

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

CONSERVATION, HERITAGE AND INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIPS REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CRAC)

25th Meeting

18 and 19 March 2009 – Townsville

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

The 25th CRAC meeting was held on 18 and 19 March 2009 in Townsville. The Chairman paid respect to the Wulgurukaba and Bindal 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

Members were updated on the progress made in preparing the 2009 Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report.

The Report is to be tabled by the Minister during the Parliament's sitting days, sometime between mid-August and mid-September 2009.

Members were reminded that the Report does not itself make recommendations; rather it will provide an opportunity to look into the future identifying possible impacts on the health of the Great Barrier Reef, and provide a good basis for the future management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The document is referenced with scientific material, and includes a lot of background and baseline information to set the scene for this first report. Subsequent Outlook Reports will likely be smaller, as there will be no need to include as much background information.

Members urged the GBRMPA to consider a variety of communication media to disseminate the final report to many different stakeholder audiences, including advice in a form that can be readily digested by people without scientific knowledge.

REPORT ON SUCCESSES IN COMMERCIAL FISHING INDUSTRY

Members were provided a presentation on the efforts of the commercial fishing sector to minimise their impacts on protected species and ensure sustainability of their operations, and it was noted that a lot of the work has been done by the fishers themselves.

Members supported the GBRMPA in engaging with the industry through constructive dialogue to encourage sustainable practices in the commercial fishing industry, and were keen to encourage the GBRMPA to progress towards an accreditation system.

EAST COAST INSHORE FINFISH FISHERY (ECIFF)

An update was provided to members on recent actions relating to the ECIFF and other current fisheries management issues within the GBRMP. It was noted that the Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) Declaration for the ECIFF will bring with it a whole range of new management systems. The changes will likely take some time to settle down, and industry will need time to adjust.

Members endorsed the priorities for research to ensure best practice management of the East Coast Inshore Finfish Fishery. The Committee noted that in broad terms the current approach

to fisheries management in the GBRMP is to provide for spatial separation of fishing through zoning and enforcement under the GBRMP Act, and be informed by research on impacts on habitats and target species. This is coupled with active involvement with Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries (QPI&F) for licensing controls of fisheries and with industry where appropriate. The Great Barrier Reef trawl fishery is a good example of this combination of management approaches.

In light of the recent decisions about the ECIFF and, in particular, the shark fishery, the Committee recommended that the GBRMPA reviews its current model for management of commercial and recreational fishing within the GBRMP and considers new approaches that include:

- (a) A review of policy objectives and outcomes for target and non-target species and fishing gear impacts on habitats;
- (b) Better understanding of the social and economic drivers of fisheries;
- (c) Better understanding of the different cultures of and within recreational, commercial and Indigenous fisheries;
- (d) Better data on total take particularly from commercial and recreational fisheries;
- (e) Better understanding of ecosystem effects of removal of target and non-target species, particularly top predators;
- (f) Better understanding of the population status and management needs of at-risk species, particularly sharks;
- (g) Examination of community-based social marketing tools to determine the capacity for attitudinal change within commercial and recreational sectors towards sustainability and EBM within the GBRMP;
- (h) Further engagement with the fishing industry in constructive dialogue to develop sustainable fisheries practices (Hinchinbrook Seafood Industry Inc might be a willing partner in such engagement); and
- (i) Schemes that recognise improved sustainability of fisheries such as through accreditation equivalent to those applied to high standard operators in the reef tourism industry.

SPECIES CONSERVATION ISSUES

Members were updated on the activities undertaken by the Species Conservation Unit, including:

International Sea Turtle Society

The 29th Symposium of the International Sea Turtle Society was held in February 2009. There were a number of Traditional Owner groups in attendance (including international Indigenous groups), who also gave presentations to the forum about the successes they have had. The resultant message was how strong and focussed they are with managing their resources, and the way they have incorporated traditional knowledge with western ideas in the management of those resources.

A study of turtles has been undertaken recently, looking at the change of genetic combination. An interesting finding was that turtles normally found in the southern areas of the Great Barrier Reef are now also being found in the northern Great Barrier Reef population. Although some geographic indicators say the population is not under stress, the reason for the shift to the north is not known.

Aquatic Snakes

Members noted the update on the Red List global assessment of the world's aquatic snakes, and the report by Dr Tony Courtney and researchers on "Quantifying and reducing the incidental catch and fishing mortality of sea snakes in the Queensland (Australia) trawl fishery".

Members endorsed the need for better data on the take of sea snakes such as that derived from studies undertaken by Dr Courtney and others. An understanding of the ecosystem effects of the take of sea snakes (incidental or deliberate) should also be sought. The Committee recommended that the GBRMPA seek to make popeye, fish box or other appropriate by-catch reduction devices (BRDs) mandatory under fisheries or other relevant legislation, for those sectors of the trawl fishery where they have been found to be effective.

INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIPS ISSUES

Members were updated on the activities currently being undertaken by the GBRMPA's Indigenous Partnerships Group.

Members noted with interest the proposed establishment of an Indigenous RAC which will be, as with the other RACs, expertise-based and include Indigenous and non-Indigenous members drawn from around Australia. Members also welcomed the GBRMPA's proposal to bring together, from time to time, all of the Indigenous members from all RACs.

An issue causing concern to Indigenous members involved their traditional rights of hunting turtle and dugong on their own sea country, and whether or not a Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreement (TUMRA) would be sufficient to enforce those rights.

Members agreed that advice should be sought on the legislative basis for control of hunting of dugong by non-Traditional Owners within TUMRA areas without the permission of the Traditional Owners for that TUMRA area.

SPAWNING AGGREGATION PROTECTION

Members noted the current situation for the protection of reef fish spawning aggregations and the possibility of the non-continuation of closures during the current economic crisis, and considered that there is an unacceptable risk to the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem as a whole if spawning closures do not continue in their current form or in an expanded form. The risks from not having closures are considered to be:

- (a) Direct risks to individual reefs and groups of reefs that aggregate spawning fish, through targeted fishing of aggregations, particularly by recreational fishers;
- (b) Indirect risks to both self-seeding reefs and those that depend on upstream reefs for sources of new larvae;
- (c) The undoing of the beneficial effects to reef biodiversity of four years of closures; and
- (d) Possible flow-on effects to other fisheries that utilise seasonal closures (e.g. the barramundi fishery).

The Committee noted that fisheries management issues were carefully considered in the 2003 rezoning, and the spawning closures were an integral part of the overall management package for fisheries that was considered when finalising the new zoning network. The Committee recommended that:

1. General conservation principles (e.g. the precautionary principle) that are designed to protect key ecological

processes such as spawning should be applied to cases such as this;

2. The objective should be to achieve the best conservation outcomes for the least economic or social cost; and
3. Seasonal fish spawning closures should continue with prioritised research to help refine the timing and location of these closures.

ECOSYSTEM BASED MANAGEMENT IN THE GBRWHA

A briefing was provided to members on the concept of ecosystem based management (EBM), and the need, following recent changes to the GBRMP Act, to be consistent with EBM and the principles of ecologically sustainable use when seeking to achieve the objects of the Act. Discussion took place on how the GBRMPA was seeking to demonstrate the degree to which current management practices were meeting the EBM approach and the principles of ecologically sustainable use.

Members agreed that the GBRMPA should be clear about what it does and why it does it in order to improve communication. Members also agreed that the GBRMPA needs a clear conceptual framework that allows weighting of the relative importance of factors in decision making. These factors may be weighted differently depending on the conceptual model used for marine resource management.

CRAC TERM REVIEW

The Chairman asked members for assistance in preparing his report on the effectiveness of the Committee over the current term of membership, which is due to expire on 31 July 2009.

Members may wish to consider the following questions for discussion at the next meeting:

- a) What is the most valuable aspect for you for your participation in the CRAC?
- b) What do you regard as the most important/effective items of advice from the CRAC to the GBRMPA during this last term (2006-2009)?

NEXT MEETING

The following dates were suggested for CRAC meetings for the remainder of 2009:

CRAC 26 – 22 and 23 July; and

CRAC 27 – 11 and 12 November 2009.

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

Mr Doug Baird	Tourism and Recreation
Ms Kate Davey	Non-Government Organisation, Conservation
Mr Jon Day	GBRMPA
Dr Pat Hutchings	Non-Government Organisation, Ecologist
Ms Anissa Lawrence	Fisheries Issues
Dr Ghislaine Llewellyn	Non-Government Organisation, Conservation
Mr Justin McCaul	Non-Government Organisation, Conservation
Prof Helene Marsh	Scientific Community
Mr Peter Ogilvie	Qld Environmental Protection Agency
Associate Professor Stephan Schrierer	Indigenous
Mr Bernie Singleton	Indigenous
Associate Professor Peter Valentine	World Heritage, Protected Area Management
Mr Simon Woodley	Independent Chairman
Vacant	Dept of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts