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Reef threatened by do-gooding, not fishing and mining

- by: *Keith Delacy*
- From: [The Australian](#)
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I HAVE just read a report written by marine biologist Walter Starck of Townsville for the Australian Environment Foundation, in response to the proposal to add further to our Marine Protected Areas. Starck is an unusual scientist in that he advances his knowledge by practical, hands-on experience, observation and evidence, sometimes putting him at odds with the mainstream scientific establishment.

However, I would venture to say that no one knows more about marine biology, and certainly the Great Barrier Reef, than Starck. He has spent a lifetime getting his hands dirty - or should that be clean if you are out on the reef?

He wonders what we are trying to protect with this Coral Sea MPA, what demonstrated problem are we addressing? He points out that well-managed reefs around the world can sustain an average seafood harvest rate of 15,000kg per square kilometre per annum. The average harvest rate for the Great Barrier Reef is 9kg. That's right, 9kg, or if you like a minuscule 90g per hectare.

Australia has by far the largest per capita fishing zone in the world yet we import two-thirds of our seafood consumption, at an annual cost of \$1.7 billion.

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A quarter of this comes from Thailand, yet their fishery zone is about one 20th of Australia's, and it has three times the population to feed. Our catch is about half that of New Zealand and about the same as Poland's.

Claims of widespread over-fishing at our levels of harvest are the height of absurdity. There is absolutely no scientific evidence of threatened marine species, population collapses or effects on marine biodiversity from fishing. Almost without exception, away from the coastal and tourist influences, the Great Barrier Reef is pristine, rarely visited and home to the same number of fish species today as at first human settlement.

The Coral Sea, the site for this new MPA, is one of the world's prime yellowfin tuna fishing grounds. The Japanese fishermen used to sustainably catch about 30,000 tonnes a year there, but that has been stopped.

Meanwhile Papua New Guinea now licenses Asian fishing companies to fish the same migratory stocks of tuna in its water. PNG catches about 750,000 tonnes per annum. We then import \$165 million in canned tuna each year. In other words, we protect our fish for Asian fishermen to catch and sell back to us.

Now we learn that Queensland taxpayers will fork out \$26m to compensate fishermen to cease fishing in our healthy, underutilised fisheries so that we can import even more fish from much more heavily exploited resources elsewhere. The result - fewer people gainfully employed, less wealth created, further damage to our current account, not to mention the Queensland budget.

And all this debate about the danger posed to the reef by shipping is nonsense. One cyclone causes more reef destruction than if all of the ships that ever traversed the reef since the beginning of time crashed into it.

During World War II thousands of ships were sunk on or around reefs, bombed and smashed, some of them oil tankers. And where is the evidence of that today? To the extent that they went down on a reef they are now part of that reef. The Chinese bulk coal carrier Shen Neng 1 ran aground on the reef east of Rockhampton in 2010 amid cries of outrage and demands to cease bulk shipping through the reef. But in reality it was a minor blip on the vastness of the reef, one that will quickly rectify itself.

In March 2009 the Pacific Adventurer was hit by Tropical Cyclone Hamish and spilled 230 tonnes of fuel oil and a large number of fishing containers into Moreton Bay. Then premier Anna Bligh called it the worst environmental disaster that Queensland had seen, and a large clean-up effort was mobilised.

In February 2010 the Australian Maritime Safety Authority issued its report into the incident. One sentence stands out in my mind: "The total oil-related mortalities were three dead animals comprising one sea snake, one Little Tern and one Petrel species." Surprisingly this outcome was not reported with same gusto as the original accident. The boundary of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, inexplicably, extends right into Gladstone Harbour, even though the reef is 40km away. But this doesn't stop the park being invoked endlessly and shamelessly in the campaign against economic development in the harbour.

Of course, we all believe in sustainability and preserving our precious environmental assets. But please base it on good science and good sense.

The Great Barrier Reef is truly one of the great wonders of the world. But it is a massive self-correcting eco-system with great powers of renewal. It is under no threat from fishing or tourism or shipping. It seems to me the reef, and particularly our lifestyle and economy, are under more threat from misguided do-goodism.

Keith DeLacy is a prominent Queensland company director and former Labor treasurer of Queensland. He lives in Cairns.

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- *Stevo Posted at 3:41 PM June 04, 2012*

Ah yes, the Institute of Public Affairs' environmental wing (otherwise known as the Australian Environment Foundation) produces a report that continues the relentless war on environmental science by the Right. Funny how a body of scientific knowledge is only really challenged when its conclusions challenge the economic viability of one or more industries: - smoking was known to cause cancer as early as the 1920s but tobacco companies were still denying the link in the late 1980s - a scientific consensus on the health risks associated with asbestos was reached by the 1950s, yet the industries that relied on it for profits managed to create enough doubt for it to continue to be mined and used for decades. Keep on fishin'...

- *Berwin Smith of Bethania. Qld. Posted at 3:40 PM June 04, 2012*

Former Greens leader Bob Brown claimed recently Marlin and Snapper had disappeared from East Coast Australian waters due to over fishing. The fact they are more prevalent now than 30 years ago proves he like his fellow travellers lie through their false teeth.

- *Ru serious of the real world Posted at 3:16 PM June 04, 2012*

firstly let me take offence at the little point of you benefiting from the industry derugulation that your asking for without being upfront about that, ohh and while we're on things that your not upfront about and ignoring the blantant parts that are make believe aka ships vs storms science not being evedinse based how many hectres in a year keith? why do you think the asian fishing companies dont fish the waters where they reside anymore? let me get this right your argument is becuase its really big nothing bad can happen... like how a big air plane can loose some tiny engine parts and