




Speech By
Tony Perrett

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

Record of Proceedings, 13 October 2016

AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to take Note

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (12.46 pm): I rise to speak briefly on the consideration of the Auditor-General's report No. 20 of 2014-15 titled *Managing water quality in the Great Barrier Reef catchments*. Last year the committee investigated this report which a lay observer would assume would be about what the title says, that is, managing water quality in the reef catchments. Instead, the Auditor-General's report largely focussed on determining whether the adverse impact of broadscale land use on the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef is declining. This is a limited and narrow focus on only one area of activity which impacts the water quality of the reef. In fact, in some ways it presupposes the guilt of those who undertake broadscale land use, such as graziers and canefarmers, without balancing it with other factors. The glaringly obvious—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Crawford): Member for Gympie, we have just hit 12.47 pm, which is one hour. I ask you to adjourn the debate.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—LNP) (12.47 pm): by leave, without notice: I move—

That, notwithstanding anything contained in the standing and sessional orders, the debate on committee reports continue until one o'clock.

Question put—That the motion be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Mr PERRETT: The glaringly obvious is the omission of any reference to natural disasters in a region which is renowned for significant and extreme weather events. All of us want the water quality of the Great Barrier Reef to be as pristine as possible. Proposals to increase regulation, change management practice, lock up land and remove humans from agricultural industries are looking at the problem through a narrow lens. Cyclones and floods can have a devastating effect on the reef regardless of any programs and management practices demanded by government or implemented by industries.

The Auditor-General's report focuses on two reports: the Reef Plan and the Great Barrier Reef report card. The Reef Plan is a coordinated response of actions by both the Queensland and Australian governments in conjunction with the natural resource management bodies of agricultural industries and landholders. Over time the goals of the Reef Plan have altered from halting the decline in water quality to ensuring that by 2020 the quality of the water from broadscale land use has no detrimental impact on the health and resilience of the Great Barrier Reef.

The report card released in June 2014 advised that its goal to halt and reverse the decline in water quality entering the reef had been achieved, yet the Auditor-General's report disputes the claims of the report card, preferring to draw its own conclusions. The report card assessed the combined result of all Reef Plan actions up to June 2014 as well as changes in the extent of riparian vegetation and wetlands between 2009 and 2013.

During that period the reef would have been adversely impacted by some severe weather events. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority advises that large volumes of floodwater have the greatest potential to cause lasting damage; that cyclones often cause severe and widespread damage which takes decades, if not centuries, to recover from; and that flood plumes from the intense rainfall that accompanies cyclones expose large areas of the reef to changes in water quality. Who can forget the floods of 2011 and 2013? Floods not only flush chemicals and pesticides into the system but also other debris. They reduce salinity and increase turbidity, which also affects water quality. Fourteen cyclones hit Queensland's east coast between 2009 and 2014, and another two travelled from the gulf to the east coast and the reef. Cyclone Yasi was one of the most powerful cyclones to affect the Great Barrier Reef since records commenced. Rainfall was 300 to 400 per cent higher than normal.

Those who are honestly interested in improving water quality know that we must get the balance right. Of the period under review, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's *Outlook Report 2014* concluded that over the past decade the region experienced a series of extreme weather events, including floods and six category 3 or above cyclones. The report states—

While improved land management practices are beginning to reduce the amount of nutrients and sediments leaving the catchment, there is likely to be a long lag time between these improvements and reductions in pollutants flowing into the Region, and again between that and improvements in related marine processes.

A thorough and candid investigation into managing water quality in the Great Barrier Reef must consider all factors which impact the reef, not just the effects of broadscale land use. It must reflect on all causes and not use this as yet another excuse to demonise primary industries. We must get the balance right.