



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

ADJOURNMENT

Shipping

SPEECH

Thursday, 13 October 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 13 October 2016
Page 1988
Questioner
Speaker Albanese, Anthony, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (12:18): I take this opportunity to talk about shipping and the potential impact on our environment of shipping in two areas: firstly, the Great Barrier Reef, and secondly, in my electorate of Grayndler. On 20 September, when asked about calls from the environmental movement for more protection of the Great Barrier Reef from coal freighters, the Deputy Prime Minister said that shipping accidents on the reef were inevitable. He said:

... but that's life. If you have ships at sea you're going to have them run into things and sink from time to time.

As the person who was the transport minister in the previous government, responsible for the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, I say thank goodness that is not the approach of AMSA or the regulatory authorities. The comment was reckless in the extreme. The Deputy Prime Minister was speaking after the government reached a \$39.3 million out-of-court damages settlement with the operators of *Shen Neng 1*, a coal freighter that ran aground at Douglas Shoal about 100 kilometres east of Rockhampton in 2010. When the *Shen Neng 1* hit the reef it was 10 kilometres outside the shipping lanes. The mariner in charge was operating on little sleep because the vessel did not observe Australian workplace health and safety requirements—that is why he was jailed for 18 months for negligence. While accidents certainly have happened, they are more likely to happen if ships passing through the reef are being steered by sleepy overseas operators who have no idea where they are. It is up to governments to maintain high safety standards and that is why an Australian shipping industry is vital—not optional but vital. Governments through appropriate regulation can certainly have an impact. What the Deputy Prime Minister has said is ignorant in the extreme and puts under threat the overwhelming support that there is for safe passage of ships to Australia's north and around our coastline.

I want to talk about another issue which is of concern, particularly in my electorate. In June I contacted the transport minister, Darren Chester, to offer bipartisan support for action to ensure that cruise ships on Sydney Harbour use low-sulphur fuel. There has been concern because the New South Wales government carried legislation at the same time as the federal government was considering anti-pollution legislation, which had the unintended consequence of rendering inoperable the state government's new requirements on the use of low-sulphur fuel, 0.1 per cent or less, on Sydney Harbour.

Residents of Balmain have expressed legitimate concern about fuel fumes from cruise ships in White Bay. It is important that the Commonwealth act and address this problem. Since the election I have repeatedly asked Minister Chester to fulfil his commitment to resolve this issue either through legislation or other means but it needs to be required in a way which is better than just voluntary compliance. Cruise ships do provide significant economic activity for Australia but it is important that they operate within environmental best practice. I am pleased that the cruise ship industry has agreed to voluntarily implement this New South Wales government policy of using low-sulphur fuel but Commonwealth action is required. If the Commonwealth makes legislation that has unintended consequences then it is its responsibility to fix it. Minister Chester understands that there is a problem but he needs to fix it. This government seems incapable of being able to legislate in the national interest. This is an issue which is not ideological, which has bipartisan support. I say to the minister: get on board; introduce the legislation. We on this side will ensure its quick passage through both houses of parliament and fix this problem.