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**LAKE PEDDER AND THE FRANKLIN DAM**

# Lake Pedder And The Franklin Dam 'People And Power'

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8.3 SOSE

Mrs Beeton

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In 1979, the battle to save Lake Pedder was lost. This was simply because a few people in power decided to act. The events of the flooding of Lake Pedder has affected Tasmania, as well as Australia, and has a powerful message with its story: with great power comes great responsibilities.



Lake Pedder And The Franklin Dam

Lake Pedder was a beautiful Glacial lake surrounded by mountains. It had been called 'The Jewel of Tasmania' and many other titles that reflected the serene beauty of this particular lake. So it came as a shock to many when Eric Reece AKA 'Electric Eric' announced that Lake Pedder would be modified. The modification included flooding Lake Pedder. The Hydro-Electric Commission had joined with the Tasmanian government to make a dam so that it could supply Tasmania with electricity. While this would be beneficial for a developing state, there were other ways to get this power and save a priceless location. This started a battle that would change the way people thought about people power, and prove that everyday people could change the state that we live in.

The people of Tasmania worked together to attempt to stop the flooding of Lake Pedder. There was a massive response from the people of Hobart, creating a ten thousand signature petition, the highest amount of signatures put together for one petition in Tasmania. As more people understood the situation that lake Pedder faced, more people were committed to the cause. As Lake Pedder started drowning in the waters of the Gordon River, the LPAG (Lake Pedder Action Group) launched their campaign to a national scale, giving them an extra 7 000 signatures to their ever-growing petition to save Lake Pedder.

*'... we received a lot of intelligence over the telephone. The most dramatic piece was the night when the phone rang and a message was given to take ... certain acts of Parliament to a certain lawyer in a certain law firm and ask their opinion about the validity of the Lake Pedder scheme. And we did exactly that. We didn't really know what it all meant, but we took those documents along ... and within a couple of hours, we had a case against the government on their illegal flooding of Lake Pedder.'*-Dr Walker

In March 1972, the world's first Greens party was created, by members of the LPGA and community persons, primarily for the cause of the drowning of Lake Pedder. After it did not win the election, the LPGA opened Australia's first shop-front for conservation. But despite their efforts, Lake Pedder and the hopes of 17,000 Australians were drowned in the Gordon River's waters. The flooding of Lake Pedder caused conservatives to create the Tasmanian Wilderness Society. This society maintained a close watch over HEC plans for future dams in Tasmania. Then, when HEC proposed yet another dam in 1978, the Tasmanian Wilderness Society was ready to act.

By 1980, 10,000 Tasmanians people protested against the damming of the Franklin River on the streets of Hobart. Later in the campaign, the Tasmanian Wilderness Society asked people to write 'No Dams' on a referendum that would decide if the Franklin River, or another river, the Olga River got dammed, and 45% of the people voted 'No Dams'. Their next move was an election campaign, in which the votes of the conservatives were the reason ALP got into the Tasmanian Government, and after the Federal Government taking the Tasmanian Government to the High Court, the Franklin was

saved. The loss of Lake Pedder was not for nothing, and thanks to people power, the Franklin was saved.

In response to the outcries made by the public, Eric Reece was as stubborn as a mule. He would not back down, as the drowning of Lake Pedder was the cheapest, most straightforward and easiest lake to dam, to supply renewable energy to a percentage of Tasmania. After passing a law through the Tasmanian government that meant that Lake Pedder was no longer a National Park, HEC got the thumbs up and started preparation for the Gordon dam project. But, the public outcry progressed to a case in the government court and forced Eric Reece (or 'Electric Eric' as he came to be known) to act, passing a specific law called the Gordon River Doubts Removal Bill, that once again made the flooding of Lake Pedder legal.

*'We were trodden under foot . . . because we were idealistic. And it's very difficult to . . . make a case for the beauty of something when there are facts and figures standing against you, because economic rationalists and engineers have got scant regard for what artists or architects might call beauty. They simply say that beauty is in the balance sheet.'* -Max Angus

As a final attempt to save Lake Pedder, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam proposed to give Electric Eric a blank check, to pay for the costs for the saving of Lake Pedder, but Eric Reece was as unmovable as Hydro-Electric Commission's dam wall. As far as he was concerned, the sooner they flooded Lake Pedder, the better. But when it came to the Franklin River, Eric's successor, Robin Gray found himself backed against a rock and a hard place.

As yet again, 10,000 people revolted, and even though Premier Doug Low added the Franklin River to the Wild Rivers National Park, Robin Gray still managed to convince the government about damming another river, the Olga River. He also arrested 1400 conservatives, including leader Bob Brown, after they attempted to assemble a blockade on the Franklin River, creating fights with the workers. Eventually refusing the Australian government, saying they had no right to intervene with the Tasmanian Government's business, Robin had to back down and abandon the dam project.

Throughout the battle and aftermath of the controversial Hydro-Electric Commission Dam Schemes, many different types of power were used. The Lake Pedder story is about the inspiring people power versus the mighty power of laws, being wielded by the states and government. In the end, the drowning of Lake Pedder taught Tasmanians just how important nature is, and has allowed us to reflect on and change our view towards naturally beautiful places. Tasmania is a natural paradise, and we should keep it that way.

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