




Speech By
Hon. Dr Steven Miles
MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

Record of Proceedings, 20 April 2016

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Great Barrier Reef, Coral Bleaching

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef) (2.36 pm): Members will be well aware that the Great Barrier Reef is currently affected by a global mass coral bleaching event caused by warming oceans due to climate change combined with the effects of a strong El Nino weather system. I can confirm to the House that extensive in-water and aerial surveys conducted in March and April of this year by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority show extreme coral bleaching in Far North Queensland between Cooktown and the tip of Cape York. Bleaching has also extended and intensified between Cooktown and Townsville and minor bleaching has been detected in the southern areas of the marine park. In fact, findings released today by the National Taskforce on Coral Bleaching confirm that 93 per cent of reefs within the Great Barrier Reef are affected by some degree of bleaching.

Thankfully, I can also report to the House that key tourism sites off Cairns are not as severely impacted as areas further north. I have personally witnessed that most of the reef around Cairns is as vibrant and beautiful as ever. This is some bright news in an otherwise distressing event. This bleaching event is still unfolding and the full extent and severity, including the level of coral mortality, will take a number of months to become clear. It is difficult to see the disturbing effects of coral bleaching, as I have, and know our precious Great Barrier Reef is under pressure. It is imperative, for the sake of the reef and our tourism industry, that we do everything we can to reduce these pressures.

The Palaszczuk government is working hard to address local pressures on the reef, in particular the land based run-off of sediments and nutrients that pollutes the waters of the reef lagoon. We cannot hope to ensure the reef's long-term future without decisive action on global warming. It is the federal government's job to ensure Australia's carbon emissions reduce in line with the international agreement on keeping global warming to well below two degrees. We are still waiting to see the federal government do its job. Given the scale of bleaching being experienced, the clear link to global warming and the lack of a coherent effective national policy, I have today written to federal environment minister Greg Hunt, calling on him to convene an urgent meeting of Australia's environment ministers so we can discuss developing such a policy together. I have requested this meeting to be in Cairns as soon as possible so that ministers and officials can see firsthand the devastating effects of warmer ocean temperatures caused by climate change on our Great Barrier Reef. I will continue to keep the House informed as this issue unfolds.