




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MIRANI

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Pioneer-Burdekin Pumped Hydro Project

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (2.36 pm): I have the great honour of representing an electorate that is home to one of the most beautiful regions in Queensland, Eungella National Park and the lovely Pioneer Valley. The people who live there had their world turned upside down on 28 December 2022 when the Queensland Premier announced the government's plan to build the world's largest pumped hydro scheme right on their doorstep. To my knowledge, not a single minister or anyone else connected with the government bothered to visit Eungella or the proposed location of that project—not even the Yuwibara people, the traditional owners of that area—before committing \$12 billion to tear up the whole area. If they had, they would have seen the lush rolling fields and precious subtropical rainforest. The fragile ecosystem is home to many of Queensland's endangered species. This morning I asked the environment minister about the project. I will be writing to her to ask her to come and look at just what they propose. She will see the majestic mountain that will have its top blown to smithereens, its insides hollowed out for giant pipelines and its vegetation cleared for the network of roads needed to service that gigantic project.

Eungella National Park is one of the jewels in the crown of Queensland's beauty, biodiversity and tourism. Now the whole community is being hit with a swarm of Queensland Hydro bureaucrats from Brisbane who are trying to tell them what to do while refusing to answer any of the residents' most basic questions about the project. People are being pressured to sell their homes. The deadline for acquisitions is this month. Many have been threatened with compulsory acquisition if they refuse to sign.

This needs to stop now and so does the whole project, frankly. Has the government even bothered to look at the alternatives? We have cogeneration. Pumped hydro is old technology. Australia's three biggest pumped hydro plants were built over 40 years ago. They have operated only infrequently and sometimes not at all for years at a time.

What was really shocking to me was when we last went to the meetings with Queensland Hydro and they presented maps with a lower reservoir marked as plan B. It was another area—another valley—that they planned on damming and making a part of this whole system. There is a reason for that. No-one is being straight or up-front about it. When you put transmission lines and so on into an area and you spend that much money to transmit that much power then you are going to use the rest of those valleys to transmit more power and to use that infrastructure.

Someone is not telling the truth here. Why were those maps just about dragged out of my hands? Why were they taken off the table so that the locals could not take them home to scrutinise and see what is going on and what the government has planned? 'No, they're the wrong maps', we were told. What a shame! It is an absolute shame for the people. First we were not told at all. Now they are introducing stuff and we do not know what is going to happen. It is a disgraceful way to treat those people.

Experts I have spoken with have said that there are a number of insurmountable environmental and technical issues with this project. They say that the cost alone will be astronomical. No doubt, it will blow out. Even Rod Welford, the former Labor minister for natural resources and the environment, has issued a warning on the scale of investment and the significant risks of cost blowouts. Rod was there when everything was happening in the Finch Hatton Gorge. The proposed lower reservoir B is actually in Seninis Road, which goes into one of our other little areas called Kowari. Then right next door to that is Finch Hatton Gorge. These places are known throughout the world. They are beautiful ecosystems with rare birds, rare frogs and naturally occurring platypus. They are looking at sticking all their infrastructure up in these beautiful areas while the city folk do not understand exactly what this means and what cost it will have. Offset documents do not offset the cost of what is there. These places have their own personality, just as we do. You can offset as much as you like, but you will never replace what you take away in terms of what we are about to do. Trust me on that. I know; we grew up there.

There is a lot we do not know about this project. What is the exact footprint of this infrastructure and what is the size of the power stations, the cables and the infrastructure? I know one thing: you do not put something in there and spend that much money without a plan to expand on it later, because you will not build two or three of them in that area. That area has the ability to support expansion. Trust me: when the government sees that, generally it goes about doing that. That is the sad part of it. The map I have seen with lower reservoir B tells me that something more is going on. The people of Eungella want to know. They want their future secured.