




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (4.32 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I have read through some of the technical points in relation to this bill. Not surprisingly, a lot of alarm bells went off. I see that this bill regulates nutrient management plans and other incentive programs that were funded by the federal government. Those programs will no longer be supported by the federal government, as they will be regulated practices. That is cost shifting compliance onto the farmers, who mostly cannot afford it.

This legislation makes no allowances for the impact of natural disasters and weather events. Anyone who knows anything about land would realise how big a problem natural disasters and weather events are. I also see in the bill that 33.7 million hectares in Great Barrier Reef catchments are all blanketed with one-size-fits-all legislation. I heard the member for Gregory say that, in regard to his electorate, a farmer up to 900 kilometres inland from the Great Barrier Reef could be affected just as much as a farmer who is farming inland from the mouth. This is exactly what happened with the tree-clearing legislation. Queensland is far too big for one set of laws. The government cannot apply this blunt instrument of legislation. It is clumsy and irresponsible.

The Australian and Queensland governments are jointly investing roughly \$200 million a year into the reef's health. The Australian government has announced another \$500 million boost for reef protection. That works out to \$1.28 billion that has been committed over five years to the 2050 reef action plan. Unquestionably, the reef is a big concern for everyone. I do not think that any member in this House has a mortgage on feeling for the reef and wanting the reef to be there in the future. It reeks of hypocrisy that we have environmental challenges throughout the state—prickly acacia, feral pigs, feral cats, noxious woody weeds—that get a measly little bit of money spent on them, yet that sort of money goes on the reef. It is hard to see how that approach is commensurate with a holistic focus on environment. It just reeks of politics being applied to an issue.

There are reports that demonstrate that over 90 per cent of the sediment that is supposed to be causing all of the problems for the reef is falling well short of the reef. Regardless of the source of that sediment, the farmers are going to be the ones who will pay. I am also aware of some interesting facts about the level of sediment coming out of national parks.

This issue is about science. People are hiding behind the science and saying that it should not be questioned because 90 per cent of the scientists are saying it. We really cannot go past the fact that Peter Ridd, who has dedicated his life to science, would walk away from a career into oblivion. He has nothing to gain from this. He is not saying that there is no problem, he is just saying, 'You need to question this stuff. This stuff has to be looked at.' What a remarkable thing for someone to do. We have to take notice of that person and ask, 'Why would someone who is so qualified step outside his career into oblivion just to challenge that?' We should be objective and challenge the science. It is not sufficient to say that the science says it. Let us unpack the science and look at it. We need to ground truth it.

One thing I like to pride myself on is talking to people on the ground. I do not live near the reef. I have probably been to the reef as many times as other members in this chamber have. I have been there many times snorkelling and fishing, but I talk to a lot of people who go out to the reef. I find that they are trying to be objective when they say, 'Rob, there are parts of the reef that we have seen go down and sometimes it is from cyclones—who knows—but there are a lot of places that are blossoming and where the reef is expanding.' I get a lot of mixed views from the people I talk to about the reef. When I talk to people who are on the ground, the issue is not as cut and dried as we are led to believe. This legislation is being rammed through and it will have such a big impact on Queensland industry, yet we are not supposed to question it. Anyone who questions the science is ostracised. That is the whole point of having an argument. If the members opposite bring up these facts, they need to have some answers.

In relation to the vegetation management legislation, there was so much rubbish being dished up in this House about the SLATS reports. One of the reports that was damning of the clearing that was taking place remarked that Boulia shire was a place of concern. Anyone who knows the Boulia shire would see the humour in that remark. You could burn a tank of diesel going between two trees in Boulia, but that shire was identified by the science as being a reason for the vegetation management laws. We saw in those SLATS reports that there was no regard given to the encroachment of vegetation.

The other week I was up in the cape where carbon credits are being sold. Ironically, the cold burns are resulting in thickening scrub, meaning more erosion and less groundcover. Anyone with the slightest bit of common sense or scientific knowledge would know that that is going to create more run-off into the reef. We are also not building any dams, which would seem to be the best sediment traps out there. We cannot build those. They seem to be an affront to these environmental people. This issue is embroiled in politics and needs to be debated properly in this House.

I spent a number of years living in Townsville. I spent time with a lot of people who worked in the industry and who also expressed a lot of concerns. There is an industry building around this science. I am not casting aspersions on all reef scientists. I am sure that most of them have a lot of integrity but, in this day and age, it is not much of a stretch of your imagination to think that, if a scientist is getting funding from reporting, 'There are problems and we need to have a better look at this,' there would be some influence and they would create alarmism. That alarmism has not been very good for our tourism industry. Living out in Mount Isa, all I hear about the reef is that it is bad and that it is dying. That is all I hear on the TV.

If there is a problem, let us have a look at it. It does not help tourism numbers on the reef, which are down. It would be a very sad reflection on this parliament if we did have some scrutiny on this science and it said it is not as bad as we think it is. There has been so much talk about this, it has been highly politicised, which must be damaging to the tourism industry. Living in Mount Isa all I hear is that the reef is dying. Presumably those overseas would be thinking it is dying and therefore why would they visit it. That correlates with the decline in numbers of tourists in the north. That needs to be a consideration.

Southern Gulf NRM, a natural resource management group in my electorate, does a terrific job. They cover a vast area with a variety of bioregions within it. There are seven people on the staff. About 40 people work in NQ Dry Tropics. I have asked why the disparity, as they have a much smaller footprint and it would presumably be a lot less technical area to deal with. They have told me, 'It is at the reef. Mate, you get funding if you mention the reef.' I hear that time and time again up north. We do need to study the reef. There needs to be reef science. That needs to be questioned as well, without name calling, being called a Neanderthal and told you do not know anything about it. I do. I spend time up there. I spend time with people on the ground. We are entitled to a view and I think there is a lot of validity in it.

Farmers have their hands tied behind their back. They are up against subsidised world markets. What better example than the sugar industry with the heavily subsidised Indian sugar killing them at the moment. In the Burdekin the majority of farmers are operating below the cost of production. They are struggling as it is. It is a \$4 billion industry. We are only talking about sugar cane. Many more industries will be hurt by this legislation. It is assumed these producers will keep providing. These industries will not keep providing to the people of this state. This is not just an issue for the north, it is an issue for the state. You cannot keep doing this to farmers and industry. They will not keep delivering. We will wake up in 10 years with no way to pay these bills. We need these industries. Maybe some of them do have to curb their practices. I am not saying they are all good producers; but this is not the way to go about it.

In the next parliament the KAP will be demanding a repeal of these laws in 100 days. They are no good and they do not belong here. We also call for an audit in the federal parliament of the reef science. I think it is important for people to have some clarity around this and see where all this money

is going. I think there is a very genuine need. I think that it is a legitimate call that needs support in the federal parliament. We want to see validity around this science. This is bad legislation to try to fix this supposed problem.