

GREAT BARRIER REEF MINISTERIAL FORUM

Communiqué

11 December 2012

Australian Government and Queensland ministers responsible for the Great Barrier Reef have reaffirmed their commitment to work together to tackle the long-term challenges of managing the reef.

At the 35th meeting of the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum in Brisbane, the Ministers discussed the positive progress of the joint Strategic Assessment of the Great Barrier Reef and the Australian Government's proposed response to the 2012 World Heritage Committee decision on the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

The meeting, chaired by Federal Environment Minister, Tony Burke, canvassed a broad range of issues including new scientific and management practices to help maintain the outstanding universal value of this iconic site.

Ministers agreed on directions being taken to avoid the reef being overwhelmed by pressures such as coastal development and declining water quality and highlighted the importance of stewardship programs in improving the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

Australian Government Ministers attending were Minister Burke and Tourism Minister Martin Ferguson, Queensland ministers attending were Andrew Powell, Queensland Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Andrew Cripps, Queensland Minister for Natural Resources.

Joint Field Management Program

The joint Field Management Program plans and executes field operations in the Commonwealth and State marine parks and on island national parks within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. It aims to maintain well-functioning marine and island ecosystems, through the delivery of practical on-ground actions.

Under the Intergovernmental Agreement, funding for field management is shared between the two governments on a 50:50 basis. The Australian and Queensland governments have confirmed their ongoing commitment to support joint field management activities.

In addition to the core funding, both governments have confirmed their commitment to replacing the program's aging major long distance monitoring and compliance vessel.

Reef water quality protection plan

The Reef Water Quality Protection Plan (Reef Plan) was established in 2003 and includes quantitative targets to halt and reverse the decline in water quality.

The Forum noted the annual report from the Chair of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan Partnership Committee and agreed that the two governments will work towards updating this successful plan by July 2013.

Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)

The concept of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) is central to the way the World Heritage Convention is implemented.

At its 36th meeting in June 2012, the World Heritage Committee requested that Australia establish the OUV of the property as a clearly defined and central element in the property's protection and management system.

Ministers noted the recommendation and agreed that the Australian and Queensland governments will continue to work together to meet this recommendation, including through the strategic assessment and other environmental assessment processes.

Ministers also noted the actions currently being undertaken to further define and incorporate OUV into the protection and management systems for the property.

State Party Report

Australia will submit an updated State Party Report on the state of conservation of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, to the World Heritage Centre by 1 February 2013, for consideration by the Committee at its next meeting in June 2013. Ministers noted that the State Party Report is being prepared and will be submitted to the World Heritage Centre by 1 February 2013.

Progress against World Heritage Committee decisions

Ministers noted the progress and scope of the comprehensive strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage property and the expected timeframe for completion.

Ministers agreed that the Australian and Queensland governments will work together to scope a long term plan for the sustainable development of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area informed by the comprehensive strategic assessment, and report to Ministers in March 2013.

Conservation targets

Ministers agreed the Australian and Queensland governments would jointly develop an outcomes-based framework to provide a systematic process for continual improvement to the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area to include targets to be monitored, reported and adapted over time.

This framework will initially identify agreed outcomes, targets and activities that contribute to protecting the Outstanding Universal Value of the property and identify gaps and trends where new outcomes and targets may direct future management efforts.

Progress on this task will be reported to the next Forum in 2013.

About the forum

The Australian and Queensland Governments have been working together for the long-term protection and conservation of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park since its inception in 1975.

The role of the Ministerial Forum is to facilitate and oversee the implementation and achievement of the objectives of the 2009 Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement.

The agreement aims to ensure an integrated and collaborative approach to manage marine and land environments within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

The participants in the forum included: Federal Minister for Environment, Tony Burke, Federal Minister for Tourism, Martin Ferguson, Queensland Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, Andrew Powell, Queensland Minister for Natural Resources, Andrew Cripps, Queensland Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, John McVeigh and Queensland Minister for National Parks, Steve Dickson.