




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (6.16 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. Coral reefs are said to be the rainforests of the ocean, teeming with life and vital to our underwater ecosystems. The Great Barrier Reef is the largest living structure on earth, home to six of the world's seven marine turtle species, 3,000 corals and 1,700 species of fish. It is a cultural icon. It encompasses lands treasured by more than 70 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups for tens of thousands of years and whose sovereignty over those waters has never been ceded. The reef itself is said to be more than 500,000 years old.

Essentially, every member's contribution in this debate has acknowledged that we all love the reef, but I am still not clear whether most politicians actually fathom the incredible cultural and environmental significance that is at risk here. I am staggered—genuinely staggered—at some of the opposition members' contributions that appear to dispute the clear message from all credible scientists—that if we continue on our current path the reef is completely cooked. The member for Callide, for one, authoritatively stated that coral cover has not decreased. It is proper tinfoil hat stuff. Cherrypicked figures and references to increased coral cover at one point in the southern reef are provided to insinuate that everything is hunky-dory, but clearly it is not. Let us put the risks and costs of inaction in language that the LNP hardheads might understand. It is a source of jobs for more than 60,000 people and contributes more than \$6 billion to the economy annually.

The government says it wants to protect the reef, but we know that by far the most significant threat to the reef is inaction on climate change. Government members and the Premier constantly repeat that they accept the science of climate change, but I cannot help but notice the repeated refrain in this debate that climate change is just one of two major threats to the reef along with poor water quality. I do not think that repetition is a coincidence. I think it is a deliberate attempt to downplay the government's inaction on climate change and to mask the hypocrisy of accepting the science but continuing to expand our fossil fuel exports in a manner completely inconsistent with what the science says is necessary.

The most recently published Great Barrier Reef outlook report states unequivocally that climate change is the primary threat to the Great Barrier Reef and that, 'The current rate of global warming will not allow the maintenance of a healthy reef for future generations.' The government shamelessly promotes and supports new thermal coalmining in the Galilee Basin. The level of cognitive dissonance here is truly astounding. Our leading reef scientists predict that, if we do not make extraordinary efforts to tackle these leading threats—climate change foremost of these—we will lose the reef as we know it. That is not hyperbole. Those are the facts.

This legislation should go some way to help improve water quality. For that reason I absolutely support the bill but, without action on climate change, remaining coral will die and ocean acidification will continue to intensify. The reef will be lost anyway. Calling for new tenders on gas projects and

opening the Galilee Basin to produce new thermal coal is tantamount to signing the death warrant for the Great Barrier Reef. Every single member of the government and the opposition supports that and it is utterly unconscionable.

As we have heard a number of times in this debate, last month's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority outlook report downgraded the reef's future prospects from poor to very poor. Scientists at the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority say that leading reasons for these declining prospects are primarily climate change and water quality but there are a plethora of other threats, most caused by human activity. The need for reef water quality improvement could not be more clearly framed than it is by this most recent report.

The IPCC has also recently reported some hard truths that inform this assessment from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, which I have raised here previously. Even if we achieve the Paris Agreement's target of 1½ degrees of average global temperature increase, coral reefs are expected to decline by a further 70 per cent to 90 per cent. Achieving this goal requires us to move completely past thermal coal power generation by 2050. It is a tough task, but it is not impossible. The IPCC tells us that, if average global temperature rises by two degrees, the consequence is that more than 99 per cent of coral cover will be lost.

Against this backdrop and the government's commitment to new thermal coalmining in the Galilee Basin it is hard to not feel cynical about this bill. Nonetheless, the legislation is necessary to improve the reef's resilience and give it a fighting chance if we, in fact, see the necessary action on climate change. The bill is a good start but could be improved and it leaves some significant gaps unaddressed. It provides a good framework for tackling sediment nutrient loading. That much is clear. I suggest that it could go further, even in just addressing water quality issues, as I will detail in a moment. To be effective, this regime will need to be backed up by tight regulations that provide the necessary standards and implementation detail and the resources to ensure that the new regulations are effectively monitored and enforced.

I am also of the view that a purely punitive approach is not enough. Certainly, the proposed enforcement measures are necessary, but much more needs to be done to work with the agricultural sector and industry in improving these standards. The government should also be proactively employing more Landcare advisers to work collaboratively with the agricultural sector and peak bodies to improve practices.

Queensland Labor's recent approval and ongoing support for Adani's new thermal coal project is important to discussions about the reef not only because of the enormous contribution of this project to climate change. I think there is little doubt that the approval of Adani indicates this government's tacit willingness to sacrifice one of the natural wonders of the world to escape the heat from the Murdoch press for a little while and to firm up some political donations from Labor's mates in big mining. Beyond the climate change impacts, a key part of Adani's mine is a massive expansion of the Abbot Point Coal Terminal, which is in the Great Barrier Reef riparian area.

Mr BROWN: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The member for Maiwar should be well aware that he has a bill before parliament that directly addresses this issue. Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek your guidance to bringing him back to the bill at hand and the focus of the sedimentation run-off.

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you. Member for Maiwar, before I get you to resume your speech, I give you some guidance that you have a bill with regard to this matter. I suggest that you do not stray into that territory. There will be plenty of time to address that. Could you come back to the long title of this bill.

Mr BERKMAN: Mr Deputy Speaker, I appreciate your guidance and the assistance from the member for Capalaba—always, always a solid contributor to this House in debates. Beyond the climate change impacts, a key part of Adani's mine is the massive expansion of the Abbot Point Coal Terminal, which is itself in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area. That means more industrialisation in the area, more water pollution, more coal barges floating through reef, more risk of disasters that would dump dirty black rocks on one of nature's crown jewels.

In recent years, research from the Australian Institute of Marine Science—or AIMS—demonstrates the impacts of coal dust on corals, seagrass and reef fish. Coal dust is a real concern for the health of the reef in the same way that sediment loading and nutrient loading are, which are addressed by this bill. Twice in recent years—not just once, but twice—Adani has breached its licence conditions and released coal-laden water into the waters of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area. Adani at Abbot Point was issued a temporary emissions licence to account for the massive rainfall brought by Cyclone Debbie, but ended up breaching even the amended, expanded licence by 800 per cent.

As I understand this bill, it will go absolutely no way to addressing this kind of impact on reef water quality and the health of those ecosystems, nor will it do anything to address the ongoing lawful dumping of enormous amounts of maintenance dredge spoil offshore in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area. Although the agriculture sector is doing the heavy lifting to reduce sediment loads from across reef catchments, port operators are allowed to sully the waters of this World Heritage area with impunity.

In conclusion, I want to again use this opportunity to plead with the government to take action on climate change seriously, starting with a moratorium on any new thermal coal and gas mining. Our reef depends on it, so do all of our children's futures and so do our Pacific neighbours, whose homes are already disappearing. The measures imposed by this bill are a positive step and, on that basis, I support both its intent and substance, but it will all be for nought without the most urgent possible action on climate change.