




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

Record of Proceedings, 17 September 2019

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

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development) (5.13 pm): I rise to support the bill. The Great Barrier Reef is the largest living structure on this planet. We have the privilege and responsibility to be the custodians of the reef. It is home to an incredible array of unique living organisms. Its outstanding biodiversity is celebrated the world over. Of course, it is of vital cultural significance to the traditional owners who have lived amongst its shores for over 65,000 years. On that point, I acknowledge the excellent contribution to this debate by the minister and by the member for Cook.

Visiting the reef, one cannot help but be moved. One feels an obligation to protect and care for the reef which has existed for an estimated 500,000 years. It is our responsibility in this House today to ensure it continues to exist for generations to come. Today the reef is facing its biggest challenge yet. The impact of climate change and water quality is threatening the health of the reef and the marine ecosystems that depend upon it. This bill will address this issue of water quality by tackling both agricultural and industrial land based sources of water pollution such as sewage treatment plants, aquaculture and mining, as well as farm run-off.

The build-up of nutrient and sediment loads in the reef system due to run-off is a direct cause of coral cover decline. The Australian Institute of Marine Science has shown that the Great Barrier Reef lost around 50 per cent of its coral cover between 1985 and 2012. The run-off is also linked to algal blooms, loss of seagrass coverage and species decline. We must improve water quality to ensure the future of the reef.

The Great Barrier Reef has a number of economic, social and iconic values and attracts two million visitors each year and contributes more than \$6 billion to the economy while providing more than 64,000 full-time jobs. The tourism sector is dominated by small businesses, representing over 90 per cent of businesses. Those small business tourism operators employ the majority of the tourism workforce and are the backbone of the industry. That is why we have to continue to invest and protect the reef. This includes investing \$25 million into the Great Barrier Reef island resorts to boost tourism in the region, creating 150 jobs. Across the state I have met with business community leaders who are struggling as a result of declining reef quality. The international perception is one that we absolutely have to address.

The Palaszczuk government has committed over \$330 million to improve the health of the reef. We are committed to fighting for these jobs and ensuring the reef's longevity to ensure the continued economic prosperity of Queensland. We have to improve water quality to protect the reef. As its custodians, we must protect the reef, and that is what these amendments will do.

These amendments will regulate the agricultural activities in all six reef regions and expand the minimum commodity standards from grazing and sugar cane to include grains and other horticulture. New cropping activities will need to comply with farm design standards. However, existing farmers who have already voluntarily moved to improved practice standards will see little impact, and that is the point.

I understand some of the concerns of the Queensland agricultural sector and their concerns about regulatory burden. I want to acknowledge that many farmers right now are doing the right thing. They limit their run-off. However, at a macro level this is not happening fast enough to save the reef. We are at a tipping point. To ensure the future of the reef we must act now. To protect the jobs and the small businesses that rely on the tourism industry we must act now. I commend the bill to the House.