

Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce

Terms of Reference

Background

The Queensland Government has made several election commitments designed to protect and improve the condition of the Great Barrier Reef. These commitments include banning the sea dumping of capital dredge spoil within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, reducing carbon emissions by reintroducing nation-leading tree clearing laws, and reinstating world class coastal planning laws.

To protect the Great Barrier Reef the Queensland Government has also set ambitious targets of reducing nitrogen by up to 80% and sediment by up to 50% by 2025 in key catchments such as the Wet Tropics and Burdekin. The Queensland Government has committed to invest an additional \$100 million over five years to secure progress towards targets through water quality initiatives, scientific research and helping to transition to better environmental practices in the primary production industries to meet this target. Up to \$10M will be reserved to fund the buy-back of net fishing licenses in key areas.

The Queensland Government has committed to convening a high-level taskforce to determine the best possible approach to achieve these outcomes.

Membership

Members of the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce will be appointed by the Minister and will have the following expertise-based membership across the industry, conservation, science and government sectors:

Chair:

Chair

Industry expertise:

- Grazing
- Agriculture (cane)
- Tourism
- Resources

Conservation / regional groups / conservation planners expertise:

- Conservation planning / environmental decision-making
- Regional communities
- Community engagement and partnerships
- Water quality improvement planning

Science expertise:

- Chair of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan Independent Science Panel
- Economic expertise
- Water quality expertise
- Land management expertise

Government/regional communities:

- Local government
- Australian Government
- Queensland Government

- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

Other relevant experts may be invited to attend as observers from time to time at the Chair's discretion. Peak bodies will be engaged through other existing reef-related committee structures (eg the Reef 2050 Reef Advisory Committee) and directly.

Chair

The Chair will be appointed by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef.

Role

The Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce will provide advice and recommendations to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef (and Queensland Government more broadly) on:

- the best approach to meeting the government's water quality targets, including the effectiveness and cost of robust regulations, incentives, Best Management Practice Programs, market-based trading mechanisms and other policy instruments, or a combination thereof.
- priority areas for investment for the additional \$100M including:
 - upgrades to, and extension of the water quality monitoring network,
 - scientific research (where critical to support the recommended approach to meeting the targets, and/or facilitating the effective translation of current research into practice improvement), and
 - promoting environmentally sustainable industry practices especially to support primary producers in reef catchments to reduce fertiliser and sediment runoff (including consideration of a potential net benefit policy);
- opportunities to align different sources of funding (eg from the Australian Government) and leverage Queensland Government investment effectively;
- opportunities to maximise and align other sources of funding such as private/philanthropic and various science funds (eg Advance Queensland Initiative and National Environmental Science Program); and
- ensure outcomes can be effectively monitored and reported over time, including providing advice on the adequacy of existing monitoring and reporting activities.

In providing advice on these matters, the taskforce should have regard to existing programs and policies (eg the work of the Reef 2050 Independent Expert Panel which is providing advice on the Australian Government's additional \$100 million investment).

The Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce will be required to report to the Minister within 12 months of commencement, with an interim report by the end of December 2015.

The Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce, through the Chair, should engage with peak stakeholder groups as part of their deliberations, particularly through the Reef 2050 Reef Advisory Committee.

Operation

The Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce will meet as required, but is expected to meet at least 4 times over 12 months.

Secretariat support will be provided by the Office of the Great Barrier Reef in the Department of the Environment and Heritage Protection. Meeting agendas will be prepared by the Secretariat in consultation with the Chair and will be distributed to members at least a week in advance of meetings. The Secretariat will provide a research function for the taskforce as requested.

Alternates or proxies may be permitted where approved by the Chair. Submissions and decisions made by the group will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting and will be subject to Right to Information requests in line with the Right to Information Act 2009 (Qld).

Members will be reimbursed for reasonable costs associated with travel and accommodation, but will not be remunerated for their participation.

Subcommittees, or working groups with membership broader than that taskforce, may be formed to perform specific tasks or pieces of work at the request of the Minister to support the taskforce. The Chair may also nominate a small review group to provide feedback and peer review on the work and draft recommendations of the

taskforce.

Specific short-term pieces of work may be contracted by the Secretariat to help inform taskforce deliberations where agreed (e.g. cost benefit analysis / analysis of different trading mechanisms etc).