

## WATER QUALITY AND COASTAL DEVELOPMENT REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE

4<sup>th</sup> Meeting

7 and 8 March 2001 – Townsville

### SUMMARY DOCUMENT

A summary document is prepared after each meeting of the Reef Advisory Committee to inform other advisory committees serving the Authority, and persons generally (including the public) of business of the RAC. The documents form part of the records of the meeting and so its content is limited to matters raised in the meeting, and, where necessary, background details given to the meeting.

Any inquiries should be referred to the Authority's Secretariat, or to the appropriate member.

#### **CROWN-OF-THORNS STARFISH (COTS) AND WATER QUALITY LINKS**

The Committee was provided with a background on the outbreaks of COTS on the Great Barrier Reef (GBR), the theories behind those outbreaks and the links to water quality. This was followed by a presentation from on the patterns and intensity of past and present outbreaks.

A researcher presented his work on the investigation into a possible link between terrestrial run-off and COTS outbreaks on the GBR. The Committee heard that the study shows that there is a correlation between climate and COTS numbers and that it could be possible to predict outbreaks.

Members discussed if, due to the obvious linkages between COTS outbreaks and water quality, COTS should be used as an indicator species in water quality management.

The Committee heard that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) had asked the CRC Reef to convene a group to conduct a review of COTS and that the GBRMPA was currently waiting for feedback and direction from the group.

In summary, the Committee suggested that the GBRMPA give some urgency to the CRC Reef organised review and take a more active role in driving coordination of a broader risk assessment to drive priorities for Research and Development and Action Plans by a range of responsible groups.

#### **QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT REEF PROTECTION PLAN**

The Committee was briefed on the Queensland Government's Reef Protection Plan policy. During discussion members commented that:

- The Sturgess Report makes the point that the Queensland government is not identifying what

they spend funds on to protect the Reef;

- The programs identified in the Plan should be quantified and a performance measurement included for each one; and
- The GBRMPA should be a member of the Taskforce.

#### **NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR SALINITY AND WATER QUALITY**

The Committee heard a presentation on the Queensland implementation of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. The Committee feels that the GBRMPA needs to be well represented at regional workshops and action plans should reflect the needs of the Reef in terms of water quality.

#### **WORKSHOP ACTIONS/COMMENTS ON THE STRATEGIC WORK PROGRAM**

The Committee discussed the Strategic Work Program (SWP). The Chair sought comments on, and additions to, a draft paper he had prepared which incorporated comments members had made at previous meetings. During discussion, members made the following points with regards to water quality:

- The GBRMPA needs to become more proactive and less reactive in dealing with issues;
- Partnerships between local, state and Commonwealth need to be strengthened and the GBRMPA needs to work collaboratively with these groups;
- A communication strategy needs to be developed;
- A risk assessment analysis/weighted evidence approach should be adopted;
- Volunteers could be utilised more effectively; and
- The GBRMPA needs to develop water quality standards.

Additionally, the Committee discussed monitoring water quality (in regard to protection of the Marine Park) and in particular monitoring of river systems and land use practices.

After discussion, the Committee made the following recommendations:

- The GBRMPA should urgently facilitate a meeting of all bodies involved in monitoring water quality and the impacts of land and water use on the Marine Park with the aim of getting commitment (and funding) for a coordinated long-term approach and the development of a cost effective and statistically correct method for monitoring water quality parameters;
- The GBRMPA should commence discussions with Local and State Governments with a view to gaining a high level agreement on managing and protecting the GBR; and
- The GBRMPA should write to Environment Australia to release the National Water Quality standards.

#### **REVIEW OF 25-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN**

In discussing the Strategic Plan, members commented that while the Plan did establish some overall strategies which still form the basis for action, the Plan had a number of faults and it was a shame that the evaluation cycle did not proceed.

At the next Water Quality RAC meeting, GBRMPA staff will brief the Committee on the status of the review of the Plan.

#### **REVIEW OF THE GBRMPA WATER QUALITY POLICY DOCUMENT**

The Committee was updated on the status of the GBRMPA's Water Quality Policy Document. The document was an administrative document which, as a courtesy, had been referred to the Minister for direction. The priorities identified in the document reflected those of the Water Quality RAC and the GBR Consultative Committee.

Members raised their concern that they were being kept in the dark and reinforced the Committee's role of being involved in the development of any policy and strategic plans relative to the Committee.

#### **GBRMPA'S REVIEW OF ICM AND REGIONAL STRATEGIES**

The Committee was updated on the review of ICM and regional strategies that had been carried out by GBRMPA staff.

#### **AQUACULTURE POLICY**

The Committee was briefed on the GBRMPA's draft administrative guidelines that have been developed for the assessment of aquaculture developments. The GBRMPA was working with Environment Australia to achieve uniform assessment and with the State to develop compatible guidelines.

The draft Codes of Practice for the Industry were tabled. In discussing the assessment of aquaculture developments, members stated that Environment Australia and the GBRMPA need to be giving the same messages and that a national standard needs to be developed for the industry based on what is currently being done on some of the best farms.

Following discussion, the Committee recommended that the GBRMPA talk to Environment Australia to make sure a consistent message is being relayed regarding assessment processes. Additionally, the Committee recommended that the GBRMPA speed up the improvement and simplification procedures where State and Commonwealth assessments are being carried out.

#### **STURGESS REPORT – ACTIONS RELEVANT TO WQ&CD**

The Committee agreed that implementation of many of the recommendations in the Sturges Report by both the State and Commonwealth would address many concerns about improved efficiency and effectiveness and spell out responsibility for addressing water quality and coastal development issues.

#### **INFORMATION ITEMS**

The Committee was made aware of a plan to spray fungicides on a broad scale in an effort to combat rust on cane. The Committee heard that some recommendations had been put on the use of the fungicide by the National Registration Authority but there appears to be no monitoring associated with the use of the fungicide.

The Committee suggested that the GBRMPA write immediately to the Queensland Department of Primary Industries asking that they advise the GBRMPA on procedures for the monitoring of compliance associated with the use of this fungicide and report on any breaches.

The Committee was also made aware of a process developed by CSIRO to assess the risk of using different pesticides.

#### **NEXT MEETING**

It was proposed that the next meeting be held in July/August 2001.