



Speech by

**Vicky Darling**

**MEMBER FOR SANDGATE**

Hansard Thursday, 8 October 2009

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## **GREAT BARRIER REEF PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Ms DARLING** (Sandgate—ALP) (6.11 pm): I rise to support the Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Bill 2009. From the outset I would like to reiterate an important point: all levels of government and the whole community have a responsibility to protect and conserve the Great Barrier Reef. The successful establishment and implementation of this legislation relies on cooperation between the government, industry representatives, and cattle graziers and sugarcane growers in North Queensland.

There is a long history of cattle farming and sugarcane-growing industry representatives talking to government about these issues. In fact, the discussions go back for decades. In 2003 then Queensland Labor Premier Peter Beattie and then Liberal Prime Minister John Howard made a 10-year commitment to the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan to halt and reverse the decline of water quality entering the reef. Cooperation is an important word to note here tonight. The reef plan to which Mr Beattie and Mr Howard put their signatures stated that there was a need for regulation 'where there was a risk that voluntary approaches will fail to deliver significant water quality improvements'. The commitment had bipartisan support then as it should today. I note that the shadow minister is nodding, and I look forward to his support of this bill. Five years on there is indeed evidence that the voluntary approach has not worked. I refer to the 2008 *Scientific consensus statement on water quality in the Great Barrier Reef*, which many members have referred to in this debate. I table a copy for the information of members.

*Tabled paper:* Document titled 'Scientific consensus statement on water quality in the Great Barrier Reef' [[1052](#)].

It is important at this point to correct some misinformation that I have noticed in the speeches of opposition members.

**Mr Seeney:** Who wrote this for you?

**Ms DARLING:** I am sad to say that I have had to listen very carefully to all of the arguments opposite until my ears bled. I can vouch for the fact that this speech is written by me.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr O'Brien): Order! The member for Sandgate has the call.

**Ms DARLING:** I see they are very keen for me to correct them. I find that a lot in my life; that people are keen for my correction. Several members opposite have declared themselves reef degradation deniers. Such denial is astonishing given the enormity of scientific evidence. The statement I have just tabled is a consensus of scientific views collated by 13 well-respected reef specialists with up-to-date peer reviewed information based on over 500 papers, yet those opposite have slammed this evidence. The statement—I was going to say that again.

**Mr Seeney:** You want to practise it when they give it to you.

**Ms Jones:** She wrote it.

**Mr Seeney:** It's all those big words from the department.

**Ms Jones:** They did not write it. She wrote it herself.

**Mr Seeney:** You don't believe that.

**Ms Jones:** It's true.

**Ms DARLING:** Those opposite are very often threatened by intelligent women, but I think they had better just get over it.

Ask anyone in the street about the problems with the Great Barrier Reef, and they will tell you the reef has been studied and studied, and the general public understands the need to act urgently. Instead, I am advised the opposition has relied on the dated evidence of a physicist—someone who studies water movement—rather than marine biologists and reef experts who study chemical content and impact on the reef ecosystems.

Many opposite also support the \$200 million Reef Rescue plan. What an insult to our farmers to deny that certain farm practices have a detrimental impact on the reef, yet those opposite support those farmers claiming taxpayer funds under the rescue plan. Are they suggesting our farmers are ripping off the taxpayer? Of course they are not. As the member for Whitsunday has explained, there are many examples of best practice among farmers in her region. These people are proudly sharing their knowledge and experience to help their industries. Following Premier Bligh's decision to push forward with regulation, a committee of senior officers has led a detailed analysis of options and developed a preferred approach to form the regulation.

**Mr Seeney:** They have written a very nice speech for you.

**Ms DARLING:** This analysis has been made with the assistance of professionals with years of technical and practical agricultural experience in the public and private sectors. There should be no doubt that this government is 100 per cent committed to working in partnership with regional NRM bodies, industry and other stakeholders in water quality entering the reef lagoon from broadscale agriculture. Did I skip a sentence there?

**Mr Seeney:** Get them to number the pages for you.

**A government member:** Ignore them.

**Ms DARLING:** I will certainly ignore them. They are the most patronising comments I have heard for quite some time. All right, I am in for a fight.

I will repeat for the benefit of the *Hansard*: there should be no doubt that this government is 100 per cent committed to working in partnership with regional NRM bodies, industry and other stakeholders to achieve the goal of the reef plan—that is, the improvement in water quality entering the reef lagoon from broadscale agriculture. Right from the start of the legislation development process there has been a concerted effort to seek the opinion and advice of industry and stakeholders.

**Mr Seeney:** No, you have read that page already.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Callide, that is enough.

**Ms DARLING:** A reef protection stakeholder advisory committee has been formed with non-government members representing agriculture, conservation, local government and tourism interests. Since November 2008—and it is important to detail the extensive consultation that has gone into this—there have been two specific agriculture industry meetings. There has been a very constructive meeting with conservation and tourism representatives. There have been four public meetings held in the relevant catchment areas, two meetings of the stakeholder advisory committee, two meetings of the chief executive officers group and weekly meetings of a working group comprising members with specific technical expertise from relevant government departments.

The minister has also formed an implementation task force for the bill comprised of representatives from AgForce, Canegrowers, the Queensland Farmers Federation and the Australian Cane Farmers Association that will guide the development of the tools to be used to implement the regulation. It has been a very open-door consultation process. The Great Barrier Reef is a Queensland icon, a national treasure and an international drawcard. The time for talk is over. It is time to act. I congratulate the minister and all the departmental officers who have worked so hard to prepare this bill, and I commend it to the House.