



Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**


**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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**MOTION**

**Revocation and Dedication of Protected Areas and State Forest Areas (Cognate Debate)**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (11.50 am): It is a great day when we can stand in this House and talk about a legacy project. Of course, I am referring to the Mullett Creek Dam at Waterloo. I acknowledge Tom Gorton and his family for their 22-year endeavour and for reaching at least one more stepping stone towards the success of their enterprise in my electorate. I pay my respects to the family and acknowledge their frustrations with the bureaucratic stepping stones that they have had to negotiate. While it has been said that this is not a foregone conclusion, we acknowledge their work and we very much thank the minister for bringing this motion to the House today. It is great when we can make a speech in this place about something so important for that family and, more importantly, the district and the electorate.

The 12,000-megalitre dam will be significant. It has been acknowledged in previous contributions that it is about trebling production. We often talk about the mangoes, avocados and other produce that come from this particular part of the world so we really are quite excited about this step. The freehold tenure that needs to be enacted to accommodate the dam is part of this revocation and, of course, as has been said we are very excited to talk about it today.

This is about water security for tree crops. We know that water is the lifeblood of agricultural enterprises and is vital for mangoes, macadamias and avocados. We want to see the flow-on economic, social, corporate and commercial benefits. The traditional owners and local, state and federal stakeholders also have a buy-in. I acknowledge the Gortons' work with the First Nations people in fire mitigation practices, particularly in the state forests that surround them and the Littabella National Park, which face significant fire issues. The family have been farming at Mullett Creek since 1901. In the foyer on level 3, near the door, is a carved owl named Charlie. The wood from which the owl is carved came from the Gorton farm. Tom's father cut the log and Tom snigged it out with a bullock team.

**Mr Stevens:** What sort of timber is it?

**Mr BENNETT:** That is a good question from the member for Mermaid Beach, but I am not sure of the answer. It is a nice bit of timber that has been carved into something important and there is nothing more important than having an owl on the parliamentary precinct. The family's connection to the parliament should not be understated and we welcome that contribution

Tom, Rob and their families have been involved on the farm for a long time. Between them, they have 90 years experience in farming at that location. They have a strong existing track record of growing their business and producing superior quality fresh fruit for domestic and international markets. I note that some five or six years ago we trialled the irradiation of mangoes to be sent to California. Those mangoes came off Tom's and Rob's farm. Their own packing shed was built in 2008. They supply produce to Coles, Woolworths and Aldi Australia-wide and export to Asia and Middle Eastern countries

as well. Additional growth of the enterprise has been limited by the water supply issue. Given the series of droughts, floods and other issues, we do need to make sure that water supply is secure not only in this case but also across the nation as we look at what food production will look like into the future.

I know from experience that the Gorton family takes real pride in their custodianship of native bushland, as I mentioned earlier. They put a lot of their own resources into maintaining the national parks and state forests around their enterprise. We know that they consciously employ environmental practices and that farming sustainably is part of their core mission and values.

We know that without sufficient water businesses, communities and economies will collapse and that is why this motion is really important. The Gortons have six full-time employees but their staff numbers expand to 150 employees during peak harvesting times. That is a significant part of the economy for my electorate. They know from the modelling that they have done on the dam, which has been given to the department, they will be able to employ an extra 12 full-time staff and 250 casuals will come on board during harvesting, which is a significant increase as all members would agree. The expected increases for their Sunny Bluff Produce business are really important and I am talking about things such as transport and logistics; technology and computers; banking and accounting; fertilizers and chemicals; protocols, consultants and industry bodies; parts and repairs; and on it goes. As any farming family knows, a lot of investment is made in those things.

I acknowledge the minister and the department for the briefings we have received over the many years that this has been going on. Their forthrightness and ability to communicate have been welcomed. However, in closing, I say again that the bureaucracy that the Gorton family has had to negotiate has been horrendous. It is not the state government issue; there are a lot of independent inquiries and stakeholders involved. However, we are now another step closer to a great enterprise and a great outcome for my electorate. I commend the revocation motion to the House.