30 August 2024

Statement from Peter Ridd:

Firstly, for the avoidance of doubt, and because I am regularly accused of being in the pay of fossil fuel and agricultural industries, I receive no payment for any of the work that I do. I was fired from JCU after saying there are serious quality assurance problems in GBR science, and have worked on a voluntary basis since.

In response to your questions:

1. What is your reaction to the latest Reef Outlook report showing high levels of coral cover?

Just confirming you mean the Outlook report and not the Consensus Statement that I was referring to in my newspaper article.

It is good the Outlook Report mentioned high coral cover, because the science consensus statement did not – which is a disgrace.

However, the Outlook Report downplays the significance of record amounts of coral – after all it has exposed, yet again, the scientific doomsaying about the GBR, which has been going on since the 1960s.

The story here is that the reef science institutions have got it wrong again and again.

2. Do you believe that climate change and warming oceans pose any threat to the Reef in the future?

There is a potential threat – the future is hard to predict and we don't understand everything about the Reef or climate. Anybody who does not worry about something as precious as the GBR is unwise or generally reprehensible. But I worry about everything precious even when it is doing well. I worry about my son and daughter even though, by any measure, they are doing extremely well for themselves.

For the environment, I am less concerned about the GBR than other issues - such as Third World rainforest loss. Or in Australia, our disastrous fire management approach where we have forgotten almost everything the Aboriginal people taught us. Or feral animals or weeds - I won't elaborate

All the focus on the GBR, when it is clearly doing extremely well, takes attention away from other major problems. For the GBR there has not been a single of the 3000 reefs lost, not a single species lost, and record amounts of

coral! I wish we had such great news about other Australian ecosystems that genuinely need care and government commitment.

3. Do you believe that corals on the Reef are sufficiently resilient to withstand any effects of ocean warming?

Yes. It is almost certain that a warming climate will be beneficial to the corals of the GBR – far more likely than a negative impact. Corals grow faster in hot water. Clearly the last 4 or 5 bleaching events killed very little coral - after all we ended up with record amounts of the species (acropora) that are MOST susceptible to bleaching.

In addition, corals have an almost unique ability to deal with changing climate – they change their symbiotic algae to a species more suitable for hotter water. They do this during bleaching. So bleaching, although it will kill some individual corals, is the adaptive response mechanism that corals use to deal with temperature changes. Most species have to go through generations of evolution and natural selection to change their genetic makeup to do what corals can do in a few weeks during bleaching.

Corals should not be the poster child for the negative impacts of climate change.

4. Do you believe that media coverage of the health of the Reef is fair and balanced?

No, but the media will always focus on bad news – and the science institutions, who are unduly pessimistic about the GBR, feed the media what the media want. The science institutions are manipulating the media for their own purposes. I wish that the media would realise that the real bad news is that our GBR science institutions have become untrustworthy – that is what the record amounts of coral on the GBR have proven.

They said we lost huge amounts of coral in 2016/17/20/22 and we ended up with record amounts of coral. And the type of coral that have rebounded the most – the acropora - are the types MOST susceptible to hot water bleaching. They worry there is too much fast growing acropora. And yet in 2018, shortly after the well-publicised bleaching events in 2016/17, a group of sixteen highly influential scientists, representing many important reef-science institutions lamented the loss of acropora -stating

> Fast-growing staghorn and tabular corals [acropora] suffered a catastrophic die-off, transforming the three-dimensionality and ecological functioning of 29% of the 3,863 reefs comprising the

> world's largest coral reef system … changing it [the GBR] forever as the intensity of global warming continues to escalate.[1]

So, the reef was changed forever by the loss of acropora, and now has record amounts of it.

Final Comment

I have been fact-checked about a dozen times, quite a few times by media-watch. In the last fact-check by a major fact-checker, they decided not to publish their report. I think they could finally see what this record high coral data means – it is not just good news about the GBR, it is very bad news about our reef science institutions.

I would ask you to contemplate the possibility that the reef-science institutions have been afflicted with groupthink, ideology, and raw self-interest (a perpetually threatened GBR makes the money flow). But of these, groupthink and the exclusion of dissenting voices is the biggest problem.

Contemplating the possibility that some of our science organisations have become, to some degree, untrustworthy is almost as unpleasant as the prospect of permanent damage to the GBR. Both could be true, but in my view the former is certain.

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[1] Hughes TP, Kerry JT, Baird AH, Connolly SR, Dietzel A, Eakin CM, Heron SF, Hoey AS, Hoogenboom MO, Liu G, McWilliam MJ, Pears RJ, Pratchett MS, Skirving WJ, Stella JS, Torda G. Global warming transforms coral reef assemblages. Nature. 2018 Apr;556(7702):492-496. doi: 10.1038/s41586-018-0041-2. Epub 2018 Apr 18. PMID: 29670282.