Coral Battleground? Re-examining the 'Save the Reef' campaign in 1960s Australia

Today's campaigns to protect the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) have parallels with historical campaigns. With hindsight, we can more clearly see the way environmental discourses are socially constructed as well as their outcomes. This is potentially insightful for contemporary environmentalists. Beginning in 1967, the Save the Reef campaign had a thoughtful media strategy and sought to socially construct the GBR as a precious ecosystem that was at risk from exploitation. Historical accounts often portray environmentalists as a weak, David-like contender in a fight against the powerful Goliath of the Queensland government and extractive industries. Using the historical archives as our primary data source, however, reveals that these memories are overstated and that environmentalists actually enjoyed widespread support. Moreover, we see that the GBR has no explicit 'opponents'; even those who sought to exploit it came from a position of pragmatic conservationism, believing exploitation and conservation could co-exist. The historical struggle over power and control of the GBR shows the positive outcomes which emerged from broad coalitions, as opposed to an adversarial and combative approach to activism.

Keywords: environmental movement; Great Barrier Reef; historical sociology; social construction; Save the Reef; Black bans; Australian environmentalism

Introduction

The Great Barrier Reef (GBR) is a controversial environment. Marine and climate scientists assert that its future is increasingly uncertain unless the Australian federal and Queensland state governments articulate a plan and produce funding to mitigate the effects of climate change, port development, increased shipping, agricultural run-off, and other impacts (McCalman 2013; Veron 2014; Waterhouse et al. 2014; Bridge et al. 2013). Since the 1980s, scientists claim that over half of the GBR's coral cover has disappeared as a result of cyclones, Crown of Thorns starfish (COTS) and coral bleaching (Belwood et al. 2004; Bruno and Selig 2007; De'ath et al. 2012). Van de

Leemput et al. (2016) have shown that the most recent coral bleaching is the third in a potential wave of five events increasing in intensity in the northern and central zones of the GBR, which could affect the entire GBR in the coming decades. They predict a bleak future for the GBR within the existing environmental management status quo (Brodie and Waterhouse 2012).

The GBR is a historically valued environment and an important component of Australia's national identity, shaping how Australians understand themselves as a society (Wynveen, Kyle and Sutton 2010; McCalman 2013; Lloyd 2015). Thus, concerns for this ecosystem have manifested in public protests, the stalling of one of Australia's largest coal mine projects, and have contributed to the removal of a Queensland Liberal National Party government. In 2015 the GBR narrowly avoided placement on the World Heritage 'in-danger' list (*The Telegraph*, July 2). However, controversies around the GBR should be understood as any social controversy, for example like aged care or paid maternity leave – as a disagreement over the best way to manage it, or a struggle for power and resources, rather than an active opposition to the GBR itself (Dietz, Ostrom and Stern 2003).

In this paper, we use historical sociology methods to revisit the history of the Save the Reef campaign from 1967-1974. This campaign has been widely remembered as a 'David vs Goliath' battle passionate, ecologically minded outcasts against an anti-environment, pro-development Queensland government and the collective might of the oil industry (eg Wright 1977; McCalman 2013; Capp, *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 8 2014; Spinifex Press website, "All Reviews – The Coral Battleground"). In her first-hand account of the campaign, first published in 1977, Judith Wright (1977, 50, 125) explicitly identified the campaign in such terms twice, specifically noting the environmentalists' lack of financial resources. Beyond the use of 'David versus

Goliath' terminology, though, the sense of the narrative clearly positions a small group of committed activists fighting for the good of the GBR in opposition to a politically and economically powerful government and oil industry.

We contend this positioning of environmentalists as small and weak overstates the level of opposition the environmentalists faced, but more importantly fails to appreciate the immense support they enjoyed. Wright frames the conflict as a dichotomy of resource-poor environmentalists over resource-rich energy companies. In reality, the environmentalists had access to other resources, illustrating Tilly's (1978) notion of Resource Mobilisation (RM). In revisiting the historical archives, we can see that there was in fact very widespread support for protecting the GBR, even amidst disagreements about the most appropriate conservation approach. We argue that Wright (1977) and other activists telling the story of this campaign fall back on the Goliath narrative as a framing technique, a way of appealing to a wide audience. The creation of a *Coral Battleground* (Wright 1977), while a compelling narrative, pits adversaries against one another. Activists embroiled in such a campaign may well feel like they are up against a Goliath despite, as we point out in this paper, enjoyed significant support. We suggest that contemporary activists might learn from this historical example. In particular, we argue that adversarial environmental discourses can be unproductive in cases like this one. When activists work *with* politicians, scientists, the media and the public, the outcomes are positive, as occurred in 1967. We take a *verstehen* approach to understanding what productive discourse and positive outcomes look like, coming from the perspective of the activists themselves; in this example, the positive outcome was the protection of the GBR from exploitation for mineral resources. In this paper, we will first briefly explain the historical timeline of this early Save the Reef campaign. This is followed by a short discussion of the framing techniques employed by social

movements and other agents in a campaign such as this one. We then expand on the historical example to highlight the way this campaign was socially constructed, showing how powerful the environmental activists and their campaign actually were.

Historical Timeline: Saving Ellison Reef and the GBR

The 'Save the Reef' campaign began in earnest on 14 August 1967 when a member of the Cairns Cane Growers Executive, Donald Forbes, lodged an application for limestone mining on Ellison Reef, a typical coral reef in the central region of the GBR. The prospect of dredging for lime immediately received opposition from the local Innisfail branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (WPSQ). The WPSQ began a campaign that used scientific and legal arguments to protect the GBR from dredging and any future drilling for resources. They also began to consciously utilise the media, writing Letters to the Editor and winning favourable coverage from reporters, vital steps in shaping public opinion about the GBR campaign. Further, the WPSQ letter writing campaign targeted Queensland politicians, pointing out the harm that would be done to tourism, and thus the North Queensland economy, if a precedent of exploitation were set. The WPSQ also arranged the equipment and transport for members of the Queensland Littoral Society (QLS) to undertake scientific surveys of Ellison Reef. Their surveys showed a very complex ecosystem, with a range of hard corals, algae, fish, megafauna and invertebrate species living on it. These findings convinced the Innisfail Mining Warden that the application to mine Ellison Reef for limestone should be refused.

Despite the clear success in the fight against limestone mining, the Ellison Reef campaign revealed applications for oil drilling on the GBR. Members of Queensland's parliament were torn, with a number of politicians on both sides expressing their opposition to oil drilling. This opposition was bolstered by oil spills in other parts of the

world which highlighted the risk of drilling in such a precious ecosystem. Others, however, believed the GBR was going to be exploited in some way, and sought strategies to do so 'without serious damage' (Endean, quoted in *The Courier Mail*, 23 November 1967). The Queensland government was keen to maintain the environmental values of the ecosystem as tourism was signalled as the GBR's 'greatest commercial potential' (Cabinet Minutes, 1 April 1968). Oil drilling was approved in Repulse Bay in the Whitsunday region, but was challenged by a widespread 'black ban', a strike that targeted vessels coming in to Australia that would be involved with the drilling.

Framing Techniques: Socially Constructing Social Movements

Social movements attempt to 'frame' issues, which is to assign meaning to and interpret events in ways that aim to convince others of their proposed solution (Klandermans 1992). Klandermans (2014, 53) identifies three processes by which social movements socially construct their frames: (1) through public discourse, that is, the interface of media discourse and interpersonal interaction; (2) by persuasive communication during mobilisation campaigns by movement organisations, their opponents and countermovement organisations; and (3) consciousness raising during episodes of collective action. Consciousness raising is mainly centred on participants in the action but 'may also occur among sympathetic spectators' (Klandermans 1992, 92). Klandermans' approach shows the importance of communication, and our paper will focus on the first two processes as they are primarily externally-oriented. This is for both practical reasons, because we rely on the material captured by the historical archives, and because we are interested in the ways that environmental groups 'tap-dance with the media' in their attempts to communicate (Hutchins & Lester 2006). Framing can be as subtle as word choice in discussion of an issue, and the words that are chosen 'shape the nature of the debate' (Sodero and Stoddart 2015, 60). McAdam,

Tarrow and Tilly (2001) argue that social construction is a dynamic interaction that is not just the result of social movement framing; multiple agents play a role in shaping the discourse around an issue, including the movement, their opponents, the government, corporations, the media and others. These arguments about social construction are not limited to social movements; 'all knowledge and all knowledge-claims are to be treated as being socially constructed' (Pinch and Bijker 1984, 401), and this is particularly relevant when discussing environmental value (Hannigan 2006).

The GBR is perceptually important to Australia in ecological, social and economic terms. Almost 90% of Australians 'recognise the Great Barrier Reef as integral to their identity and the majority believe it to be Australia's most inspiring national icon' (Goldberg et al 2016). While it received World Heritage status for its perceived natural heritage values, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) recognises its cultural value to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, its importance for tourism and other maritime industries, and its historical and social value as a National Heritage site (GBRMPA website, 2016). The Save the Reef campaign illustrates the multi-faceted nature of social construction in an environmental campaign. It highlights the way that certain narratives are used, whether they are factual or not, and how those narratives come to be understood as truths by various agents in these movements. We will show how different stakeholders contributed to the social construction of this historical campaign through public discourse and persuasive communication.

The Social Construction of the Save the Reef Campaign

Sugar Cane Growers: The Original David

Donald Forbes' attempt to mine Ellison Reef for limestone was not based on a desire to

decimate the GBR but rather to assist 'Aussie battlers', sugar cane farmers who were faced with an increase in sugar prices. Price increases were linked to the Cuban Revolution, which created a gap in the US sugar market (Clare 1971). In order to be a competitive export industry, cane growers were thus under pressure to simultaneously decrease costs and increase outputs. Cane growers needed lime to improve the soil, but it was neither affordable nor readily accessible. The Ellison Reef lime would be a cheap and local source of valuable lime (Clare 1971, 107-8). And harvesting this lime was not expected to cause environmental harm – it was not yet socially constructed as a problem (Spector and Kitsuse 1973). In fact, in 1951 GBR scientists promoted the 'vast deposits' of coral gravels awaiting collection (McNeill 1951, 191). Forbes argued 'that the lime he wanted to take was not living coral' but 'dead' rubble 'that was lying all over the place out there, just waiting to be gathered up' (quoted in Clare 1971, 105). This is an example of the ideological position of those who supported exploiting the GBR's resources. While they did not want to ruin the GBR, they felt that resource extraction and environmental protection could co-exist.

Cane growers described Forbes, and themselves, as 'battlers' (Clare 1971, 111). They were battling slumping sugar prices, and in their opinion, inequality of access to the GBR's resources. One cane grower told Clare (1971, 111): 'It's the battler that loses out. They want oil, they get it. We want lime, we can't have it'. Like the environmentalists, the cane growers identified their position as weak, and in these retrospective interviews the opponent was the strong and powerful oil industry. We usually think of David as the good in a battle against evil, and the evil that the cane growers socially constructed was the inequality of global marketplaces. Cane growers were not actively opposed to environmentalists but saw themselves as the powerless, small competitor in a fight against huge opponents. This perception is supported by the

way the campaign continued to unfold. After initial reports, Forbes was barely heard from in the media. However, his application raised issues of intrinsic value versus use value, environmental exploitation, and 'ownership' of the GBR.

Harnessing the Media to Socially Construct a campaign

The mainstream media is a key actor in the social construction of a campaign – even more so before social media provided an unmediated large audience for social movements (Couldry 2012). Activists rely on journalists to translate environmental issues to a broad audience to achieve the first of Klandermans' (2014) three social construction processes. Journalists report from a specific 'angle' or hook that sets the theme of the story. What emerges is a set of linguistic codes and rules that shape a discourse and general knowledge of a subject (Newlands 2013). Thus, activists in the 1967 Save the Reef campaign heavily targeted mainstream news outlets, particularly newspapers, which the main source of current affairs. Of course, journalists are themselves agents who contribute to social construction, and did not simply regurgitate activist discourses.

John Büsst, President of the Innisfail branch of the WPSQ, helped lead this carefully cultivated media strategy. He sought to use the media to present scientific and legal evidence that would set a precedent preventing further exploitation of the GBR. A key part of this strategy was, as he suggested to Judith Wright, 'any press publicity, including letters to, say, *The Courier Mail* and *The Australian*, by yourself as soon as possible, before the case is heard would be invaluable' (Letter, Büsst to Wright, 2 September 1967). Wright and other environmental activists obliged and the Ellison Reef case quickly drew the attention of the media. *The Courier Mail* (21 September 1967) interviewed Wright and featured elements of her letter sent to the Innisfail Mining Warden on behalf of the WPSQ. Wright stressed the issue of precedent and said 'some

principle must be laid down to protect' the GBR. The next day *The Courier Mail's* editorial (22 September 1967) awarded 'full marks to Queensland Wildlife Preservation Society's Innisfail president [John Büsst] for his prompt action on a Barrier Reef application'. The editorial expressed outrage, because granting the Ellison Reef application would be 'the green light for a complete exploitation of this acknowledged wonder of the world'. The editorial also called for action and urged the government to refuse 'the bulk destruction by dredging'. It warned that the destruction caused by COTS would be 'trifling compared with 84 acres of what could only be called shameful vandalism soon to be considered by a mining warden'.

The environmentalists' strategy was twofold: first, to encourage the media to focus on the scientific evidence; and second, to build on personal networks. It was successful on both counts. The discovery of 'life' on Ellison Reef drove the media coverage. The *Evening Advocate* (23 November 1967) printed the headline 'Shell found on Ellison Reef not seen elsewhere'. As part of the second strategy, the environmentalists closely involved key journalists in the campaign. Judith Wright and John Büsst convinced *The Australian* journalist Barry Wain of the importance of the Ellison Reef case. Wain wrote six articles in less than five weeks during the Ellison Reef campaign. During 1968, Büsst maintained contact with Wain and sent him letters for publishing, briefed him on developments and asked him to convince Aubrey Collette and Bruce Petty to draw cartoons. *The Australian* argued in favour of delaying oil exploration on the GBR until further biological research had been conducted and emphasised the importance of the biology of the GBR to tourism (eg *The Australian*, 1 May 1969, 24 December 1969). The activists' media strategy was successful even according to the QLS (Connell 1971). Mainstream media engaged positively with the environmentalists, and with scientific reports about the GBR, to present a clear message

that the GBR was too precious to risk. The notion or perception of risk often plays a dominant role in shaping public opinion (Klandermans' first process). Media narratives of risk are common in environmental stories. Risk is regularly set within a frame of uncertainty, disaster (implicit) or explicitly risk (Painter 2013). The environmentalists' media strategy adopted a disaster discourse to suggest that mining would be an implicit risk to the GBR.

Targeting Politicians

Alongside the media strategy, activists employed Klandermans' (2014) second process of social construction, persuasive communication in the form of lobbying to influence decision-makers. Again, we do not suggest that politicians are mere pawns at the whims of environmentalists. Instead, politicians, particularly Queensland government MPs, were engaged in their own processes of persuasive communication and attempting to shape the public discourse. From the late 1950s until the 1989, Queensland was governed by the Country Party (now the National Party) in coalition with the Liberal Party, and the Labor Party in opposition. Luckily for the activists, most politicians were already sympathetic to the GBR because it was perceived as beautiful, a potential tourist site, and environmentally valuable. Activists did not take this support for granted, though, and continued to lobby hard. The QLS sent their Ellison Reef Report to state and federal politicians, a costly exercise. It is likely this ongoing nature of the lobbying, and the costs, that have led to the memory that environmentalists were the 'David' in this 'battle'. Activists did fight, though it was to maintain their favoured position, and this has been remembered as a fight against a much bigger opponent.

The Queensland government was the key decision-maker for the GBR when the limestone mining application was lodged in 1967. Months later, Ellison Reef was considered saved but Minister for Mines and Main Roads, Ron Camm, along with all

other Australian mines ministers, introduced the *Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Bill* on 27 October 1967. This bill, which had been negotiated by all the states and the federal government since the early 1960s, sought to remove ambiguity around the management of Australia's off-shore oil reserves. It was presented to the Queensland parliament as a bipartisan act in line with other states. By removing the legislative hurdles which had delayed the broader development of the GBR's possible oil reserves, the bill made possible the drilling of the GBR for oil.

Support for the bill was underpinned by a utilitarian conservation ethic which had informed GBR use for much of European engagement (Lloyd 2015). Within this perspective the GBR was large enough to allow various forms of exploitation and resource use to co-exist alongside the GBR's natural attributes. It was not, despite rhetoric to the contrary, motivated by environmental despair but by a widely-held attitude that valued the GBR for the combination of economic and natural attributes. The bill was unpopular, with some members of the government and the Labor Opposition both immediately voicing their concerns for the GBR. Opposition Leader John Houston (Hansard, 18 October 1967) voiced particular concern for the GBR's future: 'No other State has a natural asset as valuable as is the Great Barrier Reef of Queensland'. Houston's objections resonated with many members of the Legislative Assembly. Liberal member Bill Hewitt said Houston's remarks 'spoke for us all' (Hansard, 18 October 1967). Labor member Doug Sherrington announced his complete opposition to the development of the GBR to obtain oil or lime, 'until a full appreciation is gained of its value' (Hansard, 18 October 1967). Liberal member Alexander Dewar joined the chorus urging for the GBR's protection and asserted: 'No amount of royalty from oil taken from the sea-bed would be worth the risk of having the Barrier Reef wiped out. No matter what steps the Government has in mind' (Hansard, 18 October

1967). The bill passed but when the prospect of drilling the GBR for oil became a legislative reality, concern was swift and largely bipartisan.

In February 1969, as a result of the *Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Bill*, six companies had been granted rights to explore for petroleum in the GBR area. Politicians' fears for the GBR were fuelled by oil disasters in other places, such as the *Torrey Canyon* off Cornwall. The announcement of petroleum leases emerged at the same time as oil began to leak from a pipe off the coast of Santa Barbara in California. For the conservationists, the Santa Barbara disaster was 'the big break'. As Wright (1977, 51) put it, 'Santa Barbara's tragedy was the Reef's good fortune' because of the publicity it attracted to the 'possible fate' of the GBR. Büsst wrote to the *Townsville Bulletin* (10 February 1969) to point out 'that oil exploration in California is also permitted *only* under the *strictest control*' and demanded the Premier and the Queensland government take their 'Hands off the Great Barrier Reef'.

Political Constructions: Stewardship of the GBR

Despite outspoken opposition to the exploitation of the GBR within Queensland's parliament, fears remained for a fragile ecosystem. Activists used ongoing tensions between state and federal governments to their advantage. They also mobilised personal networks in their campaign through activists like John Büsst, who was friends with Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt. The fact that environmentalists were part of networks including the Australian Prime Minister further challenges the framing of the activist position as small and weak. The ability to play on tensions of sovereignty and jurisdiction was a very strong position to occupy. In a private conversation in late 1967, Holt assured Büsst 'that the federal government will take over the Barrier Reef' (Büsst

quoted in Clare 1971, 98). After Holt disappeared (he likely drowned while swimming in the surf off the southern Victorian Coast in December 1967) Büsst continued to lobby both John Gorton (Prime Minster 1967-1971) and the Opposition leader Gough Whitlam (Prime Minister 1972-1975) about the GBR (Letters, Büsst to ACF, 22 July 1968; 2 August 1968). Gorton maintained the federal government's preservationist stance, and the media reported on doubts from various levels that the Queensland government was well-equipped to protect the GBR (*The Age*, 27 August 1968). In particular, doubts were raised about a 'threat to the reef posed by negligence, lack of scientific knowledge and prospecting and mining activities'. However, Gorton's intervention was hindered by the issue of Queensland's state sovereignty over offshore oil reserves. Nonetheless, the federal government placed pressure on the Queensland government to abandon its plans to explore the GBR for oil.

Environmental organisations used this question of sovereignty to their advantage, and were aided by the media coverage of the issue. In October 1968, the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) passed a motion which stipulated that the federal government should 'lay claim internationally to all those parts of the Reef and the area it occupies which may not now be internationally recognised as under Australian control' (ACF Newsletter, October 1968; *Sydney Morning Herald* 14 October 1968). The motion included the provision that the GBR should be under 'one control'. Environmentalists turned to the threat of oil disasters, discussed above, in lobbying the federal government to take control of the GBR away from Queensland. Patricia Mather, Secretary for the peak research body, the Great Barrier Reef Committee (GBRC) wrote to the *Senate Select Committee on Off-shore Petroleum Resources* which had been established following the introduction of the *Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Act*. Mather asserted that the Santa Barbara disaster made evident

the necessity for the establishment of a single authority to govern the management of the GBR (Letter, Mather to Senate Select Committee, 19 February 1969). The federal government responded to this ongoing pressure and announced that any future oil drilling applications on the GBR would not receive their approval (Cabinet Minutes, 4 March 1969).

The federal cabinet then began investigating the likelihood of broadening federal control of areas of the GBR for the purposes of controlling and managing fisheries and the resources of the Continental Shelf (Cabinet Minutes, 25 March 1969). Their decision made the Queensland government's options of issuing new leases legislatively impossible. The Queensland government was placed in an equally awkward position when it became apparent that many of their ministers, including Bjelke-Petersen, owned shares in oil companies that held leases over the GBR (Whitton 1993). The pressure of the state elections, the federal government's stance, and the environmentalists' activism seemingly forced the Queensland government to concede that they would not issue any further leases for oil drilling on the GBR and they pledged, during the election campaign in 1969, that the GBR would be protected (*The Courier Mail*, 29 April 1969).

The question of who owned the GBR was not resolved, however. Former politician and diplomat Percy Spender was commissioned to report on sovereignty of Australia's continental shelf and the natural resources of its sea bed, from a legal perspective. Spender concluded that, excluding inland waters, Queensland's territorial boundaries expired at the low water mark. He argued all the natural resources of the sea beds bordering Australia belonged to the federal government, not the states (Spender 1969, 38-9). Spender's argument was supported soon afterwards by the High Court decision in *Bonser v La Macchia* (1969) which affirmed that the states were not sovereign bodies as recognised in international conventions.

Despite growing momentum towards the GBR's protection, it was not out of danger. Back in 1964, the Queensland government had granted an oil drilling lease to Ampol-Japex, who signalled their intention to drill a well in Repulse Bay in 1969 (Royal Commission 1970-74, Exhibit 255). Because this agreement was signed before the federal government claimed ownership of the GBR, there was no doubting Queensland's sovereignty. The drilling rig the *Navigator* was due to arrive in Australia in early 1970. Any opportunity of resolving the various competing uses and values of the GBR was lost. Oil drilling became the primary 'battleground' in the fight to protect the GBR. Even Prime Minister Gorton stated resolutely that 'anything which in any way would seem to endanger the Great Barrier Reef, not only on the question of drilling for oil, is something which should not, as far as legal possibilities are concerned, take place' (Hansard, 26 August 1969).

A Royal Commission into Exploratory and Production Drilling for Petroleum in the Area of the Great Barrier Reef set up by both the Queensland and federal governments in 1970. Initially, Wright (1977) believed it would be a 'David and Goliath' battle, with the position of strength occupied by the Queensland government and the Australia Petroleum Exploration Association. However, the coalition of conservationist groups, the QLS, WPSQ, ACF, Great Barrier Reef Committee (GBRC), and Save the Reef Committee (STRC), were supported by the federal government, who financed their legal representation (Telegram, Gorton to Bjelke-Petersen, 1 July 1970). When the Royal Commission finished in 1974, environmental discourses around the GBR had shifted. The Whitlam government had passed the *Seas and Submerged Lands Act 1974* which seized federal sovereignty over Australia's submerged resources. All of the states challenged the legislation in the High Court and lost at the end of 1975.

Additionally, the federal government moved forward with the drafting and introduced the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* in June of that year.

This back-and-forth between the state and federal governments is another factor that has added to the discourse that conservationists were engaged in a battle against a powerful enemy. While they had widespread support from the media and politicians, they still faced obstacles. Perceptions of corruption and vested interest within the Queensland government were considerable foes, and it is unsurprising that those battles are remembered at the expense of how successful the campaign was overall. Not only would those fights stick in activists' memories, but conflict makes a more compelling narrative.

The Power of Public Opinion

Public opinion is shaped by the factors we have discussed thus far, especially the public discourse. While primarily mediated by journalists, this discourse is actively shaped by activists and politicians. As the Save the Reef campaign shows, though, the public is not merely an object affected by these discourses; it can also become a powerful voice in the 'dynamic discourse' (McAdam et al. 2001). Social movements rely not only on highly committed activists, but also the sympathetic public, which 'provides movement organizations with a resource that can be mobilized in a political struggle' (Stern et al. 1999, 81). In this campaign, environmentalists employed simple, visual tactics, such as stickers. They also built cross-movement coalitions, such as enlisting the support of trade unions to ensure the GBR had widespread public support.

The environmentalists needed funds to carry out the work of lobbying politicians, discussed above. In early 1968, the QLS began selling 'Save the Barrier Reef' stickers to provide funds for their campaign. The idea proved successful: by August 1968 nearly 8,000 stickers had been distributed (QLS Newsletter, July/August

1968). The stickers spread so far that Wright (1977, 31) recalled arriving in Perth from overseas and seeing cars brandishing orange 'Save the Barrier Reef' stickers (Wright 1977, 31). When activists remember selling stickers to raise funds, their economic resources are contrasted sharply against the oil industry, who they perceived as wealthy. Thus, even though they acknowledged their strength in numbers, they justify positioning themselves as the weaker opponent because of this difference in financial resources, despite a wealth of other resources (Tilly 1978). A petition to save the GBR gathered 10,000 signatures (QLS Newsletter, July/August 1968; *The Australian*, 4 September 1968). The environmentalists maintained their presence in the media, discussed above, and new organisations formed: for example the 'Save the Reef Committee' and the 'Housewives Concerning the Protection of the Barrier Reef'.

After Queensland's agreement with Ampol-Japex became widely known, the public were largely outraged. On September 18 the Queensland Premier's Department was inundated with telegrams from around Australia with various single line messages including: 'please save the Barrier Reef', 'No drilling no more promises', 'Don't make our barrier Reef one of the great blunders of the world' and 'No drilling Barrier Reef otherwise no vote' (Telegrams from QSA 538155). Letter writers expressed 'strong protest' against drilling on the GBR. They called for an authority to be established 'to protect this wonderful asset' and one asked Premier Bjelke-Petersen to consider whether his obligations were 'to a business contract or to the preservation of the greatest coral reef in the world?' (Letters from QSA 538155). The Bowen Shire Council, the Humanist Society of Queensland, Zoological Society of Frankfurt and the Townsville and District Tourist Development Association all lodged objections to oil drilling on the GBR (Submissions from QSA 538155). For these groups, the public, the federal government, the media, and the conservationists the prospect of oil drilling on the GBR

could not be endorsed. The economic value of the GBR, in their estimations, did not extend to its potential oil resources. More importantly, as most objections noted, GBR tourism offered unprecedented wealth. Oil drilling would only put that economic possibility in jeopardy.

Cross-movement Coalitions

When the Queensland government maintained that drilling would go ahead under strict controls, environmentalists began to build coalitions with trade unions. The most well-known example of such a coalition is the 'Turtles and Teamsters' alliance in the 1999 World Trade Organisation protests (Flesher Fominaya 2014). As in 1999, the 1969 coalition did not rely on 'bridge brokers' (Mayer 2009), or individuals who identify with both movements. Rather, the coalition was an unlikely one between highly educated and middle-class 'greenies' and blue collar workers. Büsst explained:

> The submission I wrote some time ago for the ACTU [Australian Council of Trade Unions] eventually stirred things up, as did my hasty dash to Townsville to see Whitlam, to ask him to put a ban on the rig. It has taken 2 ½ years to bend this weapon – this is it, and the screws can be tightened still further, if the government enquiry is not over and above board, and if we are not permitted to import overseas scientists. (Letter, Büsst to Wright, 4 February 1970)

This unlikely coalition is telling of how widespread the public support was for the protection of the GBR; workers were willing to risk their livelihoods in an environmental strike. Typically, 'natural resource protection is quasi-systematically pitted against issues of economic development and employment growth' (Busca and Lewis 2015, 23). But environmental movements are successful when the public voluntarily makes sacrifices (Stern et al. 1999), and this is an example of such a sacrifice being willingly adopted.

The GBR is an important part of Australian identities, contributing to 'the production and reproduction of the social realm' (Lockie 2015, 141). While labour typically 'side[s] with capital' in such debates (Mayer 2009, 221), the GBR acts as a common identity around which a coalition formed. For example, the Amalgamated Engineering Union wrote to Premier Bjelke-Petersen to inform him:

> If Ampol-Japex persists, in the face of public opinion and drills in Repulse Bay, a voluntary Australia-wide boycott on all Ampol-Japex products will be called for, and a similar boycott on any other oil or mining company endangering the future of the Great Barrier Reef. (Letter, AEU to Bjelke-Petersen, 16 September 1969)

Likewise, the Australian Primary Producers Union (APPU) considered it urgent for the Queensland government to make a 'clear statement of policy indicating that a conservation approach' would be adopted 'and that no exploitation would occur' (Letter, APPU to Bjelke-Petersen, 17 October 1969).

The most powerful statement of support came from the Transport Workers Union, who announced a 'black ban' on any ship or rig intending to drill in Repulse Bay (*The Australian*, 6 January 1970). A 'black ban' is a mass refusal to supply or purchase goods or services. In 1973, Jack Mundey, trade union leader and environmentalist, coined the term 'green ban' to distinguish traditional union 'black bans' and those with a distinct environmentalism agenda (Hutton and Connors 1999, 128-33). The 1970 'black ban', which was undoubtedly green in nature, was announced by federal Senator George Georges, but supported by the rank and file members of the union. In discussions of the 'black ban', Georges explained that the 'militant action' was necessitated by the failure of both federal and state governments 'to take action to ban drilling' (*The Australian,* 6 January 1970).

The mainstream media supported this 'militant action'. *The Australian* accused both state and federal governments of conducting 'a shameful exercise of buck-passing'

(24 December 1969). In response to the 'black ban', *The Australian* published an editorial (7 January 1970) stating:

> The obdurate refusal of the Queensland and Commonwealth governments to heed public demands for action to stop oil exploration on the Great Barrier Reef now looks like rebounding on them. The black ban proposed by Senator Georges to abort drilling plans will have an unprecedented measure of public support and will probably succeed. It deserves to.

The editorial levelled heavy criticism against the Queensland government accusing it of incorrectly prioritising maintaining confidence with foreign investors over maintaining credibility with its constituents.

However as the quote above shows, the narrative of a powerful enemy emerged even here. As we discussed above, the federal government at the time was overwhelmingly in favour of conserving the GBR and attempted to take control over it. But their inability to act earned them enemy status. This 'us versus them' mentality can be important for social movements because it creates a sense of collective identity. However, there is little room for grey area in such constructions (Petray 2012), and so we see a supportive but ineffective government being lumped with the 'them' who were attempting to exploit the GBR. The risk of such framing is alienating those so-called enemies, thus creating actual enemies who actively work against a cause. Moreover, conflict is an important news value that may have been highlighted because it makes the narrative more compelling. However, such framing positions environmentalists as outsiders, rather than actors who can influence environmental governance (Cordner and Brown 2015, 71).

The 'black ban' had major consequences. Ampol-Japex decided to postpone drilling, and urged a 'thorough investigation' by a joint government committee of inquiry (Telegram, 13 January 1970). The 'black ban' and the widespread public

opposition to oil drilling on the GBR gave the federal government the opportunity to intervene and bring about a general postponement of all oil drilling on the GBR. Bjelke-Petersen still supported drilling and wanted it to go ahead, which sparked a wave of public animosity. Letters to the Premier expressed 'disappointment', found the decision to allow oil drilling 'ill-conceived', and identified the GBR as a key reason to vote against Bjelke-Petersen's government (Letters from QSA 538155). In the face of severe public scrutiny the Queensland government asserted that it was 'fully conscious of its responsibility to judiciously protect and conserve the natural resources of Queensland' (Press Release, 15 January 1970). They received some support, however most correspondence from the public was negative. Many telegrams and letters resonate with the sentiment expressed here: 'We deplore and regard with disgust the obstinate self-interest with which you disregard the care and preservation of the Great Barrier Reef which belongs to all Australians' (Telegram, Ms Baillieu to Bjelke-Petersen, 15 January 1970).

The public was given an outlet to vent their frustrations with the Queensland government early in 1970, when a by-election was held for one state seat. The Labor opposition and environmentalists both highlighted the GBR as a major election issue (Wright 1977, 129; *The Courier Mail*, 17 January 1970). While only voters in that electorate could officially have their say, the by-election presented an important platform for public debate and discussion. Both Labor and Liberal candidates openly opposed drilling the GBR for oil, while the Country Party candidate did not (Wright 1977, 129-31). As a result, the Liberal candidate won, which environmentalists hoped would send a wake-up call to the Bjelke-Petersen government, even though it did not change the government. More importantly, this event was seen by environmentalists as a turning point: the moment when the 'trades unions and the conservationists were no

longer an "irresponsible minority"' (Wright 1977, 131). When the Royal Commission began in 1970, the public 'Save the Barrier Reef' campaign effectively came to an end.

Discussion and Conclusions

Why has such a successful campaign, peopled by friends of Prime Ministers and supported by Australia's national newspaper, been remembered as the product of an 'unlikely trio' (McCalman 2013, 282-3) As the historical evidence shows, support for the protection of the GBR was widespread, yet the dominant narrative that remains suggests environmentalists were up against staunch enemies. The evidence also shows that all stakeholders in this debate had an interest in maintaining the GBR as an important ecosystem and tourism opportunity, though they had different ideological approaches for how to do so. The application to mine limestone for sugar cane growers, and the Queensland government's pragmatic conservationism, both rested on the assumption that the GBR would remain viable even if small areas of it were used for resource extraction.

The idea that the GBR 'belongs to all Australians', as one campaign participant stated above, highlights an important alternative to the idea of a small and weak environmentalist position. Adopting an 'us versus them' frame is, by its very nature, exclusionary. The emphasis of the few against the many might tell a compelling story, and might strengthen the sense of collective identity for those actively involved in a campaign. But it does little to include the broader public into the movement, and challenges opportunities to build widespread solidarity. Moreover, it ignores the fact that the campaign was widely supported by the media, the federal government, trade unions, and importantly, a considerable majority of the Australian public. In this way, it attempts to rewrite the power relations for the purpose of a good story, which obscures the importance of diverse social actors in this successful environmental campaign.

In a period when the GBR's future is again under increased scrutiny and governments are being urged to be more proactive to ensure its future, the 'Save the Reef' campaign provides important lessons. We hope that by exposing the complex aspects of the historical campaign, the hitherto unexposed motives of protagonists might provide some nuance to a debate which has become increasingly dominated by binaries of 'exploiters' and 'conservationists'. It is possible that the continuation of the Goliath narrative has actively contributed to the adversarial nature of the present-day GBR campaign because social movements are the product of their histories (McAdam et al. 2001). Rather than setting up strong binaries, this case shows that inclusive campaigns that draw on the importance of the GBR to Australia's identity can be very successful.

We recognise, however, significant differences between the campaign that began in 1967, and the current one. First, the media landscape has shifted, with social media allowing environmentalists a platform for their persuasive communications. Future research is needed into the role of social media in the current campaign for the GBR. Second, increasing pressure on journalists limits their time to really engage with issues in the way that Wain, for example, could in 1967 when he was brought to the GBR by environmentalists. Moreover, conflict is a compelling narrative, so campaigns that have no 'battle' need to find other news values to ensure they remain reportable. Third, both Queensland and federal governments are supportive of activities like coal mining which will purportedly boost the economy, but will also contribute to climate change and potentially endanger the GBR further. As with the pragmatic conservationism stance in the 1960s, governments want to maintain the GBR but do not see resource extraction as mutually exclusive. As Sodero and Stoddart (2015, 59) point out about Canadian governments, 'such policy paradoxes, especially in the realm of climate and resource politics, are so common as to almost be unremarkable'.

Today, tensions remain between the state and federal governments over stewardship of the GBR. Again, this is a struggle over power and resources, rather than a belief that the GBR is not important. Queensland's need for economic growth has resulted in a policy where the 'emphasis is less on protection and conservation, and more about generating sustainable wealth from the region' (Hughes et al 2015). Federal government is also pushing for economic growth, whilst trying to keep the GBR off the 'in-danger' list. Environmental groups continue to socially construct the media coverage within a frame of implicit risk (Lankaster et al., 2015). Whereas in 1967 newspaper journalists were targeted, today environmental activists utilize social media. Social media and the internet enables activist groups to gain not just national but also international support for their campaign.

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