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To whom it may concern,

The dive industry on the Gold Coast is alive and well and continues to provide visitors and locals alike with a rare and surprising experience.

This has only been achievable through the passion and hard work of a few local dive operators.

While a couple of large companies continue to thrive in and around the Broadwater, they are owned by overseas interests and the majority of the money generated from their business ventures continues to flow overseas and away from our local community.

It is the smaller, local operators like myself, that time and time again work hard at promoting and protecting the wonderful, diverse underwater environment that we are privileged to work out of and share with locals and visitors alike.

I cannot even begin to tell you how many overseas and interstate visitors are blown away by the sheer diversity of marine life in our Seaway. They all say the same thing though, and that is " I had NO IDEA that this existed here".

Last weekend, while I was conducting open water lessons at the Seaway, I counted the amount of divers getting into the water on high tide (the best time to dive the Seaway for most people), I stopped counting at 100. This does not include divers that got in before high tide or divers at other locations along the seawall or at the Western Beach (another Fantastic dive site that will be highlighted on Totally Wild in a few weeks) this was a spur of the moment count before I got in myself!

We have a valuable asset in the Seaway, it is highly accessible and it is free for all to enjoy. There are many places along the seawall that offer different dive entry points and all offer a different dive experience. It also does a lot to soften the attitude of visitors who believe the Gold Coast has little to offer beside lots of mediocre restaurants and theme parks.

On any one dive at the Seaway, we can see Green turtles, Eagle rays, Manta Rays, thousands of trevally, Barracuda, giant QLD Grouper (protected) Barrumundi cod (protected) Grey Nurse Sharks at the tip of the rock wall (protected). Last year while in the water with students we experienced a close encounter with a Humpback whale!

We are lucky enough to have the occasional Dolphin drop by for a visit as well. All of these students are leaving the Gold Coast with an experience that they will probably never have again! This is how they will remember the Gold Coast.

As small business owners, we do a lot to promote the Gold Coast as a viable dive destination and many families decide to holiday here instead of Fiji because we promise them a rare experience, one that all the family can be happy with. While Mum and the some of the kids go to Seaworld, we teach Dad and the other kids how to dive @ the Seaway and pick Mum and the kids up on the way back through. When they go shopping the next day, Dad and a son or daughter come for another dive with us. Because we can promise that experience and we work in with the families to ensure they have a great holiday together, they decide to come here and spend their money, NOT overseas.

We are lucky to also have the Narrow Neck artificial reef to dive on as well as the Fabulous Scottish Prince wreck, just out the front of Seaworld.

This wreck is protected and is in remarkably good shape for being under the water for such along time. It offers a sensational dive and is always full of marine life. The Scottish Prince is the most intact and divable wreck from Brisbane to Ballina, yet not many people know about it, more people ask me about the “Tassie II” at Byron Bay which is now a bit of rubble on the sea bed. While both of these offer a great dive experience they are in very shallow water, around 8 – 12 meters

The future of diving on the Gold Coast depends on many things. It depends on how we look after our water ways to ensure that we can continue to offer this magical experience for locals and visitors alike, it depends on keeping these areas accessible for all to enjoy. It also means making some decisions on the future of diving on the Gold Coast.

If we promote the Gold Coast as an international Dive destination we need to be able to cope with the numbers of visitors who want to dive here and offer them a variety of dive experiences to keep them here.

Divers spend money! They typically have a good disposable income. Most of them also care about the environment.

Among others, a couple of things would need to happen.

Number one:

We need to move the Marine Sanctuary Boundary from the rock wall at South Stradbroke to the Southern Seaway Wall.

It needs to be declared a “no take zone” to gain any credibility as a dive site.

At the moment we witness numerous people collecting from the Seaway to sell to local Aquarium shops, they take a lot of Marine life from the area, many times they take large, exotic fish that have been there for a long time. It does a lot of damage to the area and is distressing to visitors who dive there to see these animals taken. Along the Western Beach they collect Seahorses and sell them to the local Aquarium shops, who in turn sell them to their customers, knowing full well that wild Seahorses will only stay alive for around 2 weeks in captivity.

I have witnessed people collecting *dozens* of octopi and smashing them on the rocks to kill them first then throwing them into a bin in their car boot. Very upsetting to families who witness this.

Shouldn't there also be a bag limit on how much people can take? How can one person just clean out a whole species in one area and not be accountable? Spearfishermen walk past with a large Barramundi Cod on the end of their spear, these are a protected species. There are no signs around the Seaway with pictures of what they can or can't take or information on bag limits. Even though the Seaway is a "no spearfishing zone" it is not policed, fisheries are so understaffed that they rely on people like me to report incidents where people break the rules. Many, many spearfishers frequent the area at night and enter the water on scuba (illegal to spear fish on scuba in QLD) and wipe out a whole area, killing anything that moves, including sleeping parrot fish – not much of a sport is it?

Number two:

To limit the stress on any one area we need more diveable sites. I have dived in many places around Australia where the local councils have recognised the value of their local dive sites in attracting visitors to the area and capitalised on it by lobbying for a decommissioned vessel to be sunk as a designated dive destination.

This has increased dive tourism to the area dramatically.

It also increases employment in the dive industry in general as all the dive sites in the area become more recognised. It also reduces the human impact on any one area as it offers more choices for the diver.

Would we be able to lobby for the HMAS Ipswich to be sunk here on the Gold Coast as a premier dive site? It would really put us on the map and has proved extremely successful for other cities.

I have dived on the HMAS Swan, the HMAS Perth, the HMAS Brisbane and the amount of business they drive to an area is staggering. Even the HMAS Perth in Albany, where it is COLD for most of the year is successful, it has overcome the negative impact of inclement weather by offering trips out to the HMAS Perth on a little submarine.

One can only imagine how successful a designated dive wreck on the Gold Coast would be, with our year round magical weather, it would be diveable 12 months of the year.

In closing, we need to move with the times, Eco Tourism is big business, we have all the right ingredients here on the Gold Coast, it would be a shame to "miss the boat" so to speak.

We would greatly appreciate the councils support in developing an artificial reef program for the Gold Coast.

Yours sincerely
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