



## WATER QUALITY AND COASTAL DEVELOPMENT REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE (WRAC)

26<sup>th</sup> Meeting

26 and 27 February 2009 – Townsville

### SUMMARY DOCUMENT

The twenty-sixth meeting of the WRAC was held on 26 and 27 February 2009 in Townsville. The Chairman paid respect to the Traditional Owners and acknowledged their traditional land and sea country in the Townsville region.

A summary of the outcomes of the main items discussed is set out below.

#### GREAT BARRIER REEF OUTLOOK REPORT

The Committee was updated on the progress on the preparation of the Outlook Report, including key messages about water quality and coastal development, and the timetable for completion of the Report.

An important milestone was reached on 24 February 2009, when the Report was despatched to the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) in preparation for the external peer review process. Comments from the peer review process are due back to the Minister by the end of March 2009. The final submission of the Report to the Minister remains on track for 30 June 2009. Shortly after this time, the Minister will table the Report in Parliament.

Members made the following comments in discussion:

- The issue of coastal development has been raised for a number of reasons, particularly community perceptions of coastal development and coastal development pressures in the Great Barrier Reef. The Report will reflect those sorts of issues. The GBRMPA is keen for the WRAC to provide advice on the sorts of areas the GBRMPA should be focusing on in regards to a response, and where the GBRMPA's efforts would best be directed.
- The EPA may look at floodplain hydrology as the next step forward; long-term viability depends on hydrology. Floodplain health has a direct link to the health of the Great Barrier Reef.
- The emphasis being put on Traditional Owner (TO) involvement was noted. Perhaps more stakeholder consultation is needed with state and federal plans, not just local government.
- Planners would benefit significantly from knowing the cumulative effects of coastal development on the Great Barrier Reef. The whole impact of coastal development, as it affects the Great Barrier Reef, is a huge underpinning issue which many find difficult to understand.
- The GBRMPA could introduce this type of information at an educational level, through stakeholder groups and industry. To successfully get the message across, the process needs to be more conversational than regulatory, and the information needs to be in a form that is easily understood (i.e. less scientific).

In concluding discussion, members noted the progress in preparing the 2009 Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report, and the information presented in the independent reviewers' draft Report on management effectiveness for coastal development and possible GBRMPA actions.

#### MARINE MONITORING PROGRAM UPDATE

The Committee was given a presentation on the progress of the marine monitoring program and its integration in preparation for contributing to the development of a paddock to Reef Great Barrier Reef Report Card.

Members made the following comments in discussion:

- Information on storm pollutants needs to be included.
- The Reef Guardian Schools program plays an important role. Many of the schools involved produce their own calico bags and posters for promotional purposes.
- There is no information on the amount of litter that makes its way into the Marine Park.

Members were also presented a satellite image of the flood plumes associated with the recent flooding events in north Queensland, particularly around Townsville and Cairns. Currently, the Great Barrier Reef is coming under stress from salinity levels as well as higher water temperatures; while coral can survive bleaching events, they cannot survive low salinity. Members were advised there is no evidence at this time that links an outbreak of Crown-of-thorns starfish with excess nutrient levels as a result of a flood plume.

#### RESTRUCTURE AND REVIEW OF COASTAL ECOSYSTEM AND WATER QUALITY WORK PROGRAM – PROGRAM LOGIC

The Committee was briefed on the changes associated with the GBRMPA's new structure, which has resulted in the Group now being known as the Coastal Ecosystems and Water Quality (CE&WQ) Group. A presentation was provided on the Group's program logic and how the Group's work program links in. The GBRMPA has a statutory responsibility to report on the health of the Great Barrier Reef, through Outlook and other reporting. The CE&WQ Group still has a major role to play in contributing to that reporting process.

Members discussed where the responsibility lays for various agencies in terms of the management of water quality in the GBRMP, and the route that sediment takes along the way.

Members made the following comments in discussion:

- There was concern that decisions currently being made by governments, which could potentially have major benefits for the Great Barrier Reef, are being made in the absence of available data.
- While the GBRMPA's main responsibility is marine, and the impacts on the Great Barrier Reef, it is important that they also have input into decisions regarding terrestrial impacts (e.g. what pollutants are most important to address).
- Engagement and how the guidelines are used are important considerations. Many stakeholders will likely need some direct one-on-one interaction to focus on how they should use the guidelines.

In concluding discussion, members agreed that the Group's new work program has reached a new level of sophistication, not only in what the Group does, but the rationale behind the actions. Long-standing members agreed that this was a very positive step forward compared to the work programs of previous years.

### **SUSTAINABLE COASTAL DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The Committee was given a presentation on the current activities and issues in relation to coastal development adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef, including the Reef Guardian Council Program; identifying and promoting local government actions to implement Reef Plan; the Product Steward for Oil Program; CoastInfo; and the Coastal Development Position Paper/Coastal Ecosystems Program Logic.

There was concern at the apparent absence of Indigenous input. The Indigenous representative undertook to network with her representative group with a view to presenting an update at the next meeting.

### **REEF PLAN REWRITE/UPDATE**

The Committee was given a presentation on the progress made in the rewrite of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan and the integration of the Monitoring Program framework. Members were asked to comment on the role and the level of engagement of the GBRMPA in the re-written Reef Plan.

Members agreed that the GBRMPA's involvement is critical to link the programs; there is a need for stakeholders to have formal input into the process; the process needs to be adequately resourced and properly supported; there needs to be focus on where the responsibility lies; an independent science panel is important; and the involvement of Traditional Owners needs to be highlighted and addressed somewhere in the process.

### **REEF RESCUE UPDATE**

Members were updated on the progress of the implementation of the Reef Rescue package, particularly in relation to the coastal regional natural resource management bodies and peak agricultural industry bodies, as well as the GBRMPA's activities in relation to the package. Members were also updated on the Land and Sea Country Indigenous Partnerships Program.

Members agreed that there is a need for co-ordination between stakeholder groups and the Australian Government

in respect to the Government's Caring for our Country initiative.

### **WRAC TERM REVIEW**

The current term of all four RACs expires on 31 July 2009. Members' comments were sought on the Committee's performance over the last three years and suggestions for the future direction of the RAC process.

Members agreed that the Committee was effective and provided valuable advice to the GBRMPA; however, some were concerned about the appropriateness and/or relevance of some of the representation around the table including, in some instances, themselves. Members were reminded that the RACs are expertise-based with representation from both individuals and organisations.

The GBRMPA acknowledged the value of learning first-hand the insights provided by this Committee, as well as the opportunity for the GBRMPA to seek advice on a range of issues such as fine-tuning policy prior to public release.

The WRAC meetings have provided the opportunity for members to come together and speak openly and frankly on a range of issues that they may not have had the capacity to do in other fora. It was also acknowledged the capacity to value-add to the CE&WQ Group's work program, using the skills from each of the members.

Members agreed that the main focus of the WRAC should continue to be on water quality issues, with some coastal development, ecosystem and climate change issues included.

### **REPORTS AND ISSUES**

Members each provided a report on issues and activities within their representative group.

### **NEXT MEETING**

The dates for WRAC meetings during the remainder of 2009 are:

- WRAC 27 – 18 and 19 June; and
- WRAC 28 – 22 and 23 October.

#### **CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE**

Mr Mike Berwick AM .....	Terrain NRM
Ms Veronica Blazely .....	Dept of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
Mrs Leith Bouilly .....	Independent Chairperson
Mr Grahame Byron .....	Qld Government – Reef Secretariat
Mr Rob Cocco .....	Reef Catchments
Dr Piet Filet .....	Non-Government Organisation, Conservation
Professor Iain Gordon .....	CSIRO
Ms Sandy McCathie .....	Sustainable Practices in Building and Development Industry
Ms Rachel Mackenzie .....	Horticulture Industry
Ms Sheriden Morris .....	Marine and Tropical Science Research Facility
Ms Joann Schmider .....	Indigenous
Mr Kirk Smith .....	Landcare
Mr Bob Sullivan .....	Cape York NRM
Mr Vern Veitch .....	Recreational Fishing
Mr Hugh Yorkston .....	Director, GBRMPA
Mr Doug Yuille .....	Qld Environmental Protection Agency
Vacant .....	Qld Local Government Association
Vacant .....	Sugar Industry
Vacant .....	Tourism Industry