




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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SUSTAINABLE PORTS DEVELOPMENT BILL

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (12.42 pm): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am happy to join with you in welcoming the students and their teachers here and I hope they leave better informed about the great work that the former LNP government did to protect the Great Barrier Reef during its term in government, setting up and doing all the hard yards. If there is one invaluable lesson for students, it is that you have to do the hard graft in the first place and after that you will get the credit for it. You cannot just waltz in having said nothing for three years and then claim credit, as the member for Yeerongpilly has just done. I do not remember the member for Yeerongpilly standing up a year ago and saying, 'I need to do something about the Great Barrier Reef.' I do not remember him turning up at the scientific committees or doing the hard work or making any representation in relation to that. I do not remember the member for Mount Coot-tha doing it. What I do remember is coming to office in March 2012 and being presented with the very first significant infrastructure challenge that the government had to face at that time—that is, as I said yesterday, a proposal approved by the previous Labor government to develop the port of Abbot Point by taking 35 million cubic metres of dredge spoil out of the port of Abbot Point and disposing of it at sea.

That was the very first issue. Of such concern was it that the member for Callide, myself and the former premier sat down immediately and pulled out that map that he referred to that he took down to Tony Burke, together with the then chief executive of North Queensland Bulk Ports Corporation, and went through what a travesty it would be if that was allowed to go ahead. Not only was it environmentally a tragedy for the reef; it was economically a tragedy for the state of Queensland as well. It would have consigned Queenslanders to a dreadful environmental outcome, a challenge to the reef and a challenge to the finances of the state. In fact, it was so economically under thought that subsequent to being elected in 2012 one of the first things that also started happening was question marks about the planning that went into it in the first place by the people who were supposedly going to use it—companies like Rio and others who had signed up for the early stages of development of it.

When we think back to the history of it, it is important to put on record exactly what the government that was elected in 2012 faced at that time, and that is also endorsed by the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan itself. Page 31 at clause 3.4 of that document states—

After two years of analysis, comprehensive strategic environmental assessment reports for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and adjacent coastal zone ... were endorsed by the Australian Minister for the Environment under the EPBC Act in August 2014.

August 2014—not any time after February 2015 but August 2014, and it was two years worth of work before that going back to August 2012 when that work was commenced after UNESCO had placed the Great Barrier Reef on watch in 2011. Let us remember who was in government in 2011.

Opposition members: Labor!

Mr NICHOLLS: It was Labor at both the state and federal level. It is sort of reminiscent of the loss of the AAA credit rating. Who was in power at that stage?

Opposition members: Labor!

Mr NICHOLLS: Labor. It was in recognition of that challenge that the then LNP government undertook the work in order to lead to the endorsement by the Australian minister of the comprehensive plan—a comprehensive plan that also followed the North-East Shipping Management Plan released in late 2014 to provide an integrated approach to shipping management for the ships that traverse the Great Barrier Reef and use the channel to come into the state to provide the goods that we all enjoy such as the TVs on the wall here and probably the paper that this is being printed on. All of that comes in through ships through the Great Barrier Reef. It just does not materialise here. It has to come in via a ship.

Mr Cripps: *Shen Neng 1. Remember the Shen Neng?*

Mr NICHOLLS: We remember the *Shen Neng 1* that hit the shoal. We remember all of those things. So that was put in place by the LNP government. In September 2013 there were five capital dredging projects either planned or under assessment that the then newly elected coalition government in Canberra determined would not be allowed to dispose of their dredge material in the marine park—all done under the stewardship of the conservative coalition in Canberra as well as the LNP in Queensland. Why do I make those points? Why is it important to remember the history? Because it is important to acknowledge that no-one has a mortgage on concern on the Great Barrier Reef. No-one has a mortgage on a concern of the environment—not this side of the House, not that side of the House. We all jointly have a responsibility in relation to the Great Barrier Reef. I have never sailed a coal ship through the Great Barrier Reef, but I have done a fair bit of scuba diving on it. I love it! My kids love going fishing on it. Tourists like travelling the world to come here. We have taken friends and colleagues up and down that reef. Indeed, in November last year when the G20 leaders were in Cairns for what I think was one of the most successful finance leaders' meetings ever held they went out onto the Great Barrier Reef and marvelled at its great beauty. So we all have a responsibility in order to protect the Great Barrier Reef. I acknowledge that groups like WWF and others have the interests of the reef at heart, but we are all responsible for it and we have all taken respective care and, I would submit much more, that that work accelerated between 2012 and 2015 after the reef was put on the watch list by UNESCO.

This bill, which in many respects reflects the Ports Bill that was introduced by the member for Callide in November 2014, should be supported. Yesterday, we discussed a potential delay of just over 4½ months to allow the EIS process to proceed so that we could give the people of Cairns some indication of what the economic future might hold for them in Cairns. But today, that motion having been put and defeated, this bill should proceed, because it acts to protect the reef and it implements the commitments that were made and the policies that were put in place by the former government. There are changes and the member for Callide has outlined the changes in relation to the planning process, in relation to the overlay plans and some other changes in relation to strict prohibitions as opposed to ministerial decision-making that have been put in this bill. I acknowledge that those changes have been made and they have been through the committee process.

The concerns that have been expressed by this side of the House in relation to the challenges of this bill, and particularly the challenges affecting the port of Cairns, are reflected also in the committee report. I must say that that report is one of the most remarkable committee reports that I have ever seen released. I commend certainly the LNP members of that committee for their consistency in terms of the outcome of that report. Obviously, the report shows the challenges that exist in relation to the regulation of the port of Cairns and what is the going on. As I said yesterday, when it comes to the proposals around the 50,000 cubic metres of spoil that is allowed to be moved in any one project and the cumulative 150,000 cubic metres over four years, the science seems to be pretty thin on the ground. As I said yesterday, that seems to be a case of horsetrading. Nonetheless, it gives people in Cairns some hope for the future.

I would say also that the provision of the protection of the EIS gives them some hope, although, given the government's actions in withdrawing \$40 million worth of funding for the proposed cruise ship expansion that was being considered there, there is less hope than there was. But it should not be beyond the wit of us all, and in particular the government and Ports North, to come up with a solution that meets the environmental requirements under the reef plan and that meets the economic needs of the people of Cairns.

I particularly want to pay tribute to the member for Callide and the member for Glass House, who worked so diligently in getting us to the stage where the government is now currently able to bring this bill forward. I acknowledge—I think we all should—that the reef is a great possession of all of us. We all owe it to protect it and to do it in the most sensible way possible for the benefit of all Queenslanders.