



Speech By  
**Glenn Butcher**

**MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE**

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Record of Proceedings, 13 October 2016

**AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**Report, Motion to take Note**

 **Mr BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (12.26 pm): I move—

That the House take note of report No. 22, *Consideration of the Auditor-General's report No. 20: 2014-15—Managing water quality in Great Barrier Reef catchments*.

This report presents the findings from our consideration of the Auditor-General's report No. 20 of 2014-15, *Managing water quality in Great Barrier Reef catchments*. The Auditor-General's report presented the findings of a performance audit by the Queensland Audit Office which examined whether the adverse impact of broadscale land use on the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef is declining. The QAO report highlighted the significant pressures on reef catchments and the challenges ahead for government and agricultural industries seeking to work together to reduce sediment, nutrient and pesticide run-off into reef waters.

In the course of our inquiry, the committee was briefed by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection on the finding of the latest reef report card. Overall, the results were consistent with the findings of the QAO audit. The Auditor-General made five recommendations, all of which have been implemented by the government or are the subject of substantial ongoing work. In addition, the Queensland government has committed to a substantial increase in funding for programs to improve reef water quality and is working with stakeholders including agricultural industries to reduce run-off that negatively impacts on our water quality. This is very welcome news.

As noted by the committee in our report, improving water quality in reef catchments is crucial to ensuring the future health and survival of the iconic Great Barrier Reef and protecting those coastal communities and industries that depend on it. The reforms implemented since the audit was released reflect strong commitments by the government in partnership with grazing, sugarcane and other agricultural industries and stakeholders to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus run-off and sediment run-off that are urgently required.

The committee noted the good progress being made by agricultural industries in the adoption of the BMP programs, with nearly 10.6 million hectares of grazing land in the Burdekin, Fitzroy and Burnett-Mary catchments now covered by the grazing BMP. Over 240,000 hectares, which is over 50 per cent, of cane-growing areas in reef catchments are now covered by the Smartcane BMP, and 6,200 hectares, or 55 per cent, of land under banana cultivation in the Wet Tropics is now covered by the banana BMP program as well. These achievements are very encouraging.

The establishment of the dedicated Office of the Great Barrier Reef is a positive step forward for ensuring that programs across government are working effectively and that any funds invested will help achieve water quality improvement for the reef catchment areas. The report of the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce, established in relation to recommendation 2 from the audit, has provided further frank advice to the government towards achieving its ambitious 2025 water quality improvement

targets. The committee welcomed the task force's findings, particularly its call for a more collaborative approach by all industries and recommendations for enhanced communication, increased levels of agricultural extension and innovation, expanded water quality monitoring, greater financial and other incentives, and staged and targeted regulations. Having a mix of incentives in place that recognises the achievements of farmers and graziers who adopt best management practices, as well as regulations, promises to be a better approach to achieving the water quality improvements that are crucial to the future health of our Great Barrier Reef. I commend the committee's report to the House.