

## **GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2008 Second Reading**

**Mr ROBERT** (Fadden) (12.10 p.m.)—Before I speak on the [Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2008](#), I ask for indulgence to wish Red Nose Day a very happy 21st birthday for tomorrow, which is officially Red Nose Day. I want to acknowledge what SIDS and Kids have been doing to help stamp out Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Over the last 20 years, the death of infants through SIDS has reduced by something like 90 per cent, which I think we in parliament would all applaud. If I could be so bold, as I look towards the government minister, on behalf of all of parliament I wish to say, 'Happy 21st, SIDS and Kids, for tomorrow.'

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr AJ Schultz)**—I thank the member for Fadden. I am sure all parliamentarians would support him in his sentiments.

**Mr ROBERT**—I support the [Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2008](#) and note that it is in fact our legislation. The previous coalition government completed a review of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act and authority in 2006. The former Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell, oversaw that review which delivered on a coalition election commitment to review the act and improve the performance of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. The review consulted with a wide range of stakeholders with a diverse range of views. It held 36 consultations and considered 227 submissions. The coalition cabinet then released a response accepting all the recommendations. The [Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2008](#) is largely a result of this work by former Senator Ian Campbell and the Howard government.

The purpose of this now Labor government bill is to establish a modern and robust regulatory framework that provides the capability for the efficient and effective protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef into the future. Proposed changes include updating the act to reflect the fact that the Great Barrier Reef has been World Heritage listed, updating the act to reflect that the coalition government introduced the EPBC Act and closing the perceived gaps in emergency management powers. The new bill also picks up the coalition cabinet's decision to move beyond a criminal penalty only system to allow for greater flexibility of enforcement options, such as reef recovery or civil penalties for breaches such as fishing in no-take zones. In addition, the bill expands the number of board members from three to five, in line with recommendations. Under the bill, one of those places will now be filled by an Indigenous representative. In the Senate, we will also move to ensure that there is appropriate industry representation.

By way of background, the Great Barrier Reef is one of the world's largest and most complex ecosystems. It comprises not one continuous reef but over 2,900 individual reefs, including about 760 fringe reefs around islands and along the mainland. There are over 900 islands and cays within the boundaries of the current marine park. The reef is one of the most visually spectacular and richly diverse ecosystems on the planet and, indeed, is visible from space. The reef represents one of the most amazing aspects of life: that where there is wind, wave and true buffeting the reef is most alive. Coral is brighter on the ocean side than on the mainland side. Where the coral has to struggle, it is the brightest. Perhaps there is a lesson there for the government.

Of course, the reef is also one of Australia's most internationally recognised tourist icons. Its value to Australian tourism is immense. Reef related tourism generates close to \$6 billion a year. Recreation and commercial fishing generate hundreds of millions more. It would be difficult to overestimate the reef's importance to Australia economically, culturally and environmentally.

By way of history, we have come a long way as a nation in our attitude towards the Great Barrier Reef. In 1967 the Queensland department of mines received an application to mine limestone on Ellison Reef and legislation was drawn up to govern the granting of offshore oil exploration permits. In 1969, an oil company was actually granted a permit covering the entire reef. Soon afterwards concern began, quite rightly, to grow about the potential for environmental catastrophe brought about by a major oil spill. A Royal Commission into Exploratory and Production Drilling for Petroleum in the Area of the Great Barrier Reef was held between 1970 and 1974. This resulted in the banning of petroleum drilling and a recommendation that a statutory authority be set up to protect the reef and regulate research and development within its vicinity.

At the same time, a committee of inquiry into the national estate deemed the reef to be of World Heritage standard and found that the Queensland and Commonwealth governments had a responsibility to preserve and manage the reef. These recommendations of course received bipartisan support and resulted in the enactment of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975. Over the following 25 years or so, more sections of the reef were progressively proclaimed to be part of the marine park.

I proudly say that no government in this nation's history has done more to protect the Great Barrier Reef than the Howard government. This was done principally through a number of far-reaching and ambitious actions. Firstly, the Howard government passed the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act in 1999—opposed by members opposite, can you believe it? This act gave the country its first national environment specific legislation in our history. One of the most significant impacts of the act has been to give the Australian government unprecedented powers to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

The second massive contribution to the protection of the Great Barrier Reef by the Howard government was the development of a new zoning plan for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park that ensured that one-third of the reef—a sixfold increase—will be protected in so-called 'no take zones', zones where no extractive activity can occur. Another great advance by the Howard government was in terms of protecting the biodiversity, and thus the resilience, of this national icon in the development in concert with the Queensland government of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan.

The fact that the Howard government did more to protect the Great Barrier Reef than any other government is supported by the current government Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, the member for Kingsford Smith, who I believe is actually absent from the country during the debate on his own bill. The member for Kingsford Smith, the current responsible minister, said on 10 May 2007—and I will quote so the government does not miss any of it:

... we certainly acknowledge that the significant protection of the Great Barrier Reef is one of the Howard government's real environmental achievements.

Building on this great legacy, the Howard government then put together what Labor has now copied in the form of the bill we debate today. To get a sense of the impact and importance of this legislation that the Howard government put through, it is worth while looking at the extent of the various marine park zones before 2004 and afterwards. General use reduced from 77.94 per cent to being only 33 per cent. Habitat protection increased from 15.2 to 28.2 per cent, and marine national parks increased from 4.6 per cent to a staggering 33.3 per cent. The marine park now covers around 98 per cent of the World Heritage Area and an additional one per cent is covered by Queensland national parks and by the Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is now by far the largest marine protected area in Australia. It extends over 2,300 kilometres along the Queensland coast and covers close to 344,000 square

kilometres. The Howard government can be incredibly proud of the legacy it left the Australian people.

I will conclude on three simple three points. Firstly, I am staggered by the timing of this bill's introduction. I believe it only serves to highlight the fact that the Rudd government's legislative program is in disarray. On 18 June this year we were told by Minister Garrett's office that the bill would be held over until late August. By the following morning, 19 June—clearly there had been a chaotic evening with the Prime Minister—it was announced that the bill was to be debated a few days later, whilst the responsible minister was overseas. Thus, this bill is being debated whilst the minister damages Australia's reputation on the international stage over whaling. Instead of allowing the industry time to comment and review the legislation over the parliamentary winter break, the bill is being brought forward to fill a legislative gap because the chaotic Rudd Labor government cannot pull its legislative agenda together.

Secondly, the Rudd Labor government needs to ensure that there is at least one person with tourism industry skills and experience on the board of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Yet there has been a marked lack of consultation with the industry on this matter—yet another example of the government's hypocrisy on broader environmental matters such as the destruction of the solar industry. Before the election, you could not see the member for Kingsford Smith without a set of solar panels strapped to his back, walking behind the caped crusader, Captain Chaos, the Prime Minister himself. And now, with the virtual destruction of the solar industry, a bill coming forward and the minister absent, there is only one conclusion that can be drawn: the legislative agenda of this government is in disarray.

Thirdly—and, may I say, most poignantly—this Prime Minister, the caped crusader himself, has only ever uttered the phrase 'Great Barrier Reef' once in his 10 years in parliament. On 8 September 2005, when the member for Griffith was speaking about the Protection of the Sea (Shipping Levy) Amendment Bill 2005, he actually snuck in the phrase 'Great Barrier Reef'. But apart from that, in 10 years in this hallowed chamber—and he purports to be one of the great environmental champions; perhaps we can put a big 'E' on the cape of the caped crusader, Captain Chaos, for his purported environmental concern—he has not mentioned the Great Barrier Reef. It was only that one time and never in the context of its protection. I can only assume that the Great Barrier Reef is just not one of the Prime Minister's ever-growing number of chaotic priorities. Notwithstanding that this government's legislative agenda is in complete disarray, the [Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2008](#) is almost wholly the work of the coalition, which is why we seek to support the bill.