



Speech by

Mr BRUCE LAMING

MEMBER FOR MOOLOOLAH

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MOOLOOLAH RIVER

Mr LAMING (Mooloolah—LP) (11.51 p.m.): I take this opportunity to bring to the attention of the House what is probably the most significant environmental challenge in the Mooloolah electorate. I refer to the Mooloolah River and the quality of its waters and littoral zones.

My interest was first attracted to this issue over 20 years ago when I first moved to the Sunshine Coast. At that time there were significant challenges to the river with canal estates on both sides of the lower reaches, a busy commercial harbour and agricultural pursuits right to the river bank in many parts of the upstream reaches.

I first became interested in the welfare of waterways generally when, in the seventies, I was one of the last people to visit Lake Pedder in Tasmania before it was flooded for hydro-electric purposes. Having worked briefly on the Snowy Mountains Scheme some years earlier, I could hardly say that I am not in favour of hydro-electric schemes, and I do not. But environmental value judgments do have to be made in relation to our waterways, and I believe the flooding of Lake Pedder to have been a mistake. Some icon waterways deserve preservation; others deserve the best environmental management possible consistent with their best overall use.

Such were the tremendous pressures on the Mooloolah in those days that many pundits gave up on the Mooloolah and turned their attention to other waterways on the coast. Despite my good friend Stan Tutt's description of the Mooloolah as a river in bondage over 20 years ago, a lot of people, including myself, fortunately did not give up on the Mooloolah River.

In fact, the Sunshine Coast Branch of the Littoral Society was set up at that time and took a keen interest in all Sunshine Coast waterways, including the Mooloolah. That society is now known as the Australian Marine Conservation Society and I am still a member.

It is fortunate, indeed, that the State Government many years ago had the foresight to establish the Mooloolah River National Park, and this has been a catalyst in encouraging an environmental focus on the river and contiguous land holdings by both Caloundra and Maroochy councils. Although the awareness of the environmental value of the river is now considerably enhanced, the population and therefore the pressure on the river has doubled, so the battle to save the Mooloolah's environmental integrity will never be over.

As recently as February this year I was fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to host a forum at the University of the Sunshine Coast to ascertain which groups were actually working on catchment management and the river environment. This forum was chaired by Professor Alan Sheehy, Dr Ron Neller from the University of the Sunshine Coast, assisted by my friend and associate David Woodrow. I believe the forum was a success and provided the opportunity to ascertain what research had been or is being undertaken; consider the current environmental status of the river and harbour; identify any current or potential threats to that environment; establish what courses of action are desirable; identify which agencies might need to be approached to provide further assistance; decide whether to establish an unofficial steering committee for the ongoing maintenance; and to make recommendations to councils and/or Government departments about beneficial changes to by-laws or legislation. Attendance included environmental groups, catchment coordinators, both councils, commercial and recreational fishing groups and other commercial stakeholders such as marina operators. At the request of the chairman, Professor Alan Sheehy, the group was asked to voice their issues and concerns regarding the present and future state of the Mooloolah River.

Here is a list of the concerns: discharge of diesel fuel, preservation of remaining natural environment, creation of riparian zone, incident response to turbidity and fish kill, water quality and water flow, sustainability of the river, turbidity, public awareness and ownership, discharges of litter, quantifying the problem, enforcement and compliance, chemical inputs, detergents fuel and salt brine, faeces discharged from vessels, litter blown in from the south-east winds, integration of activities and education, sediment accumulation, integration of monitoring, education for schools, acid sulfate soils, stormwater run-off, and on-site sewerage and grey water.

Studies are one thing; putting management practices into place is another. Since the forum I have had discussions with the Caloundra council regarding devices to restrict pollutants entering the river from stormwater drains, discussions with marina managers in regard to management of the risk of pollutants from vessels and discussions with a major shopping centre manager about the control of plastic bags which often find their way into our waterways.

There is now an oil spill response plan in place and substantial fines have been meted out to offenders. I believe we should work towards a nil discharge of effluent into the river, not just for the environment but also for the benefit of the thousands of people who swim in the river, canals, La Balsa Park beach in the harbour and Mooloolaba beach where the river's waters flow into the ocean. There is much to be done and sacrifices to be made by all stakeholders, but I believe that progress is being made thanks to the combined goodwill of all concerned.
