



Speech by
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Wednesday, 3 June 2009

PRIDE OF AUSTRALIA MEDAL; CHARLTON, MS S

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (9.22 pm): The Pride of Australia Medal acknowledges ordinary Australians who do extraordinary things throughout our communities. Medal recipients are the country's unsung heroes. Their contributions inspire all of us, as individuals and collectively, to help make our nation a better place to live. I rise tonight to put on record my congratulations to Sandra Charlton, who has been short-listed for a Pride of Australia environment medal for her efforts to eradicate the tilapia fish from the Mulgrave River. The noxious tilapia, introduced to Australia as an aquarium fish from southern Africa, has the potential to take over tropical river systems. The species has become a major pest in waterways throughout Queensland, as well as Western Australia and Victoria—so much so that the fish has been described as the cane toad of the waterways.

Balancing her environmental work with her day job as a school teacher, locally Sandra Charlton has become known as the 'Tilapia Terminator'. She first became aware of the extent of the problem fish in 2005. This led to the birth of the Tilapia Terminators Fishing Challenge, a way that students and the wider public could play an active role in reducing fish numbers. I have known Sandra Charlton since she was my physical education teacher many years ago at Gordonvale Primary School. She has always been a hard worker and has always been able to get students involved in activities. It is this ability to tap into the enthusiasm of students that will see the numbers of this pest fish in our local waterways substantially reduced while also improving the awareness of the environmental impact the tilapia has on our tropical river systems.

At the first half-day Tilapia Terminators Fishing Challenge in 2005, 250 entrants caught 212 fish. Through the leadership of Ms Charlton, the event has grown to include students from 35 schools, with 463 entrants catching a staggering 1,998 fish over a day and a half. Sandra's love for the environment and commitment has already been recognised when she was recently announced as 'Australia's Greenest Teacher' by Clean Up Australia Chairman, Ian Kiernan. Mr Kiernan said that Ms Charlton's commitment to teaching students about the environment is outstanding and that, through the introduction of the fishing challenge and changes to the school curriculum, she has helped to create awareness among those who can make the biggest difference in the future—our children. Sandra is to be congratulated for her nomination, for her personal commitment to having an idea and following it through and for the ingenious way she has been able to enlist the help of schoolchildren to become wildlife warriors, doing her part to stamp out a serious pest to our native fish populations. Finalists for the Pride of Australia Medal will be announced on 5 July and winners announced on 10 July. Regardless of the outcome, Sandra is already a winner and I wish her the very best of luck.