



Australian Government
Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority

Committee Secretary
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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Dear Committee Secretary

Impact of Defence training activities and facilities on rural and regional communities

I would like to bring to the Committee's attention the close working relationship between the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Department of Defence in relation to training exercises that occur within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Marine Park).

The Australian Defence Force has operated and trained in the Great Barrier Reef Region (the Region) for more than 100 years. Training activities are undertaken in a few designated areas covering less than four per cent of the Marine Park.

While most of these areas are small, the Townsville Star and the Shoalwater Bay Defence Training Area near Rockhampton are two of Australia's largest defence training areas. Other field training areas are located at Halifax Bay and Cowley Beach. Training areas are regularly used by the Australian Defence Force and occasionally by other countries for land and sea-based exercises. Activities include navy clearance dive training, boating and navigation exercises, and amphibious landings.

Defence operational activities in the Region can also help, directly and indirectly, to achieve Marine Park management objectives for the Region including hydrographic surveys, and fisheries and border protection patrols. In addition, the acquisition of land and sea areas around Shoalwater Bay in 1965 has provided ecological benefits. The area continues to support high biodiversity, including internationally significant migratory species and wetlands, and has significant landscape features.

The Australian Department of Defence directly manages all defence training activities. It also manages the environmental impacts within the Marine Park in collaboration with the Authority as outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding¹. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan provides for use and entry for defence activities without permission after notification to the Authority. These activities are subject to any directions from the agency.

The Authority's five-yearly Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report² includes, amongst other things, assessments of non-commercial uses within the Region as well as an independent assessment of management effectiveness³ of activities within the Region. Defence activities are part of these two assessments. Both the 2009 and 2014 Outlook Reports found that Defence activities were some of the most effectively managed within the Region.

The Authority has found that Defence activities are well planned and well resourced, so incidents causing harm to the habitats and species in the Region are rare. High impact activities are confined to specific localised areas and limited to a few weeks per year. Many defence activities are conducted with dedicated shipboard and aerial observers who can collect data on marine wildlife sightings and ensure activities are delayed if required.

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission on the Senate inquiry into the impact of Defence training activities and facilities on rural and regional communities. I have no concerns with making this submission public.

Yours sincerely

Russell Reichelt
Chairman

5 April 2017

Document Links:

1. Memorandum of Understanding
http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/248632/2016-2020-MOU_Defence.pdf
2. Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report
<http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/managing-the-reef/great-barrier-reef-outlook-report>
3. Independent assessment of management effectiveness
<http://elibrary.gbrmpa.gov.au/jspui/handle/11017/2857>

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