



CONSERVATION, BIODIVERSITY AND WORLD HERITAGE REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE 7th Meeting 7 and 8 March 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.

ADVICE REGARDING MAJOR ISSUES FOR THE GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK AUTHORITY (GBRMPA)

Members were provided with an outline of major issues being dealt with by the GBRMPA at present:

- Briefing of the new Minister of Environment, The Hon. David Kemp;
- The GBRMPA Audit of East Coast Trawl Fishery;
- Mission Beach trawl closure;
- Water quality;
- Far North section zoning plan;
- Crown-of-thorns starfish removal program; and
- Reef HQ closure for refurbishment.

WORLD HERITAGE UPDATE

The Committee were advised of World Heritage matters that have occurred since the last Conservation RAC (CRAC) meeting in July 2001, including:

- World Heritage Bureau meeting in Helsinki, Finland, December 2001;
- Attendance at a workshop on World Heritage biodiversity sites organised by UNESCO/IUCN/UNEP in Hanoi, Vietnam on 21 February-1 March 2002;
- The first Periodic Report for the Asia-Pacific region is due to be provided to the World Heritage Committee in June 2003. Members have requested that they are given the opportunity to provide input into the preparation of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA) Periodic Report that forms part of the Asia-Pacific Region Report and also have the opportunity to comment on the completed draft report. A sub-committee will be formed to provide the input to the report.

REPRESENTATIVE AREAS PROGRAM (RAP) UPDATE

There have been a number of achievements in the RAP since the last meeting in July 2001, including:

- A December Update has been printed and distributed;
- The repackaged Community Participation materials have been tested with positive feedback and suggestions for minor changes have been implemented;
- Biophysical datasets are continuing to be developed and refined for the analytical side of RAP;
- Report on classification phase of RAP has been positively peer reviewed and is now being revised;
- Maps showing the current levels of protection against reef and non-reef bioregions are available on the web; and
- Indigenous consultation strategy in place and has begun implementation.

Members were also advised of a possible launch date for RAP at the end of April, early May 2002.

The Committee recommended that the GBRMPA ensure that suitable evaluation and review processes were established as soon as possible so that the effectiveness of RAP meeting its objectives was able to be demonstrated in the future.

SPECIES CONSERVATION UPDATE

Staff of the Species Conservation Program reported on the activities of the Unit and advised that the following research publications had been published:

- *Shark Control Records Hincast Serious Decline in Dugong Numbers off the Urban Coast of Queensland* (by H Marsh, G Death, N Gribble and B Lane);
- *Dugong Distribution and Abundance in the Southern Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Hervey Bay: Results of an Aerial Survey in October-December 1999* (by H Marsh and I Lawler.) (Available at website www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/info_services/publications/research_publications/rp70/index.html);
- *A review of water quality issues influencing the habitat quality in Dugong Protection Areas* (by B Schaffelke, J Waterhouse and C Christie, GBRMPA Water Quality Unit). (Available at website www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/key_issues/water_quality/AroWOIHHQIDPA.pdf);
- *Seagrass and Marine Resources in the Dugong Protection Areas of: Upstart Bay, Newry Region and Sand Bay, Llewellyn Bay and Ince Bay and Clairview Region – April/May 1999 and October 1999* (by R G Coles, W J Lee Long, L J McKenzie and C A Roder) (Available at website www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/info_services/publications/research_publications/rp72/index.html).

GREAT BARRIER REEF TURTLE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

At the last CRAC meeting, the Committee decided that the issue of turtle conservation in the GBRWHA was to be considered in more detail, in particular the issue of a turtle research strategy.

The Committee was given a PowerPoint presentation which outlined background material on turtle research and introduced a meta-population simulation model for the southern GBR green turtle population. Dr Chaloupka demonstrated the functions of the model and explained a variety of scenarios that could be developed.

Members discussed and noted:

- The importance of long-term sea turtle research on the GBR;
- The invaluable contribution this work has made to our understanding of turtle biology and to management of human impacts on turtle species on the Reef;
- The model's intrinsic worth; and
- That although the datasets upon which the model were based are regarded as 'world best', the model could be improved with better data levels of human mortality and spatial heterogeneity of human induced mortality.

The Committee recommended that options be investigated for the model to be (a) further developed; and (b) be utilised for engaging traditional owners and stakeholders at scales relevant to their interests.

The Committee also acknowledged:

- The traditional and cultural importance of certain turtle species to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities;
- The need for these communities to continue those traditional practices;
- The importance of these communities being involved in ongoing turtle research; and
- The importance of continued long-term research through an appropriate program;

and therefore recommended that the Authority and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service continue to support the long-term continuation of core components of existing turtle research and develop priorities for additional research to complement and build on the existing program.

The Committee also made the following recommendations in relation to additional research projects that may improve the CHELONIA Turtle Population Model:

1. New data on feeding ground concentrations should be considered by the modellers for incorporation in view of their capacity to inform heterogeneity issues;
2. Better understanding of the distribution and quality of pasture critical to the survival of sea turtles; and
3. Better information on fisheries related mortality of turtle especially from trawl and net fisheries.

GBRMPA PERSPECTIVES ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Indigenous Policy and Liaison (IPLU) staff made a series of presentations to the Committee on:

- a) The approach taken by the GBRMPA to Indigenous issues;
- b) Agency priorities, in relation to Indigenous issues including staff education;
- c) Consultative processes between the GBRMPA and Indigenous communities in relation to the RAP. (Due to the limited communication with ATSI people about the RAP the Authority commissioned a report from Mr Dermot Smyth and Mr Bob Muir, on the most appropriate approach for consultation. The completed report presented a set of principles developed by Aboriginal people for application in the Program and a proposed consultation approach.)
- d) Cooperative management approaches;
- e) Native Title issues, including the implications of the Croker Island Decision; and
- f) Traditional hunting in the GBRMP, including current status of hunting, current GBRMP traditional hunting management regime, and future options and alternative procedures for cooperative management.

The Committee was advised that:

- a) A major concern of Indigenous people is future economic aspirations and how these aspirations will be affected by potential green zones in the RAP; and
- b) Traditional owners want a regulatory system in place for traditional hunting to enable them to prosecute illegal poachers with the full force of the law. The need to manage the southern GBR turtle stock in conjunction with other users outside Australian waters was also noted.

CRAC PERSPECTIVES ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES RELEVANT TO CONSERVATION, BIODIVERSITY AND WORLD HERITAGE (CB&WH)

The Committee received presentation from members as follows:

- Associate Professor Schnierer provided background information on the Convention on Biological Diversity, emphasising *Article 8(j)* of the Convention and advised the establishment of an Indigenous Advisory Committee under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act)*;
- Professor Marsh and Ms Nursey-Bray presented a PowerPoint presentation outlining the Hopevale Project; and
- Mr Leaver provided a brief overview of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act* requirements advising that the Act defines the environment as including both physical and cultural matters.

CRAC Discussion

Following the presentations, the Committee held wide-ranging discussion on Indigenous issues relevant to CB&WH matters.

An urgent need for closer cooperation with Indigenous communities in the management of biological resources in the GBRWHA was identified. The Committee recommended the GBRMPA undertake a pilot project with an Indigenous community and suggested some objectives for the project.

In relation to the moratorium on issuing permits for traditional hunting of turtle the Committee concluded that this policy was unworkable and a review was in order. The Committee recommended the GBRMPA approach Minister Kemp with a view to restoring the capacity to issue turtle permits (if appropriate) in consultation with traditional owners, emphasising the importance of cooperative solutions with Indigenous communities. The Committee also recommended that the GBRMPA investigate statutory mechanisms to manage traditional hunting.

Consultation and Engagement of the GBRMPA with Indigenous Communities

The Committee discussed at length the issues of consultation and engagement of the GBRMPA with Indigenous communities in CB&WH matters, in particular the RAP.

In discussion the following issues were noted:

- The enormous work program confronting the IPLU and other GBRMPA staff in relation to Indigenous issues;
- The GBRMPA may not be able to satisfy community expectations, particularly for Indigenous communities, with current resources for RAP;
- Unless issues relating to co-management, Native Title and traditional hunting and fishing were addressed in the framework of the RAP process then the whole program and subsequent zoning could be in jeopardy; and
- A more suitable framework for liaising with traditional owners needs to be established with improved networking of current bodies and processes to provide more efficient use of resources and maximise useful outcomes.

The Committee recommended to the GBRMPA that:

- a) Additional resources for addressing Indigenous issues in the GBRMP/GBRWHA be provided;
- b) Traditional owners be given priority over stakeholders in the GBRMPA's RAP negotiations;
- c) The special rights of traditional owners in the RAP process be explained to the wider community; and
- d) RAP negotiations with traditional owners be undertaken in the context of other concerns.

The Committee agreed to the development of a draft discussion paper on Indigenous issues relevant to CB&WH matters, building on the discussions at this meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

The Committee agreed to review its performance since its inception. The Chairperson will initiate a review process with members.

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

Mr Doug Baird	Tourism and Recreation
Ms Kate Davey	Conservation
Mr Jon Day	GBRMPA
Dr Pat Hutchings	Ecologist
Mr Ted Loveday	Fisheries
Prof Helene Marsh	Scientific Community
Mr Bruce Leaver	Environment Australia
Ms Melissa Nursey-Bray	Conservation
Mr Peter Ogilvie	Qld Parks and Wildlife Service
Assoc Prof Stephan Schnierer	Fisheries relating to Indigenous Peoples
Mr Tim Smith	Water Quality, Coastal Issues
Mr Peter Valentine	Conservation, Protected Areas Management
Mr Simon Woodley (Chairperson)	Research
Ms Imogen Zethoven	Conservation