

The Babinda Statement of Intent

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Preamble

A cross-sectoral workshop addressing management issues relating to wetlands adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef was held in Babinda, north Queensland, 25–26 September 1997. The workshop was sponsored by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

The non-government participants included representatives from:

The Queensland CANEGROWERS, Sunfish, the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Queensland Commercial Fishermen's Organisation, the Girringun Reference Group, the Mackay CANEGROWERS, the Babinda CANEGROWERS, the North Queensland Conservation Council, World Wildlife Fund, the Regional Organisation of Councils, the Queensland Conservation Council, the Cairns and Far North Queensland Environment Centre, the Banana Growers, the Australian Coral Reef Society, the Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators, the Pro Guides Association, the Australian Marine Conservation Society, the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Tourism Advisory Group, Reef 2005 and the Gladstone, Port Douglas, Cairns, Mackay, Whitsundays, Townsville, Hinchinbrook, Cooktown and Capricornia Regional Marine Resource Advisory Committees (RMRACs).

Government and institutional representatives included:

Senator the Hon. Ian Macdonald, The Hon. Howard Hobbs, Dr Ian McPhail and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority staff, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Wet Tropics Management Authority, Queensland Department of Environment, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Queensland Department of Natural Resources, Australian Institute of Marine Science, Environment Australia, James Cook University and the Queensland Department of Primary Industries.

The diverse range of opinion represented at the workshop presented a considerable challenge in terms of establishing a consensus on the question of the future of the remaining wetlands adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef and the associated issues of water quality and fish habitat.

The final session focused on a range of possible initiatives. What follows below is a record of the outcome in the form of *The Babinda Statement of Intent*, based on what was recorded by the facilitator, and a compilation of the broadly agreed motions put forward by a number of delegates. It is apparent from subsequent discussions that while on most points there is consensus, some issues remain to be resolved.

Therefore, in recognition of this and in order to maintain the considerable momentum generated by the workshop, the Authority presents the following statement of intent to participants for your consideration and feedback.

Please note, that following discussions with the CANEGROWERS, the Marine Park Authority has received their comments. At their request we have included these, as on a number of points the CANEGROWERS feel that the Authority's record does not accurately reflect what was agreed at the workshop. Their comments are in square brackets following the particular point in question.

It is hoped that similarly to the CANEGROWERS, all participants will provide their comments to the Authority by the middle of November to enable a summary of delegate's

comments regarding *The Babinda Statement of Intent* to be included in the published proceedings of the workshop. In this way the statement becomes:

- (a) a vehicle for a better understanding of the range of opinions regarding wetland protection;
- (b) a focal point for ongoing debate and discussion of this important issue; and
- (c) a mechanism which may facilitate ongoing contact and cooperation amongst participants on the issue of wetlands protection.

The Authority hopes that *The Babinda Statement of Intent* will, over time, yield consensus amongst all participants on a plan of action designed to protect and enhance the remaining wetlands adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

The Babinda Statement of Intent

The following statement is a representative summary of recorded motions, broadly agreed statements and other points of agreement expressed by participants in the final plenary session of the workshop in regard to THE PROTECTION OF THE REMAINING WETLANDS ADJACENT TO THE GREAT BARRIER REEF WORLD HERITAGE AREA:

1. That the remaining wetlands must be preserved.
[The CANEGROWERS recognise the values of all remaining wetlands.]
2. That all pre-emptive clearing should cease as a practice.
[Pre-emptive clearing should not be an advantage in the granting of cane assignment – land suitability will be based on the land in its uncleared state.]
3. That drainage design and associated works be modified to incorporate fisheries habitat values.
4. That the Commonwealth Government should be lobbied to introduce a 150% tax rebate for on-farm works that are beneficial (to wetlands), such as a combination of watercourse stabilisation, restoration or maintenance of riparian strips and wetlands and the establishment of artificial wetlands and lagoons.
5. That local governments should be lobbied to reduce rate charges on land within properties identified by Queensland Department of Environment and Queensland Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries) that remain unproductive for the landholder but are of benefit to the wider community.
6. That the workshop request the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (in partnership with Environment Australia, the Queensland Department of Environment, the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and the Queensland Department of Primary Industries) conduct one- to two-day workshops with each Local Government and relevant regional stakeholder organisations adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef and that these workshops be individually tailored to each area and seek the following outcomes:
 - an assessment of the area of wetlands existing prior to European settlement and the amount lost since that time;
 - an understanding of the values of wetlands to fisheries and related ecosystems,
 - the consequences of wetlands loss;
 - evaluation of the threats to wetlands;
 - a strategy for the restoration of wetlands;
 - recipes and formulas for the conversion of drainage systems to healthy habitats;

- model local laws which local governments could adopt to halt the further loss of wetlands and to address the management of degraded systems;
[The CANEGROWERS do not believe that there was agreement on the concept of 'model local laws'.]
 - funding opportunities to resource local governments to undertake community education and remedial work.
7. A process is required to further resolve outstanding issues and that such a process should be in place before the end of 1997 and should involve the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the other stakeholders.
 8. Finally, it was acknowledged that there are a wide range of human activities which degrade wetlands including urban development, industrial development, port works and reclamation, aquaculture and stormwater run-off.