



Speech by

## Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Wednesday, 14 April 2010

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### MOTION: ELECTRONIC VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM

**Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (5.40 pm): I rise to support the motion of the Leader of the Opposition. Rat-running ships in the Great Barrier Reef are completely unacceptable. But there is an unanswered question here. When did the government know it had a problem with rat-running ships through the Great Barrier Reef? When did the government know that there were ships going through this area that had the potential to create such incredible damage?

This morning I asked the transport minister a question in this parliament. It was interesting to hear the minister's response. We have had two incidents in just a number of weeks where rat-running ships have hit the reef. I asked the minister whether she could 'advise if Maritime Safety Queensland is aware of any other vessels entering this and other restricted passages in the Great Barrier Reef without permission and what action has been taken in relation to those matters'. In the course of the minister's answer she replied—

My advice is that such an incident is quite unusual and that this happens perhaps a couple of times or, at the outside, three times a year.

The minister said that this is unusual. Yet we have seen in a matter of two weeks two incidents. So I think it beggars belief that this is in fact some remarkable event when we have had two incidents in recent times, we are seeing greater traffic and people are saying that there are more incidents than just the two that have come to public attention in the last couple of weeks.

But perhaps the minister has not asked, because I also note that the minister said, 'If you want more detail of those incidents which are in Commonwealth waters, go and ask the Commonwealth government.' That is completely unacceptable. I think this is an example of buck-passing. At the end of the day, when we want to see the Great Barrier Reef and the Queensland coastline protected, we do not want a minister saying, 'There is a line in the water and if something happens on the other side of the line we don't want to know about it; we don't ask.' Ignorance is not bliss and it does not protect the Great Barrier Reef.

**Mr Horan:** Even though the boats have come from our ports in our waters.

**Ms SIMPSON:** That is right. Maritime Safety Queensland has a role to know what is happening within Commonwealth waters. In fact, we have heard this government claim previously that Maritime Safety Queensland and the Commonwealth authorities work cooperatively in order to ensure that safety measures are in place to deal with such incidents. But only 12 months ago we saw a damning situation where an oil spill occurred in Moreton Bay. The independent reports that came out of that incident did not absolve the government and did not absolve the agencies that were responsible for handling that at all. In fact, they found that there were no major oil spill plans in place to protect Moreton Bay.

So how can we believe the minister and this government when they say that there are only two to three incidents a year of this type occurring in the Great Barrier Reef? We do not believe them, and we believe that it is time a proper surveillance system was put in place, with no more excuses about who is responsible—federal or state. They are both responsible. They have to have records as to how many rat-running ships have been brought to the attention of the government in recent times. Otherwise, how can

we trust that there have been any efforts to seriously address the matters that have been brought to our attention in recent times?

This incident with the *Shen Neng 1* was unacceptable, but we are increasingly hearing that, within monitored and unmonitored waters, incidents are occurring that are putting our reef, our wildlife and certainly the future economic livelihood of this state at risk. It is time for a proper surveillance system to be put in place. It is also time for the records of those areas that are allegedly monitored to be released. Once again, how can we trust this government?

Only yesterday we heard the transport minister misleading, we believe, this parliament about the reasons the Barrier Reef vessel tracking centre was moved from Hay Point to Townsville. Minister Nolan told parliament that the VTS, the vessel tracking system, monitoring room was moved from Hay Point to Townsville to gain better access to broadband and reliable electricity. People in the industry say that that is nonsense. Hay Point has been completely self-sufficient, with its own large diesel generator that kicks in when there is any interruption to the electricity supply. Hay Point ReefVTS, as I am advised, has not stopped operating in storms or cyclones. In fact, the broadband claim is also false as this, I understand, has not been an issue. At the end of the day, the state government wants to take credit for ReefVTS but is quick to walk away in regard to the rat-running in other parts of the reef.

*(Time expired)*