

HONDA

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5 September, 2008

The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment,
Communications and the Arts

Dear Senator McEwan,

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

Honda MPE is a wholly owned division of Honda Motor Japan. We import and distribute marine outboards, and have dealers across the Great Barrier Reef area. We also assemble some small engine products in Australia.

Honda has a long history of making decisions based on environmentally sound choices – even when those choices were not the best commercial decisions.

Outboards emit their exhausts into the water before it bubbles up to the atmosphere. For this and other reasons our founder Soichiro Honda announced in the 1960's that we would produce only cleaner four stroke outboards rather than the high emission two strokes which still dominate the market in Australia. Honda has only sold low emission products since we began in the marine market in 1964.

It wasn't until the 1980's that some European authorities introduced emissions standards for outboards, and in 1988 the US followed. Since then standards have toughened and now operate in the USA, EU, Canada, Japan, Brazil and Chile to name a few. This all six outboard companies in Australia have a full range of low emission products available. The Australian government has been working on the issue since 2005 and are currently conducting a cost benefit analysis considering regulatory standards that will match USA EPA 2009, in perhaps by 2012.

By way of example a mid sized 150hp outboard operated by a commercial tourist operator will clock up about 1000 hours each year. On this basis a one star rated outboard will push out into the reef waters 12 tonnes of excessive emissions (Hydrocarbons and Nitrous compounds) – much more than the 3 star rated engines sold by Honda and all of our five competitors.

Despite attempts over two or three years we have been unable convince GMRMPA to mandate that tourism operators use low emission outboard engines.

I explain this story to illustrate how we are perplexed with the management strategies taken by GBRMPA and the legislation before you is no exception. Their focus seems entirely on closure of fishing and not in fact, on protection of the reef.

To our dealers it seems to be a pro tourist / anti fishing body. Some of them feel that “protection: is a guise for anti –fishing”. With most strong emotional statements, there may be a grain of truth.

Honda would be the first company to protect the reef if it were in danger from fishing (fishing being the only activity banned). Research by Ayling and others showed that before the 2002 rezoning, the off take of fish was 17kg/sqklm p.a., this being well below the 7700kg/sqklm taken in nearby countries and is less than 1% of the UN recommended maximum catch rates for tropical reefs.

The Queensland Fisheries’ size limits, bag limits and closed seasons provide more than enough protection. These standards were toughened just two years ago

After the last rezoning the GBRMPA and then Minister announced that the reef was “fully protected” and our industry suffered - with restructuring grants (not the more expensive full compensation) topping \$250m, I fear the cost from this current Bill. The explanatory notes to the Bill explain that there is no financial implications from this Bill but that is unlikely.

This is the first issue I ask the Committee to consider. This bill will open a floodgate to much wider closures to fishing. We know some of our dealers are just surviving and the last years have been a boom market nationally but not in north Queensland. A Mackay boat dealer closed just this week while another Queensland boat dealer of twenty years shrunk from two premises to one in August.

This Bill, and it’s inevitable closures will have severe and negative social and economic effects.

The 2006 review of GBRMPA conducted by the Department of Environment and Heritage (its own department) concluded that any reviews should consider socio economic effects and use transparent science, yet it is clear that whoever drafted this Bill is ignoring those recommendations.

Criminal Convictions

The wide public opinion is that these criminal convictions, for some 300 must be reversed if the government is to retain any respect with the voters. The error that led to a criminal record instead of a fine was just that. An error, and I implore you to correct this error.

If it wasn't a mistake then it was on purpose then the people who drafted the laws and pulled the wool over the eyes of the politicians need 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

I have been informed that these powers as proposed by the Bill are unheard of and excessive. I cannot see how a frisk search of a fisherman is necessary to find if they have been fishing.

Definition of fishing

This definition will make it illegal for any boat to turn on a sounder – even if they are carrying no piece of fishing equipment. This is unsafe. Many boats now have combination GPS / sounders and old navigation skills have been lost. Failing to this increases the risk of a boat hitting a reef. This law would be at odds with Maritime Safety laws – Qld and international.

Legal Defence

As Senator Stephens has pointed out, this Act diminishes basic legal rights of defence. That provision needs to be removed.

3 strikes and you are out

Three convictions in ten years means a lifetime ban under this legislation. This seems out of line with any other legislation in Australia. It should be removed.

Precautionary Principle

Then there was a review in 2006 and the GBRMPA was advised by the key findings to use 'transparent science' and consider socio economic costs in future. The precautionary principle states that decisions don't need to be guided by science and thus ignores the recommendation of its own Department, just two years ago. If science is not a guiding principle, and social economic costs are ignored how can any public consultation be of value and be anything other than ignored?

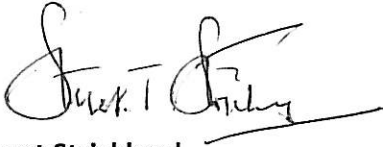
The goals

Australia has taken a significant turn if this bill is enacted. The public ownership and wise use of coastal areas has been a tenant of Australian society, where as in other countries the wealthy own the beaches. This Act will reverse that situation and give ownership to those who believe the people should be locked out of nature. We hold that wise use is the best option for all.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours faithfully,

Honda Australia Motorcycle & Power Equipment Pty Ltd

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart Strickland', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stuart Strickland
Managing Director