

WA seafood to go off the menu as WA eco-policies runs off the rails



WAFIC Chief Executive, Darryl Hockey says DBCA's failed marine park process will take local seafood off WA menus and impact food local security

When children behave badly, parents often blame the child, without thinking that they themselves may have inadvertently given permission for their poor behaviour.

And to a great extent, I find myself wondering how much responsibility the WA Government must shoulder when we see some crusading eco-evangelists stalking mining CEO houses, while others plan a takeover of our treasured coastal waters.

Full points to the Premier for calling out these behaviours of activists outside the private home of the Woodside boss as the criminal actions they appear to be. But behind the reprimand, we need to ask why these eco-activists felt it was okay to do this?

We are seeing the same issues arising through the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions' (DBCA) support of Pew and allowing the multi-billion dollar US-based eco-lobby to become embedded into WA eco-policy setting.

As we have seen with the oil and gas sector, the risks are high that if a newly spoiled 'eco-child' doesn't get its way, then it sometimes takes matters into its own hands.

And the foundations for this have already been laid. We saw the Environment Minister publicly applaud 17,000 of Pew's pro-forma letters that came from all parts of the planet, except WA, when DBCA was seeking feedback on the controversial and deeply flawed consultation for the Buccaneer Marine Park.

On the South Coast, we now see Pew flexing its political capital with demands for 30 percent no-take sanctuary zones, which would make it one of the world's largest marine parks.

This is despite the fact that large sanctuary areas in other marine reserves are known to have created some concerning impacts on fish populations and behaviours, particularly leading to an over-abundance of apex predators.

Catastrophic impacts

Thirty percent sanctuary zones would be catastrophic for the State's south coast fishing industry, destroy livelihoods and families and the flow-on from that means no fresh local WA seafood in these towns for locals or tourists.

Pew, and therefore DBCA, simply don't give a damn about the damage they would wreak.

Instead of having the sustainable seafood we currently love, WA will have to import dodgy seafood from low-cost, Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated (IUU) fisheries in developing nations, which would be a classic lose-lose outcome.

WA communities will lose access to their local seafood and pay more for the privilege, while the environment will also lose as unsustainable fisheries are placed under accelerated pressures.

It's ironic that the crusaders would cause way more damage than they would supposedly be saving.

But there is a simple answer. DBCA and the Environment Minister need to realise that WA locals want to see balanced outcomes, where the socio-economic impacts on people are minimised.

Give locals a say

Any pub-test will confirm that we don't want overseas zealots taking away our access to WA waters.

People from WA want to not only have a say, but also to be a part of the decision-making. Certainly local voices should carry more influence than US eco-lobbyists.

Didn't the message get through from the Cultural Heritage Act debacle?

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Expansive marine park sanctuary exclusion zones will kill off WA's South Coast fisheries and ensure there is less WA seafood on local menus

But Pew has absolutely no interest in the impacts upon local people, all they want is maximum sanctuary areas.

West Australians love their local seafood and we all became very aware of the importance of food security, and being able to feed ourselves, when borders got locked down during COVID.

DBCA has certainly not considered this in its planning process. They have proved incapable of managing a fair and transparent community consultation process and are not only on the nose with the south coast community, but with other government agencies as well.

They have not considered the interests of commercial and recreational fishing and irresponsibly avoided looking at the cumulative impacts.

DBCA under the spell of foreigners
It's time the WA Government took a deeper look into DBCA and its relationships with revved-up foreign eco-lobbyists, and what will happen when the spoiled kid doesn't get its way. The government also needs to have a close look at the poisoned relationships with other government agencies.

It's concerning that DBCA has been going it alone and not engaging with key community stakeholders, but even more concerning that those in charge are not calling it in, but are rather allowing it to gather more steam.

Also, at the very time the government is looking at the future renewable energy potential of the state, DBCA is locking away key sites from not only sustainable fishing, which feeds local communities, but also potentially shutting the door on renewable energy projects with great environmental benefit. It's nothing short of sheer short-sighted stupidity.

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Speaking of Pew

WAFIC has unconfirmed reports that Pew has been directly engaging with traditional owners in the Shark Bay area in regard to the proposed expansion of terrestrial national parks. They called a meeting of Elders, tried to get them to divulge the locations of places of cultural significance and on the second day, even took them out on country in an attempt to visually inspect the key places.

This raises some questions: What was Pew's role? Were they acting with the knowledge and approval of DBCA? Had they been contracted by DBCA? Why don't they head back to New York City and mind their own business?

WA needs to ensure it retains food security and that WA locals can enjoy the local sustainable seafood they love.

The question is: does DBCA have the courage to denounce its alliance with Pew, and stand up for locals, regional

WA businesses and the food security of our State?

A fresh start is needed

One thing is for sure, the South Coast marine park will be a test case for the integrity of the Cook government, whether its consultation processes are fair and whether or not their agencies deliver the outcomes publicly promised by Ministers to avoid adverse impacts on commercial fishing.

This is even more relevant following recent ABC disclosures of alleged Ministerial interference in WA environmental decision making.

In good faith, WAFIC stands ready to have positive, constructive and collaborative discussions with government to quickly deliver a fair and balanced outcome for the park design.

Commercial fishers, as the only stakeholder group dramatically impacted by the sanctuary areas, need to be given the opportunity for packaged consultation. WAFIC stands by ready to collaborate.

DBCA must be taken from the table and replaced with an independent, objective and trustworthy Chair. The Community Reference Committee (CRC) needs to be re-enacted. Both DPIRD and WAFIC need a seat at the table.

There needs to be genuine local representation from WA conservation interests and a proper socio-economic assessment designed.

All four indigenous groups need to be represented, and trusted marine scientists need to be brought to the table.

This is the basis for something sensible to be developed, particularly as commercial fishers have identified a number of ideal sites for protection, but these can only be shared in a trusted environment.

Darryl Hockey
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