



Speech by

Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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CURRUMBIN WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (10.05 pm): Most honourable members in this parliament have heard of 60-year-old Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary, world famous for its lorikeet feeding. Gifted in a deed of trust to the people of Queensland in 1976 by founder Alex Griffiths, the sanctuary has struggled financially over the years trying to compete with theme parks and trends. Receiving no government funding, the sanctuary relies heavily on sponsorships and volunteer staff and was in dire straits around the time the new CEO, Michelle Monsour, arrived at the sanctuary at the beginning of 2005. Soon everyone was commenting on the positive effect this woman fostered. For the first time in years the sanctuary began to hum and then to sing. People who worked there were smiling, volunteers were lining up to help and the broader community and the sanctuary formed a relationship based on trust while businesses were happily opening their wallets to sponsor.

In March 2006 legislation changed sections of the Currumbin Bird Sanctuary Act to allow installation of a new entity with a board to remain under the control of the National Trust of Queensland. At the time I asked the minister who would be in the best position to select board members to guide the sanctuary, meet the commercial endeavours and access money to do so. I commented respectfully that one benefit of this amendment is that the sanctuary would be a little further removed from the National Trust.

I stand here tonight at the behest of residents, paid staff and 100 volunteers who all are fiercely protective of the future and survival of their beloved sanctuary. They are outraged at news that this relatively new board decided not to recommend to the National Trust that Ms Monsour's contract, which expires in January, be renewed. No reason was given for this decision, leading to staff seeking my help to organise a petition requesting the House to immediately intervene and request the National Trust of Queensland and the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary board to renew the contract of Michelle Monsour in the interest of the future of the sanctuary and tourism on the Gold Coast.

Never before have I seen such an outpouring of support for an individual to keep their job. One sponsor has decided to withdraw \$250,000 of funding and another will consider the \$900,000 they are considering approving for the future wildlife hospital, a desperately-needed facility. I am told that in less than three years Michelle has achieved more for the sanctuary than any of her predecessors combined over the past 20 years. By not renewing her contract these faceless individuals who are appointed by the National Trust risk undoing all that has been achieved and the conservation, education and goodwill engendered.

It has now become apparent to many that the relationship between the National Trust and the sanctuary is no longer tenable and the time has come for the sanctuary to stand alone as a statutory body, let corporations and businesses offer support and give the people of Currumbin a strong say in the variations of the model to be adopted and those who sit on the board. As a member of the National Trust and advocate for our sanctuary, I am disgusted to have witnessed the scurrilous behaviour that has been dished out in such an underhand manner to this woman by these bodies, who behind her back today circulated a media release announcing that her position would be advertised widely. For some 18 months now the sanctuary has been in discussions with the trust about the need to separate. Old Alex Griffiths would be turning in his grave.