



Speech By
Dale Last


MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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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 LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (6.24 pm): I rise to speak in support of the disallowance motion moved by my colleague the member for Broadwater. It is always a pleasure to follow the member for South Brisbane. She asks: what about the tourism jobs? I am going to stand tonight and ask: what about the jobs in the agricultural sector? What about the farmers? When the member for South Brisbane is having a meal tonight she might like to have a look at that meal and ask herself where it came from. While she is doing that she should ask herself where the clothes she is wearing came from, because they came from our hardworking farmers in this state.

I support this motion moved by the member for Broadwater because at the end of the day this legislation is yet another attack on regional Queensland by this government. If this government has its way, if it continues to bring this legislation before this parliament, there will be a wasteland in terms of agriculture from Cairns to Gympie. Its members will not be satisfied until they shut down all the farming operations between Cairns and Gympie.

Members opposite talk about this toxic water run-off from our farms and how it is polluting the reef. I went out to a canefarmer in the Burdekin a few months ago, Russell Hall up at Clare. He waded into his recycle pit. That is where all the water from his irrigation is collected. It is teeming with fish and birdlife. He had a glass with him and he went and filled it with the water and he drank it. I was so confident in him and his farming practices that I did, too. If that water is so toxic, if it is so full of chemicals and pesticides, why would all that fish and birdlife be present in that water? Why would it be clear when it is poured into a glass? We must ask the question: if these farmers are such environmental vandals why is that water quality of such a high standard?

Members opposite cannot have it both ways. Whilst they talk a big game on standing up for primary producers, at the end of the day when they bring legislation like this before the House, their true colours shine through. Is it not ironic that on the same day that the Premier stood up in this place and talked about a multimillion dollar stimulus package for the agricultural sector we are having this debate, which I can tell honourable members is absolutely demonising our farmers who are out there every single day busting their guts to try to make a living. They are doing it tough at the moment. Members can ask any one of them.

Mr STEWART: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I think the member used unparliamentary language.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Burdekin, would you like to withdraw that?

Mr LAST: I withdraw. Our hardworking farmers are out there trying to make a living and are up against it at the moment with depressed world sugar prices. If people go to places like the Burdekin they will find that those entire communities are dependent on the sugar industry and the rural sector. They can travel up the coast and look at a number of towns, and they do not have to go far: Maryborough, Bundaberg, Mackay, all through the Burdekin, Ingham, Innisfail, Mulgrave, Mossman—what would those communities be like without their sugar industry?

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members on my right.

Mr LAST: Our canegrowers have continued to innovate and they have continued to play their part in protecting the Great Barrier Reef. Despite the fact that farmers do not receive BMP funding and pay for the changes out of their own pocket, the number of cane farming enterprises participating in best management practices, as alluded to by the member for Broadwater, continues to increase. In fact, 1,953 cane farming enterprises are now benchmarked under the internationally recognised Smartcane BMP system. Instead of recognising this achievement, this government continues to persecute our sugarcane farmers. I do not know any farmer who puts on more chemical, fertiliser or water than they absolutely need to in order to grow their crops—

An opposition member: They can't afford to. It would cost too much.

Mr LAST:—because that is just like pouring money down the drain. It is in their best interests to retain every megalitre of water on their farms and not see it go down the river. They want to retain it because that is efficiency. They are developing systems—and I have seen it firsthand—and I have seen the cost that these farmers incur in building onsite recycling pits and water storage facilities so that they can recycle this water and engage in best management practices.

Tonight we have heard a lot about science. When I have a question about the Great Barrier Reef—and can I put on the record that I am as passionate as anyone in this place about protecting the Great Barrier Reef and making sure that it is there for future generations—I go to an institute in my electorate called the Australian Institute of Marine Science. I talk to those scientists, because they are at the cutting edge of scientific research when it comes to protection of the Great Barrier Reef in terms of measurements and analysis. That is where we should focus, instead of this scaremongering campaign that we have from those opposite—that the reef is dying and will not be there for the next generation.

The sugar industry supports \$4 billion in economic activity, 22,000 jobs and 10,000 businesses at a time when this state is reeling off the back of the COVID-19 pandemic. How important is that industry to the economic prosperity of this state? The sugar crush has started throughout Queensland and, of course, that generates even more jobs. It is an industry that we should encourage and support because, at the end of the day, those jobs provide much needed income for a lot of families across Queensland.

As members of this House, it is our responsibility to represent our constituents through the good and the bad. We stand or fall based on how we represent our electorate, the people who live there and the businesses that operate there. Every member of this House who voted in support of that reef legislation has let down their primary producers. While those opposite hide behind unelected people, through this disallowance motion the LNP calls on us, the elected members in this place, to be the people who decide the future of this key industry and all the others affected by this legislation. It is about time that those opposite stood up for the people who stood up for them. It is about time that every member in this House treated our primary producers with the respect and dignity that they richly deserve. I will back our farmers every single day of the week and I will stand with them shoulder to shoulder on this issue, because this issue is demonising them. It is having a big impact on them. It has put another level of red tape and bureaucracy on their shoulders that they can ill afford to bear. The first step tonight in supporting our agricultural sector and our farmers is supporting the member for Broadwater's motion.