

Activists follow a well-worn path of exaggeration, hyperbole and even lies

This article in the Cairns Post by Julian Tomlinson, Regional Editor in Chief, News Ltd., 2 June 2016, discusses scientists' views and related media coverage of the current Great Barrier Reef coral bleaching – “In the search for relevance, activists follow a well-worn path of exaggeration, hyperbole and even lies.” (Click on graphic to expand.)

Julian Tomlinson



“BY SAYING “SAVING”, HE IS TELLING THE WORLD THAT THE REEF IS IN IMMINENT DANGER AND ABOUT TO DIE. NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH

When facts are inconvenient

IN THE search for relevance, activists follow a well-worn path of exaggeration, hyperbole and even lies.

Worse still is a compliant media and political sector that swallows the emotive shouting hook, line and sinker before foisting it on to a time-poor public who see a 10-second TV news grab and believe they have all the facts.

Public figures must exercise moderation around sensitive topics and encourage alternate – maybe unpopular – ideas to be heard.

Students should be compelled to read and consider views they do not agree with.

Parents should ensure they and their children are widely read and aware of all aspects of an issue, not just the angles forced upon us by politicians, teachers, university lecturers and mass media.

This week we have seen Opposition Leader Bill Shorten pledge \$500 million to protecting the Great Barrier Reef.

But he didn't use the word “protecting”, he said “saving”.

By saying “saving”, he is telling the world that the Reef is in imminent danger and about to die.

Judging by the number of fishermen who bagged out on coral trout



SURPRISE FIND: Coral from a new reef discovered off the Amazon River.

and nannygai off Cairns at the weekend – not to mention the findings of highly qualified scientists – nothing could be further from the truth.

Yet of all the nation's journalists at these press conferences, not one dared to ask from where Mr Shorten got his information. Nor did they ask if he was aware of other scientific work that directly contradicts the doom-and-gloom merchants.

As a result, the only information people see in their loungerooms and newspapers is one side of the story and, to be frank, no one can be bothered to do their own research.

So basically, people like Bill Shorten, the brain-hurting Greens and Sir Richard Branson – not to mention influential bloggers and commentators – use strong language and deal in absolutes that really aren't abso-

lutes at all. They are treating as definite what is definitely indefinite.

They speak of sediment from farms killing the Reef, but pay no heed to the fact a thriving, colourful 9000sq km reef has been found off the mouth of the Amazon River that spews out more sediment than any river system in the world.

Scientists have admitted that this reef defies every textbook written about coral and reef formation.

At the very least, it shows that coral – like other living organisms – can adapt to changing environments.

But there is no tempering of political or media statements and no acknowledgment of other educated and credible scientific opinions.

If you're a scientist who has evidence of strong coral regrowth after bleaching events, or figures that show far less coral deaths from bleaching than what is being reported, there's virtually zero chance of Waleed Aly highlighting this on *The Project*.

And if, by some quirk, you did manage to get something published in mainstream media, the peddlers of doom would immediately weigh in with ridicule in a concerted campaign to discredit you. It's also likely they would berate the journalist for daring to question what is worth so many bil-

lions of dollars in grant money.

So instead, we get alarmist headlines and stories peddling as undeniable fact what are actually highly questionable assertions, or even lies.

Rather than being independent, impartial and unafraid to buck the accepted belief system, today's media simply repeats whatever sounds most dramatic and emotive.

Whether it be climate change, Islam, Safe Schools, gay marriage, immigration or coal mining, hyping up an issue to levels akin to the end of the world and shaming anyone who expresses an educated counterview is actually included in a book published in 1971 called *Rules for Radicals*.

It contains advice such as: “Power is not only what you have but what the enemy thinks you have.”

And this: “Ridicule is man's most potent weapon.”

And this: “The threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself.”

When politicians and commentators use such strong language and remain unchallenged by the media, society follows suit to the point that anyone who professes a divergent opinion to the “popular” one – no matter how heavily it's based in fact – is laughed at and publicly ridiculed.

julian.tomlinson@news.com.au