




Speech By
Ali King

MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE

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ENVIRONMENTAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION (REVERSAL OF GREAT BARRIER REEF PROTECTION MEASURES) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms KING** (Pumicestone—ALP) (6.37 pm): I rise to speak against the Environmental and Other Legislation (Reversal of Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) Amendment Bill. The Health and Environment Committee rejected this bill out of hand, and anyone in this House who cares about our environment, our precious Great Barrier Reef or the 64,000 Queenslanders whose livelihoods depend on it must also reject it.

I will say one thing for this bill: at least it does what it claims on the tin. As the Australian Institute of Marine Sciences told the committee, the name of this bill says it all. In the current warming climate, who could possibly support a bill called the 'Reversal of Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures'? This bill is utterly tone deaf. It is out of touch with the science and the environmental aspirations of Queenslanders. It is out of touch with our tourism industry as we emerge from the global pandemic, with its especially brutal economic impacts on tourism jobs in the Far North. It is out of touch with Queensland's place in history as the host state of the 2032 Olympic Games.

Throughout the committee hearings, the member for Hinchinbrook was not able to elicit any evidence whatsoever demonstrating that this legislation is needed, that it has a scientific basis or would be anything other than disastrous for the reef and our tourism sector. The member for Hinchinbrook said he is deeply embedded in North Queensland. Now I do not want to consider that claim too closely, but he also claimed to speak as a former tourism operator, and with this bill he is selling the tourism sector of the north straight down the river. The member for Hinchinbrook and now the member for Traeger enthused about their love for the reef, but all the warm and fuzzy talk about spear fishing and boating will not protect the Great Barrier Reef. Let me be very clear: this bill has absolutely no scientific basis.

Mr Dametto interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Order! Member for Hinchinbrook, your interjections are not being taken.

Ms KING: The member for Hinchinbrook claimed over and over again during our committee hearings that 'there should be independent review of the science'. The members for Traeger and Hill have questioned the science in the course of this debate. The answer over and over from eminent scientific voices was 'there already is independent review of the science, and that is the scientific community's peer review process'.

The Scientific Consensus Statement on which our reef regulations are based has been covered at length by members speaking before me, so I will not go into it in more detail. It confirms the major impact of agricultural run-off on our reef and was described to the committee as one of the best processes in the world. The member for Hinchinbrook brought this bill based on the fringe views of just one or two cherrypicked scientists. Trump-like, he continues to advocate for the acceptance of alternative facts.

Just as we have seen the KAP complain about the best scientifically-based responses to COVID, now the member for Hinchinbrook is cherrypicking his science. He bought into the Green Shirts' claims that the science underlying our reef regulation should be subject to antagonistic scrutiny, but in fact he is just antagonistic to facts and science. As the National Environmental Law Association stated to the committee, the best available peer reviewed science tells us our reef regulations are needed to mitigate the impacts of climate change on our reef.

This bill would undermine Queensland's strong economic recovery, which has emerged from the government's strong health response. Great Barrier Reef tourism is valued at \$6.4 billion per year and supports those 64,000 direct and indirect jobs. Especially since Cyclone Debbie and the bleaching events that followed, reef recovery has been slow, and many tourism operators told our committee that they have had to put off diving and snorkelling activities that pay their bills. The Whitsundays community in particular told us that our effective reef regulations to ensure water quality are part of the recipe for a healthy reef and a healthy regional economy. Slashing those strong reef regulations would be disastrous for tourism operators and those 64,000 workers who rely on the World Heritage status of the reef. With the World Heritage status of the reef already under consideration, this bill would be a sledgehammer to the confidence of the World Heritage Committee about Queensland's commitment to protecting our reef.

We heard from well-respected Whitsundays conservationist Tony Fontes, who noted that the bill attempts to downgrade regulations and goes against every plan to protect the Great Barrier Reef. Those conservationists and scientists who contributed to our committee process gave clear evidence that what happens on land impacts the water. Inshore reefs matter, and they bear the brunt of the land based run-off that these regulations are in place to minimise.

In my contributions I also want to acknowledge the work of many canegrowers in implementing the industry-developed best practice principles that form the basis of our reef regulations. The Bundaberg Canegrowers and others made it clear that they take a best practice approach to fertiliser usage that meets and exceeds the requirements of the regulations. Our reef regulations are based on the Six Easy Steps framework that was developed by growers themselves to minimise unnecessary nutrient use and maximise productivity. We also heard from growers in the Burnett-Mary region that they meet the regulatory framework by over 98.8 per cent and that their best practice approach is top of the class. While our government has worked hard side by side with growers to increase the uptake of voluntary measures, including funding to the tune of \$275 million, the science clearly shows that agriculture remains a major source of water pollution and more progress is needed.

I want to turn to the LNP and the sad little tightrope walk we saw from the member for Bonney. Honestly, who would want to be responsible for the shadow environment portfolio under the LNP? The member for Bonney spends all his time taking photos with baby turtles because based on his party room everything else is off limits. He cannot talk about tree clearing, and he does not dare talk about climate change in those terms because of the rumbles of dissent from the Nationals on the backbench. For all his greenwashing, now the member for Bonney is trying to placate his backbench further with these amendments, dog whistling to the anti-science community and talking down our reef regulations. I agree with the member for Hinchinbrook that the LNP is desperately trying to ride two horses.

An opposition member interjected.

Ms KING: I take that interjection because I know what BMP is, having sat on the committee. Whether it is the member for Callide rejecting net zero or the former leader of the opposition desperately promising to wind back emissions targets as a last-ditch election commitment, the LNP are all over the place when it comes to protecting the reef. The member for Hinchinbrook says the LNP are not standing up for farmers, but in seeking loopholes to our strong reef regulations we heard the member for Bonney certainly not standing up for our tourism sector and those 64,000 small business owners and workers who rely on the Great Barrier Reef for their living.

In conclusion, this is a bad bill. It is a non-solution looking for a problem. It has been shoddily pasted together from alternative facts and cherrypicked science. This hopelessly flawed bill would harm our reef and it would undermine our strong economic response, which has been hard fought by Queenslanders. It would damage our tourism industry and risk the jobs of 64,000 people. I want to acknowledge my fellow committee members and the hard work of the chair particularly former secretary Jacqui Dewar.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Order, member for Pumicestone! Pause the clock. The member for Traeger, the member for Hill, the member for Hinchinbrook and the member for Burleigh will cease quarrelling.

Ms KING: In conclusion, if members value our reef, if they value our tourism sector and our economic recovery, I urge them to vote against this bill.