THE three species that stopped the Mary River dam now need saving themselves.

Scientists and conservationists yesterday called on Mary Valley farmers to immediately change the farming practices that had seen species' numbers dwindle to near extinction.

They said Mary Valley residents, who used environmental arguments to oppose the dam, should now show their conservation bona fides by saving the lungfish, Mary River cod and Mary River turtle.

University of Queensland scientist Craig Franklin said that long before the Traveston Dam was proposed, poor agricultural practices had led to a decline of the three species.

“They may have stopped the dam but the threats have not been removed,” he said.

“These species were in big trouble before the dam from existing practices. Threats such as sand mining, barrages, extraction of water, cattle trampling river-sides and sand banks – it all has to stop.”

Wildlife Preservation Society spokesman Des Boyland said the decline of the species had to be halted.

“If we continue as we have in the past it will virtually commit these species to extinction,” Mr Boyland said. “Some landholders were probably doing the right thing but landholders need to be informed of what they need to do.”

Griffith University’s Angela Arthington said it was critical that monitoring and research began immediately on the cod, lungfish and turtle.

“The next step is to work closely on the (recovery) plans to mitigate any effects on habitat, movement or breeding,” she said. “About $28 million was to be spent (by the State Government) on the dam’s species conservation and research centre, so they should go ahead and still build that.”

Prof Arthington said riparian or riverside zones had to be protected from stock, areas revegetated to stop run-off, bank stability and in-stream habitat improved and exotic species eradicated.

Save the Mary River Action Group spokesman Kevin Ingersole said most farmers now realised they were part of the Mary River’s problems.

“We haven’t thought deeply enough about the consequences of our actions, but there has been a great awakening,” Mr Ingersole said.

FEW LEFT: The lungfish which is still fighting for survival.