



Speech By
Lachlan Millar


MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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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 MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (5.53 pm): I rise to support the motion moved by the shadow minister in relation to subordinate legislation Nos 233 and 234 of 2019. Firstly, can I say after hearing the shadow minister and the previous government member that I give a commitment to the Minister for Environment: I am prepared to sit down and work with the minister to do this properly, to make sure that we have a better result for farmers and for the Great Barrier Reef. We might not agree on everything and we might argue over certain issues, but I am happy to sit down with the minister and with agriculture and with the environmentalists and the conservationists to try to work out how we can do this better. That is my commitment to the minister.

I am concerned that these reef regulations breach fundamental legislative principles. I am concerned that they breach the rights of impacted landholders and farmers. I am also concerned that they constitute another attack on Queensland's agriculture and Queensland's regions with no benefit other than to secure preferences for Labor from the Green movement. These regulations are another example of the Labor Party putting its own political interests before the interests of Queensland.

Every Queenslander loves the Great Barrier Reef. Our role as stewards is taken very seriously, particularly by Queenslanders living in adjoining catchments. To give members an understanding, I come from the Emerald irrigation area. I do not have a conflict of interest because my interest in that irrigation property was resolved seven years ago, but I have a strong and firm commitment to the Emerald irrigation area and to the cotton industry where we established best management practices back in 1996. To give members an understanding of best management practices in the cotton industry, we are looking at ISO 9002 as the benchmark that they meet. We have a social licence to be farmers. We understand that and we take that very seriously. The cotton industry has come a long way from the mid-nineties. We treat water quality and our environmental credentials very seriously.

To have legislation like this come into parliament erodes the confidence between government and farmer and government and grazier. It erodes that trust that we need to build up. We have fantastic organisations such as Cotton Australia and the Cotton Research and Development Corporation that have been working very closely together with government—both the state Labor government and the federal government—to make sure that we have a rigorous program in place to meet our environmental credentials. We take them very seriously.

The former speaker from the other side mentioned that we have trouble with big words. We do not have trouble with big words, and saying things like that does not help the relationship between agriculture and the government. We have to work together. Right now agriculture plays a critical role in developing our economic wellbeing over the next 12 months to two years because of COVID-19. Agriculture is there and prepared to do the heavy lifting, along with other industries.

To say that the LNP are about not protecting the Great Barrier Reef is wrong. We love the Great Barrier Reef just as much as those opposite do and we respect that. That is why I am making this commitment to the minister: I am prepared to sit down with the minister to try to work out how we can do this better. We can bring the agriculture sector and the conservationists and the environmentalists together to find a sensible solution. That is what I am asking for. I am not saying I have all the great ideas. What I am saying is let's get together and protect what we have been able to establish over the last 30 years in agriculture to make sure that we have policies in place not only to protect the Great Barrier Reef but also to be able to grow agriculture to boost our economy. That is what we are looking for.

I can tell the minister now that agriculture is wanting to do that. They are sick of being the whipping boys when it comes to environmental regulation in Queensland. They are doing their best. I know that the member for Broadwater's family are involved in cane farms. I know his parents very well. They do more than they need to do—much more—not only because they want to protect what they do but also because they know they have a social licence to live up to in order to be able to farm where they do. I know that the member for Gympie is a grazier, and graziers have now become involved in this legislation because over the last 20 years the cattle industry have moved into significant environmental reforms such as cattle BMP.

I want to thank the former minister for the environment under the LNP, Andrew Powell, who introduced BMP grazing and BMP cane. He was able to convince agriculture and the environment movement that this was the way forward. It is important that we continue to have a relationship that is going to work. I also want to thank Mario Quagliata, Canegrowers' lead in the Green Shirts Movement, for pushing to establish a federal Senate inquiry into the current science being used by the Labor government and now questioned by scientists such as former JCU scientist Peter Ridd to establish what is fact and what is fiction. This is important for those opposite. What they are trying to establish is what is fact and what is fiction. Why not wait for that inquiry to say what is fact and what is fiction? Surely the Labor government could wait to see what comes from that inquiry.

As AgForce general president Georgie Somerset said, agriculture has done more than any other industry group to reduce impacts on the reef. Under the LNP agriculture steadily embedded the voluntary use of best management practices, but voluntarily is obviously not the way this Labor government wants to go. The Labor Party prefers centralised, bureaucratic regulations that punish and blame target groups. I think it is important that the members of this parliament come together to make sure that we try to do the right thing when it comes to the environment. We need to understand that as legislators it is important that we do the right thing, and that includes involving agriculture, environmentalists and conservationists to get the right result.

I want to conclude with what we will be blamed for. As the shadow minister and member for Broadwater said, we will be blamed for Nemo not surviving environmental vandals. Have a look at the LNP's record over the last 70 to 80 years when it comes to the environment. It was the LNP that brought in serious penalties for environmental harming of the reef, including fines of up to \$3.5 million or five years. It was telling that Labor chose to vote against those laws. It was the LNP that banned oil and gas operations on the Great Barrier Reef. Under the LNP the Great Barrier Reef marine park was established, allowing World Heritage listing. It was the LNP that set new international standards in marine conservation by expanding the marine park's 'no take' sanctuary areas.

It was the Labor Party under Anna Bligh that planned to supersize the port of Abbot Point. In what would have been an act of environmental vandalism, Labor planned to dump—and I hope those opposite are listening—38 cubic metres of dredge spoil on top of the reef. Fortunately, the LNP was elected in time to fix Labor's mess, scaling back the proposed port, reducing the amount of dredge spoil and insisting that the spoil must be disposed of on land and not on the reef or its waters. It was the LNP that embedded protections for the reef into Queensland's port strategies, and it took the LNP to fulfil UNESCO's recommendations for port development. Before those opposite start spruiking how environmentally aware they are and how great they have been in the past, the LNP has also played a significant role in protecting the Great Barrier Reef.

We are simply asking if we could come together—bring agriculture, conservationists and environmentalists into one room and get this right. I ask those opposite to support the shadow minister's motion. Let's stop fighting about this. Let's get this right and let's do it properly.