




Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Bailey**

**MEMBER FOR MILLER**

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Record of Proceedings, 15 March 2022

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

 **Hon. MC BAILEY** (Miller—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (5.39 pm): I am always pleased to follow the member for Callide. It is always pleasing when he says something. He did not say a word for four hours in estimates last year at my committee. I understand there was a water forum last week up in Central Queensland, and he did not say a word during the whole of that either. There were lots of questions and queries. The member for Callide, again voiceless, did not say a word. He did the Marcel Marceau stuff he is so renowned for. It is always good when he actually says something.

I rise to speak against this bill, obviously. Let's call it for what it is. This is a Katter wedge on the LNP. Actually, they are doing a pretty good job of it. When you look at the seats the Katter party has, they actually have more North Queensland seats than the LNP: Hinchinbrook, Traeger and Hill versus Burdekin and Whitsunday. Tactically, they seem to be on the right track in terms of their objective to cannibalise the LNP in North Queensland.

However, the merits of the bill are simply not there and are reprehensible. We have seen today that the new deputy leader is not from the National side of the LNP for the very first time. We now see the little Newman leadership team—

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hart): Pause the clock. Members, there is way too much noise and interjection across the chamber. I am interested in what the minister has to say. I was interested in what the previous member had to say. I am interested to hear the rebuttal.

**Mr BAILEY:** Thank you for your protection, Mr Deputy Speaker; I always appreciate it. The LNP has decided to oppose this bill because they want to be seen to be supporting the reef, but when they vote on legislation put up by this government they always oppose it when it matters. We have a case of the opposition wanting to be seen to be doing a certain thing, roping the Nats in to say 'We have to be seen to be doing something for the reef,' and once again the Nats get done. They have lost out on the leadership team. We have the little Newman leadership team now running the LNP. There are no Nats in there. They demoted the most senior Nat in their ranks. The member for Maroochydore has been set back about six or seven spots. She is their shadow integrity spokesperson. They talk about integrity and they have just demoted their shadow integrity spokesperson. That is extraordinary behaviour.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Miller, can I draw you back to the bill, please.

**Mr BAILEY:** This bill is just political posturing and positioning from the Katter party in their ongoing and clear strategy to cause damage to the LNP and take LNP North Queensland seats off them. If I was the member for Burdekin or the member for Whitsunday I would be quite concerned that the Katters were after me because—

**Mr DAMETTO:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The bill was put together because this is what farmers wanted. I take personal offence and I would like the member to withdraw.

**Mr BAILEY:** When we look at it, this government is committed to protecting the Great Barrier Reef. We have a very strong record of supporting the integrity of the reef, our tourism sector, jobs and the economy that goes with it. We know that it contributes \$6.4 billion to Australia's and Queensland's economy. Sixty-four thousand jobs depend on it. It is one of the unique natural wonders of the world. Action on climate change is the most effective thing we can do. The run-off of chemicals as a result of agricultural activity has an impact, and we have to consider what the evidence is. It is of immense environmental significance. This government, through a whole range of measures—certainly in my area in terms of our ports—has made sure there are strong measures to ensure the protection of the reef.

It is pretty extraordinary that the Katter party, at a time when climate change is biting—we have just been through a terrible flooding disaster from Wide Bay to Toowoomba and west, down to the border and right through New South Wales to Sydney through Lismore—is trying to wind back environmental protections. We have to get serious about the science and about the action. This bill is absolutely contra to what we need to do as a responsible government. To the extent people vote for it, whatever the motive might be to oppose this bill I think that is appropriate.

Just so people are aware, there are: 1,600 types of fish on the reef, 600 types of coral, 30 species of whales and dolphins, and more than 70 traditional owner groups are involved. We have invested more than \$700 million to protect the reef since 2015, including \$270 million to continue the Queensland Reef Water Quality Program, which is having very strong outcomes. We introduced regulations in 2019 to further strengthen protections for the reef, especially in terms of water quality, and that has been effective. The Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce recognised that transformational change was needed to reduce pollution from agriculture in our reef catchments, so we would be an irresponsible government not to do something about that. The Katters really need to join the 21st century on this, with all due respect to the member for Hinchinbrook. We have seen the impacts of climate change. We have seen a number of natural disasters in the seven years we have been in power. We have seen the impacts of more voracious and fast-forming cyclones in Queensland in a way that we have not seen before.

We are a developed First World economy with smart people and resources. We have to work together to act on climate change. This kind of bill is taking us in the reverse direction. It is not the way forward and I urge all MPs to oppose this Katter bill because it is reprehensible. It does not deserve support. It might be a political wedge, but I do not believe that gives it any integrity whatsoever. Our regulations are designed to bring all agricultural operations up to minimum practice standards and to ensure that new or expanded activities do not further worsen the water quality program. The regulations are a critical component of Queensland's commitment under the Reef 2050 Plan.

Only last year the UNESCO World Heritage Committee indicated an intention to list the reef as being in danger. Having the Great Barrier Reef listed as World Heritage in Danger would not only damage Australia's international standing but also put in jeopardy the recovery of Queensland's tourism industry, which has suffered enormously as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While we are able to avoid this classification, the World Heritage Committee has asked for further information on action being taken to protect the reef. Reversing the reef protection regulations introduced by this government would not only undermine our efforts to improve reef water quality; it would also negatively be regarded by the World Heritage Committee, that is, the window out on to the rest of the world.

Let's be clear: the proposed changes to these protections would increase agricultural run-off into the reef, causing further damage to this already fragile natural wonder. The irresponsibility is incredible. We know that, alongside climate change, run-off is one of the leading threats to the ongoing health of the reef. Two consecutive years of extreme sea surface temperatures, mostly due to climate change, caused mass coral bleaching in 2016 and 2017. The extent and severity of the coral bleaching was unprecedented, impacting two-thirds of the Great Barrier Reef and causing large numbers of coral deaths. A mass bleaching event was again recorded in 2020. The threat is very, very real.

Under the Queensland Climate Action Plan we are addressing climate change, pursuing three key climate change commitments: powering Queensland with our 50 per cent Renewable Energy Target by 2030; achieving zero net emissions by 2030; and achieving emission reductions of at least 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. Understanding the modern economy is what this government is all about. If you are interested in jobs, if you are interested in prosperity and expanding the economic pie, you have to understand the new economy. In the meantime, it is more important than ever that other threats to the reef are reduced, particularly in the short term, including by improving reef water quality. Science shows that good water quality is essential to boosting the resilience of the reef to better withstand the impacts of climate change.

The Palaszczuk government cannot work alone when it comes to protecting the reef. We need the Morrison-Barnaby LNP federal government to work with us to take real action on climate change and secure the future of the reef, but they do not have any record on that to date. We also need

producers to play their part for improved local water quality and a healthy reef. We acknowledge those producers who have invested effort into improving their practices. This is just political tactics from the Katter party. It is a step back into the past. It is a step back into the 20th century. It deserves to be voted down and I oppose the bill vehemently.