

Queensland Government submission to the Environment and Communications References Committee

Inquiry into the Great Barrier Reef 2050 Partnership Program

Reef 2050 governance

The Queensland Government is a joint partner in the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan (Reef 2050 Plan) with the Australian Government. The Reef 2050 Plan forms a schedule to the Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement and joint decision making is governed through the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum.

The Ministerial Forum generally meets twice per year – mid year and end year. It last met in July 2017; there was no meeting at the end of 2017 due to the Queensland Government caretaker period. The next meeting is scheduled to occur on 19 July 2018 in Brisbane. The Queensland Government is represented by the Premier and Minister for Trade, the Honourable Anastacia Palaszczuk MP, and the Minister for Environment and Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts, the Honourable Leeanne Enoch MP.

Administratively, advice is provided to the Ministerial Forum by a Standing Committee of Officials including relevant Queensland and Australian Government departments and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Regular coordination occurs through an Executive Steering Committee including the Office of the Great Barrier Reef within the Queensland Department of Environment and Science, the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Energy and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. The Executive Steering Committee generally meets on a fortnightly basis.

The Office of the Great Barrier Reef coordinates across seven Queensland Government agencies that have a role in implementation of activity within the Reef 2050 Plan to provide a whole-of-Queensland Government perspective at Executive Steering Committee meetings. The three agencies – the Office of the Great Barrier Reef, the Department of the Environment and Energy and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority effectively form a joint team for the purposes of implementing the Reef 2050 Plan and work very collaboratively.

The Queensland Government was not consulted on the Australian Government's 2018-19 budget measure, and was only advised on the day of the announcement. The Queensland Government is pleased to continue to work collaboratively in partnership with the Australian Government and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation and appreciates the commitments that have been made to ongoing collaboration as details of the funding allocation are further developed.

However, the Queensland Government is concerned at the unprecedented approach of providing such a level of funding to a single private organisation without going to the open market to ensure a transparent and accountable procurement process. Notwithstanding these concerns, the Queensland Government strongly reiterates its commitment to continuing to work collaboratively with the Australian Government as this significant investment program is rolled out in partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.

Delivery of the Reef 2050 Plan

The Reef 2050 Investment Framework, published in December 2016, identified over \$1.28 billion investment into Reef 2050 Plan actions over five years 2015-2020, including over \$715 million by the

Australian Government and over \$400 million by the Queensland Government. Funding gaps to implement the plan's actions over five years were estimated to be between \$143 million and \$408 million.

The Queensland Government's Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce commissioned an analysis of the costs to achieve the Reef 2050 Plan's water quality targets. This analysis by Alluvium Consulting estimated a total cost of \$8.2 billion to reach the water quality targets by 2025. However, since this analysis, further science has been undertaken to refine the water quality targets and establish ecologically relevant targets for each of the rivers that flow to the Reef. The new water quality targets are included in the Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan, due for consideration by the Ministerial Forum on 19 July 2018. Achieving the new, more accurate targets can be expected to lower the total cost estimate significantly.

The Australian Government's new funding partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation represents a substantial increase to the pool of funding for the Reef. The Queensland Government announced an additional \$40 million in its 2018-19 budget with increased funding for water quality and the Joint Field Management Program.

The Queensland Government also invests in partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, including projects such as

- the development of the eReefs water modelling tool, a six year, \$30 million collaborative project with funding from government and the private sector
- the Raine Island Recovery Project, a five year, \$7.95 million collaboration between BHP, the Queensland Government, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Wuthathi and Kemer Kemer Meriam Nation (Ugar, Mer, Erub) Traditional Owners and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation
- the Reef Islands Initiative with Queensland Government investment of \$3 million into the \$14 million, ten-year program.

The Reef Islands Initiative is the most recent partnership arrangement between the Queensland Government and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation. Under this partnership, the Great Barrier Reef Foundation will match the Queensland Government's \$3 million investment to undertake on-ground and in-water restoration and conservation actions across a network of Great Barrier Reef islands. This is a high priority response to the challenges of climate change impacts. The Foundation will match the Queensland Government's funding over three years and has already been successful in matching the first phase with contributions from a philanthropic investor of \$1 million, with additional private sector funds of \$2 million from Lendlease to match the remaining Queensland Government funding. The Australian Government has also committed \$5 million over 10 years where LendLease will match \$3 million and the remaining to be sourced from future philanthropic or private investment.

Such partnership projects do demonstrate the Great Barrier Reef Foundation's track record in managing Reef projects and leveraging additional funding from the private sector and philanthropists. It is expected that it will be challenging for the Foundation to expand its capacity significantly to accommodate scale and scope of the new funding and the Queensland Government will be pleased to offer support by helping to identify suitable priority investments.

Suitability of the funding package

The funding announcement identified several components to the funding provided to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation:

- \$201 million further improving water quality with changed farming practices such as reduced fertiliser use, and adopting new technologies and land management practices.
- \$100 million harnessing the best science to implement reef restoration and funding science that supports Reef resilience and adaptation.
- \$58 million expanding the fight against the coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish.
- \$45 million supporting other work, particularly increasing community engagement such as Indigenous traditional knowledge for sea country management, coastal clean-up days and awareness raising activities.
- \$40 million enhancing Reef health monitoring and reporting to track progress and inform better management.

Climate change is the most pervasive threat to the Great Barrier Reef. Successive bleaching events in 2016 and 2017 were unprecedented in their level of impact and are clearly linked to man-made global warming. Almost half of the Reef's shallow water corals were killed as a result of these two bleaching events and the situation can only be expected to worsen as climate change continues to intensify. It is essential that we take urgent steps to reduce local pressures on the Reef, such as from water quality and crown-of-thorns starfish, as well as develop new ways to help the Reef adapt to a changing climate, and take rapid action to reduce global emissions and curb climate change. The science is clear that the Reef depends on achieving the most ambitious Paris Agreement target of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C.

While the new Australian Government funding is appreciated, and the funding split appears to be a logical distribution of funds across programs to address local pressures and adaption, without commensurate effort by the Australian Government to reduce Australia's carbon emissions, and show strong leadership in the international arena to drive global action, the new funding will be insufficient to protect the Reef for future generations.

Conclusion

The Queensland Government reiterates its commitment to continue to work in close partnership with the Australian Government in the implementation of the Reef 2050 Plan. The new funding announcement is appreciated, notwithstanding concerns about the governance of the process of granting funding, and the Queensland Government is pleased to offer support to the partnership to help guide investments toward filling priority gaps in the context of the Queensland Government's investment programs. However, the Queensland Government remains highly concerned that without commensurate action on climate change, the future for the Reef remains challenging.