

**Wetlands Preservation - Southern RMRAC view**  
 S. DePinto  
 Mackay Regional Marine Resource and Advisory Committee, 44 Macalister Street, Mackay, Qld 4740

I am representing and expressing the views and concerns of Marine Resource Advisory Committees and concerned citizens from Townsville to Gladstone. I have had to compile many views. Marine biologists and scientists etc., estuary to the ocean, wetland and marine environments, marine specialists and comments by community groups such as RMRACs etc., Government and all decision makers must face their decisions in regards to wetland and marine areas and they must be within very strict parameters of advice given to them by these scientists and bodies. Councils and shires are continuously reclaiming wetland, creeks, gullies, salt pan areas for housing, industry and farming as is happening here. They should be prosecuted for failure to abide by legislation protecting wetland and riparian vegetation. If this destruction to this very valuable wetland is not stopped immediately, the Haughton fishing industry alone will be very seriously affected, as is happening on a regular basis around the coastline. We must not forget that up to 85% of fish and marine creatures offshore are inshore dependent. I call on QCFO to stand up and be counted. Their focus regarding this matter is not good enough.

So too the tourist industry. We must remember that once a wetland has been destroyed it is gone forever, gone for all eternity. We must let this sink deeply into our subconscious, especially in those of our decision makers, because if you don't care what happens to our precious wetlands you should step down and let someone who does care take your place.

In our area off Mackay alone, bund walls and ponded pastures are common place and most of these were constructed approximately 40 years ago. About 99% of these structures are illegal. One ponded pasture alone is 21 km long and has destroyed many hundreds of hectares of very relevant nurseries. In the past 40 years I have seen this area go from a fisherman's paradise to almost total desolation. It was the home of barra, sand grubba, all of unbelievable quantity and quality. Prawns and crabs were plentiful - go there today and you're lucky to catch a feed. All this within 40 years.

A few days ago I received a letter from the Planning and Environment Manager of the Port Authority. It reads 'The tourist query: Where are all the fish gone?' At the Gladstone Port Authority open day, tourists commented that they were not catching any fish either off the beach or up the rivers. As fishing was one of their prime reasons for staying in Gladstone, they said that they would consider going somewhere else next year. Not a statement pleasing to the promotion of the area. Even one of our own members, who I will not identify, told me that he could not get a bite at his secret fishing spot which is normally certain to produce fish. He asked to what do we attribute this drop off.

Let's assess the facts: tourism, fishing and recreational fishing complement each other in a big way. These very important industries must be protected and this can only be achieved by maintaining the ecological integrity of our Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. As I see these three industries to be most important to Queensland and Australia in the very near future and in the long term we should urgently help and encourage our beef producers and farmers along our coastline to remove all dams and ponded pastures and the like from all nursery areas and creeks and to build their dams well away from these very sensitive nursery areas. In the gulf country, ponds dry up in the dry season - this happens almost everywhere dams and ponded pastures are constructed but more especially in tropical north Australia.

The 50 000 hectares of wetland in north Queensland that is currently being destroyed for cane expansion is cruel and outrageous. Development and expansion of industry should NOT occur at any price. We are all dependent on the natural environment for survival and so we must strive to protect these special areas, not destroy them. It all comes down to protecting what very little we have left. We all must stop thinking only of today and plan very carefully for tomorrow.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to very strongly protest on behalf of the people I represent against any further destruction of these priceless wetlands that are adjacent to and play a very important role in protecting our Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and all of its creatures. I beg all politicians and decision makers to LISTEN to the community and be advised by Great Barrier Reef Marine Park specialists and act on their advice. Today I call on every Australian to stand up and be counted and if they truly love this country to fight against any further destruction to wetland and marine environment areas. I want to remind all politicians that the young generation of voters DO care about environmental protection of the Park for themselves and their children. So be warned, if the Government won't listen to us now you can be sure that our voices will be heard through the ballot polls. We vote and we care.