




Speech By
Brent Mickelberg

MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

Record of Proceedings, 18 September 2019

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (GREAT BARRIER REEF PROTECTION MEASURES) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (6.10 pm): I rise to speak in opposition to the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. This is legislation that will push more Queensland farming families out of the industry they have been in for generations. At the outset I note that, like many Queenslanders, I own a farm—this is disclosed on my register of interests—and may be affected by this legislation.

Despite the hyperbole of those opposite, no-one wants to see the Great Barrier Reef put at risk. It is clear that the reef is under pressure as the impacts of frequent tropical cyclones, climate change and poor water quality make it more difficult for reef ecosystems to recover after periods of decline.

What is really at question here today are the actions that government, industry and the community generally should take in response to those threats. How does government improve the water quality of the reef while balancing the impact on communities?

At its core this bill seeks to improve water quality on the Great Barrier Reef and the main issues, as I understand them, are caused by excessive sediment, pesticide run-off and dissolved nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorous. It is clear that this bill seeks to deal with the effect of agricultural production in relation to these issues. However, the bill is silent on the impact of urban areas and indeed the impact of state owned land on these very same problems. As I understand it, the state is not required to apply the same standard to crown land, road reserves, national parks and state forest as will apply to graziers and farmers. For some obscure reason, the government has chosen to exclude Cape York areas from this bill despite bank erosion and sediment loads being a significant part of the rationale for the introduction of Labor's wild rivers legislation in Cape York many years ago.

I note the submission from the Reef 2050 plan independent expert panel. I take from its submission that sediment loads are a significant issue for the reef and that any solution needs to be targeted. It states that landscape remediation may be required and that such remediation may take a number of years to be fully effective. I note the expert panel comments in relation to the contribution of gullies and stream bank erosion and its suggested course of action, including 'targeted land retirements'—targeted land retirements of country that is currently used for agricultural production. It begs the question: is Labor's next step to force landholders to cease using existing agricultural land if it contributes to reef water quality issues?

I note that the independent expert panel submission to the bill discusses the need to potentially intensify agricultural production on more productive and less vulnerable landscapes. Such a course of action could maintain profitability, achieve better water quality outcomes and provide improved biodiversity—they are its words, not mine—but such an approach would require the ability for farmers and graziers to develop country, something which Labor has already made more difficult with its draconian vegetation management changes. Labor is happy to sheet home responsibility for dealing

with the changes facing the reef to farmers and graziers, but at the same time it wants to tie their hands when it comes to making positive changes to their business in developing additional country and protecting the environment.

Along the same vein I note the committee contribution from a third generation grazier, Rebecca Vander Have. Rebecca details the manner in which many graziers renovate degraded pasture through tillage and reseeded with perennial pasture plants. It is a process that improves the environment, provides ground cover, improves soil health and improves water quality. Rebecca details the fact that at her grazing enterprise they improve 300 hectares each year. Such a process is only made more difficult under this legislation. Under this legislation, graziers who try to do the right thing are now going to have to navigate complex and costly administrative processes just so they can do the right thing by their business and by the environment.

Ms Grace: You're making it up!

Mr MICKELBERG: If I am making it up, Minister, I am more than happy for you to come in here and correct the record.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): Through the chair.

Mr MICKELBERG: I am more than happy for the government to come in and correct the record.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the chair.

Mr MICKELBERG: Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for your guidance. For Rebecca and many other graziers, they are going to have to do that each and every year. Perhaps the most concerning aspect of this legislation is the fact that this legislation will place the power to set the rules in relation to farming practices across the vast majority of the state in the hands of an unelected public servant. With this bill the government has abrogated its responsibility for that task and instead placed the responsibility in the hands of a bureaucrat. Surely we owe it to the people of Queensland to be accountable for decisions that affect primary producers to the extent which this bill does. Surely the 93 elected representatives who sit in the Queensland parliament and are accountable to our communities should properly consider and debate issues of significance like the regulations and the rules which will now be in the hands of an unelected bureaucrat.

Earlier we heard the inspiring contribution from the member for Mackay, who contends that it was her advocacy that resulted in a five-year stay of execution for canegrowers.

Mrs Gilbert: And others.

Mr MICKELBERG: And others; I take that interjection. What she has delivered for canegrowers in her electorate, and evidently others from the Labor benches, is a five-year blank cheque for a public servant to make decisions that will have a considerable community impact and will disproportionately place the burden for dealing with this issue on canegrowers. Mackay canegrowers are already struggling with low global commodity prices and escalating costs of production and they will wear the cost of the actions of a local member who will not fight for them.

This bill is just the latest Labor government attempt to appease its Greens masters, whom we all know it relies on as it clings desperately to power. I would welcome a considered approach that deals with all of the challenges facing the reef including those factors related to urban development, road maintenance and construction, and the management of state land. This bill is not a considered solution, however. I will be opposing this bill and I urge those few members opposite who care about regional communities to do the same.