




Speech By
Stephen Andrew

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2022

ADJOURNMENT

Department of Environment and Science

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (8.54 pm): In terms of unforeseen expenditure in the Department of Environment and Science, the 2021-22 Consolidated Fund Financial Report states reasons such as bringing forward payments to local government for the waste disposal levy, the Reef Water Quality Program, protected area estate infrastructure and enterprise bargaining.

The Treasurer recently introduced Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2022 into state parliament to enable taxpayers to pay for this unforeseen blow-out in the budget. The DES blow-out demonstrates that not only can they not manage evidence-based science in the reef; they cannot manage their finances either. Taxpayers have the right to demand that poor policy areas are no longer propped up and that good money is no longer thrown after bad. Queensland farmers, as stated by the chair of the AgForce Reef Taskforce, believe that programs such as the waste levy and reef regulations, which enforce poor, unrealistic policies, should cease or be critically overhauled. They are costly for all Queenslanders, reduce productivity, have no proven improved environmental outcomes and create undue stress on individuals.

Unfortunately, there is no evidence that the Department of Environment and Science is putting measures in place to prevent another annual budget blow-out. Since July 2022, 15 new permanent environmental officers for compliance activities have been appointed. Reef protection regulations are rolling out into all reef catchments on 1 December 2022, prior to the review of the reef Scientific Consensus Statement. The amount of coral on the Great Barrier Reef is at its highest level since 1985. The latest data on the GBR indicates that it is in good shape. It happens to have a great deal of coral in 2022 because there have been few major mortality events over the past five to 10 years. The three or four bleaching events since 2016, which have been widely reported in the media, could not have killed much coral; otherwise, the 2022 statistics would not be good. The data since 1986 shows every region and every sector of the reef, and most reefs have had periods of very low coral cover. This is entirely natural. Much is often made of this in the media, but the health of the system is its ability to recover from major stress. The data collected by AIMS shows that the GBR is a robust and healthy system.

Additionally, properties are being purchased and added to the protected area estate, which already is comprised of 500 parcels of land across Queensland. So why does this government still target the practices of largely one sector—agriculture? Why not urban development or resources? Maybe this is due to the votes in the more high density areas. There seems to be no cap on staff numbers or planning on how to manage existing conservation lands. Will the minister curtail this Department of Environment and Science spending and the purchase of properties for the protected area estate until at least we are back in the black with state debt and review the science that underpins these reef regulations?