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Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act Review

Submission from Blanche R. Danastas, Marine Biology Student of James Cook University.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP) is known around the world to be both the best example of a large-scale multi-use marine park, and the best managed marine park in the world. These facts reinstate that the current management regime is also the best available. The high level of interaction between the GBRMPA, Scientists and community (i.e. Management Advisory Committees) builds a broad view of perspectives, which facilitates the best possible outcomes when decisions are made. The current model of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) as an independent statutory authority with the power to manage the GBRMP, which is located in close proximity (Townsville) to the GBRMP and to national science centres and interest groups is very successful. **No changes should be made to this structure.**

Aspects that do require reviewing include:

- Currently there is a lack of transparency in decision-making and management decisions in two regards. There are permits for extractive or discharge activities being granted with little to no public consultation.
 - **These permits should be available on the GBRMPA website for public comment**
 - Stakeholders with a vested financial interest are placing pressure on the GBRMPA to achieve outcomes that are not always in line with the best outcomes for the GBR in terms of the Precautionary Principle and Ecologically Sustainable Development- these are principles engendered in the GBRMP Act (1975) (the Act).
 - **Engagement processes enabling stakeholders with a vested financial interest should be minimised as it places additional, undue pressure on the GBRMPA. The GBRMPA must be an independent statutory authority that manages the reef to ensure the best possible ecologically sustainable outcomes (which are often not in the best interest of commercial profit) in an open and transparent manner.**
 - **Any decisions to implement stakeholder requests should be made available on the GBRMPA website for public comment.**
- There are no provisions in the Act to assess cumulative impacts of actions i.e. Anchor damage, mooring construction, disposal of dredged materials.
 - There are provisions for this in the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999) (EPBC). The Act should be amended to include provisions like those included in the EPBC. Failure to consider cumulative impacts means failure to view impacts at a broad scale level, thus GBRMPA management decisions are being made at an inappropriately small scale.
 - **Management decisions must be made in terms of the best possible ecologically sustainable outcome at a small scale (i.e. for individual reefs) within the context of the broad scale of the ecosystem (i.e. the GBR) that is congruent to the concept of ecosystem based management.**
- Permit fees must reflect the economic value of the reef, as permit fees are currently far too low and undervalued.

- **Permit fees should be calculated based on two primary aspects: (a) the amount of profit that has, can or will potentially be made by operators (b) the amount of impact that has, can or will potentially be incurred by an operator.** This will better fund the GBRMPA for management and enforcement and act as an incentive for operators to value the resource and exploit it in an ecologically sustainable manner.
- There are no third party standing rights to enable a person/group to challenge management decisions i.e. decisions that may be seen to have outcomes inconsistent with the Precautionary Principle and Ecologically Sustainable development.
 - There are provisions for this in the EPBC for third party standing. The Act should be amended to include Third Party Standing Rights like those included in the EPBC.
- Penalties for breaches of the Act should be increased in alignment with those contained in the EPBC.
 - The GBRMPA should also increase prosecution to 100% of offenders who are unequivocally caught breaching the Act. This would both punish the perpetrator and act as a deterrent to future breaches, especially if fines are more severe in alignment with penalties contained in the EPBC.
- The boundary of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park should be amended and extended to include the entire GBR World heritage Area and important reef systems in the Coral Sea including Osprey, Shark, Bougianville, Dianne banks, Moore, Holmes, Willis Group, Maedeline Cays, Flora, Chilcott Island, Coringa Island, Lihou, Herald cays, Diamond Islets, Flinders Reefs, Turtle Island, Terragosse Islets, Malay, Abington, Mellish, Marion, Frederick, Kenn, Saumarez, Wreck, Cato Island and Bank reef systems for example.
- The GBRMPA should be give greater powers to manage offsite impacts as well as onsite impacts, so that impacts from activities outside the GBRMP that impact on the GBRMP can be mitigated adequately, as is not the current circumstance.
- The GBRMPA should receive increased levels of funding for management and enforcement
- There is a fairly strong disregard for principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development and the Principle primarily because of undue pressure placed on the GBRMPA by politicians and stakeholders. **The GBRMPA should be freed from these unnecessary pressures to enable them to manage as an independent statutory authority that manages the reef to ensure the best possible ecologically sustainable outcomes in an open and transparent manner.**

Conclusions

- **The current structure of the GBRMPA should not change.**
- **Undue influence from politicians and stakeholders with a vested financial interest should be minimised or stopped, while transparency is maximised by publishing applications for permits and approvals on the GBRMPA website for public comment.**
- **Permit fees should be amended to reflect the value of the resource, currently at \$6 Billion dollars for the GBRMP.**
- **The boundary of the GBRMP should be amended and extended to include the entire GBR World Heritage Area and important reef systems in the Coral Sea.**
- **Penalties and Third Party Standing rights should be included and amended in alignment with the EPBC.**
- **The Precautionary Principle and Ecologically Sustainable development Principles should be better engendered in management by applying the principles further than just in the objectives of the Act.**
- **The GBRMPA should receive greater funding to better manage and enforce, AND be given greater powers to manage on and offsite impacts and breaches**
- **The authority must remain an independent statutory authority, which manages the reef to ensure the best possible ecologically sustainable outcomes in an open and transparent manner.**