



Submission to the Inquiry into the Great Barrier Reef 2050 Partnership Program

Addressed to:

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications

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The Science Party has addressed some of the inquiry's terms of reference as noted below. In summary, the \$444 million in non-competitive funding granted to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation is a grotesque and undemocratic misuse of public funds.

This submission responds to the following points:

- *the proficiency of the Great Barrier Reef Foundation and its capacity to deliver components of the Reef 2050 Plan; and*
- *the process of granting funding to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation for the Great Barrier Reef 2050 Partnership Program, the terms of agreement for funding, and the ongoing administration of funding.*

The process by which the amount of \$444 million was granted to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation (GBRF) violates the Science Party's core principle of *Open and Efficient Government to end corruption and reduce waste*. Transparency and accountability in government are fundamental to democracy; if voters don't get what they vote for (or if they can't tell whether they got what they voted for), then democracy is broken.

The large dollar amount of the grant raises the question: what will the money be used for? In most cases, this question would be answered by the application that won the grant, or by the awardee's previous budgets. In this case, there was no application and the foundation's previous annual budgets are in the range of up to \$10 million. Indeed, the GBRF is reported as being both surprised and overwhelmed by the grant¹.

For context, with regards to the scale of the grant and the processes that usually surround such amounts: the Australian Research Council assigns panels of experts the task of deliberating over many competing applications for a total pool of about \$800 million of funding per year, delivered through a number of programs, and is unable to fund all worthy applicants.

It is simply not acceptable to give such a large amount (or any amount) of public money in such an unprecedented manner, to an organisation that has neither planned nor applied for it.

The absurdity of the grant is heightened by the fact that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA; the agency established by the government to manage and advise on the reef) has an annual budget in the tens of millions, considerably greater than that of the GBRF, but well below the grant amount.

The Science Party hopes that the GBRF will work closely with the more experienced GBRMPA to identify the most effective uses for the funds.

¹ 'Like winning lotto': Reef Foundation minnow braces for \$444m windfall. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/like-winning-lotto-reef-foundation-minnow-braces-for-444m-windfall-20180511-p4zeud.html>