



North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance

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Looking after our Country...our way...

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Committee Secretary
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Support for Indigenous representation on the GBRMPA Board

Dear Committee Secretary,

I wish to make a submission regarding the GBRMPA Act Amendment Bill. I understand that the closing date for submissions has lapsed, but I was only recently made aware of the Committee Inquiry yesterday and I would therefore request that you circulate my submission to Committee Members.

The purpose of my letter is to urge the Committee in the strongest possible terms to reject the proposal to remove Indigenous representation on the Board of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. You would be aware of the document 'A Voice In All Places: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Interests in Australia's Coastal Zone (Resource Assessment Commission, Canberra, 1993). In addition to this, Chapter 10 of the Coastal Zone Inquiry Final Report' (<http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/publications/rac/index.html>) recommends that Indigenous people's representation on boards and authorities involved in the governance of protected areas, including marine parks, must be taken.

The North Australian Indigenous Land & Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) strongly opposes this proposed amendment to the Act for the following reasons. Firstly, full engagement of Indigenous people at the highest level of decision making is crucial to successful management of the GBRMP. Indigenous people have rights and responsibilities to and expertise in land and sea management, and, have proven ability in providing expert advice. Further, this special relationship has been recognised in the Native Title Act s211 regarding customary use of natural resources. In particular, the Coastal Zone Report's Recommendation 19 states that:

The Inquiry recommends that the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council, in conjunction with the Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander Commission and representatives of land councils and other indigenous organisations, establish criteria for the participation of indigenous people in the management of conservation areas, including national parks, marine parks and World Heritage areas

Therefore, removing the Indigenous specific position on the GBRMP Board will remove the ability of the MPA to access Indigenous expertise, perspectives and support at this high level. The proposed amendment would send signals that Indigenous people are not important to GBRMP management decision making. This could jeopardise Indigenous engagement in government initiatives for better management of land and sea, such as the National Partnership Approach to the Sustainable Harvest of Turtle and Dugong, as well as, all other established or developing partnerships between government and Indigenous people and organisations. Importantly, it flies against the developments of the past decade in advancing Indigenous participation in the management of protected areas, marine parks and others, where high conservation outcomes are sought.

Finally, I understand that the intention of the proposed amendment is to implement recommendations of a review on the governance of government institutions and the like. I would like the Committee to appreciate and understand that the governance of a protected area on land or sea is very different than the governance of many other government institutions. Boards of protected areas make decisions about the management of natural and cultural values that are part of the inherited "countries" of Indigenous peoples - whose interests and subsequent history in these areas are not comparable to the interests of other "stakeholders". It is because of these complexities that comprehensive, well resourced inquiries in Australia (such as the Coastal Zone Inquiry) and others overseas have concluded that special arrangements need to be made for representation of Indigenous people in protected area governance.

NAILSMA highly recommends that the Senate reconsiders amending the Act. Please do not hesitate to contact our office if the Senate would like to discuss this matter further.

Yours truly,

Joe Morrison
NAILSMA Executive Officer
