



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 21 July 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Dugong Management

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (10.02 a.m.), by leave: The protection of Queensland's coastal and marine environments is one of the key planks of the Beattie Labor Government's commitment to valuing and enhancing our future way of life. Protecting the wildlife that depend upon our stewardship of healthy and safe habitats is an integral part of that commitment. To that end, I am pleased to announce today the finalisation of the plan to conserve and manage dugong in Queensland over the next five years.

The dugong is scheduled under the Nature Conservation Act 1992 as a species vulnerable to extinction. I am increasingly concerned about the mortality of dugong along our coastline, especially where there is evidence of human interference. There have been population declines in the southern Great Barrier Reef and Hervey Bay regions since the 1980s. So far this year there have been 25 recorded deaths. While the majority could have been as a result of natural causes, too many are due to the animals being caught in fishing nets.

This plan documents the strategies needed to achieve greater protection and recovery of dugong in Queensland's waters. It addresses habitat degradation, particularly seagrass loss; incidental mortality from fishing activities; boating traffic; indigenous hunting; education and information; and research and monitoring. It has been developed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to provide a comprehensive framework to determine threats to dugong and to lessen those threats.

Under the Fisheries Act, Queensland has declared 16 dugong protection areas between Hervey Bay and the Hinchinbrook region where netting is either prohibited or strictly controlled. This dugong conservation plan complements the dugong protection areas while imposing few additional restrictions than are already provided under the Fisheries Act.

While the dugong protection areas have been quite successful in reducing threats from fishing activities, they now need to be formally assessed to cover all threats to dugong and their habitat. This new dugong conservation plan will take effect as a regulation under the Nature Conservation Act. It provides guidance to fishers on how to immediately report to the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service incidents involving death or mortal injury of dugong.

Because dugong are long lived and have a low reproduction rate, we need to have a long-term monitoring program in place. At the same time, the modification of fishing practices through education and industry training programs needs to be maintained.

As land use pressures, climate change and marine activities continue to impact on the health of Queensland's marine environment, this dugong conservation and recovery plan may not have all the answers. But with goodwill, greater community care for these extraordinary and much-loved ocean wildlife and more understanding of the fragility of their habitat, then we have an opportunity to reverse their continuing and unacceptable decline along Queensland's east coast.
