

THE QUEENSLAND *on*LINE

WITH SENATOR SUE BOYCE



December 16, 2009

IN CAIRNS

This week I will be in Cairns meeting with disability advocacy and support groups and local business people including tourism industry operators, undertaking some local inspections and addressing the local Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The Cairns region encompasses some 250,000 people of which 130,000 are in the workforce. The economy has a gross annual product of about \$10 billion and it supports an estimated 14,000 businesses.

But it is enduring a serious downturn with the highest unemployment rate – 13.8 per cent – in Queensland.

Local business leaders working with the community are determined to see the situation improve and have a strongly pro-active strategy to stimulate the economy, restore confidence and grow jobs.

They are doing it not just in the face of seeming indifference from both the Commonwealth and Queensland governments but what must seem to the locals to be a deliberate disregard.

In recent times the Rudd Government has made two significant decisions which have impacted and will continue to impact – the Cairns and north Queensland economy.

On May 29, the Environment Minister Peter Garrett unilaterally imposed a conservation zone over nearly a million square kilometres of the Coral Sea without even a pretence of meaningful consultation. His Department held only two meetings prior to the proclamation – one with the Australian Conservation Foundation and the other with the Pew Charitable Trust prior to this decision before declaring what is now the world's largest no-take marine park.

We can all imagine what the Australian Conservation Foundation's view is but who or what is the Pew Charitable Trust?

Pew is a US-based environmental lobby group committed to locking up the Coral Sea from any use contrary to any scientific fact. It is breath-taking that a US-based lobby group should be consulted – and their views obviously accepted – yet the local people who rely upon the Coral Sea in one way shape or form for their livelihoods didn't even rate a courtesy call.

That high-handed decision was an abuse of power and it over-rode the planning process put in place by the Howard Government to profile the entire Eastern Bio-region.

Last month in the Senate, the Opposition attempted to overturn the decision with a disallowance Motion but it was lost when the vote tied 31 to 31. The decision will stand.

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There was no consultation with the fishing, charter boat, marine and tourist industries at all and the operators and employees of these industries have every reason to be very suspicious and very fearful of the consequences – the fully intended consequences – of this decision. Plainly, it was a pandering to the green vote for no good reason.

The Coral Sea is a low volume, high value fishery and is in pristine condition. It is under no threat and never was.

There was no scientific evidence advanced for the decision and no assessment made of the financial cost to communities who will be affected.

Announcing the decision Mr Garrett said the final decision on what protection will be given the Coral Sea will be made next year and he solemnly promised that local communities would be consulted during the assessment process.

But I ask you to consider what his mindset already is.

He said – and I quote – “This region is the Amazon of the seas and we recognise how important it is that concerted regional action is taken to secure the health of ocean environments.”

Does that suggest to you that the so-called process will be fair, reasonable, consultative and based on scientific fact?

In *The Australian* of December 5/6, a front-page story, Marine park battle of the Coral Sea, covered the issue.

Reporting that the Pew group “is investing heavily in the Coral Sea battle”, it stated, “But a number of scientists and environmental groups, such as the World Wildlife Fund are wary of the Pew proposal, with some warning that the US group’s over-zealous approach risks derailing the entire process.”

The WWF was quoted as saying, “Pew’s approach has scared a lot of fishermen but we think sustainable fishing could be a possibility in the Coral Sea.”

Even Mr Patrick Fitzpatrick, described by *The Australian* as a “prominent marine biologist and documentary film maker who has been pushing for protection of the Coral Sea for more than a decade” said the Pew hardline stance was “completely unhelpful” and “ridiculous”.

Yet Mr Garrett happily listened to them while ignoring any local people.

As my north Queensland colleague, Senator Ian Macdonald has said, a bio-regional planning process – started by the Howard government – was already in place and that the deep uncertainty this now creates for the marine, tourism and fishing industries is another blow to the Cairns area community which already has the highest employment rate in Australia.

Back in June, in what was a devastating and possibly fatal blow for the once vibrant ship building industry, NQEA lost the \$450 million contract to build part of three new destroyers for the Australian Navy. There had been a false dawn of hope in early May when the firm was named as preferred tenderer.

Unfortunately, the contract was subject to a 10 per cent performance bond which the company was unable to secure from the banks or the Queensland government and the opportunity to create some 250 jobs and save others has been lost.

If the Queensland government had been alert, pro-active and determined to help this vital and iconic local industry, it would have come forward with a proposal to ensure that performance bond was obtained – either from the government itself, from a consortium of banks or even both.

If the federal government had been sympathetic, concerned and involved it also would have acted to protect the industry.

Neither government did anything to save an industry which has had a long and proud history in this region.

SENATE VOTES TO RECOGNISE VOLUNTEERS

In the last session of Parliament, the Senate voted to recognise the outstanding contribution that volunteers and volunteer support organisations make to Australian society.

Liberal Senators Guy Barnett and Mitch Fifield, the Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector, moved a motion to say 'thank you' to volunteers around the country ahead of International Volunteer Day on December 5, and calling on the Government to continue to support volunteers and volunteer support organisations.

The motion was strongly supported and passed by the Senate.

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS AND OFFICE HOURS

I'd like to wish everyone a merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. This will be my last Queensland onLine for 2009, and I look forward to our next issue in February 2010.

The office will be closed over the Christmas break from December 18 and will reopen on January 4, 2010.

NEW COALITION SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition - Tony Abbott MP

Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs - Julie Bishop MP

Shadow Minister for Trade, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government - Warren Truss MP

Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Shadow Minister for Resources and Energy - Senator Nick Minchin

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations - Senator Eric Abetz

Shadow Treasurer - Joe Hockey MP

Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training, Manager of Opposition Business in the House - Christopher Pyne MP

Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Water - Ian Macfarlane MP

Shadow Attorney-General - Senator George Brandis

Shadow Minister for Defence - Senator David Johnston

Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing - Peter Dutton MP

Shadow Minister for Families, Housing and Human Services - Kevin Andrews MP

Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and Heritage - Greg Hunt MP

Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs - Senator Nigel Scullion

Shadow Minister for Finance and Debt Reduction - Senator Barnaby Joyce

Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Food Security, Fisheries and Forestry - John Cobb MP

Shadow Minister for Small Business, Deregulation, Competition Policy and Sustainable Cities - Bruce Billson MP

Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy - Tony Smith MP

Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship - Scott Morrison MP

Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research - Sophie Mirabella MP

Shadow Minister for Tourism and the Arts, Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport - Steven Ciobo MP

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation, Apprenticeships and Training - Senator Mathias Cormann

Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs, Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law, Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House - Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Assistant Treasurer - Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for COAG and Modernising the Federation - Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education and Childcare, Shadow Minister for the Status of Women - Sharman Stone MP
Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs - Michael Keenan MP
Shadow Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Assisting Shadow Minister for Defence - Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs - Louise Markus MP
Shadow Minister for Ageing - Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
Shadow Minister for Seniors - Bronwyn Bishop MP
Shadow Special Minister of State and Scrutiny of Government Waste - Senator Michael Ronaldson

SENATE COMMITTEES

UPCOMING SENATE INQUIRIES



[I'm a member of the Senate Community Affairs Committee, deputy Chair of the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the Australian Crime Commission, and a member of the Joint Committee for Corporations & Financial Services and the Joint Committee on Migration.]

The *Community Affairs Committee* has announced inquiries into the following:

[Planning Options and Services for People Ageing with a Disability](#) - to report by September 2, 2010.

This inquiry will look at access to planning options and services for people with a disability to ensure their continued quality of life as they and their carers age, and to identify any inadequacies in the choice and funding of planning options currently available to people ageing with a disability and their carers.

[Consumer Access to Pharmaceutical Benefits](#) - to report by the June 30, 2010.

This inquiry will examine Consumer access to pharmaceutical benefits and the creation of new therapeutic groups through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

[Suicide In Australia](#) - to report by the end of April, 2010.

This inquiry will examine the costs of suicide in Australia, particularly the disproportionate effect on young, indigenous and rural Australians. We'll also be looking at the effectiveness of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, and ways improvements can be made.

[Hearing Health In Australia](#) - to report by the end of February, 2010.

This inquiry will look at the current state of hearing health in Australia, and the effect poor hearing has on our community.

The *Corporations and Financial Services Committee* is currently inquiring into:

[Financial Products and Services In Australia](#) - completed.

This inquiry is complete, and the report of the Committee is available at http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/corporations_cte/fps/report/index.htm.

The *Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission* has announced a new inquiry into the following:

[Adequacy of Aviation and Maritime Security Measures to Combat Serious and Organised Crime](#) - submissions have now closed.

This inquiry will look at the methods used by serious and organised criminal groups to infiltrate Australia's airports and ports, and the extent of infiltration. This includes illegal imports of drugs, firearms, money laundering and people smuggling.

The *Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Migration* has announced a new inquiry into the following:

[Inquiry into the Migration Treatment of Disability](#) - although the deadline for submissions was October 28, 2009, submissions are still being accepted.

The Committee will investigate the assessment of the health and community costs associated with a disability as part of visa processing in Australia. While the formal submission period has closed, the Committee will continue to accept submissions and encourages people with a disability, employers, business organisations, disability and community services providers, and any other interested individuals or organisations to make comment.

OTHER INQUIRIES

[Liquidators and Administrators](#) - submissions should be received by February 12, 2010 to report by August 31, 2010.

This inquiry will investigate the role of liquidators and administrators, their fees and their practices, and the involvement and activities of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, prior to and following the collapse of a business.

[National Broadband Network](#) - to report by April 30, 2010.

This inquiry will examine the National Broadband Network, including the economic underpinnings of the scheme as well as the decision to establish the NBN.

BOOST GDP BY BOOSTING FEMALE WORKFORCE - INDEPENDENT REPORT

A major report by Goldman Sachs released last month – [Australia's hidden resource: The Economic Case for Increasing Female Participation](#) – has proved that closing the gap between levels of male and female workplace participation would boost Australia's GDP.

According to the group's chief economist Tim Toohey, closing the gap between male and female employment would boost Australia's GDP by 11 per cent while bridging the gap between male and female productivity rates has the potential of boosting economic activity by more than 20 per cent.

The report stated that young females were up to five times more likely to have a weekly average income of less than \$150 a week and twice as likely to have an average weekly income of less than \$600 than men of a similar age.

The report said more women graduated from tertiary study than men in Australia making it clear that while women had the desire to be economic participants, our employment structures were set up in a way which forced many women to choose between work and care.

It found that there was not a single industry in Australia where females were paid more than males.

Obviously, the encouragement of a more even spread of gender throughout industries, equal pay for equal work and flexible work practices allowing men and women to more effectively balance work and care responsibilities would deliver national economic dividends.

The Goldman Sachs report came only days after the House of Representatives Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations issued its own report *Making it Fair* which made 63 recommendations to the government about achieving pay equity.

The Australian Institute of Company Directors welcomed the report noting in particular that the current proportion of women on major company boards - 8.3 per cent of Australian Stock Exchange (ASX) top 200 company directors – was not good enough and needed to be increased.

The ASX announced a few days ago that from next year companies will have to list in their annual reports “the proportion of women employees in the whole organisation, in senior management and on the board”.

The reporting of the gender balances in annual reports will be compulsory but there will be no sanctions if the status quo remains.

GROCERYCHOICE INQUIRY HIGHLIGHTS WASTE AND MISMANAGEMENT

The GroceryChoice website was launched with much fanfare by the Government on August 6, 2008. After much criticism over the effectiveness of the website, the government announced that responsibility for the website would now be handed to the consumer organisation Choice.

The Government announced on June 26, 2009 that the project would be abandoned a few days before Choice were due to relaunch the website.

A scathing [report](#) has revealed the Government's GroceryChoice program was designed to fulfil a hollow election promise to put downward pressure on grocery prices characterised. However, it became clear that the aims of the website were not going to be achievable. The poorly-designed ACCC website collected data in 61 regions across Australia, some of them covering tens of thousands of square kilometres, bearing no resemblance to real-world consumer shopping patterns.

The inquiry found that the entire process was characterised by waste and inefficiency.

It also raised questions about the legitimacy of the tender process run by the ACCC, and the hasty decision making that led to a rushed contract that cost the taxpayer \$2.7 million.

A number of recommendations have been made by the Inquiry to address the many concerns that were raised. These include :

- that the Commonwealth Auditor-General investigate the tender process undertaken by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in relation to the data collection contract for the GroceryChoice website;
- that the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission take more care in the future to monitor and assess the performance of contractors that undertake data collection on its behalf;
- that the Government reveal its plans for an industry-operated grocery price data website;
- that the Government note the unfair manner in which its contractual arrangements with CHOICE were prematurely terminated by the Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs, the Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP, without affording CHOICE a right of reply, and ensure that such unprofessional and discourteous conduct does not occur again;
- that both the Government and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission note

- that the operation of the GroceryChoice website was prejudicial and unfair to independent retailers;
- that the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission investigate any potential breaches of the Trade Practices Act 1974 in relation to the role played by the Australian National Retailers Association in negotiations with CHOICE on the GroceryChoice website.



Overall, the committee found that GroceryChoice was a shocking waste of taxpayers' money, clearly demonstrating the Government's apparent disregard for obtaining value for money. The estimated cost so far is \$7.7 million with an estimated contingent liability of \$700,000. This does not include the cost of any potential legal action CHOICE may bring.

Our latest ShopSmart information is available at www.shopsmart.sueboyce.com.au.

QUEENSLAND'S NANNY STATE

David Gibson, Queensland Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Planning has sponsored an e-petition calling on the Government to immediately withdraw legislation introduced by the Bligh Government to force all house-sellers to fill in a mandatory Sustainability Declaration form from January 1st 2010.

This form will achieve nothing in improving the sustainability of our homes and adds just another layer of bureaucracy; and potentially cost, to the selling of our homes.

Sellers face fines of up to \$2,000 and real estate agents face fines of up to \$10,000 if these forms are not prominently displayed, among other requirements.

The Bligh Labor Government has already been forced to revise the Sustainability Declaration once and has indicated it will change again. They are still committed to the implementation from January 1st, putting the owners and real estate agents of the 50,000 properties currently on the market - and future sellers - at risk of legal action.

The Real Estate Institute of Queensland (REIQ) contacted Premier Bligh on November 30th [with their concerns](#) about the complexity of the process and the lack of consultation and rushed passage of the legislation.

I urge all Queenslanders to [CLICK HERE](#) to sign the e-Petition.

'TIS THE SEASON TO BE JOLLY...

Twelve of Australia's finest family-owned wineries had joined together for an exciting marketing and export innovation – www.australiasfirstfamiliesofwine.com.au – and the venture is proving to be a great success.

This “mixed dozen” of wineries throughout Australia collectively represent more than an astounding 1200 years of wine making experience and more than 5,500 hectares of our finest vineyards.

The families who own and run these iconic firms have a passion and an integrity that won't let them fall victim to multi-national companies that all too frequently are run by number crunchers and not vigneron.

The web site has links to all twelve foundation members. Do yourself a favour and go and visit it – there is no better season to enjoy some fine Australian wines.

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE TO OUR TROOPS

Australian troops – men and women – are doing a tough and responsible job in Afghanistan, East Timor and the Solomon Islands, bravely serving their country and helping bring peace and security.

At the best of times, it is a dangerous and lonely time but at Christmas the separation from family, friends and their homes is particularly tough.

You can show your support and goodwill by sending a message of support and encouragement to our troops via email at messagetothetroops@defence.gov.au or by fax to (02) 6266 7701.

Both fax and email are managed by the Defence Department.

Your thoughtful gesture will mean so much.



SILVER MEMORIES

Are you an older person, know an older person or just a fan of the great music of the 1920's through to the 1950's?

Brisbane community radio 4MBS Classic FM 103.7 – www.4mbsclassicfm.com.au – has launched a new radio service, Silver Memories which has already proved to be a hit with older people after a two-year trial. It features spoken word programs, poetry, classic serials from yesteryear, classic comedy, music from the great musicals and more twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.



The station can be received via the internet or by a small custom built and inexpensive radio tuned to the Silver Memories frequency designed for the older listener with a simple on/off switch. It would make an ideal Christmas gift.

Go to www.4mbsclassicfm.com.au for more details.

FAMILY SEPARATION - WHERE DO YOU TURN?

There is no greater tragedy than the breakdown of a family, especially for any young children involved, and it is important that those affected have resources to allow them to make mature and informed decisions.

A new website – www.familyseparation.humanservices.gov.au – has been established to provide a single entry point into the family law system. It provides useful information and practical advice to help families better understand their rights and responsibilities following separation.

The help provide is completely non-judgemental; what it does is to provide a clear path to relevant information about emotional, financial and legal support when experiencing separation.

It is never easy for anybody caught up in a family breakdown but this information could make handling the situation and dealing with the future just a little easier.

Other information can be obtained from the Child Support Agency website – www.csa.gov.au.

SURF LIFESAVING AUSTRALIA

As many of us head for the beach for our annual holidays, all too frequently we take for granted the selfless volunteer work by our surf lifesavers.

In 2008 – 2009, more than 13,000 people were rescued, 34,000 first aid treatments provided and more than 55 million beach visits were carefully and professionally watched over by the men and women of the surf life saving movement.



The organisation now has more than 150,000 thousand members – of which more than 43,000 are “patrolling members” - in 306 surf life saving clubs around Australia and nurture and train well over 56,000 junior lifesavers, the “nippers”.

The work of Australia’s greatest volunteering organisation deserves everybody’s help – they need our assistance so visit their website, www.slsa.com.au

And remember always to swim between the flags!

If you know someone who’d like to receive Queensland onLine, please email the office at online@sueboyce.com.au

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