




Speech By
Michael Healy

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Record of Proceedings, 1 May 2018

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (4.25 pm): It is an absolute pleasure to stand up and bring a different tone to the chamber. I also feel passionately about this, but I do not intend to character assassinate or marginalise. I have always known that one gets a lot further in life with a jar of honey than a gallon of vinegar.

I rise to speak in favour of the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. The objectives of this bill are to amend the Vegetation Management Act 1999, the Planning Act 2016, the Planning Regulation 2017 and the Water Act 2000 to reinstate responsible land-clearing laws in Queensland. The Newman government's amendments to vegetation management saw tree-clearing rates skyrocket. That is a fact. The rate of excess tree clearing reached an alarming rate of 395,000 hectares in 2015-16, according to the annual deforestation report in October 2017. Excessive land clearing in Queensland under the former government reached a rate of a thousand football fields every day.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr HEALY: I have always been told that you will never learn anything when you are talking.

The 2015-16 Statewide Landcover and Trees Study, SLATS, showed the rate of tree clearing in the Great Barrier Reef catchments had soared by almost 50 per cent since 2012-13. The Palaszczuk Labor government made an election commitment to implement new nation-leading tree-clearing protections to stop this shocking escalation of land clearing in our state. I would like to say that again. The government made this election commitment to the people of Queensland. This bill will deliver on this commitment.

These laws will help protect the Great Barrier Reef and the tens of thousands of jobs that depend on the reef. The Great Barrier Reef is the largest living structure on earth. It is bigger than the United Kingdom. This World Heritage Listed site is the largest and longest coral reef system in the world and it is internationally recognised for its outstanding biodiversity. It supports hundreds of thousands of coral and marine species.

As the member for Cairns, I represent a community on the doorstep of the Great Barrier Reef. The reef is precious not just to everybody in Cairns and our region where 80 per cent of the leisure diving on the Great Barrier Reef takes place, but it is precious—and we recognise this—to all Queenslanders, to all Australians and to the global community, to which we have a far broader commitment. We know the Great Barrier Reef needs our help. A key commitment of the Reef 2050 Plan is to reduce land clearing. It is simple and straightforward.

Both state and federal governments committed to this planning and it is what has stopped UNESCO from putting the reef on the 'in danger' list. The Palaszczuk government's Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 is critical to protecting the reef and its status.

The Great Barrier Reef is crucial to North Queensland's and indeed Australia's tourism economy. In Tropical North Queensland our tourism industry is worth \$25 billion and supports around 23,300 jobs. This is 17.6 per cent of employment in this area. A crucial part of Tropical North Queensland's tourism industry is the reef, which attracts visitors from around the world and contributes to the hundreds of millions of dollars being invested in Cairns and the surrounds. Indeed, the reef attracts around three million visitors a year and contributes \$6.4 billion to the Australian economy. I am trying to register the importance of this particular natural phenomenon.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McArdle): I ask members to keep their conversations to themselves or to take them outside.

Mr HEALY: For Queensland the reef contributes \$6 billion to the Queensland economy and supports more than 60,000 jobs. The Deloitte Access Economics report released on 26 January 2017 identified the social, economic and iconic asset value of the Great Barrier Reef, estimated by them at \$56 billion. That is why recently the federal government finally put their hand in their pocket and have just invested over half a billion dollars to ensure the protection of this vitally important asset, which is not just a state asset but a natural asset to Australia and to the world.

The health of the Great Barrier Reef is critical to growing Queensland's \$25 billion tourism industry and the thousands of tourism jobs reliant on the reef. Beyond the economic and tourism value of the reef is the value the reef has to all Queenslanders. It is in our DNA. It is something that we all know is precious, unique and something we need to not only cherish but also protect.

Queensland is where life is—maybe not for some today—beautiful one day and perfect the next, and we want to keep it that way for future generations. These amendments are important to ensuring the reef will be enjoyed by future generations, for my two children and their children and for the hundreds of thousands of people who come from around the world to visit monthly or annually. The Great Barrier Reef is one of the world's greatest natural assets. It is in our backyard and it is our duty to protect it.

I would like to acknowledge and pay my respect to the committee members. I appreciate their passion. I get that. I understand that. I also recognise that it is hard work. I acknowledge that, so I want to keep my comments friendly and happy and not make recommendations as to who should do what. I am very proud to support the Palaszczuk government's Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill.