




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

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**AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE: REPORT, MOTION TO
TAKE NOTE**

 **Mr WHITING** (Murrumbidgee—ALP) (12.10 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the debate on this committee report. Like others in this House, I was born and bred in North Queensland. I grew up in Mackay. I saw what happened to the fringing coral reef at Brampton Island—the one between Brampton Island and Carlisle Island. In my lifetime I have seen how that was devastated. For reasons which we know about, it has been wrecked. As a tourism destination it has been severely impacted by the loss of the fringing coral reef between these islands just off the Mackay coast near the Pioneer River. I can attest to the fact that we do have a problem on these fringing reefs and the Great Barrier Reef.

The member for Burdekin said that the voluntary regime is working well. From reading this report I cannot see how he could actually come to that conclusion. The section on land management practices at page 5 of the report states—

The 2013 Reef Plan places a high emphasis on voluntary actions and market-based drivers ...

Industry participation in voluntary programs has been slow, particularly for the Smartcane Best Management Practice program. The rates of participation are not at levels needed to effectively contribute to the achievement of the Reef Plan water quality targets.

At page 4 the report states—

The audit report disputed the veracity of claims in the Great Barrier Reef Report Card, released in June 2014, that the goal to 'halt and reverse the decline in water quality entering the reef' has been achieved.

I think there is enough in this report to show that we really do have a problem. There are a couple of problems. We need to protect the reef. We know that. It certainly points out that the policy position under the previous government was inadequate. I commend the Auditor-General on this report. I have a problem with the inferences of members opposite that we are looking at findings that may be skewed. I believe that there is a problem. This report points out why we do need policy action in this area.

The member for Hinchinbrook and the member for Burdekin talked about political agendas. What I would say to those members is that there has to be political action. We need political action. We need political action to protect the crucial tourism industry that relies on the Great Barrier Reef.

I will make a couple of points about the impact that Great Barrier Reef tourism has on our economy. Some \$12.6 billion in expenditure is generated by Great Barrier Reef related tourism. Some 70,000 Australians are employed in this industry that relies on a healthy Great Barrier Reef. Over the next 100 years there will be \$51.4 billion in visitation dollars generated by tourism on the Great Barrier Reef.

It is certainly imperative that we take action at a policy level and a political level to protect this icon that drives such a large portion of our economy. I point out that this part of the economy is absolutely crucial for all other sectors of the economy. If we do not have a healthy tourism industry, the cane and cattle industries will suffer as well. I think this report speaks of what we need to do at a policy level. I certainly commend the report to the House.