

DBCA's pathway of broken promises



WAFIC Chief Executive, Darryl Hockey says feedback has confirmed DBCA and its US-based eco-partners are seeking an outcome based on percentages

THE phones have been ringing hot since WAFIC began placing the truth on the table regarding the tawdry public consultation processes undertaken by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) for the proposed South Coast Marine Park. We thank those people who are sharing their insights.

Our research has exposed how commitments were made and broken by DBCA; how the commercial fishing industry was deliberately excluded from meetings; how DBCA broke its solemn promises that it would act in good faith; how fishers were not given adequate opportunity for input; how the outcomes were pre-determined from the start; how DBCA has been outsourcing its policy-making to US eco-lobbyists; how they have been using percentage targets, instead of scientific data; how there is no budget whatsoever for scientific research, compliance, indigenous management or compensation; how DBCA has breached the Community Engagement Strategy on a number of occasions; how there was no plausible scientific basis to their sanctuary zone mapping; how they used key

commercial fishing information to target areas for exclusion; how they blatantly ignored the advice of DPIRD (supposedly an equal planning partner); how they manipulated the formation and activities of the Science SAG; how they have failed to adequately consult with all indigenous groups (supposedly project partners); how there has been no consideration given to the displaced fishing effort impacts, nor to cumulative impacts, nor to food security and the effects upon supply of fresh local seafood to the community; and the sad story goes on and on.

The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are: (a) they closed down their selected Community Reference Committee (CRC) because it wouldn't rubber stamp what DBCA had secretly come up with; (b) a key community-elected level of government (the Esperance Shire Council) does not support the process to date because there is insufficient science and no proper socio-economic impact studies conducted; (c) a leading well-respected community member of the CRC has gone public to say the process has not properly considered impacts upon commercial fishing; and (d) the DBCA person who was

working with the community on the ground in Esperance has let loose in the media at DBCA for not having the necessary consultative capacity.

Put all this together and it's pretty obvious that the consultation process is a smoking pile of twisted metal, simply a complete trainwreck.

The south coast community is now becoming very aware of just what DBCA has been up to, and its crude attempts to manipulate and barrel the marine park into existence have demonstrated serious ethical shortcomings, and are certainly not in keeping with acceptable standards of good government. The really concerning thing is this: there is still a lot more disturbing material to come.

Dirty deals done dirt cheap

We have been reliably informed that in-principle agreement has been reached between DBCA and certain key stakeholder groups to aim for a sanctuary zone target of under 12.5 percent in the Marmion Marine Park extension, while aiming for over 25 percent sanctuary zones in the proposed South Coast Marine Park. But the side-agreement with conservationists is that every endeavour will still be made to take the south coast level past 30 percent.

And while the draft Marmion Indicative Management Plan, when initially released for public comment, may have maps showing more than 12.5 percent, once the consultation process is finished it will miraculously reduce to the agreed level.

Why has this occurred? Well, the politics of dealing with a near-metro area with thousands of recreational fishers was starting to cook, and the decision-makers could see that if it all blew up then there was a chance that the Marmion proposal would fail, and the south coast would follow.

DBCA's pathway of broken promises

So, pragmatism prevailed and they went for the light option with Marmion, but repaid the eco-lobbyists with way more water along the south coast, away from the city where it appears that people don't matter.

This raises a number of issues and some ethical concerns. Over the past two years DBCA has gone to extraordinary lengths to absolutely dismiss any concerns that there may be numerical targets in place. WAFIC has heard their assurances on many dozens of occasions that numbers have nothing to do with the outcome. Well of course this is not the case, and as everybody suspected, it never was.

Furthermore, clearly the decisions are not being made scientifically. An under-the-table deal based on agreed percentages was sealed by DBCA with its aligned stakeholders a few months ago.

They negotiated this secret 12.5/25 percent pact with their outsourced US environmental advisers to agree on the basis that much bigger areas of the south coast would be locked away. That is, the payback for accepting a smaller percentage in Marmion, would be that a larger percentage would be delivered in the south coast, where there would be less public resistance.

So, the discussions inside DBCA over recent months have only centred around numerical outcomes, while DBCA continually states that there are no percentage targets, this is the absolute opposite of the truth. Sadly, there is one value at play and this is a mathematical value. A percentage. A number, certainly devoid of any proper consideration of science, or socio-economic impacts, or indeed what local people want.

You will notice that the Marmion Marine Park has been in a period of radio silence for the past few months.

There are two main reasons: DBCA wants to allow things to go quiet and settle down at the community level at Marmion, and secondly, there is little need to do anything as this secret agreement is already a done deal.

So, instead they have been focused full time on trying to lock up as much water as possible on the south coast.

Yes, ladies and gents, the planning tool used by DBCA for marine parks is a calculator. It has nothing to do with science or consultative outcomes. It's about doing everything possible to drive a stake through the very heart of the commercial fishing industry.

WAFIC is right onto this deal. We know what has happened and we know what is happening. We know the parties involved. We will be holding everyone accountable at the appropriate time.



US dollars flow into eco-campaign to influence locals

The question now is 'why?' Why has DBCA shackled itself so tightly to the US-based eco-lobby group, Pew Charitable Trust, while ignoring and excluding local advice?

The propaganda has started already, with billionaire US eco-lobbyists now funding advertising campaigns designed to influence unwitting WA citizens to support the marine park plans.

Yes, the very same plans which have not been approved by the CRC advisory committee set up by DBCA, nor by the Esperance Shire Council which was elected to represent the south coast community. Interestingly, since the CRC was disbanded by DBCA 11 weeks ago on 29 March, DBCA has kept its re-amended plans secret, with bodies such as WAFIC being kept in the dark.

Yet the overseas eco-lobbyists have

been out in the social media actively supporting and promoting sanctuary zones in marine parks. How would Pew know what to promote? Clearly, they are aware of what is being proposed, as they are part of the inner circle.

So DBCA ignores local knowledge and science and disregards the socio-economic impacts upon south coast communities, but fully embraces the input from cashed-up lobbyists from the other side of the world.

And the Pew/DBCA team is using the same tired old techniques they used in the Buccaneer Archipelago, urging people to cut and paste a proforma email to send to the Premier. Remembering that when they did this last time, more than 17,300 of the 17,500 community submissions received in the Buccaneer were eco-proformas, mostly from interstate and overseas.

This is certainly taking global activism to new (low) levels. Rich overseas elites seeking pre-determined outcomes in other parts of the world, with zero regard for consequential socio-economic damage.

Pew is targeting wealthy countries managing already sustainable marine environments, rather than putting in the hard work to influence the source of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in developing countries, because that would be hard work. Ironically, that is where they could make a real difference.

Closing down a sustainable Australian commercial fishing region will simply create additional demand from unsustainable IUU fisheries. Well done Pew. You'll make the situation worse, but somehow you'll feel good about it.

Our Message: Western Australians are more than capable of making up their own minds, we certainly don't need to be dictated to by overseas activists.

Darryl Hockey
Chief Executive Officer
WA Fishing Industry Council