



Reef 2050 Plan

INDEPENDENT EXPERT PANEL – COMMUNIQUÉ 18 OCTOBER 2016

The fifth meeting of the Reef 2050 Plan Independent Expert Panel was held today in Brisbane, chaired by Professor Ian Chubb AC, former Chief Scientist of Australia.

The Panel reviewed draft Reef 2050 policy and guidance documents relating to cumulative impact management, net benefits and offsets. The Panel noted the intention to release the documents for public comment and agreed that the language needs to be clear and accessible for the intended audience. There are strong linkages between the policies and the Panel provided advice on technical rigour, future application and science communication options. The Panel noted the challenges in preparing these documents and their importance for future decision making.

The Panel was briefed on the update on progress in implementation of the Reef 2050 Plan to be provided to the World Heritage Centre at the beginning of December, 2016. Members agreed that the update should be factual and noted that it will be focussed on implementation of the Plan, rather than a state of the conservation report. The Panel noted the first Reef 2050 Plan annual report was recently released that showed progress in delivery of actions in the first year of the plan.

The Panel provided advice on the development of the Reef 2050 Plan Investment Framework. Members workshopped six key priority areas for future investment that had been identified through the previous meetings prioritisation process – water quality, crown-of-thorns starfish, the Reef 2050 Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program, the Joint Field Management Program, fisheries and Traditional Owners actions. The Panel noted challenges involved and that future investment decisions should provide the greatest possible return on investment in terms of outcomes for Reef health.

Two Reef Trust Phase V projects were presented to the Panel, which have been designed to receive significant co-investment and contributions. The Panel commented on and endorsed a proposal to support coastal habitat and wetland restoration. It also discussed and endorsed in principle a proposal to address nutrient loss from four sugar cane mill areas, subject to technical feedback provided being addressed through project planning.

The Panel reviewed a draft plan that had been prepared on the recommendation of the Reef 2050 Advisory Committee, outlining actions to reduce pressures on the Northern section of the Reef. The Panel noted that the final results of monitoring of the extent of coral mortality due to bleaching will not be known until early 2017, with information on other indicators (such as fish) to come later. The Panel agreed that any plan should be a living document, reviewed after new information becomes available and suggested a workshop should be held to inform an update in early to mid 2017.

The Panel received an update on development of the Reef 2050 Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program and a report from the Chair of the Independent Science Panel. It discussed opportunities to better use seasonal climate forecasting in on-ground management of sediment and nutrient movement and other emerging scientific matters.

The Chair of the Independent Expert Panel will report to the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum at their next meeting in November. The Panel will next meet in March 2017.



Panel members

Professor Ian Chubb AC (Chair)

Australia's former Chief Scientist.

Associate Professor Eva Abal

Program Director of the Global Change Institute's Sustainable Water Program.
Chief Scientific Officer of the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.

Dr Andrew Ash

Chief Research Scientist.
CSIRO Agriculture.

Professor Mike Bell

Chair of Tropical Agronomy.
University of Queensland.

Professor Damien Burrows

Director of TropWATER.
James Cook University.

Professor Bill Dennison

Professor of Marine Science and Vice President for Science Applications.
University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science.

Dr Stefan Hajkowicz

Natural resource policy and economic analyst.
CSIRO's Sustainable Regional Development.

Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg*

Director of the Global Change Institute and Professor of Marine Science.
The University of Queensland.

Professor Terry Hughes

Director of the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies.
James Cook University.

Professor Helene Marsh

Dean of Graduate Research Studies and Professor of Environmental Science.
James Cook University.

Dr Russell Reichelt

Chairman and Chief Executive.
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

Dr Britta Schaffelke

Research Program Leader.
A Healthy and Resilient Great Barrier Reef, Australian Institute of Marine Science.

Adjunct Associate Professor Stephan Schnierer

Southern Cross University.

Dr Roger Shaw

Independent consultant.
Chair of Reef Water Quality Protection Plan Independent Science Panel.

Professor Natalie Stoeckl

College of Business, Law & Governance.
James Cook University.

* Apologies, Tuesday 18th October 2016.