

## Overview

### What is the Outlook Report and why was it produced?

A recommendation of the 2006 *Review of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* was to prepare a five-yearly Outlook Report for the Great Barrier Reef. The aim of the Outlook Report is to provide a regular and reliable means of assessing performance in an accountable and transparent manner.

The Report assesses the current state of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem's environmental, social and economic values, examines the pressures and current responses and finally considers the likely outlook.

### How were the assessment topics chosen?

The assessment topics are the eight assessments required by the Act, with each assessment forming a chapter of the Report. For each of the assessments required under the Act, a set of Assessment Criteria allow an ordered analysis of the available evidence. An overall grade for each Assessment Criterion is provided, based on a series of grading statements. This approach has been developed specifically for the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report to meet the legislative requirements. It is intended that future Outlook Reports will follow the same process so that changes and trends can be tracked over time.

### How was it developed?

The Outlook Report was prepared by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority using the best available information as at December 2008. No new research was undertaken as part of developing the Report; rather, the evidence used was derived from existing research and information sources. A number of Australian and Queensland Government agencies, researchers, industry representatives, interest groups and the community contributed to the development of the Report.

Two experts in protected area management, monitoring and evaluation, public policy and governance were commissioned to undertake an independent assessment of existing protection and management. Their report forms the basis of the assessment of existing measures to protect and manage the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem.

### Was it independently reviewed?

Yes, four reviewers appointed by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts independently reviewed the contents of the Report. These reviewers are recognised national and international experts in their fields.

### Are there recommendations?

No. While the Outlook Report presents a comprehensive and frank assessment of the current state and likely future of the Great Barrier Reef, it does not offer recommendations for solutions to the issues raised. These responses will come from the Australian and Queensland Governments.

### What is the outlook for the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem?

While the Great Barrier Reef is recognised as one of the world's best managed reefs and is likely to survive better under the pressure of accumulating risks than most reef ecosystems, the Outlook Report identifies that the current long-term outlook for the Great Barrier Reef is poor.

Unavoidably future predictions of climate change dominate most aspects of the Great Barrier Reef's outlook over the next few decades. Decisions made in the next several years are likely to determine its long-term future. The future outlook for the Great Barrier Reef will depend to a large degree, on the extent to which climate change is addressed worldwide and on the resilience of the ecosystem in the immediate future.

### What are the key threats to the Great Barrier Reef that have been identified in the Outlook Report?

This first Outlook Report identifies climate change, continued declining water quality from catchment runoff, loss of coastal habitats from coastal development and a small number of impacts from fishing and illegal fishing and poaching as the priority issues reducing the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef.

### Does this Report mean that zoning in the Marine Park will change?

No. Zoning is one of many management arrangements to ensure the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is used sustainably. The current Zoning Plan commenced on 1 July 2004 and the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* states that it cannot be reviewed until at least July 2011. There is no planned review of, or statutory requirement to review the zoning of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in 2011. The decision to make changes after this time rests with the Australian Government's Environment Minister.

### How effective is the existing management of the Reef?

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is a multi-use Marine Park and is considered by many to be a leading example of world's best practice management. However, the effectiveness of management is challenged because complex factors that have their origin beyond the Great Barrier Reef Region, namely climate change, catchment runoff and coastal development cause some of the highest risks to the ecosystem. These factors are playing an increasing role in determining the condition and future of the Great Barrier Reef.

Both the Australian and Queensland Government have direct legislative responsibilities to the Great Barrier Reef. Management is achieved through a combination of on-ground actions, working with industries and communities, education and regulation.