



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard Wednesday, 26 November 2008

MOTION: REEF RESCUE PROGRAM

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (5.39 pm): I am very pleased to second the motion moved by the shadow minister for sustainability, climate change and innovation, the member for Gympie. This motion is a real test for government members in seats north of Bundaberg, who should be supporting their local communities against the misguided, misdirected and unfounded attack by the Bligh government on our primary industries.

Like many north Queenslanders, I was appalled by the attack on Queensland's primary producers by the state Labor government. Labor has been quick to cast a slur on farmers, but it is yet to disclose the detail of the compulsory regulations it believes will reduce run-off from coastal farming areas. The LNP and industry stakeholder groups look forward to seeing how the Bligh Labor government will determine which farm practices will be targeted and how it will accurately demonstrate their alleged impact on the reef.

It is interesting to reflect on comments by the federal minister for the environment, Peter Garrett, at the Reef Summit hosted by the Premier on 24 October 2008. Minister Garrett said—

Agricultural industries must continue to take the lead role in driving the uptake of sustainable land management practices and governments, federal and state, must support industry in this task.

Minister Garrett went on to say that it is the role of governments to support them by providing incentives, helping to build capacity, through extension and awareness raising, emphasising that to succeed we must work together. I ask the Premier and Minister McNamara: why is the state Labor government taking a different approach to the federal Labor government? Why does it not have any confidence in Prime Minister Rudd and Minister Garrett?

In contrast to Labor, the LNP recognises that farmers have already made significant improvements to farming practices that have been good for the environment. Significant advances in land management practices through voluntary initiatives and incentive based programs have already brought about improvements across a number of environmental indicators. With additional government support, these improvements would have continued to push best practice benchmarks even higher.

Regulation should always be a last resort. Overregulation does not encourage innovative solutions or improved production technologies. It reduces efforts to improve farm practices to a lowest common denominator level. Then again, the bureaucratic approach has always been the Labor way. This announcement is not about securing the future of the reef; it is about securing green preferences for the next state election. If Labor were serious about protecting the reef, it would acknowledge that primary producers will be major partners in achieving that goal. You do not strengthen partnerships by publicly berating your partner.

Subject to the release of the final details of the Commonwealth government's \$200 million Reef Rescue package, an LNP government in Queensland will lock in behind this voluntary, incentive based program to improve land management practices aimed at improving the health of the Great Barrier Reef. The LNP believes more could be achieved for the long-term health of the reef by Queensland pooling its resources with the initiative currently being developed by the Commonwealth government.

An LNP government will take the funds committed by the Bligh government for more bureaucratic regulation and create a partnership with the Commonwealth government to achieve something meaningful and lasting for the ongoing conservation of the Great Barrier Reef. My LNP parliamentary colleagues and I will be keen to see the final detail of the federal government's plan. If it stacks up and we can agree on how to allocate funding provided by an LNP government, it could be a real step forward for the reef. The LNP and industry stakeholder groups believe that we can do better than millions of dollars worth of bureaucracy.

After witnessing genuine consultation with industry stakeholders in my own electorate, I have a degree of confidence in the incentive based, voluntary framework being developed by the Commonwealth government. I was encouraged to see this occurring with people who understand farming practices, the significant progress that has already been achieved and what practical efforts can be undertaken in the future. Farmers and industry groups have been able to take ownership and drive this voluntary, incentive based program.

The aggressive, regulatory approach from the state Labor government and the cooperative, incentive based approach that will be pursued by the LNP is a real point of difference between another Bligh government and a new Springborg government. The Bligh government has made a serious mistake by vilifying Queensland farmers and portraying farming activities as the major threat to the future of the Great Barrier Reef.

The Bligh Labor government has decided that farmers are an easy political target in the face of mounting pressure over some of its crazy policies that are bad for the environment, like the Traveston Crossing Dam on the Mary River. Farmers will be the major partners in the effort to improve the quality of the water flowing into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. Once again, I say to all members of the House: you do not create strong partnerships by publicly threatening your partner.