



Australian Government

Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority

G R E A T B A R R I E R R E E F

OUTLOOK REPORT 2009



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".... for here they are reefs of coral rock, rising like a wall almost perpendicularly out of the unfathomable deep, always overflowed at high-water, and at low-water dry in many places; and here the enormous waves of the vast Southern Ocean, meeting with so abrupt a resistance, break, with inconceivable violence, in a surf which no rocks or storms in the northern hemisphere can produce."

- James Cook, August 1770

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This Report contains photos of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Readers of this report should be aware that, in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, seeing images of deceased persons in photographs may cause sadness or distress and, in some cases, offend against strongly held cultural prohibitions.

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts
Parliament House
CANBERRA



Dear Minister

I am pleased to provide the ***Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2009*** to you as Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts and through you to the Australian Parliament and the people of Australia.

The ***Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2009*** has been prepared by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority based on the best available information. Many people with an interest in the Great Barrier Reef have contributed to its development, including leading Great Barrier Reef scientists, industry representatives and members of regional communities.

This Report fulfils the requirements of Section 54 of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*, namely that the Outlook Report contain assessments of the: current health of the ecosystem within the Great Barrier Reef Region and of the ecosystem outside that region to the extent it affects that region; current biodiversity within that region; commercial and non commercial use of that region; factors influencing the current and projected future environmental, economic and social values of that region; existing measures to protect and manage the ecosystem within that region; current resilience of the ecosystem within that region; risks to the ecosystem within that region and long term outlook for the ecosystem within that region. The contents of the Report were independently peer reviewed.

The legislation requires that an Outlook Report be prepared every five years. This first Outlook Report highlights that the Great Barrier Reef is one of the most diverse and remarkable ecosystems in the world and remains one of the most healthy coral reef ecosystems. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is considered by many to be a leading example of world's best practice management. Many of the management measures employed in the Great Barrier Reef Region and beyond are improving its resilience, for example the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003*.

The Report also highlights challenges for the future, identifying climate change, continued declining water quality from catchment runoff, loss of coastal habitats from coastal development and remaining impacts from lawful fishing and illegal fishing and poaching as the priority issues reducing the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef. It also highlights gaps in information required for a better understanding of ecosystem resilience.

The outlook for the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem is at a crossroad, and it is decisions made in the next few years that are likely to determine its long-term future. Given the strong management of the Great Barrier Reef, it is likely that the ecosystem will survive better under the pressure of accumulating risks than most reef ecosystems around the world.

I commend this Outlook Report to you for tabling in both Houses of the Australian Parliament.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Reichelt".

Russell Reichelt
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

30 June 2009



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The *Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2009* was prepared by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority with assistance and contributions from many others.

A number of Australian and Queensland Government departments and agencies provided information, expertise and comment throughout the development process.

The independent assessment of the existing measures to protect and manage the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem was undertaken by Marc Hockings and Brian Gilligan with early assistance by Bruce Carter.

Many Great Barrier Reef scientists willingly contributed their knowledge and information. J.E.N. (Charlie) Veron undertook a scientific review of the Report and Helene Marsh provided detailed comments on an earlier draft.

Members of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's eleven Local Marine Advisory Committees (Cooktown, Douglas, Cairns, Cassowary Coast, Hinchinbrook, Townsville, Whitsunday, Mackay, Capricorn Coast, Gladstone Region, Bundaberg) and four Reef Advisory Committees (Conservation, Heritage and Indigenous Partnerships; Fisheries; Tourism and Recreation; Water Quality and Coastal Development) provided advice on relevant aspects during the Report's development. A number of scientists, industry leaders, interest group leaders, community opinion leaders and Government representatives contributed opinions and information through an Outlook Forum.

An Outlook Reference Group, comprising Richard Kenchington (Chairman), Mark Burgman (Australian Centre of Excellence for Risk Analysis), Col Creighton (independent consultant), Steve Hatfield-Dodds (Department of Climate Change), Bruce Mapstone (Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre), Sheriden Morris (Reef and Rainforest Research Centre), Peter Oliver (International Water Centre) and Imogen Zethoven (Pew Environment Group) provided valuable advice throughout.

Finally, the contents of the Outlook Report were formally peer reviewed by Richard Beamish (Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada), Neil Byron (Productivity Commission, Australia), William Dennison (University of Maryland, USA) and Terry Hughes (ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, Australia).
