




Speech By  
**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR HILL**

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

 **Mr KNUTH** (Hill—KAP) (6.09 pm): I rise to support the Environmental and Other Legislation (Reversal of Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) Amendment Bill 2021 and to congratulate the member for Hinchinbrook on his passion for representing farmers. As the bill rightfully points out, key concerns highlighted by the industry regarding the act include its undermining of existing efforts by growers to improve water quality, imposing Big Brother style supervision over everyday farming decisions and crippling the cane industry's ability to expand. Growers are forced to provide an environmental impact statement if they want to crop an existing part of their farm they have already cropped in past years. The government has now given itself the power to demand information from any adviser or even any company working with farmers.

Growers in the agriculture industry are of the strong view that the act is based on flawed reef science which has not been proven appropriately, checked or replicated. The KAP bill seeks to reduce the maximum penalty for the offence committed under the Environmental Protection Act from over \$220,000 back to the \$13,000 it was prior to the Labor government's amendments in 2009 and to introduce a number of protections for farmers from future regulatory changes to nutrient application. The bill also seeks to legislate an enforceable undertaking for a first offence as opposed to a financial penalty for a breach of section 78 of the Environmental Protection Act in relation to fertiliser application.

I really believe that this government must stop demonising our farmers and, instead, work with them to keep our strong agriculture industry alive. The value of the agriculture industry in Queensland is over \$22 billion annually. The industry directly employs 84,000 Queenslanders, and 40,000 Queensland businesses are directly related to the industry. The agriculture industry in Queensland is one of the biggest and most valuable, yet the government is hell-bent on destroying farming operations in this state by implementing unnecessary regulation after regulation based on flawed science which makes it almost impossible to effectively manage and run a farming operation.

Generational farming operators are at risk, as youth no longer see a future in agriculture because of the unnecessary onus, regulations and interference by consecutive state governments. People are walking away from their farms because they no longer see the light at the end of the tunnel. The function of government is supposed to be one of supporting our industries, reducing regulation and encouraging growth. However, this government would rather put up signs stating that Queensland is 'closed for business' and 'do not to take up farming as we will be importing all our produce in the near future'.

Governments have a bad history of demonising landowners. You can guarantee that 12 months before every election there will be a bill brought before the House related to vegetation management or reef run-off. In 1999, under the Beattie government, I was there when thousands of landowners protested and marched over the removal of their vegetation-clearing rights. In 2004 the Beattie government removed freeholding rights. In 2000 the government introduced wild rivers legislation to remove sustainable management of our river catchment systems, but that was blocked by Indigenous leaders in the cape. That was a great thing. In 2009 the Bligh government introduced environment risk

management plans that imposed a \$75,000 fine if you did not fill out forms properly, and if you did not fill out the forms there would be a jail sentence. This is legislation that was brought to the House. Landowners and farmers were so angry that they stormed the Premier's office in Townsville. After another few incidents where they privatised our assets, the Bligh government was kicked out and Labor was reduced to seven seats.

In 2013 the Newman government put farmers offside by giving mining companies unjust exploration and development rights over agricultural land. They were kicked out in 2015. In 2016 the Labor government introduced laws that reversed the onus of proof such that landowners were guilty before being proven innocent if they cleared their land. In other words, murderers were dealt with more leniently than landowners. This was blocked during the hung parliament, but in 2019 these draconian laws were introduced. This bill is all about reversing this and bringing some form of balance back to the farming industry.

I have highlighted all the trends. This is not about protection of the Great Barrier Reef; it is about making it appear to the south-east corner that the government is doing something. In fact, they know little about what is going on in the Great Barrier Reef. The member for Traeger referred to demonising Professor Ridd. I recall a particular moment when reef scientists looked at all this bleaching of the coral reef in North Queensland and said that it was because of climate change and reef run-off. Professor Ridd had photos of the coral from 60 years ago and was able to expose the facts about that bleaching. It was about 14 or 15 feet underground but, over the years, all the sand from the south-east had washed up and built up such that the coral had pushed to the surface and was burnt from the sun. It had nothing to do with coral bleaching; it was because of what had occurred over the years. Professor Ridd was demonised because of that.

There is another way we can do this. Since 2019 I have been a huge supporter and advocate of the Russell River Catchment Sustainability Plan. I have had a number of meetings with the minister seeking government support and funding for this plan. What makes it unique is that we have traditional owners, cane farmers, community groups, scientists and conservationists all working together to improve water quality outcomes in river systems flowing in the Great Barrier Reef catchment. We have gone nowhere on this in terms of getting government support. This is the way to go about it: all of the catchment groups working with government and with the Indigenous people to get an outcome. We do not need a massive big stick, a \$250,000 fine or regulations that make it difficult for growers to participate in farming. I commend the member for Hinchinbrook on his initiative and I commend this bill to the House.