

GREAT BARRIER REEF INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT 2015

An agreement between:

- **The Commonwealth of Australia; and**
- **The State of Queensland**

relating to the protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef

*Signed for and on behalf of the
Commonwealth of Australia by*

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'T. Abbott', written over a horizontal line.

The Honourable Tony Abbott MP
Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia

*Signed for and on behalf of the State of
Queensland by*

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'A. Palaszczuk', written over a horizontal line.

The Honourable Anastacia Palaszczuk
Premier of the State of Queensland

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
are the Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef area
and have a continuing connection to their land
and sea country

PREAMBLE

The Commonwealth and Queensland Governments have long demonstrated their commitment to working together collaboratively for the long-term protection and conservation of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem, to ensure it is preserved as an important feature of the nation's and the world's heritage. The Emerald Agreement formalised this cooperative approach in 1979 and a series of collaborative arrangements has evolved over time. The *Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement 2009* was established to provide a contemporary framework for cooperation between the governments, recognising challenges that were not foreseen at the time of the 1979 Agreement. With the development of the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan (Reef 2050 Plan), the Commonwealth and Queensland governments agreed on a vision for the future and renewed their commitment to protecting the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area including its Outstanding Universal Value. This agreement establishes these arrangements, clearly articulating objectives, respective functions and accountabilities.

The Great Barrier Reef and its Outstanding Universal Value

The Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest coral reef ecosystem and an Australian and international icon. The diverse range of habitat types and extraordinary biodiversity make the Great Barrier Reef one of the richest, most complex natural systems on earth. The area has significant environmental as well as social, economic and cultural values and plays an important role in the local, regional and national economies.

The Great Barrier Reef comprises a complex network of bioregions that interconnect with the adjacent onshore coastal and catchment ecosystems. These transcend jurisdictional boundaries and encompass overlapping areas of responsibility. Moreover, many of the major pressures on the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem are from outside the marine environment and encompass social and economic considerations on the land.

The Great Barrier Reef was internationally recognised in 1981 as being of Outstanding Universal Value with its inscription on the World Heritage List, under the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (the World Heritage Convention), as:

- containing superlative natural phenomena
- an outstanding example representing major stages of the earth's history, including significant landforms and physiographic features

- an outstanding example of significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution of marine and coastal ecosystems
- containing the most important natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including threatened species
- having integrity, including the fullest possible representation of marine ecological, physical and chemical processes
- having long-term protection and conservation in place

As a party to the World Heritage Convention, Australia has a duty to ensure the protection, conservation, presentation and transmission of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area for current and future generations and must do all it can to this end, to the utmost of its resources (Article 4). The approach the Australian and Queensland governments are taking to the protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area will ensure that its Outstanding Universal Value is sustained or enhanced over time (*Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, paragraph 96).

The Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area covers an area of 348 000 square kilometres and is also included in the National Heritage List established under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Jurisdictional Framework

The Commonwealth is responsible for the management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, established under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* within the Great Barrier Reef Region. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park extends over 2 300 kilometres along the Queensland coastline and covers approximately 344 400 square kilometres. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park generally extends over Queensland State coastal waters to the low-water mark, and, under the 1979 Offshore Constitutional Settlement, vesting of title and powers over these coastal waters is subject to the operation of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*.

Queensland is responsible for the management of the Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park, covering approximately 63 000 square kilometres, which is established under the *Marine Parks Act 2004* (Qld). This is contiguous with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and covers the area between low and high water marks and many waters within the limits of the State of Queensland.

There are around 1050 islands and cays within the boundaries of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The majority of the islands fall within the jurisdiction of Queensland and almost half of these are national parks under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Qld). There are around 70 islands that are owned by the Commonwealth and form part of the Marine Park.

The Queensland Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park and the Queensland island national parks form part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Queensland and the Commonwealth both have responsibilities relating to fisheries in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area under the *Fisheries Management Act 1991* (Cth) the *Fisheries Act 1994* (Qld) and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth).

Development and land use activities in coastal and water catchment areas adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area are an important influence on the World Heritage values of the Area.

The Queensland Government is responsible for natural resource management, land use planning and regulation of activities on the islands, coast and hinterland adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area including through the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009*, *Environmental Protection Act 1994*, *Marine Parks Act 2004*, the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and the *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995*. The Commonwealth Government is responsible, under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* for regulating activities having or likely to have a significant impact on matters of ‘national environmental significance’ as defined by the Act, and on the environment within Commonwealth land and waters.

The Great Barrier Reef Region, as defined under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*, has the same external dimensions as the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, including Queensland State coastal waters up to the low water mark, but excludes islands or parts of islands that form a part of Queensland and waters ‘within the limits’ of Queensland (Schedule A).

OBJECTIVES

The parties agree that the objective of this agreement is to ensure an integrated and collaborative approach by the Commonwealth and Queensland to the management of marine and land environments within and adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, so as to:

- provide for the long-term protection and conservation of the environment of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem, including its Outstanding Universal Value and its transmission in good condition to future generations
- allow ecologically sustainable use of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem subject to the overarching objective of long-term protection and conservation
- provide for meeting Australia's international responsibilities for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area under the World Heritage Convention.

In order to achieve these objectives, the Commonwealth and Queensland reaffirm their ongoing commitment to:

- the vision of the Reef 2050 Plan, to ensure that the Great Barrier Reef continues to improve on its Outstanding Universal Value every decade between now and 2050 to be a natural wonder for each successive generation
- prohibit activities for the exploration and recovery of minerals or petroleum, and any drilling and mining within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, including for the purposes of depositing materials
- maintain complementarity and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of relevant Commonwealth and Queensland management arrangements, in particular: marine park legislation and associated regulations; zoning plans and plans of management; planning and development arrangements; environmental assessment and permit requirements; management of fishing activities
- prohibit the sea-based disposal of capital dredge material in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and in the balance of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area from port-related capital dredging
- ensure that decisions deliver a net benefit to the ecosystem
- continue a Commonwealth/Queensland Ministerial Forum to facilitate implementation and achievement of the objectives of this agreement
- continue a joint program of field management, with shared funding on a 50:50 basis, for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Queensland marine and national parks within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area
- continue joint action to halt and reverse the decline in quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef

- continue joint action to maximise the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef to climate change
- ensure the ongoing protection, restoration and management of key ecosystems critical to Reef health
- address significant threats to the health and biodiversity of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem, including pollution from the land and sea, the impacts of climate change, ecologically unsustainable fishing activities and other resource extraction activities
- periodically review the condition of the environment of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem, including its Outstanding Universal Value and any need for further action
- ensure that Indigenous traditional cultural practices continue to be recognised in the conservation and management of the Great Barrier Reef.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Commonwealth and Queensland recognise the following guiding principles, and agree to apply them in implementing this agreement:

- A collaborative and cooperative approach is fundamental to the effective long-term protection, conservation and management of the Great Barrier Reef as this is beyond the power and remit of either jurisdiction
- The precautionary principle will be applied to protecting the environmental, World Heritage and National Heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef including its Outstanding Universal Value
- The marine and land environments within and adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area will be managed in an integrated manner consistent with ecosystem-based management and the principles of ecologically sustainable use
- Economic growth and the long-term health of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem are interconnected, and actions or changes in one can impact on the other and must be taken into account, in particular:
 - population growth and economic development increases the demand for resource and recreational use of the Great Barrier Reef
 - land-use activities in the catchment, and urban development can have adverse impacts on the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef

- regulation of activities that exploit marine resources, measures for protection of marine parks, or initiatives to reduce external pressures on the ecosystem can have regional and local social and economic effects, and improve the long term viability of the region
- Trends in the health, use of and risks to the environment of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem, including its Outstanding Universal Value will be regularly monitored and reported to ensure decisions are soundly based
- Co-ordinated long-term monitoring and research and the collection and sharing of marine-based biological, physical, social and economic data is fundamental
- Regular, periodic review of the resources necessary for the long-term management of the marine and national parks within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area will be undertaken
- Initiatives should be delivered through a concerted response across all levels of government with shared funding arrangements for joint Commonwealth-State initiatives agreed on a case-by-case basis.

GREAT BARRIER REEF MINISTERIAL FORUM

The Ministerial Forum will consist of four members:

- The Commonwealth Minister responsible for administering the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*, who is the Chairperson
- One Commonwealth Minister appointed by the Prime Minister
- Two Queensland Ministers appointed by the Queensland Premier.

Ministers appointed to the Forum must have responsibility for matters relating to the environment and marine parks and may include ministers with responsibility for science, tourism and/or natural resource management.

Ministers responsible for mining may not be members of the Forum.

Role

The role of the Ministerial Forum is a strategic one, to facilitate and oversee the implementation and achievement of the objectives of this agreement. The Forum will:

- provide a forum for joint policy development and coordination in relation to issues affecting the protection, conservation, management and use of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem as encompassed by the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area
- further the collaboration and coordination of regulatory and management activities applying to the marine and national parks within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, in particular fishing and island management
- ensure an integrated, ecosystem-based approach to management of land and marine environments with a bearing on the management and protection of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem, including actions to address:
 - the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef from the catchments
 - the impacts of climate change
 - the management and regulation of fishing activities
 - the impacts of changes in land use in the coastal and catchment areas
 - the impacts of extractive use of resources
 - the management of direct use
 - the management of cumulative pressures on the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area
- periodically consider the condition of the environment of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem, including its Outstanding Universal Value, and the long-term trends and risks based on the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report and the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan Report Cards
- ensure successful implementation of the Reef 2050 Plan, including consideration of the effectiveness of actions to achieve targets as part of an adaptive management approach
- periodically consider the allocation of resources required for field management of the marine parks and island national parks within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and implementation of the Reef 2050 Plan
- advise the Prime Minister and the Queensland Premier on the five-yearly Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report prepared under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*
- review periodically the operation of the agreement and the extent to which the objectives have been achieved
- undertake other functions as agreed by governments from time to time with respect to this agreement.

SCHEDULES TO THIS AGREEMENT

Schedules may be appended to this agreement from time to time, recording detailed commitments of governments directed at giving effect to this agreement. Commitments detailed in the schedules must be consistent with this agreement. The Ministerial Forum may add, remove and amend schedules to this agreement, with the exception of Schedule A.

Table of Schedules

- A The Great Barrier Reef Region and World Heritage Area
- B Protocols for the Operation of the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum
- C Joint Field Management Program for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Queensland national and marine parks within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area
- D Climate Change and the Great Barrier Reef
- E Fishing and Collection of Fisheries Resources in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area
- F [Reef Water Quality Protection Plan 2013](#) [no word version available]
- G Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan