



Australian Government

**Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority**

The Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia
Committee Secretariat
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The Committee Secretariat

Inquiry into opportunities for expanding the aquaculture industry in Northern Australia

The Great Barrier Reef is one of the world's most diverse marine ecosystems with a rich mosaic of plants, animals, habitats and heritage values that are universally recognised as an amazing natural treasure. In addition to its outstanding universal value as a world heritage area, the Reef is vitally important to communities and industries that depend on a healthy reef for recreation and their livelihoods.

The Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2014 found that the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem is under pressure. Cumulative effects are diminishing the ecosystem's ability to recover from disturbances. Some threats are increasing, driven mainly by climate change, economic growth and population growth. The emerging success of some initiatives (such as improving land-based run-off) means some threats may be reduced in the future. However, there are significant lags from when actions are taken to improvements being evident in the ecosystem. More than ever, a focus on building resilience by reducing all threats is important in protecting the Region's ecosystem and its outstanding universal value into the future.

Given that the Reef's ability to tolerate further impacts is severely limited, all future developments in the adjacent coast must ensure that they can operate without significant impact on the Reef's ecosystems.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority supports the development of an ecologically sustainable aquaculture industry in the Great Barrier Reef Region on the understanding that these industries commit to playing their key role in ensuring that Australia meets the targets and objectives described in the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan and in the Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment and Program Report.

The key objective for water quality is that *"Over successive decades the quality of water in or entering the Reef from all sources including industry, aquaculture, port (including dredging), urban waste and stormwater sources has no detrimental impact on the health and resilience of the Great Barrier Reef."*

Key water quality targets that the aquaculture industry must contribute to include:

- By 2018, at least a 50 per cent reduction in anthropogenic end-of-catchment dissolved inorganic nitrogen loads in priority areas, on the way to achieving up to an 80 per cent reduction in nitrogen by 2025;
- By 2018, at least a 20 per cent reduction in anthropogenic end-of-catchment loads of sediment in priority areas, on the way to achieving up to a 50 per cent reduction in by 2025;

- By 2018, at least a 20 per cent reduction in anthropogenic end-of-catchment loads of particulate nutrients in priority areas; and
- By 2020, Reef-wide and locally relevant water quality targets are in place for urban, industrial, aquaculture and port activities and monitoring shows a stable or improving trend.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority welcomes this review and strongly supports the development of a plan that underpins the proposed expansion of the aquaculture industry in the Great Barrier Reef Region on the basis that it includes:

- Acknowledgement that the current condition of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area is poor and declining particularly in the southern inshore waters (Outlook 2014, Great Barrier Reef Strategic Assessment and Program Report, Long-Term Sustainability Report);
- Acknowledgement that any new developments in the Great Barrier Reef Region must demonstrate how they will contribute to the successful delivery of the targets and objectives described in the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment and Program Report;
- A review of the ecosystem health and sustainability science as it applies to the aquaculture industry in the Great Barrier Reef Region;
- Development of assessment guidelines to determine the assimilative capacity of waterways in the Great Barrier Reef Region to accept the discharge of aquaculture wastewaters (particularly sediment and nutrient loads);
- A site selection process for the location of new aquaculture facilities in the Great Barrier Reef Region based on the assimilative capacity of the receiving waterways.

I look forward to working collaboratively with the aquaculture industry in exploring opportunities for future expansion in the Great Barrier Reef Region.

Yours sincerely

Bruce Elliot
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Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use

1 May 2015