



Speech by

## Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

---

Hansard 13 December 2001

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

#### Reef Protection Plan

**Hon. P. D. BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.36 a.m.), by leave: During the February state election this year I made a commitment to establish a Reef Task Force to provide a Reef Protection Plan. I am pleased to advise the House that the Reef Task Force has been working diligently for some months now and will next week present the government with its first report, which will lay the framework for further work in this important area.

The principal target of the task force and the plan is the problem of run-off from the mainland and potential impacts on our reef systems. This problem has been the subject of heated debate over recent years with differing views often expressed. The deliberations of the task force have been no different. Opposing scientific views have been tabled: producer groups have found themselves pitted against each other, water quality targets have been presented and disputed, and the environment movement has welcomed the opportunity to showcase its concerns. Unfortunately, even after months of debate, a considerable divergence of opinion still exists, and this concerns me greatly and I draw it to the attention of the House.

It concerns me because a similar development occurred with the tree clearing issue. As honourable members well remember, we tried a similar approach to gain consensus on that issue. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful and the quite moderate legislation we introduced at the time had to be amended. But the issue failed to go away. The environment movement took their battle federally and managed to trigger the Howard government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act—something that I warned about. The end result is that Queensland's rural landholders, particularly in western grassland and brigalow areas, find themselves having to apply to both the state and federal governments for permits to clear—something that would not have been necessary if our legislation had been supported initially. My office has had several approaches from rural representatives lamenting this outcome and wishing they had supported our original legislation. I do not want to see this happen again. Neither industry nor the Queensland economy needs such disruption.

My appeal today—and I do this deliberately—is to those industry groups that see the Reef Protection Plan as a danger to take a broader view and appreciate that with the Democrats and the Greens holding the balance of power in the Senate the potential is there for the Howard government to again trade off major commitments like the full sale of Telstra for green returns. Or worse still, they could find themselves in a Federal Court defending their industry against a charge of threatening the World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef. Based on the recent Wet Tropics decision, which ruled in favour of flying foxes, the potential exists for this act to again hold sway. Such an outcome is not in the best interests of Queensland or Queenslanders.

I simply ask for some commonsense and a reasonable approach from all parties. This is simple. I urge a cooperative attitude from all participants to avoid such a scenario. I can assure all stakeholders that no one party is being targeted by this task force. Rather, this is a plea to put an end to this long-running saga of pollution claims and counterclaims that are damaging to Queensland and its enterprises. By working together in a cooperative manner, the pain of the courts or sell-outs from federal political parties can be avoided. Make no mistake, I warned about this in relation to tree clearing and what I warned about came true. I do not want the same thing to happen here.