




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (5.53 pm): I rise to make a contribution to close the debate on the Environmental and Other Legislation (Reversal of Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) Amendment Bill, the private member's bill of the Katter's Australian Party to wind back the reef water quality protections that have been legislated so recently.

To be clear, I do not support this bill. It represents a huge backward step in the already mammoth task we have of rescuing the reef. I do not think it is possible to overstate the peril that the reef faces at the moment, nor is it possible to overstate the importance of protecting the reef. The ecological consequences of losing it would be absolutely devastating given the fundamental role of reef ecology for the whole of the ocean ecology.

It is fair to say that we probably do not yet understand the full ecological consequences of losing the reef. Countless species who spend part of their lifecycle on the reef are at risk. The intrinsic ecological value of the reef is at risk. This natural wonder of the world that is right at our doorstep and the ecosystem services it provides are at risk. I am loathe to take this frame of monetisation, but for the bean counters and hardheads in the room, we need to recognise that the economic consequences for coastal communities would be absolutely devastating. We have heard plenty of others in the debate talk about the \$6 billion in economic contribution that the reef makes to the state and the more than 60,000 jobs in Queensland that rely on reef tourism. All of that is at risk.

I want to repeat some of the points that my colleague from South Brisbane has made because they have not been made often enough in this debate. Climate change is the real threat to the reef. I can honestly relate to the sense of frustration felt by farmers and sympathise with those who feel they are being targeted in circumstances where the government is not pulling its weight to do what we know is necessary to avoid the impact of climate change on the reef. Our emissions reduction targets are pathetic. As much as this government might want to point to the federal LNP and their failings on climate change, our targets for emissions reduction are the same as theirs: net zero by 2050, 30 per cent reduction by 2030. At these rates there is no doubt that we will hit two degrees and that the reef is dead.

The statistics that the member for South Brisbane gave us are important. At two degrees average global warming we will lose 99 per cent of our coral reefs globally. At 1½ degrees we stand some chance of keeping between 10 and 30 per cent of those reefs alive. But if we do not take the action that the science is saying is necessary on climate change and do it now—deep cuts this decade: 75 per cent emissions reduction by 2030 and net zero by 2050—the whole reef is cooked. Farmers who see the science of climate change for what it is can quite rightly feel like they are being targeted. They can feel hard done by about the fact that they are being asked to do the heavy lifting to save the reef when the Queensland government is not doing its job.

It is interesting that we are having this debate this week in the context of another bleaching event, a bleaching event in the La Nina part of the ENSO cycle. That is not something we are used to. This is the coral reef equivalent to watching the Gondwana rainforest burn as we saw in the fires of 2019 and

2020. This is not normal. We will continue to hold the government's feet to the fire and point out their grossly inadequate climate action, but our objective now must be to do anything we can to save whatever is left. Reef water quality regulations are absolutely essential. It is one of the only other steps that we can take to improve reef resilience and to give it a fighting chance if we do ultimately see the kind of action from government that we need to reduce emissions.

Another important point that has been overlooked in this debate is that farmers stand to be major beneficiaries of climate action. Protecting and restoring our agricultural land and natural landscapes, as we need to to draw carbon down from the atmosphere, is a huge opportunity for farmers. It has been a long while since we heard some really deliberate talk and some political will around the possibility of soil carbon and carbon farming. The potential for this to take off was there. In the days when I was working in the office of climate change under the member for Glass House as the then minister—before he turfed us all out on Newman's election—there was some extraordinary work going on on carbon farming and soil sequestration and on the methodologies to measure the amount of carbon that could be sequestered through those technologies.

We call them technologies, but they are trees. If members want to see carbon capture and storage go and look at a really big tree somewhere. The potential for this to happen was squandered by the LNP at the state level. It was squandered by the LNP federally. That image of members standing around on the floor of parliament patting each other on the back and cheering at the repeal of world-leading emissions reduction legislation is burned into my mind. That legislation was passed when a federal Labor government needed to rely on the Greens to get outcomes. We got outcomes: we got world-leading emissions reduction legislation.

Since then we have seen the federal government strip out huge parts of the carbon farming initiative as it turned it into the Emissions Reduction Fund. It took the floor out of the carbon market in Australia and the scope for carbon farming to play a big part in enhancing the economic opportunities for regional Australia. Then there was the latest debacle just this week with news of our emissions reduction minister, Angus Taylor, effectively rorting the market and screwing over countless companies and individuals who had optional delivery contracts under our carbon credit units. The bottom line here is that landholders, including farmers and traditional owners, should be standing to benefit from the opportunities that carbon markets present and from the rollout of clean energy by genuine partnerships with the renewable energy industry and ideally with state owned generators such as CleanCo.

In closing, for me perhaps the most concerning thing about this bill is the way it perpetuates the tendency in our parliaments and our political discourse to devalue and to undermine science. It does not work to come in here and throw some air quotes around the word science and pretend that the scientific method does not actually work. There is a persistent trend for politics to trump good science driven policy, and this is another example of that. This is cherrypicking the perspectives of a single expert. We could just about call this the Peter Ridd bill. It is quite extraordinary to present one person's view and act as though that can somehow undermine or overturn everything that the scientific method demonstrates to us about the risks to the reef, both of climate change and of water quality. As elected representatives, we owe it to the people we represent to respect science and to model our policy on that.