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POLL PRESSURE ON SCIENCE CHIEF OVER SCIENTIFIC DUEL ON GREAT BARRIER REEF

FARMERS facing a rising tide of red tape based on the Reef Regulations Amendment Act 2019 are demanding the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) step up for a head-to-head debate on its home turf of Townsville, North Queensland.

They have taken the unprecedented step of taking to the local airways to ask the community to join the call by voting in an online poll.

AIMS CEO Dr Paul Hardisty was invited to the debate by Marine Geophysicist Dr Peter Ridd and the Pioneer Cane Growers Organisation (PCGO) on 3 September.

“AIMS has still not said whether or not it will attend the event at 4.30pm on 8 October despite contacts by phone and email direct to Dr Hardisty and his office,” said PCGO Director Max Musumeci.

Two weeks on from the initial invitation, the PCGO took to the airwaves of Townsville to ask the local community to add its voice to the demands for Dr Hardisty or a suitable scientific delegation to step up to the debate, which is being held on 8 October at 4.30pm.

“We put out a poll on local Townsville radio which asked the community whether AIMS, as the pre-eminent science organisation based on the Great Barrier Reef, whether they wanted AIMS to join Great Barrier Reef Expert Dr Peter Ridd in a scientific debate about the Great Reef,” said Mr Musumeci.

“There have been 300 responses to the poll so far, and growing, and a resounding ‘yes’ is coming out loud and clear.

“AIMS has no excuse not to step up to this a live-streamed debate for the whole community on October 8. The topics should be familiar to Dr Hardisty and his team – they are the issues that were covered in the 2017 Scientific Consensus Statement on which the 2019 Reef Regulations Amendment Act is based.”

The 2019 Act has caused a storm of controversy since it was pushed through the Queensland Parliament by the Labor **Palaszczuk** Government in September 2019, with protests that the legislation – which is adding layers of red tape for farmers - is based on unchecked science.

Dr Ridd and farmer organisations across Queensland are seeking the establishment of an Office of Science Quality Assurance to check the science being used to make political decisions, and a public petition demanding this of government raised more than 5,400 signatures in less than 100 days.

Mr Musumeci said: “The Reef Regulations Amendment Act is based on unchecked science. This debate will bring into the community a robust discussion between AIMS and Dr Ridd over the facts around farming and the Great Barrier Reef.

“As Dr Ridd has said time and again, farming is NOT damaging the Great Barrier Reef, and as a farmer in the region adjacent to the Reef I can state quite categorically that we are the most committed custodians of the land and oceans on which we work, live and spend our leisure time.

“The use of unchecked science to drive political decision-making and legislation, including the 2019 Reef Regulations Amendment Act, is massively impacting ALL farming sectors – the farmers that Australians rely on for 89% of all food and drink on our tables today.”

He added: “As Queensland goes to the polls on 31 October, the community needs to understand the truth around the Great Barrier Reef and the risk being posed by unchecked science to our farming industry.