

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
OPENING STATEMENT

My name is Russell Reichelt, Chairman of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

Thank you for the opportunity to update you on the state of the Great Barrier Reef and the management activities of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

First, I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef and their continuing connections to their land and sea country—and pay respect to the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, the Ngunnawal people.

The recent funding announced by the Australian Government is the largest ever single investment in the Great Barrier Reef and comes at a time when the Reef needs it most. This is very welcome news and targeted at projects that can help build the Reef's resilience – water quality improvements, crown-of-thorns starfish control and restoration and adaptation programs.

As part of this announcement, the Authority also received \$42.7 million over five years from 2019-20 for the expansion of our Joint Field Management Program, with an ongoing increase of \$10.2 million per year after that.

This additional funding will enable more Authority staff to be out on the water in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area talking to commercial operators, Traditional Owners and the public, ensuring compliance with reef protection rules, working on island and reef restoration, and responding to incidents such as cyclones and ship groundings, which will support the ability of reefs and islands to recover after disturbance.

The Marine Park Authority already has a strong collaborative partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, who will soon receive a \$443 million grant through Reef Trust. We will continue working with the Foundation to ensure every opportunity is taken to boost reef protection.

On the state of the Reef – we have had no new results from surveys of Reef health since the last meeting of the Committee. We have reported to you

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
OPENING STATEMENT

previously on the significant loss of coral after the bleaching events of 2016 and 2017, and we're keen to see more recent survey results expected in the coming 6 months. These surveys by the Australian Institute of Marine Science will give a clearer picture of areas where recovery may be beginning.

Fortunately, the sea surface temperatures of the 2018 summer have been milder than those two very hot summers. Sea Temperatures have been close to the long-run averages and the reef has avoided another major heat stress event this past summer.

The cyclone season also concluded on 30 April, with only one low-category tropical cyclone in the Great Barrier Reef region. During the summer monsoon season, there were some flood plumes and I understand the Australian Institute of Marine Science will be surveying reefs in June (that is, next month) that may have been flood affected.

In the long run, the steady rise in global ocean temperatures continues to be the single biggest risk to the health of the Great Barrier Reef. We acknowledge the national and international efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement, and I am sure the Committee is aware of the importance of meeting these targets if the health of tropical coral reefs is to be secured.

While this national and global effort is underway, the recent boost to our capability to increase protection measures on the Reef creates very significant opportunities to reduce local pressures and build reef health.

To assist the Committee in relation to Great Barrier Reef matters we have officials present today from the Authority who will be able to provide information on the Authority's expenditure and programs and officials from the Department who will be able to provide information on the Australian Government's Reef Investment, Reef 2050 plan and implementation of the governance review of the Authority.

Thank you.