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Lake Pedder answer 'blowing in the wind': Bob Brown

EXCLUSIVE

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Tasmania's boom in wind farms means Lake Pedder — which was flooded by a hydro power scheme in 1972 — can finally be drained and restored, says Bob Brown.

The former Greens leader told The Australian that with up to 10 wind farms proposed or under construction in his home state, the key argument against restoring Pedder to its former glory — energy security — was negated.

"Tasmania's got electricity in great abundance," Dr Brown said. "We're seeing that continuing to increase with the wind farms about to come on line and calls for the Marinus (interconnector) under Bass Strait to deal with it."

There was now no need for the relatively small amount of hydro-electricity the flooded Lake Pedder provided, he said, making the time right to drain the lake to its original size and restore its famed beach.

The original Lake Pedder — and its globally unique 3km long, almost 1km wide pink quartzite beach, created by glaciation 10,000 years ago — remains intact but lies beneath 15m of tannin-stained water.

Flooding of this jewel of Tasmania's southwest wilderness for a hydro-electric scheme in 1972 provoked one of the nation's first major environmental struggles and gave birth to the world's first green party.

Prince Phillip, Sir Edmund Hillary and a diverse range of politicians, including former prime minister Tony Abbott, have all bemoaned its loss or championed its restoration.

Hydro Tasmania has estimated that Lake Pedder provides between 5 per cent and 6 per cent of its total revenue — about \$20m to \$30m a year. However, restoration advocates say a compromise of draining the lake but retaining two smaller impoundments to feed hydro generation would reduce the revenue loss to between 1.5 per cent and 2 per cent.

Dr Brown has opposed one of the current wind farms, proposed for Robbins Island in the state's northwest, due to concerns about its impact on birds, including endangered wedge-tailed eagles.

However, he said the wind boom meant there was now no justification to retain a flooded Pedder. As well, there was now vast experience globally in restoring ecosystems and removing redundant dams.

“The push for Lake Pedder’s restoration is growing in strength very rapidly — it’s as if it’s suddenly hit the right time nearly 50 years after the lake was flooded,” Dr Brown said.

“We are in the UN decade of ecological restoration, and Lake Pedder has been adopted as one of the potential showpieces of that.

“Up to 1000 dams have been (removed) or are slated for removal in the US (including) ... structures much bigger than those flooding Lake Pedder.”

Energy Minister Guy Barnett rejected Dr Brown’s push. “Draining late Pedder would be both economically and environmentally irresponsible and bordering on madness,” he said. “Lake Pedder is a vital part of Hydro Tasmania’s energy infrastructure.

“Lake Pedder contributes around 40 per cent of the water used in the Gordon Power Station and powers over 50,000 homes and businesses each year, along with contributing approximately 13 per cent of Tasmania’s total power generation.

“There is no compelling biological conservation or environment protection reason to drain the lake.

“Draining Lake Pedder has potential to cause massive environmental and biological harm and leave it as one big slush hole.”

A podcast on the issue with Dr Brown, Ms Milne and others features as part of a series of “Sci Art Walks” in the current Beaker Street Festival (<https://www.beakerstreet.com.au>).