

Tony Fontes



Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the proposed Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) Bill 2019. I have been working as a dive operator in the Whitsundays for the past 40 years. Over that time I have seen the health of the Reef deteriorate due to the impacts poor water quality climate change.

Unlike climate change, water quality is a problem with a local solution.

The Whitsundays is particularly impacted by poor water quality as our local catchment is dominated by sugar cane and grazing. As well, we have large river systems to the north and south of our region.

Sediment and fertiliser runoff from farms has wiped out our inshore coral reefs and severely damages our seagrass meadows of our Great Barrier Reef. Our island reefs are also impacted by poor water quality from agricultural runoff as well as dredging. Quite obviously, poor water quality impacts directly on tourism, the main product of the Whitsundays.

Our Great Barrier Reef is an international icon and one of the world's most beautiful and biologically rich ecosystems on earth. It provides \$6.4 billion to the economy every year and supports over 64,000 jobs.

I strongly support the proposed Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019, however I believe there are key gaps.

This Bill before the committee is critical to give the Reef the clean water it needs to help restore its health.

I strongly support the main elements of the Bill, which are:

- Catchment pollution targets that will give the Reef clean water.
- The 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.
- The introduction of minimum practice standards that limit nutrient and sediment run-off from sugar cane, grazing, bananas, grains and horticulture.
- The ability to collect essential data that can drive productivity improvements but also ensure full regulatory compliance.
- Ensuring there is no decline in water quality from new developments.

However, there are some key gaps in the new laws that must be addressed to give the Reef the resilience it needs in this time of crisis:

The Bill does not address activities in high risk areas such as along creek beds and riparian zones, erodible soils and wetlands

The Bill ensures there is no decline in water quality from new developments but this excludes new agricultural developments, which must also be considered.

Whilst these laws will stop outdated polluting practices in the catchment, the practice of dumping millions of tonnes of maintenance dredge spoil continues to be allowed. Dredging north and south of the Whitsundays has a serious impact on our water quality.

Thank you for accepting this submission. We are depending on you to safeguard our previous Great Barrier Reef ecosystem and all the life that depends on it.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Fontes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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