




Speech By
Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

Record of Proceedings, 22 October 2019

RECREATION AREAS MANAGEMENT (FEES) AMENDMENT REGULATION

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (6.25 pm): I am very happy to rise to support the disallowance motion. There is nothing more Labor than increasing a tax. You can forget about getting in your car and going for a fish or a camp in Queensland. Under Labor, you pay more and you get less. The member for Gladstone was just talking about his son. He said, 'I spoke to my son and he said, "I have to pay five bucks a month more for my beach permit."' I was talking to my son, I was talking to my second son and I was talking to my daughter, and I said, 'Do you know what they are doing? They are increasing the charges to drive on the beach over at Straddie.' They said, 'Dad, there's nothing like a commie to do it in for all of us, is there!'

I have listened to a lot of drivel in this place, but what I have heard for the last 45 minutes just about tops the list. We are hearing that this money has to be equalised. I knew the equalisation argument would come up: 'It is the same as Moreton but less than Rainbow Beach because we need to spend the money to make sure that the tracks and everything are all looked after.' I have been to Rainbow Beach and I can tell you that this government is not spending the money anywhere along those camp sites through that part of the world. Drive along and see the rubbish sitting behind the dunes. Drive along and see the toilet paper that litters the place. Drive along and see the fireplaces, the glass and the rubbish. There is no maintenance being done at Rainbow Beach, Minister Lynham.

An opposition member: None.

Mr NICHOLLS: None whatsoever. Do you know who looks after the roads over on Moreton Island? It is not the state government; it is the Brisbane City Council. They are the ones who spend the money. They are ripping you off on Moreton—I know because I have just been over there. Now they are going to rip you off on North Stradbroke Island because there are two beach access points. One is at the end of George Nothling Drive and the other is beside the Adder Rock campground as you go on to the beach.

I have been going to North Stradbroke Island for 40 years and those tracks have not got any better over all of that time. The camping spots are not getting any better over all of that time. If you want to get into the Keyholes off Main Beach, it is now blocked off. You cannot get there. You cannot get to Blue Lake either.

This fee is a farce. There is no explanation of where the money is being spent. If it is being spent the same way it is being spent on Moreton Island and Rainbow Beach and the coloured sands, it is being wasted yet again.

I have been visiting North Stradbroke Island, Minjerribah or, as it is most and best loved and known, Straddie for almost 40 years. My wife has been visiting her entire life.

Mr Power: Where's your tinnie?

Mr NICHOLLS: Just sit down and listen. You will learn something.

Mr Power: Where's your tinnie?

Mr NICHOLLS: Just sit down and listen and learn. Stop talking and listen, mate. You have two ears and one mouth—use it that way.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Whiting): Order! Member for Clayfield, you know the standing orders. Put your comments through the chair.

Mr NICHOLLS: I was just taking an interjection, Mr Deputy Speaker. My wife's father visited almost his entire life—in fact, since 1947, when his mother bought a fisherman's shack just below the lighthouse at Point Lookout, a place we still go to holiday many times a year. 'Timbin Timbin' has been a family tradition for our family for 72 years, and all of our kids, their cousins and extended family could not imagine not going to Straddie. My daughter recently had her friends over for a year 11 pre schoolies, following in the tradition of her two older brothers, although with substantially better behaviour.

I mentioned my father-in-law, Robert Paterson, for good reason. Despite his early and untimely death in 2003, his love of the island, of fishing and whales, permeates everything that our family does on Straddie to this day. He was the first what I would call 'scientific' whale watcher at Point Lookout. Back in the early 1980s before it was trendy, before the University of Queensland was there, before the marine department was there—before anyone else was there—he was watching and counting whales from Point Lookout. His research was published in such reputable magazines around the world as *Nature* because of the work that he did there.

In 1980 he saw probably the first whale that had been sighted from North Stradbroke since the end of whaling because tragically people thought those magnificent beasts of the ocean had been lost. He was also appointed honorary curator of whales at the Queensland Museum because of his studies. He held authority to collect dead whales from all Queensland beaches and in fact received the Queensland Museum medal for his work in researching the eastern Australian humpback whale. The reason I know all of this is because I spent a lot of time over there courting his daughter, staring out to sea looking for a whale blow. There would be days and days where all we would do is drink green tea and look at whales. Eventually we were both successful: he saw whales and I married his daughter!

But he was no woolly-headed idealist. He was pragmatic, informed and realistic. He would see this regulation that increases fees for what it is: nothing more—and this is the key point—than an admission of failure by an incompetent government and a tax grab considered in secrecy and imposed on an unsuspecting public. Make no mistake: this is no altruistic move by the government or some mythical equalisation the minister referred to. It is a stark admission of the failure of the Economic Transition Strategy for Straddie. The fact is that at some stage in the next two to three years the money will run out. The six-year Economic Transition Strategy and the \$27 million assigned to it will come to an end, and everyone will be wondering what to do next because it has not worked.

Despite the glossy brochures, the happy snaps and the self-promotion, Straddie is struggling and businesses are struggling. My family and I go to that island many times a year, and we have seen the vacant shops at Dunwich and the closure of the Reach Out chemist at Point Lookout. The fact that the bakery at Point Lookout and the local street shop down at Dunwich have been for sale for five years is all indicative of the economy falling over because this government's Economic Transition Strategy is not working. You do not have to ask me: I went online and had a look. The one completed project on the Minjerribah Futures website is the Peel Island access project. As stated on the website—

An independent preliminary options report produced by Kellogg Brown & Root, which included the findings of the earlier ... regulatory and financial constraints associated with construction and maintenance of all of the access options investigated. **Based on this report, Peel Island access will remain unchanged at this stage.**

That is the extent of the completed reports. Then I had a look at the Minjerribah Futures website and the Dunwich Master Plan: 'Consultation in 2018. No update provided since.' We are still waiting. Then I had a look at the public transport study being undertaken by the department. Public consultation finished at the end of July 2018: 'Draft public transport study to be introduced before the end of 2019'. How is that going? We are two months away and no-one has heard a word about it. Then I had a look at the Minjerribah Futures Research Program, reports 1 and 2, to see what the major hesitations going over to the island are. The report states—

Improving the Experience

- Online survey panelists who did not intend to visit—

they are the ones you do want to go there—

were asked to suggest improvements that would entice them to visit it. The most common suggestions fell into three key areas (i) improving visitor information; (ii) improving accessibility; and (iii) reducing the cost.

When you go to section 3.2.5, 'Reasons for not visiting', the No. 1 reason, which 13.2 per cent of respondents gave—guess what it is—was 'too expensive'.

This is not a sustainable strategy. This is not a strategy that is driven by a plan. This is not a strategy that addresses business needs. In fact, when I look at the Minjerribah spring update—with a nice picture of the minister on the front there—it says that the second round of visitor research is out now. What do most people come for? We heard the minister talk about the Indigenous experience. What does the report actually say? They mostly come for the beach. For the beach! What is mostly on the beach? Cars driving on the beach going fishing and camping. This states—

Looking to take your business to the next level? The Minjerribah Futures team will be working closely with island businesses ... to understand their business needs and interests.

I would have thought that is pretty simple: customers who spend money. That is what you need for businesses to work over there. This is a tax, nothing more. It is a tax on working families; it is a tax on locals; it is a tax on everyone on the island, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. For that reason it should not be supported in this place.