



Speech by

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OCEAN CURRENT MONITORING, GREAT BARRIER REEF

Mr TURNER (Thuringowa—ONP) (12.07 p.m.): It is common knowledge that our Great Barrier Reef is the most profitable tourist attraction in Queensland. Tourists travel from all over the world to view this spectacular natural wonder of the world. The revenue received from this attraction by the Queensland Government and Queensland businesses amounts to many, many millions of dollars. The number of jobs directly linked to the Great Barrier Reef is mind boggling. Yet every day the life of the coral reef and the lives of the people visiting this reef are threatened.

Too many lives have been lost on the reef, too much damage has been done to the reef, and too little knowledge has been gathered to find out why. Every day, oil tankers, laden with their cargo of fish and coral killing oil, travel through and along our Great Barrier Reef, risking a potential disaster with every kilometre that they travel, and the occurrence of a major oil spill on our fragile reef is only a matter of time. In this instance we do not ask why, but when. These oil spills will happen, more coral will be damaged, and more fish and wildlife will be killed. These tragedies will occur, but there is a way to reduce the impact on the environment.

Accurate knowledge of the ocean currents is essential for our oil spill emergency teams to be able to clean up before major damage is done. Ocean currents change with the seasons many times in a year, but every year the pattern remains the same. Once the ocean currents pattern has been monitored and set down, this knowledge could become as available as a tide sheet and be just as easily accessible to all reef visitors from the shipping pilots to the weekend diver. Most importantly, this information would be available to our reef protection authority and our search and rescue teams.

It has now been revealed that the search for the Lonergans, who were accidentally left stranded on the reef, was conducted in the wrong area. Pieces of equipment worn by the Lonergans were found nowhere near where the search started. Unfortunately, these two lives were lost, and nothing we could do now would bring them back, but what we can do is reduce the risks of such a tragedy happening again.

A precise knowledge of the ocean currents could pinpoint the position of any floating object whether it be a boat, plane wreckage, an oil slick or a person, thereby narrowing the search area and shortening the rescue period. The search for the Lonergans cost around \$500,000. I know that not one of us here begrudges the spending of one cent of that money; there can be no price put on a life. Yet, for a mere \$150,000, the price of ocean current monitoring equipment, the search for the Lonergans could have possibly ended with a successful rescue. The use of ocean current monitors would be the extra safety precaution we could offer the millions of visitors to our Great Barrier Reef in the coming years.

Recently, I visited the Australian Institute of Marine Science in Townsville. I believe \$150,000 for two ocean current monitors and \$60,000 per year operational maintenance would be a small investment in the protection of lives, the reef, the fishing industry, tourism, businesses and jobs. All of Queensland would benefit from and profit from that meagre but wise investment.

Not only can the knowledge gained from that ocean current monitoring equipment help to stop the killing of our reef, it can also be used to rejuvenate the coral and protect endangered ocean species that rely on ocean currents for food, water, temperature and breeding. On the same night of every year the coral of the Great Barrier Reef spawns. For hundreds of kilometres, billions of coral polyps, like

some magical illusion, eject their spawn into the ocean currents. This phenomenon has been studied, discussed and filmed for many years. Still, there is more to be learnt about the outcome of when the coral spawn is swept away by the ocean currents. Many questions remain unanswered, limiting our ability to help the replenishing of our coral reef and also hampering our endeavours to stop the death of the coral reef in some areas.

Marine biologists know that the ocean currents play a major part in the continuing life cycle of coral, but their lack of knowledge and understanding of the ocean currents has hampered their research and progress. Exact monitoring of the ocean currents would open up a whole new area for researchers to study. The knowledge they would gain would benefit not only our Great Barrier Reef but also other coral reefs around the world. The fragile and delicate structure of the coral reef and the ocean species that rely on the reef for food and protection are suffering from the cancerous ravages of pollution and ignorance. The purchase and use of ocean current monitors would be an insurance policy against further damage to our Great Barrier Reef. I urge the Minister for Primary Industries to investigate funding for this essential project and further basic scientific research. We cannot continue to play Russian roulette with the environment.
