

Spending Hundreds of Millions to Make a 0.1 Percent Different to the Great Barrier Reef

Hard-working Aussie fishermen, and the people who depend on them, are about to suffer severe restrictions on their production. And all based on dubious science.



By [Peter Ridd](#)

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Commentary

Australia's federal government has thrown the barramundi fishing industry to the sharks as part of the blackmail payout to UNESCO to stop the organisation listing the Great Barrier Reef as "endangered." However, UNESCO will be back in a few years for another payout—that's what blackmailers do.

Hard-working Aussie fishermen, and all the people who depend on them, are about to suffer severe restrictions on their production. And all based on dubious science.

The barramundi fishery mostly operates in the creeks and rivers, or very close to shore. Our out-of-touch government ministers have never explained how catching a barra in a creek somehow damages the Reef, which is far from shore—mostly 40 to 100 kilometers (25 to 62 miles).

But worse is to come as governments cast their net further afield.

As part of the UNESCO demands, the federal government has announced that it is now restricting fishing in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria to “save the Reef.”

That area of the Gulf is 700 kilometres from the Reef and on the wrong side (to the west) of Cape York Peninsula. How can catching a barra near Mornington Island affect the Reef? Was this really demanded by UNESCO or is it being used as a convenient tool by our government to further enforce extreme green environmental policies?



Map of Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef. (Courtesy of Peter Ridd)

If killing the barra fishery seems like a scientific folly, the recent letter from Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek to UNESCO asking that the Reef not be listed as endangered contains an even bigger indication that the

government, and the science institutions upon which they base their dubious decisions, have lost the plot.

Ms. Plibersek's letter proudly states that government schemes costing hundreds of millions of dollars have stopped 140,000 metric tonnes of sediment reaching the Reef from farms and cattle stations in the last decade.

That 140,000 figure sounds like a lot of mud. But in a decade, the rivers in question carry roughly 1,000 times more sediment than that out into the ocean.

So, they reduced the sediment to the Reef by a meagre 0.1 percent—and they made it a big deal!

And it is not as though mud is a big risk for the Reef.

There's No Issue



Finger coral on the Great Barrier Reef, Australia, on July 13, 2021. (Melanie Sun/The Epoch Times)

Before I was [fired by James Cook University](#) after calling for better quality assurance of Reef science, my group worked extensively on the impact of sediment.

We invented some of the instrumentation for doing this work. We took more measurements than all the other groups combined. We showed that mud almost never reaches the Great Barrier Reef, which is far offshore. And even when it does, it is in minuscule quantities for only short periods of time. Even the inshore reefs, such as around Magnetic Island near Townsville, are barely influenced by mud coming directly from the rivers fed by tropical monsoon rains.

Government-funded scientists and managers have thus spent hundreds of millions to make 0.1 percent difference to a non-problem.

We must hope that they do not try to scale-up their effort and completely solve a problem that does not exist. At this rate, it would cost roughly 10 percent of Australia's yearly GDP just to manage this one environmental factor.

Strangely, Ms. Plibersek conveniently forgot to mention that data from the Australian Institute of Marine Science show that, since records began, the reef has never had more coral than in the last two years. People might think that Ms. Plibersek was on UNESCO's side and doing their bidding.

The time has come for a forensic audit of the science that is being used to smash the livelihood of hardworking Aussie farmers and fishers. The government is in effect picking off industries one at a time in a classic "salami" tactic.

The Australian Environment Foundation is organising a coalition of affected small industries to fight back, and top of the list is to audit the science.

Peter Ridd is chairman of the [Australian Environment Foundation](#). Views expressed in this article are opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.