

Senator McEwen, Chair
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts

Dear Senator McEwen,

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

I am a 37 year old father of one who has been fishing since I was knee high to a grasshopper. My father and uncles took the time to teach me how to fish at a very young age and instil in me a love of all aquatic environments and the creatures that live within them. To this end, as soon as I had finished high school I studied Environmental Management at Deakin University in Victoria for the sole purpose of working in the aquatic field.

I majored in Freshwater Ecology and Coastal Geomorphology and have since gone on to work in retail tackle sales, as a freelance fishing journalist, a sub-editor for various fishing magazines, an editor for Queensland Fishing Monthly and I am currently Managing Editor of the Fishing Monthly Group.

It would be easy to say that I am passionate about fishing and all things aquatic. I was annoyed when the marine parks were introduced as I believe diligent science was not used in the creation and placement of the zones and it disaffected many of my readers, writers, advertisers and friends.

Having studied Environmental Management I am all for conservation but my research and readings have shown me that the Barrier Reef is nowhere near extinction as some would suggest.

Despite status given to the Great Barrier Reef it is vastly under-utilised, huge in size and not at risk from fishing pressure. And even if global warming is true, then reducing fishing pressure will not save the reef.

Criminal Convictions

Criminal Convictions for those caught fishing in Green Zones is the most unfair and stupid thing I have ever heard. It is not disputed that these people were fishing – and from what I read many didn't even catch a fish. Most stand up and accept that they may have been doing the wrong thing.

Because of these criminal convictions many of these people have all sorts of problems getting jobs visas and insurance just for fishing! This was a mistake in making the law. If it's a mistake then the government needs to do the honest thing and fix it up. I would ask that when the amendment is reviewed you end of all the criminal records – that's fair.

If it wasn't a mistake then I must believe this was introduced on purpose, which means the people who drafted the laws pulled the wool over the eyes of the politicians and this needs to be addressed. A criminal record for fishing but no compulsory record for first offenders - even for theft or assault or worse: What are they thinking?

Powers to Inspect

From what I read this law sounds like the fishing inspectors will have more power to search and even frisk anglers than the police even have with terrorist suspects.

To introduce this section of the amendment you would be giving incredible powers to a body that some say are out of control... just for a few fish?

This is clearly out of balance and needs to be dropped.

Definition of fishing

The definition of fishing in the amendment doesn't just ban fishing in a green zone, it bans doing anything that might lead to finding a fish. That means that turning on a sounder, which is a responsible act of safety, would be banned. That is a serious concern for anyone who travels around the reef.

This is a law that needs to be thrown out. This law was in the previous version – but it's still wrong.

The definition will also ban glass bottomed boats, snorkelling, underwater observatories, and if a whale or dolphin, dugong or turtle surfaces, and you look at them, you will be in breach of the law - it means that just looking at the water in a green zone would be illegal as you may see a school of fish surface!

Legal Defence

As Senator Stephens points out, this act will try to take away basic legal rights of defence. It says that if you are in green zone you know the boundaries. This Bill takes away basic legal rights and is not fair or right. I ask you to strike out the clauses because many reef users will not understand exactly where they are in relation to the green zone boundaries.

3 strikes and you are out

Three conviction in ten years and a lifetime ban? Again this is out of balance. Can you tell me one other area - like speeding fines where you lose your licence for life for one offence every 3.3 years? This is excessive and needs to be knocked out of the Act without question.

Precautionary Principle

The precautionary principle is a major problem.

This Bill doesn't listen to the umpire. We complained that the green zones were not based on science – all the perpetrators did was ask where we caught fish saying they wanted to make sure they didn't take those areas - and that's how they made up the green zones. No science was used at all because they had none available to them. Then there was a review in 2006 and the GBRMPA was told to use transparent science. But they don't want to listen to the umpire they want a law that says they don't have to use science, instead if they feel something is threatened they can close access to it out of precaution. In a world where the general public is highly educated about issues, basing decisions on good, solid science is expected. To use precautionary principle to manage areas is not good science and those suggesting it are clearly not interested in science at all. They would seem more interested in their own agenda.

Again this clause needs to be struck out.

The goals

The biggest change is the goals of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

In this amendment the goal changes from sharing and wise use to conservation. This will make the Great Barrier Reef a zoo, something akin to a Museum and ordinary Australians who like fishing can go jump. This is clearly an anti-fishing law - nothing else is affected. The reef is the most under fished reef in the world - less now since 2002 and there is plenty of research and data to show this simple and clear fact if you would only look.

As Australian we have rights that other countries don't. Here no one can own a beach

or the ocean, but GBRMPA want to own it and lock us out of OUR park – all Australian's park.

I ask who voted for them and who allowed them to have autocratic power? I didn't vote for an Animal Rights Party that is openly opposed to angling in any form.

The Goal as it stands today should stay as good management of natural resources is based on robust science and sensible decision making that conserves (not preserves) the natural system while still allowing sensible use. We need shared, responsible and wise use - nothing less.

Conclusion

This Bill is dangerous for all of Australia .

All other environmental agencies and marine parks will follow the lead of GBRMPA.

It will set a very dangerous precedent that will vastly affect life in Australia.

The last lot of zoning cost the government over \$250m when GBRMPA suggested it would only cost \$2m initially. So I ask as a final question: What will this cost our economy and our lifestyle?

Yours Truly

Stephen Booth