

THE BIG DRY

Hydro storage levels near 20%

By **SIMON BEVILACQUA**

HYDRO Tasmania dam levels look set to drop below 20 per cent because of some of the lowest inflows in recorded history.

The historically low dam storages, caused by a 10-year dry spell, have crippled the state's capacity to generate electricity.

The last time storages were below 20 per cent was in 1968, when power restrictions and daylight saving were introduced to restrict impact on Tasmanian lakes.

Hydro energy and market analysis manager Michael Connarty said it was unlikely Tasmanians would experience a repeat of the power restrictions.

"Such options are not foreseen to be needed in the current situation due to the availability of Basslink," Dr Connarty said.

Originally sold on its ability to get Tasmanian hydro power into the lucrative national electricity market, Basslink is now being used to provide the state's power needs.

"Basslink has provided an inval-

able back-up for the hydro power system since its commissioning in May last year, as has our access to a supply of natural gas from Bell Bay," Dr Connarty said.

"Hydro Tasmania's lakes have suffered some of the lowest inflows since records have been taken.

"Inflows for March were only around a half of what we would normally expect for this time of the year.

"Inflows into Great Lake over the

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last year are the lowest recorded and it is currently just below 13 per cent full.

"Even at present levels we are reluctant to keep using the lake as recovering from such low levels will be a long-term consideration and very much dependent on future inflows."

Dr Connarty said an environmental monitoring plan was in place for the Great Lake.

"Lakes King William, Rowallan and Echo are also potentially at risk without significant rain in the coming months," he said.

"Inflows into both Lake Rowallan and Lake Echo have been the lowest on record and Lake Echo has only received 13 per cent of its average inflow in the last 12 months."

In April 1968 Hydro dam storages dropped to 14.2 per cent, which saw introduction of daylight saving, restrictions to power consumption and other auxiliary generation.

"Hydro Tasmania is taking all measures possible to maintain a sustainable power system," Dr Connarty said.

"We do not expect there to be a supply issue in the foreseeable future due to having Basslink and Bell Bay operational."



RUNNING LOW: A very dry Great Lake.