

Re: Clarification of more Moore misstatements

From: Walter Starck

Date: 2 November 2009

Recently I had begun to consider if I had perhaps been too harsh on Minister Moore and what I had thought to be poor judgement might be more a matter of poor advice. I must now thank Mr. Moore for relieving any such doubt and generously providing another opportunity to address some of his misstatements.

Who is a “Scientist” and Does it Matter?

At the WAFIC AGM of 23 October the Minister made some remarks implying doubt regarding my qualifications as a “scientist” (with the quotation marks his addition). This deserves some comment as it seems the Minister may not understand that matters of science are determined by reason and evidence, not by consensus or pissing contests over credentials. In fact, some of the most important advances in science have come when relative unknowns challenged prevailing expert opinion with an explanation which proved to be a better one. In scientific disagreements, attacks on personal qualifications are an implicit admission of defeat. They are invariably only resorted to when there are no credible answers to a better argument.

Although largely irrelevant, as the Minister apparently thinks my qualifications important enough to concern himself with, I will fill in a bit on my background. If nothing else, this might provide some small reduction in the ignorance under which he is so obviously labouring in this respect.

I grew up on an island in the Florida Keys in a family of fishermen and began catching and selling fish off the family dock at age 5. At age 6 I got my first boat and a castnet. During high school I dived for crayfish to earn pocket money and would regularly catch between 50 to 200 pounds in a day’s diving. I attended university at the University of Miami and on completing my BSc scored in the top one percentile in the national Graduate Record Examination. I went on to graduate school at the Institute of Marine Science under a National Science Foundation Fellowship, one of the highest academic scholarships in the U.S. The IMS (now Rosensteil School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences) was and is among the top marine science research institutions in the world. I completed my PhD studies in record time and was awarded the degree in early 1964.

Since then I have worked independently. This has included research grants and contracts from the National Science Foundation, Office of Naval Research, National Geographic Society and various private foundations. For twenty years I owned and operated my own 104 ton research vessel exploring widely from the Caribbean to the S.W. Pacific including 10 years on the Great Barrier Reef and in the Coral Sea. I have often worked in cooperation with various research organizations. In such capacity I have been a Research Associate of the Institute of Marine Science, The Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu, The Australian Museum in Sydney and the Western Australia Museum.

My research experience has included studies in over two dozen countries and resulted in numerous articles, books, scientific reports in peer reviewed journals and documentary films which have been broadcast in over 50 countries. It has also resulted in the discovery of over 100 species of fishes that were new to science, numerous new invertebrates and over 100,000 specimens now in the reference collections of major museums. One, a rare slit shell, became a gift of state from the U.S. Government to the Emperor of Japan on the occasion of his visit to the U.S.

In addition to basic research, I have worked extensively in development of marine technology and hold two patents in this area. This design and development experience includes several boats, an amphibious aircraft, various underwater photographic and lighting equipment and the first

successful closed circuit mixed gas electronically regulated breathing apparatus. The photographic equipment included original development of the optical dome port now used universally for wide angle underwater photography. The electronic rebreather was manufactured and sold to NASA, the U.S. Navy, the Israeli Army, some nameless government agencies and the Edwin Link Foundation among others. In Australia it was regularly used by one of the leading commercial dive companies involved in the early development of the Bass Strait oil field. Over the years I have frequently been a professional consultant on various matters relating to marine research and technology.

I could go on, but suffice it to say I probably have enough qualifications to be deemed a scientist without the need for quotation marks. Like most gratuitous comments on other people, Mr. Moore's remarks in this regard reveals more of their source than of their subject.

Piled Higher and Deeper

When it comes to experts on the ecology and dynamics of marine populations, there aren't any. What we don't know greatly exceeds what we do and much of what we think we know is probably wrong. It has been aptly said that PhD stands for Piled higher and Deeper. The most we can expect from experts is that they understand enough to at least recognise their own ignorance and few have even reached that level. In managing fisheries the best we can usually do is to monitor a resource and adjust to what nature does. Pretending to be able to predict the future using theories and models is a delusion of office workers. Unfortunately, the reality is out there, under the surface, safely out of sight so pretensions of expertise are relatively safe from exposure.

Filletgate Thefts and Lies

Another matter commented upon by Mr. Moore at the WAFIC AGM involved what has become known as the Filletgate affair. His claim that I did not give him enough time to do anything before going to the media is verifiably untrue.

I first emailed the minister on 1 August 2009 in regard to proposed restrictions on the WRLF. No acknowledgement was received and on 11 August my letter to the Minister was published as a paid advertisement in *The West Australian*. On 31 August I emailed the Minister again regarding critical shortcomings found in DoF modelling by the independent Prescott Review and affirmed by four of the world's leading fisheries scientists. Again there was no response.

On 7 September 2009 at 5:31 AM Perth time I emailed the Minister under the Subject: DoF integrity issue – IMPORTANT. In this message I wrote:

"It appears that specific and irrefutable evidence of critical deficiencies in DoF science which I brought to your attention in my email of 31 August are going to simply be ignored. The foremost concern of the department is clearly neither the resource nor the industry but rather the exercise of their own arbitrary power and authority. The ongoing juvenile display of arrogance and intransigence by DoF has precluded any possibility of reasonable negotiation and has already resulted in considerable unnecessary damage to the credibility and reputation of the department.

As the concerns already raised have not even resulted in an acknowledgement of receipt, it seems that more is unfortunately going to be required. Hopefully, the following matter of integrity may finally be sufficient to evoke some recognition that there are problems which can no longer be ignored."

After setting out the details and evidence involved I closed with:

"To minimise any concerns about delay providing time for a cover up, I expect prompt action will be taken. I also expect that receipt of this letter will be promptly acknowledged and I will be advised that it is being properly investigated so that I need not seek address elsewhere. "

When, after 5 more days no reply had been received, I contacted the media on the evening of 11 September and the story appeared the next day in *The West Australian*. The Minister then immediately posted a news release on his web page saying he had ordered the matter investigated and that I had not given him time to respond. How long does it take to acknowledge receipt of an email presenting information of potentially major importance? If the Minister is unhappy with the media attention, he has only his own arrogance or negligence to blame.

The Minister also raised the question of why I waited so long to bring the fillets matter to attention. That question would better be asked of his department as I had presented the evidence to them in October last year. At that time I had raised no questions of impropriety as the appearance was obvious and I wished to afford opportunity for an innocent explanation if such should be the case. None was ever offered and I had been preoccupied with more critical concerns of the fishermen. When the Minister chose to ignore my well founded concerns over dubious scientific claims, I decided to see if he might even try to ignore an undeniable appearance of malfeasance in his department. Again, if he is displeased by the matter, he might consider that he himself provoked it. A lot of the time he doesn't have enough of to even acknowledge an email of critical import could be saved by being more open to well founded concerns and engaging his brain before making ill-considered public statements.

Newby and Other Misunderstandings

While on the topic of matters pertaining to WAFIC, in a letter dated 15 October to the Vice Chairman of WAFIC, the Minister states:

"I would like to make it clear to the WAFIC Board, as I have said to Mr Newby, that I did not nor will I ever sanction any demand for the Chairman of WAFIC to resign. If this is what was inferred, then it is a misunderstanding for which I apologise. It is not my place to get involved in board or membership issues of independent organisations like WAFIC."

Mr. Newby has stated he was advised that if he did not resign from WAFIC their funding would cease. One may wonder how anyone could possibly misunderstand this as not being a demand and a rather imperious one at that. One may also note that, although the Minister clearly states he did not and will not ever sanction any such demand, the only one to lose their job has been Mr. Newby and though only an unfortunate "misunderstanding" it was left to stand. At least to his credit, Mr. Moore appears to be a remarkably tolerant boss, even when his staff does something on his behalf that he himself would never ever sanction. It's too bad such kindness does not extend to hundreds of fishermen and their families

While describing someone as a "scientist" may sometimes warrant use of quotes to indicate some uncertainty, no such doubt ever seems to attend *lying* when used to describe a politician.

One might also be forgiven for wondering whether the Minister may have misunderstood the difference between a Minister and an *Ubergruppenfuhrer* or about how many more "misunderstandings" will be needed before government recognises the damage being wrought and that a full time Fisheries Minister is needed.

Regards,

Walter Starck