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## **EDUCATION OF AN INNOCENT AUSTRALIAN**

Who would have believed the answer he gave me.

“My greatest wish” he said “is that my son gets just the chance of a job, not even the job, just the chance of a job.

“What is your greatest fear” I continued

“That he doesn’t get a job, because he then becomes a liability to himself, to our family, and to our Community.

His head was down, staring at the floor in an air of despondency. He was an elder in the Aboriginal Community in Borroloola in the Northern Territory.

We were meeting in the community shed to gain support for the export feeder ship to carry the lead zinc out to the overseas ships.

The Greens, under the guise of the Darwin Environment Centre, had managed to have the mouth of the Macarthur River listed as a heritage area. The area is hot, dusty and is prolific with crocodiles, sharks and poisonous snakes. A holiday mecca for mother-in-laws.

But this was nothing to do with protecting the environment, it was all about obstructing a mining Company. In an attempt to get the valuable exports moving, the tiny port of Bing Bong was created and a feeder ship designed.

The Borraloola community had the chance of taking equity in the ship, and they were successful in doing so. A decade later the partnership is still working and the exports are going well, as is the employment of locals.

The greens, totally miffed at such a venture getting through, convinced themselves and EPA departmental chiefs that the ship was nuclear powered. So a team was dispatched quietly for the 1000 km drive from Darwin to Bing Bong. The local port manager denied the vessel was nuclear powered and one of the zealots spotted the sign on the bow of the ship. “There it is ! the sign that indicates the ship is nuclear powered. “ he pronounced with glee. This was short-lived when the local manager clarified that the symbol was not for radio-active material, but was indeed the sign for the bowthruster

Interestingly enough, the hidden agenda of the Greens was not lost on me, and I am constantly amazed by the behaviour of the Greens. In other countries they would have their genitalia microwaved for such National treachery

Unfortunately we have enshrined some of their aims in law, and young graduates with environmental degrees and no common sense, stalk the Nation and can bring any business or project proposal to a quick end with their interpretation of what is acceptable. What is acceptable to them? Very little, especially if involves concrete, machinery or development.

In 1985 when the argument of environmental advantages was used to promote the proposed ferry across Port Phillip heads in Victoria, the proponents carefully calculated savings on exhaust emissions and road maintenance and presented their case. This was unacceptable to the Victorian EPA. The then departmental chiefs and the Minister for the Environment Joan Kirner, who later became Premier, were not interested in the environmental gains.

Her confession of naivety and lack of skills on the 4 Corners TV program years after she was ousted, was no consolation to the many projects that withered or that were delayed under her regime.

Last months National Ports Conference witnessed almost every port CEO in the country highlighting the “torturous path of having to deal with environmental regulations”. Even the Federal Minister for Transport Warren Truss, confessed the “Tragedy of regulations” holding up port expansion, exports, National earnings and of course jobs.

What are we doing about it? Have we gone stark raving mad?

Well much to the hilarity and amusement of our Asian competitors, yes I think we have.

Take the much vaunted ETV (Emergency Towing Vessel) proposed for the Torres Strait. This \$6m annual expenditure will have a 60 tonne bollard pull tug standing by in the Torres Strait to stop any vessel that loses its power from damaging the precious reef. Please note that many of the ships that do ground on the reef, actually do so at full speed with little or no notice, and a minimum of fuss.

Transport within the Torres Strait is carried out predominantly by small tinnies and this attracts the Nations highest concentration of search and rescue operations, and a toll of annual drownings. Two years ago, a Torres Strait Islander Pastor and his wife were drowned in the same area while going interisland with their kids. The Federal and Queensland Government in a posturing act, both undertook to fix this. Expressions of

interest were called during 1994 and all of the submissions, over time, slid off the table with bureaucratic and political disinterest

Last month another 5 islanders were drowned carrying out their duties for the immigration department in a small boat.

As a student of the bleeding obvious, listening to an AMSA presentation on the ETV at the recent Master Mariner's meeting in Brisbane, I asked the question of why are we not spending money in the Torres Strait protecting the inhabitants instead of big budget items to protect the reef

Why don't we give the Torres Strait communities a safe and reliable ferry?. No-one could answer.

But the fact is that the environment has taken supremacy over Australian lives. Our environmental rules have taken supremacy over exports, earnings, jobs and opportunities for our kids.

Call me old fashioned or kinky, but if a decision has to be made between the good of a rare frog, or an Australian teenager, I'll vote for the teenager every time.

Stuart Ballantyne

## Australia drowning in a sea of regulations

Who would believe, that in the first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that in the home of the cavalier Australian Spirit, is the one of the biggest regulatory regimes on the planet.

In this weeks Ports 2005 conference held in Brisbane, the ex Queensland Infrastructure Minister Paul Clausen suggested, it was from the convict heritage that Australians love to be surrounded by rules and regulations.

At the same time the Nation's telecommunication giant Telstra admitted that their shares had dropped by \$1, due to the \$2bn expenditure in complying with the 330 new regulations recently inflicted on the communications industry.

"From 20 regulations to 350 is a significant jump", stated Sea Transport Corporation's Stuart Ballantyne, "but the Marine industry has thousand of regulations to deal with some of them over 100 years old". He did observe that the recent fuel price hike is severely affecting the trucking industry and its present 1.5 billion tonnes per year domestic freight. This hiccup for trucks will propel the coastal shipping tonnage from its paltry 52 million tonnes p.a.. "The auction lots are full of trucking companies going bust, this is no longer a trucking Nation" he observed, "there is a very bright future for coastal shipping if we can subdue the regulators."

The opening speech by Federal Transport Minister Warren Truss, highlighted the "tragedy of necessary regulation" which is constraining Port development and hence the loss of the Nation's export earnings of coal and ore that are so eagerly sought by China.

South Australia's Flinders Ports Chief executive Vincent Tremaine, observed that the port development regulatory process was "torturous" and added unnecessary cost that of course in the end made them less competitive.

Highest on the offending list, observed by almost every speaker in the conference, was the Environmental Protection Authority and its variants inside and outside Government. "There is no pleasing them" observed Paul Clausen, "and the public suffer through employment and export opportunities."

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) also came under criticism, who together with the US Coast Guard, comprising possibly the 2 smallest merchant fleets in the western world, and having a disproportionate amount to say about new rules and regulations

Perhaps this may explain why Australians with get up and go, are getting up and making their mark in other countries

For verification

Stuart Ballantyne

0418-754710

email [stuart@seatransport.com](mailto:stuart@seatransport.com)