

Dear Committee Secretary,

Greenpeace Australia Pacific (GPAP) appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the *Inquiry into the Great Barrier Reef 2050 Partnership Program*. GPAP has almost 800,000 supporters and we are part of a global network that uses investigations and non-violent creative confrontation to force solutions to the world's most pressing environmental problems. We are entirely independent and do not accept donations from governments or corporations, relying completely on donations from individuals, with a small percentage coming from trusts and foundations.

The Great Barrier Reef is in dire straits, with 49% of the Reef having died in an eighteen-month period due to two successive bleaching events. Climate change, primarily due to burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas, is the primary threat to the Great Barrier Reef. The vast majority of scientists studying the Great Barrier Reef agree that the Reef will be irreversibly transformed in any world which warms much beyond 1.5 degrees. The impacts that the Reef has experienced to this point come from a world which has warmed by one degree. In order to avoid further damage to the Great Barrier Reef, governments at all levels, businesses and the community will need to take rapid and concerted action to phase out coal by 2030 and decarbonise the Australian economy this half of the century, ensuring a just transition so that coal-impacted communities are not left behind. What that means in practice is that not a single dollar can afford to be wasted in our efforts to protect what is one of the world's greatest natural wonder, of which Australia is a steward on behalf of the global community.

Australia's lead scientific organisations, including the CSIRO, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Parks Authority, the Australian Institute of Marine Science and Australia's universities, play a critical role in Reef-related projects. Indeed, the lion's share of the Great Barrier Reef Foundation's disbursements to date have been to these agencies. It is poor practice to introduce additional administrative costs and overheads by channeling money through a Foundation backed by private interests, especially when a key member of the Reef Trust Partnership Management Committee is also a director of Origin Energy.

We agree with Environmental Justice Australia's assessment that the partnership is procurement rather than a grant, and as such needs to comply with the Commonwealth Procurement Guidelines, which require open tender, due diligence and transparency. There are criminal offences for failure to adhere to these guidelines. The partnership is a critical component of the Reef 2050 plan, and therefore a core function of government. Provision of government services such as the Reef 2050 plan should either be delivered by government or by third parties through an open tender.

The chairman's panel of the Reef foundation includes representatives from some of Australia's largest polluters, including AGL, Qantas, Peabody, Orica, JP Morgan Chase,

and National Australia Bank. With that in mind, it is unsurprising that the Foundation has made statements that are geared at minimising the impact that climate change is having on the Reef. For example, the Foundation states on its website “Scientists tell us the best way to help the Reef withstand and recover from the impacts of climate change – such as coral bleaching – is to reduce all the other stressors threatening the Reef, including water quality and crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks.” While it is critical to tackle the other stressors facing the Reef, the weight of scientific opinion is that the best way to help the Reef is to accelerate ambition on climate change.

The Reef’s corporate partnerships are of questionable utility. For example, the corporate partnership with Qantas is described on the Foundation’s website in the following way: “Airline staff and customers have participated in an immersive ‘on-reef’ experience as citizen scientists, learning about the Great Barrier Reef while also collecting important observations for researchers. These ‘Reef ambassadors’ have then shared what they learnt with their colleagues and are inspired to drive projects in their workplace that reduce Qantas’ electricity, water and waste footprint.” As aviation represents a rapidly growing contribution to climate change, it is key for Qantas to be focussing its efforts on decarbonising the aviation sector, rather than taking their employees on tours of the Reef to promote lower carbon footprints. The description of the Foundation’s work in relation to their existing projects does not inspire confidence in their ability to champion the decarbonisation agenda.

GPAP is concerned at reports that senior members of the Foundation have been hosted at private functions at the prime ministerial residence. These reports raise serious questions about the probity of the procurement, especially given the speed, lack of process and lack of transparency with which the procurement occurred.

Recommendations

- The Foundation should be required to return the funding to the Government for reallocation through a proper process to government agencies with appropriate scientific credentials
- The committee should inquire into whether any laws were breached in any aspect of the procurement
- Future efforts to protect the Great Barrier Reef should focus on accelerating efforts to achieve net zero emissions economy-wide well before 2050, and to phase out coal in favour of renewable energy by 2030

We would be happy to assist the committee further in its efforts to shed light on the process by which this procurement was offered.



Kind regards,

Jonathan Moylan
Campaigner

