

# Top public servant rues link to developer

By **PAUL WHITTAKER**

PREMIER'S Department head Peter Ellis yesterday said he wished he had never met a developer he once worked for who was accused in State Parliament of a land scam.

Brisbane developer David Nilsson's alleged sale of non-existent blocks of coastal property at Clairview, in Broad-sound Shire near Mackay, to investors from Nauru was denounced in Parliament two months ago by Labor Member for Fitzroy Jim Pearce.

Mr Pearce said Mr Nilsson's company sold six unregistered five-acre lots depicted on a concept plan to six Investors from Nauru for up to \$70,000 a lot.

Several Singaporean investors also were allegedly duped by Mr Nilsson into buying land at grossly inflated prices.

Mr Ellis, who was a consultant to Nilsson Corporation from 1993 to 1995, said he was not involved in the Nauru land sales.

He said he had only worked on obtaining approvals for the proposed Clairview development.

"I wish I never met him," Mr Ellis said.

"I walked away when he wasn't paying the bills.

"It took me a year to get my last invoice paid."

Mr Pearce said he was outraged Mr Nilsson was using his name in material selling Clairview land at Investment seminars Mr Nilsson was currently conducting in Malaysia.

The Nauru purchasers were told they were buying land at Clairview which was within the area of a concept plan developed by Nilsson Corporation for a resort town for 20,000 people.

Quoted as the developments' project director in The Courier-

Mail on May 31, 1994, Mr Ellis said the resort town was planned in a series of stages over 20 years and would include a small ships port and integrated transport facility for rail and road.

Mr Pearce told Parliament the company's own studies revealed the plan was not economically viable and the area's water supply could not sustain more than about 3000 people.

Mr Ellis was later part of a planning team that cut the town's population to 1500.

Former Nilsson Corporation general manager Tom Knobel, who resigned as the company secretary after learning of the Nauru complaints, said Mr Ellis attended a 1994 meeting where Knobel raised his concerns about the Nauru land sales.

Mr Nilsson, the company's former development adviser Arthur Muhl and former engineering adviser Bill Knobel also were at the meeting.

Mr Muhl and Mr Knobel said Mr Ellis was at the meeting.

Mr Ellis wrote to Mr Nilsson twice last year demanding he stop using his name and stop describing him as a director in off-shore marketing documents for the Clairview development.

In letter to Mr Nilsson in April last year, Mr Ellis wrote: "At no time was permission granted to you to use my name in this document or any other ... I am also concerned that the presentation of the project in the documentation referred to misrepresents the facts as I know them."

Broadsound Shire Council Mayor Mike McArthur confirmed Mr Pearce's claims about the non-existent lots, saying it appeared Mr Nilsson had "conned a number of people."