

A/Committee Secretary
Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee
Parliament House
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13 March 2019

**Inquiry into: Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures)
and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019**

Dear Committee

The Great Barrier Reef is one of Queensland's greatest treasures. We must protect it for future generations and for the 70 000 people and communities who rely on it for their livelihoods.

The two key impacts on the Reef's health are climate change and polluted run-off. Queensland must play its part to tackle climate change – and even take a leadership role to help fast-track efforts to address greenhouse gas emissions.

We must also take action to cut the massive loads of unnatural sediment and chemical pollution running into Reef waters. This pollution directly impacts corals through smothering and loss of light as well as fueling crown of thorns starfish outbreaks. Clean water is also critical for resilience and recovery from coral bleaching events.

Catchment pollution is a threat that we can address here and now - in fact it is only Queenslanders who can solve this problem. These new laws are critical to give the Reef the clean water it needs to help restore its health. Current programs have not made nearly enough progress towards clean water targets. The Reef Water Quality Science Taskforce said "Transformational change is needed over the next 5-10 years if the targets have any chance of being achieved." The Taskforce recommended new and improved regulations as a key part of these necessary changes.

Many farmers are adopting improved practices, which not only cut pollution but make farmers more profitable. However, progress towards practice change targets is also way too slow. Millions of dollars are being spent to assist many farmers to improve their practices but this money will be wasted unless those who continue with outdated polluting practices are regulated.

We need strong laws to ensure all farmers achieve minimum standards and highly polluting practices are phased out. This not only benefits the Reef but also farmers. The new laws will drive uptake of practices, which have been shown to improve business profitability and farm viability. They will also protect the social license of the agricultural sector, so that the good work of many to be 'clean and green' is not undermined by those who persist with polluting practices.

The Wide Bay Burnett Environment Council Inc (WBBEC) strongly supports the main elements of the Bill:

- Catchment pollution targets that will give the Reef clean water.

- Ability to regulate all industries, all agriculture sectors and all catchments - the laws should apply to everyone so that progress can be made as rapidly and as equitably as possible.
- Industry standards as an alternative means of compliance so farmers can choose their own pathway to improved practices - but these standards must be genuinely 'best practice' in terms of Reef water quality, rather than minimum standards or business as usual.
- The ability to set minimum standards which will ensure significant cuts to water pollution, including the full Six Easy Steps for cane farming, and all grazing land in C and D class restored to good condition (B class or better).
- The ability to collect essential data that can drive productivity improvements but also ensure full regulatory compliance.
- New developments to not increase pollution, so the investments and efforts made to cut pollution from existing land and water users will not be wasted.

There are however some key gaps in the new laws that must be addressed:

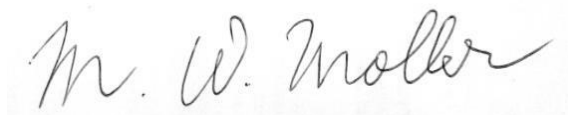
- The Bill does not address activities in high risk areas such as riparian zones, erodible soils and 'leaky' cropping land – the Reef water quality targets cannot be reached if these area's issues are not covered.
- The Bill allows for point source pollution from industrial development to be offset but agriculture is excluded and will not be able to access least cost options for pollution abatement. WBBEC believes that offsets for point source pollution are entirely fictitious, and instead advises that point sources of pollution - effluent from waste water treatment plants, for example - should, wherever it is technologically feasible, be altogether eliminated. That is, all waste waters should be treated to a quality suitable for re-use or recycling, and then re-used or recycled. The Bill should perhaps be renamed in relation to what it is meant to do ie the 'Land Use Pollution Abatement Bill', the incorporation of offsets in its current form means it could be called the 'Point Source Pollution Bill'.
- Whilst these laws will stop outdated polluting practices in the catchment, the practice of dumping millions of tonnes of maintenance dredge spoil continues - this must be stopped or at the very least effective offsetting of pollution put in place.

The Bill provides a good framework for tackling the pollution that is harming the Great Barrier Reef. To be effective however it will need to be backed up by: regulations which provide the necessary standards and implementation detail; and resources to ensure compliance with the law, including improved training and education for landholders via dedicated Government extension officers.

WBBEC urges the Committee to support this important Bill to help safeguard the future of our Great Barrier Reef and to recommend improvements to ensure the achievement of the 2025 clean water targets.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. This submission has been approved by the WBBEC Executive Committee.

Yours sincerely



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