



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Marine Sanctuaries

SPEECH

Monday, 28 November 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Page 4659
Questioner
Speaker Thistlethwaite, Matt, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (13:25): I am pleased to support this motion. I thank the member for Fremantle for raising a very important issue. Australia's marine network is under unprecedented pressure, particularly around the Great Barrier Reef, with unprecedented levels of coral bleaching which is going to, if it is not abated, affect the domestic tourism industry and so many industries that rely on the health of the reef for people to make a living. There is little doubt that Australia is blessed with some of the world's most beautiful ocean environments. Whether it is summer trips to the beach with the family or our fierce protection of our ocean wildlife, Australians place extraordinary value on all things connected with the ocean. Given our strong feelings, Australians expect a high standard from their governments when it comes to management and conservation of those marine assets.

The Labor Party has an exceptional record of protecting Australia's ocean environment. The Whitlam government established the nation's first marine reserve to protect the Great Barrier Reef; Bob Hawke and Michel Rocard worked together to turn the Antarctic into the world's largest conservation area; and the last Labor government established Australia's marine park network, the largest network of marine protected areas anywhere in the world. In developing these marine reserves, Labor spent four years establishing the science, conducting more than 250 public consultations and receiving more than 750,000 submissions from Australians regarding ocean conservation. It puts to shame the claims made by the previous speaker that Labor did not consult when it established these marine reserves—750,000 submissions speak for themselves.

As noted in the motion, according to the 2010 Census of Marine Life, Australia's marine environment is the most biologically diverse in the world, with our oceans spanning tropical, temperate and sub-Antarctic waters where at least 33,000 marine species have been identified. It is also important to note that Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and is required to conserve as well as sustainably utilise its exclusive economic zone.

In our marine environment, we have much to be proud of, and it is a source of pride that warrants proper protection. Unfortunately, this Liberal coalition government has set aside the management plans for the Commonwealth marine parks so that it could conduct a review—a review that, as I mentioned, the Labor Party already conducted when we were in government. And now, after almost three years, the 40 marine parks have not been implemented, leaving five of Australia's six marine regions with little or no protection despite the fact that the government made a promise to implement those marine reserves within 12 months.

Also noted in this very thorough motion is that, in recent consultation by Parks Australia, over 50,000 submissions were received from around Australia calling for the reinstatement of the marine parks and their high-level marine national park zoning without further delay or loss of protection. I have had numerous representations from constituents in my electorate. I have received visits here in Canberra from people who are concerned about the fact that this government is stalling and delaying the ultimate declaration of these important marine reserves. The government has turned its back on a great number of Australians that are in support of protecting our marine environment and its biodiversity.

Labor understands the importance of protecting our environment, particularly our marine parks, for current and future generations as well as supporting sustainable, well managed industries. Only Labor has proven that it can deliver both. With these goals in mind, I add my voice to this motion and the call for the Turnbull coalition government to bring the Commonwealth network of marine parks that were declared in 2012 into operation without further delay and with no loss of marine national protection.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Vamvakinou): Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Sitting suspended from 13:31 to 16:00