



Speech by

## John-Paul Langbroek

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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### MOTION: ELECTRONIC VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.30 pm): I move—

That this House calls upon the state and federal governments to immediately commit to extending the electronic vessel monitoring system so that it encompasses the entire Queensland coast.

That such a system be fully funded and operational within 12 months; and that the Minister for Transport update state parliament on a monthly basis on the progress of discussions, funding and installation of the system's extension.

On 3 April this year, at Douglas Reef off Gladstone, the *Shen Neng 1* ran aground on the Great Barrier Reef. It was daylight. In today's *Financial Review*, at page 13, Mark Ludlow reports that Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Chief Scientist David Wachenfeld said that the *Shen Neng 1* had caused widespread damage to the reef, which could take 20 years to recover. Dr Wachenfeld told the ABC that this is by far the largest ship grounding we have seen on the Great Barrier Reef. He said—

This vessel did not make an impact in one place and rest there, and then was pulled off. This scar is more in the region of three kilometres long and up to 250 metres wide.

The park authority chairman, Russell Reichelt, said toxic paint from the ship's hull was killing coral around Douglas Shoal, where the ship ran aground on 3 April. Mark Ludlow's article concludes by saying that federal environment minister Peter Garrett said he would ask the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority for a thorough review of the site.

Reportedly, the *Shen Neng 1* was travelling at full speed, it was offcourse and we have now heard about the damage it has caused to the reef. Did the government know that it was offcourse? No. There are repeated reports of rat-running by ships in the Great Barrier Reef area. The government knows this, yet there is no monitoring of ships south of around Hay Point. I have a copy of the ship reporting area. The current surveillance area ends at latitude 22, south of Hay Point but north of Rockhampton and Gladstone, where there will be a massive increase in shipping over the next few years. The question is: why is there no monitoring of ships south of around Hay Point? Why is the government ignoring the environmental and safety needs of our southern coastline, including a substantial part of the Great Barrier Reef? We can ask the question: is it a lack of money? In the last financial year, the government raked in over \$3 billion in royalties from the resources sector. Surely the reinvestment of some of that money into monitoring shipping along our coast is justified? However, we know this is the government that sent Queensland bust in a boom and obviously applied the money that it obtained from royalties to other needs. Now we see the consequences of not having a state-wide surveillance system. Obviously, members opposite have higher priorities.

Let us look at some of the statistics. Every year, 1,500 ships use the Gladstone harbour. It is predicted that that number will be 3,700 by 2017. Half of those ships carry coal for the export market, but other ships carrying hazardous materials travel these routes. Last year, Gladstone handled almost 1½ million tonnes of caustic soda and more than 150,000 tonnes of ammonium nitrate. Soon, Gladstone will become a major terminal for liquified natural gas exports. However, as I have said already, and as Queenslanders should be aware, there is no vessel monitoring south of Hay Point. North of Hay point, under joint federal and state arrangements between the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, AMSA, and

Maritime Safety Queensland, MSQ, shipping is monitored by the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait vehicle traffic service, known as ReefVTS.

**Ms Nolan:** Vessel.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** Yes, by the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait Vessel Traffic Service, known as ReefVTS.

**Ms Nolan:** Vessel.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I thank the minister for that correction. I did not need it to come through on my BlackBerry, because I can hear the Minister for Transport shrieking at me. ReefVTS comprises a mandatory ship reporting system, ReefRep, and monitoring and surveillance systems, including radar. This system targets the ships that represent the highest risk to the reef: all ships over 50 metres in overall length and all tankers, liquefied gas carriers and chemical tankers. The question remains: why is the government unwilling or unable to extend this system? It is another example of the government's inability to manage the core government responsibilities for Queensland. Maybe they are making sure they look after their mates.

**A government member:** Oh!

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I have concerns about the chair of AMSA and head of the Gladstone Port. He has a long-term association with the Labor Party in Gladstone. He was the ALP candidate for Gladstone in 1988. The question is: are his roles in conflict? AMSA's role is to make Australia's waterways as safe as possible and the Port of Gladstone's role is to maximise shipping through the port and oversee the predicted doubling of ship numbers in the next seven years. These questions need to be answered.

The government has form for bungled responses to oil spills and shipping disasters. This grounding happened only 12 months after the *Pacific Adventurer* spilt 271 tonnes of oil into Moreton Bay. There have been two independent reports into the *Pacific Adventurer* oil spill, and both are damning. They show a trail of confusion, poor planning, a lack of political leadership and ineffective responsiveness. Findings include a limited capacity to deal with large-scale oil spill incidents without additional support. Command and control arrangements used in the *Pacific Adventurer* incident was a hybrid model that emerged over time, resulting in role ambiguity, which impacted on all areas, including decision making. The absence of a centralised planning role at the BICC was a significant contributor to command and control challenges. Again, there was little compatibility between oil spill response and disaster management administrative arrangements. It also should be noted that, although a disaster situation was declared by the Queensland Premier, the Queensland disaster management arrangements were not formally activated. Finally, with regards to the EPA, there was an apparent inability to provide advice and reach agreement. There is much more and it is unacceptable. What was the government's response? It has announced that fines for corporations involved in oil spills will increase from \$1.75 million to several more million dollars than that. While we welcome those changes, it is like shutting the gate after the horse has bolted. We demand more and the people of Queensland demand more.

The LNP believes that a real monitoring system covering the whole of the Queensland coast is essential. We believe the government has delayed too long and is putting one of Queensland's greatest assets at risk. We believe that waiting to act until there is another major oil spill on our pristine coast is unacceptable. I urge the government to accept this motion and work with the Rudd government to implement real vessel monitoring along the whole of Queensland's coast as a matter of urgency.

In moving this motion today, we are looking to the future of our state and are planning appropriately. Given the dramatic increase in shipping volumes that we have seen, it is hard to believe that the state government has been so tardy in moving to extend the ReefVTS service. I ask members to think for a moment about the consequences of continuing to accept standards from a decade ago as adequate to cope with the circumstances of today. The *Shen Neng 1* was a coal carrier and the containers lost from the *Pacific Adventurer* contained ammonium nitrate, but along the east coast we have a burgeoning trade. Apart from massive bulk iron ore, bauxite and coal carriers, there are tankers carrying tens of thousands of tonnes of crude oil and soon there will be an increasing number of LNG carriers. It is irresponsible not to realise that, in time, a major spill will come.

We can consider a scenario of a large tanker, perhaps carrying 85,000 tonnes of light crude, passing the Swain Reefs in the middle of the night, when its ballast tanks rupture and fill with seawater. Before the pumps can be rigged, the weight of the water causes the tanker's bows to shear away. By morning, 20,000 tonnes of crude is in the water in a slick 60 kilometres long and 400 metres wide. There is a fire and the tanker is soon surrounded by a wall of flames 15 metres high.

This slick would threaten the entire Capricorn group of islands, from Heron to North West and the Keppels to the Byfield National Park and Shoalwater Bay. I ask members to think about what would happen if the scenario I have just outlined were to come to pass—and do not say it will not happen, because that scenario did happen off the coast of Western Australia in July 1991. The *Kirki* disaster was a

giant wake-up call for shipping design standards and for the introduction of systems such as ReefVTS. So long as there are large cargoes of oil and gas and so long as the volume of shipping increases, we need to advance our systems of safety, navigation and emergency response.

So I ask the parliament to consider what will happen on the fateful day when there is a big spill—a spill of the size perhaps that we saw off the coast of Western Australia in 1991. If we are prepared and our response is effective, we may be able to avoid some of the ecological damage we might otherwise face. For the sake of the future of our state, our economy, our children and grandchildren and our way of life, we had better be prepared and our response had better be effective, because in every way we depend on continuing access to these waters for our international trade, our tourism, our fishing industry, our recreation and our lifestyle. If we get it wrong, the wave of trade and prosperity will be dramatically curtailed.