




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (6.35 pm): I rise to speak to the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. From the outset I want to make clear my opposition to this legislation because it is yet another attack on regional Queensland. Yet again this government is hiding behind the shambles of a consultation process in an attempt to cast the hardworking men and women who put food on our table and clothes on our backs as environmental vandals. The minister would have Queenslanders believe that primary producers are not doing their bit to improve water quality at the reef. Nothing could be further from the truth. In just four short years, over 69,000 hectares of sugarcane growing land in the Burdekin has been registered for best management practices, or BMP, and statewide more than 70 per cent of sugarcane land is managed by growers who are registered for BMP according to Canegrowers Queensland.

In fact, even the Department of Environment and Science's most recent Service Delivery Statements confirm that the take-up of BMP for sugarcane growers within reef catchments was above the department's own target. My question to the minister is: if the department's own targets are being exceeded, why will he not defer this legislation here tonight? As QFF president Stuart Armitage said, regulation is a high-cost, simplistic instrument that supports minimum standards that does little to encourage innovation and excellence. The reality is that our primary producers are innovative. They are striving for excellence and they are delivering results.

This government's efforts to mislead Queenslanders does not stop there. The minister continuously states, '60,000 jobs now rely on the reef's health'. The reality, according to respected economist, Colin Dwyer, is that just under half of those jobs are outside Queensland. While the WWF says tens of millions of dollars are going towards improving practices, it is farmers who have done and continue to do the heavy lifting. For example, canegrower Russell Hall in the Burdekin has spent \$600,000 on one farm to increase recycling of water and to reduce run-off. His neighbour, Ricky Mio, has constructed a ring tank to capture all the water on his farm at a cost of \$3 million, which means no water leaves his farm. That is right: there is no run-off from his farming operation. Instead of demonising our farmers, why will this Labor government not work with our farmers to deliver works on the ground that will make a real difference.

Let us look at the consultation process. Contempt is a strong word, but it is the only word that can be used to describe this government's attitude towards primary producers. That contempt is illustrated perfectly by the fact that this government had to be dragged kicking and screaming to conduct hearings on this legislation in regional Queensland. In contrast to all the submissions made, all the witnesses who have appeared and all the rallies held around this state, the minister unashamedly confirmed in her media release that the bill is not being amended. That contempt is further illustrated by the minister coming to the Burdekin to promote this very bill. Did she meet with farmers whose families have been caring for the land for generations? No. The minister met with a multinational company that, I might add, in 2017 and 2018, donated \$22,000 to the Queensland Labor Party. So much for consultation.

Those opposite stand here and say that they consulted by holding meetings in Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville, Mackay and Bundaberg, but I for one am yet to hear of any primary producer who believes they were consulted in an appropriate manner. There is clear evidence of members from that side of the House not just ignoring their constituents but also selling them out. At our last sitting, the three Townsville based members mentioned the need for jobs in North Queensland 20 times. Instead of standing up for more than 14,800 North Queenslanders employed in or as a result of the sugar industry, they were silent until they went back to their standard playbook of saying one thing in the north and another thing here in Brisbane. Along with the members for Mackay and Cook, their attempts in calling for no further changes to the minimum standards for at least five years is nothing but a smokescreen and will mean nothing for the farmers on the ground.

It is not only primary producers whom this government is holding in contempt. According to the government, the basis of modern science is wrong. Further, the scientific process is not a one-off; it is actually an ongoing cycle. However, will this government embrace retesting the science? The answer is, no! Entire industries are at risk and even asking for the science to be revisited is treated as blasphemy. My question to the minister is this: what economic and social modelling was undertaken by the government for this bill? The implementation of this bill will provide a \$40,000 impost on each and every farmer in the reef catchment area. That is money that they will need to fund out of their own pockets.

You cannot ignore the science. In 2009, it was lead scientists from the Australian Institute of Marine Science who concluded that localised agents such as water quality could not be the main factor causing the decline of the reef and that farm run-off did not extend to offshore reefs. That science directly contradicts the minister's statement yesterday that 'sediment and nutrients from farms and other land based activities can travel hundreds of kilometres'. Professor Walter Stark, who studied the Great Barrier Reef for more than 30 years, has questioned claims that drainage from land based activities is the main cause for damage to the reef. After an extensive study into the effects of nutrient levels, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority found that even at 20 times the normal nutrient level there was no increased algae growth. This is not covert science from untrusted sources. In fact, those studies were referred to in this place in 2009. Add to that the claims by Professor Peter Ridd, whose message has not changed in the 10 intervening years, and we can clearly see that science has an integral role in this debate.

Even when we look at the science that this government refers to, there are serious questions raised about the government's credibility. The reef 2050 plan was adopted in 2015 and benchmarks were set in 2016, with the goal of achieving catchment targets by 2025. The way the minister and other members of this government speak, one would think that no progress had been made, but nothing could be further from the truth. If we look at the Burdekin region, by 2018 there had been an 18.4 per cent reduction in sediment leaving catchments. With seven years remaining to reach the goal of a 30 per cent reduction, our primary producers deserve congratulations, not demonisation. According to the 2018 report, the reduction of particulate nitrogen leaving catchments in the Burdekin region sits at 16.4 per cent, which is well on the way to a 25 per cent reduction by 2025. Meanwhile, also according to the 2018 report, a 17 per cent reduction in particulate phosphorous has been achieved in the Burdekin region, which is also well on the way to a 25 per cent reduction by 2025. We all value our environment and, despite the attempts by those opposite to say otherwise, our primary producers love the reef.

My challenge to the minister is to stand in this House and acknowledge the progress that is being made. The *Great Barrier Reef outlook report 2019* states—

Coral juveniles were observed in densities likely to support future reef recovery.

However, there is no mention of that by those opposite. There is also no mention of the serious concerns raised by the Queensland Audit Office. Those concerns include a lack of monitoring sites, the use of model results rather than measured results and goals that are simply unachievable.

This legislation is based on political ideology, not science. Respected scientists and farmers have merely asked for the science to be reviewed. Where is the review for Queensland's primary producers? Where is the review for the 22,657 jobs that this legislation will put at risk? As one contributor to the *Townsville Bulletin* said today, this is duplicitous political hypocrisy. I have seen firsthand how primary producers are playing their part in protecting the reef. They are recycling water, planting alternate crops to secure nitrogen in the soil and leaving paddocks fallow. It is work such as that that will help us achieve our goals while protecting a vital part of the Queensland economy, but this government refuses to work with our primary producers. As my colleague the member for Broadwater explained yesterday, practices have changed over the years and our primary producers have adapted. That fact was highlighted when he, unlike the minister, met with representatives of a sugar growing family in Clare, just west of Ayr.

While the minister met with donors, the LNP met with farmers. Our primary producers are some of the best and most innovative in the world. They do not deserve the demonisation that they have endured from those opposite.

We are questioning why the science the government is choosing to use cannot be questioned and we are questioning when its attacks on primary industry will stop. As AgForce CEO Mike Guerin said, the so-called commitment to not make any further changes for five years will not even be enshrined in this bill. It is being reported that the commitment will not even be in the regulation. It is just another empty promise from a Labor government that is hell-bent on punishing regional Queensland. When not a single change to these anti-farmer laws is made, a hollow commitment to not make any further changes for five years is meaningless. The minister and her government should make no mistake: they will be held to account by hardworking people in regional Queensland who just want a fair go. Your actions far outweigh your words—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): Through the chair, please.

Mr LAST:—and the primary producers will never forget the contempt this government has shown for them. I am proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with our farmers to oppose this bill and I will continue to support them in their efforts for a fair go.