



Speech by

Jason Costigan

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (GREENTAPE REDUCTION) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr COSTIGAN (Whitsunday—LNP) (12.15 pm): It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House to speak in support of the Environmental Protection (Greentape Reduction) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. Before I go any further, I wish to place on the record my thanks to those people from various organisations and industry as well as the community in general who provided submissions to the committee. Of course, I refer to the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee, now under the chairmanship of my good friend and colleague the member for Lockyer.

The committee has cleaned up a mess that, as far as I am concerned, Labor developed a long, long time ago. The term 'green tape reduction' is one that resonates with many people in my electorate of Whitsunday, particularly those people engaged in our sugar and tourism industries, two industries that come under the umbrella of the Newman LNP government's four-pillar approach to firing up the Queensland economy. In the case of tourism—and communities such as Airlie Beach have been to hell and back—this bill will help provide the framework and conditions for a renaissance of this once mighty industry, an industry that keeps Airlie's poor old heart pumping. In fact, on the back of the recent DestinationQ conference in Cairns—the first of its kind—this state government has agreed to a 12-month action plan to get the tourism sector out of the doldrums. That plan will see us tackle the previous government's red and green tape which, metaphorically speaking in my own vernacular, I wish I could chop up with a cane knife out the back of Bloomsbury. From a parochial point of view, I think the Premier summed it up rather nicely in the House on 10 July 2012 when he said—

... if you go sailing in the Whitsundays you are not allowed to go ashore. It is forbidden.

No, not the Forbidden City in the People's Republic of China; it must be the forbidden beach in my beloved Whitsundays. We have plenty of them; there are beaches scattered everywhere across our 74 islands. They are magnificent islands and those beaches invariably are without a single human being walking on them. Why do we have these forbidden beaches? Because of those Tarago troopers in the corner and their predecessors from the ALP. I acknowledge the hand going up from the member for Rockhampton. 'Oh what a feeling'? I do not think so.

As the Premier pointed out when talking about people sailing through the Whitsundays and coming ashore—

... they cannot put their hand on the beach or walk up and down and feel the sand between their toes ...

I point out to honourable members that we are talking about sand. In the case of world famous Whitehaven Beach, we are talking about almost pure silica sand—not mud, not volcanic lava, not anthrax. It is almost pure silica sand and it sucks in tourists like Julia Gillard sucked in the people of Australia with the tax from hell, the carbon tax.

The people of Queensland, including those in my electorate from Mackay through to the small communities south of Bowen, have had a gutful of red and green tape. It is okay if you are playing Rugby

League for South Sydney, but not if you are operating in the tourism and sugar industries or in small business of course.

In fact, I might ask my colleague the Minister for National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing to join me with that cane knife up the back of Bloomsbury when the Whitsunday community cabinet takes place this weekend. We will shed as much red and green tape as possible and send it to the rabbit warren at Redfern marked to the attention of Russell Crowe.

Essentially, this bill rebuilds the approval process for environmental licensing under the act to cut costs, deliver greater certainty in terms of business investment and allow environmental regulation to be delivered with greater efficiency. A slow approval process does nothing—I repeat: nothing—to stimulate growth and jobs in our tourism industry in places like the Whitsundays. I have no doubt that if you ask the operators themselves in places like Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour they will tell you that and then some, perhaps with a little more colour than in Ken Done's studio. In fact, I spoke to one prominent tourism operator recently and, when asked about the red and green tape confronting his business, he said 'bureaucratically cumbersome at best' and 'prohibitive restrictions'. This bill will do plenty to help cut red tape and regulation toward that target of 20 per cent, as outlined by the Newman LNP government prior to the election on 24 March 2012.

Perhaps the best outcome here is that this bill will bring about a licensing system that is proportionate to risk. We have heard that term before in this place, but I will say it again: proportionate to risk. As the minister has pointed out previously, 'we will introduce a standard application process for lower risk businesses'. I did say 'lower risk businesses', so let us go back to what the Premier said in relation to coming ashore to those magnificent Whitsunday islands. Imagine the footprints on the beaches—a beautiful part of the world. Unless they are the size of King Kong, I do not think a few dozen tourists walking onto the beach will bring about an environmental disaster, no matter how quiet and remote the beach may be. As the Minister for Tourism has previously alluded to in this debate, thanks to this bill there will be opportunities in the areas of ecotourism and adventure tourism. That is good news for the tourism sector and therefore good news for the Whitsundays.

In this debate we have heard some ramblings from the member for South Brisbane. I say 'ramblings', because the member basically said that this bill is all thanks to the former Bligh Labor government. What I will say is that this bill, as far as I am concerned, is largely thanks to Labor's insatiable appetite for legislation. They love it. If the former government had been fair dinkum about this, why did they not come up with these reforms years ago, when they had the opportunity?

Mr Cox: It's the Labor way.

Mr COSTIGAN: It is the Labor way. After all, for 20 of the past 22 years they ran Queensland.

Mr Ruthenberg: Into the ground.

Mr COSTIGAN: I take that interjection as well. I have not showcased my work to my colleagues prior to my coming into the House today but, yes, they ran Queensland right into the ground, bringing in green tape galore.

Mr Ruthenberg: They left their own footprints there.

Mr COSTIGAN: They have left their own footprints in that regard. There is green tape galore. To see that, you just have to ask the cane-cookies from Narpi to Noorlah, right in the middle of the sugarcane belt that is in my electorate. They will use some of that colourful language that would be more befitting of the studio of one Ken Done.

Regardless of the origin of this bill, these reforms are most sensible. They represent a very good outcome for the environment. At the same time—and critically, might I say—they provide much greater scope to grow the Queensland economy. Do members remember how Peter Costello had to grow the Australian economy from the mess that he and former Prime Minister Howard inherited? That is what we in this House are trying to do. That is what the Newman LNP government is trying to do. It will take time, but we will do it.

I believe that these reforms will provide much greater scope to grow the Queensland economy—something that has to happen and will happen under this government as we start chipping away at paying back that \$65 billion—possibly up to \$85 billion or \$100 billion; who knows?—of debt accrued by state Labor. They are the Olympic gold medal winners when it comes to waste, waste and more waste. As a one-time sports broadcaster, I can hear the great Ray Warren calling it now: 'It's gold, gold, gold to Labor in the 100 metres debt.'

I salute the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection for his stewardship in relation to this bill. Needless to say, I commend it to the House.