




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Record of Proceedings, 18 September 2019

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

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (3.49 pm): I, too, rise to speak against this bill, the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. I might start by giving credit to Michael Guerin, who is the CEO of AgForce. In an article which he penned that appeared in the Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin*, among other places, on 12 September, he said—

Despite the clear signal from farmers and the wider Queensland community that the current reef regulations are not welcome and will not work (unless the intention of the legislation is to send more Queensland graziers and grain growers to the wall), it appears that the government is set to proceed on its present course.

...

AgForce has felt the growing tide of frustration and even anger from members, industry and community, at the seeming indifference portrayed by the state government to an industry that contributes so much to the economic, social, biodiversity and environmental outcomes, and rightly so.

In my view—and I am sure my view is shared by others—Mr Guerin is expressing the irritation of tens of thousands of stakeholders in the primary producing industries along the Queensland coast. It is not just AgForce; it is Canegrowers, the Australian Banana Growers' Council, Growcom and the Queensland Farmers' Federation among others.

This bill is typical of Labor's approach to environmental issues. It is heavy-handed and whilst there is a pretence of consultation, there is actually no evidence of listening. Consultation where a government asks what people think and then goes ahead and does exactly as it pleases is not consultation in the minds of fair-minded Queenslanders. That is having a tin ear and that is exactly what we have seen from this Labor government, certainly in the time that I have been in parliament.

It is not the first time we have seen attacks on the bush. We have seen the vegetation management laws, which are a real sticking point to growth and prosperity in the regional parts of Queensland including in my own electorate. We have seen the debacle of the 'blue dots' where constituents of mine and many others around the state have been told by the department that they believe there is a protected plant species on their property. They then have to go to great lengths and great expense to investigate the matter.

In the case of one of my constituents he paid for a consultant biologist—many, many thousands of dollars—to identify the presence of a protected cycad. The scientist he engaged made it quite clear that the presence of that particular protected species was a result of his clearing of the land, his grazing of the land and his cultivation of the land and that it did not appear at all in the remnant vegetation. It was 'scientific opinion' that what my constituent was doing actually preserved the protected species and ought to have been allowed.

However, it seems that the government does not want to listen to science when it does not suit them, and I am looking at the environment minister. I have corresponded with the minister about this. It is quite obvious not just to a scientist but to any man on the Clapham omnibus that the individual farmer

was being disadvantaged, but we complain to the government to no avail. That is the concern I have: we talk about science and accepting science, but it seems that the government only accepts science when it is electorally advantageous to them. Perhaps they are not concerned about the vote of my constituent but more about the vote of the people of South Brisbane.

We heard the shadow minister, my honourable friend the member for Broadwater, say in response to the minister's second reading speech that he actually has worked on a cane farm; he owns a cane farm, a small part of his parents' property, and his mum and dad still operate that cane farm. He speaks with the authentic voice of someone who has skin in the game, someone who understands the industry, not of a bureaucrat from William Street or George Street. He talked about how technology has advanced enormously in the sugarcane industry since he was a boy, which was not all that long ago. We are talking about a 90 per cent reduction in the use of fertilisers and a 50 per cent reduction in the amount of water run-off. Those are worthwhile advances. They contribute to the efficiency of the production and also to the good of the environment.

He made the point that this bill is not the solution. This bill hands enormous power to an unelected bureaucrat who will have the ability to determine what the farming practices are of people like Mr and Mrs Crisafulli up in North Queensland, people who know their properties, who have a concern for the environment and who use the very best practice possible. I could not help but notice his rather pithy observation that a line of affected Labor Party members got together and expressed indignation at what was happening and managed to secure an amendment to the bill. I am looking at the member for Mackay. She surely has iron in her soul; she put her foot down and she made sure that her electorate was represented. However, I do not think that anyone is going to believe that.

I think that those who have skin in the game in those electorates that Labor is concerned about like Cook, Cairns, Townsville, Thuringowa, Mundingburra, Mackay, Maryborough—even McConnel, the education minister's seat has an economic stake in the sugar industry—will see that for what it was: a shabby deception, a ruse—and a very bad one—to attempt to make it look like those members were acting with the best interests of their constituents at heart. I think they are going to be greeted with a lot of cynicism because of that, and why would they not?

In talking about how this bill is going to impact people in North Queensland, honourable members should think about how people in North Queensland responded to Labor at the federal election. I think that they vicariously expressed their unhappiness with the treatment of this state Labor government through the federal election. We all know that there was a conga line of concerned Labor backbenchers who traipsed off to see the bosses on the Thursday afternoon just before the election—we were all here in the House at the time—and they were told, 'No, no, no. You're right. You don't understand; Uncle Bill will be the Prime Minister. We'll all be good. Manna will rain from heaven afterwards and we will be able to continue doing what we are doing.' Of course, that is not what happened.

I say to this Labor government and particularly to those members like the members for Cook, Cairns, Townsville, Thuringowa, Mundingburra, Mackay and Maryborough that they are kidding themselves if they think that this bill is compatible with the economic and social needs of their electorate. I do not believe that there has been adequate consultation or acceptance of the responses of farmers all along the Queensland coast who are going to be impacted by these draconian laws.

We are talking about a situation in which regarding supplies of chemicals, farm workers and everyone in the agriculture supply chain will be compelled to participate in an East German style 'dob in your mate' regime. That is not good for communities. There is no assurance of confidentiality about the data that is collected nor is there about how it will be interpreted and employed. It could be employed to the disadvantage of the industry, against the industry's wishes and advice. That is not just what I say; that is what canegrowers said.

I had the pleasure of attending the demonstration by canegrowers and others outside the parliament which sat in Townsville with my honourable friend the member for Burdekin who spoke to them. It was quite clear to me that they were great people who understand the reef, understand their responsibility as producers and who also pay taxes and provide jobs and wealth to pay for the services that we need in this state, to pay for politicians and to pay the welfare bill in this country.

Where is the government's focus on that? I say to this government: this bill is a mistake. This bill is heavy-handed. It attacks those who might once, in years gone by, have voted for the Labor Party, but what has happened to that Labor Party? It does not exist anymore. It has turned its back on farmers, farm workers and the bush. This bill is one virtuoso demonstration of that failing. I will not support the bill. I urge everyone in the House to join me in that respect.