



Reef 2050 Plan

INDEPENDENT EXPERT PANEL - MINUTES

Date	Wednesday, 14 February 2018
Venue	Room Z1124, Level 11, Z Block, QUT Garden Point Campus, Brisbane QLD
Opened	9:00am
Closed	3:30pm

ATTENDEES

Members

Prof Ian Chubb AC, Chair	Dr Russell Reichelt
Dr Eva Abal	Dr Britta Schaffelke
Dr Andrew Ash	Adj Assoc Prof Stephan Schnierer
Prof Damien Burrows	Adj Prof Natalie Stoeckl
Prof Bill Dennison (<i>videoconference</i>)	Ms Jane Waterhouse
Prof Terry Hughes	Dr Stuart Whitten
Prof Helene Marsh	

Other

Prof Kerrie Wilson	ARC Future Fellow, The University of Queensland
Mr Stephen Oxley	First Assistant Secretary, Department of the Environment and Energy
Ms Deb Callister	Assistant Secretary, Department of the Environment and Energy
Ms Angela Cameron	Director, Department of the Environment and Energy
Mr Craig Moore	Director, Department of the Environment and Energy
Dr Kevin Gale	Assistant Director, Department of the Environment and Energy
Ms Stefanie Lowe	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
Dr Mel Cowlshaw	Manager, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
Ms Carolyn Cameron	Director, Cameron Strategies (<i>item 8a, 10.40am - 12.10pm</i>)
Ms Liz Wren	Strategic Indigenous Leadership Officer, Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (<i>item 8c, 1.20 - 1.50pm</i>)
Mr Duane Fraser	Policy and Engagement Officer, Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (<i>item 8c, 1.20 - 1.50pm</i>)
Dr David Souter	Research Manager, Australian Institute of Marine Science (<i>item 8d, 1.50 - 2.20pm</i>)

APOLOGIES

Members

Prof Ove Hoegh-Guldberg



DISCUSSION

1 Acknowledgement of Country

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

2 Welcome to Members

The Chair welcomed members and presenters to the meeting, noting Prof Ove Hoegh-Guldberg as an apology.

The Chair welcomed Prof Kerrie Wilson as an observer.

The Panel noted the Queensland Government commitment to reintroduce land clearing laws, within the first six months of government.

3 Conflicts of interest

The Chair noted the summary of conflict of interests and addressed updates.

4 Recent media

The Panel discussed the media article [Millions spent on Great Barrier Reef projects against expert advice](#), The Guardian, 21 January 2018.

The Panel agreed that internal deliberations leading to final advice of the Panel must be confidential to ensure members can canvas views and perspectives without risk of deliberations being provided to the media.

The Panel discussed the media article ['Serious case of negligence': Scientists blast controls on coral-eating starfish](#), The Sydney Morning Herald, 17 January 2018. The Panel noted that the media article was damaging because of the decision not to release the report from Reefcare International.

The Panel requested an agenda item at the next meeting dedicated to the crown-of-thorns starfish funding program run by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

The Panel discussed the funding announcement from the Australian Government on 22 January 2018.

- \$36.6 million to the Reef Trust for actions to improve the quality of water entering the Reef.
- \$10.4 million for crown-of-thorns starfish control.
- \$4.9 million for the Australian Government's boost to the Joint Field Management Program.
- \$6 million for the design and feasibility phase of a major Research and Development Program

The Panel agreed to add a standing item to future agendas on media clips to be drawn to the attention of the Panel.

The Panel considered that the Panel's communiques and advices (in the publications section) on the Department of the Environment and Energy website are hard to find and requested the

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Department take steps to rectify.

5 Update on 2018 water temperatures

The Panel received a presentation by Dr David Wachenfeld, Chief Scientist of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority on 2018 marine water temperatures to date. Dr Wachenfeld detailed the heat stress in the Torres Strait and in patches around the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, including the Whitsundays, noting that it is not causing mass bleaching. Current predictions suggest there will not be mass bleaching this summer.

The Panel discussed the similarities and differences in the mass bleaching events across 2016 and 2017 and noted that the closeness in timing of the disturbances meant the events interacted with each other.

The Panel discussed the current outbreak of crown-of-thorns starfish in the southern Swains reefs off Yeppoon. The reefs are 200-250kms offshore and not subject to inshore water quality impacts. The outbreak appears to be driven by natural nutrients upwelling from below.

6 Report to Ministerial Forum

The Panel discussed the misuse and misconceptions around the word 'resilience'.

The Panel agreed that 'resilience' has different meanings in different contexts, for example biophysical vs socio-economic, and that nuancing is required to accurately convey timescales. The Panel agreed that emphasizing the adaptability of the Reef is critical in messaging and that misunderstandings about 'resilience' should be corrected with scientific facts and evidence.

The Panel discussed the need for a narrative to explain that parts of the Reef are reacting to climatic changes in different ways. The Panel considered that the future Reef will be different to the current Reef, however, a sustained Reef is achievable if innovative solutions are sought now.

The Panel discussed the recoverability of the Reef, noting that the environment has changed and the recovery rate of coral has slowed. There remains gaps in current knowledge and therefore rather than managing for averages, managing for uncertainty should be a focus.

The Panel agreed that a plain English interpretation of what was meant by a resilient Reef, or resilience of the Reef, would be useful advice to provide to Ministers.

The Chair requested three members (Dr Russell Reichelt, Professor Terry Hughes and Dr Britta Schaffelke) draft a one-page explanation of resilience, as it relates to the Reef and cover both scientific definitions as well as human dimensions. The Panel agreed that all members would review and own the final document, and that the final version will be made public after it is provided to Ministers.

7 Update on World Heritage matters

The Panel received an update on Australia's appointment to the World Heritage Committee. Australia's World Heritage Committee Delegation includes a natural heritage expert (Prof Helene Marsh) and a cultural heritage expert (Dr Anita Smith). As a result of the appointment, Australia

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must now focus on all World Heritage properties, as well as the 19 properties within Australia.

The World Heritage Committee acknowledges that climate change is the greatest growing threat for all natural heritage properties, and is a concern for historic heritage properties. As such, a workshop was held in Germany to update the UNESCO [Policy Document on the Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage Properties](#) (2008).

8a Reef 2050 Plan (mid-term review)

The Panel was updated on the progress of the mid-term review. The mid-term review focuses on priorities for immediate attention that fill identified gaps in the existing Reef 2050 Plan.

The Panel was invited to discuss and provide feedback on the draft revised Reef 2050 Plan. The Chair reminded members of the scope of the mid-term review, noting that the inclusion of climate targets and actions is out of scope for the mid-term review.

The Panel provided the joint Secretariat with the following feedback:

- The enormity and urgency of the challenge should be clearer. The Plan should also allow flexibility for the unknowns, given the challenges ahead.
- While the Plan should acknowledge and reflect on successes to date, for example zoning and more efficient cane fertiliser use, the draft Plan is overly positive of progress to date, especially against water quality targets.
- The draft Plan should acknowledge that there is more knowledge now than when the original Plan was prepared, but there are still significant gaps in knowledge, especially around climate change. The reality of a changing environment is that it is uncertain and we are in uncharted territory.
- The number of climate change actions in the draft Plan could be increased, given that there are more local interventions that could be achieved. There could be more around mitigation, given that climate change is the acknowledged greatest threat to the Reef.
- The draft Plan should acknowledge that the Reef will be different in the future. It will still provide values to the community, but they could be different.
- Transformational thinking and change is required not only for government, but communities as well. The Plan needs to acknowledge that business as usual isn't sufficient to address the challenges. The Plan should encourage more innovation, including innovation in communication and in monitoring and reporting.
- The draft Plan should lead more into the 2020 review and acknowledge that the mid-term review might not be the time to change some things, but make it clear that they will be evaluated as part of the 2020 review. Planning the 2020 review should commence immediately.
- There should be an executive summary of the changes at the front of the Plan, rather than changing the entire document. It would include the clear key messages upfront.
- The scalability of actions is critical and should be considered strongly.

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- Acknowledge that little action has been taken on Traditional Owner actions. However, the Traditional Owner aspirations and commitments project will advise on Traditional Owner actions in the mid-term review.
- The draft Plan could further incorporate the Reef 2050 Plan Review Options report from the CSIRO, AIMS, JCU and Eberhard consortium.
- The draft Plan should use more evidence to show why actions are being taken (like the Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan 2017-2022 has done with the 2017 Scientific Consensus Statement).
- The Plan should focus on clear and ambitious targets regarding stressors, and have less actions regarding symptoms.
- The Plan should stress that more action is required on regulation in Queensland.
- The Plan should include more on-ground actions and interventions.
- The draft Plan should be specific in its mention of sustainable economic development as it can mean different things in different contexts.

The Chair committed to writing a joint letter with the Chairman of the Reef 2050 Advisory Committee to the Ministerial Forum with this feedback.

8b Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan

Ms Louise Smyth updated the Panel on progress drafting the Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan 2017-2022, following the public consultation period in late 2017. The Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan 2017-2022 will be finalised in the same process and timeline as the revised Reef 2050 Plan.

The Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan 2017-2022 is underpinned by the 2017 Scientific Consensus Statement, and retains a focus on agriculture in reef catchments as the primary source of water quality pollution to the reef, but now also addresses impacts from urban areas, industrial activities and public land uses to ensure a comprehensive approach to managing impacts.

The Panel was invited to discuss and provide feedback on the draft Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan 2017-2022. The Panel provided the joint Secretariat with the following feedback:

- Government incentives are needed to get remaining farmers to Best Management Practice.
- The public consultation period produced a good version of the Plan, and it is very clear about the challenges ahead.
- The Plan could further consider and describe the impacts on the marine environment.
- Acknowledge that we don't have all the answers now, and that's ok.

The Panel was briefed on the Queensland Government enhancing and broadening reef regulations. The consultation on the regulatory impact statement was a public process, closing on 19 February 2018.

The consultation regulatory impact statement assesses the costs and benefits of the proposals,

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which are to:

- set nutrient and sediment pollution load limits for each reef catchment to target responses for managing risks to water quality
- provide the ability to apply minimum practice standards targeting nutrient and sediment pollution for key industries in reef catchments
- require fertiliser re-sellers to keep and produce records on request, of nutrient application advice provided to their clients to improve nutrient management outcomes
- establish a water quality offset framework that can apply across industry sectors as a measure to manage water quality impacts for new, expanded or intensified development in the context of the new catchment pollution load limits.

Panel comment on the consultation regulatory impact statement was welcomed.

9 Opportunities for engagement

The Panel discussed a proposal from the Great Barrier Reef Foundation to strengthen the communication between the Panel and the Foundation with the intention of ensuring some of the good ideas and insights raised by the Panel have funding potential beyond those afforded through Reef Trust.

The Panel agreed to exchange ideas between the Great Barrier Reef Foundation International Scientific Advisory Committee and the Panel, through existing members of both bodies, Prof Ove Hoegh-Guldberg and Dr Russell Reichelt.

The Panel agreed to share the three unused innovation challenge statements, prepared for the Advance Queensland Innovation Challenge, with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.

8c Reef 2050 Plan (Traditional Owner aspirations and commitments)

The Panel was presented to on the Traditional Owner aspirations and commitments project.

The Department of the Environment and Energy has engaged the services of a consortium to work directly with Traditional Owners to better understand and reflect their aspirations for the Great Barrier Reef, deliver on existing commitments and support their increased involvement in implementing the Reef 2050 Plan.

The consortium is comprised of the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance, Cape York Institute, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, the Australian Institute of Marine Science and James Cook University.

The project will look to establish a design for the most effective delivery arrangements for future programs relevant to Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef.

The consortium will provide a report shortly as an input to the mid-term review. The report will review existing Traditional Owner actions within the Reef 2050 Plan and recommend how actions should be treated as part of the Mid-Term Review.

The Panel noted that due to the 72 Traditional Owner groups in the Great Barrier Reef World

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Heritage Area, the consortium will be working hard to bring groups together for a consensus based approach. The consortium will be hosting a Reef-wide form in Cairns in May 2018 to consult with Traditional Owners.

The consortium are hoping to achieve a clear roadmap on how best to make further progress, including being in a position in 2020 where Traditional Owner aspirations are well understood.

The Panel thanked the presenters and the consortium on their work to date. The Panel acknowledged the challenges for the project and welcomed future updates.

8d Reef 2050 Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program

Dr David Souter from the Australian Institute of Marine Science gave a presentation on the Reef 2050 Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program. The focus of the program is to enable timely and suitable responses by Reef managers and partners to emerging issues and risks, and enable the evaluation of whether the Reef 2050 Plan is on track to meet its outcomes, objectives and targets.

The program is developing a knowledge system that will enable resilience based management of the Great Barrier Reef and its catchment, and provide managers with a comprehensive understanding of how the Reef 2050 Plan is progressing.

The program is in the development phase with a design recommendation due in mid-2018.

8e Reef Trust

The Panel was provided a briefing on the funding boost to the Reef Trust as part of the Australian Government funding announcement in January 2018.

The Panel discussed and endorsed a project proposal, and noted the proposed process for the development of a new phase of Reef Trust investment to improve Reef water quality and boost progress towards high priority Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan 2017-2022 targets.

10 Other business

No other business was raised.

11 Panel business

The Panel endorsed the minutes from the ninth meeting on 24 October 2017.

The Panel is scheduled to next meet on 25 July 2018 in Brisbane, with a joint evening event to be held on 24 July 2018 with other Reef 2050 advisory bodies. Members were encouraged to send ideas for speakers for the event to the Secretariat.

The Panel drafted a communiqué and agreed to its release on the Department of the Environment and Energy's website (<http://www.environment.gov.au/marine/gbr/reef2050/advisory-bodies>).

The Panel agreed a process for recording decisions made and/or advice provided out of session. Going forward, out of session decisions and advice will be discussed at the next meeting of the Panel and this will be formally included in the minutes for that meeting.

DISCUSSION

Advice of the Panel out of session between meetings 9 (24 October 2017) and 10 (14 February 2018)

The Panel did not support the Reef Havens Project Proposal as provided to them on 3 November 2017. The Panel's advice was provided to Ministers on 20 November 2017.

The Panel's advice noted that should a project of this nature go ahead, it should be constructed as a research proposal, with appropriate oversight, to gather sufficient information to enable a judgement based on fewer unknowns.

The Panel advised that if the project were reframed as a research project, the following should be considered:

- An independent and expert 'steering' group be established to facilitate experimental design.
- Extensive data acquisition to be the basis for the experimental design.
- Monitoring should include temperature range and depth of thermoclines during doldrum conditions, changes in temperatures at different depths and over multiple tidal cycles, along with water quality variables such as clarity, nutrient content, pH and oxygen saturation.
- Variations to the natural cycle should be compared with the engineering solution.