

## **Stories from front line communities in the battle to save the Great Barrier Reef**

Sandra Williams

In late 2012 the Great Barrier Reef was facing a new threat from the expansion of industrial ports and shipping traffic. An environmental disaster that emerged in Gladstone Harbour following dredging for fast tracked gas processing plants alerted the environment movement to a terrible agenda. There were over 60 major port, infrastructure and mine developments seeking approval before the end of 2014. Millions of tons of dredging, dumping in the Reef's waters and a shipping superhighway were on the cards. The scale and pace of the proposals being supported by state and federal governments was unprecedented and posed serious risks to the future of the Reef. The Great Barrier Reef is a global treasure – it belongs to the whole world. Australia is fortunate to be its custodian, and has a moral obligation to protect and preserve the reef for future generations. It sustains our way of life; our love of diving, fishing, sailing, and discovery. It's part of our national identity and it's a valuable natural asset to our economy – the battle to save the reef has captured the hearts and minds of Australians. Yet preserving the reef in a healthy and resilient state is not as simple and straightforward as you might imagine. Those of us working to save the reef face enormous opposition from numerous and diverse interests. I'm going to share with you some of the challenges and successes from the communities in the front line fight to save the reef.

### **Bio**

Sandra first sailed along the Great Barrier Reef coast in Queensland forty years ago, but it was the Whitsundays islands and fringing Reef that she fell in love with, dropped anchor, and stayed to raise her family. Her career has involved managerial roles in the accommodation, charter boat, bare boat, and dive industries. Sandra is currently a member of the Local Marine Advisory Committee with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and is a founding member and director of the Whitsunday Residents Against Dumping (WRAD). WRAD is a community group that formed three years ago to protect the Great Barrier Reef from dredging and dumping through advocacy, education, action, and community awareness. WRAD are a volunteer group with over 2000 local supporters. For the last two years Sandra has been employed part time as the Great Barrier Reef campaigner with the Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS).