



## Nautilus Theatre

16 May 2001

**Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders):** Today I praise an achievement in my electorate that has been on the agenda for about half a century. I refer to the provision of an arts complex in Port Lincoln to serve the people living on Eyre Peninsula. Well-known author Colin Thiele was a teacher at Port Lincoln High School in the late 1940s and 1950s. While his prowess as a writer is well documented, his support for other areas of the arts may not be so well known.

Colin Thiele was a member of the very active Port Lincoln Players who regularly performed in the Port Lincoln Civic Hall. Patrons of that time began the drive for a purpose-built theatre. It was a project that no-one expected to take 50 years to come to fruition. Various propositions have been considered and debated over the years. Port Lincoln watched enviously as Whyalla, Port Pirie, Mount Gambier and then Renmark received theatres. Port Lincoln was promised the next regional theatre, but it did not happen. People on southern Eyre Peninsula nevertheless continued to work and plan for a cause that often seemed hopeless, so that the residents of the area could see the types of shows that people in the rest of the state took for granted.

One among the many who deserve mention is Dr Jenny Chillingworth of the Port Lincoln Arts Council and SA Country Arts Trust. Jenny's unwavering support over several decades encouraged Arts Council members to persevere. I also make special mention of Marilyn Mayne, Arts Council member and friend, who kept trying when the project seemed a hopeless dream.

In the 1990s, moves to redevelop the Port Lincoln Soldiers Memorial Civic Hall as an arts facility to include a theatre resulted in the formation of a committee headed by Bob Kretschmer. Councillor Julie Low of Lower Eyre Peninsula District Council took over from him, and she was followed as chair by Councillor Jill Parker of Port Lincoln City Council. Jo McLeay has been Jill's 'partner' in the later stages of the redevelopment.

The Port Lincoln Arts Council and Port Lincoln City Council approved a property exchange with Artyrea Gallery precinct being handed over to council in return for gallery space, facilities for craft, and practical teaching space for arts being provided in the redevelopment. A plan for the redevelopment of the civic hall was costed at \$1.8 million, leading to intensified efforts to raise the funds required. Then came a Liberal federal government that was willing to put funds into regional and rural Australia through the Federation, Cultural and Heritage Projects program. Barry Wakelin, the federal member for Grey, and I were delighted when our funding application brought Port Lincoln City Council \$1 million to be matched dollar for dollar by the redevelopment of the civic hall as a theatre and arts centre. The state Minister for the Arts, the Hon. Diana Laidlaw budgeted \$500 000 towards the project. Port Lincoln City Council and Lower Eyre and Tumby Bay district councils added to the coffers.

However, the cost had escalated to more than \$2 million by this time, bringing about a financial shortfall. Strong community support was needed to prevent the project floundering and hopes being dashed once again. Donations of \$5000 and \$10 000 each came from local people. Naming rights to sections of the complex added to the funds and diehard enthusiasts bought a seat. It is a long list that has enabled the building to open almost debt free. The culmination of the project came a few days ago when the Port Lincoln Soldiers Memorial Civic Hall reopened as an arts facility, combining a theatre seating more than 500 people, two galleries, a media/meeting room and associated infrastructure.

Full houses in the newly named Nautilus Theatre enjoyed a program on Friday and Saturday nights sponsored by the Tuna Boat Owners Association. Local content came from singer-songwriter Kristen Lawler and pianist Richard McDonald. An opening fanfare composed by Richard was performed by the members of the Port Lincoln High School brass ensemble: Brodie Edmonds, Scott McConnell, Bradley Lawson, Sarah Hueppauff, Sam McConnell, Chris Hester, Dylan Clarke and Anna Dearman.

The stage in the new complex has been officially named the Arts Council Stage in recognition of the financial and physical support given by members. A curtain design project, sponsored by Country Arts SA, employed local community artist Vicki Bosisto to research images and ideas which best represented the region and fabric artist Sue Catt-Green, assisted by Geraldine Krieg, to paint the design. Vicki Bosisto also coordinated a project, City Sites, where young people from all over Eyre Peninsula designed and executed silk banners for the entrance foyer in just five days. City Sites was sponsored by Country Arts SA and Carclew Youth Arts Centre. Liz Gordon-Tassie designed the civic hall logo, again inspired by the sea, and has donated the copyright of the design to the civic hall management board.