral Company.²¹ The government resumed the property in order to build Monduran Dam and more than half of the property, including the homestead, outbuildings and cattle yards, was covered by the dam.²⁰

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Monduran Station is also situated in the area of the dam but was unaffected by its construction. It is most well-known for being the site of the capture of the infamous bushranger The Wild Scotchman (James Alpin McPherson) in 1866.^{22,23}

Naming the Dam

Monduran Dam was originally named as such for the property it was situated near. The State Water Resources Commission preferred to use names with local significance.²⁴ 'Monduran' also apparently means 'big waters',²⁵ an appropriate name for what was then the State's second largest dam.⁴

Renaming the Dam

Fred Haigh, one of the main driving forces behind the dam, died suddenly in 1974.²⁶ He never got to see the project fully completed. State Cabinet decided to rename the dam in his honour in 1979. A ceremony was held on Friday 11 May 1979 and the dam was officially renamed the Fred Haigh Dam. The body of water behind the dam retained the name of Lake Monduran.²⁴ Incidentally, the Burnett Barrage would later be renamed the Ben Anderson Barrage after the other pioneer behind the dam.²⁷

Fred Haigh

Fred Haigh was born in suburban Melbourne and began working at age 15 in the Victorian State Rivers and Water Supply Commission.²⁷ In Queensland he was appointed Senior Irrigation Engineer in the Queensland Irrigation and Water Supply Commission in 1948.^{26,27} In 1949 he was promoted to Deputy Chief Engineer and also served as Assistant Commissioner from 1949-1955. In 1955 he was promoted to Commissioner.^{26,27}



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Fred Haigh was the State's third and longest serving Commissioner - 19 years.²⁴ He was known as a very hard worker who expected a great deal of his staff. Fred was well-respected and regarded as an expert in irrigation.²⁷

He died suddenly on 15 July 1974 at his home in Brisbane. He was 61.^{26,27}

References:

- ¹ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Tue 17 Feb 1970, p3.
- ² *Bundaberg News Mail*, Thu 11 Nov 1971, p3.
- ³ *Bundaberg Irrigation Scheme Queensland*, Economics of Water Resource Development Number 3, AGPS, Canberra: 1975 (http://www.abare.gov.au/publications_html/landwater/archive/74_Bundabergirrigation.pdf)
- ⁴ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Mon 16 Feb 1970, p1.
- ⁵ Fred Haigh Dam, SunWater FactSheet (http://www.sunwater.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/2099/SunWater_Dams_2011.pdf)
- ⁶ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Mon 15 Nov 1971, p1.
- ⁷ *Bundaberg News Mail*, 12 Nov 1971, p6.
- ⁸ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Sat 6 Nov 1971, p3.
- ⁹ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Tue 16 Nov 1971, p1.
- ¹⁰ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Sat 2 Nov 1974, p3.
- ¹¹ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Fri 21 Feb 1975, p1.
- ¹² *Bundaberg News Mail*, Sat 12 Mar 1977, p3.
- ¹³ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Wed 16 Mar 1977, p1.
- ¹⁴ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Mon 21 Oct 1974, p3.
- ¹⁵ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Fri 25 Oct 1974, p3.
- ¹⁶ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Tue 19 Nov 1974, p3.
- ¹⁷ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Thu 7 Nov 1974, p3.
- ¹⁸ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Fri 8 Nov 1974, p3.
- ¹⁹ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Sat 9 Nov 1974, p1.
- ²⁰ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Thu 11 Nov 1971, p3.
- ²¹ Mullet, Joy. *Centenary Shire of Kolan: 1879-1979*.
- ²² Dignan, Don. *The Story of Kolan*, pp30-31.
- ²³ 'Wild Scotchman Festival', *Arts Bundaberg*, Vol 4 No 3. <http://library.bundaberg.qld.gov.au/heritage/arts/vol4>
- ²⁴ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Sat 12 May 1979, p3.
- ²⁵ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Thu 10 May 1979, p2.
- ²⁶ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Wed 17 Jul 1974, p1.
- ²⁷ Pullar, Ian & Margaret Cook. 2001. *Watery Sauces: a people's history of the Water Resources Commission (Queensland) and its predecessors 1881-1995*, Chapter 3: Organisation...and Reorganisation, pp39-51. Dept. of Natural Resources and Mines. (Parts available: <http://www.waterysauces.org.au/history/consolidation/pullarbook/fbh.pdf>)

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Peta Browne
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