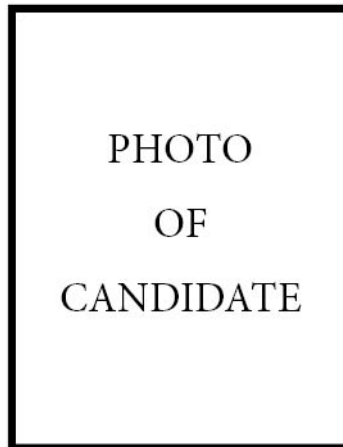


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GREG McMAHON

**INDEPENDENT SENATE CANDIDATE for QUEENSLAND
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‘Knowledge Experts’ need whistleblower protection too

“Recent complaints from discipline experts working on government programs, that they are, or have been, adversely affected because of the technical reports they have made on controversial issues, mean these people need the same protection that whistleblowers should be receiving,” the President of Queensland’s Whistleblower Action Group, Greg McMahon, said today.

Mr McMahon, an independent candidate for the Senate in Queensland, was referring to recent claims made concerning reports on the Barrier Reef and on the shipping of livestock to Asia.

On the topic of bleaching of the Barrier Reef, reports by experts have been denigrated as personal political beliefs, and the scientists have been termed as activist scientists.

On the shipping of livestock overseas to Asia, a government veterinarian was removed after reporting on the conditions experienced by animals on those ships.

“Both these cases appear to be examples of the phenomenon where pressure is exerted by third parties through the government to affect the employment of technical experts whose reports on controversial matters are not welcomed by those third parties,” Mr McMahon said.

“The expert is replaced, allowing the government program to provide more-welcomed reports on the same issues.

“One of Queensland’s three Whistleblowers of National Significance, Jim Leggate, was an early case of this phenomenon,” Mr McMahon said.

"Jim Leggate was an expert who secured a first-class reputation for environmental controls at the Ranger Uranium Mine.

"His move to Queensland Mines Department as an inspector was heralded.

"However, Jim Leggate wrote reports on the pollution permeating into water supply aquifers and being carried out to the Barrier Reef from abandoned mine sites in Queensland.

"The mining industry did not welcome these reports," Mr McMahon said.

"Under pressure, Jim then did become a whistleblower," he said.

"In the early 1990s the cost to remedy this problem was estimated at \$1 billion in Queensland...now it is Queensland's share of an estimated \$18 billion for Australia.

"Jim Leggate allegedly received a punitive transfer, but 25 years later, today, it is the Barrier Reef that is being punished."

Mr McMahon said other colleagues had informed him of the day they knew their careers as technical experts within government were over.

"It was the day that a ministerial adviser, or some other functionary in a politicised agency, stood behind them requiring them to change parts of their reports.

"The revised statements were incorrect or misleading, and the officers said 'No', and that was the end," Mr McMahon said.

Mr McMahon said he had been subjected to such pressures when he was the government's expert on floodplain management.

"But my time was before the introduction of Freedom of Information legislation, so my reports could be stored and ignored. With FOI, that is no longer the case," he said.

"A population of Knowledge Experts, who lose their careers and/or reputations, and/or jobs, without ever becoming whistleblowers, has emerged.

"These men and women of integrity in their professional careers suffer the same fate for the same reasons as whistleblowers, and deserve similar protections," Mr McMahon said.

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