

Submission to the Enquiry into the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and other Legislative Amendment Bill.

4-08-08.

Senator Mc Ewen Chair,

I am person of mature age having seen six decades pass, but I doubt that I have ever seen anything to surpass recent legislation concerning the Reef and related fishing. For so few radical eco terrorists to have so much influence in the face of reason or transparent rationale is without doubt without precedence in Australian society. I am a passionate fisherman and like so many of my colleges also passionate about caring for our environs, most of whom these days practice catch and release as a normal part of our past time. Despite much valued and concise input into previous zoning meetings, by a dedicated group of people many of whom hold qualifications in marine sciences and who also happen to be ardent anglers; virtually all of this data was ignored by the committee. These proposed new amendments are entirely draconian and go far beyond what is required.

Granting wide reaching powers to fishing inspectors that would leave the anti terrorist squads envious should surely be seen as absolutely excessive, given that we are talking about fishing, not life or property threatening behaviour. These proposed powers should be moderated to a more appropriate level. This amendment also removes basic legal rights, to wit if you are in a green zone you are guilty regardless, and the act of making this a criminal offence is totally out of proportion to the event. Do it three times whether inadvertently or not, life time ban. This is also entirely disproportionate and must be amended.

The literal interpretation of this act would see any one traversing a green zone with a depth sounder running for navigation purposes liable to be nabbed for “searching for fish”, amongst a host of other equally nonsensical additions. These amendments [subsection 3[1] could only have been drafted by a person or persons with a deep and pathological hatred of fishing. They have been constructed from an emotive stance and not from any real scientific basis. Indeed from careful analysis of these amendments the only inference one could draw is that one is guilty until proven otherwise. This is entirely undemocratic and certainly not “the Australian way” These amendments are really just an “anti fishing’ law and should be struck out. Even under current law people have been convicted, some of whom were in reality guilty of no more than not being aware of their exact position. As a consequence the said same people have great difficulty in trying to obtain visas and even insurance. What a heinous crime being lost! Imagine what is going to happen with the proposed carte blanche amendments. This is supposed to be a democracy!

We as Australians always pride ourselves on the “fair go” principal, but I have never before witnessed such a monumental swindle on our democratic rights by a vocal and self interested minority. How dare these people presuppose to suggest that they and they alone know what is right for the average Australian. Carefully ignoring a wealth of

evidence that there is a more appropriate manner of implementing change for the better which after all is what we all desire in the end. I and all my compatriots in fishing have the sustainability of the reef and marine environs in general at heart and would like to consider our selves as conservationists. We practice “catch and release” as a personal option and wish to keep our fish resources for our kids and grand kids. We don’t want them locked away for the plunder by commercial, long line and foreign poachers. The gulf is constantly ravaged by foreign vessels with virtual impunity due to under resourced coastal surveillance. What irony if they can continue unhindered because fisheries or costal surveillance is too busy chasing all the newly created criminals out reef fishing, as it will soon be impossible to go to the reef without breaking some law, such is the complexity of the proposed amendments.

I trust that you will accept this as representative of many of my peers thoughts on this matter and it be given due consideration The great majority of the Australian public list fishing as a pursuit that they undertake regularly or semi regularly, and that most are of voting age, this equates to millions of voters, and I am sure that most will remember the architects of this bill come next election.

Thank you
Robert Eddy