



14th September 2018

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Via email: etc.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Tourism underpins the reef's economic value.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland is a Regional Tourism Organisation connecting the tourism industry from the Torres Straits to Cardwell in the east, and west to the Northern Territory border. We directly generate about \$3.3B for the region's economy, as well as employing more than 10% of our community.

While the reef has been valued by Deloitte's at \$56B, much of that worth is associated with its iconic brand value - environmental, economic, social, even spiritual. \$5.7B of revenue of the annual \$6.3B is derived from tourism. A first hand experience visiting the reef is also the most influential way that we can help people to understand it, love it and enjoy it.

Not only does the Great Barrier Reef drive our tourism economy, it is part of our region's heart and soul. The reef is the main reason that international visitors choose Australia. Over the last 2 years poor communication around the state of reef health has been our community's greatest challenge - affecting us on a personal level and through our economy. The bleaching event in 2016/17 was devastating to see in the areas affected. However, contrary to popular media, much of the reef was *not* damaged and we are also gratefully witnessing the sprouts of recovery in many local sites over this past year.

Collaboration is the new innovation.

We acknowledge that our planet is challenged by pollution and related issues, and our reef is the canary in the coal mine. COTS, cyclones and poor water quality can be a chronic stress or acute crisis. Science has a key role to play in working with the community and reef managers in achieving innovative, world leading solutions to the complex challenges of building large scale reef resilience and in some cases, restoration. Science also has a responsibility to be the lens through which our society understands the reality of our natural world. With the global spotlight on the reef, every word spoken is listened to by the whole world.

The fragmented structure of reef related organisations, and divided, narrow messaging greatly concerns us. The reef is a complex mosaic, changing in space and time, and communicating its status is difficult in a soundbite at the best of times - but portraying the whole context is vital. The headline media grabs of the past 2 years have left the world believing the words "the reef is dead" - a profoundly untrue statement.

Unfortunately, our leading reef organisations did not speak out to refute this by putting these science findings into a wider, more accurate context. This has led to an increasing sentiment of apathy, and a "should I bother to go?" attitude from many of our international markets.



A new, innovative approach is needed for the reef; *collaboration is the new innovation.*

For a transformative approach, the reef needs a platform that brings together the best thinking and practices from all the reef organisations to deliver wholistic, trans-disciplinary solutions. This may well become the crucible for disruptive innovation that can only be created by crossing over current borders and boundaries.

Individual organisations, from CSIRO, AIMS, GBRMPA and the many NGO's that have evolved around the reef will be the drivers, the thinkers and the doers. Individually, they will continue to do great work. Together, the whole will be greater than the sum of the parts - and this is what we believe a co-ordinated finance platform such as that delivered by the GBR Foundation can do as facilitator and enabler.

It seems to us that to continue the old model encourages a silo approach via competitive tendering for government funds and does not foster and reward collaboration that achieves the best possible collective impacts.

We strongly endorse bipartisan support for a coordinated, collaborative approach with clear authoritative leadership on reef issues. A politically brave approach is required for these funds to be leveraged, delivered efficiently and used to build new collaborative reef solutions on the ground. What does success look like? When the reef is no longer a political football, and we are all working together for the best possible outcomes.

Australian's should know about, and be proud of our reef custodianship - we need to tell the story.

The Partnership currently defines 5 pillars, but we believe a 6th pillar is vital - Communication. The true story of the reef's status and our innovative best practice science and management needs to be told by this credible, authoritative reef leadership group. But as well, the message needs to be amplified globally to counter the powerful hold that negative media has taken - locally, nationally and across the world. The tourism industry is eager to help and partner - on our reef boats, through our travel trade connections and through our media networks.

The GBR Foundation has a solid track record of project delivery and we believe has the capability to be the platform that drives and connects the many passionate people and projects across the reef. In times of difficulty, leadership needs to encourage teamwork not division.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Morris
CHAIR