



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park

SPEECH

Monday, 9 February 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Laming, Andrew, MP

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Mr LAMING (Bowman) (12:21): There is no doubt that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is an icon for everyone, a tourist top-of-the-list visit for anyone, both Australian and from overseas, but I want to highlight the important issue of balancing economy, environment and the native title rights of Indigenous land and sea holders to hunt in those areas. That has always caused some confusion to Australians, who regard it as pre-eminent above all things that endangered species should be protected, but we have acknowledged the rights of native title holders in those areas to hunt, usually with a combination of traditional and non-traditional means.

My first interest in this area was in 2005, when I lobbied the then coalition environment minister that they should not be using contemporary and modern-day tools for these purposes and that, if they were truly hunting traditionally, it should be done with traditional tools. There are of course two sides to that debate because we have to look at the humanity and the compassion of using traditional tools, sometimes leading to the injuring of animals rather than a quick kill that is achieved with modern-day equipment. We also have the issue of being able to pursue animals using motorised vessels until they are exhausted, which is also a concern to many.

That is only a piece of subtext to the Environment Legislation Amendment Bill 2013, which increases the penalties for those who do not have those exemptions under the EPBC Act. Those are the people who are engaged in killing, poaching and transportation, often for trade or commercial purposes. No-one in Australia would support our most valued dugongs and turtles being subject to such a fate, so that bill is very simple. It is supported, I think, by everyone that the killing, injuring, taking, transporting, moving, poaching or keeping of any of these products of turtle or dugong should be not only prohibited but dealt with by tough penalties.

Of course, we have had the Queensland election, where the signal was also very, very clear from voters that, above all else, they want to take an absolutely precautionary principle approach to the Great Barrier Reef and take no chances. For any Queensland government, in balancing up port expansion, the economy and local jobs with an absolute, no-exceptions protection of the Great Barrier Reef, both the marine park area and the conservation region around it, we have to be making sure that we take no chances with dredging.

The first thing that I want to see is those limits to dredging and very careful disposal of what is dredged, because obviously, for larger and larger vessels to access our major ports, there is going to be an element of that. We need to be constantly monitoring water quality and ensuring that those improvements are achieved, and I have no doubt that that is occurring. We need better strategic planning. With port development, we need to be looking for the least impact, the least footprint, the least ecological and hydrological impact on our local foreshores as possible, and of course we need to be reinvesting some of the proceeds of a strong economy into protecting the reef.

That all makes common sense. That is part of both the coalition and the state LNP's approach, and I want to see that that is not in any way imperilled if there is to be a change of government when government in Queensland is decided.

Where we go from here is quite simple. We respect the role of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to make independent assessments of how we are going on the Great Barrier Reef. Not only is it one of the greatest natural wonders of the world, it is also probably the best protected. No place on the planet has more environmental investment in keeping it in its pristine condition than the Great Barrier Reef. On any technical appraisal of the work that we have done here in Australia we can make a very strong case internationally that we are doing the right thing for our park and that its world heritage status should not be considered to be in danger.

We have got an outlook report and we have the state party report, which importantly was done independently, as I have said, by the marine park authority. Those contributions make a very strong case for us to be able to fend off a number of environmental groups that are working very hard to have that endangered status supported internationally. What we can do with these reports is show (a) that we are doing more than anywhere else in the world, (b) that we are investing more money than anywhere else in the world to look after this pristine asset, (c)

that we are doing the monitoring that will give us the early warning if anything is going wrong, and (d) that we truly, unlike anywhere else in the world, can perfectly balance the needs of a local economy in job creation and the exploitation of our natural resources for the benefits of Australia together with protecting the Great Barrier Reef.