



WATER QUALITY AND COASTAL DEVELOPMENT REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE (WRAC) 14th Meeting – 23 and 24 September 2004 – Townsville SUMMARY DOCUMENT

BRIEFINGS ON PROGRESS

National Action Plan (NAP)/Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) Progress

- Information Systems for Regional Arrangements (ISRA) is moving ahead and funding is being sought.
- Designation criteria have been developed and all regional bodies except South West Natural Resource Management (NRM), Cape York, Torres Strait and South East Queensland have been designated.
- The regional NRM website is now active. The address is regionalnrm.qld.gov.au
- The Regional Investment Strategy (RIS) guidelines have been released and are quite specific about requirements for RIS.
- Both a Reef and climate module are on the web for regional groups to access. The Reef module gives guidance on how to ensure Reef actions are suited to the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan (Reef Plan).
- The Water and Salinity Statewide Investment Program has developed a compendium of information with definitive links. The compendium needs to be widely distributed so people can see where links are.
- A draft partnership agreement between the State, the Commonwealth and the regional bodies has been developed.

Burnett/Mary NRM Board

- The interim plan is about to go to the Joint Steering Committee (JSC) for approval.

Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA)

- The FBA plan has been accredited and currently working on the RIS.
- The FBA is still proceeding with the Boyne and Calliope section of the plan.
- The requirements for the RIS will be tidied up within the next week and it is hoped it will get approval at the next JSC meeting in October 2004.
- An Executive Officer has been appointed.

Mackay/Whitsunday NRM Group (MWNRM)

- The Mackay/Whitsunday regional plan is with the Technical Advisory Panel and then it will be sent to the Coordination Committee for assessment and comment.
- The current Executive Officer has resigned, but will stay with the group until the plan is presented. A new Executive Officer has been appointed.

Burdekin Dry Tropics Board

- The draft plan has gone to the Northern Coordination group for the third time. If approved, the plan will be sent to JSC.
- It is intended to launch the plan for public comment late October 2004.
- The Chairman position has been re-advertised.
- Two consultancies have recently been advertised: a marine and coastal study; and an Indigenous/traditional owner plan.

Wet Tropics

- The State Minister released the Wet Tropics plan for public comment on 17 September 2004 for a six-week public consultation period.
- Work has commenced on the RIS.
- The inaugural meeting of members will be held on 5 November 2004.
- It is hoped the plan will be submitted to the JSC and finalised for accreditation around Christmas.

GBR Wetlands Program

There are currently four projects being delivered on through Queensland agencies:

- 1) Mapping and classification of wetlands across Queensland.
- 2) Inventory Database of Wetlands.
- 3) The Environmental Protection Agency is also developing Wetlands Management Profiles to provide a one-stop shop for management information for wetland managers.
- 4) The Department of Natural Resources and Mines is conducting a Queensland Wetlands Information Review and Gap Analysis.

Projects funded through the Great Barrier Reef Coastal Wetlands Protection Program (GBRCWPP) include:

- The Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) produces a very comprehensive report on a range of incentives and has now been asked to produce a 15-page 'key findings' document.
- A decision support system to assist investors in making decisions or choices when there is more than one wetland being developed.

- The Federal Minister announced a \$2 million, two-year Pilot Program for the GBRCWPP.

Members reiterated the need to ensure that there is not duplication, as the State Government has done a lot of this mapping; and that it is essential to engage the local government and the industry.

REEF WATER QUALITY PROTECTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Members were given a presentation outlining the following:

- Implementation activities for the Reef Plan;
 - Development of the Reef Plan Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Framework;
 - Establishment of an Advisory Committee to provide advice on the progress of the implementation; and
 - Queensland Monitoring and Evaluation Implementation Plan.
- Members provided the following comments:
- There was concern regarding the structure in place and its ability to monitor if targets are being met.
 - Both State Development and Department of Local Government and Planning need to be involved.
 - It will be difficult to deliver on the actions of the Reef Plan if there is not a whole of government approach.
 - Need to ensure that global warming/sea temperature is taken into consideration.
 - The report submitted to the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Council should be publicly available.

In considering the establishment of an Advisory Committee, members advised:

- It would be better to use an existing committee rather than establish another advisory committee.
 - As there is a range of wider interests at play than the regional bodies in the Great Barrier Reef, ensure that there is a general mix of representation.
- At the last meeting, members had identified key issues of concern.

Further comment on these issues was provided, including:

Short timeframes for the regional plan development

- The industry has really strong feelings about this issue.
- There is a general feeling that the timelines are too fast and there is not enough time to absorb the information and how it will affect everyone.
- Unrealistic expectations have been set at the high level and now many processes are behind.
- Although the groups have been given a deadline for the plans, there will not be any more transitional funding after Christmas and, as a result, there may be some poor RIS programs.

Ownership of landholders of plans

- Holding property level planning workshops is a useful mechanism as it brings together the key industry bodies, key government agencies and regional groups.

Members agreed that this would be a useful exercise to see if an outcome can be determined.

CRC CATCHMENT TO REEF

The Director of the CRC Reef advised the Committee that the CRC will be raising the profile of water quality and the issue is now co-equal with other issues that have traditionally held the institution's attention. Members were further advised that the CRC's water quality program, when completed, will be submitted to the WRAC for comment and advice. During discussion, members provided the following comments on the activities of the CRC Catchment to Reef programs:

- An area in which the CRC could be beneficial is distilling research data for community digestion.
- It is very important that the GBRMPA style of activities is aligned with what the Consortium for Integrated Resource Management (CIRM) approach might be.

Members were advised that information regarding the Healthy Country, Healthy Reef conference can be found at the following website:

<http://www.rainforest-crc.jcu.edu.au/events/Catchment%20to%20Ree%20Conf.htm>

MORETON BAY PRESENTATION

Members were provided with a briefing on the activities and processes of the Moreton Bay Waterways and Catchments Partnership and the South East Queensland Regional Water Quality Management Strategy, including:

- The setting of water quality objectives;
 - The development of partnerships to action these in the Moreton Bay region; and
 - Innovative approaches developed to monitor and report on the condition of Moreton Bay and the adjacent waterways.
- During discussion, the following points were made:
- The Reef Plan's monitoring program is too expensive; it needs to be done with minimum dollars.
 - The linkages are essential.
 - Community based monitoring is sometimes under-rated and under-valued.
 - There are a lot of techniques that have come out of the Moreton Bay project that are transferable.
 - The partnership with the CRC Reef is crucial.
 - Local government needs to be engaged.

COASTAL CATCHMENT INITIATIVE (CCI) IN THE GBR CATCHMENT

The Committee was updated on the roll out of the CCI and the development and implementation of the Water Quality Improvement Plans (WQIP) and heard that:

- WQIP are currently being developed in urban areas and aimed at point source pollution.
- While the CCI was designed to address catchment water quality in coastal and urban hot spots, the load-based approach is also relevant to the Reef area.
- The whole Reef catchment will be considered as one hot spot; this will encourage better interaction with Reef Plan actions.
- A pilot project is being conducted in the Douglas Shire.
- Priority catchments will be identified and then the WQIP will be developed.
- This process should provide a structured approach to setting targets.
- This approach needs to be endorsed by the government, the Reef Plan Operational Committee and the Joint Steering Committee.
- \$7 million has been allocated for the next two years.
- Regions will be contacted in November and asked to provide feedback on the proposed approach.

Members advised:

- It would be good to know how the catchments will be prioritised.
- Ensure that what is being proposed under CCI is well integrated with all the other processes underway.
- Understand that there are efforts being made in all catchments already and the last thing needed is to have those processes underway modified.
- The capacity and willingness of the catchments to take on this process will be crucial.
- A set of criteria should be developed by which a catchment can be judged if it is more of a priority than another.

It was agreed that a document articulating the objectives of the WQIP, the process, issues to be considered and a list of criteria to prioritise catchments, should be prepared and distributed.

DISCUSSION OF SUGAR INDUSTRY AUDIT

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, on behalf of the Sugar Industry Guidance Group, commissioned an independent environmental audit of the value chain of sugar industry production from farm to refinery. The audit was undertaken by consultants C4ES Pty Ltd and was recently released. A copy of the full report can be found at: <http://www.affa.gov.au/content/output.cfm?ObjectID=CE264379-360F-47F2-9120DDA17BC39936>

CONSORTIUM FOR INTEGRATED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Members were briefed on an initiative of CIRM that aims to coordinate research and development to support Reef Plan outcomes. A meeting involving key agencies and organisations involved in funding research and development (R&D) was held last week. Outcomes of that meeting were:

- Agencies and institutions completed a table indicating existing, ongoing activities, and showed how these aligned with the Reef Plan actions.
- CIRM appointed a project officer for four months, who will conduct a gap analysis.
- It is anticipated that priorities for the gap analysis can be integrated with needs of possible funding bodies and providers.
- The information will be reported back to the Interagency Operations Committee.

IDENTIFYING AND SETTING REGIONAL/STATE/NATIONAL WATER QUALITY TARGETS FOR REEF PLAN

Members were advised that a meeting involving government agency technical staff and key research providers was held in August to discuss progressing the development of the State-wide water quality monitoring

program and further modelling and information requirements. At the meeting, it was identified that a program to assist regional bodies to develop end-of-valley targets by June 2005 was required and that this might be achieved by:

- a) Updating the existing modelling with the best currently available information, such as using a higher resolution Digital Elevation Model.
- b) Enhancing the nutrient modelling capacity to the extent that it is achievable in the short term (six months).
- c) Testing with provenance tracing techniques some of the catchment 'hot spots' identified in the Brodie et al (2004) report.
- d) Running prognostic scenario models based on the proposed management actions that can be modelled to inform regional bodies that proposed management actions will deliver reductions in sediment and nutrient delivery to the end-of-valley.

The five activities identified to achieve these actions are:

- 1) Develop a communication strategy for the use of models to assist in target setting;
- 2) Review which management actions can be modelled;
- 3) Nutrient enhancements to existing models;
- 4) Validation of Brodie et al Sednet outputs; and
- 5) Regional modelling undertaken.

It was further advised that 'the way forward' proposal had gone to the Inter-Departmental Operations Committee (IOC) and it had been approved in principle; however, the document needed to be re-worked, and that was currently being undertaken.

During discussion the following comments were noted:

- The whole process will fall over unless there is a robust scientific framework.
- The first step is to get the cooperation and support of the regions. This step is imperative. The next step is to take the management actions and quantify them in terms of effects that can be modelled. Then the models can be used to quantify water quality targets at a regional level. If this leads to an improved water quality outcome this can be the initial target and subsequent and ongoing improvements can be factored in over time as part of their region's adaptive management process, as expressed in the regional plans. If improvement in water quality is achieved the regions may need to re-evaluate and renegotiate specific management action targets and model these new actions to quantify their water quality targets.
- Some regions have already started a process for establishing targets, so how this work will proceed needs to be clearly set out soon.
- This process needs to start now.
- There was concern that the model will be used in the whole of the GBR catchment scale and this information needs to be applicable to specific catchments or regions.
- It was clarified that models would be run at a catchment scale but just once across the whole catchment.
- The critical issue is this process for developing water quality targets may cut across a lot of other processes; e.g., Strategic Investment Proposals (SIPs). Need to determine the institutional arrangements and who has the authority of leading the science program.
- The resources required for the whole program over the next 2-3 years would be in the vicinity of \$500,000.
- There needs to be a strong recommendation from the JSC level to the regional bodies advising that this is an agreed way forward.
- The regional groups need something to take to their respective boards.
- Peak industry bodies need to be approached as well.

NEXT MEETING

It was proposed that the next meeting be held in November 2004.

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

Mr Tony Allingham	Grazing Industry
Cr Mike Berwick	Wet Tropics NRM
Ms Veronica Blazely	Dept Environment and Heritage
Mr Harry Bonanno	Burnett/Mary NRM
Mr Martin Breen	Aquaculture
Mr Noel Dawson (Chairman)	Water Quality
Mr Tony Fontes	Tourism Industry
Dr Miles Furnas	AIMS/CRC Water Quality
Mr Richard Leck	Conservation
Ms Sheriden Morris	CSIRO
Dr Tony Pressland	Qld Dept Natural Resources and Mines
Mr Clive Rogers	Mackay/Whitsunday NRM
Dr Nick Schofield	Catchment Management
Mr Kirk Smith	Catchment Management/Landcare
Mr Ian Sutton	Conservation
Mr Vern Veitch	Recreational Fishing
Ms Barbara Wildin	Fitzroy Basin Association
Dr Tim Wrigley	Canegrowers
Mr Hugh Yorkston	GBRMPA