

CORRECTED VERSION

SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LAND DEVELOPMENT

Tuerong — 27 September 2007

Members

Mr D. Davis

Mr P. Hall

Mr P. Kavanagh

Mr E. O'Donohue

Ms S. Pennicuik

Mr B. Tee

Mr M. Viney

Chair: Mr D. Davis

Deputy Chair: Mr B. Tee

Staff

Secretary: Mr R. Willis

Research Officer: Ms C. Williams

Witness

Mr N. Burgess, MLA Hastings.

Mr BURGESS — Chair, can I seek leave to briefly address the committee?

The CHAIR — Brief is the word, if people are prepared to stay.

Mr BURGESS — Thank you very much. I am Neil Burgess and have been the member for Hastings since last November. I want to make three brief points. One is that I find it an interesting situation, having been in the area during the whole process, that the status quo is that this is already land that belongs to the community. I would have thought that in such circumstances the onus would have been on the government or whoever wanted to sell this to come up with the reasons why it should be sold. Having written to the departments and the minister, and also having met with Parks on several occasions now, no-one has been able to give me an indication of why it is necessary to sell this land.

On the basis of conversations that I have listened to here today, with the proposal being put forward that this is to fund looking after or developing the park or the reserve itself, I think we really need only to look at a recent precedent from the last few years in the Beaconsfield Reservoir, which was actually given in full to the community, under full care of the community group. There was no suggestion that any amount had to be sold off to fund the rest of it or the development or the care of it. I think we are in a situation where unless we can see some really strong reason for this to be sold off, then I cannot see why we would be doing so.

Having said that, I think it is also necessary to look at the other reason that was put forward — that was, that a recent report of I think 2004 suggested that this land, the 100 acres, 40 hectares, was of a lesser value than the surrounding area of Devilbend. I think it is necessary to look at that particular report against the background of what was going on prior to that group being put together to form that report and while that report was being put together.

The background of that was a very, very strong push by people to sell the whole lot. The message that was delivered strongly to that group was: if you do not compromise on land that can be sold, you will lose it all. There is no question that that was the message given to every one of those members. The result that they came out with was what they considered as a situation that may in fact save some of Devilbend for this community. I think it is important that that is considered in that context.

The third and final point I want to make is that, as I said before, I am the local member for this area; Devilbend is in my area. I have the opportunity every day of speaking to the community at all levels: at the community groups, to individual residents — virtually everybody in this community at one stage or another, whether it was through the campaigning time or since I have been a member; and I am yet to find anybody who wants any of that land to be sold. In fact, the strong push is that we should be consolidating that and expanding it in future as we get local opportunities to do so.

What I am qualified to talk about today is what has been said to me and what the view of the local community and certainly my constituency is — that is, that all of Devilbend should be retained, including the 40 hectares.

Mr TEE — I suppose I am curious as to your suggestion that there has been no government justification. As I understand justification — and we canvassed all of those — there is a major road, a very busy road, between the proposal and the block; that the 2004 report, for which a number of experts as well as community people, including community people here, said it had little conservation value; and that if you look at it on any map it is not part of the integral, it sort of abuts it. It is not part of the block of land; it is sort of set aside from it. From the discussion we have heard, I do not think that in that context it is appropriate or feasible to suggest there has been no justification. This has been part of a very long and public process. To say there is no justification does not seem to me to hold any water. Whether you accept it is a different issue, but to say there has been no justification is not sustained by the facts.

Mr BURGESS — Am I allowed to respond?

The CHAIR — Very briefly — a short response.

Mr BURGESS — I think the word ‘justification’ is the summary of the situation. There has been no reason to sell it. Once it was decided that it should be sold, the justification was that it was a separate part. What we should be looking to do is consider it in the context of the report that came out from which you have quoted. The

fact was that those people felt they had to negotiate away some of the land to keep the rest. You can roll your eyes, but that is exactly what the situation was.

Mr TEE — Again, the committees of the working group who were here today struck me as being very independent people whose evidence was that they spent a lot of time and a lot of effort. They do not strike me as being the sort of people who would be or were intimidated in any way by the process.

Ms PENNICUIK — Thank you for those two important points and the background to that report and the useful comparison with Beaconsfield.

The CHAIR — Thank you. I declare the hearing closed.

Committee adjourned.