



Speech by

Lindy Nelson-Carr

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FEDERAL ELECTION; GREAT BARRIER REEF, OIL DRILLING

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (12.16 p.m.): Many Queenslanders are old enough to remember what Queensland was like in the early 1970s and can hardly fail to recall a long-running debate that ranged then over oil drilling on the Great Barrier Reef. To the Queensland government of the day, it seemed that 'Great Barrier Reef' actually meant 'great barrels of royalties' from oil. Happily, oil drilling on the Great Barrier Reef was sent to the archives along with other well-won environmental battles that stopped mining in limestone cave areas and sandmining on Fraser Island.

Most everyone knows that oil drilling on or near the Great Barrier Reef would prove disastrous. The Beattie government knows it, scientists know it, Australians at large know it and the world community seems to know it. Why, then, does the Howard government persist in keeping the prospect of oil prospecting alive instead of nailing it in the coffin where it belongs?

ABC news on 21 June this year reported that three sensitive offshore basins on the edge of the Great Barrier Reef have been listed by the federal government as a high priority for oil exploration. The report said that the Securing Australia's Energy Future policy identified the eastern, Marion and Townsville plateaus, just outside the Great Barrier Reef, as priority areas for petroleum drilling. Despite repeated denials, the stories just keep popping up and have been doing so for some time. Is the well-worn saying 'where there's smoke there's fire' applicable in this instance? I very much hope not.

On 13 October 2002 the *Sun Herald* ran a piece which said that a federal government agency had been accused of involvement in a secret move to survey oil reserves in waters alongside the Great Barrier Reef. As reported, the agency, Geoscience Australia, ordered satellite photographs of oil seeps in the Coral Sea which show the location of rich oil deposits. The agency argued that the photographs were for environmental purposes but Democrats leader Andrew Bartlett rightly said that the excuse did not stand up to scrutiny.

Over the past four years the *Townsville Bulletin* has printed claim and counterclaim about the federal government's Great Barrier Reef intentions. Other newspapers have done the same, but I am particularly aware of stories that have run in my home city, which is on the doorstep of reef territory and where such great work is being done in the field of marine science. Commenting on a proposal by Norwegian company TGS-NOPEC to conduct tests for oil in the Townsville trough, about 200 kilometres off the Queensland coast, the member for Herbert, Peter Lindsay, was quoted in the *Townsville Bulletin* on 18 August as saying, 'There should be no threat to the environment if oil exploration goes ahead near the Great Barrier Reef.' Not surprisingly, he seems to have had second thoughts because he is certainly not taking that line now. TGS-NOPEC has also backed off and appears to have abandoned its plans.

There is no question about the immense appeal of the Great Barrier Reef to tourists or about the need to protect its fish stocks and natural wonders, but a nagging fear remains. If the region contains Australia's richest offshore oil fields, as many suggest, as world oil reserves dwindle the temptation to drill may become too great for some future governments to resist. For federal Labor and Queensland Labor, however, oil exploration on or anywhere near the reef is anathema. You just cannot believe the Howard government, and it was interesting to hear two other speakers this morning saying exactly the same thing.

He lied to us about Medicare, he lied to us about the rises in health insurance premiums, he lied to us about the cost of university degrees, he lied to us about the GST, he lied to us about price rises.

A government member interjected.

Ms NELSON-CARR: He did. He lied about price increases in petrol and beer, to name just a couple; he lied about the children overboard; he lied about weapons of mass destruction. I could go on and on.

A government member interjected.

Ms NELSON-CARR: He is a lying rogue. I will take that interjection. Without the slightest doubt, the Great Barrier Reef cannot and must not ever be allowed to become the North Sea of the South Pacific.

I would like to finish my speech this morning by showing this to members: 'Truth overboard, 35 lies told by John Howard and counting'. Have a look at that little lying rodent. This is the mother of all lies. This was from John Howard on ABC Radio on 25 August 1995—

Truth is absolute. Truth is supreme. Truth is never disposable in national political life.

I rest my case.