



Speech By
Hon. Leanne Enoch


MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

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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)

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts) (6.43 pm): I rise in opposition to the disallowance motion moved by the member for Broadwater, who I am sure thought he would be sitting in a different seat tonight to move this motion. Tonight we have once again seen the recklessness of the LNP on full display. The Great Barrier Reef is a World Heritage listed icon. It contributes \$6 billion to the Australian economy every year and supports 60,000 jobs. Our government is committed to its ongoing protection, and that is what these regulations are all about.

The member for Broadwater is supposed to be the opposition spokesperson for tourism and the environment, and today he has turned his back on both of those groups. Why? Because his attention is on being the next leader of the opposition. He thought that this motion was going to be a good way to shore up votes on the backbench. However, this entire disallowance motion is an exercise in LNP internal party muscle flexing. This is a very difficult time for tourism operators in the wake of COVID-19, and for the LNP to come in this place and further jeopardise their livelihoods by risking the health of the Great Barrier Reef is outrageous.

The regulations that the LNP seeks to disallow commenced the provisions of the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2019. This act's primary objective is to strengthen measures to improve the quality of the water entering the Great Barrier Reef, thereby protecting the reef and the jobs that rely on it. Contrary to what has been claimed, the act is a considered and balanced approach based on best available peer reviewed science and the recommendations of leading experts.

I have stated before the importance of taking urgent action to improve reef water quality. Poor water quality is a major cause of poor reef health, particularly for inshore coral ecosystems. The other major threat is of course climate change. As members may be aware, the reef experienced a third mass bleaching event this past summer. While climate change requires global, national and local action to reduce emissions, responsibility and the capacity to improve reef water quality rests firmly with Queensland and Queenslanders and improved water quality flowing into the reef gives it the best chance of survival as the climate changes.

Tonight I have heard a lot from those opposite about working together, but to do that we have to acknowledge and accept the science. That is what I call on those opposite to do: to accept the science—the consensus science around this—rather than attack it. The science about poor reef quality is very

clear. The 2017 Scientific Consensus Statement, the Reef Water Quality Report Card 2017 and 2018 and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's reef outlook report 2019 all confirm that, in spite of the efforts of some, poor water quality continues to threaten the reef. In fact, last year's outlook report gave the troubling message that the outlook for the reef is very poor. Excess nutrients and fine sediments from land based sources are polluting the reef.

The Great Barrier Reef protection measures enacted on 1 December 2019 by this regulation and by this government directly respond to and act on this science—science that is backed in by so many sources. The measures also directly respond to the recommendations of the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce in its 2016 report. Made up of economic and industry experts and leading water quality scientists, the task force was convened to provide the best possible advice on how to meet the water quality targets essential for a healthy reef now and into the future. The task force advised that a mix of tools was necessary to drive a step change in improving reef water quality and that this mix of tools should include strengthened regulations. Again, these were experts from multiple disciplines coming together and recommending a regulatory approach.

Regulation was considered necessary along with other measures such as funding for innovation and on-ground practical advice to achieve the changes in land management practice at the vast scale required for a healthy reef. More recently, the Australian and Queensland governments' response to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the benefits of using science and expert advice to guide complex decision-making when facing difficult problems. Likewise, the Great Barrier Reef protection measures are based on clear science and expert advice.

Instead of responsibly acting on the scientific evidence, what we have seen from the LNP at both a state and federal level is a callous disregard for the facts and a shameful attempt to discredit reputable peer reviewed science. The worst example of this from the LNP is not in its appalling Senate inquiry that is giving oxygen to unsupported claims about the reef and not the constant attacks on science from the members opposite; it is the appalling proposal that Queensland should introduce an office of science quality assurance. That is right, Deputy Speaker: you have heard that right. The LNP wants to create a government body whose specific job it will be to vet and censor independent peer reviewed scientific evidence in our state. That is what that office of science quality assurance is all about. If members were not frightened before, they should be now. In the year 2020, what kind of political party thinks that governments should be able to intervene in what expert advice scientists provide? It is a disgraceful suggestion from a party that has quite simply run out of ideas.

Coming back to the regulations themselves, while the efforts of the agricultural industry, individual farmers, local governments and others to reduce sediment and nutrient pollution in reef waterways is acknowledged, more widespread and rapid action is required.

The Great Barrier Reef protection measures set pollution load limits for each reef region, establish minimum agricultural practice standards targeting nutrient and sediment pollution from key industries, set standards for the quality of advice provided to regulated producers, establish a framework to recognise farmers operating at industry best practice and seek to counter additional pollution from new cropping and industrial development. We need every industry, not just every farmer, to implement practices that we know reduce the potential for nutrient and sediment run-off and we need every agricultural adviser to support our farmers in this effort.

These measures will ensure that certain high-risk practices are no longer used and instead farmers take the steps many of their neighbours have already taken and seen success with. For example, graziers in the Burnett Mary have received funding and advice through the Better Beef for the Reef project to help fix erosion hotspots on their property. Using increased ground cover to address the erosion has resulted in less sediment run-off. Adopting practices that keep valuable soil and nutrients in the paddock helps farm productivity and maintains jobs and communities. That is because these regulated practices are based on expert advice and industry accepted best practice on how to maintain or improve productivity and profitability while limiting the risk of nutrient and sediment losses off farm and onto the reef. We also know from the body of evidence gathered from on-farm trials over many years that regulated practices reduce run-off without limiting agricultural productivity. For example, one large sugarcane farm increased its profits by over \$100,000 by refining the amount of nitrogen applied using soil tests and crop needs. The grower saved money on fertiliser costs and increased their revenue through greater sugar yields. In this way farms can be productive, profitable and sustainable.

The Palaszczuk government supports the growth of the agricultural sector; its growth can be reef safe. Our approach on managing new cropping development is pragmatic and it is expected that most new enterprises will involve standard applications and be subject to standard conditions. A standard application can be made if new cropping activities are proposed of no more than 100 hectares of land and the land does not have a cropping history. A standard application can also be made for new

cropping activities for banana production for any area of land if it is being done to move an existing banana production out of an area that is subject to a notice about Panama disease, for instance. This means most applications will be straightforward with a streamlined application process. All standard applications will be promptly approved subject to the same set of conditions. The conditions will relate to farm design to manage the risks of nutrient and sediment losses off farm, including setbacks from natural waterways. Application fees are minimal and annual fees will not be payable. If one or more conditions are not workable on a particular site or for a particular operation a variation application can be made and alternative conditions set.

Further and importantly, only land that has never been cropped or not been cropped in a long time is subject to the new cropping requirements. Farmers are also able to readily respond to market demand and commodity prices with changes in crop type not triggering additional requirements. New cropping activities for more than 100 hectares will be subject to a site specific assessment process and will require proponents to provide site specific information for that assessment. This more stringent approach means that the development of large areas for intensive cropping can be carefully assessed to ensure that water quality impacts will be effectively managed.

Further consultation about the standard conditions for new cropping and horticultural activities will occur once restrictions to manage the COVID-19 pandemic are eased. In response to the unprecedented circumstances of the global pandemic, I took the reasonable step to suspend the stakeholder consultation process that was underway and delay the commencement of the new cropping requirement. This strikes the right balance between progressing these important measures to protect the Great Barrier Reef and alleviating potential pressures on industries and communities affected by the impacts of COVID-19. The delay means producers will not need an environmental authority until 1 June 2021 to start new cropping and horticulture on land that that does not have a recent cropping history. It also means producers have an extra 12 months to get ready for the new requirements and extra time to consider the draft standard conditions and provide input on their design. Consultation will recommence later this year as restrictions lift. Industry and real-world feedback is so important to ensuring the proposed standards are workable for producers as well as being effective in reducing the risk of water pollution.

The Palaszczuk government is committed to supporting our agricultural industry and protecting our reef and the jobs and economic benefits that both generate. To support producers to meet the new regulations the government is investing \$10.1 million in rebates of up to \$1,000 for eligible graziers, sugarcane farmers and banana growers to obtain professional advice about managing nutrients and sediment. This is on top of over \$120 million in Queensland government investment since 2009 in industry-led best management practice programs and one-on-one support. Additionally, these regulations will have little to no impact on farmers who have already adopted industry accepted best practice standards. This is because the act recognises industry accreditation programs such as the Smartcane BMP program that support producers to meet or exceed the regulated agricultural activities standards. Producers who are accredited through recognised industry best management practice programs or similar programs will be considered as meeting the minimum practice standards and will be a very low priority for compliance visits. Many producers support this approach because it recognises and values the efforts already made by the growers who are already doing the right thing.

I would also like to remind the House that the government has committed to not changing the minimum practice agricultural standards for sugar cane, bananas and grazing for five years. I made this commitment last December to provide greater certainty and assurance to farmers. I would also like to point out that even after five years the standards cannot be changed without due process. The law requires that these provisions can only be changed after a rigorous process involving a regulatory impact assessment, public consultation and consideration of all submissions received. The changes then need to be approved by regulation with the regulation subject to parliamentary scrutiny and, of course, disallowance. The Queensland government has also committed that after three years of operation it will review the legislation's effectiveness in reducing the load of dissolved inorganic nitrogen and fine sediment in the Great Barrier Reef catchment waters.

While the agricultural sector has a major role to play, it is important to emphasise that all industries in our reef catchment are playing their part in improving water quality. New, expanded or intensified regulated industrial land use activities that release nutrients and sediment into waterways will also need to meet new requirements. This includes sewage treatment plants, of course. This will ensure that new activities in the Great Barrier Reef catchment do not jeopardise the progress made to date largely by our farming communities towards meeting the water quality targets.

The Great Barrier Reef protection measures do not target farmers, they do not target the agricultural industry. They seek to ensure that good practices put to use also protect the health of the reef. Protecting the Great Barrier Reef is one of the Queensland government's six priorities under Our

Future State: Advancing Queensland's Priorities. It is the world's largest coral reef ecosystem and an Australian and global icon. It is critical to the spiritual, cultural, economic and social wellbeing of the more than one million people who live in its catchment and to Australians generally. It is the centrepiece of Queensland's vibrant tourism industry and the top reason people visit our beautiful state.

I trust the science and I trust the expert advice that these measures will result in improvements to reef water quality and give the Great Barrier Reef the best possible chance in a changing climate. Improving water quality will help the reef recover more quickly from coral bleaching, which is more important now than ever before. The bleaching this summer affected a broader area, impacting southern areas not previously bleached in 2016 or 2017. While the effects of this event do not appear to be as severe as previous years, it is worrying to note that this is the first time that a mass bleaching event has occurred in the absence of an El Nino episode. The significance of this cannot be overstated. Like the fires last summer, coral bleaching is what climate change looks like. There is no surprise that the bleaching followed the hottest February ever recorded in Australia. Addressing water quality will provide the greatest prospects for a reef that is resilient to a changing climate.

This is a shameful disallowance motion by a desperate LNP in an attempt to bolster support from the backbench. We are debating a motion that will risk the health of the Great Barrier Reef and the thousands of jobs that rely on it, all for the sake of one person's job. I oppose the motion before the House.