



Speech by

Mr T. MALONE

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard 13 September 2001

VOLUNTEERS

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (6.54 p.m.): The year 2001 is the Year of the Volunteer, the year in which we rejoice in our achievement, applaud and promote participation, and recognise outstanding efforts. We commend our volunteers and continue to highlight the great Australian ethos of helping those in need within our community. We are proud when initiatives are introduced which enhance and preserve our fragile environment. We also recognise that our volunteers contribute their time, energy, ingenuity and skills in many cases with their own funds. But still we put in place barriers which may stop many groups from helping us.

There are a number of volunteer-based diving groups along the coast of Queensland which provide an extraordinary service of monitoring varying aspects of our fragile Great Barrier Reef, whether it be in the seagrass beds upon which our dugong feed or in the fringing coral reefs surrounding our World Heritage and renowned coral reef systems. But do we assist in their valiant endeavours to help us and our environment? I have to say no.

One particular group in my electorate, CREW—which stands for Cumberland Region Eco Watch—has, with the valuable assistance of grants through Coastcare, been able to implement a program of coral monitoring on the fringe reefs around the islands of Mackay. This data is not only used locally to assess the impact of development and boat moorings; it is also used in the worldwide program of Reef Check, which can make comparisons or benchmark the relative health of our coral reefs across the world.

CREW also installs, maintains and cleans 'no anchorage' buoys which delineate coral reef areas that are susceptible to damage. In fact, Australia's oceans policy identifies damage from boat anchors and inappropriate moorings as a serious environmental issue. Corals and seagrasses, which are already at risk from a variety of threats, have been identified as particularly vulnerable. CREW and other groups such as OUCH from the Whitsundays, CAFNEC from Cairns and the Woongarra Marine Park Monitoring and Education Program at Bundaberg are faced with ceasing their valuable work due to the lack of foresight by our Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Whilst initially encouraging and even fostering the groups to carry out work to preserve and monitor our World Heritage coral reef, the Parks and Wildlife Service has decided to implement a policy aimed principally at external agencies and contractors.

The diving operation policy introduced by the service in August 2000 is a scatter-gun approach which the service has interpreted to apply to these groups. In effect, it states that all persons diving for the agency from an agency workplace must have qualifications as per Australian Standard AS2815.1 which is, in effect, an approved commercial diver to 30 metres.

Time expired.

Mr MALONE: I seek leave to have the rest of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Can you imagine groups of this type being required to be fully qualified commercial divers, a training program which can cost up to \$5,000 per individual, not to mention the four weeks necessary to undertake the course.

What have we come to?

Very minor changes to this draconian policy will enable these groups to continue with their valuable projects.

Is the Parks and Wildlife Service prepared to work cooperatively with these groups to review the policy? No.

Their response has been to have the groups seek changes to the Australian Standards instead. What chance do you think they would have by taking this course of action? More bureaucracy!

No review of the policy is proposed until 2002. In the meantime, the ability of these groups to continue with their work and to seek valuable grant funding is put on hold.

Not only is this future work being put in jeopardy but the inactivity of the service over the past eight months to undertake their obligations in relation to existing grant projects has resulted in a review of Coastcare projects priorities.

Our volunteers, our community, our environment, our Great Barrier Reef deserve better. I think it is time that the Parks and Wildlife Service focused its efforts on nurturing these groups not disenfranchising them.

I respectfully call upon the Minister for Environment (Dean Wells) to have the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service review their current Diving Operations Policy as a matter of urgency with a view to encouraging participation of groups such as CREW.
