



Reef 2050 Plan

INDEPENDENT EXPERT PANEL - MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 18 November 2020, 10:00am – 3:00pm AEDT

Venue: Videoconference

ATTENDEES

Members

Prof Ian Chubb AC, Chair

Dr Andrew Ash (*excluding item 8*)

Dr Richard Brinkman

Prof Damien Burrows

Dr Romy Greiner

Prof Ove Hoegh-Guldberg

Prof Terry Hughes

Prof Catherine Lovelock (*item 4 onwards*)

Prof Helene Marsh

Adj Assoc Prof Stephan Schnierer

Dr Britta Schaffelke

Dr Russell Reichelt

Dr Stuart Whitten

Prof Kerrie Wilson

Other attendees

Ms Deb Callister Assistant Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Ms Rebekah Hamed Director, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Mr Craig Moore Director, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Dr Will Howard Assistant Director, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Ms Milica Milanja Secretariat, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

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 Shaun Barclay Director, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

Ms Laura Wallace Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (*item 7*)

Ms Miranda Robertson Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (*item 7*)

Dr Anna Roberts Natural Decisions Pty Ltd (*part of item 4*)

Dr Rachel Eberhard Natural Decisions Pty Ltd (*part of item 4*)

APOLOGIES

Members

Ms Jane Waterhouse

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 to the meeting.

At the start of the meeting, Adj Assoc Prof Stephan Schnierer paid tribute to Gigari George, a Wulgurukaba Traditional Owner who had strong links to the Reef and was a dedicated advocate for Traditional Owner interests and aspirations.

The Chair noted the main items of business on the agenda were to receive an update on the Reef 2050 Plan consultation, provide comment on the update of the Plan, discuss some of the early findings from the Reef 2050 governance review and to finalise the Panel's advice on work exploring climate change trajectories.

3. Conflict of Interest

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

4. Panel Business

The Panel endorsed the minutes of Meeting 17, held on 19 May 2020, and noted progress with actions arising from previous meetings including:

- Definition of the use of 'consensus' in relation to the 2017 Scientific Consensus Statement – the Panel noted that this will be addressed through planning for the 2022 scientific consensus statement.
- Information piece on coral cover/percentages – members of the Panel are considering whether it can be incorporated into its advice on coral bleaching which is being finalised.

The Chair noted the following out of session items progressed since the last meeting:

- Letter to the Ministerial Forum – on 13 August 2020 the Panel wrote to the Hon Sussan Ley and the Hon Leeanne Enoch offering a 'rapid response' service for GBR advice. The Chair noted responses received from the ministers.
- Panel's advice to Ministers on coral bleaching, coral composition and coral reassemblage – the Panel noted progress and next steps to finalise this advice.
- Advice on work exploring climate change trajectories and management intervention benefits – the Panel met on 1 October 2020 to discuss their initial advice on this work. The Chair noted that this would be discussed further at agenda item 9.

The Chair thanked members for their contributions to the above.

During the members' only discussion held as part of this item, the Panel met with Natural Decisions Pty Ltd, the independent reviewers engaged by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (on behalf of the Joint Team) to examine whether governance arrangements for the Reef 2050 Plan are effective and contributing towards the objectives of the Plan. The reviewers provided members with some insights into early findings and sought further comment on particular issues to help inform their review.

5. Post-election update – Queensland Government

Ms Elisa Nichols provided a short update following the 2020 Queensland state election. The Panel noted that the Hon Meaghan Scanlon has been appointed the new Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Youth Affairs. Ms Nichols provided members with an overview of the government's election commitments relevant to the Great Barrier Reef. These included \$10M for the Reef Credits initiative, a tradable unit that quantifies and values the work undertaken to improve water quality flowing onto the Great Barrier Reef.

6. World Heritage Committee update

Ms Deb Callister provided the Panel with an update on World Heritage Committee (WHC) matters. The Panel noted that:

- an extraordinary session of the WHC was held on 2 November 2020
- it was agreed that the postponed 44th WHC session would be held in Fuzhou, China in mid-2021, with specific dates to be agreed
- the World Heritage Centre has indicated it will accept additional information on 2020 state of conservation reports up until first of February 2021
- the state of conservation of the GBR will be considered at the upcoming WHC session.

7. 2020 Review of the Reef 2050 Plan – update

Ms Deb Callister and Ms Miranda Robertson provided the Panel with an update on the Reef 2050 Plan review, including an analysis of key feedback received over the course of the 6-week public consultation period on the Plan.

The Panel:

- provided advice on areas of the Plan that could be revised to improve clarity
- recommended strengthening the commentary on climate change to clarify that it is not a future threat but a current contemporary driver of degradation to the Reef
- discussed Australia's unique vulnerability to climate change
- supported the development of issue and sector specific communication products that could assist with public engagement and understanding of the Plan
- suggested that the executive summary be revised to make it shorter and more concise.

The Panel noted the next steps to finalising the Plan.

8. Reef Water Quality Report Card

Ms Elisa Nichols provided the Panel with a presentation on the Reef Water Quality Report Card for 2019. The Panel discussed the Report Card and noted that results were embargoed until jointly released by the Queensland and Australian Governments.

9. Climate Change Trajectories Report

The Panel noted that following their meeting on 10 October 2020 to discuss the *Climate Change Trajectories and Management Benefits for the Great Barrier Reef* report, members put a series of questions to Professor Peter Mumby to address their main concerns with the Report. Professor Mumby responded to the Panel's questions and members noted that the Report's Executive Summary has since been updated to include a summary of conclusions and caveats.

The Panel discussed its concerns about the technical nature and limitations of the report. Members agreed to prepare some high-level advice out-of-session, with a focus on explaining the limitations of the report and its use. The Panel's agreed to finalise its advice out-of-session, with a view to providing it to the Reef 2050 Advisory Committee (RAC) Chair, ahead of the RAC meeting on 23 November 2020 where the Report was to be discussed.

10. Update from the Reef Water Quality Independent Science Panel

The Panel noted the written updates provided by the Chair of the Reef Water Quality Independent Science Panel (ISP) on ISP meetings held in June and October 2020.

11. Panel Business Continued

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

The Panel noted the proposal to hold an information session for IEP and RAC members in early December 2020. It was expected that this session would include presentations on science communication, the State of the Climate 2020 report and GBRMPA's Reef Knowledge System. Members noted that invitations would be issued when a suitable date was identified.

The Panel noted that their next formal meeting would be held in early 2021, with a date to be confirmed.

The Panel did not raise any other business.

The meeting closed at 3.30pm.