



Reef 2050 Plan

INDEPENDENT EXPERT PANEL - MINUTES

Date: Monday, 28 February, 10:00am – 3:30pm AEDT

Venue: Videoconference

ATTENDEES

Members

Prof Ian Chubb AC, Chair
Dr Andrew Ash
Dr Richard Brinkman
Prof Damien Burrows
Dr Romy Greiner
Prof Terry Hughes
Prof Catherine Lovelock

Prof Helene Marsh
Dr Russell Reichelt (*apologies 9.30-10.30am*)
Adj Assoc Prof Stephan Schnierer
Dr Britta Schaffelke
Dr Stuart Whitten
Ms Jane Waterhouse
Prof Kerrie Wilson

APOLOGIES

Prof Ove Hoegh-Guldberg

Other attendees

Ms Paula Perrett	Assistant Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE)
Mr Craig Rosner-Moore	Principal Director, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE)
Ms Lucie Blom	A/g Director, DAWE
Dr Will Howard	Assistant Director, DAWE
Ms Milica Milanja	Secretariat, DAWE
Dr Chris Locke	Deputy Secretary, DAWE
Dr Simon Banks	First Assistant Secretary, DAWE
Ms Angela Stokes	Director, DAWE
Ms Elisa Nichols	Executive Director, Office of the Great Barrier Reef, Department of Environment and Science (DES)
Ms Louise Smyth	Director, Office of the Great Barrier Reef, DES
Dr David Wachenfeld	Chief Scientist, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)
Dr Teena Browning	A/g General Manager, GBRMPA
Dr Rachel Pears	Assistant Director, GBRMPA

1. Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair acknowledged the traditional custodians of the lands on which the meeting was held, and paid respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

2. Welcome to Members

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and outlined the main items of business on the agenda, which would include discussion of the upcoming Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Reef, a Reef health update from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, discussion of advice on actions to implement the updated Reef 2050 Plan, a briefing on the new Australian Government Reef investment package and an update on the development of the Scientific Consensus Statement.

3. Conflict of Interest

Panel members declared actual and perceived conflicts and the Chair outlined actions to manage potential conflicts in accordance with the Panel's protocol.

4. Panel Business

The Panel endorsed the minutes of Meeting 21, held on 19 November 2021, and noted they would be published on the Panel's page of the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment website shortly after this meeting.

The Panel noted the status of actions arising from previous meetings. There were no out-of-session items finalised since the last meeting.

The Chair provided members with an update on appointments noting that three members who had been on the Panel since its inception had indicated they wish to step down at the end of their current terms to make way for new members. The Chair and members thanked Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, Dr Britta Schaffelke and Dr Andrew Ash and acknowledged the valuable contribution they had made to the work of the Panel. The Chair advised that a process to appoint members was underway, and that update would be provided once a decision had been made by Ministers.

A members' only session was held as part of this item.

5. World Heritage Committee Update

Ms Perrett provided the Panel with an update on World Heritage Committee matters, including the:

- State Party Report on the State of Conservation of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Centre, which was submitted to the World Heritage Centre on 1 February 2022

- Joint World Heritage Centre and IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission to the Great Barrier Reef, which was expected to take place in late March 2022.

The Panel noted that the State Party Report had concluded that the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) remains whole and intact. Comments from the Panel included that:

- it was increasingly clear that different parts of the GBR were impacted differently, and the scientific community recognises that the GBR is patchier and more heterogeneous than when it was listed
- reporting done at a whole-of-GBR scale means that some of the differences in the integrity of the GBR World Heritage Area can be underreported
- the World Heritage Committee (WHC) regards the GBR as a single property and it must be reported on as such. However, the scale and complexity of the GBR makes this difficult. Reporting at specific points in time does not make sense because the GBR is such a large dynamic system.

The Panel noted that there is no standard or threshold that defines what 'intact' looks like for OUV on the scale of properties such as the Reef.

The Panel noted that the critical message is that the GBR is under pressure regardless of the condition of any part of the system and that there is no sign that the pressure is easing. Members were of the view that the complexity of these issues could be better communicated, and especially to communities located in areas of the GBR that are more at risk of degradation. The Panel suggested it would be useful to meet with GBRMPA in the early stages of developing the next Outlook Report to have a discussion on how to handle OUV in large assets that are vulnerable to climate change, because the climate has changed since these properties were listed by the WHC.

Members noted that they would be provided with more information about the Mission, including potential opportunities for Panel members to meet with the Mission, in due course.

6. State of the Reef – summer update

Dr Wachenfeld provided the Panel with a Reef health update, noting that:

- summer is always a risky time for the Reef and the warming trend is continuing
- Australia has been in a La Nina this summer, which typically means cooler weather with more cloud, wind, and rain – however this has been the warmest La Nina year on record
- After a hot December, milder conditions through January and February have kept sea-surface temperatures about average
- Recent aerial and in-water reports have confirmed mild to moderate coral bleaching happening in multiple regions around the Reef

- most corals are not severely bleached at this point but corals in these areas remain vulnerable if warmer conditions return in March as forecast.

The Panel discussed how corals in affected areas would be affected if the sea surface temperatures remain above average during March. The Panel noted:

- that despite a La Nina summer, the Reef has come dangerously close to a bleaching event and only avoided it so far due to milder conditions in January and February
- an observation that if a bleaching event hasn't occurred recently in a particular region, the corals in that area become more 'naïve' or sensitive to bleaching – whereas if bleaching events happen closer together the corals become more tolerant, and it takes more heat to cause bleaching compared to previous events
- predictions of a potential loss of 99% of corals at 2C of warming may be too pessimistic, because the coral assemblages will adapt – it is possible that we'll still have a functioning GBR at 2C warming but the Reef composition will be different, based on the survival of heat tolerant corals.

The Panel discussed other aspects that could be measured or tracked to get a better picture of the underlying processes and more nuanced stresses that influence coral abundance in the Reef.

Members noted the easiest and most scalable approach is to measure coral cover, but that this does not provide the necessary insight into the fundamental change in coral composition, and the susceptibility and recovery capabilities of the various corals following a bleaching event. It would be possible to get a more nuanced understanding of these dynamics, but it would be a difficult and resource intensive undertaking and very expensive to do at large scale and repeatedly.

7. Reef 2050 Plan – advice on additional actions

The Panel noted requests from Minister Sussan Ley and Minister Meaghan Scanlan, seeking the Panel's further advice on additional actions to implement the updated Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, published in December 2021, and address the concerns of the World Heritage Committee.

The Panel discussed and formulated its advice on suggested actions in the following categories:

- Climate- related activities
- Assessment and evaluation
- Fisheries
- Communications and engagement

Members agreed to write to Ministers with further detail. The Panel's advice is available on the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment's webpage: <https://www.awe.gov.au/parks-heritage/great-barrier-reef/reef2050/advisory-bodies#publications>.

8. Reef investment package

Mr Rosner-Moore provided an update on the recently announced \$1 billion Australian Government Reef Investment Package and the Panel's role in providing strategic advice to assist with prioritising investments delivered under the Reef Trust, as outlined in its Terms of Reference.

The Panel noted advice that the funding had been set up in a manner that will allow time to review and evaluate past and existing projects. The Panel sought further information on:

- whether there was scope to reconsider the proportion of funding allocated to the various components to respond to emerging pressures and issues
- how much of the funding was intended for new vs existing projects?
- who would decide which intervention/restorations are promising and will continue to be funded?
- how might additional funding be leveraged for this work?

The Panel noted that:

- all decisions on Reef Trust investment would be made by the Australian Government Minister for the Environment
- a big part of the assessment and evaluative process will include lessons learned

The Panel noted that it would be consulted to help prioritise and maximise the benefit of investment going forward. The Chair requested a short paper for the next Panel meeting seeking the Panel's advice on specific issues, including an indication of if and when there is capacity to review funding.

9a. Role of Australian Chief Scientist in supporting implementation of water quality package

Dr Locke outlined the proposed role of the Australian Chief Scientist, Dr Foley and Queensland Chief Scientist, Professor Possingham in supporting the Panel's work on the development of the 2022 Scientific Consensus Statement (SCS).

The Panel noted that the purpose of engaging the Chief Scientist is not to provide an alternative assessment to the independent and expert advice of the Panel or Reef ISP, but to provide an independent view on opportunities to strengthen and improve outcomes and stakeholder confidence in the process. An independent probity advisor will also provide advice for the project.

The Panel noted the update and sought advice on:

- whether there was a need to change governance arrangements to enable the involvement of Chief Scientists

- how the arrangements to involve the Chief Scientists would operate in practice, including how they would provide advice and participate in meetings.

The Panel noted that the intention was to align engagement to fit within the timeframe for the delivery of the SCS, and that in addition to providing higher-level assurance into the whole SCS process, it was envisaged the Australian Chief Scientist will consider the assurance and governance arrangements for the proposed SCS staged review process and the consensus forming process.

The Panel noted that the respective Chief Scientists were likely to be invited to future Panel meetings as formal observers to SCS items.

9b. Scientific Consensus Statement update

Ms Waterhouse provided the Panel with an update on the development of the 2022 Scientific Consensus Statement (SCS).

The Chair noted that Ms Waterhouse would present the item and answer questions. However, as the Science Coordinator for the 2022 SCS, it was agreed that to avoid any potential conflict of interest, she would leave the meeting when the discussion of the peer review process began.

The Panel noted the list of questions discussed at the previous IEP meeting, the proposed authors who will frame the synthesis of evidence for the 2022 SCS, and the approach to the evidence synthesis method.

The Chair noted that C2O Consulting were seeking nominations for Panel representatives to contribute to two small working group to progress (1) the options for peer review of the 2022 SCS and (2) the consensus options. Panel representatives will be agreed out of session.

The Panel discussed the update, including:

- the complexity of incorporating scientific evidence as well as Traditional Owner and broader knowledge
- how to navigate the involvement of the Chief Scientists, including their participation in working groups and potential conflict of interests
- the working group progressing consensus options should address issues around uncertainty and report back in a paper at the next Panel meeting.

Members discussed the potential involvement of stakeholders in the working groups, noting that:

- the team working on the SCS have reviewed the senate inquiry in detail and tried to address issues that have been raised previously and the characteristics that were criticised by stakeholders in the past
- the Reef 2050 Advisory Committee stakeholders should be engaged in the consultation and informing process, but not involved in the development – it is important to ensure there's an information exchange so there are no surprises

Ms Waterhouse left the meeting.

The Panel turned to discussing how the peer review process should be managed.

For the first part of the peer review (the review of responses to each question) the Panel agreed that C2O should not undertake selection of reviewers on its own. The Panel suggested the following framework for review:

- There should be a small group (possibly 6 members) established with functions akin to a 'editorial board' of a journal, with the specific task of securing independent peer reviewers, but they can be part of the editorial board
- C2O should have two members on that 'board'
- The remaining two members would have knowledge of the material but not be conflicted by their participation in the particular matter under review
- The Chief Scientists of Australia and Queensland would have a role.

The Panel noted that the second stage of the peer review (the eminent review) is already going to be conducted independently.

10. Update from Reef Water Quality Independent Science Panel

The Panel noted the report from the Chair of the Reef Water Quality ISP on its November 2021 meeting.

11. Update from Reef Water Quality Independent Science Panel

The Panel noted that a communique would be finalised out of session and released on the Department's [website](#).

The Panel noted proposed timing for remaining Panel meetings in 2022 with the next meeting proposed for July, and a further meeting in November. The Panel noted that the secretariat would identify a range of dates out of session and liaise with the Chair and members before selecting final dates.

The Chair and members again thanked outgoing members Dr Schaffelke, Professor Hoegh-Guldberg and Dr Ash for their contribution.

The Panel did not raise any other business.

The meeting closed at 3.30pm.