

Committee Secretary  
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

4 June 2007

Dear Committee Secretary

**Re: Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Amendment Bill 2007**

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) is committed to inspiring people to achieve a healthy environment for all Australians. For 40 years we have been a strong voice for the environment, promoting solutions through research, consultation, education and partnerships. We work with the community, business and government to protect, restore and sustain our environment.

ACF is making this submission to urge the Committee **not to remove** the requirement for an Indigenous representative on the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) Board as suggested in the key recommendations of the 2006 Review of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975 (Section 12.2 Corporate Structure of the Authority, p.150)*.

ACF has been associated with conservation of the Great Barrier Reef from 1970 including supporting the call for a Royal Commission into drilling on the reef, an initiative which eventually led to the protection of the Great Barrier Reef through the creation of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. We believe the timing of the removal of an Indigenous representative on the GBRMPA Board is particularly regretful given it was only last year that GBRMPA signed its first Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement (TUMRA) with the Giringun people of the Cardwell and Hinchinbrook region. This agreement between six sea country Traditional Owner groups outlines how marine resources can be used in an ecologically-sustainable way that still meets Indigenous cultural and recreational aspirations. It was a successful initiative of GBRMPA and has been strongly supported by the coastal Indigenous people involved in the process.

ACF has a number of policies recognising Indigenous people rights and responsibilities in relation to conservation and biodiversity protection. Additionally, through our Northern Australia Program (NAP), we are committed to increasing the role of Indigenous people in protected area management - including marine park management - across northern Australia ([www.acfonline.org.au/northernaustralia](http://www.acfonline.org.au/northernaustralia)). This includes greater acknowledgement and involvement of Indigenous people in higher level management responsibilities and decision making through appropriately supported participation in government Boards, planning and management processes.

ACF would like to remind the Committee that the commitment to appoint an Indigenous representative to the Board in 1995 was in recognition of the importance of the Mabo decision of 1993. Clearly Indigenous Traditional Owners are more than another group of 'stakeholders' in relation to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park with a range of native title rights and interests. In recognition of these rights and interests, the Authority must maintain Indigenous representation on the Board. We further believe that greater recognition of Indigenous culture, connections and traditions will enhance attraction to the Great Barrier Reef as a World Heritage area of outstanding natural and cultural value.

ACF fully supports the appointment of people to the GBRMPA Board on the basis of skills, qualifications, knowledge and experience. We would argue that Indigenous knowledge and the ability to communicate effectively with Indigenous people are unique skills and qualifications that are only possessed by Indigenous people and are essential criteria for the selection of Board members.

We believe GBRMPA would continue to benefit from having an Indigenous Board member and to support our position ACF brings the following observations to the attention of the Committee:

- **National and International Trends:** At both the domestic and international level efforts to improve the involvement of Indigenous people in both terrestrial and marine park management is increasing, not decreasing. Australian national parks such as Kakadu and Uluru Kata Tjuta already have boards with an Indigenous majority allowing for genuine joint decision making and participation in management. Internationally the World Conservation Union (IUCN) is also committed to increasing Indigenous people's involvement in protected areas management. This position was strongly endorsed at the 2003 World Parks Congress via Recommendations 24 & 25 (<http://www.iucn.org/themes/wcpa/wpc2003/english/outputs/recommendations.htm#r21>). Maintaining an Indigenous Board member is in line with the direction being set at both the domestic and international level.
- **Indigenous Benefits:** ACF would also like to draw the Committee's attention to the findings of the *Indigenous Protected Areas Programme Evaluation* by Brian Gilligan (<http://www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/publications/ipa-evaluation.html>). This evaluation found that Indigenous communities engaged in conservation and biodiversity protection programs have improved social, educational and economic conditions. While this evaluation focused on terrestrial protected areas and detailed outcomes at the local level, it is reasonable to argue that maintaining an Indigenous Board member within the GBRMPA would ensure local outcomes that benefit Indigenous communities remain a priority of the Authority.
- **Skills and Experience:** Maintaining an Indigenous representative on the Board would continue to bring considerable insight and experience to the decision making of the Board, with the representative acting as a conduit for communication with Indigenous people and Indigenous representative bodies. ACF notes that GBRMPA has a highly effective Indigenous Partnerships Liaison Unit (IPLU) that was central to securing the Park's first ever TUMRA. The work of the Unit and its benefits to the wider Indigenous coastal communities would continue to be strengthened by maintaining an Indigenous Board member, particularly at such a critical time in GBRMPA's cooperative work with Indigenous communities.

As an organisation that advocates strongly for the protection for the environment, ACF is of the view that this goal is better achieved by increasing involvement of Indigenous people in conservation, not rolling it back. Over recent decades Indigenous people have argued repeatedly for more meaningful involvement in decision making processes that affect their traditional lands and waters. In many instances they have been successful.

In conclusion, ACF would view the removal of an Indigenous specific Board member as a backward step for the GBRMPA and the management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. We request that additional consultation with Indigenous coastal communities, their representative bodies, conservation groups and other stakeholders are carried out before a final decision on Indigenous membership of the Board is finalised.

If you would like to further discuss any aspect of this submission please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jann Crase". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jann Crase  
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