



Rare turtles may be left gasping for air if Traveston dam happens

IT HAS been discovered that the rare Mary River turtle can evade predators by staying under water for at least three days – but that is unlikely to help it against its latest threat, Premier Peter Beattie.

University of Queensland PhD student Natalie Mathie, who grew up in Hervey Bay, has been studying Mary River hatchlings for the past two years and has discovered that the turtles can stay submerged for at least three days, possibly up to a week in the right conditions.

Unlike most freshwater turtles, the Mary River Turtle could extract about half its oxygen requirements from river water using special sacs in its bottom.

She believes their diving is a



survival strategy to lessen their chances of being eaten by birds on the surface or by fish and eels.

Ms Mathie said she was worried about the how the planned dam at Traveston Crossing would change the Mary River landscape and damage turtle

habitat, washing away undercut banks, nesting banks, fallen logs and well-oxygenated streams.

She said the Mary River turtle needed riffle zones, which were shallow rocky areas that ran into big pools, keeping water oxygen levels high.

“The dam will have a lot less oxygen and it will also be cooler because it’s deeper.”

The endangered turtle is unique to the Mary River and it is believed only hundreds of eggs are laid each breeding season.

Ms Mathie, who is with UQ’s School of Integrative Biology, has been studying how the presence of predators affect the turtles’ respiration and diving behaviour.