

7 September 2008

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.

As a 60 year old who has worked hard all his life, is approaching retirement and has been an avid recreational fisher all his life, I am very concerned and angry that the freedom and lifestyle that I cherish is under threat by the insidious and draconian legislation contained in the above bill. The rights of ordinary citizens who want to engage in an outdoor activity that has been an integral part of our Aussie lifestyle for over a century are taken away by these totally irresponsible and restrictive regulations. Fishers will have less legal rights than suspected terrorists!

If I look appreciatively at an attractive woman, am I necessarily a rapist? After all, I have the equipment! Yet if I carry equipment to go fishing and pass through a corner of a green zone to get to a reef where I'm taking my family for a picnic, I can be prosecuted and fined (Section 9 subsection 3(1)).

What about if a storm blows up when I'm out on the reef and I want to head for home in a hurry via a green zone? According to this legislation, I can't cross the area and may have to make a sizeable detour which could compromise the safety of the people on my craft. Is your legislation about to drown people?

The residents and business fraternity of northern Queensland has already been severely affected by the reef closures. The government has already paid out over \$200 million in compensation, businesses have gone bust, marriages have broken up, a couple of people even committed suicide!

The recent internal inquiry into the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority revealed that its personnel had abused their position of trust and acted irresponsibly in the development of the GBR closures. Is this legislation the way GBRMPA responds to these damning criticisms – it penalizes the community for criticising their incompetence.

And what about all those fishers that were caught in a green zone and now have criminal records? Many of them weren't even aware they were in a green area. Fine them, fair enough, but label them as criminals, that's not on. There are heaps of people getting away with 'real' criminal offences who get 'let off' every day by courts that are way too lenient on serious offenders yet a person who went out on the water to wet a line becomes a criminal because he couldn't interpret a book with thousands of GPS co-ordinates!

I am a proud citizen of our country and, like millions of others, I value my freedom. Please don't take away any more of my freedom because I love to go fishing!

Yours sincerely,
David J Donald