




Speech By  
**Michael Healy**

**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

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

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (5.59 pm): I want to acknowledge the member for Burnett. I thought that was a wonderful speech. At the very end, with 48 seconds to go, he said ‘but seriously’. I am not sure what part of the speech we need to take seriously, but I recognise all of those very valid points. I take that all in the cut and thrust of it. I think it would be a waste using science, so I will stick to some pretty small words. The objective of this proposed bill is to repeal the 2019 Great Barrier Reef protection bill, which was introduced fundamentally to strengthen the reef protection regulations. That is pretty straightforward; you cannot really get that one mixed up.

I say from the outset that, not only as the member for Cairns and not only as somebody who has worked in marine tourism for 17 years but also as an environmentally concerned citizen, I totally oppose this bill—absolutely every bit of it.

**An opposition member** interjected.

**Mr HEALY:** I know! It will come as a great shock to those who are not familiar with the science. However, I can say that I am aware of the fact that the reef protection regulations have been subjected to strong opposition from the agricultural sector and my learned colleagues are feeling the pressure; I acknowledge that. The member for Burnett has even indicated that these people vote for him, and I get that. I also understand that the sugarcane industry is the dominant land use in the Hinchinbrook electorate. However, to say that we are attacking farmers is like saying that DUI laws are having a go at those who manufacture alcohol. There is an enormous and impressive inconsistency, and that is what I find enormously concerning—

**Mr Dametto** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hart): Member for Hinchinbrook, you will get another go shortly. Can we hear the member in silence, please.

**Mr HEALY:** I appreciate your protection, Mr Deputy Speaker. The reef protection regulations have been subject to strong opposition, and I understand that, but at the end of the day we have to think broadly and look at it from a far broader perspective. The introduction of the Great Barrier Reef protection measures by the Palaszczuk government in 2000 are simply that: they are there to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

The Great Barrier Reef is an economic powerhouse. I remind each and every member here that it contributes more than \$6.4 billion each year to the Australian economy. Prior to COVID, it was generating 64,000 jobs. It is absolutely enormous. The fact that I personally have made a living and have done quite well over it does not taint my views. I see young kids—my daughter and my 14-year-old son—wanting to get into the marine tourism industry. In my role as the Assistant Minister for Tourism Industry Development I travel up and down the east coast of this great state and I see the future for young children and I see the future for people in businesses. This is not about attacking anyone; this is about finding a balance, which is what we do through a significant process of consultation.

The objectives of the current reef protection regulations commenced on 1 December 2019. The idea is to strengthen Great Barrier Reef protection measures by improving the quality of water entering the reef. The reef protection regulations were in direct response to the 2016 recommendations of the Great Barrier Reef Water—wait for it—Science Taskforce and the best available consensus reef science. One of the main causes of poor reef quality water is cumulative contributions of nutrient and sediment, pesticide being one of them, and run-off from agriculture in reef catchments. Locally, significant contributions from industrial land uses—we are talking sewage treatment, waste disposal, mining activities and also aquaculture—also contribute to the water quality problem. It is in a wide range of areas. The Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce recognised that transformational change was needed to reduce and diffuse source pollution from agriculture into our reef areas. The regulations are designed to bring all agricultural operations up to at least minimum practice standards and ensure that the new and expanding cropping and industrial activities do not further worsen the water quality issues. The regulations are a critical component of Queensland's commitments under the Reef 2050 Plan.

If anybody meets the regulated minimum practice standards across the main commodity types, it has been modelled that this would mean around 80 per cent of the target would be dissolved inorganic nitrogen, which is a good thing. That is what we are targeting. The regulations are also key to the federal government's response to the World Heritage Committee.

I want to touch on the federal government and their contribution in this area because it is impressively disappointing. The federal LNP donated \$443 million to a private foundation which has only six staff but has links to big resources companies. May I add, the private foundation's managing director, Anna Marsden, said that the investment by the federal LNP was an absolute surprise when this money was controversially donated to this unknown foundation in 2018.

This is the same federal LNP government that appointed Warren Entsch as the special envoy to the Great Barrier Reef. This is the same Warren Entsch who told the ABC that 'warm water originating from the Northern Hemisphere and flowing across the Pacific to the reef was the chief cause of mass coral bleaching'. If I had the time, I would read it again. He also claimed in the interview with ABC presenter Fran Kelly that attempts to clean up the water over the reef meant corals were more exposed to more sunlight, making the bleaching worse. The science is intimidating. Coral and ocean scientists have described statements on coral bleaching from the government's reef envoy Mr Entsch as 'far-fetched' and 'ill-informed'. I love the—

**Mr Power:** That is good—

**Mr HEALY:** I take the interjection from the member for Logan. I do love the restraint. I would have described it very differently outside of this chamber. However, it is expected—and I make this note—that the UNESCO World Heritage Committee will be meeting in the very near future and they will make their determinations on the reef and the status of the reef, so we will be able to see whether Mr Entsch and his LNP federal government have made any significant contribution at all. Reversing the reef regulations would be negatively regarded by the World Heritage Committee. Repealing the reef protection regulations would increase the burden of regulation for some growers.

If the private member's bill was passed—I can guarantee members that it will not because we have not lost one since I got here—we would be reverting to the outdated requirements for environmental risk management plans for priority catchments from the past. The environmental risk management plans are no longer considered as best practice regulation. They have been replaced with outcomes focused minimum practice standards. The new standards make clear the requirements to be complied with and do not require paperwork that is not directly linked to the outcomes. Even the agricultural sector opposed the reintroduction of the environmental risk management plan. I suggest that those promoting this really need to go and talk to the environmental sector and see where they are going. Removal of this recognition framework would undermine the work by accredited farmers.

I also take this time to acknowledge those farmers—and there are so many of them out there—who recognise the challenges, recognise the responsibility they have and understand the importance of the reef. It is about finding that balance. As a government, through a process of consultation and through a process of engagement—not through a popular and a politically motivated stunt—we are working towards the best outcomes. I would like to register in the strongest possible terms that I oppose the bill in its entirety.