




Speech By
Amy MacMahon

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

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

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (5.46 pm): The Great Barrier Reef is literally one of the seven natural wonders of the world, but at the rate we are going it is a living ghost. On the path that we are on, we are almost certain to hit two degrees of global warming because we are clinging on to the fossil fuel industry and on that path the reef is dead, and that is even without this bill which would set us back even further. This bill would be detrimental for the reef's water quality and detrimental for Australia's international obligations. It proposes to reverse water quality protections for the reef that were put in place just two years ago. To reverse these changes would mean that Australia can no longer meet its goals for the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan. We cannot give up on the reef this easily.

There is a point where the climate emergency moves from scientists' predictions right into our lives. It has happened recently with the devastating floods that have levelled homes in Queensland and northern New South Wales and it is happening with the death of the reef. The 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change looked at what would happen if we limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times by 2100 instead of the two degrees agreed to in the Paris Agreement in 2015. To achieve just a 1.5-degree rise, even that requires immediate and drastic action because the current pace of emissions would breach that level sometime between 2030 and 2052. While a 1.5-degree rise will still bring major impacts, preventing that extra half a degree will spare entire ecosystems, cities and vulnerable populations from exponentially worse climate change. A temperature rise of two degrees Celsius would eliminate 99 per cent of the world's reefs whereas 1.5 degrees would save a sliver of them, with losses between 70 per cent and 90 per cent.

The reef is doomed under the Queensland government's targets, which are as bad as the federal LNP's targets. It is seeking a 30 per cent emissions reduction below 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050. At that rate we will hit two degrees and the reef will die. Farmers are right to say they feel hard done by. This government is asking them to do the heavy lifting to save the reef where the government will not. Farmers are on the front lines of climate change and, if we did climate action right, climate action would include support and improved prosperity for farmers who care for the land every day. Protecting and restoring our agricultural landscapes, supporting farmers, will require us to draw down carbon from the atmosphere. This is a huge opportunity for farmers. Landholders, including farmers and First Nations communities, could be benefiting from the rollout of clean energy via genuine partnerships with the renewable energy industry.

We are so far from that. We need to cut pollution by 70 per cent by 2030 and completely phase out coal and gas with a transition plan that guarantees jobs and income for workers and communities. Improving water quality for the reef is not enough. For the sixth time in the last 25 years, the Great Barrier Reef is experiencing mass bleaching, the result of heatwaves, rising water temperatures and

land run-off. Run-off reduces light available to corals to grow and stresses coral with excessive nutrients. Last year the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority said—

Poor water quality is a major threat to the Great Barrier Reef, particularly inshore areas. Improving the quality of water entering the Marine Park is critical and urgent. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority supports actions that reduce pollutant loads from all land-based sources.

In its submission it wrote—

There is a large body of evidence, over many years, culminating in the Great Barrier Reef 2019 Outlook Report, which identifies land-based run off as one of the highest risk threats to the Reef, specifically sediment and nutrient run-off. This is why both governments are investing to improve water quality.

The Whitsunday Conservation Council in its submission writes—

The overwhelming scientific consensus on the detrimental impacts of poor water quality of GBR is settled.

They also write—

Good quality water is critical for our Great Barrier Reef's health. Urgent and rapid compliance with the Reef protection regulation is required to give the inshore ecosystems of our Reef the quality of water it needs to survive, sustain its Outstanding Universal Value and build resilience to warming waters.

The National Environmental Law Association writes in its submission—

The Bill is inconsistent with the scientific consensus that there is substantial evidence to suggest that land-based run-off affects GBR water quality.

The Environmental Defenders Office writes—

In light of the recent draft decision of the World Heritage Committee to potentially change the status of the Reef to 'In Danger', law reform should focus on further reducing impacts in order to build resilience, not repealing protections.

They also add—

In fact, the 2019 Amendment Act did not go far enough in providing for the strong actions needed to build Reef resilience.

I recently had the chance to visit the Great Barrier Reef with my dad and stepmum, visiting John Brewer Reef off Townsville. It was incredible. We saw reef sharks, fish, jellyfish and an amazing array of coral. To my untrained eye, iridescent white and purple coral looked incredible, but I learned that this is a sign of coral in distress. John Brewer Reef is the same reef that Professor Adam Smith and scientist Nathan Cook from James Cook University recently visited and their findings were dire. They wrote—

Descending beneath the surface at John Brewer Reef near Townsville, our eyes were immediately drawn to the iridescent whites, blues and pinks of stressed corals among the deeper browns, reds and greens of healthier colonies.

They go on to say—

This is the first time the reef has bleached under the cooling conditions of the natural La Nina weather pattern which shows just how strong the long-term warming trend of climate change is. Despite the cooling conditions, 2021 was one of the hottest years on record.

Without urgent action the reef will die. We need climate action. We need to improve water quality. We need to support farmers, the people who feed us.