




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (10.48 pm): I also take the opportunity to acknowledge all the new members and all the returning members in the House. We all know that we have plenty to do and we look forward to the challenges. Welcome.

I rise to contribute to the debate on the confidence motion because Queensland is seeing Labor for what it really stands for and not for what was said during the election campaign. We now see a government that has plans to establish almost as many task forces and committees as it has sitting days for this 2015 parliamentary year. At last count, the number of reviews and panels that the Labor Party had pledged to Queenslanders it would establish totalled of 28.

We have also heard many times that there would be consultation before major legislative changes, but I suspect—and this has been raised with me in my electorate—that this does not include items like funding cuts to health projects in the bush, good policy reversal, the destruction of the seafood industry and the destruction of the agricultural industry in areas around Bundaberg and the hundreds of jobs that are in jeopardy. With all these talkfests, Queenslanders want to know what legislation will be debated, and of course it is important that this is set out quickly.

I do acknowledge that today we have finally heard some interesting policy announcements that will frame the legislative debate as we go forward. There are many Queenslanders who are asking for debate in relation to the Labor Party's promise not to sell assets and the instructions to the Attorney-General to scrap the LNP government's mandatory laws against criminal gangs. These and many more policies were heavily exploited during the campaign. We heard very little from them prior to the election and now after some two months we see a dark and familiar trend emerging from the past failings of Queensland Labor. The same policies that failed Queenslanders the last time are now being rolled out and trumpeted. Yes, members, it is clear that Labor is selling assets after telling Queenslanders prior to the election that Queenslanders do not want their assets sold. But true to form, off we go and the 'for sale' signs are going up. We heard great words of wisdom and a commitment to Queenslanders from the Treasurer who said, 'Labor will pay down debt with no asset sales' and 'Labor could start to pay down debt this year if elected.' But true to form, five days later we have another broken promise and we have not even established a government. Unfortunately, we have seen a \$30 million announcement today that, predictably, will make waiting times worse.

In one of the Australian Labor Party's greatest policy failures in Australian history in relation to the live cattle industry—and I am glad that the minister is in the House—we heard the minister talking down the sector and making several statements that has left those in the bush very concerned. It proves that nothing has changed. I acknowledge that there were some misquoted statements here tonight, but I think it is important that we take that strategy forward and have it acknowledged. I do want to take some time to speak about the fishing industry, and it has already been raised here this evening. These are food producers, Minister, who are extremely disappointed and worried about the proposed regulation which was not discussed with Queenslanders. The Labor government is proposing to introduce net-free zones from Cairns, Mackay and Yeppoon to the Fitzroy River delta in

order to purportedly deal with fishing related tourism in the regions. It has not been asked for and it is not what Queenslanders are telling us they need. It is interesting that the word 'consultation' appears in the document. I have read it with interest. When you are refusing to meet with those stakeholders, Minister, it is interesting—

Mr Byrne interjected.

Mr BENNETT: No, we are all good, Bill. We are happy to go there, Minister. At meetings in Rockhampton the industry was told that the deal is done. We all know that commercial fishing has almost been annihilated under the previous Labor government, but the former LNP government gave them a reprieve. These are small business people, mums and dads, who have struggled financially ever since losing their ability to diversify the industry. Commercial fishermen are food producers who make seafood available for the 90 per cent of the population who cannot catch their own, and I think that is important. There are solutions, and I think we can do that without the arbitrary process of shutting down the whole sector. We are condemning Queenslanders to eating seafood out of the sewers of South-East Asia, and now that we are coming up to Easter I do not think that is an acceptable outcome.

Mr Byrne: What nonsense!

Mr BENNETT: I hear you over there, Minister. The ALP is big on slogans like 'we are listening'. As you know, there was absolutely no consultation on this subject with the commercial fishing sector. For two weeks we have been trying to drag those opposite to the table, but to no avail. For the business sector in Queensland, confidence has reached an all-time low. Queenslanders did not ask for or expect a major infrastructure freeze. There were some great projects in the system which now all await the verdict of a government fixated on a political get-square.

In Childers we have seen a major health project cut from those who need it most. We have been advised that 10 social service jobs are to be terminated from our community at the end of this financial year. These are front-line services for those in need as a result of natural disasters.

Government members interjected.

Mr BENNETT: I am happy to take that interjection. I am happy to talk to you about this. These are the facts. I previously mentioned the brutal proposal to destroy the seafood industry. Cutting jobs was something that those opposite used extensively during the 54th Parliament and during the 2015 election campaign, and within a week of the election we had this government also sacking senior public servants. We could talk about hypocrisy and raising standards, and of course the Labor candidate for Lytton, who is now working for an investment corporation, is an important point.

While Queensland flounders under Labor's legacy of debt and deceit, we have seen the huge issue of the Labour Day public holiday dealt with in record time. I congratulate those opposite, because my electorate thinks it is wonderful that the most important issue has been sorted.

Government members interjected.

Mr BENNETT: I acknowledge the new Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Steven Miles. For too long environmental success was measured by how much red tape and legislation governments could produce instead of by the delivery of real outcomes that protect the environment. Three years ago Labor was failing to manage the Gladstone Harbour development and supported the dumping of 38 million tonnes of dredge material in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Labor poorly managed this process and our national parks, and of course we saw them overrun with pests and weeds.

I note that the crocodile management plans that were introduced are under review. I would just remind the House that we listened to the concerns of Queenslanders in North Queensland and worked with local councils and key stakeholders to come up with location-specific plans to get the balance right between public safety and the conservation of crocodiles.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BENNETT: Is that the interjection? Well done. We scaled back Labor's plans for dredging at Abbot Point by 90 per cent. We are going forward and we want to see those outcomes. This is about Queensland and it needs to be above politics. We delivered on practical community based environmental issues like Everyone's Environment grants, which has seen 100,000 trees planted, 61,000 kilograms of rubbish collected and 74,000 hectares of land restored. We have invested in programs to eradicate pests and weeds, sensibly managing wildlife habitat, protecting and enhancing national parks and improving agricultural practices to improve water quality, especially in Great Barrier Reef catchments.

In my own electorate of Burnett there are amazing results being achieved on farms in relation to fertiliser and pesticide reduction, with an 80 per cent reduction being recognised and a 20 per cent increase in yield. These farms on the Burnett River are setting a great example for healthy waterway

management—something that I hope we can share with the minister. The Best Management Practice programs developed with the cane and grazing industries in Queensland to protect the Great Barrier Reef are having results. These initiatives are from the same farmers who are very worried about some of the government's agenda for the bush.

In responding to the Queensland Plan, this side of the House announced that it would release the Environmental Action Plan to guide the government's environmental agenda from 2020. The Environmental Action Plan's 43 initiatives would deliver on two of the Queensland Plan's targets. Queensland has the best balance of environmental protection and economic development in Australia and Queensland is recognised as a world leader in environmental management and protection. These key proposals should be the centrepiece of the government's plan to improve Queensland's environment and deliver balanced environmental outcomes at a lower cost. Some of those include eReefs, which is the product of a partnership with the privately run Great Barrier Reef Foundation. EReef computer simulations would report on water quality and predictive modelling to inform management responses to pollutant loads affecting the Great Barrier Reef.

The Waterway Health report card expansion would provide continued funding for the Gladstone Healthy Harbour partnership as well as support for the establishment of new report card partnerships for the Mackay-Whitsunday region, Townsville and Cairns. The Catchment Partnerships program would develop a statewide framework for consistent regional catchment strategies to achieve water quality objectives to treat the causes of degraded water through a whole-of-catchment approach. This program includes a pilot in South-East Queensland which will focus on preventing gullies and riverbanks from eroding, replanting riverbank vegetation and working with farmers to implement improved land management processes with oversight through a river improvement trust to protect drinking water security and improve the Moreton Bay area.

The Centre of Excellence for Environmental Modelling and Data Access would drive efficiency in the industry and economic development through greatly improved data access and the opening up of rich datasets which are contained in environmental impact statements. The centre will be a partnership between the Queensland government, the CSIRO and universities, bringing together leading scientists and innovative technologies. It will create decision-making tools to measure cumulative environmental impacts. Environmental performance reporting systems are essential to meet both the Queensland Plan's legislative requirements and to assess progress in achieving Queensland's environmental goals and to provide an evidence base for environmental priorities.

I agree that creating climate resilient regions is important. The response to the Queensland Plan announced the development of a partnership driven Queensland climate adaptation strategy. A key initiative of the adaptation strategy will involve working with local governments to address climate impacts such as heatwaves, bushfires, sea level rise and severe weather events that we know and have come to live with in Queensland.

The Private Land Conservation Program, which is already running, is about engaging with private landowners, who currently deliver the management of a third of Queensland's 12 million hectares of protected area estate. It will allow for the significant private conservation arrangements under the current NatureAssist election commitment to be maintained and increased.

While reflecting on what has been said by those opposite, I note for the interest of the House and the concern of those who really want the Great Barrier Reef to be protected that it was again stated yesterday that the government is to invest—I am happy to provide further information on this—some \$100 million over five years on a task force for Great Barrier Reef protection. While the funding is welcome, we are already putting in \$35 million annually. It seems to me to be a cut. The one thing that disturbs me is that \$10 million a year is being syphoned off to pay for the unworkable net buyback of the fishing policy proposal. That is clearly identified, and I think it is quite disingenuous.

I know that the honourable the minister has a genuine passion for the portfolio he has been entrusted with and I hope there can be some influence asserted to achieve good policy outcomes and to maintain and enhance real protection mechanisms for all Queenslanders. If things are allowed to return to the way they were in 2012 we will see a return of Labor ignoring real protection for the environment and instead creating large bureaucracies. Unfortunately, Labor measured environmental protection in pages of legislation when it needs to be measured in outcomes.

Under Labor, the spin for Greens preferences became more important than ensuring our environment is protected and properly maintained for future generations. Labor repeatedly puts politics before scientifically based decisions. The implementation of environmental protection measures was ad hoc and hijacked by vocal interest groups. For example, the green zones in the Moreton Bay Marine Park lacked any defined scientific basis for its boundaries, resulting in

widespread community concern. In terms of the protection of wildlife such as vulnerable koalas, Labor relied on flawed management and allowed the degradation of a lot of habitat, something we are happy to have invested a lot of time in over the past three years.

The Auditor-General found that 17 per cent of protected areas had management plans. Labor failed to meet its own legal requirements and claimed that management plans would take 30 years to put in place. The waste strategy was actually just a big tax. It was a cash grab from a broke government that increased the cost of living for Queenslanders.

Of course, no-one was accountable. This meant that the previous minister for environment hid behind out-of-control monolith departments like the former department of environment and resource management, DERM. Under Labor, heritage protection was an afterthought. Now, for the first time in a long time, Queensland's unique heritage values are recognised in the ministerial and departmental portfolio name and are a key aspect of the minister's responsibility. I know that we can do better.

In conclusion, many Queenslanders and I had great hopes and aspirations for our state. However, we are seeing clearly a government with no clear policy framework or even a plan to guide or manage the state during these important and trying times. Queenslanders and I have no confidence in this government.