




Speech By  
**Joan Pease**

**MEMBER FOR LYTTON**

---

Record of Proceedings, 22 February 2022

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

 **Ms PEASE** (Lytton—ALP) (6.17 pm): Like everyone in this House, I love the Great Barrier Reef and the great work that our agriculture sector does for Queensland. I point out that the member for Hill has been referencing one scientist and disregarding any of the consensus statement, which was contributed to by 3,000 authors and had 1,300 peer reviewed documents. I know where I will put in my stakes. I will back that report, not the report from one scientist that just provides documentation they want to take note of. We also heard the member for Hill dispute a lot of other information, particularly around COVID. Perhaps we might need to start calling him the 'member for faked facts'.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Krause): Order! Member for Lytton, I remind you to refer to members by their appropriate title at all times.

**Mr KATTER:** I rise on a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I take offence to that comment.

**Ms PEASE:** I withdraw it.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Lytton, thank you for your withdrawal. I reiterate my warning to refer to members by their appropriate title.

**Ms PEASE:** Thank you. As we all know, the Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest coral ecosystem. It extends 2,300 kilometres along Queensland's coastline, from the strait in the north to Bundaberg in the south, and covers an area of approximately 350,000 square kilometres, comprising more than 2,900 individual coral reefs which represent 10 per cent of the world's coral reef areas.

The Great Barrier Reef is home to a diversity of species, including 1,625 types of fish, 600 types of coral, 100 species of jellyfish, 3,000 types of molluscs, 30 species of whales and dolphins and 133 varieties of sharks and rays. Anyone who has had the opportunity to visit the reef would say what a beautiful part of the world it is and are we not lucky to have it here in Queensland. It is important to note that it supports 64,000 jobs in Queensland and contributes approximately \$6.4 billion to the Australian and Queensland economies. It is important to our First Nations people. They consider the Great Barrier Reef to be of special significance and more than 70 traditional owner groups have long, continuing relationships with the Great Barrier Reef and its catchment, stretching back over 60,000 years.

The Great Barrier Reef is under pressure from multiple, cumulative threats including: climate change; poor water quality from land based run-off; impacts from coastal development; and direct human use such as illegal fishing and bycatch. While the greatest threat to the health of the Great Barrier Reef is climate change, deteriorating water quality has been identified as a key threat which needs to be addressed, particularly in relation to excess nutrients, fine sediments and pesticides from agricultural run-off and other industries.

Nutrients, notably nitrogen and phosphorus, which come from fertiliser used on land, have been found to increase coral eating crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks, macroalgae abundance and algal blooms which can take over and reduce coral diversity and reduce light available for corals and

seagrasses. Excess nutrients can also increase coral bleaching susceptibility and coral disease. Excess amounts of fine sediments washed into the sea from grazing activities or stream bank erosion, have been found to increase turbidity and decrease water clarity, which in turn reduces the amount of light that reaches seagrasses and coral, stunting their growth. Once sediment settles, it can also have detrimental effects on the early life stages of corals, even smothering coral and seagrasses in more extreme conditions. Sediment can also carry nutrients into the Great Barrier Reef environment. Pesticides, which are not normally found in the natural reef ecosystems, are carried in river run-off and have been detected in the Great Barrier Reef ecosystems at concentrations high enough to affect organisms. They may take months or, sadly, even years to break down.

In 2019, the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Act was introduced to strengthen Great Barrier Reef protection measures to improve the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef. This amendment act applied reef protection regulations to a broader range of agricultural activities that released nutrient and sediments into the Great Barrier Reef catchments, across a broader catchment area.

However, the policy objective of this bill that we are talking about tonight, the Environmental and Other Legislation (Reversal of Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) Amendment Bill 2021, is to repeal the amendments introduced by the amendment act. In his introductory speech, the member for Hinchinbrook claimed that the 2019 amendment act undermined the efforts by growers to improve water quality and imposed Big Brother style supervision over everyday farming decisions and effectively hobbled the industry's ability to expand and that increased red and green tape.

Unfortunately, whilst some progress was being made by farmers to establish and maintain good land management practices, including via the adoption of voluntary initiatives—and I commend all of those farmers who undertook those voluntary practices—unfortunately, as we have heard, not everyone took them up. That is why we introduced the regulations. Regulation was necessary to accelerate uptake of these practices to improve this precious part of our natural history, improve reef water quality and meet reef water quality targets. Further, the agricultural environmentally relevant activity standards—minimum practice standards—mirror practices accepted by industry as best management practice and are already used by many farmers, but not by all. That is the issue here. Not everyone was taking them up. I take a moment to acknowledge the great work of the many agricultural workers who have tried to do the right thing. We have been able to work well with them. I acknowledge their great work.

I take a moment too to thank my fellow committee members for their great work and acknowledge the great work of the secretariat, and in particular Jacqui, who is not on our committee at the moment for health reasons. I send a big shout-out to her and thank her for her great work in looking after the Health and Environment Committee. I let her know that we will continue her good work.

It is important that we oppose this bill. The reason for that is that we want to maintain the reef in its current capacity. It is an important time in history. Everyone in this House wants to be on the right side of history. I have had the opportunity to visit the Great Barrier Reef and I want my great-grandkids to be able to go and see it. In my position as an elected representative—I can be criticised for being from South-East Queensland, but my father's family are from Tully and Innisfail so I know how important the environment is—I do not want to be on the wrong side of history. I want to be known for standing up for protecting the Great Barrier Reef. I will do everything in my power to ensure that we do. I am sure everyone in the agricultural sector wants that too.

Woolworths, for example, has a great initiative called the Freshcare program. They have made a commitment to only purchasing products from banana growers who are following the regulations. If big business can undertake that and if big business is prepared to make that statement surely everyone in this House can do that as well. I call on all members to vote this bill down. It is nonsensical and dangerous for our future. It is dangerous for the Great Barrier Reef. It is dangerous for the future of our children, their children and their children. I do not support this bill.