




Speech By
Cynthia Lui

MEMBER FOR COOK

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

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (4.44 pm): I rise to speak to the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. I would like to acknowledge and thank the Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts, the Hon. Leeanne Enoch, for her strong advocacy to protect the future of the Great Barrier Reef. I also acknowledge the committee secretary and assistant secretary for their support of the committee and my colleagues and other committee members for their hard work and valuable contribution to the consideration of this bill.

When the bill was introduced and referred to the Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee, that committee hit the ground running to consult communities, stakeholders and industry groups. The committee held a number of public hearings—from South-East Queensland to various sites in regional Queensland—to capture a broad audience and hear firsthand from key stakeholders and industries. I would like to thank all stakeholders who took time out to attend public hearings, for their submissions and valuable contribution to the consideration of this bill.

The Great Barrier Reef is one of Queensland's greatest treasures and its natural beauty continues to amaze and fascinate people from all over the world. The Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest coral reef system and it supports a wide diversity of life. The reef contributed \$6 billion to the economy and 6,000 jobs rely on the reef's health.

Sadly, the reef is facing two major threats: climate change and water quality. The *2017 scientific consensus statement: land use impacts on Great Barrier Reef water quality and ecosystem condition* highlights that poor water quality continues to be a significant issue for reef health and that the main source of nutrient and sediment pollution is cumulative run-off from agricultural land use, with local scale contributions from urban and industrial land uses. There has been significant government and industry investment, particularly in agriculture, and voluntary approaches have failed to facilitate a sufficient uptake of improved practices.

At the present trajectory, the reef water quality will not be met. Despite nearly \$70 million in Queensland government investment since 2009 in industry-led best practice management programs, science and on-ground programs directed at agricultural industries and over \$220 million in Australian government funding since 2008 in similar activities, the slow rate of voluntary adoption of improved practices should be noted. It is quite clear that, without further regulation, the reef water-quality targets are unlikely to be met.

I would like to acknowledge the farmers who are already doing the right thing through voluntary practices. I thank them for their efforts, but quality improvements have not been fast enough. The risks associated with uncontrolled regulations will most definitely see an increase in sedimentation and nutrient run-off. As such there will be higher algal growth, a build-up of pollutants in sediments and marine species, and reduced light and smothered corals. The immediate risk to the Great Barrier Reef

will potentially compromise reef dependent industries such as tourism, fishing, recreation, research and education. The Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce recognised that transformational change was needed to reduce diffuse-source pollution from agriculture in our reef catchments. That means a fundamental shift in the way in which land is managed in order to avoid the poor reef outcomes of a continued business-as-usual approach.

Although we have jobs and industry depending on the health of the reef, I also want to acknowledge the First Nations peoples and their connection to the Great Barrier Reef. First Nations peoples are the first traditional owners of the Great Barrier Reef area and have a continuing connection to their land and sea country, going back millennia through their Dreaming. The reef is of great significance to more than 70 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups—from the Torres Strait Islands in the north to Bundaberg and K'gari in the south.

The first people, the first scientists of this country, have been experiencing its changes and documenting in dance, songlines, storylines, art and ceremony. The formation of the Great Barrier Reef thousands of years ago is reflected in creation stories that are still being retold today—passed down from generation to generation through language and dancing. First Nations customary lore and practice underpins caring for the reef for thousands of years and maintaining its health as a component of a fully functioning biocultural ecosystem. The reef is embedded in traditional owner beliefs, knowledge, language, lore and way of life and First Nations peoples know themselves as an integral part of the reef. They are spiritually, culturally, socially and economically connected.

The storylines from now will tell a new story of rapid seasonal change and the impact on species, on long-held hunting and cultural practices and on land management. First Nations people have told us of their vision for a healthy reef and healthy people. Indigenous land and sea ranger groups are increasingly working to conserve important ecosystems and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage locations, including the reef catchments and adjacent sea country. The rangers have been very successful in delivering outcomes for conservation as well as positive social and economic outcomes for local communities.

The implementation of this legislation will strike a thriving balance by protecting all jobs: Indigenous jobs in agriculture, those that rely on the reef and the ranger jobs in between. Economic development opportunities, including on Aboriginal lands, are maintained by the bill as it allows for future development. However, this development must be undertaken in a sustainable way so as not to compromise the ability to meet the water quality targets for a healthy reef. We need everyone to adopt good practices as the customary way of caring for the reef so that it can continue to ensure healthy people for generations to come.

We recognise the importance of embedding traditional knowledge in equal standing with Western knowledge and valuing the work that First Nations people can do to care for country. That is why we continue to fund Indigenous land and sea ranger groups with \$12 million per year, supporting over 100 rangers across the state. Many rangers are located alongside the reef and are increasingly working to conserve important ecosystems and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage locations including in the reef catchments and adjacent sea country.

The rangers have been very successful in delivering outcomes for conservation as well as positive social and economic outcomes for local communities particularly through junior ranger programs which are giving confidence in a positive future to young people who can be proud of their traditional knowledge. Queensland has embarked on a reform journey through Tracks to Treaty, reframing the relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders and we will continue to expand our partnerships with the traditional owners of the Great Barrier Reef to protect this icon together.

On a final note, I recently suggested changes to ensure the minimum agricultural standard in the Cape York catchment is not switched on as planned once proposed reef protection laws pass through parliament. I asked the minister to acknowledge the good water quality results from the Cape York region in the latest Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Report Card. The latest water quality science showed promising results for Cape York and showed the region had already met sediment and particulate nutrient targets. These are great results. I am delighted that the minister has announced that the government will not switch on the minimum standard in Cape York because of these results. The Palaszczuk government is committed to protecting the reef and this government is making decisions about the protection of the reef based on scientific evidence. I commend this bill to the House.