




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

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Great Barrier Reef

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef) (10.02 am): Yesterday I informed the House that I had called on federal environment minister Greg Hunt to convene an urgent meeting with state and territory environment ministers in Cairns so that ministers could witness firsthand the coral bleaching caused by climate change and discuss together Australia's policy response. I am pleased to report that at 10 to five last night, Minister Hunt called a national teleconference of state, territory and Commonwealth environment ministers which we held at 10.30 last night.

While it was not the face-to-face meeting I envisaged and despite the short notice, it was attended by all state and territory ministers except the ACT, whose minister was already attending another engagement. All ministers agreed that what is currently happening on the Great Barrier Reef is alarming and is an issue of concern not just to Queenslanders but to all Australians. All ministers agreed that strong and urgent action is needed on climate change. We did not agree on what that action should be, but Minister Hunt has agreed to hold further weekly talks—an unprecedented acknowledgement of the urgency with which we need the federal government to deliver a coherent and effective climate change policy for Australia.

What was interesting about last night's meeting was that the one thing Minister Hunt did not want to talk about was his government's policies to reduce carbon pollution. I cannot say I blame him—he does not have any. We also talked about funding for local Great Barrier Reef actions—funding for reef water quality improvement and for increased monitoring to learn about the extent and severity of the current bleaching event, all of which is important work but does not address the fundamental issue causing the coral bleaching which is climate change. It is true that the Palaszczuk government is working hard to reduce those local pressures. We have set new ambitious run-off pollution targets. We have allocated \$100 million more for water quality improvement and we have tasked the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce, which will report next month, to advise us scientifically on what the best investment will be.

We already know though that the money currently on the table from the Commonwealth will not be enough to achieve the water quality improvements committed to at UNESCO. The federal government needs to do more. I was gratified to hear last night Minister Hunt say that he would be making further funding commitments to reef water quality improvements. The call by the Palaszczuk Labor government for an emergency meeting of environment ministers to discuss coral bleaching has led to a commitment by the Commonwealth to new funds for water quality and a commitment to weekly talks to address climate change. I want to thank Minister Hunt and my ministerial colleagues for responding so quickly to our call. We now have an opportunity to work together to make sure that Aussie kids, our kids, have the clean energy jobs of the future.