



Working together for a shared future

10 November 2014

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
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Dear Sir/Madam

Submission to Senate Committee Inquiry into Australia's environment

The Queensland Resources Council (QRC) would like to thank the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications for the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Committee Inquiry into the *Abbott Government's attacks on Australia's environment, and their effects on our natural heritage and future prosperity*.

QRC is the peak representative organisation of the Queensland minerals and energy sector. QRC's membership encompasses minerals and energy exploration, production, and processing companies and associated service companies. QRC works on behalf of members to ensure Queensland's resources are developed profitably and competitively, in a socially and environmentally sustainable way.

At the outset, QRC would like to note our significant concern in relation to the number of recent inquiries, largely repetitious in nature, that have been called by the Senate to examine and re-examine the same, or similar, subject matter as this inquiry. This is of concern in terms of tying up the resources of not only Senate representatives, but also parliamentary time and administration staff and departmental staff, not to mention the resources of peak bodies such as QRC and other interested parties for no practical outcome for the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) or any other part of Australia's environment.

Overarching comments

The Queensland Resources Council (QRC) wishes to provide the following overarching comments in relation to the inquiry, which we have focused on the aspects of the Inquiry relative to the GBR.

The QRC is strongly of the view that a coordinated and consolidated approach is needed to the development of policy, and the management of matters, affecting the GBR. An ongoing partnership approach, involving government, industry and the community working together, will be critical in efforts to restore the Reef and maintain its health into the future. Unfortunately repetitive inquiries such as this do nothing but divert the resources of those most interested in the health of the reef away from concentrating their efforts in such a partnership approach.

Having said this, I will briefly address the following specific aspects of the inquiry, namely points b. and d. of the terms of reference for the inquiry,

b. attacks on federal environmental protection through handing approval powers over to state governments, which have poor track records and recent environment staff cuts;

In this regard, I would draw the Committee's attention once again, to the vast weight of evidence in support of the streamlining of approval process, in terms of both environmental outcome and administrative efficiency. Several key examples are provided below.

The Hawke Review of the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* recommended, in 2009, that the Commonwealth work with the States and Territories as appropriate to improve the efficiency of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regime under the Act, including through accreditation of State and Territory processes where they meet appropriate standards. See <http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/5f3fdad6-30ba-48f7-ab17-c99e8bcc8d78/files/final-report.pdf>

In its review of major project assessment processes last year, the Productivity Commission made specific recommendations for government to continue to strengthen and expand the scope of existing bilateral assessment agreements and to establish a 'one project, one assessment, one decision' framework' by restarting negotiations on bilateral approval agreements. QRC supports these recommendations and the accreditation of standards under such agreements.

See http://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/130353/major-projects.pdf

In fact, the Gladstone Bund Wall Inquiry Report, released in May this year, also found, in reviewing business improvement processes currently on foot, including bringing future approvals for major projects under the 'one stop shop' and focusing on outcomes-based conditions, that –

- *Business processes being implemented by the Department of the Environment are likely to lead to better compliance and enforcement for major projects.* (Finding 35) and that
- *Finalisation of the approval bilateral agreements between the Australian and state governments has the potential to deliver better compliance and enforcement for major projects* (Finding 36).

See <http://www.environment.gov.au/topics/marine/gbr/gladstone-bund-wall-review>

d. undermining Australia's compliance with the World Heritage Convention ... in particular by attacking the Great Barrier Reef.

In relation to the terms of reference point d. QRC wishes to draw the Senate Committee's attention to the information provided previously by QRC to the Committee on 2 June 2014 in its submission to the (yet another) recent Senate Inquiry into the management of the GBR. The QRC's Submission to the GRB Inquiry is attached for your reference and the information contained within therefore forms part of QRC's submission to this current 'Australia's Environment' Inquiry.

As evidenced by its World Heritage listing and recognition of its outstanding universal value, the GBR is unquestionably one of the most important features of Australia's environmental heritage and biodiversity landscape. The resources sector has a very strong interest in preserving the biodiversity of the iconic GBR and QRC recognises that the health of both the reef and the resources sector are intertwined.

However, we remind the Senate, again, that it is critical to recognise that resource activities, ports, shipping and associated activities that occur in and adjacent to the GBR are currently highly controlled and regulated via a broad suite of state, national and international regulations.

QRC's fundamental position in relation to the GBR is that there needs to be focus on a risk management approach to the regulation of activities with the greatest impact on the environment and heritage values present at a particular location, rather than reactions to special-interest groups and media commentary that do not correspond to the scientifically identified primary impacts.

Current media and public debate and UNESCO World Heritage Committee's interest in the GBR and port development specifically, is a reaction that appears, in part, to be driven by various claims from those opposed to development that are not, in fact, supported by the published evidence and science on issues such as dredging, shipping and port development. It is more than unfortunate that the previous GBR Senate inquiry did not do more to address this.

Having said this, it is clear that the report from the GBR Senate inquiry backs the work that is well underway in order to improve reef health. In fact, apart from unsupported conclusions drawn in the report in relation to the one stop shop and dredging impacts, the report's recommendations largely support and reflect the work of the host of stakeholders who have been contributing to the development of the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan (LTSP).

The LTSP, along with the program of work represented in the GBR Strategic Assessment and its related research and policy program, the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2014, the Queensland Ports Strategy and the North-East Shipping Management Plan, provide a suite of responses clearly aimed at addressing key threats to the Great Barrier Reef. This suite of work not only specifically addresses Australia's World Heritage Convention obligations but also includes actions addressing recent World Heritage Committee recommendations in relation to the GBR.

As noted above, there have been a number of inquiries and reviews undertaken relating to the GBR either broadly or on specific issues and the QRC is strongly of the view that a coordinated and consolidated approach is needed in the development of policy and the ongoing management of matters affecting the GBR. An ongoing partnership approach, involving government, industry and the community working together, will be critical in efforts to restore the Reef. Unfortunately it is difficult to see how such an approach can be achieved to the fullest

extent possible when Inquiries such as this one continually seem to imply that there is little concerted effort being made to work together for the best environmental outcomes for the GBR.

QRC emphasises to the Committee that the Strategic Assessment and the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan are the appropriate overarching mechanisms to delivering this coordinated approach. As such, I commend these and their related work programs to you as both the framework and the suite of activities that will need to be supported by all stakeholders in order to effect a genuine improvement in the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

Yours sincerely

Michael Roche
Chief Executive