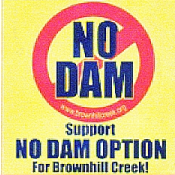

No Dam for Mitcham News Page

By Ron Bellchambers



The greatest threat to the environment and heritage of the City of Mitcham is *still* the proposed dam in Brownhill Creek Valley / Wirraparinga, whether at Site 1 (Seven Pines) in Brownhill Creek Recreation Park, or Site 2 in Ellison's Gully.

The recent SA History Festival in May highlighted just how important these areas are to South Australia's Indigenous and European heritage. At the very entrance to the park there is a beautiful avenue of plane trees, planted from 1907 in honour of our first Labor Premier Thomas Price. Moving through the valley one passes Aboriginal Scar trees such as the famous Monarch of the Glen (a river red gum over 400 years old), remnants of historical quarries, magnificent stands of trees listed as Trees of State and National Significance and the ever present legacy of a rich market gardening past. Ellison's Gully also features an intriguing mining history and the remains of Mitcham Water Works, a cast iron reticulation system that supplied water to Mitcham and parts of Unley from 1879-1930's. The history of these valleys is very much alive thanks to the living culture of the Kurna community and the passion of the Kurna Nation Cultural Heritage Association to maintain their links to this special place, which they call Wirraparinga. We are fortunate to also have descendants of the first European settler families and market gardeners who share their cultural heritage first hand. The volunteer work of the Mitcham Heritage Research Centre and the Mitcham Historical Society has been central to our understanding and documentation of this precious heritage.

The site of the original Mitcham Village was chosen due to its proximity to Brownhill Creek Valley and Ellison's Gully. These valleys have long nourished Mitcham's growth from a small settlement into the City of Mitcham and contributed to its cultural heart. Brownhill Creek Recreation Park (1841) and Ellison's Gully not only comprise Mitcham's backyard, but also Adelaide's backyard. Brownhill Creek Recreation Park is the gateway to Yurrebilla, the Greater Mount Lofty Parklands, and the Yurrebilla trail snakes through the valley linking suburban Adelaide to the hills. No wonder then, that tens of thousands of Adelaideans have officially voiced their opposition to the destructive, disruptive, costly and unnecessary dam. Sixty percent of the signatories to the No Dam petition (numbering over 10,000) are from outside the Mitcham Council area and our State's major environmental and heritage organisations are still strongly opposing the dam. It should be absolutely clear to all five councils, the project and all government authorities that a complete Stormwater Management Plan will *never* be achieved while the proposed dam is still an option.

Since 2011 the No Dam in Brownhill Creek Community Action Group has supported the Stormwater Management Project and the five council CEO's Steering Committee in working towards a complete and effective Brown Hill Keswick Creek Stormwater Management Plan, that protects the environment, documented heritage and public amenity of these valleys. Significant progress has been made with Adelaide, Burnside, Mitcham, Unley and West Torrens councils finalising the plan for Part A works (80% of the project). Part A works in the Keswick Creek and lower Brownhill Creek catchments, will provide 90% of the overall flood mitigation required. The five councils have recently agreed to place a "priority on investigating a creek upgrade solution for the upper reaches of Brownhill Creek" (Part B works) and support for this No Dam option will secure the final piece of the stormwater plan 'puzzle'.

Creek upgrading is required even if a dam is built, provides direct flood protection for properties in all rain events, is feasible, the cheapest option and is more broadly accepted by the community. The costs of the creek upgrade will be largely borne by the project and direct engagement with a relatively small number of affected creek owners will enable them to improve their amenity and alleviate the present legal and financial uncertainty surrounding creek ownership. Doing nothing is simply not an option for these creek owners. The project needs to clearly demonstrate to affected creek owners that a creek upgrade is in their best interests. Revised rainfall figures from the Bureau of Meteorology, incorporating revised hydrology and modelling, indicate that if a creek upgrade is carried out a dam will no longer be required.

A narrow window of opportunity now exists for the five councils to commit to the one creek upgrade option, rather than continuing on with a multitude of divisive options. A one-option approach is more likely to lead to a long awaited, complete Stormwater Management Plan. Failure to move decisively on this one option will result in a damaging delay. Local Council elections in November and the end of term for the current Stormwater Management Authority Board in December 2014, could see this window of opportunity close. A creek upgrade solution must be chosen soon for the greater good.

Please visit www.brownhillcreek.org to view a video of our latest deputation to Mitcham Council and access the facts.