



Speech By  
**Christopher Whiting**

**MEMBER FOR BANCROFT**


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**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (GREAT BARRIER REEF PROTECTION MEASURES) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT ACT, PROCLAMATION**

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

**Disallowance of Statutory Instruments (Cognate Debate)**

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (5.46 pm): I rise to oppose this disallowance motion as will other government members. I will not, as the member for Broadwater said, attempt to paint those opposite as anti reef. I am going to attempt to paint them as anti science. That is a much easier task. I will be using the words of James Joyce to illustrate that point. I firstly want to address the comments made by the member for Broadwater around bureaucrats making changes to these reef regulations. That is nonsense. We have committed to not change these minimum standards for five years. Even if we did, they would have to come back before the parliament.

We have heard earlier today that the Palaszczuk government has a plan to unite and recover for Queensland jobs. The plan means we are bringing forward investment in infrastructure, buying locally in Queensland and supporting Queensland industries and businesses. As part of that plan, we need to make sure that we are protecting the reef as a crucially important asset for our state.

The Great Barrier Reef supports over 60,000 Queensland jobs and contributes over \$6 billion to the Australian economy. It is more than just an economic foundation for our state. It is a part of the natural heritage of every Queenslanders and every citizen in the world. We look after the Great Barrier Reef on behalf on every person in the world. That is our responsibility.

Two of the biggest risks to our stewardship of the Great Barrier Reef are climate change and poor water quality. The LNP seems to believe these are not a problem or need to be ignored. I say to the LNP that the science is clear. Climate change and poor water quality are having bleaching and other impacts. Poor water quality has continued to harm the Great Barrier Reef. This summer we have seen the third, and most widespread, mass coral bleaching event on the reef in the last five years. This event impacted southern areas not previously impacted in the 2016 and 2017 back-to-back bleaching events, as well as northern and central reefs.

Although the extent of the impacts is thought to be less severe than in 2016, the fact that it has occurred so close to the other events means that it looks like it will prevent coral generation. This is also the first time that a mass bleaching event has occurred in the absence of an El Nino episode. While climate change is the biggest threat to reef ecosystems, better water quality is critical to improving reef health. With better water quality, the reef is more resilient and it can recover from events such as coral bleaching and cyclones.

We will no doubt hear tonight the LNP saying that these regulations are an imposition, that they are green tape and that they are an extra burden on farmers. Our action on water quality presents a great opportunity for canefarmers and pastoralists in Queensland. Action on water quality delivers funding to Queensland farms. Like our unite and recover plan, we are investing in Queensland infrastructure, businesses and industry. The government is investing a record \$330 million in the reef region—a lot of that is investment on our farms.

There is the \$10 million Farming in Reef Catchments Rebate Scheme. That gives rebates of up to \$1,000 to support producers to get agronomic advice. The Reef Water Quality Program supports the Grazing Resilience and Sustainable Solutions, GRASS, program. That is a \$6.1 million program supporting beef producers in the Burdekin, Fitzroy and Burnett Mary regions by delivering one-on-one support and tailored land management plans to address land in poor or degraded condition.

The Reef Water Quality Program also supports the \$15 million Landholders Driving Change, LDC, program. That is an NQ Dry Tropics project. That has engaged 80 per cent of graziers, managing almost one million hectares of grazing land in the Bowen, Broken and Bogie catchments. It includes 42 practice change contracts covering 21,945 hectares of grazing land, with 15 small-scale gully works and four large-scale gully works underway. That is estimated to eliminate 5,000 tonnes of sediment being dumped on the reef.

With improved water quality, the reef has a much better chance of recovering from recent climate change and extreme weather events. The short- to medium-term future of the reef will be determined by the action taken, including the programs I have just mentioned, over the next five to 10 years. The science is irrefutable. The time to act is now. That is what we are doing. The reef will not be helped by the LNP wanting to establish an 'Office of Science Quality Assurance'. This is an odd policy designed to undermine scientific rigour. Let us call it the 'Office of Alternative Facts'.

It is a great day to discuss the proposal to establish an 'Office of Alternative Facts' because today is Bloomsday—the day when all the action happened in the James Joyce book *Ulysses*. This is one of the 20th century's greatest books and it contains this quote which is so relevant to this debate: 'I fear those big words, Stephen said, which make us so unhappy.' There are so many big words in these regulations that make the LNP so unhappy—climate change, global warming, greenhouse gases.

How do the LNP deal with the big words and the big concepts like reef water quality that make them so unhappy? They choose new words, choose a new office, choose new facts and choose new arguments. They say things like, 'The science is still undecided,' or 'The science is perhaps unsound.' They say things like, 'More carbon dioxide is a good thing for farmers.' 'We can simply adapt.' 'Climate changes all the time. Remember when the mammoths roamed the earth?' I will always remember that line from those opposite. That will be remembered for years.

Their proposal to oppose these reef regulations and establish an 'Office of Alternative Facts' shows that they are scared of those big concepts like reef water quality and they are scared of those big words. It shows that the only party that can be trusted to take action to help save and protect this international icon, this international asset—the Great Barrier Reef—and to look after the economy is Labor.