




Speech By
Hon. Leanne Linard

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Record of Proceedings, 14 September 2023

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Great Barrier Reef; Ipswich, Odour Issues

 **Hon. LM LINARD** (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (10.11 am): I join with the Premier in welcoming the UNESCO World Heritage Committee's decision not to list the Great Barrier Reef 'in danger'. The Great Barrier Reef is one of the world's truly remarkable places. I have been fortunate to experience the reef on two occasions and both times I have been truly amazed by the vast array of marine life and unparalleled beauty of the coral reef. It is truly one of the richest and most complex natural ecosystems on earth. Our government takes its role as guardian of the reef incredibly seriously. That is why we have been working so hard since we were first elected in 2015 to protect the reef from the threats impacting it. We have acted on water quality, tree clearing, sustainable fishing and greenhouse gas emissions and we have welcomed the opportunity to work with the Albanese government since its election. Like our government, it believes in the science and is committed to working to protect the reef.

The World Heritage Committee's announcement overnight confirms the draft decision handed down last month which cited the significant progress being made on climate change, water quality and sustainable fishing, all putting the reef on a stronger and more sustainable path. However, the job is far from over. The work to protect this iconic ecosystem continues. The commitments we have made, alongside our existing Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan commitments, must be delivered, including accelerated action to improve water quality, fisheries reforms and climate action. I look forward to continuing to work alongside Minister Plibersek as the Queensland and Commonwealth governments work hand in hand with the science community, industry, conservationists, the community broadly and UNESCO to protect this natural wonder so it can be enjoyed by future generations.

On another matter, in 2022, after flooding in Ipswich exacerbated odour issues coming from nearby waste facilities, the government ordered an independent review of the powers and penalties in the Environmental Protection Act 1994. Richard Jones, a retired judge of the district and planning and environment courts, and barrister Susan Hedge were asked to identify whether the powers and enforcement tools available when responding to environmental harm, particularly nuisance, were sufficient. They were also asked to look at the utility and effectiveness of existing penalties, including comparing them with the penalties that apply in other jurisdictions.

Overall, the review established that the Environmental Protection Act contained adequate powers and penalties to, in most instances, enforce environmental obligations and reduce the risk of environmental harm. The review also found that the act also benchmarked well in relation to enforcement tools and penalties compared to other legislation in Queensland and in other jurisdictions. However, the review made 18 recommendations for improving the legislation and effectiveness of tools available, with a particular focus on addressing nuisance issues and protecting the health and wellbeing of the community.

The government supported or supported in principle all of the 18 recommendations. Some of the recommendations have already been implemented and I am pleased to advise the House that my department will today start public consultation on the remainder. In line with the recommendations made, the government is proposing reforms to make it easier to proactively manage environmental risks while removing barriers that may delay a regulatory response in the event of environmental harm, particularly where residential and industrial areas are co-located. This includes by placing greater emphasis on human health, wellbeing and safety within the legislation as well as clarifying what constitutes an environmental nuisance and serious environmental harm. Additionally, the reforms introduce a new offence for anyone that fails to meet their general environmental duty, which requires people and industry carrying out activities that cause, or are likely to cause, harm, including nuisance to others or to the environment, to proactively manage the risks. Public consultation will close on 10 November, with the Department of Environment and Science then considering the feedback received.

I acknowledge the ongoing impacts from odour being experienced by the Ipswich community, particularly around the Swanbank area. I acknowledge the ongoing strong advocacy of the members for Bundamba, Jordan, Ipswich and Ipswich West who have continued to raise these matters with me since I was appointed minister and my predecessors. The Department of Environment and Science has a dedicated team actively investigating odour issues in the area. This team has been bolstered with additional resources to undertake increased compliance inspection activity.

Field investigations, community feedback and other intelligence have helped to identify that composting facilities located in the southern part of the Swanbank industrial area are a likely main cause of these recent odours. These facilities have been subject to increased targeted compliance inspection activities over recent months to ensure operators meet their environmental obligations. This included a series of unannounced detailed site inspections at composting sites in the industrial area in late July this year.

Looking longer term, the department is developing an air-monitoring plan for the Swanbank Industrial Area with a view to providing air-quality information to community and to provide further intelligence to underpin compliance actions. Resolving odour issues is complex, especially where residential areas are located close to industrial areas that are generating odour. However, if and when noncompliance is a cause, we must leave no stone unturned to reduce environmental harm and nuisance. Local members and the local community rightly expect nothing less. I trust that the Ipswich City Council will take the same approach and I look forward to working with it, alongside local members and the community, to achieve the best outcome for residents.