

# Herald Sun

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## Greens be dammed, we need protection

- **Miranda Devine**
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Water spills from the Wivenhoe Dam two weeks ago. Picture: Bruce Long

Source: Supplied

**IN THE annals of disturbing photographs in Australian politics sits the tableau of Julia Gillard and Bob Brown signing a pact in September.**

Surrounded by their respective cauldron-stirrers, it ranks right up near the Molotov-Ribbentrop deal.

By some oversight of the voters last election, the Greens wield power well beyond their pay grade. Instead of playing the role of barnacles along for the ride, they are now queenmakers, sharing the throne with a Prime Minister who will do and say anything to keep the peace.

Now their loopy pronouncements carry weight, which is why the week's sport was to kick Bob Brown after he demanded coal barons pay reparations for the floods because, by his voodoo logic, burning coal caused climate change that led to all the rain.

His junior, Sarah Hanson-Young, has escaped censure for sins of logic just as egregious. Even while acknowledging the Wivenhoe Dam was holding back water that would have flooded countless more Brisbane homes, she was claiming dams don't prevent floods.

This is the cognitive dissonance of the Greens, the awe-inspiring ability to hold two conflicting ideas simultaneously without noticing any contradiction.

They did the same after the 2009 Victorian bushfires, blaming global warming and claiming hazard reduction wouldn't have prevented the conflagration. No one had said it would, only that reducing the fuel available to bushfires reduces their scale and intensity, just as Joh Bjelke-Petersen's decision to dam the Brisbane River in 1985 reduced the extent and severity of the floods this year. Reducing fire intensity and flood severity saves lives.

Greenies never waste an opportunity to push their ideological scare-barrow, that man-made climate change causes all natural disasters and we must urgently close down our coal industry and slash CO2 emissions.

Yet it may emerge that it was this very preoccupation with climate change that caused authorities to take their eye off the ball.

Leaked emails from a Wivenhoe Dam engineer, published in The Australian last week, suggest the Brisbane floods were caused by water released too late from an overfull dam.

If the water had been released before the dam had reached 190 per cent capacity, some experts claim Brisbane could have avoided the worst of the floods.

But so convincing have been the expert pronouncements that we are facing a future of endless drought, the idea of releasing precious drinking water must have been anathema to Wivenhoe's managers.

Eco-catastrophists always cite the precautionary principle: if they are right and we don't reduce CO2 emissions, we face Armageddon. If they are wrong, all it costs is dollars.

But when money is allocated and attention prioritised to making contingency plans for vague hypothetical scenarios in the distant future, real priorities are neglected and real risks overlooked.

When leaders proclaim climate change as the greatest moral challenge, the entire machinery of government becomes preoccupied with the busy work of solving an imaginary problem. It is then easily blindsided by a real emergency.

This all-too-human phenomenon of selective attention is depicted in the famous psychology experiment with a gorilla. Volunteers have to watch a video showing a group of people passing a ball and count the number of times the ball changes hands. Most people concentrate so hard on the ball they don't notice the big gorilla that walks through the middle of the screen.

We have been so busy fretting about carbon dioxide that we have neglected the real challenge -- how to

adapt and protect ourselves from natural disasters.

Of course, there is one piece of man-made infrastructure that has come in handy during both drought and flood: the humble, vilified dam, which performs double duties in water storage and flood mitigation.

Civil engineers and hydrology specialists such as John Brown, who did the original environmental impact study on NSW's rejected Welcome Reef Dam, point out Australia has one of the greatest water resources in the world. The mean annual discharge of our rivers is 22,000 cubic litres per capita -- four times more than the US (6250), five times more than China and 13 times more than Israel.

Yet global warming gurus have derided proposals for new dams, claiming there would never be enough water to fill them.

Hah! Traveston Crossing near Gympie, where Environment Minister Peter Garrett rejected a dam in favour of a lungfish, was flooded two weeks ago. The new dam would have been overflowing.

Queensland is the last state building dams; the Paradise Dam near Bundaberg, commissioned in 2005, is now 100 per cent full.

But there can be no better-timed dam than the Wyaralong, northwest of Beaudesert, which won't be completed until mid-year but which filled to its brim at 9.27am on Tuesday, 11 January, just 25 days after the dam wall was plugged.

Australia fell for the Greens' hoax because of the drought. It's time to come to our senses and build lots more dams before the next one.

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