Ecologically sustainable development of ports and shipping

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) is committed to protecting the Great Barrier Reef while ensuring the sustainable development of ports and shipping.

GBRMPA aims to achieve this through a range of management initiatives, through partnerships and in consultation and collaboration with industry, government agencies and other Great Barrier Reef stakeholders.

Protecting the Reef: Comprehensive Strategic Assessment

A key focus for GBRMPA is a joint Australian and Queensland government strategic assessment of the World Heritage Area and adjacent coastal zone under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

The aim is to assess and manage the impacts of actions, including coastal development, on the World Heritage property and other matters of national environmental significance.

The comprehensive strategic assessment presents an opportunity to better address cumulative impacts from multiple developments over a time period.

The strategic assessment is being prepared and will be available for public consultation in 2013.

There are two key components of the strategic assessment — a marine component and a coastal component, both of which are intrinsically linked.

GBRMPA is leading the marine component which is looking at the arrangements in place to manage and protect matters of national environmental significance including the Marine Park and World Heritage Area.

The Queensland Government is leading the coastal component which is looking at coastal developments and planning for urban, industrial and port developments.

It will also examine the processes and management arrangements in place to ensure development occurs sustainably and does not impact unacceptably on matters of national environmental significance.

The two assessments together will form a comprehensive strategic assessment of the World Heritage Area and the adjacent coastal zone and will:

- Investigate the adequacy of the existing management arrangements for the World Heritage Area.
- Assess current and future planned development in the World Heritage Area and the adjacent coastal zone and analyse its likely direct, indirect and cumulative impacts.
- Assess the potential impacts on matters of national environmental significance from the management arrangements for the World Heritage Area and the implementation of the Queensland coastal management, planning and development framework.

GBRMPA 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.

The strategic assessment will help identify, plan for and manage existing and emerging risks to ensure the ongoing protection and management of the unique environmental values of the World Heritage Area, the Marine Park, the adjacent coastal zone and other matters of national environmental significance.

Achieving ecologically sustainable outcomes for ports and shipping

GBRMPA is developing a number of management initiatives that will inform the strategic assessment and establish best practice environmental management to address risks to the values of the Marine Park and World Heritage Area while providing for ecologically sustainable development of ports and shipping.
Working with stakeholders

As part of this process, GBRMPA is working with stakeholders to promote stewardship in environmental management, including the development of innovative management tools and incentives for the adoption of best practice environmental management.

Management initiatives

Management initiatives will include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Working in partnership with North Queensland Bulk Ports (NQBP), key stakeholders and Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPaC) to assess proposed developments in the Port of Abbot Point area to examine the cumulative impacts of their proposed activities.

- Identifying and engaging with all port-related stakeholders and initiate an improved memorandum of understanding and develop best practice port management guidelines.

GBRMPA will also develop industry-specific position papers, including shipping and ports. The aim of these position papers and guidelines is to establish ecologically sustainable management frameworks and incorporate best practice management techniques to minimise environmental impacts from ports and shipping.

- Developing guidelines for hydrodynamic modelling for dredging projects to provide a framework for effective application of modelling in the Marine Park and to assist in the prediction of potential impacts associated with dredge plumes.

- Undertaking targeted research projects (funded through the Australian Government’s Sustainable Regional Development program) to address key knowledge gaps relating to ports and shipping.

Studies will examine ways to improve management of dredge material disposal in the Great Barrier Reef Region and identify the impacts and effective management strategies associated with offshore ship anchorages in the World Heritage Area. The outcomes of this research will inform the strategic assessment.

- Working closely with AMSA, other government agencies and industry stakeholders to prepare the North East Shipping Management Plan to assess the effectiveness of current shipping safety measures and identify additional or enhanced measures that may be needed in the future.

The plan will focus on issues directly related to the safety of shipping such as navigation, routeing, water space management as well as issues that prevent or mitigate ship-sourced pollution.

GBRMPA intends to actively work with our stakeholders including the ports and shipping industries, DSEWPaC and other Australian and Queensland government agencies to develop initiatives and innovative management tools to ensure that ports and shipping are sustainable in the Great Barrier Reef and that the Reef is preserved now and in the future.

Further information:
GBRMPA Ports and shipping team
ports@gbrmpa.gov.au or (07) 4750 0700