




Speech By  
**Stephen Andrew**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

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

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (5.17 pm): I rise to speak on the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. To put my position straight up, I am strongly opposed to the bill in its present form. From my position on the crossbench, I wish to take this opportunity to enlighten those most deeply affected as to what I believe is going on and who is responsible for it. The new laws purport to reduce water pollution from agricultural land use entering reef waters. It will therefore affect cattle grazing, horticulture and commercially produced bananas, sugar cane and grains across multiple catchment regions from well north of my electorate down to the Burnett-Mary region.

In effect, it will be Central and North Queensland that bear the brunt of the new legislation and not population heavy South-East Queensland. As raised by others previously, the reef bill hands over considerable powers to government bodies to change farming standards and cropping activities, adding yet another layer of regulation on farming at a time when Queensland farmers are recovering from previous natural disasters. In addition, changes to the EPA will see compliance officers attend farms to assess operations against the new practice standards and request information about farming activities. There is a maximum fine of \$222,194 if these practice standards are not met. You could argue that the penalty for murder in this state is not even this harsh. It is over the top.

If farmers, growers and producers fail to provide the new regulatory bodies with the information required on fertiliser and chemical use, soil testing and crop yield, there will be a fine of \$6,672 imposed for each failure to produce the data sought. Who is responsible for this bill and for these manifestly huge penalties? One only needs to follow the money to see who exactly is funding the reef bill and the 'joint' bipartisan plan of action between both state and federal governments.

Firstly, a federal government LNP press release of 30 August 2019 from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority stated that the Australian and Queensland governments were jointly investing over \$2 billion over the next decade under a comprehensive plan to protect the Reef 2050 Plan, which includes monitoring and nutrient management. Secondly, the federal LNP environment minister, Sussan Ley, also issued a press release on the same day as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. She advised that on 30 April 2019 she tabled the Morrison government's \$1.2 billion investment in the reef and its \$3.5 billion Climate Solutions Package to meet international targets.

Thirdly, the federal environment minister further announced the launch of a number of reef initiatives that are being taken by the Morrison government and specifically referred to 'the rollout of a targeted sediment and nutrient reduction program focused on practice change and landscape remediation across seven priority reef catchments'. The press release specifically confirms that the Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan is a joint federal LNP and state ALP government exercise.

It would seem therefore that the federal LNP and the Queensland Labor governments are as guilty as each other for imposing such hardship on Central and North Queensland farmers, growers and producers. Under the Reef 2050 Plan and other measures, the federal Liberal-Nationals will provide \$1.2 billion towards reef protection whilst state Labor are contributing \$258 million through to 2025. How much of this eventual planned investment over the next decade will go to farmers?

I put a peg squarely in the sand when I came down here and presented some ideas on making fallow crop valuable—go in where there is 60 per cent of cleared fallow land. I believe that the money from the 2050 plan should at least be put towards that straight up. Without having to dig any holes, we could stop particulate matter, hold run-off and improve water quality straight away. I spoke to the minister about that. I am hopeful that between the state and federal bureaucracies they will come to that conclusion without spending any more money the way they have been doing.

How much of this money will actually provide benefit to farmers, growers, graziers and producers, or will it just go towards white-collar welfare and paper-pushing office jobs? When I go and see the farmers out there and I ask who has come to see them and who is doing what, no-one knows anything. They have spent tens of thousands of their own money making sure that they are stopping run-off, making sure that they get the best out of their fertilisers and their paddocks and looking after their ecosystems.

Both major parties have already decided that these laws are to be introduced and have begun allocating funds to various regulatory bodies to be set up. An example of how this money will be frittered away on anything other than helping farmers was the federal Liberal government's outrageous granting of \$442 million to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation—a grant that was never put to public tender and that the Australian National Audit Office even said was a 'highly irresponsible decision'.

Some of this federal money should have been used to back up the scientific evidence, independently checking the science and assuring the quality of the science. We would feel a lot better and more secure if they did that rather than what we are doing right now by jumping into this.

I worry about the situation that we as a parliament are not whistling for the banks to go and have a look at the farmers and say, 'This is going to become more expensive for you guys. How can we give you loans going forward if your yield per hectare goes down and it may cost more per hectare to deliver?' What happens when their profitability goes down?

**Mr Dametto:** Sends them to the wall.

**Mr ANDREW:** They go to the wall and it is a fire sale to where? Someone else, some corporation, comes in. I have sat in here for the last term of government listening to the government, the opposition and the crossbench members and all I hear is attacks on everything that begins with 'c'—cane, cattle, coal. It is a cold way of delivering things to the region when we should be thinking about these people—the primary producers who pay tax, who pay for our bureaucrats, who pay for us to be here, who make sure that the state is in good form in terms of export dollars.

What will this do to the confidence of people coming into the industry? What about the succession plans of the farmers and their families? Do we ever think about that? Do they go in there now and say, 'I'm not going to let you go into this industry, but we had a great thing.' I can go back to my great-great-grandparents—the South Sea islanders who came here and delivered the sugar industry for nothing, and we are losing it for what? It is ridiculous. We need to rethink what we are doing here. There is no need for this.

I spoke to Joe Galea. He has spent 50 years on the farm. He was sitting in front of me with his wife and his wife was crying. They are not people who dress up in a fancy way. They do not own a fancy car. They have spent 50 years on the farm. They have \$40,000-odd in water costs. They have no money. They are selling their property. It is 400-acre farm and they have nothing. They have no money in the bank. Every year they whittle away their savings. He says, 'Stephen, what can we do? Why are we doing this? Why are we going through this? The costs of things now are too exorbitant. I just don't get it.' I go to meetings with all the farmers and they are standing there saying, 'Stephen, we are just working for the community. We're not making one cent ourselves, but we are giving people jobs in the community and we are going backwards doing it.'

Is this what we do here as a parliament, as a government? I thought we backed business. I have heard members stand up and say, 'Small business is the powerhouse of Queensland.' Well, prove it. Show me where we are doing it. Show me where we are giving them a hand and some leeway, rather than putting more regulation on them and forcing more red tape on them. We are not doing that.

I spoke to Justin Camilleri. I have so many different people who come to me all the time. We are talking about the Great Barrier Reef. I have never seen one whale wash up on the reef. I have fished them all—Bugatti, Round, Square, Stevens, Pompey. I could name a hundred of them. I have looked at them through viewing buckets catching trout—and I know. You never see anything washed up on that reef. I have seen a whale dead on the beach in Mirani at Sarina Beach where I live. Everything I see that goes into the ocean generally comes through the river and ends up straight back on the beach. Even offshore when a boat breaks down, where does it end up? It ends up on the beach, but we are telling everybody that everything ends up on the reef. I do not see how.

Given the substantial federal government contributions and policy directives, it remains to be seen if a future LNP government will rescind this bill. It will be interesting to see what happens if they get in at the next election, because their federal counterparts have put a lot of money into making this happen.