




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

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (4.53 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, specifically surrounding the protection of the Great Barrier Reef and the agricultural lands that adjoin the reef. It is very important that it is clearly on the record that everybody in Queensland absolutely loves the Great Barrier Reef and wants it to be there for generations to come to enjoy. I have dived the reef. I have snorkelled the reef. It is a wonderful, natural tourist attraction.

All of that said, we have to ask ourselves what this bill is trying to achieve. Clearly this bill is trying to achieve politics over policy. One can get no clearer example that this bill is politics over policy than the fact that we are debating it in the CBD of Brisbane rather than on the coastline of Townsville. If we were debating on it the coastline of Townsville then we would be able to hear from the people whose lives will be directly affected, potentially good and bad: those who are in the tourism industry and those who are in the sugar and other agricultural industries. We are not debating it in Townsville; we are debating it in the CBD of Brisbane. It clearly shows that this is all about politics over policy.

The desire of the Labor Party is to atomise the Queensland community into small segments and give them false dichotomies by saying, 'It is either farming or the reef. You cannot have the reef and farming.' This is simply not true. In fact, we owe it to the world, because we are a great scientific state—and Australia is a G20 nation—to show a better way to manage potential conflicts between agriculture and the natural environment.

This Labor government does not want to achieve those outcomes. It wants to bring in a set of regulations that at a whim can be changed by a bureaucrat, who is unelected, who is not answerable to anybody, who is hiding in the shadows somewhere in the dark recesses of the bureaucracy, who can literally take control and ruin people lives, investments and what they have built with the sweat of their brow. A government should not do that.

There will always be devil in the detail. The reason this House exists is to analyse and look at the devil in the detail; to make sure that when decisions are made that affect many groups and many people all over our great state that they are analysed carefully, that they go through a reporting process, that information is gathered, that there are public hearings and that expert opinions are sought. Instead of that we have a bill before us that will just let some bureaucrat somewhere change everything because that is what they feel they should do that day. I think that is a complete abrogation of the government's responsibility to protect our environment and ensure that we have a thriving agricultural sector going forward.

It is the desire of those opposite to send the virtual signal up that they are the only people who can protect the environment, the only side of politics that will be able to save planet earth. It is an absolute load of nonsense. The simple facts are that if we end up with zero agriculture we will have to import all of our food from other places that have far worse environmental practices than we have in

Queensland. We should use science and our capacity to find solutions to managing the environment and provide that to other places in the world so that they too can protect their environments and still have a thriving agricultural sector. Simply talking to the noisy greens in the CBD of Brisbane might win those opposite a few seats in Brisbane, but make no mistake, it will not save the reef. The reef itself will be saved by decent science and discussion of the details of how to implement policies and practices—potentially in this place—not by a bureaucrat sitting behind a desk, answerable to nobody. The processes that this House goes through when it affects people's lives are important and should be taken seriously.

Economic modelling from the Australian Sugar Millers Council shows that 22,657 jobs will be directly impacted by decisions that are made in this House in relation to this bill. There are those who would say that the LNP does not have a good history of protecting the reef. The LNP government introduced the toughest laws ever to protect the Barrier Reef, increasing fines for serious environmental harm to the reef to over \$3.5 million or five years in jail. Labor had a chance to support those laws, but they did not. They voted against them. It is interesting that those who claim to be the great advocates of the reef did not want people who have caused serious environmental harm to do five years jail, which was the law that the LNP introduced.

The LNP government immediately acted to cut by 90 per cent Labor's plan to dump 38 million tonnes of dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. I will say that again, because I think people in the Brisbane CBD should hear this: the Labor Party had a plan to dump 38 million tonnes of dredge spoil into the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. When people are out on the streets protesting because they want to protect the reef, they should seriously think about the actions of the minister at that time, Minister Jones, and then think about how they are going to next cast their ballot. The Greens in Brisbane should seriously consider how they are going to next cast their ballot. I am challenged by exactly how much is 38 million tonnes of spoil, but I am pretty sure that Nemo would not appreciate it being dumped on his head. Why on earth somebody would do that and then claim to be the great protector of the reef is beyond me.

What we are seeing is a lot of politics but not a lot of policy. A private bureaucrat, behind closed doors, will be able to take control of how people in the agricultural sector have to go about their business, without debate or open discussion about the detail. Mandating the collection of data and other things will mean there is going to have to be an inbuilt cost imposed on agricultural producers. Unfortunately, that could potentially make them even less competitive in an international market, particularly when people are out there dumping product, as we see at the moment.

Clearly, the way forward is for Queensland to lead in developing practices that allow cooperation between agriculture and a thriving reef. That is what we should be doing. That should be our place in the world, so that we can pass that knowledge on to other societies that have coastal agriculture and reefs. We have the capacity to do that. That is the obligation that we should be passing on. We should be using science and our economic might to show that it is possible for these two things to coexist. That should be done in a voluntary way, so that we bring everybody in Queensland along on the journey. We should not be doing it in a mandatory overbearing way in which a bureaucrat has control.

We know that water quality is going to be key to the long-term future of the reef. We can all agree that we should be doing things to fix it. It should be done through science, it should be done cooperatively and it should be done with the support of the industry so that we can share that knowledge with other places in the world. In that way, we can get better outcomes not just here in Queensland but also on other great dive sites and reefs throughout the planet.