

ROSS RIVER

Historically the Ross River was an intermittent system with ephemeral flows (seasonally dry), however the construction of 4 barriers along the length of the river system has caused long stretches of the river to hold water all year round. These barriers (3 weirs and 1 dam) were constructed as part of attempts to service the water needs of residents in the locality. Today many of these barriers contain eel-ways to ensure the movement of certain aquatic animals is not disrupted, whilst still ensuring Townsville's water supply demands are met.

Due to the stable connection to the sea in the lower section, and the ease of access for land thoroughfare the Ross River was identified initially as an excellent location for a port. Through the years the Ross River has serviced nearby residents by providing land and other resources for shipping, industry (boiling down works, sawmilling, abattoirs), agriculture, and military use. Today the Ross River services residents through civic amenity and is recreationally enjoyed by many for purposes such as fishing, boating, water sport activities, swimming, bushwalking, and birdwatching.

Location

The Ross River rises in the foothills of Hervey Range and Mount Stuart Range and flows North then curves East across the plains to the sea at Cleveland Bay. Approximately 45km in length, the Ross River is an important waterbody in the Townsville region.

Geology

The land area currently known as Townsville was initially discovered in 1819, however European settlement did not commence until the early 1860s. Urban expansion and population growth was rapid, resulting in the river flats off the Ross River being used for tropical agriculture, industry, transport, mining and military purposes.



Initial port a distant memory as international steamships berthed in deep water wharves at Townsville's growing harbour

Original river mouth completely disappeared amongst the infrastructure of the artificial harbour.

Water supply drawn from private wells and rainwater tanks (unreliable source, would often dry up or become contaminated)

Stop weir (now known as Aplin's Weir) constructed to prevent saltwater from mixing upstream (ensuring freshwater was retained)

Black Weir was constructed to dam Ross River as a freshwater reservoir



Gleeson's Weir, 1934

Stop weir upgraded (concrete structures installed)

Stop weir construction complete and renamed Aplin's Weir



Image: Aplin's Weir, 1966

1890s

1866

Transport of goods outside of Townsville possible with the opening of first port along river

1908

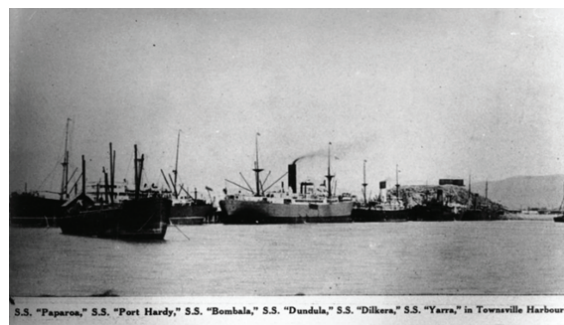
Recognition that water shortages could be solved by damming the Ross River

1923

Gleeson's Weir pumping began to service water needs of residents

1927

1929



Transport ships in Townsville Harbour, 1929

1934

1934

1936



Black's Weir, 1936

1943

1944

1960s

Lavarack's Barracks built
Mount Stuart training area exclusion zone protects this area from residential growth

1966



Lavarack Barracks, 1967

To ensure water security into the future, construction of a pipeline to allow water exchange from Burdekin Dam to supplement the Ross River Dam was achieved (Haughton Pipeline Stage 1). Upgrading these works will continue to ensure water supply is met

1967

1970s

Ross River Dam construction began at Five Heads Creek

Ross Creek and Ross River connection disrupted by placement of landfill (connection remains via surface flow, stormwater and groundwater)

1974



Spillway at Ross River Dam, 1974

2020



Ross River Dam, 2018

Today

Ross River provides an important habitat for many freshwater and marine species (many recognised species from the Great Barrier Reef spend certain stages of their lifecycle inhabiting this waterbody).

Recognised as an important recreational fishery (especially barramundi and mangrove jacks), the river is seasonally stocked with many of these fish species.