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Time For JCU To Accept It Has A Problem With Research

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The University of Delaware has conducted an investigation into Danielle Dixson, who worked on the effect of carbon dioxide on reef fish while at James Cook University. It found she was guilty of “research misconduct” on fish behaviour and coral reefs. The investigation appears to have only focused on Dixson’s work after she left JCU. However, whistleblower Tim Clark and other international collaborators have found that much of her work at JCU could not be reproduced. All her JCU work appears to be – shall we say – highly questionable.

This is the second time a star JCU PhD graduate from the JCU Coral Reef Centre has moved to another university and rapidly been found to be guilty of misconduct. Oona Lonstedt was infamously found guilty of data “fabrication” by Uppsala University in Sweden, and much of her work, which is closely associated with Dixson’s, has also been found to be highly questionable and extremely serious questions have been raised about her work at JCU.

Also, the latest coral cover statistics shows that the reef has never had more coral on it since AIMS surveys started (see my last posts) even though the JCU Coral Reef Centre has been claiming that vast amounts of coral died in 2016 from bleaching. They claimed devastating bleaching again in 2017, and again in 2020 and again in 2022. You have to start to wonder about much of JCU’s CRC work. Corals take 5-10 years to regrow – how could the GBR have lost so much coral and now be at record highs? Is there any quality assurance of their work?

It is time for JCU to accept that I might have been onto something when I stated, in 2017, that JCU has a serious quality assurance problem at its Coral Reef Centre. It is time to do an investigation and set past wrongs right. There is a new Vice Chancellor, so I hope he does the right thing. Otherwise, it smashes the reputation of all the excellent staff and students at the institution. JCU needs to do a thorough investigation of the Coral Reef Centre, and it could start by employing people from Uppsala and Delaware for the job. If JCU won’t do it, the Australian Research Council and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standard authority should.

Before I finish, I wish to say I have many friends at JCU who do first rate science and are great teachers. As a JCU-person from a first-year student in 1978 until I was fired as a professor in 2018, I was associated with the university for all but one year. My wife, my children, my brother, my sister, my in-laws and even my father did degrees there. So, it saddens me to see the damage that has been done to its reputation. But despite all that has happened, I still regularly advise people to send their children and grandchildren to JCU because their teaching is as good as any university in Australia.

As a final comment, it should be noted that Dixson denies the allegations against her and intends



to appeal any finding of research misconduct.

References

Latest misconduct case: see

<https://www.science.org/content/article/star-marine-ecologist-committed-misconduct-university-says>

<https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/fish-and-foul>

Clark, T.D., Raby, G.D., Roche, D.G., Binning, S.A., Speers-Roesch, B., Jutfelt, F. and Sundin, J. (2020). Ocean acidification does not impair the behaviour of coral reef fishes. *Nature*, 577(7790), pp.370–375.

For the Lonstedt case

<https://www.science.org/content/article/does-ocean-acidification-alter-fish-behavior-fraud-allegations-create-sea-doubt>

<https://www.science.org/content/article/can-you-spot-duplicates-critics-say-these-photos-lionfish-point-fraud>

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-017-08321-2>

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