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To the Editor  
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For some thirty years the operating rules of Wivenhoe dam have divided the dam's massive storage into two distinct sections with approximately 40% of the dam allocated to water storage and 60% to flood mitigation.

The rules requiring that division have remained unchanged despite massive swings in climate patterns and seasonal conditions. Calls for those rules to be reviewed to take account of better climate pattern predicting and vastly improved weather forecasting have been consistently rejected by the Minister responsible Stephen Robertson.

His announcement this week that 25% of the water stored for domestic use is to be released, unsupported by any publicly available modelling or information, smacks more of political opportunism than a concession that the operating rules of the dam need to be modernised to be more responsive to the predictive technologies that have vastly improved since the dam was built.

There was little acknowledgement from the Minister that decisions about water releases, their necessity, their timing and the rate of discharge have a much greater influence on the effectiveness of the dam than his simplistic argument about the division of the dam into water storage and flood buffer compartments.

The dam's operating rules have long been kept secret but under pressure after the recent flood they were released with large sections blacked out. Importantly what was released shows no indication of a crucial predictive management approach that is common place in many other climate dependent industries and businesses.

In the mining, agriculture, tourism and even retail industries manager's decisions are informed and influenced by predicted climate patterns and long range weather forecasts that have become increasingly sophisticated and reliable as technology has advanced.

When the rules for operating Wivenhoe were first drawn up satellite photography was in its infancy, a seven day weather forecast was speculative and the La Nina climate pattern as measured by the southern oscillation index or SOI was poorly understood.

Even though all of these now well accepted and increasingly accurate predictive tools are widely available the operating rules for Wivenhoe show no requirement for dam managers to use that information to enhance the efficiency of the dam as either a flood buffer or a water storage.

The absence of any predictive management techniques provides an insight into why Wivenhoe filled to 190% in the second week of January triggering massive releases which many believe contributed adversely to the disastrous flood.

In the first week of January 2011 at the beginning of our traditional wet season the SOI was positive thirty five and the La Nina climate pattern showed no signs of weakening. Meanwhile the seven day weather forecast was for a week of heavy rain across an already saturated catchment.

None of these factors appear to have influenced the release rate of water from the dam at that critical time. Had the dam filled at the very end of the wet season in March or April and the La Nina climate pattern been reversing to a dry El Nino with an SOI of minus forty the operating rules would appear to have dictated the same release strategy.

A responsible Government and a capable Minister would ensure that the dams operating rules compulsorily require vastly different responses to those vastly different scenarios. That they do not illustrates both the archaic inadequacy of the operating rules and yet another massive failure of the Labor Government.

That failure to recognise the need for Wivenhoe's operating rules to be modern, flexible and responsive to climate patterns is at the core of the mis-management of the dam that has seriously affected it's effectiveness as both a flood mitigation and a water storage asset.

To many people have paid too high a price for that failure.

Yours sincerely

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