Queensland Ports Association

Queensland Ports Association
Russell Smith *Chair*
Cyril Stringfellow *Secretary*

GPO Box 926
Brisbane Qld 4001

Telephone 07 3258 4730
Email
Cyril.Stringfellow@portbris.com.au
ABN 87 833 854 057

2 June 2014

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment & Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Submission to Senate Inquiry 'Great Barrier Reef'

I am pleased to provide the Queensland Ports Association's (QPA) submission to the above inquiry.

The QPA is the peak industry body representing all Queensland port authorities: Brisbane, Gladstone, North Queensland Bulk Ports, Townsville and Ports North. Our members are strongly committed to environmental sustainability and ensuring that the natural values in and surrounding port areas are conserved and protected.

Ports are critical to maintaining and growing the Queensland economy, enabling the export of our agricultural and mineral commodities and imports such as fuel, cars, household goods machinery and building products that support Queensland communities. The importance of ports and their efficient functioning is recognised in the National Ports Strategy, National Land Freight Strategy, the recently released Queensland Ports Strategy and related transport legislation and regulations.

The QPA strongly believes that port operation and growth can continue whilst ensuring important environmental values are protected. Queensland ports have a long and successful history of responsible environmental management in operating near areas of high conservation value. Queensland ports have made significant contributions to the protection and improved knowledge on the science and management of the Great Barrier Reef, including programs on seagrass distribution and ecology, water quality monitoring, turtle protection and wetland rehabilitation.

Whilst our submission deals purely with the port industry, it must be acknowledged that a wide range of industries, communities and recreational and commercial groups use the GBRWHA.

Our submission addresses the Inquiry's Terms of Reference (ToR) as relevant to the port industry. Where appropriate, we have combined our responses across several ToR's.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Kane
Chair – Queensland Ports Association (Planning and Environment Committee)
QUEENSLAND PORTS ASSOCIATION

SUBMISSION TO: *SENATE INQUIRY – GREAT BARRIER REEF*

2 JUNE 2014

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Value of Ports

> Our ability to trade goods with the world and grow the Australian economy depends heavily on ports. Efficient, commercial ports are critical for the export of our agricultural and mineral commodities and for a range of imports including household goods, manufactured products, vehicles, machinery and fuel. Maintenance and growth of our economy depends directly on seaborne trade.
>
> Approximately one third of our GDP is generated by seaborne trade.
>
> Australia is the 12th largest economy in the world (IMF 2012) and has the fourth largest shipping task.
>
> Sea transport, via Australian ports, offers the most economical, energy efficient and environmentally friendly transportation for large-scale movements of all cargo types. As an island country, there are limited alternatives available to the use of sea transport for the movement of general freight and bulk commodities, particularly mineral resources. Other forms of transport are typically constrained by the volumes that can practically be carried at any one time.
>
> *(Morton & Sprott, 2014)*

In 2011/2012, Australian ports facilitated the export/import of over 1 billion tonnes of cargo.

As outlined in the *National Port Strategy*, our freight network around the nation provides the backbone for our future prosperity[1]:

> *'As a nation dependent on maritime trade, Australia's ports are an important gateway for goods. Consequently, ports and associated infrastructure are of the utmost economic and social importance to Australia.'*

Over the ten-year period 2001/2002 to 2011/2012, annual average trade growth of 5.8% was experienced across the Australian port sector.[2]

In the Queensland context, the *Draft Great Barrier Reef Port Strategy* also highlighted the importance of the industry to the growth and development of our society, through sustainable economic growth[3]:

'Ports adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef support each of the four pillars of the Queensland economy:

- ***Resources:*** *Resources from Australia's largest coal deposits as well as significant lead, zinc, silver, gold and copper reserves make their way to global markets through ports along the Great Barrier Reef.*
- ***Agriculture:*** *Agriculture and grazing catchments make up a majority of the land use adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef. Produce, particularly sugar, makes its way to global markets through ports in the Great Barrier Reef region.*
- ***Tourism:*** *The Great Barrier Reef and surrounding regions are globally recognised tourist destinations and support a significant portion of Queensland's tourism industry. Ports are essential to Queensland's growing cruise shipping industry.*
- ***Construction:*** *Port development and related infrastructure and freight corridors support significant construction activity.'*

In 2012/2013, the Queensland port system's total throughput was approximately 286 million tonnes - an increase of 8.8% over the previous financial year.

The Senate Committee should note that Queensland GBR regional ports contribute significantly to the underlying economic well-being and social infrastructure of Queensland by supporting thousands of jobs (directly and indirectly) throughout the state and Australia.

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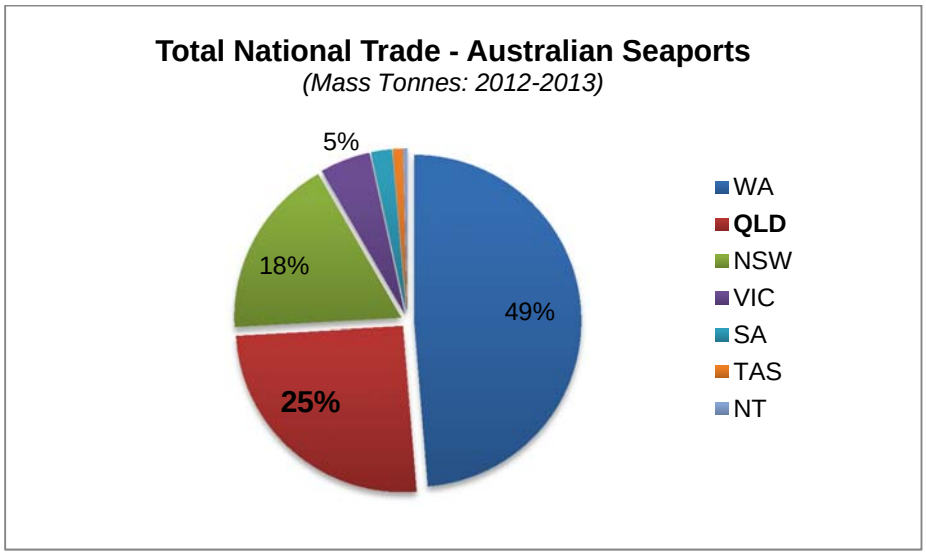
[1] Infrastructure Australia (2012) National Ports Strategy, available at: http://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/publications/files/COAG_National_Ports_Strategy.pdf
[2] Ports Australia (2014) Trade Statistics, available at: http://www.portsaustralia.com.au/tradestats/
[3] Queensland Government (2012) *Great Barrier Reef Port Strategy,* available at: http://www.dsdip.qld.gov.au/infrastructure-and-planning/great-barrier-reef-ports-strategy.html

As a network, Queensland ports currently manage around 25% of national trade.



(Ports Australia, Trade Statistics, 2014)[4]

The value of exports transiting through Queensland ports equates to approximately $45-$50 billion.[5] Available data shown in the table below, clearly demonstrates the significant value of export products moving through selected GBR ports.

Exports from selected GBR Ports

Port	Dominant Cargo type	Value of Exports 2012-2013
Cairns	Mixed	**$339,655,700**
Lucinda	Sugar	**$110,533,500**
Townsville	Mixed	**$5,831,920,800**
Abbot Point	Dry Bulk	**$1,911,843,300**
Mackay	Mixed	**$466,592,000**
Hay Point	Dry Bulk	**$14,040,880,600**
Gladstone	Mixed	**$8,762571,100**

Clearly, our port network is a fundamental precursor for continued economic growth and prosperity.

[4] Ports Australia (2014) Trade Statistics – Website www.portsaustralia.com
[5] Queensland Treasury & Trade (2014) 'Data Tables: Overseas Export of goods by Port, value, Queensland Ports 2002-03 to 2012-13

1.2 Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area

> The Great Barrier Reef is an iconic part of Australia, is recognised internationally, and is something all Australians want to protect for future generations. The GBR and surrounding catchments support a range of industries that generate more than $40 billion in economic activity every year.
>
> The region is critical to the health of the Queensland economy and to the Australian economy as a whole.
>
> *(State Party Report to the World Heritage Committee, 2012)*

The QPA recognises the significant value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA) as a natural wonder of the world with superlative natural beauty.

Upon establishment of the GBRWHA in 1981, eleven commercial trading ports were within the boundary of the World Heritage area - a clear recognition that port operations were considered as being able to co-exist within a World Heritage context subject to careful and diligent management.

Since that time, continued development at ports within the GBRWHA has been undertaken within the World Heritage framework including the guidelines and conventions of the World Heritage Committee.

Arguably, the GBRWHA is now one of the most regulated marine environments anywhere in the world with land use, shipping and port operations needing to demonstrate full compliance with a wide range of regulatory requirements and licensing conditions at all times.

All QPA members are acutely aware of, and committed to, their current strict operating conditions within this world-renowned region.

As an integral link in the international and domestic tourism transport chain, the established port locations have, and will continue to, provide a fundamentally important access point to enable appreciation of the GBR, including the recognised World Heritage values. The infrastructure and promotion activities of specific Queensland port locations has played a major role in allowing access to the GBR, and it is therefore important that future management arrangements ensure that the role of ports in this regard is acknowledged and enabled.

1.3 Industry commitment and the need for balanced management

Our members are strongly committed to environmental sustainability and ensuring that the World Heritage values in and surrounding port areas are conserved and protected.

Our history of management over many decades proves our commitment to successful co-existence.

The QPA recognises that a balanced and well-planned approach to economic growth within the region is required to ensure the integrity of the Great Barrier Reef.

We believe a cooperative approach is needed to ensure strong and sustainable outcomes in future years, due to the GBRWHA accommodating a number of industries and users (ie. tourism operators, adjacent coastal / urban / agricultural development, defence, mining activities, research and domestic park users).

The Commonwealth and Queensland Government's demonstrated commitment to the Great Barrier Reef Strategic Assessment – the largest Strategic Assessment of its kind, is testament to the strong, coordinated approach to environmental management within the region.

Adding to the government initiatives, our members have actively sought to participate in the Strategic Assessment process and have provided vast amount of industry information and significant input into 'Demonstration Cases' and technical reviews.

2 MANAGEMENT OF PORTS

Relevant Inquiry Terms of Reference:

a) management of the impacts of industrialisation of the reef coastline, including dredging, offshore dumping, and industrial shipping, in particular, but not limited to, current and proposed development in the following regions or locations:

i. Gladstone Harbour and Curtis Island,
ii. Abbot Point,
iii. Fitzroy Delta, and
iv. Cape Melville and Bathurst Bay;

2.1 Port development and future management

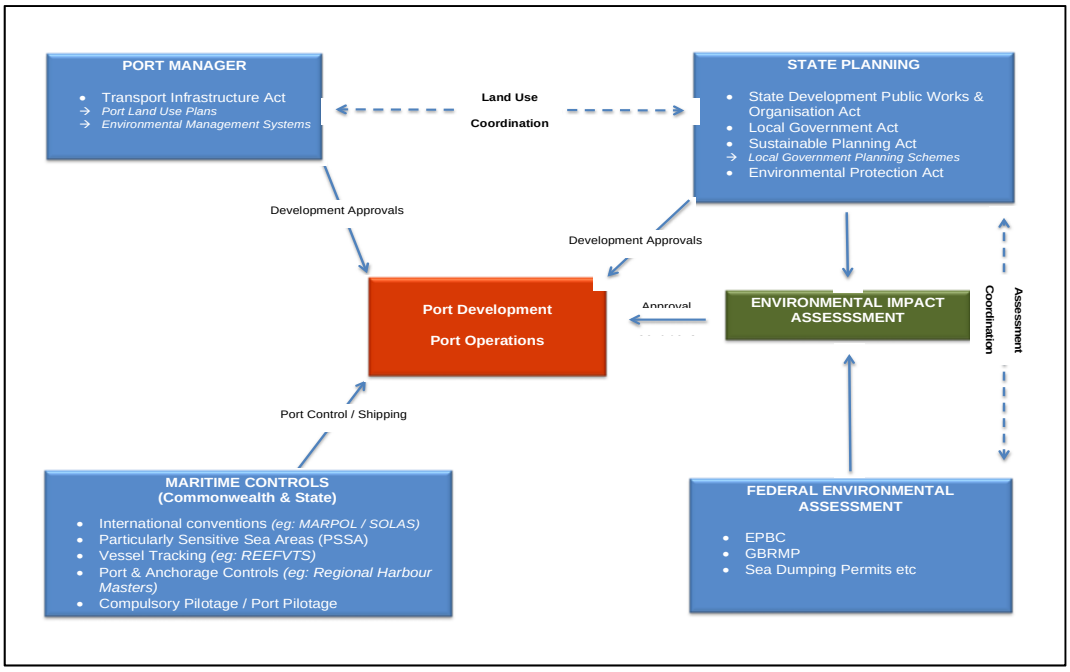
Ports have been operational along the Queensland coast since the mid 1800s. Over the last 150 years, the port network in Queensland has grown to become significant infrastructure supporting our nation's economy.

The port industry nationally has a commendable environmental track record. Ports continue to invest extensive resources to ensure leading environmental management practices are adopted. Ports operate in a highly transparent manner, with significant opportunities for governments and the community to observe and participate in the planning, management and monitoring of operations. Additionally, ports contribute significantly to the development of environmental best practice approaches, science and management. Queensland ports have been at the forefront of numerous key environmental initiatives including:

- the Abbot Point Cumulative Impact Assessment - including a ground-breaking study on the potential for impacts to the Outstanding Universal Value of the GBR.
- funding and support for long-term seagrass monitoring at numerous locations along the Queensland coast.
- advanced monitoring and sampling programs for water quality, sediment, turtles and dugong.

The regulatory framework related to ports consists of international conventions, federal and state laws, regulations and planning policies. Port operations in and adjacent to the GBRWHA are arguably amongst the most highly regulated activities anywhere in the world.

The diagram below has been drawn from the *Great Barrier Reef Strategic Assessment* and demonstrates the numerous legislative and policy arrangements relating to port operations and port development in Queensland currently.[6]



[6] Australian and Queensland Governments (2013) Draft Great Barrier Reef Strategic Assessment, available at: http://www.dsdip.qld.gov.au/gbr-strategic-assessment

Whilst this framework has generally delivered effective and acceptable outcomes, a series of recent reviews and inquires have recommended reforms and streamlining to deliver improved transparency in decision-making processes, outcomes and certainty.

In 2012, the Queensland government released the *draft Great Barrier Reef Ports Strategy* in part response to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee's initial decisions and recommendation in June 2011 (see Section 6 for greater detail). This strategy laid out a number of management principles, one of which was a proposed restriction of any significant port development, within and adjoining the GBRWHA, to within existing port limits until 2022.

Significantly, the Queensland Government has released a draft *Queensland Ports Strategy* (QPS), with the final strategy expected to be released soon[7]. This is a 'whole-of-state' Port Strategy that includes those ports within the GBRWHA.

Of particular note for this inquiry, the 'strategic objectives' of the draft Queensland Ports Strategy include:

- providing certainty and direction for future port planning
- supporting environmental protection, in particular for the Great Barrier Reef
- supporting improvements in the management and productivity of ports and the ports network
- enhancing regional supply chain connections
- facilitating the strategic use of ports.

The establishment of 'Priority Port Development Areas' (PPDAs) is a key feature of the QPS, with five PPDAs being declared along the Queensland coast, namely:

- Brisbane
- Gladstone
- Mackay and Hay Point
- Abbot Point
- Townsville.

We believe that the Queensland Government has responded appropriately to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (WHC) request, to restrict major port development to long-established port development areas within the GBRWHA.

It is anticipated that the new Queensland Ports Act (due for release in late 2014) will confirm the concepts of PPDAs and further, require enhanced port master planning and environmental management frameworks at these priority port locations.

The requirement for advanced port master planning is supported by the QPA and consistent with best practice approaches to land use and environmental planning at seaports around the world. This also builds upon the port master planning work conducted by Ports Australia in 2013 and further, is consistent with a Commonwealth Department of Environment study in to best practice port development.[8] [9]

This Commonwealth project included a literature review and case study analysis of practices undertaken at international ports during key stages of port development including: site selection and master planning, design and construction, operation, and monitoring and continuous improvement.

The report was particularly focused on impacts and practices relevant to the protection of matters of national environmental significance under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The report found that early and comprehensive master planning at and around port nodes is critical:

> *'Comprehensive and transparent site selection and master planning processes incorporating proactive stakeholder and community engagement principles are critical to enabling avoidance of long-term and prolonged legacy issues for port operations and the environment.*
>
> *Site selection, master planning and design are the stages in a port's development where there is the most opportunity to avoid and mitigate environmental impacts, especially impacts on coastal*

[7] Queensland Government (2013) Draft Queensland Ports Strategy, available at: http://www.dsdip.qld.gov.au/infrastructure-and-planning/queensland-ports-strategy.html
[8] Ports Australia (2013) Leading Practice Port Master Planning: Approaches and Future Opportunities, available at: http://portsaustralia.com.au/port-master-planning.pdf
[9] Commonwealth of Australia (2013) *Environmental Best Practice Port Development: An Analysis of International Approaches*, available at: http://www.environment.gov.au/resource/environmental-best-practice-port-development-analysis-international-approaches

processes and hydrology, aesthetics and habitat. These processes need to consider a range of aspects including the regulatory setting, environmental values of the location, cumulative impacts, and operational requirements'

The QPA supports the need for improved master planning with Queensland ports already commencing associated projects to ensure compliance with the requirements of the draft QPS and expected legislative changes via the new Queensland Ports Act expected in late 2014.

2.2 Specific Port Precincts

Gladstone Harbour

The Port of Gladstone dates back around 100 years.

The Port is located within the GBRWHA boundary and adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP). Clearly, the location of major industrial ports within World Heritage properties is not unique or mutually exclusive. In establishing the GBRWHA boundaries in 1981 the presence of a number of commercial trading ports inside the boundary was a clear recognition that port infrastructure and operations were not considered to be unworkable or unmanageable in a World Heritage context.

Today, the port is the largest multi-cargo port in Queensland in terms of tonnage, and the fourth largest in Australia. It is the major bulk commodity port and LNG hub of Queensland. It also caters to all forms of containerised and general cargoes.

Gladstone Harbour has been a key focus of the World Heritage Committee's recent interest in the GBR and accordingly a number of reviews and inquiries have been conducted into recent events around the port. Particular attention has been focused on fish health issues that occurred concurrent with a major dredging project (Gladstone Western Basin Project).

As noted in reports published in 2012 following scientific investigations conducted by the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, CSIRO, the University of Tasmania and also in the *Independent Review of the Port of Gladstone (2013)*, the fish health issues in Gladstone Harbour during 2011 were the most likely the result of extreme weather events, freshwater influxes and associated overcrowding from fish that moved into the area after overspilling from Awoonga Dam. Accusations and claims that dredging related activities were responsible are not supported by available evidence.[10]

Abbot Point

The Port of Abbot Point commenced operations in 1984. The Port is currently a single commodity (coal) export port. It is the most northerly coal exporting port in Australia and is one of the three major coal exporting ports on the Queensland coast, the other two being the Port of Hay Point and the Port of Gladstone.

The port is strategically located to provide export capacity from the northern Bowen basin and potentially in the future the Galilee basin. There are a number of projects currently proposed at the port that if realised will result in an expansion of infrastructure and export capacity. Currently two new terminals are in advanced stages of planning, while market demand and interest is being examined to determine what further expansion may be required in the medium to longer term.

The proposed development at the port has been the subject of extensive environmental study and assessment. This has included:

- The *Abbot Point Cumulative Impact Assessment* – which was identified in the Great Barrier Reef Strategic Assessment as a comprehensive examination of the combined effects of port development.[11]
- Dredging Project Public Environment Report and Supplementary – involving a rigorous assessment process over a 24-month period that involved examining a range of dredge material relocation options and potential impacts.[12]

These assessments highlight that port development, including a 3 million m^3 capital dredging campaign, can occur in a sustainable manner and deliver conservation objectives that maintain or improve the current

[10] Commonwealth of Australia (2013) Independent review of the Port of Gladstone, available at: http://www.environment.gov.au/topics/marine/great-barrier-reef/port-gladstone-review
[11] Abbot Point Working Group (2013) *Abbot Point Cumulative Impact Assessment, available at: http://www.nqbp.com.au/abbot-point/#related_downloads*
[12] North Queensland Bulk Ports (2013) Abbot Point Capital Dredging Project Public Environment Report and Supplementary, available at: http://www.nqbp.com.au/environment/

environmental situation. Further, the studies also showed that the marine values of the area could be protected and that the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the GBR preserved through appropriate design, management, monitoring and offsetting residual impacts.[13]

2.3 Dredging

> Shipping channels are of equal importance to our road and rail networks and, like these networks, need to be maintained and developed as trade grows.
>
> Dredging of shipping channels is an essential part of port operation in Australia and globally. Although shipping channels are declared in naturally deep-water areas, thus enabling the safe passage of shipping, dredging will always be required.
>
> *(Morton and Sprott, 2014)*

Few ports in the GBRWHA are naturally deep and dredging is needed to allow ships to enter ports efficiently, quickly and safely. Dredging is not an optional activity and has been an essential element of operating ports in the GBR for more than 100 years. Maintenance dredging as well as periodic enlarging and development of navigation channels is required to allow trade to occur and enable economic growth. All dredging and at sea placement activities are subject to detailed management measures to ensure impacts are effectively managed and do not result in unapproved impacts.

The need for dredging:

'Capital Dredging' (also termed *'developmental dredging'*) is required to create new or to improve existing channels, berths and swing basins. Periodic channel widening and deepening is necessary to ensure ports can safely and efficiently accommodate both the increasing numbers of ships trading with Queensland as our economy grows and, the larger ships that progressively form part of domestic and global trade. In some ports, such as Gladstone, periodic channel upgrades have occurred approximately every 20-30 years since the port was established. Failure to undertake channel improvements would result in missed trade opportunities and increasingly inefficient supply chains leading to higher costs being borne by the community to support trade import and export.

Over time, shipping channels, berth pockets and swing basins naturally infill with marine sediments that move along the coast, are transported down rivers or result from cyclones/floods. These accumulated, naturally occurring sediments need to be removed (via *'Maintenance Dredging'*), generally each year, to allow the safe passage of commercial shipping vessels to wharves. Failure to undertake maintenance dredging to ensure designated channel depths (determined by the Harbour Master) could result in shipping access being restricted and/or reduce the volume of cargo being carried. This would have major economic implications to businesses associated with the export of mineral/agricultural products and the import of essential commodities (e.g. cement or fuel) to Queensland businesses and the wider community.

Placing dredged material at sea:

Most dredged material in Queensland is placed offshore at designated Dredge Material Placement Areas (DMPAs) following a complex environmental impact assessment and approval process. Such areas comprise un-vegetated open substrates distant from coral reefs, additionally most are located outside the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and have been used for decades.

Dredged material is not placed on habitats of high conservation value and never on coral reefs.

Most DMPAs in the GBR retain the material and, where some dispersal does occur, monitoring studies have shown that this is limited and has not affected areas of high conservation value.[14]

Computer modelling of dredge material dispersion, undertaken for the GBR Strategic Assessment as part of examining the benefits of relocating existing DMPAs in the GBR, concluded that there was little environmental benefit in allocating new areas.[15] Unfortunately the modelling has been misunderstood and misused.[16] Some

[13] Abbot Point Working Group (2013) *Abbot Point Cumulative Impact Assessment, available at:* http://www.nqbp.com.au/abbot-point/#related_downloads
[14] Morton R., Kettle B., Jones A., and Stump, R. (2014). Dredging by Queensland Ports - needs, methods and environmental effects. *Report to Queensland Ports Association.*
[15] SKM (2013) Improved dredged material management for the Great Barrier Reef Region. Sensitive Receptor Risk Assessment of Alternative and Current Dredged Material Placement Sites: Report prepared in conjunction with Asia-Pacific Applied Science Associates for Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.
[16] Australian Marine Conservation Society (2014). Dredging, dumping and the Great Barrier Reef. Report published May 2014

have inappropriately used the report to suggest widespread dispersion of dredged material occurs and ignored the critical limitation stated in the report (and provided on the computer maps) that it overestimated sediment dispersion and was not intended to model actual sediment movement or indicate potential environmental impacts. In fact, GBRMPA themselves acknowledged these limitations in their Interpretive Statement.[17]

The chemical composition of dredge material placed at-sea:

Toxic dredged material is not placed at sea.

Any material proposed for at-sea placement must be evaluated through the *National Assessment Guidelines for Dredging* issued by the Commonwealth Government (Department of Environment).[18] Approval for at-sea placement only occurs once it has been demonstrated that the material would not lead to toxicity effects. The guidelines prescribe protocols for the sampling and testing of sediment by accredited laboratories and are internationally considered to be of a world-leading standard.

Sediment testing over many years has shown that almost all material dredged in the GBRWHA is clean although some minor volumes from inner harbour areas may have elevated contaminant levels (e.g. from antifouling pants). Any material with contaminant levels that could result in adverse environmental effects is placed on land, never at sea.

Land based placement of dredge material:

The *National Assessment Guidelines for Dredging* also require that all alternatives (e.g. beneficial re-use or land based placement) have been evaluated prior to any approvals being granted for at-sea placement.

Placement of material at sea is generally the best environmental option in Queensland. Land based options are not viable as coastal areas of Queensland have high conservation, residential or cultural value. Land based options are viable only for small amounts of material or one-off projects. Recent technical studies for the Great Barrier Reef Strategic Assessment concluded that land placement of dredged material (particularly fine grained maintenance material) was not a viable long term option for the six major ports in the Great Barrier Reef region.[19]

Reclamation is often suggested as an alternative to at-sea placement, however, in many cases the material dredged is not suitable for reclamation or other land based uses. In some instances it is appropriate, but can often have major and long-term environmental and social impacts (e.g. to coastal sediment transport processes, visual and cultural values) and is extremely expensive. Although some cost recovery can occur if reclaimed land is used for future development, there are major costs associated with the need to engineer reclaimed areas to withstand storm surges and cyclonic waves (e.g. using rock retaining walls) that are common in Queensland coastal areas, as well as additional treatment for potential acid sulphate, construction stability and reduction of long term settlement.

Regulation of dredging and impact assessment:

Port operations and dredging are highly regulated and subject to international agreements, as well as Commonwealth and State legislative requirements. Most large-scale dredging programs require several approvals/ permits under both Commonwealth and State legislation.

Adaptive management monitoring approval conditions are common for major projects to ensure impacts are detected and avoided before they become significant. Existing approvals processes ensure that dredging is adequately managed by regulators, even for ports sitting outside of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Impacts associated with dredging and dredge material placement in the GBR over recent years have been localised and short term. Approaches to predicting such impacts are accurate and dredge management techniques effective. This has been confirmed by the results of monitoring dredging projects in northern Australia over the past 20 years which demonstrated that effects have been consistent with, or less than, impact assessment predictions with only two exceptions.[20]

In 2013, water quality impacts at Gladstone were greater than predicted but monitored seagrass was not affected. Similarly, unpredicted water quality impacts at Hay Point in 2006 affected the normal seasonal recruitment of a deep-water seagrass species for one year, however seagrass cover the following year was greater than pre dredging.

[17] Refer: http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/97159/Interpretive-Statement-draft-20131028web.pdf
[18] Commonwealth of Australia (2009) National Ocean Disposal Guidelines for Dredged Material, available at: http://www.environment.gov.au/resource/national-assessment-guidelines-dredging-2009
[19] SKM (2013). Improved dredged material management for the Great Barrier Reef Region. Literature Review and Cost Analysis of Land-based Dredge Material Re-use and Disposal Option. Report prepared in conjunction with Asia-Pacific Applied Science Associates for Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.
[20] Morton R., and Sprott J. (2014). Dredging and Australian ports - Subtropical and tropical ports. *(Report prepared for Ports Australia), available at: http://portsaustralia.com.au/dredge-report.pdf*

2.4 Shipping

Commercial shipping has occurred in GBR waters for well over a century. Australia is almost totally dependent on shipping for the import and export of commodities vital to the Australian economy and way of life. Shipping within the GBR is a highly regulated activity with stringent management arrangements in place.

In recent times we have also seen a number of widely varying and in some instances inaccurate estimates of future shipping numbers in the GBR.[21]

Government agencies, port authorities and port customers, both collectively and individually, have undertaken extensive studies to better understand and document the specific and real risks of shipping activities within the GBR to ensure that the public debate and any shipping related management decisions are based on factual information and realistic forecasts.

Detailed forecasting commissioned by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) (using recent trade forecast data from the Bureau of Resource and Energy Economics) has predicted 2,450 coal ships by 2020. This is significantly lower than previous forecasts and reflects changes in market conditions over the past 12-18 months and also a global trend towards larger Capesize vessels. The AMSA work also forecasts up to 500 LNG vessels by 2025, all through the Port of Gladstone.[22]

Any increase in shipping traffic of itself, presents a minimal change to the risk if managed accordingly. Currently, shipping within the GBR region is a highly regulated activity and there are stringent management arrangements for commercial shipping in this area.

The primary shipping management strategies, systems and/or regulations in place within the GBR region include:

- Declaration of the GBR by the International Maritime Organisation as a 'Particularly Sensitive Sea Area' enabling Australia to apply specific maritime controls, such as compulsory pilotage, designation of shipping routes and mandatory location reporting.
- Designated shipping areas
- REEFVTS system
- Oil and chemical spill response capability
- Compulsory pilotage in all major ports and the narrower sea channels
- Ship quality vetting

Overall the impacts and risks to the GBR from shipping are considered to be extremely well managed and are improving over time to address the increased shipping volumes and related risks. This is demonstrated by the success of the REEFVTS system, that tracks and provides navigational advice to vessels on a 24/7 basis, with only one grounding of a vessel in the Torres Strait having been reported since its introduction in 2003.

[21] Greenpeace (2012) Boom goes the Reef, available at; http://www.greenpeace.org/australia/en/what-we-do/climate/resources/reports/Boom-Goes-the-Reef/

[22] Braemar Seascope (2013) North Queensland Ship Traffic Growth Study Supplementary Report, Prepared for Australian Maritime Safety Authority, available at: http://www.amsa.gov.au/community/consultation/nesm-consultation.asp

3 STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT AND IMPACT MANAGEMENT

Relevant Inquiry Terms of Reference:

b) management of the impacts of agricultural runoff;
c) management of non-agricultural activities within reef catchments impacting on the reef, including legacy mines, current mining activities and practices, residential and tourism developments, and industrial operations including Yabulu;
g) whether the strategic assessments currently underway are likely to protect the reef from further decline;
h) the identification and protection of off-limits areas on the reef coastline to help protect the health of the reef.

3.1 Strategic Assessment Findings

In 2009, the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report identified climate change, continued declining water quality from catchment run-off, loss of coastal habitats from coastal development, remaining impacts from fishing and illegal fishing and poaching as the key issues reducing the Reef's resilience or ability to withstand threats.

Climate change is still the most serious threat facing the Reef and is likely to have far reaching consequences for the Region's environment. Future climate change predictions indicate sea level and sea temperature rises will continue and the ocean will become gradually more acidic. More frequent and severe extreme weather is also predicted.

Sediments and nutrients in catchment run-off and the loss of connectivity between coastal and marine environments will continue to affect the Reef, particularly its southern inshore areas. While agricultural practices in the Region are improving, and the loads of sediments and nutrients being washed into the Region are decreasing, there is likely to be a lag of some decades before water quality in the Region significantly improves.

In turn, high concentrations of nutrients in Reef waters are likely to promote continued, more-frequent outbreaks of the coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish.

The operation of ports and further port development will require significant additional capital and maintenance dredging.

(Great Barrier Reef Strategic Assessment Draft Report 2013)

At an overarching level, the QPA supports the findings of the draft *Great Barrier Reef Strategic Assessment* (GBRSA). The draft GBRSA reports are the most comprehensive assessment conducted to date on the state of the Reef and its management arrangements. The Strategic Assessment reinforces the need for a strategic approach to assessing, addressing and managing the many natural and anthropogenic influences on the health of the Reef.

It is important that this process is continued through to completion and that the program enhancements and the *Long-term Plan for Sustainable Development* are implemented.

It is widely recognised that the southern portions of the GBR have declined in condition and that the resilience of the reef is currently low in some, but not all, areas. Fortunately, there is evidence of recovery from the recent years of extreme weather events (e.g. cyclones) in some key ecological communities (e.g. strong recovery has been recorded for inshore seagrass communities at Townsville and Gladstone ports).

The QPA has noted the key findings of the GBRSA, supported by scientific data, that the key risks to the health of the GBR are increasing sea temperature, Crown of Thorns starfish and catchment runoff of nutrients and sediments. These activities have historically impacted the reef and continue to be the major contributing threats.

Port activities and dredging are identified as one of the many uses within the GBR and as such one of the potential influences on its condition. Port activities have been regulated and managed by both state and federal governments for decades.

While noting and supporting the overall findings and recommendations of the GBRSA, the QPA has concerns with some aspects of the assessment. Specifically, the GBRSA significantly overstates the risks and impacts of dredging and dredge material placement at-sea. The GBRSA draws heavily on a supporting technical report on dredge material dispersion that uses a very limited modelling approach with broad based assumptions that was

never intended for impact assessment.[23] As outlined above in Section 2.3, this report has been misunderstood and misused by various organisations. The actual limitations of the modelling and studies undertaken are included in the report and also in the interpretative statement issued by the GBRMPA.[24] These limitations must be read in conjunction with this report and applied when utilising the report in the GBRSA and in other policy contexts.

Other aspects of the draft Strategic Assessment that the QPA has identified for improvement include:

- *Economic role and contribution of ports*: Ports form part of the multiple-use of both the GBRMP and the GBRWHA, having pre-existed before these were established, and are recognised in listing and zoning documents. The GBRSA omits a description of the essential need or benefits of ports as it does so for other industries that operate within the region.
- *The need for and regulation of dredging*: As outlined above, the GBRSA significantly under represents the role and need for ports and shipping. The GBRSA does not sufficiently recognise the need for dredging and that dredging of shipping channels is an essential part of port operation. The GBRSA needs to note that ports and shipping channels are of equal importance to road and rail networks and, similar to these land-based networks, have a requirement to be maintained and developed as our population, economy and trade grows.
- *Net Environmental Benefit*: the current state of GBR is a result of multiple factors over long periods of time. The cumulative impacts of land-use practices and a growing human population have created pressures on the GBR for decades. A system that attempts to address these pressures through net benefit activities is supported, although it must be run in conjunction with a broader program of reduction, avoidance and mitigation. Ports have implemented environmental impact avoidance, mitigation and offsetting for many years and have developed leading practice approaches in this area. Whilst QPA notes the potential positives of a net environmental benefits approach we are strongly of the view that it must consider and apply across the land-use and development spectrum and not be focussed just on those industries and activities where regulation and offsetting is easily and already applied.
- *Cumulative Impacts*: it is widely recognised that cumulative impacts need to be considered, and QPA is pleased that the GBRSA has been undertaken to look at the long term management of the GBR. The GBRSA describes the benefits of assessing cumulative impacts, which is supported by the QPA. However the approach to be applied in future is currently unclear in the document and this needs to be clarified. A major consideration in undertaking cumulative impact assessments is the one of scale and scope.

As stated earlier the completion of the GBRSA is essential, as is ensuring that the documents and recommendations are accurate, balanced and practical for implementation. The QPA will continue to support the process and is keen to participate in future management activities and consultation activities as they develop, including the *Great Barrier Reef Long Term Plan for Sustainable Development*.

3.3 Future Commitments

The two components of the GBRSA, being the marine component and the coastal zone component, have both identified a number of future commitments that will improve the effectiveness of the program in protecting and managing the outstanding universal value of the GBRWHA (and the environment more generally). These recommended enhancements include:

- Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership
- Regional Plans
- Queensland Ports Strategy
- Cumulative Impact Assessment Guidelines
- Reef Trust
- New offsetting approaches and a Net Benefits Policy
- Continuation of the Reef Water Quality Protection Program
- Long Term Plan for Sustainable Development

It is understood that the *Great Barrier Reef Long Term Plan for Sustainable Development* will be a mechanism

[23] SKM (2013) Improved dredged material management for the Great Barrier Reef Region. Sensitive Receptor Risk Assessment of Alternative and Current Dredged Material Placement Sites: Report prepared in conjunction with Asia-Pacific Applied Science Associates for Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.
[24] Refer: http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/97159/Interpretive-Statement-draft-20131028web.pdf

to bring together the various elements of reef management and provide direction to future activities. The proposed plan is forecast to include four broad elements:

1. A vision for the GBRWHA that reflects the diversity of use and interest in the property, protects the outstanding universal value, sustains its integrity and integrates the three pillars of sustainability (environmental, social and economic).
2. An outcomes framework that includes desired outcomes and targets for protection of the property's Outstanding Universal Value.
3. Adaptive management actions to deliver outcomes and targets (primarily drawn from the two strategic assessments and with a focus on critical areas of new work).
4. Integrated monitoring and reporting programs to measure the success of the GBR Plan.

The QPA believes that these enhancements and policy initiatives can combine to provide a positive and improved management and planning regime for the GBR region. Particularly important is the coordination and cohesion of policy and organisational operations to ensure common targets and outcomes and objectives are being pursued.

From a ports perspective, the most significant change involves the positive steps underway to improve port master planning that will provide certainty in terms of port development and environmental outcomes. The development of a Queensland Ports Strategy (as outlined in Section 2.1 above) is a major component of this work.

Accordingly, the QPA is supportive of current moves by the Queensland government to streamline planning policies and environmental regulation for ports. This includes the proposed introduction of statutory master plans and environmental management frameworks for all priority ports as outlined in the draft Queensland Ports Strategy.

To ensure however, that these reforms achieve the desired intent of improved planning and environmental management, it is essential that a seamless approach to port planning and development approvals is subsequently recognised at the Commonwealth level. The changes underway provide an opportunity to achieve this by having the proposed statutory master planning system in Queensland recognised at the Commonwealth level - notably via incorporation of the master planning process into a future Approvals Bilateral Agreement under the EPBC Act.

The combined reform of the State planning process with Commonwealth accreditation could provide a simplified and more efficient legal and policy framework that gives a clear 'line of sight' alignment of broad national and state policies right through to project approvals and delivery. This alignment of critical instruments is well presented in a port relevant context in the figure below from the Ports Australia report into leading practice port master planning.[25]

Critical Instrument Alignment

Source: Ports Australia, *Leading Practice: Port Master Planning Approaches and Future Opportunities*, 2013, Figure 6.2

[25] Ports Australia (2013) Leading Practice Port Master Planning: Approaches and Future Opportunities, available at: http://portsaustralia.com.au/port-master-planning.pdf

3.4 Bilateral Agreements

> While Australia already has in place the building blocks of a sound development assessment and approval regulatory system, there is substantial scope to comprehensively overhaul the framework in Australia for major projects.
>
> *(Productivity Commission, Review of Major Project Development Assessment Processes, December 2013)*

Our association is supportive of government efforts to improve and streamline assessment and approval processes through the introduction of Approval Bilateral Agreements under the EPBC Act. Such a system will remove a great deal of unnecessary duplication, reduce timeframes and costs, and enable a better focus on real environmental outcomes. In developing such a system, however, it is imperative that the system is designed to ensure appropriate standards of environmental assessment and decision-making are maintained or improved.

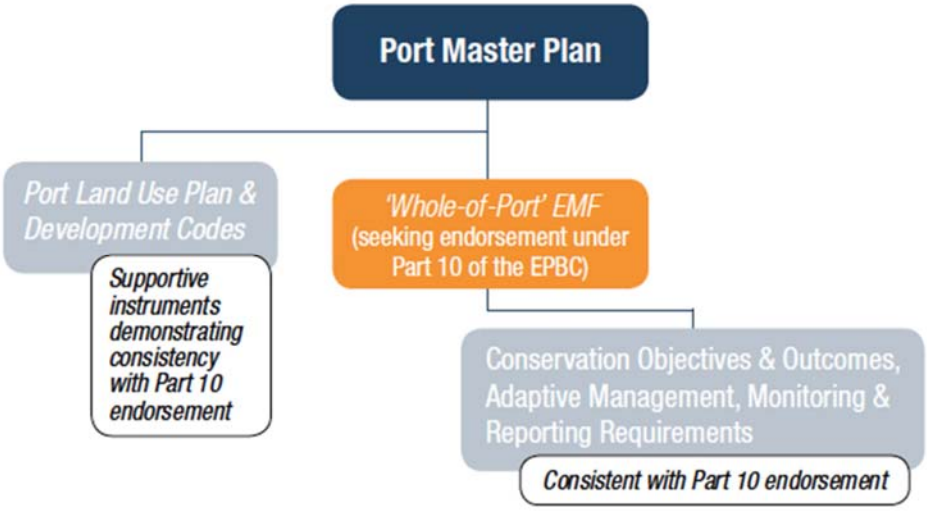
The QPA is also of the view that while the introduction of bilateral agreements is an important and worthwhile initiative, the necessary reforms to improve the assessment and approval process cannot simply be addressed through the accreditation of existing legislative processes. Consistent with our comments in Section 3.3 above, the QPA would encourage continued effort in the delivery of reforms in this area at all levels of Government.

Maintaining Environmental Standards

The QPA is strongly of the view that the implementation of bilateral agreements and accredited process must ensure that environmental standards and outcomes are maintained and, where possible, improved. Accreditation processes must provide transparency and assurance that best practice standards are being met.

In this regard, the QPA supports both the Ports Australia report on best practice master planning and the draft Queensland Ports Strategy that call for the development of environmental management frameworks that meet both Commonwealth and State environmental standards.[26] [27] This concept is illustrated in the figure below from the Ports Australia report, which demonstrates how an environmental management framework (EMF) embedded within a port master plan should be structured to obtain accreditation.

Potential Documentation hierarchy under Part 10 EPBC Assessment



(Source: Ports Australia, *Leading Practice: Port Master Planning Approaches and Future Opportunities*, 2013, Figure 6.2)

[26] Queensland Government, Draft Queensland Ports Strategy, October 2013, accessed http://www.dsdip.qld.gov.au/resources/plan/draft-qps-consultation.pdf on 25 April 2014

[27] Ports Australia (2013) Leading Practice Port Master Planning: Approaches and Future Opportunities, available at: http://portsaustralia.com.au/port-master-planning.pdf

4 ROLE OF GBRMPA

Relevant Inquiry Terms of Reference:

d) ensuring the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has the independence, resourcing and capacity to act in the best interest of the long-term health of the reef.

4.1 Operational strengths

The independent assessment of the effectiveness, conducted as part the *GBR Strategic Assessment (Marine Component),* identified that the GBRMPA has been particularly effective in managing activities and impacts for which it has direct jurisdictional control, such as tourism. The assessment also recognised the difficulties for the Authority in achieving positive outcomes on the ground, given the spatial and temporal scales of the threats facing matters of national environmental significance.

These findings support QPA member experiences that the GBRMPA's structures and human resource strengths are primarily in the management of a maritime protected area and in the direct operational elements of its role – areas where it is widely recognised as a global leader and expert.

4.2 Central policy and assessments

Currently policy and regulation responsibilities relating to the GBR are spread across numerous government agencies at both a federal and state level. As noted above in section 3.3 a greater level of alignment and coordination is needed.

The environmental impact assessment and associated approvals process is becoming increasingly complex, costly and time-consuming without actually improving the scientific evaluation, transparency or environmental outcomes delivered. Ports are experiencing considerable delays with assessments and significant duplication between the separate assessment process.

Currently projects being undertaken partly or wholly within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, within Commonwealth areas, or which generate additional shipping activity, are required to be assessed separately by the Queensland Government and federally under the EPBC Act, the GBRMP Act and the Sea Dumping Act. This results in duplication, confusion and loss of efficiency.

A number of stakeholders and regulators have a philosophical view of how ports should be developed and operated, this often means that the starting point for an assessment requires the proponent to disprove why a certain option (i.e. onshore disposal) is not credible rather than undertake an assessment of all options and select the best environmental option.

Additionally, throughout an assessment there is a lot of 'scope creep' or changing focus from regulators, which means that proponents rarely have certainty of process or certainty of outcome. Issues that were assumed to be resolved based on an assessment are raised again and revisited at a later stage, often more than once. Equally, there is not enough recognition given to the primary assessment document (e.g. EIS) in the public consideration of proposals or in the final decision. Approval conditions are generally drafted in a way where it is hard to see how any information in the EIS has been taken on board. Approval conditions can be very similar across projects and the specifics of each project are often not considered enough.

A single and centralised approach to policy development and environmental assessment is required. This assessment needs to be properly risked based, proportional, informed by science and transparent to all parties including the public and the proponent.

5 INFORMED DECISION MAKING AND CONSULTATION

Relevant Inquiry Terms of Reference:

e) *the adequacy, timeliness and transparency of independent scientific work undertaken to support government decisions impacting the reef;*

f) whether government decision processes impacting the reef are consistent with the precautionary principle;

j) the extent to which government decisions impacting the reef, including development of the strategic assessments and Reef 2050 Plan, involve genuine, open and transparent consultation with the Australian community, affected industries and relevant scientific experts, and genuine consideration of the broader community's views in final decisions

5.1 Science based decisions

Much of the focus and commentary surrounding the GBR over the last few years has been driven by opinion and misunderstood or misrepresented information. Many of the claims and concerns about port developments related to the GBR are not supported by published evidence or science. Certain statements about the volumes and impacts of dredging, shipping numbers, fish health and impacts to OUV have been made without supporting evidence.

The QPA is strongly supportive of using evidence-based, scientific research to inform decisions and management. Where the science indicates impacts or uncertainty then appropriate avoidance, mitigation, monitoring and precaution are warranted.

The QPA strongly advocates that any changes to policy or regulation must be based on robust, scientific evidence and a proportional response to risk.

5.1 Consultation

The transparency and opportunities for stakeholder involvement in activities related to the GBR over the past two years has been considerable and probably unprecedented. The number of previous inquires, reviews, assessments and policy related consultations are too many to list.

The effectiveness and comprehensiveness of these consultations vary and the QPA has expressed disappointment in some aspects of the consultation methods applied, particularly in regards to ports and dredging as part of the strategic assessment process. However, the QPA notes the challenge in managing such consultations and the large number of people and organisations involved.

The QPA is committed to an ongoing involvement in the deliberations and planning activities related to the GBR region.

The development of the *Reef 2050 Plan* (also known as the *Long Term Plan for Sustainable Development*) is seen as a mechanism to combine and summaries the ongoing and future management priorities for the GBR.

As a key stakeholder, the QPA has expressed an interest in being involved in this process and believe that the involvement of a range of relevant stakeholder groups is critical.

Coordination and alignment of the various reviews, inquires, strategic assessment and operational activities is needed and further standalone or separate process must be avoided where possible.

6 WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE DECISONS

Relevant Inquiry Terms of Reference:

i) consistency of efforts with the World Heritage Committee's recommendations on what is required to protect the reef.

6.1 State Party Progress

In May 2011, the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO determined that the approval of liquefied natural gas processing and port facilities on Curtis Island (Gladstone) could impact on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the World Heritage Property - the Great Barrier Reef. Following this decision, a 'Reactive Monitoring Mission' was organised to allow the mission to consider the state of conservation across the management of the whole world heritage property.[28]

Each year since the 2011 decision, the Australia Government has submitted detailed *'State Party Reports'* to the World Heritage Committee outlining:

- the nature of the threats to the reef
- what the Australian Government is doing to improve the resilience of the reef, and
- how the Outstanding Universal Value of the property is being managed and protected.

These *State Party Reports* (2012, 2013 and 2014) have outlined a number of initiatives, programs and inquiries undertaken by the Australian and Queensland Governments to address coastal development issues in relation to the overall management of the GBRWHA – demonstrating consistency of efforts with the World Heritage Committee's recommendations. Detailed information can be found in each of the *State Party Reports*, however it is important to outline several significant achievements or actions underway in relation to the GBRWHA.[29]

State Party Report 2012
• Outlined that agreement had been reached with both the GBR Ministerial Council (comprising Commonwealth and State ministers with jurisdictional responsibilities for the GBRWHA) and the Queensland Government to undertake a comprehensive Strategic Assessment of the GBR pursuant to the national environmental law (EPBC Act).
• That the Australian Government had invited a joint World Heritage Centre and IUCN reactive monitoring mission to the property.
• Provided a summary (in Table 1 within the State Party Report) of the chronology of key management changes in recent decades.
• Provided an update on key conservation issues for the property since the release of the Outlook Report in 2009
• Provided a summary of key management issues in preparation for the Reactive Monitoring Mission.

Following the publication of the 2012 State Party Report, the Reactive Monitoring Mission took place between 6th and 14th March, 2012.

Based on the report of the reactive monitoring mission and information provided by the State Party, a draft state of conservation report on the GBRWHA was prepared by the World Heritage Centre with advice from the IUCN for decision at the World Heritage Committee meeting in late June 2012 (St Petersburg).

In Decision 36 COM 7B.8 of 2012, the WHC made nine recommendations and also requested the State Party address the further 15 recommendations in the mission report.

Australia's response to the 2012 decision of the WHC was contained in the State Party Report 2013.

State Party Report 2013
• Outlined continued commitment to Reef Water Quality Protection Plan ('Reef Plan').
• Outlined continued commitment to Caring for our Country Reef Rescue Initiative.

[28] UNESCO World Heritage Committee decisions, available at: http://www.environment.gov.au/topics/heritage/heritage-places/world-heritage-list/gbr/more-information
[29] Commonwealth of Australia, Great barrier Reef State Party Reports, available at: http://www.environment.gov.au/topics/heritage/heritage-places/world-heritage-list/gbr/more-information

- Reconfirmed that no new port developments had been approved outside of long established port areas.

- Reconfirmed that under the EPBC Act, all relevant direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the GBRWHA will be formally and rigorously assessed.

- Outlined additional measures to protect OUV including:
    - commissioning expert research into aesthetic and geological values of the GBR and gathering historical data in relation to baseline condition of the property at the time of listing
    - developing advice for proponents and departmental assessment officers in relation to how impacts to Outstanding Universal Value should be considered in assessment processes under the EPBC Act
    - incorporating Outstanding Universal Value explicitly into the terms of reference of the strategic assessments, and
    - incorporating Outstanding Universal Value explicitly into the terms of reference of environmental impact assessments and other formal impact assessment documentation for individual proposals.

- Outlined that a North East Shipping Management Plan (NESMP) was under preparation to examine shipping management issues.

- Outlined the release of the draft Great Barrier Reef Ports Strategy outlining:

'…. the vision and principles guiding the Queensland Government's approach to port planning and development in the GBR coastal zone over the next ten years. This approach is defined by the Queensland Government's focus on getting the right balance between economic development and environmental protection. The principles are as follows:

- *Strategic use of ports to facilitate economic growth.*
- *The right balance between economic development and environmental protection.*
- *Maximise efficiency throughout the port system.*
- *A whole of network approach.*
- *Clarity and transparency in port planning.*

The State Part Report also outlined that:

'in 2012 the Queensland Government demonstrated its commitment to these principles through the following decisions:

- *withdrawing support for the proposed multi-cargo facility at Abbot Point, preferring an incremental approach to development, and*
- *moving to two preferred rail corridors to connect the Galilee Basin to export facilities, rather than multiple rail alignments'.*

- Outlined the introduction, into Queensland law, *the draft Coastal Protection State Planning Regulatory Provision (SPRP)* (which came into effect on 8 October 2012).

- Outlined that the Comprehensive GBR Strategic Assessment was on track and progressing well.

- Outlined that consultation with a range of stakeholders (including Traditional Owners, conservation organisations, commercial fishing, recreational users, marine tourism, ports and shipping, farmers and graziers, local governments, and scientists) was progressing well.

- Report also outlined that a number of other existing committees have also provided input, including:
    - GBRMPA's Reef Advisory Committees (RACs)
    - GBRMPA's Local Marine Advisory Committees (LMACs)
    - the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan Partnership Committee and Independent Science Panel
    - Reef catchment Natural Resource Management bodies

- Outlined government commitment to Long Term Sustainable Development Plan by the State Party which will be provided to the WHC in 2015.

- Outlined that the GBR Ministerial Forum agreed that the Australian and Queensland governments would jointly develop an outcomes-based framework to provide a systematic process for continual improvement to the GBRWHA, which will include targets to be monitored, reported and adapted over time.

• Outlined commitment from Australian Government to undertake an independent review of management arrangements and recent environmental concerns relating to the Port of Gladstone and Curtis Island.
• Outlined that the Queensland Government had announced a partnership agreement would be established to ensure the ongoing monitoring and improvement of Gladstone Harbour and surrounding catchments.
• Outlined State Party's response to all recommendations of the Reactive Mission Report
• Outlined other state of the environment issues (and action strategies) relating to the property such as Crown of Thorns Starfish, Climate Change, Water Quality, Coastal Development, Fishing, Ports and Shipping, Biodiversity Protection, Tourism, Recreation, Island Management, Indigenous issues, Historic Cultural Heritage, Reef Guardian Stewardship, Defence activities Scientific Research, Compliance
• Updated application made pursuant to the EPBC Act.

Following the publication of the *2013 State Party Report*, work continued on both the Strategic Assessment of the GBR and the development of the Queensland Ports Strategy.

Based on the report, a draft state of conservation report on the GBRWHA was prepared by the World Heritage Centre with advice from the IUCN for decision at the World Heritage Committee meeting in June 2013 (Cambodia).

In Decision 37 COM 7B.10 of 2013, the WHC made additional requests and recommendations to the State Party.

Australia's response to the 2013 decision of the WHC was contained in the ***State Party Report 2014*** - clearly the most advanced State Party Report to date and testament the volume of work completed since the original 2011 WHC decision.

Our association is firmly of the belief that significant progress and consistency has been demonstrated since the original WHC decision in 2011 as demonstrated by the following table drawn from the 2014 State Party Report.

Report card: Australia's progress in responding to the 2013 World Heritage Committee decision

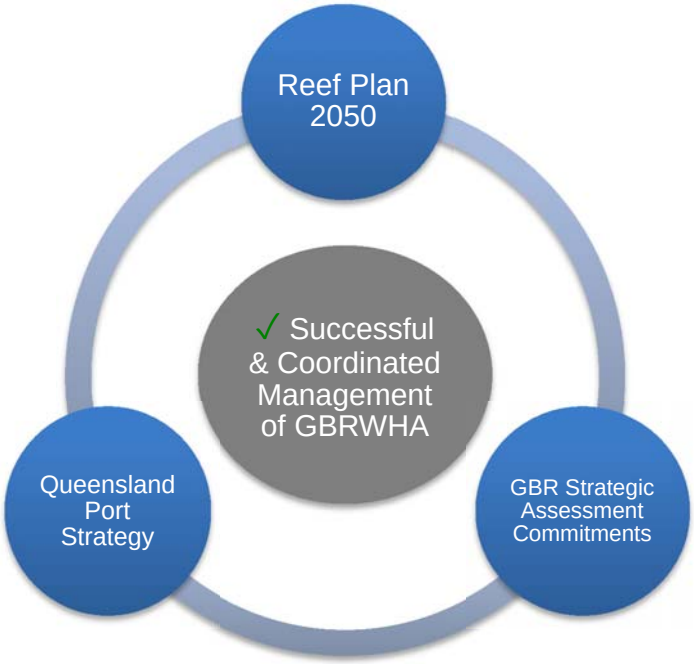
2013 WHC decision (37 COM 7B.10)	Progress since June 2013	Status
3. Strategic assessments and Reef 2050—Long-Term Sustainability Plan	**Strategic assessments** • Draft strategic assessments of the management of the entire property and the adjacent coastal zone were released on 1 November 2013 for public comment until 31 January 2014 and active consultation with key stakeholders and the broader community. • The draft strategic assessments: – are the largest and most comprehensive of their kind ever undertaken in Australia – conclude that the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of the Great Barrier Reef remain largely intact, while some aspects of the overall health of the Reef have declined – propose key areas of strengthened management to reduce the risks to the Reef, halt and reverse decline and restore health and resilience, including but not limited to: • adopting a management framework focused on clear outcomes for the future of the Reef's values and driven by specific measurable targets • developing a cumulative impact assessment policy to provide a transparent, consistent and systematic approach to assessing cumulative impacts across jurisdictions from activities within and adjacent to the region • introducing a net benefit policy to guide actions required to restore ecosystem health • introducing a reef recovery programme to address local issues at a local scale • establishing a reef-wide integrated monitoring programme. **Reef 2050—Long-Term Sustainability Plan** • Work has commenced on the development of the Reef 2050—Long-Term Sustainability Plan for the GBRWHA, and opportunities have been provided for initial public input. • Broad elements proposed for the Reef 2050—Long-Term Sustainability Plan include: – a vision for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area that reflects the diversity of use and interest in the property, protects the Outstanding Universal Value, sustains its integrity and integrates the three pillars of sustainability (environmental, social and economic) – an outcomes framework that includes desired outcomes and targets for protection of Outstanding Universal Value – adaptive management actions to deliver outcomes and targets, primarily drawn from the strategic assessments and focusing on critical areas of new work; these include but are not limited to: • a standard approach on cumulative impact assessment • implementing a policy of net benefit in the assessment of projects or actions • building on successful programmes to deliver a plan for reef recovery – an integrated monitoring and reporting programme to measure the success of the plan – a Reef Trust to improve water quality and coastal habitat, a Dugong and Turtle Protection Plan and crown-of-thorns starfish control	On track

2013 WHC decision (37 COM 7B.10)	Progress since June 2013	Status
4. Managing development in Gladstone Harbour and on Curtis Island	• The Independent Review of the Port of Gladstone was completed and its reports were released in two stages (July and November 2013). Both the Australian and Queensland governments have agreed to consider the review's proposed principles for port optimisation in planning for future port development and operations in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. • The Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership was launched and implemented. Its intention is to bring community, industry, science, government, statutory bodies and management together to maintain and improve the health of Gladstone Harbour. • The draft North-East Shipping Management Plan was released for public comment. The plan sets out Australia's intentions to enhance ship safety and environmental protection and specifically considers further measures to reduce and manage shipping-related risks to the Outstanding Universal Value	On track
5. Water quality	• The Reef Water Quality Protection Plan 2013 (Reef Plan) was released, guided by a revised Scientific Consensus Statement. • The 2011 Reef Plan Report Card was released, showing continued progress towards water quality targets. • The Australian and Queensland governments reaffirmed their commitment to the Reef Plan in December 2013.	On track
6a. No development to impact individually or cumulatively on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property	• No developments that would have an unacceptable impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property have been approved and all decisions made since the release of the draft strategic assessments have been consistent with those assessments. • Projects referred and assessed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) explicitly incorporate Outstanding Universal Value into their decision-making framework. • Any development proposal that could impact on the Great Barrier Reef will only be approved with the most robust conditions that ensure high environmental standards and a net benefit to the property, including protection of Outstanding Universal Value and integrity.	On track
6b. No port development outside existing and long-established port areas	• No new port developments or associated port infrastructure projects have been approved outside existing or long-established major port areas in the Great Barrier Reef Region. • The Draft Queensland Ports Strategy, released in October 2013, proposes to concentrate port development within existing major ports and introduce a statutory requirement for port master planning. • Outside the long-established major ports, the Queensland Government will also prohibit capital dredging for the development of additional deepwater port facilities for the next 10 years within the GBRWHA.	On track
6c. Ensure legislation remains strong and adequate to maintain and enhance Outstanding Universal Value	• Development proposals considered under national and state laws are assessed with enhanced consideration and understanding of the Outstanding Universal Value of the GBRWHA. A suite of products has been produced, including draft EPBC Act Referral Guidelines for the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. • Australia is working to deliver a single streamlined process for environmental approvals, maintaining high environmental standards.	On track
7. Overall protection and management of the property	• Australia continues to make substantial progress in implementing the World Heritage Committee decisions and mission recommendations and is committed to corrective action to maintain the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. • A strong foundation of existing protection and management of the property remains firmly in place and continues to be built upon. • The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is preparing the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2014 for release mid to late 2014.	On track
8. Submit 2014 State Party Report by 1 February 2014	• The 2014 State Party Report has been completed. • The World Heritage Committee has been notified of all proposed developments through regular reports to the World Heritage Centre. • A further State Party Report will be submitted in 2015.	Complete ✓

7 CONCLUSIONS

The QPA welcome the opportunity to provide input into the Great Barrier Reef Senate Inquiry. As a key stakeholder and user within the region, our experience in managing coastal development activities through the World Heritage Area allows informed and experience commentary for the committee's consideration.

Our submission has outlined the large volume of work underway with regards to the GBRWHA and in response to the initial decision of the WHC. It is our very strongly held view that significant progress has been made to date. As the figure below details, the collective effort of *Reef 2050 Plan* (also known as the *Long Term Plan for Sustainable Development*), the implementation of the Queensland Port Strategy and the range of forward commitments made under the Great Barrier Reef Strategic Assessment, will proactively combine to deliver appropriate coordination and careful management of the region well into the future.



GBRWHA Coordinated Management Framework 2014 & beyond

This submission outlines a number of critical points for the committee's consideration:

- As an island-trading nation, our ability to trade goods with the world and grow the Australian economy depends heavily on ports.
- Australia is the 12th largest economy in the world (IMF 2012) and has the fourth largest shipping task.
- Sea transport, via Australian ports, offers the most economical, energy efficient and environmentally friendly transportation for large-scale movements of all cargo types.
- The QPA recognises the significant value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA) as a natural wonder of the world with superlative natural beauty. Accordingly, QPA members are strongly committed to environmental sustainability and ensuring that the World Heritage values in and surrounding port areas are conserved and protected.
- Upon establishment of the GBRWHA in 1981, eleven commercial trading ports were within the boundary of the World Heritage area - a clear recognition that port operations can co-exist within a World Heritage context subject to careful and diligent management.
- Since 1981, continued development at ports within the GBRWHA has been undertaken within the World Heritage framework.
- The GBRWHA is one of the most regulated and best managed marine environments anywhere in the world with port development, shipping and operations needing to demonstrate full compliance with a wide range of regulatory requirements and licensing conditions at all times.
- As part of port operations, dredging of channels and operational areas will always be required.

- Approval for at-sea placement of dredge material only occurs once it has been demonstrated that the material would not lead to toxicity effects and that all alternatives to at-sea placement have been evaluated and not considered viable.
- Dredged material is not placed on habitats of high conservation value and never on coral reefs. However, the placement of clean, naturally occurring marine sediments at-sea may be the best environmental solution for many ports in the GBRWHA.
- Since the original WHC decision in 2011, significant policy development has occurred. Furthermore, a number of future commitments have been identified that will improve the effectiveness of the current policy and legislative system in protecting and managing the outstanding universal value of the GBRWHA (and the environment more generally). These recommended enhancements include:
    - Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership
    - Regional Plans
    - Implementation of the Queensland Ports Strategy
    - Development of Cumulative Impact Assessment Guidelines
    - Reef Trust
    - New offsetting approaches and a Net Benefits Policy
    - Continuation of the Reef Water Quality Protection Program
    - Development of *Reef 2050 Plan* (also known as the *Long Term Plan for Sustainable Development*)

The QPA is of the view that the GBR Senate Inquiry should acknowledge the significant progress being made by both Commonwealth and State Governments and that the current program of activities be endorsed and supported to allow new policy and forward commitments to be properly realised and implemented.

There is no doubt that the Australian and international communities highly value the Great Barrier Reef and that there is a keen desire to see the Reef protected and preserved into the future. QPA members, and more specifically the staff that work in our ports, strongly share these views. As part of the community that lives and works inside the Great Barrier Reef region we have a vested interest in protecting the value and quality of our environment. At the same time, the continued effective operation and growth of our ports as key national assets is essential. Managing, delivering and balancing these multiple aims is the job of governments, industry and the community as a whole.

The QPA urges the Senate Committee to consider this need to deliver balanced outcomes when examining the combination of legislative, policy and management arrangements in place and under development in your review of the effectiveness of management of the Great Barrier Reef.