

SPECIAL MEETING	
21 OCTOBER 2014	

GREAT BARRIER REEF 2050 LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

J Elphinstone Senior Planning Officer (D#431555)

RECOMMENDATION:

- A. That Council makes a submission to the Department of Environment regarding the Draft for Comment Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan (“Plan”) raising the following issues:**
- 1. The Shire’s coastline abuts the Great Barrier Reef and the Shire’s lands form the Reef’s catchment. Douglas Shire’s Planning Scheme acknowledges the meeting of the two World Heritage Areas and need for balanced development respective of these internationally recognised attributes. The proposed Plan sets a strategic path for future development, inherently the conservation of the reef for future generations and the guidelines for use by current generations who are the custodians of this environment. The Plan should recognise the relationship of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area with the Great Barrier Reef in the higher level components of the Plan, not just as a mention under Appendix C, Coastal Zone Program Commitments, “the Queensland Government will continue to support programs that improve the Outstanding Universal Value of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.”**
 - 2. There should be an inclusion of a requirement for the Queensland Government and Local Governments to support the Great Barrier Reef in the development of local planning schemes.**
 - 3. Council acknowledges its membership of the FNQROC and supports FNQROC in making a submission.**
- B. That consultation surrounding Douglas Shire’s future Planning Scheme should include a consideration of the appropriate recognition of the Plan.**
- C. That Douglas Shire Council notes that the Reef Plan 2050 is an overarching framework for protecting and managing the Great Barrier Reef for the next 35 years and Council looks forward to being involved in the development of a Regional Implementation Plan including Douglas.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This matter as previously reported to the Council’s Ordinary Meeting held 7 October 2014 where Council resolved to defer determination of the matter so that further information could be reviewed by Council officers. A review has been undertaken and this is compiled in the body of this report.

FURTHER REVIEW

UNESCO identifies the integrity of the Great Barrier reef as follows, (UNESCO website)

“Integrity

The ecological integrity of the GBR is enhanced by the unparalleled size and current good state of conservation across the property. At the time of inscription it was felt that to include virtually the entire Great Barrier Reef within the property was the only way to ensure the integrity of the coral reef ecosystems in all their diversity.

A number of natural pressures occur, including cyclones, crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks, and sudden large influxes of freshwater from extreme weather events. As well there is a range of human uses such as tourism, shipping and coastal developments including ports. There are also some disturbances facing the GBR that are legacies of past actions prior to the inscription of the property on the World Heritage list.

At the scale of the GBR ecosystem, most habitats or species groups have the capacity to recover from disturbance or withstand ongoing pressures. The property is largely intact and includes the fullest possible representation of marine ecological, physical and chemical processes from the coast to the deep abyssal waters enabling the key interdependent elements to exist in their natural relationships.

Some of the key ecological, physical and chemical processes that are essential for the long-term conservation of the marine and island ecosystems and their associated biodiversity occur outside the boundaries of the property and thus effective conservation programs are essential across the adjoining catchments, marine and coastal zones.”

The World Heritage Committee meets once a year. UNESCO's website states that the Committee,

“... has the final say on whether a property is inscribed on the World Heritage List. It examines reports on the state of conservation of inscribed properties and asks States Parties to take action when properties are not being properly managed. It also decides on the inscription or deletion of properties on the List of World Heritage in Danger.”

The World Heritage Committee meeting in Doha (Qatar) held on 18 June 2014 deferred for 12 months a decision on whether to inscribe Australia's Great Barrier Reef on the List of World Heritage in Danger. The Committee's concerns over the site relate to planned coastal developments, including development of ports and liquefied natural gas facilities. The Committee has requested Australia submit an updated report on the state of conservation of the site in by 1 February 2015. It is this report the World Heritage Committee will consider at its meeting

The Great Barrier Reef Long term Sustainability Plan has called for the integrity and system functions of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area to be protected by maintaining and restoring the connectivity, resilience and condition of marine and coastal ecosystems. Specifically this is to be achieved by ensuring:

- (a) no further loss of coastal ecosystem extent and function; and
- (b) increasing restoration and reconnection of riparian areas in priority basins adjacent to the southern and central sections of the Great Barrier Reef.

There are a number of actions that have been identified as improving the health of the coastal catchment areas that include:

- (a) improving water quality from all sources within the catchments (urban and rural);
- (b) considering impacts of climate change and mitigating detrimental impacts;
- (c) protecting natural systems and habitats of the coastal zone and protecting biodiversity and ecological systems.

Council would expect to have a further opportunity to be involved in the development of a resourcing strategy and regional and sector based implementation plans.

The Far North Queensland Region Organisation of Councils (FNQROC), of which Council is a member, is preparing a submission that calls for a greater role for local government beyond the role of *“executing state legislation and policy.”* The draft FNQROC submission states,

“Local governments are often at the frontline of management in the protection and maintenance of MNES. Within the Wet Tropics bioregions this relates specifically their role in strategic planning and delivery of pest management, community engagement, water quality improvement, and habitat restoration and revegetation programs. Coupled with their role in urban water management, infrastructure design, disaster response, economic development, climate adaptation and land use planning we are confident they have a much greater role than that outlined in the current report.

Local government are also chartered with the management of a significant system of reserves, esplanades and easements across the GBR coastal zone, much of which contains, connects or has potential to restore MNES.”

Council can actively undertake to protect and improve the Great Barrier Reef by:-:

- (a) establishing partnerships with NRMs, farming, tourism and conservation groups regarding water quality issues that identify priority actions in Douglas;
- (b) preparing a climate change adaptation plan, improvements and upgrades to waste water treatment facilities, reducing urban point source pollution, inclusion of gross litter traps, coastal habitat mapping and protection;
- (c) proactivity engaging businesses and the community in assisting in the care of the Great Barrier Reef; and
- (d) engaging with scientific groups, for example the CSIRO.

The objectives and actions identified above are matters that Douglas Shire Council can undertake irrespective of the reporting to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. Any holistic review and future Council direction needs to be identified in Council’s Corporate Plan Goals and the associated Operational Plan Activities and Initiatives.

The majority of the Shire's economic base is dependent on agriculture, which operates within the GBR catchment areas and tourism, which operates on the Great Barrier Reef and also depends on the World Heritage Wet Tropics. It is important that any programs or support of the Wet Tropics and the Great Barrier Reef recognises the need to sustain the economic bases of the community. The community needs to be economically viable to support these World areas. In compiling the new Planning Scheme Council can set objectives in the Scheme, require new development to achieve a range of environmental values and actively engage with the community to achieve a best practice plan for development and growth having respect to the values and wealth of the natural environment.

CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE:

Council's Regulatory Role is prescribed under the Sustainable Planning Act 2009. This is not reflected in Council's Corporate Plan other than "to manage the rate, extent and impacts of changes to the built environment" to "preserve the unique appeal to the Douglas Shire."

Through the SPA Council develops the Planning Scheme. The Operational plan requires a new draft Scheme to be prepared for State Interest check.

COUNCIL'S ROLE:

Council can play a number of different roles in certain circumstances and it is important to be clear about which role is appropriate for a specific purpose or circumstance. The implementation of actions will be a collective effort and Council's involvement will vary from information only through to full responsibility for delivery.

The following area outlines where Council has a clear responsibility to act:

Regulator: Meeting the responsibilities associated with regulating activities through legislation or local law.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

No further resources are required as Council already undertakes strategic planning in the development of a new Planning Scheme under the Sustainable Planning Act 2009.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS:

None.

INTERNAL/EXTERNAL CONSULTATION:

None. The Plan is open to the public for the whole of the community to comment.

ATTACHMENTS:

Executive Summary and Great Barrier Reef Region Map, Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan.

Attachment 1: Executive Summary, Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan

Executive summary

The Great Barrier Reef is not only one of the natural wonders of the world, it is a significant part of Australia's national identity. It faces a number of pressures and whilst considerable progress has been made over many years to improve the management of the Reef, there is still more to be done. The Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan presents a comprehensive strategy to protect the Reef's values into the future while allowing ecologically sustainable development and use.

When the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1981, it was already a multi-use area supporting a range of commercial and non-commercial activities. The adjacent catchment has undergone significant development including land clearing, agriculture, mining, industrial and urban growth. While some activities (such as commercial turtle harvesting and whaling), have been stopped and others (in the case of drilling for oil on the reef) were never allowed to start, it is clear that the full consequences of this ongoing development are only now being understood and addressed.

Since World Heritage listing, major steps have been taken to protect and manage the Reef. Almost all of the property is now within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and a strict zoning plan is in place. In addition, state and national laws were passed to curb land clearing in catchments and ensure that impacts of new development on the Reef and its Outstanding Universal Value are taken into account through planning systems and environmental assessment processes.

Industries and the community have played their part in protecting the Reef. For example, through the *Reef Water Quality Protection Plan*, improved land management practices by farmers and graziers have been instrumental in halting the long-term increases in sediment, nutrients and pesticides entering the Reef.

Despite this significant progress, the greatest risks to the Reef remain—as outlined in the *Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2014*—climate change, poor water quality from land-based run off, impacts from coastal development and some fishing activities. Many of the activities needed to improve the Reef's resilience have already commenced, and the Australian and Queensland governments agreed with the UNESCO World Heritage Committee that this long-term plan for the Reef was essential.

Equally important are the cultural and economic aspirations of the Indigenous communities of Queensland where strong connections with country continue. The cultural and ecological knowledge of Traditional Owners will be essential in delivering effective long-term management for the Reef.

This Plan identifies the actions that must be taken to protect the Reef for future generations. It brings programs and activities together to ensure greater coordination, efficiency and effectiveness. It describes how all levels of government, non-government organisations, industry and community groups can work together to further strengthen existing and implement new initiatives for the Reef. Integral to this approach will be the development of sectoral-based implementation plans around key human activities. These plans will outline how avoidance, mitigation, management and restoration actions combine to ensure development is sustainable.

In addition, regionally-based implementation plans will be important to address locally significant risks and to encourage community participation.

At the core of the Plan is an outcomes framework to guide the protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef towards an overarching vision:

In 2050 the Great Barrier Reef continues to demonstrate the Outstanding Universal Value for which it was listed as a World Heritage Area and supports a wide range of sustainable economic, social, cultural and traditional activities.

Outcomes, objectives and measurable targets have been identified across seven themes—water quality, biodiversity, ecosystem health, economic benefits, heritage, community benefits and governance—to form a comprehensive management framework to achieve the vision. Where appropriate, they build upon existing targets (such as those in the *Reef Water Quality Protection Plan 2013*) and focus on activities which will safeguard the Outstanding Universal Value of the Reef.

A Reef-wide integrated monitoring and reporting program is being developed to review the success of the Plan and inform adaptive management. It will build upon and coordinate existing monitoring and reporting activities and will be directly linked to the outcomes and targets identified in the Plan.

The Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum, which is made up of Australian and Queensland government ministers with portfolio responsibilities for the Great Barrier Reef, is overseeing the development and implementation of this Plan.

When completed, the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan will become a schedule to the Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement 2009.

Attachment 2: Great Barrier Reef Region Map, Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan



Map of the Great Barrier Reef and catchment indicating the boundaries of the World Heritage Area, the Great Barrier Reef Region, the Marine Park and the Reef catchments.