



HERITAGE SERVICES INFORMATION SHEET 8

THURINGOWA'S WATER SUPPLY

Have you ever wondered how residents of Thuringowa obtained their water?

The Townsville Thuringowa area is situated in a rain-shadow area with rainfall concentrated in the summer months. Dry conditions occur over much of the rest of the year.

In the early decades of settlement, water for the Thuringowa area was drawn from private wells and rainwater tanks. However this was not always reliable as private wells often became contaminated by waste or dried up in the cooler months. In such situations water had to be purchased from water carriers who charged high rates.

While it might be assumed that the Thuringowa Council could have provided water to residents from Ross River, this was not the case.

The Townsville City Council established the Townsville Water Authority (later Townsville Waterworks Board) in 1882 to

provide reticulated water to residential areas within the Townsville City area. This body controlled the water in Ross River (1887-1980) and later the Paluma Dam (1957-1980) and Ross River Dam (Stage 1 -1974). The board represented the needs of Townsville residents only and conflict often arose between the two Councils, when Thuringowa sought Townsville City's consideration of their needs. The augmentation of the water supply in the Thuringowa area is distinguished by the Council's attempts to find alternate sources of water outside those controlled by the Townsville Water Board. The result was that Thuringowa maintained many separate schemes by the late 1970s.

Lyn Henderson divides the reticulation of Thuringowa's water supply into three eras. Firstly during the period 1887-1915 when the former Thuringowa suburbs of Hermit Park, Mundingburra and Rosslea were reticulated.



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Secondly, 1947 when reticulated water was provided to the township of Paluma and finally, 1957-1985 when the Council had to instigate and maintain eight separate water schemes to serve residents in its outer suburbs.

Although in the late nineteenth century rural local authorities were not compelled to provide reticulated water to residents, Thuringowa Shire saw the provision of water as a sign of a progressive Council. Thuringowa Chairman, Joseph Hodel stated in 1889, "No opportunity should be lost in giving the public water because a plentiful supply would double the population of the Division."

Thus in 1896, during Hodel's term, a reticulated water scheme was established. However it took nine years of trials to find a reliable and uncontaminated source.

The water was provided from a well located in Anderson Park. The well, named after the Chairman, Hodel was known locally as the Shire Well. It provided water to the nearby suburbs of Hermit Park, Rosslea and Mundingburra. It not only created a healthier environment

but also improved the general quality of life for Thuringowan residents.

Before this well became the established source for reticulated water in the area, other wells had been sunk however they proved unsatisfactory due to cost, contamination or irregular supply. Sites on Fulham Road, Ross River, Stewart Creek, Stewart Range, Purves Street and Love Lane were trialed. Even the construction of a dam at Five Head Creek was considered by Council in 1892.

In 1947 Thuringowa Shire accepted its second challenge: to provide reticulated water to the settlement of Paluma. The infrastructure had been put in place by the RAAF during World War II and water was readily available from a nearby creek. Percy Jones worked on the project during the war:

"Well Mt Spec was just a few houses up on Paluma, and up on the top they'd put some big water tanks, and that was the town water supply. They pumped the water from a creek down the back; the water was icy cold. We used to pump it up in this tank.





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And of course, we had to reticulate all the water all over Mt Spec where the sergeants' and the officers' mess was, and all the houses that were confiscated, the houses for the fellas that were recuperating."

After the war the Council only needed to connect the remaining residents to the main.

As residential subdivisions developed in 1950s, residents called for reticulated water. Townsville City Council continued to refuse requests from Thuringowa to connect Thuringowa residents in the areas of Rollingstone, Bluewater and the northern beach settlements to the Mt Spec pipeline. Thus Council had to find suitable water sources to service its developing communities.

In 1964 suitable water for reticulation to Innes Estate and Geaney's Lane was provided from Black River via a reservoir on Mt Bohle. The Upper Ross area was reticulated from bores sunk west of Ross River and in the 1970s Rollingstone was reticulated from the Rollingstone Creek. In addition Council provided water to Giru from bores it sank in the Ayr Shire.

After the Ross River Dam was completed in 1974 Townsville City Council became more willing to meet Thuringowa requirements as its own water problems were eased. By 1976 suburbs in the Upper Ross were utilising water provided from the Townsville City mains. By the late 1970s the Council was operating eight separate water reticulation schemes in the shire area.

In 1987 NQ Water was established to obtain, conserve and supply water in bulk to local governments. The establishment of this body has reduced competition between the two Councils over water. Townsville and Thuringowa City Councils however continue to be responsible for the reticulation of water to residents in their area.

Today water is not only available from Ross River Dam and Paluma Dam but also from the Burdekin Dam.





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NQ Water predicts that rising domestic and commercial demand for water will result in the construction of a new supply network with water from the Burdekin Dam treated at Toonpan and then pumped to a reservoir to be constructed near Mt Jack. This will serve future development in the Townsville Thuringowa area.

Acknowledgements:

- Paper by Mr Ian Fairweather, City Engineer, Townsville City Council, 1966.
- Lyn Henderson, More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A history of local government in action in Thuringowa Shire 1879-1985, PhD thesis, April 1992.
- John Mathew
- www.nqwater.com.au

