



TEARS OF GRIEF FOR THE REEF

The last few months have seen a shocking deterioration in the marine environment of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area and in particular, Gladstone Harbour and surrounds.

Australians for Animals (AFA) commissioned a legal opinion from a well-known barrister as it's becoming pretty obvious that there are very few options left in terms of preventing further irreversible damage to Gladstone and the GBRWHA.

As the charity had to put together the documentation for the barrister, to save on costs, we have spent several months combing through a veritable mountain of approvals, conditions, scientific papers, government documents, newspapers, and emails. It has been no mean task as AFA has also had the responsibility of identifying and ensuring that relevant experts are available if we go to court. Some of these experts are American. Because of the massive issues which are part and parcel of the oil and gas industry in the USA, the scientists there have much more experience in dealing

with the appalling problems which these industries generate.

At this stage, the AFA committee has not made a decision one way or the other on whether we will take the gigantic step of mounting a lawsuit. If we do a legal challenge in the Federal Court under Commonwealth legislation, not only would the charity be up against the Federal government but potentially industry heavyweights.

The major downside of the Federal Court is the potential for an adverse cost judgement against the charity which could see AFA wiped out.

It has happened to other conservation organisations which have made legal challenges in the Federal court with strong lawsuits.

AFA also has the option of mounting a legal challenge in the Queensland state court for



Federal Court Building.

Planning and the Environment where costs are not ordered against either party. However Premier Newman is busy trying to undo this situation which would mean a similar situation to the Federal Court.

These are not easy decisions for the charity and we're seeking a number of opinions from legal experts.

In the meantime, AFA is using some of our limited funding to bring out experts from the US who are not compromised by government funding (as is the case in Australia) and who are recognised internationally.

The Center for Biological Diversity, a leading public interest law firm in the USA is taking out a lawsuit against the US Export and Import Bank over their funding of some of the massive US corporations involved in constructing the world's largest LNG (Liquified Natural Gas) Terminals at Gladstone.

This is a vitally important lawsuit and AFA is assisting the Center by providing current research and as much information as we can identify to ensure the lawyers are well briefed.

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BLOGS UP AND RUNNING

As well, AFA has set up a blog on the Reef at: www.greatbarrierreef.org.au and we're happy to say that it's getting great coverage with more than 1,500 hits a month.

We had an email from the Queensland State Library a few weeks ago requesting that the blog become part of the Library's archive records of the ongoing campaigns over the GBRWHA.

The State Library of Queensland aims to build a comprehensive collection of

Queensland publications to ensure the availability of our documentary heritage both now and in the future. The blog will also be part of the records of the National Library!

We have also set up a blog at www.australiansforanimals.org.au and this blog is also getting an amazing number of hits!

NOISE IN THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT

Last month, the Australian ran a major article on noise in the underwater environment which featured our Co-ordinator, Sue Arnold and the charity's call for state and federal legislation on this issue. It has been no mean feat to get national coverage on underwater noise. AFA wrote to every individual MP and all the Senate carefully explaining the issues which are sufficiently serious to cause massive mortality to whales, dolphins, dugongs, and fish.

The response from politicians – ALP, Coalition and Greens has been nothing short of pathetic.

We sent information on the noise issue for months to key environmental journalists at the Sydney Morning Herald and the Australian with no success in getting any media. It was nothing short of a miracle that an article finally appeared in the Australian but there was no follow up and no interviews with acoustic experts who had much more to contribute.

It's of great concern to realise that critical issues which can cause irreversible damage to marine life have no currency with our political parties. In the US and Europe, noise in the marine environment is a number one issue along with climate change and ocean acidity and no wonder. With the greedy hands of the world's giant energy corporations seeking out more areas to destroy, the marine environment has become the focus of massive exploration and exploitation.

Noise in the ocean is more like a 'battalion of elephants in the room' rather than the usual 'elephant in the room'. Underwater noise can cause cetaceans to go temporarily deaf and in more serious instances to cause permanent deafness. In their acoustic world, it would be like humans being unable to hear each other, to experience traffic noise, to hear the radio, or the song of birds.

Noise has a devastating impact on the marine environment. Acoustic signals can travel long distances depending on the state of the tides, wind, seabed and other parameters. Christopher Clark, Director of Bioacoustic Research Program, Cornell University says the cumulative impact of noise in the urbanised ocean environment seriously compromises whales. He



uses this example.

"Imagine a space ship is over your village and it's sending explosions down to every 10 seconds, driving everybody crazy. The choice is you either leave or die.

"The acoustic world is 10% of what it should be. The whales social network is destroyed, their world seriously compromised, their immune and reproductive systems impacted by stress created by noise."

The use of sound for communication and detection in the marine environment is important for survival for marine animals. Marine animals depend on their hearing sensitivity to retain cohesion in groups, for echolocation (among marine mammals), to locate and capture food, for detection of predators, for sensing their physical and biological environment and for avoiding dangerous situations (including anthropogenic threats). There's great variation in hearing sensitivity among animals due to evolutionary diversification of anatomical structures involved in hearing and selection pressures on the way different animals utilise sound.

Not only is their acoustic world destroyed but communication

between mother and calf is impacted, so too is their ability to locate prey, threats, changes in their environment. The standard response by governments and the oil and gas industry is:- "Whales, dolphins and any other creatures exposed to noise will simply move to another area".

This is absolute garbage, the statement is unscientific, there's no evidence that animals move and no research which would indicate that other areas are suitable in terms of prey, threats, and survival needs.

It's more of an "out of sight, out of mind" statement or one of those motherhood spins which is so typical of our politicians today.

Imagine how aquatic critters cope with the cumulative impacts of noise from dredging, pile driving, shipping traffic, blasting, and all the associated infrastructure involved in constructing the massive developments along the GBRWHA and the west coast of Western Australia. What happens if they've gone deaf?

Death caused by noise is hideous. Ears explode as do lungs and any swim bladders. A recent finding of a dead orca in Puget Sound, Washington state demonstrates what

happens. The orca was bleeding from every orifice, its lungs had exploded. Government authorities deny that noise caused mortality in spite of major research which demonstrates the injuries are absolutely representative of death caused by acoustic trauma.

AFA has helped the Western Australian environment groups who are fighting against the construction of a massive gas hub off James Price Point. As AFA has gained considerable experience in noise issues, (we're well connected with some of the best noise experts in the world), we were able to provide extensive information. However, as long as the current situation exists – political parties and state/federal governments ignoring the underwater noise issues – the future for the marine environment is dire.

AFA predicts that the Southern Hemisphere Humpback population which migrates up and down the east and west coast of this ancient continent are at considerable risk. One of the big risks for all marine creatures is stress caused by acoustic trauma which can impact reproduction, and cause immune system problems as creatures search for other habitats, other sources of food and safety.

Imagine how much noise one ship every hour of every day of every month for the next 20 years will generate. That's the current scenario which will undoubtedly change with an approval for a second shipping channel in Gladstone. Noise experts describe this as chronic noise as there's no peace, no let up. This is the level of traffic which will be generated along the GBRWHA.

DUGONGS AND TURTLES CONTINUE TO DIE

We know that the death rate continues unabated and that there's an increasing number of ship strikes causing mortality in both species.



A recent report by Dr Helene Marsh, Australia's leading expert on dugongs highlights the destruction of dugong habitat caused by port development and infrastructure at Gladstone and Townsville. Yet another report which is ignored by the state and federal governments.

A recent meeting with one of the scientists on the Gladstone Port development Ecosystem Monitoring Research Project highlighted the disasters which are unfolding. 35% of the snub-fin dolphins which are located near Port Curtis (part of Gladstone Harbour) are almost certainly dead. There's no sign of this once vibrant population.

OLD REEF NEWS DREDGED UP AS NEW NEWS BY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The Federal Minister for the Environment, Tony Burke, came out last month with the "news" that 50% of the GBRWHA coral has been destroyed.

This is old news as the UNESCO World Heritage Committee made this finding in June, 2012 when the Secretariat met in St Petersburg, in the Russian Federation. As a result of all the development and massive problems facing the Reef, the World Heritage threatened to downlist the GBRWHA as a World Heritage in Danger.

It is now highly likely that next year UNESO will have no option but to downgrade

the Reef as development continues unchecked. AFA was shocked to see on the Federal Government's website a proposal to construct a second shipping by the Gladstone Ports Corporation. We submitted extensive comments as have Queensland conservation councils, however we wouldn't like to put money on the outcome. If the Feds approve the second channel, which is highly



Coral Bleaching

likely, Gladstone Harbour will be doomed with all the remaining marine creatures – snubfin dolphins, dugongs, turtles, fish and other critters unable to survive the turbidity and loss of prey.

PREMIER NEWMAN'S QUEENSLAND

In September, our Co-ordinator had a meeting with the new Minister for the Environment in Queensland, Andrew Powell.

She had met with Andrew pre the election several times and as always, AFA was hopeful that perhaps the new Minister would be concerned by the ongoing violations of the consent conditions relating to Gladstone Harbour.

Given the huge cutbacks to the State's public servants, it's astonishing that the Queensland government even manages to operate.

There was no receptionist at the Minister's office, and it was very obvious that wherever people could be replaced by computers or answering machines, they were replaced.

This cutback has also impacted the number of rangers across Queensland who have the

responsibility of policing and enforcing the Nature Conservation Act. Prior to the Queensland elections, AFA was aware that there were just a mere 100 rangers in the entire state so the likelihood of enforcing legislation in Queensland is increasingly remote under the Newman government.

Apparently Premier Newman has no concern about the Reef in spite of assurances to the public pre-election that his government, if elected, would ensure protection. Look no further than Gina Hancock's Alpha Coal Project with a huge Indian company recently granted approval.

AFA is deeply concerned



Campbell Newman

over the fate of the World Heritage Area and this concern is greatly magnified by the ongoing under-reporting and misinformation by the mainstream media and the almost total lack of focus on the cumulative impacts on the marine environment.

LOCAL ANIMALS NOT FORGOTTEN

With more horror stories unfolding on the Far North Coast (which we will not include in this newsletter) it is becoming nothing short of a nightmare as efforts by local animal shelters to get more inspectors continue to fall on deaf ears.

AFA continues to have major concerns over the complete refusal by the RSPCA to engage another inspector in this region, so heavily populated with people, domestic and farm animals. All the pleas over the years have resulted in absolutely zero response from the RSPCA and State government.

The latest appalling cruelty was so dreadful that our Co-ordinator made contact with the General Manager of the Lismore Northern Star newspaper which is a part of the Australian Provincial Newspaper chain. He has been very helpful in the past and totally understands the situation on the Far North Coast is out of control.

As well, Sue's husband, former Senator Norm Sanders who was on the historic Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare decided to do what he could and did a major interview with the newspaper calling on the State government to act.

Saturday 20th October, the Northern Star ran a huge front page story headed up "Time to Stop the Cruelty" detailing some of the shocking



incidents which have taken place over the last year. It was an amazing front page and AFA held some hope that perhaps, finally, the government would act.

Given that Don Page, currently NSW Minister for Local Government is our local MP and given that no one knows the cruelty issue better than Page, it is really outrageous that this man continues to ignore the plight of animals in this area.

Although local shelters could apply for inspectorial status, their funds are completely tied up with caring for hundreds of dumped and cruelly treated animals. AFA provides funding to several of the local

shelters and we will continue with our effort to ensure there are more inspectors.

Along with the local shelters, AFA was appalled to see a prominent advertisement in the Casino paper by the RSPCA calling for donations at a time when this organisation continues to refuse to appoint more than one inspector in this region. Taking funds from local shelters and ensuring there is one only inspector for an area the size of Tasmania is not on and should not happen.

In the meantime, it's shameful that the O'Farrell government refuses to deal with this growing problem and will not contemplate solutions such as

AFA NEEDS YOUR HELP TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

As you can see, AFA has been very very busy over the last couple of months and newsletters have been at the bottom of the list as the charity struggles to cope with the workload.

We have the possibility of bringing Chris Clark, Director of the Bioacoustic Laboratory, Cornell University early next year.

Chris is probably the most experienced recognised expert on noise in the marine environment. AFA believes it is vitally important to bring Dr Clark to Australia as we continue with our efforts to

persuade state and federal government to legislate on acoustic impacts which cannot be avoided with the exponential increase in oil and gas developments.

This is going to be a decisive year coming up in 2013. Whether the Reef survives or not will be an election issue federally.

AFA is fighting tooth and nail to prevent more damage but we desperately need funds to bring experts to Australia and in the event that we take the decision to run a legal challenge over the damage. This is the time and the moment. Please help.

**For the Animals,
Sue Arnold & Friends.**

PHOTO APPEAL

AFA desperately needs images of The Great Barrier Reef, both above and below water.

If you have images of The Reef, it's animals or of mining and shipping activities that you've taken yourself and that you can grant us permission to use, please send them to:

info@australiansforanimals.org.au

Please include a note in your email granting us permission to use the images and your full name so we can credit you appropriately.

*Every Day
Earth Day*



*This is my simple religion,
There is no need for temples;
no need for
complicated philosophy.
Our own brain,
our own heart
is our temple,
the philosophy is kindness.*

Dalai Lama

Photo Samantha Hic SW
New Providence Bahamas



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