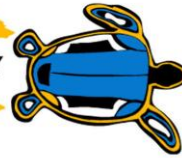


INTERNATIONAL SEA TURTLE SOCIETY



Wednesday, April 30, 2014

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GABALAZS@HONLAB.NMFS.HAWAII.EDU

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Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for the Environment
Government of Australia
GPO Box 787
Canberra ACT 2601
Australia

Dear Hon Mr. Hunt,

I write on behalf of the members of the International Sea Turtle Society (ISTS) attending the 34th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation, held in New Orleans, Louisiana USA from 10-17 April, 2014. The symposium is a unique event that in this occasion drew over 700 participants from more than 70 countries around the world, from across disciplines and cultures to a common interest and objective: the conservation of sea turtles and their environment. The Symposium encourages discussion, debate, and the sharing of knowledge, research techniques and lessons in conservation to address questions on the biology and conservation of sea turtles and their habitats.

Among the topics included in the program were marine turtle ecological interactions, linkages among scientists, coastal communities, turtles, humans, consumptive and non-consumptive use, collaborative research, community-based conservation, policy-makers and managers.

During the Annual Business Meeting, the ISTS passed the attached resolution urging the protection of sea turtles from industrialization in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA). The resolution was prompted by concerns that industrial development in the GBRWHA threatens to disturb and pollute sea turtle marine and nesting habitat.

The ISTS is alarmed that UNESCO, the international body charged with overseeing implementation of the World Heritage Convention, will consider adding the GBRWHA to the "World Heritage In Danger" list at the 38th session of the World Heritage Committee that will be held in Doha, Qatar, from 15 to 25 June 2014.

We understand that at its 36th Session, after receiving reports regarding proposed industrial development in the GBRWHA, the Heritage Committee recommended a monitoring mission to the property. The World Heritage Centre/IUCN's resulting report expressed concern regarding development impacts on the GBRWHA's Outstanding Universal Values.

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PAST PRESIDENT
JEFFREY.SEMINOFF@NOAA.GOV

ANA BARRAGAN (MEXICO)
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ARBR@PRODIGY.NET.MX

Particularly, in assessing impacts on the Area's biological diversity, the report expressed "significant concerns regarding the long term prospects for a number of key habitats and species." The report found that "[c]oastal and port development reduces the status of the[se] values . . . , notably through the cumulative additional pressures on nearshore species such as dugong, and seagrass habitats."

In response to the mission report, the World Heritage Commission requested several additional reports from Australia. However, at its 2013 meeting, the Commission "note[d] with concern . . . the limited progress made by" Australia in implementing the various recommendations made in the mission report, "as well as on-going coastal development."

The Commission requested that Australia submit an updated report on the Site's status by February 2014, "with a view to considering, in the absence of substantial progress, the inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger."

The ISTS is concerned that impacts of removal of the Great Barrier Reef from World Heritage status would be disastrous not only to the sea turtles, but to the economy of the state and the public perception of the competence of the Australian government as conservation leaders.

For the reasons detailed above, the ISTS urges the Queensland and Australian Commonwealth governments to take actions to ensure that the Great Barrier Reef retains its World Heritage characteristics. The resolution offers some specific actions to take that will help protect sea turtle populations and their habitat in the GBRWHA. The protections provided by World Heritage Status and the additional measures suggested will be essential to the long-term health of the sea turtle populations in the region, which frequently range far beyond Australia's shores.

I thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter and would be pleased to answer any questions that you might have.

With best wishes,



Roldan A. Valverde
President
International Sea Turtle Society

cc:

Hon Andrew Powell MP
Member for Glass House
Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection
Level 13
400 George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
GPO Box 2454,
Brisbane QLD 4001
AUSTRALIA

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ROLDAN.VALVERDE@SELU.EDU

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PAST PRESIDENT
JEFFREY.SEMINOFF@NOAA.GOV

ANA BARRAGAN (MEXICO)
PAST PRESIDENT
ARBR@PRODIGY.NET.MX

Mr. Russell Reichelt, Chairman and Chief Executive
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
Townsville head office
2-68 Flinders Street
PO Box 1379
Townsville QLD 4810
AUSTRALIA

Queensland Premier Campbell Newman
PO Box 15185
City East
Queensland 4002
Phone: (07) 3719 7000
Fax: (07) 3220 6222
The.Premier@premiers.qld.gov.au

Tim Badman
Director,
IUCN World
Heritage Programme
IUCN Conservation Centre
Rue Mauverney 28
1196, Gland, SWITZERLAND
e-mail: tim.badman@iucn.org

Fanny Douvere,
Special Projects Unit
UNESCO
World Heritage Centre
7 Place de Fontenoy
75352
Paris, FRANCE
e-mail: f.douvere@unesco.org