

**INDIGENOUS REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMUNIQUE**

Meeting 4 - 23 and 24 May 2016

*The Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee (IRAC) was established in 2015 to provide strategic-level advice to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Board to:*

*1) build a greater understanding of Traditional Owner issues within Marine Park management; and*

*2) address the risks to the Marine Park identified in the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Reports.*

*The IRAC is a competency-based committee with Members providing a cross-section of expertise and interests in areas relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities connected to the Great Barrier Reef. The Committee has been appointed from 18 March 2015 to 30 June 2018.*

**Introduction**

The fourth meeting was arranged to follow the Girringun Sea Country Forum held in Mission Beach on 20 – 22 May 2016 to enable greater engagement between IRAC members and Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef on matters of importance. The IRAC Chair, Mr Phil Rist, on behalf of the Members and Agency staff, acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the Mission Beach area, the Djiru peoples, their Elders past and present, and acknowledged all Traditional Owners and Indigenous communities connected to the Great Barrier Reef.

**GBRMPA Business Report**

**The committee noted the current status of the priority projects provided in the report.**

**Coral bleaching** - The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is coordinating and conducting in-water surveys across the Marine Park as part of its comprehensive response to mass coral bleaching. Based on the data that is being collected, the overall picture is one of widespread bleaching; however it’s not uniform in its severity. Bleaching is a clear sign of heat stress, but it doesn’t mean all affected corals will die. Surveys confirm the coral bleaching ranges from severe through to moderate and minor, with reefs between Port Douglas and the tip of Cape York being the most severely affected. It’s these far northern reefs that are experiencing a mortality rate of around 50 per cent.

As a practical measure to protect existing coral cover, we will also continue our efforts to cull the coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish — a program which received an additional $7 million under Reef Trust to support culling activities until June 2018. It is also important to protect critical herbivores (plant-eating fish) at this point to help keep the seaweed down and maximise the chances of reef recovery. The IRAC members noted the importance of the surveys and requested copies of herbivore information posters to spread the message of the importance of herbivores within their communities.

**Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program**

**The committee noted the information provided in the report for the Land and Sea Country Partnership Programme: 2013 - 2018.**

The Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program provides unique opportunities to plan and implement Sea Country Partnership arrangements with Great Barrier Reef Traditional Owners. The Director of Indigenous Partnerships, Ms Jessica Hoey provided a report on the status of the Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program and major outputs in the last three (3) months. Advice from the IRAC requested greater emphasis on the achievements associated with Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreements (TUMRAs) and their promotion. An offer was made for Department of Environment and Energy staff to visit TUMRA areas to gain a first-hand understanding of the work being undertaken on country. Through the sponsorship component of the Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program, GBRMPA partnered with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Marine Science in 15-16. This resulted in up to seventy (70) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that live adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef receiving advice about careers in Marine Science, marine park management and experiencing a trip to the reef with scientists. The IRAC commended this partnership and its valuable outputs, which align with influencing future generations to look after the reef.

**Animal Care and Protection Act – and traditional use methods**

**The committee discussed 2012 amendments to the Animal Care and Protection Act (Qld) and its application to legal traditional take.**

Animal welfare interest groups and other stakeholders, including some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, have voiced concerns about cruelty associated with the traditional hunting of sea turtles and dugong. This has been playing out on social media and IRAC commented some of the posts appeared vexatious and were low on facts.

A fact sheet, developed by Biosecurity Queensland, who administer the Animal Care and Protection Act (Qld) provides guidance for animal care and protection during traditional hunting, which is allowed under the Native Title Act, and supported under TUMRAs – to the extent that it is sustainable. This guidance provided in the fact sheet was discussed. IRAC advised greater guidance is needed within TUMRA permit systems to reduce the risk of a breach of the Animal Care and Protection Act. Suggestions around a code of conduct that explains what reasonable methods for dispatch are and what are not should be incorporated into TUMRA permit systems. Currently the fact sheet states the Act does not take away hunting rights but does protect turtle and dugong from unreasonable pain and suffering.

**GBRMPA Reconciliation Action Plan development**

The IRAC supported the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan for GBRMPA. It is a significant step for the Agency to reflect on the good work that has already been done and provide for better working relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, non-indigenous staff and people with cultural connections external to the Agency. IRAC advised the importance of the Garma Festival as an event which supports reconciliation and may provide avenues for GBRMPA to learn from others with mature reconciliation action plans.