



Reef 2050 Plan

INDEPENDENT EXPERT PANEL - MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 13 November 2019, 9:00am – 5:00pm

Venue: QUT Gardens Point – Council Room

ATTENDEES

Members

Prof Ian Chubb AC, Chair	Adj Assoc Prof Stephan Schnierer
Dr Andrew Ash	Dr Britta Schaffelke
Prof Damien Burrows	Dr Russell Reichelt
Prof Ove Hoegh-Guldberg	Ms Jane Waterhouse
Prof Helene Marsh	Dr Stuart Whitten

Other attendees

Ms Deb Callister	Assistant Secretary, Department of the Environment and Energy
Ms Rebekah Hamed	Director, Department of the Environment and Energy
Mr Craig Moore	Director, Department of the Environment and Energy
Dr Will Howard	Assistant Director, Department of the Environment and Energy
Ms Milica Milanja	Secretariat, Department of the Environment and Energy
Ms Elisa Nichols	Executive Director, Office of the Great Barrier Reef, Department of Environment and Science
Ms Louise Smyth	Director, Office of the Great Barrier Reef, Department of Environment and Science
Ms Margaret Johnson	General Manager, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
Dr David Wachenfeld	Chief Scientist, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
Ms Jessica Hoey	Director, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (<i>items 1-6, 8</i>)
Dr Mel Cowlshaw	Assistant Director, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
Prof Morgan Pratchett	Reef Research Leader from James Cook University
Dr Mike Emslie	Experimental Scientist, Australian Institute of Marine Science (<i>item 5</i>)
Dr Richard Brinkman	Australian Institute of Marine Science, QLD IMOS Node Leader (<i>item 8</i>)

APOLOGIES

Members

Prof Terry Hughes
Prof Kerrie Wilson

1. Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair acknowledged the traditional custodians of the area. He acknowledged their continuing culture and contribution they make to the region and paid respects to their Elders past and present.

2. Welcome to Members

The Chair welcomed members and presenters to the meeting. The Chair noted apologies from Prof Terry Hughes and Prof Kerrie Wilson. The Chair noted that Prof Morgan Pratchett, Reef Research Leader from James Cook University, was attending the meeting as an observer with speaking rights (but not voting rights) on behalf of Prof Terry Hughes.

The Chair noted the main items of business on the agenda were to discuss issues related to reef science, hear from IMOS about oceans observations, and provide advice on draft targets for the revised Reef 2050 Plan.

3. Conflict of Interest

Panel members declared actual and perceived conflicts and the Chair outlined actions to manage potential conflicts in accordance with the Panel's protocol.

4. Panel Business

The Panel endorsed the minutes of Meeting 15, held on 13 August 2019, with one correction to a presenter's name.

The Panel noted progress of actions arising from the previous meeting, including the clarification of the Panel's role in the Reef Trust Partnership provided by the Department in response to a request at the August meeting.

The Chair noted that the following item was finalised out of session following the last meeting:

- Advice to the GBR Ministerial Forum expressing the Panel's support for reef science, dated 19 August 2019.

The Chair noted that the letter has been published on the Department of the Environment and Energy's website. He also noted responses to the letter from Minister Karen Andrews MP and Senator Jonathon Duniam.

The Panel discussed its current membership vacancies and the skills and expertise to be considered for new appointments to the Panel. The Panel identified the need for additional expertise in oceanography and social science/behavioural change.

A members' only discussion was held as part of this item.

5. Reef Science

Dr Mike Emslie from the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) joined the meeting by videoconference. The Panel discussed aspects of reef science, including the metrics and definitions used to determine coral cover; and water quality and the scientific consensus statement.

The Panel agreed there was a need for:

- a succinct description of the GBRWHA ecosystem, noting that there are many elements that comprise the system, not just coral
- a clear explanation of the indicators and methods used for measuring condition and trend reporting in relation to coral reefs.

The Panel discussed water quality and the 2017 Scientific Consensus Statement. The Panel noted that ‘scientific consensus’ did not necessarily refer to unanimous agreement by the scientists involved, but referred to the use of the ‘weight of evidence approach’, which is used by scientists to evaluate available data and evidence to form a conclusion.

The Panel agreed to convene a small working group to review and synthesise key findings from recent reports on Reef science, and coral cover in particular, and to produce a short information document.

6. Revised Reef 2050 Plan – Target Setting

Dr Mel Cowlshaw from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority provided the Panel with an update on the proposed targets under the revised *Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan* (Plan).

The Panel provided advice on the appropriateness and adequacy of the draft targets designed to measure ecosystem functions and ecosystem services.

The Panel:

- noted that ‘pressures’ should only include things that cannot be actioned or controlled; the Plan should distinguish between the pressures that we are trying to control and those that are out of our control
- advised the need for careful use of language – for example ‘healthy’ can have multiple meanings, including undiseased or referring to a very satisfactory size or amount, so explicit terms should be used
- re-emphasised the need to address climate change to achieve the Plan’s vision.

Members were comfortable with the proposed shift in language to have overarching ‘objectives’ supported by targets and indicators when describing ‘Healthy Reef: Health People’.

7. 2020 Review of the Reef 2050 Plan

Ms Louise Smyth provided the Panel with an update on progress with the 2020 Review of the Reef 2050 Plan.

The Panel discussed and provided advice on the issues identified at the joint RAC/IEP workshop (24 October 2019), including gaps and issues that required a change in emphasis.

The Panel also discussed:

- the presentation given at the workshop on future climate trajectories, noting the importance of including the likelihood of extreme events such as cyclones, marine heatwaves, bleaching and floods into the models
- the importance of including information of the methodologies and assumptions underpinning the models
- ‘blue carbon’ and the potential of mangroves and seagrasses to be used to draw carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.

The Panel advised that the revised Plan should be a succinct, high-level strategic document. The Panel noted next steps and indicative timeframes for completion of the revised Plan.

8. IMOS Ocean Observations

Dr Richard Brinkman from the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) joined the meeting to present on the Integrated Marine Observing System (IMOS). Dr Brinkman provided an overview of IMOS and the types of observations that it monitors, including ocean temperatures, sea level trends, circulation patterns of ocean currents and salinity.

The Panel discussed what these observations indicate about the oceanography of the Great Barrier Reef and noted that IMOS had established a good baseline of data that will help to pick up longer term trends going forward.

9. Reef Trust Investments

Mr Craig Moore provided the Panel with an overview of the proposed approach to commit unallocated Reef Trust funds across the following Reef Trust outcomes:

- improving water quality
- improving the health and resilience of coastal habitats
- improving and protecting marine biodiversity.

The Panel endorsed the proposed approach.

10. State Party Report – update

Ms Deb Callister briefed the Panel on the State Party Report on the conservation of the Great Barrier Reef, scheduled to be submitted to the World Heritage Centre on 1 December 2019.

The Panel noted the update, including the approach taken to report on Australia and Queensland's approach to Reef management and next steps.

11. Reef 2050 Plan implementation – progress on actions

The Panel noted the summary of progress on the Reef 2050 Plan actions provided by Ms Rebekah Hamed.

12. Panel Business Continued

The Panel agreed that a communiqué would be finalised out-of-session and published on the Department of the Environment and Energy's website.

The Panel noted that their next meeting was proposed for mid-March 2020 with a date to be determined.

The Panel did not raise any other business.

The meeting closed at 4.05pm.