

**INDIGENOUS REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMUNIQUE**

Meeting 5 – 18-19 October 2016

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

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

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

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

**Introduction**

The fifth meeting of the IRAC was held in Townsville in October 2016. Two new members were welcomed, Mr Stan Lui and Ms Leah Talbot. Mr Lui is a representative for the Torres Strait Regional Authority and is the Chair of the Indigenous Reference Group for the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation. Mr Lui hopes his membership will help to share information and learnings from the TSRA and identify alignment and partnerships with GBRMPA. Ms Talbot is recognised as a special matter expert specialising in Indigenous research methodologies at the CSIRO. The Acting IRAC Chair, Mr Bob Muir, on behalf of the Members and Agency staff, acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the Townsville Area, the Wulgurukaba and Bindal peoples, their Elders past and present, and acknowledged all Traditional Owners and Indigenous communities connected to the Great Barrier Reef.

**Stronger alignment with the Marine Park Authority Board**

**The committee endorsed the proposal to schedule future IRAC meetings to better align with Marine Park Authority Board Meetings.**

The IRAC reflected on the first year of its term and noted the operation and management of the committee had evolved to be more advice focussed and it was a privilege to provide advice in more interactive sessions. A key focus of the IRAC is to advise the MPA Board on matters of significance to GBR Traditional Owners. Moving forward the IRAC will review MPA agenda’s and provide formal advice on agenda items (that fall within scope) and other GBRMPA business items on IRAC agendas.

**Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program**

**The committee noted the 15-16 Annual Report for the Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program and provided advice on future format and promotion.**

The Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program provides unique opportunities to plan and implement Sea Country Partnership arrangements with Great Barrier Reef Traditional Owners. The Director of Indigenous Partnerships, Ms Jessica Hoey, tabled a copy of the 2015-16 report, and executive summary. IRAC members commended the new report structure which showcased each TUMRA group and their activities on country; provided case studies on Indigenous compliance programs and highlighted the strong engagement focus of Agency staff to support partnerships. The IRAC advised the report should be circulated widely to other reef stakeholders (e.g. councils, PBC’s, Universities that operate in the marine park) to raise the profile of the work being done and facilitate future partnerships between GBRMPA, Traditional Owners and other reef users.

**Joint Field Management Program Periodic Review**

**The committee participated in a feedback workshop with independent review consultant Terry Harper to inform the review of the Joint Field Management Program.**

The Joint Field Management Program (the ‘Program’) is responsible for planning and executing field operations for the monitoring and protection of Commonwealth and State marine parks, Commonwealth Islands and island national parks within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

The Program delivers activities in a 348,000 square kilometre area that stretches 2300 kilometres in length and contains over 3000 reefs and 1050 islands. The Program is jointly supported on a 50:50 arrangement by the Australian and Queensland governments for approximately $17 million annually. Delivery is principally through the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing). The Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum has requested a Periodic Review Report be prepared.

The Project Specification for the review identifies the value of partnerships and the importance of consulting with Traditional Owners and interest groups as part of the review. Advice on perceived gaps in field management delivery and recommendations for field management priorities for the next five years and beyond were sought from the IRAC. In summary, the IRAC advised that a more comprehensive co-management funding and investment model is needed to strengthen Traditional Owner involvement in joint management of the Marine Park. IRAC discussed and provided advice on potential models for increased Traditional Owner involvement depending on capacity and governance.

**Indigenous Heritage Value Guidelines**

The Environmental Assessment and Protection section of the Agency has been working with the Indigenous Partnerships section to draft Indigenous heritage value guidelines. These draft guidelines were released on 5 September 2016 for public comment until 18 November 2016 and will be used to improve understanding of these values and protection when assessing permits for access to the Marine Park.

The IRAC supported development of the guidelines and reiterated the need for permittees to engage Traditional Owners early regarding activities, in particular research, they wish to undertake in their sea country. Traditional Owners should be privy to research programs and outcomes and want to work collaboratively with researchers on how the findings can be used. Moving forward the Agency needs a system to protect culturally in-confidence information that is willingly shared by Traditional Owners to inform permit decision making.

**Parks Australia – Indigenous Engagement Framework**

The Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Reserve abuts the Marine Park. Parks Australia is seeking to facilitate engagement on sea country within Commonwealth marine reserves over the next 6 months to ensure that management plans recognise sea country values in reserves and provide for the establishment of collaborative management arrangements. The Director of National Parks, Sally Barnes and Zoe Cozens presented on the Indigenous Engagement Framework for Preparing Management Plans for Commonwealth Marine Reserves. The IRAC noted the engagement framework and discussed ways for Parks Australia to involve Traditional Owners in the process.

**Indigenous Heritage Strategy**

The Agency is developing an Indigenous Heritage Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The IRAC endorsed the engagement plan for the development of the strategy and advised the more appropriate title should be the ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage Strategy. Moving forward, the Agency needs to support non-TUMRA groups as well as TUMRA groups to identify and protect heritage.