



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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GREAT BARRIER REEF PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Dalrymple—LNP) (3.31 pm): I rise to speak to the Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Bill. The government states that the objectives of this bill are to reduce the impact of agricultural activity on the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef and to contribute to the achievement of water quality improvement targets set for the Great Barrier Reef by the Queensland and Commonwealth governments. The bill regulates certain sugarcane-growing and cattle-grazing operations in the Wet Tropics catchment, the Mackay-Whitsunday catchment and the Burdekin Dry Tropics. Research shows that the reef provides employment to some 63,000 people engaged in the tourism, fishing and recreational industries, yielding annual revenues of the order of \$5.8 billion including \$5.1 billion from tourism, \$610 million from recreational activity and \$119 million from commercial fishing.

Queensland is blessed. We have large proportions of the Great Dividing Range, the Great Basalt Wall and an abundance of natural resources. We also have our Great Barrier Reef that is teeming with fish and provides that commercial activity and, likewise, recreational fishing. It has an abundance of fish and is in pristine condition.

Politics is about perception. When the Premier went to the last election promising to go full term only to go to the Governor six months early, she promised that there would be no fuel tax and that there would be no selling of Queensland's profitable assets built by hardworking Queenslanders. Another promise was to create 100,000 jobs to the roar of the party faithful and a standing ovation.

Combining all this—we were not going to hit Queenslanders with a fuel tax, assets would remain in the ownership of Queenslanders—to the average voter this was quite impressive. Another trick to try to win voters was putting their hands on their hearts and saying, 'We are going to protect one of the great wonders of the modern world, that is, the Great Barrier Reef.' However, it is did not stop there; the government said that the blame will go to those tree-clearing and bulldozing farmers and graziers who pump the rivers dry, destroy the ozone layer and are the cause of climate change—just as they have blamed them year in, year out. I have been out to the Great Barrier Reef a number of times—and it has been three years. We tried three times to get out to the reef due to rough conditions. I had the opportunity to snorkel and we saw teams of MOIRA Wrasse, coral trout, sweetlip and parrot fish. That reef was in pristine condition. This contention that if we do not do something within the next 10 to 15 years we will not have a Great Barrier Reef is absolute rubbish.

In reality the reef is in pristine condition and that is backed by the research of a number of leading scientists. I will read from a small article in the North Queensland register about James Cook University leading eminent scientist of 25 years Dr Peter Ridd. He states that there is no better coral reef ecosystem than the Great Barrier Reef. That article states—

It was virtually undisturbed, most was well offshore and if you go out there, you'd be lucky to see another boat.

Unlike most other coral reef systems of the world, herbivorous fish are not harvested on the GBR—our catch is all carnivorous fish, which leaves the herbivorous species to keep algae under control and the reef is in pristine condition, he said.

As a physical oceanographer, his area of interest has been sediment transportation, and his conclusion is there is no significant threat to the reef from human activity and he was adamant cane farmers are not killing the GBR. He said there are scientists who say global warming will kill the reef within 60 years. Some say nutrient and pesticide increases, crown of thorn starfish—

Ms Jones: So why do they get money under Reef Rescue? Why do cane farmers think it is okay to get money under Reef Rescue if they are not damaging the reef?

Mr KNUTH: Why do you not listen to this side? You want to hear just one side.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members should direct their comments through the chair.

Mr KNUTH: The article goes on—

He said there are scientists who say global warming will kill the reef within 60 years. Some say nutrient and pesticide increases, crown of thorns starfish and ocean acidification will kill it within 30 years, but none of those threats can be substantiated, particularly global warming, as coral is a tropical species which improves in growth rate and health as water temperature rises.

I could read a lot more of this but I will conclude due to time constraints. The article states—

However, compared to what is already out there and the small time it is in the environment, it is insignificant.

"There is algae growing amongst the corals on the reef that act like legumes and produce more than 20 times the amount of N of a river flow. Then there are upwellings of nutrient-rich water from the Pacific that flood over the reef containing 100 times the N and P of the river discharges. So it would be virtually impossible to quantify the effects of man-induced increases in nutrients as they are so small."

The evidence of these scientists proves that this idea that the nutrients from farmers are killing the Great Barrier Reef is a myth; it is a lie. It is all about perception. To add to this, the rainforest sediment contributes more nutrients than the cities and towns of Cairns, Innisfail, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton and all of the farmers put together. The Bligh government's approach in demonising farmers to seek to reward the radical green extremists who have not dug a hole, not built a fence, not milked a cow, who are not out there amongst the flies, the crows, the heat and the dust or contributing one cent to the economy is all to save the government's political hide at the expense of the agricultural communities in the Burdekin, Mackay, Whitsunday and the Wet Tropics catchment. It puts at risk the agricultural economy which generates \$3.8 billion annually from cattle, cane and horticulture and punishes 4,500 land managers against the advice of its own experts.

Why introduce this bill? We have already had a sensible initiative aimed at improving reef water quality, including the Commonwealth's \$200 million Reef Rescue initiative. Reef Rescue is a great initiative from the federal government. It is a \$200 million voluntary program. It is working well and many landowners are participating. In reality, it is all about goodwill. We just cannot understand why the state government does not contribute \$100 million to solve this problem and then everybody would work well together.

Ms Jones: You just said it wasn't a problem. You just said it was a myth.

Mr KNUTH: If there is a problem—

Ms Jones: So you want taxpayers' dollars for a problem you don't think exists?

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members will direct their comments through the chair.

Mr KNUTH: But who are you targeting? One interest group—all at the expense to save their own political hide. In reality, there was no need for this draconian piece of legislation which undoes all the good work that now exists. There is no need for this bill. That is what the LNP will do. We will work with farmers. We will support them. We will assist them. We will advise them. We will not put in place the 'spy in the sky' satellites and the 'dob in a farmer' hotlines and all the nonsense that has been put in place at present.

Another restriction is set out in proposed section 84, which provides that a person who makes an agricultural environmentally relevant activity record must keep all relevant primary documents—that is, documents used to prepare the agricultural records, such as invoices for the purchase of fertiliser, and soil test reports mentioned in the record—for at least five years after making it unless the person has a reasonable excuse. The maximum penalty for failing to do so is 100 penalties units, which is a \$10,000 fine.

In addition to identifying the kind of information, proposed section 94 specifies that an environmental risk management plan must identify any hazards of the property that may cause the release of contaminants into water entering the reef; include measurable targets and performance indicators for improving the quality of water being discharged from the property; and, subject to sections 90(2) and 95, include a management plan for the agricultural ERA that provides for the management of the application of agricultural chemicals on the property, nutrients applied to soil on the property and sediment loss from the property, including the management of ground cover and erosion zones to prevent sediment loss. Not being able to fulfil these requirements will mean fines of up to \$30,000.

The farmers and graziers are not contributing even a minuscule proportion of these. They are contributing nothing, yet all this burden, all this cost, all this expense is put on these farmers. What for? To save the government's political hide. It is pleasing to see that the dairy farmers have been exempt, after pushing from the shadow minister for climate change and sustainability. I believe that has been a good win for us. There were 300 dairy farmers on the Tablelands; they are now reduced to 78. There will come a time when we will not have milk on the table. The more restrictions the government puts on farmers, the more likely we will be importing milk from overseas. That is what land management is about. Land management is about sowing the good seed, producing the best food, the best crop. At the end of the day, in the members' dining room it is about putting the best food on the table—the good beef, the good milk, the good juices. That is what primary producers are all about.