

COMMENT: MPAs & other environmental excesses

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By Walter Starck PhD

The recent policy announcement by the Coalition regarding Marine Protected Areas is a hopeful first step in the direction of a return to environmental reality and away from political pandering to the eco delusions of the Greens. It is important to recognise a few home truths regarding MPAs:

- They are a costly hypothetical solution to a problem which doesn't exist.
- They have no effect on pollution or climate change and the possibility of overfishing is already more than adequately addressed by the most costly and restrictive fisheries management in the world.
- There is no threat to marine biodiversity. We have never lost even one marine species from any human cause and none are threatened with extinction.
- The Law of the Sea Treaty under which we claim EEZ rights provides that other nations may petition to access our resources if we are not utilising them. It would be difficult for Australia to sustain an argument that vast no-take MPAs are a "use" of fisheries resources.
- Holders of fishing rights have committed to large investments in both money and years of their lives on the assurance that their rights were, secure, permanent and tradeable. Their licenses are in fact a contract with government and the terms and conditions of their rights cannot be legally changed without either their full knowledge and individual consent under contract law, or fair and just compensation.
- The Biodiversity Treaty which has been cited as requiring the declaration of MPAs, also requires that traditional uses be protected. Recreational and commercial fishing are traditional uses going back to first settlement by both indigenous and colonial peoples.
- At present, no need for or benefit from, extensive MPAs has been shown to exist and it would be prudent to await the accumulation of further knowledge to implement them over time in accord with increasing knowledge. Current scientific understanding is simply not adequate for a soundly based large scale implementation of MPAs at this time. The crash program of MPA implementation amounts to large scale environmental meddling with no proper assessment of either needs or consequences. It is simply cheap pandering for green votes.
- Over recent years numerous large scale clinical and epidemiological studies published in the world's leading medical journals have found significant health benefits from increased seafood consumption for a broad range of neurological, cardio-vascular and immune related conditions. Translated into reduced health care costs, it could save Australia billions of dollars per year not to mention the improved quality of life for millions of Australians. We need to be looking at how to expand our underutilised

fisheries and aquaculture potentials, not seeking to find more imaginary reasons to close them down.

- Fisheries have by far the lowest impact of any form of food production. To replace global fisheries production with beef would require conversion to grazing of an area about 15 times larger than the whole of Australia.

Beyond the matter of fisheries management, ill-conceived environmental restrictions have become a major impediment to almost any productive activity involving use of land or natural resources. An expansion of the Coalition's MPA policy to offer a similar rethink on excessive environmental restrictions in general as well as a strengthening of property rights would strike an overwhelming chord of popularity.

The anti ETS sentiment in the electorate which was the propelling force for the Coalition's change of leadership and public approval is but an exposed seam. A motherlode of resentment against environmental nonsense is just beneath the surface and a rousing chorus of agreement awaits only a leader willing to say that this emperor not only has no clothes, he is disgusting. The political pandering for green votes at the expense of the livelihood of thousands of fishing families and the health of millions of persons is tantamount to treason.

**Walter Starck,
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About Walter Starck

Walter Starck grew up on, an island in the Florida Keys. In 1964 he completed a PhD degree at the Institute of Marine Science of the University of Miami. In 1968 he took delivery of a purpose built 150 ton research vessel, El Torito, and spent the next two decades exploring widely from the Caribbean to the Western Pacific. He eventually arrived in Australia and in 1979 established a home base on a 164 acre rainforest property on the north shore of the Daintree River.

His research interest has centered on coral reef biology and has included research grants and contracts from the National Science Foundation, Office of Naval Research and National Geographic Society. He has been a research associate of the Institute of Marine Science in Miami, the Bishop Museum in Hawaii, The Australian Museum in Sydney and the Western Australia Museum in Perth.

In recent years he has written, spoken and consulted widely on environmental and resource management issues.