

Submission to the Inquiry into the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2008

Date: 04 September 2008

Dear Committee member,

Please accept this submission to the inquiry into the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2008.

My Name is Steven Thompson, and I am just an average income earner you works as an Accounts Payable Officer. I am and avid recreational fisher and reside in Jensen (Townsville), a gate way to the Great Barrier Reef.

Though I strive to follow all rules, not only to avoid prosecution and fines, but to help to make our unique ecosystem sustainable so my kids and grandkids of the future can enjoy everything I have.

It is bad enough that the Government treats us like vermin, an discredits one of Australia's favourite past times as nothing but Neanderthal behaviour, but to impose new rules and regulations, allowing the GBRMPA more power to target innocent fishers than what the Australian Federal Police has to target espionage is just ludicrous.

Using the 'precautionary principle' is a joke, it just means that anyone approached by the GBRMPA can be fined or prosecuted purely based on the opinion of the officer. These new laws introduced to the Senate are taking away our rights and freedoms which I thought this country stood for and is fighting for in the likes of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Re-defining fishing, to include such ridiculous things as "searching for fish" is beyond me, how can the GBRMPA prosecute someone for looking for fish? Does the Government realise that this will in effect, exclude recreational divers and dive charter operators from the areas in question? The whole argument put forward by the EPA and GBRMPA was to preserve these zones so that divers and snorkellers could have pristine, untouched reefs to dive on and see how the marine life interacts and behaves in their natural environment. It also exludes researchers from the area, now that looking for fish will be outlawed, how can the GBRMPA now conduct research into how effective these 'green zones' have been, or will they be above the law? Will it be one rule for Fishermen and another for everyone else? As far as I'm concerned, that's nothing but discrimination to the highest degree.

As I understand this amendment, it could well be illegal for me to use depth sounding equipment in a green zone, even though I am not physically fishing, the fact that I might see a fish, can make me a criminal, since when can the government change a definition of an activity to suit their own draconian needs. Soon people will be too scared to even admire the veiw from the beach, just in case they might see a fish that breaches.

The previous convictions of North Queenslanders because of the zoning laws, which were at the time new, should be over-turned, or at least pardoned, the original legislation was inept, excluding the right of a person to mount a defence against a charge, instead, they impose a compulsory criminal conviction, for fishing in the wrong area, because they didn't have GPS equipment and had to rely on GBRMPA issued maps for navigation of the green zones, even though, there were no Marine Charts available with the data. It's more of a case that the GBRMPA was out to specifically target and incriminate honest people.

Before the rezoning, the fishing catch was 17kg per square kilometre. That is less than one per cent of the sustainable catch rates eg 7700kg/sqklm off Fiji, yet we are still targeted as criminals and the GBRMPA won't stop until it will be illegal to enter the park at all.

I encourage you to please throw this amendment out, what we have to enjoy in our own backyard today will be destroyed by scaremongering based on poor (if any) science and emotion. Any science that has been applied has been from models from other eco systems on the other side of the globe, and as the GBRMPA states, our Great Barrier Reef is a unique eco system compared to any other part of the world, why was there no credible science and research implemented well before we have reached this point.

Sincerely,

Steven Thompson
Great Barrier Reef Fisherman.