

Green Slime: Our bigge

Every day the media bring us news of severe environmental threats. Most are only hypothetical possibilities of things that have not actually happened but "might".

Contrary to this constant stream of "threats", our real environmental situation in Australia is the best in the world. Our waters and air are cleaner and most of our continent remains natural environment in excellent condition.

No marine species in Australia has ever been lost due to human causes nor are any now threatened with such extinction. The Great Barrier Reef is in pristine condition. Of the more than 2,500 named reefs in the complex, only a few dozen near population centres are regularly visited.

Over 90 percent of the reefs are seldom or never fished or even visited by anyone. Most are too far offshore to be affected by human activities on the coast; and, even much of that remains undeveloped. The Great Barrier Reef commercial fishing harvest rate is at 9kg/km²/year when 4,000kg/km² is considered to be an average sustainable limit for reef fisheries. All this is easily verified, non-controversial fact. The reality of this situation is readily observable to anyone by making an extended reef cruise or a flight over the Reef. Apart from the proximity of the few small population centres, boats are hard to find and one passes reef after reef with no vessel anywhere in sight.

On a national scale, the situation is not too dissimilar. Along most of the coast boats are few and far between. The national fishery harvest rate is only about one-thirtieth of the global average and two-thirds of domestic seafood consumption comes from imports.

The situation ashore is not much different. Most of the coastline is undeveloped. Thousands of kilometres of beaches and headlands stretch in endless succession with little human debris.

Away from a few moderately populated coastal areas and half a dozen coastal cities, most of the interior of the continent is sparsely inhabited. Most of it remains vast areas of wilderness.

Flying anywhere over the outback in a small aircraft is an awesome experience. Lifting off opens up a vast panorama of wilderness disappearing over the curvature of the Earth. Such an experience puts a very different perspective on the concerns of urban greens who, by choice, prefer to live in tiny fragments of the continent where nature has been annihilated. Out in the real world, things aren't so bad at all, nor are they getting worse.

Overfishing is a myth

Overfishing simply isn't happening. Our already pathetically small fishing industry is rapidly declining as the burden of regulation drives fishermen to give up and deters newcomers from starting. Apart from a few of the most lucrative export fisheries, the quotas and licences fishermen were led to believe would be their retirement fund have been rendered nearly worthless by restrictions and demands. Worse yet, they have become costly liabilities to maintain. In the most valuable fisheries, licences and quotas are increasingly being bought by investors and the resources owned by absentee landlords. While their share-croppers do the fishing, these new landed gentry groom the bureaucratic overlords for indulgences. The Twenty-first Century is the new Middle Ages.

Far from being overfished, our fisheries are the most under-utilised and expensively regulated in the world. Management costs for a number of the smaller fisheries are greater than the GDP of the sector. Significant savings could be achieved by just paying the fishermen not to fish and doing away with all the expensive management. (*Mis-management? Ed.*)

Farming faces a similar situation with respect to environmental delusions. The prevailing misperception is one of unsustainable practices resulting in widespread land degradation and

environmental damage. However, the reality is the least subsidised, most efficient farm sector of any OECD nation and an industry that has achieved significant ongoing advances in both efficiency and land management practices over recent decades.

Overgrazing with erosion and soil damage from hard-footed livestock is another popular delusion. While such claims are commonly made and widely believed, the evidence is sparse and mostly trivial.

Actually, through provision of numerous year-round watering places for stock, the grazing industry has greatly increased the abundance and diversity of wildlife over vast areas. The worst examples of poor land management are not on farms and grazing properties, but are most easily found on Crown land, especially the more remote national parks and wilderness areas.

Although rampant forest destruction is another favoured fantasy of the eco-cult, the reality again defies the perception. Over a fifth of the continent is forested and harvest rates are well below limits of sustainability. The total area of both natural and plantation forest is increasing and is now probably greater than when European settlement began.

Toxic green slime of lies



Photo: Alpha

The greatest environmental threat we face does not come from primary production but from environmentalism itself. This toxic green slime of delusions, distortions, exaggerations and outright lies being propagated in the name of "saving" the environment is a threat to the economy, the food supply, basic rights, the democratic process and indeed our entire way of life. This is not just hyperbole. Here are just a few examples:

- A small but lucrative trap fishery of six boats fishing an area of over 200,000km² on the Northwest Shelf is suffering ongoing restrictions on effort because of purported concerns about overfishing. However, catches have remained excellent, and at present levels of permitted effort, it would take over 1,000 years to fish the entire area just one time.

Moreover, video cameras on traps clearly show that only a small portion of fish around a trap are caught by it. These six boats are restricted to a total catch of under 1,000 tonnes annually. Thailand, which is our largest source of seafood imports, has a smaller total shelf area than this fishery. It also has 60,000 fishing boats and for many years has sustained a catch of about 2.5 million tonnes.

Still, office bound bureaucrats based more than a thousand miles away have managed to concoct a fantasy of overfishing. In

st environmental threat

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the 19 years they have "managed" this resource these "managers" have never once gone out on a boat to actually see what they are "managing". This is management by remote control using an unverified "model" which bears no resemblance to the obvious reality.

The average catch per trap is over 20 times larger than the model says even exists. The utter impossibility of catching fish that don't exist or of overfishing an area when 99.9 percent of it isn't fished at all, simply does not compute in brains clogged with eco-bullshit.

- Drought stricken farmers in the Murray-Darling are having to pay tens of thousands of dollars each year to retain rights for water which they have not received for three years. In financial desperation, more and more are having to sell their rights at discount prices to the only buyer in a depressed market, the government.

The plan is to use this water for so-called environmental flows to "restore" a condition that never existed naturally. This exercise in national self-abuse is permanently removing some of our most productive agricultural land from future use and "restoring" it to desert aridity.

- Tree clearing prohibitions are turning large areas of productive grazing country supporting diverse wildlife into unproductive, low biodiversity, scrub forest dominated by a few eucalypt species producing only fuel for future intense fires. Clearing restrictions are likewise forcing rural residents to allow encroaching tree growth to create a potential fire bomb around their homes awaiting only an inevitable ignition to devastate their lives.

- Aquaculture is the fastest growing sector in world food production. For the past three decades, global production has increased by over 1,200 percent with an average compound growth of around nine percent per annum.

Australia, with some 60,000km of mostly uninhabited coastline well suited for aquaculture, a benign climate and unpolluted waters, clearly has vast potential, yet development of the industry is now declining after a weak start.

A comparison of Australian aquaculture production with that of a sampling of other nations is instructive. Thailand and Vietnam each have only about one-eighth of Australia's coastline; but both have around 30 times greater aquaculture production than Australia. The EU has over 40 times greater. Even New Zealand has over double Australia's production.

Although the small size of Australia's industry has been attributed to higher cost structure there is obviously something more to it than this. Certainly Australian costs for land, labour, equipment, energy and feedstock are at no disadvantage to Canada, France, Japan, Norway, the UK, or the US. Yet all have hugely greater aquaculture industries.

The real reason is only one thing: over-regulation. Despite the world's best natural conditions for it, aquaculture in Australia has been strangled at birth by an impossible morass of regulations. It is only these regulatory demands which impose multi-fold greater expenses, delays and uncertainties than anywhere else.

Apart from a few exceptions that became well established before regulation made new operations uneconomic, aquaculture here has actually been declining in recent years while it continues to boom elsewhere. The only sector booming here is regulation.

- Small miners are another once-numerous sector of primary production now on the way to extinction from bureaucratic demands. Numerous widespread and valuable mineral deposits that are too small for large-scale exploitation now lie idle but are eminently economic for small-scale operations using modern technology.

Eco-salvation science gets it wrong

Sadly, we now have a whole generation of managers and researchers thoroughly indoctrinated in eco-salvation ideology. They aren't just pursuing their own private gain. It's much worse. They actually believe they are doing the right thing and are saving the environment. Their funding is highly dependant on addressing purported problems in a climate of competition over the urgency and severity of various hypothetical threats. Funding predicated on threats never discovers them to be minor or non-existent. It always finds evidence for them and a need for further funding. Basic research aimed only at better understanding the world we live in has sadly become just a quaint outdated custom of the past.

Scientific right and wrong in this context is no longer a matter of correct or incorrect understanding of how things work. The old values of pre-enlightenment times have been restored.

Right and wrong is once again something determined by belief in accord with ideology, not something to be discovered from reason based on evidence. Current managers "know" environmental damage must be occurring because any human activity at all must disturb the delicate balance of nature and is by definition an unnatural "impact" amounting to a desecration. This is especially so if any profit or enjoyment might be gained by someone.

Such moral judgement is underscored by the fact that primary production and outdoor recreation is seen as "exploiting" nature for personal benefit. Right thinking greens condemn such terrible desecration when these people could just get their food and entertainment from a shop like they themselves do.

While some vestiges of science aimed at objective understanding do survive, the prevailing approach in environmental sciences is now one of providing a stamp of scientific authority to the green agenda. Any researchers who object to such corruption of science or who insist on presenting findings not in accord with eco-salvationist ideology are soon sidelined by lack of funding and scientific censorship via peer review.

Unfortunately, the situation for reform is not simply one of providing better evidence and argument but the much more difficult one of converting righteous, authoritarian belief to objective scientific reasoning open to uncertainty and revision. This will also entail a change in fundamental perspective, from humankind as an unnatural imposition on the ecosystem to a holistic view of an ecosystem which includes our own species and its many effects as an integral part of nature.

Probably one of the most effective and certain means of reform would be to index the budgets and salaries of government departments to the productivity and profitability of the sector for which they are responsible. This would indeed effect an immediate miracle change in perspective.

It is time that positive outcomes be required, not just meaningless eco-waffle. It is also time that real evidence be demanded of researchers, not just unsupported opinions by a chorus of "experts" singing for their supper.

Above all, it is past time for the public to realise that we are all paying the price of gross resource mismanagement in our cost of living, our health, our freedom and in the broader well being of the nation.

Sanctimoniously sitting on vast stores of badly needed resources while mouthing platitudes about biodiversity, sustainability and our precious fragile environment won't cut it. If we won't make use of our resources, hungry others will. Having to scrape aside a bit of green scum to get at them won't be much of a deterrent. The choice is ours.