



Speech by

Mr J. HEGARTY

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

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DOLPHINS

Mr HEGARTY (Redlands—NPA) (10.24 a.m.): Ecotourism has gained a popular following in recent years, and no more so than whale watching and dolphin feeding. Whale watching has been successfully regulated by licensing tourist boat operators and setting strict conditions to protect these wonderful marine mammals.

Both whales and dolphins are protected in Queensland under the Nature Conservation Regulation (Whales and Dolphins) which, amongst other embargoes, prohibits touching or feeding the animals. Research has shown that dolphins suffer a high mortality rate in pods that are in regular contact with humans, particularly if they are handfed. Perhaps young dolphins are not learning to catch food for themselves if their mother's attention is focused on tourists feeding her. They are definitely at more risk from sharks. Dolphins are at risk from human pathogens, from sharks attracted by fish offal and from poor nutrition as a result of handfeeding.

All these elements have contributed to dolphin mortality, especially among young dolphins in their first year of life where death rates are as high as 80%. Overseas, wildlife authorities firmly enforce dolphin protection laws to ensure the animals' long-term survival. Closer to home, Monkey Mia in Western Australia is reporting dolphin deaths. Handfeeding practices there are under scrutiny as a preliminary step to banning it if death rates are not reduced.

In Queensland, the rare Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin populations in the Great Sandy Strait could be in danger of extinction if legislation to protect them is not enforced. These are substantial questions that any community needs to ask itself. The wild creatures of our marine environment are a tremendous asset in tourism terms, but we must manage our contact with them in ways that do not put fragile populations at risk.
