




Speech By
Hon. Leeanne Enoch

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

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

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algerst—ALP) (Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts) (12.41 pm), in reply: The Great Barrier Reef is the largest living structure on the planet. As science tells us, it is some 500,000 years old. First Nations people have lived alongside the Great Barrier Reef for more than 65,000 years. As the first scientists, they have documented the health of the Great Barrier Reef through art, song and dance for more than 3,000 generations. This all serves as a reminder that we are literally but a speck in time. Our generation is but a speck in time, but our speck in time is probably the most important one in the history of our existence because the choices we make now will affect the future survival of our natural assets, including the Great Barrier Reef.

The science that backs the reasons why we need to think about this makes it very clear that the Great Barrier Reef has two major threats: climate change and water quality. Report after report and science that has been tested and challenged over and over again continue to tell us that we must take action now. The science has been absolutely clear on this. Unfortunately, what we have seen from those opposite and their colleagues at a federal level—including the actions of the federal LNP this week to challenge the legitimacy of the science that underpins their own government's reef policies—is of great concern. In school we teach our children that science is fact. When elected representatives stray away from that most basic premise and away from what the community expects, we move into very dangerous territory.

I would like to thank all honourable members for their participation in the debate of the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. I will begin by setting the record straight on something that has been consistently raised during this debate, and that is the need for financial investment in reef protections.

The Palaszczuk government is investing a record \$330 million into the Great Barrier Reef over five years, and \$261 million of that investment is specifically for water quality improvements. Over \$120 million has already been invested in the agricultural sector on programs designed to help farmers voluntarily meet minimum standards, including \$55 million for the cane industry and \$11 million for the grazing industry. We are also establishing the \$500 million Land Restoration Fund, which will see many complementary land restoration activities in reef catchments. This investment works alongside the hundreds of millions invested by the federal government into reef water quality as part of our joint commitments under the *Reef 2050 water quality improvement plan 2017-2022*.

Let me be clear: our government is investing more into Great Barrier Reef protections than any state government before us, but, despite all of the investment and progress made by some hardworking farmers and producers who have, been doing the heavy lifting for others, the dial has not moved quickly enough to improve water quality. While I appreciate the contributions of members who have supported the bill, I am also concerned that there has been a lot of misinformation coming from those opposite.

The bill directly responds to the need to improve water quality flowing into the reef which, science shows, is not improving fast enough. Improved water quality will help the reef adapt to other pressures such as the impacts of climate change, cyclones and, of course, coral bleaching. We need to work together to protect the reef, and this bill helps to do this by establishing a framework to reduce nutrient and sediment releases from agricultural activities and new industrial development. A key objective is to set nutrient and sediment load limits for all reef catchments in line with the targets of the *Reef 2050 water quality improvement plan 2017-2022*. That is a joint plan between the state and the federal governments.

Agriculture is the predominant land use in reef catchments and is cumulatively the largest source of nutrient and sediment run-off to the reef. This bill enables industry-specific minimum standards to be set for sugar cane, grazing, bananas, other horticultural crops and grains production, and these improved standards will be applied across all reef catchments. The reef catchments include all of the river basins that flow into the reef in the Cape York, Wet Tropics, Mackay-Whitsunday, Burdekin, Fitzroy and Burnett-Mary regions. However, as announced in my second reading speech, we have made a commitment not to turn on the minimum standards for Cape York as planned, as it is already meeting its targets through voluntary action.

Industry minimum standards will require growers to replace high-risk practices with practices that are known to limit nutrient and sediment run-off while ensuring farms can increase productivity and profitability. We know this can be done; it is already being done on some farms. We have seen it across many farms already—for example, one large cane farm has been able to increase its profits by more than \$100,000 by using the recommended amount of nitrogen. This farmer saw an increase in productivity from greater sugar yields.

Those opposite refuse to admit that the proposed minimum standards align with the standards developed by industry, including AgForce, Canegrowers, the Australian Banana Growers' Council and others. These are minimum standards that align with industry standards which have been developed by them. These industry developed standards align with the best available science and take into account local and industry knowledge. They will enable productivity and profitability to be maintained. The standards will be staged to roll out between 2019 and 2022 according to water quality risk.

The process for setting minimum standards was consistently raised by those opposite, and it seems most of this was based on a misunderstanding of the legislative process. In fact, the member for Broadwater spent a great deal of time lamenting the responsibility of the department's chief executive in approving minimum standards.

It is important to note here that agricultural ERA standards are made under the existing provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1994. I mention this because section 318D of this act already requires the ERA standard to be prescribed by regulation before it takes effect. As the opposition well knows, regulations are tabled before this parliament and can be the subject of a disallowance motion so there is already appropriate oversight by the parliament in the current process. There is no smoke and mirrors. There are no big, bad bureaucrats. It is just the same process as with other regulations. It is the same for every other ERA standard for every other industry regulated under the Environmental Protection Act.

In fact, this is a mechanism which was supported by the former Newman LNP government as part of their green-tape reduction bill back in 2012. The member for Glass House, when he was the minister for environment, took credit for those amendments so when they come in here and cry foul they obviously have very, very short memories. Interestingly, the opposition's proposed watered-down amendments would only require the ERA standard be prescribed by regulation. Their amendment would actually remove the statutory consultation period for future agricultural ERA standards and the need for the chief executive to consider submissions received during that consultation period.

I would also like to address the comments made by the member for Noosa, and I thank her for her contribution to this debate. I think it is important to note that this bill is not all about the agricultural sector. It extends to all intensive land uses, such as sewage treatment plants, aquaculture and mining. Environmentally relevant activities, such as sewage treatment plants, dredging and mining, are licensed through an environmental authority. The existing Environmental Protection Act 1994 has a sufficient head of power to regulate impacts to water quality from these activities, and the proposed amendments to the Environmental Protection Regulation 2019 will enhance these considerations.

New prescribed and resource environmentally relevant activities will also contribute to meeting the catchment load limits through the requirement for no additional nutrient or sediment loads for their activity. This bill also ensures that, when providing tailored advice about agricultural environmentally relevant activities, farm advisers—such as agronomists and fertiliser sellers—provide advice that is not

false or misleading and keep records of the advice provided. These provisions acknowledge the influential role advisers play in the land management decisions made by farmers and that they too have a role to play in improving reef water quality and they should be accountable for providing accurate advice.

I absolutely reject the member for Broadwater's claim that these provisions pit farmers against consultants and fertiliser suppliers. What the member fails to recognise is that water quality improvement is everyone's responsibility and we must work together. The only thing which is driving community discord at this point in time is the false claims being made by the LNP which are calling respectable science into question. Current media coverage of minority scientific opinion, which has been promoted by the LNP, calls into question peer reviewed published science. Those opposite should absolutely be ashamed about that.

This bill also provides for a regulation-making power in the future to collect data from the agricultural sector to support informed decision-making on reef water quality matters. Contrary to the misleading views put forward by some, it does not allow the government to outright demand data. As I have already advised the parliament, data provisions will not be commenced as part of this regulatory package.

During this debate, the opposition have offered many anecdotes about good farmers and I have met those farmers too and I absolutely applaud them. However, I also know that more than half the canefarms visited by my department's compliance team are not complying with the current regulations for soil testing, fertiliser application and record keeping when first visited. This means that they are operating below their own industry's best practice standards which align with the regulated standards. What records show, however, is that on a return visit nearly every farmer has taken steps to become compliant, with many becoming fully compliant. That is without fines even being issued. This demonstrates that a well-constructed regulatory program does support and complement the efforts of growers and landholders, and this is the difference between fact and opinion. As politicians, those opposite cannot just visit one farm and form opinions based on that. You need to work from evidence and scientific fact, and that is what this government is doing.

There were a number of quite alarming contributions from those opposite. What we heard in the member for Callide's contribution yesterday were some of the most outrageous attacks on science that have ever been put to this parliament. I know he prefers to sit in dark rooms with his little tin foil hat on and draw out his policies. However—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): Minister, I think that is unparliamentary and I ask you to withdraw.

Ms ENOCH: I withdraw. His claim that the peer review process is corrupt is simply an attack on hardworking, intelligent scientists and is a criticism of the same science that their—

Mr Boyce interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Callide, I know you are being provoked.

Ms ENOCH: It is a criticism of the same exact science that his own federal colleagues also rely on in the work that they have been producing, including the most recently released *Great Barrier Reef outlook report 2019*. That was a report released by the federal government utilising the very science that those opposite have been attacking. The reputable science has repeatedly shown that these regulations are urgently needed, and ignoring this is absolutely dangerous. We saw that from the Water Science Taskforce in 2016 which was led by the former Queensland chief scientist and involved 10 scientists and other experts. We heard it again from the 2017 Scientific Consensus Statement, which included 48 scientific experts. And we heard it again from the LNP government's own reef outlook report 2019. The science on the state of the reef is absolutely sobering. I table for the benefit of the House a copy of the headline results of the Reef Water Quality Report Card 2017.


Tabled paper: Reef Plan, undated, reef plan targets [1565](#).

The results, of mostly Ds and Es, are absolutely stark, but as I have said we will also respond to good results. Cape York has met its water quality targets so we will not be switching on the regulations in this area. The member for Burnett in his contribution asked for a comparison between Cape York and the Burnett-Mary and I am happy to provide that for him now in the paper I have just tabled. Unlike the Cape York region, the Burnett-Mary region has not yet met its water quality targets. In fact in the latest Water Quality Report Card the Burnett-Mary scored straight Es against its water quality targets. Cape York by contrast met all of its water quality targets. Under the regulations, the Burnett-Mary already has three years before standards commence and has had 10 years without regulation, unlike other regions, to meet minimum standards voluntarily.

I would also like to address the comments from the member for Hinchinbrook, who sank so low that he called into question reputable scientific organisations in this country. His comments are not worth repeating but, quite frankly, questioning the important work that reputable organisations do was an extremely low blow and is another example of this blatant disregard for scientific evidence.

Talking about low depths this week, I take a moment to mention the member for Burdekin, who accused me of contemptible behaviour by meeting with a 'multinational company', as was his quote, when I visited the Burdekin region earlier in the year. Let me say this: the company in question grows 500,000 tonnes of cane and is one of our largest growers. How ridiculous that the member thinks it is not a company that is worthy of consultation. In other parts of the state, I have met with individual growers on their farms and heard their feedback, but I will not apologise for also consulting with businesses. Just for the member's information, in 2016 that same company donated over \$10,000 to the LNP, so if he is going to throw mud perhaps he should get all the facts right.

A bill does not reach this point without considerable work from many people both within and outside of government. The key components of the reef regulations, including the proposed practice standards for producers, were detailed in the consultation regulatory impact statement released for public consultation in September 2017. Over 50 submissions were received. These submissions helped inform the development of the bill.

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algeria—ALP) (Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts) (3.01 pm), continuing in reply: I too thank the stakeholders who met with the Department of Environment and Science to discuss the development of the bill, including peak body representatives, other industry groups, the conservation sector and individual producers. I especially wish to acknowledge the representatives who attended the various technical working groups, volunteering their valuable time to contribute to meaningful discussions on the regulatory proposals.

I thank the Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee for their inquiry into the bill—the members for Stretton, Scenic Rim, Noosa, Theodore, Cook and Jordan—and the committee staff who assisted with the inquiry. I acknowledge the industry representative bodies, scientists, volunteers, businesses, local governments, Indigenous land councils, research institutions, conservation groups and members of the public who made a submission to the parliamentary committee and those who appeared before the committee.

Lastly, I acknowledge the team in the Office of the Great Barrier Reef for their incredible hard work in bringing this package together. In particular, I acknowledge Elisa Nicholls, Louise Smyth, Kate Watkins, Sarah Hindmarsh, Rhys Watson, Britney McKenzie, Alex Brown, Scott Robinson, Chris Johnson, Dominic Henderson, Hannah Fry and Greg Edeson. I also acknowledge the incredible and tireless hard work of the team in my ministerial office.

The benefits from a healthy reef, which is Queensland's greatest environmental asset, are too numerous to fully articulate. Tourists snorkelling on the reef seem to bubble with excitement and beam with joy from experiencing firsthand the beauty and complexity of this amazing World Heritage Listed ecosystem. Failing to protect the reef would be catastrophic for the myriad of wildlife that depends on it, as well as the jobs it supports. In my opinion, that is reason enough to take strong action. Of course, I absolutely commend this bill.