



ECOSYSTEM REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE (ERAC) 4th Meeting – 4 and 5 October 2011 – Townsville SUMMARY DOCUMENT

The fourth meeting of the ERAC was held in Townsville on 4 and 5 October 2011. Members of the Catchment and Coastal RAC joined the ERAC on 5 October for joint presentations and discussions on several items.

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.

BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY FOR THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

Members of the ERAC were firstly updated on the progress of the development of the draft Biodiversity Strategy, ahead of further discussion at the joint session with the Catchment and Coastal RAC.

The Committee welcomed the completion and the use of vulnerability assessments to provide the framework to identify and prioritise key issues to be addressed by the Strategy. Implementation of the Strategy now will be an important collaborative work program between the GBRMPA and other key management agencies. The Committee is keen to continue playing an advisory role on its implementation.

The Committee supported the establishment of the inshore marine biodiversity program and recommended that:

- 1) As a first step, a conceptualisation be developed of the complex inshore ecosystems and pressures and impacts; and
- 2) A workshop be held, including relevant GBRMPA staff, key experts and stakeholders, to scope the proposed program and linkages using a program logic approach to provide a framework for the program.

After the joint discussion, the Committees remained supportive of the Biodiversity Strategy, and agreed that the question of pressures on inshore biodiversity remains; we need to work out what is needed, and how we are going to get significant change.

EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

Members of both Committees were provided an update on the extreme weather events of the 2010/11 summer, and the resultant very substantial impacts on the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem and marine-dependent industries. It was noted there have been five Category 5 cyclones so far this century, compared to none last century; and the predictions are that the frequency of cyclones will be dependent on climate change.

The Committees agreed that the presentation on the extreme weather outcomes highlighted the pressure the Great Barrier Reef is under, and prompted two questions for the GBRMPA:

- 1) Is the GBRMPA rethinking its management arrangements in light of the recent weather history?
- 2) How can the GBRMPA better communicate the message of what is happening, and has happened?

The Committees also noted the need for timely advice being provided to the Queensland Flood Recovery Group.

THE 2011 WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE DECISION

Members of both Committees were provided a briefing on the decision of the World Heritage Committee regarding their concerns for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area in light of the Liquefied Natural Gas developments on Curtis Island near Gladstone. An array of activities will comprise Australia's response to the Committee's decision, including a comprehensive strategic assessment to identify planned and potential developments that could impact on the "Outstanding Universal Value" of the World Heritage Area.

The Committees were also provided a briefing on the Australian Government's response, including a State Party report due to the World Heritage Committee by February 2012; along with a brief update from the Queensland Government's perspective. Generally, both governments are on the same page in terms of a strategic assessment. The task will be very time-consuming, and crosses over several departments. Some of this information will shortly be put to the Queensland Cabinet to get a mandate to do the strategic assessment. Queensland is looking at the coastal area as a centrepiece of the work and, in terms of focus areas, is looking at a longer-term approach to underpin the management plans. Obviously there will be a need for some governance discussions around engagement.

EFFECTS OF COASTAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

Members of both Committees were provided a presentation on the relevance of the 25 year vision for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area; and on the assessment of catchment and coastal ecosystems and the critical coastal development, planning and management issues.

The Committees then participated in a workshop to discuss key coastal development issues, with a view to providing the GBRMPA with advice. During the workshop, attendees were asked to think about the information provided on coastal ecosystems, as well as the relevancy to the issues we are addressing of the vision *"To have integrated management of activities which take into account the ecological relationship between the Great Barrier Reef and adjacent areas"*

supported by an informed, involved and committed community".

The Committees agreed the vision of the GBRMPA's 25 Year Strategic Plan is still relevant; however, issues like climate change and adaptation will require a strategic approach to address the cumulative impacts and to understand the thresholds in the ecosystems.

Members agreed generally with the coastal development issues identified by the GBRMPA, but noted there will be hot spots of development that will require a closer focus, early involvement, good governance arrangements, an agreed focus or goal, and effective monitoring and reporting on achievements.

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT OF THE GREAT BARRIER REEF WORLD HERITAGE AREA

Members of both Committees participated in a workshop to discuss the strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, with a view to providing the GBRMPA with advice.

During the workshop, attendees were asked to provide comment on: (i) what they wanted from the assessment; (ii) what policy programs are currently underway; (iii) what are the ones that need to be picked up; and (iv) ideas for engaging the key stakeholders from start to finish.

The Committees agreed the objectives for the World Heritage Strategic Assessment will need to be clear, with transparent principles and using existing systems where possible (e.g. RACs, GBR Ministerial Council). The assessment should be seeking a convergence of policies, plans and processes that protect the Matters of National Environmental Significance. It should also seek to achieve confidence in the decision-making framework. Members highlighted the importance of working with the systems that are in place (e.g. Queensland's statutory regional plans/NRM plans), and that the assessment might need to have a 'deep assessment' in its focus areas of how these systems/processes are working.

There was recognition that there needs to be a conceptual understanding of how the complex management system works, and it was suggested that a matrix of development type and responsibility would possibly help. There are a number of powerful players who need to be engaged at a high level, so some sort of independent and well-facilitated reference group might be needed for testing of ideas, and the like.

The Committees recommended bringing Ministers periodically into the process, and potentially meeting with Chief Executive Officers of major industries at perhaps two to three key points during the planning process.

The issue of legacy of past decisions was raised by some members; that is, the difficulty of addressing these issues and looking for ways of mitigating their impacts. The potential for offsets to be used to do this was highlighted, as well as the need for coordinated and strategic use of offsets across governments and NRM regions.

The non-government members of the Committees wanted to record their extreme concern, in line with that of the World Heritage Committee, with the level of development in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, and felt there needed to be better communication of what was happening.

ECOLOGICAL RISK ASSESSMENT FOR TRAWL

ERAC members were updated on the project findings and related climate change adaptation planning work for the Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA) for the Trawl fishery.

The Committee congratulated the GBRMPA for providing the leadership in the delivery of the ERA for Trawl, and noted that the methodology is applicable to other fisheries.

The Committee recommended that the data and results of the ERA be utilised to: (i) model and forecast the consequences of at least three different levels of effort – high (2005 level), medium, and low (level considered sustainable) – by the trawl fishery on the species, habitats and assemblages assessed by the ERA; and (ii) provide insights into the effectiveness of different management measures implemented by the fishery.

TURTLES, DUGONGS AND SEAGRASS

ERAC members were updated on the current situation regarding turtles, dugongs and seagrasses, and the management responses put into place to date. For example, the loss of seagrasses means that green turtles are changing their diet to feed on other foods, and stomach content analyses on some dead turtles have found 95-100 per cent mangrove leaves, compared to around three to four per cent normally.

The Committee supported the ongoing work to develop effective co-management arrangements and assessment of various methods for minimising entanglements and by-catch of dugong and turtles, and noted that for dugongs the key outcome is the survival of adult animals.

The Committee noted and supported the GBRMPA's action to have in place regulations to modify netting practices in Bowling Green Bay, and supported measures that allow the GBRMPA to respond quickly and effectively to crises impacting critical species and habitats in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and World Heritage Area.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled to be held in March 2012.

Current Membership of the Committee 2009-2012

Dr Andrew Ash	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)
Mr Graeme Devin	Queensland Game Fishing Association (QGFA)
Dr Peter Doherty	Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS)
Mr Shaun Hanson	Commercial fisheries
Mr Terry Harper	Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), Department of Environment and Resource Management
Mr Winston Harris	Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA)
Mr Darren Kindleysides	Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS)
Dr Gilly Llewellyn	WWF Australia
Professor Helene Marsh	Species ecology conservation
Dr Barry Pollock	Sunfish Queensland
Mr Nigel Routh	Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC)
A/Professor Stephan Schnierer	Indigenous fisheries and conservation research and policy
Mr Lyle Squire Jnr	Dive-based fisheries
Mr Bruce Stobo	Charter fisheries
Ms Diane Tarte	Independent Chairman
Mr Dermot Tiernan	Acting/Fisheries Queensland, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI)
Supported by:	
Mr Peter McGinnity	General Manager, GBRMPA
Mr Jon Day	Director, Ecosystem, Conservation and Sustainable Use, GBRMPA