



Australian Government

Great Barrier Reef  
Marine Park Authority

GREAT BARRIER REEF REGION STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

# Program Report



The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority acknowledges the continuing sea country management and custodianship of the Great Barrier Reef by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners whose rich cultures, heritage values, enduring connections and shared efforts protect the Reef for future generations.

None of the measures outlined in the report are intended to have the effect of extinguishing native title.



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Marine Park Authority

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# Program Report

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## FOREWORD

The Great Barrier Reef is an amazing natural treasure and one of the most biologically diverse places on Earth. Internationally recognised for its outstanding universal value, it is important to communities and industries for both their livelihoods and recreation. It is a place of great significance to its Traditional Owners who have a unique and continuing connection to the area.

Like many coral reefs throughout the world, the Great Barrier Reef is under pressure. Climate change, run-off, coastal development, some remaining impacts of fishing, and outbreaks of crown-of-thorns starfish are among the most serious threats to the Reef.

To secure the Reef's future, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (the Authority) has worked with the Queensland Government and the Commonwealth Department of the Environment to undertake a comprehensive strategic assessment. This work forms part of the Australian Government's response to the World Heritage Committee's concerns about the impacts of development on the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Taking a big picture approach to Reef management, the assessment looked at the Great Barrier Reef Region and the adjacent coastal zone, including the values of the Region, threats to those values, and actions required to protect them. The assessment considered cumulative impacts — multiple pressures from multiple sources — and how these affect the marine environment in the short and long term.

The assessment found the World Heritage Area's outstanding universal value remains largely intact. The northern third of the Region is in good condition; however, areas in its southern two-thirds, particularly those inshore, are in decline.

Alongside the comprehensive assessment — with an understanding of Reef health, current management, future needs and risks — this 25-year program report sets the future management direction of the Authority. It outlines measures to protect and conserve the Region's values, including matters of national environmental significance, and safeguards to ensure activities do not have an unacceptable impact on the marine environment. It proposes actions to manage the Reef in the years ahead, including strengthening existing management and introducing new initiatives ranging from on-ground work to policies and engagement.

Drafts of the Strategic Assessment Report and the Program Report were made available for three months of community consultation. Feedback was considered in finalising the two reports, and is summarised in a supplementary report.

The first part of this report describes the significance of the Region, and outlines the comprehensive strategic assessment process and its key findings.

The second part outlines the Authority's comprehensive management program to protect the Region's values and allow ecologically sustainable use. It describes how foundational management actions will continue and be expanded upon, along with initiatives to strengthen Reef management including:

- a management framework focused on clear outcomes for the future of the Reef's values and driven by specific measurable targets
- cumulative impact guidelines and regional standards to improve assessment and management of cumulative impacts from all activities within and adjacent to the Region
- a net benefit policy to guide decision making and actions required to deliver an overall or 'net' improvement to ecosystem health and the condition of the Region's values
- a program of regionally based Reef recovery actions to support restoration of critical habitats, functioning of coastal ecosystems and sustainable multiple use
- a Reef-wide integrated monitoring and reporting program, which is an important part of evaluating performance and guiding adaptive management across the life of the program.

The third part of this report focuses on the environmental assessment and decision-making processes of the Authority. It outlines how these processes protect the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance and the Reef's outstanding universal value.

The Authority's management program will inform the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan which, in turn, will provide an overarching framework ensuring integration, coordination and alignment of actions across jurisdictions to protect the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area's outstanding universal value, and ensure development activities and use of the Region remain ecologically sustainable.

We are confident that our 25-year management program will place the Authority in the best position to face the challenges ahead. We need to work together — governments, industry and communities — to ensure this natural wonder remains healthy and resilient, so that it enriches the lives of future generations just as it does for us today.



Russell Reichelt  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer  
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority



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## PART A

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# Overview





Figure 1 Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, Region and Marine Park

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (the Authority) is an Australian Government statutory agency responsible for protecting and managing the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region (Figure 1).

In managing the Region, the Authority must have regard to, and seek to act in a way that is consistent with the objects of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* (the GBRMP Act), the protection of the world heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (World Heritage Area), and the principles of ecologically sustainable use.

Many Australian and Queensland government agencies have responsibilities within the Region, and the Authority works in close collaboration with these agencies in carrying out its functions. The Authority also places strong emphasis on its partnership arrangements and stewardship programs with Traditional Owners, industry sectors, community groups and individuals who directly participate in protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef.

## 1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to outline the Authority's 25-year management program to protect and manage the Great Barrier Reef, including relevant matters of national environmental significance.

This report forms part of the comprehensive strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area being carried out under Part 10 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). It is made up of three parts:

- **Part A** provides an overview of the Authority's management program; describes the significance of the Great Barrier Reef; and outlines the strategic assessment process and key findings.
- **Part B** describes the Authority's comprehensive management arrangements and future commitments to protect and manage the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Region. It sets out the future management activities of the Authority and provides guidance to its partners, consistent with the objectives and functions set out in the GBRMP Act.
- **Part C** outlines how the Authority's environmental assessment and decision-making processes identify and manage impacts within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Marine Park) including matters of national environmental significance.

## 1.3 Program definition

The word 'program' is used throughout the report and it means those management arrangements under the Authority's jurisdiction. Management arrangements include, but are not limited to:

- statutory instruments, including regulations, zoning plans, plans of management and permits<sup>a</sup>
- non-statutory mechanisms including policies, position statements and guidelines
- partnership and collaborative arrangements with Queensland and other Australian government agencies
- partnerships with Traditional Owners in the management of marine resources
- partnership and stewardship programs, including education programs and engagement, with local governments, communities, Indigenous persons, business and industry
- research and monitoring
- compliance and enforcement programs
- resourcing.

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<sup>a</sup> Note permits are formally referred to as the 'permission system' and are described in detail in Part C of this report.



## 1.4 Program objectives

The program's overarching objective is to:

- provide for the long-term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region, including relevant matters of national environmental significance.

The program's other objectives, so far as is consistent with the overarching objective, are to:

- allow ecologically sustainable use of the Great Barrier Reef Region
- encourage engagement in the protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef Region
- assist in meeting Australia's international responsibilities on the environment and protection of world heritage, including the protection of the property's outstanding universal value.

## 1.5 Protecting matters of national environmental significance

The program aims to strengthen protection of matters of national environmental significance in the Great Barrier Reef Region, including the outstanding universal value of the World Heritage Area. The matters of national environmental significance relevant to the Great Barrier Reef Region are:

- world heritage properties
- the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
- national heritage places
- Commonwealth marine areas
- listed migratory species
- listed threatened species and ecological communities
- wetlands of international importance.

There is substantial overlap and connections between the Region's matters of national environmental significance. A suite of key values and attributes relevant to these matters, together with a set of key environmental processes, was identified through the strategic assessment process (see Chapter 4 of the Strategic Assessment Report).

Each individual matter, together with the attributes that relate to them, is embedded within complex and dynamic systems. Their effective future protection relies on integrating management measures and a focus on protecting the Great Barrier Reef environment as a whole. Recognising this, the program considers all the matters collectively.

## 1.6 Program scope

The program scope is based on the functions and powers of the Authority as set out in the GBRMP Act.

The area to which the Authority's comprehensive management program (Part B) applies is the **Great Barrier Reef Region**, as defined in the GBRMP Act, and places outside the Region to the extent that the Region may be affected by actions in those places.

The Region extends in latitude from the tip of Cape York in the north to just past Lady Elliot Island in the south. Its western boundary is mean low water of the mainland coast of Queensland and it extends eastwards between 80 and 250 kilometres. It covers 346,000 square kilometres and includes Commonwealth islands. It does not include Queensland islands or internal waters.

The area to which the Authority's permission system (Part C) applies is the **Great Barrier Reef Marine Park<sup>b</sup>** (the Marine Park).

The Region and the Marine Park cover the same area, with the exception of 13 coastal exclusion areas that are not within the Marine Park. The Marine Park covers 344,400 square kilometres and includes the subsoil beneath the seabed extending to a depth of 1000 metres and the airspace above extending to a height of 915 metres.

Differences between the boundaries of the Great Barrier Reef Region, the Marine Park and the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area are illustrated in Figure 1 and described in Table 1 below.

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<sup>b</sup> As proclaimed under Subsection 31(1) of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* (refer Amalgamated Great Barrier Reef Section — *Gazette* no. s119 dated 21 April 2004).

Note - the Authority has the authority under s.66(2)(e) of the GBRMP Act to regulate or prohibit acts, whether in the Marine Park or elsewhere, that may pollute water in a manner harmful to plants and animals in the Marine Park. While the Authority has this authority, the scope of the Authority's program — as described in Part C — is limited to the Marine Park.

**Table 1 Differences between the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, Region and Marine Park**

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park covers approximately 99 per cent of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and 99.5 per cent of the Great Barrier Reef Region

Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area	Great Barrier Reef Region (Part B of this report)	Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Part C of this report)
348,000 km <sup>2</sup>	346,000 km <sup>2</sup>	344,400 km <sup>2</sup>
Inscribed 1981	Established 1975	Declared in sections between 1979 and 2001; amalgamated into one section in 2003
Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>all islands within outer boundary (about 1050)</li> <li>all waters seaward of low water mark (including internal waters of Queensland and port waters)</li> <li>all 12 trading ports</li> </ul>	Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>approximately 70 Commonwealth islands</li> <li>all waters seaward of low water mark (excluding Queensland internal waters)</li> </ul> Does <u>NOT</u> include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>internal waters of Queensland</li> <li>Queensland islands (about 980)</li> </ul>	Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>approximately 70 Commonwealth islands</li> <li>all waters seaward of low water mark (excluding Queensland internal waters)</li> </ul> Does <u>NOT</u> include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>internal waters of Queensland</li> <li>Queensland islands (about 980)</li> <li>13 coastal exclusion areas</li> </ul>

## 1.7 Program timeframe

The timeframe of the program is 25 years.

Its delivery will be underpinned by an integrated monitoring and reporting program (see Section 8.3.7) which, in turn, will inform the Authority's performance evaluation against program objectives and outcomes.

The Authority's adaptive management approach will provide sufficient flexibility to deal with changing circumstances over the life of the program and allow for modifications as required.

## 1.8 Informed by the strategic assessment

The strategic assessment of the Region has resulted in three reports — this Program Report, the Strategic Assessment Report and the Supplementary Report.

Development of this report has been informed by the findings and recommendations of the Strategic Assessment Report and the accompanying Supplementary Report, which incorporates the outcomes of public consultation and independent reviews.

An overview of the strategic assessment process and its key findings is provided in Section 3. The program outlined in this report is designed to implement the recommendations set out in Chapter 12 of the Strategic Assessment Report.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is an Australian icon and one of the most precious ecosystems on Earth. It is a world heritage property, recognised internationally for its outstanding universal value. Containing a maze of reefs and islands, it stretches more than 2300 kilometres along the Queensland coast. It is the world's largest coral reef ecosystem and is rich in biodiversity — from mangroves and seagrasses to coral reefs and open waters.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef area, and there are about 70 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owner clan groups whose customary estates include land and sea country within the Great Barrier Reef. The Authority acknowledges the Reef's Traditional Owners, past and present, and their unique and continuing connection with the area.

The Great Barrier Reef is critical to the cultural, economic and social wellbeing of the more than one million people who live in its catchment, and is valued by the national and international community. It is a marine protected area, conserving the Reef's environment and supporting a wide range of activities, including tourism, fishing, recreation, traditional use, research, defence, shipping and ports. The Reef's environment helps bring billions of dollars to Australia's economy each year and supports almost 70,000 jobs.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.2 International recognition

On 26 October 1981, the Great Barrier Reef was inscribed on the World Heritage List of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage<sup>2</sup>, on the basis of its outstanding universal value (Figure 2).

The Great Barrier Reef was the first coral reef ecosystem in the world to be made a World Heritage Area, recognised for its natural beauty and natural phenomena; its representation of major stages in the Earth's evolutionary history, including man's interaction with the environment; its ecological and biological processes; and its habitats for the conservation of biodiversity. The Great Barrier Reef is one of only a small number of marine world heritage properties inscribed for meeting all four 'natural' criteria. When considering the Reef's nomination for world heritage listing, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) stated:

*'... if only one coral reef site in the world were to be chosen for the World Heritage List, the Great Barrier Reef is the site to be chosen.'*<sup>3</sup>

Articles 4 and 5 of the Convention set out the obligation and responsibility to protect, conserve and rehabilitate the Reef's values for all future generations and to present those values to the world.<sup>2</sup>

Notably, a criterion at the time of listing referred to the *'interaction between man and his natural environment'*. In the context of the Great Barrier Reef, this is recognition of the strong and continuing connections between Traditional Owners and their land and sea country. This connection with land and sea country is reflected in the consideration of attributes related to matters of national environmental significance in this assessment.

### 2.3 National importance

The Great Barrier Reef ecosystem has long been recognised for its remarkable biodiversity — from coastal estuarine systems, inshore fringing reefs and seagrass meadows to islands and spectacular outer barrier reefs. These habitats support many threatened or migratory species listed under the EPBC Act. The Reef is an integral part of the Australian national identity. It is a subject of national pride, reflected in both the number of people who visit it and in the continuing public interest shown in its future health and management.

Early concerns for the Reef's future culminated in the Australian Government introducing the GBRMP Act in 1975. The main object of the GBRMP Act is:

*'To provide for the long term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region.'*

The Act established the Authority and defined the Great Barrier Reef Region. It also enabled declaration of the Marine Park, introducing the concept of a multiple-use marine area where 'reasonable use' of natural resources could coexist with conservation.

Over subsequent years, sections of the Region were progressively declared as Marine Park. Today the Marine Park is one of the world's largest marine protected areas, covering approximately 344,400 square kilometres. It is complemented by the Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park, established in adjacent state waters under Queensland Government legislation. Both marine parks form part of the World Heritage Area.

The Great Barrier Reef is also formally listed as a national heritage place under Australia's national environment legislation, the EPBC Act.

## **2.4 Integrated management**

### **2.4.1 Intergovernmental agreement**

Since commencement of the GBRMP Act in 1975, the Australian and Queensland governments have worked in a long-term partnership to protect and manage the Region. This cooperative approach was initially formalised by the Emerald Agreement signed in 1979, and reaffirmed in the Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement signed in 2009. The objective of this agreement is to ensure an integrated and collaborative approach is taken by the Australian and Queensland governments to manage 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 and biodiversity of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem, as encompassed by the World Heritage Area, 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 World Heritage Area under the World Heritage Convention.

The Field Management Program, established through the intergovernmental agreement, is a jointly-funded, cooperative partnership between the Authority and the Queensland Government. It undertakes operations and routine day-to-day management activities in the Marine Park, the adjacent Queensland Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park and on national park islands.

### **2.4.2 Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum**

The Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Council was established under the 1979 Emerald Agreement. Arrangements for the Council were updated through the Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement in 2009. From 1 July 2011, the Council has been called the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum.

The Ministerial Forum is comprised of two ministers each from the Australian and Queensland governments, with responsibility for matters relating to the environment and marine parks, science, tourism and/or natural resource management. Ministers responsible for mining may not be members.

The Ministerial Forum's role is strategic in that it facilitates and oversees implementation and achievement of the objectives of the intergovernmental agreement. Since the integrated governance and management model for the Great Barrier Reef has been in place it has facilitated development of complementary Commonwealth and Queensland legislation, integrated management with relevant Commonwealth and Queensland agencies, and guided the application of ecosystem-based management principles both inside and outside marine park boundaries.

## **2.5 Legislation and conventions**

There is a range of Commonwealth and Queensland legislation relevant to the protection of the Great Barrier Reef.

Management is also guided by Australia's obligations under relevant international conventions and agreements.

A comprehensive list of legislation and conventions relevant to the Region, together with a description of management tools and the Authority's partners in management, is provided in Chapter 3 of the Strategic Assessment Report.

# OUR INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL OBLIGATIONS TO PROTECT THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

Over almost half a century, the Australian Government has worked to recognise and protect the remarkable attributes of the Great Barrier Reef. This diagram shows how the international concepts of world heritage and outstanding universal value, as well as the declaration of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and other matters of national environmental significance relate to the Great Barrier Reef.

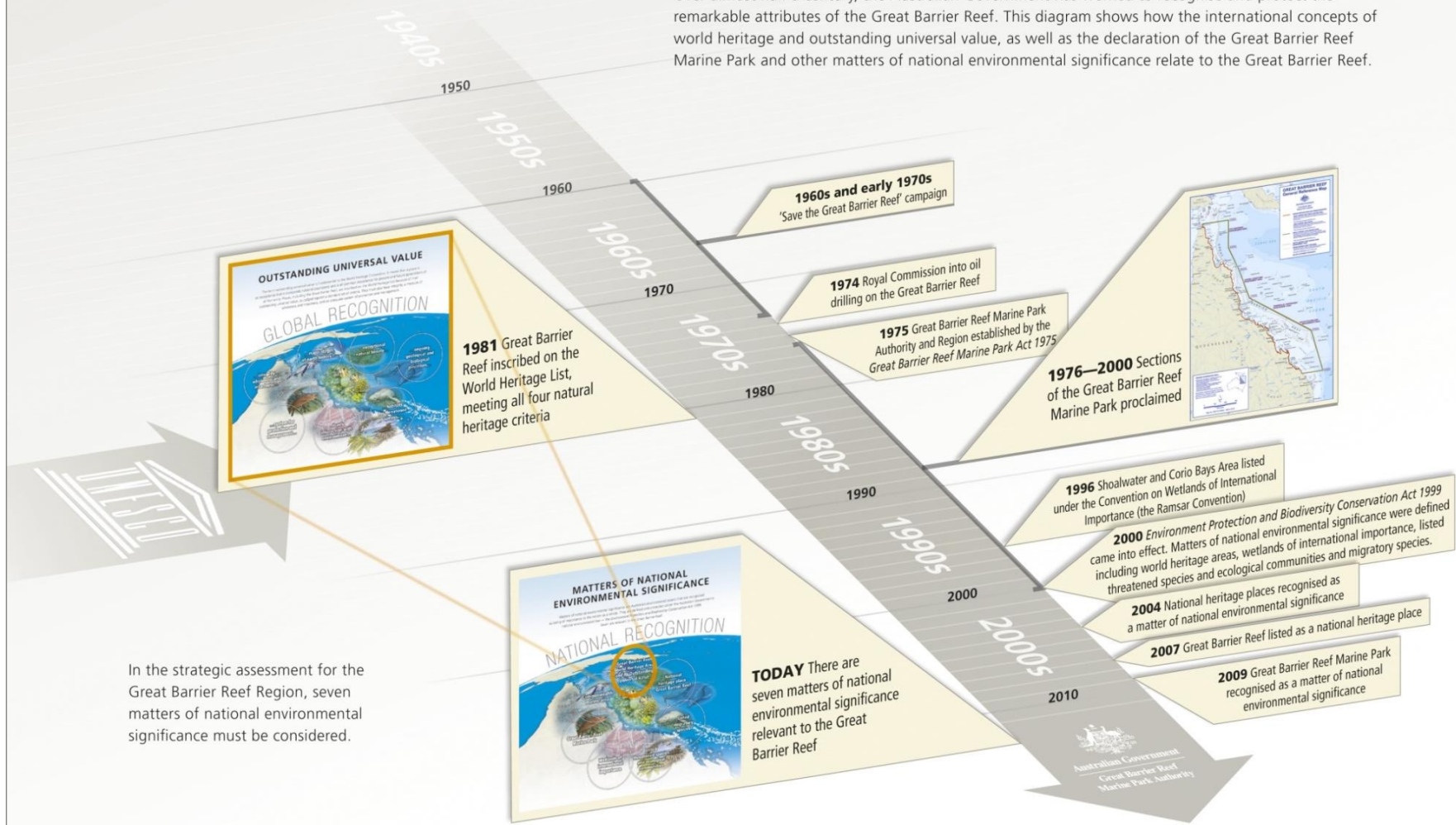


Figure 2 International and national obligations to protect the Great Barrier Reef



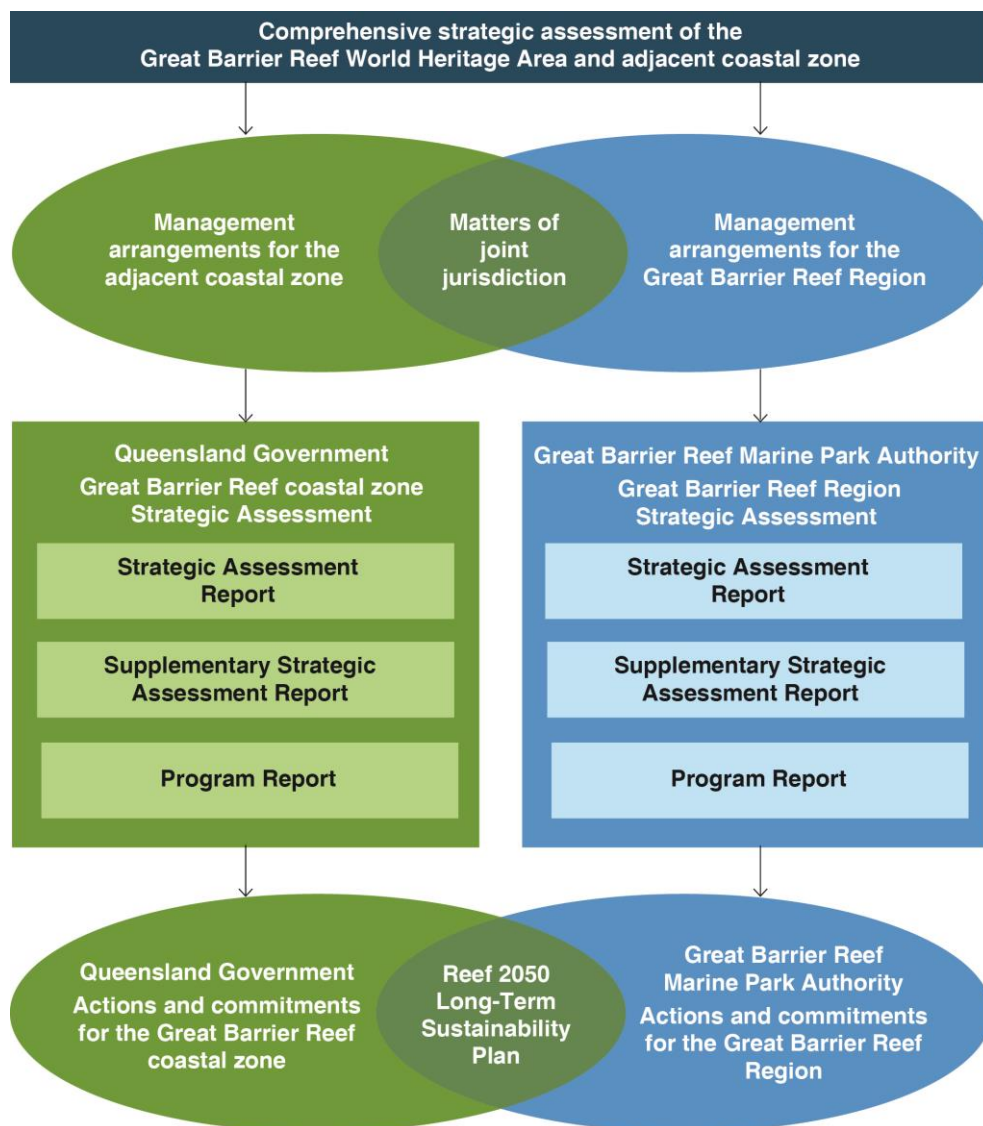
### 3 Comprehensive strategic assessment

#### 3.1 Two complementary strategic assessments

This report forms part of the comprehensive strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and adjacent coastal zone being carried out under Part 10 of the EPBC Act. The comprehensive strategic assessment examines impacts on relevant matters of national environmental significance as defined in the EPBC Act, including the outstanding universal value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, and the Authority's management arrangements to deal with such impacts.

As part of the assessment, the Authority is responsible for preparing a strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef Region, as set out in an agreement with the then Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (see Appendix 1 of the Strategic Assessment Report). The strategic assessment for the Region is complemented by a strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef coastal zone being undertaken by the Queensland Government.

Building on the findings of both strategic assessments, the Authority is working with all relevant partners to develop a long-term sustainability plan for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (Figure 3). Further detail on the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan is provided in Section 9.6.



**Figure 3 Comprehensive strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and adjacent coastal zone**

The findings of each assessment are presented in individual reports. The areas of overlap and joint management responsibility are addressed in both strategic assessments. The findings will inform development of the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan for the World Heritage Area.

## 3.2 The assessment process

The Great Barrier Reef Region is a large and complex natural system with multiple uses and is subject to many impacts. The state of the Region's biodiversity, geomorphological features, Indigenous and historic heritage values, and the benefits derived from the environment, are constantly changing in response to a complex suite of interactions between drivers, activities and impacts.

To address these challenges, the Great Barrier Reef Region strategic assessment utilised a range of best practice approaches and tools to:

- analyse the Region's values and identify a suite of key attributes and environmental processes (see Chapter 4 of the Strategic Assessment Report)
- analyse drivers, activities and impacts acting on key attributes and environmental processes and assess the effect of impacts on them (see Chapters 5 and 6 of the Strategic Assessment Report)
- examine the successive and combined effects of some of the key impacts on water quality, coral reefs and seagrass meadows, including the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of activities and how they overlap in time and space (see Chapter 6 of the Strategic Assessment Report)
- assess the condition and trend of key attributes and environmental processes using best available information, including scientific data, expert opinion and Traditional Owner and stakeholder knowledge (see Chapter 7 of the Strategic Assessment Report)
- assess the effectiveness of current management arrangements to manage the impacts of activities on values, identify problematic issues and areas for improvement (see Chapters 3 and 8 of the Strategic Assessment Report)
- identify key knowledge gaps and priorities for research, modelling and monitoring to address information needs critical to management (see Sections 6.10 and 7.7 of the Strategic Assessment Report)
- assess future risks to the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem posed by identified impacts, based on the assessment of the current condition of key attributes and environmental processes, effectiveness of management and ecosystem resilience (see Chapter 10 of the Strategic Assessment Report)
- project the future condition of the Great Barrier Reef, including matters of national environmental significance (see Chapter 11 of the Strategic Assessment Report).

On the basis of the above, the strategic assessment concludes with a series of recommendations to improve the effectiveness of management arrangements (Chapter 12). It also outlines adaptive management measures to protect matters of national environmental significance across the 25-year life of the program (Chapter 13).

## 3.3 Key findings of the strategic assessment

The key findings of the Great Barrier Reef strategic assessment are summarised below.

### Impacts — past and present

The strategic assessment examined drivers of change affecting the Region, including climate change, economic growth, population growth, technological developments and societal attitudes. It assessed impacts of activities undertaken within the Region, including tourism, commercial and recreational fishing, recreation, traditional use of marine resources, shipping, defence activities, research activities and port activities; and those conducted beyond the Region's boundaries including agriculture, aquaculture, urban development and industrial development.

The assessment found:

- Impacts on the Region's environment are compounding. For almost all of the major impacts considered, the intensity of effect is greatest in inshore areas in the southern two-thirds of the Region.
- Attributes of the outstanding universal value have been affected, including those relating to biodiversity, geomorphological features, ecosystem processes, natural beauty and man's interaction with the natural environment.
- The most significant past and present impacts include those related to climate change (sea temperature increase); catchment run-off (freshwater inflow, nutrients, crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks, pesticides and sediments); modifying supporting terrestrial habitats; and direct use (dredging and dredge material disposal, death of discarded species and illegal fishing and poaching).
- Several of the most significant impacts (for example, those related to catchment run-off and extreme weather) operate at broad scales affecting large areas of the Reef.
- Activities historically undertaken in the Region and its catchment, such as harvesting of iconic species and catchment clearing, are still affecting the Reef and reducing its ability to recover from current impacts. Legacy impacts are also assessed as significantly affecting many Indigenous heritage values in the Region.
- The combined effects of increased nutrients and sediments, together with a cluster of floods, temperature extremes and cyclones, have seriously affected key habitats such as coral reefs and seagrass meadows. Species of conservation concern continue to be at risk primarily due to degradation of inshore and

estuarine habitats, loss of connectivity, legacy impacts and some past and present fishing activities (both legal and illegal).

- The effects of dredge disposal may be more widespread than previously understood. While dredging and dredge material disposal does not introduce additional sediment loads to the Region, these activities resuspend and redistribute sediments in areas subject to multiple pressures.
- Indigenous heritage values have been significantly affected, and these effects are intensified by the closeness of Traditional Owners' relationship to the environment. Traditional Owners emphasise that changes in their sea country have impacted their culture.
- Most impacts are assessed as increasing into the future, driven mainly by climate change, economic growth and population growth. The future impacts of climate change are predicted to be very serious as greenhouse gas concentrations continue to rise. The success of recent initiatives to improve the quality of catchment run-off entering the Region means related impacts are likely to be reduced in the future.
- Cumulative effects are diminishing the ecosystem's ability to recover from disturbances. This loss of resilience is especially concerning given its importance in protecting the Region from future climate change impacts.

### **Condition of the Reef**

The assessment of the values and attributes relevant to matters of national environmental significance found:

- While the outstanding universal value of the World Heritage Area remains largely intact, the overall health of reefs, especially in the southern two-thirds of the Region, below about Cooktown, has declined significantly.
- The inshore areas of the southern two-thirds of the Region are most affected, with species and habitats in the north generally in better condition. Habitats further offshore and in deeper water have also been subject to fewer impacts.
- Legacy issues, such as catchment clearing and harvesting of iconic species, are still affecting the Reef. Some of these issues go back decades, even to the late 1880s, and their effects are likely to continue long into the future.
- A decade of extreme weather has caused a decline in Reef condition, and reduced the capacity of the ecosystem to recover from these and other disturbances.
- Terrestrial habitats along the Great Barrier Reef coast have been substantially modified, particularly south of about Port Douglas. This reduces the ability of habitats, such as wetlands and connecting water bodies, to support the healthy functioning of the Reef.
- Key marine habitats such as coral reefs and seagrass meadows are in decline, while populations of some iconic and highly vulnerable animals are on a downward trend. This includes southern dugong populations, some species of marine turtle, and some offshore and pelagic-foraging seabirds.
- A number of natural processes vital to the healthy functioning of the marine environment, such as sedimentation, nutrient cycling and connectivity, are also in decline. Again this is particularly evident in the inshore areas of the southern two-thirds of the Region.
- The Great Barrier Reef still retains the amazing natural beauty for which it is famous. However, its underwater aesthetic value has been reduced in the inshore areas of its southern two-thirds — largely as a result of coral declines.
- Traditional Owners with connections to the Region maintain their cultural practices and customs. However, Indigenous heritage values are closely tied to land and sea country, and many have deteriorated as changes in the environment reverberate profoundly through their culture and heritage, both now and in the past.
- Community benefits are dependent on the condition of the bio-physical values of the Great Barrier Reef. Economic benefits and employment were found to remain relatively stable; however, impacts such as extreme weather, poor water quality, and crown-of-thorns starfish have affected some values such as access to reef resources and enjoyment.

### **Management effectiveness**

An independent assessment of management effectiveness commissioned as part of the strategic assessment found that while the Authority's management of activities within the Region is generally effective, more is required to halt and reverse declines in Reef health, especially in addressing impacts arising outside the Region.

Addressing cumulative impacts across jurisdictions, the application of socio-economic and Indigenous knowledge, and setting of targets to benchmark performance were found to be problematic for most management areas examined.

A series of demonstration case studies highlighted that Reef-wide approaches to management need to be complemented by regional cooperative management approaches to account for spatial variation. They also highlighted:

- the advantages of being proactive in tackling the issues facing the Reef
- the importance of partnerships — including across all levels of government, and with Traditional Owners, industry and the broader community — to strengthen efforts to improve water quality, address impacts at a local scale and implement regionally or sector-specific best practice management solutions
- the value of foundational activities to underpin management, such as long-term integrated monitoring and improved understanding of heritage values and community benefits derived from the Region.

### **The Reef's future**

The Great Barrier Reef Region remains one of the most resilient tropical marine ecosystems in the world; however, there is increasing evidence that its resilience is being seriously eroded.

Based on the effectiveness of the Authority's current management, the current condition of values and the likely future impacts, a number of impacts were assessed as presenting a high or very high risk to the future condition of the Region's values:

- Climate change is the most serious threat facing the Reef and is likely to have far reaching consequences for the future of the Region's environment. Future climate change predictions indicate sea level and sea temperature rises will continue and the ocean will gradually become more acidic. More severe extreme weather is predicted.
- Agricultural practices in the Great Barrier Reef catchment are improving and leading to reduced nutrient and sediment loads entering the Reef through catchment run-off. However, there is likely to be a significant lag time before measurable water quality improvements are achieved in the Region.
- Outbreaks of crown-of-thorns starfish are likely to continue over the next 25 years, contributing further to coral mortality.
- Clearing and modifying coastal habitats that support the Reef are likely to continue to present a very high risk, especially to inshore biodiversity; for example, through the loss of connectivity between coastal and marine environments.
- Ports operations and further port development will require capital and maintenance dredging, potentially involving much larger volumes.
- While there have been substantial improvements in the management of fishing in the Region, the death of discarded and incidentally caught species of conservation concern across all fisheries and the Queensland Shark Control Program continues to present a high risk to their populations.

The assessment found that the accumulation of impacts through time and over an ever-increasing area is diminishing the ecosystem's ability to recover from disturbances. Without additional management intervention, there is a high risk of further declines in the condition of biodiversity and heritage values and the community benefits they support.

### **Path forward**

The strategic assessment concluded that managing the multiple impacts affecting the Reef requires a multi-pronged approach.

A concerted international effort to reduce global climate change, combined with action at the national, state and local levels to build the Reef's resilience by reducing impacts across all sources, is vital to protecting the Great Barrier Reef's outstanding universal value.

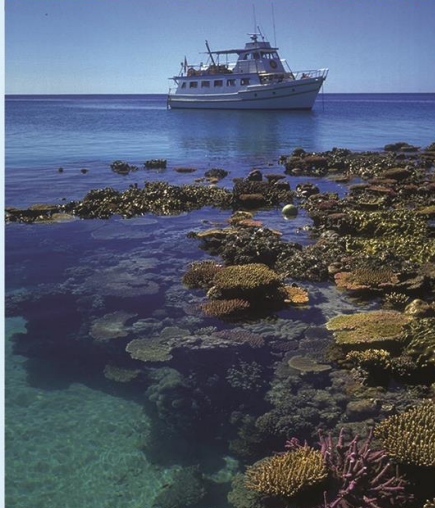
There is a need to maintain and restore the Region's biodiversity. In the north of the Region, the Reef's health needs to be maintained and enhanced. In the southern two-thirds, the focus needs to be on restoring Reef health and halting and reversing impacts on its values.

Our understanding and protection of the Region's rich heritage values and community benefits needs to be improved and better integrated into planning and assessment decision making.

Critically, managing cumulative impacts needs to be improved and mechanisms developed which will deliver net environmental benefits across the Region.

These improvements will be vital to protecting the Reef's outstanding universal value and restoring the Reef's health and resilience for generations to come.





## PART B

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# Comprehensive management program





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## 4 Introduction

Part B of the Program describes the Authority's comprehensive management program to protect and manage the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region and allow ecologically sustainable use, consistent with the objects of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* (GBRMP Act). It also describes how measures to protect matters of national environmental significance have been incorporated into the Authority's comprehensive management approach.

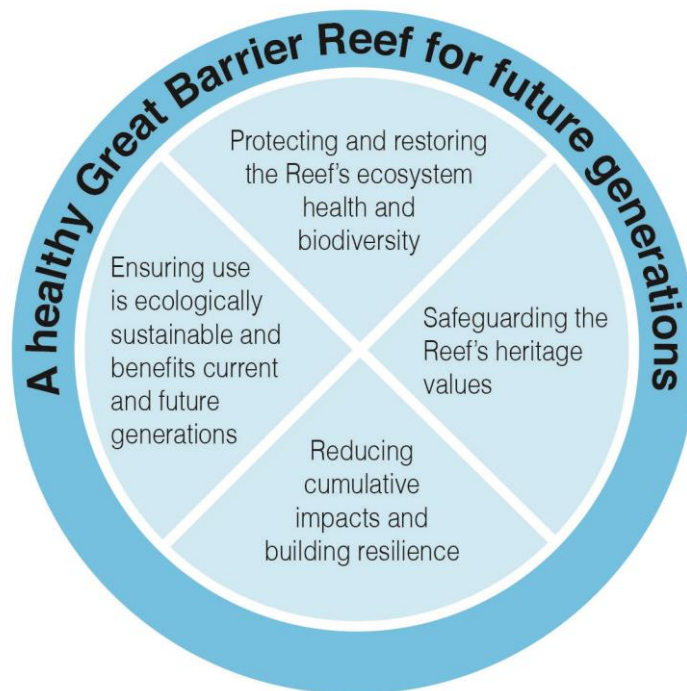
The Authority's vision for the Great Barrier Reef is:

### ***A healthy Great Barrier Reef for future generations***

To make the vision a reality, the Authority will focus its management on achieving four goals (Figure 4):

- protect and restore the ecosystem health and biodiversity
- safeguard the Reef's heritage values
- ensure use is ecologically sustainable and benefits current and future generations
- reduce cumulative impacts and building resilience.

These goals are not mutually exclusive. In particular, the goal of protecting and restoring ecosystem health and biodiversity is fundamental to safeguarding heritage, particularly Indigenous heritage values, and ensuring ecologically sustainable use. Success in achieving these goals depends on cumulative impacts from all sources being reduced, and building Reef resilience.



**Figure 4 Vision and management focus of the Authority**

### 4.1 Legislative basis

The Authority's comprehensive management program is established under the GBRMP Act. Its operation is governed by this Act and the following pieces of legislation.

- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983 (GBRMP Regulations) are the primary regulations in force under the GBRMP Act.
- *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Environmental Management Charge—Excise) Act 1993* and *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Environmental Management Charge—General) Act 1993* govern operation of the environmental management charge.
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003 (the Zoning Plan) is the primary planning instrument for the conservation and management of the Marine Park.

- Cairns Area Plan of Management 1998, Whitsundays Plan of Management 1998, Hinchinbrook Plan of Management 2004 and Shoalwater Bay (Dugong) Plan of Management 1997 (plans of management) establish more detailed management arrangements for specific areas of the Marine Park.

The Act establishes an objectives-based regulatory framework as well as establishing the Authority and its functions. In performing its functions, the Act requires the Authority to act in a way that is consistent with the objects of the Act, the principles of ecologically sustainable use and the protection of the world heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

#### **Objects of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975 — Section 2A**

- (1) The main object of this Act is to provide for the long term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values<sup>c</sup> of the Great Barrier Reef Region.
- (2) The other objects of this Act are to do the following, so far as is consistent with the main object:
  - (a) allow ecologically sustainable use of the Great Barrier Reef Region for purposes including the following:
    - (i) public enjoyment and appreciation;
    - (ii) public education about and understanding of the Region;
    - (iii) recreational, economic and cultural activities;
    - (iv) research in relation to the natural, social, economic and cultural systems and value of the Great Barrier Reef Region;
  - (b) encourage engagement in the protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef Region by interested persons and groups, including Queensland and local governments, communities, Indigenous persons, business and industry;
  - (c) assist in meeting Australia's international responsibilities in relation to the environment and protection of world heritage (especially Australia's responsibilities under the World Heritage Convention).
- (3) In order to achieve its objects, this Act:
  - (a) provides for the establishment, control, care and development of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park; and
  - (b) establishes the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority; and
  - (c) provides for zoning plans and plans of management; and
  - (d) regulates, including by a system of permissions, use of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in ways consistent with ecosystem-based management and the principles of ecologically sustainable use; and
  - (e) facilitates partnership with Traditional Owners in management of marine resources; and
  - (f) facilitates a collaborative approach to management of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area with the Queensland Government.

<sup>c</sup> As per Section 3 (1A) of the GBRMP Act, the terms 'environment', 'biodiversity', and 'heritage values' have the same meaning as in the EPBC Act.

Ecologically sustainable use and its principles are defined under the GBRMP Act as follows:

**Ecologically sustainable use — Section 3AA**

For the purposes of [the GBRMP] Act, ecologically sustainable use of the Great Barrier Reef Region or its natural resources is use of the Region or resources:

- (a) that is consistent with:
  - (i) protecting and conserving the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region; and
  - (ii) ecosystem-based management; and
- (b) that is within the capacity of the Region and its natural resources to sustain natural processes while maintaining the life-support systems of nature and ensuring that the benefit of the use to the present generation does not diminish the potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations.

**Principles of ecologically sustainable use — Section 3AB**

For the purposes of [the GBRMP] Act, the following principles are principles of ecologically sustainable use:

- (a) decision-making processes should effectively integrate both long-term and short-term environmental, economic, social and equitable considerations;
- (b) the precautionary principle;
- (c) the principle of inter-generational equity — that the present generation should ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations;
- (d) the conservation of biodiversity and ecological integrity should be a fundamental consideration in decision-making;
- (e) improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms should be promoted.

In order to achieve its objects, the Act:

- provides for the establishment, control, care and development of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (the Marine Park)
- provides for zoning plans and plans of management
- regulates, including by a system of permissions, use of the Marine Park in ways consistent with ecosystem-based management and the principles of ecologically sustainable use
- facilitates partnership with Traditional Owners in management of marine resources
- facilitates a collaborative approach to management of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area with the Queensland Government.

The GBRMP Act also provides for policies to be established to guide decision makers and the public. They are not legislative instruments. They detail the way in which the Authority intends to manage the Marine Park or perform its other functions, and the way in which the Authority considers that the GBRMP Act or other legislative instruments apply.

## 5 Program elements

Through the GBRMP Act, the Authority has a clear and long-standing responsibility to protect and manage the Great Barrier Reef. Over the past three decades, the Authority has established a strong and comprehensive set of management arrangements to protect the Reef and adapted them in response to emerging issues and improved understanding.

The strategic assessment demonstrated that the Authority's management is effective for activities within the Region for which the Authority has direct jurisdictional control. However, for more jurisdictionally complex issues, management is not keeping pace with the many impacts acting on the Region. Without substantial strengthening of the full scope of management arrangements, the Great Barrier Reef's health is likely to continue to deteriorate, principally as a result of increasing external pressures.

### 5.1 Foundational management

The Authority's comprehensive management program builds on the strong **foundational management arrangements** already in place to protect biodiversity and heritage values and provide for ecologically sustainable use. The Authority will continue those current arrangements that were assessed to be effective in protecting matters of national environmental significance and that are necessary to carry out the functions under the Act.

The Authority's comprehensive management program is built around three foundational program areas (Figure 5):

- **Environmental regulation** — the Authority is the primary environmental regulator for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef Region. It uses a range of spatially explicit planning instruments and system-based management tools such as regulations, the Zoning Plan, plans of management, permits, compliance and statutory reporting.
- **Engagement** — the Authority recognises that protection of the Great Barrier Reef requires local, national and international effort. It works with Traditional Owners, the Australian and international communities, business, industry and local government, together with Australian, Queensland and international agencies to influence best practice and find pragmatic solutions to secure the future health of the Reef.
- **Knowledge, integration and innovation** — the Authority strives to access and capture the best available science from a network of science providers, both nationally and internationally, as well as drawing on traditional ecological knowledge and information from the wider community.

### 5.2 Strengthening management

The Authority recognises the results of the strategic assessment demonstrate the need to strengthen its management in a number of key areas, and improve integration and alignment of the Authority's activities and that of its partners. Drawing upon the recommendations of the Strategic Assessment Report, the Authority has committed to adopting a comprehensive suite of measures to strengthen management — including five **new initiatives** (Figure 5):

- a **management framework based on outcomes and targets** to guide decision making and actions required to maintain and restore the condition of values
- **cumulative impact assessment guidelines** to inform a transparent, consistent and systematic approach to the assessment of cumulative impacts across jurisdictions from activities within and adjacent to the Region
- a **net benefit policy** to guide actions required to restore ecosystem health, improve the condition of values and guide financial contributions to that recovery
- a **Reef recovery program** to restore sites of high environmental value, applying the measures above and cooperative management actions
- a Reef-wide **integrated monitoring and reporting program** which directly links to the outcomes-based management framework and underpins the Authority's adaptive management approach.

Building upon the Authority's foundational management arrangements, these initiatives will drive actions required to build a healthy and resilient Great Barrier Reef and enhance protection of matters of national environmental significance.

The commitments to strengthen management are outlined in highlighted boxes within the sections on each of the three program areas, including reference to relevant strategic assessment recommendations.



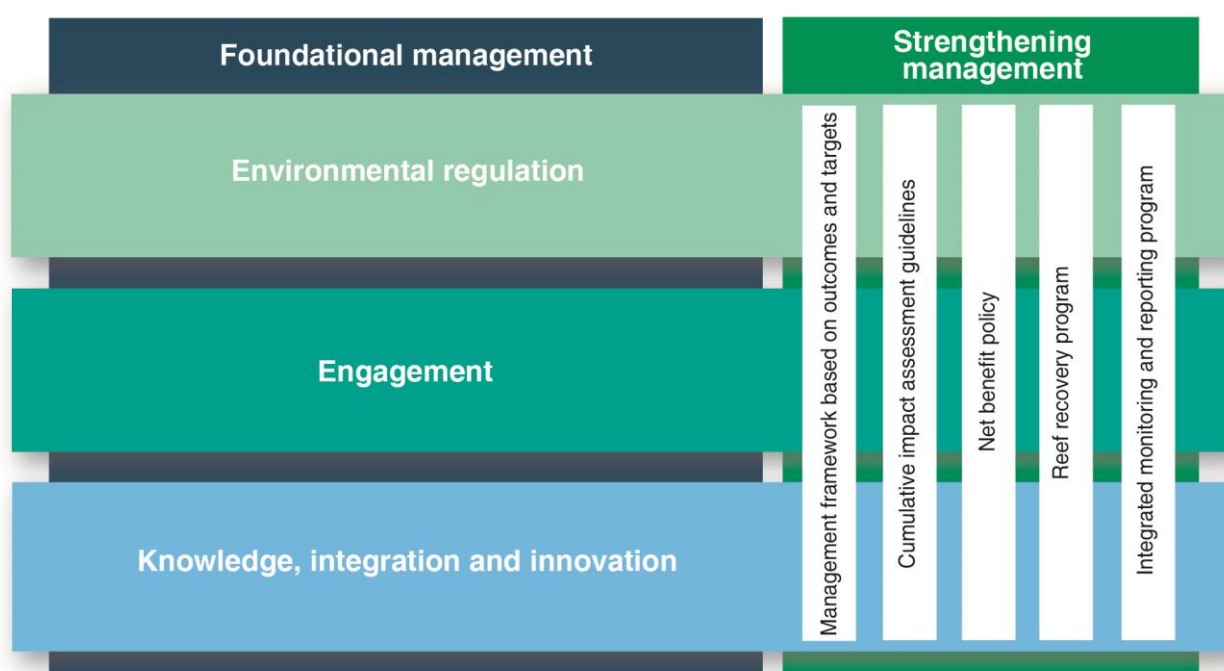


Figure 5 Key program elements

### 5.3 Adaptive management and implementation

The Authority's adaptive management approach provides sufficient flexibility to deal with changing circumstances over the 25-year life of the program and allow for modifications as required. The Authority's approach to adaptive management, including performance evaluation, reporting and governance arrangements is outlined at Section 9.

The Authority's foundational management arrangements, together with measures to strengthen management, form the basis of the Authority's program for which the Authority will be seeking endorsement by the Minister under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). If endorsed by the Minister, this program of improvements will strengthen protection and management of matters of national environmental significance in the Region and inform decision-making under the EPBC Act.

### 5.4 Permission system

Part C of this report outlines the Authority's permission system which forms part of its environmental regulation program. It details the operation of its current permission system, and outlines commitments and undertakings of the Authority to ensure adequate protection of matters of national environmental significance.

### 5.5 Management approach

#### 5.5.1 Outcome-based target-driven management

To support attainment of the program's statutory objectives, the Authority has committed to adopting a comprehensive outcomes-based target-driven management approach.

Outcomes have been developed for the Region's values and environmental processes identified in Chapter 4 of the Strategic Assessment Report (Table 2). They have been derived by linking international and national obligations to protect the Region's environment to the current condition and trend of values and processes as assessed in Chapter 7 of the Strategic Assessment Report.

These obligations can be summarised as a responsibility to 'restore, maintain and enhance' the condition of the Region's values and to 'transmit' those values in good condition to future generations.

*Outcomes-based management provides clear line of sight between international and national obligations to protect and restore the Reef, with the current condition and trend of the Reef, and the Authority's management program.*

Outcomes for the Region's values will guide the Authority's planning and decision-making processes. For example, if a value is likely to be affected by a planning decision or development proposal, the effect of such a decision should be consistent with achieving the identified outcome for the affected value or process.

This approach will ensure all matters of national environmental significance, including the Reef's outstanding universal value, are comprehensively, systematically and explicitly considered in the Authority's decision-making processes.

Outcomes for the Region's values and environmental processes highlight the need to:

- restore the condition of values and processes in poor and very poor condition in the southern two-thirds of the Region, including critical habitats such as coral reefs and seagrass meadows and ecological processes such as connectivity and recruitment
- maintain and enhance the condition of values and environmental processes in the northern third of the Region.

**Table 2 Desired outcomes for the Region's values and processes**

The outcomes for each of the values and processes identified in Chapter 4 of the Strategic Assessment Report are based on their current condition and trend as assessed in Chapter 7 of that report.

Current condition	Desired outcome
Very good	The condition is maintained
Good	The condition is maintained and enhanced
Poor	The condition is restored to good
Very poor	The condition is restored to good
Trend in condition	Desired outcome
Improving	The trend is maintained
Stable	The trend is maintained and improved
Deteriorating	The decline is halted and reversed

The Authority, in collaboration with partner agencies, Traditional Owners, industry and stakeholder groups, is developing targets to support the delivery of outcomes (Figure 6). Their purpose is to ensure actions within the Region and the catchment are focused on the delivery of outcomes critical to the health of the Great Barrier Reef, and the restoration, maintenance and enhancement of the Region's values. Management targets will be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

Regionally specific standards and guidelines will be developed to account for local variability in the condition of values (see Section 6.3.1).

An integrated Region-wide monitoring and reporting program will underpin the implementation of the Authority's outcomes-based approach, evaluating performance against targets, and guide adaptive management.



**Figure 6 Role of management targets**

Targets provide a critical link between the Authority's objectives and outcomes and actions within each of its program areas and those of its partners.

## **New initiative — Outcomes and targets**

### **Purpose**

To provide clear line of sight between statutory objectives, outcomes for the condition of the Region's values and management activities of the Authority and its partners.

### **Context**

The Great Barrier Reef is a highly complex and dynamic system supporting a diverse range of values. The condition of these values, together with supporting ecosystem processes, varies across the Region with multiple impacts affecting values at local, regional and Reef-wide scales.

Management of the Region is similarly complex, involving a number of government agencies, Traditional Owners and stakeholders working across the Region and adjoining catchments.

The adoption of an outcomes-based and target-driven management approach provides a comprehensive, rigorous and transparent framework for all parties to work together to reduce impacts and maintain and restore the condition of the Region's values.

### **Intent**

To support attainment of statutory objectives through the development and implementation of a comprehensive outcomes-based target-driven management approach.

Condition and trend-based outcomes will apply to the full suite of the Region's values and environmental processes.

Outcomes will ensure all matters of national environmental significance, including the Reef's outstanding universal value, are explicitly considered in decision-making processes.

Targets are designed to support a collaborative approach to the achievement of outcomes, guiding actions required to protect the Region's values, including the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area's outstanding universal value.

Targets will guide actions required to:

- build the health and resilience of habitats and species
- restore connectivity and improve the functioning of coastal and inshore ecosystems
- enhance understanding and protection of Indigenous and historic heritage values
- ensure use of the Region remains ecologically sustainable and continues to deliver community benefits
- reduce high risk and cumulative impacts affecting the Region's values.

Developed in collaboration with partner agencies, Traditional Owners, industry and stakeholder groups, targets will be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound.

Achievement of outcomes and targets will be monitored and reported on as part of the integrated monitoring program. The metrics to be monitored for each target will be based upon best available information including scientific data, Traditional Owner knowledge and expert opinion.

It is intended that the outcomes and targets be collaboratively reviewed and updated — initially after 12 months — and every five years as part of the Authority's Outlook reporting cycle and Reef Plan reporting, as well as more frequently as understanding improves and circumstances change.

Outcomes and targets will also form a central component of the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan and this work will link to and inform the Plan's outcomes framework (see Section 9.6).

### **Relevant recommendation(s) of the strategic assessment**

The principal recommendation of the strategic assessment relevant to this initiative is:

- REC25: Establish a management framework with clear outcomes and targets for the protection of values and the management of impacts, including cumulative impacts.

## **5.5.2 Managing a highly connected landscape**

A major lesson learned from managing the Reef, and reinforced through the strategic assessment, is that there is extensive and intricate connectivity in the natural system. Species rely upon habitats that rely upon ecological processes. In turn, the Reef's biodiversity, heritage values and natural beauty support people economically, provide them with food and enrich their lives.

The *Operational guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*<sup>4</sup> highlight the importance of protecting the integrity of a natural system. Integrity is a measure of wholeness and intactness of the natural system and its attributes.

Taking into account the wide spatial variations reported in the strategic assessment, the Authority considers that to maintain and improve the Region's integrity, actions will be required at all geographic scales. There will be a need to maintain overall protection and management while working at finer scales to preserve areas of high conservation values, and to focus more locally on high risk impacts.

To this end, the Authority will maintain its solid management foundation at a Reef-wide scale, continuing to implement comprehensive management arrangements such as regulations, zoning and permits that apply to all users in all areas.

Within the Region and adjoining catchments, the Authority intends to more explicitly adopt different management approaches between the northern third and the southern two-thirds. This approach recognises clear differences and local variation in the condition of values and the impacts affecting them, and underpins the Authority's Reef Recovery program.

### **5.5.3 Reducing cumulative impacts and restoring the Region's values**

Addressing the specific challenges associated with managing cumulative impacts is central to the Authority's forward management approach, and is a key driver behind many of the measures to strengthen management. These include developing guidelines for the assessment of cumulative impacts, an increased focus on research and modelling to improve understanding of the effects of cumulative impacts on the Region's values, and developing regional standards and guidelines which take into account the impact of multiple stressors on habitats and species.

And while avoiding and mitigating impacts will remain the primary focus of management efforts, the Authority recognises these approaches are not sufficient on their own. A more comprehensive approach is required to the delivery of offsets — which, to date, have only been required if residual impacts are significant — and actions which will result in a net improvement in the condition of the Region's values.

Implementing these measures, together with systems for continuous improvement and best practice approaches, are central to the Authority's forward program and are reflected in its principles for managing impacts.

### **5.5.4 Decision making in the absence of perfect knowledge**

The strategic assessment highlighted two key findings which are central to the Authority's forward approach. These are:

- Our understanding of many of the cause-and-effect relationships of impacts on values and thresholds for species, habitats and ecosystem health is limited.
- There is a need to act now — to halt and reverse declines, and to restore, maintain and enhance the condition of the Great Barrier Reef.

As managers of this complex and intricate system, the Authority is committed to evidence-based decision making. We cannot, however, wait for the certainty of science or complete knowledge to act as, in many instances, this is unlikely to be gained within timeframes required to inform decision making.

In the absence of perfect knowledge, the Authority will use the best available information including scientific data, expert opinion, and Traditional Owner and stakeholder knowledge to inform its decision making.

Decision making will be consistent with achieving statutory objectives, outcomes for Reef health and protection of matters of national environmental significance, as well as the principles of ecologically sustainable use as follows:

- Where we have an acceptable level of certainty, we will act now.
- Where we do not have an acceptable level of certainty, we will prioritise actions to address the information gaps that are causing uncertainty.
- As knowledge gaps are being filled, we will not ignore the issues at hand but act in a manner consistent with the precautionary principle — 'that lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing a measure to prevent degradation of the environment where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage'.



## Principles for managing environmental impacts within the Great Barrier Reef Region

- 1. Conservation of biodiversity and ecological integrity should be the fundamental consideration in decision making**

The natural environment is the foundation of the Region's values and there are limits to the amount of disturbance it can absorb without compromising its integrity. Decisions about managing impacts should support the outcomes of maintaining and restoring the condition of values and processes. Improvements in biodiversity and ecological integrity also represent the best opportunity to protect Indigenous heritage values and community benefits for generations to come.
- 2. Decision making should integrate long-term and short-term environmental, economic, social and equity considerations**

The full suite of values relevant to matters of national environmental significance is identified in the strategic assessment. They provide the basis for comprehensive decision making about impacts. Decisions now should ensure that these values are maintained, enhanced or restored for the benefit of future generations.
- 3. Avoiding impacts is the highest priority**

Every effort should be made to avoid impacts on the Region's values, including considering prudent and feasible alternatives to a proposed activity. In considering alternatives, the Authority will have regard to any alternative sites for the activity, any alternative approaches to the activity, as well as the alternative of not carrying out the proposed activity.
- 4. Mitigation measures should be employed**

Potential impacts on the Region's values that cannot be avoided should be minimised — addressing direct, indirect and cumulative impacts. Mitigation measures should consider and explicitly account for the likely spatial and temporal scales of impacts.
- 5. Offsets will only be considered where impacts cannot be avoided or mitigated and where residual impacts will not exceed critical thresholds in the short, medium or long term**

Historically, environmental offsets have addressed 'significant' residual impacts. Given the declining health of the Reef and the Authority's goals of protecting and restoring the Reef's condition and ensuring ecologically sustainable use, offsets now need to be more widely applied to compensate for all residual impacts. They need to produce measurable conservation outcomes within timeframes relevant to affected values or processes.
- 6. Management arrangements should incorporate systems for continually improving practices across the life of activities**

Ongoing adaptive management is critical to ensuring ecosystem values and processes are maintained and enhanced over time. Environmental management plans and approval processes need to be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances, and linked to best practice standards.
- 7. Best practice standards should be employed in managing impacts**

Recognising the world heritage status of the Region, management of impacts should always be to best practice standards. Innovative approaches which improve environmental outcomes and operational efficiency and provide incentives to achieve best practice will be promoted. Planning and assessment decision making will be based on best practice assessment methods and the best available information. This will include the use of modelling and mapping to help understand the cause-and-effect relationships between impacts and values.
- 8. Impacts should be managed such that ecosystem thresholds are not reached**

Management of impacts should be based on current and forward projections of condition for the Region's values and processes. As many values and processes have been assessed to be in poor condition, impacts deemed acceptable in the past may not be acceptable in the future. Where ecosystem thresholds have been exceeded, any further development activity should be able to demonstrate a net improvement in the condition of relevant values and processes.
- 9. A risk-based approach should be adopted in managing impacts**

Assessing and managing for risk is an important part of effectively managing impacts. A comprehensive risk assessment should consider all likely impacts and the likelihood and consequence of those on the full suite of the Region's values and processes.
- 10. In assessing impacts, uncertainty should be recognised and specified, but not delay protective actions**

Environmental assessment and planning processes should identify: the extent to which the limitations of available information may influence conclusions; any poorly understood variables or assumptions made; and the reliability of the information considered. This includes where ecosystem thresholds or trigger levels have not been established. In addition, the precautionary principle requires that the Authority not delay measures to prevent degradation in cases where there is a lack of certainty. This principle is particularly relevant to inshore areas in the southern two-thirds of the Region where, while there is still a high degree of uncertainty about impacts and their effects, there is a clear need to address environmental degradation from a range of sources.

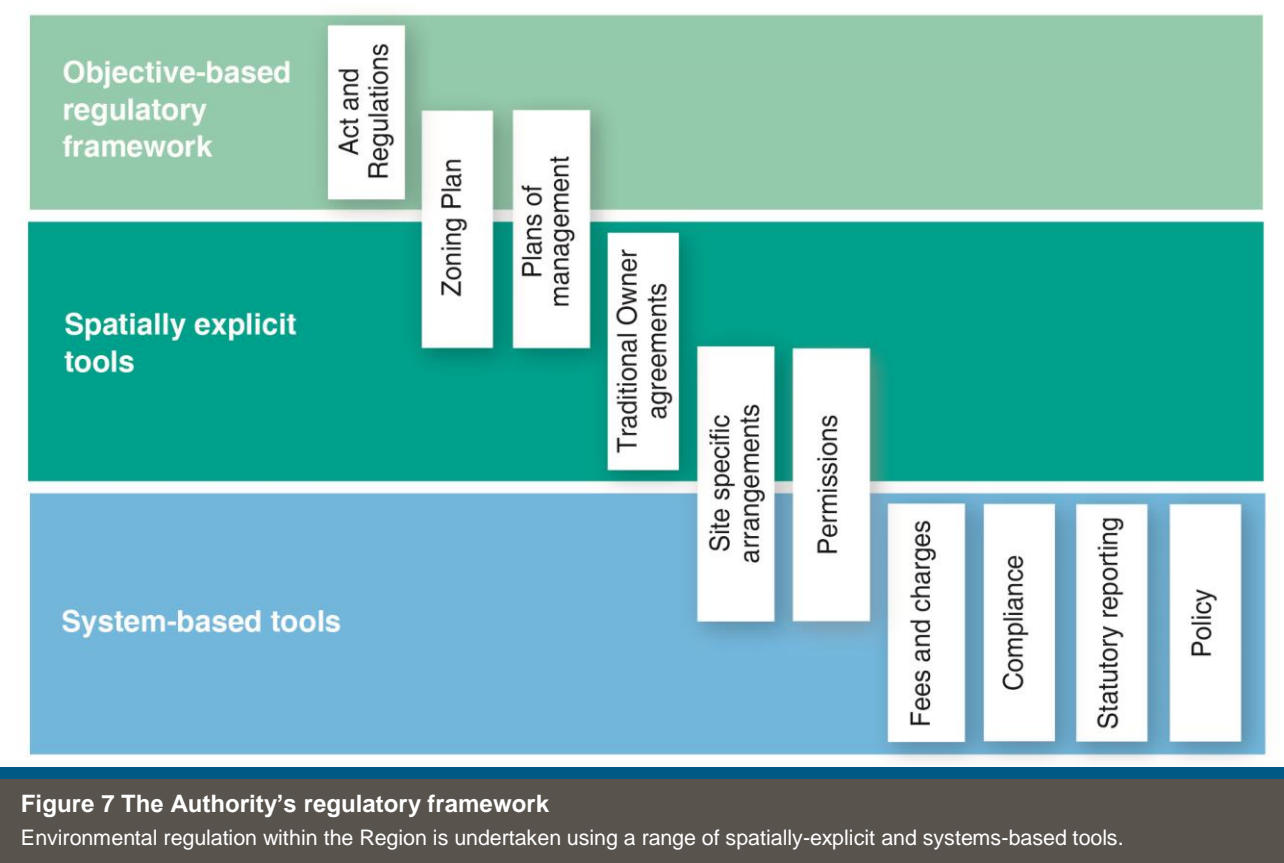
# 6 Environmental regulation

## 6.1 Context

Environmental regulation within the Great Barrier Reef Region is a complex and challenging task because of the size, diversity and dynamic nature of the Reef ecosystem; its cultural, social and economic importance; local, state, national and international interests; and jurisdictional arrangements.

The GBRMP Act and Regulations provide the statutory basis for the protection and management of the Region, and the management tools employed by the Authority. These include a range of spatially-explicit and systems-based management tools (Figure 7).

The Authority will adopt the following arrangements and commitments to support the delivery of the Authority's comprehensive management program, adapting them as required to address changing circumstances.



## 6.2 Foundational management arrangements

The Authority's current environmental regulation arrangements provide a strong foundation for its comprehensive management program. The Authority will continue to implement the tools that have been assessed to be effective in protecting the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Region, including relevant matters of national environmental significance.

### 6.2.1 Spatially explicit tools

The Authority uses a range of spatially-explicit planning instruments as outlined in Figure 7. These include:

- at a Reef-wide scale, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan, including Designated Shipping Areas
- at a regional scale, plans of management and Traditional Owner Agreements
- at a local scale, designated Special Management Areas, site specific management arrangements and site infrastructure.

#### Zoning Plan

The *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003* (the Zoning Plan), is the primary planning instrument for the conservation and management of the Marine Park.

The Zoning Plan aims, in conjunction with other management mechanisms, to protect and conserve the biodiversity of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem, while providing opportunities for the ecologically sustainable use of, and access to, the Region by current and future generations.

The Zoning Plan divides the Marine Park into eight zones (Figure 8). It sets out the purposes for which each zone may be used or entered without permission, and the purposes for which each zone may be used or entered only with the written permission of the Authority. The General Use Zone provides for the widest range of activities, while the Preservation Zone is the most restricted. The Commonwealth Islands Zone provides for the use or entry of areas of the Marine Park above mean low water on Commonwealth islands. There are complementary zoning arrangements in adjacent areas under Queensland jurisdiction within the Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park.

In accordance with section 37 of the GBRMP Act, the Authority may amend a Zoning Plan if it (or its most recent amendment) has been in operation for at least seven years.

#### Plans of management

Plans of management complement the Zoning Plan and impose controls on the granting of permissions. They address issues specific to an area, species or community in greater detail than can be accomplished by the broader Reef-wide zoning plans.

Plans of management are generally prepared for intensively used areas, particularly 'at risk' groups of islands and reefs, and for the protection of species of conservation concern or ecological communities.

There are four plans of management, covering about eight per cent of the Marine Park. The plans for the Cairns Area, the Whitsundays and Hinchinbrook set out detailed management arrangements applying to all users of these areas, with a focus on protecting key natural values and allowing a range of uses. The Shoalwater Bay (Dugong) Plan of Management aims to manage activities in the bay that threaten its dugong population or impact on its seagrass meadows.

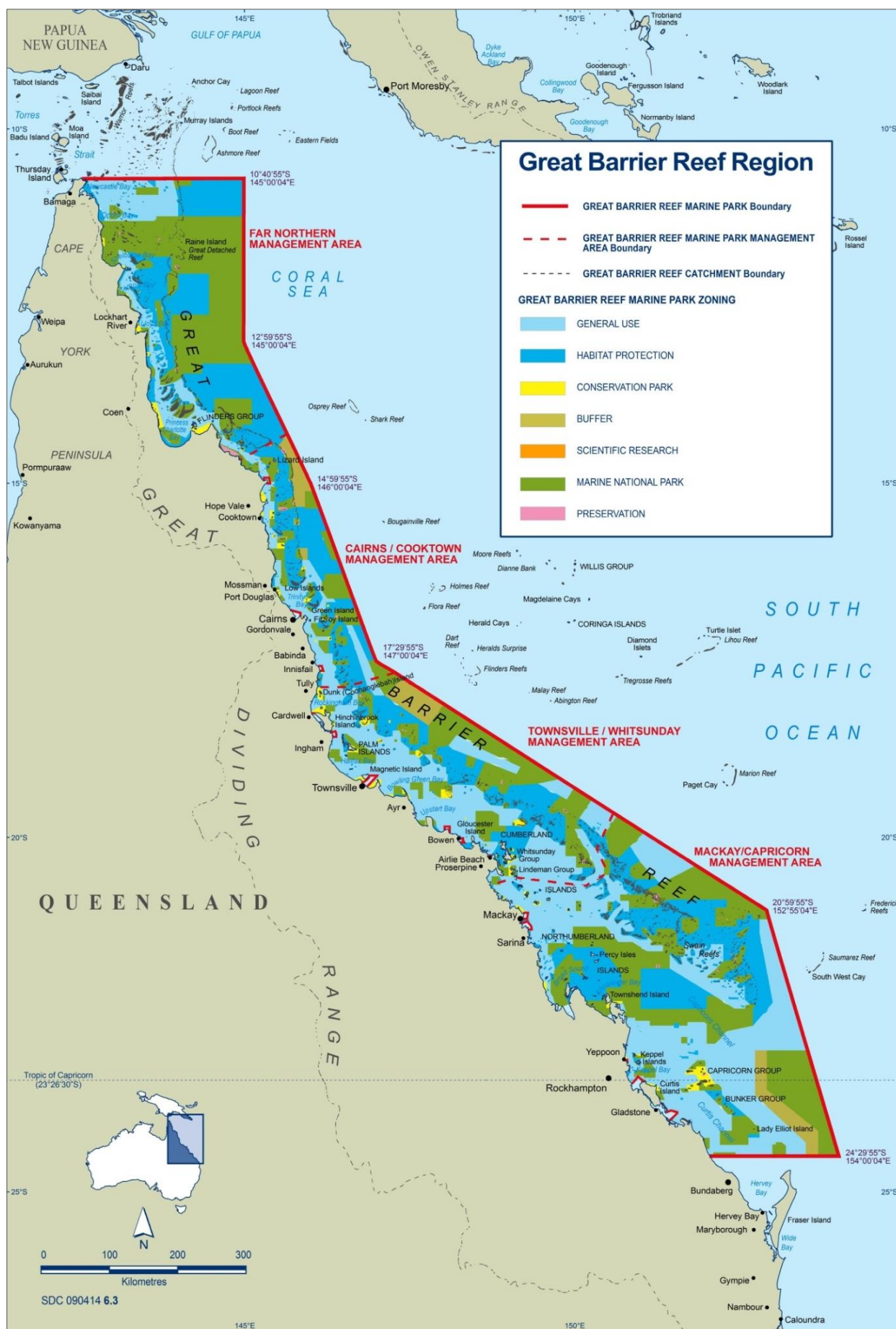
Plans of Management are not subject to the sunset provisions of subsection 54(2) of the *Legislative Instruments Act 2003*, and may be amended from time to time.

#### Traditional Owner agreements

Formal Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements describe how Traditional Owner groups work with Australian and Queensland governments to manage traditional use activities in sea country. Indigenous Land Use Agreements are agreements between one or more native title groups and other people or parties about the use and management of land and waters.

The agreements address issues such as the sustainable take of culturally-significant species and supporting Traditional Owner cultural practice in the conservation and management of the Great Barrier Reef. The agreements incorporate traditional and contemporary scientific knowledge and environmental management for the ongoing protection of the Great Barrier Reef. Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements are used by Traditional Owners as a formal tool to conserve and protect species and ecosystems critical to the health of people, culture and country.

Agreements can incorporate specific management strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of key species, as well as habitats. Other management activities that Traditional Owners may identify in their agreement implementation plan include restoring and maintaining waterways and coastal ecosystems; maintaining and protecting significant heritage values including sites; sharing and documenting traditional ecological knowledge, culture and language; and research and monitoring of sea country including through partnerships with managing agencies and leading scientific institutions.



**Figure 8 The Great Barrier Reef Zoning Plan**

The Reef-wide Zoning Plan protects biodiversity values through a network of no-take zones for 33 per cent of its area and for at least 20 per cent of each bioregion. It provides for the spatial control of use, and sets out arrangements for activities consistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable use. In addition to the zones mapped, there is a separate zone for Commonwealth islands.



There are currently seven Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements covering over 13 per cent of the Region. They include coverage over traditional sea country estates of Wuthathi; Lama Lama; Yuku-Baja-Muliku; Yirrganydji; Girringun; Woppaburra; and Port Curtis Coral Coast.

Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements and Indigenous Land Use Agreements operate for a set time, after which the agreements and their timeframes are renegotiated.

#### **Site specific management arrangements**

Site specific management arrangements are localised plans for use of a particular site. They guide decision-makers and the public. They are a form of policy, developed by the Authority under Section 7(4) of the GBRMP Act. They are not legislative instruments.

Site specific management arrangements identify significant values of the specific site, and describe current management arrangements for these sites concentrating on managing specific use issues and cumulative impacts at the site.

Review of site specific management arrangements falls within the formal control process undertaken by the Authority (Section 6.2.2 – Policy).

#### **Site infrastructure**

On-ground infrastructure is installed to manage use and protect the values of individual sites throughout the Marine Park. For example, facilities such as moorings, no anchoring areas and transit lanes support sustainable use of popular sites within planning areas and elsewhere. The Authority and the Queensland Government install and maintain site infrastructure as part of the joint Field Management Program.

### **6.2.2 System-based tools**

The Authority uses a range of system-based regulatory tools to manage the Great Barrier Reef. These include its permission system, fees and charges, audit and compliance, and statutory monitoring, evaluation and reporting programs.

#### **Permissions**

Permissions facilitate opportunities for use of the Marine Park and are a tool to reduce impacts, separate potentially conflicting activities, collect data for planning and monitor potentially damaging activities. They are issued mainly for tourism activities, dredging and dredge material disposal, and infrastructure (for example, jetties and marinas). Harvest (dive-based) fishery operations within the Marine Park require a Marine Park permit, as do netting activities (other than bait netting) in the Special Management Area within Princess Charlotte Bay. Any developmental fishery program would also require a permit from the Authority.

As part of the permitting process, there is formal environmental impact assessment under the Act for evaluating the likely possible risks or impacts to the environment from a proposed activity or development. There are four key steps in the permit assessment and decision process. They are scoping, assessment, decision, auditing and compliance.

Common activities where a detailed assessment process is undertaken include, but are not limited to, the construction and operation of pontoons, jetties, moorings, pipelines and marinas as well as dredging. The assessment criteria include ecological, social and economic considerations, Traditional Owner interests, as well as current and future use of the proposed location. These assessments will continue to be informed by the best available information using contemporary assessment methods including, where appropriate, modelling and mapping to understand the cause-and-effect relationships of impacts on values.

The period for which permissions are granted varies dependent on the activity. For example, new tourism permissions are generally granted for one year. This allows time to establish the operation, and provides the applicant and the Authority an opportunity to review the operation.

Existing permission holders who apply to continue the same operation and satisfy the assessment requirements are generally granted a permission for six to 15 years, depending on the activities to be conducted and the level of environmental certification they have achieved from a third party certification body.

Joint Queensland Government–Authority permits are issued for activities which operate across jurisdictions. Fisheries licences are issued by the Queensland Government.

Part C provides a detailed outline of the Authority's permission system demonstrating how procedures and standards deliver on the objects of the GBRMP Act as well as meeting the requirements of the EPBC Act.

#### **Fees and charges**

Three main fees and charges apply in the Marine Park:

- The cost of assessing a permit application for commercial activities is partly recovered through payment of a permit application assessment fee.
- The environmental management charge applies to some commercial activities operating under a permit issued by the Authority. The revenue is applied to Marine Park management.
- Bonds (usually as a bank guarantee) may be held by the Authority to cover the risks associated with a proposed activity. It primarily relates to recovery, restoration and/or removal of an activity/structure, and is designed to act as a financial incentive for a permission holder to meet required performance levels.



## Compliance

Compliance activities — through education and enforcement — encourage adherence to legal requirements such as those contained in permits, plans of management and zoning, helping to ensure balanced and sustainable use of the Marine Park. The Field Management Program, jointly undertaken by the Authority and the Queensland Government, plays a key role in compliance activities in the Region, including in relation to fishing. A cooperative multi-agency approach allows a broad range of legislation and compliance tools to be used, with vessel and aerial surveillance activities by all agencies coordinated by the Field Management Compliance Coordination Unit. The Authority works closely with Traditional Owners in relation to traditional use of marine resources and in managing any risks associated with poaching of species of conservation concern (for example, dugongs and marine turtles), including through Indigenous community compliance liaison officers<sup>5</sup>. Informal activities such as under the community-based Eyes and Ears Incident Reporting program also help inform compliance actions.

## Field management operations

Field management activities, as part of the joint Australian and Queensland government Field Management Program, underpin regulatory approaches. They are a significant proportion of the Authority's work program and are at the frontline of efforts to protect the Great Barrier Reef and ensure use remains ecologically sustainable. Activities that support environmental regulation include: on-ground visitor management; visitor infrastructure and facilities (for example, moorings and reef protection markers); compliance; monitoring and assessment of habitats and vulnerable species; and incident response (for example, extreme weather events and shipping incidents).

## Statutory reporting

The Authority has a number of statutory, national and international obligations to report on the Great Barrier Reef, its condition and management arrangements. Analysis and reporting also provides direction for strategic planning within the Authority. Examples of reporting include:

- an annual report to the Parliament of Australia
- five-yearly reporting, including on reef condition, resilience and management effectiveness, through the Outlook Report (see below)
- responses to government priorities for example, this strategic assessment
- international reporting obligations such as contributing to world heritage reporting.

## Policy

Policies developed by the Authority under section 7(4) of the GBRMP Act, guide decision makers and the public. They are not legislative instruments. They detail the way in which the Authority intends to manage the Marine Park or perform its other functions, and the way in which the Authority considers that the Act or other legislative instruments apply.

There are three broad categories of guidance documents:

- **Policies:** these give effect to the Authority's responsibilities, functions and powers outlined in the GBRMP Act (for example, managing environmental impacts).
- **Position statements:** these outline the Authority's position on issues where the Authority has a strong interest, but does not have legislative powers (for example, emerging risks from shipping).
- **Guidelines:** these generally support the Authority's policies or position statements and provide more detail on issues (for example, managing visitation to seabird breeding islands).

A comprehensive list of policies, position statements and guidelines are presented in Chapter 3 (Table 3.1) of the Strategic Assessment Report. Guidance documents are reviewed every four years and, if needed, updated more regularly to reflect the best available science and management, consistent with maintenance of high environmental standards.

A formal control process within the Authority regulates the development, amendment, revocation and approval of external policies and plans. Where policies or plans are likely to have a regulatory impact on business or the not-for-profit sector (such as changes to service charges, subsidies, compliance costs, restriction on competition), a 'regulatory impact statement' is developed in consultation with the Office of Best Practice Regulation. Prior to final drafts being prepared, every new or significantly reviewed external policy or plan is required to be made available for public comment for a minimum period of 28 days.

This formal control process enables the review of external policies and plans every four years or sooner, as prompted by changes in legislation, standards, whole-of-government policy, advancements in scientific knowledge and/or advancements in better environmental management practices.

All guidance documents referred to in the Program Report are subject to review and updates in accordance with the control process.

## 6.3 Commitments to strengthen management

The areas of environmental regulation identified in the strategic assessment as requiring strengthening are: regional standards for protection; managing cumulative impacts; enhancing protection and restoration; improving certainty; improving consideration of climate change impacts; strengthening consideration of heritage values and community benefits; improving compliance; and improving incident response capacity; and streamlining and harmonising regulatory tools.

### 6.3.1 Regional standards for ecosystem health

Using its water quality guidelines as a model, the Authority will work with its partner agencies, local communities, the private sector and experts to cooperatively and progressively develop regionally-based ecosystem health standards. Standards will be based on the current condition of values and associated ecosystem processes and the desired condition for the area. Because many values and processes are currently in poor condition, standards deemed acceptable in the past may no longer be acceptable.

New and revised standards will include thresholds and management triggers for:

- key indicators for ecosystem health (for example, nutrient concentration or light penetration) for a range of habitats and species
- the cumulative impacts of multiple stressors (for example, nutrient concentration combined with light penetration) on a range of habitats and species.

#### Program commitment(s):

- Regionally-based standards for ecosystem health

REC18, REC20, REC30

### 6.3.2 Strengthening guidelines

The Authority's guidelines will be progressively updated to include the new and revised standards for ecosystem health (see above) and the management of cumulative impacts.

Guidelines will complement existing statutory arrangements and be developed in accordance with international and national obligations to protect the Region's values and the principles of ecologically sustainable use.

New and revised guidelines will include, but not be limited to:

- developing cumulative impact assessment guidelines to inform a transparent, consistent and systematic approach to the assessment of impacts from activities within and adjacent to the Region
- updating and strengthening the Great Barrier Reef water quality guidelines to include standards for a broader range of habitats and species, and thresholds for ecosystem health
- updating the Great Barrier Reef hydrodynamic modelling guidelines for dredging and dredge material disposal to consider the effects of longshore drift, resuspension and interannual variability in currents
- developing a new guideline on the assessment and management of underwater noise impacts on species.

#### Program commitments:

- Strengthened guidelines (for example, water quality)
- Cumulative impact assessment guidelines

REC18, REC19, REC21, REC25, REC7

## **New initiative — Cumulative impact assessment guidelines**

### **Purpose**

To provide a transparent, consistent and systematic approach to the management of cumulative impacts from activities in and adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef Region.

### **Context**

The strategic assessment found impacts on the Region's values do not operate in isolation but overlap and interact with each other; and that their accumulation through time and over an ever-increasing area is diminishing the ecosystem's ability to recover from disturbances. It concluded that an improved understanding of cumulative impacts and their management were critical to the future health and resilience of the Region.

To date, the understanding of cumulative impacts has been limited. The focus of these guidelines is on developing processes to improve the way in which cumulative impacts are assessed and considered in planning and assessment decision making. Guidelines will address the specific challenges associated with managing cumulative impacts identified in the strategic assessment.

### **Intent**

The guidelines will provide a transparent and systematic approach to:

- identifying relevant values and ecosystem processes, including attributes relating to matters of national environmental significance
- identifying impacts operating across the Region, including past, present and likely future impacts
- considering the spatial and temporal scales (zones of influence) at which direct, indirect and cumulative impacts should be considered
- methods used to assess cumulative impacts, including the cause-and-effect relationship of relevant multiple and compounding impacts on values
- applying appropriate standards and guidelines and assessing risk.

The guidelines will set out requirements for peer and expert review together with data collection standards and protocols (refer to the integrated monitoring and reporting program, Section 8.3.7).

They will be developed collaboratively with Australian and Queensland government agencies responsible for assessing and determining development proposals that may affect the Great Barrier Reef and take into consideration comments received through the strategic assessment process.

The Authority will have regard to the guidelines in its planning and assessment decision-making processes, ensuring all relevant drivers, activities, impacts and their effects on the Region's values are explicitly considered. It will inform proponents and the community about the Authority's approach to managing impacts, improving transparency and certainty about assessment requirements for development activities.

The Authority will promote the guideline's application in relevant assessment processes at both a national and state level with the objective of establishing a single integrated approach to the consideration of cumulative impacts in decision making across jurisdictions.

The guidelines will be developed and reviewed in accordance with the Authority's policy control procedures (see Section 6.2.2 – Policy)

### **Relevant recommendations of the strategic assessment**

The principal recommendation of the strategic assessment relevant to this new initiative is:

- REC7: Work closely with Australian and Queensland government agencies to improve understanding and management of cumulative impacts from activities within and adjacent to the Region, and provide clearer guidance on how proponents and decision makers should address cumulative impacts in assessments.

## **6.3.3 Measures to restore, maintain and enhance the Region's values**

The Authority will further strengthen its management of impacts and measures to restore the Reef's values through the development of a policy and supporting guiding material on the application of environmental offsets and delivery of net environmental benefits in the Region.

Environmental offsets and net environmental benefits will be applied in the context of the 'avoid-mitigate-adaptive' management hierarchy for the management of impacts to ensure:

- highest priority is given to avoiding impacts
- impacts that cannot be avoided must be minimised
- offsets are used to compensate residual adverse impacts
- net benefits deliver an overall improvement in the condition of values or environmental processes
- adaptive management ensures activities are managed in response to changing circumstances and improving knowledge (see Part C, Sections 11.6.4 – 11.6.7).

Actions to deliver net benefits will be considered as part of the Authority's planning and assessment decision-making processes and its broader stewardship and engagement programs with partners.

#### **Program commitment(s):**

- Offset guidelines and net benefit policy

REC23, REC24

#### **New initiative — Delivering net environmental benefits**

##### **Purpose**

To provide guidance on the application of environmental offsets and delivery of actions that will result in a 'net environmental benefit' or improvement in condition of the Region's values.

##### **Context**

The strategic assessment found that the health of the Reef is declining, particularly in the southern two-thirds of the Region. While avoiding and mitigating impacts will remain the primary focus of management efforts, these are not sufficient on their own. A more comprehensive approach is required to both the delivery of offsets — which, to date, have only been required if residual impacts are significant — together with additional activities which result in a net improvement in the condition of the Region's values.

##### **Intent**

The intent of this initiative is to drive a strategic and coordinated approach to the delivery of actions required to compensate residual impacts from development activities and restore Reef health.

Offsets and net benefits will be applied in the context of the avoid-mitigate-adaptive management hierarchy for the management of impacts.

Offsets will only be considered in circumstances where all reasonable avoidance and mitigation measures have been applied and where residual impacts will not exceed relevant environmental standards, including thresholds for ecosystem health. Offsets will be required to apply to all residual impacts.

Net benefits will be focused on actions to restore ecosystem health and resilience, as this is fundamental to protecting the Region's biodiversity and heritage values, and the community benefits they support.

Policy guidance on environmental offsets and net environmental benefits will:

- inform planning and assessment decision-making processes including the assessment of permission applications under the GBRMP Act
- provide an operational context for the application of the EPBC Act's environmental offsets policy<sup>19</sup> within the Great Barrier Reef Region
- guide voluntary actions and contributions to restore the health and resilience of the Reef, including the Authority's stewardship and partnership programs.

It will be developed collaboratively with Australian and Queensland government agencies, taking into consideration comments received through the strategic assessment process. It will complement Australian and Queensland government offsets policies and restoration programs.

Environmental offsets and net benefit actions will contribute to the attainment of outcomes and management targets, and their success will be evaluated as part of the integrated monitoring and reporting program (see Section 8.3.7).

The policy and supporting guidance material will be developed and revised in accordance with the Authority's policy control procedures (see Section 6.2.2 – Policy).

##### **Relevant recommendations of the strategic assessment**

The principal recommendations of the strategic assessment relevant to this new initiative are:

- REC23: Develop a policy and supporting mechanisms to facilitate strategic and collaborative implementation of offsets across jurisdictions.
- REC24: Inform implementation of Australian and Queensland government offsets policies and restoration programs by identifying actions that will maximise the delivery of environmental benefits to the Region.

#### **6.3.4 Streamlining, harmonising and enhancing regulatory tools**

The Authority will review the adequacy of its regulatory tools to protect areas within the Region that remain in good condition, areas of high conservation value and areas subject to high cumulative risk. Where necessary, it will strengthen its regulatory safeguards. This will include evaluating the adequacy of existing planning arrangements in areas north of Cooktown and areas subject to high growth in recreation and other uses (for example, Keppel Bay).

The Authority will improve alignment of its regulatory tools, reduce unnecessary regulatory burden and seek to harmonise definitions and provisions with other similar and relevant legislation, while maintaining strong levels of environmental protection and adequate safeguards. It will also seek to improve alignment between Commonwealth and Queensland protected area management arrangements including the application of standards and joint permitting and approval processes.

It will rationalise and streamline its tourism management arrangements to improve alignment between plans of management, policies and permitting processes and reduce regulatory burden commensurate with risk.

**Program commitments:**

- Measures to enhance alignment of permission system with EPBC Act assessment processes REC8A
- Streamlining, harmonising and enhancing management tools REC8, REC9, REC10, REC12

### 6.3.5 Improving assessment of matters of national environmental significance

In order to more explicitly consider all matters of national environmental significance in its assessments, the Authority will incorporate consideration of the full suite of values identified in the Strategic Assessment Report in its decision-making processes, including the property's outstanding universal value. The need to consider the full suite of values will be made explicit in the policies to be developed as part of the outcomes-based management approach (Section 5.2) and will be progressively included in existing policies as they are updated.

The increasing significance of climate change and extreme weather in the Region means the Authority will also update its assessment processes so that impacts are appropriately considered in its decision-making processes.

As outlined further in Section 8.3 and Part C, the Authority will work towards improving its understanding of the values relevant to matters of national environmental significance, in particular at-risk species, Indigenous and historic heritage values and community benefits, and improve information management systems so that this information is more accessible to decision makers.

For assessments relevant to a number of agencies across jurisdictions, the Authority will work with these agencies to streamline the assessment processes and seek to have a more coordinated approach to community consultation. Through partnerships with other relevant agencies, and the community, it will also provide a coordinated approach to the protection and management of matters of national environmental significance.

**Program commitment(s):**

- Improving assessment of matters of national environmental significance REC1, REC3, REC4, REC8A

### 6.3.6 Supporting recovery and managing for resilience

The Authority will further develop operational activities that support recovery of the Reef ecosystem and improve the resilience of the ecosystem. For example, the Authority will support increased investment in site infrastructure, recognising that these facilities will become more important as growth along the Queensland coast increases demand for visitor facilities, particularly on islands, and vessel-related infrastructure such as moorings and anchorages. The Authority will also support development of a collaborative Reef-wide management strategy for Great Barrier Reef islands.

In the short to medium term, there is an identified need to reduce illegal fishing in the Region as it is undermining biodiversity protection and compromising values. There are also opportunities to support recovery (for example through measures identified in the *Great Barrier Reef Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan 2012–2017*<sup>6</sup>).

**Program commitment(s):**

- Further develop operational activities that support Reef recovery and build resilience REC12, REC15, REC17, REC17A, REC25, REC35, REC36, REC37, REC38

### 6.3.7 Improving certainty

Inherently, there is a large level of uncertainty surrounding protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef — a vast and complex marine protected area which is managed for multiple use. The Authority deals with this uncertainty by basing its decisions on the best available knowledge, and using its regulatory tools to provide



certainty with regard to where activities may occur and under what conditions they may proceed. Where uncertainty exists, the Authority will continue to adopt a risk-based approach and apply the principles of ecologically sustainable use to its decision making.

The strategic assessment demonstrated that, for many activities in many areas, such as tourism, research activities and shipping, the Authority's regulatory framework provides a high degree of certainty about where activities may occur and under what conditions.

The assessment identified there was less certainty in relation to the port activities within the Region. In line with the recommendations of the strategic assessment, the Authority will support development of a Queensland ports strategy that concentrates port development around long-established major ports in Queensland, and encourage port master planning.

The Authority will also facilitate the development of a whole of government policy to provide a strategic and consistent approach to the sustainable management of dredging and dredge material disposal in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Recognising that continued population growth in the Great Barrier Reef catchment is likely to increase demand for facilities to enable access to the Region, the Authority will also promote a strategic approach to the development and operation of marinas and other access infrastructure along the Great Barrier Reef coast.

**Program commitments:**

- Improving certainty for planning and management
- Dredging and dredge spoil disposal policy

REC11

REC11A

### 6.3.8 Strengthening protection and management of heritage values

The *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Heritage Strategy*<sup>7</sup> developed in 2005 under the EPBC Act, will be reviewed and updated to more comprehensively address natural, Indigenous and historic heritage, with a view to improving understanding of heritage values and better integrating their consideration in decision-making processes.

The Authority will also consult with Traditional Owners and stakeholders about pursuing an amended national heritage listing for the Great Barrier Reef, or more formal arrangements under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* to strengthen recognition and protection of Indigenous and historic heritage values.

The Authority will work with Traditional Owners to develop a comprehensive management framework to promote and coordinate the contributions of Traditional Owners to management of the Great Barrier Reef, and to guide management of Indigenous heritage values in the Region. This will include development of a strategy specifically focused on Indigenous heritage.

**Program commitment(s):**

- Strengthen protection of heritage values

REC4, REC5, REC13, REC28

### 6.3.9 Improving the compliance program

One of the Field Management Program's key aims is to achieve effective compliance with relevant Commonwealth and Queensland laws among Reef users. While the Authority regards education and communication as the most effective means to encourage compliance with legislation, it also undertakes enforcement and prosecution action where it is deemed appropriate and necessary. Such actions are of vital importance as illegal activities remain a high risk to matters of national environmental significance.

The Authority will improve its compliance effectiveness across the Region through the adoption of more advanced surveillance technology, improved coordination of compliance activities across jurisdictions, and by strengthening powers to deter repeat offending. It will seek to reduce illegal fishing, in particular, by working with its partners to achieve the installation of real-time vessel tracking of the commercial fishing fleet and improving the effectiveness of penalties for illegal activity as a deterrent. It will also strengthen its Indigenous community compliance program, in particular, to address poaching and other illegal activities of shared concern.

**Program commitment(s):**

- Improving compliance

REC16, REC8A

### 6.3.10 Improving incident response capacity

Increasing use of the Region and the likelihood of an increase in severe weather events, means the Authority and its management partners need to have a strong capacity to respond to incidents.

In relation to shipping, the Authority will work with other responsible agencies to implement the actions set out in the *North-East Shipping Management Plan*<sup>8</sup>, once finalised, including to:

- implement systems, training, equipment and procedures to ensure immediate response capacity to shipping and cargo incidents, including arrangements to fund necessary environmental responses not covered by the *National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil and other Hazardous and Noxious Substances*
- improve incident response capacity to and understanding of chemical and cargo spills
- improve capacity to treat marine pest incursions.

The Authority will ensure the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events are appropriately considered in the Authority's management decisions, and support initiatives to build the capacity of management agencies and Reef users to respond to incidents relating to climate change and extreme weather events.

#### Program commitment(s):

- Improving incident response capacity

REC10A

## 7 Engagement

### 7.1 Context

The Authority's non-regulatory approaches focus on enhancing protection measures within the Region, and influencing drivers and activities which affect the Region but fall outside of the Authority's jurisdictional control. It recognises that protection of the Great Barrier Reef requires local, national and international effort. By establishing ongoing and collaborative working relationships, the Authority aims to influence actions which affect the Reef and instil a sense of collective stewardship. The Authority utilises a range of approaches to encourage engagement in the protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef Region.

The Authority will adopt the following arrangements and commitments to support the delivery of the Authority's comprehensive management program, adapting them as required to address changing circumstances.

### 7.2 Foundational management arrangements

The Authority's current engagement arrangements provide a strong foundation for its future management program. The Authority will continue to work with Traditional Owners, the community, business, industry, research institutes and government agencies to encourage best practice, and find pragmatic solutions to secure the future health of the Reef.

#### 7.2.1 Partnerships

Partnerships are formal arrangements, often executed through a memorandum of understanding or an agreement, to improve management outcomes for the Region. They detail how the parties will work together to advance their mutual interests.

The partnership between the Australian and Queensland governments, established through the Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement 2009, is fundamental to management of the Reef. The agreement underpins the many joint Australian and Queensland government programs and management arrangements which are central to the protection of the Reef, including the joint Field Management Program.

The Authority has a number of other formal partnerships with individual government agencies, industry bodies, Traditional Owners and community groups. Examples include: the Reef Rescue marine monitoring program which is a commitment under the *Reef Water Quality Protection Plan*<sup>9</sup> (Reef Plan); and the High Standard Tourism program<sup>10</sup> which aims to achieve best practice standards and is governed by a deed of agreement with Ecotourism Australia, a certification body.

Partnerships will continue to play a central role in the Authority's forward program for the protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef.

#### 7.2.2 Stewardship and best practice

Recognising the Region's world heritage status, the Authority encourages stewardship and best practice approaches across all regulated and unregulated activities within the Region and the Reef's catchment.

The Authority works with its stakeholders to build enduring relationships and provides the opportunity to contribute to protection and management.

There is a suite of stewardship and best practice initiatives with local government, volunteer groups, schools, tourism operators, fishers, farmers and graziers. Examples include the Reef Guardian program which is a voluntary stewardship program for schools, local government, fishers and farmers; Eyes and Ears incident reporting program; Pro-vision Reef Stewardship Action Plan; High Standard Tourism program; and Responsible Reef Practices for tourism and recreation.

The Authority also provides technical expertise and advice to its stakeholders, including local government, natural resource management bodies and industry, to promote collaborative arrangements which encourage development and adoption of best environmental practices.

The Authority will continue to pursue opportunities to strengthen stewardship and drive best practice approaches as part of its forward program.

#### 7.2.3 Education and community awareness

The Reef supports a diverse range of commercial and recreational users. It is also a place of intense local, regional, national and international interest. Programs to inform Reef users, visitors and the local community about the Great Barrier Reef and its protection and management will continue to underpin the Authority's comprehensive management program. Such activities encourage compliance with management principles and legislation, and inform the community about ways they can contribute to improving the future health of the Reef. Examples include:

- The Reef HQ Aquarium provides people of all ages and physical abilities the chance to see and gain an appreciation for a living coral reef ecosystem, what makes it special and why it needs to be protected.

The Aquarium's reef videoconferencing program has showcased the living reef to more than 700 locations nationally and internationally.

- The Authority's website is a key communication tool — it conveys information about the Authority's work; the marine environment, health and threats to the Reef; provides news and education resources; and also conveys information that is available for consultation.
- Community Access Points, such as at boating and fishing outlets along the Great Barrier Reef coast provide local access to information, including zoning maps and educational material.

#### **7.2.4 International engagement and capacity building**

The expertise of the Authority's staff and the achievements of the Authority in community engagement, bioregional planning, climate change adaptation, Outlook reporting and adaptive management have resulted in requests to assist with capacity building for other marine park managers. The Authority's international engagement strategy primarily focuses on hosting visitors and participating in international forums to exchange ideas on and share experiences in marine protected area management.

The Authority recognises it has a responsibility to share its three decades of experience and expertise and be a driver of positive change and excellence in marine protected area management. To meet this responsibility, the Authority leads, hosts and participates in a range of international forums.

For example, in 2012 and 2013 the Authority hosted the International Coral Reef Initiative on behalf of the Australian Government. The initiative involves governments, international organisations and non-government organisations who are striving to raise awareness of the importance of coral reefs and threats to their future.

The Authority will continue to engage at an international level to share expertise, including best practices and success stories, with marine park and world heritage managers facing similar challenges.

#### **7.2.5 Consultation**

The Authority seeks public comment on significant changes to its management arrangements. This includes consultation on the development or amendment of its Zoning Plan, plans of management and policies. It also seeks public comment on applications to undertake activities in the Marine Park that are likely to affect the public's reasonable use of a part of the Marine Park.

The Authority maintains Reef Advisory Committees to advise the Authority on its management actions in relation to key issues. They are competency based, comprising a cross-section of stakeholder interests. At a local level, the Authority receives advice from voluntary, community-based Local Marine Advisory Committees.

#### **7.2.6 Advisory role**

As highlighted in the strategic assessment, many of the impacts affecting the values of the Region arise from activities that are beyond the direct jurisdiction of the Authority. Therefore, in addition to implementing formal agreements with key partners, the Authority works directly with a range of Australian and Queensland government agencies, local government and industries by providing technical and policy advice in relation to matters that affect the Reef.

The Authority will continue to work with the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and relevant Queensland Government agencies to ensure its technical and policy advice is appropriately considered in relevant Commonwealth and State environmental assessment and decision-making processes.

### **7.3 Commitments to strengthen management**

Given that engagement and partnerships are central to almost all of the Authority's activities, many of the recommendations of the strategic assessment relate to this component. The areas identified as requiring significant strengthening relate to: influencing drivers and activities affecting the Region's values; adopting regionally-based approaches to inshore biodiversity; supporting best practice and stewardship; improving decision makers' engagement with the community as well as strengthening coordination and integration of management across all parties.

#### **7.3.1 Reef recovery program**

The Authority will implement a Reef recovery program for the Great Barrier Reef Region. This will involve the adoption of regionalised and cooperative management approaches which support local communities and encourage cooperation between government agencies, the private sector and research institutions in implementing actions to protect and restore the Region's values and support sustainable use.

The program will use measures outlined in this report to strengthen management to build upon and better integrate current initiatives to reduce impacts and restore the condition of the Region's values.

Integral to the program will be the acknowledgement, promotion and transfer of the many rich sources of knowledge held within the community, along with supporting opportunities for local communities to develop and implement remedial actions to restore values.

**Program commitment(s):**

- Reef recovery program

REC22, REC24, REC27, REC29

**New initiative — Reef recovery program****Purpose**

To reduce high risk and cumulative impacts on the Region's values through implementing regionally-based cooperative management approaches.

**Context**

The strategic assessment clearly demonstrates that a number of habitats, particularly in the southern two-thirds of the Region, as well as many of the species that rely on them are in decline. These habitats and species have been affected by a range of impacts, including declining water quality due to catchment run-off, crown-of-thorns starfish, loss of habitat due to coastal development, and climate change. Although considerable gains have been made in reducing fishing impacts, illegal fishing, poaching and incidental catch of fish and other marine animals remain a concern.

Connectivity within and between terrestrial and marine ecosystems is critical to the health and resilience of the Region. The Authority has worked with scientific experts and stakeholders to build an understanding of the state of the catchment and associated marine ecosystems and the impacts affecting them. This work shows that while there is a suite of common issues across the Region (for example, impacts from extreme weather, catchment clearing and run-off), the way these issues interact is often very localised and varies from place to place.

These findings highlight the critical importance of adopting regional and local approaches to address threats to the Region's values and promote sustainable use.

**Intent**

To establish a Reef Recovery program for the Region based on regionalised and cooperative management approaches developed and implemented with local communities, Traditional Owners, Australian and Queensland government agencies, local government, the private sector and experts.

In the northern third of the Region, the focus will be on safeguarding the Reef and maintaining the area in a natural state, largely unaltered by works or facilities. In the southern two-thirds of the Region, the focus will be on restoring the condition of values and reducing impacts on those values, while continuing to provide for a range of sustainable use opportunities.

The program will build upon and strengthen integration of current initiatives to reduce threats, restore degraded habits, improve water quality and re-establish connectivity and functioning of coastal ecosystems. It will systematically address the cumulative impacts on the Region's values, giving priority to threats to identified at-risk species, species groups and habitats.

The program will inform the development of regionally-based standards and guidelines, including best practice approaches, to meet outcomes for the condition of values and to determine levels of acceptable use required to protect the Region's values.

Standards and guidelines will complement existing statutory arrangements, including the Zoning Plan and water quality guidelines, and be developed in accordance with international and national obligations to protect the Region's values and the principles of ecologically sustainable use.

The Program will be rolled out on a regional basis. Priority will be given to implementing the program in the Keppel Bay, Mackay and Townsville (Cleveland and Bowling Green bays) areas, as well as Princess Charlotte and Bathurst bays.

**Relevant recommendations of the strategic assessment**

The principal recommendations of the strategic assessment relevant to this new initiative are:

- REC14: Promote, recognise and encourage stewardship and best practice efforts by community, industry and government.
- REC27: Strengthen engagement with all relevant partners to facilitate actions that maintain and enhance the condition of values and reduce impacts, particularly in relation to climate change, catchment run-off, degradation of coastal ecosystems and direct use.
- REC38: Support initiatives to build the capacity of management agencies and Reef users to adapt and respond to climate change and extreme weather events.



### 7.3.2 Influencing drivers and activities affecting the Region's values

The strategic assessment identified four categories of high risk impacts: climate change, catchment run-off, degradation of coastal ecosystems and direct use. Of these, only one — direct use — has components that are within the Authority's jurisdiction and regulatory control. The Authority's ability to influence the drivers and activities causing most impacts on the Region relies on its capacity to engage and work collaboratively with its partners and stakeholders.

The Authority will strengthen and focus its engagement activities to improve its influence on high risk impacts affecting the Region's values. It will seek to have its policies and guidelines adopted by its partners. Approaches will include:

- working further with the Australian Government and the broader community to promote awareness of the effects of a changing climate on the Great Barrier Reef, to develop and implement climate change adaptation measures and to build ecosystem resilience
- continuing and strengthening partnerships with the Australian and Queensland governments, local government, natural resource management bodies, the Authority's Reef Guardian networks and other stakeholders in relation to actions to improve catchment run-off, including actively promoting the uptake of improved land management practices to more rapidly achieve Reef Plan targets, and to support development and implementation of further regionally-based water quality improvement plans
- continuing and strengthening engagement with Australian, Queensland and local governments, together with natural resource management bodies, the Authority's Reef Guardian networks and the community to highlight the importance of functioning coastal ecosystems, to maintaining a healthy Reef and promoting a whole of ecosystem approach to management of the Reef and its catchment — informed by the Authority's coastal ecosystem basin assessments and management case studies
- continuing to work with its government partners, including ports corporations, to improve governance, strategic planning and the environmental sustainability of port activities across the Region
- continuing to work in close collaboration with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, Maritime Safety Queensland and other relevant partners in the management of shipping within the Region, including through finalisation and implementation of the *North-East Shipping Management Plan*<sup>8</sup>
- building on the significant progress made by the commercial fishing industry in achieving better sustainability, continuing to work with Australian and Queensland government partners, together with the fishing industry, to further address the remaining risks. The Authority will also continue and enhance engagement aimed at ensuring the sustainability of recreational fishing.

#### Program commitment(s):

- Influencing drivers and activities affecting the Region's values

REC27, REC37, REC38

### 7.3.3 Supporting best practice and stewardship

Recognising the Region's world heritage status, an emphasis on best practice and stewardship encourages all regulated and unregulated activities within the Region to be carried out in accordance with world's best practice standards.

The Authority will work directly with Reef users and the broader community who undertake activities within the Region to promote awareness, understanding and appreciation of the Reef's outstanding universal value.

Building on the successes of its current programs, the Authority will strengthen its activities aimed at: improving the development and uptake of best practices and innovative approaches; reducing impacts of activities; and improving sustainability.

The Authority recognises the role that the Reef's tourism industry plays in presenting the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. It will continue to promote presentation of the Reef's values in partnership with the tourism industry, including through strengthening training and the development of educational material.

#### Program commitment(s):

- Supporting best practice and stewardship

REC14

#### 7.3.4 Improving consultation arrangements

The Authority recognises the importance of consultation with interested parties in all of its management activities, and will continue formal and informal consultation processes with Traditional Owners, Reef users and the broader community.

It will work with relevant agencies to improve the coordination of consultation arrangements for the assessment of project proposals across jurisdictions, and increase the public's confidence in their ability to engage in the protection and management of the Region.

The Authority will continue to adapt its consultation arrangements across the life of the program, in response to the evolving nature of issues affecting the Region and the changing needs of the Authority and its stakeholders.

For example as part of the strategic assessment process, the Authority has committed to the establishment of a peak Great Barrier Reef advisory group made up of Traditional Owners, scientific, conservation and industry experts to provide high level advice on the implementation of the Authority's comprehensive management program.

##### **Program commitments:**

- Improving consultation arrangements
- Establishing a peak Reef advisory committee

REC34A

## 8 Knowledge, innovation and integration

### 8.1 Context

A comprehensive and up-to-date understanding about the Great Barrier Reef, its values, the processes that support it and the impacts that are affecting it is fundamental to managing the Region. Within the Region, knowledge and understanding is improved through the activities of a wide range of research providers such as the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS), Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), government agencies (such as the Authority, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) and universities, as well as by commercial companies and consultants, stakeholders, Traditional Owners and community members.

The Authority will adopt the following arrangements and commitments to support the delivery of the Authority's comprehensive management program, adapting them as required to address changing circumstances.

### 8.2 Foundational management arrangements

#### 8.2.1 Identifying values

The Authority manages a vast amount of information about the Region's biodiversity and is placing an increasing focus on understanding heritage values and community benefits derived from the Region's environment. It also applies the latest available information and expert knowledge on impacts on those values to assess their condition and trend. The four major sources of information for management are: research, monitoring, modelling and community knowledge. Maintaining and enhancing collaboration with other agencies and research bodies is an important aspect of the Authority's program, helping to ensure all information relevant to the Region's values is available for management planning and decision making.

#### 8.2.2 Research, monitoring and reporting

The Authority undertakes, commissions, influences or is a partner in a wide range of research and monitoring activities relating to the Region. The outcomes of these activities are designed to better inform decisions on protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef. Key information needs to improve management of the area are identified in the Authority's *Scientific information needs for the management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park 2009–2014*<sup>11</sup>. This document, along with partnership agreements with key research institutions, provides the basis for focusing research on matters relevant to the long-term protection and management of the Reef.

Examples of the Authority's activities include:

- guiding, coordinating and supporting relevant environmental, social and economic research to improve understanding of the risks facing the Reef and their likely effects
- investigating impacts caused by major storms,<sup>12</sup> flooding, mass bleaching,<sup>13</sup> outbreaks of pests and diseases,<sup>14</sup> shipping incidents and direct use
- monitoring the condition of the environment
- monitoring impacts and drivers of environmental change.

The Authority has a number of statutory reporting requirements and these are described in Section 8.3.7.

#### 8.2.3 Building corporate knowledge

Based on nearly 40 years of managing the Region, the Authority has developed an extensive body of corporate knowledge about the Region and its management. This is also the case for many of its management partners, such as the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and natural resource management bodies. The knowledge is applied to all aspects of the Region's management, and is also available to other partners and stakeholders to support their contributions to protecting the Region's values.

### 8.3 Commitments to strengthen management

It is important that information from all sources is integrated into management and that knowledge is shared with others. The strategic assessment provided an opportunity to more systematically and comprehensively identify, collate and present information on:

- the Region's values, including matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes and environmental processes
- drivers, activities and impacts acting on those values.

The areas identified in the strategic assessment as requiring significant strengthening relate to: improving understanding of heritage values; improving spatial mapping capabilities; supporting a long-term social and economic monitoring program; improving alignment and coordination of research priorities, in particular, research

on cumulative impacts; increasing emphasis on use of modelling approaches; standardising data collection and improved data sharing; and integrating knowledge, monitoring, reporting and adaptive management.

### 8.3.1 Improving identification and understanding of matters of national environmental significance

Identifying and understanding the values relevant to matters of national environmental significance in the Region, especially through mapping, will continue to be an important input into planning and decision making through the life of the program. The Authority will work with other relevant agencies and research organisations to:

- improve understanding and sharing of information about the Region's values, their distribution, condition and trend and the impacts that are affecting them
- improve spatial representation of information relating to the Region's values. This will provide greater certainty and transparency about the occurrence and distribution of particular values in the Region and impacts affecting them
- identify values of the Region that are not easily represented and measured, such as aesthetic values.

#### Program commitment(s):

- Improving identification and understanding of matters of national environmental significance  
REC3, REC6, REC32

### 8.3.2 Identifying Indigenous heritage values

The Authority will collaborate with Traditional Owners to undertake an assessment of the Indigenous heritage values of the Region. The Authority will also implement an Indigenous knowledge management system to promote the use of traditional ecological knowledge and contribute to improved protection of Indigenous heritage values. This will include development of a protocol to ensure appropriate safeguards are in place to protect culturally sensitive information, and better practice guidelines for engagement with Traditional Owners.

#### Program commitment(s):

- Improving identification of Indigenous heritage values  
REC4, REC5, REC13, REC28

### 8.3.3 Developing and maintaining a historic heritage database

The Authority will develop and maintain a database of places of historic significance to improve the identification and protection of historic heritage values. The database will include information on historic shipwrecks, World War II artefacts and historic lightstations, together with places of scientific and social significance. The Authority will also establish protocols with other relevant Australian and Queensland government agencies responsible for listed places (for example, lighthouses and historic shipwrecks) to improve data sharing arrangements.

#### Program commitment(s):

- Developing a historic heritage database  
REC5, REC13

### 8.3.4 Improving understanding of community benefits

The Authority recognises the range of important community benefits provided by the Region's environment, and will promote research to improve understanding of the role that the Great Barrier Reef plays in the life of the community — incorporating relevant outcomes into planning and decision making.

The Authority will also work with partner agencies to implement a long-term socio-economic monitoring program to improve understanding and consideration of community benefits derived from the environment in decision-making processes. This measure recognises the role of people and communities in the Region's ongoing management, and the benefits the Region provides to the community. Building a clearer understanding of the social and economic benefits derived from the environment is fundamental to understanding the effects of impacts on those benefits, and safeguarding the Region's future as a multiple-use area.

**Program commitment(s):**

- Improving understanding of community benefits

REC6, REC33

### 8.3.5 Improving alignment and coordination of research priorities

The strategic assessment has identified research needs critical to the Region's management. To meet these needs, the Authority will seek to strengthen partnerships and improve alignment between the priorities of the Authority and those of its partners, stakeholders and research providers. Key focus areas over the next five years will be research which delivers improvements in:

- understanding how impacts interact with values (including matters of national environmental significance and outstanding universal value) and determining regionally-based ecosystem thresholds and tipping points for those interactions
- understanding the spatial and temporal scales (zones of influence) at which processes occur and interact with values
- understanding sensitivity and exposure to individual and cumulative impacts, particularly for key values
- understanding the ecosystem processes that operate in the Great Barrier Reef and the effects of a changing climate on the processes and the Reef's resilience
- informing qualitative and, where they exist, quantitative models of cause-and-effect relationships for the Great Barrier Reef, to improve understanding of interactions and to provide predictions
- synthesising monitoring data and other information to inform ecological and social risk assessments and developing guidelines and standards for management action
- uncovering new biodiversity values and hotspots
- testing management responses for their effectiveness in improving protection of values.

The Authority will also continue to encourage and support research and innovation that improves the sustainability of activities in the Region and reduces impacts on the Region's values. Examples of some of the key areas identified in the strategic assessment are:

- improving understanding of the cumulative impacts of port activities within the Region, including identifying key knowledge gaps and addressing critical information needs
- further research and development into better gear technologies designed to reduce interactions with protected species and bycatch in all commercial fisheries, and with protected species in shark control nets
- improving understanding and management of the impacts of noise on species, particularly at-risk and inshore species.

**Program commitment(s):**

- Improving alignment and coordination of research priorities

REC20, REC30

### 8.3.6 Increasing emphasis on use of modelling approaches

The Authority will place increased emphasis on the use of modelling approaches to improve its understanding of cause-and-effect relationships between drivers, activities, impacts and the Reef's values, and the successive and combined effects of impacts on the Region's environment. It will employ a range of modelling tools to improve predictive capacity and to test the application of potential approaches to addressing impacts. An increased emphasis on modelling will require the Authority to strengthen collaborative arrangements with its partner organisations with modelling expertise, and to build its staff capacity in this field.

**Program commitment(s):**

- Increasing emphasis on use of modelling

REC20, REC31



8.3.7 Integrated monitoring and reporting

The Authority will establish an integrated Region-wide monitoring and reporting program to support implementation of the outcomes and targets, and to guide adaptive management.

The program will provide comprehensive and systematic monitoring and reporting of:

- the condition and trend of the Region’s key values and processes related to matters of national environmental significance
- individual (direct and indirect) and cumulative impacts acting on the values
- ecosystem thresholds, environmental standards and trigger levels for the protection of values.

It will also contribute to the assessment of the effectiveness of policies, plans and programs implemented to protect matters of national environmental significance, and ensure ecologically sustainable use.

The program will improve the integration and coordination of existing monitoring programs through the development and implementation of standardised protocols for information collection, collation analysis, reporting and data availability. It will improve the scalability of data (from point source or local, to regional and Reef-wide scales) and synthesis of information from different sources. This will provide a more comprehensive and systematic understanding of the condition of values and scale of impacts.

The integrated monitoring and reporting program will build upon existing monitoring programs of the Authority and its partners, including:

- long-term core monitoring programs — to assess the condition and trend of the Region’s values and broadscale impacts, such as water quality, over many years
- short to medium-term, issue-specific monitoring — to examine the condition, extent of impact on and recovery rate of species, habitats or community benefits
- compliance monitoring — to target the impacts of a development action (for example, construction of a marina or dredging program) in accordance with conditions specified in a permit, licence or approval.

The program will incorporate the knowledge and monitoring information of Traditional Owners, stakeholders and the broader community.

Program commitments:

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| • Integrated monitoring and reporting program     | REC31 |
| • Better integration of knowledge into management | REC31 |

## **New initiative — Integrated monitoring, reporting and adaptive management program for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area**

### **Purpose**

To establish an integrated Region-wide monitoring program to support the implementation of the outcomes and targets and to guide future protection of the Great Barrier Reef.

### **Context**

Monitoring provides information on the condition of the Region's values and the status of the impacts and activities affecting those values. It allows early detection of trends and changes and the assessment of future risks, as well as playing a fundamental role in evaluating management effectiveness. It is also critical to informing the development, refinement and application of models that help managers understand trends and patterns occurring in the Region. Monitoring data is used to meet statutory reporting requirements such as the Authority's five-yearly Outlook Report and its annual report, as well as other reporting obligations including communicating the outcomes of the *Reef Water Quality Protection Plan*.

Existing monitoring programs have largely been designed to address and report on a specific issue, location or management initiative. A review of these monitoring programs has identified that most key management needs are currently being addressed by some form of monitoring but, in many cases, it is too limited, either spatially or temporally, to adequately meet information needs. Additionally, there is a lack of indicators which address the full suite of biophysical and socio-economic values and a need for improved data standardisation, discoverability and accessibility.

### **The program**

The program will provide comprehensive and systematic monitoring and reporting of:

- the condition and trend of the Region's values and processes including matters of national environmental significance
- individual and cumulative impacts acting on the Region's values
- ecosystem thresholds, environmental standards and trigger levels for the protection of values
- the effectiveness of management policies, plans and programs to protect the Region's values and ensure use is ecologically sustainable.

The program will improve the integration and coordination of existing monitoring programs through the development and implementation of standardised protocols for information collection, collation and data sharing. It will improve the scalability of data (from point source or local, to regional and Reef-wide scales) and synthesis of information from different sources. This will provide a more comprehensive and systematic understanding of the condition of values and scale of impacts.

The integrated monitoring program will build upon existing monitoring programs of the Authority and its partners, including:

- long-term core monitoring programs — to assess the condition and trend of the Region's value and broadscale impacts, such as water quality, over many years
- short to medium-term, issue-specific monitoring — to examine the condition, extent of impact on and recovery rate of species, habitats or community benefits
- compliance monitoring — to target the impacts of a development action (for example, construction of a marina or dredging program) in accordance with conditions specified in a permit, licence or approval.

The program will incorporate the knowledge and monitoring information of Traditional Owners, stakeholders and the broader community.

It will be developed collaboratively with parties involved in research and monitoring and the protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef.

### **Relevant recommendations of the strategic assessment**

The principal recommendation of the strategic assessment relevant to this new initiative is:

- REC31: Implement an integrated monitoring, reporting and adaptive management program for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, including more explicit reporting on the condition and trend of matters of national environmental significance to enable the performance of activities to be monitored against regulatory objectives, outcomes for matters of national environmental significance and relevant guidelines and standards, including ecosystem thresholds.

## 9 Adaptive management and implementation

The dynamic and complex nature of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem, the pace of change in factors affecting it, and improving knowledge about both the ecosystem and its impacts means the Authority needs to be flexible and adaptive in its management into the future.

### 9.1 Using adaptive management to protect and manage matters of national environmental significance

Adaptive management has played a central role in understanding and managing the Region in the past decade.<sup>15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22</sup> The Authority recognises that to achieve its outcomes for a system as dynamic and complex as the Great Barrier Reef — in both its natural and human dimensions — an ongoing adaptive approach will be required.

Adaptive management that responds to changing circumstances requires an up-to-date and comprehensive understanding of the status and trend of key indicators of matters of national environmental significance, the impacts that may be affecting them and the benefits being derived from the environment.

The integrated monitoring and reporting program will improve the interface between knowledge and management, support performance evaluation and underpin the Authority's adaptive management approach. Management activities that will benefit from the improved integration of knowledge and management include:

- ensuring targets are regularly reviewed and updated in line with the best available knowledge
- informing priorities for the Authority's strategic and annual operating plans
- promoting innovation, including the use of new technology, uptake of new practices and market-based or incentive-driven approaches
- rationalising, updating and improving alignment of the Authority's policy documents in line with the latest available information to inform regulatory and engagement processes
- developing and maintaining a register of critical knowledge needs to drive ongoing improvements and complete the adaptive management cycle.

The Authority's adaptive management approach will provide sufficient flexibility to deal with changing circumstances over the life of the program and allow for modifications as required (see Chapter 13 of the Strategic Assessment Report).

### 9.2 Performance evaluation and reporting

The Authority will systematically and regularly monitor and evaluate its performance towards achieving the outcomes in the proposed program. Evaluating performance will allow the Authority to learn from its successes and failures, improve continually as an organisation, adapt its management arrangements and better deliver on its goals. By structuring its future program around outcomes, rather than outputs, the Authority will have the flexibility to continually adapt its management arrangements.

Future Outlook Reports will inform progress towards achieving outcomes, including condition and trend information for ecosystem processes, values and impacts. This information will directly facilitate assessment of management performance, as statements around condition and trend are generally the basis of targets for values and impacts. Importantly, the 'outlook' section of each five-yearly report will inform adaptive management by integrating current knowledge and modelling to produce a predicted future condition of the key indicators of matters of national environmental significance.

The integrated monitoring and reporting program will support the Authority's management approach and is central to the Authority's adaptive management cycle.

At its highest level, evaluation of the effectiveness of the management program will be through the statutory five-year Outlook reporting cycle which includes a requirement to assess 'existing measures to protect and manage the Region's ecosystem'. The findings of each report will inform the Authority's five-yearly priorities and be the principal guide to adaptive management.

Annual strategic planning, taking into account emerging information and monitoring results, will inform finer scale adjustments to management arrangements.

The Authority will also assess the effectiveness of individual policies, plans and programs as part of its normal processes of project planning, implementation and review.

#### Program commitment(s):

- Adaptive management review cycles conducted annually and five-yearly as part of the Outlook Report

REC31

### 9.3 Program resourcing

As an Australian Government statutory authority, the Authority is resourced primarily through government appropriations. These are determined through the annual budgeting and forward estimates cycle. In addition, the Authority receives a special appropriation derived from the environmental management charge.

The Authority receives non-appropriation funding from other sources for its general operations and specific programs. This includes funds from the operation of its Reef HQ Aquarium, specific program-based government funding, Queensland Government contributions to field management, and other minor cost recovery fees (for example, permit application and assessment fees).

Achieving the goals, outcomes and targets of the management program described in this report will require a sharpened focus in the Authority's current delivery mechanisms.

The Authority will continue foundational management arrangements and strengthen management within the Authority by realigning its current business systems and processes. More effective use of existing resources and stronger cooperation with partner agencies will ensure the Authority is well placed to build on its existing management arrangements.

The Authority will embed the strengthened management measures within existing policies, plans and programs, where appropriate. It will stage implementation of the remaining measures, including its new initiatives, based on their priority and the availability of resources.

The constantly changing nature of the Great Barrier Reef requires that the Authority's management program is sufficiently focused to consistently deliver results, yet agile enough to seamlessly shift and respond to issues when necessary.

The speed with which the outcomes and targets will be achieved will be contingent on future resourcing arrangements of both the Authority and its partner agencies. Improved certainty of funding, over timescales similar to those needed to deliver environmental benefits, would enable the Authority to strengthen its long-term approach to complex management issues.

### 9.4 Governance

The Authority is responsible for implementation of the management program. It is committed to implementing the outcomes of the strategic assessment in collaboration and consultation with the Queensland Government and other Australian government agencies.

Recognising the central role of the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum in facilitating an integrated and coordinated approach to protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef, it is proposed that a report be provided annually to the Forum on implementation of the proposed Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan. This report would be developed collaboratively with the Queensland Government and the Australian Government's Department of the Environment. This arrangement will allow identification of opportunities for further cooperation, resolve any emerging issues and maintain momentum from the strategic assessment process.

#### Program commitment(s):

- Contribute to improved governance arrangements

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### 9.5 Implementation

Table 3 outlines implementation arrangements for the delivery of the Authority's management program. Timeframes are included for measures to strengthen management and forward commitments. Activities are designed to improve protection of all matters of national environmental significance, including the outstanding universal value of the property.

**Table 3 Implementation of measures to strengthen management and forward commitments**

Over the next five years, the Authority will focus its management efforts on the implementation of a suite of measures to strengthen foundational management. Measures are designed to strengthen the protection and, where relevant, restoration of the Region's values including matters of national environmental significance.

	Within 12 months	Within two years	Within five years	Ongoing	Annually	Five-yearly
<b>New initiatives</b>						
Outcomes and targets	●					
Offset guidelines and net benefit policy	●					
Cumulative impact assessment guidelines	●					
Reef recovery program				●		
Integrated monitoring and reporting program			●			
<b>Measures to strengthen management</b>						
<b>Environmental regulation</b>						
Regionally-based standards for ecosystem health			●			
Dredging and dredge material disposal policy	●					
Strengthened guidelines (e.g. water quality)		●				
Measures to enhance alignment of permission system with EPBC Act assessment processes	●					
Streamlining, harmonising and enhancing management tools		●				
Improving assessment of matters of national environmental significance				●		
Further develop operational activities that support recovery and build resilience				●		
Improving certainty for planning and management			●			
Strengthening protection of heritage values			●			
Improving compliance				●		
Improving incident response capacity				●		
<b>Engagement</b>						
Influencing drivers and activities affecting the Region				●		
Supporting best practice and stewardship				●		
Improving consultation arrangements		●				
Establishment of a peak Reef advisory committee	●					
<b>Knowledge, innovation and integration</b>						
Improving identification and understanding of matters of national environmental significance				●		
Improving identification of Indigenous heritage values			●			
Developing a historic heritage database		●				
Improving understanding of community benefits			●			
Improving alignment and coordination of research priorities	●					
Increasing emphasis on use of modelling			●			
Better integration of knowledge into management			●			
<b>Forward commitments</b>						
Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan	●					
Adaptive management — review cycles					●	●
Governance (Ministerial Forum)					●	



## 9.6 Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan

The Authority is committed to working with the Australian and Queensland governments to develop and implement a Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. This commitment is a central component of the Australian Government's response to World Heritage Committee concerns regarding the impacts of development on the property.

The Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan will provide an over-arching framework ensuring integration, coordination and alignment of actions to protect the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area's outstanding universal value, and support ecologically sustainable development and use.

It will build on the Australian and Queensland governments' strong foundation of management measures to protect the Great Barrier Reef, and include the following elements:

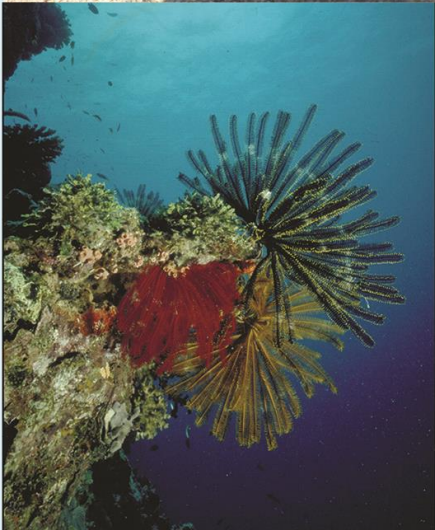
- a vision for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area that reflects the diversity of use and interest in the property, protects the outstanding universal value, sustains its integrity and integrates the three pillars of sustainability (environmental, social and economic)
- an outcomes framework that includes measurable targets to guide actions for the protection of the property's outstanding universal value
- actions to deliver outcomes and targets, primarily drawn from the two strategic assessments and with a focus on critical areas of new work
- integrated monitoring and reporting to measure the success of the plan and inform adaptive management.

It is proposed that the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum will be responsible for oversight of the plan's implementation.

### Program commitments:

- Develop a long-term sustainability plan for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area in partnership with the Australian and Queensland governments

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## PART C

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Protecting matters  
of national  
environmental  
significance



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## 10 Introduction

The Authority's Program outlines the Authority's commitments to support approval of a class of actions under Part 10 – Strategic Assessments, Section 146 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

### 10.1 Purpose

The purpose of Part C of the Authority's Program is to demonstrate how its permission system meets the requirements of the EPBC Act to ensure that development in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Marine Park) occurs in an ecologically sustainable manner, and that activities carried out do not have unacceptable impacts on matters of national environmental significance protected under the EPBC Act.

Part C of the Program Report:

- outlines commitments and undertakings of the Authority to ensure adequate protection of matters of national environmental significance
- together with the Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment Report, provides the basis for the Minister for the Environment to consider endorsing the Authority's Program under Section 146 of the EPBC Act
- provides the basis for the Minister for the Environment to consider approving the taking of an action or class of actions in accordance with the endorsed Program. Any approval will be subject to implementation of the commitments made by the Authority in Part C, including proposed regulatory amendments, which are summarised at Table 5 and Table 6.

### 10.2 Background

The Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment assesses the adequacy of the Authority's management arrangements, including its environmental impact assessment and management processes, to identify and manage impacts on matters of national environmental significance relevant to the Great Barrier Reef Region.

The findings of the Strategic Assessment Report have informed the development of the Authority's comprehensive management program which is described in Part B of this document. It contains a detailed description of the Authority's management arrangements and future commitments to protect and manage relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the outstanding universal value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

This part of the Program Report specifically focusses on how the Authority's environmental impact assessment and management processes — referred to hereafter as its permission system — identifies and manages impacts on matters of national environmental significance protected under the EPBC Act.

### 10.3 Legislative basis

The Authority's permission system is established under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* (the GBRMP Act) and its operation governed by this Act and the following pieces of legislation.

- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983 (GBRMP Regulations) are the primary regulations in force under the GBRMP Act.
- *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Environmental Management Charge—Excise) Act 1993* and *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Environmental Management Charge—General) Act 1999* govern operation of the environmental management charge.
- *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Aquaculture) Regulations 2000* were established to govern aquaculture operations to stop pollution of water in a manner harmful to animals and plants in the Marine Park.
- *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003* (the Zoning Plan) is the primary planning instrument for the conservation and management of the Marine Park.
- Cairns Area Plan of Management 1998, Whitsundays Plan of Management 1998, Hinchinbrook Plan of Management 2004 and Shoalwater Bay (Dugong) Plan of Management 1997 (plans of management) establish more detailed management arrangements for specific areas of the Marine Park.

The permission system is supported by comprehensive, non-legislative regulatory policy and guidance material.

## 10.4 Activities under the Program

The Marine Park is a multiple-use area. It provides for a range of ecologically sustainable commercial, recreational and research opportunities and for the continuation of traditional activities.

The GBRMP Act includes provisions which **prohibit mining** operations (which includes prospecting or exploration for, as well as recovery of, minerals) in the Great Barrier Reef Region, unless authorised by a permission granted under the GBRMP Regulations for the purpose of research or investigations relevant to the conservation of the Marine Park.

Activities covered under the permission system, which are intended to be covered by this Program for the purpose of seeking endorsement and approval of a class of actions under the EPBC Act are:

- all activities requiring a permission under the Zoning Plan, including:
  - aquaculture operations
  - harvest and development fisheries
  - research (other than limited impact research)
  - tourism programs and developments
  - educational programs (other than limited impact educational programs)
  - vessel or aircraft charter operations
  - navigating a vessel or aircraft
  - operating a facility, including
    - discharging waste from a facility
    - installation, operation and decommissioning of a facility
    - moorings
    - operating a landing area or a facility for aircraft
  - carrying out works, including:
    - dredging
    - dumping of spoil
    - reclamation
    - beach protection works
    - harbour works
  - taking animals and plants that pose a threat to human life or safety, marine ecosystems of the Marine Park or use or amenity of a part of the zone or adjacent area.

The activities under Part 5 of the Zoning Plan are not intended to be covered by this Program.

The Authority will continue to implement joint management arrangements for the area of shared jurisdiction with the Queensland Government in accordance with the Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement 2009.

If the Authority receives a permit application for an activity that is likely to have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance which is not covered by the above classes of actions in the strategic assessment, the Authority will provide applicants with the earliest possible advice of this and direct them to the normal EPBC Act assessment pathways administered by the Department of the Environment, or the Queensland Government where an accredited process or delegated authority exists.

## 10.5 Reducing duplication while maintaining standards

Approval of classes of action will be subject to alignment with any approval bilateral agreement under Part 5 of the EPBC Act that may be in effect for the program area.

- An updated assessment bilateral agreement between the Australian and Queensland governments was signed on 13 December 2013 through which the Queensland Government is accredited to undertake environmental assessments of any proposed actions that may impact the Great Barrier Reef.
- The two governments are negotiating an approval bilateral agreement to accredit Queensland Government processes for assessment and approval of proposed actions under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.
- The agreement aims to reduce duplication of environmental assessment and approval processes between the Commonwealth and Queensland, while maintaining high environmental standards.

The intent of the Authority seeking approval of classes of action is also to maximise opportunities for streamlining and reducing potential regulatory duplication while maintaining high environmental standards.



## 11 The permission system

### 11.1 How the permission system operates

The Authority's permission system is established under the GBRMP Act. Section 2A(3)(d) of the GBRMP Act states that *'in order to achieve its objects, this Act:*

*'regulates, including by a system of permissions, use of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in ways consistent with ecosystem-based management and the principles of ecologically sustainable use'*

The permission system operates within an objective-based regulatory and outcome-based policy framework.

### 11.2 Objective-based regulatory framework

#### 11.2.1 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act

In managing the Marine Park and carrying out its functions, the Authority must have regard to, and seek to act in a way that is consistent with, the objects of the GBRMP Act, the principles of ecologically sustainable use and the protection of the world heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (Subsection 7(3) of the GBRMP Act).

The permission system operates within and calls upon specific provisions established under the *Great Barrier Reef Zoning Plan 2003* (the Zoning Plan) and plans of management. These objective-based instruments provide for the spatial control of use, and set out specific arrangements for activities consistent with protecting the environment and the principles of ecologically sustainable use.

The way in which the Zoning Plan and plans of management relate to the permission system is described below.

#### 11.2.2 Zoning Plan

The Zoning Plan establishes which activities are 'as of right' and do not require a permission; which activities require a permission; which activities can operate under an accredited arrangement in accord with the Zoning Plan (for example, an accredited harvest fishery); and where specific activities may occur in the Marine Park.

The objects of the Zoning Plan are:

##### **Objects of the Zoning Plan – GBRMP Act Section 32**

- (1) The objects of this Division are:
  - (a) to regulate the use of the Marine Park so as to:
    - (i) protect the ecosystem within the Great Barrier Reef Region; and
    - (ii) ensure the use is ecologically sustainable; and
    - (iii) manage competing usage demands; and
  - (b) to protect areas in the Marine Park that are of high conservation value; and
  - (c) to protect and conserve the biodiversity of the Marine Park, including ecosystems, habitats, populations and genes; and
  - (d) to regulate activities that exploit the resources of the Great Barrier Reef Region so as to:
    - (i) minimise the adverse effect of those activities on the Great Barrier Reef; and
    - (ii) ensure the ecologically sustainable use of the resources; and
  - (e) to protect the world heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area; and
  - (f) to provide for the ecologically sustainable use of marine resources by Traditional Owners consistent with their traditional practices; and
  - (g) to reserve some areas of the Great Barrier Reef Region for public enjoyment and appreciation; and
  - (h) to preserve some areas of the Great Barrier Reef Region in a natural state, undisturbed except for the purposes of scientific research that cannot be undertaken elsewhere in the Marine Park.
- (2) To achieve these objects, this Division provides for the preparation of zoning plans in respect of areas in the Marine Park.

There are eight different zones within the Marine Park, and the Zoning Plan sets out the objectives of each zone, the purposes for which each zone may be used or entered without permission, and the purposes for which each zone may be used or entered only with the written permission of the Authority.

In deciding whether or not to grant a permission, consideration must be given to the objectives of the zone in which the proposed conduct will take place, as set out in the Zoning Plan.

### 11.2.3 Plans of management

Plans of management complement the Zoning Plan and provide further controls on the granting of permissions. They address issues specific to an area, species or community in greater detail than can be accomplished by the broader Reef-wide Zoning Plan.

There are four plans of management for areas in the Marine Park, covering about eight per cent of the Marine Park. The plans for the Cairns Area, the Whitsundays and Hinchinbrook set out detailed management arrangements applying to all users of these areas, with a focus on protecting key natural values and allowing a range of uses. The Shoalwater Bay (Dugong) Plan of Management aims to manage activities in the bay that threaten its dugong population or impact on its seagrass meadows.

The objects of plans of management are:

#### **Objects of the plans of management — GBRMP Act Section 39Y**

- (a) to ensure, for particular areas of the Marine Park in which the Authority considers that nature conservation values, cultural and heritage values, or scientific values are, or may be, threatened, that appropriate proposals are developed to reduce or eliminate the threats;
- (b) to ensure management for the recovery and continued protection and conservation of species and ecological communities that are, or may become:
  - (i) extinct; or
  - (ii) extinct in the wild; or
  - (iii) critically endangered; or
  - (iv) endangered; or
  - (v) vulnerable; or
  - (vi) conservation dependent;
- (c) to ensure that activities within areas of the Marine Park are managed on the basis of ecologically sustainable use;
- (d) to provide a basis for managing the uses of a particular area of the Marine Park that may conflict with other uses of the area or with the values of the area;
- (e) to provide for the management of areas of the Marine Park in conjunction with community groups in circumstances where those groups have a special interest in the areas concerned;
- (f) to enable people using the Marine Park to participate in a range of recreational activities.

## 11.3 Outcomes-based policy framework

To support attainment of the objectives-based regulatory framework, including the protection of world heritage values, the Authority has committed to the adoption of a comprehensive outcomes-based management approach as outlined in Part B. This framework explicitly identifies the desired outcomes for each matter of national environmental significance, and for attributes and ecosystem processes relevant to matters of national environmental significance.

Decisions made under the Authority's permission system will be consistent with achieving the outcomes for matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes as identified in the Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment Report and amended in accordance with its policy review procedures. At the highest level these include items in Table 4.

**Table 4 Outcomes for matters of national environmental significance relevant to the Region**

These outcomes have been adapted to the Great Barrier Reef from the Australian Government's Standards for Accreditation of Environmental Approvals under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

Matters of national environmental significance	Outcome
All matters of national environmental significance	Matters of national environmental significance are protected and conserved.
World heritage properties	The outstanding universal value of the Great Barrier Reef world heritage property is identified, protected, conserved, presented and transmitted to future generations.
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park	The outstanding universal value of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, as a world heritage property, is identified, protected, conserved, presented and transmitted to future generations. The environmental, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park are protected and conserved for the long term, consistent with the objects of the <i>Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975</i> .
National Heritage places	The outstanding value to the nation of National Heritage properties is identified, protected, conserved, presented and transmitted to future generations of Australians.
Commonwealth marine environment	The environment, ecosystem functioning and integrity of Commonwealth marine areas are maintained or enhanced in full conformity with relevant marine bioregional plans and plans of management for relevant marine reserves.
Listed migratory species	The survival and conservation status of listed migratory species and their critical habitat is promoted and enhanced, consistent with Australia's international obligations.
Listed threatened species and ecological communities	The survival and conservation status of listed threatened species and ecological communities is promoted and enhanced, including through the conservation of habitat critical to the survival of a species or community and other measures contained in any recovery plans, threat abatement plans or conservation advices.
Wetlands of international importance	The ecological character of each Ramsar wetland is maintained, and the conservation and wise and sustainable use of the wetland is promoted for the benefit of humanity in a way that is compatible with maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem. This is to be achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development.

## 11.4 Assessment and decision-making process

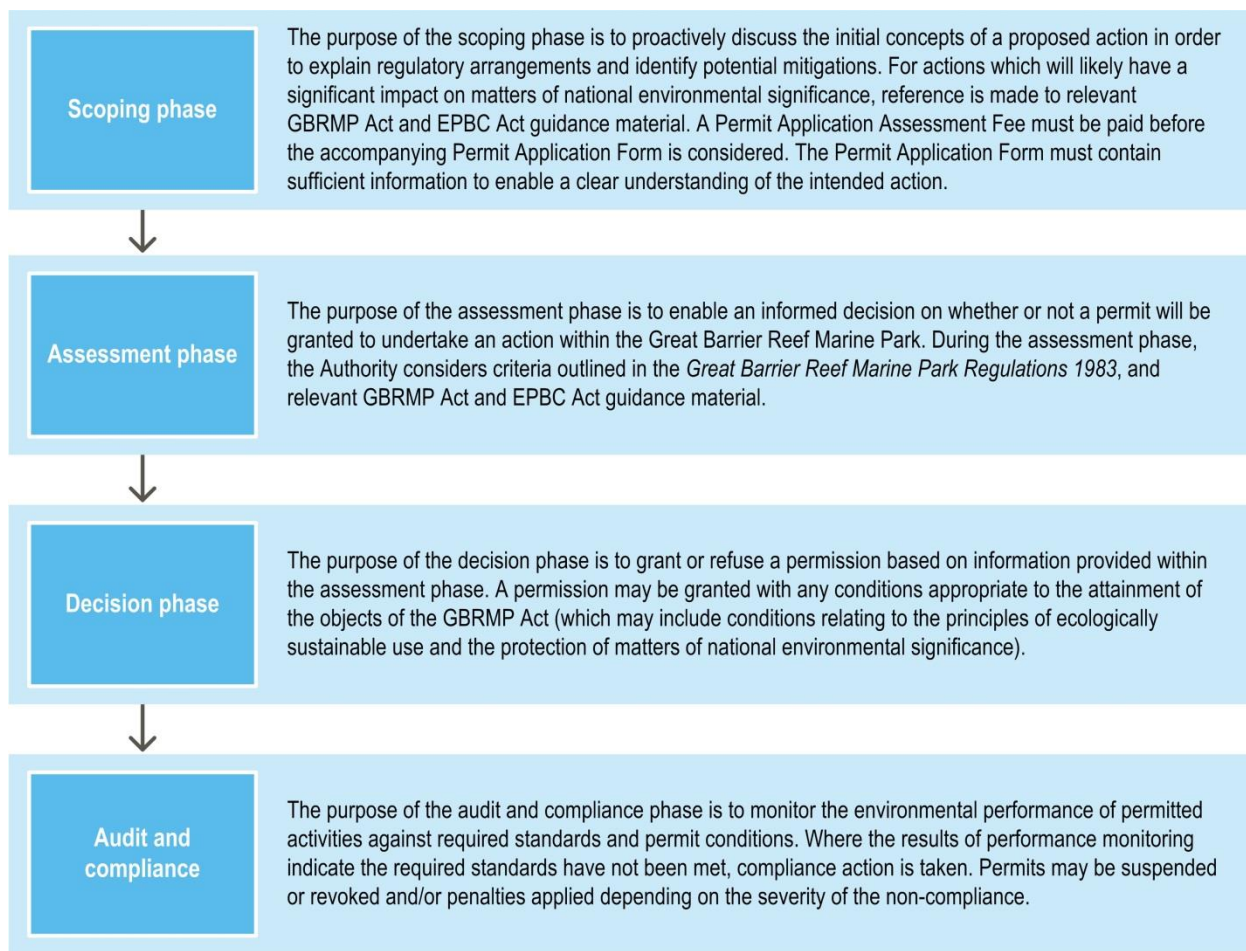
In accordance with the Zoning Plan, a person proposing to engage in a conduct within or partly within the Marine Park that is not allowed 'as of right' or under an accredited arrangement, must apply for a permission under the GBRMP Act. Permissions are legal documents granting a company or a person authorisation to carry out activities in the Marine Park. Permit requirements would remain unchanged following approval and endorsement of the Program.

Part 2A of the GBRMP Regulations describes how permissions apply to the conduct of activities in the Marine Park and sets out the statutory requirements for permissions including:

- applications for a permission, including advertising of applications (Divisions 2A.2 and 2A.3)
- consideration of applications, including mandatory and discretionary considerations when deciding whether or not to grant a permission (Division 2A.4)
- granting and refusing permissions (Division 2A.5)
- form, term and condition of permissions (Division 2A.6)
- transfer (Division 2A.7), modification, suspension and revocation of permissions (Division 2A.8)
- offence provisions (Division 2A.9).

For each permit application made, the Authority undertakes an assessment of the nature and scale of activities and makes a determination based on the acceptability of those activities on the environment.

There are four key steps in the permission assessment and decision process. They are scoping; assessment; decision; auditing and compliance (Figure 9).



**Figure 9 The four key steps in the permission assessment and decision process**

Each of these steps is described in detail in the following sections.

## 11.5 Scoping phase

The purpose of the scoping phase is to proactively discuss the initial concepts of a proposed action in order to explain regulatory arrangements and identify potential mitigation measures. This includes discussion and consideration of prudent and feasible alternatives which may have a lower impact on the environment. For actions which will likely have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance, reference is made to relevant GBRMP Act and EPBC Act guidance material, including relevant significant impact guidelines. Information available through online data sources hosted by the Department of the Environment, such as the Environment Reporting Tool, augments local knowledge in determining whether matters of national environmental significance are likely to occur in the area of interest. Based on reference to these guidance materials and local knowledge, the potential impacts of the proposed action can be considered and discussed with the applicant.

#### Program commitments:

- A clear understanding of legislative requirements, including criteria for determining whether an action is likely to have a significant impact, together with consideration of prudent and feasible options at an early stage, will maximise prospects of the proposed development proceeding in an environmentally acceptable way. Accordingly the Authority will:
  - require consideration of relevant EPBC Act policy documents by applicants, including relevant significant impact guidelines, in the scoping phase of the permission assessment and decision process
  - require consideration by applicants of prudent and feasible alternatives which may have a lower impact on the environment and amend its policy documentation to include reference to this requirement
  - develop guidelines to assist applicants to determine whether an action is likely to have significant impact on the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park matters of national environmental significance. The Authority will seek to have these guidelines approved by the Minister

### 11.5.1 Permission application

A Permit Application Form and accompanying Permit Application Assessment Fee are provided and must contain sufficient information to enable a clear understanding of the intended action. The application form should contain, but not be limited to, the following information:

- details of the applicant
- a summary of the proposal, including:
  - a description of each of the activities that will be carried out, including a description of works to be undertaken and facilities to be used to carry out the activity
  - the location of the activities
  - proposed timetables for carrying out the activities
- description of prudent and feasible alternatives considered to reduce the impacts of activities on the environment
- description of the existing environment that may be affected by the proposal
- details of sensitivities of that environment, including matters of national environmental significance protected under the EPBC Act and relevant attributes and environmental processes
- details of the environmental impacts and risks for the proposal
- an evaluation of all the impacts, including direct, indirect and cumulative impacts; and risks, including relative level of certainty
- environmental performance standards and measures for the activities to be carried out, benchmarked against regulatory objectives, outcomes for matters of national environmental significance and relevant GBRMP Act and EPBC Act guidelines and standards
- environmental monitoring and reporting standards to be employed to measure environmental performance, appropriate to the type of activities
- description of the legislative and other requirements that apply to the project and are relevant to the environmental management of the proposal.

Permission applications are formally registered as they are received in the Authority's permission database, and details regarding the application are made available to the public on the Authority's website.

#### Program commitment

- The Authority will amend its Permit Application Form to include a section which specifically addresses matters of national environmental significance.

### 11.5.2 Permit application assessment fee

A permit application assessment fee is required by the Authority to assess applications. Determination of the fee is based on requirements set out in Regulation 128 of the GBRMP Regulations (see Table 128 of the Regulations). Under this regulation, the fee is based on whether the application is an initial application or for continuation of a permission, and different fees apply for different activities, including:

- activities that require an assessment on referral information, under Division 3A of Part 8 of the EPBC Act
- activities that require an assessment on preliminary documentation, under Division 4 of Part 8 of the EPBC Act



- activities that require an assessment on a Public Environment Report, under Division 5 of Part 8 of the EPBC Act
- activities that require an assessment of an Environmental Impact Statement, under Division 6 of Part 8 of the EPBC Act.

Consistent with the above, the Authority will seek to pursue amendments to the GBRMP Regulations (in particular Regulation 128) to ensure continued application of fees for the Authority's assessment of activities that are covered by an approval granted under section 146 of the EPBC Act (Part 10 – Strategic Assessments).

#### Program commitment(s):

- The Authority will seek to pursue amendments to the GBRMP Regulations (in particular, Regulation 128) to ensure continued application of fees for the Authority's assessment of activities that are covered by an approval granted under section 146 of the EPBC Act (Part 10 – Strategic Assessments)

### 11.5.3 Determination of assessment level

The Authority assigns an assessment level to each permission application. The assessment level is based on the potential level of impact and the level of information required to adequately address mandatory and discretionary considerations (Section 11.6.2) and is outlined in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Environmental Impact Management Policy.

Under this Policy, an application will be assigned a level of assessment. Examples of different levels of assessment include:

- assessment by Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), or equivalent — a document prepared by the applicant which provides a detailed description of the proposed activity, the likely environmental impacts and risks, alternatives to reduce impacts and mitigation measures
- assessment by Public Environment Report (PER), or equivalent — a simplified version of an EIS which outlines the proposal, examines environmental implications and describes the precautions necessary to protect the environment.

In determining which assessment level will apply to a particular application, the Authority will take into consideration matters identified in relevant EPBC Act policy statements, guidelines, procedures and Authority policy documents. These include:

- number of matters of national environmental significance affected
- sensitivity of the environment affected, including the condition of matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes and environmental processes
- scale and nature of impacts, including cumulative impacts and the complexity of issues
- degree of confidence with which these impacts can be assessed
- the adequacy and completeness of the information
- the extent to which potential relevant impacts have already been assessed under state legislation
- the degree of public concern associated with the proposal.

To ensure consistency with the EPBC Act assessment approach and alignment of assessment levels on actions likely to have a significant impact on the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance, the Authority will seek to pursue amendments to the GBRMP Regulations to explicitly outline the levels of assessment under the permission system.

#### Program commitments:

- The Authority will seek to pursue amendments to the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983* to explicitly outline the levels of assessment under the permission system.
- The Authority will update its permissions guidance material for applicants to describe the general information requirements for each level of assessment.

### 11.5.4 Additional information

The Authority may, for the purpose of assessing the application, request the applicant provides additional information. If the applicant does not provide the additional information to the Authority within 20 business days (or such longer period that the Authority allows), the application is taken to have been withdrawn (Regulation 88E of the GBRMP Regulations).

## 11.6 Assessment phase

The purpose of the assessment phase is to enable an informed decision on whether or not a permit will be granted to undertake an action within the Marine Park. During the assessment phase, the Authority considers criteria outlined in the GBRMP Regulations and relevant GBRMP Act and EPBC Act guidance material.

For each permit application made, the Authority undertakes an assessment of the nature and scale of activities and makes a determination based on the acceptability of those activities on the environment. Applications for permits can be refused, granted or granted with conditions.

### 11.6.1 Consultation

Regulation 88D of the GBRMP Regulations requires applications to be advertised if the Authority considers that granting of a permission may restrict the reasonable use by the public of a part of the Marine Park. Public advertisements must:

- set out information about the application
- invite interested persons to make written comments to the Authority about the application within a period of not less than 30 days.

The applicant must publish the advertisement in a newspaper circulating in that part of the State of Queensland adjacent to that part of the Marine Park in which the permission is sought. The Authority must also publish the information on its website.

Following the period of public comment, the Authority requires the applicant to provide a report to the Authority detailing how concerns or issues raised in submissions received have been addressed in assessment documentation, and a description of what changes, if any, have been made to the proposal. This report is made available to the public on the Authority's website.

The Authority will seek to pursue amendments to the GBRMP Regulations (in particular Regulation 88D) to require advertising of applications where the granting of a permission may restrict the reasonable use by the public of a part of the Marine Park, or is likely to have a significant impact on the Marine Park, including on matters of national environmental significance.

The Authority also undertakes appropriate consultation with persons or organisations, including Australian and Queensland government agencies, whose functions, interests or activities could be impacted by the proposed activity.

#### Program Commitments:

- The Authority will publish notification of all permit applications on the internet as soon as practicable after receiving a permit application.
- The Authority will seek to pursue amendments to of the GBRMP Regulations (in particular, Regulation 88D) to require advertising of applications by the applicant where the granting of a permission may restrict the reasonable use by the public of a part of the Marine Park, or is likely to have significant impact on the Marine Park, including on matters of national environmental significance.
- Relevant policies will be updated to explicitly state that appropriate consultation will be undertaken with persons or organisations, including Australian and Queensland government agencies, whose functions, interests or activities could be impacted by the proposed activity.

### 11.6.2 Mandatory and discretionary considerations

Mandatory and discretionary considerations for deciding whether to approve a permission are set out under the GBRMP Regulations, as per the below:

### **Mandatory and discretionary considerations when deciding whether or not to grant a permission — Regulations 88Q and 88R of the GBRMP Regulations**

Under Regulation 88Q of the GBRMP Regulations, the Authority must consider the following matters in deciding whether or not to grant a permission:

- (a) the potential impacts of the conduct proposed to be permitted by the permission (the proposed conduct) on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park;
- (b) options for monitoring, managing and mitigating the potential impacts of the proposed conduct;
- (c) if the proposed conduct will take place in an area to which a zoning plan applies — the objectives of the zone as set out in the Zoning Plan;
- (d) if the proposed conduct also requires an approval or permit under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*:
  - (i) whether the approval or permit has been, or is likely to be, granted and, if granted, the terms and conditions of it being granted; and
  - (ii) any relevant assessment documentation (within the meaning given by Subsection 133(8) of that Act) in relation to the approval or permit;
- (e) any written comments received about the application in response to public advertisement published in accordance with Regulation 88D of the GBRMP Regulations;
- (f) any other matters relevant to the orderly and proper management of the Marine Park.

Under Regulation 88R of the GBRMP Regulations, the Authority may consider the following matters in deciding whether or not to grant a permission:

- (a) the requirement in Section 37AA of the Act for users of the Marine Park to take all reasonable steps to prevent or minimise harm to the environment in the Marine Park that might or will be caused by the user's use or entry;
- (b) the effect that the grant of the permission will have on public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of the Marine Park;
- (c) the impact of the conduct proposed to be permitted under the permission in the context of other conduct in the relevant area or nearby areas, or in the Marine Park, that is being undertaken, is planned, is in progress, or is reasonably foreseeable at the time of the Authority's consideration of the application, whether or not related to or a consequence of the proposed conduct;
- (d) any policies or guidelines issued by the Authority about the management of the Marine Park or the performance of the Authority's functions under the GBRMP Act and these GBRMP Regulations;
- (e) if the application for the permission relates to an undeveloped project the cost of which will be large — the capacity of the applicant to satisfactorily develop and manage the project;
- (f) if the proposed conduct also requires an approval or a permission under a law of Queensland — whether the approval or permission has been, or is likely to be, granted and, if granted, the terms and conditions of it being granted; and
- (g) any international Convention to which Australia is a signatory, or any agreement between the Commonwealth and a State or Territory, that is relevant to the application;
- (h) any relevant law of the Commonwealth, or a relevant law of Queensland as in force from time to time, or a relevant plan made under such a law, relating to the management of the environment, or an area in the Marine Park;
- (i) any relevant recovery plan, wildlife conservation plan, threat abatement plan or approved conservation advice, under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*;
- (j) whether the applicant for the permission is a suitable person to hold such a permission having regard to:
  - (i) the applicant's history in relation to environmental matters; and
  - (ii) if the applicant is a body corporate — the history of its executive officers in relation to environmental matters; and
  - (iii) if the applicant is a company that is a subsidiary of another company (the parent body) — the history of the parent body and its executive officers in relation to environmental matters; and
  - (iv) any charge, collected amount or penalty amount that is overdue for payment by the applicant as the holder of a chargeable permission (whether or not the permission is in force); and
  - (v) any late payment penalty that is payable by the applicant as the holder of a chargeable permission (whether or not the permission is in force); and
  - (vi) any unpaid fines or civil penalties required to be paid by the applicant in relation to a contravention of the Act or of these Regulations;
- (k) any other matters relevant to achieving the objects of the Act.

The permission system ensures protection of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, which necessarily includes matters of national environmental significance.

Under Regulation 88Q(a) of the GBRMP Regulations, the Authority must consider the potential impacts of the conduct proposed to be permitted by the permission on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park.

The 'environment' is defined as including (among other things) ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities, natural and physical resources, the qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas, heritage values of places and the social, economic and cultural aspects of each of these things.<sup>d</sup> This would relevantly include the ecological character of declared Ramsar wetlands, listed threatened species and ecological communities, listed migratory species, the environment in a Commonwealth marine area and the environment in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

'Heritage values' are defined as the natural and cultural environment having aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance.<sup>e</sup> This would relevantly include the world heritage values of declared world heritage properties, and the National Heritage values of declared National Heritage places in the Marine Park.

Given the relevant matters of national environmental significance fall broadly within the mandatory considerations that the Authority must consider, they would be relevant considerations.

### **11.6.3 Assessing potential impacts of activities on matters of national environmental significance**

In deciding whether or not to grant a permission, the Authority must consider the potential impacts of the proposed action on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park (Regulation 88Q(a) of the GBRMP Regulations). This would necessarily include consideration of the potential impacts of the proposed action on matters of national environmental significance and outstanding universal value.

The Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment Report describes each matter of national environmental significance and identifies key attributes and environmental processes relevant to each matter.

The Strategic Assessment Report also describes activities within and adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef Region likely to impact matters of national environmental significance, including cumulative impacts.

#### **Program commitments:**

- Where an action is likely to have a significant impact on a matter protected under the EPBC Act within the Marine Park, the Authority will require applicants to consider the impacts of actions on matters of national environmental significance, and relevant attributes and environmental processes as described in the Strategic Assessment Report and as amended in accordance with the Authority's policy review procedures.
- Where an action is likely to have a significant impact on a matter of national environmental significance within the Marine Park, the Authority will require applicants to consider impacts (including direct, indirect and cumulative impacts) arising from the action in the context of all impacts affecting the matter.

### **11.6.4 Measures to maintain and enhance matters of national environmental significance**

In deciding whether or not to grant a permission the Authority must consider options for monitoring, managing and mitigating the potential impacts of the proposed action (Regulation 88Q(b) of the GBRMP Regulations).

In order to meet Australia's international and national obligations to protect the Reef's environment and the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area's outstanding universal value, the Authority will adopt the following approaches when assessing the likely impacts of actions on matters of national environmental significance.

### **11.6.5 Avoid — mitigate — offset**

The purpose of the avoid-mitigate-offset hierarchy is to guide the assessment and approval of permit applications to maintain the current condition of matters of national environmental significance.

*Avoid* — the Authority will give highest priority to avoiding impacts on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park (including matters of national environmental significance and outstanding universal value). Avoidance measures must consider prudent and feasible alternatives to a proposed activity. These should include, but not be limited to, consideration of alternative sites and alternate approaches to carrying out the activity.

<sup>d</sup> See Section 528 of the EPBC Act. Section 3(1A) of the GBRMP Act provides that 'environment' has the same meaning as it has in the EPBC Act.

<sup>e</sup> See Section 528 of the EPBC Act. Section 3(1A) of the GBRMP Act provides that 'heritage value' has the same meaning as it has in the EPBC Act.

*Mitigate* — potential impacts that cannot be avoided must be minimised. Mitigation measures must consider direct, indirect and cumulative impacts, and account for the likely spatial and temporal scales of impacts across the duration of the proposed activity.

*Offset* — offsets compensate for the residual adverse impacts of an action on the environment. Offsets will only be considered where:

- all reasonable avoidance and mitigation measures have been applied
- residual impacts will not exceed critical thresholds in the short, medium or long term for a matter of national environmental significance or ecosystem health
- the commitments regarding acceptability in Table 10 will not be breached.

Offsets can help to achieve long-term environmental outcomes, including for matters of national environmental significance. Offsets will be required to deliver measurable environmental outcomes within the timeframes relevant to affected matters of national environmental significance attributes and environmental processes.

**Program commitment(s):**

- The Authority will implement guidelines for the application of Great Barrier Reef offsets to maintain the condition of matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes and environmental processes, where impacts cannot be avoided or mitigated. The guidelines will seek to deliver an outcome equivalent to, or better than, the outcome that would apply if the EPBC Act Environmental Offsets Policy were applied.

### 11.6.6 Net benefit

The purpose of net benefits is to enhance the condition of matters of national environmental significance.

While offsets are focussed on addressing residual impacts associated with development actions, net benefits are focussed on delivering actions (above and beyond offset actions) which will restore or improve the Great Barrier Reef to a good condition.

In order to meet Australia's international obligations, and transmit the Region's values in good condition, there is a need for all residual impacts from activities to be addressed (that is, offsets) and additional measures to be employed which will deliver net improvements to the condition of the Region's values (that is, net benefits).

Guidance documents and supporting mechanisms, including funding mechanisms, to facilitate the delivery of offsets and net improvements to matters of national environmental significance across jurisdictions are required.

**Program commitment(s):**

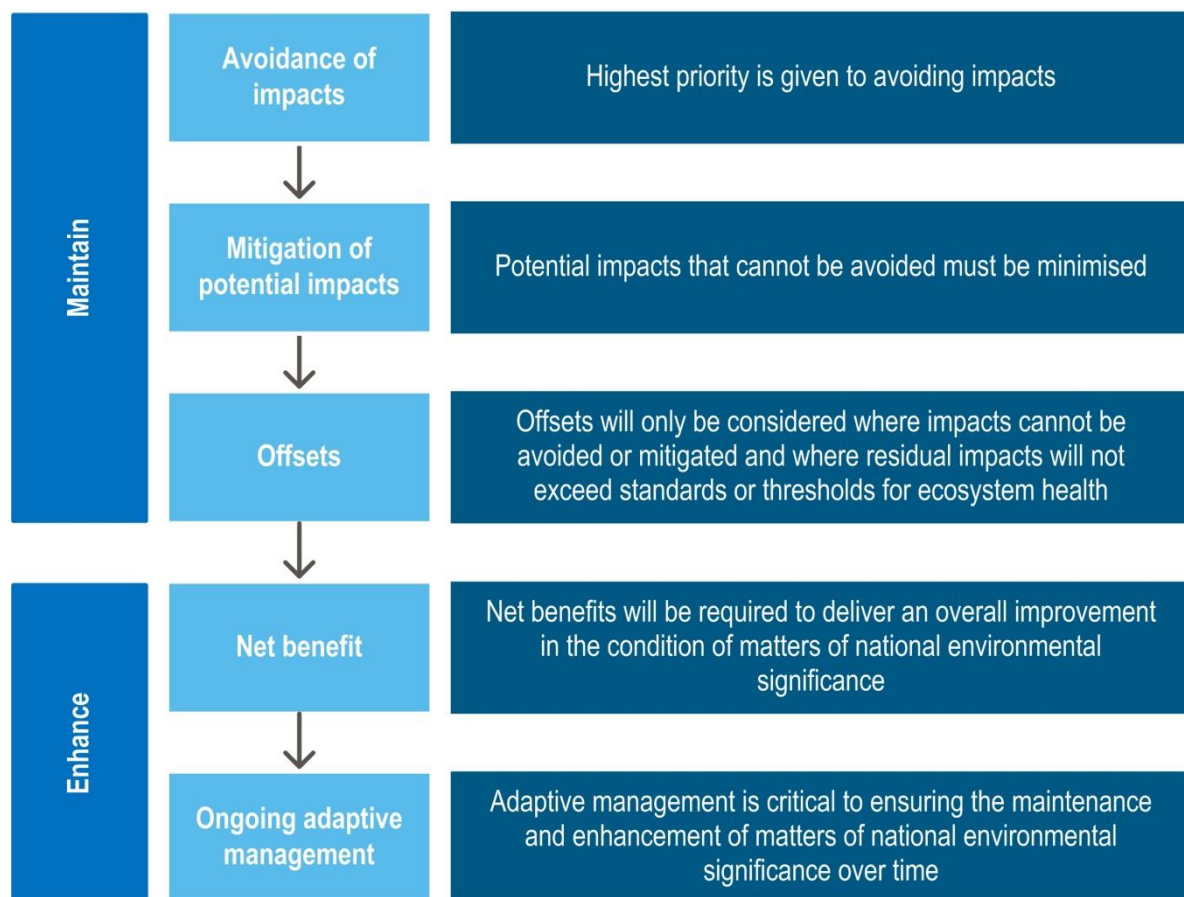
- The Authority will implement a Great Barrier Reef net benefit policy to enhance the condition of the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes and environmental processes.

### 11.6.7 Adaptive management

Ongoing adaptive management is critical to ensuring the maintenance and enhancement over time of matters of national environmental significance. The Authority will consider systems for continuous improvement across the duration of the proposed activity as part of the assessment process. Such systems need to be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances and new technologies, and be linked to best practice standards.

The Authority's approach to maintaining and enhancing the condition of matters of national environmental significance is outlined in Figure 10.





**Figure 10 The hierarchy of avoid, mitigate, offset, net benefit and adaptive management considered in the assessment of impacts of activities on matters of national environmental significance**

### 11.6.8 Regionally-based standards

As outlined in Section 6.3.1, the Authority has made a commitment to work with its partner agencies, local communities, the private sector and experts to cooperatively and progressively develop regionally-based ecosystem health standards. Standards will be based on desired outcomes for the condition of the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance and outstanding universal value, and will incorporate thresholds and management triggers for ecosystem health.

### 11.6.9 Risk

The Authority adopts a risk-based regulatory approach in conducting its operational processes. In assessing permissions, a comprehensive risk assessment (based on the principles within *AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009 Risk Management Principles and Guidelines*) will be undertaken considering all potential impacts and the likelihood and consequence of those on the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance and outstanding universal value.

### 11.6.10 Best practice standards

Recognising the world heritage status of the Region, the management of impacts should be undertaken in accordance with best practice standards. Innovative approaches that improve environmental outcomes and provide incentives to achieve best practice will be promoted and encouraged for wider adoption. The Authority will require applicants to benchmark their practices against recognised best practice standards.

### 11.6.11 Precautionary principle

The precautionary principle requires the Authority not to delay measures to prevent degradation in cases where there is a lack of certainty. In assessing applications, the Authority will require applicants to identify the extent to which the limitations of available information may influence conclusions, and the reliability of the information considered. This includes identifying circumstances where ecosystem thresholds or trigger levels have not been established.

### 11.6.12 Evidence-based decision making

The Authority undertakes, commissions, influences or is a partner in a wide range of research, industry and community activities to better inform decisions and management strategies of the Marine Park. The Authority's

environmental impact assessment and decision-making processes will be based on best practice methodologies (including the use of modelling and mapping to help understand the cause-and-effect relationships between impacts and values), and the best available information (including scientific data, expert opinion, and Traditional Owner and community knowledge).

#### 11.6.13 Integrated monitoring and reporting

The Authority, in collaboration with its partners, is implementing an integrated monitoring and reporting program. The program will improve the integration and coordination of existing monitoring programs (including compliance monitoring) through the development and implementation of standardised protocols for information collection, collation analysis, reporting and data availability. It will improve the scalability of data (from point source to regional and Reef-wide scales) and synthesis of information from different sources. The Authority will require permittees to provide information consistent with these protocols.

#### 11.6.14 International conventions and Commonwealth and State agreements

In deciding whether or not to grant a permission, the Authority may consider any international convention to which Australia is a signatory, or any agreement between the Commonwealth and a State, that is relevant to the application (GBRMP Regulation 88R(g)). Conventions and agreements relevant to the management of the Great Barrier Reef are outlined in the Strategic Assessment Report.

##### Program commitment(s):

- Where an action is likely to have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance within the Marine Park the Authority will consider any relevant international conventions and Commonwealth-State agreements in assessing and determining permissions under its permission system.

#### 11.6.15 EPBC Act conservation plans and advices

In deciding whether or not to grant a permission, the Authority may consider any relevant recovery plan, wildlife conservation plan, threat abatement plan or approved conservation advice, under the EPBC Act (Regulation 88R(i) of the GBRMP Regulations). For those applications for a permission where the activity is likely to have a significant impact on a matter of national environmental significance within the Marine Park, the Authority has made a commitment that it will consider these relevant plans or advice in its assessment.

##### Program commitment(s):

- Where an action is likely to have a significant impact on a matter of national environmental significance within the Marine Park, the Authority will consider all relevant plans, policies, documents and guidance (as specified in Table 10) in assessing and determining permissions under its permission system.

#### 11.6.16 Policies and guidelines

In deciding whether or not to grant a permission, consideration is given to any relevant policies or plans issued by the Authority about the management of the Marine Park or the performance of the Authority's functions under the GBRMP Act and Regulations.

Developed by the Authority under Section 7(4) of the GBRMP Act, policies and plans guide decision makers and the public. They are not legislative instruments.

'Policies and plans' are broadly categorised into five document types:

- **Strategies:** Outline a five-year approach for the management of one or more issues affecting the Marine Park or the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.
- **Policies:** Statements of principles intended to guide conduct and decision-making beyond what is detailed in legislation. Policies give effect to the Authority's responsibilities, functions and powers outlined in the GBRMP Act.
- **Position Statements:** Position statements outline the Authority's position on issues where the Authority has a strong interest, but does not have legislative powers; for example, emerging risks from shipping.
- **Guidelines:** Detail recommended practice, generally in support of a policy or position statement.
- **Site management arrangements:** Localised plans used for sites with significant values and/or use issues that describe the current management arrangements.

Examples of the Authority's 'policies and plans' include policies on the management of tourism permits, dredging and dredge material disposal, sewage discharges from marine outfalls, together with standards and guidelines such as the *Water quality guidelines for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, 2010*.

A formal 'control' process (aligned to AS/NZS ISO 9000:2006 Quality Management Systems) is in place within the Authority, which regulates the development, amendment, revocation, and approval of guidance documents. This control process provides for their review every four years or sooner, as prompted by changes in legislation, standards, whole of government policy, advancements in scientific knowledge and/or advancements in better environmental management practices.

Key policies relevant to the assessment of environmental impacts of activities on matters of national environmental significance may be found in Chapter 3 of the Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment Report. A comprehensive list of all policy documents may be found in Chapter 3, Table 3.1 of the Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment Report.

The Great Barrier Reef Region strategic assessment informed the development of a set of recommendations to strengthen the protection of matters of national environmental significance. These included measures to:

- improve the identification and consideration of values relevant to matters of national environmental significance, including Indigenous and historic heritage values and the community benefits derived from the Region's environment
- improve the assessment of impacts on the Region's values, particularly cumulative impacts
- better avoid impacts on the Region's values and improve actions to mitigate impacts on the Region's values
- inform outcomes-based decision-making and considerations for determining the 'acceptability' of impacts
- establish arrangements to maintain the condition of matters of national environmental significance by offsetting those impacts which cannot be avoided or mitigated to ensure their maintenance
- establish arrangements to enhance the condition of matters of national environmental significance through 'net benefit' approaches
- improve understanding of the effects of dredge material disposal in the Region
- strengthen standards for ecosystem health and protection, and for the management of heritage values
- improve the coordination and integration of relevant monitoring activities to better inform adaptive management
- improve compliance effectiveness and incident response capacity across the Region.

### Program commitments:

Based on these findings, and in addition to previously identified commitments, the Authority commits to progressively strengthening (and from, time to time, amending) its policies, guidance material and support tools for assessing and determining permissions as follows:

- Amend policies and guidance material used in the determination of permissions so they explicitly require the consideration of matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes, including:
  - biodiversity and environmental processes
  - Indigenous and historic heritage values
  - community benefits derived from the environment, including those not easily represented or measured (such as aesthetic values).
- Develop and maintain regionally-based standards for ecosystem health (including water quality) that support best management practices, and may be used to inform:
  - the assessment of point source and cumulative impacts on the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes
  - actions to mitigate impacts and cumulative impacts on the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes
  - outcomes-based decision-making and considerations for determining 'acceptability' based on the commitments in Table 10 relating to impacts on the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance.
- Implement guidelines on cumulative impact assessment to inform a transparent, consistent and systematic approach to the assessment of impacts from activities within and adjacent to the Region.
- Implement a Great Barrier Reef net benefit policy to enhance the condition of the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes and environmental processes.
- Develop guidelines requiring consideration of regionally-based standards for ecosystem health to improve the assessment of impacts including cumulative impacts on the Region's values.
- Improve the hydrodynamic modelling guidelines so they take account of longshore drift, resuspension and inter-annual current variability.
- Develop guidance material to assist in determining the acceptability of impacts. Criteria shall include consistency of assessment outcomes with regulatory objectives, outcomes for the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance and relevant GBRMP Act and EPBC Act guidelines and standards.
- Develop guidance material to be used in the determination of permissions to require the consideration of the impacts of underwater noise, particularly on at-risk species and inshore species.
- Develop guidelines to improve the collection, management, analysis and interpretation of information derived from the Authority's permission system and compliance monitoring. The information will be used to better inform adaptive management strategies.
- Develop and/or strengthen knowledge and information management tools (including spatial mapping tools, hydrological connectivity tools and systems for managing Indigenous and historic heritage information) so their use can enhance understanding of:
  - the effects of impacts of actions on the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance
  - measures to avoid, mitigate and offset impacts on the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance
  - actions to deliver net benefits and best practice adaptive management.
- Update the Environmental Impact Management Policy to enable the effective integration of all commitments.
- Develop specific guidance documents for notifications under Part 5 of the Zoning Plan to make reference to consideration of matters of national environmental significance under the EPBC Act.

### 11.6.17 EPBC Act policy statements, guidelines and procedures

The EPBC Act regulates actions that will have or are likely to have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance. The Australian Government's Department of the Environment has developed a number of policy documents which provide guidance on the practical application of the EPBC Act. It has also developed internal assessment manuals and templates, specifically focused on MNES, which are used during assessments. The Authority will integrate relevant components of these into its policy documents, as required, as they are reviewed and updated.

#### Program commitments:

- The Authority will consider relevant Department of the Environment policy documents, guidelines, plans of management and other online data sources available on the Department's website in its scoping, assessment and decision-making process.
- The Authority will integrate relevant components of the Department of the Environment's EPBC Act assessment templates and manuals into its assessment documents as they are reviewed and updated.

## 11.7 Decision phase — granting and refusing a permission

The Authority must, after taking into account the required matters, make a decision to grant or refuse an application. A granted permission must be in writing and specify:

- the name of the applicant
- the conduct that the applicant is authorised to engage in
- the period for which the permission is granted
- the conditions subject to which the permission is granted (refer below).

The period for which a permission is issued varies dependent on the type of permission, including whether or not the applicant is eco-certified<sup>f</sup>. For example a permission for a tourist facility such as a pontoon is issued for six years or 15 years if eco-certified. The conditions a permission may be subject to are:

#### Conditions of permission — Regulation 88ZE of the GBRMP Regulations

- (1) A permission may be granted subject to any conditions appropriate to the attainment of the objects of the Act.
- (2) Without limiting the generality of Subregulation (1), a permission may be granted subject to any of the following conditions:
  - (a) a condition relating to the manner in which conduct (including the use of, or entry to, a zone) that is the subject of the permission is to be carried out;
  - (b) a condition requiring the preparation, submission for approval by the Authority, and implementation of a plan for preventing, minimising or mitigating the potential environmental impacts of the permitted conduct;
  - (c) a condition requiring specified monitoring and audit activities to be carried out;
  - (d) a condition requiring the permission holder to enter into an agreement with the Commonwealth providing undertakings appropriate to the attainment of the objects of the Act;
  - (e) a condition requiring the provision of a security by way of a bond, guarantee or cash deposit;
  - (f) a condition requiring the permission holder to pay the Authority's reasonable costs associated with inspections and supervision in relation to any project that is permitted by the permission;
  - (g) a condition requiring the permission holder to indemnify the Authority in respect of costs to the Authority that the permission holder's conduct may incur (including costs that may be incurred under Section 61A of the Act);
  - (h) a condition requiring the permission holder to insure against any specified liability of the holder to the Authority for measures taken by the Authority to repair and mitigate damage to the Marine Park caused by the permission holder's conduct or contravention of the Act or these Regulations;
  - (i) a condition requiring the permission holder to undertake specified activities:
    - (i) to protect the environment of the Marine Park; or
    - (ii) to repair or mitigate damage to the environment of the Marine Park;
  - (j) a condition requiring the permission holder to make a financial contribution for the purpose of supporting activities mentioned in paragraph (i).
- (3) The Authority must not include in a permission a condition of a kind mentioned in paragraph (2)(i) or (j) that is not directly related to activities authorised by the permission unless the permission holder has consented to the condition.

Applicants are notified of the Authority's decision in writing and permission decisions are published on the Authority's website.

<sup>f</sup> To be assessed as an eco-certified product, there has to be minimal impact on the environment, a focus on optimal resource use and conservation practices as well as helping the local community.



## Review of Decisions

The GBRMP Regulations provide for a two stage review process.

- A request for reconsideration of a decision must be made by the applicant or affected third party, in writing, within 21 days of the permit decision being published on the external Authority website. The request must be accompanied by the reasons for making the request. A reconsideration of the decision must be made by the Authority within 30 business days after receipt of the request for reconsideration.
- The applicant may request a statement of reasons from the Authority (generally, this should be done within 28 days of receiving a copy of the decision). The Authority has 28 days after receiving a request to provide a statement of reasons to the applicant.

If the appellant is not satisfied with the reconsidered decision, they may appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal for further review.

## 11.8 Audit and compliance phase

The Authority utilises a structured approach to compliance management depending on the assessed threat to the Great Barrier Reef. Formal delegations or authorisations for the power to take an action in response to a breach of permit conditions support this structured approach and are in place.

Strategies or actions to mitigate compliance risks may be applied singly or in combination. These include:

- Information: Making information available about the regulatory requirements of Marine Park users in order to increase compliance.
- Education: Providing users with a more comprehensive understanding of the Reef so that they understand they need to behave in a manner that minimises their impact on the ecosystem.
- Surveillance: Locating, tracking and observing incidents/behaviours with a view to preventing, deterring and, if necessary, investigating non-compliance.
- Intervention: Intervene in an activity in order to advise, warn or interview person/s engaged in non-compliant activity.
- Audit (field, desk, financial, systems): Conducted in order to confirm compliance with the terms and conditions of the relevant permission(s). Permissions granted include, but are not limited to, tourism operations, harvest fisheries, aquaculture operations and research.
- Cautions: An individual or an entity may be issued with a 'caution' (for instance, by way of an advisory letter) from the Authority for an activity that is deemed contrary to statutory requirements, and advised of the consequences of continuing or engaging in further offences.
- Warnings: An individual or an entity may be issued with a written 'official warning' by the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecution (CDPP) for an activity that is deemed contrary to statutory requirements, and advised of the consequences of continuing or engaging in further offences.
- Infringement Notices: An individual or entity may be issued with an infringement notice where a Marine Park Inspector reasonably believes that a person or entity has committed an offence for which an infringement notice can be issued. The issuing of the infringement notice is in accordance with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Infringement Notice System Policy and Procedures Manual.
- Directions by Inspectors: An individual or an entity may be issued with a direction by a Marine Park Inspector to cease or desist from an activity, or issued with an order to undertake a certain activity. In most cases, such directions relate to the remediation of a situation to reduce or prevent harm.
- Infringement Notices: An individual or entity who is alleged to have committed an offence against the GBRMP Act be issued with an infringement notice and required to pay a pecuniary penalty as an alternative to having the matter dealt with in Court.
- Administrative Actions: A range of actions which may be applied in order to penalise an individual or entity. This may include strengthening of permit conditions, suspension, or revocation of a permit.
- Investigation: Used to gather evidence of a suspected offence for consideration by the CDPP for prosecution action, or by the Authority for civil or administrative action (that is, remediation or restorative action). Investigations may need to be referred to the Australian Federal Police (AFP) for case management or assistance. The seizure of property may occur as a result of an investigation or associated compliance action.
- Prosecution: Determined by the Courts if an alleged offence has been proven. Courts apply penalties/costs in accordance with the relevant legislation (this applies to criminal and civil prosecutions). Confiscation and forfeiture of property may result from a prosecution or associated compliance action.

Substantial penalties apply under Sections 38EA and 38EB of the GBRMP Act for engaging in conduct that contravenes conditions of a granted permission.

**Program commitment(s):**

- The Authority will strengthen its system for monitoring and managing compliance risks associated with permit conditions. It will review and make any necessary improvements to internal policies, procedures, training protocols and mechanisms to systematically enhance the effectiveness of its compliance and auditing process. This will include specific reference to matters of national environmental significance.

## 11.9 Administrative arrangements

Administrative arrangements will be established between the Authority and the Minister for the Environment to ensure that information relating to the Program is provided in the most effective and efficient way. Arrangements will be in place within six months of approval.

The arrangements will provide a mechanism for continuous improvement through learning from the outcomes of assessment decisions, any relevant reviews, updates to relevant policies, guidelines, recovery plans and any other relevant new information that relates to matters protected under the EPBC Act.

For the purpose of maintaining the currency of the Department of the Environment's online data sources, the Authority will work with the Department of the Environment to establish appropriate administrative arrangements for the provision of information and data, arising from implementation of the permission system, relating to matters of national environmental significance.

The arrangements will provide a mechanism for the Australian Government to meet its current and future reporting obligations relating to international agreements, treaties and data/information sharing needs.

The Authority recognises that some activities may be multi-jurisdictional in implementation and/or potential impact. To facilitate an effective and integrated approach to Commonwealth and state environmental assessment and decision-making processes within the Marine Park that is consistent with the objects of the GBRMP Act, the Authority will work with Queensland Government agencies and the Department of the Environment to establish appropriate administrative arrangements. These shall include, but not be limited to, administrative arrangements to support implementation of any programs endorsed under Part 10 of the EPBC Act, and arrangements for providing advice to Queensland on actions within, or likely to impact on, the Marine Park to support the implementation of any bilateral agreement under Part 5 of the EPBC Act that may be in effect in the program area.

**Program commitment(s):**

- The Authority will work with Queensland Government agencies and the Department of the Environment to update administrative arrangements including, but not limited to, reporting and communication mechanisms, information and data, environmental assessment and decision-making processes.

## 11.10 Regulatory reform

Consistent with an adaptive management approach, the Authority will continue to investigate mechanisms to improve efficiencies while maintaining high environmental standards. This may include, but not be limited to, streamlining of the environmental management charge arrangements.

**Program commitments:**

The Authority will investigate and implement opportunities through its ongoing regulatory reform processes to:

- enhance the effectiveness of its permission system to achieve objectives and outcomes for the protection and management of the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance
- harmonise requirements with relevant Commonwealth and state legislation and reduce regulatory burden.

## 12 Implementation of commitments to protect matters of national environmental significance

The Authority's permission system is central to ensuring that development in the Marine Park occurs in an ecologically sustainable manner. The Authority will give highest priority to avoiding impacts on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park (including matters of national environmental significance and outstanding universal value).

To ensure that activities carried out are consistent with the objects of the GBRMP Act, the principles of ecologically sustainable use, and the findings of the Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment, the Authority commits to the actions and principles outlined in Table 5 and Table 6.

**Table 5 Authority commitments to protect and manage matters of national environmental significance (EPBC Act)**

<b>Program commitments effective at Program endorsement</b>
<p>The Authority will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• require consideration of relevant EPBC policy documents, including relevant significant impact guidelines, in the scoping phase of the permission assessment and decision process</li> <li>• require consideration of prudent and feasible alternatives which may have a lower impact on the environment as part of the scoping phase of the permission assessment and decision process — and amend its policy documentation to include reference to this requirement.</li> </ul>
<p>Where an action is likely to have a significant impact on a matter of national environmental significance within the Marine Park, the Authority will require applicants to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the impacts of actions on matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes and environmental processes as described in the Strategic Assessment Report, and as amended in accordance with the Authority's policy review procedures</li> <li>• impacts (including direct, indirect and cumulative impacts) arising from the development action in the context of all impacts affecting the matters of national environmental significance.</li> </ul>
<p>Where an action is likely to have a significant impact on a matter of national environmental significance within the Marine Park, the Authority will consider any relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• international conventions</li> <li>• Commonwealth– state agreements</li> <li>• plans of management</li> <li>• recovery plan</li> <li>• wildlife conservation plan</li> <li>• threat abatement plan</li> <li>• approved conservation advice under the EPBC Act</li> <li>• EPBC Act guidelines, policies and information</li> </ul> <p>in assessing and determining permissions under its permission system. These are outlined further at Table 10.</p>
<p>The Authority will consider relevant Department of the Environment policy documents, guidelines, plans of management and other online data sources available on the Department's website in its scoping, assessment and decision-making process.</p>

**Table 6 Authority actions to support Program commitments**

<b>Program commitments to be implemented prior to an approval of the taking of an action, or class of actions, in accordance with the endorsed Program</b>
Develop guidelines to assist applicants to determine whether an action is likely to have a significant impact on the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park matters of national environmental significance. The Authority will seek to have these guidelines approved by the Minister.
The Authority will amend its Permit Application Form to include a section which specifically addresses matters of national environmental significance.
The Authority will seek to pursue amendments to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983 to explicitly outline the levels of assessment under the permission system.
The Authority will update its permissions guidance material to outline the general information requirements for applicants according to the level of assessment.
The Authority will seek to pursue amendments to the GBRMP Regulations (in particular Regulation 128) to ensure continued application of fees for the Authority's assessment of activities that are covered by an approval granted under section 146 of the EPBC Act (Part 10 – Strategic Assessments).
<p>Public consultation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Authority will publish notification of all permit applications on the internet as soon as practicable after receiving a permit application.</li> <li>• The Authority will seek to pursue amendments to the GBRMP Regulations (in particular Regulation 88D) to require advertising of applications where the granting of a permission may restrict the reasonable use by the public of a part of the Marine Park or is likely to have a significant impact on the Marine Park, including on matters of national environmental significance.</li> <li>• Relevant policies will be updated to explicitly state that appropriate consultation will be undertaken with persons or organisations, including Commonwealth and State government agencies, whose functions, interests or activities could be impacted by the proposed activity.</li> </ul>
The Authority will implement guidelines for the application of Great Barrier Reef offsets to maintain or improve the condition of the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes and environmental processes, where impacts cannot be avoided or mitigated. The guidelines will seek to deliver an outcome equivalent to, or better than, the outcome that would apply if the EPBC Act Environmental Offsets Policy was applied.
The Authority will implement a Great Barrier Reef net benefit policy to enhance the condition of the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes and environmental processes.
<p>Amend policies and guidance material used in the determination of permissions so they explicitly require the consideration of matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• biodiversity and environmental processes</li> <li>• Indigenous and historic heritage values</li> <li>• community benefits derived from the environment, including those not easily represented or measured (such as aesthetic values).</li> </ul>
<p>Develop and maintain regionally-based standards for ecosystem health (including water quality) that support best management practices, and may be used to inform:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the assessment of point source and cumulative impacts on the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance</li> <li>• actions to mitigate impacts and cumulative impacts on the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance</li> <li>• outcomes-based decision-making and considerations for determining 'acceptability' of impacts based on the commitments in <b>Table 10</b> relating to impacts on the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance.</li> </ul>
Implement guidelines on cumulative impact assessment to inform a transparent, consistent and systematic approach to the assessment of impacts from activities within and adjacent to the Region.
Implement guidelines requiring consideration of regionally-based standards for ecosystem health to improve the assessment of impacts including cumulative impacts on the Region's values.
Facilitate development of a dredging and dredge material disposal policy.
Improve the hydrodynamic modelling guidelines so they take account of longshore drift, resuspension and inter-annual current variability.
Develop guidance material to assist in determining the acceptability of impacts. Criteria shall include consistency of assessment outcomes with regulatory objectives, outcomes for the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance and relevant GBRMP Act and EPBC Act guidelines and standards.
Develop guidance material to be used in the determination of permissions to require the consideration of the impacts of underwater noise, particularly on at-risk species and inshore species.
Implement guidelines to improve the collection, management, analysis and interpretation of information derived from the Authority's permission system and compliance monitoring. The information will be used to better inform adaptive management strategies.

<b>Program commitments to be implemented prior to an approval of the taking of an action, or class of actions, in accordance with the endorsed Program</b>
<p>Develop and/or strengthen knowledge and information management tools (including spatial mapping tools, hydrological connectivity tools and systems for managing Indigenous and historic heritage information) so their use can enhance and support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the effects of impacts of actions on the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance</li> <li>• measures to avoid, mitigate and offset impacts on the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance</li> <li>• actions to deliver net benefits and best practice adaptive management.</li> </ul>
<p>Develop specific guidance documents for notifications under Part 5 of the Zoning Plan to make reference to consideration of matters of national environmental significance under the EPBC Act.</p>
<p>The Authority will integrate relevant components, as required, of the Department of the Environment's EPBC Act assessment templates and manuals into its assessment documents as they are reviewed and updated.</p>
<p>The Authority will strengthen its system for monitoring and managing compliance risks associated with permit conditions. It will review and make any necessary improvements to internal policies, procedures, training protocols and mechanisms to systematically enhance the effectiveness of its compliance and auditing process. This will include specific reference to matters of national environmental significance.</p>
<p>Update the Environmental Impact Management Policy to enable the effective integration of all the commitments above.</p>
<p>The Authority will work with Queensland Government agencies and the Department of the Environment to establish administrative arrangements including, but not limited to, reporting and communication mechanisms, information and data, environmental assessment and decision-making processes.</p>
<p>The Authority will investigate and implement opportunities through its ongoing regulatory reform processes to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enhance the effectiveness of its permission system to achieve objectives and outcomes for the protection and management of the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance</li> <li>• harmonise requirements with relevant Commonwealth and state legislation and reduce regulatory burden.</li> </ul>



## 13 Permission system evaluation, monitoring and reporting

In order to measure the performance of the permission system against objectives and outcomes for the protection of matters of national environmental significance, a review framework for evaluating, reporting and monitoring will be developed. Reviews will be conducted against terms of reference which will be jointly developed between the Authority and the Department of the Environment within six months of approval. The review's results will be provided to the Department of the Environment and published on the Department's and Authority's websites. The review framework will include:

- an initial evaluation review of the permission system to assess progress in achieving objectives and outcomes for the protection of matters of national environmental significance, to commence 24 months following any approval of a class of actions and to be submitted to the Department of the Environment no later than 30 months following the date of approval.
- a five-yearly evaluation review of the permission system, which will be aligned with the reporting period for the *Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report*, to assess progress in achieving the statutory objectives and outcomes for matters of national environmental significance.
- the Authority's annual report to the Minister for the Environment, required under the GBRMP Act, will have a specific section which details all relevant decisions made under the permission system relating to consideration of matters of national environmental significance.

### 13.1 Program evaluation review

There will be an initial review of the permission system's progress in achieving objectives and outcomes for matters of national environmental significance 24 months following any approval of a class of actions, and submitted to the Department of the Environment within six months of commencement of the review. Subsequent program evaluation reviews will be aligned with the *Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report* (five yearly) and form part of the independent review of management effectiveness conducted for each Outlook Report.

The framework for the review will be agreed between the Authority and the Department of the Environment within six months of approval.

The purpose of the review will be to assess the performance of the permission system against objectives and outcomes for matters of national environmental significance, including ensuring that impacts are not unacceptable. Each review will include a detailed evaluation of a sample of all relevant decisions made by the Authority, to ensure appropriate consideration has been given to matters of national environmental significance.

The review's findings will be provided to the Minister for the Environment and will be published on the Department of the Environment's and the Authority's websites. The review will enable the Authority to determine if refinements to management arrangements and standards are required, to ensure the commitments and objectives for matters of national environmental significance are being delivered by the permission system.

### 13.2 Annual reporting

The Authority is required to provide an annual report to the Minister for the Environment under the GBRMP Act. Each annual report following the Program's endorsement will include a section on the Program. The section on the Program will list the decisions made under the Program, the findings of compliance inspections, non-compliance with decisions, and any investigations underway for the previous year relating to potential significant impacts on matters protected under the EPBC Act.

The report is provided to the Minister for the Environment as soon as practicable after 30 June each year. The report is published on the Department's and the Authority's websites.

## 14 How the permission system considers EPBC Act requirements

### 14.1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of how the Authority's permission system meets the relevant EPBC Act requirements. The Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment Report assesses how implementation of the permission system will ensure the appropriate level of consideration and management of impacts on matters protected under the EPBC Act.

#### 14.1.1 Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act

The EPBC Act is the Australian Government's central piece of environmental legislation. It provides a legal framework to protect and manage nationally and internationally important flora, fauna, ecological communities and heritage places — defined in the EPBC Act as matters of national environmental significance.

The objects of the EPBC Act are set out below:

##### **Objects of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* – Section 3**

- (a) to provide for the protection of the environment, especially those aspects of the environment that are matters of national environmental significance;
- (b) to promote ecologically sustainable development through the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of natural resources;
- (c) to promote the conservation of biodiversity;
- (ca) to provide for the protection and conservation of heritage;
- (d) to promote a cooperative approach to the protection and management of the environment involving governments, the community, land holders and Indigenous peoples;
- (e) to assist in the cooperative implementation of Australia's international environmental responsibilities;
- (f) to recognise the role of Indigenous peoples in the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of Australia's biodiversity; and
- (g) to promote the use of Indigenous peoples' knowledge of biodiversity with the involvement of, and in cooperation with, the owners of the knowledge.

#### 14.1.2 EPBC Act protected matters

The EPBC Act is concerned with requirements for the protection of particular environmental aspects at the national scale. Part 3 comprises two Divisions, which deal with a range of matters. Division 1 describes requirements relating to matters of national environmental significance, and Division 2 describes protection of the environment under the Commonwealth's jurisdiction and the broader environment, from proposals involving the Commonwealth.

Under the EPBC Act, actions that have, will have or are likely to have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance require approval from the Minister responsible for the EPBC Act. The Minister, or their delegate, will decide whether assessment and approval is required under the EPBC Act.

The matters protected under the EPBC Act relevant to Part C of the Authority's Program are:

- world heritage values of declared world heritage properties (Sections 12 and 15A)
- national heritage values of declared National Heritage places (Sections 15B and 15C)
- the ecological character of declared Ramsar wetlands (Sections 16 and 17B)
- listed threatened species and ecological communities (Sections 18 and 18A)
- listed migratory species (Sections 20 and 20A)
- the environment in a Commonwealth marine area (Sections 23 and 24A)
- the environment in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Sections 24B and 24C).

#### 14.1.3 Strategic assessment — endorsement criteria

In deciding whether to endorse the Program, the Minister must have regard for the likely acceptability of impacts from activities regulated by the Authority on matters of national environmental significance and other matters protected under the EPBC Act. In doing so, the Minister must have regard to the endorsement criteria for the strategic assessment as set out below:

### Endorsement criteria<sup>9</sup>

In determining whether or not to endorse the Program, the Minister will have regard to the extent to which the Program meets the objects of the EPBC Act. In particular, that it:

- protects the environment, especially those aspects of the environment that are matters of national environmental significance;
- promotes ecologically sustainable development through the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of natural resources;
- promotes the conservation of biodiversity;
- provides for the protection and conservation of heritage;
- promotes a cooperative approach to the protection and management of the environment; and
- assists in the cooperative implementation of Australia's international environmental responsibilities.

Without limiting the matters the Minister may consider when making the decision to endorse the Program, the Minister will consider the manner in which the Program:

- identifies direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on matters of national environmental significance;
- avoids impacts on matters of national environmental significance;
- mitigates the impacts on matters of national environmental significance;
- offsets the impacts on matters of national environmental significance;
- contributes to the enhancement of the existing environment and management of existing threats;
- demonstrates adaption to reasonable climate change scenarios.

Commitments in the Program must be adequately resourced throughout its life.

- The Program must demonstrate an effective system of adaptive management that addresses uncertainty and contingency management as well as procedures for monitoring, independent auditing and public reporting on implementation.

#### 14.1.4 Strategic assessment — terms of reference

The Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment Terms of Reference require the program to:

- describe how the principles of ecologically sustainable development have been applied
- identify the key adaptive management measures that address uncertainties and risks in the decision-making process (the 'precautionary principle', and use of the best available science)
- describe the monitoring, review and public reporting processes
- identify likely circumstances and procedures that may result in the review, modification and abandonment of the program.

### 14.2 Comparison of GBRMP Act permission and EPBC Act assessment processes

The following section provides a comparison of approaches used to inform the GBRMP Act permission and EPBC Act assessment and approval processes. It also outlines how the Authority's permission system:

- applies the principles of ecologically sustainable development
- addresses the endorsement criteria
- considers and manages impacts on each matter of national environmental significance.

#### 14.2.1 Comparison of approaches used to inform assessment processes under the GBRMP Act and EPBC Act

Table 7 provides a comparison of approaches used to inform the approach that will be taken under an endorsed Program for assessment of GBRMP Act permissions, and the approach taken under EPBC Act assessment processes.

<sup>9</sup> Taken from Strategic Assessment Agreement for 'Strategic assessment of the impacts of actions on the values of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, other relevant matters of national environmental significance, and the management arrangements to deal with such impacts under the jurisdiction of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority', dated 16 February 2012.

**Table 7 Comparison between GBRMP Act permissions and EPBC assessment processes**

Principle aspect of permission system	Description	Authority mechanism	EPBC Act, matters of national environmental significance
<b>Overarching definitions, principles and approaches</b>			
<b>Objective-based regulation</b>	The Authority must, in regulating use through its permission system, have regard to, and seek to act in a way that is consistent with, the objects of the GBRMP Act, the principles of ecologically sustainable use and the protection of the world heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.	GBRMP Act 2A; 3AA; and 3AB.	Consistent with EPBC Act 3(1).
<b>Outcomes-based policy</b>	The Authority has committed to adopting a comprehensive outcomes-based management approach. This framework will explicitly identify the desired outcomes for the Marine Park, including matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes and ecosystem processes.	GBRMP Act s7(4) policy document.	Consistent with Australian Government Framework of Standards for Accreditation of Environmental Approvals under the EPBC Act.
<b>Jurisdiction</b>	Great Barrier Reef Marine Park	GBRMP Act Part V Division 1.	Appropriate jurisdictional coverage.
<b>Activities</b>	All activities requiring a permission under the GBRMP Zoning Plan	GBRMP Zoning Plan — activities other than low impact activities. Activities that have, will have or are likely to have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance will require a higher level of assessment for a Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Permit.	Regulates actions with likely significant impact on a matter of national environmental significance.
<b>Definition of ecologically sustainable use</b>	Ecologically Sustainable Use of natural resources means use of the natural resources within their capacity to sustain natural processes while maintaining the life support systems of nature, and ensuring that the benefit of the use to the present generation does not diminish the potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations.	GBRMP Act 3AA; and 3AB.	Consistent with EPBC Act s528.
<b>Definition of Environment</b>	Environment means ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities; natural and physical resources; the qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas; and the heritage value of places including the social, economic and cultural features of these matters.	GBRMP Act – Definitions.	Consistent with EPBC Act s528.
<b>Avoid, mitigate, offset, adaptive management hierarchy</b>	The Authority considers options to avoid, mitigate, offset and adaptively manage impacts as part of its permission assessment and decision-making.	GBRMP Regulation; GBRMP Act s7(4) policy document.	EPBC Act Guidelines to Undertaking a Strategic Assessment.

Principle aspect of permission system	Description	Authority mechanism	EPBC Act, matters of national environmental significance
<b>Offsets</b>	The Authority will develop and implement guidelines for the application of Great Barrier Reef offsets within 12 months of program endorsement. The guidelines will seek to deliver an outcome equivalent to, or better than, the outcome that would apply if the EPBC Act Environmental Offsets Policy was applied.	GBRMP Regulation GBRMP Act s7(4) policy document.	EPBC Act Environmental Offsets Policy requires consideration of significant residual impacts.
<b>Net benefits</b>	The Authority will develop and implement a net benefit policy; to improve the condition of the Great Barrier Reef, within 12 months of program endorsement.	GBRMP Regulation, GBRMP Act s7(4) policy document.	Outcomes for the condition and trend of the Region's values and processes have been defined by linking international and national obligations to protect the Region's environment.
<b>Cumulative impacts</b>	The Authority's environmental impact management policy requires the cumulative impacts of activities to be considered. The Authority will develop and implement cumulative impact assessment guidelines, within 12 months of program endorsement.	GBRMP Regulation; GBRMP Act s7(4) policy document.	Both the EPBC Act and the permission system seek to ensure protection of the environment, including matters of national environmental significance, from approved activities.
<b>Integrated monitoring and reporting</b>	The Authority will develop and implement an integrated monitoring and reporting program which will link compliance monitoring from permissions to broader regional and Reef-wide monitoring and reporting programs. The integrated monitoring and reporting program will incorporate national and international reporting requirements for the environment.	GBRMP Act s7(4) policy document. Administrative arrangement to be developed with the Department of the Environment, including reporting.	Consistent with EPBC Act Part 21 reporting requirements.

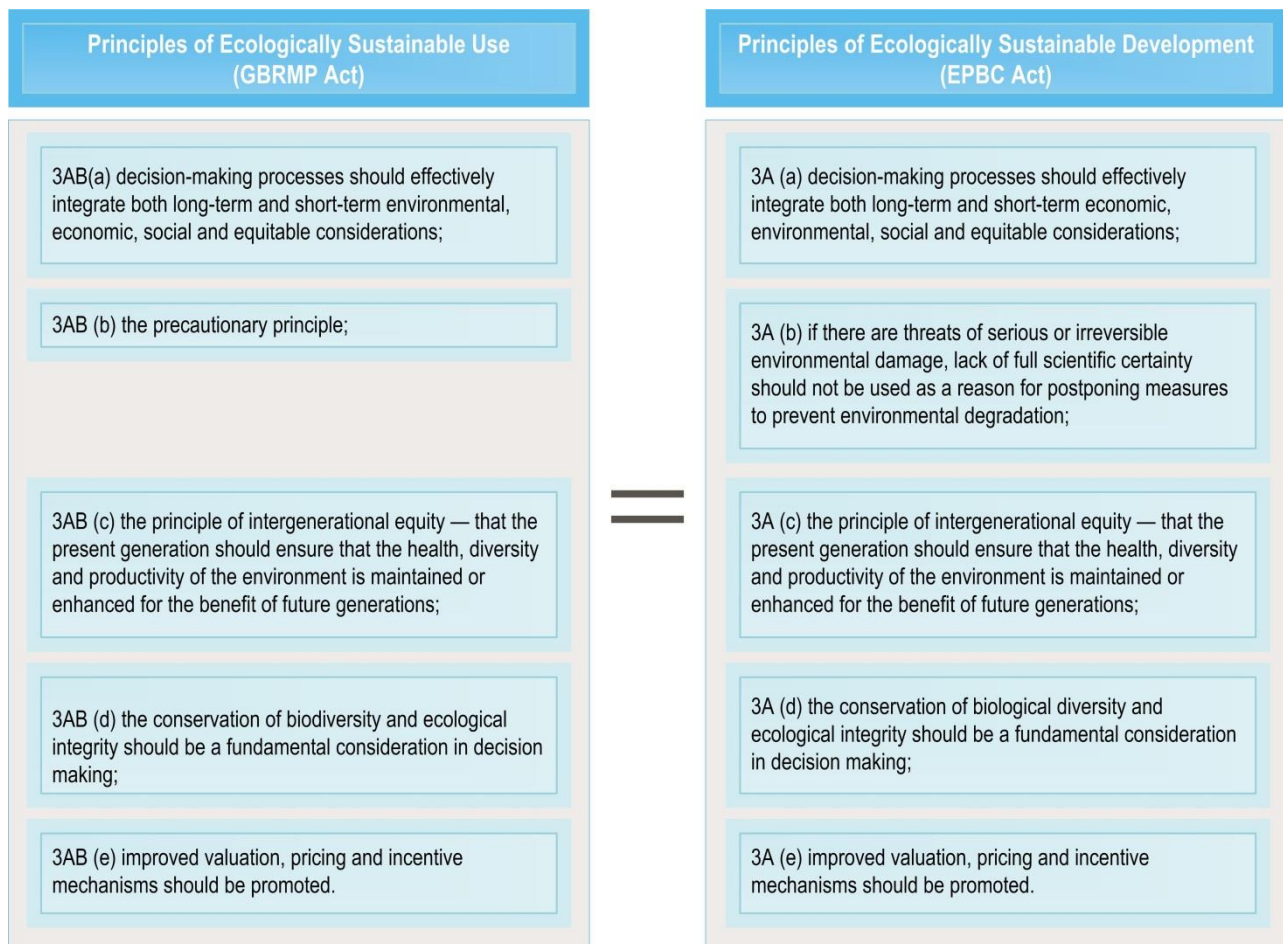
### 14.2.2 Ecologically sustainable development

The GBRMP Act and Regulations establish the permission system to regulate use of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park *'in ways consistent with the ecosystem-based management and the principles of ecologically sustainable use'*.

The principles of ecologically sustainable use as defined under the GBRMP Act are equivalent to the principles of ecologically sustainable development as defined under the EPBC Act (Figure 11).

Table 8 provides specific explanation of how the principles of ecologically sustainable development are applied within the Permissions System.





**Figure 11 Principles of ecologically sustainable use**

The principles of ecologically sustainable use outlined within the GBRMP Act, and the equivalent principles of ecologically sustainable development within the EPBC Act.

**Table 8 Applying the principles of ecologically sustainable development within the permission system**

Principle of ESD	Application to the Authority's permission system
a) Decision-making processes should effectively integrate long-term and short-term economic, environmental, social and equitable considerations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Section 7(3) of the GBRMP Act requires the Authority in performing its functions to have regard to, and seek to act in a way that is consistent with, the principles of ecologically sustainable use. This includes consideration of these principles in the preparation of zoning plans, plans of management and permit decision making.</li> <li>The potential impacts on the environment and on social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or part of the Marine Park must be considered in all permit decisions.</li> <li>The effects on public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of the Marine Park, as well as impacts on other activities may be considered in permit decisions.</li> <li>The Authority's environmental impact management policy requires consideration of impacts on environmental, economic and social values.</li> <li>Decision making is informed by the best available information and, where appropriate, stakeholders are engaged and public comment is sought (for example, during major permit assessments).</li> <li>Minimum standards for public consultation are identified under the Act and in the Authority's policies to guide those involved in the Authority's decision-making processes.</li> <li>A cumulative impact assessment policy will incorporate this principle.</li> </ul>
b) If there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Section 7(3) of the GBRMP Act requires the Authority in performing its functions to have regard to, and seek to act in a way that is consistent with, the objects of the Act and the principles of ecologically sustainable use. This includes consideration of these principles in the preparation of zoning plans, plans of management and permit decision making.</li> <li>Consideration of permit applications is based on the best available science.</li> <li>Where there is scientific uncertainty, the Authority seeks to harness expert opinion, plus knowledge held by Traditional Owners and stakeholders, including through its advisory committees and through seeking public comment.</li> <li>A cumulative impact assessment policy will incorporate this principle and increase the rigour of environmental assessment processes.</li> </ul>
c) The principle of intergenerational equity — that the present generation should ensure the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Section 7(3) of the GBRMP Act requires the Authority to perform its functions consistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable use. This includes consideration of these principles in the preparation of zoning plans, plans of management and permit decision making.</li> <li>A policy on delivering net benefits, including offsets, will contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of the health, diversity and productivity of the environment for future generations.</li> <li>Increasingly, the outcomes of integrated monitoring and reporting will be available for consideration in decision making, providing guidance on community benefits and likely future trends, and evaluating the delivery of net benefits.</li> <li>A cumulative impact assessment policy will incorporate this principle.</li> <li>An outcomes-based management approach and a net benefit policy will improve actions to maintain and enhance the condition of the Region's values for future generations.</li> </ul>
d) The conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity should be a fundamental consideration in decision making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The main object of the GBRMP Act includes providing for the long-term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region. This is the basis for the Authority's management arrangements.</li> <li>Zoning arrangements, which include about one-third of the Marine Park in no-take zones, are a vital component in conserving biological diversity and ecological integrity. Connectivity and protecting a representative area of all bioregions were key considerations in designating no-take zones.</li> <li>A range of policies, including the <i>Great Barrier Reef Biodiversity Conservation Strategy</i> guides the Authority's management relevant to the conservation of biological diversity. Additionally, the <i>Great Barrier Reef Climate Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan</i> assist the Authority to address the challenges of climate change in relation to biological diversity.</li> <li>The potential impacts on the environment, including its biodiversity, and the objective of the zone where an activity will occur are required to be considered in all permit decisions.</li> <li>All relevant recovery, conservation threat abatement plans or approved conservation advice under the EPBC Act may be considered in permit decisions.</li> <li>A cumulative impact assessment policy and a net benefit policy will incorporate this principle.</li> </ul>
e) Improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms should be promoted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Socio-economic monitoring will be included in long-term core monitoring for the Region.</li> <li>The Authority's management is informed by economic valuations of Reef-dependent activities.</li> <li>Tourism operators are recognised and rewarded for being certified as meeting best practice standards, including with longer-term permits.</li> <li>Cost recovery principles are applied in the Authority's management arrangements.</li> <li>A framework will be developed to guide implementation of investments for net benefits designed to increase the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef Region. This framework will support the Authority's advice to the Australian and Queensland governments on investments, including for Reef Trust.</li> <li>A cumulative impact assessment policy will incorporate this principle.</li> </ul>

### 14.2.3 Endorsement criteria

A summary of how the permission system addressed the Strategic Assessment Agreement endorsement criteria is provided in Table 9.

**Table 9 Addressing endorsement criteria**

This table describes how the Authority's permission system meets the endorsement criteria as described in the Agreement with the then Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (see Appendix 1 of the Strategic Assessment Report).

Endorsement Criteria	Application to the Authority's permission system
a) Protects the environment, especially those aspects of the environment that are matters of national environmental significance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The permission system ensures protection of the Great Barrier Reef Region, which necessarily includes matters of national environmental significance.</li> <li>The Authority commits to updating its policies to make explicit reference to consideration of matters of national environmental significance, including the outstanding universal value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area</li> <li>The commitments in the Program Report, including those supporting the permission system, ensure protection of the Great Barrier Reef Region, which necessarily includes protection of matters of national environmental significance.</li> </ul>
b) Promotes ecologically sustainable development through the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of natural resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The permission system is a key component of the Authority's regulatory approach to achieve the objects of the GBRMP Act.</li> <li>The main object of the GBRMP Act is the long-term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region.</li> <li>Ecologically sustainable use of the Region is allowed for only if it is consistent with the main object.</li> </ul>
c) Promotes the conservation of biodiversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistent with the main object of the GBRMP Act.</li> <li>Part 13 of the EPBC Act provides mechanisms, including recovery plans, threat abatement plans, and conservation plans for migratory and marine species to promote the conservation of biodiversity.</li> <li>The commitments in the Program Report for the permission system ensure the assessment of activities that are likely to have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance will consider all of the above mechanisms.</li> </ul>
d) Provides for the protection and conservation of heritage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The main object of the GBRMP Act is the long term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region.</li> <li>Consistent with 88Q(a) of the GBRMP Regulations, the Authority must consider the potential impacts of the conduct proposed on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park — this includes Indigenous, social, cultural and heritage values.</li> <li>The commitments made under the Program Report will require the Authority to amend its policies and guidance material which are used in the determination of permissions so they explicitly require the consideration of matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes, including Indigenous and historic heritage values; and to develop and/or strengthen knowledge and information management tools including systems for managing Indigenous and historic heritage.</li> </ul>
e) Promotes a cooperative approach to the protection and management of the environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The permission system supports a cooperative approach to management, and includes joint permitting and a Joint Field Management Program with the Queensland Government.</li> <li>Any permit application which may restrict the reasonable use by the public of a part of the Marine Park will be placed on the Authority's website and will require public advertising as outlined in Regulation 88D of the GBRMP Regulations.</li> <li>In accordance with Regulation 88Q(e) of the GBRMP Regulations, any written comments received about the application in response to the public advertisement are a mandatory consideration in the assessment of the permit application.</li> <li>The Authority will seek to amend Regulation 88D of the GBRMP Regulations to require advertising of applications by the applicant where the granting of a permission may restrict the reasonable use by the public of a part of the Marine Park or is likely to have significant impact on the Marine Park, including on matters of national environmental significance.</li> </ul>
f) Assists in the cooperative implementation of Australia's international environmental responsibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The permission system supports the objects of the GBRMP Act.</li> <li>The commitments made under the Program Report will require the Authority to update its current administrative arrangements with the Department of the Environment, including for the transfer of information required for reporting to the World Heritage Committee on implementation of Australia's international environmental responsibilities.</li> </ul>

Endorsement Criteria	Application to the Authority's permission system
g) Recognises the role of Indigenous people in the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of Australia's biodiversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The permission system supports the objects of the GBRMP Act.</li> <li>Consistent with Regulation 88Q(a) of the GBRMP Regulations, the Authority must consider the potential impacts of the conduct proposed on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park — this includes Indigenous, social, cultural and heritage values.</li> <li>The commitments made under the Program Report will require the Authority to amend its policies and guidance material which are used in the determination of permissions so they explicitly require the consideration of matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes, including Indigenous and historic heritage values.</li> </ul>
h) Promotes the use of Indigenous peoples' knowledge of biodiversity with the involvement of, and in cooperation with, the owners of the knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The permission system supports the objects of the GBRMP Act.</li> <li>Consistent with Regulation 88Q(a) of the GBRMP Regulations, the Authority must consider the potential impacts of the conduct proposed on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park — this includes Indigenous social, cultural and heritage values.</li> <li>The commitments made under the Program Report will require the Authority to develop and/or strengthen knowledge and information management tools, including systems for managing Indigenous and historic heritage.</li> </ul>
i) Identifies direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on matters of national environmental significance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistent with Regulation 88Q(b) of the GBRMP Regulations, the Authority must consider options for monitoring, managing and mitigating the potential impacts of the conduct proposed in the permit application.</li> <li>Under the commitments made in the Program Report where an action is likely to have a significant impact on a matter of national environmental significance protected under the EPBC Act, the Authority will require applicants to consider impacts (including direct, indirect and cumulative impacts) arising from the development action in the context of all impacts affecting matters of national environmental significance.</li> <li>The Authority has also committed to develop, and implement, cumulative impact assessment guidelines.</li> </ul>
j) Avoids impacts on matters of national environmental significance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistent with Regulation 88Q(b) of the GBRMP Regulations, the Authority must consider options for monitoring, managing and mitigating the potential impacts of the conduct proposed in the permit application.</li> <li><i>Avoid</i> — the Authority will give highest priority to avoiding impacts on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park (including matters of national environmental significance and outstanding universal value). Avoidance measures must consider prudent and feasible alternatives to a proposed activity. These should include, but not be limited to, consideration of alternative sites and alternate approaches to carrying out the activity.</li> <li><i>Mitigate</i> — potential impacts that cannot be avoided must be minimised. Mitigation measures must consider direct, indirect and cumulative impacts, and account for the likely spatial and temporal scales of impacts across the duration of the proposed activity.</li> <li><i>Offset</i> — offsets will only be considered where impacts cannot be avoided or mitigated, and where residual impacts will not exceed standards or thresholds for ecosystem health. Requirements for offsets will apply to all residual impacts. Offsets will be required to deliver measurable outcomes within the timeframes relevant to affected matters of national environmental significance and related attributes and environmental processes.</li> <li>The commitments made under the Program Report will require the Authority to develop a Great Barrier Reef offset policy to enhance the condition of values relevant to matters of national environmental significance.</li> </ul>
k) Mitigates the impacts on matters of national environmental significance.	
l) Offsets the impacts on matters of national environmental significance.	
m) Contributes to the enhancement of the existing environment and management of existing threats.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistent with 88Q(a) of the GBRMP Regulations, the Authority must consider the potential impacts of the conduct proposed on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park.</li> <li>The Authority applies an avoid-mitigate-offset-net benefit-adaptive management hierarchy in the assessment of impacts of activities on matters of national environmental significance.</li> <li>The commitments made under the Program Report will require the Authority to develop a Great Barrier Reef net benefit policy to enhance the condition of values relevant to matters of national environmental significance.</li> </ul>
n) Demonstrates adaption to reasonable climate change scenarios.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistent with 88Q(a) of the GBRMP Regulations, the Authority must consider the potential impacts of the conduct proposed on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park; and 88Q(f), any other matters relevant to the orderly and proper management of the</li> </ul>

Endorsement Criteria	Application to the Authority's permission system
	<p>Marine Park.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority recognises the increasing significance of climate change and extreme weather in the Region and, as one of the four high risk impacts (climate change, catchment run-off, degradation of coastal ecosystems and direct use), it will require consideration in permit assessments.</li> <li>The commitments made under the Program Report will require the Authority to update its assessment processes so that climate change impacts are appropriately considered in its decision-making processes.</li> </ul>
o) Commitments in the Program must be adequately resourced throughout its life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority will continue foundational management arrangements and strengthen management within the Authority by realigning its current business systems and processes. More effective use of existing resources and stronger cooperation with partner agencies will ensure the Authority is well placed to build on its existing management arrangements.</li> <li>The Authority will embed the strengthened management measures within existing policies, plans and programs, where appropriate. It will stage implementation of the remaining measures, including its new initiatives, based on their priority and the availability of resources.</li> </ul>
p) The Program must demonstrate an effective system of adaptive management, that addresses uncertainty and contingency management as well as procedures for monitoring, independent auditing and public reporting on implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority will consider systems for continuous improvement across the duration of the proposed activity as part of the assessment process. Such systems need to be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances and new technologies, and be linked to best practice standards.</li> <li>There will be an initial review of the permission system 24 months following any approval of a class of actions, and submitted to the Department of the Environment within six months of commencement of the review. Subsequent program evaluation reviews will be aligned with the five-yearly <i>Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report</i> and form part of the independent review of management effectiveness. All review findings will be made publicly available on the Authority's and the Department's websites.</li> </ul>



#### 14.2.4 Permission system consideration of specific EPBC Act matters

An overview of how the permission system ensures the appropriate level of consideration and management of impacts on each matter of national environmental significance protected under the EPBC Act is provided in Table 10.

**Table 10 Permission system consideration and management of impacts on matters of national environmental significance (EPBC Act)**

These outcomes have been adapted from the Australian Government's Standards for Accreditation of Environmental Approvals under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

Permission system commitments	Responsibilities	Mechanism (legislative and policy)
<b>Protected matter — world heritage properties</b>		
<p><i>The outstanding universal value of the Great Barrier Reef world heritage property is identified, protected, conserved, presented and transmitted to future generations.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority will make decisions consistent with the Objects of the GBRMP Act which includes Section 2A(c) to 'assist in meeting Australia's international responsibilities in relation to the environment and protection of world heritage (especially Australia's responsibilities under the world heritage Convention).</li> <li>In making decisions that are consistent with the Objects of the GBRMP Act, the Authority must consider the potential impacts of the conduct proposed to be permitted by the permission on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park. Consideration will be given to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Australia's world heritage management principles</li> <li>a plan that has been prepared for the management of the Great Barrier Reef declared world heritage property under Section 316 or as described in Section 321<sup>h</sup> of the EPBC Act.</li> <li>the world heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef world heritage property.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><u>Permit Applicant</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With all applications for permits, as a policy matter, the Authority considers that the onus is on the applicant to establish that the environmental impacts of the proposed operation are acceptable.</li> <li>An application must be submitted to the Authority. It must provide enough information so permit assessors can clearly understand what the intended activity is and where it is to be carried out, and the likely nature and scale of environmental impacts. In the event that the activity is likely to affect the world heritage property, a detailed description of the relevant attributes of the world heritage property must be provided.</li> <li>If an application does not include sufficient information for the purposes of assessing the likely nature and scale of environmental impacts, including on the values of the world heritage property, additional information or documents must be provided.</li> <li>Applicants should note that making a statement (whether orally, in a document or in any other way), in connection with an application for a permit, that is false or misleading, or omits any matter or thing without which the statement is misleading, is a criminal offence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GBRMP Regulation 88A enables the Authority to develop permit application forms and vary them to meet legal and management responsibilities. These forms will be reviewed and updated, following approval of the Program, to meet the Authority's responsibilities outlined in the adjacent column.</li> <li>GBRMP Regulation 88E enables the Authority to request further information for the purpose of assessing an application within 20 business days, or the application is taken to have been withdrawn.</li> <li>The Authority maintains guidance (that will be updated following Program and Authority approval) that applicants should have regard to in the preparation of their Permit Applications. The guidance will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incorporate consideration of all matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes, including the impacts on the property's outstanding universal value</li> <li>include references to relevant documents to be considered by Permit Applicants in preparing Permit Applications including, but not limited to, Statements of Outstanding Universal Value, cumulative impact assessment guidelines, net benefit policies and EPBC Act guidance documents.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>h</sup> The GBRMP Zoning Plan 2003 is the primary planning instrument for the conservation and management of the Marine Park. Noting the existence of the Zoning Plan, Section 321 of the EPBC Act does not require the preparation and implementation of a separate plan for managing the Great Barrier Reef world heritage property in relation to so much of the property as is in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Permission system commitments	Responsibilities	Mechanism (legislative and policy)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Permit applications will be considered on a case by case basis, with consideration given to the objectives of the zone in which the proposed conduct will take place, as set out in the Zoning Plan.</li> <li>In undertaking assessments, the Authority will have regard to relevant policy documents, guidelines, the property's <i>Statement of Outstanding Universal Value</i> and plans of management on the Department of the Environment's website.</li> </ul>	<p><u>The Authority</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority will make permit decisions consistent with the GBRMP Act, the Zoning Plan and the Program's commitments to world heritage properties.</li> <li>As the Marine Park is also part of the World Heritage Area, the Authority will consider the effect that an action proposed to be taken in the Marine Park is likely to have on the relevant attributes of the world heritage property.</li> </ul> <p>Regulation 88Q requires consideration of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The potential impacts of the conduct proposed to be permitted by the permission (the proposed conduct) on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values (including outstanding universal value) of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park.</li> <li>Options for monitoring, managing and mitigating the potential impacts of the proposed conduct.</li> <li>If the proposed conduct will take place in an area to which the Zoning Plan applies — the objectives of the zone, as set out in the Zoning plan, are considered.</li> <li>Any written comments received about the application in response to the public advertisement published in accordance with Regulation 88D.</li> <li>Any other matters relevant to the orderly and proper management of the Marine Park.</li> </ul> <p>Regulation 88R provides for consideration of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The requirement in Section 37AA of the GBRMP Act for users of the Marine Park to take all reasonable steps to prevent or minimise harm to the environment in the Marine Park that might or will be caused by the user's use or entry.</li> <li>The effect that the granting of the permission will have on public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of the Marine Park.</li> <li>The impact of the conduct proposed to be permitted under the permission in the context of other conduct in the relevant area or nearby areas, or in the Marine Park, that is being undertaken, is planned, is in progress, or is reasonably foreseeable at the time of the Authority's consideration of the application, whether or not related to or a consequence of the proposed conduct.</li> <li>Any policies or guidelines issued by the Authority about the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Section 318 of the EPBC Act requires that a Commonwealth agency must not authorise any person to do anything that may contravene a plan made under Section 316 for management of a world heritage property. As a Commonwealth statutory authority, the Authority must comply with this requirement.</li> <li>The Authority is required to assess all valid permit applications. In assessing an application, the Authority must consider criteria outlined in the <i>Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983</i>. In deciding whether or not to grant a permit, the Authority must consider matters outlined in GBRMP Regulation 88Q (mandatory considerations) and may consider matters outlined in 88R (discretionary considerations).</li> <li>Where an action is likely to have a significant impact on world heritage values of a declared world heritage property, within the Marine Park the Authority will consider, as part of the permit assessment process, any of the below considerations (outlined in Regulation 88R) which are relevant:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>international conventions,</li> <li>Commonwealth–state agreements</li> <li>recovery plans</li> <li>wildlife conservation plans</li> <li>threat abatements plans, and/or</li> <li>approved conservation advices.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The Authority maintains internal guidance documents and templates for permit assessments. The Authority will update and issue these to comply with the Program's commitments, and consider relevant policies, documents and other material issued by the Department of the Environment in the assessment of Permit Applications, to ensure that management of impacts to the outstanding universal value of world heritage property is appropriately taken into account.</li> </ul>

Permission system commitments	Responsibilities	Mechanism (legislative and policy)
	<p>management of the Marine Park or the performance of the Authority's functions under the Act and the Regulations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the application for the permission relates to an undeveloped project, the cost of which will be large — the capacity of the applicant to satisfactorily develop and manage the project.</li> <li>• If the proposed conduct also requires an approval or permission under a law of Queensland — whether the approval or permission has been, or is likely to be, granted and, if granted, the terms and conditions of it being granted.</li> <li>• Any international convention to which Australia is a signatory, or any agreement between the Commonwealth and a state or territory, that is relevant to the application. This ensures consideration of Australia's obligations under the <i>World Heritage Convention</i>. Note: following the Program's endorsement, these will be mandatory considerations.</li> <li>• Any relevant law of the Commonwealth or a relevant law of Queensland, as in force from time to time, or a relevant plan made under such a law, relating to the management of the environment, or an area in the Marine Park.</li> <li>• Whether the applicant for the permission is a suitable person to hold such a permission, having regard to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) the applicant's history in relation to environmental matters; and</li> <li>(ii) if the applicant is a body corporate — the history of its executive officers in relation to environmental matters; and</li> <li>(iii) if the applicant is a company that is a subsidiary of another company (the parent body) — the history of the parent body and its executive officers in relation to environmental matters; and</li> <li>(iv) any charge, collected amount or penalty amount that is overdue for payment by the applicant as the holder of a chargeable permission (whether or not the permission is in force); and</li> <li>(v) any late payment penalty that is payable by the applicant as the holder of a chargeable permission (whether or not the permission is in force); and</li> <li>(vi) any unpaid fines or civil penalties required to be paid by the applicant in relation to a contravention of the Act or of these Regulations.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Any other matters relevant to achieving the objects of the Act.</li> <li>• If it is considered, the proposal may restrict reasonable use by</li> </ul>	

Permission system commitments	Responsibilities	Mechanism (legislative and policy)
	the public of a part of the Marine Park, the Authority can require a public notification of the proposal and invite public comments. These comments will then be considered in assessing the application.	
<b>Protected matter — Great Barrier Reef Marine Park</b>		
<p><i>The outstanding universal value of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, as a world heritage property, is identified, protected, conserved, presented and transmitted to future generations.</i></p> <p><i>The environmental, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park are protected and conserved; use is ecologically sustainable; and the community is engaged in its protection and management.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority will make decisions consistent with the Objects of the GBRMP Act, which includes the main object at Section 2A(1) to 'provide for the long-term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region'.</li> <li>In making decisions that are consistent with the Objects of the GBRMP Act, the Authority must consider the potential impacts of the conduct proposed to be permitted by the permission on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park. Consideration will be given to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>maintaining and enhancing the environment of a Commonwealth marine area</li> <li>a plan of management for a Commonwealth reserve, and the IUCN reserve management principles</li> <li>a plan of management for a Commonwealth Heritage place, and the Commonwealth Heritage management principles</li> <li>any relevant bioregional plans.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Permit applications will be considered on a case by case basis, with consideration given to the objectives of the zone in which the proposed conduct will take place, as set out in the Zoning</li> </ul>	<p><u>Permit Applicant</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With all applications for permits, as a policy matter, the Authority considers that the onus is on the applicant to establish that the environmental impacts of the proposed operation are acceptable.</li> <li>An application must be submitted to the Authority. It must provide enough information so permit assessors can clearly understand what the intended activity is and where it is to be carried out, and the likely nature and scale of impacts on the environment.</li> <li>If an application does not include sufficient information for the purposes of assessing the likely nature and scale of environmental impacts, additional information or documents must be provided.</li> <li>Applicants should note that making a statement (whether orally, in a document or in any other way), in connection with an application for a permit, that is false or misleading, or omits any matter or thing without which the statement is misleading, is a criminal offence.</li> </ul> <p><u>The Authority</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority will make permit decisions consistent with the GBRMP Act, the Zoning Plan and the Program's commitments to the protection of the Marine Park.</li> <li>The matter protected in the Marine Park under the EPBC Act is the whole of the environment as defined under Section 528 of the EPBC Act. The Authority will consider the effect that an action proposed to be taken in the Marine Park is likely to have on the environment, including consideration of guidance in relevant management plans.</li> </ul> <p>Regulations 88Q and 88R describe the Authority's permit assessment considerations. These will be applied for each matter of national environmental significance as outlined in the world heritage property example of this table (above).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GBRMP Regulation 88A enables the Authority to develop permit application forms and vary them to meet legal and management responsibilities. These forms will be reviewed and updated, following approval of the Program, to meet the Authority's responsibilities outlined in the adjacent column.</li> <li>GBRMP Regulation 88E enables the Authority to request further information for the purpose of assessing an application within 20 business days, or the application is taken to have been withdrawn.</li> <li>The Authority maintains guidance (that will be updated following Program and Authority approval) that stakeholders should have regard to in the preparation of their Permit Applications. The guidance will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incorporate consideration of all matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes</li> <li>include references to relevant documents to be considered by Permit Applicants in preparing Permit Applications including, but not limited to, GBRMP Act and EPBC Act guidance documents.</li> </ul> </li> <li>As a Commonwealth agency, the Authority must comply with the following requirements to properly assess the environmental impacts of a permit on the environment of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Section 341V of the EPBC Act requires that a Commonwealth agency must not authorise any person to do anything that may contravene a plan made under Section 341S for management of a Commonwealth Heritage place. If there is no Section 341S plan, a Commonwealth agency must take all reasonable steps to ensure that acts relating to the property are not inconsistent with the Commonwealth Heritage management principles (Schedule 7B, EPBC Regulations).</li> <li>Section 362 of the EPBC Act requires that a Commonwealth agency must not perform its functions or exercise its powers</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Permission system commitments	Responsibilities	Mechanism (legislative and policy)
<p>Plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In undertaking assessments, the Authority will have regard to relevant policy documents, gazettal instruments, bioregional plans, wildlife conservation plans, plans of management and EPBC Act guidance documents on the Department of the Environment's website.</li> </ul>		<p>inconsistently with a management plan that is in operation for a reserve. If there is no plan in operation, Section 357 requires a Commonwealth agency to not exercise its powers or perform its functions inconsistently with the Australian IUCN reserve management principles (Schedule 8, EPBC Regulations) or a management plan previously in operation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Section 286 of the EPBC Act requires that a Commonwealth agency must take all reasonable steps to act in accordance with a wildlife conservation plan.</li> <li>The Authority is required to assess all valid permit applications. In assessing an application, the Authority must consider criteria outlined in the <i>Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983</i>. In deciding whether or not to grant a permit, the Authority must consider matters outlined in GBRMP Regulation 88Q (mandatory considerations), and may consider matters outlined in 88R (discretionary considerations).</li> <li>Where an action is likely to have a significant impact on the environment in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, the Authority will consider, as part of the permit assessment process, any of the below considerations (outlined in Regulation 88R) which are relevant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>international conventions</li> <li>Commonwealth–state agreements</li> <li>recovery plans</li> <li>wildlife conservation plans</li> <li>threat abatements plans, and/or</li> <li>approved conservation advices.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The Authority maintains internal guidance documents and templates for permit assessments. The Authority will update and issue these to comply with the Program's commitments, and consider relevant GBRMP Act and EPBC guidance documents issued by the Department of the Environment in the assessment of Permit Applications, to ensure that management of impacts to the environment of the Marine Park is appropriately taken into account.</li> </ul>
<b>Protected matter</b> — national heritage places		
<p><i>The outstanding value to the nation of national heritage properties will be protected, conserved and transmitted</i></p>	<p><u>Permit Applicant</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With all applications for permits, as a policy matter, the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GBRMP Regulation 88A enables the Authority to develop permit application forms and vary them to meet legal and management</li> </ul>



Permission system commitments	Responsibilities	Mechanism (legislative and policy)
<p><i>to future generations of Australians.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority will make decisions consistent with the Objects of the GBRMP Act, which includes the main object at Section 2A(1) to 'provide for the long-term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region'.</li> <li>Heritage values have the same meaning as in the EPBC Act, and are defined as 'the natural and cultural environment having aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance'. The national heritage values of declared national heritage places fall within the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park.</li> <li>In making decisions that are consistent with the Objects of the GBRMP Act, the Authority must consider the potential impacts of the conduct proposed to be permitted by the permission on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park. Consideration will be given to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the preservation of the national heritage values of a national heritage place</li> <li>Australia's national heritage management principles</li> <li>a plan that has been prepared for the management of the Great Barrier Reef national heritage place under Section 324S<sup>i</sup> of the EPBC Act.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Permit applications will be considered on a case by case basis, with consideration given to the objectives of the zone in which the proposed conduct will take place, as set out in the Zoning Plan.</li> <li>In undertaking assessments, the Authority will have regard to relevant policy documents, guidelines,</li> </ul>	<p>Authority considers that the onus is on the applicant to establish that the environmental impacts of the proposed operation are acceptable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An application must be submitted to the Authority. It must provide enough information so permit assessors can clearly understand what the intended activity is and where it is to be carried out, and the likely nature and scale of environmental impacts including relevant values and sensitivities of national heritage places.</li> <li>If an application does not include sufficient information for the purposes of assessing the likely nature and scale of environmental impacts, additional information or documents must be provided.</li> <li>Applicants should note that making a statement (whether orally, in a document or in any other way), in connection with an application for a permit, that is false or misleading, or omits any matter or thing without which the statement is misleading, is a criminal offence.</li> </ul> <p><u>The Authority</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority will make permit decisions consistent with the GBRMP Act, the Zoning Plan and the Program's commitments to national heritage places.</li> <li>As the Marine Park is also part of the national heritage area, the Authority will consider the effect that an action proposed to be taken in the Marine Park is likely to have on the national heritage values of the area.</li> </ul> <p>Regulations 88Q and 88R describe the Authority's permit assessment considerations. These will be applied for each matter of national environmental significance as outlined in the world heritage property example of this table (above).</p>	<p>responsibilities. These forms will be reviewed and updated, following approval of the Program, to meet the Authority's responsibilities outlined in the adjacent column.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GBRMP Regulation 88E enables the Authority to request further information for the purpose of assessing an application within 20 business days, or the application is taken to have been withdrawn.</li> <li>The Authority maintains guidance (that will be updated following Program and Authority approval) that stakeholders should have regard to in the preparation of their Permit Applications. The guidance will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incorporate consideration of all matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes</li> <li>make reference to consideration of the protection of the values of the national heritage place</li> <li>include references to relevant documents to be considered by Permit Applicants in preparing Permit Applications including, but not limited to, gazettal instruments, cumulative impact assessment guidelines, net benefit policies, and EPBC Act guidance documents.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Section 324U of the EPBC Act requires that a Commonwealth agency must not authorise any person to do anything that may contravene a plan made under Section 324S for management of a national heritage place. If no plan made under Section 324S exists, a Commonwealth agency must take all reasonable steps to ensure that acts relating to a property are not inconsistent with the national heritage management principles (Schedule 5B, EPBC Regulations). As a Commonwealth statutory authority, the Authority must comply with this requirement.</li> <li>The Authority is required to assess all valid permit applications. In assessing an application, the Authority must consider criteria outlined in the <i>Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983</i>. In deciding whether or not to grant a permit, the Authority must consider matters outlined in GBRMP Regulation 88Q (mandatory considerations) and may consider matters outlined</li> </ul>

<sup>i</sup> The GBRMP Zoning Plan 2003 is the primary planning instrument for the conservation and management of the Marine Park. Noting the existence of the Zoning Plan, Section 324S of the EPBC Act does not require the preparation and implementation of a separate plan for managing the Great Barrier Reef national heritage place in relation to so much of the property as is in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The Great Barrier Reef is both a World and National Heritage Area. The areas have identical boundaries and values. The Marine Park covers around 98 per cent of the World and National Heritage Area, the other two per cent being Queensland islands and internal waters.

Permission system commitments	Responsibilities	Mechanism (legislative and policy)
gazettal instruments and plans of management on the Department of the Environment's website.		<p>in 88R (discretionary considerations).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where an action is likely to have a significant impact on national heritage values of a declared national heritage place within the Marine Park, the Authority will consider, as part of the permit assessment process, any of the below considerations (outlined in Regulation 88R) which are relevant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>international conventions</li> <li>Commonwealth–state agreements</li> <li>recovery plans</li> <li>wildlife conservation plans</li> <li>threat abatements plans, and/or</li> <li>approved conservation advices.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The Authority maintains internal guidance documents and templates for permit assessments. The Authority will update and issue these, to make it explicit that decisions made by the Authority must be consistent with national heritage management obligations, principles and management plans, and that these must be taken into account when determining the acceptability of a permit where impacts to the values of national heritage places may arise.</li> </ul>
<b>Protected matter — wetlands of international importance (Ramsar wetlands)</b>		
<p><i>The ecological character of each Ramsar wetland will be maintained, and the conservation and wise and sustainable use of each wetland is promoted for the benefit of humanity in a way that is compatible with maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem. This is to be achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority will make decisions consistent with the Objects of the GBRMP Act, which includes the main object at Section 2A(1) to 'provide for the long-term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region'.</li> <li>Environment has the same meaning as in the EPBC Act, and is defined as including (among other things) ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities, natural and physical resources, and the qualities and</li> </ul>	<p><u>Permit Applicant</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With all applications for permits, as a policy matter, the Authority considers that the onus is on the applicant to establish that the environmental impacts of the proposed operation are acceptable.</li> <li>An application must be submitted to the Authority. It must provide enough information so permit assessors can clearly understand what the intended activity is and where it is to be carried out, and the likely nature and scale of environmental impacts including to the ecological character of a Ramsar wetland.</li> <li>If an application does not include sufficient information for the purposes of assessing the likely nature and scale of environmental impacts, additional information or documents must be provided.</li> <li>Applicants should note that making a statement (whether orally, in a document or in any other way), in connection with an application for a permit, that is false or misleading, or omits any</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GBRMP Regulation 88A enables the Authority to develop permit application forms and vary them to meet legal and management responsibilities. These forms will be reviewed and updated, following approval of the Program, to meet the Authority's responsibilities outlined in the adjacent column.</li> <li>GBRMP Regulation 88E enables the Authority to request further information for the purpose of assessing an application within 20 business days, or the application is taken to have been withdrawn.</li> <li>The Authority maintains guidance (that will be updated following Program and Authority approval) that stakeholders should have regard to in the preparation of their Permit Applications. The guidance will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incorporate consideration of all matters of national environmental significance within the Marine Park and relevant attributes</li> <li>make reference to consideration of the protection of the ecological character of Ramsar wetlands</li> <li>include references to relevant guidance documents to be</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Permission system commitments	Responsibilities	Mechanism (legislative and policy)
<p>characteristics of locations, places and areas. This includes the ecological character of declared Ramsar wetlands, listed threatened species and ecological communities, listed migratory species, the environment in a Commonwealth marine area and the environment in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In making decisions that are consistent with the Objects of the GBRMP Act, the Authority must consider the potential impacts of the conduct proposed to be permitted by the permission on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park. Consideration will be given to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a plan of management for a Ramsar wetland to preserve the ecological character of a Ramsar wetland</li> <li>the Australian Ramsar management principles.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Permit applications will be considered on a case by case basis, with consideration given to the objectives of the zone in which the proposed conduct will take place, as set out in the Zoning Plan.</li> <li>In undertaking assessments, the Authority will have regard to relevant policy documents, guidelines, Ramsar Information Sheets, Ecological Character Descriptions, and plans of management on the Department of the Environment's website.</li> </ul>	<p>matter or thing without which the statement is misleading, is a criminal offence.</p> <p><u>The Authority</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority will make permit decisions consistent with the GBRMP Act, the Zoning Plan and the Program's commitments to wetlands of international importance.</li> </ul> <p>GBRMP Regulations 88Q and 88R describe the Authority's permit assessment considerations. These will be applied for each matter of national environmental significance as outlined in the world heritage Property example of this table (above).</p>	<p>considered by Permit Applicants in preparing Permit Applications including, but not limited to, Ramsar Information Sheets, Ecological Character Descriptions, cumulative impact assessment guidelines, net benefit policies, and EPBC Act guidance documents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Section 330 of the EPBC Act requires that a Commonwealth agency must not authorise any person to do anything that may contravene a plan made under Section 328 for management of a Ramsar wetland. If no plan made under Section 328 exists, a Commonwealth agency must take all reasonable steps to ensure that acts relating to a Ramsar wetland are not inconsistent with the Ramsar Management Principles (Schedule 6, EPBC Regulations). As a Commonwealth statutory authority, the Authority must comply with this requirement.</li> <li>The Authority is required to assess all valid permit applications. In assessing an application, the Authority must consider criteria outlined in the <i>Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983</i>. In deciding whether or not to grant a permit, the Authority must consider matters outlined in GBRMP Regulation 88Q (mandatory considerations) and may consider matters outlined in 88R (discretionary considerations).</li> <li>Where an action is likely to have a significant impact on the ecological character of declared Ramsar wetlands within the Marine Park, the Authority will consider as part of the permit assessment process, any of the below considerations (outlined in Regulation 88R) which are relevant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>international conventions</li> <li>Commonwealth–state agreements</li> <li>recovery plans</li> <li>wildlife conservation plans</li> <li>threat abatements plans, and/or</li> <li>approved conservation advices.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The Authority maintains internal guidance documents and templates for permit assessments. The Authority will update and issue these to comply with the Program's commitments, to make it explicit that decisions made by the Authority must not be inconsistent with Ramsar management obligations, principles and management plans, and that these must be taken into account when determining the acceptability of a permit where impacts to Ramsar wetlands may arise.</li> </ul>

Permission system commitments	Responsibilities	Mechanism (legislative and policy)
<b>Protected matter</b> — listed threatened species and ecological communities		
<p><i>The survival and conservation status of listed threatened species and ecological communities will be promoted and enhanced, including through the conservation of habitat critical to the survival of a species or community and other measures contained in any recovery plans, threat abatement plans or conservation advices.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority will make decisions consistent with the Objects of the GBRMP Act, which includes the main object at Section 2A(1) to 'provide for the long-term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region'.</li> <li>Environment has the same meaning as in the EPBC Act, and is defined as including (among other things) ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities, natural and physical resources, and the qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas. This includes listed threatened species and ecological communities.</li> <li>In making decisions that are consistent with the Objects of the GBRMP Act, the Authority must consider the potential impacts of the conduct proposed to be permitted by the permission on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park. Consideration will be given to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the preservation of a listed threatened species or ecological community</li> <li>a recovery plan or threat abatement plan for a listed threatened species or ecological community</li> <li>Australia's obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Apia Convention, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).</li> </ul> </li> <li>Permit applications will be considered on a case by case basis, with consideration given to the objectives of the zone in which the proposed</li> </ul>	<p><u>Permit Applicant</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With all applications for permits, as a policy matter, the Authority considers that the onus is on the applicant to establish that the environmental impacts of the proposed operation are acceptable.</li> <li>An application must be submitted to the Authority. It must provide enough information so permit assessors can clearly understand what the intended activity is and where it is to be carried out, and the likely nature and scale of environmental impacts, including impacts to listed threatened species and ecological communities.</li> <li>If an application does not include sufficient information for the purposes of assessing the likely nature and scale of environmental impacts additional information or documents must be provided.</li> <li>Applicants should note that making a statement (whether orally, in a document or in any other way), in connection with an application for a permit, that is false or misleading, or omits any matter or thing without which the statement is misleading, is a criminal offence.</li> </ul> <p><u>The Authority</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority will make permit decisions consistent with the GBRMP Act, the Zoning Plan and the Program's commitments to listed threatened species and ecological communities.</li> </ul> <p>GBRMP Regulations 88Q and 88R describe the Authority's permit assessment considerations. These will be applied for each matter of national environmental significance as outlined in the world heritage property example of this table (above).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GBRMP Regulation 88A enables the Authority to develop permit application forms and vary them to meet legal and management responsibilities. These forms will be reviewed and updated, following approval of the Program, to meet the Authority's responsibilities outlined in the adjacent column.</li> <li>GBRMP Regulation 88E enables the Authority to request further information for the purpose of assessing an application within 20 business days, or the application is taken to have been withdrawn.</li> <li>The Authority maintains guidance (that will be updated following Program and Authority approval) that stakeholders should have regard to in the preparation of their Permit Applications. The guidance will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incorporate consideration of all matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes</li> <li>direct applicants to consider the listing category and protection of the listed threatened species or ecological community</li> <li>include references to relevant guidance documents to be considered by Permit Applicants in preparing Permit Applications including, but not limited to, recovery plans, threat abatement plans, conservation advice, cumulative impact assessment guidelines, net benefit policies and EPBC Act guidance documents.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Section 268 of the EPBC Act requires that a Commonwealth agency must not take any action that contravenes a recovery plan or a threat abatement plan. As a Commonwealth statutory authority, the Authority must comply with this requirement.</li> <li>The Authority is required to assess all valid permit applications. In assessing an application, the Authority must consider criteria outlined in the <i>Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983</i>. In deciding whether or not to grant a permit, the Authority must consider matters outlined in GBRMP Regulation 88Q (mandatory considerations) and may consider matters outlined in 88R (discretionary considerations).</li> <li>Where an action is likely to have a significant impact on listed threatened species and ecological communities within the Marine Park, the Authority will consider, as part of the permit assessment process, any of the below considerations (outlined</li> </ul>

Permission system commitments	Responsibilities	Mechanism (legislative and policy)
<p>conduct will take place, as set out in the Zoning Plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In undertaking assessments, the Authority will have regard to relevant policy documents, Recovery Plans, threat abatement plans, conservation advice, and guidelines and plans of management on the Department of the Environment's website.</li> </ul>		<p>in Regulation 88R) which are relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>international conventions</li> <li>Commonwealth–state agreements</li> <li>recovery plans</li> <li>wildlife conservation plans</li> <li>threat abatements plans, and/or</li> <li>approved conservation advices.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority maintains internal guidance documents and templates for permit assessments. The Authority will update and issue these to comply with the Program's commitments, to make it explicit that decisions made by the Authority must not be inconsistent with relevant recovery plans, threat abatement plans and wildlife conservation plans, and that these must be taken into account when determining the acceptability of a permit where impacts to listed threatened species and ecological communities may arise.</li> </ul>
<b>Protected matter — listed migratory species</b>		
<p><i>The survival and conservation status of listed migratory species and their critical habitat is promoted and enhanced, consistent with Australia's international obligations.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority will make decisions consistent with the Objects of the GBRMP Act, which includes the main object at Section 2A(1) to 'provide for the long-term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region'.</li> <li>Environment has the same meaning as in the EPBC Act, and is defined as including (among other things) ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities, natural and physical resources, and the qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas. This includes listed migratory species.</li> <li>In making decisions that are consistent with the Objects of the GBRMP Act, the Authority must consider the potential impacts of the conduct proposed to be permitted by the permission on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine</li> </ul>	<p><u>Permit Applicant</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With all applications for permits, as a policy matter, the Authority considers that the onus is on the applicant to establish that the environmental impacts of the proposed operation are acceptable.</li> <li>An application must be submitted to the Authority. It must provide enough information so permit assessors can clearly understand what the intended activity is and where it is to be carried out, and the likely nature and scale of environmental impacts on an area of important habitat for a migratory species.</li> <li>If an application does not include sufficient information for the purposes of assessing the likely nature and scale of environmental impacts, additional information or documents must be provided.</li> <li>Applicants should note that making a statement (whether orally, in a document or in any other way), in connection with an application for a permit, that is false or misleading, or omits any matter or thing without which the statement is misleading, is a criminal offence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GBRMP Regulation 88A enables the Authority to develop permit application forms and vary them to meet legal and management responsibilities. These forms will be reviewed and updated, following approval of the Program, to meet the Authority's responsibilities outlined in the adjacent column.</li> <li>GBRMP Regulation 88E enables the Authority to request further information for the purpose of assessing an application within 20 business days, or the application is taken to have been withdrawn.</li> <li>The Authority maintains guidance (that will be updated following Program and Authority approval) that stakeholders should have regard to in the preparation of their Permit Applications. The guidance will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incorporate consideration of all matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes</li> <li>refer to consideration of the protection of listed migratory species and areas of important habitat for listed migratory species</li> <li>include references to relevant guidance documents to be considered by Permit Applicants in preparing Permit Applications such as wildlife conservation plans, cumulative impact assessment guidelines, net benefit policies and EPBC Act guidance documents.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



Permission system commitments	Responsibilities	Mechanism (legislative and policy)
<p>Park. Consideration will be given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o the preservation of listed migratory species and areas of important habitat for a migratory species</li> <li>o the Bonn Convention</li> <li>o China Australia Migratory Birds Agreement (CAMBA)</li> <li>o Japan Australia Migratory Birds Agreement (JAMBA)</li> <li>o Republic of Korea Australia Migratory Birds Agreement (ROKAMBA)</li> <li>o an international agreement approved under Subsection 209(4) of the EPBC Act.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permit applications will be considered on a case by case basis, with consideration given to the objectives of the zone in which the proposed conduct will take place, as set out in the Zoning Plan.</li> <li>• In undertaking assessments, the Authority will have regard to relevant policy documents, wildlife conservation plans, guidelines and plans of management on the Department of the Environment's website.</li> </ul>	<p><u>The Authority</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Authority will make permit decisions consistent with the GBRMP Act, the Zoning Plan and the Program's commitments to listed migratory species.</li> </ul> <p>GBRMP Regulations 88Q and 88R describe the Authority's permit assessment considerations. These will be applied for each matter of national environmental significance as outlined in the world heritage property example of this table (above).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section 286 of the EPBC Act requires that a Commonwealth agency must take all reasonable steps to act in accordance with a wildlife conservation plan. As a Commonwealth statutory authority, the Authority must comply with this requirement.</li> <li>• The Authority is required to assess all valid permit applications. In assessing an application, the Authority must consider criteria outlined in the <i>Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983</i>. In deciding whether or not to grant a permit, the Authority must consider matters outlined in GBRMP Regulation 88Q (mandatory considerations) and may consider matters outlined in 88R (discretionary considerations).</li> <li>• Where an action is likely to have a significant impact on listed migratory species within the Marine Park, the Authority will consider, as part of the permit assessment process, any of the below considerations (outlined in Regulation 88R) which are relevant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o international conventions</li> <li>o Commonwealth–state agreements</li> <li>o recovery plans</li> <li>o wildlife conservation plans</li> <li>o threat abatements plans, and/or</li> <li>o approved conservation advices.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Authority maintains internal guidance documents and templates for permit assessments. The Authority will update and issue these to comply with the Program's commitments, to make it explicit that decisions made by the Authority must not be inconsistent with relevant recovery plans, threat abatement plans and wildlife conservation plans, and that these must be taken into account when determining the acceptability of a permit where impacts to listed migratory species may arise.</li> </ul>
<b>Protected matter — Commonwealth marine area</b>		
<p><i>The ecosystem functioning and integrity of Commonwealth marine areas are maintained or enhanced in full conformity with relevant marine bioregional plans.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Authority will make decisions consistent with the Objects of the GBRMP Act, which includes the main object at Section 2A(1) to 'provide for the long-term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the</li> </ul>	<p><u>Permit Applicant</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With all applications for permits, as a policy matter, the Authority considers that the onus is on the applicant to establish that the environmental impacts of the proposed operation are acceptable.</li> <li>• An application must be submitted to the Authority. It must provide enough information so permit assessors can clearly understand what the intended activity is and where it is to be carried out, and the likely nature and scale of impacts on the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GBRMP Regulation 88A enables the Authority to develop permit application forms and vary them to meet legal and management responsibilities. These forms will be reviewed and updated, following approval of the Program, to meet the Authority's responsibilities outlined in the adjacent column.</li> <li>• GBRMP Regulation 88E enables the Authority to request further information for the purpose of assessing an application within 20 business days, or the application is taken to have been withdrawn.</li> </ul>

Permission system commitments	Responsibilities	Mechanism (legislative and policy)
<p>Great Barrier Reef Region<sup>1</sup>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environment has the same meaning as in the EPBC Act, and is defined as including (among other things) ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities, natural and physical resources, and the qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas. This includes the environment in a Commonwealth marine area.</li> <li>In making decisions that are consistent with the Objects of the GBRMP Act, the Authority must consider the potential impacts of the conduct proposed to be permitted by the permission on the environment and on the social, cultural and heritage values of the Marine Park or a part of the Marine Park. Consideration will be given to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>maintaining and enhancing the environment of a Commonwealth marine area</li> <li>a plan of management for a Commonwealth reserve, or the IUCN reserve management principles</li> <li>a plan of management for a Commonwealth heritage place, or the Commonwealth heritage management principles</li> <li>any relevant bioregional plans.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Permit applications will be considered on a case by case basis, with consideration given to the objectives of the zone in which the proposed conduct will take place, as set out in the Zoning Plan.</li> <li>In undertaking assessments, the Authority will have regard to relevant policy documents, gazettal instruments, bioregional plans, wildlife conservation plans, plans of management and EPBC Act guidance documents on the Department of the Environment's website.</li> </ul>	<p>environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If an application does not include sufficient information for the purposes of assessing the likely nature and scale of environmental impacts, additional information or documents must be provided.</li> <li>Applicants should note that making a statement (whether orally, in a document or in any other way), in connection with an application for a permit, that is false or misleading, or omits any matter or thing without which the statement is misleading, is a criminal offence.</li> </ul> <p><u>The Authority</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority will make permit decisions consistent with the GBRMP Act, the Zoning Plan and the Program's commitments to Commonwealth marine areas.</li> <li>The matter protected in the Commonwealth marine area under the EPBC Act is the whole of the environment, as defined under Section 528 of the EPBC Act. The Authority will consider the effect that an action proposed to be taken in the Marine Park is likely to have on the environment, including consideration of guidance in relevant management plans.</li> </ul> <p>GBRMP Regulations 88Q and 88R describe the Authority's permit assessment considerations. These will be applied for each matters of national environmental significance as outlined in the world heritage Property example of this table (above).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority maintains guidance (that will be updated following Program and Authority approval) that stakeholders should have regard to in the preparation of their Permit Applications. The guidance will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incorporate consideration of all matters of national environmental significance and relevant attributes</li> <li>make reference to consideration of the environment of the Commonwealth marine area</li> <li>include references to relevant documents to be considered by Permit Applicants in preparing Permit Applications including, but not limited to, GBRMP Act and EPBC Act guidance documents.</li> </ul> </li> <li>As a Commonwealth agency, the Authority must comply with the following requirements to properly assess the environmental impacts of a permit on the environment of the Commonwealth marine area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Section 341V of the EPBC Act requires that a Commonwealth agency must not authorise any person to do anything that may contravene a plan made under Section 341S for management of a Commonwealth heritage place. If there is no Section 341S plan, a Commonwealth agency must take all reasonable steps to ensure that acts relating to the property are not inconsistent with the Commonwealth heritage management principles (Schedule 7B, EPBC Regulations)</li> <li>Section 362 of the EPBC Act requires that a Commonwealth agency must not perform its functions or exercise its powers inconsistently with a management plan that is in operation for a reserve. If there is no plan in operation, Section 357 requires a Commonwealth agency to not exercise its powers or perform its functions inconsistently with the Australian IUCN reserve management principles (Schedule 8, EPBC Regulations) or a management plan previously in operation</li> <li>Section 286 of the EPBC Act requires that a Commonwealth agency must take all reasonable steps to act in accordance with a wildlife conservation plan.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The Authority is required to assess all valid permit applications. In assessing an application, the Authority must consider criteria outlined in the <i>Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983</i>. In deciding whether or not to grant a permit, the Authority must consider matters outlined in GBRMP Regulation 88Q (mandatory considerations) and may consider matters outlined</li> </ul>

Permission system commitments	Responsibilities	Mechanism (legislative and policy)
		<p>in 88R (discretionary considerations).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where an action is likely to have a significant impact on the environment in a Commonwealth marine area within the Marine Park, the Authority will consider, as part of the permit assessment process, any of the below considerations (outlined in Regulation 88R) which are relevant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>international conventions</li> <li>Commonwealth–state agreements</li> <li>recovery plans</li> <li>wildlife conservation plans</li> <li>threat abatements plans, and/or</li> <li>approved conservation advices.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The Authority maintains internal guidance documents and templates for permit assessments. The Authority will update and issue these to comply with the Program's commitments, and consider relevant policy documents, gazettal instruments, bioregional plans, wildlife conservation plans, plans of management and EPBC guidance documents issued by the Department of the Environment in the assessment of Permit Applications, to ensure that management of impacts to the environment of the Commonwealth marine area is appropriately taken into account.</li> </ul>

## GLOSSARY OF COMMONLY USED TERMS AND ACRONYMS

**Action:** Includes a project, a development, an undertaking, an activity or series of activities, and an alteration to any of these things. (Adapted from EPBC Act)

**Adaptive management:** A systematic process for continually improving management practices through learning from the outcomes of previous management. It includes a monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and improvement cycle. (Adapted from *A guide to undertaking strategic assessments*)

**Attribute:** Those aspects which underpin and support matters of national environmental significance.

**Authority:** Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

**Avoiding impacts:** Measures taken so that actions have minimal negative effect on the environment. (Adapted from *A guide to undertaking strategic assessments*)

**Basin:** An area of land where surface water channels to a hydrological network and discharges into the sea (for example, a whole river system). Within the Great Barrier Reef catchment, 35 basins have been defined, based on the major river systems. A basin can include small creeks and streams that discharge directly to the sea.

**Benthic:** The bottom of the seafloor which includes the collection of organisms living on or in the bottom.

**Biodiversity:** The variability among living organisms from all sources (including terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part). It includes diversity within species and between species, and diversity of ecosystems. (EPBC Act and GBRMP Act)

**Bycatch:** Any animal, plant or marine product that was unintentionally caught (that is, not targeted) during commercial, recreational or traditional fishing activities, including Queensland's Shark Control Program. Bycatch can either be retained (see by-product) or discarded.

**By-product:** Any animal, plant or marine product that was unintentionally caught but retained during a commercial, recreational or traditional fishing activity.

**Capital dredging:** Dredging for navigation, to create a new or enlarged channel, port, marina or boat harbour areas. Dredging for engineering purposes, to create trenches for pipes, cables, immersed tube tunnels, to remove material unsuitable for foundations and to remove overburden for aggregate.

**Carrying capacity:** The number of individuals an ecosystem can support without having any negative effects. It also includes a limit of resources and pollution levels that can be maintained without experiencing high levels of change.

**Coastal ecosystem:** Inshore, coastal and adjacent catchment ecosystems that connect the land and sea, and have the potential to influence the health and resilience of the Great Barrier Reef.

**Coastal reclamation:** The process of creating new land where there was ocean, wetlands, or other waterbodies by filling the area with 'land fill' or infrastructure such as groynes and jetties.

**Coastal zone:** The area of land and sea in or adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef containing Queensland waters, plus adjacent inland areas either within five kilometres of the coast or less than 10 metres above sea level (whichever is the further).

**Cultural keystone species:** The species that play special cultural roles for Indigenous and local peoples and are the ones they depend upon most extensively to meet their needs for food, clothing, shelter, fuel, medicine, and other necessities of life. These are the species that become embedded in a community's cultural traditions and narratives, their ceremonies, dances, songs, and discourse. Cultural keystone species can vary widely from one region to another and from one culture to another.

**Cumulative impact:** The impact on the environment resulting from the effects of one or more impacts, and the interactions between those impacts, added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future pressures.

**Cumulative risk:** The combined risks to the environment by multiple impacts.

**Discarded catch:** See non-retained catch.

**Driver:** An overarching cause of change in the environment. (*Australia State of the Environment Report 2011*)

**Ecologically sustainable use:** Use of natural resources within their capacity to sustain natural processes while maintaining the life-support systems of nature and ensuring the benefit of their use to the present generation does not diminish the potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations. (EPBC Act)

**Ecosystem:** A dynamic complex of plant, animal and microorganism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit. (EPBC Act)

**Ecosystem-based management:** An integrated approach to managing an ecosystem and matters affecting that ecosystem, with the main object being to maintain ecological processes, biodiversity and functioning biological communities. (GBRMP Act)

**Ecosystem services:** Actions or attributes of ecosystems of benefit to humans, including regulation of the atmosphere, maintenance of soil fertility, food production, regulation of water flows, water filtration, pest control and waste disposal. It also includes social and cultural services, such as the opportunity for people to experience nature. (*Australia State of the Environment Report 2011*)

**Environment:** Ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities; natural and physical resources; the qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas heritage values of places; and the social, economic and cultural aspects of the above. (EPBC Act and GBRMP Act)

**Environmental Impact Statement:** An EIS is a statement of the likely impacts of an action on the environment and how they may be managed, mitigated or offset. Similar to a Public Environment Statement (PER) but broader in scope. (Part 8, Division 6, EPBC Act)

**EPBC Act:** *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.*

**Extraction:** The removal of any animal, plant or marine product through legal commercial, recreational or traditional fishing activities including Queensland's Shark Control Program.

**Geomorphology:** Scientific study of landforms and the processes that shape them. (*Australia State of the Environment Report 2011*)

**GBRMP Act:** *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975.*

**Great Barrier Reef catchment:** The area adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef Region which drains into the Region.

**Habitat:** The environment occupied by an organism or groups of organisms. (Adapted from EPBC Act)

**Halimeda:** Green macroalgae which is responsible for distinctive circular deposits on parts of the Great Barrier Reef.

**Heritage value:** A place's natural and cultural environment having aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance, or other significance, for current and future generations of Australians. (EPBC Act and GBRMP Act)

**Impact:** An event or circumstance which has an effect, either positive or negative, on a value.

**Indigenous person:** A person who is a member of the Aboriginal race of Australia; or a descendant of an Indigenous inhabitant of the Torres Strait Islands. (GBRMP Act)

**Indigenous:** For the purposes of the strategic assessment, the term 'Indigenous' should be read to apply specifically to Traditional Owners and Traditional Owner groups.

**Indirect impact:** An impact that is not the direct result of a particular action but has been made possible by that action. These include downstream or upstream impacts, as well as facilitated or consequential impacts resulting from further actions (including actions by third parties). (Adapted from *A guide to undertaking strategic assessments*)

**Inshore:** Enclosed coastal and open coastal water bodies which extend from the mean low water mark out to approximately 20 kilometres, but also includes areas further offshore that are habitats for recognised inshore specialist species.

**Integrity:** A measure of the wholeness and intactness of the natural and/or cultural heritage and its attributes. (*Operational guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention* paragraphs no. 88–95)

**Listed migratory species:** A migratory species that is native or included under a relevant international convention, which has been placed by the Environment Minister on the published list of migratory species. (Adapted from EPBC Act)

**Listed threatened species:** A native species which is extinct, extinct in the wild, critically endangered, endangered, vulnerable or conservation dependent, as set out in the published list of threatened species established by the Environment Minister. (Adapted from EPBC Act)

**Maintenance dredging:** Dredging to ensure that previously dredged channels, berths or construction works are maintained at their designated dimensions.

**Marine Park:** Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

**Matters of national environmental significance:** Those matters defined in the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

**Mesophotic reefs:** Corals found at water depths where light penetration is low.

**Mitigating impacts:** Measures put in place to reduce the level of impact arising from an action, including indirect and cumulative impacts. (Adapted from *A guide to undertaking strategic assessments*)



**Morphology:** The form and structure of animals and plants, without regard to their functions.

**Net benefit:** Having an overall positive impact on the environment of the Great Barrier Reef.

**Non-retained (or discarded) catch:** Marine life caught by commercial, recreational or traditional fishers which has been discarded. This includes targeted species discarded due to size or catch restrictions, low market value, 'catch and release' practices, or bycatch that has been unintentionally captured.

**Outstanding universal value:** Cultural and/or natural heritage which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of such significance to humanity as a whole to make it worthy of special protection. (Adapted from *Operational guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*)

**Offshore:** Offshore water bodies extend from approximately 20 kilometres out to the edge of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park boundary.

**Offsetting impacts:** Measures intended to compensate for the residual adverse impacts of an action on the environment. (Adapted from *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, Environmental Offsets Policy*, 2012)

**Palaeochannel:** An ancient stream or riverbed, cut into the rock or soil and overlaid by sediment after the stream has changed its course or dried up.

**Pelagic:** Relating to or living in or on oceanic waters. The pelagic zone of the ocean begins at the low tide mark and includes the entire oceanic water column and living organisms that inhabit this zone for all or part of their life (for example, plankton, pelagic fish).

**Poaching:** The illegal take of any animal, plant or marine product from land that is not one's own or is under official protection. It also includes the illegal take of a protected species.

**Protected species:** A species that is a cetacean; a listed marine species, a listed migratory species, a listed threatened ecological community, or a listed threatened species; a species of marine mammal, bird or reptile that is prescribed as endangered wildlife, vulnerable wildlife or rare wildlife under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Qld); a species declared to be a protected species for the purposes of this definition; a species declared to be a strictly protected species for the purposes of this definition. (GBRMP Act)

**Precautionary principle:** The principle that lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing a measure to prevent degradation of the environment where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage. (EPBC Act and GBRMP Act)

**Pressure:** An activity or group of activities that cause an impact on a value.

**Program:** The Authority's management arrangements, including future commitments, as described in the Program Report.

**Public Environment Report:** A PER is a statement of the likely impacts on the environment and how they may be managed, mitigated or offset. Similar to an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) but narrower in scope. (Part 8, Division 5, EPBC Act)

**Recreation:** An independent visit for enjoyment that is not part of a commercial operation. It is distinct from tourism where a visitor pays to use a commercial operation. (*Recreation Management Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park*)

**Refugia:** An area where an organism can survive during a period of unfavourable conditions.

**Resilience:** The capacity of an ecosystem to recover from disturbance or withstand ongoing pressures.

**Region:** Great Barrier Reef Region as defined in the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*.

**Retained catch:** Marine life caught and kept by commercial, recreational or traditional fishers including targeted and non-targeted species.

**Risk:** The possibility of something happening that impacts on objectives. It is the chance to either make a gain or a loss and is measured in terms of likelihood and consequence. (*Australian Standard for Risk Assessment* (AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009))

**Ship:** Vessels greater than 50 metres in overall length or carrying specialised product regardless of length (for example, oil tankers, chemical or liquefied gas carriers).

**SEWPaC:** The former Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, now the Department of the Environment.

**State Development Area:** Defined areas established to promote economic development for industry, infrastructure corridors and major public works.

**Take:** The act of or attempt to remove, gather, catch, kill, destroy, dredge for, raise, carry away, bring ashore, interfere with and obtain (by other means) an animal, plant or marine product.

**Taxa:** Groups of one or more populations of organisms.

**Threshold:** The breaking point above which an ecosystem or a component of an ecosystem can no longer sustain natural processes and remain in a healthy condition (for example, the point at which there is a phase shift from coral-dominated or algal-dominated reefs).

**Throughput:** The quantity of cargo that is passed through a port in a given period (exports and imports).

**Tourism:** Commercial activities that provide transport, accommodation or services to people who are visiting the Region principally for enjoyment. (Derived from GBRMP Act)

**Trading port:** A trading port refers to a port that has an associated pilotage area as defined in schedule 5 of the Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Regulation 2004. In these areas, the regional harbour master has the authority to direct the master of a ship to navigate or operate a ship in a prescribed way.

**Traditional Owner:** An Indigenous person recognised in the Indigenous community or by a relevant representative Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander body as having spiritual or cultural affiliations with a site or area in the Marine Park, or as holding native title in relation to that site or area; and who is entitled to undertake activities under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander custom or tradition in that site or area.

**Traditional Owner group:** The group of Traditional Owners who, in accordance with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander custom, speak for a site or area.

**Trophic:** Of or relating to nutrition.

**Trigger value:** A point which, if exceeded, would mean there was a significant risk of adverse effects on an ecosystem or a component of an ecosystem. Exceeding a trigger value would 'trigger' action to address contributing impacts and/or review the trigger value.

**Turbidite:** A type of sedimentary rock composed of layered particles that grade upward from coarser to finer sizes and are thought to have originated from ancient turbidity currents in the oceans.

**Value:** Those aspects or attributes of an environment that make it of significance.

**Vulnerability:** The degree to which a system, organism or community is susceptible to, and unable to cope with, an impact.

**World Heritage Area:** Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

**Wellbeing:** The combination of economic prosperity, community liveability and environmental integrity, which is determined by the quality, quantity, distribution, use and preservation of economic, human, social and natural capital. (Commonwealth of Australia (2012) Sustainability Framework (Version 0 – April 2012). Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Canberra, Australia)

**Zones of influence:** Areas where impacts have detectable effects on values.

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