



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Wednesday, 19 April 2006

AGNES WATER, SEWAGE

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (10.22 pm): I have recently been contacted by residents of Agnes Water who have alleged that raw sewage sludge from septic tanks is being pumped into an open pit at the Agnes Water-1770 waste management facility. Most disturbingly, they also allege that this raw sewage sludge has been pumped into that open pit for over 10 years. Those residents also provided me with photos of the Miriam Vale Shire Council truck pumping sewage into that pit. I have passed those pictures on to the environment minister. Last week, on Thursday afternoon, I visited the Agnes Water-1770 dump and saw first-hand the sewage sludge pit.

The sewage pit is situated approximately 300 metres from residential housing; 500 metres from Tom's Creek, a small tidal creek which feeds into Round Hill Creek; and approximately 600 metres from a surf beach. The worker who mans the dump office, 50 metres from the sewage pit, told me that his mosquito bites take about a month to heal.

In past months I have written to the environment minister about the residents' concerns. Today I received a letter from the minister for environment which confirms that her department has known for more than 12 years about the existence of the Miriam Vale shire's sewage pit at the Agnes Water land fill. I table a copy of that letter. The minister says that her department does not believe current practice is ideal. That has to be the understatement of the year. This is a disgraceful environmental and public health issue that this government has known about and turned a blind eye to for the duration of its incumbency. It begs the question: how many more sewage sludge pits are operating in Queensland while this minister makes lame excuses and turns a bureaucratic blind eye?

The minister claims that the EPA has placed a number of conditions on the Miriam Vale Shire Council to operate the Agnes Water land fill, including sewage pit operations, and these conditions do not authorise the disposal of untreated sewage but, rather, residues from treatment plants and septic treatment systems. I would like the environment minister to explain to my constituents who live 300 metres away from the government approved pit what is the difference between residues from septic systems and untreated human waste?

It is my understanding that the tankers connect to the septic tanks, ingest their load and then discharge the fluid into the pit. For all practical purposes, the sewage is untreated. It would have the same amount of germs and harmful pathogens that are present in untreated human waste. Certainly, last week it looked like human waste and smelt like human waste. I also had conversations with the mayor of the Miriam Vale shire, Mr Tom Jeffery, who told me that it is his understanding that sewage dumping does not have EPA approval. The minister says that it does. What is the truth of the matter? How can the minister say that she is protecting the environment—

Time expired.