



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Environment

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (9.37 a.m.), by leave: Honourable members would be aware that my Government has, in recent months in particular, introduced a number of initiatives that were aimed at protecting our State's unique biodiversity. They will achieve that aim. There was the South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement, which not only protected our native forests in the short-term but also protected them forever. And this initiative also protected the jobs of timberworkers and gave a shot in the arm for many timber towns in the region. They were given security and certainty they had never had before. Next, we announced initiatives to protect the Great Barrier Reef and give long-term security to trawl fishers.

The most recent initiative came yesterday with vegetation clearing guidelines to protect our unique biodiversity and give long-term security to farmers and future generations of farmers. The response from the Federal Government—in particular the Minister for the Environment, Senator Robert Hill—has been disappointing to say the least. It has been disappointing to date. Let us hope it gets better.

Senator Hill seeks to portray himself as the champion of the environment. Well, I now seriously doubt that Senator Hill is interested in anything but short-term political gains. On the forest agreement, Senator Hill has been missing in action despite the fact that it delivers two environmental gains in the battle against greenhouse gases. First, the agreement means that logging will stop in those native forests. Yet Senator Hill still refuses to support our agreement. On the reef protection measures, Senator Hill prefers to puff out his chest and table thump—again, no support from the Minister. And, third, the vegetation clearing guidelines: Senator Hill has turned his back on Queensland farmers by refusing to provide any Commonwealth funding for the State's initiatives.

Let me say this very clearly so that the Federal Minister knows exactly what I think. Senator Hill has shown his true colours—and they are not green; they are yellow or maybe brown. It is about time we had support from the senator. For a Federal Minister who professes to want to protect the environment, Senator Hill's decision to turn his back on an initiative that achieves that aim is surprising and disappointing. I can only wonder what role has been played by the Queensland Nationals and Liberals.

I can only wonder what role has been played by the Queensland Nationals and Liberals, who have consistently and publicly opposed environmental initiatives such as the South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement, the trawl fishing plans, and now the guidelines to deliver sustainable farming through controlled vegetation clearing.

Senator Hill's backdown to the Queensland Nationals and Liberals on these issues is appalling but, more importantly, it puts the State's unique biodiversity at serious risk. It does not help the farmers. In this State, we have become used to seeing the Queensland Liberals kowtow to the Queensland National Party on just about everything, but now the malaise has spread to Canberra. We have Federal Liberal Ministers running scared of the big bad Nats. What a pathetic sight! The Prime Minister needs the Nats, and he knows it!

I can find no other way to explain Senator Hill's claims that Queensland is not entitled to funding for compensation payments to farmers who would be affected by the vegetation clearing guidelines. When the Australian Democrats agreed on the GST, the price paid to them by the Federal Government

was a massive boost to environment funding for projects exactly like this. In round terms, the pool was boosted to \$600m. Queensland's share is roughly \$100m.

If Senator Hill is serious about protecting and preserving our delicate and unique biodiversity, he will get down from his political high horse and join me, the Government, the farmers and the conservationists at the negotiating table. The other option is to stay under the thumb of the Queensland Nationals and Liberals, whose only motivation in these issues is political one-upmanship on One Nation—nothing more. Members opposite are trying to protect their political hides by attempting to block initiatives that a Labor Government has delivered—initiatives that they have failed to deliver and initiatives that will protect the land, ensure land management and protect the environment.

Let me move on to the issue of protecting the Great Barrier Reef and Senator Hill's position on this important issue. On 15 November, Cabinet endorsed a fisheries management plan for Queensland's east coast trawl fishery. This plan was the result of many years of negotiations up and down the Queensland coast and was aimed at ensuring that the industry was placed on a long-term viable future. As I reported to the House at the time, not all aspects of the original plan were included in that decision. There were very good reasons for that.

If these aspects had been included, there was the very real possibility that small family-operated trawling operations would suffer and be at risk of folding. This Government could not condone this unnecessary collapse of legitimate trawling operations without a thorough investigation of all viable options.

After my Ministers and I met with the stakeholders, we set in place a working group involving all stakeholders to examine those issues that were not included in the approved plan. That working group will meet for the first time today. The issues are—

- the availability of by-catch reduction and turtle-exclusion devices;
- the need for these devices in deep water king prawn fisheries and the Bundaberg coastal scallop fishery;
- the necessary reductions in catch-effort and the appropriate time frame for the introduction of these reductions;
- species that should be targeted by this fishery and those that should remain as by-catch;
- the need for associated socioeconomic impact studies;
- and what closures should occur in areas that have not been trawled, or trawled for less than 20 days per year in recent years.

I made this issue a high priority, allocating senior officers of my department to oversee the working group and report back by 1 March 2000. Zonal closures for north Queensland were set in place, with the first of these commencing on the 15th of this month—six days away. This outcome was fair and reasonable under the circumstances.

Imagine my surprise to read in yesterday's Courier-Mail that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority—a key stakeholder with strong links to the Federal Government—had pulled out of the first working group meeting set down for this morning. I was even more dismayed by Federal Environment Minister Robert Hill's comments. Senator Hill said that the authority had completed its consultations with the State Government long ago and a decision was long overdue. Once again I felt that, for inexplicable reasons, Senator Hill intended to leave legitimate trawl operators in the lurch. However, I am pleased to inform honourable members that late yesterday afternoon I was advised that a senior representative of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority would attend this morning's meeting and represent the Federal Government's position on this issue. I am delighted with this outcome.

I urge Senator Hill and authority representatives to participate in a spirit of goodwill and cooperation within the working group in a genuine attempt to resolve the issues of sustainability within this industry in a way which will have the least impact on operators. By doing so, Senator Hill's deadline of 1 January 2001 for the start-up of his catch-effort reduction plan can be comfortably met.

Let me assure honourable members of this Government's commitment to sustainability within our fisheries. I know Senator Hill has objectives here. I believe that we can have a sensible outcome with some reasonable negotiations. I look forward to reporting further to the House on this issue.

I also look forward to reporting further to this House on the intrusion by the Federal Minister, Warren Truss, who has attempted to undermine payments to Queensland farmers. I put the National Party on notice: the National Party's attempts to prevent compensation being paid to Queensland farmers is not only anti-bush, it is anti-Queensland and anti-farmer. I reiterate to the House that I will stand side by side with the farmers and we will fight for real compensation for Queensland farmers while Warren Truss and the National Party attempt to prevent Queensland farmers from being properly compensated.