



Australian Government

**Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority**

GREAT BARRIER REEF REGION STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

Terms of Reference



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General Manager, Communication and Policy Coordination
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority,
PO Box 1379, Townsville Qld 4810.

Further information is available from:



Australian Government

**Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority**

2-68 Flinders Street East (PO Box 1379)

Townsville Queensland 4810

Telephone +617 4750 0700

Fax +617 4772 6093

Web site www.gbrmpa.gov.au

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The Australian and Queensland governments are working together to undertake a comprehensive strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and adjacent coastal zone. The comprehensive strategic assessment will help identify, plan for and manage existing and emerging risks so that the unique values of the Great Barrier Reef are protected and managed.

There are two components to the comprehensive strategic assessment - a marine component and a coastal component. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (the Authority) will lead the marine component involving a strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef Region (the Strategic Assessment). The Queensland Government will lead the coastal component involving a strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef Coastal Zone.

Purpose

The purpose of these Terms of Reference is to set out the requirements for the Authority in preparing the Strategic Assessment Report for the Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment.

The Strategic Assessment will assess the likely impacts of actions on relevant matters of national environmental significance as defined in the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, and the Authority's management arrangements to deal with such impacts.



Map 1: Great Barrier Reef Region

Scope

The scope of the Strategic Assessment is defined by both geographic area and the management arrangements within the Authority's jurisdiction.

The area to be considered by the Authority in its Strategic Assessment is the Great Barrier Reef Region, as defined in the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*, and areas outside that Region to the extent that actions in those areas may affect that Region (the Strategic Assessment area). The Great Barrier Reef Region covers an area from the tip of Cape York in the north to past Lady Elliot Island in the south, with mean low water as its western boundary and extending eastwards a distance of between 70 and 250 km (Map 1).

All management arrangements under the jurisdiction of the Authority will be considered together with partnerships and collaborative arrangements with other Queensland and Australian government agencies and partnerships with stakeholders and members of the Great Barrier Reef coastal community.

The Authority and the Queensland Government will work closely together on those aspects of the two strategic assessments where they have joint management responsibilities, for example shipping, water quality and island management.

Due to the size and complexity of the Great Barrier Reef, the Authority's Strategic Assessment will include both a broad examination of the Great Barrier Reef Region and more focussed studies of specific locations and issues.

Context

The Australian and Queensland governments share responsibility for managing the Great Barrier Reef. The adaptive, ecosystem-based management approach for the Great Barrier Reef is constantly reviewed and updated in response to new and emerging issues.

In 2009, the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report identified that the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem is at a crossroad and decisions made now are likely to determine its long-term future. Climate change, declining water quality from catchment runoff, coastal development and remaining impacts from fishing were identified as the biggest risks to the future of the Reef. Since this 2009 report, some of the identified risks to the Reef have increased. These include increases in shipping activity as a result of port expansions; population growth as a result of expanding urban and industrial activities along the Great Barrier Reef coast; intensification and changes in land use within the Great Barrier Reef catchment; and extreme weather events including flooding and cyclones.

The comprehensive strategic assessment is part of the Australian and Queensland governments' adaptive approach to managing the Great Barrier Reef. Once complete the comprehensive strategic assessment will strengthen the protection of the Great Barrier Reef and guide its management by providing greater certainty on where sustainable uses can occur, the type of activities that will be allowed and the conditions under which activities may proceed.

The comprehensive strategic assessment is being carried out under Part 10 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Agreements between the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (the Minister) and both the Authority and the Queensland Government to undertake the complementary strategic assessments are available at: <http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/notices/assessments/great-barrier-reef.html>

The comprehensive strategic assessment also forms part of the Australian Government's response to the World Heritage Committee's concerns regarding the impacts of development on the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Great Barrier Reef and Coastal Zone values

In accordance with the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, the assessment will address impacts on **matters of national environmental significance** as defined in that Act, including world heritage properties, national heritage properties, nationally threatened species and ecological communities, nationally listed migratory species, wetlands of international importance, Commonwealth marine areas and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The Strategic Assessment will describe the extent to which these matters apply to the Great Barrier Reef Region, the values which underpin these matters and ecosystem processes critical to their functioning.

As part of the strategic assessment, there will also be explicit consideration of matters relating to the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Outstanding Universal Value is a concept central to world heritage properties. It relates to the exceptional qualities of global significance that make an area worthy of special protection. The Great Barrier Reef was listed as a world heritage property in 1981 on the basis that it met all four of the natural criteria which contribute to its Outstanding Universal Value. These criteria relate to the property's biodiversity, its significant ongoing biological and geological processes, its superlative natural phenomena and exceptional natural beauty, and its evolutionary history. Outstanding Universal Value also includes the concept of 'integrity' which is a measure of wholeness or intactness of the property's natural heritage and its attributes.

Reports to be prepared

The Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment will deliver two reports:

- **Program Report** containing a detailed description of the Authority's management arrangements, including future commitments, to protect and manage matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.
- **Strategic Assessment Report** prepared in accordance with these Terms of Reference.

The Great Barrier Reef Coastal Zone component of the comprehensive strategic assessment will be made up of two similar reports, as shown in Figure 1. Where there are joint management responsibilities these aspects will be addressed in both the Authority's and Queensland Government's reports.

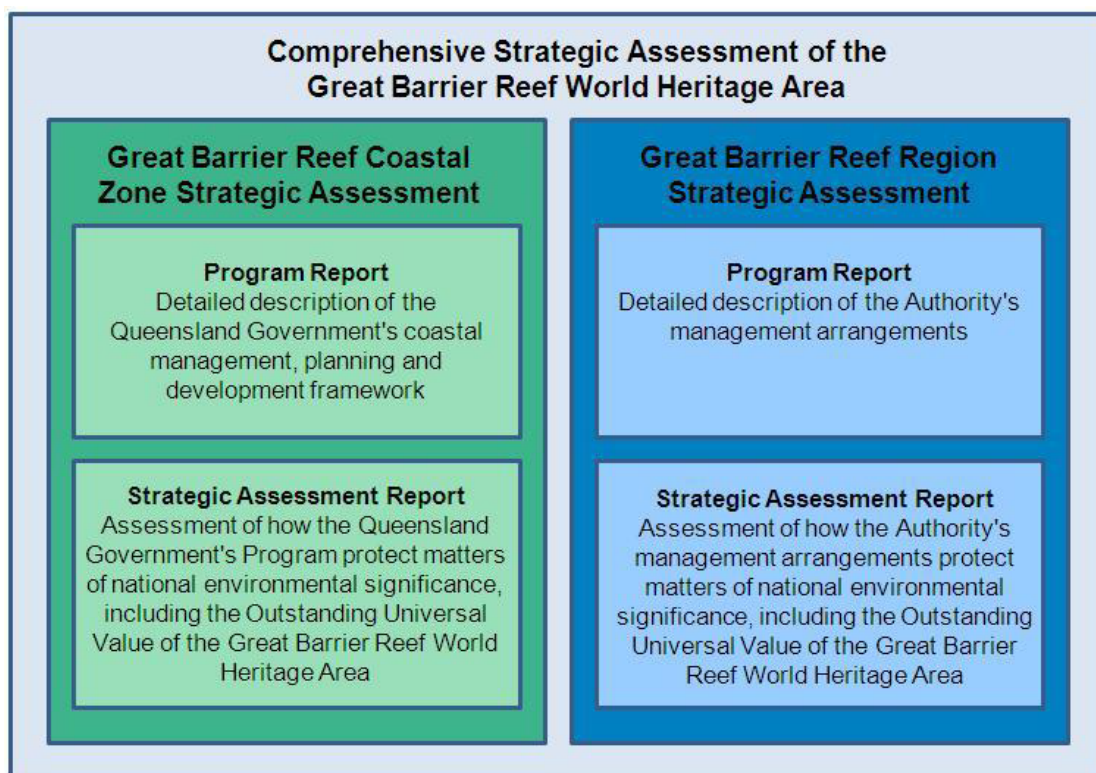


Figure 1: Reports of the *Comprehensive Strategic Assessment for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and Adjacent Coastal Zone*

Drafts of the Program Report and the Strategic Assessment Report will be released together for public comment prior to their finalisation and submission to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.

Timeframes

It is anticipated that a draft Strategic Assessment Report and Program Report for the Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment will be made available for public comment early to mid 2013.

It is intended that the comprehensive strategic assessment for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and adjacent coastal zone will be finalised by mid to late 2013.

Prior to finalisation of the comprehensive strategic assessment, the Australian and Queensland governments will continue to apply high environmental standards when considering development proposals that may affect the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

The life of the Program described in the Program Report will be 25 years, during which time there will be monitoring, evaluation and periodic review of the Program.

Development of the Terms of Reference

To ensure a consistent approach to developing the two strategic assessments, the Terms of Reference have been developed in close cooperation with the Queensland Government and the Australian Government's Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.

Draft Terms of Reference were made available for public comment between 18 February and 30 April 2012. A report on submissions received and how public comments were considered in finalising the Terms of Reference is available on the Authority's website at www.gbrmpa.gov.au.

Strategic Assessment process

In preparing the Strategic Assessment, the Authority will:

- Work in close consultation and collaboration with the Queensland Government, the Australian Government's Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities and other relevant Australian Government agencies.
- Engage stakeholders and the community throughout the Strategic Assessment process using the Authority's network of advisory committees together with regional and issue-based meetings.
- Communicate with the wider community throughout the Strategic Assessment process using the Authority's website, fact sheets, media releases, advertisements and newsletters.
- Use methods consistent with, and build upon approaches employed in the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2009, where relevant.
- Engage independent expertise to assess the effectiveness of the Authority's Program and commission a peer review of the Strategic Assessment Report.
- Use the best available information to undertake the Strategic Assessment, including scientific data, expert opinion, and Traditional Owner and community knowledge.

Use of the term 'Program'

The word 'Program' is used throughout the Terms of Reference. In simple terms it means those management arrangements ('policy, plan or program') under the jurisdiction of the Authority. Management arrangements include, but are not limited to, those described in section 4.1.2 of the Terms of Reference.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

In preparing the Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment Report, the Authority must comply with the requirements set out below.

1. Purpose and Description of the Program

- 1.1 Provide an overview of the current Program. For the purposes of the Strategic Assessment the life of the Program is 25 years. The overview is to include a description of:
- a) The purpose of the Program, including Program objectives.
 - b) The area to which the Program applies (the Strategic Assessment area).
 - c) Legislation, plans, policies and other mechanisms that make up the Program, including Program commitments.
 - d) Relevant activities within the scope of the Program.
 - e) International, national, state and regional context (environmental, social, cultural and economic) in which the Program operates, including activities outside the Strategic Assessment area that may influence the Program.
 - f) Relevant national, state, regional and local planning or management frameworks that affect the Program and contribute to protection and management the matters of national environmental significance.
 - g) Identification of how long the Program will be in effect and the process for review of the Program, including adaptive management.
 - h) Identification of the relevant authorities responsible for the implementation of the Program.

2. Matters of National Environmental Significance

2.1 Description of matters of national environmental significance

- 2.1.1 Describe the extent to which the following relevant matters of national environmental significance, as defined in the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* apply to the Strategic Assessment area.

- a) world heritage properties, including consideration of the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area
- b) national heritage places
- c) wetlands of international importance
- d) listed threatened species and ecological communities
- e) listed migratory species
- f) Commonwealth marine areas
- g) the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

The description must:

- h) Identify key terrestrial, coastal and marine environmental, biodiversity and heritage values and/or attributes which underpin the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

- i) Describe ecosystem processes considered critical to the functioning of the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.
- j) Provide sufficient information to allow an understanding the connectivity between the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

2.2 Condition and trend of matters of national environmental significance

- a) Describe the current condition and trend of key indicators of the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.
- b) For world heritage values, benchmark the current condition of key indicators of Outstanding Universal Value against the retrospective statement of Outstanding Universal Value which describes the state of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area at the time of listing in 1981.
- c) Identify key information gaps and processes to address critical information needs.

3. Assessment of Impacts on Matters of National Environmental Significance

3.1 Actual and potential impacts

- a) Describe the environmental, social, cultural and economic drivers affecting the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.
- b) Describe and analyse the actual and potential impacts on the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, in the Strategic Assessment area, including:
 - i. impacts from past, present and future activities
 - ii. direct, indirect, consequential and cumulative impacts
 - iii. the likely impacts of climate change.
- c) Describe the spatial and temporal scale at which impacts and their effects on the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, are occurring or are likely to occur.
- d) Identify key information gaps and processes to address critical information needs.

4. Measures to Address Impacts

4.1 Current Program

4.1.1 Describe and assess the effectiveness of the Program to:

- a) Identify the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, and determine their current condition and trend, including spatial and non-spatial approaches.
- b) Identify and analyse direct, indirect, consequential and cumulative impacts, including the methods used to determine these types of impacts.
- c) Consider environmental, social, cultural and economic issues.
- d) Avoid, mitigate, offset and adaptively manage impacts.
- e) Address uncertainty and risk.

- f) Provide certainty regarding where uses may occur, the type of activities allowed, conditions under which activities may proceed and circumstances where impacts are likely to be unacceptable.
- g) Halt and reverse any declines and enhance the condition of the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including mechanisms to deliver a 'net benefit' to the condition of the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area,
- h) Adapt to reasonable climate change scenarios.
- i) Integrate with related local, Queensland and Australian government programs to protect and manage the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.
- j) Meet Australia's international responsibilities in relation to the environment and protection of world heritage.
- k) Monitor, evaluate and report on the:
 - i. Condition and trends of the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.
 - ii. Impacts of activities, including the setting of targets to benchmark management performance.

4.1.2 In assessing the effectiveness of the Program, consideration must be given to:

- a) Statutory instruments, including regulations, zoning plans, plans of management and permits.
- b) Non-statutory mechanisms including policies, position statements and guidelines.
- c) Partnership and collaborative arrangements with Queensland and other Australian government agencies.
- d) Partnerships with Traditional Owners in the management of marine resources.
- e) Partnership and stewardship programs, including education programs and engagement, with local governments, communities, Indigenous persons, business and industry.
- f) Research and monitoring programs.
- g) Compliance and enforcement programs.
- h) Resourcing of the Program.

4.2 Demonstration cases

4.2.1 Develop demonstration cases to assess in finer detail the effectiveness of the Program to protect and manage the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, and to guide improvements to the Program.

4.2.2 Demonstration cases are to be chosen by the Australian and Queensland governments. Criteria that will be used to guide this selection process include, but are not limited to:

- a) Where multiple impacts are acting or predicted to act upon a region, locality or value.
- b) To examine a specific management approach or method to identify a set of values/attributes or to assess a range of impacts/pressures.
- c) To demonstrate connectivity across coastal and marine systems.
- d) To demonstrate the integration of environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits in decision-making.
- e) To improve understanding of factors affecting Great Barrier Reef ecosystem resilience.
- f) Where lessons or outcomes could transfer to other areas.

- g) Opportunities to build capacity for future management.
- h) To examine the effectiveness of management across local, Queensland and Australian government jurisdictions.

5. Projected Condition of Matters of National Environmental Significance

- 5.1 Describe the projected condition of the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, based on an evaluation of their:
- a) Current status and trends.
 - b) Actual and potential impacts.
 - c) The effectiveness of the Program to protect the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, and manage impacts.
 - d) An understanding of ecosystem resilience.
 - e) An assessment of overall risks to the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

6. Proposed Program

6.1 Recommendations for changes to the Program

- 6.1.1 Recommend changes to the current Program to improve its effectiveness to deliver its objectives, including outcomes that protect the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. Recommendations for improvements should specifically address the matters listed in section 4.1.1.
- 6.1.2 Consistent with section 6.1.1 above, recommend improvements to related local, state and national government programs.

6.2 Principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development

Describe how the principles of ecologically sustainable development have been applied in the proposed Program. The principles of ecologically sustainable development as described in section 3A of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* are:

- a) Decision-making processes should effectively integrate both long-term and short-term economic, environmental, social and equitable considerations.
- 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.
- 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 biological diversity and ecological integrity should be a fundamental consideration in decision-making.
- e) Improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms should be promoted.

6.3 Adaptive management

- a) Identify the key adaptive management measures in the proposed Program that address uncertainties and risks inherent in the decision making process.

- b) Describe how the adaptive management measures will be implemented to ensure the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, are effectively protected and managed over the life of the Program.

6.4 Monitoring and reporting

- a) Describe the monitoring, review and public reporting process that will be used to examine whether the Program adequately protects and manages the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, and the framework for measuring success.
- b) Describe the processes for adapting the Program in response to new information.
- c) Nominate the parties responsible for undertaking the monitoring, review and reporting and for implementing any actions arising.

6.5 Review, modification or abandonment

- a) Identify and analyse likely circumstances and procedures that may result in the review, modification or abandonment of the Program. This is to include a discussion of how any commitments under the Program would continue to be met under these situations.

7. Strategic Assessment Process

7.1 Collaboration with the Queensland Government and other Australian Government agencies

- a) Undertake the Strategic Assessment in consultation and collaboration with the Queensland Government, the Australian Government's Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities and other relevant Australian Government agencies.

7.2 Community engagement

- a) Document how the community and stakeholders were engaged in the Strategic Assessment process and how views and comments were taken into account in the preparation of the Strategic Assessment Report and the Program Report.
- b) Along with the draft Program Report, make the draft Strategic Assessment Report available for public comment for a period of no less than 28 days.
- c) Provide the Minister with a report on the public submissions received on the draft Reports, together with proposed final drafts of the Strategic Assessment Report and Program Report, incorporating any revisions made in response to public comments.

7.3 Independent review

- a) Engage independent expertise to undertake an assessment of the effectiveness of the current Program to protect and manage the relevant matters of national environmental significance, including the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.
- b) Arrange for the content of the draft Strategic Assessment Report to be peer reviewed by at least three appropriately qualified persons.
- c) Provide the Minister with the independent assessment of management effectiveness, the peer review comments and a report identifying how the findings of the independent assessment and peer review have been considered in the Strategic Assessment Report and the Program Report.

7.4 Information and assessments

- a) Use the best available information to undertake the Strategic Assessment, including scientific data, expert opinion, and Traditional Owner and community knowledge.
- b) Document the methods used to undertake the Strategic Assessment.

- c) For information used in the Strategic Assessment, indicate where possible:
 - i. the source of the information
 - ii. how recent the information is
 - iii. the reliability and limitations of the assessment.

8. Endorsement Criteria

Describe how the Strategic Assessment Report meets the Endorsement Criteria set out below:

Endorsement Criteria

When deciding whether to endorse the Program, the Minister must be satisfied that the *Strategic Assessment Report* adequately addresses the impacts to which this Agreement relates, and that any recommendations by the Minister to modify the Program have been responded to appropriately.

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 *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. In particular, that it:

- a) Protects the environment, especially those aspects of the environment that are matters of national environmental significance.
- b) Promotes ecologically sustainable development through the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of natural resources.
- c) Promotes the conservation of biodiversity.
- d) Provides for the protection and conservation of heritage.
- e) Promotes a cooperative approach to the protection and management of the environment.
- f) Assists in the co-operative implementation of Australia's international environmental responsibilities.
- g) Recognises the role of Indigenous people in the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of Australia's biodiversity.
- h) Promotes the use of Indigenous peoples' knowledge of biodiversity with the involvement of, and in co-operation with, with the owners of the knowledge.

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:

- i) Identifies direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on matters of national environmental significance.
- j) Avoids impacts on matters of national environmental significance.
- 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.
- n) 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.

The Program must address all of the above matters for it to be considered for endorsement by the Minister in accordance with the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

END



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**Great Barrier Reef
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2-68 Flinders Street
PO Box 1379
TOWNSVILLE QLD 4810
Australia

Phone: (07) 4750 0700
Fax: (07) 4772 6093
info@gbbrmpa.gov.au

www.gbbrmpa.gov.au