



Speech by
Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Thursday, 8 October 2009

GREAT BARRIER REEF PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (5.53 pm): I, too, rise to speak in support of the Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Bill. Although I may not live in North Queensland and although I am not right next door to the Great Barrier Reef, I am a very proud Queenslander and very proud of our fantastic heritage listed Great Barrier Reef. I do not think you have to live in North Queensland to admire its absolute beauty and its absolute perfection when it comes to marine biology and diversity. I have snorkelled on the reef many times and have enjoyed every visit that I have ever undertaken to many parts of the Great Barrier Reef throughout my holidays and throughout my life.

I think I am speaking on behalf of a lot of my constituents who are also very proud Queenslanders who support maintaining the Barrier Reef in the pristine condition that it is at the moment. I go around and speak to many people. I also visit many schools. Having known that this legislation was coming before the House, I asked many schoolchildren about whether they felt that we needed to do more for the Great Barrier Reef. The only people in this House who can really sit here and believe that nothing needs to be done to protect and preserve this reef are those on the other side of the House. I suggest they go and talk to the schoolchildren in their local schools and ask them whether they think that the government needs to do something to protect the reef. They will tell them that something does need to be done. That is why we are here today. We are here today because this side of the House, regardless of those sceptics opposite, believes that something needs to be done to protect our reef. We take action. We do not just sit there and gripe about things that we can do something about.

This legislation is all about doing what we can to sustain this reef and the industry around it into the future, and I support many of its amendments. This legislation does not try to set a lowest common denominator in terms of changes of management practices to improve water quality. It does no such thing. It provides for a gradual but certain improvement in management practices over a reasonable time frame until these practices are compatible with the long-term health of the reef. Nothing could be more balanced than that. There are new standards for chemical use, which will be supported by environmental risk management plans to ensure that we have continuous improvement as technology and scientific understanding improves.

Those opposite are sceptical about the scientific evidence. We on this side of the House are not. We take action immediately. We are not going to wait—and the community does not want us to wait—until the reef is beyond repair. The bill requires that farmers apply no more than the type of fertiliser that they need to apply, and this is going to be calculated according to the skills that they are developing in this area. If they do not develop these skills, as the member for Barron River says, they do not have a sustainable industry. This bill strikes that balance to give them the ability for growth and for sustainability into the future. I do not understand what those opposite do not comprehend in relation to those issues. I do not understand it and all we seem to be getting is carping rather than a full understanding of what this bill is actually about.

A risk management approach is absolutely vital if we are to sustain the reef. This bill brings in a risk management approach to land management through environmental risk management plans which are specific to each property, not a one-size-fits-all approach. It is not a one-size-fits-all approach; it is specific

to each property, but it looks at the area holistically. There is no other way that we can do that. The reef stretches many miles along the Queensland coast. If those opposite suggest any other way of doing it, they are burying their head in that beautiful white sand that they live next door to and they are making sure that we do not do the right thing as far as the reef is concerned, which will affect not just me but the generations to come. I believe that the gradual process of continual improvement will ultimately, as I said, benefit farmers but, more significantly, it is going to benefit those schoolkids to whom I speak who want the reef not only for themselves but for future generations. Speak to any one of my 15-year-old friends and they will say, 'Yes, I agree. The reef is in trouble.' We need to take action. This bill is taking action. The only sceptics in this House and in the community are those opposite. Those opposite are the only sceptics who come in here with bogus scientific reports that mean absolutely nothing.

All I can say is congratulations to the minister and those who have worked on this bill. It has a balanced approach. It will protect the reef. I commend the bill to the House.