Bottom breather

IN his day job as a news reporter in Brisbane, Strewth inadvertently sparked a barrage of phone calls and emails during the week after giving to a broad audience the startling information that the threatened Mary Valley turtle breathes through its bottom. Environment Minister Peter Garrett listed some doubt over the future of the bum-breathing turtle as one reason he canned the Traveston Dam, but University of Queensland biologist Craig Franklin, who advised the Queensland government on some of the issues regarding Traveston, says the future of genus Elusor is still under threat, even with no dam. Franklin says the turtle takes water through its cloaca and it extracts oxygen from the water through gills. Baby Mary River turtles get so much oxygen this way they don’t need to surface, while all that breathing through the cloaca means that even the more mature bum-breather doesn’t have to surface much, which may explain why scientists think it’s disappearing.