

The Thing That Wouldn't Die

Just When You Thought It Was Safe . . .

It's an all-too-familiar story. MegaBusiness announces a new project right in the middle of a pristine natural area. Concerned about the loss of a critical habitat, an endangered species, or merely a prime diving location, you join other concerned individuals and write/phone/fax businesses and officials to complain. Before long, some authority announces that the project has been canceled and everything is fine.

Can you believe what you read? Are press releases to be trusted? Or are they only smoke screens intended to hide what is really going on?

Readers may be puzzled by the latest from Cozumel. Didn't that Paradise Reef pier project get the deep six after concerned individuals and organizations worldwide flooded the Mexican local and national government authorities and Cozumel business leaders with objections? We were reassured in November 1993 by the governor of Quintana Roo and by Sedesol (the Mexican ecological enforcement agency), who announced publicly that the project had been cancelled.

Should we now be surprised at the September 1994 announcement by the developer, Consorcio H, that permits were in hand and Paradise Reef pier construction would begin in October? When questioned, Sedesol stated that the reef was already dead — despite recent reports from many divers on the beauty and diversity of this very

much alive reef. The developer has begun to fence off and develop nearby property, a further threat to the reef.

Not far below the horizon, the Galapagos Islands marine ecosystem, until recently a "safe" world ecological treasure and a monument to good govern-

ment, is under siege by illegal shark fishing fleets. This Ecuadorian national park, marine reserve, whale sanctuary, and UN-designated World Heritage Site was declared open for shark fishing in June 1994 — a decision that was nominally reversed 3 months later by President Sixto Duran Ballen of Ecuador after

How to Be Heard

To oppose the Paradise Reef project, contact:

Cecilio Hernandez
Mexican Government Tourist Office
10100 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 224
Los Angeles, CA 90067

Mickey Kantor
U.S. Trade Representative
600 17th St. NW
Washington, DC 20506

Ing. Mario A. Villanueva M.
Governor of the Free and Sovereign
State of Quintana Roo
Palace, Chetumal Q. Roo, Mexico
Fax: country code 52, area code 983,
number 2-5882

German Garcia Padilla
Mayor of Cozumel
Cozumel, Q. Roo, Mexico
Fax: country code 52, area code 987,
number 2-2431

Dr. Ernesto Zedillo
President of Mexico
Los Pinos
Mexico City, Mexico
Fax: country code 52, city code 5,
number 522-05-49

H. James R. Jones
United States Ambassador to Mexico
Fax: country code 52, city code 5,
number 207-00-91

To support enforcement and strengthening of the law and further oppose all harvest of sharks, sea cucumbers, and other creatures in the Galapagos National Park, contact the following:

President Sixto Duran Ballen
Garcia Moreno 1043
Quito, Ecuador

INEFAN
Av. Amazonas y Eloy Alfaro
Piso 8
Quito, Ecuador

Mickey Kantor
U.S. Trade Representative
600 17th St. NW
Washington, DC 20506

Spread the word; use the Internet. In a global village whose shores are under siege, a tidal wave of faxes, letters, and telegrams seems appropriate.

a storm of protest from around the world.

If this sounds to you like an exercise in bureaucratic side-stepping, you may be forgiven. The laws against shark fishing (most of which involves simply cutting off the fins and returning the mortally wounded predators to the water) before June 1994 were enforced casually if at all. It remains to be seen whether President Duran Ballen's threat of more patrols and "extreme sanctions" will bring action. Significantly, the new regulations allow "artisan fishing" by established Galapagos fishermen to con-

tinue "for fish eaten by themselves and the tourists."

Even if the top marine predator is truly protected, the entire Galapagos ecosystem is now threatened by after-the-fact legalization of the sea cucumber harvest supplying Asian specialty markets. Illegal processing camps have sprouted like garbage dumps along the shorelines of the national park. Despite warnings from the Charles Darwin Research Station that exploitation may have unforeseen dire consequences, the only concession to environmental concerns has been to require that the catch be processed aboard ships.

Big money interests are like cockroaches. Turn on the light and they all scurry for cover; turn it off, wait a few minutes, and they're back finishing off the dog's dinner, sucking the grease out of your stove top, egging your silverware drawer.

What we are learning is that once the light goes on, it must stay on. As divers, as protectors of the environment, and as concerned human beings, we must keep the spotlight on Paradise Reef and the Galapagos, even as we turn on new ones in other seas.

The Turkeys Among Us

How Even the Experienced Screw Up

Two Australian researchers, Jeffrey Wilks and Lindsay Christie, conducted a study of 192 divers diving from a charter boat. They recorded errors that the divers made while suiting up and during the dive.

The group they observed was representative of a wide cross-section of recreational divers in its male-female ratios, levels of certification, experience, and diving frequency. About 40 percent of the divers were visitors from outside Australia.

Divers often struggled into their gear while the buddy stood and talked to them — and failed to correct problems. One-third had trouble assembling their own equipment. They faced their BCs the wrong way or upside down on the tank, or attempted to attach the reg-

ulator first stage by screwing the yoke into the tank valve opening. Holding the air-pressure gauge in front of one's face as the tank valve was turned on (thus risking injury if the gauge exploded) was the next most common equipment error.

Many divers were shy and embarrassed when "buddied up" with a stranger. They looked to the divemaster rather than their buddy for assistance, or struggled through pre-dive preparations by themselves, all the while becoming more nervous or distressed before even entering the water.

Less serious errors were made by six divers preparing to dive without a snorkel* (three others wore theirs on the wrong side) and six divers donning their BCs (with tank) over their heads.

Two divers were clearly nervous during the dive preparation.

In general, 57% made no attempt to run through a pre-dive check. Many divers did not connect their power inflator to their BC. Weight belts were often twisted. Two divers prepared to enter the water without weightbelts, while 15 had their weightbelt release flap positioned so that they would have to use their left hand to open it. Thirteen divers (7%) prepared to enter the water without turning their air on.

Upon first entering the water, or coming to the surface during the dive, 4% failed to signal the boat that they were okay. Directions given during the dive briefing (usually about what time to return to the vessel) were disregarded by