



# WATER QUALITY AND COASTAL DEVELOPMENT REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE (WRAC) 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting 22 and 23 March 2007 – Townsville SUMMARY DOCUMENT

The twentieth meeting of the WRAC was held on 22 and 23 March 2007 in Townsville. A summary of the outcomes of the main items discussed is set out below.

## OUTLOOK REPORT

The GBRMPA Chairman welcomed the WRAC members and provided an update of the Outlook Report. Discussions reinforced the Report had the capacity to influence the structure and mechanisms for research in the long-term. The WRAC's input into this process will be valuable.

## WATER QUALITY AND COASTAL DEVELOPMENT GROUP'S 5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

Members were provided with a progress report on the WQ&CD Group's 5-year strategic plan 2007-2012. Three discussion groups were formed to consider the priority issues, outcomes and strategies. The priority issues identified included:

- The GBRMPA influencing partner agencies;
- Reef Plan implementation;
- Reef health reporting and target setting;
- In-Park management and regulatory core business;
- Coastal development;
- Climate change implications for water quality and coastal development; and
- Identifying future threats in the short-, medium- and long-term.

A further iteration of the WQ&CD Group's 5-year Strategic Plan will be prepared, taking into consideration members' comments.

## REEF PLAN – INTEGRATED GOVERNANCE

Members were provided with a progress report on the integrated governance roles, responsibilities and activities in relation to Reef Plan. In discussion, the following comments were noted:

- It was suggested that non-government stakeholders would find the Reef Plan governance arrangements difficult to understand. There was concern that the governance structure was an impediment to industry engagement.
- Reef Plan governance reinforced concerns that while Reef Plan provides integrated resource management and voluntary uptake, outcomes of Reef Plan to halt and reverse the decline of water quality to the Reef are not happening quickly enough.

- The GBRMPA should lead stakeholders by influencing acceleration in delivery of Reef Plan outcomes.

## WATER QUALITY MONITORING AND REPORTING

Members were updated on activities relating to the GBRMPA's Marine Monitoring Programme, including the following points:

- The programme has been running since February 2005, and builds on current knowledge and technology. Funding runs out in June 2007.
- Natural Resource Management (NRM) bodies will also be able to use the information in their reporting process.
- Currently, there is a lot of effort going into developing remote sensing capability in the GBRMP.
- The Committee agreed that water quality monitoring is a critically important activity; that it should be funded as a core activity of the GBRMPA; and that it should be undertaken on an ongoing basis.

## RESEARCH NEEDS

The WRAC was briefed on water quality research needs and requested that a further discussion on this issue should occur at a future meeting. In discussion, the following comments were noted:

- There was some concern at the lack of research into the possible relationship linking the Crown of Thorns Starfish and water quality.
- It is hoped that an efficient and effective programme to co-ordinate water quality monitoring across Queensland will be in place in 2008.

## REPORTS ON PROGRESS AND ISSUES

Members updated the Committee on current issues in their particular areas, relevant to the GBR.

The emergence of a public groundswell of awareness to greenhouse abatement became evident across many of the areas.

The Committee supported developing a carbon trading proposal in support of bio-sequestration of carbon emissions. It was noted, if the emissions were offset in the GBR catchments, that this was an opportunity to achieve a dual benefit of improving Reef health.

Other emerging issues included improvement to farm management practices, and the impact of aquatic weeds on water quality in the GBR.

Sugarcane smut, a fungal disease, is a problem in the wet tropics and in the Bundaberg area. The monitoring and containment by the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations (BSES) has been substantial.

## LAND MANAGEMENT

A series of guest speakers provided members with an update on current strategies to address water quality impacts through land management. The presentations on land management showcased some fantastic examples of work that is being done within the local farming community, sugar industry, and the State Government. Three different perspectives were discussed, with the following comments noted:

- Members agreed that these achievements are typically fragmented and there is a disconnect in delivering outcomes due to a lack of alignment of programmes across government agencies, cross-regionally and across industries.
- Land management is a key issue and that best management practices (BMPs) are a key tool to improving water quality.
- The timetable to implement industry incentive schemes and extension programmes should be accelerated.

### Cane Management Practices for the Reef Regions

In the Mackay-Whitsunday NRM area, land managers are undertaking a variety of innovative land practices. A herbicide action plan has been implemented; through this work, a suite of management issues has been identified in relation to the use of nutrients and herbicides in both the grazing and horticulture sectors. For farmers, this programme will be a risk reversal – financial incentives to try something new; some may continue, others may go back to their previous practices.

Members agreed that fostering change and attitude involves incentives. There may need to be a comparison approach for farmers where farmers are motivated to change by seeing their neighbours changing practices successfully.

### Canegrowers Farm Products Assessment Data

Members were updated on the research being undertaken by the industry body, Canegrowers, and the strategies being implemented by individual cane growers, including:

- Data was provided on current farm management practices in various areas, including product use of nutrients and fertilisers, and organic carbon figures.
- The data collected from current audits can be used in relation to other work.
- Research on nitrogen continues, in an effort to gain a better understanding, and pass that knowledge on to growers.
- This is a “first cut” and it is important to do follow-up research. Indications are that fertiliser sales are down 20% over the last 10 years.
- This information is critical to target where we need to put our resources, and moves industry along; the investment is not large, about \$4,000.
- Members acknowledged that confidentiality is a big concern for growers. Farmers are currently improving

their farm management practices; however, there is some frustration in terms of a lack of momentum.

- While there have been improvements made in the cane industry made, there is still the need to provide incentives and extension.

### Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries – Reef Extension Programme and Other Initiatives

There is an ongoing challenge with co-ordination, from policy level down to individual setting of targets – ultimately working towards the same goal. There is some disconnectivity between head office engagement, regional day-to-day type activity on the ground, and how the dialogue becomes consistent across those areas.

Members expressed concern at the inconsistency of effort alignment. Programme managers sometimes find it a challenge to align their programmes. They are hopeful that the Reef Partnership might provide some cross-industry, cross-agency and cross-regional body alignment, at least at a general level.

In concluding discussion, members were asked to understand that at the most fundamental engagement level there is some fantastic work being done, and it is good to be able to liaise with growers now that they are more conversant with the processes.

## COASTAL MANAGEMENT

Members were updated on the impacts of coastal development on water quality in the GBR.

Members recommended the strategic focus for the WQ&CD Group needs to better address the emerging threats of linear coastal development. The GBRMPA should promote the development of a coastal policy for the GBR that includes commitment to a fixed urban footprint and support the development of a “Coastal Development Policy” or “Coastal Population Policy” for Queensland.

## NEXT MEETING

The next meeting, WRAC 21, is proposed for 26 and 27 July 2007.

### CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

Mr Mike Berwick .....	Far North Queensland NRM
Ms Veronica Blazely .....	Dept of the Environment and Heritage
Mrs Leith Bouilly .....	Independent Chairman
Mr Colin Creighton .....	Mackay-Whitsunday NRM
Mr Tony Fontes .....	Tourism Industry
Professor Iain Gordon .....	CSIRO
Mr Steve Greenwood .....	Qld Local Government Association
Mr Richard Leck .....	Non-Government Organisation, Conservation
Ms Andrea Leverington .....	Qld Government – Reef Secretariat
Ms Sandy McCathie .....	Sustainable Practices in Building and Development Industry
Ms Rachel Mackenzie .....	Horticulture Industry
Ms Sheriden Morris .....	Marine and Tropical Science Research Facility
Mr Kirk Smith .....	Landcare
Mr Bob Sullivan .....	Cape York NRM
Mr Vern Veitch .....	Recreational Fishing
Dr Tim Wrigley .....	Sugar Industry
Mr Hugh Yorkston .....	Director, GBRMPA
To be appointed .....	Indigenous