




Speech By  
**Lachlan Millar**

**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**

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

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (12.09 pm): I rise to make a contribution to this bill, which has rightly drawn widespread condemnation as a clumsy and punitive green inspired attack on regional Queensland. Like the member for Broadwater, and as many members know, I come from an agricultural farming business in the Central Highlands. I too remember as a young boy loading chemicals and fertilisers that would not be acceptable today. The technology we have today did not exist back then. We did not have high-value GPS technology such as GreenStar, which monitors output to the millimetre. Today's technology also allows us to apply to the millimetre fertiliser rates mapped out on a computer screen mounted in a tractor, where it is needed. We have regular shed meetings and field days to display the latest technology. Sustainability has long been a key focus of the Australian cotton industry. Today cotton growers grow more cotton on less land with more efficient water use and less impact on the environment than ever before. In Australia, 80 per cent of cotton growers are in a BMP voluntary program, which started back in 1997.

This bill is simply an overreach and a payback to the green environmentalists who helped many Labor members in South-East Queensland get votes. This government is prepared to throw our hardworking farmers and graziers in regional Queensland under the bus to prop up seats in South-East Queensland. It is telling that this bill was listed on the *Notice Paper*, but carefully not debated during parliament's recent sitting in Townsville. Why has it come up today? Could it be that Labor's only regional members of parliament fear what the bill will do to their electorates? The problem for those members—indeed, the problem for the Queensland Labor Party—is that eventually people will work you out by watching what you do. It is an old saying that actions speak louder than words and by its actions Labor has clearly shown regional Queenslanders that it does not govern for them. They know that this government has repeatedly sacrificed their interests in order to woo green votes in the south-east corner.

This bill is another example of the Labor Party putting its own political interests before the interests of Queenslanders. Every Queenslander loves the Great Barrier Reef. In agriculture, our role as stewards is taken very seriously. Therefore, the government should not be surprised that Queenslanders find it hard to believe that agriculture is the sole and major threat to reef and water quality. As AgForce General President Georgie Somerset has said, agriculture has done more than any other industry or group to reduce its impacts on the reef. Even Mackay conservation advocate Pat Julien has criticised the bill, pointing out that it does not do anything to support the quick and reliable identification of water pollution sources or to address current pollution sources.

What are local governments being asked to do about upgrading to tertiary level sewage treatment in the reef catchments? What are they being asked to do with their stormwater run-off? Loaded with nitrogen from garden fertilisers, oil from road surfaces and other pollutants, are reef councils simply discharging it onto the reef for free? What are the property developers, airport owners, shipping and the

tourism industry being asked to do in this regard? When viewed in this light, it is clear that the Labor government is once again using agriculture as a scapegoat and has no real interest in practical protections for the reef.

This is in contrast with the former LNP government. It was the LNP that brought in serious penalties for environmentally harming the reef. Labor chose to vote against those laws. It was Labor, under Anna Bligh, that planned to supersize the Port of Abbot Point. Labor planned to dump 38 cubic metres of dredge spoil on top of the reef. Fortunately, the LNP was elected in time to fix Labor's mess, reducing the amount of dredge spoil and insisting that the spoil must be disposed of on the land and not on the reef or in its waters. The LNP is proud of its solid record as a reef guardian. Highlights include embedding protections for the reef into Queensland's ports strategies, fighting one of the reef's biggest threats in the crown-of-thorns starfish and providing funding for agriculture to develop best management practices. I thank the member for Glass House, the former environment minister, who led the charge on that with BMP cane and also BMP cattle.

This minister justifies the bill by saying that agriculture has been too slow to adopt the BMPs, yet she provides no report on the results of the efforts of past decades. Even more basic research shows that legislation and government regulation do not achieve true practical change. A review of the past 10 years of voluntary efforts by agriculture have a lot to teach us. Instead, the minister has created such a punitive regime in the bill that AgForce actually deleted all of its BMP data. That was not done lightly. It was done in a direct response to fear about this bill mandating compulsory data reporting, not just by farmers and graziers but also by their suppliers.

Yesterday at 3.39 pm, my office received a ministerial media release stating that, while the minister is not amending the bill, the government will not make data collection compulsory and will, instead, seek to work voluntarily with the industry to collect the relevant data. I welcome this change. However, the last-minute announcement of that and other changes just highlights what a poor piece of legislation this is. It reinforces the fact that this legislation is for political purposes and not practical outcomes for the reef.

What has not changed is the fact that, if this legislation is passed, virtually every farmer and grazier across the 30 million hectares of reef catchment faces the prospect of committing an offence. The final insult to all thinking Queenslanders is that the very ambitious water quality targets set by the legislation are not supported by equally generous government funding. Farmers have publicly stated that they view the legislation as the last straw. One gentleman called on the Palaszczuk government to just buy him out, as it is clear that they want him out of business.

What is at stake here? The horticultural industry produces 120 different crops on farms that will be affected by the bill. This includes the bulk of Australia's tropical fruits, as well as macadamia nuts, avocados, citrus, tomatoes and winter vegetables. The effects of this bill will extend to graziers and cotton and grain growers in my electorate of Gregory, imposing administrative burdens that have brought members of the industry out to publicly protest at rallies. We have seen those rallies right up and down Queensland, involving Green Shirts, AgForce and Canegrowers. Economic modelling from the Australian Sugar Milling Council puts the value of the sugar industry at over \$4,000 million. As I am sure the member for Mackay appreciates, that industry is a major employer and a valuable export industry. It is also an industry that is struggling with prices that have been artificially depressed by the dumping of sugar on international markets. The Queensland government is loading the industry with penalties at a time when it should be offering every bit of support.

Given the importance of those industries to the people and the towns in the reef catchment, why wasn't there proper consultation? In Queensland, our committees are our house of review. Yesterday, the member for Stretton, in his role as committee chairman, pointed to regional hearings and public briefings on the bill as evidence of consultation. If that is the case, why did they vote to pass this bill without any amendments? I quote the Chairman of Canegrowers, Paul Schembri, on his view of the consultation. He mentioned that hundreds of growers attended the hearings and said—

That there is no recommendation—

by the committee—

for any amendments to the most dangerous elements of the Bill means the whole consultation process was a box-ticking exercise for a foregone political outcome—it was a sham.

He also said—

While the committee sat politely and listened, even asking questions of growers who took their time from their farms to detail the many practical ways they work for Great Barrier Reef water quality every day, the majority of MPs—

on the Labor side—

did not actually hear us and their report is an insult.

Again, actions and outcomes support Mr Schembri.

Following more than 230 submissions, the committee's sole recommendation was to pass the bill. It was the member for Scenic Rim and the member for Theodore who expressed the LNP's reservations, but could not change Labor's intentions. Therefore, here we stand again today. This is our last chance to deliver for regional Queensland the protection from flawed and punitive legislation that this parliament is supposed to provide. To that end, the LNP will be moving some amendments to try to remove some of the worst excesses of this bill.

Finally, I would expect all members, especially all members from regional Queensland, to consider and support the LNP's amendments. Believe me, on this vote the eyes of regional Queensland are on us. Regional Queenslanders have learned to tune in to our words and look at our actions. Attention is being paid to who votes for this attack on regional prosperity, regional families, regional jobs and regional farms. How can someone in my electorate who is grazing cattle at the headwaters of the Belyando, far away from the reef catchment, have much impact on the reef? We should be trying to help those people who are struggling through eight years of drought. They are trying to restock and put more pasture on their paddocks so that they can get back into action, and we are again going to penalise graziers and farmers right throughout Queensland. I can tell members now that if they support this bill, groups such as Green Shirts, AgForce and the agricultural industry will come out in force against them at the next election.