




Speech By
Julianne Gilbert

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Record of Proceedings, 18 September 2019

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

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (12.19 pm): It gives me great pleasure to be here in Parliament House in Brisbane to debate this bill. There has been a lot said by those opposite about conspiracy theories and debating this bill in the people's house of Queensland. That is usually where we debate bills.

The Great Barrier Reef is an important world ecosystem. It is also an important economic driver for the Queensland economy so we need to make sure it is protected. As we have heard already, the reef contributes \$6 billion to our economy and over 60,000 jobs. A lot of those jobs are in the communities surrounding my electorate.

Sadly, the reef is facing two major threats: climate change and water quality. We need to address these threats. The science in these two reports shows that it is more important than ever that we take action to protect the reef. The Palaszczuk government is already taking steps to improve water quality through our proposed reef regulations. We know that there are some farmers who are doing the right thing through voluntary practices, and I thank them for their efforts. Not all producers are on board. Water quality improvements have not been fast enough. There are some farmers who are implementing some innovative practices and they must be commended.

The Environmental Protection Act 1994 already includes the Great Barrier Reef protection measures that aim to reduce the risk of sediment, nutrient and pesticide run-off from certain sugarcane growing and grazing activities. The proposed amendments are in response to the 2016 recommendations of the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce. The recommendations were made in recognition of the reef's World Heritage status and the contributions the reef makes to the Queensland and Australian economy. Protecting the reef protects the economy as well as our social, cultural and spiritual values. A thriving reef supports a thriving tourism industry, which is important for my region, fishing industry and a lifestyle that is the envy of many.

The 2016 Deloitte Access Economics report estimated that the reef, as I mentioned earlier, supports more than 60,000 jobs. The job numbers associated with the reef are larger than for most of Australia's major banks and many corporations. Tourism is the second largest dollar earner in the catchment of the Great Barrier Reef. The Deloitte report valued the reef at \$56 billion as an Australian economic, social and iconic asset. This means that it is considered more valuable than the Sydney Opera House—in fact, 12 times more so.

The Great Barrier Reef is also important from a global perspective. It is a global brand. It is superior to other Australian natural assets in terms of visitor preferences, reputation and experiences. Representatives of our tourism industry understand how important it is to have a healthy Great Barrier Reef, and so do our commercial, recreational and traditional owner fishers.

Fishing is another key industry supported by the Great Barrier Reef. Fishing continues to be a significant source of income and lifestyle for our coastal communities. Commercial fishing Queensland wide contributes approximately \$180 million to the Queensland economy annually and directly supports over 2,000 jobs and many small businesses. There are also thousands of recreational fishers. Their activities directly support jobs in our local communities up and down the Queensland coast.

Our fisheries resources are also a major tourism attraction and are another reason people visit the Great Barrier Reef. There are 300 licensed charter operators taking people fishing Queensland wide and a significant portion of these are accessing the reef. Fishing is heavily dependent on a functioning and resilient Great Barrier Reef ecosystem. The Great Barrier Reef also provides another significant economic and social benefit such as recreational uses, research, educational and scientific values. Having a healthy Great Barrier Reef ecosystem is critically important to everyone. We need these regulations to protect the reef and the thousands of jobs that rely on it.

When UNESCO last considered the Great Barrier Reef in July 2017 it acknowledged the Queensland government's progress in enforcing existing reef regulations and identified the need for accelerated effort to meet water quality targets. The next report will be submitted to the World Heritage Centre by 1 December and considered at UNESCO's meeting in mid-2020. We as a government must do something because farmers do not know what UNESCO will impose upon them. We must report that we have implemented the reef regulations to demonstrate that we are making every effort to meet our obligations to avoid the Great Barrier Reef being listed as in danger.

Our government supports the agricultural sector's need for certainty. In response to feedback from farmers in my community I asked the Minister for Environment to ensure that once this legislation and its underpinning regulations are ready later this year there would be no further changes to the minimum standards for at least five years. I am delighted that in her second reading speech the minister announced that the government has committed to doing that. Ensuring that there are no further changes to the minimum standards for five years once these changes are made will help provide certainty to industry to help increase profitability and productivity. These minimum standards were set by industry.

For the last decade, the Queensland government has supported agricultural industries to voluntarily improve their practices to help improve run-off. Unfortunately, the uptake of these voluntary practices has not been fast enough. Water quality has not improved fast enough. The standards that are in the legislation are already approved and accepted by industry. The regulations will ensure that these standards will be the minimum for everyone to follow. The legislation is vital to ensure that the reef and the jobs in the agricultural industry and the economic benefits that they support are protected now and into the future.