

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, SCIENCE & LEARNING
HEAD, AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM RESEARCH INSTITUTE
Dr Brian Lassig

Phone: (02) 9320 6237; Fax: (02) 9320 6015

Email: brian.lassig@austmus.gov.au

Professor Russell Reichelt
Chair
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
PO Box 1379
Townsville
Queensland, 4810

27 October 2014

Dear Professor Reichelt

The Australian Museum would like to provide some comments on the **Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan** which is currently open for public comment.

One of my staff members was involved in the workshops held to develop the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's five-yearly review of the health of the Reef - the Outlook Report - (2014) which identified the Great Barrier Reef as an icon under pressure. The Report calls for actions to reduce threats, help restore its condition and improve its outlook.

So the Australian Museum welcomes the development of the **Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan** as a means of addressing the issues highlighted in the Outlook Report.

The plan outlines a range of new and maintenance of existing strategies, such as the development of the new Reef Trust program, development of action from the strategic assessment, the regulatory and policy framework for offset requirements for development that will have an adverse impact on matters of environmental significance, an ongoing delivery of an effective on-ground field management program, together with a continued implementation of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan.

These potentially useful initiatives will be funded from a range of existing sources such as the Queensland Ports Strategy, Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership, Crown-of-thorns starfish control program, Reef Water Quality Protection Plan 2013 and the new Reef Trust program. The annual report (by the Australian Department of the Environment, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the relevant Queensland government departments) will assess performance in delivering the outcomes and progress towards implementing the actions and achieving the targets. This is in addition to the mid-term review in 2018 and the development of the first five-year review of the Plan to be delivered in 2020 which will be informed by the 2019 Outlook Report—a statutory assessment and reporting requirement under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*. All of this reporting is expensive and of necessity involves considerable man hours.

The plan also suggests that a system of reporting will be underpinned by Integrated Monitoring and Reporting. All of this reporting is desirable but we are extremely

concerned that without significant additional funds these reports will just become tick box exercises with little or no data to support the actual findings and lead to no overall improvement in the Reef. With the recent changes in staff at the GBRMPA we wonder if there is the expertise within the Authority to actually deliver these outcomes. In addition, we know that staffing levels in many relevant Queensland government departments have declined which again raises the issue as to whether they have necessary expertise and funding to implement this plan.

The Plan does seem to be heavily focused on port development and associated dredging and we welcome the fact that for the next 10 years, the Queensland Ports Strategy prohibits dredging within and adjoining the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area for the development of new, or the expansion of existing, port facilities outside priority port development areas (PPDAs). PPDAs will be established at the long established major ports of Abbot Point; Gladstone; Hay Point and Mackay; and Townsville. All activities that occur on the Reef will continue to be carefully managed within strict environmental limits. This is only one of many threats to the GBRWHA, and while water quality issues and Crown of Thorns are also specifically mentioned, there is, no mention is made of the increasing water temperatures, ocean acidification and increasing severity of storms which affect the entire reef and not just coastal areas and ports. This is in addition to the increasing tourist activity and expanding cruise ship industry and shipping activities in general which are difficult to control. There is also nothing regarding long term viability of fisheries and endangered species. The plan suggests these can be adequately managed by the multiple robust Environmental Impact Assessment processes within Commonwealth and Queensland legislation which apply to development proposals on or adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef.

We are also concerned that the Plan seems to diffusing the long term fate of the GBR to many agencies which do not have as their core business the continued maintenance of the biodiversity and functioning of the GBR. While accepting that the GBR cannot be managed in isolation from its surrounds we would like to recommend that the Authority have the overall responsibility for this world heritage area and be given the necessary funding to ensure that they can fulfil this role.

The development of this Plan was largely in response to the concerns expressed by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in July 2011 that Australia would undertake a strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef and prepare a long-term plan for sustainable development. While certainly this is needed, we repeat there are many other threats to the GBR that need attention. In reality, port developments occupy only a small percentage of the GBRWA.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Lassig', with a stylized, flowing script.

Brian Lassig

