

# Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and Adjacent Coastal Zone Strategic Assessment

## Fact Sheet



Flood plume from Maria Creek, Kurramine. Photo: Commonwealth of Australia (GBRMPA)



Australian Government  
Great Barrier Reef  
Marine Park Authority



Australian Government  
Department of Sustainability, Environment,  
Water, Population and Communities



Queensland  
Government

# Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and Adjacent Coastal Zone Strategic Assessment Fact Sheet

## Have your say about the draft terms of reference for two strategic assessments under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Public comment is invited on the draft terms of reference for two strategic assessments under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

The two assessments comprise a comprehensive strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and will assess the potential impacts on matters of national environmental significance (MNES) from:

- the management arrangements for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (led by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA); and
- the implementation of the Queensland coastal management, planning and development framework (led by the Queensland Government).

The terms of reference outline the requirements for the preparation of a strategic assessment report for each of these assessments.

This document provides supporting information for individuals or organisations wishing to learn more about the assessments and who is considering making a submission on the draft terms of reference.

## Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is one of the world's most treasured natural wonders and is internationally renowned for its outstanding biodiversity and beauty.

The reef is a multiple-use area supporting a range of activities and industries, such as tourism, fishing, boating and shipping. Its adjacent catchments also support many communities and diverse industries that generate more than \$40 billion annually. The region is critical to the economic and social well-being of more than one million Australians.

The Australian and Queensland governments are committed to ensuring the Great Barrier Reef retains the values for which it was declared a World Heritage area and that it continues to be one of the best managed marine protected areas in the world.

## Proposed strategic assessment

The Australian and Queensland governments are working together to undertake a comprehensive strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and the adjacent coastal zone.

The comprehensive strategic assessment will help identify, plan for and manage existing and emerging risks to ensure ongoing protection and management of the unique environmental values of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and adjacent coastal zone. This will be achieved by:

- investigating the adequacy of the existing management arrangements for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area; and
- assessing current and future planned development in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and the adjacent coastal zone and analysing its likely direct, indirect and cumulative impacts.

## What is a strategic assessment?

A strategic assessment is a process carried out under the EPBC Act to undertake a landscape scale assessment looking at a region, a series of proposals, or a plan or decision-making process, rather than project-by-project assessments. The EPBC Act protects a range of MNES, including the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

In normal project-by-project assessments, development proposals are considered individually through existing local, state and Australian Government planning and environmental approval processes. In contrast, strategic assessments look at the overall picture of how a series of proposals, or the planning framework itself, will affect MNES on a larger scale and over a longer period. This longer term view helps assess the cumulative impact of a series of individual developments or the overall implementation of a plan.

As well as helping to protect Australia's unique biodiversity, strategic assessments also benefit the community, developers, industry and government by streamlining approval processes for specified types of development and providing long-term certainty about what kind of development is permitted.

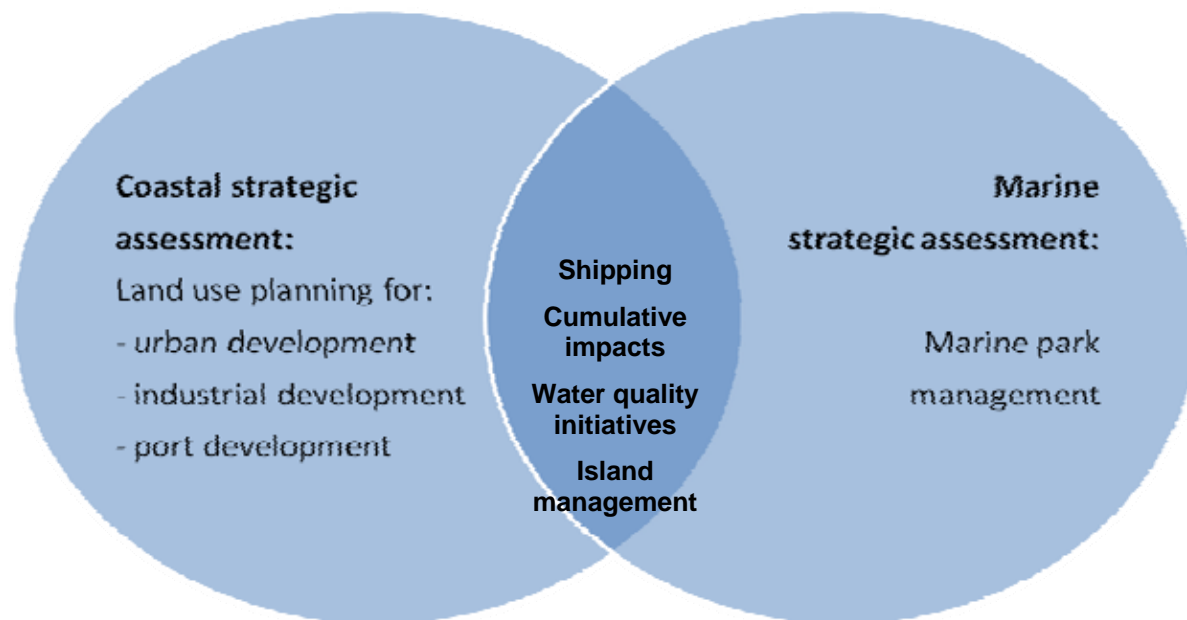
## Components of the comprehensive strategic assessment

There are two key components of the comprehensive strategic assessment—a marine component and a coastal component. The marine and coastal ecosystems are intrinsically linked and their function is inter-related. Together these components will form a comprehensive strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and the adjacent coastal zone.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority will lead the marine component which will look at the arrangements in place to manage and protect the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

The Queensland Government will lead the coastal component which will look at coastal development such as planning for urban, industrial and port development and the processes and management arrangements in place to ensure development occurs sustainably and does not impact unacceptably on MNES.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Queensland Government will work together to analyse impacts at the marine–coastal interface from activities such as shipping, water quality management in reef catchments and island management.



## **What will be considered in the assessments?**

Strategic assessments analyse plans, policies or programs to determine how well these processes protect MNES and how, if necessary, they could be improved. Planning, policy and regulatory arrangements for a number of types of development will be considered, including:

- the full range of activities in the marine park
- water quality policies and controls
- national parks and protected areas
- development within the coastal zone, including urban, island, marina and aquaculture development
- industrial development
- port development.

The plans, policies and programs to be considered in any strategic assessment are collectively known as the 'program'. Further information on the scope of the programs being assessed for the coastal and marine strategic assessments can be found with the terms of reference.

Planning and decision making for development outside the strategic assessment area, such as agriculture, mining and dams, is not included, except in relation to a consideration of broader cumulative impacts on protected matters within the strategic assessment area. Development outside the strategic assessment area will continue to be assessed through conventional assessment and decision-making processes, including under the EPBC Act where necessary.

## **What types of impacts will be considered?**

Impacts on the following MNES protected under the EPBC Act will be considered in the strategic assessment:

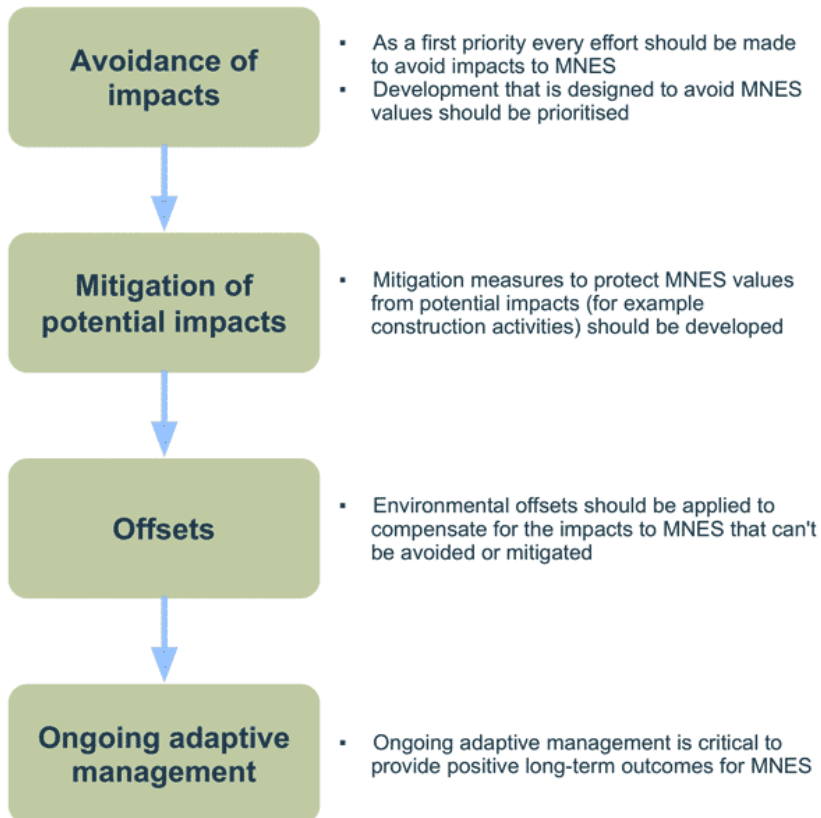
- World Heritage properties (e.g. Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and parts of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area)
- National Heritage places (e.g. Great Barrier Reef and parts of the Wet Tropics)
- wetlands of international importance (e.g. Bowling Green Bay, Shoalwater and Corio Bay)
- listed threatened species and ecological communities (e.g. green turtle, littoral rainforest and coastal vine thickets)
- listed migratory species (e.g. dugongs, migratory seabirds)
- Commonwealth marine area (i.e. waters beyond the State limit)
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

## **How will impacts be analysed?**

The strategic assessments must identify direct, indirect and cumulative impacts and then assess how these are avoided, mitigated or offset in order to determine whether the respective programs effectively protect MNES. The strategic assessments will also outline adaptive management arrangements including the responsibilities for resourcing, monitoring, evaluation and compliance.

The terms of reference for the assessments outline in further detail the requirements for identifying and analysing potential direct, indirect and cumulative impacts, taking into account issues such as knowledge gaps and scientific uncertainty. A science framework will be established early in the strategic assessment process which will outline the various methods to be used in assessing impacts, particularly cumulative impacts.

Consideration of climate change and other long term influences on impacts will also be incorporated into the strategic assessments.



### What is the geographic area covered by the strategic assessments?

The strategic assessments cover:

- the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, including all islands
- the coastal zone adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef, including Queensland waters, and adjacent inland areas (5 km inland or 10 metres AHD contour, whichever is further)
- areas of the Great Barrier Reef catchment to the extent that water quality management arrangements apply.

The area of the strategic assessments is shown overleaf.

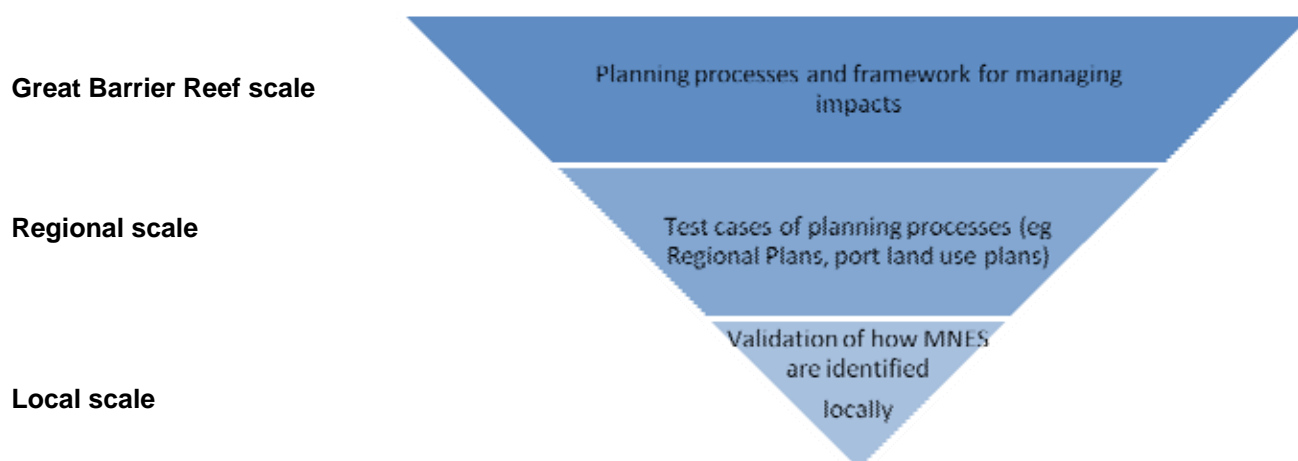


## Managing complexity and scale

The strategic assessments of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and adjacent coastal zone are the largest and most complex undertaken to date under the EPBC Act. Because of this, it will not be possible to look at every single MNES at a local scale.

Instead, a tiered or hierarchical approach will be used. The assessments will look at the systems and processes in place to identify and manage impacts on MNES that may arise under existing plans, policies, and programs. The assessments will also look in more detail at specific locations and initiatives as a means of demonstrating the effectiveness of the management framework in protecting environmental values at a local scale.





### How will cumulative impacts be considered?

Cumulative impacts will be examined in relation to the planning framework for defining urban and industrial footprints and marine park zoning schemes, and at a more detailed level in a number of case studies.

The Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and adjacent coastal zone contain a range of unique environmental values from the terrestrial zone through to the marine ecosystem. For many of these values, there is a high degree of variability in terms of the level of information and data to support our understanding.

As a result, a suite of tools will be used to assess the cumulative impacts on these values. A science framework will be agreed at the outset to ensure both strategic assessments are utilising the full range of available data under a consistent risk based framework.

Environmental values	Tools for assessing impacts
Listed species (e.g. terrestrial flora)	Mapping/GIS
Listed species (e.g. littoral rainforest and coastal vine thickets)	Distribution/habitat and risk assessment
Wetlands	Mapping/GIS
Water quality	Quantitative modelling of pollutant loads
World Heritage values	Risk assessment (i.e. similar to the Great Barrier Reef Outlook report)

### What will this mean for future development?

If the Australian Government Minister for the Environment is satisfied that processes in place adequately protect MNES, he may then endorse the program and approve certain classes of action or types of development occurring in accordance with the program. Such an approval would allow activities under the program to proceed without the need for further federal approval of individual proposals. This can save up to 12 months in approvals for complying projects, while still maintaining the appropriate environmental protections.

Strategic assessments may also include recommendations for changes to the program if the assessment identifies that MNES are not adequately protected. These recommendations are taken into account by the minister in making a decision on whether or not to endorse the program.

## **What happens to development in the meantime?**

The strategic assessment does not affect any development approvals already granted under the EPBC Act, or the assessment and approvals process for new proposals referred prior to its completion.

Proponents are not prevented from referring actions to the Australian Government in the normal way while the strategic assessment is being undertaken. Proponents who refer an action during this period will be expected to meet a high standard of assessment in terms of the level and rigour of information provided, including the consideration of cumulative impacts. This will ensure project-by-project assessments that occur during the strategic assessment period are managed appropriately and will not compromise the strategic assessment process.

## **How can you get involved in the strategic assessment?**

There are a number of opportunities for the public to engage in the strategic assessment process. Members of the public can provide comment on the draft terms of reference for the two strategic assessments.

Public comment will also be invited on the respective programs and draft strategic assessment reports to be prepared by the GBRMPA and the Queensland Government.

## **How to have your say on the terms of reference**

To provide comments on the draft terms of reference for the marine component of the strategic assessment being led by GBRPMA, visit <[www.gbrmpa.gov.au](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au)>.

To provide comments on the draft terms of reference for the coastal component being led by the Queensland Government, visit <[www.derm.qld.gov.au](http://www.derm.qld.gov.au)>.

Please note: public submissions will be considered and taken into account for the purposes of finalising the terms of reference for the two assessments.

Public submissions will be collated by GBRMPA and the Queensland Government. Where the issues raised relate to the other agency's assessment, the submission will be forwarded to that agency.

Copies of all submissions will then be provided to the Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPAC), which is responsible for the administration of the strategic assessment process.

Public submissions will be subject to relevant laws governing privacy and disclosure of information, such as freedom of information legislation.

## **Further information**

Further information for the strategic assessments can be found at the following websites:

- for the marine strategic assessment, visit the GBRMPA website <[www.gbrmpa.gov.au](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au)>
- for the coastal strategic assessment, visit the Department of Environment and Resource Management website <[www.derm.qld.gov.au](http://www.derm.qld.gov.au)>
- for general strategic assessment information, visit the SEWPAC website <[www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au)>.