

In Coffs Harbour the Citizens of the Year are Peter and Sue Hallam, who are recognised for their contribution in assisting refugees. The Young Citizen of the Year is Janine Ryan, who was involved in the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program, as well as the Naval Cadets and the Cancer Council. The Community Event of the Year award went to the Sawtell Chilli Festival. The Voluntary Organisation Award for Community Excellence was awarded to the Silent Visitors Palliative Care Program. The Junior Sports-person of the Year is Michael Sullivan for nine gold medals at last year's New South Wales Combined Catholic Colleges Swimming Championships. The Senior Sports-person of the Year is Mr Greg Hubbard. The Meritorious Action Award went to Daniel Holloway for a rescue conducted at Diggers Beach, and the Sue Hunter Memorial Award went to Mr Phil Doyle. *(Time expired)*

Trade: Ugg Boots

Ms JACKSON (Hasluck) (7.49 p.m.)—I wish to draw the attention of the House to the plight of many small businesses in Australia that are having their livelihoods threatened by a United States firm, Deckers Outdoor Corp. Deckers Outdoor Corp. is a US firm that in 1995 acquired an Australian company, Ugg Holdings Inc., and trademarks to its name. Ugg Holdings has recently threatened legal action against a number of Australian manufacturers and distributors of ugg boots. The US company is demanding that those Australian companies concerned immediately cease and forever refrain from advertising, promoting, marketing, distributing and/or offering for sale their goods by reference to the word 'ugg' or any other name incorporating the words 'ugg', 'ug' and/or 'ugh'.

This issue was brought to my attention by my constituents Bruce and Bronwyn McDougal, who operate a small family business in Kenwick which has manufactured and distributed ugg boots for over 26 years under the business name Uggs-N-Rugs. Two days before Christmas they received their letter from the lawyers of Ugg Holdings Inc. demanding that they cancel their business name, withdraw their Internet domain names and hand over all labels, swing tags and brochures with the word 'ugg' on them, as well as withdraw their application to trademark their business name.

Needless to say, there has been community outrage at a US company claiming ownership over an Australian icon which until a year ago was barely recognised in the United States. Potentially hundreds of Australian businesses now face hardship through loss of distribution outlets and sales, despite having traded using the word 'ugg' for up to 30 years and in some cases as long as 85 years, long before Deckers Outdoor Corp. took an interest in manufacturing and selling ugg boots.

It seems that ugg boots have become fashionable in the United States in recent times as a consequence of the number of high-profile celebrities who have been seen around the town in ugg boots. Ironically, as the price of ugg boots in the US has now reached \$US350—in Australia they still retail for a maximum of about \$A120—these are being mass produced by Deckers in China. The increasing popularity of ugg boots in the US appears to be the motivation behind the threat of legal action now against Australian ugg boot manufacturers.

I think it is wrong that this US corporation believes that it can own an Australian icon and potentially damage the livelihoods of many Australian families. Fortunately, Bruce and Bronwyn are not the type of people to lie down and let an overseas company dictate what they can and cannot do in their own country. The actions of Deckers Outdoor Corporation have caused much anger in the community, who fail to understand how a US firm was allowed to trademark the word 'ugg' in the first place. 'Ugg' or 'ugg boot' is a generic term used to describe a product, just as you would use the words 'trainers' or 'runners' or 'sneakers' to describe a number of different brand products. In Australia we have been calling sheepskin boots 'ugg boots' for about 85 years. It defies belief that an Australian icon would be trademarked in the US when it is a generic term. If you look at IP Australia's own web site, it states that trademarks are difficult to register if they are:

...marks that describe your goods. ... It must not be a sign that other traders may wish to use to promote or describe their goods and services.

It is clear that 'ugg' is and would be used by other traders to promote their goods and therefore I believe there are grounds to question the registration of the word 'ugg'. I have written to the minister and called for his immediate intervention in respect of this matter. The businesses concerned have embarked on a campaign to 'Save Our Aussie Icon'. The campaign is drawing widespread community support. Many Australians have offered financial support to the group to assist in their legal battle. I urge the Howard government to join this campaign and take immediate action to ensure that another Australian icon is not lost and, further, that a traditional and longstanding Australian industry is kept alive and well.

It is said that the market sometimes knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. For Deckers Outdoor Corporation it may be about money; but for Bruce and Bronwyn and many other Australians it is about so much more than that. It is about our way of life, family livelihoods and our sense of tradition and identity. These are things that money cannot buy or replace. I urge the government to act to ensure that ugg boots remain an Australian icon.