



CONSERVATION, BIODIVERSITY AND WORLD HERITAGE REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CRAC) 15th Meeting 25 and 26 November 2004 – Townsville SUMMARY DOCUMENT

The 15th meeting of the CRAC was held on 25 and 26 November 2004 in Townsville. Following is a summary of the main items discussed at the meeting.

REPORT ON GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK AUTHORITY (GBRMPA) ACTIVITIES

The Committee was briefed on the recent activities of the GBRMPA, including the following issues:

- The GBRMPA is required to develop a monitoring program to report on the changes in water quality as it enters the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) and have recently advertised for expressions of interest, to develop and implement the monitoring program for the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan.
- During the election campaign it was stated that funding would go towards an organisation that would harness the expertise of Reef and Rainforest Co-operative Research Centre (CRC). The CRC Reef Research Centre Board is currently discussing the form, shape and focus of this new body.
- A strong relationship with the Australian Greenhouse Office (AGO) has been developed and they have been supportive of the coral bleaching work being undertaken by the GBRMPA. The AGO has given the GBRMPA \$1M to continue its coral bleaching work for the next two or three years.
- Through the encouragement of Senator the Hon Ian Campbell, a new Local Marine Advisory Committee (LMAC) has been established in Bundaberg.
- Future Eye (a consulting firm) has been contracted by the GBRMPA to determine what stakeholders and community groups thought about the Representative Areas Program (RAP) consultation process. The GBRMPA is placing community engagement as a high priority for its business and having an independent body analysing what was undertaken is extremely beneficial.

The CRAC supports a review process that is well structured and unbiased for determining the effectiveness of the RAP/rezoning public consultation processes.

The CRAC commented that the RAP/rezoning process has been a world leading process, based on expert scientific opinion and extensive community consultation, that achieved the goal of providing for no-take zones for protecting biodiversity while providing for reasonable use throughout the Marine Park.

The CRAC recommended that:

1. The new zoning plan should be implemented and monitored to determine the outcomes of the new plan; and

2. The zoning plan should only be reviewed after experience gained from an extensive implementation period.

UNIQUE AND SPECIAL AREAS UPDATE

Members were advised the draft report 'Identifying Special-Unique Sites in the GBRWHA (Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area)' is an historic documentation of the biophysical basis for identifying special and unique areas in the RAP process. It was noted that the report requires updating and members were asked to provide advice.

After discussion, the CRAC noted that:

- (a) The report seeks to document the basis for identifying special and unique areas in the RAP process;
- (b) The report is only concerned with the biophysical basis for special and unique areas; and
- (c) Equivalent social and cultural information about special and unique areas was not available at the time of RAP development;

and recommended that:

1. In the current exercise, an explicit link be made between the special and unique areas and the outstanding universal value of the GBRWHA as identified in Lucas et al 1997 "The Outstanding Universal Value of the GBRWHA"; and
2. In future identification of special and unique areas, the cultural relationships between people and their natural resources be included as part of the assessment. The CRAC noted that Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements (TUMRAs) should provide an opportunity for that to be done.

SHARK CONSERVATION

The GBRMPA's Project Manager for the State of the Reef Report has recently travelled to the United States and South-East Asia on a Churchill fellowship in June/July 2004 to look at shark conservation management. He provided a presentation discussing conservation and management of sharks in the United States and then outlined the status of sharks on the GBR, priority research needs, the information gaps, management challenges and potential mechanisms for community education.

After hearing the presentation, the CRAC commended the initiative of the GBRMPA in addressing shark conservation issues in the GBRWHA, and recommended that the GBRMPA:

1. Commissions research that -
 - (a) documents the traditional use of sharks and rays by Indigenous communities,

- (b) assesses the economic value of the shark fishery, in all forms, against the cost of managing the fishery, and
 - (c) assesses the value of “sharks” for tourism against their value as a fished species;
2. Ensures strong links between the shark conservation program and its obligations under the National Action Plan for shark conservation;
 3. Seeks advice on the environmental effects of the expansion of shark fishing in the Coral Sea;
 4. Includes a section about Indigenous shark fishing in the State of the GBRWHA report;
 5. Identifies the shark component of the inshore net fishery;
 6. Convenes a scientific workshop that identifies research and conservation priorities for shark conservation, including knowledge of traditional use;
 7. Commissions a report that identifies the important habitats within the GBRWHA for key shark species; and
 8. Commissions a report that examines the potential for providing protection under the GBRMP Act for those relevant sharks listed under the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Red List.

DUGONG ISSUES

An update was provided to members on dugong work in progress. It was shown through Geographical Information Systems (GIS) modelling that the RAP and the new Queensland Coastal Marine Park had increased the proportion of dugong habitat in the GBRWHA that was highly protected by 15% to approximately 50%. It was also reported that if dugong stocks were to be allowed to recover along the urban coast of Queensland, the anthropogenic mortality target should be zero. The corresponding figure for the northern GBR is about 100 dugongs per year. These targets included all sources of anthropogenic mortality.

MINKE WHALE PROJECT

Researchers from the Museum of Tropical Queensland and James Cook University provided a presentation outlining the swim-with-dwarf minke whale ecotourism project conducted with the involvement and support of the tourism industry in the northern GBR.

The CRAC commends the swim-with-minke whale research program as a model for effective collaboration between researchers and tourist operators.

TRADITIONAL USE OF MARINE RESOURCES – UPDATE

Members received a presentation discussing section 211 of the Native Title Act. After the presentation, the CRAC recommended that the GBRMPA:

1. Seek clarification of the application of s.211 of the Native Title Act in terms of its relationship with other laws concerned with the conservation of protected species;
2. Consider in its planning, the likely growth in Aboriginal local government bodies over the next five years or so, and their potential impact on the TUMRA process; and
3. Ensure that strong links are made between the Indigenous Advisory Committee established under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act and the Marine and Coastal Committee

(MACC) Taskforce on Indigenous hunting of dugong and turtle, that reports to the Natural Resource Management (NRM) Ministerial Council.

MONITORING/KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Over the past three meetings the CRAC has discussed the need for appropriate and adequate Performance Indicators and monitoring that might demonstrate that the objectives of the RAP have been achieved.

The GBRMPA is addressing these issues through the development of community engagement and monitoring programs, review of existing monitoring and KPIs in the light of the RAP/rezoning, and community surveys of expectations about monitoring.

After discussing these issues the CRAC commended the Authority for its initial work in addressing the monitoring and community engagement to determine the effectiveness of RAP/rezoning, and recommended that the GBRMPA:

1. Convene a scientific workshop to pool and synthesise the current state of knowledge about the State of the GBRWHA (similar workshops held in the past at approximately decadal intervals have been very informative);
2. Include monitoring of ecological processes and inter-reefal areas in any long-term monitoring program;
3. Work within the limitations and interests of the communities by demonstrating how community monitoring fits into the wider monitoring program, illustrating the benefits to the community from involvement in monitoring and providing a clear process for conduct and feedback about monitoring; and
4. Establishes a theoretical context for addressing monitoring, i.e. the current understanding of marine biodiversity and means of measuring change, as a way of demonstrating the practicalities of establishing a monitoring program that seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of RAP/rezoning.

The CRAC proposes to invite expert marine ecologists to address the CRAC at a future meeting, so that members may be better informed about marine biodiversity monitoring.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 28 and 29 April 2005.

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE	
Mr Doug Baird	Tourism & Recreation
Ms Kate Davey	Non-government organisation, Conservation
Mr Jon Day	GBRMPA
Dr Pat Hutchings	Non-government organisation, Ecologist
Mr Bruce Leaver	Dept of the Environment and Heritage
Mr Richard Leck	Non-government organisation, Conservation
Prof Helene Marsh	Scientific Community
Ms Melissa Nursey-Bray	Non-government organisation, Conservation
Mr Peter Ogilvie	Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service
Assoc Prof Stephan Schnierer	Indigenous Issues
Mr Tim Smith	Water Quality, Coastal Issues
Mr Duncan Souter	Queensland Seafood Industry Association
Mr Peter Valentine	World Heritage, Protected Area Management
Mr Simon Woodley	Independent Chair