



Speech by

## Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Thursday, 8 October 2009

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### GREAT BARRIER REEF PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL

**Mr MESSENGER** (Burnett—LNP) (4.44 pm): This piece of legislation is nothing more than a political bribe to the Greens which ensures that their preference deal with Labor continues at the next election. This is a shameful piece of legislation that has been guillotined through this parliament in an absolutely shameful way. It has been guillotined through this parliament so that there is not proper scrutiny of this legislation and also to take the pressure off a minister who is obviously out of her depth in this place.

**Ms Jones:** I introduced this in June. You have never spoken to me about this. I introduced this in June.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Ryan): Order! Minister!

**Mr Wettenhall** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Barron River. The member for Burnett has the call.

**Mr MESSENGER:** The minister should be ashamed. She squawks and squawks and continues on. She has the protection of the guillotine in this particular piece of legislation and she does not like being questioned because she does not have the capacity to properly address the issues that are raised—

**Ms JONES:** I rise to a point of order. I find that offensive and I ask the member to withdraw it. This bill was introduced in June. The member could have asked me any question between June and now.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister, you have made your point.

**Mr MESSENGER:** I withdraw. In a little while I will talk to the minister about inviting her to my electorate, because I have.

**Mr Cripps:** What is the rush?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Hinchinbrook!

**Mr MESSENGER:** It is a piece of legislation which shows how politically desperate the Labor Party has become. We know its members are desperate and unpopular in the south-east corner because they resort to the same predictable knee-jerk reaction, and that is to drop the knee into the farmers and the workers of North Queensland under the pretext of protecting the environment. It is always the common thing, the whipping boy. 'Let's drag out and flog the farmers. Let's get in and protect the environment. Let's save the Great Barrier Reef.' That is the predictable action of this government. If there was ever proof of an unprecedented level of corruption and dysfunction that has eaten away into Queensland public life, it is this putrid piece of legislation offered in the chamber. If there was ever proof that we need a royal commission to examine the links between government, Labor mates and cronyism, it is this piece of legislation. Let us put Aila Keto under the microscope. Let us put the World Wide Fund for Nature and all of those people under the microscope. If there was ever proof that an elite group of green fanatics and left-wing ideologues were in charge of the Queensland public finances, it is in this piece of legislation.

On a day when the Local Government Association of Queensland is calling for a regional economic stimulus package to fend off the global downturn and a new report from the Australian Development

Strategies group shows unemployment in Far North Queensland is the highest in the country at 11.8 per cent, those opposite introduce more red tape which is designed to attack productivity and jobs. This legislation is targeted at cane farmers and cattle graziers in the north of our state. The farmers in the Burnett are feeling nervous and we heed the warning from the member for Mirani. The next time that Aila Keto or some other faceless green comrade gets on the phone to the Premier they are in for a political kicking; we know that.

Every speaker opposite including the minister has stood and held their hands on their hearts and said, 'We want to protect the Great Barrier Reef.' The people of the Burnett and especially the people of the Discovery Coast have a little bit of experience with the Great Barrier Reef.

**Ms Jarratt:** Oh yes!

**Mr MESSENGER:** Oh yes. The member for Whitsunday, who likes to think that she knows all about the reef, might like to know that the people of the Discovery Coast and in the Burnett are at the closest point on the eastern seaboard of Australia to the Great Barrier Reef—30 nautical miles.

**Ms Jarratt:** Ooh!

**Mr MESSENGER:** What is happening there? This government is contributing \$30 million to build a desalination plant on the mainland at the closest point to the Great Barrier Reef. Run-off from that plant will destroy parts of the reef. It will destroy the environment for two endangered species of turtles. I table this document and invite the minister to come and investigate and to stay there.

*Tabled paper:* Brochure titled 'SOS... Save Agnes Water's Turtle Breeding Beaches' [[1051](#)].

Where has the World Wide Fund for Nature been? Where has the Wilderness Society been? There are two species of turtle—the loggerhead turtle and possibly the leatherback turtle. One per cent of the nesting females of loggerhead turtle are nesting on Bathtubs Beach, and the minister is allowing a desal plant to be built there. There will be a big electric pump placed on a beach where I counted 30 nesting sites.

On 2 February this year I attended a turtle symposium. I handed out leaflets to the attendees which alerted them to the risk imposed on Agnes Water's turtle breeding beaches by this proposed desalination plant, and I voiced concerns with a Queensland leading turtle expert. During the turtle symposium Queensland's leading turtle expert, Dr Col Limpus, confirmed that endangered loggerhead turtle species are nesting at Bathtubs Beach, where the desalination plant will be constructed. After he studied the photo of the turtle tracks taken at Bathtubs Beach, Dr Limpus officially confirmed that at least one female loggerhead turtle is nesting within 100 metres of the desalination plant site. He told me that there were approximately 600 laying female loggerheads on the east coast of Australia and said that there could be five or six loggerhead turtles laying at Bathtubs Beach. If the majority of those nests on Bathtubs Beach are loggerheads, that will mean that approximately one per cent of Australia's endangered loggerhead nesting females are laying at Bathtubs Beach.

I pointed out to Dr Limpus that it was incorrect for him to compare Labor's desalination plant on Heron Island with the plant at Agnes Water because the plant at Agnes Water, in its first stage only, was going to be 10 times the size of Heron Island's desalination plant, since the plant at Agnes Water will be producing one megalitre a day compared with Heron Island's 0.1 megalitres a day. Dr Limpus also was not aware that there was going to be a submersible pump, similar to a sewerage pump, located on the beach directly where the turtles nest.

I cannot believe that Dr Limpus continued to contradict himself by admitting that endangered turtles did nest on Bathtubs Beach but he was not concerned—and nor is this government, which is promoting and enabling this plant. It is contributing almost \$30 million to a project that will supply water to 700 ratepayers. It does not make sense. Guess what, Mr Deputy Speaker: that \$30 million is linked directly to this project. There was another solution: there was a pipeline solution to the water problem. But this government directly linked that money so there was going to be a desalination plant on this beach—30 miles from the Great Barrier Reef—endangering two species of turtle.

I have written to Peter Garrett about this. I have written to the minister opposite about this. But have I heard boo about it? Will they say anything about it? The hypocrisy is unbelievable. When they say that they are out there to protect the reef—

**Mr O'BRIEN:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. My point of order is under standing order 236. The bill is to do with run-off from cane farms and cattle farms. The member is not speaking to the bill. I ask him to return to the provisions of the bill before the House.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Ryan): Order! Member for Burnett, I will remind you about the purposes of the bill and I ask you to continue.

**Mr MESSENGER:** I remind the member for Cook of the long title of the bill. He, more than all other members here, should know about the provisions of this bill. This is about the Great Barrier Reef. It says so—'Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Bill'. What I am talking about here today is Great Barrier Reef protection. Our community is trying to protect its share of the Great Barrier Reef from a Labor project which is about to destroy it.

Government members have the gall to stand up here and say that they are the great protectors of our reef. What hypocrisy! What bunkum! They should hang their heads in shame. They are allowing \$30 million of government funds to go to a project that will be to the significant detriment of that area of the Great Barrier Reef. They just do not want to hear that sort of talk in here. They are used to having it all their own way. They do not like to think they are hurting the environment.

Another project I will tell members about that happened at Agnes Water was a sewage hole. Raw sewage was pumped into a hole in the ground for 10 years. This government knew about it. I brought it to the attention of the former environment minister. Finally it was stopped. But that is the sort of rubbish that goes on with this government. This government has taken away the 40 per cent subsidy to local governments for infrastructure projects. At Bundaberg that means that the sewage will continue to—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Burnett, I accept your point that you are speaking about the Great Barrier Reef, but I am not sure that talking about the local government subsidy in Bundaberg is relevant to the purposes of the bill. I draw your attention to the purposes of the bill and ask you to continue.

**Mr MESSENGER:** I will go back to the long title of the bill. I am about to make a point about protecting the Great Barrier Reef, Mr Deputy Speaker. The point I am making is that we could recycle that water. We could stop that water being pumped into the ocean just 500 metres from a beach where endangered turtles nest. If that 40 per cent subsidy was returned, local governments along the east coast of Queensland, including the local governments in North Queensland, would be able to build infrastructure that would protect the Great Barrier Reef from sewage run-off, Mr Deputy Speaker. That was the point I was getting to.

I invite the minister for the environment to put on her wetsuit and come to Agnes Water and go diving around Agnes Water, which is the closest point to the reef that she will find on the east coast of Queensland.

**Mr Elmes** interjected.

**Mr MESSENGER:** Yes—just get out of Moreton Bay. In that area she will find some of the most diverse ecological species in Queensland. We have soft corals in the mouths of our rivers, and we have a thriving tourism industry that depends on the health of our reef. The minister has totally ignored our part of Queensland. She is running scared. She will not go and face the community who want to talk to her about the damage to the Great Barrier Reef that her government is about to cause with this desalination plant. It is time that the minister faced up to this and did the right thing. She is the environment minister for the whole of Queensland, not just selected areas—especially environmentally sensitive areas like Agnes Water.

The truth has been uncovered in the Burnett. The truth has been discovered on a beach at Agnes Water. The Greens and the Labor leadership do not care about the environment. They care about one thing: they care about political power and they care about cosyng up to each other so they can stay in power. They will allow rampant environmental damage to occur and they have not said boo about it. Where is Roger Currie speaking about this abomination at Agnes Water? Where is Aila Keto talking about it? Where are all the protesters waving placards around Queensland about this? Not one person has come out against this. It just demonstrates the hypocrisy of this green movement in Queensland and the hypocrisy of those opposite.

**Mr O'Brien:** I wish more of my constituents could see you in action.

**Mr MESSENGER:** I take the interjection of the member for Cook. I invite the member for Cook to resign and stand and run against me in the Burnett—please, please. Then we would see just exactly what my constituents think of him. The member for Cook wants to talk about his constituents. I have been to his electorate and have spoken to his constituents, and I can say firsthand that they have a very, very low opinion of him.

**Mr O'Brien:** So much so that they have elected me three times!

**Mr MESSENGER:** I will take that interjection.

**Mr Reeves** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The House will come to order. The member for Burnett has the call.

**Mr MESSENGER:** I will go back to the point that I first made at the beginning of my speech: this is an extremely important day in Queensland. We have just found out that unemployment has increased significantly. North Queensland has the highest rate of unemployment. Those opposite are about to vote to pass a bill that will tie farmers up; that will strangle them with red tape.

**Mr Cripps** interjected.

**Mr MESSENGER:** I take the interjection from the member for Hinchinbrook. He knows what he is talking about. Those opposite talk about creating jobs, but they cannot have it both ways. The only jobs they want to create are those of spin doctors and to do so with public money, or possibly siphon the money off and give a great big backhander to all those green groups who suck up to them or the green aristocrats who dictate government policy and how it should be presented in the House. This bill is an abomination. It is a clear example of a green bribe that is being paid off. It is a clear example of why we should have a royal commission into Labor mates and cronyism. I totally oppose the bill.