



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard Wednesday, 14 April 2010

MOTION: ELECTRONIC VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (6.16 pm): The events of the last two weeks off the coast of Central Queensland have revealed two things. Firstly, they have revealed that the Bligh Labor government has been asleep at the wheel as far as the regulation of commercial shipping in and around the Great Barrier Reef is concerned. What has been going on over the last two weeks has been an elaborate mixture of media spin and chest beating by all sorts of Labor politicians, including the Prime Minister, the Premier and a cast of assorted ministers.

When the tough questions have been asked of the Bligh Labor government by the media over the past two weeks and this week in this parliament by the LNP opposition, the Premier and her ministers have ducked and weaved and gently pushed the responsibility off to the Commonwealth government. 'It happened in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park,' they say. 'They are Commonwealth waters,' they answer. 'Not in our jurisdiction,' they claim. They were all at their buck-passing best, running away from the responsibilities that they have undertaken as ministers.

But haven't the same Labor politicians been running up frequent flyer points to get in front of the cameras and the microphones to try to show how concerned they are about the Great Barrier Reef? 'Not our jurisdiction,' says the Premier, 'but my government will amend the transport legislation to provide for significantly increased penalties for incidents in Queensland waters.' 'Not our jurisdiction,' says the transport minister, 'but Maritime Safety Queensland has been at the forefront of the response.' 'Not our jurisdiction,' says the environment minister, 'but Parks and Wildlife Service rangers have been deployed to participate in the clean-up operation.'

The Bligh Labor government has been breaking its neck to try to put a spotlight on this issue and its efforts to protect the reef notwithstanding that it claims not to be responsible. Well may it pull out all stops to drag the attention of the public away from the shameful nurses pay scandal consuming Queensland Health. Interestingly, the Deputy Premier and health minister and the public works and ICT minister are equally keen to disavow their responsibility in this regard. There is a familiar pattern appearing here.

The second issue follows on from the first—that is, the Bligh Labor government has failed to perceive the threat to the Great Barrier Reef posed by the thousands of huge commercial vessels navigating through the reef system along Queensland's east coast, driven by the resources boom in regional Queensland. It is not an issue that the government can claim has crept up on it. It has been occurring for years. Reports abound of the frequent rat-running that has been occurring for the period of the resources boom while Labor has looked the other way in respect of this threat to the reef.

The question is: what has Labor been doing instead? The answer is that Labor spent the last 12 months persecuting farmers and graziers in North Queensland through its so-called reef protection legislation. If the Bligh government had not been so busy persecuting soft targets like the sugar industry and the beef industry, it might have been awake to the fact that there were other more pressing threats to the reef and it might have done something about the lax regulation of foreign shipping companies making thousands of trips through the reef lagoon every year. The government cannot blame landowners for

getting angry when this sort of blatant hypocrisy is on show. Let me assure the members opposite that the farmers and graziers in North Queensland are seething about it.

In front of all the cameras and the microphones this week the Premier and her ministers have been expressing concern for the pristine Great Barrier Reef. Is this not the same Great Barrier Reef that it has spent the last 12 months telling us has been damaged by decades of farming activity in North Queensland? It cannot have it both ways: the reef is either significantly damaged by farming activity or it is pristine. The Bligh government has been exposed for using an argument that suits it at the time, depending on which way the political breeze is blowing.

These foreign shipping companies are obviously traversing the Great Barrier Reef without proper supervision. This motion moved by the LNP seeks to address this situation and it should be supported on that basis by all members in this place.

The three-kilometre scar on the Great Barrier Reef, the oil spill and the toxic paint from the hull of the *Shen Neng 1* are the clear and present dangers on the Great Barrier Reef, not the progressive, modern land management practices of North Queensland primary producers.

This motion is not, as was alleged by the member for Keppel, a reflection on state government agencies' work to clean up this problem. This motion seeks to shine a light on the policy failures of the Bligh Labor government for which it has ducked and weaved responsibility for the last two weeks.