




Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR TRAEGER**

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

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (5.49 pm): I will do my best to get through some of the technical issues, but I would like to talk about the politics here. I will pick up on some of the things that were said by the minister. I am very strongly of the view that this is driven by politics more than it is genuine outcomes. I understand people have the belief that there is a problem with the reef. I respect that attitude. However, that respect is never reciprocated.

To me Peter Ridd is a hero. This debate is not about Peter Ridd. Despite what anyone might think about his competency—and I think one would be pretty brave to bring that into question given his experience and level of expertise—all he has ever asked for is an independent audit of the science. That was his main point. It was not to say, 'I am right and they are wrong', but to say, 'Can we at least have an independent audit of the science?' That is what he was crucified for. A lot of people in this place conform to a party position, which keeps them in their job. That is not very brave. Peter Ridd was ousted for saying, 'I don't think this is right.' He was thrown out of his 30-year career for taking a stand on principle and we are laughing at him. I ask everyone to show some respect for someone who has integrity in science. Whether you agree with him or not is another issue, but show some respect.

We are talking here about an issue where politics is ingrained into a scientific position. I have been through the growth of this issue. I remember when the reef became a popular issue in Townsville. There was an industry built around it. I love the reef, as we all do. I have been out on it many times snorkelling and scuba diving. I never looked at the science much, never cared much about it, because it was not a big problem. It started becoming a problem. It always troubled me that a ground truth from people who were not political all said, 'I don't know what is going on. Sure, there are parts that are bleached, but there are other parts that are blooming and I do not really see it. I can't ground truth what the scientists are telling me.' I will not hang my argument on that either. That alerted me that there could be some problems.

I am sure many people in this chamber do not mix with people on the reef as much as we do in the north. It stands to reason that we would put a little bit more weight in that. Then you start asking questions around the water that runs out of these rivers which are called reef waters, so in the definition from the start the science is distorted. When a scientist says the reef waters are polluted, that is talking about the rivers as well. Of course they are. There is stuff running into the rivers, but does that water make it out to the reef? That is a logical question to ask. We should be challenging scientists on this as best we can.

In relation to that water making it out to the reef, there is literally no apparatus that can measure the amount of nitrogen that is getting out there. That is a fact. Please stand up and prove me wrong, but there is nothing that can detect the amount of nitrogen that is making its way out to the reef. There is 100 times more organic nitrogen floating around out there. That is well established. We can establish that more coral has grown ever since fertiliser and agriculture came into being. That is definitive science. Where there is no definitive science is around any of this stuff making it out to the reef. Scientific reports

state reef waters are polluted. Reef waters include the rivers upstream as well. Every eight hours as much water flows in and out of the reef due to the tides and currents than all the river flows for a whole year. There is not an apparatus strong enough to measure any nitrogen. There are other things like phosphorous in the rivers. If there are any quantities, there is no discernible impact.

It is not just Peter Ridd saying this, but under oath in the Senate inquiry Dr Hardesty said he could not say that there is any link between the water quality and the calcification of coral. There are some chinks forming in the armour. It starts with one isolated scientist—one brave person, like we are seeing in this integrity crisis that is erupting—and then the chinks start to form and suddenly they are not the minority, idiots and ignorant; there is some truth to what they are saying. Please be respectful of the alternative arguments and have a decent debate on this.

Moreton Bay has coral. We are saying there is coral dying everywhere. You can throw a rock on some coral reefs off the port. With millions of people here and pollution coming out of the river there is coral growing off the port. The average distance out to the reef is 50 kilometres. It is up to 200 kilometres. To say that the pesticides and fertilisers from these farmers is doing this damage is a bit of a stretch and it is very hard to see how that works, but it is very convenient for these industries built around this position and the scientists who make a living off it. Their position works off the precautionary principle. How convenient.

We have to prove that there is definitely no impact at all from any of this activity, which is impossible. We cannot prove that the vaccines do not harm people. We cannot prove most things in science with absolute certainty. Until we can do that everything is on the table. Guess who pays? The farmers, a small voting bloc that does not count for much in the parliament. Let us pick on them. We are not picking on the towns and cities where nitrogen and phosphorous is coming out of sewage treatment plants into reef catchments. We are not worried about them even though we have some great biosolutions. We are not worried about the \$4 billion sugar industry. All the members who represent sugar seats better be listening because this is serious. Look at the production records that were tabled—and I will table them again—from the Burdekin region. There has been a steady decline since 2016.

*Tabled paper:* Graph, undated, titled 'Sugar production—Burdekin region' [172](#).

BMPs were introduced in 2010. The soil retains the fertiliser but by six years it starts depleting and then production records in the Burdekin drop off a cliff. Projecting that further with these reef regulations that are coming in now, we need to start making other plans for these mills. I really hope you do. That is a very serious set of figures. Do not keep these people hanging on. Be very honest about this. If you want to make that decision, fine, but understand the consequences of what you are doing to these mill workers and all those downstream jobs. This is a killer for the industry. Make no bones about it. Farmers were brave at the start, but it has all been muddled up now because money is flowing through these different programs that are being used strategically. It has muddied the waters. People will start to look for buyouts. Do not say we are going to adopt BMPs and that is the answer. You have to look at the real science. Is there even an impact? It does not take a lot of scratching the surface to realise there is none. If there is, there are better ways to do it.

Canegrowers have stated that a 30 per cent reduction in nitrogen use would lead to a drop in cane production of five to 7.5 tonnes per hectare each year—that is a staggering 2.3 billion tonnes of sugar cane across the Queensland sugar industry, a loss of \$110 million in earnings per year. You better find another way to make that money, by the way. Find another industry that is going to replicate it, because you are telling everyone around the world the reef is dying. That defies what AIMS is saying. As the member for Hinchinbrook said, they stopped giving us data in 2016 so you have to go looking for it. When Peter Ridd said it was at a record high, that gets fact checked by the scientists and they say, 'It is not a record; it could just be near the record.'

If you listened to the media and all the scientists in the last 10 years you would think the reef is just about dead. If you listen to David Attenborough and UNESCO, it is dead and it is endangered. Is it? That contradicts what we are seeing now with record coral cover—or let us say near record cover to be accurate. If it is near record coral cover, what are we talking about? We are shutting down a \$4 billion sugar industry because there could be a problem that we cannot really establish because there is record coral cover. What other more important metric could there be than record coral cover?

If there is a problem, does it deteriorate from the inside and hollow out and then all collapse in one heap? I do not think so. If there was a gradual decline you would be seeing it. It is not there, so I think we are well within our rights to question the science that is being fed to us. That is why there should be an office of scientific quality assurance. This is much bigger than the reef. We should have faith in our institutions and our scientists. They should be able to have a rigorous debate without being ostracised, without being called ignorant and have people laugh at them. We should be able to have a mature debate about this and argue it on the facts. We are presenting facts; argue them back. That is how this is supposed to work, not to just laugh and say, 'That's silly. Oh, that's Peter Ridd.' That is an immature way to address this issue. The people of Queensland deserve more than that.