



Speech by

**CHRIS CUMMINS**

**MEMBER FOR KAWANA**

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**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**  
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**Mr CUMMINS** (Kawana—ALP) (9.06 p.m.): I am very happy to contribute to the Environmental Protection Legislation Amendment Bill and the Environmental Legislation Amendment Bill 2003. I acknowledge that the Environmental Legislation Amendment Bill 2003 continues our government's commitment to nature conservation and effective environmental legislation right across Queensland. The amendments will update, strengthen and clarify existing provisions in the Nature Conservation Act 1992.

I would like to thank the minister for his numerous visits over the past couple of years to the Sunshine Coast, one of which we were immensely pleased with earlier this year, with the announcement that the Environmental Protection Agency made payments totalling \$850,000 to a Sunshine Coast council—the Maroochy council—for which in return it will transfer two parcels of land into state ownership in addition to protected area estates. The land is bounded on three sides, and I am talking about one parcel which was 55 hectares which will be added to the Mooloolah River National Park. The area is bounded on three sides by the Mooloolah River and shares its other boundary with the national park. The site retains all of its natural vegetation. The area represents an area of high conservation value within a region of rapid urban encroachment—one of the fastest growing areas in the state and indeed Australia, that being the Sunshine Coast.

The low-lying parts of this site are heavily vegetated with paperbark forest, mangroves and associated saline communities. The north-western corner of the site features coastal lowland scribbly gum—a vegetation type that historically has been subject to high rates of clearing within our locality. There was another acquisition of approximately 397 hectares of freehold land near Coolum Creek. Placing both these lands in community ownership is a real win for our local community and indeed the environment. We are now providing buffers against rapidly expanding development and protecting some of the few remaining coastal lowlands in South-East Asia. It will create an important green space in coastal wetland regions that are under a very strong threat from urban growth.

I would also like to briefly outline my thanks on behalf of the Sunshine Coast community to the minister and his department for a recent event. On Sunday, 19 October we were very pleased to be able to host the minister at Currimundi Lake, where we renamed what was formerly the Currimundi Lake Conservation Park the Kathleen McArthur Park. Kathleen McArthur was a tireless worker for conservation on the Sunshine Coast, and I know the member for Caloundra has spoken about her in this House before, as many other members would be very much aware. It was a great day for both Currimundi and the entire Sunshine Coast. So I do thank the minister. We had a great wildflower walk through this conservation park.

The local councillor up there was a former federal member with the minister in a previous life, Councillor Elaine Darling. She continues to work tirelessly to lobby the federal government over unexploded ordnances, or UXO clearing. It is a major concern to the Sunshine Coast community that the federal government still has not come to the party to work in a positive way to identify these unexploded ordnances and clear them out and make our communities much safer. I commend Councillor Elaine Darling who, over the years, has been a great friend.

I would also like to mention the Environment Minister, who is in the House. I want to thank him for assisting me in ensuring that the state government Environmental Protection Agency has higher

quality controls through an updated development approval for the Kawana and Landsborough sewerage treatment plants. This development approval incorporated the requested measures that will avert the need for discharge to the Mooloolah River, something the minister knows I have been very passionate about. Rivers are our lifeblood and the lifeblood of the environment.

We upped the ante on Caloundra council. I knew that Caloundra council could play a part because I had been there for four years. By ensuring that we made the restrictions higher, it allowed for the reuse of council's effluent by third parties to irrigate certain areas, excluding those for human crops. Specifically the development approval requirements included the installation of a four megalitre capacity overflow storage tank and the blocking of the discharge pipe into the Mooloolah River, which can only be unlocked in an extreme emergency situation. Of course, the state government must be notified of such incidents.

The sewerage outfall to the Mooloolah River has not been used since July 1999. I will make sure that we try and keep this in place because millions of litres were being pumped into the Mooloolah River in storm surges and the like. Sadly, Caloundra council had allowed the treatment plant to run down. There is no excuse for that because councils make millions of dollars out of their water and sewerage treatment. In Caloundra council we combined the water and sewerage into a company called CALAQUA, a commercial entity. They transfer millions of dollars each year—between \$3 million and \$5 million—from the profits they make out of water and sewerage into the general fund. It is great if it can make that money. Over the years all companies have put up the price of water. People are happy to pay a higher amount for water because it is a precious resource. That cost is supposed to ensure that people do not waste the water. People sometimes pay upwards of \$100 a year for the use of their water. A lot of this profit is acknowledged by the councils and utilised.

Councils have to get their priorities right in ensuring sewerage treatment is of the highest quality. Healthy waterways are essential for the biodiversity of water life which, sadly, brings me to a negative situation on the Sunshine Coast with the recent report cards. Maroochy River received a D plus. There were only two rivers in the south-east that received a worse score. A lot of the problem comes from Maroochy Water, which again is a commercial identity under the Maroochy Shire Council. The sewerage treatment plants, the STPs, have regularly been exceeding the discharge guidelines set out by the EPA licence. These breaches have led to a higher than normal nitrogen level in the middle reaches of the river. It has been reported that more than the equivalent of 32 Olympic swimming pools of treated effluent is how much Maroochy council has exceeded in its daily discharge.

This example puts into context the controversy over the performance of the Maroochy sewerage treatment plant and its effect on the river's health. Under the licence with the EPA the plant is allowed to pump the equivalent of 19 Olympic swimming pools full of treated effluent into the river every day. That is 25 million litres of treated waste. That treated waste has gone through an advanced secondary treatment process incorporating nutrient reduction and UV disinfection. But on 15 May this year an incredible 53 Olympic pools—68.2 million litres—was pumped into the river via the plant's underwater release pipe off the northern shore of Maroochy River near the junction of Oyster Bank Road and Godfreys Avenue.

For more than two years the council has been aware that it has had a major problem with the effluent going into the Maroochy River from its own treatment plant. We also have thousands of failing septic tanks. It really is a council issue. Sunshine Coast residents are appalled. I quote from one letter from a resident of Bli Bli—

Now after years of failing to listen to the warnings, or to adequately plan for population growth, councils are waking up to the fact that our rivers are suffering from our impact on them.

It is time to stop the politicking and the point scoring and get on with what needs to be done to restore our rivers to good health and keep them that way.

At the rate our population is tipped to grow, planning sewerage treatment plant upgrades two years down the track is just a catch-up measure.

It is time for action, residents and ratepayers don't want to be fed more promises, promises over the next four months leading up to the election, we want, and our river needs, action NOW!

I fully agree with that. It is up to the Maroochy council, who have told me that they also transfer millions of dollars across from the Maroochy water fund. I acknowledge that the member for Maroochy and her father before her have held the seat for two decades. I do not know what has been done, but in this term I lobbied the minister hard to lift the standard of the discharge requirements for the Mooloolah River. We have to have a look at the Maroochy River and how Maroochy council continues to abuse this fine asset. We are increasing in population and the pressure is growing on these vital areas.

It would be remiss of me not to mention some great work being done upstream by the Martin's Creek Headwaters Action Group. Tom Rickards, who is a good acquaintance of mine and he is a great bloke, and this community group are a bunch of grey volunteers, as they call themselves. They are a community group of Buderim residents vitally interested and working towards the rehabilitation of the Martin's Creek headwaters and its environment. The Martin's Creek Headwaters Action Group is

composed entirely of volunteers from the Buderim community with a steering committee of ten local residents. Manual labour for work programs is provided by volunteers from the Buderim community and beyond. They have accepted the challenge associated with the rehabilitation of the Martin's Creek headwaters in Buderim, which has been sadly neglected for some years. Martin's Creek headwaters is located in the Maroochy shire creek reserve land and council parkland. This group will carry out the full restoration of the creek and surrounds for 950 metres in the very heart of Buderim.

In closing, I would again like to make the point that Sunshine Coast residents are very keen to see improvements to our environment. I thank the minister, who has been a regular visitor to the Sunshine Coast. As each year goes on, we need to continue to ensure improvements to our environment because, as they say in fishing, we cannot destroy what we have come here to enjoy. It would be a great legacy if we could leave to our children and our children's children improvements to the environment. Hopefully we can improve the quality of the discharge of sewerage and the like. Hopefully it will be improvements that will be appreciated by our community.

I commend the minister and his department. I thank him for the great assistance that he has been over this term of parliament. I am very proud to support the bills before the House.