



Speech By  
**Samuel O'Connor**


**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**

---

Record of Proceedings, 14 October 2021

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENT**

**Farming in Reef Catchments Rebate Scheme**

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (2.12 pm): Climate change is the greatest threat to the Great Barrier Reef, but there is no doubt land based run-offs are also having an impact on the water quality of Queensland's most precious natural asset. What is in doubt is how serious the government is about genuinely working with the agricultural sector to help make their practices more sustainable to improve this.

Recently I made my way down from Cairns to Mackay to see some of these farms for myself. Every single grower I met felt a connection to the reef. They care deeply about it because it is their backyard. The last thing they all wanted to see was their soil or nutrients running into it because, regardless of anything else, it is just a waste of money.

It is a separate issue but the other matter that every single one of them raised with me was how poorly our national parks are being maintained. They are completely under-resourced which means feral animals are impacting their farms. One farmer in particular told me he has to hire someone for 40 grand a year to work 30 hours a week solely hunting pigs from the national park next door.

The point I wanted to raise today is the extraordinary failure of both the environment department and the agriculture department. When the reef regulations were brought in, the main amount of money provided to help farmers meet these new standards was the Farming in Reef Catchments Rebate Scheme. It involved \$10.1 million for sugarcane producers, graziers and banana growers by way of grants up to \$1,000 to help get professional agronomic advice on how to reduce sediment and nutrient run-off. Of that \$10.1 million in two years just \$3,849.50 has been spent; that is 0.04 per cent. From the thousands eligible, just four farmers have been given this support. Farmers I have spoken to say this would cover at least a third to half of the cost of getting an agronomist, so clearly there has been an issue with how these grants were promoted. How did neither the environment minister nor the agriculture minister pick up on this in two years? Did no-one in either of their departments think it was strange that just four growers were given support from such a large amount of funding?

Ministers, these are the sort of questions you have to be asking. It is not good enough to just announce a program and think, 'That is a big amount of money—job done.' The government actually has to make sure these programs are rolled out so they achieve their goals. Who would have thought?

It shows the government is not serious about safeguarding the reef and they are not interested in working with farmers to make their practices more sustainable and environmentally friendly. Farmers need to be our genuine partners in protecting the Great Barrier Reef. We need to work with them, especially on programs like this which encourage best practice.