



Speech by

**CHRISTINE SMITH**

**MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH**

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Hansard 7 October 2003

### **MERMAID BEACH SAND DUNES**

**Mrs SMITH** (Burleigh—ALP) (11.27 p.m.): I rise to speak about an issue that is causing great concern to many Gold Coast residents. I refer to the construction of fences and gardens on the beach by home owners adjoining the sand dunes at Mermaid Beach. The sand dunes are on publicly owned land that should be freely accessible to Gold Coasters and visitors. Even more outrageous is the fact that these private gardens on public land have apparently been constructed with the knowledge and approval of the Gold Coast City Council.

A local activist, Anna McLaren, first brought this issue to my attention some months ago. Since then there have been various meetings between state government, council representatives and local residents. Not one of the state government departments consulted accepts that there is any reason for the fences to remain and they are puzzled that the council ever allowed them in the first place. It does not puzzle me, nor will it puzzle any of my Gold Coast colleagues, as this is exactly the type of behaviour that the Gold Coast City Council often indulges in—allowing the rich extra privileges and denying free access to ordinary residents.

Claims have been made that the fencing is necessary to protect the sand dunes. This is not entirely true. The dunal system is particularly fragile and there is support for some structure to be built in the area to prevent erosion. Consequently, the concept of the big paddock has been developed. This concept allows for perimeter fencing to be constructed which assists in the prevention of erosion and encourages growth of natural flora. Areas which need special protection or revegetation should be fenced off, but not as individual areas in front of each property.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you may remember the issue of the Miami bushland which this government chose to protect at considerable expense. Despite the fact that the council had every opportunity to participate in a solution to that problem and despite the green space levy imposed on Gold Coast residents, they did nothing to assist. In fact, the very councillor who told me that the land was not sufficiently important for the council to purchase with the levy has not stopped claiming credit for saving the land.

On 21 September, the day we were celebrating the protection of the Miami bushland, I also attended a protest meeting at the Mermaid Beach sand dunes, a meeting which not one councillor managed to attend. The question is: if councillors find it so embarrassing that they cannot face some protesters, why do they not just pull the fences down?

It is now up to the Gold Coast City Council to do the right thing: remove the fences and return the sand dunes to the Gold Coast residents and visitors to enjoy. But when the fences do come down—and they will—I can guarantee that one or more of the councillors will be there claiming the credit. That is something they are very good at.