

A summary document is prepared after each meeting of the Reef Advisory Committee (RAC) 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 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's (GBRMPA) Secretariat, or to the appropriate Member.



Australian Government
Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority

WATER QUALITY AND COASTAL DEVELOPMENT

REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE (WRAC)

21st Meeting

26 and 27 July 2007 – Townsville

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

The twenty-first meeting of the WRAC was held on 26 and 27 July 2007 in Townsville. A summary of the outcomes of the main items discussed is set out below.

REEF WATER QUALITY PROTECTION PLAN (REEF PLAN) UPDATE AND PRIORITIES

The Committee heard that this is a critical time for the Reef Plan, which is being updated. Stakeholder groups have expressed concerns that the objectives of Reef Plan can only be achieved if appropriate resources are allocated. Members agreed there needs to be a paradigm shift in Reef Plan implementation if we really want to make a difference to water quality on the GBR.

A “stewardship” framework for agricultural land use is to be developed and workshopped at a future WRAC meeting. The concept of “stewardship” should include definition of duty of care, best management practice as well as links to incentive schemes. Three members of the Committee agreed to participate in a Working Group to assist in developing the paper. A report will be provided to the Committee at a future meeting.

Regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) Groups

Members were briefed on a paper currently being developed by several regional NRM groups, relating to on-ground investment for Reef resilience. The document is yet to be completed, with the initial work being undertaken by the Mackay/Whitsunday NRM Group and industry groups. There is a strong collegial, industry partnership, whole of catchment approach, which is priority based.

The Committee showed general support for the document, and encouraged the GBRMPA to support the process. Members agreed that monitoring and evaluation of the proposed outcomes is critical.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND RESILIENCE

The Committee supported the principle that Climate Change is intimately connected to ensuring a “resilient” Reef ecosystem. In the emerging light of climate change, we need to focus on improving water quality to build resilience in the Reef.

Members were provided with a presentation on the ClimateSmart Adaption 2007-2012 and ClimateSmart 2050 that includes a number of actions that will be directly relevant to the GBR. The strategy aims to reduce emissions by 60% by 2050. The key attributes of carbon offsets are additionality, monitoring and reporting, independent verification, permanence and ownership.

Members were provided with a second presentation on collaboration of the various sectors in an effort to address the next phase of the GBRMPA Climate Change Action Plan. The Action Plan has been funded for five years, and is awaiting approval for release by the Minister.

Members acknowledged the importance of industry partnerships. It is also important for the GBRMPA to engage with the tourism sector to encourage the industry to understand how they may contribute to impacts of Climate Change.

Members felt not enough is being done to promote renewable energy particularly in North Queensland, where solar energy should be encouraged.

The Committee agreed that the Queensland Government lacks a GBR focus in regard to climate change matters and encouraged the GBRMPA to engage with the Queensland Government to ensure a cross-sector awareness of this issue.

The Committee believed any carbon trading system should allow multiple ecosystem benefits for the GBR catchment. The Committee also agreed that the notion of the GBR catchment becoming carbon neutral would be a positive aspirational goal, providing huge benefits to the health of the GBR, and providing opportunities for reinvestment of resources.

The Action Plan and Reef Plan need investment to bring results to bear. The continued investment in science, re-alignment of programmes, and properly engaging with tourism and regional bodies are all positive steps.

The Committee will continue to have the issue of climate change as a standing agenda item for future meetings.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Members were updated on the GBRMPA's research priorities for water quality, and provided some suggestions in relation to gaps in critical research needs. The Committee considered the current research priorities are dominated by questions that direct research to "science discovery" than "management" questions.

The Committee acknowledged that the review of research priorities is a fluid process, and agreed to provide some assistance to the GBRMPA through a Working Group.

The Committee requested a report at a future meeting on the research outcomes from the first year of Marine and Tropical Science Research Facility (MTRSF).

OUTLOOK REPORT

The Committee was updated on progress of the Outlook Report, and noted that the first Report must be submitted to the Minister by 30 June 2009.

The Committee provided input into key areas for the Report, namely:

- 1 Data sets that could serve as guides to current and future trends;
- 2 Pressures from a water quality and coastal development perspective that may be relevant in preparing the Outlook Report;
- 3 Ways to effectively engage the water quality and coastal development sector during the development of the Outlook Report; and
- 4 Ongoing engagement with WRAC.

COASTAL DEVELOPMENT

Members were provided with presentations on coastal development from three different perspectives: Queensland Government management arrangements; the National Sea Change Taskforce's policy framework; and emerging and changing approaches, particularly in relation to sustainable practices in the housing industry.

Members were concerned at the lack of obvious protection of water-courses in many development projects. There was also concern that numerous ad hoc developments would impact greatly on the entire Queensland and GBR coastline.

Members were particularly concerned that, in some instances, projects approved many years ago are required to be honoured, even though they may not be approved today, given the more up-to-date information on current land management and best practices available during the assessment process.

The Committee agreed to recommend that the GBRMPA develops a position paper on the impacts of coastal development on the GBR. In preparing the position paper, the GBRMPA should consider the interaction with the Marine Park in relation to coastal land, wetlands, pollution nodes and water use nodes.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting, WRAC 22, is proposed for November 2007.

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

Mr Mike Berwick	Far North Queensland NRM
Ms Veronica Blazely	Dept of the Environment and Heritage
Mrs Leith Bouilly	Independent Chairman
Mr Colin Creighton	Mackay-Whitsunday NRM
Mr Tony Fontes	Tourism Industry
Professor Iain Gordon	CSIRO
Mr Steve Greenwood	Qld Local Government Association
Mr Richard Leck	Non-Government Organisation, Conservation
Ms Andrea Leverington	Qld Government – Reef Secretariat
Ms Sandy McCathie	Sustainable Practices in Building and Development Industry
Ms Rachel Mackenzie	Horticulture Industry
Ms Sheriden Morris	Marine and Tropical Science Research Facility
Mr Kirk Smith	Landcare
Mr Bob Sullivan	Cape York NRM
Mr Vern Veitch	Recreational Fishing
Dr Tim Wrigley	Sugar Industry
Mr Hugh Yorkston	Director, GBRMPA
To be appointed	Indigenous