



Reef 2050 Plan

INDEPENDENT EXPERT PANEL - MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 19 May 2020, 9:00am – 12:40pm

Venue: Videoconference

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 Terry Hughes	Dr Stuart Whitten
Prof Helene Marsh	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
Ms Jessica Hoey	Director, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
Dr Rachel Pears	Assistant Director, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
Ms Anna Marsden	Managing Director, Great Barrier Reef Foundation (<i>item 8</i>)
Ms Theresa Fyffe	Executive Director, Great Barrier Reef Foundation (<i>item 8</i>)

APOLOGIES

Members

Nil

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 the main items of business on the agenda were to receive an update on the 2020 coral bleaching event, discuss impacts that COVID-19 is having on Reef management and research, provide advice to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation on their draft 2020-21 Annual Work Plan and discuss progress and next steps for the 2020 Review of the 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 16, held on 13 November 2019, and noted the status of actions arising from that meeting.

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

- The Panel's advice to the GBR Ministerial Forum on coral bleaching, dated 1 May 2020.

The Chair thanked members for their contributions to the advice and noted that it has been published on the IEP page on the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment's website.

During the members' only discussion held as part of this item, the Panel discussed creating a forum similar to the Australian Academy of Science's Rapid Research Information Forum, to provide a mechanism to rapidly respond to pressing questions from Ministers on matters relating to the Great Barrier Reef. It was envisaged that answers developed would be peer reviewed, with a process to be determined by Panel members out of session.

5. Reef Health Update

Prof Terry Hughes provided the Panel with an update on the 2020 coral bleaching in the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). The Panel noted that:

- the GBR has bleached significantly five times, in 1998, 2002, 2016, 2017 and 2020
- the 2020 event had bleaching occur in the northern, central and southern Reefs and was second only to 2016 in terms of severity of bleaching
- the cumulative impact of the five bleaching events means that 90% of the GBR has now bleached to some extent
- work is continuing to identify potential spatial refuges but the number of these is diminishing

- bleaching attenuates with depth.

The Panel discussed:

- why some coral genera are surviving better than others
- the difference in mortality for moderately bleached reefs compared with those with more severe bleaching
- the proportion of coral species lost over time and data showing that coral reassemblage is not happening the same way it has in the past
- the way that coral community composition has changed in recent times due to more frequent bleaching and the impact that these changes will have.

The Panel agreed to write to the GBR Ministerial Forum with further advice on the impacts that bleaching is having on the Reef.

6. COVID-19 Impacts on the Great Barrier Reef

Ms Deb Callister introduced the discussion about impacts that measures to handle the COVID-19 pandemic was having on Reef 2050 Plan delivery, Reef management, program delivery and research.

The Panel noted the updates from the Joint Team, which outlined the ways that the Australian and Queensland governments were working with stakeholders to minimise impacts. Activities in the Reef Catchment have had minimal disruption and project delivery partners have adapted to new ways of utilising technology to hold virtual events and workshops.

The Panel noted that there have been more impacts on activities in the Marine Park, particularly on marine tourism operations and commercial fisheries. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority outlined ways it was working to assist businesses, Traditional Owners and communities during and post-pandemic.

7. 2020 Review of the Reef 2050 Plan – update

Ms Deb Callister provided the Panel with an overview of progress with the 2020 review of the Reef 2050 Plan. The Panel noted that the draft updated Reef 2050 Plan has been revised following feedback from the Panel, the Reef Advisory Committee and further consultation with Australian and Queensland government departments and agencies.

The Panel noted that they would have further opportunities to provide advice on the draft updated Plan, both during and after public consultation.

8. Reef Trust Partnership Draft 2020-21 Annual Work Plan

Ms Anna Marsden and Ms Theresa Fyffe from the Great Barrier Reef Foundation (GBRF) joined the meeting to present on the Reef Trust Partnership Draft 2020-21 Annual Work Plan.

The Panel noted the progress made with the Reef Trust Partnership to date and noted that the Work Plan does a good job of outlining priority activities for 2020-21.

The Panel:

- noted the importance of making project funding decisions that focus on achieving the greatest outcomes with available funds

- reiterated its earlier advice that it is important to look for and encourage innovative approaches to problems that need a solution, and
- stressed the importance of adaptability to allow for timely responses to future challenges.

The Panel agreed it would finalise its advice out of session and provide it to the Foundation in coming weeks.

9. 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 November 2019 and February 2020.

The Panel noted that the ISP was in the initial stages of planning for development of the next scientific consensus scientific on water quality science. The Panel were of the view that the process for developing the scientific consensus statement should be made publicly clear ahead of its development, to ensure transparency.

The IEP sought information on the availability of the Independent Review of the Paddock to Reef Program Modelling and requested the document be provided to members if available.

10. Reef Trust – Update on investment of unallocated funding

Mr Craig Moore provided the Panel with an update on the development and status of proposals for future Reef Trust investments.

The Panel noted that investments would be focussed across three Reef Trust Outcomes: coastal habitats, species protection and water quality.

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 that their next meeting was scheduled on 23 July 2020, but that this may need to be rescheduled depending on timing of public consultation on the updated Reef 2050 Plan.

The Panel did not raise any other business.

The meeting closed at 12.40pm.