




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

 **Mr BOOTHMAN** (Theodore—LNP) (3.56 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. Firstly, I would like to thank my fellow committee members, the parliamentary staff and all those who took time out of their busy schedules to write submissions and attend the public hearings. I must say from the outset that we all want to protect the Great Barrier Reef. All members on both sides of the chamber want to protect the Great Barrier Reef. It is a world famous icon. It brings tourists from all over the world to our great state. It is an asset that is worth protecting for future generations, but the issue I have with this is that the government's whole approach is to blame one sector.

During the committee process, representatives from different groups complained about the limited time they had to prepare for this process. This was certainly highlighted by the Cape York Aboriginal communities which stated there was simply not enough time for them to comprehend and understand the potential impacts this bill would have on the communities of Cape York.

This bill has a one-size-fits-all approach, yet let us put the Great Barrier Reef into some context. The Great Barrier Reef stretches 2,300 kilometres and covers an area of 344,400 square kilometres. Along this vast distance there are different soil types and topography that react differently to weather events and erosion. Some areas are highly vulnerable to soil erosion whilst others are not. Therefore, the one-size-fits-all approach will be very difficult to implement in some areas yet easier in others.

In addition, not knowing what the standard will be places further questions around the issue. There were some regulations released last night, but opposition members have no idea what they were. That leaves the decision to one individual who is beyond the scrutiny of the parliament, and this was a major point of contention for the majority of stakeholders.

Equally concerning for agricultural groups is the paltry sum of \$25 million that was going to be allocated over four years to help farmers and graziers meet the new guidelines. This paltry amount will do little to help; it is a drop in the ocean. In his submission, Professor Brodie stated that the real cost will be in the ballpark of \$10 billion over 10 years, and the farmers will be forced to bear much of that cost themselves. This would be simply unattainable for farmers. It will force farmers off the land. This will also have a domino effect through other industries that rely on the farming sector. There is no better example of that than the sugar-milling industry. As we all know, sugar mills require a certain volume of cane to make their mill viable. If the mill falters, the other industries that rely on those mills will also falter. Therefore, there is a complete domino effect all the way along the Queensland coast when it comes to farming and other industries.

As I stated earlier, each region reacts differently due to soil types, topography and terrain. The reef south of Cairns is in a better condition than the reef north of Cairns, which certainly does raise some questions. I spoke to one of the submitters after a hearing and he spoke about the numerous cyclones that went through those areas, causing quite a bit of damage. Many farmers have been

implementing best practice techniques and have reached accreditation whilst others are working towards it. It is in the best interests of farmers to look after their soil and their farming properties and to ensure that they remain viable. This also includes ensuring fertiliser remains on the land, which allows a maximum crop yield. The last thing a farmer wants to see is his fertiliser going down the river and off the coast, because it costs them money.

Therefore, we need to customise approaches and help farmers bear the cost of bringing them up to these standards. As I said, each farming area may have a different requirement. For example, some could build water retention ponds to stop water going out to sea so it can then be recycled on the property. Others could reinforce gullies for graziers to limit soil erosion in those areas. Potentially these can be significant and, therefore, cost vast amounts of funds.

During the Brisbane hearing I asked the WWF and the Environmental Defenders Office about another issue. I asked them their opinions about the dropping of dredge spoil onto the Great Barrier Reef and what we could do with this. Ms Pointon stated—

Firstly, you could require, as is required for capital dredge spoil, that it is dumped on land. We have required it of capital dredge spoil. There is no reason not to require it of maintenance dredge spoil as well.

Mr Hoobin then jumped in and said—

Just quickly on that point, I think it is one of the other glaring omissions from this bill. As Revel says, it is being dumped on the reef right now. We are spending all this money and we are asking the farmers to do all this work, yet we are allowing ports and the major companies they support to dig stuff up and dump it directly in the reef. It seems a crazy thing to do. It is best on land but, if not, at least offset it and create revenue streams for more on-ground action in the catchment.

Therefore, this legislation still allows dredge spoil to be dumped directly onto the reef and members opposite continuously attack farmers over water quality issues. Therefore, I can certainly understand why certain individuals in the hearings brought this up with me and expressed their frustration.

If the agricultural industries are forced to do all this heavy lifting without the necessary support they desperately need, an industry that creates jobs and wealth in our state with a domino effect through other industries, I fear it will be too great a burden for the sector to bear. Therefore, I say that we need to protect the reef, but we need to give the farmers the help they desperately need and want.

In Mackay one of the farmers stated that they go out snorkelling on the reef on a regular basis. They love to go out there. It is a family outing on the weekend for them to go out and enjoy the reef. The last thing these people want to do is destroy something they hold so dear, something they have grown up with and something they want their grandkids and their great-grandkids—future generations—to see. Therefore, we need to support our farmers in this endeavour. We need to give them the help they desperately need. If we are here to protect the reef, we need to ensure that we best equip our local communities and our farmers.