



Dr Don Kinsey AM

Mr David Borthwick

Chair:

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act Review

through:

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I was Executive Officer (position now titled Executive Director) of GBRMA from 1985 – 1992. During that period, I was Acting Chairman of the Authority for one continuous period of approximately six months. I also was the establishment Director of the CRC for the Great Barrier Reef Heritage Area (initially known as the CRC for the Ecologically Sustainable Development of the Great Barrier Reef).

I have been involved with environmental management issues in Australia (through The Australian Institute of Marine Science and GBRMPA), USA (where I was Director of the University of Georgia Marine Institute), and Southeast Asia. In 1993, I was made a Member of the Order of Australia for *service to reef ecology and to the conservation and management of marine environments*. I also have been involved in the scientific study of coral reef systems and their role/fate in global climate change since 1960. My research interests have involved coastal and reef systems throughout the world and particularly in Australia, USA, central Pacific, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean.

My comments below all relate to the matter of a possible move away from the present statutory Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to a more centralised Commonwealth department-based policy and management system.

I have considerable concern about the future of the management of the GBR Marine Park because of what I perceive already to be a progressive move away from the determination of management policy using a dedicated, regional, and user-based approach. I believe such a trend will both be perceived to be and, in fact, will actually be a weakening of the great strength which has historically characterised the GBRMPA/Queensland Government management approach.

The GBRMPA is recognised throughout the world as the best example of multi-use management of the marine environment and, arguably, as the best example of environmental management in any context. This is an icon of which Australia should rightly be very proud. One of the principal attributes of the system which the world

so admires is the totally focused and tightly integrated system of management. This is recognised as having facilitated the extraordinary (and unusual) collaboration between the State and the Commonwealth which has resulted in a powerful, complementary, day-to-day management system. I am confident that this collaboration will be totally compromised and probably lost in the event that a more centralised, departmental approach is adopted. Surely, one of the weakest things any government can do is to remove a system which works well and replace it with an uncertain future.

I believe that GBRMPA has always exhibited political sensitivity while performing a truly remarkable balancing act with the interests of all user groups. Clearly this can never please all parties and controversy will always surround such efforts. This is unavoidable. Any controversy associated with the efforts of the GBRMPA has been at a level deserving the greatest admiration. In any period of controversy, there will be parties who see an advantage in gaining additional political leverage. This will always be a temporary stance from which they will revert to favouring the more independent system in the long term. Again, I cannot believe that centralising management and making it closer to government can provide any long-term advantage in conflict resolution over the statutory authority, Commonwealth/State collaboration approach.

As well as balancing the interests of user groups, the GBRMPA has done a remarkable job of recognising and considering the opinions of all interest groups at state, national, and international levels in developing planning policy, not just for the day-to-day management of the GBR, but for a major area listed as World Heritage.

While some media reports and user-group releases suggest there is a growing level of dissatisfaction with GBRMPA policy, I have detected no general feeling in the north to support this concern. My impression is that the Authority is perceived in the same positive and supportive way that it has been since its inception. All concerns reflect the same difficult and inevitable compromises that have always been required to manage this enormous territory for ecologically and economically sustainable use.

I believe it to be critical that the physical presence in North Queensland not only consists of the hands-on management staff, but the decision making body itself. This indicates a genuine conviction by Australia that the GBR is truly important not only as an icon, but to our economic future and to our status in demonstrating sustainable, multi-use environmental management. It demonstrates that the Government recognises that the GBRMPA is, and must remain, a tightly integrated body that can best do its job where the subject of its efforts is located. The logistics, infrastructure, and technical support are all available at a very advanced level in North Queensland.

Don Kinsey
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