



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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REVOCATION OF STATE FOREST AREAS

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (8.52 pm): Tonight I rise to support the revocation motion proposed by the minister to excise about 321 hectares from the Wongi State Forest, located about 16 kilometres north-west of Maryborough, for the purpose of accommodating the extra water—I am led to believe it will double the capacity—that will be stored in Lenthalls Dam as a result of the dam wall being raised by two metres. Lake Lenthall covers an area of approximately 400 hectares, with a shoreline of around 53 kilometres, and at full storage level it has a capacity of 17,800 megalitres. I note that the minister said that raising the dam wall was going to increase the dam's capacity by about 75 per cent. My calculations tell me that it should have the capacity of 35,000 megalitres with the dam wall extension. The dam is 350 metres long.

The dam's location is 36 kilometres west-south-west of Hervey Bay. To get there, you take the turn-off west from the Bruce Highway and then it is approximately 20 kilometres north of Maryborough and approximately eight kilometres south of Howard. Once off the highway, most of the road is gravel, with bitumen for the last 100 metres. The nearest airports at Maryborough and Hervey Bay are approximately a 35- to 45-minute drive to Lake Lenthall. I congratulate the Hervey Bay City Council for upgrading the airport. I know they are very jealous in Bundaberg about the 737s landing at Hervey Bay. That is quite a boost to their tourism industry.

The Lake Lenthall recreation area is undergoing an extensive upgrade to improve facilities and to increase the number of activities available to the public. The current facilities include toilets; a picnic area; a viewing platform above the spillway; walking tracks; a boat ramp; apparently very easy parking; importantly, disabled access; and, of course, camping at Wongi. There are no public phones at Lake Lenthall. If you want the nearest fuel and bait you would have to head back along the Bruce Highway.

There are abundant fish stocks at Lake Lenthall. There is good Australian bass, barramundi, golden perch or yellow-belly, silver perch, spangled perch, eel-tailed catfish and saratoga. Each year the Fraser Coast Fish Stocking Association spends about \$7,500 restocking Lake Lenthall with fingerlings. The Wide Bay Water Corporation subsidises the restocking, which is also funded from fishing permit fees. Since 1984, almost 450,000 fingerlings have been released, including barramundi, Australian bass, golden perch or yellow-belly, and silver perch. After this revocation motion is passed, there will probably be a little more water between the fingerlings and maybe they might be a little harder to catch.

The EPA web site tells us that Wongi is reputedly an Indigenous word meaning snake, and the Wongi State Forest has extensive pine plantations, open eucalypt forests and a chain of deep lagoons. The lagoons are popular and provide watering holes for native animals. The access, once again, is by conventional vehicle via the Bruce Highway. Camping is allowed at the Wongi camping area. A permit is required and must be obtained on arrival at the park from the self-registration station.

Mr Peter Care, the manager of the engineering group of the Wide Bay Water Corporation, has made some comments to my office about the raising of the Lenthalls Dam wall. The project has been running since 1996. The raising of the wall by two metres will double the volume of water in the dam and supply water to the Hervey Bay community for the next 20 to 25 years. That is based on the growth rate figures at the moment. The organisation has had significant discussions with the federal and state governments. The

development is ready to go. It is just waiting for state government approval. Peter said that this is a significant project for the Hervey Bay community as without this development the community would not be able to develop or grow. Peter says that they have received positive feedback and endorsement from the local community, the Indigenous groups and also the local environment groups. However, a little later on I will highlight some concerns of a local green group. They have negotiated an EPA agreement with the government to pay for land that has been lost. I was quite happy to hear in the minister's speech that the DPI has expressed concern that it would like to see any trees that would be covered by the water harvested and obviously the money placed back into the public purse.

As the member for Hervey Bay indicated, Hervey Bay is one of the fastest growing local government areas in Queensland. I believe it is the second fastest growing area. The figures I have show that there are 39,000 residents in Hervey Bay. That must have been written about a year ago because I think, after speaking with Ted Sorensen, it is about 52,000.

Mr McNamara: That is right. That is Bundaberg propaganda.

Mr MESSENGER: Yes, probably. I take the interjection of the member for Hervey Bay. I can remember the day that Hervey Bay's population passed Bundaberg's population and it caused a lot of depression in Bundaberg. Currently, the water supply is at capacity in meeting the demands of the population. I am told that if does not rain within 18 months Hervey Bay will run out of water. Ted Sorensen, the local mayor, was probably a little more forthright in his comments when I spoke with him today. He would say, 'If this doesn't go ahead then development will grind to a halt.'

On the subject of water conservation, over the past 10 years Wide Bay Water has been taking proactive measures in conserving water in Hervey Bay through a range of water demand management strategies. These strategies include the water recycling scheme and leakage control and pressure management—two strategies that have made Wide Bay Water a leader in the Australian water industry.

Water consumption in Hervey Bay has been reduced from 600 litres per person per day in 1998 to 288 litres per person per day now. We have to give them a pat on the back for that. It is quite an incredible achievement. They have spent over \$1 million conducting 10 years of study into the raising of Lenthalls Dam to meet the needs of Hervey Bay's growing population. Independent reports were prepared by various groups including WBM Oceanics; Sinclair Knight Merz; Gutteridge Haskins and Davey; department of natural resources forest ecosystem; department of natural resources state water projects; the Queensland department of environment and heritage; and the Queensland department of primary industries, water resources. The Wide Bay Water Corporation also met with local community representatives and interest groups to discuss the impacts of raising the dam.

Through these studies and consultations, raising Lenthalls Dam was identified as the best option to secure Hervey Bay's water supply. An appraisal study of water supply sources for the Sunshine Coast and Mary River Valley by the state government in 1994 indicated that Lenthalls Dam would need to be raised by six metres by 1997 to meet Hervey Bay's water needs. Seven years later, through comprehensive water demand management, Wide Bay Water Corporation has managed to delay the raising of the dam and to reduce the height it needs to be raised to just two metres.

In relation to protecting the Wongi waterholes, earlier this year the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water submitted the interim resource operation licence to the Wide Bay Water Corporation setting out the legal requirements it must meet in order to progress with raising Lenthalls Dam. The licence states—

Upon the raising of Lenthalls Dam, water is not to be backed up so as to cause flood inundation of the Wongi Waterholes above the present levels at the time of granting the licence.

I am a little bit confused as to whether those Wongi waterholes will be flooded as a result of this.

Mr Chris Foley: There is a levy being built.

Mr MESSENGER: There is a levy there, okay. The Wide Bay Water Corporation has managed to meet the community's expectations in securing a water supply for Hervey Bay while protecting the environment.

It may interest members to know that the Wongi State Forest is also used by the Fraser Coast Astronomical Society for its observing nights. Obviously another asset of the Wongi forest is that it is dark; it does not have many lights. So viewing nights are held from time to time in the Wongi State Forest. Obviously those observations are very successful. Because of the deep sky, objects can be viewed quite easily in that particular environment in the Wongi forest.

Mr McNamara: It was the place to view Mars recently when Mars was closest to the earth.

Mr MESSENGER: And I believe Dr Ian Richards is in charge of that. I remember Ian quite well. He is a gentleman I used to speak with while I was on the ABC. We used to talk about heavenly bodies and indicate when the planets were all aligned.

A government member interjected.

Mr MESSENGER: Of course. I think he ran as a Greens candidate for Hervey Bay.

The Wide Bay Water Corporation is undertaking a substantial upgrade of the Lake Lenthall recreational area. Apparently there are plans for new roads; parking and walking tracks have been established; and toilets and picnic and barbecue areas are being upgraded. I know that will be met with quite a lot of pleasure from many families around the Wide Bay-Burnett. Once again, new facilities will be made available for wheelchair-bound people. It is good to see that disabled people are being thought of. A new boat ramp has also been installed. Power boats up to 4.5 kilowatts, or six horsepower, are allowed but speeds are restricted to a maximum of four knots, ensuring a quiet ambience for the enjoyment of all visitors.

I note that currently in Hervey Bay there are water restrictions. The council is following up and being very water wise. The hosing of driveways and paved areas is banned at all times, and all sprinklers and soaker hoses are banned from 5.30 am to 8 pm. Drip and micro irrigation systems and hand-held hosing are still allowed.

I have to compliment the Hervey Bay City Council on its water recycling. It was developed in the late 1980s, when population and tourism growth in Hervey Bay had created the need for more sewage treatment facilities. The Environmental Protection Agency would not permit the extra treated sewage to be discharged into local creeks that flowed into the bay. An ocean outfall was required. However, in a community where tourism relies on preserving the pristine waters of the region, any impact on the bay was considered unacceptable. The challenge was to find an environmentally responsible solution that was both economically viable and acceptable to the residents of Hervey Bay. The result is a land based effluent disposal system that has not only protected the waters of the region but also delivered dividends for local farmers, the council and ratepayers.

The scheme basically consists of three parts. There is the Pulgul irrigation system, the Eli Creek irrigation scheme—both are joined by a 12.5-kilometre pipeline—and a stormwater harvesting project. The stormwater harvesting is quite interesting. To manage the situation where demand might exceed supply, the Wide Bay Water Corporation has incorporated a stormwater harvesting scheme to provide additional water for treatment if necessary, particularly during the peak canegrowing period from November to April. Stormwater is stored in flood retardation basins around the city then released into the sewer during lower night-time flows. This very innovative engineering approach helps minimise odour and corrosion in the sewerage network while preventing contaminants such as oil, animal waste, fertilisers and litter flowing into the bay through the stormwater systems. The Wide Bay Water Corporation uses around 80 per cent of its waste water in the irrigation system. Its EPA licence stipulates 90 per cent reuse by 2007, but the corporation's goal is to continue expanding the scheme's customer base to recycle 100 per cent of the effluent. It is quite a visionary goal as well.

My office has spoken with Roger Currie from the Wide Bay Burnett Conservation Council. I note that the Wide Bay Burnett Conservation Council has always been opposed to the two-metre raising of Lenthalls Dam. It has been involved in this issue for the past five years. Originally the council wanted a six-metre raise, as I have stated previously. The Wide Bay Burnett Conservation Council originally assisted the traditional owners to approach the federal government—I think it was Minister Ian Campbell—to put a protection order over the Wongi waterholes, but this was unsuccessful on application. The Wide Bay Burnett Conservation Council does not believe it is a good investment to put public money in here, the reason being that, if they get the approval, it would barely supply enough water for five years. There seems to be a disagreement between the Wide Bay Burnett Conservation Council and engineers with the council. The council is obviously saying that it will provide water for the next 20 to 25 years. I have to note, in the interests of balance and fairness, that the Wide Bay Burnett Conservation Council believes that dams are not the alternative in this region because it is not getting enough rain.

The other reason that Roger and his group oppose the proposal is that they are pushing a conservation movement and are moving to convince the state and federal governments to recycle water. In this case, I think that Hervey Bay sees the best of both worlds. We have a common-sense solution to water because they are not wasting it, obviously. They are one of the world leaders. When it comes to water recycling, the community of Hervey Bay leads the world and is a shining example for the rest of Queensland and Australia.

As I mentioned earlier, I spoke with Ted Sorensen, the Mayor of Hervey Bay. His only criticism, in typical Ted fashion, was that this revocation did not happen sooner. He is 100 per cent behind the motion. If this revocation does not happen it will halt all development in Hervey Bay because they will simply run out of water. I congratulate Ted, his community and his council on the vision that they have displayed in water management. Their vision has inspired many different communities around Australia and, indeed, the world.

In a previous life when I was working with the ABC, I remember a visit by the Japanese governor of the Shiga province. I remember that the governor came specifically to Hervey Bay to inspect the way that it

managed its water. This particular governor was responsible for about 1.2 million people. A city of that size was looking at Hervey Bay. Hervey Bay's management of water is world renowned.

It also has fed into and created a vision that I would like to see for Queensland. That vision is zero ocean outfalls. They are doing it in Hervey Bay. Preliminary research by my officers—very good research, too, so I have to congratulate my staff—has found, according to the Clean Ocean Foundation web site, Queensland has 32 ocean outfalls. The Clean Ocean Foundation, or the COF, is an environmental organisation that is dedicated to the closure of all ocean outfalls, supporting and promoting the phrase, 'The ocean is not a dumping ground'.

According to this organisation—and more and more figures are coming in, so it is a work in progress—Queensland alone dumps almost one-fifth of the 3 billion litres that is dumped along the Australian coastline every day. Around 422 million litres per day of semi-treated effluent is dumped into our pristine estuary systems and, of course, around our coastline. That is bad enough if you are in another state. If you are in New South Wales, that is bad enough. However, we live in Queensland and we are right opposite the Great Barrier Reef, so it is even more imperative that we get it right.

Mr Rowell interjected.

Mr MESSENGER: I take that interjection from the member for Hinchinbrook. That is right; there is secondary treatment. I have a list going from Mossman right down to Cairns. Mossman has secondary with chlorination; Pioneer Bay South has secondary. There is a whole list of ocean outfalls and I am adding to that list as I go on. Most of it is secondary. Certainly there are some tertiary outputs.

In my own area, I know that Bundaberg has tertiary water. It puts out about 2.76 megalitres per day. I have inspected the site at Bargara in my electorate of Burnett. In Bargara alone, 2 to 3 megalitres of secondary water goes straight out into the marine park area right beside the Mon Repos beach. We really do have to fix this problem. We have to find ways to help councils fix this problem of ocean outfalls.

Mr Shine interjected.

Mr MESSENGER: As I indicated earlier in my speech, they have a recycling program.

Mr Hopper: You were asleep.

Mr MESSENGER: Yes, he was.

I was pleased to hear that the DPI indicated that it would like forest that would be flooded by the increasing water to be harvested. I was also pleased to hear that the Butchulla and Gubbi Gubbi peoples were consulted and a cultural heritage plan developed. This revocation is part of a balanced, well-researched and commonsense response, and a solution to a critical water shortage in Hervey Bay. I support the revocation motion before the House.