




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (6.25 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. That should come as no surprise to anybody. The primary policy objective of this bill is to amend the Environmental Protection Act 1994 and, in doing so, strengthen the protections of the Great Barrier Reef.

The Great Barrier Reef, World Heritage listed for its ecological significance, outstanding universal value, exceptional biodiversity and national beauty, is the world's largest coral reef ecosystem. It is visible from space. It extends for over 2,300 kilometres along Queensland's coastline—from the Torres Strait in the north to Bundaberg in the south—covering an area pretty much the same size as Japan. With more than 2,900 individual coral reefs, which represent about 10 per cent of all the coral reef areas in the world, the Great Barrier Reef sustains extensive seagrass meadows, mangrove forests and soft-bottom habitats and is home to a diversity of species, including 1,625 types of fish, 600 types of coral, 100 species of jellyfish, 3,000 varieties of molluscs, 30 species of whales and dolphins and 133 varieties of sharks and rays.

The reef continues to be Australia's greatest natural attraction, recognised as an iconic experience locally, nationally and internationally. The importance of the Great Barrier Reef to our First Nations people is significant and heavily recognised. The Great Barrier Reef is also a significant economic asset. We have heard speakers talk about other industries and their importance. The worth of the Great Barrier Reef has been estimated at \$56 billion. It supports reef-dependent and reef associated communities and industries in a range of commercial activities and attracts millions of visitors from around Australia and the world. The Great Barrier Reef provides up to 60,000-plus jobs and generates an annual revenue of approximately \$6 billion for the Australian and, more importantly, Queensland economy.

I have spent over 28 years of my professional life diving, working on, promoting and selling the Great Barrier Reef across Australia and, fortunately at somebody else's cost, around the world. For the people of my electorate of Cairns, the Great Barrier Reef is fundamental to their economy. Tourism operators have increased their stewardship through contributing to reef monitoring, adhering to responsible reef practices, trialling small scale reef restoration initiatives and supplying the delivery of quality reef interpretation and education via accredited master reef guides. We all recognise that everybody has to play a part—not just the canefarmers. Every industry has a part to play and the tourism industry is certainly doing that.

The reef continues to provide not just thousands of jobs and career opportunities, but is a magnet for investment not only in Cairns but also in other regions throughout our great state. When one looks at the local investment in Cairns we see amazing and unique infrastructure like Skyrail. If the Barrier Reef were not there Skyrail would not exist. There are over 300 tourism products in Cairns alone. They would not exist if we did not have the Great Barrier Reef.

When we look at international investment, one only has to recall the vast investment made by the Japanese company Daikyo back in the eighties and nineties that contributed to a number of hotels being built in Cairns. Daikyo built one of the most impressive golf courses in the world. Another example of investment is Cornes & Co, who for the last 30 years have owned and operated the Quicksilver Group, one of the largest employers in the region of the Great Barrier Reef. There are existing industries making huge impacts on people's lives. People are receiving wages, they are paying for their kids to go to school, they are paying their mortgages. This is a key and integral part of the economic cycle in North Queensland.

Recently, we have seen Mr Gussan Aboud make a personal investment of over \$600 million for three new hotels in Cairns. All of these investments have and continue to provide jobs and careers. Last year in Cairns alone we welcomed 2,900,000 domestic and international visitors and the Great Barrier Reef was the drawcard. When some of my colleagues in the chamber talk about the economic importance of the Great Barrier Reef, we are living it, we are looking at it.

The undisputed science and I reiterate that, the undisputed science, tells us that climate change and poor water quality are recognised as significant threats to the long-term health and resilience of the Great Barrier Reef. Climate change is already affecting the Great Barrier Reef's corals and the ecosystem they sustain through sea surface temperature increases, ocean acidification, altered weather patterns—as we have heard, more intense storms, more powerful cyclones—and rising sea levels. Tasked to assess and report on the Great Barrier Reef's health every five years, the 2014 Great Barrier Reef outlook report identified that, even with positive actions undertaken since 2009 to reduce threats and to improve resilience, the Great Barrier Reef remains at risk from a cumulative effect of impacts including climate change, poor water quality from land based run-off, impacts from coastal developments and some remaining impacts from fishing. The bill will achieve its objectives through a regulatory framework that ensures that reef water quality targets for nutrients and sediments are taken into account in regulatory decision-making; the broad application of minimum regulated standards to eliminate high-risk practices that contribute to excessive nutrient and sediment run-off; producers move to standards that align with recognised benchmarks for agricultural industries under the Paddock to Reef Water Quality Risk Framework while maintaining productivity and, most importantly, profitability; new development can occur without compromising the water quality gains made to date, while also minimising the regulatory burden on existing activities; good performers that utilise practices with low water quality risks are recognised and rewarded; and existing industry-led best management practice programs or the development of new programs can provide participants with an alternative pathway for meeting regulatory requirements.

On 4 March 2019 the committee invited stakeholders and subscribers to make written submissions on the bill. The committee received, I am told, 230 submissions. The committee received a public briefing about the bill from the Department of Environment and Science and the committee held public hearings in Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville, Mackay and Bundaberg. I was very pleased to join the meeting in Cairns and see it well attended. A significant number of interested members of the public were in attendance at each one of these hearings, showing the interest and the importance of this particular issue. It is important to note that the government has undertaken significant consultation with all relevant sectors as to how best to meet these policy recommendations. Any claims that the policies in this proposed framework are not based on evidence and thorough consultation is not based on fact and ignores the significant work done in this area.

The Department of Environment and Science is taking a multipronged approach to working with farmers to reduce pollutant run-off. This includes investment in a number of initiatives, such as industry best management practice programs, on-ground works, landholder extension and education activities, more monitoring to understand the issues and where to invest, regulatory proposals and innovation to trial new solutions.

The department also implemented a targeted compliance program in 2016 to increase the adoption of the existing fertiliser use and record-keeping provisions under chapter 4A of the Environmental Protection Act. There have been 629 sugarcane compliance activities undertaken since the completion of the program. Follow-up visits indicate that the compliance program is successfully prompting growers to amend their practices in relation to fertiliser application rates, soil testing and record keeping.

As a person who has spent the last 28 years making a living off the Great Barrier Reef, I had great pleasure talking to my brother-in-law and my father-in-law this morning—funnily enough, both of them canefarmers. I broached this topic with them and I was told there are a few changes but they will be right, it should not be a big issue, we have to look after the reef. They said it had been a good process

and they were pretty happy. They said there are a couple who will whinge and carry on but fundamentally will get away with it. They indicated that they should be right and in principle they agreed with the protection of the reef.

Contrary to what some in this chamber are suggesting, we on this side know that farmers are part of the solution. We do not build a wall and create an issue; the dull and ignorant will pursue that. The science is clear and undisputed and this legislation backs the science. As a person who has made a living off the Great Barrier Reef, I am proud to commend this bill to the House.