

Express Extra 4.7.10.

Pollution spill a costly lesson



A pollution spill on the Peel River

GEORGE Weston Foods Ltd was convicted and ordered to contribute \$67,000 to a Tamworth conservation project and pay \$30,000 in prosecution costs after it pleaded guilty to polluting the Peel River in September 2008.

The Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water prosecuted the company after a blend of animal fat and oil leaked from its plant and discharged to the Peel River, leaving a 2.25 kilometre slick of tallow (animal fat) and oil in the river for nine days.

In the Land and Environment Court on Friday, Justice Malcolm Craig ordered George Weston Foods to pay a penalty of \$67,000 to Tamworth Regional Council for the implementation of the Peel River Riparian Project Stage 2. His Honour also ordered the company to pay prosecution costs of \$30,000 and place notices in *the Sydney Morning Herald*, *Financial Review* and *Northern Daily Leader* outlining details of the offence.

On top of the court penalty, George Weston Foods had already paid out \$38,217 in clean up costs.

Department of Environment and Climate Change acting director general, Sally Barnes, said the case was an important reminder to industry to protect waterways.

"In operating its stock feed production premises, the company in this case failed to isolate its onsite stores of animal tallow and oil from nearby stormwater drains," Ms Barnes said.

"Stormwater drains lead to our precious waterways and we all have a responsibility to protect these areas from harm.

"In sentencing the company Justice Malcolm Craig has taken up the option of the penalty being directed towards a local environmental project.

"By partially funding the second stage of the Peel River Riparian Project, the penalty will ensure there is a positive outcome for the environment," she said.

George Weston Foods Ltd closed its Tamworth premises in January.