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Contact: Secretary 0407 207 441

Mr Josh Thomas
CEO
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
josh.thomas@gbmpa.gov.au

16 July 2021

Dear Mr Thomas,

The Whitsunday Conservation Council (WCC) would like to bring to your attention our serious concerns regarding the responses made by GBRMPA to the recent draft decision by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to place the Great Barrier Reef on the list of world heritage sites that are “in danger”.

This draft decision to list the Great Barrier Reef as “in danger” has caused much shock and consternation, even indignation here in Australia, particularly amongst our politicians. The media was full of words like “blindsided”, “politically influenced” and “Chinese involvement”.

The response from Canberra was not surprising. But what was surprising as well as disappointing, was the response from GBRMPA, as noted through the numerous media interviews by you as the CEO of GBRMPA.

Our surprise came from what you said. You claimed surprise by the decision and agreed that politics may be involved. You also stated that GBRMPA will press the case to fight the “in danger” listing.

But our disappointment came from what you didn't say.

- Never mentioned that GBRMPA's own GBR Outlook Report 2019 states that the long-term outlook for the Reef has shifted from poor to very poor (except in response to reporter's questions).
- Never acknowledged that there are valid scientific reasons for the “in danger” listing.
- Never acknowledged that the Australian government has done very little to reduce our carbon emissions and currently has no effective climate policy.
- Never suggested the action required to have any chance to save the Reef: Australia and the rest of the world) must cut its carbon emission by 75% by 2030 and 100% by 2035.
- Never mentioned that Australia must become a leader in the fight to combat climate change in order to encourage other countries to step up with their carbon emission goals.

- Never mentioned what would happen to the Reef if the world reaches 2 or even 3 degrees increase, which is where our current carbon emissions trajectory will take us.
- Never acknowledged that water quality improvement has been far too slow because of a lack of regulations and poor take-up by farmers.
- Never addressed what the “in danger” listing actually means and the potential benefits the listing will bring to the Reef.
- Never talked about how the tourism industry can handle this situation to minimise any impact.

We feel that GBRMPA, Australia’s lead agency for managing the Great Barrier Reef, should acknowledge that the Reef is “in danger” and needs help.

- The science clearly indicates that the health of the Reef has significantly deteriorated since UNESCO’s previous decision taken in 2015.
- This is reflected in the GBR Outlook Report 2019 which states that the long-term outlook for the Reef has shifted from poor to very poor.
- The very poor rating primarily reflects the accelerating impacts of climate change and, to a lesser degree, decades of poor water quality.

The WCC does not see the “in danger” listing as a black mark for Australia. We see it as a call to action, not just for Australia but the whole world. Not just for the Great Barrier Reef but for all the coral reefs of the world.

Now is the time to leave politics behind and look at how we can best ensure a healthy future for the Great Barrier Reef.

GBRMPA should take this opportunity to press home the need for a strong climate policy that will cut Australia’s carbon emission by 75% by 2030 and 100% by 2035. This will show UNESCO and the rest of the world that Australia is serious about protecting the Reef. And hopefully, this will encourage other countries to step up with their carbon emission goals.

Sincerely,



Faye C Chapman
Secretary
Whitsunday Conservation Council

The Whitsunday Conservation Council acknowledges the Ngaro, Gia, Juru and Birri People, the Traditional Custodians of the land and seas upon which we meet to conduct our activities. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

