

## GREAT BARRIER REEF MINISTERIAL FORUM

### Communiqué

10 July 2013

Australian and Queensland government Ministers responsible for the Great Barrier Reef met in Brisbane today for the 36th meeting of the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum.

At the meeting the Ministers were updated on the recent decision of the 37th meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. Ministers noted the many actions being undertaken by the Australian and Queensland governments to protect the Great Barrier Reef and the substantial progress being made in response to the requests of the World Heritage Committee. Ministers discussed progress on the two strategic assessments of the Great Barrier Reef. Ministers also applauded the continued positive progress on improving water quality with release of the Reef Plan 2011 Report Card and endorsed and released a new Reef Water Quality Protection Plan which outlines joint actions to further improve water quality over the next five years.

Ministers noted the ongoing success of the Joint Field Management Program for the Great Barrier Reef, in particular progress in constructing a replacement field management vessel, ongoing crown-of-thorns starfish control program for key tourism sites, multi-agency surveillance to control illegal activity, and installation of remote sensing networks at Raine Island to improve the breeding success of Green Turtles.

The meeting, chaired by the Hon Mark Butler MP, Australian Government Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Water, was also briefed on the status of the Reef by Dr Russell Reichelt, Chairman of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, and on the development of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan 2013 by Dr Wendy Craik, Chair of the Partnership Committee.

Ministers attending were the Hon Mark Butler MP, Australian Government Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Water, and Queensland Government Ministers the Hon Andrew Powell MP, Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, the Hon John McVeigh MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Hon Steve Dickson MP, Minister for National Parks.

#### **Reef Plan 2013**

The Forum endorsed the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan 2013 (Reef Plan 2013) and agreed to its public release and inclusion as a schedule to the *Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement 2009*.

Reef Plan 2013 is a joint government agreement with the long term goal to ensure that runoff from agriculture has no detrimental impact on the health and resilience of the Great Barrier Reef. Improving water quality is the most important activity that governments can do to protect the Reef.

Reef Plan 2013 includes nine key actions, with clear responsibility for delivery by a range of partners, including the Queensland and Australian governments, industry and regional delivery partners. The actions focus on a combination of incentives, education, best management practice systems and extension.

The Forum also noted the latest Scientific Consensus Statement, prepared by more than 40 leading water quality scientists. The findings helped inform development of Reef Plan 2013 and will continue to be used to target investments and actions to the critical areas.

Ministers approved the appointment of Dr Andrew Ash and Dr Graham Bonnett to the Independent Science Panel. Dr Andrew Ash, from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), has extensive expertise in research on grazing and climate change adaptation. Dr Graham Bonnett, also at CSIRO, has led a range of research aimed at improving sugarcane productivity whilst ensuring environmental health.

Ministers noted the report on the latest Reef Plan and the requirement for 'game changing' practices to be implemented, particularly in the Burdekin and Wet Tropics catchments, to achieve the Reef Plan targets.

Ministers acknowledged the importance of achieving alignment of funding to optimise the uptake of best management practices that enhance reef water quality.

### **Reef Plan 2011 Report Card**

The Forum endorsed the 2011 Report Card and agreed to its public release.

Ministers noted that the report card demonstrates that real progress has been made towards Reef Plan targets, particularly in the area of improved land management practices which have reduced pollutant runoff significantly.

Ministers praised the significant efforts made by graziers, canegrowers and other primary producers who have taken practical steps to reduce the runoff of sediment, nutrients and pesticides to Reef catchment streams.

The report card highlights that it will take time for these achievements to translate into improved marine condition, given the extreme weather events that occurred in 2010-2011, including Tropical Cyclone Yasi.

### **World Heritage Committee decision**

The Forum noted the decision of the 37th session of the World Heritage Committee at its meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Ministers noted that the World Heritage Committee welcomed progress on the two strategic assessments and the independent review of management arrangements for Gladstone Harbour, as well as the renewed commitment to the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan and associated Reef Rescue measures, and the positive results indicated in the Second Reef Plan Report Card (2010).

Ministers also noted further progress in a number of key areas - including the scoping of a long term plan for sustainable development, explaining outstanding universal value, and the development of the two strategic assessments - being undertaken by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Queensland Government.

Ministers agreed to continue to work together to address the World Heritage Committee concerns, to be reported in the 2014 State Party Report to be submitted by 1 February 2014. Ministers will consider a detailed report on progress against the decision at the next Ministerial Forum in December 2013.

### **Update on status of the Reef**

The Forum received a presentation on the current state of the Reef from Dr Russell Reichelt, Chairman of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

Ministers heard that while the Reef is widely acknowledged as one of the best managed coral reef ecosystems in the world, it still faces some serious challenges. Current management activities to address these pressures include the zoning plan, water quality programs and stewardship initiatives.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's strategic assessment is assisting the Authority to identify key management priorities to address the cumulative impacts effecting the values of the Reef.

### **Joint Field Management Program**

The Forum also noted an overview of the Joint Field Management Program, which plans and carries out field operations in the Commonwealth and State marine parks and on island national parks within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Key recent activities under the program include the combined government funding of \$3.13 million in 2012-2013 for the control of crown-of-thorns starfish and the letting of a contract for a replacement monitoring and compliance vessel, scheduled for delivery in March 2014. This vessel will be equipped with 80 square metres of solar panels, reducing its carbon emissions by 30 per cent and cutting annual operating costs. It will be twice as fast as the current vessel and more cost-effective, improving capacity to respond to incidents quickly and servicing all parts of the marine park.

### **About the Forum**

The Australian and Queensland Governments have been working together for the long-term protection and conservation of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park since its inception in 1975. The role of the Ministerial Forum is to facilitate and oversee the implementation and achievement of the objectives of the *Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement 2009*. The agreement aims to ensure an integrated and collaborative approach to manage marine and land environments within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.