



Speech by

Andrew Powell

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GREAT BARRIER REEF PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr POWELL (Glass House—LNP) (5.22 pm): I rise today to contribute to the truncated debate on the Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Bill. From the outset let me be very clear so those opposite have no misgivings: I and the LNP are strong advocates for the Great Barrier Reef. The Great Barrier Reef is one of the true natural wonders of the world. It is the largest coral reef system in the world covering some 344,000 square kilometres in area and stretching some 2,300 kilometres in length. According to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, it is home to some 15,000 species of fish, 360 species of hard coral, one-third of the world's soft coral, up to 8,000 species of molluscs or shells, nearly 500 species of marine algae, 600 species of starfish and sea urchins, 17 species of sea snakes, 22 species of seabirds and 32 species of shore birds that live and breed on the islands, 13,000 dugong, six species of marine turtles—all listed as threatened—and 30 species of cetaceans, that is, whales or dolphins. Furthermore, the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area is the largest World Heritage area in the world, inscribed on the World Heritage List on 26 October 1981. The World Heritage area is 348,000 square kilometres in size meaning that over 99 per cent of the world's World Heritage areas fall within the boundaries of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park which is why I and the LNP support the federal government's Reef Rescue package.

Let me dwell for a moment on the elements of that package, and I refer to a joint media release from the federal government dated May 2008 which states—

The rescue plan will help protect one of the world's great natural wonders, while benefiting local conservation and Indigenous groups, agricultural production and tourism, fishing and aquaculture industries.

The \$200 million five-year Reef Rescue plan includes \$146 million for a Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Grants Program, the majority of these funds to be provided in the form of matching grants to landowners and managers who commit to implementing proven practices to reduce the amount of nutrient and sediment run-off from the land; \$12 million for a Healthy Reef Partnerships Program to boost partnerships between governments and non-government organisations; \$10 million for a Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Research and Development Program, a competitive research funding program to look at the link between land management practices and environmental impacts and develop new water quality monitoring techniques for nutrients, chemicals and sediments; \$22 million for a water quality monitoring and reporting program to expand existing monitoring and reporting of water quality in the reef and fund a coordinated catchment-wide water quality monitoring program; and \$10 million for the Land and Sea Country Indigenous Partnerships Program, including at least \$5 million to employ sea country officers in Indigenous communities and provide additional funding for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to strengthen partnerships with Indigenous communities.

All of these elements have the support of the LNP, but let me highlight two aspects of what I just said. Firstly, as acknowledged by the federal ministers for the environment and for agriculture, this plan protects one of the world's greatest natural wonders while benefiting local conservation and Indigenous groups, agricultural production and tourism, fishing and aquaculture. The important point to make is protecting and benefiting—that is, protecting and benefiting, not protecting and punishing. The second point I want to reflect on is that Reef Rescue is a five-year program that began last year. This Bligh government has given the program less than 12 months before it has introduced this punitive legislation. In

fact, it has given it even far less than that because, as the explanatory notes suggest, its decision to put forward this bill comes on the basis of the 2008 *Scientific consensus statement on water quality in the Great Barrier Reef*.

Of course this statement has identified no improvement in water quality. The funding from the Reef Rescue package had not even left the coffers of Canberra when it was published. Quite frankly, I am sick and tired of all governments of any ilk, but particularly this one, throwing good money after bad at packages, programs and plans and then not waiting to see the effects of such—or, worse, not studying the outcomes at all. If I was the federal government, I would want to let the Reef Rescue package run its full five-year course. I would also want the Queensland government to reallocate the \$50 million it is planning on spending on policing this proposed bill into beefing up the oversubscribed grants programs offered by the Reef Rescue package. Finally, if I was the federal government, I would await and call on the Queensland government to await the final results of the \$32 million scientific longitudinal studies that are part of the package before I throw the baby out with the bathwater and bring out the big stick.