

2nd March 2006

The Hon John Howard, Prime Minister
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

RE – GBRMPA REVIEW & REPRESENTATIVE AREAS PROGRAM (RAP)

AMPTO is the peak industry body for marine tourism on the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). Within the catchment of the GBR we represent an industry valued with an annual worth by Access Economics at \$5.8 billion and employing 63,000 Australians. In QLD our industry is second only to mining in money terms, and second to none for employment.

Owing to the ongoing campaign by the fishing industry, (which is insignificant in comparison being worth about \$150 million) our industry has developed real fears and concerns for the future of the GBRMPA and the continuance of the extra protection afforded the GBR through RAP.

Despite the loud voices from the minority fishing interests, Australians and Queenslanders at large wanted and continue to support the extra protection provided by RAP and a recent survey of central QLD boat ramps showed 80% of fishermen also support it. In fact in 2005 recreational boat registrations in areas adjacent the GBR were up 8.5% on 2004. Hardly indicative of an industry in peril!

Much has been said by the fishing industry and some members of parliament about the inaccuracy of the \$10 million compensation needed for the fishing industry but in fairness, it must be remembered that the GBRMPA did not produce that estimate, other government departments did. The QLD Seafood Industry Association's own estimation of the financial impact of the new zoning on its members was a total of \$23 million. Your government has already compensated them to the tune of \$55 million.

There is little doubt that the GBRMPA would benefit from being re-structured to enable management by an expertise based board so that it could better respond to today's community and business needs and that marine tourism expertise is needed if we are to be able to move forward in strategic planning for the ongoing replacement of the more than \$1.5 billion of infrastructure our members have in the GBR. However, some of the possible scenarios being spoken of in Canberra are totally unacceptable to our members. It appears to AMPTO that the Uhrig Review of the GBRMPA has become a "witch hunt" to satisfy the fishermen.

The GBRMPA and its Chair, Virginia Chadwick, have done a fantastic job with the RAP. It was Australia's largest ever public consultation and the most significant environmental program in your time so far as Prime Minister and paraphrasing your own words, "it is a visionary, historic plan"! The GBRMPA has received 13 international awards and now is fighting for its very existence because of the RAP.

Prime Minister, I urgently seek a meeting with you for our Executive Director, Mr Col McKenzie, and myself, so that we might discuss this situation directly, as I fear that without your personal support, the GBRMPA and the GBR as we know it are doomed to be lost and the loss of the GBRMPA is simply not acceptable to our industry.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Hutchen', written in a cursive style.

David Hutchen
Chair