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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By Post & by Email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretariat

Re: Great Barrier Reef 2050 Partnership Program

AgForce Queensland Farmers (AgForce) is the peak industry group representing beef, sheep & wool and grain producers in Queensland. The broadacre beef, sheep and grains industries in Queensland generated around \$6.8 billion in gross farm-gate value of production in 2015-16. The producers who support AgForce provide high-quality food and fibre to Australian and overseas consumers. Our members manage around 60 million hectares of the Queensland agricultural landscape and contribute significantly to the social fabric of rural and remote communities. These producers care for their natural and farmed landscapes, animals and crops. Australia's northern rangelands and Great Barrier Reef are unique national icons which we all strive to preserve and nurture in good health.

AgForce believes that the Australian Government's decision to partner with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation will result in a favourable return on investment, through greater efficiency and effective management and will attract additional reef funding through philanthropist and corporate investment and donations.

Agricultural land use is one of many factors which can affect water quality and long-term health of the Great Barrier Reef. The multi-industry, multi-organisation, partnership approach outlined in the Reef 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan is pivotal for protecting the Reef against pressures instigated by human activities.

AgForce has been involved in Reef partnerships since 2008, after industry water quality initiatives were integrated into the revised ReefPlan 2009. ReefPlans (2009 and 2013) and the Reef 2050 Plans (2015 and 2018) have delivered a mix of practical outcomes such as:

- Adoption of best land management practices
- Improved industry benchmarking
- Innovative research into coral survival and adaptations
- Reducing crown of thorns starfish predation
- Protecting threatened and migratory species
- Developing and linking Paddock to Reef Models with the E-Reef Model.

In 2014, the Australian Government commenced extensive consultation for a 'Reef Trust' to collect all sources of long term investment to maintain the World Heritage Values of the Great Barrier Reef. The potential for receiving offsets, private and philanthropic contributions was highlighted. A range of

delivery mechanisms focusing on outcomes, including market-based instruments were considered. Traditional grant processes could potentially constrain collaboration and innovation. Reef Trust funds were to be managed according to governance guidelines, relevant regulations and overseen by senior officials in the Australian and Queensland Governments¹. The Reef 2050 Plan Investment Framework indicated \$1.28 billion over five years has already been committed to delivering actions within the Reef 2050 Plan². It is imperative that resources are allocated to highest priority actions that will deliver Reef resilience. Other Reef studies which are pure science or ecology and not directly contributing to resilience should seek alternative funding sources, external to Reef Trust.

The Great Barrier Reef Foundation is an excellent delivery agent to oversee a range of funding inputs, ensuring transparent, apolitical governance and alignment of funding allocations to priority actions for resilience across the whole Reef 2050 Plan. AgForce commends this decision. We support the Queensland Auditor-Generals findings that the current response to water quality issues is disparate and lacks the guidance of a central authority with clear accountability for delivery and achievement³. AgForce believes that the GBR Foundation offers the clearest solution to the issues that have impeded progress in the improvement of water quality within the reef catchments.

GBR Foundation (ABN 82 090 616 443) is a long-established, not-for-profit, public company since 1999 which registered as a charity in 2012. The 14 board directors strive hard to achieve the principal activity of the Foundation which is to protect tropical reefs and adjoining coral coasts. The skills-based board is a mix renowned eminent Reef scientists and successful business operators. Pro bono services provided by 12 partnering companies enable staffing and operating costs to be kept low and maximises investment into Reef actions. All annual financial statements, constitutional governance and core business of this charity is transparent and publicly available on the national website for charities (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission www.acnc.gov.au). Charity status enables the GBR Foundation to accept donations, bequests and private company contributions. The 2017 Annual Information Statement shows \$2.2M from donations and bequests, \$3.46M from other revenue sources, which were all greater than \$1.9M from government sources. In 2017, 76% of the GBR Foundation's income (\$5.9M) was provided as research grants for eReefs and resilient Reefs faced with climate change issues. The operational efficiency of the GBR Foundation should be congratulated. The purpose and achievements of this independent lead charity for the Reef is trusted by community and a wide range of research partners. The Australian Government has chosen wisely to devolve responsibility of managing the \$444M government investment into Reef health over six years through the partnership with the GBR Foundation. This offers good value for taxpayers' money, efficient management of government funding and opportunity to lever additional Reef funding through private investment and donations.

Reef 2050 Plan (2018) states that the GBR Foundation has previously generated \$80M from private and philanthropic sources over 10 years, for co-investing into Reef health and resilience. These important collaborative partnerships need to be fostered with well-respected, existing charities such as the GBR Foundation to ensure essential priorities for protecting the World Heritage Great Barrier Reef are continued into perpetuity.

¹ Reef Trust – Investment Strategy Initiative Design and Phase 1 Investment 2014-15. Commonwealth of Australia 2014. <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/pages/e40fbc03-3d32-4116-b7bf-fcad4702b2b4/files/reef-trust-investment-strategy.pdf>

² Reef 2050 Plan Investment Framework <http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/ea14e16d-15c1-4599-ac4a-53b9f1375f59/files/reef-2050-investment-framework.pdf>

³ Follow-up of Managing water quality in Great Barrier Reef catchments. Report 16: 2017-18. <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/tableOffice/TabledPapers/2018/5618T931.pdf>

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. Please contact Andrew Freeman, Marie Vitelli or myself (07) 3236 3100 or email: agforce@agforceqld.org.au if you require any further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely

Michael Guérin
Chief Executive Officer