



*A voice for the environment*

12 March 2019

A/Committee Secretary  
Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane Qld 4000  
**Email:** [itdec@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:itdec@parliament.qld.gov.au)

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

Dear Committee,

The Great Barrier Reef is one of the seven wonders of the world, the largest living structure on Earth, is an Australian icon and is treasured worldwide. It is home to six of the world's seven marine turtle species, 3,000 corals, 1,700 species of fish, and provides employment for over 64,000 people.

The major threats to the reef are;

- Climate Change: which leads to coral bleaching, increased extreme weather events and ocean acidification.
- Water Pollution: from land-based run-off leading to impacts like outbreaks of crown-of-thorn starfish.
- Coastal Development: which affects coastal habitats that support the Reef and producing damaging urban litter.

The cumulative effects of these threats weaken the Reef's resilience, reducing its ability to recover from serious disturbances predicted to become more frequent in the future.

The Reef is affected by run-off from 35 major catchments draining 424,000 square kilometres of coastal Queensland. Most sediment entering the Great Barrier Reef comes from catchments in major pastoral areas such as the Burdekin, Herbert and Fitzroy Rivers.

Immediate action must be taken to significantly reduce the massive loads of unnatural sediment and chemical pollution entering Reef waters. This pollution directly impacts corals through smothering, loss of light as well as increasing crown of thorns starfish outbreaks.

Catchment pollution is a threat that we can tackle now. These new laws are critical to protect the Reef and help restore its health. Current government 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."

We need strong laws to ensure all agricultural producers attain minimum standards and highly polluting practices are ceased. The new laws will drive uptake of practices, which



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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.

**We strongly support the main elements of the Bill:**

- Catchment pollution targets that will deliver 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.
- 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 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 areas 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.
- The 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.

I urge 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 your consideration of my submission. Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely

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Assistant Coordinator

**Capricorn Conservation Council**