

Paradise Dam Essential Works

Questions and Answers

Q: What is Sunwater doing at Paradise Dam?

A: Sunwater is proactively reducing the dam's capacity to 42 per cent to facilitate essential work to lower the spillway. This will allow for better community safety management should an event like the 2013 flood of record occur again. To achieve this, Sunwater has transferred approximately 25,000ML of customer-owned, but not yet diverted, water to Ned Churchward Weir and Ben Anderson Barrage. Normal scheme operations will provide access to this water. Sunwater is also releasing at no charge 80,000ML of unsold water which is currently held by Sunwater. Sunwater is planning to undertake essential work in 2020 on to lower the spillway by 5m.

Q: Is Paradise Dam safe?

A: Under normal and current forecast weather conditions, and under smaller flood flows similar to those seen in Cyclones Marcia and Debbie, Paradise Dam is safe. However, in the unlikely event of another 1-in-200-year event like 2013 the dam wall may have stability issues and not perform to industry standards.

Q: What is being done to keep the community safe?

A: An approved Emergency Action Plan (EAP) for Paradise Dam is in place and will be reviewed in partnership with the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG). Sunwater will continue to work in partnership with local government given the leadership role the LDMG play in managing local flood risks and emergencies, and keeping communities safe. In addition, Sunwater has formed a Paradise Dam Community Reference Group and appointed a chair, with the first meeting scheduled for 31 October.

Q: By how much will the spillway be lowered?

A: The initial decision is to lower the spillway wall by 5m to allow for better community safety management by reducing the amount of water in the dam and the pressure on the dam wall. Building Queensland will undertake an accelerated assessment to guide us on future options. This assessment is due to be completed by February 2020.

Q: Are customers paying for the essential work?

A: All capital works will be initially funded by Sunwater.

Q: Has Sunwater considered how lowering the spillway will impact the future of the region?

A: Sunwater acknowledges there are social, economic and environmental impacts associated with the essential work on Paradise Dam; however, Sunwater has an obligation to make this difficult decision to allow for better community safety management and to facilitate the essential work. Lowering the spillway wall is the most effective way to improve the stability of Paradise Dam during significant flood events. The decision to do so has not been taken lightly and comes after a robust series of internal, external and peer reviewed assessments. The external assessments were carried out by both national and international experts.

Q: Why aren't the technical reports being made publicly available?

A: Experts at the Inspector-General of Emergency Management and Building Queensland will first consider all the Sunwater information and technical reports, including the highly technical GHD report and a further peer review of this by an independent US expert. These experts need time to provide their analysis and advice in context. Building Queensland will then provide advice to government and the public early next year.

Q: Why are you releasing water in a drought?

A: The decision to proactively reduce the amount of water stored in Paradise Dam when many storages across the southern and western Queensland are at or close to record lows, was not made lightly. However, Sunwater has an obligation to make this difficult decision to facilitate the essential work and allow for better community safety management.

Q: At what rate will the water be released?

A: For this water release program, releases are occurring over 69 days (10 weeks): 50 days at 1730ML/d from the environmental outlet and 19 days at 850ML/day from the Irrigation outlet. This combination was chosen as optimal as it minimised downstream impacts and extends the timeframe to allow customer uptake. In the event of forecast rainfall, more releases may be required.

Q. As a customer how can I get access to the water?

A: The water being released from Paradise Dam over a 10-week period has been made available at no charge from midday Friday 27 September. (No Part A and no Part B charge). Access to this water will have no impact on existing customers' existing allocation balances. Customers will still be required to pay Part A charges for their existing water entitlements. Customers can find out more information via email to customersupport@sunwater.com.au or via SMS to Ph: 0400 601 795.

Q: I'm a Burnett River customer. What about my allocation?

A: Burnett customers will still have their water. Burnett River allocation will be retained in Paradise Dam for use when required.

Q: How can non-customers access the water?

A: Anyone who is not a Sunwater customer and is intending to access water released from Paradise Dam in this out-of-allocation event will need to enter into a short-term water supply contract with Sunwater (details same as current customers not on downstream channels or river). Two standpipe locations (Mittelheuser Road, Mon Repos and Clayton's Road, Cordalba) and have been established to allow trucks to access the water and can be accessed by entering a short-term access agreement with Sunwater. The form can be downloaded from the Sunwater website at <https://www.sunwater.com.au/schemes/bundaberg/>

Q: Farmers don't have the pumping capacity to take all that water. Why didn't you tell them earlier?

A: The structural issues with the dam were only recently confirmed. Sunwater fast-tracked our processes to assess the options. This needed to be comprehensive as well as timely but unfortunately did not allow for consultation with our valued customers or the community.

Q: How will the reduction of water stored and the lowering of the dam wall impact threatened species such as the lungfish and white throated snapping turtle?

A: The release rate of water from the dam has been carefully considered. Management measures are being implemented to minimise impacts to threatened species (such as lungfish and white throated snapping turtles) and the likelihood of significant impacts to threatened species is low. The additional river flows are expected to have a beneficial effect. The lowering of the dam wall is being planned with species management in mind. Generally speaking, a lower dam is expected to have less environmental impact in the longer term.

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