

ENVIRONMENTAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION (REVERSAL OF GREAT BARRIER REEF PROTECTION MEASURES) AMENDMENT BILL 2021

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

My name is Mario Quagliata, and I am directly affected by the Queensland Government's reef regulations in my capacity as a cane farmer and contract earth mover for agricultural purposes near Tully in Far North Queensland. For many years I have voluntarily been altering my farming methods to reduce our so-called impacts on the Great Barrier Reef. This includes laser levelling my paddocks, using trash blanketing, and installing wetlands to reduce erosion and I am SmartCane BMP accredited. I have also installed a bioreactor as a joint project with the MIP government appointed group to gather data.

My property is alive with birdlife, fish, frogs, and freshwater turtles - hardly indicative of an operation that is harming the environment. I have been walking these creeks banks since the young age of eight, some 40 years ago and have noticed no change in the wildlife.

And I am not alone as I know of numerous farmers in my region undertaking similar Landcare measures under the SmartCane BMP banner. They too report thriving wildlife on their farms, including fish they catch and eat regularly with no signs of a system under pressure.

I would also like to point out the widely accepted incidence of farmers accidentally missing a row of cane when fertilising.

As the cane grows, the row without fertiliser is markedly smaller and yellow in colour than the fertilised cane just one metre away.

The question remains: how is it that fertiliser supposedly makes the way to the coast and coral many kilometres away, when it won't even run one metre to the next row of cane in quantities that improve plant growth?

I was a keen observer and participate of the 2020 Federal Senate Inquiry into the methods used by the Queensland Government to formulate its reef regulations.

I was most fascinated to hear the Australian Institute of Marine Science evidence which stated they have never blamed farming for their concerns with Reef health, their main concern is climate change.

Similarly, we heard from highly qualified reef scientists Piers Larcombe and Peter Ridd who testified that the Great Barrier Reef lagoon is naturally

turbid from wave action stirring up sediment from the ocean floor, and that coral and sea grass had adapted to these conditions.

Furthermore, they said sediment and chemicals running off farms only affected inshore reefs - or about 3% of the total GBR.

We also heard from internationally renowned reef scientist, Walter Starck who said coral is remarkably resilient to environmental changes and that the current state of the GBR is far better than what is constantly claimed in the media.

I would also add that the State Government's own water quality report card released this year, gave an "A" rating for a 25.5% reduction in nitrogen runoff into the GBR lagoon.

But the report conveniently still gave a fail rating for overall land management by farmers. How can land management be given a fail when the water measurements directly contradict it?

CONCLUSION: The current laws do nothing to reward farmers who are largely doing the right thing, and they unfairly punish people for even honest mistakes.

The evidence from multiple quarters indicates the issue of farming's impact on the Reef is dramatically exaggerated and ignores very credible science that contradicts the Government's "Scientific Consensus Statement" which is used to demonise farmers.

I strongly urge the Queensland Government to repeal the latest version of its reef regulations and instead encourage farmers to improve their practices by way of incentives. More credence and support should be given to Canegrowers' SmartCane BMP program as an effective way to curb farm runoff, rather than the "big stick" laws currently in place.

The Government should also be open to science that defies the unnecessarily alarmist "doomsday" view of Reef health promoted by those who rely on an unhealthy reef to secure grant funding.

Peter Ridd and Piers Larcombe have decades of experience studying the Reef, they are not fringe-dwelling crackpots. They, Walter Starck, Jennifer Marohasy and others are eminently qualified to present credible assessments of reef health and threats, but they are ignored. This is to the detriment of not only cane farmers, but tourism operators and Australia as a whole.

It is about time the State Government supported its farmers and tour operators and get its Brisbane bureaucrats out of the office and into the water to see for themselves the resilience and health of the GBR.

I would like to believe that the Labour Government is not pandering to the Greens and attacking farmers for political gains for votes but cannot reach no conclusion. Happy to be involved in questioning or conversations with the committee.

MARIO QUAGLIATA

