




Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (12.54 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. As the shadow minister has already outlined to the House, the LNP will not be supporting this bill because, unfortunately, it is yet another example of this government's misguided approach to protecting the environment. In short, it unfortunately once again focuses on the imposition of more regulation on landowners.

One of the primary aims of this legislation, according to the explanatory notes accompanying the bill, is to implement the new Queensland Coastal Plan. The explanatory notes accompanying the bill state that the Queensland Coastal Plan will remove duplication and overlap with other legislation. I wish I could say that was true. I wish this legislation was really simplifying and reducing the burden of red tape on landowners in coastal areas of Queensland. Unfortunately, this government is addicted to regulation. Time and again we have seen responsible landowners burdened with additional regulation with little to no real benefit to the environment.


Unfortunately, it is North Queensland that has been exposed to the full force of this government's addiction to regulation when it comes to the environment. Unfortunately, in the current term of this government and during the tenure of this minister, North Queensland has been targeted for several new layers of regulation, red tape and restrictions which fly in the face of the assertion made in the explanatory notes in this bill that the goal of the proposed legislation is to remove duplication and overlap with other legislation. The claims of this government that it is trying to reduce the regulatory burden on landowners in no way reflects the reality of the increase in the burden of regulation, red tape and restrictions on landowners in North Queensland and in particular on the landowners in my electorate of Hinchinbrook. The increasing regulatory burden is dragging down the communities that I represent in North Queensland.

I will give some examples of how the claim made in the explanatory notes that this legislation seeks to reduce the regulatory burden on landowners in coastal areas of North Queensland is inconsistent with the actions of this government over the course of this term. For example, we had the amendment bill to the Vegetation Management Act which proposed to restrict the management of regrowth vegetation in Queensland. One of the particular clauses in that bill focused on the restrictions on the management of regrowth vegetation adjacent to watercourses in North Queensland. That bill proposed 50-metre buffer zones either side of watercourses in catchment areas in North Queensland, and I think they were described as the Mackay-Whitsunday catchment, the Wet Tropics catchment and the Burdekin catchment areas.

Those regulations have imposed restrictions on the management of regrowth vegetation 50 metres either side of every watercourse in the aforesaid catchment areas. Those catchment areas are massive and in North Queensland, particularly in the area that I represent in North Queensland—the Wet Tropics—watercourses dominate the landscape. As a result, the regrowth vegetation that is now restricted as far as its management is concerned takes up a very large area of land in my electorate indeed.

That was one of the first strikes that came on landowners in North Queensland following the election of this government in 2009. The second wave of additional regulation and red tape and restrictions on landowners in North Queensland came with the introduction of the so-called Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Act. That act proposed restrictions on sugarcane farmers and graziers in three catchments in North Queensland—the Mackay-Whitsunday catchment, the Wet Tropics catchment and the Burdekin catchment. Those restrictions have resulted in enormous regulatory burdens on primary producers in those catchment areas. It will have implications for the productivity of those industries in North Queensland. Unfortunately, it imposes restrictions on the ability of those landowners to pursue their livelihoods on the properties that they own. It is totally inconsistent for the minister to say that this legislation will give an opportunity for landowners to be relieved of duplication and the burden of regulation when nothing in this bill proposes to relieve additional regulation in respect of that legislation that came in in 2009.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 pm to 2.30 pm.

 **Mr CRIPPS:** Before the luncheon adjournment I was talking about the disparity between the claim made by the government in its explanatory notes accompanying the bill that the proposed introduction of the Queensland Coastal Plan will remove duplication and overlap with other legislation and the reality of the track record of this government during its current term. I mentioned in particular the legislation that went through this House in 2009 in respect of the increased restrictions placed on landholders in the management of regrowth vegetation adjacent to watercourses in the three catchment areas nominated in that legislation—the Mackay-Whitsunday catchment, the Wet Tropics catchment and the Burdekin catchment—and also the reality that the Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Bill, introduced by this government, also severely restricted the opportunities for landowners to pursue their livelihoods on their properties in a viable and productive fashion.

The reality is that the increase in the amount of regulation that legislation such as that I have just mentioned and the increased regulation that will be imposed on landowners in North Queensland as a result of the implementation of this plan severely undermines the productivity of industry in those areas, and that undermines jobs in the communities that I represent. That is the great concern of representatives from North Queensland, I am sure, from all sides of the House. I think it is really important for the government to keep in mind the increased regulation that it continues to impose on landowners, particularly on landowners in North Queensland.

I will give members an example of the type of insidious regulation imposed, particularly on rural industries in North Queensland. The introduction of the Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Bill and the legislation associated with that bill changed the status of farming from pursuing an agricultural industry, from farming in the traditional sense that we understand it. It changed the status of farming and made it an environmentally relevant activity. So rural primary producers in North Queensland in those three catchments that I mentioned are not actually farming anymore for the intents and purposes of the Environmental Protection Act; they are pursuing an environmentally relevant activity.

It is interesting to note in the explanatory notes accompanying the bill that a number of other existing ERAs are listed, and they include chemical manufacturing and heavy metal refining. I do not think any fair-minded Queenslanders, whether they live in an urban area, a metropolitan area, a provincial city or a rural area of Queensland, would think it fair to deal with rural producers in the same way and under the same legislation that we use to regulate heavy metal refining and chemical manufacturing. I think that is diabolical. That is why over the past couple of years I have so passionately and regularly fought against the introduction of that Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Bill.

I reject the assertions made by the minister on several occasions over the course of the past two years, and particularly this morning when she repeated her allegations, that the LNP opposition had failed to stand up to protect the reef. I reject those assertions. We are very interested in the practical protection of the Great Barrier Reef. We consider it an environmental icon and a natural wonder. But when the government of Queensland comes into this place and introduces a bill that tries to change the status of farmers from primary producers to pursuing an environmentally relevant activity under the same legislation as chemical manufacturing and heavy metal refining, I find that a diabolical proposition that I cannot abide. That is the reason I fought so hard against that bill and the legislation associated with it.

The Queensland Coastal Plan also involves the application of another set of maps on coastal areas in Queensland. I have been perusing those draft maps associated with the Queensland Coastal Plan. In particular, I have been perusing the maps as they pertain to areas of North Queensland. The maps that I have here with me apply to the Whitsunday-Mackay area, the Townsville region and the Far Northern region. Interestingly, those are the same regions that mirror those catchment areas that I was talking about before in relation to the restrictions on the management of regrowth vegetation in North Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Bill. Basically, those maps mirror those catchment areas that I was talking about earlier.

We have been mapped and we have been zoned and we have been mapped and zoned again in North Queensland. Over the course of the past couple of years we have had the introduction of the Far North Queensland Regional Plan. I do not necessarily disagree with having a regional plan. I think having a regional plan is something that you probably ought to do. But attached to that Far North Queensland Regional Plan we have the areas of ecological significance mapping. The areas of ecological significance mapping attached to that statutory plan is very extensive indeed throughout Far North Queensland. It restricts the types of activities landholders can pursue on their land.

In more recent times we have also had the introduction of the state planning policy for wetland areas. This state planning policy for wetland areas has been introduced in communities along the east coast of Queensland, including in my electorate and throughout North Queensland, and it continues to restrict the types of activities that can be pursued on people's properties, particularly in relation to applications for development on properties and in particular for the pursuit of earthworks on properties. In my electorate in the Wet Tropics of North Queensland, landowners need to be able to pursue emergency earthworks immediately upon the identification of a problem on their property. When we have monsoonal rains and massive storms, we need to be able to have immediate permission to pursue emergency drainage works on those properties. Unfortunately, the state planning policy for wetland areas proposes to significantly reduce the opportunity for landowners in my electorate to do those things.

As I said earlier, this will be yet another set of maps that cover property owners in my electorate of Hinchinbrook and throughout North Queensland. I want to give honourable members a scenario. In my electorate of Hinchinbrook—a beautiful part of the state nestled between the Great Dividing Range and the coast—two-thirds of the land mass is already conserved: it is World Heritage declared, national park or State Forest. That provides us with a beautiful natural environment, but it comes at a cost: none of that land can be rated; none of that land returns a revenue stream to our local government authorities; none of that land can be used for the future expansion of industries that underpin the economy in my electorate; none of that land can be used to expand residential, commercial or industrial areas for the economy in my electorate to be diversified. This mapping proposes to extend further the areas of my electorate that will be reduced in value and will reduce the numbers of opportunities for landowners to pursue economic activities in my electorate.

How on earth can the government continue to expect North Queenslanders and the communities in my electorate to accept further mapping, further restrictions, further zoning, further red tape on our way of life and on the industries that underpin the economy in our electorate? How on earth do they expect us to just sit down and accept the continued pressure on our ability to pursue our livelihoods in North Queensland? It is just a diabolical set of circumstances.

The regulation creates an enormous amount of uncertainty for landowners. People really are coming to the end of their patience with this scenario. They are finding it extremely difficult to comply with the regulatory burden being placed upon them simply for pursuing the activities that they have pursued for several decades to make a living, to provide for their families and to provide jobs in the communities that I represent. I cannot allow this legislation to go through without registering my real concerns about the impact that more zoning and more mapping will have on the property rights of the people who own land in my electorate of Hinchinbrook.