




Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Record of Proceedings, 28 March 2023

**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (6.12 pm): I rise to address the parliament on the Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. Throughout this debate I have listened to the contributions of members. In particular, I refer to the member for Thuringowa who made what I would say were some gratuitous attacks on the shadow minister for environment. I think that those comments were very misplaced. I would say to the member for Thuringowa that the LNP candidate, Natalie Marr, is coming for you. She is absolutely coming for you in North Queensland.

Mr HARPER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Member, I bring you back to the long title of the bill.

Dr ROWAN: I was the Liberal National Party shadow minister for the environment and heritage protection during the 55th Queensland parliament and I have constantly supported genuine and balanced measures that both conserve and protect our environment. Indeed, the Queensland Liberal National Party is committed to seeing genuine efforts further implemented and delivered across our state for the environment. The LNP continues to work constructively to achieve such goals.

Before further expanding on various aspects in relation not only to the content of the legislation but also the associated legislative and consultative processes undertaken by the Palaszczuk Labor government, I note that the stated objective of the bill is to improve administrative efficiency and ensure the regulatory frameworks within the environment portfolio remain contemporary, effective and responsive. As outlined in the explanatory notes, the legislation seeks to make amendments to the Environmental Protection Act 1994, the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011, the Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1994 and the Land Title Act 1994. Much has been made of the fact that this legislation ultimately remains mostly administrative in nature. That being said, in relation to this legislation the Liberal National Party cannot ignore the disastrous way in which Labor's Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef has discharged her responsibilities in failing to meaningfully and openly consult with key stakeholders throughout this entire process.

Again in relation to some comments from the member for Thuringowa who talked about LNP members reading the report, we have referred to the comments of stakeholders throughout this process as has been articulated previously. They are contained within the parliamentary committee's own report. It is not what the LNP members put together; it was what stakeholders said in their testimony before and submissions to the committee. That is why we say that this government has given up on listening to Queenslanders. Today we have heard contributions from various ministers who are not listening to Queenslanders and what they are saying in relation to other matters in Queensland. We are talking about what the submitters themselves said in the contributions that they made to the committee process and that are contained within the committee report. That is what LNP members of the committee were highlighting to the parliament, as is their responsibility when it comes to democracy in Queensland. It is our responsibility to listen to Queenslanders and stakeholders and to reflect their views not only in the report but also here in the Queensland parliament.

Not surprisingly, as has been articulated already by the Liberal National Party shadow minister for the environment and the Great Barrier Reef, at the end of this whole process stakeholders were left with nothing more than distrust and scepticism with respect to this Labor state government. In any democracy it is absolutely crucial that the government of the day, irrespective of jurisdictional level, works openly and transparently with respect to decisions for all Queenslanders. Unfortunately, the management of this bill has been another prime example of the opposite, revealing once again a state Labor government that is out of touch with the needs and concerns of those who have genuinely raised matters and a government that has failed to fully consider and respond to the consequences of its proposed actions.

Whilst this legislation will offer improvements in environmental protections, it is impossible to ignore the way it has been managed. It is important to acknowledge that there will be improvements with respect to environmental protections. However, the way the bill has been managed is of great concern, particularly with respect to some of the stakeholders who have provided input into the consultation process. As has been widely stated, this bill was first presented to stakeholders as being minor and administrative in nature. However, it was later revealed that the first draft contained more significant amendments than were expected, leading to alarm and concern amongst key stakeholder and environmental groups. This lack of consultation and communication with key stakeholders by the Labor state government, whilst typical of this government, is unacceptable and it is a breach of its most fundamental obligations to the community. What is more, it is also disappointing that such a problematic and inept process of legislative consultation could jeopardise genuine improvements to environmental protections.

So problematic was the Labor state government's consultation on the legislation that it warranted inclusion and comment by the Health and Environment Committee in its tabled report. As the committee stated—

Submitters were critical of the department's consultation process in the development of the Bill, emphasising concerns that consultation on the draft Bill involved engagement with selected stakeholders only, and only on specific parts or versions of the draft legislation, and was conducted under strict confidentiality arrangements, including requiring representatives of identified organisations to sign confidentiality deeds which prevented circulation of draft materials to members for feedback.

Submitters complained of short timeframes for responses to versions of documents restricting their capacity to respond fully. Submitters expressed concern about the possibility that the department, or departments more broadly, might adopt this approach for the future.

Given these damning findings and stakeholder feedback, it is not surprising that the Queensland parliament's Health and Environment Committee had to issue its own comment, including that 'the committee encourages open consultation with stakeholders and the general public, over timeframes that facilitate an effective legislative process.' This is aimed squarely at the Palaszczuk state Labor government, and it is incumbent on them to ensure future legislative processes and stakeholders are not treated in such a disrespectful manner.

Before concluding my contribution today I must say that I firmly believe that as elected representatives of our communities in the Queensland parliament we have a responsibility to support genuine efforts to conserve and enhance our environment, both locally and for our state. That is why I have always been proud to support genuine and meaningful efforts to protect and improve our environment, including ensuring bipartisan support such as I gave with respect to the removal of plastic bags in Queensland and the implementation of Queensland's container deposit or refund scheme when the current Deputy Premier was the minister for the environment.

I am also a strong supporter of broader efforts to ensure that clean, affordable and reliable energy is delivered to Queenslanders, with renewable energy forming an important part of our energy mix. Environmental protection and conservation is everyone's responsibility. We have all an important role to play. Certainly, that is why I continue to work with my local environmental and conservation groups throughout the Moggill electorate and, more broadly, the western suburbs of Brisbane.

Finally, for the benefit of the record, I remind Labor members opposite with respect to Linc Energy that it was the former Beattie and Bligh governments that supported underground coal gasification in Queensland. Again, the implementation or the fostering of that form of technology in Queensland occurred under former Labor governments. Environmental degradation is squarely at the feet of the Labor government with respect to the fostering of that technology in Queensland and the circumstances that we saw of Linc Energy. Whilst those opposite always try to point to others and other governments with respect to potential failings or errors that may have been made, it is the responsibility of the current Labor government to acknowledge that in Queensland. That is a consequence of its poor decision-making and of its poor evaluation of particular technologies. That rests squarely at the feet of not only this Labor government but also former Labor governments in Queensland. The LNP will always stand up and support our environment. We have always done that and we will continue to do so.