

Acting Committee Secretary  
Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee  
Parliament House, George Street, Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Sir,

I wish to make a submission to the proposed Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures and Other Legislation) Amendment Bill 2019 (Reef Protection Bill)

I am a lifetime cattle producer. Our two cattle properties are in southern inland Queensland. Despite being 6 hours west of the coast we are affected by the proposed legislation. It adds further regulation to our already heavily regulated industry.

We have always cared about the health of our land, its ecosystems and biodiversity. I also happen, like most land holders to want not only the Great Barrier Reef protected for future generations but also the health of our rivers, precious underground water and biodiversity.

The fact sheet for the Bill states ‘the *main cause of poor Reef water quality is the cumulative effect of multiple nutrient and sediment releases from agricultural lands in the Reef regions, along with locally significant contributions from industrial land uses.*’

It is concerning this Bill further targets landholders already operating under restrictive legislation but makes no mention of the effect on the Reef from:

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- Queensland’s population of 5 million that mostly live adjacent to the coast
- The waste of the above from household, backyard and businesses directly adjacent to the coast ending up in stormwater drains and out to sea and ultimately affecting the reef
- The above waste including unlimited unregulated backyard use of chemicals for lawns, gardens
- The above worsening as governments of both persuasions encourage population growth and development *along the coast* with the Sunshine Coast population alone predicted to hit 495,000 by 2041
- Ongoing clearing of shrinking remnant vegetation along the coast to cater for urban sprawl of this population growth, in many cases metres from waterways
- Widespread heavy metals and industrial pollution directly adjacent to the coast in creeks and rivers including PFAS chemicals from airports, heavy metals from industrial sites. In many cases these are metres from sea water, all eventually ends up in the sea
- The industrial footprint of the resources sector
- Over 40 operational and post operational coal mines in the Fitzroy basin licensed to discharge their waste water into river systems in the Great Barrier Reef catchment area
- The cumulative effect of all coal mine waste water releases to rivers
- In February alone there were 21 coal mine waste water releases in the reef catchment of the Fitzroy Basin (Qld Government DES website)
- Over 5,000 coal seam gas wells bringing up millions of tonnes of salt and contaminated ground water
- The cumulative effect of this coal seam gas ‘treated’ waste water being discharged into river systems in reef catchments

- Cases of mines buying stock water bores that tap deep clean limited underground reserves to use this clean water to dilute contaminated mine water prior to using as irrigation
- ANZECC water quality standards being applied to the rivers receiving mine waste water after discharge and not the toxicity of mine water prior to discharge. That is to say relying on the dilution effect for safety rather than enforcing clean water entering the rivers
- Agricultural landholders raising concerns in many cases about the threat to the integrity of their land from resources activity and by default the effects on the reef downstream. At Chinchilla it was landholders that raised concerns about 900,000 tons of product salt landfill and 45,000 tons of waste salt landfill from coal seam gas operations each year, proposed to be stored fewer than 100 metres from Stockyard Creek.
- 15,000 abandoned mines in Queensland (quote Mr Oscar Kadletz, Abandoned Mines Coordinator, Dept. Natural Resources and Mines to the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry, October 24th, 2011). Floods have highlighted pollution problems as these spill into waterways including those in reef catchment areas
- Acid and heavy metal overflow spill from the abandoned Mt Morgan mine into the Dee River which was already perhaps the most polluted river in Queensland from mining. It sits at the top of the big Fitzroy Basin catchment in a reef area

In tandem with new penalties proposed on land holders by this Bill the Government is encouraging:

- A significantly expanded resources exploration program (The Queensland Exploration Program June 2018)
- New petroleum and gas opportunities totaling 43,000 km<sup>2</sup> and new coal land releases of more than 1,100 km<sup>2</sup>. (The Queensland Exploration Program June 2018)

This increasing industrialization of clean agricultural land by resource companies is frustrating landholders who are trying to protect the natural capital of their environment - and by default runoff to the reef. They are trying to protect a sustainable industry against short term extractive polluting industries that operate under the protection of different legislation. There is simply no way agriculture would have been allowed to destroy the habitat at Curtis Island and Gladstone harbour and affect its water quality and marine life like the CSG industry was allowed. Yet the emphasis on saving the reef is focusing on ever increasing penalties for rural landholders who are often hundreds of kilometres away.

A focus on the Bill proposed is no net decline in water quality from new agricultural development. It is deeply concerning as a land holder relying on clean rivers and who does not want to see reef pollution to observe the explosion in mining waste water releases into rivers under different rules.

From November 2012 until July 2016, the Queensland Government 'conducted a pilot of enhanced mine water release as part of a long-term strategy to improve mine water management across the Fitzroy Basin. Participating mines managed mine-affected water through enhanced environmental authority (EA) conditions enabling mines with legacy water issues to manage water releases more proactively and effectively over subsequent wet seasons'

The result was that 'the pilot conditions increased opportunities for mine water releases with no noticeable impact on water quality for ecosystem health, stock irrigation or domestic use'. A government report states 'This demonstrated that well-managed and regulated coal mine

water releases can be optimised without affecting environmental values or downstream drinking water quality'. The theory being the dilution effect renders all this insignificant. The cumulative effect of all mine discharges remains unanswered as does the veracity of the initial data supplied.

The Government is proposing tourism development in national parks. Most recently it has called for tenders for development in Hinchinbrook Island National park. This park lies directly adjacent to the barrier reef. Yet if a cattle producer 500 km from the coast under the proposed Amendment Bill wants to increase his cropping area by greater than 2 ha they requires a license and farm design plan.

A true, balanced approach to protecting the Reef needs to:

- Adopt a holistic consistent approach across all industry and all population not just agriculture on Queensland's footprint on reef quality
- Stop competing interests between Government departments to both exploit and protect
- Acknowledge the effect on the reef of population growth, economic growth, short term extractive polluting industry growth and urbanisation
- Stop the political bias that encourages growth of above whilst inferring the reef can be saved by increasing punitive measures on sparsely populated agricultural landowners who are trying to protect their green space
- Stop using rivers as a dilution point for coal mine and gas well waste water releases
- Call for an independent scientific enquiry into both the data used to justify mining waste release into rivers and the cumulative effect of all mine releases into rivers in Queensland
- Acknowledge, incentivise and reward land holders for the natural environmental capital they are protecting from urbanisation and industrialisation
- Identify site specific hot spots for reef pollution rather than blanket legislation that captures in some cases producers 100s of km from the reef and activities on their own properties that may be nowhere near any watercourse

Undoubtedly agricultural land holders have a major role to play in reef protection by reducing soil and pesticide runoff from their properties. In my own industry, the cattle industry, I do not know a landholder who wants to increase runoff from his property. Not only is this environmentally wrong it is financial suicide for a farming business wanting to remain sustainable.

This submission does not dispute that reef ecosystems are under pressure. It is no coincidence that along the sections of the far north Queensland coast where population density and heavy industry is at its lowest the reef is at its healthiest.

The reality is the reef is suffering death by a thousand cuts. This will only be addressed by every one of Queensland's 5 million population owning responsibility for their effects and not this Bill targeting agricultural landholders only.

Nigel Onley

