



WATER QUALITY AND COASTAL DEVELOPMENT REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE

7th Meeting

19 and 20 June 2002 – 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 document forms 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.

The Chairperson welcomed members to the 7th WRAC meeting, in particular new members representing the Queensland Seafood Industry Association and Environment Australia.

WATER QUALITY ACTION PLAN AND REEF PROTECTION TASKFORCE – REEF TASKFORCE BRIEFING

The Committee was provided with a general update on the Water Quality Action Plan from the GBRMPA's perspective, advising:

- Consultation with both Commonwealth and Queensland government agencies is being undertaken to progress actions to address water quality issues.
- The Australian Centre for Tropical Freshwater Research (ACTFR) has been contracted to review present water quality monitoring programs in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA) and its catchment, and to identify standard requirements for monitoring water quality.
- The Water Quality and Coastal Development (WQ&CD) Group has released and distributed two reports:
 - a) *Research Publication No. 68, Flood Plumes in the GBR: Spatial and Temporal Patterns in Composition and Distribution, and*
 - b) *Research Publication No. 66, A review of Water Quality Issues Influencing the Habitat Quality in Dugong Protection Areas.*
- The Action Plan has been usurped by actions taken by Environment Australia.
A guest speaker from Environment Australia provided an update from their perspective, advising that:
 - A group of Commonwealth and State officials are working to agree on a single approach to move forward in addressing water quality issues in catchments.
 - A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) – Great Barrier Reef Initiatives has been agreed to by Queensland, has been agreed to by both Minister Kemp and Minister Truss, and is presently in the process of getting the Prime Minister to agree to it.

The Committee were advised that the Reef Protection Taskforce will have a draft Action Plan released in September and it will be a product of a consultation process. The Plan will be comprehensive, give an institutional framework on which the government can work and will determine a range of actions through industry and local government with a view to implementing them on the ground, utilising mechanisms already out there.

The Committee expressed their support for the State government Reef Protection Action Plan, an across-government

approach and the need for a consultative approach to the preparation of this Plan. Members voiced the following concerns:

- It is important not to bulldoze planning through because if the community is not fully involved in the process it will not work.
- Needs to be an awareness of the different stages of the planning process in all plans being used to address catchment and water quality issues.
- It is important that industry and community know that an MOU exists between the Commonwealth and the Queensland governments.
- Funding for implementation of plans may be inadequate and the timeframes for current funding programs may not be long enough to guarantee implementation of plans.
- Time for consultation in Reef Protection Action Plan seems inadequate.

NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST EXTENSION (NHT) AND NATIONAL ACTION PLAN (NAP) FOR SALINITY AND WATER QUALITY (NAPSWQ)

The Committee was provided with a summary of the briefing notes on implementation of NHT and NAPSWQ programs, including:

- There will be a fundamental shift in the Trust towards more strategic investment.
- The model for regional investment under the extension of the Trust will be based on that used for NAP.
- There was scope within both NHT and NAP for funding 'no regrets' action.

The Committee expressed support for the targeted approach being used by both NAP and NHT programs and the strategies and guidelines to build regional support.

WATER QUALITY STRATEGY AND WORK PROGRAM

The WQ&CD Group has been working on a broader Strategic Direction document that will provide direction to annual work programs for at least the next five year period. The Strategic Direction document comprises two components: a) threats from land-based runoff; and b) threats from shipping activities in the GBRWHA.

Members discussed the Strategic Direction document and agreed that, to make the best possible use of time, a working group should be created to 'fine tune' the document. They will further develop an outline for the document and this will be the major focus of a workshop at the next meeting. It was felt that RAC members represent a wide cross-section of the community and stakeholders and should be able to provide the necessary stakeholder input to make this a worthwhile "draft" strategic document which could be exposed to external comment.

COMMONWEALTH AQUACULTURE APPROVAL PROCESS

The Committee was provided with a brief review on the Australian Prawn Farmers Association (APFA) position. APFA is very keen on pursuing a State/Commonwealth agreement and is in the process of getting comments on the agreement together. While feedback from the industry indicates that the service level from the GBRMPA has improved, there is still concern with the fact that 'everyone has a finger in the pie'.

The Committee was then provided with an update on the GBRMPA's position in the aquaculture approval process, noting the following:

- Six one-stop shop referrals;
- Eight GBRMPA permits to discharge aquaculture waste have been granted;
- Three GBRMPA applications currently being assessed;
- One one-stop shop referral being processed;
- One Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) approval; and
- Four EPBC assessments in process.

REVIEW OF COMMUNICATION, EXTENSION AND OTHER ACTIVITIES IN PROGRESSING ACTION TO ADDRESS WATER QUALITY IN THE GBRWHA

The Committee was advised that the WQ&CD Group had contracted a research scientist from the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) to talk to the science community, Government departments, industry groups and other interested parties about the concept of managing risk with respect to scientific certainty and water quality issues in the GBRWHA and its catchment. The Committee was provided with a presentation on Assessing Scientific Evidence and Uncertainty in the Management of Water Quality Impacts on the GBR, and were advised that while this particular presentation is aimed at scientists, there are other various versions specifically aimed at different audiences.

Members advised that the communication outline should be included in the Strategic Directions document. The WRAC was pleased to see the development of the communication process, as this has been seen as a major strategic need.

A SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF QUEENSLAND COASTAL COMMUNITIES

The Committee was provided with a presentation on GBR Coastal Communities: A Social and Economic Profile. The presentation provided a summary of the socio-economic profile of the 26 Local Government Areas adjacent to the GBRMP, and included socio-economic information from inland communities that make up the GBR catchment region.

The seafood industry representative and other members expressed concern at many of the calculations, including likely double-counts, use of less than the best available data, a variety of incomparable bases for calculation between industries and the possible inappropriate multipliers. The Committee was advised that the seafood industry rejects the use of these numbers for the Representative Areas Program (RAP) debate or any other process, and requests the GBRMPA to rework the dataset as a matter of priority.

After hearing the presentation, members advised:

- Where there was information missing;
- This seems to be more traditional economic profiling, perhaps should think about looking at people's perceptions and what the drivers are;
- When looking at the priority areas identified in the Action Plan, social profiling will be required in order to identify what the real costs are; and
- Should not ignore ecosystem values – look at economic value of ecosystems.

PRESENTATIONS ON PROGRAMS ASSOCIATED WITH ADDRESSING WATER QUALITY ISSUES IN THE GBRWHA CATCHMENT

At the previous meeting, the Committee expressed that they were interested in having an update on new research and development (R&D) initiatives. Members heard the following presentations:

- Rainforest and Reef Cooperative Research Centres: Catchment to Reef;
- Healthy Country;
- CRC Research Program Initiatives; and
- CRC for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management.

SUSTAINING OUR AQUATIC ENVIRONMENTS CONFERENCE

The Chairperson reported to the Committee that over 200 people attended the "Sustaining our Aquatic Environments" conference in Townsville during 20-23 November 2001. There was a wide representation of land users, conservationists, industry, community, decision-makers and scientists. The papers are currently being edited and will be available on a CD and the Australian Water Association website in July 2002.

REVIEW OF RAC'S PERFORMANCE, OUTCOMES AND BENEFIT/COSTS

The Chairperson presented a summary of members' responses to the questionnaire circulated prior to the meeting. The key issues identified in terms of restricting the effectiveness of the Committee will be discussed at the next meeting, with a view to improving the performance and value of the Committee. Key issues will be focussing on priority and strategic issues and building on the value of the Committee as a wide representation of the community in providing early advice on developing programs.

OTHER BUSINESS

The Committee was provided with a presentation on innovative approaches to improve implementation of practices that will lead to improved catchment management and water quality. This presentation generated considerable discussion on alternative strategies to those currently used, and the Committee will pursue these and other alternative strategies at future meetings.

NEXT MEETING

It was proposed that the next meeting be held in October 2002.

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

Mr Tony Allingham	Grazing Industry
Ms Claudia Baldwin	Department of Natural Resources
Mr Harry Bonanno	Sugarcane Industry
Cr Greg Breckell	Local Government
Mr Martin Breen	Aquaculture
Mr Noel Dawson (Chairperson)	Water Quality
Mr Tony Fontes	Tourism Industry
Dr Miles Furnas	AIMS/CRC Water Quality
Mr Nick Heath	Qld Seafood Industry Association
Ms Margaret Moore	Conservation
Ms Sheriden Morris	GBRMPA
Mr Chris Pattearson	Environmental Protection Agency
Dr Christian Roth	CSIRO Tropical Land and Water Management
Dr Nick Schofield	Catchment Management
Dr Roger Shaw	Coastal CRC
Mr Kirk Smith	Catchment Management/Landcare
Mr Ian Sutton	Conservation
Mr Mark Tucker	Environment Australia
Mr Vern Veitch	Recreational Fishing
Ms Imogen Zethoven	Conservation