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INNOVATION, TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr DA Pegg MP (Chair)
Mr JM Krause MP
Ms SL Bolton MP
Mr MA Boothman MP
Ms CL Lui MP
Mrs C Mullen MP

Staff present:

Ms E Jameson (Acting Committee Secretary)
Ms R Stacey (Assistant Committee Secretary)

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (GREAT BARRIER REEF PROTECTION MEASURES) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2019

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 25 MARCH 2019

Brisbane

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The committee met at 8.59 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where we are today. On 27 February 2019, the Hon. Leeanne Enoch, the Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts, introduced the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019 into the Queensland parliament. The bill was referred to the Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee for detailed consideration, with a report date of 12 April 2019. My name is Duncan Pegg. I am the member for Stretton and chair of the committee. With me here today are Jon Krause, the member for Scenic Rim and deputy chair; Cynthia Lui, the member for Cook; Charis Mullen, the member for Jordan; Sandy Bolton, the member for Noosa; and Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore.

The purpose of today is to hear evidence from stakeholders as part of the committee's inquiry. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. These proceedings are similar to parliament and are subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing rules and orders. In this regard, I remind members of the public that under the standing orders the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee.

The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and will be subject to the chair's direction at all times. The media rules endorsed by the committee are available from committee staff if required. All those present today should note that it is possible that you might be filmed or photographed during the proceedings by media and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I ask everyone present to turn off mobile phones or switch them to silent mode, please.

The program for today has been published on the committee's web page and there are hard copies available from committee staff if required. If any questions on notice are taken, your responses will be required by Friday, 19 March 2019. We will now hear from the first witnesses.

CRANE, Mr Jim, Director, Industry and Government Affairs, Australian Sugar Milling Council

FREEMAN, Mr Andrew, General Manager, Projects, AgForce Queensland Farmers Ltd

GALLIGAN, Mr Daniel, Chief Executive Officer, Canegrowers

GUERIN, Mr Michael, Chief Executive Officer, AgForce Queensland Farmers Ltd

PIETSCH, Mr David, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Sugar Milling Council

SCHEMBRI, Mr Paul, Chairman, Canegrowers

SOMERSET, Mrs Georgie, General President, AgForce Queensland Farmers Ltd

STUBBS, Mr Alex, Chair of Reef Working Group, AgForce Queensland Farmers Ltd

VITEELI, Ms Marie, Policy Officer, AgForce Queensland Farmers Ltd

CHAIR: Good morning. I invite each organisation to make a brief opening statement, after which committee members may have some questions for you. We will go from right to left. I invite our friends from AgForce to kick things off.

Mrs Somerset: Chair, thanks for the invitation to present this morning. Mr Stubbs and I also represent either end of the reef catchment, with his cattle and cane property at the northern end in the Wet Tropics catchment and my grazing property in the upper Boyne catchment, just north of the Bunya Mountains. I am providing a deliberately short opening statement, but following your questions Mr Stubbs would like to provide a brief closing statement from AgForce as well, if that is possible.

Everyone loves the reef. Farmers love the reef. Farmers do their utmost to care for the land, soil, animals and crops. Land care results in reef care. Our farmers manage their landscape for the benefit of all. Reef care requires a whole-catchment approach to water quality. Farmers do not need additional reef-wide regulations that single them out as the main contributor to run-off of sediments and nutrients.

AgForce members manage about 20 per cent of the grazing and grain land use across the six reef catchments. In 13.4 million hectares or 40 per cent of the reef grazing catchment they have already voluntarily completed grazing BMP modules. AgForce does not support blanket regulations for graziers and grain growers across the entire 33.7 million hectares used for beef cattle and cropping land use. We believe the immediate focus should be on the high-risk erodible soils. We believe the focus must be on supporting and incentivising those who manage the five to 10 per cent of the erodible soils that are high risk to better understand how their land management practices impact water quality. We believe this can be achieved by focusing on this very small segment of the catchment through effective extension and agronomy advice to achieve real practice change and long-term benefit for the reef.

AgForce has deep concerns that this bill will send the message that current land management practices are enough and no further improvements need to be made across the catchments. We believe the application of existing and emerging science will enable further significant gains to be made in all catchments and we seek to promote innovation through an incentive scheme, rather than simply through minimum practice and farm design standards. We also seek effective consultation by government with the grains industry on a grains minimum practice standard.

AgForce actively seeks to engage in an alternate pathway to blanket regulation across the 33 million hectares, where those operating at best practice and beyond are recognised for the work they have done and do and they are not penalised through unnecessary regulation. We seek that the committee focus on assisting managers of the five to 10 per cent at-risk land, encourage voluntary best practice and work effectively with industry, as we have outlined in our submission. We welcome your questions on our submission.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mrs Somerset. I will now call our representatives from Canegrowers to give a brief opening statement, if you so wish.

Mr Schembri: Thank you, Mr Chairman. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before your committee. Canegrowers represents 75 per cent of Queensland's 4,500 canegrowers. I have a sentence for two about the landscape of our industry. We farm a footprint of 360,000 hectares adjoining the Great Barrier Reef. Obviously, 360,000 hectares is quite significant and so we are a substantial land-use activity on the Queensland coastal plain.

As an opening comment, I want to say that we do take our environmental responsibility very seriously and, whether we be cane farmers or in any other industry or land-use activity, we all must play our respective parts in terms of the environmental sustainability of the reef. I make the observation that, for our industry, it is increasingly the case that our customers now are demanding from us increased certification and authentication that our whole value chain, but particularly the cane farming system, is being grown in an environmentally sustainable way. I will get to the point: the economic driver in our industry is now a huge incentive to ensure that our environmental credentials are up to scratch. In other words, we do not think we need this new bill, because the hip pocket is the best way to drive behavioural change in an industry.

I will make just a comment or two about the people I represent. Australian cane farmers are acknowledged as being world leaders in terms of environmental sustainability. At every forum that I attend internationally, Australian farmers are held up there as being the world leaders in terms of environmental sustainability. We are innovative, we use technologies that other countries do not and we are considered to be at the leading edge, engaging in world's best practice. Therefore, it is somewhat irritating to come back to Queensland where our environmental credentials are made out to be second rate.

Chairman, very succinctly, I say that we think that the reef protection bill will add unnecessary cost to our industry. We think it is heavily bureaucratic and, importantly, it will restrict our growth whilst providing very little in terms of public benefit. I want to drill into three of these points and tail off, if I can.

We find this issue quite perplexing. On my research, the current reef regulations, as you would recall, were introduced by Premier Anna Bligh in 2009. The current regulations include the following requirements that a cane farmer must comply with: an environmental risk management plan, soil testing, nutrient calculators, record keeping, the prescribed use of chemicals, chemical accreditation, mandatory setback areas and grower audits. That is not the new bill; that is the existing bill. To me, that is an extraordinarily high regulatory threshold. Therefore, we see no need for the new regulations when current regulations exist and have a high regulatory threshold.

I want to advise you that since the announcement of the bill a lot of farmers who have been engaged proactively with government and other farmers in all sorts of programs have thrown their arms up in the air and said, 'Why should we be bother?'. Most importantly, now there is an attitude of growers saying, 'This is all too hard; why should we bother?'.

The second grievance we have with the new bill is in relation to the powers that are vested in government to audit individuals. We think those powers are extreme and excessive. I find it rather interesting that, if the government was attempting to at some stage engage in a cooperative partnership between farmers and the government, we think the existence of these excessive powers where you can demand from individuals or organisations all sorts of information—the sheer existence of those powers—will create the opposite effect. In fact, we think this legislation will set a new benchmark of hostility between growers and government.

I want to pick up on one point that is constantly thrown back at us: the government says, 'We're not after the good growers; we are only after the cowboys'. The cane farmer cowboy is reputedly that farmer out there who applies fertiliser in exceedance of permissible levels and applies chemicals at well above the permissible levels. I want to say to you that the cowboys are mythical. They do not exist. Economic forces in our industry—and, I dare say, for every other part of agriculture—have regulated them out of existence. There is this focus on the cowboys out there, but economic forces have taken them out of the game. I have to reiterate that the powers that you are now vesting in government by this legislation are excessive and we believe it is overreach.

Our final point is this: as an industry we need to grow and expand. You would think as a government you would be doing your utmost to encourage industries to expand. We need to expand, we need to beat off inflation, we need to manage unit costs and any industry that cannot grow is going to have a doubtful viable future. In terms of this bill, the standard or the entry point for new canelands, and even old canelands, is very high. We will have to perform an environmental impact assessment and site inspections, and it will make it almost impossible to bring in new canelands. I want to say that, very sadly, this is going to kill off the prospect of large greenfield industrial-type cane farms that might have been laid down as an attempt to capture—

CHAIR: I would ask you to wind up, please, Mr Schembri.

Mr Schembri: I am winding right up—the opportunity out of the Asian Century. Also, our industry has been often cited as providing an opportunity for renewable energy, biofuels and so forth. Therefore, to wind up, our view is that the new regulations are highly bureaucratic. We think that growers will not be able to comply or will not be motivated to comply. Additionally, the good will of growers working in partnership with government will be replaced by a 'why would we bother' approach. We ask that the bill be set aside, so that we can find a partnership to ensure the economic sustainability of industry and the environmental sustainability of the reef.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Schembri. Our friends from the Australian Sugar Milling Council, I invite you to make a brief opening statement.

Mr Pietsch: Good morning and thanks for the opportunity to make some comments on behalf of members of the Australian Sugar Milling Council. We would like to highlight three particular things to the committee this morning. Firstly, our milling companies understand, acknowledge and support the need for government, industry and the wider community to do more to sustain the Great Barrier Reef as one of our great natural wonders. All sugar industry stakeholders recognise the need to do more to reduce the impact of our activities on reef water quality.

Secondly, we believe that the best way to do this is in a true partnership approach between industry, government and community stakeholders. Any water quality measures introduced need to also have a clear and positive impact on the sustainability of the many stewards who manage the land and natural resources in those catchments. Negatively impacting the business viability of local sugarcane growers will threaten their capacity to optimally manage their operations and this, in turn, will significantly affect the viability of the entire sugar milling area. Any subsequent mill closures would result in major social, economic and environmental setbacks for those communities.

Sugar milling continues to be the cornerstone for many communities along the coast of this state. An independent report commissioned by the Sugar Milling Council earlier this year identified the annual economic contribution of sugar manufacturing to Queensland at more than \$4 billion per annum, supporting more than 22,500 jobs.

We are concerned this legislation and the regulations that may underpin it may have a very poor scientific basis. Of particular concern is that there is no clarity around whether the measures introduced or being proposed will achieve the water quality targets for the reef. The government has stated that voluntary uptake of improved practices has not been at a sufficient level to meet reef water quality targets and that they must accelerate regulatory intervention. This suggests that the government has a clear view on what would constitute a sufficient level of uptake to avoid additional regulations, and this should be made clear.

We raise a major concern in relation to the head of power relative to mandating the acquisition of data. In our submission we provide an example where records that are held by a sugar mill and collected for a specific production related purpose may be inaccurately or perversely used in the context of this legislation. Data held by industry that is considered accurate for the purposes for which it is collected such as harvest management, productivity improvement, extension or sugar cane plant breeding programs may not necessarily be complete, accurate or suitable for the purpose intended in the new bill. A change to the legislation must provide a qualification that the data which might be acquired under this power needs to be proven to be relevant.

In summary, we acknowledge the need for industry to do more. This must be done in partnership with industry, government and the community. We have real concerns in relation to the collection and use of data for purposes for which it was not intended or relevant.

CHAIR: This is not a question primarily for AgForce; I am also interested to hear from other stakeholders. We have heard the debate about a voluntary approach and Mrs Somerset talked about an incentive scheme. The department has stated—and we have heard from other stakeholders—that the voluntary approach has failed to facilitate a sufficient uptake of improved practices. I wonder what your response to that is and how you think an incentive scheme would improve things.

Mrs Somerset: We believe that to achieve voluntary participation of 40 per cent in the Grazing BMP within 10 years on 33 million hectares is a significant practice change. There is no market driver for grazing to be there, but this is about producers wanting to do the right thing. We believe that achieving 40 per cent in 10 years has been significant. I will let the cane industry speak to even higher levels of participation.

What we are also saying is that we believe there are greater improvements to be made. This is where emerging and existing science uptake will be limited if we sit with the practices that we have today. We believe that we need to strive for further innovation and greater improvements. As the bill is set out at the moment we will be left with what is best today, but it may not be best for the reef in the future. That is particularly around grains and the innovations that have been made. We also want to look at a whole range of practices around increasing soil carbon and innovation in that space for grazing. None of that is currently covered under the Grazing BMP, which was designed 10 years ago.

We have new science now and we are innovating around that. If you say that this is enough, what incentive is there for producers to continue to innovate and practise even better land management apart from their own drivers? Forty per cent has been achieved without any impost in terms of having to do this, and we think that is a significant uptake. We can drive further uptake. We would prefer to focus on the smaller percentage who have not necessarily taken up best practice and work with that five to 10 per cent rather than lump the whole 33 million hectares of grazing land into being regulated at this time.

Mr Galligan: In relation to the cane industry, the Smartcane BMP program has been funded again at the beginning of this year by state government, so it has been a fully funded program by the state government. In five years we have gone from a cold start to having 70 per cent of the land under cane now within the program. It is an externally audited program, so 70 per cent of the land is benchmarked against practice and 20 per cent is accredited. Two thousand farmers have been in the program and approximately 350 are now accredited. As Georgie said, the accusation continues to be that it has not been fast enough. This is within five years, so I think that is extremely fast. I have a few other points about BMP. As it is invested in by the state government, the state government has a stake in the management of BMP. It can negotiate with the industry based around its R and D performance about what is best practice, so the state government actually has influence about best management practices. That is why it is a true partnership. Farmers have to be motivated to be involved.

In the recent past—also through state government funding—we have worked with behavioural scientists to understand why farmers may or may not be changing. This has led to the recognition that the best way to motivate anyone to change is to work with them from their perspective and to have them articulate their resistance to change. The most important strategy the behavioural science work has shown us is that we should acknowledge where people have already changed. That has been the barrier to BMP not necessarily being benchmarked or accredited, but to acknowledge that they have already made significant changes. We demonstrated the fact that the most difficult part of the change for farmers is recordkeeping, which is already a regulatory requirement under the current legislation in Queensland. That motivation and work to change to increase the adoption of BMP beyond 70 per cent is now going to disenfranchise growers by actually increasing the regulation under the current proposed bill.

CHAIR: Is there anything further on that particular question?

Mrs Somerset: I am not sure if you are aware, but within the grazing industry we have existing regulation around the use of chemicals and land use. There are regulations for livestock under the Livestock Production Assurance scheme which we must all sign up to if we are to sell stock in Australia. There are existing regulations that we sit under which cover chemical use and all sorts of other things. I think you need to work with industry to understand the multitude of regulations under which we exist as well, and BMP is one of those. We have regulatory responsibilities under many acts to look after the land and to act within the law.

Mr Galligan: I would like to raise two very brief points. The other problem that people raise with BMP is: is it improving water quality? That is an extremely difficult question to answer, there is no doubt about that. How do you measure the diffuse response in water quality from a whole range of efforts? The same question needs to be put to regulation, because I have not seen the government talk about what the improvement in water quality has been as a result of the compliance regime under the current regulations.

The next issue, as David mentioned, is that in relation to BMP we are starting to wonder how much is enough. The most recent report card we have on water quality comes from 2016. We do not have any feedback mechanism. We do not have any sophisticated reporting or monitoring program funded to ensure we can show growers in their landscape that water quality is improving, because that would engage them. What we are asking for is greater investment in the on-the-ground monitoring of water quality.

Mr KRAUSE: I have a question for each of the groups represented. A large number of the submissions received raised concerns about the government's consultation process and stated that, unless their industry body alerted them to the legislation, they otherwise would have been unaware of it. I want to ask AgForce, Canegrowers and the Sugar Milling Council if you could give us an idea of what percentage of members of your groups would have been in that boat in terms of having no knowledge of this legislation? I will start with Mrs Somerset, if we could.

Mrs Somerset: I might let Mr Guerin, our CEO, answer that. I suspect it is a very high percentage going from my local governments, which are in a reef catchment.

Mr Guerin: I could not give you an accurate figure, to be honest. We can do a quick survey if that would be helpful to the committee.

Mr KRAUSE: I am happy to take your gut feeling on these things, Mr Guerin.

Mr Guerin: My gut feeling is that very few of our members had an understanding of the regulations when they arrived. Very few—in fact, none—had any idea what was proposed in the regulation because we had no advance warning of that. The link between the work we have done over the last couple of years with all sorts of bodies in terms of the reef and the regulation was not clear. The timing was not clear. In terms of contributing strongly and positively to thinking about the reef, probably the worst thing from our perspective is that, having had that announcement put to us with no notice, we now have an incredibly inadequate amount of time to respond, to use our good policy and long-term policy work to think about that, and to come back in a positive and constructive way. We are feeling underprepared today, as we have had roughly 10 days with industry to try and pull this together as best we can.

Mr Schembri: Certainly our goal is to have some knowledge about the new legislation. Our magazine *Australian Canegrower* featured it quite prominently. I am cognisant of the fact that we only represent about 75 per cent of the growers, so there would be other growers in the state who may have a limited understanding of the new regulatory requirements that are coming out. One of the things that I have encountered with growers to date in terms of discussing this issue is the complexity

of it. If you have a look at the bill it is 50-60 pages, so they do not understand the complexity of it. I will be succinct: we really do need regional meetings. Our industry is spread over 2,500 kilometres. It is important that regional growers and communities have an opportunity to have input into this bill, so we would strongly recommend regional meetings.

Mr KRAUSE: My question is to the Sugar Milling Council. How many of your members were actually across or aware that this was coming?

Mr Pietsch: Certainly our members are very attuned to the issues, and professional organisations are always on the lookout for regulations that may affect their businesses. I will say that there was definitely some frustration expressed at the short time frame in terms of turnaround for submissions. They rely heavily on us as an industry organisation rather than being able to put their individual points of view forward.

Mr KRAUSE: I have a question for Mrs Somerset and Mr Schembri. Given the short time frames, one submission outlined the emotional toll this bill caused their family, particularly with regard to graziers, who have already been overwhelmed by a number of natural disasters in recent months. Have you spoken to members about that? What type of emotional impact is this legislation having on your members as a result of the way it has been presented to them?

Mrs Somerset: In relation to the time frame particularly and having another layer of regulation not only after the natural disasters but the drought, this is coming on the end of a very hard summer and the loss of a winter crop last year in Central Queensland. Many members contacted me privately about their inability to get a submission in in the time frame. In my district they are early weaning about two months ahead of schedule because of the lack of feed in Central Queensland, so they are trying to juggle what they are doing. There are some in the north who are dealing with the post-flood clean-up. I think there is an emotional toll from being told again 'You're not doing a good job,' that you are being judged as not managing your land—even if you are an accredited BMP producer—and feeling as though another regulation is going to come at you. We do not have more people that we can pull in to do this work for us. Most of our 5,500 members are family members. They are people like me: I do all the bookwork, the financing and the auditing while my husband and his father do the outside work. The struggle of trying to meet regulatory standards when we believe we are doing the best possible job for the whole community in managing the landscape has had an emotional toll on us all.

Mr Schembri: In terms of the sugar industry, it has been well documented that there have been some very bad floods in the north this year. Literally from Cape York right down to the Mackay region has been in the grip of some of the highest and most widespread flooding in recent memory. I am not going to sit here today and say it is a wipe-out or anything like that, but some individuals have borne a disproportionate burden of the flooding. They are just slowly getting on their feet and trying to come to terms with that devastation. I also want to talk about our colleagues in the southern region. From Bundaberg, Isis and Maryborough south they are in the grip of one of the worst droughts in living memory. They cannot afford to pay electricity to pump their crops. Farmer after farmer in the Bundaberg region is telling me that they are going through emotional breakdowns because they are turning off their pumps. Whilst they have the water, they cannot afford to water their crops. We thought the timing of this bill was quite unhelpful.

I concur with my colleague next to me in saying that there is general frustration in terms of 'what do we need to do?' Farmers are pretty proud of what they have been doing. There is frustration because they do not know what they need to do. Let's understand that not all in the industry are good at recording information and so forth, but they are still good growers. There needs to be an understanding that a good, efficient, environmentally sustainable farmer may not necessarily meet the template of the regulation.

Mr KRAUSE: I have another question for—

Mr SPEAKER: Deputy Chair, I am going to give other committee members a go. If we have time at the end we will come back to you.

Mr KRAUSE: I still have a few questions to ask, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: You have asked two questions and you have asked more questions than any other committee member so far.

Mr KRAUSE: Two questions.

CHAIR: That is two more questions than all of the other people sitting here. You know that we have limited time. Member for Cook, do you have questions?

Ms LUI: My question is to Mrs Somerset. You mentioned the incentive scheme and being more innovative in looking for alternative pathways. Can you elaborate on what you think alternative schemes would look like?

Mrs Somerset: What we want to do is reward people who are already working within the BMP framework and other recognised frameworks and take that further and invest in the BMP process which, like cane, is government funded but is a voluntary process, and we want to keep it voluntary. We want to incentivise people to engage with that process, with greater recognition of what BMP delivers. I am going to refer to Mr Stubbs because I think he can add to the incentivisation, and it would be useful for you to hear from him on that.

Mr Stubbs: There are a lot of areas where the producers want to try to do the right thing. It must be understood—and this is in our submission—that just because some producers have not done BMPs does not mean to say that they are not at best practice or A and B—close to best practice. There is incentive for those who want to raise their standards. They are probably the five to 10 per cent at the bottom. They are what we would probably call people who tend to have old farming practices, particularly in grazing. They are on certain catchments where we have soils that are easily erodible and have high bank breakdown and consequently sediment going out to the Barrier Reef lagoon. The consequence of that is that we can put in good quality extension officers to go and engage with them. Do not bring regulation and the threat of a heavy fine, because what will happen is that they will pay the fine and go out and probably flog their land harder to meet that debt that they have put on top of their last debt. If we can engage them into viability and profitability, we will then establish a good outcome for the environment. They are the two things that must work together.

Certain landscapes, certain soil types and certain areas within the region—it is so diverse from here to the top of Cape York, where you come from—they are so different. Each catchment and each landscape has to be managed in its own particular way and better understood—not just one size fits all. If we go there and try to pick up their profitability and show them that there is a better way to operate their operations, we will see those five to 10 per cent improve, particularly the C guys will try to get to B. The C guys will say, 'If they can do it, so can I.' There is nothing better than a guy down the road who seems to have a better operation than yours. You are going to start the ask questions and then try to lift. I think there is a big area there that has not been developed yet. There has been a lot of funding gone in, but I do not think all of it has hit the ground in the right spots to do what we are talking about now in some of the areas that we would like to see it go to.

Mrs Somerset: We see potential for BMP to be recognised as a brand. If you are BMP accredited, you are recognised as being reef friendly. We think there is potential to work with the government on what that might look like and how it fits within brand Queensland and what we are doing effectively across the whole catchment.

Mr BOOTHMAN: My question is to Canegrowers. One of the submissions spoke about sewage treatment plants and shire councils and that at certain times of the year they can have a higher discharge of nutrients. In one submission a farmer said that this was a 'serious concern' for farmers who are being blamed for this extra discharge from sewage treatment plants. The draft bill allows for these plants to have offsets. Then they could certainly blame the local farming population. What is your view on those offsets? How will the offsets affect those councils and how will they affect the farming communities in those river catchments?

Mr Schembri: I am possibly not the best qualified to answer this. I do not know what comes out of sewage plants, so I am not an expert on it. I think that farmer—and I did have a conversation with him—was making the point that there is farmer frustration in terms of equity in terms of a perceived view that everybody outside of the capital cities is subject to this. Why don't we look at everything that leaves the coastline, whether it be discharge from a sewage plant, whether it be activities around suburbia et cetera. There is this frustration that there is a targeted group of people who are bearing the cost of all of this.

In terms of an offset, I think he might be getting to the point as to whether good farmers can get an offset. I think that is consistent with what Georgie Somerset has said about incentivising those people who are doing the right thing.

I will finish by saying that we have one milling company that is paying growers up to \$2,500 to complete BMP. More recently in the last two weeks we have had international Coca-Cola—not Coca-Cola Australia—confirm that our farming systems meet their standard of what they need for their processes. We have also met the international bond sucrose standard, which is the highest standard in the world.

Mrs Somerset: Part of the point being made is that some industries are able to achieve an offset, but it is not open to agriculture. One of the things we would like to achieve is the potential for soil carbon offsets. At the moment the carbon offsets for agriculture are about locking up areas of land and not about being able to use them effectively and manage the landscape. What we would like to explore more fully is how we can measure soil carbon across the reef catchments and be rewarded for improving the soil carbon which will increase water infiltration, because the water will infiltrate where the soil carbon is increased, and that then improves the quality of the run-off and the sediment control.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Given the industry's comments about the degree of consultation undertaken so far, would you like to see public hearings and departmental briefings held in regional areas before the committee reports?

Mrs Somerset: Yes. We have written to the committee chair outlining the areas that we would like to see regional hearings being held—Laura, Cape York; the Charters Towers area; Clermont-Emerald; Theodore; and Gayndah.

Mrs MULLEN: I want to follow up on this issue of consultation. We have information from the department that since August 2016 there has been ongoing consultation on the reef regulatory proposals through the Agricultural Stakeholder Advisory Group, which I understand you all currently sit on, and also that there were three separate public consultations undertaken in March 2017, September 2017 and January 2018 on a discussion paper and a consultation regulatory impact statement, which provided detail on the regulatory proposals including the proposed minimum standards. I want to understand if that information provided by the department is correct in your view and also, if it is correct, how have you then been communicating with your membership on this consultation that has already taken place?

Mr Freeman: In our suite of projects that we run at AgForce we do quite a lot of work in reef water quality. Alex is the chair of our reef working group. The department did come and consult. They did come and speak to us about what they were proposing with the reef regulations. I think they did that around the time you mentioned—August 2016. It was a fairly robust conversation that was held in Brisbane. We do appreciate the fact that they did take the time to pull our reef working group together and listen to what they were saying about regulation and why we did not think it was the best way to go. Additionally, they did have those three regional meetings in North Queensland. Whether that is sufficient or not, I will not be judge of that, but that is what occurred.

Mrs MULLEN: There was certainly some consultation undertaken?

Mr Freeman: There was some, yes.

Mr Galligan: I will answer the last part of the question first. We take our responsibilities to inform our industry very seriously, just as we do our role in protecting the Great Barrier Reef. I have no dispute about the department's record about those meetings taking place. Our real concern is that having meetings is one thing but feeling like we have been listened to is a different story. The decision regulatory impact statement describes what happened as a result of consultations. Every single element of the table that describes the changes demonstrates that the regulatory package has actually got worse from a farming perspective. It feels like the more meetings we have the worse it gets.

My final point would be that the consultations or the meetings that are happening—we have staff and numerous farmers who spend hours indeed with departmental staff on farm trying to describe the impact—have been focused on the minimum standards and the regulatory impact of the design of the regulations. There has been no consultation about the bill. When we talk about our concerns about the bill, it is about the capacity for the director-general to continually change the minimum standards and also the capacity for the government and the director-general of the department to seek information from the industry. Those have not been consulted about at all. The flexibility of the department in the future to change the minimum standards without review and for the department to seek information from the industry that may not necessarily be relevant to reef water quality have not been part of any consultation. It has all been about proposed regulations, which are not actually on the table at the moment—only the bill is.

Ms BOLTON: Mrs Somerset, you speak of the five to 10 per cent high-risk land and incentives. Can you drill down as to what those incentives could incorporate that would really make that difference?

Mrs Somerset: This is partly what Mr Stubbs was talking about. It is about working with those people around both the natural resource management and the financial capacity of their land, working with them with strong agronomic and land management work—this will be across not just agriculture; Brisbane

there will also be other land managers within the catchment who are sitting with those sorts of soils—working with them to help them see what the benefit can be from improving their land management. We feel that focusing on those people gives us a chance to make a difference rather than trying to do an average job across 33 million hectares. Focusing on that small percentage will make a significant difference around those areas. We can focus in on those people around providing really effective and respected advice and working with them, not just trying to regulate and fine them but to assist them to become more sustainable in the long term.

Ms BOLTON: Do you believe that it is those five to 10 per cent who are probably the greatest contributors? Given that we have already heard that the monitoring of the water quality does not seem to be that specific in terms of outcomes that have been fed back, have you identified that it is those five to 10 per cent who are probably the contributors?

Mrs Somerset: I would dispute that they are the main contributors because I do not think we have enough evidence around what is actually causing some of the water quality issues. What I do believe is that we need to work hand in hand with those people to help them to improve their land management—this will be both private and public land—so that it improves the system for the whole catchment. Sometimes they can be adjoining people who are doing the right thing but that can have an impact as well. It is about taking a really specific approach to that five to 10 per cent for the benefit of all in the catchment and not saying that we need to do something for 100 per cent. Let's focus our energies and efforts on a small percentage.

Ms BOLTON: Mr Pietsch, you mentioned partnerships between industry, government and community. I think we have heard some of those. If you were to say what is the one thing you believe would be the greatest improvement to develop that partnership, what would that be?

Mr Pietsch: I certainly think that some gains have been made in terms of engagement with the communities in the local areas. Having those communities more involved in some of those programs is always valuable. Our businesses are quite exposed. The community very much relies upon them. There are jobs and regional economies at stake. Our businesses revolve around the confidence that our growers have to continue planting and growing a crop. If their confidence is not high, we cannot go elsewhere to get that crop because of the perishable nature of sugarcane. We have to get it from within that immediate area. Any engagement with community stakeholders that helps improve the confidence of our grower suppliers is important to us.

CHAIR: The time for this session has expired. Thank you to all our—

Mr KRAUSE: Chair, I would like to move an extension of this period until 10 o'clock. I have had a chance to ask two questions. My colleague has also asked two. There is clearly a lot more ground that could be covered and I would like to see a little bit more time given to this session.

CHAIR: Deputy Chair, the schedule has been published and we have witnesses waiting according to the schedule. Now you are attempting to seek an extension. This session has expired.

Mr KRAUSE: I am moving that motion.

CHAIR: We will have to go into a private session if you want to move a motion, Deputy Chair. We have witnesses waiting and we have had a published schedule, which you and all the witnesses are well aware of.

Mr KRAUSE: I am moving that motion, Chair. Two questions from me and my colleague is barely sufficient scrutiny.

CHAIR: Deputy Chair, that being the case, we will have to adjourn to have a private meeting. I apologise to all the witnesses. This is unprecedented. We will have a private meeting and return.

Mrs Somerset: Chair, in case there is no extension, I would like to table the annual review of the grazing best management practices for 2017-18, which will give the committee extensive data about the achievements being made across the grazing catchment of 33 million hectares.

CHAIR: Is leave granted? There being no objection, leave is granted.

Proceedings suspended from 9.44 am to 9.48 am.

ANNELLS, Mr Stephen, Executive Manager, Fertilizer Australia

Di BARTOLO, Mr Wayne, R&D Committee Member, Australian Prawn Farmers Association

DINGLE, Mr Allan, Vice President, Queensland Farmers' Federation

TOBIN, Mr Travis, Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Farmers' Federation

WALLACE, Mr Scott, Hort360 Manager, Growcom

WEST, Mr Matt, President, Australian Prawn Farmers Association

CHAIR: Good morning. Thank you for your joining us. I am aware that that private meeting has now taken further time from our schedule and further limited our time with witnesses. I will invite our next witnesses to make a brief opening statement. Mr West, I invite you to make an opening statement.

Mr West: Thank you giving us the opportunity to talk today. I am the current president of the Australian Prawn Farmers Association. Beside me is Wayne Di Bartolo, a member of our R&D committee and manager of one of our biggest prawn farms, Pacific Reef Fisheries. Firstly, I would like to say that we are very pleased that the Queensland government is committed to encouraging best practice standards by key agricultural industries and strengthening the protection of the GBR.

The APFA is a link for communications between growers and related sectors, including the infrastructure, suppliers, finance, retailers, exporters, technologists, researchers and all levels of government. Currently we represent around 100 per cent of the industry, which is fantastic. The Australian prawn farming industry now produces over 4½ thousand tonnes of product annually, with a farm gate value just shy of \$80 million, and currently provides up to 300 full-time equivalent jobs in regional areas. Our industry is undergoing some significant growth in Queensland with some new corporates entering the industry and a number of approved expansions to existing farms. Conservative estimates from an independent consultant is an increase up to 18,000 tonnes by 2024, resulting in approximately 1,500 direct regional jobs and a farm gate value of \$300 million.

We support regulation and policy that manages real risks to the receiving environment and to the GBR. We support the agriculture industry adopting improved practices to reduce nutrient and sediment pollution load limits. We support this because we already operate under strict discharge regulations that to date have not been applied to other industries, and some of these are situated right next door to us.

Australian prawn farms have been operating under strict environmental licences since the first farm was established and little has change. We are unique because, apart from the strict regulation that we already operate under, the discharge from prawn farms does not negatively impact the reef. Our nutrients, such as those trapped in algae, are rapidly assimilated in a receiving environment—in other words, the catchment area. To support this we have over 40 peer reviewed research papers demonstrating that aquaculture does not have an impact on the reef. We do not release herbicides and pesticides into catchment areas. That is where the real harm lies.

Prawn farming is all about the water. It is our lifeblood. We rely on the water and we are heavily invested in making sure it is kept free of these harmful chemicals and excessive nutrients and solids. Our prawn farms spend a considerable amount of money on water treatment infrastructure while other industries in the same catchments are unregulated. Some farmers now even have to treat their incoming water to ensure it is suitable for aquaculture use.

We are more than happy for regulations to protect GBR to be implemented where there is a real requirement for them to do so. Our industry is a responsible industry and does not need further regulation. The restrictions on industry need to be science based and not based on the precautionary principle, although this has been used on our industry for many years.

We have a great industry that generates a lot for local regional economies but we are severely hampered by the inability to grow through new development. It is very costly to get a new licence and although the government has identified areas that can be used for aquaculture this realistically has not helped due to the difficulty to obtain a licence in catchments that are so-called overloaded. We do not negatively contribute to this issue yet the proposed bill wants to make it even harder for aquaculture even though science does not support that. There has not been a new prawn farm for over 19 years. There has only been the expansion of existing farms under existing licences.

The farm proposed at Guthalungra near Bowen, which will see 259 hectares of new prawn ponds and associated infrastructure, has been battling to get a licence for 20 years now. This company has invested heavily in a unique bioremediation technology to enable it to gain ASC standards, labelling it a sustainable and responsible producer of seafood, yet it is still not proven to meet the conditions under this bill.

Our take home message for you is to look at the science behind what we are saying before taking a blanket, one-size-fits-all approach. Not all industries are the same. Understand that our industry is responsible and there are plenty of investment opportunities but the proposed bill will definitely stifle growth.

CHAIR: Mr Annells, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr Annells: Sure. Thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee. Our members cover 95 per cent of the tonnes that are manufactured, imported and sold within Australia. Our members are committed to codes of practice and to stewardship programs that, among other things, seek to minimise the impact that fertilisers may have on the environment.

The regulation changes speak of data and record keeping, but do not deal with the quality of advice that is provided. If we are going to have regulatory change I think we should get it right up-front. Otherwise, if the water quality does not improve we will be back here again looking at putting stricter regulations in place.

The industry has a program called Fertcare. My predecessor worked tirelessly with the department to attempt to have Fertcare a recognised and respected model for agronomy training and accredited under the legislation. It did not get there. The addition of that would go a long way towards ensuring high quality advice is provided.

Finally, I would like to make a correction to my submission. The six easy steps in Fertcare were developed in isolation, but based on the same science. It says in the submission that they spoke to each other. They did not.

CHAIR: We will now go to Mr Wallace from Growcom.

Mr Wallace: Thank you for your invitation today. Growcom is the peak body for horticulture in Queensland. We provide advocacy, policy and process services. We cover all horticulture within the reef catchment from the Mary catchment to Cape York. We have worked with those growers intensively on water quality outcomes for the last 10 or 11 years.

We have been privy to regulation discussions for horticulture over that time. However, there is very little detail. In reading the bill there is still no detail. It says 'horticulture' and that is about it. We have only just started our state government funded BMP process for horticulture. We are about five or six years behind say cane and grazing. We have some general concerns moving forward if the bill is passed and horticulture is included. Our preference is for horticulture to be removed until such time there is sufficient science and evidence to suggest that horticulture should be included.

In terms of federal government funding for horticulture, in the last 10 years we have seen a significant decrease to the point where the GBRF funding provided recently does not include horticulture. We pose the question: what risk is horticulture posing to the reef? We are a highly regulated industry already. We fit under the chemical regulations and the food safety regulations. That is so that everyone can have safe food to eat. If we are included in the regulations we would see the need for those to align with our current system so that they do not result in an extra administrative burden for our industry.

Horticulture has invested a significant amount of money into practice change in the last 10 years. Our growers have invested about \$3 for every dollar provided. We found from a survey we did a number of years ago that of the growers who received incentives about 80 to 90 per cent of them went on to make further voluntary changes.

Rather than a regulatory process imposed, we would rather see that state government investment turned into incentives and extension provision. We feel that the industry is at a point where it is operating at quite a high practice. Really, we are waiting for some level of research to occur that would give us that, 'What is the next step? Where is the next leap in practice?' If the practices that we are doing now are deemed to be at industry standard or better, the science and the research that is occurring at the moment is only quantifying that. It is not giving us the, 'What is the leap forward?'

CHAIR: I will now ask our friends from the Queensland Farmers' Federation to make a brief opening statement, if you so wish.

Mr Tobin: I will make some general comments to let the committee get in some specific questions about the bill. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the committee's review of this bill. Regulation is a high-cost, simplistic instrument that supports minimum standards of compliance. It does not encourage or foster a culture of innovation and stewardship. By contrast, voluntary industry-led farm management systems, such as BMP programs and other water-quality improvement projects, have proven to be enablers of this social change. As such, the Queensland Farmers' Federation and its industry members remain principally opposed to the regulation of agricultural activities as described in the bill.

The QFF does not agree with the government's claim that there are no alternative ways of achieving its policy objectives. Where agriculture is concerned, a lot has changed since 26 May, when the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Task Force report was released. There has been an exponential increase in the participation of BMP and other voluntary practice improvement programs. For example, from a QFF perspective, we facilitate the Reef Alliance project, which is the only reef-wide project that provides multiorganisational coordinated extension services for commodities specifically focused on water-quality improvement. Over 1,300 farmers and graziers have already been engaged in one-on-one customised farm planning and personalised technical advice that will result in demonstrated practice change of over 1,000 businesses covering more than one million hectares of agricultural land.

The process of demonstrating farm practice change means that most of the water-quality benefits from this project will not be seen until later this year. Reporting lags—and you have already heard that the last reef report card was in 2016—and the incompleteness of the main model government measurement processes do not assist with providing a current picture. The government has not conducted a proper analysis on how effective the current reef protection regulations, which have been in place for nearly 10 years, have been to date, or whether water-quality benefits have been delivered to the reef. Fundamentally, without this analysis and understanding it cannot be concluded that increasing regulation, as proposed by this bill, will increase the expected water-quality outcomes.

There has been significant underinvestment in voluntary and industry-led practice programs by governments to date when you consider that against the cost of achieving the ambitious water-quality targets that governments themselves have set. The QFF considers that the case put forward by the government does not consider all of the relevant factors and is not compelling enough to warrant increasing regulations.

As you have already heard this morning, agriculture is looking for positive partnerships with the government that consider the triple bottom line imperative as a must for any sector of the economy. Again, we request that the committee conduct regional consultation meetings. The committee would benefit from regional hearings to engage directly with the people that these proposed regulations will affect in forming its decision, particularly when some of the more concerning elements of the bill were not included in the consultation process.

Some of our member organisations have extended an invitation to the committee members and relevant advisers to undertake an on-ground tour to see firsthand some of the many voluntary programs that farmers have implemented to improve the environmental, social and economic sustainability of their industries and their communities. Farmers have nothing to hide. Our sector acknowledges and accepts the role that we must play in the recovery effort. Many farmers and industry organisations continue to work hard to ensure that they do their bit to deliver on community expectations and protect and maintain the intrinsic values of the Great Barrier Reef. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Tobin. We will now move on to questions. I have a question of Mr Annells in relation to the Fertcare training. You spoke today and also in your submission about that being compulsory for those people who provide agronomic advice and sales recommendations to growers within the Great Barrier Reef catchment areas. Could you outline for the benefit of the committee what would be the benefits of that?

Mr Annells: You would get far higher-quality advice. At the moment, there is nothing that says that someone cannot walk off the street and give agronomic advice. It is a program that accredits those people. It then goes on to ensure that they are giving sound advice. It monitors the advice. There is a random selection of the advice they give to ensure that it is still at that high level. It manages the quality of the advice rather than, 'Here's the advice. Here's the records.' We are catching the quality component of it.

CHAIR: Further, you put forward in your submission that this legislative amendment has not gone far enough. What additional processes or regulations would Fertilizer Australia suggest in order to improve the water quality of the Great Barrier Reef?

Mr Annells: If there were Fercare training required for agronomists and salespeople, under that program they would be obliged to be giving sound advice. It would increase the productivity of the farms but also it would make sure that only enough of the fertiliser is being applied rather than too much.

Mr KRAUSE: Mr Tobin, you mentioned that regional hearings would be welcome and you would encourage them to occur. Where would you like to see public hearings and departmental briefings being held in regional areas before the committee reports?

Mr Tobin: Thanks for the question. I am a farmer from Bundaberg. I believe that we should have them in four key regions up and down the state. I think the southern region—maybe Bundaberg—central, Mackay, probably Townsville, and maybe Cairns. That represents the eastern seaboard. I think Georgie Somerset said that they wanted some meetings inside Queensland. That would be fine, but I think there needs to be at least that many.

If you look at the number of growers who are here today, there are probably only a couple in the room. It is our livelihoods that are going to be affected by this process. The committee needs to talk to those people in those regional communities about how this proposed change to the legislation will affect them now and into the future.

Mr KRAUSE: One of the government's reasons for the bill is that the industry has failed to achieve sufficient uptake in relation to voluntary measures. Has anyone ever informed the industry—the growers whom you represent—of what an exact BMP target looks like? Could it be that the government has failed to sufficiently invest to ensure that that is achieved?

Mr Tobin: Thanks for the question. No, I am not aware of any specific BMP targets as such. Obviously, there is a correlation with water-quality targets, but I am not aware of any specific BMP target. You heard this morning from the grazing industry and the cane industry. I know within cane particularly that there has been exponential growth where virtually no farmland was benchmarked five years ago to now 70 per cent of farmland under cane is benchmarked. I consider that to be a fairly quick uptake.

As to your question about investment, the reason I raised that is that, throughout the whole process of changes in the management of terrestrial activities and water based activities around the reef, there has been significant underinvestment by governments. I do not think that you would get disagreement from the conservation sector, the NRMs, or agriculture about that. When it comes to agriculture and government saying that they invested a lot of money in BMP and voluntary approaches, yes, they may have, but, when you put it in context, depending on which alluvium costing you considered—the initial one or the final one: there was a 50 per cent drop in the second amount, from \$16 billion or \$17 billion to \$8.2 billion—effectively, you are looking at either 0.42 per cent or 0.84 per cent. You are looking at less than one per cent, regardless of which number you use, of the cost of achieving these water-quality targets. I put it to you as the committee: do you consider that to be fair and reasonable? Personally, I do not.

Ms LUI: My question is to Mr West. Can you explain the practical impacts that the proposed changes to the law will have on the industry?

Mr West: It is mostly to do with zero net discharge limits. Getting to that is just unachievable. New developments coming in—the infrastructure does not exist currently. The science to be able to achieve those limits does not exist currently. Again, this industry wonders why those sorts of things are imposed on it. How much more research do we need to do to prove that this industry does not have an impact on the reef? Like I said in the report and in my speech, we are talking about microalgae. That is what the nutrients are locked up in. There is nothing else that is harmful in it. It gets taken up really rapidly in that receiving environment and to filter out microalgae on the scale of the millions of litres per day that these farmers are using, the technology is just not there. The only way to achieve this zero net discharge at the moment is to try to remove those microalgae out of the system.

Mr BOOTHMAN: My question is to Mr Tobin. There has been a lot of discussion about incentives. What do you believe those incentives should include? What innovation can be done to reduce these run-offs? I am after more detail of that.

Mr Tobin: Thanks for the question. Rather than me trying to provide specific examples, you are best off talking to the industry, because they are industry specific. I will hand to Scott, because he will be able to provide some examples for horticulture. The theory that needs to be observed is that you have to get the balance between the environment and the economic driver right. There has not been a lot of effort in that regard. There are things developing now. The government is looking at

ways to help fund this effort. It is investing in things like reef credits, creating market mechanisms and all of those sorts of things. It is a constantly moving challenge. Personally, I do not think that regulation is going to help any of that. If anything, it will undermine it and perhaps wind it backwards. The reason voluntary programs work is that farmers own their actions. They want to do better. They get the reward for doing better. As soon as you turn that into a quasiregulation, you are going to lose some people. There is no doubt about that.

There are lots of different ways. As I say, they are industry specific. If the government wants to work in partnership with the industry—and, as you heard this morning, they are all calling for that—there are ways that you can develop incentive programs specific for farmers at the on-the-ground level. They can be about controlled traffic, protecting soils, sediment traps, or whatever. There is a whole range of projects that are going on all the time. Scott, did you want to provide any specific examples of horticulture?

Mr Wallace: We have been delivering incentive programs for probably 25 years for different projects, not just reef projects. For us, we see that growers make change. That change might occur over a seven- to 10-year period. Given that equipment has a life span of 10 to 15 years, why would you buy a new pump if you did not have to? However, if society and the community want change, we would suggest that there needs to be some sort of trigger, or a mechanism that speeds up that process. You cannot have incentives by themselves. It has to be a package. Incentives, technical support, extension need to be packaged up. You cannot have one or the other.

Mr BOOTHMAN: I have a question of Matt West. You spoke about nutrients coming out of the prawn farms and how they break down differently from other nutrients. Is there any scientific information from the CSIRO, or a government body, to back that up?

Mr West: Yes, there is a document that we provided. If you do not have it, we can definitely provide it to you. Like I suggested—

Mr BOOTHMAN: It is like a CSIRO—

Mr West: Yes. Forty-two of them were done by CSIRO over, I think, an eight-year time frame.

Mr BOOTHMAN: So they are saying it would have virtually no adverse impact on the reef?

Mr West: At the end of the day if you shut a prawn farm down within six months you would not know it was there.

Mrs MULLEN: Mr Wallace, in your submission you mentioned that Growcom has spent 10 years effectively helping growers with the Hort360 program. What percentage of your growers has taken on voluntary best management practice?

Mr Wallace: Over that 10 years we use our BMP process as a component of our delivery. About 80 per cent of our growers have at some stage participated in the BMP across the reef catchment.

Mrs MULLEN: Eighty per cent.

Mr Wallace: When I talk about participation, they might have done a module or a component of Hort360, not necessarily all of it.

Mrs MULLEN: What percentage would have done all of it?

Mr Wallace: We have only just started that process of all of it.

Mrs MULLEN: Mr Tobin, the farmers who are doing the right thing, whether that is best practice or voluntary best practice, are effectively taking the heat for farmers who are not necessarily doing anything. How does your organisation reconcile that difference between farmers who are trying to do the right thing and those who are ignoring what is happening out there?

Mr Tobin: To broadly to answer your question, it is a system and it is a cumulative impact. If you are looking at it like that, in a cumulative model the more people you have operating at the best practice possible and above best practice, which is where all the industries want to go, the better. You are far better off to aim for that than aim for everyone operating on a base regulated level.

The problem with looking at it in a cumulative way is that governments then measure it on a cumulative scale, on an end-of-catchment load scale. One of the problems with that has always been the ability to be able to demonstrate to a farmer that this is coming off your farm. There are always questions around modelling but it is reasonable modelling. If you can demonstrate a more localised problem, you have a much better chance of getting those that you are talking about to come along as well. There is a huge gap. That just has not been done.

Ms BOLTON: Mr Annells, my question is about innovation within herbicides and pesticides. The APVMA ticks it off to say, 'This is safe to use,' and farmers then use it. Has there been a change to look at a different make-up going into the future so we might not even be having this conversation if there was?

Mr Annells: Is that to do with fertilisers?

Ms BOLTON: Correct.

Mr Annells: There are some innovations in fertilisers, particularly in nitrogen in delayed release fertilisers so the plant is taking up the fertiliser at the time it is growing rather than the risk of it going through the soil. There are some innovations occurring within the fertiliser industry as well, but those fertilisers come with a far higher cost than your standard ureas. It is a costing exercise as well.

Mr KRAUSE: My question is for Mr Wallace in relation to the banana industry. Their submission outlined that their industry has proposed minimum rates based on the results of a single trial on a single variety that was not conducted under commercial conditions and did not go for the whole life cycle of a crop. Are you concerned that the banana industry is just one example of many where the research simply has not been conducted to back up this legislation and the regulations that will follow?

Mr Wallace: Yes. You are dealing with 120 different horticultural crops in the reef catchment, and whilst there is some evidence for a handful of those crops there is a significant lack of information for all of those crops.

CHAIR: Thank you to all our witnesses for attending today.

HEATH, Mr Nick, President, Australian Marine Conservation Society

HOOBIN, Mr Sean, Senior Manager, Reef and Water, WWF Australia

POINTON, Ms Revel, Senior Solicitor, Environmental Defenders Office

CHAIR: Thank you for joining us today. I invite you to make a brief opening statement and then we will move on to questions. Ms Pointon, did you want to start?

Ms Pointon: Good morning. Thank you so much for inviting us to present to you today. I would like to start by congratulating the government on introducing this bill. Water quality is a serious issue that can lead to climate change in the future of our reef so it is great to see the government is taking it seriously. This is not about beating farmers up. We commend the many farmers who seek to meet BMP standards and the minimum standards in the current regulation, and support resourcing of extension officers to help farmers to meet these. But the current framework is not working and it is not working to sufficiently protect our reef, which is the objective of this legislation.

The government and relevant departments to their credit have worked hard to ensure that this best practice, science and extensive consultation support the policies represented in this new proposed framework. The 2017 science consensus statement for the reef, the foundational document underpinning the policies in this regulatory package from the water quality improvement plan, is a consensus statement of 48 leading scientists specialising in Great Barrier Reef water quality, science and management and relying on peer reviewed science to support their policy suggestions.

In addition to this, the government has undertaken significant consultation for three years with all the relevant sectors as to how best to meet these policy recommendations. Any claim that the policies in this proposed framework are not based on evidence and thorough consultation is not based on fact and ignores this significant work. This framework is flexible and cognisant of the various needs of industries that it regulates and catchments they are located in and able to be responded to as new science is developed.

No-one wants to have their activities regulated, but we live in a society managed by laws to help ensure that our society is harmonious and our environmental, economic and social impacts are sustainable in the long term. Unfortunately, it is well established through evidence that voluntary uptake of water quality improvement measures by the ag sector has not been working. The 48 per cent rate of compliance, as cited by AgForce earlier, would not be accepted in any other activity. This is so even though better regulation of nutrient application would often benefit operators' profitability and social licence as referred to by Canegrowers.

That the impacts of many agricultural activities have been comparatively unregulated for so long is an anomaly in our environment and development laws, and one that is creating unsustainable impacts to our reef. To date no permit has been needed to undertake cropping or grazing such that those proposed activities are assessed prior to being undertaken to determine whether it is actually appropriate for the location and to condition those activities to ensure minimal impact prior to them being undertaken. Further, few to no offsets have been required for water quality impacts from any industry. This is unsustainable and unfair compared to the other industries that are often subject to these permits prior to being undertaken.

While this policy package is a reasonable start, there are improvements that could be made to help better protect our reef such as clear prohibition against high-risk activities in inappropriate reef catchments to help ensure we are implementing the 'avoid' element of the offset hierarchy; extending the requirement for an environmental authority to grazing activities as well as cropping activities given the extensive impact grazing has on our environment and particularly our reef; requiring all dredging and dumping activities for maintenance dredging to also be subject to offsets; clearly stating the requirement of knowing a decline in the bill so that it is implemented when making decisions under the chapter 4A framework; and inserting a clear requirement to meet the catchment loads and point of review to further trigger action where the loads are not being met potentially.

We also note that the rest of Queensland's catchments outside of the reef also deserve improved water quality and recommend that these policies be applied across Queensland. Finally, we note that one significant reason the current legislative framework has not been working to reduce water quality impacts is a failure to enforce this legislation. Legislative changes to improve these laws will be a waste if government continues to ignore the enforcement of the laws. We implore the government to take its job of enforcement seriously across all environmental laws but particularly in this case to ensure the future of our reef.

CHAIR: Mr Heath, I will ask you to make a brief opening statement.

Mr Heath: Thank you for having us. Like you, I am a passionate Queensland and I love the Great Barrier Reef, as I know you do as well—three thousand reefs, 2,000 corals and fish species, dugong and manta rays. It is extraordinary, but it supports 64,000 jobs on water and on land, and it is all employed by the power of its sheer beauty. We are so lucky and so proud to have the reef in our backyard.

There are three reasons for this bill. First, the reef is turning into rubble, as much as some areas remain amazing. Climate is the biggest threat yet bad water has had the biggest impact. Even before bleaching, coral cover was down by half. Over my 35 years on the reef I have read or observed seagrass and inner reefs full of mud, halving the light available and laced with pesticides suppressing the life of our fish nurseries. Starfish plagues with their larvae is enhanced by eight times, devouring up to 1,000 reefs over the last couple of generations. Last year under right to information 49 per cent of visited farms were found not compliant with the current laws notwithstanding BMP programs.

Second, we are mining Queensland's food security. Seven million tonnes of our best soil is being lost on average every year. Accelerating natural rates of erosion by five times, eating our soils like cancer. Millions in chemicals, fertilisers and pesticides are lost from the crop root zone every year but not before it further sterilises our soil making us more reliant on synthetic chemicals. The latest science confirms too little change has happened despite the fact that we have been talking about this issue for 25 years.

Lastly, cash alone has not worked anywhere at scale. The world is watching and our time is up. Bleaching has removed any time buffer we had left. We must urgently boost the reef's climate resilience. We must stand up now. Only we can clean up our pollution. Despite a billion from taxpayer funded voluntary programs, many of which I continue to support, many of which are based on the wisdom in this room which I do still respect, we have not yet cleaned it up. Our visitors expect us to, as does the World Heritage committee that will be reviewing our World Heritage listing next year.

CSIRO found overseas that no water quality program has worked without some degree of legislation that enforces standards. Our best farms show using the full six easy steps and the grade A grazing land management system that reef safe standards can retain inputs and boost viability, not, I am afraid to say, the inadequate best management practices promoted at the moment. Innovation prospers once proper standards are set, and there are still hundreds of millions of dollars available to support that transition. Data already exists to target effort at the hot spots of pollution.

CHAIR: I will ask you to wind up, Mr Heath.

Mr Heath: This bill is incredibly important with powers to make the right standards. We cannot save the reef without it or you. Please pass it for your kids, your grandkids, 64,000 jobs, Queensland and its sheer beauty.

CHAIR: I now invite Mr Hoobin to make an opening statement.

Mr Hoobin: Thank you, chair and committee, for the opportunity. WWF are a global organisation working across all the continents. The Great Barrier Reef is a big focus for our organisation because it is one of the seven natural wonders of the world. In Australia we have focused on the reef particularly in the last few decades and also had a real focus on reef water quality. We do policy, we do advocacy, but we also do on-ground: we work with farmers, we work with canefarmers, we work with graziers. We have one project, Project Catalyst, which is a 10-year project. We have put millions of dollars into helping canefarmers find new and innovative ways to be more profitable and cut pollution. We are doing the same in the grazing space. I think we are a bit different to some conservation groups in that we have the policy and the on-ground.

The new laws are often a focus for disagreement, but there are large areas of commonality which should be noted. We all agree the Great Barrier Reef is one of the world's greatest natural wonders and that it should be protected for future generations. All stakeholders now accept the science that cutting water pollution is critical to help restore the reef's health. The debate is around how we accelerate pollution cuts and what role the law should play. We must accelerate pollution cuts. There was a question about BMP and targets. The target for BMP adoption was 90 per cent by 2018. The latest report card showed that it was in the low 30s for both cane and grazing. They received a D grade in the report card. We are not going fast enough. The same outcome for pollution counts. We need to do more. We need to do a lot more.

Just as we have laws to rein in the few who continue to drink drive, so too we need laws to stop the few who continue with high polluting practices. This is not just ag, it is across all industries. We should not pick out ag. No-one should be allowed to pollute the reef. Are these draft provisions the right laws to address reef polluting, to fast track pollution cuts while not unduly impacting on agriculture? Any farmer who does not want to be regulated can opt out of these new laws by adopting

their own industry's best management practice standard. The new laws will accept BMP accreditation as sufficient to comply with the law. Adoption of BMP helps improve business viability and cut pollution. It is a win-win, but those who do not adopt voluntarily their own industry BMP will need to meet minimum legal standards and stop using high polluting practices. The new minimum standards do not appear to be too onerous.

In the analysis and the regulatory impact statement it showed there were upfront costs for making these changes, but the profit that came in subsequent years quickly pays this off. The new requirement for cane is to get expert agronomic advice to maximise production efficiency. This is hardly draconian government intervention. Many farmers have adopted these improved practices voluntarily and should be congratulated. Governments have invested hundreds of millions to help this happen. If other businesses are allowed to continue with high polluting practices, the good work and investment of many will be wasted. Having all farmers meet minimum standards will also assist the social licence of industries as well as improve access to market, again ensuring the actions of a few do not ruin the good name of an industry. It is not a choice between BMP or regulation. Both have a critical role to play for the benefit of the reef and the agricultural sector.

Just one aside before I finish, the idea that Canegrowers have put up about an independent review on the effectiveness of the current laws and the new standards is something we would probably support. In fact, this bill is based on an independent expert report, the reef task force report, which said these new laws were needed. These laws are a critical part of our actions to achieve the 2025 clean water targets the reef needs. Done well they can play an important part in driving not only pollution cuts but a more sustainable and viable agricultural sector.

CHAIR: We will now move on to questions. I think you have been here for all the hearings this morning. We have heard arguments from a range of witnesses against the bill along the lines that a voluntary scheme can work, maybe an incentive scheme can work, things are improving anyway and in any event it is difficult to monitor pollution into reef catchments. I was just wondering if each of you could give me a brief response in relation to those arguments. We might start with Ms Pointon.

Ms Pointon: Certainly. As I mentioned, there has been significant investment and a lot of independent analysis of how we are going in managing the reef, particularly since we had international attention on the fact that we are not doing a good enough job of managing reef impacts. Through these many reports, including the independent task force and the science consensus statement, the water quality improvement plan, it has been stated that the voluntary uptake is not sufficient and it is not quick enough. As mentioned, of course, in an ideal world it would be great if we all voluntarily were willing to meet the standard expected of us and needed of us, and in this case reducing our environmental impact is clearly not occurring quickly enough particularly in the face of the bleaching events that the reef is facing at the moment and the need for urgent action. We would be happy, if necessary, to reference the citations in the report around when they have said that voluntary uptake is not working, as needed by the committee.

Mr Heath: I have completely supported for 20 years the voluntary programs. I have advocated for them. I have gone down to Canberra. I have gone up and down George Street. I have tried to get as many of them up as possible with as much money as could be afforded by both sides of politics and many of those times I was only there with other conservationists, the agricultural sector chose not to argue for them. In implementation I have been really disappointed by the standards that were set. I do not believe the standards are best management practice. I think they are average industry standards. For example, the industry developed the six easy steps and to my understanding, and I would be happily corrected, the Smartcane BMP is only four easy steps. It does not get to a fertiliser application rate based on block yield and until it does it will not be accurate for that block and until it does it will systematically overfertilise and pollute the reef.

I have also been disappointed by the adoption rates and I have also been disappointed by the monitoring, including with advice now from the CSIRO it just shows we cannot get there unless we send two signals at the same time: regulate a minimum standard and then reward with additional cash those whose performance is above true best practice.

Mr Hoobin: The point I was trying to make in my short address was that it should not be a choice. I think it has been painted that way, that you can either have a voluntary approach or regulations. We have both. We need both. There are many good farmers who adopt new practices, who do the right thing, who are very business minded as well as environmentally minded and they can go the voluntary path, but as in any industry there are those who will not change and that is when we need the regulations to pick up that bottom end. BMP can exist and we might get to 30, to 40, to

50, to 60 but there will still be a gap and that is where regulation has to step in. Also it is the speed. The task force report, the reef report card, shows that voluntary practice is not moving fast enough, it is missing targets and we are not getting the pollution cuts so we need both.

Mr KRAUSE: I have a question for each stakeholder. It relates to the so-called one-size-fits-all approach for the bill that is before us. I wanted to ask: could enhanced environmental outcomes be achieved if it was not a one-size-fits-all approach and provided a framework that targeted particular high-risk activities such as fertiliser application in more risky areas of the catchments, gullies, wetlands and other areas that are identified as having more risk of erosion and causing run-off?

Ms Pointon: I would not actually agree that it is a one-size-fits-all. I know we have heard it this morning from other stakeholders. I understand the bill is actually very cognisant of the different impacts that various industries have. It has different minimum standards and a staged introduction for those operators who have not been subject to minimum standards previously. The new environmental authority framework will just be for high-risk cropping activities and so the activities that you are mentioning will be subject to a different regulatory framework than other lower risk activities.

I feel this bill is actually very nuanced in how it is being applied to different industries and will lead to, hopefully, all industries being given the recognition of the actions they need to address their impacts while not being burdensome in subjecting them to all the same standards.

Mr Heath: Thank you for the question. I definitely agree that it is not one-size-fits-all, that the regulations or at least let's say the head of power in the bill, we actually have not got to regulations yet as other stakeholders have already identified. This is the architecture bill. This provides the head of power for more detailed regulations to come and so I think in those more detailed regulations there will be more differentiation, more nuance and I would certainly support that. As Revel also mentioned, there is a staged implementation and, as we all know, compliance programs will be targeted because they just do not have enough money.

In terms of the general principle about prioritisation, I think it makes a lot of sense. Satellites can survey the grass cover of grazing properties to find out which ones have fallen into D class practice and the data that exists in the fertiliser reselling industry and the mill yield data, if it was acquired by government in a privacy protected database, could give the nutrient use efficiency ratio of every farm in Queensland, just like the government already collects that sort of data from commercial fishers in the reef and has collected that data and protected its privacy for 20 years, just like the government collects water use information so that it knows who is misusing water in a drought. I think there is the ability to do all that your question has inferred.

Mr Hoobin: I agree with your point that targeting is an important thing, to go to the high polluting areas, the leaky soils, the riparians, the erodible soils, and we think that is actually one of the key gaps in the bill, that there are not provision to say these areas are really high-risk for pollution, we need to do more. That said, I do not think you can only do that. It should not be allowed that outside those areas you can still engage in high polluting practices. A bit of balance of the two. As far as the bill goes, it does allow that flexibility, or will when the regulations come in. Say for cane, the regulation will be get advice from an agronomist and that agronomist will give you advice for your property and how you adapt to it. I think there is the flexibility built in there even for the minimum standards.

Mr KRAUSE: My next question was to each of you again. In noting that all three of your submissions recommend all activities should have access to offsets, why is it important for agricultural uses to be included and do you have any insights as to why it is not?

Mr Hoobin: I am in complete agreement that offsets should apply to everyone. The first thing that has been put out there is that new developments should not increase pollution, which seems a fairly self-evident thing. If we are asking all the existing farmers and industries and we are investing hundreds of millions to cut pollution it seems crazy to allow a new development to increase it. How you do it is the question. Either you do it on your own property or site or you offset. At a certain point you can do a lot of actions on site and then it becomes quite expensive to reduce pollution further. That is where offsets come in: they provide the most cost effective means to actually reduce pollution. We have been arguing strongly it should be open to everyone. There is no reason farmers should have to address all their pollution on site and not have access to at least cost abatement. It should be an equitable and even approach to offsets and should apply across the board.

Ms LUI: My question is to Ms Pointon. Your submission raised concerns with enforcement over existing and future regulations. What level of enforcement do you believe would be required in order to give effect to the proposed new laws?

Ms Pointon: Thank you for the question. I guess any level of enforcement would be great. We have seen the result of a right-to-information application put in by the EBC in the last year that showed little to no enforcement has been undertaken since 2009 of chapter 4A reef regulations in the EP Act. While enforcement of legislation is obviously the last resort, it is necessary to ensure that the public recognises that the government is taking these laws seriously and is willing to enforce them as needed. Obviously using the scale that the department always uses in terms of providing first warnings and then moving to more serious enforcement action is supported, but definitely putting more resources and attention into enforcement in general is needed across-the-board.

Mr BOOTHMAN: My question is to Ms Pointon about impacts of dredge spoil, because you mentioned it quickly before. I am curious: what is your opinion of the impacts of dredge spoil on the reef itself?

Ms Pointon: Once again there is a lot of science around the fact that dredge spoil does have an impact on our reef. While regulatory efforts have been made to prevent capital dredge spoil from being dumped on the reef, both at a state and federal level maintenance dredge spoil can still be dumped on the reef and can be significant in quantity. I am not sure where the Hay Point maintenance dredging application is up to in the regulatory process right now, but I believe it is one million tonnes of dredge spoil potentially being proposed to be dumped in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. These are not small quantities. Especially if we are trying to achieve no net decline of our reef, then there is no reason why maintenance dredging should be exempt from the offsets framework.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Further on from that, what ways are there to mitigate dumping this dredge spoil on the reef? What is your opinion? How could we do this?

Ms Pointon: Firstly, you could require, as is required for capital dredge spoil, that it is dumped on land. We have required it of capital dredge spoil. There is no reason not to require it of maintenance dredge spoil as well.

Mr Hoobin: Just quickly on that point, I think it is one of the other glaring omissions from this bill. As Revel says, it is being dumped on the reef right now. We are spending all this money and we are asking the farmers to do all this work, yet we are allowing ports and the major companies they support to dig stuff up and dump it directly in the reef. It seems a crazy thing to do. It is best on land but, if not, at least offset it and create revenue streams for more on-ground action in the catchment.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Jumping on to that too, before you stated that nobody can pollute the reef. It is a good statement that you made before, but having an offset for dumping dredge spoil in the reef really—

Mr Hoobin: It is the second best option. Ideally it gets on-land disposal. There might be issues around where you can put it and the cost of it, so we would prefer on-land disposal but, if not, that impact should at least be offset rather than just letting it happen. It is a glaring anomaly in the current law.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Be one massive offset, in other words?

Mr Hoobin: It would be a decent offset. It would be a decent revenue stream to help the program along.

Mrs MULLEN: Ms Pointon, there are new penalties that are introduced in this bill that have been raised quite a bit, so we are talking 1,665 penalty units for an offence committed wilfully or otherwise 600 penalty units. Do you think the new penalties for contravening the minimum standards are appropriate?

Ms Pointon: Thank you for the question. Yes, I do. They will raise the standard to be in line with other similar activities in terms of the risk of environmental damage. I believe it is the same as serious environmental harm and other similar activities that have a similar impact, so there is no reason why the penalties should not be of the same extent.

Mrs MULLEN: My second question is to all of the panellists, and I guess it is the obvious one: what do you believe would be the environmental cost to the Great Barrier Reef if the proposed changes to improve the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef are not actioned?

Mr Hoobin: I can kick off with that one. There has been some modelling done on what the current laws can achieve—the minimum standards. Basically, in some catchments it can achieve for sediment or for fertiliser pollution over half the progress toward target. The task force report said that we are struggling to get to our targets and that voluntary measures are not doing it fast enough. Regulation represents the most cost-effective way to make the most rapid gains in pollution cuts, and the reef needs this right now. It is recovering from bleaching events and the science is coming out. There are some recent published papers saying that clean water helps the reef recover. It is much

more rapid recovery when it does not have sediment or chemicals impacting it. We have 2025 targets we have to meet. So far report cards are basically an annual admission of failure. Something needs to change. We do need more investment, but we need regulations to have a minimum standard for everyone so we can make rapid progress.

Mr Heath: It was a great question. Thank you for the question. One of the first impacts would be in 2020 when the World Heritage Committee reviewed progress by Australia against the commitments it made four or five years ago and it committed then to regulate in the Great Barrier Reef catchment. It would be such an insult to the committee that they would have to further consider placing the reef in danger, which impacts our tourism industry. More long term, we would see more crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks eating more coral and eating the coral that had somehow miraculously survived coral bleaching, impacting our tourism industry, threatening the jobs and just threatening a great part of Queensland. We applaud this bill. We thank the government for bringing it forward. We thank the department for putting it together and we urge you to pass it.

Ms Pointon: I think my colleagues have said it well, but we definitely will not be meeting the commitments we have made as a state and a nation to improve our management of the reef, so we will be shamed in the face of the international community, let alone have the prospect of a dead reef in the decade to come. We really recommend the passing of this bill.

Ms BOLTON: Mr Hoobin, I must admit that the conversations are really interesting, but you mentioned targeting the few who are doing the wrong thing and the actions of a few. We heard earlier about five per cent to 10 per cent of the high-risk areas, so that is a small number of areas. Given that we have heard today that there are extensive regulations and the problem in monitoring—there obviously has not been the resources to ensure that monitoring—would we not be better putting our resources into those few or that five per cent to 10 per cent instead of blanketing?

Mr Hoobin: Sure, and I think that is how it will operate. There will be a number of farmers or many farmers who go onto BMP. There will be many farmers who comply with the law. The regulations are going to be rolled out in different areas for different industries at different times, so it is going to be a very targeted approach. Every farmer is not going to be visited by the government to do some sort of check. I think grazing is a good example. The changes we were supporting is that you do not go for every grazier. A lot of graziers are going a great job. Their land is in condition A or condition B, so the new laws say that the ones who are in condition D or C are the ones we will focus on. The way the regulations have been put forward is that they are targeted. The high-risk areas have not been done well enough, but definitely for grazing they are targeting the high-risk land and land conditions. I agree that we should not be having everyone having to fill out a government form and show that they are doing the right thing. With BMP and the targeting of regulations, we can do it in a much more focused way.

Ms BOLTON: If we already have within all the industries regulations and it is struggling to monitor those, why would we need—and I suppose anyone can answer this—a whole new bill and another set of regulations that are going to cost? Would we not be better taking that money and targeting and ensuring that those few that you mention were able to on the ground help them to transition?

Mr Hoobin: It is legitimate to say the previous laws have not been enforced properly and have not been monitored properly. That does not follow that we do not actually need better laws. It is a reason we need to have laws that can be effective and can be enforced. There are only limited resources from government and they should be targeted, but regulation of minimum standards can be some of the most cost-effective ways to address this problem. For the cane industry in this case, as I have said, the regulation is basically saying to a canefarmer, 'Go and get expert agronomic advice.' It is basically saying, 'Go and find out how you can run your business better.' Taking that approach is not onerous regulation. It is trying to regulate in a better way.

Ms BOLTON: Do I have time for one more?

CHAIR: Only for you, member for Noosa, because you have had your time cut short on some of the other ones, so we will indulge you on this occasion.

Ms BOLTON: Thank you. Ms Pointon, we have consistently heard that there has been no feedback, so we have had 40 per cent take-up from, for example, grazing. What they have said is that they have had no feedback as to the difference it has made in that take-up to the water quality. How do we know that what has been undertaken so far is working?

Ms Pointon: I might defer to my colleagues in terms of their understanding of the scientific reports on these as they sit on the task force as well. May I answer your question before that you posed to Mr Hoobin, and I believe Nick might have something to say as well?

Ms BOLTON: Sure.

Ms Pointon: While we definitely stand by the fact that the current laws have been inadequate in that they are not being enforced, they are also not providing for the standard that we need to bring our water quality improvements to our water quality impacts. The minimum standards have not been adequate. While we have not seen the rest of the regulatory package we are also worried that we still need improvements on that basis, but there have been considerable signs into whether we need improvements for the minimum standards, and it is clear we do. This regulatory framework will help with that. There is better accountability needed for actions around advisers and farmers and graziers themselves. This bill goes towards providing that. The various other sectors that currently are not regulated under the chapter 4A framework will be brought into it, which is necessary to ensure fairness, let alone impacts being addressed across-the-board; better clarity around and power to provide offsets where necessary; and also the new environmental authority framework that is intended to be introduced. These are all improvements that are necessary through the bill. Yes, we need enforcement of our current laws but we also need better laws and enforcement of those.

Mr Heath: I think we are also probably slightly disagreeing in the data that has been presented to you about adoption and about the performance standard of that adoption. We think the problem is bigger than five per cent or 10 per cent. We do not actually know how big the problem is, but the water quality report cards certainly say that the adoption rates are not meeting target by quite some margin. We think we need better data—more granulated data—and the best way to get that is through data that already exists in the invoicing systems of mills and fertiliser resellers and the satellites that go over every two weeks. That can give the government privacy protected data with absolute precision and we will then be able to measure everything that we are doing to see whether it is working. We will then be able to focus the limited amount of money. We are always limited. We will then be able to focus the money with data. At the moment we are fumbling in the dark, and I think industry sometimes like it that way.

CHAIR: Mr Hoobin, did you have a response to the member for Noosa's question?

Mr Hoobin: Just briefly on the data thing and the BMP programs, part of the issue is the data is not being provided by the industry groups. I believe the Queensland Auditor-General looked into this. There are some concerns from the agricultural groups about privacy issues which might be legitimate. The government is funding these programs—is assisting these programs—and should be getting the data from them to find out if they are being effective. I agree that the data is an issue. We need much better data for both the BMP programs and the program as a whole so we can see what is working and what is not working.

CHAIR: I know we are up against time, but I have a question related to the line of questioning from the member for Noosa, because she was talking a lot about enforcement and monitoring. I wanted to find out briefly what you thought of the penalties contained in the bill for contravening minimum standards and whether or not you thought they were appropriate and why or why not. Ms Pointon?

Ms Pointon: We would agree that they are appropriate. They bring the harm that is potentially going to be caused by breach of these provisions in line with equivalent harm in other sectors. Under the Environmental Protection Act it is just bringing it into line with other environmental harm that could be caused.

Mr Heath: I concur with Revel's expertise in this area.

CHAIR: Sure. Did you have anything to add, Mr Hoobin?

Mr Hoobin: Yes. We need to have penalties which will provide the incentive for behaviour change, and it should not be varied across industry. All industries should be treated the same. I suppose the added thing to that is that the government needs to act to enforce the laws.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. The time is now 11 am and that concludes this hearing. Thank you very much to all of the witnesses and stakeholders who have participated today. Thank you to our Hansard reporters. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's parliamentary web page in due course. I declare this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill closed. There will now be a short break, with proceedings recommencing at 11.15 am. At that time the committee will hold a public briefing on the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 11.00 am.