

## **Vale Thomas David Fenwick 4-01-1941 – 20-04-2020**

Thomas David (Tom) Fenwick was born in Brisbane on 4 January 1941, the eldest of three children. Tom's father Osborn Thomas Fenwick was a Civil Engineer, and his mother Amy Catherine (nee Blunt) was a teacher at Ashgrove kindergarten. The family lived in Alderley, one of Brisbane's northern suburbs. Tom attended Wilston Primary School and completed Senior at Brisbane Grammar School, following in the footsteps of his father and uncle. A regular speech night prize recipient and an enthusiastic rower and rugby man, he greatly enjoyed his time at BGS.

A recipient of a Government Scholarship, Tom studied at the University of Queensland, graduating with Honours as a Bachelor of Civil Engineering. By all accounts, he vigorously enjoyed his university years, as an enthusiastic member and President of the UQ Engineering Undergraduate Society (EUS), a well-established patron of the Regatta Hotel, and a reliable organiser of cabarets, soirees, boat trips and interstate tours that achieved sometimes legendary status.

He began his professional career with the Irrigation and Water Supply Commission in January 1963.

He married primary school teacher Valerie Claire Jordan in April 1964 and they started married life in their house at Indooroopilly. They lived there for two years before moving to Wuruma Dam near Eidsvold. While there, Tom enjoyed bowls, Val taught at Eidsvold and Abercorn schools, and in 1968, son Matthew was born. The dam site was a good distance from town, and the pace of construction was such that trips back to Brisbane to see family were a rarity. Tom's photographic and darkroom skills were put to good use in recording the early days of the family for posting back to the grandparents in the Capital. In 1969 the family moved to Boonah to work on Maroon Dam. Nine months later, an offer from consulting engineering firm Reinhold and Partners, where his father worked, enticed Tom to leave the IWSC and join the private sector. In urgent need of a city residence, Tom and Val purchased a brand new house in Everton Park, Brisbane.

Frank Learmonth persuaded Tom to return to the IWSC in 1972, the same year that son Craig was born.

During the period to 1979, he strengthened his credentials for his future leadership roles, progressing from directing investigations into a number of major water related projects (including Three Moon Creek, Barker-Barambah Project, Burdekin River Project, Eton Irrigation Project and a number of power station water supply projects), to the establishment and management of Forward Planning Branch.

Over the period from 1979 to 1985, Tom held the position of Senior Engineer, Special Projects, where, in addition to his responsibility for internal coordination of major projects (which included: Burdekin River Project, Boondooma Dam, Wivenhoe Dam, Awoonga-Callide Pipeline, Stanwell Power Station Water Supply and Tarong Water Supply), he was involved in a wide range of policy related matters and management issues generally.

Within the State, he was closely involved in water policy matters including reviews of policies, programs and activities and in 1984, established a Policy and Economics Unit which played a significant role in providing a broader policy perspective to water resources management in this State.

During this term, Tom undertook a review of the overall Commission organisational structure, both in Head Office and in all country centres. As a result of this review and his recommendations, the initial regional structure for the Water Resources Commission was

established with a strong central office/regional office relationship, well ahead of similar developments in most other Departments. From that time, Tom maintained a firm commitment to regional arrangements and was a strong advocate of that concept at all levels of Government.

He was appointed Assistant Commissioner in December 1985 and, following the retirement of Don Beattie, he was appointed Commissioner of Water Resources in August 1986.

As Commissioner, Tom's attention was focused on providing a clear corporate direction which saw the introduction of strategic planning, the development of a corporate plan, clear objectives, new strategies and firm targets which enabled successful redirection of the organisation and its establishment at the forefront of water industry initiatives in Australia. The Strategic Planning Process resulted in the final implementation of the regional arrangements and the introduction of Program Management, which placed it in a position to manage the emerging era of rapid change resulting from the economic reform agenda which Tom's vision and foresight had predicted.

Following the election of the Goss Labor Government, the Water Resources Commission was incorporated into the expanded Department of Primary Industries in December 1989. Tom continued in the position of Commissioner of Water Resources within the new Department until 1991. In addition to maintaining the momentum of corporate development within the Commission, he played a pivotal role in establishing a corporate structure in the new Department. He was appointed Deputy Director-General of the Department of Primary Industries in 1991 and then Director General in 1994, where he provided the strength of leadership required to lead one of the largest and most diverse Departments of the State into a new era of responsive rural services and professional management of the State's natural resources and commercial forest and water businesses.

At the request of Health Minister Peter Beattie, Tom undertook the role of Director General of Health for a brief period, to implement a new regional structure.

With the change in Government and the creation of the Department of Natural Resources in 1996, Tom was the "natural" choice to lead and guide the development of this new organisation, another challenging task which required high levels of leadership, vision and skills to bring together the various and diverse elements which made up the new Department.

Tom's vision and leadership during this time of restructure is widely acknowledged by other States and the Commonwealth through his relations with them. These included Commonwealth-State involvements in water matters, including Senate inquiries, Commonwealth Grants Commission, Australian Water Resources Council and representation of the State in a range of interstate involvements, including The Murray Darling Basin Commission, and The Border Rivers Commission.

Tom's contribution to the water industry was recognised a number of times. The major pumping station in the Burdekin Irrigation Area was named the Tom Fenwick Pump Station and he was the Institution of Engineers Engineer of the Year in 1998.

In 2004, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines implemented the Tom Fenwick Prize which provided one or more prizes of up to \$20,000 to fund individual employees to undertake innovative professional development that will contribute to the future direction of the Department. Peter Shilton, who was the Tom Fenwick Trophy winner in 2006, commented, "I have to say it was a great honour to have been given this award. As result of the award I was provided with the opportunity to travel to various conferences for the next

year and with that I took the opportunity to give a paper at a conference at Park City Utah the United States. At the same time, I took the opportunity to meet with government officers involved in the protection of agricultural land in the province of British Columbia, and in the American states of Oregon and Washington. I particularly remember my discussion with the head of the relevant planning department in Oregon who seemed impressed with the way that we had (at the time) categorised agricultural land according to its agricultural potential. I also was given the opportunity to attend conferences in Australia on issues relevant to the work I was doing in the department.”

Tom retired in 1999.

*Watery Sauces: A People's History of the Water Resources Commission*, summed up Tom's contribution as follows: “Tom was a big man, (literally and figuratively) of enormous vision who survived three changes of government and coped with the complexities of continual change. According to Peter Bevin *Bill Sharp made a prediction that Fred (Haigh) would be outdone by Tom as Commissioner, that Tom would be the best. At the time I thought Fred's would be a difficult act to follow. It's difficult to compare them across different times and issues, but I think Tom was certainly equal, if not better – and that's a big statement!*”

As their sons grew up, flew the nest and began families of their own, Tom and Val resided variously at Aspley, Bridgeman Downs, Auchenflower and Hollywell, Gold Coast. Tom loved to drive and travelled regularly to Melbourne to stay with son Matt and enjoy the culinary and vinicultural delights of the surrounding districts. Painting, entertaining grandchildren, and a longstanding intense desire for the latest technology occupied his leisure time.

Board positions and work for his own consultancy, Tom Fenwick and Assoc., kept him busy. For example, the Gateway Motorway Dispute Resolution Board, the Gateway Update Project, Queensland Water Infrastructure Pty Ltd, and Gold Coast Cruise Ship Terminal Project Board all commanded his attention.

In 2014, Tom was diagnosed with prostate cancer. He dealt with it, in a typical manner, treating it as a project. He always looked and planned for the next option, undergoing endocrine therapy, chemotherapy and radio-immunotherapy as he continued to consult, drive interstate and spend time with family and old friends. Finally, medical science could offer him no more, and Tom passed away peacefully on 20 April 2020.

Tom is survived by his widow Val, his son Matthew (father of Mark) who is an Electronics Engineer and his son Craig (father of Francesca and Constance) who is a Management Consultant turned banker turned entrepreneur.