

# Editorial

## Beware of headlines

It can be dangerous just reading the headline. Take the recent ruling in Australia to dredge Queensland ports and dump the contents 'on the Great Barrier Reef'.

Greenpeace were up in arms and, whilst I am no fan at all of their motives, they got me going with their headline "Court challenge to Great Barrier Reef dredge dumping permit". I fell for it hook line and sinker but had I delved just a click or two deeper I would have found that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Chairman Dr Russell Reichelt said "It's important to note the seafloor of the approved disposal area consists of sand, silt and clay and does not contain coral reefs or seagrass beds."

That put a much different angle on the story so I thought I would consult 'the oracle', one Bob Halstead, a free thinking ex Brit now residing in Oz who is credited with such good ideas as accepting solo diving and enjoying muck diving.

His response confirmed my suspicions and was eloquently put as follows:

"There have been well funded alarmist campaigns in Australia from both Greenpeace and GetUp about the dredging and dumping of spoil "on the Great Barrier Reef". Both of these organisations can be considered anti-capitalist, socialist movements riding on the back of environmental issues to gain adherents and destroy industry. In fact the dredging and dumping will occur some 40 km from the nearest reef in areas that are already well silted, particularly in the SE trade winds and after cyclones and rainfall runoff. The whole of the GBR lagoon is often naturally silty with limited visibility, and of course corals have adapted to deal with this situation. It has always been thus. The outer reef - such as at Heron Island off the heavily dredged industrial port of Gladstone - is typically clear with exuberant live corals.

Dredging has already been carried out for many years with no detrimental effect to the GBR. In fact recent research lists Crown of Thorns Starfish and Tropical Cyclones as the two biggest threat to coral survival, with coral bleaching a distant third. Ocean acidification remains only theoretical (it is a lousy theory) with no evidence at all of any mortality.

My thinking puts the effects of dredging and dumping, on the actually small scale proposed (see maps attached) and with many safeguards in place - closed seasons, monitoring etc. as trivial compared with what nature dishes out. This was also the opinion of scientists reporting to GBRMPA that enabled them to decide to go ahead with the dredging and expand the ports so necessary for our future prosperity.

Our efforts would much better be spent setting up refuse collection and disposal infrastructure in places like Indonesia and the Solomon Islands to prevent plastic and other junk polluting our oceans. This is real - and we can do something about it - instead of chasing alarmist and political conjecture with a very weak scientific basis.

Lastly here is Dr. Walter Starck's essay (linked below) on the topic entitled "Dredging up another bogus threat". You might remember Walter as the inventor of the "Electrolung" mixed gas rebreather in the early 1970's? I would trust his science over Greenpeace's any day!"

**Bob Halstead**

**"Dredging up another bogus threat"**

<http://quadrant.org.au/opinion/doomed-planet/2013/11/dredging-another-bogus-threat/>

## BTS competition

On a lighter note I would like to encourage you to look at the results of this years Beneath the Seas photo competition (see a few of the winners on page 26 & 27).

The results are online at the link below or you can go and see them 'for real' at the BTS Exposition, March 28, 29, and 30, 2014, at the Meadowlands Exposition Center in Secaucus, New Jersey.

It must have been a hard task for the judges to pick a clear winner when the standard of the entries was so high. Check out those images which didn't win and I think you'll agree that any one of them stood a good chance of winning, such was the consistently high standard of entries.

You may not agree about competitions in general (I personally gave up entering when I kept losing!) but if they encourage the taking of such exciting images then they must be applauded and encouraged.

Enjoy.

[www.beneaththesea.org](http://www.beneaththesea.org)

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