

ABOUT THIS REPORT

In 2006, the Australian Government resolved that decision making for long-term protection of the Great Barrier Reef should be underpinned by a periodic Outlook Report. The Report would be a regular and reliable means of assessing performance in an accountable and transparent manner and a key input for any future changes to zoning plans and the consideration of broader issues by government.

The *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* was amended in 2007 requiring the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to prepare an Outlook Report for the Great Barrier Reef Region every five years (Appendix 1). The Act stipulates that the Report must be given to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts for tabling in both houses of the Australian Parliament.

This is the first Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report.

Scope of the Outlook Report

The area examined in this Report is the Great Barrier Reef Region as defined in the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*. The Great Barrier Reef Region covers the area of ocean from the tip of Cape York in the north to past Lady Elliot Island in the south, with mean low water as its western boundary and extending eastwards a distance of between 70 and 250km (see Map 1). It includes about 70 Commonwealth-owned islands. However, the majority of islands in the Great Barrier Reef are owned by the Queensland Government or privately and are not included in the Great Barrier Reef Region.

The Region's boundaries match those of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, except the Region also includes the areas around major ports.

The Outlook Report aims to assess all parts of the ecosystem within the Region, including everything

from mangroves and seagrass meadows to coral reefs and the open ocean. For the purposes of this Report all these components are referred to as the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem or simply the Great Barrier Reef.

Where it is relevant to the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem, the Report also looks beyond the boundaries of the Region and includes information about adjacent islands, neighbouring marine areas and the Great Barrier Reef catchment.

The Outlook Report is a summary of the past and present condition of the Great Barrier Reef and presents its possible future. The Act does not provide for the Outlook Report to make recommendations about future protection or management initiatives.



All of the habitats and species of the Great Barrier Reef Region are considered in this Report, including species of conservation concern such as the hawksbill turtle.

¹ Department of the Environment and Heritage 2006, Review of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*, Review Panel Report. Department of the Environment and Heritage, Canberra, Australia.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act sets out what the Outlook Report must contain.

The Outlook Report focuses on all marine areas below low water.



Structure of the Outlook Report

The Outlook Report assesses the current state of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem's environmental, social and economic values, examines the pressures and current responses and finally considers the likely outlook. It is structured around the eight assessments required by the Act, with each assessment forming a chapter of the Report.



Assessment approach

For each of the assessments required under the Act, a set of Assessment Criteria allow an ordered analysis of the available evidence. An Assessment Summary at the end of each chapter summarises the outcomes of the assessment for each criterion considered. A series of grading statements guide the allocation of a grade for each component examined in the assessment, as well as an overall grade for each Assessment Criterion. The grading allocated is a 'grade of best fit', based on a qualitative assessment of the available evidence. The '?' symbol indicates that there is little information available on which to base the grade. The grade allocated is in relation to the Great Barrier Reef on its own, not in comparison to other reefs around the world.

This approach has been developed specifically for the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report to meet the legislative requirements. It is intended that future Outlook Reports will follow the same process so that changes and trends can be tracked over time.

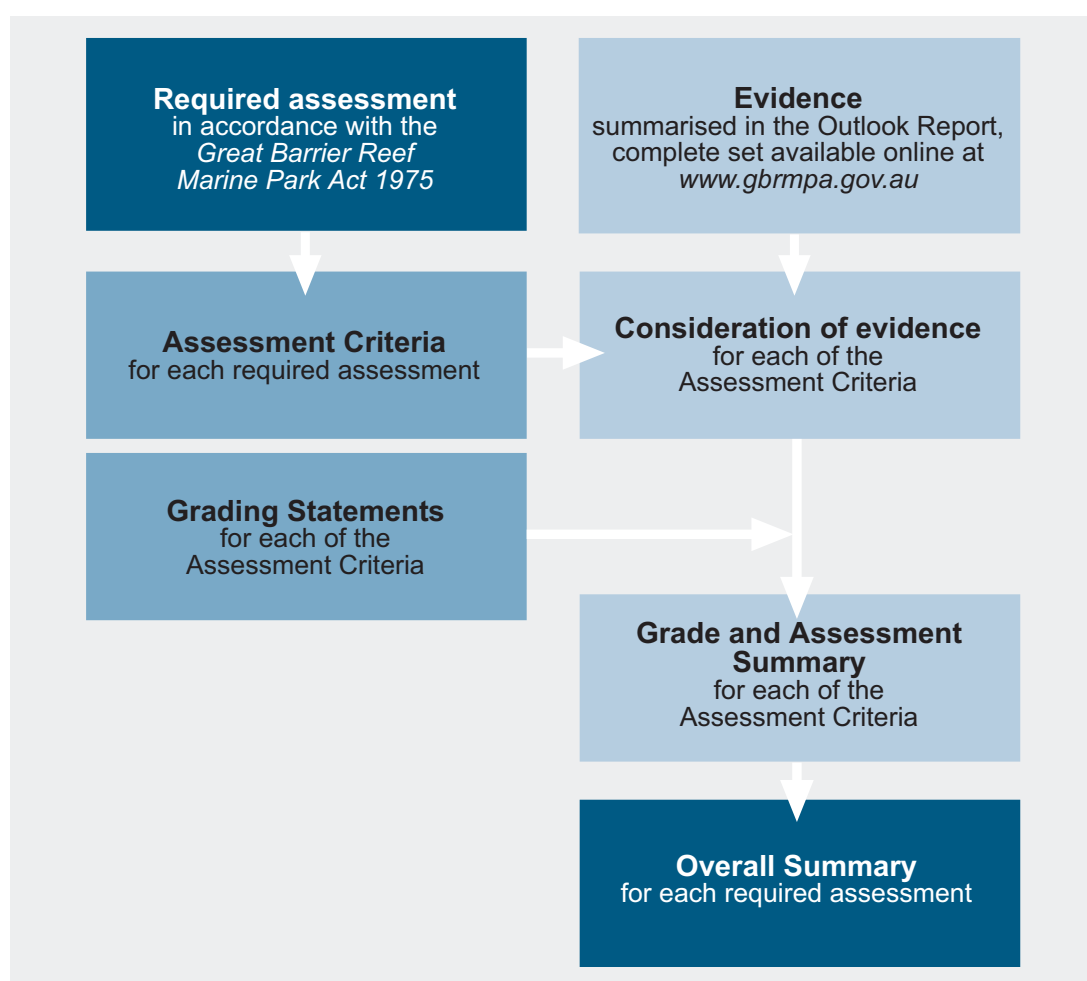
Evidence used

This Outlook Report contains the key evidence for the assessments required under the Act. As it is the first Outlook Report, it also provides contextual information about the Great Barrier Reef, its ecosystem, use and management.

The information featured in the Report is only a small portion of all that is known about the Great Barrier Reef Region. No new research was undertaken as part of developing this Report; rather, the evidence used is derived from existing research and information sources. It was drawn from the best available published science and selected based on:

- relevance to the required assessments
- duration of study
- extent of area studied
- reliability (such as consistency of results across different sources, peer-review and rigour of study).

The required assessments are structured around Assessment Criteria.



The Outlook Report is based on the best available evidence.

You can explore the information used to develop the Outlook Report online at www.gbrmpa.gov.au

The sources of the evidence directly used in each chapter are cited at the end of that chapter.

The complete set of evidence used to develop the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report is available online at www.gbrmpa.gov.au.

The evidence used to develop this Report is the best available up to the end of 2008. In some cases, new information that became available after that date has been included where it was considered to make a significant difference to a key finding of the Report.

Despite the volume of information available, there remain many aspects of the ecosystem, its uses and threats (in particular cumulative and ecosystem effects) about which little are known. Significant information gaps are noted in the text. Information from other parts of the world is included for comparison or illustrative purposes.

Developing the Outlook Report

The Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report has been prepared by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

A number of Australian and Queensland Government agencies, researchers, industry representatives and members of the public contributed to its development (Appendix 2). The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's four Reef Advisory Committees (external experts who provide independent advice on critical issues) and 11 Local Marine Advisory Committees (committees centred on regional centres along the coast) provided advice throughout the Report's development.

Many people and organisations have contributed to development of the Outlook Report.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority held community workshops to learn about changes to the Great Barrier Reef by listening to community members' stories of the past. In addition, an Outlook Forum attended by 42 participants including scientists, leaders from industry, interest groups and the community and government representatives developed likely 'outlooks' for the Great Barrier Reef.

Throughout development of the Report, an Outlook Reference Group comprising eight experts in environmental reporting, protected area management and communication provided advice and guidance on information available, assessment methods and community engagement and presentation.

Two experts in protected area management, monitoring and evaluation, public policy and governance were commissioned to undertake an independent assessment of existing protection and management. Their report forms the basis of the assessment of existing measures to protect and manage the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem (Chapter 6).

Finally, four reviewers appointed by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts independently reviewed the contents of the Outlook Report. These reviewers are recognised national and international experts with biophysical and/or socio-economic expertise and achievements, including conducting high level policy and scientific reviews. Their comments were considered and incorporated where appropriate in finalising this Report.