



Speech by

Glen Elmes

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Hansard Tuesday, 6 February 2007

JOHNS ROAD QUARRY

Mr ELMES (Noosa—Lib) (12.29 pm): I would like to draw the attention of the House to an environmental disaster that has occurred under the nose of the environment department over the past 10 months. On 24 October 2006, the Noosa Parks Association—the NPA—wrote to the environment minister and the then Minister for Natural Resources and Water alerting them to environmental damage at the Johns Road Quarry at Lake Cooroibah. That warning went unanswered. The operator, who was removed from the site by police on 17 January this year, is Mr Ted Allan of Noosa Washed Sand. Mr Allan is in partnership with Michael Sherrin, who owns a hire company.

I table that letter dated 24 October, together with attachments, and also a letter dated 1 November from the Noosa Integrated Catchment Association—the NICA—that provided further proof to the minister of increased activity and large-scale environmental damage by Noosa Washed Sand. These groups also advised the minister that they were extremely concerned about the expansion of the quarry so close to the flood plain of the Noosa River.

Tabled paper: Copy letter, dated 24 October 2006, from Shirley Williamson, Project Officer, Noosa Parks Association Inc. to Minister for Natural Resources and Water regarding extractive industry at Johns Road, Cooroibah.

Tabled paper: Copy letter, dated 26 October 2006, from Shirley Williamson, Project Officer, Noosa Parks Association Inc. to Mr Elmes MP regarding extractive industry at Johns Road, Cooroibah.

The NPA wrote to me as the local member to provide me with copies of all correspondence. At the same time, I was receiving calls and letters from concerned residents reporting a dramatic increase in trucking movements from the quarry. A concerned Noosa Council installed a traffic counter to determine the facts. In November it confirmed that at least 6,000 tonnes of material was leaving the site each day. The quarry permit is for between 50,000 and not more than 100,000 tonnes of extracted material per year. Because it is so large, I table just a sample of the traffic movements of trucks entering and leaving the quarry showing the date, time, tonnage and type of truck.

Tabled paper: Copy extract of traffic count headed Lake Cooroibah Heavy Vehicles Class 8.

I met with Peter Gill, a member of the Lake Cooroibah Action Group. Peter provided me with an overview of the quarry and the effects on the Noosa environment. On 6 November I wrote to the minister asking that she investigate concerns that had already been put to her by the NPA and the NICA. I table the minister's response with an attachment to the NPA.

Tabled paper: Copy letter dated 6 November 2006 from Mr Elmes MP to Hon Lindy Nelson-Carr MP, Minister for Environment and Multiculturalism.

Tabled paper: Copy letter dated 22 November 2006 from Hon Nelson-Carr to Mr Elmes.

Tabled paper: Copy letter, dated 22 November 2006, from Nick Heath, Policy Advisor, Office of the Minister for Environment and Multiculturalism, to Shirley Williamson, Project Officer, Noosa Parks Association Inc., regarding extractive industry at Johns Road, Cooroibah.

On 3 November the EPA visited the site and followed that visit with a letter to the operator, dated 20 November, warning that the operator was in breach of several conditions of development approval SR05011DA. This letter gave him until 1 December to answer the notice issued by the EPA. I table that letter. From April 2006, EPA officers had dramatically increased their site visits and were on site on four

different occasions on one day alone. I wrote to the minister and asked for a report on the investigation that was to be held on site on 5 December 2006 to assess the level of compliance. The minister refused my request and referred me to the EPA's web site to view the guidelines enforcement criteria. I table a copy of that response dated 15 December. I also table photos taken last Friday when I visited the quarry. These pictures do not do the scene of devastation justice, because the scope of damage is just too vast. The scene of the quarry left me speechless. The 50-metre vegetation buffer that is supposed to shield and protect the surrendering property has been mined. Johns Road is in danger of collapse. In fact, the whole area is unstable as a result of illegal activity and has the potential to wash straight into the Noosa River.

Tabled paper: Copy letter dated 20 November 2006, from Dr Glen Brown, Southern Region, EPA, to Mr Ted Allen regarding development approval compliance issues.

Tabled paper: Copy letter dated 15 December 2006 from Hon Lindy Nelson-Carr MP, Minister for Environment and Multiculturalism, to Mr Elmes MP regarding extractive industry at Johns Road, Cooroibah.

Tabled paper: Two photos.

Within two weeks of handing over the keys to Ted Allan, Jack Li Du, the previous operator, visited the site, advised Allan that what he was doing was illegal and reported the facts to the EPA. This again highlights that the EPA knew of the illegal activities in April 2006 but did nothing. Neither I nor the other locals hold Jack Li Du responsible in any way. The department's web site states—

Ms Nelson-Carr takes on the vital role of ensuring Queensland's environment continues to be protected—remaining healthy and sustainably used into the future.

Who, then, should be held accountable for what could become Noosa's own Ok Tedi? The minister knew about the concerns of locals and of the Noosa Council. As the ultimate assessment manager, the minister should have acted to close the quarry months ago. She alone is responsible. If Noosa had received just a fraction of the rainfall that north Queensland received over the past week, many tonnes of material, including acid sulfate soil, would have been carried into the Noosa River, causing a catastrophe. The minister should buy out Jack Li Du, close the quarry permanently, secure the site and then justify to this House why she should continue to be a minister of the Crown.