

# **GREAT BARRIER REEF OUTLOOK REPORT**

## **LMAC CHAIRS' OUTLOOK WORKSHOP**

Held as part of the Annual Local Marine Advisory Committees Chairs' Meeting  
31 May – 1 June 2008

### **Background**

Under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is required to prepare an Outlook Report for the Great Barrier Reef every 5 years, with the first Report due to the Minister for the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts by 30 June 2009. The Act specifies eight assessments that must be undertaken as part of the Report.

The Local Marine Advisory Committees (LMACs) and Reef Advisory Committees have been engaged during the development of the Outlook Report, especially in the process of identifying and prioritising pressures on the Great Barrier Reef. The annual meeting of the LMAC Chairs and other LMAC representatives was used as an opportunity to further engage on development of the Outlook Report.

### **Purpose**

The aims of the Outlook Workshop component at the LMAC Chairs' Meeting were to:

- Inform LMAC Chairs and other LMAC representatives about progress with, and current agency thinking about, the Outlook Report;
- Provide meeting participants with an opportunity to workshop and share their perspective on the 'outlook' for the Great Barrier Reef and on management effectiveness; and
- Assist the GBRMPA to capture regional information about the Great Barrier Reef to assist with preparation of the Outlook Report.

### **Program**

Participants were initially provided with background information about the Outlook Report and its legislative requirements. Information on the current state and likely trends for the Great Barrier Reef was provided to participants through a series of presentations, structured around broad groupings of the assessments required under the Act:

- Biodiversity, ecosystem health and resilience
- Commercial and non-commercial use
- Risks and factors affecting the values, focussing on:
  - Population growth and economic development as drivers
  - Climate change
  - Water quality – land-based runoff and marine-based pollutants
  - Extraction of natural resources
- Current management

Participants then workshopped questions about the effectiveness of management and the outlook for the Great Barrier Reef. This work was undertaken in two panels, structured to ensure a wide geographical spread on each panel.

## **Outcomes**

### ***Management Effectiveness***

Each panel identified the aspects of overall management for the Great Barrier Reef that they considered were working well and those that were not working well for each of the principle management programs. The broad outcomes were:

- *Biodiversity protection.* The new Zoning Plan had worked well in protecting biodiversity and the Reef Guardian programs and education were successfully contributing. There was concern about the protection of some species, and the prevention and control of invasive species.
- *Water quality – land based.* Some individuals and organisations are successfully improving their planning and land management practices. There are concerns about the enforcement of urban development guidelines, urban encroachment and the lack of resources for individuals to implement improvements.
- *Fisheries.* The regulation of commercial fishing (including enforcement) is working, but is not perfect. There is little information on which to base the management of recreational fishing. There is wastefulness in the bycatch of fishing activities. The right to fish in the Great Barrier Reef is available to all.
- *Marine tourism.* Tourism management is generally successful (with some concerns about the potential for further growth).
- *Climate change.* Education and awareness raising are highlighting the issues associated with climate change, but there was a slow uptake of changed practices (both by the government and Reef users). Climate change was considered to be a highly unpredictable future pressure that could radically damage the health of the Reef ecosystem and associated social and economic values.
- *Coastal development.* The management and control of coastal development was of strong concern, including issues of community consultation, consideration of long-term impacts, coordination between government agencies and enforcement. The concerns expressed were beyond environmental impacts on the Reef and were much more broadly about environmental and social sustainability of current practices.
- *Ports & shipping.* Ballast water and pilotage management arrangements are generally working well. However, there are concerns about siltage and solid waste disposal, introduction of pests, marina development controls and the impact of port expansions.

### ***Outlook for the Great Barrier Reef***

Each panel was asked to consider the outlook for the ecosystems of the Great Barrier Reef in 5 years and 20 years and why, based on their analysis of the information provided in the presentations and their own knowledge.

In the range *Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor* and *Very Poor*, both panels considered that the ecosystem of the Great Barrier Reef would likely be rated as *Good* at present and predicted that, in 5 years time, it would be *Good* or *Good to Fair*. This assessment was based on considerations such as:

- Most problems have been recognised and we have already started remedial actions in relation to most of these.
- The effects of climate change are the big unknown, but are not likely to be catastrophic in the next 5 years (although there may be more bleaching).

- Coastal development will continue to be a problem.
- Land-based runoff will still be an issue, even though strong progress will have been made.
- Education programs are likely to be maintained and continually improved to ensure that communities are more environmentally aware and responsible.

The panels considered that the outlook for the Great Barrier Reef in 20 years would be *Fair to Poor*. This assessment was based on considerations such as:

- There is a long lag time in turning around climate change and the impacts are likely to get worse before they get better.
- It is likely that Reef water quality will have started to improve
- Population increases, especially in coastal areas with unchecked coastal development, will put more pressure on the environment.
- People will want improvement in the condition of the Great Barrier Reef and will work towards achieving it.
- Public pressure on Governments will increase as public awareness increases and this will likely prompt Governments to take positive action.

Participants suggested that the outlook for the Great Barrier Reef could be significantly improved if:

- Land-based activities were better controlled.
- Legislation was better enforced.
- There was 'all-of-catchment management'.
- There was better continuity of funding.
- There was more education to build awareness of the Great Barrier Reef and that what each of us does determines the future of the Great Barrier Reef.

### ***Feedback on the Workshop***

All participants were asked to provide feedback on both the content and structure of the workshop. Comments made included:

- Interaction and opportunity to have a say has been good.
- Well run, factual, we remembered the information presented.
- The workshop was preaching to the converted, a wider audience would not have the same interest or understanding.
- The Report needs to highlight information gaps to ensure that future outlook are able to be better predicted. Some of the information presented appeared to be dated.
- The workshop wasn't able to look at regional differences (people are more likely to engage on local matters).
- Need to provide feedback to each LMAC about the workshop and its outcomes.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority  
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