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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Marine Conservation
SPEECH

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Page 7278
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Speaker Perrett, Graham, MP

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Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (16:00): It is with great enthusiasm that I rise to speak on this matter of public importance put forward by the Leader of the Nationals, Mr Truss, on the adverse impact on fishing and coastal communities of the government's marine reserve declarations. I deliberately wanted to read out the title, because anyone listening to the previous speakers from the Liberal-National Party coalition would notice that they have not actually touched on that at all. They have been spinning a yarn and trying to engage politically, but they are not actually going to the respected science in this whole process and the actual consequences.

Let us get a bit of the history on the record straightaway. This process has been underway since Prime Minister Paul Keating was in the Lodge. Since then, there was a Liberal-National Party coalition in government for 12 years. They oversaw the same process, the same regime, the same science and the same process in terms of compensation. So let's get the facts on the table right from the start.

We have had crazy suggestions in question time from, I think, the member for Dawson, that there are no collective groups that actually support this process. I just looked through my *Courier Mail*—I do actually read the *Courier Mail*, the paper of record in the great state of Queensland. It is worth having a look at it, because there is a full-page ad from 19 and 20 May—

Mr Ian Macfarlane interjecting—

Mr PERRETT: I will not take that interjection from the member for Groom. It is a full-page ad that says 'It is time to protect Australia's Coral Sea'. If you had been reading the *Courier Mail*, you would have seen it. This is by Gary Heilman from DeBrett seafood and on behalf of the longline fishermen in the Coral Sea. It is cosigned by Daniel Gschwind, the CEO of Queensland Tourism Industry Council, and Mike Ball from Mike Ball Dive Expeditions. So the reality is there has been a great consultation process overseen by the Keating, Howard, Rudd and Gillard governments.

Why is it important to get the facts on the table upfront? Because the reality is that, when it comes to protecting the environment—something we take very seriously as parliamentarians—when you strip out the politics, both sides of the chamber in Australian politics respect the environment and do our bit.

Australia is a nation where most of us have come from across the sea. Our roots go across the sea; 98 per cent of Australians have roots stretching across the sea. We know that the ocean is important. Australia is responsible for 11 per cent of the world's surface—an incredible amount of the world that we look after. We are a trading nation, so we understand how important it is to make sure that we have good connections with the rest of the world but we also know how these opportunities to protect the environment only come along every now and then. We heard the environment minister, Minister Burke, talk about those great moments in history—the Franklin, and those other ones—where people made decisions. I seem to recall it was actually the environment minister, Mr Newman, the father of Campbell Newman, the Queensland Premier, who actually took on Joh Bjelke-Petersen over something called Fraser Island, and said: 'No, Joh, you've got it wrong. You don't just strip-mine the lot. We are actually going to protect this significant piece of Australia.' That is the approach to significant blocks of earth of Australia that can only have certain biodiversity. You protect it for our children. So thank goodness that the environment minister, Mr Newman, had the courage to stand up to Joh Bjelke-Petersen. This is our chance to be that brave and protect the planet.

I was up at the War Memorial yesterday laying a wreath with a veteran of the Coral Sea—Hollyoak was his name. When you have the RSL, the French government through New Caledonia, the Howard government and the Labor Party all on the same ticket, it takes a special Leader of the Opposition to break that unity ticket. When you can get the French and the RSL and the Labor Party and the Howard government all on the one page, and then get Tony Abbott, the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Warringah, to come in and break ranks with that unity ticket, that is a special knack; that really is incredible.

Why is that? Let's have a look. Let's go back to the 2010 election and Senator Boswell's duplicitous campaign in Queensland. It was a very sneaky, quick campaign that we did not have a chance to rebut. It did not get a lot of traction in Moreton; that is why I am here telling you the truth. Perhaps in Bonner it did get a little bit more traction. Thankfully Moreton is a little bit far away from the jetties where people go off into Moreton Bay, despite the name of the electorate. The reality is that Senator Boswell managed to fool some people hook, line and sinker and say that there was going to be no fishing basically because of the Labor-Greens alliance. It was disgraceful misrepresentation.

Mr Ian Macfarlane: You said there would be no carbon tax.

Mr PERRETT: We said that we would price carbon; that is what we said. The reality is that we went to the 2007 election saying that we would price carbon, and that is what we have achieved. You know, member for Groom; you were in the negotiations. I heard those negotiations in Taipei. So, remember that we did have a CPRS deal where we priced carbon and, but for one vote in the coalition party room—where someone actually spoiled a ballot paper because they could not vote for Turnbull or Abbott—we would have had a CPRS. If we had had the Greens vote along with the vote of Senator Sue Boyce from Queensland, who had the courage to join Senator Troeth from Victoria, we would have a CPRS and Tony Abbott would be consigned to the pages of history.

The protection of the Coral Sea and the seas in the rest of Australia is a great moment in the history of this parliament. We can actually protect something for our children and our grandchildren.

The reality is that we are yet to see the emails flowing into our offices from people saying, 'We can't go fishing.' The electorate of Moreton is a long way from the Coral Sea, but I am proud to say I married a North Queenslander, a Trinity Bay High girl from Cairns. All my in-laws are in Tully, Babinda and Innisfail and they have tinnies, and they go fishing. They go to the reefs. But I can tell you that they do not go 450 kilometres out. I trust my in-laws—mostly!—but I am not going 450 kilometres out in any tinny; I can tell you that.

The reality is that we will still be able to go fishing. There is a great history, going back to Lee Marvin. If you go to beach resorts you can see those photos of Lee Marvin. Back in the seventies fishing was bringing Hollywood to North Queensland. Tourists went out after these pelagic fish; they went to catch marlin. Since then North Queensland has been world famous, when it comes to bringing tourists in. And this legislation will complement it. That is why you have Mike Ball, from Mike Ball Dive Expeditions saying, proudly, 'Get this done.' We will have a great product to sell around the world.

North Queensland is suffering at the moment in terms of jobs and tourism.

Mr Christensen interjecting —

Mr PERRETT: The reality is that this is part of the product. It is niche tourism rather than the mass brand. We have to have a niche market, and North Queensland can market itself as the pristine environment. The reality is—

Mr Christensen: Very niche!

Mr PERRETT: I understand the member for Dawson's concerns that he will not be able to stand on the beach at Mackay and cast 450 kilometres out to the Coral Sea as he used to! He will have to go out with an expedition or the like.

The reality is that the Coral Sea marine reserve is important in so many ways. The scientists agree—the same scientists that advised the Howard government. It was the same process that the Howard government went through, when that crazy left-wing environment minister—

Ms Livermore: Kemp!

Mr PERRETT: David Kemp. I always get the brothers mixed up. He understood. Peter Lindsay—for heaven's sake!—recognised that this was something to be proud of and that we should be taking a step in history and doing the right thing. I would suggest that he was not exactly a crazy left-winger!

Mr Christensen: Well—

Mr PERRETT: I will take that interjection from the member for Dawson. He knows him a bit better than me, obviously. This is the right thing to do in this parliament's history and we should be signing up for it proudly.