



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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GREAT BARRIER REEF, OIL SPILLS

Mr TURNER (Thuringowa—IND) (10.22 a.m.): The Great Barrier Reef, extending over 1,000 miles of coastline, is Queensland's most precious natural treasure. Few Australians think of the Great Barrier Reef as a shipping lane, yet 3,000 ships utilise the inner route of the reef each year. Many are bulk carriers with significant quantities of bunker fuel on board. It is an extremely difficult area to navigate, with reefs and restricted channels, strong trade winds and tidal currents. Ships regularly traverse these channels with the bottom of the hull only one or two metres off the seabed. History clearly records navigational difficulties in this area. There are high-risk areas, such as the inner route north of Cairns, Grafton Passage, Palm Passage off Townsville and Hydrographers Passage off Mackay.

With 3,000 ships feeding into 13 ports along the coast, accidents do happen. There have been 38 casualties over the past five years, with several ships running aground and one holed. In 1995 the Svenborg Guardian grounded on Kurrimine Beach outside the compulsory piloting area. The bridge was unmanned for five hours prior to the grounding. The Carola grounded, causing extensive damage to the reef. There was a pilot on board, but he was not on the bridge. When the Peacock hit, causing substantial damage to the reef, the pilot on board was asleep. Nearly all 38 incidents were caused by human error.

The probability of a major oil spill is 37% over a five-year period, increasing to 84% over a 20-year period. Minimisation and control of risk must be achieved. The SRS logs ship movements, and we have a trained response team should an accident occur. But all response techniques are limited to sea, weather, time and local conditions. Should an oil spill reach our mangrove-lined shores, no successful clean-up methods would be available and massive environmental destruction would occur. Queensland's preventive measures need to include three more steps: clearly marking the high-risk areas on charts to warn masters of the extensive damages that could occur, developing a thorough understanding of the ocean—

Time expired.
