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23 January 2026

Committee Secretary  
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Parliamentary Standing Committee Members

### **Great Barrier Reef Aquarium Redevelopment Project, Townsville Queensland**

We write on behalf of the Board of the Queensland Museum to express support for the Great Barrier Reef Aquarium Redevelopment Project (the Project).

Queensland Museum (QM) is a statutory authority established under the *Queensland Museum Act 1970* (Qld). QM's purpose is to contribute to the cultural, social and intellectual development of all Queenslanders, through the stewardship of natural and cultural heritage collections, internationally recognised research, and public engagement across a state-wide network of museums, outreach programs and major events, including World Science Festival Queensland.

QM has a proud and enduring history with the Great Barrier Reef Aquarium (GBRA) through its northernmost site, Queensland Museum Tropics, Townsville (QMT). QMT opened on 24 June 1987 as part of the bicentennial Great Barrier Reef Wonderland project—the initiative that established what is now known as the GBRA—to acquire and document coral collections from the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) and provide museum services to North Queensland communities. Rapid growth in visitation and collections led to the opening of QMT's current purpose-built, 5,000m<sup>2</sup> facility in 2000, intentionally located adjacent to GBRA as a public investment in a co-located cultural and scientific precinct.

Today, QMT serves as a vital cultural, scientific, and STEM education hub for North Queensland. Its 3,000m<sup>2</sup> public spaces feature galleries that celebrate the unique cultures, customs, and environments of Queensland's north. Behind the scenes, the facility includes 2,000m<sup>2</sup> of collection storage, laboratories, workshops, and collaboration areas. As the centre of QM's maritime archaeology program, QMT houses more than 9,000 artefacts recovered from HMS *Pandora* and other significant shipwrecks from the Great Barrier Reef, offering unparalleled insights into Australia's rich maritime history.

QMT's cultural heritage collections also include significant holdings from the James Cook University (JCU) Anthropology Museum and the Townsville Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Centre collection, which was displaced due to the Project. These collections highlight the enduring spiritual connection of First Nations communities to the Great Barrier Reef, reflecting its importance as a living cultural landscape. Through these collections and ongoing research, QMT shares the profound

influence of the Great Barrier Reef on Australia's identity and heritage, ensuring these stories of resilience, connection, and cultural significance are preserved and celebrated for generations to come.

As one of Queensland's few natural history museums, QMT plays a pivotal role in advancing knowledge and understanding of the marine biodiversity of the Great Barrier Reef. Its collections, including the world's most extensive holdings of marine invertebrates from the Great Barrier Reef, alongside internationally significant hard coral and marine vertebrate specimens, are invaluable resources for assessing the health, resilience, and long-term sustainability of this unique ecosystem.

QMT's expertise in coral identification and characterisation is widely recognised, providing critical insights that underpin reef management strategies and conservation efforts. Its scientists, jointly appointed with JCU, are leaders in marine taxonomy, systematics, evolutionary ecology, and aquatic animal health. Their research delivers essential evidence to key organisations such as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, AIMS, and JCU, supporting informed environmental decision-making, sustainable reef management, and biosecurity measures.

Building on this research excellence QMT and GBRA have operated as complementary institutions for more than three decades, each enhancing the public value of the other. Integrated programming has connected living reef systems with scientific collections and cultural heritage, including joint live-streamed programs, "Open Late" evenings attracting more than 500 visitors per event, joint participation in major community engagement activities such as Our Townsville, Seniors Day and Early Childhood Education Day and collaborative ticketing arrangements enabling seamless access to both facilities.

QMT has continued to support GBRA during its long-term closure, providing opportunities for public engagement through use of the QMT Annexe, participation in World Science Festival Queensland events in Townsville and Gladstone, and other programming initiatives, demonstrating the enduring strength of the partnership even in the absence of GBRA's physical site. However, the closure has had a measurable impact: prior to closure, GBRA attracted more than 100,000 visitors annually and was a significant driver of tourism and city activation. Since then, QMT has experienced an average decline in visitation of approximately 10 per cent, highlighting the interdependence of the two facilities. Looking ahead, the Project is forecast to attract more than 165,000 visitors in its first year and almost 4.5 million from opening to 2055, demonstrating the potential to restore and significantly enhance the economic, educational and cultural benefits delivered through the longstanding QMT–GBRA partnership.

Townsville is uniquely positioned as the only Australian city with an aquarium and museum located side by side, creating an unparalleled opportunity to establish a world-class tourism, education and research precinct that attracts national and international audiences. The immediate proximity of our institutions presents a critical opportunity for collaboration during the redevelopment phase, ensuring exhibitions, programming and visitor services are complementary rather than duplicative. A coordinated approach will strengthen the overall visitor experience, extend dwell time, and maximise the economic, educational, and cultural returns from public investment.

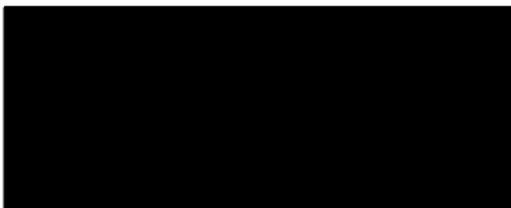
This Project also presents an opportunity for GBRA to collaborate more closely with QMT by utilising existing resources and avoiding duplication of back-of-house facilities. QMT's extensive collections, laboratories, and underutilised collaboration spaces offer a strong foundation to support the Project's research and conservation objectives. By sharing infrastructure and expertise, the parties can enhance research outcomes, improve operational efficiencies, and ensure public investment is directed towards advancing scientific understanding, reef management, and biodiversity conservation. This collaborative approach also opens the door to new interdisciplinary partnerships and the development of innovative digital tools and technologies. These efforts will not only bring the Great Barrier Reef to life for diverse audiences but also position Townsville as a leader in marine science and environmental stewardship, inspiring future generations to protect one of the world's most iconic ecosystems.

QM strongly supports the Project and welcomes the opportunity to be consulted further as it progresses, particularly in relation to precinct planning, public programming and long-term operational alignment.

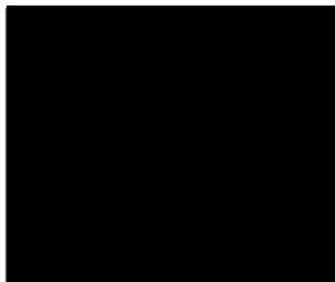
If you have any questions, or require clarification, please do not hesitate to contact Renai Grace, Chief Executive Officer, QM by telephone [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED]

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

Yours sincerely



**Professor Margaret Sheil AO  
CHAIR  
BOARD OF THE QUEENSLAND MUSEUM**



**Renai Grace /  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER  
QUEENSLAND MUSEUM**