



Directors

Eddie Hegerl AO
Diane Tarte

Marine
Ecosystem
Policy
Advisors Pty Ltd

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Mr David Borthwick
Secretary
Department of Environment and Heritage
GPO Box 787
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Borthwick,

Re: Review of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this review. I note that the intent of the review is to “deliver a modernized and strengthened Authority to provide guardianship for the Reef into the future”. As someone who has had a long term commitment to the goal of “guardianship” and protection of the Reef, obviously I welcome any initiative of the Australian government that contributes to meeting this core environmental responsibility of Australia.

In the documents accompanying your letter of August 23 last, it seems that the two major drivers for this review are the Uhrig Review of Commonwealth statutory authorities and the highly critical response of certain stakeholders to the 2004 rezoning of the GBR Marine Park. I also note that the GBR Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has been reviewed regularly over the past 30 years and in particular the last 10 years. In my view following each of these reviews the Authority has diligently responded to the recommendations, and has adapted to the changing community and political expectations during its history.

The strengths of the Authority include:

- The “ecological integrity” of the area it is charged to manage, namely the entire GBR Region. This integrity has been enhanced through the recent rezoning with the addition of the significant lengths of the Queensland coastline excluded in the original declaration and zoning of the Marine Park, and the complementary State waters zoning by Queensland. Combined with the current Reef Protection Plan and Wetlands Protection Plan, there is now the opportunity to establish the integrated, ecosystem based management arrangements that will deliver finally the desired “hilltops to ocean” framework for managing the Marine Park and World Heritage Area.

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8 Grevillea St Redland Bay, Qld 4165

Phone/Fax: ++61 (7) 3206 8687 Email: ehegerl@ozemail.com.au Email: ditarte@ozemail.com.au

- The integrated and coordinated governance and management arrangements that includes the Queensland government as a genuine partner in the management of the Marine Park. This is essential as the immediate custodians of the Marine Park are the coastal communities of Queensland.
- The extensive consultative arrangements implemented by the Authority. This is always particularly challenging for any management agency, and probably more so for an organization such as GBRMPA that has been operating for a relatively long period. Frequently primary stakeholders and the wider community will engage in a substantive way for major initiatives such as the recent rezoning, however engagement / involvement on a “day-to-day” basis is difficult to sustain. The current investment in regional offices should improve access by local coastal communities to the Authority. However, this emphasis must not result in a lessening of the Authority’s capacity to deliver on all its responsibilities.
- The high level of recognition and support by the Australian community and the bipartisan support of both the Australian and Queensland governments.

In terms of the recommendations of the Uhrig Review, it would seem that GBRMPA may well not fit easily with either of the two preferred “models” as I believe that the Queensland government must be retained as a primary member of any governance arrangement contributing to both policy development and management. However, in renegotiating future arrangements with the Queensland government I believe it would be advantageous for the Australian government to seek comparable bi-lateral arrangements with the Queensland government in relation to the management of islands in the GBR World Heritage Area, as the Queensland government currently has for management of the Marine Park.

In terms of consistency between the GBRMP Act and the EPBC Act, it is important that any inconsistencies that potentially undermine the effectiveness of either Act should be rectified. However, given the importance of the GBR Marine Park and its geographic scope, it is essential to retain the GBRMP Act in its own right including its relationship to other Australian government law.

The governance and accountability frameworks of the Authority are extensive and have been adapted as changing circumstances require. A review of the Emerald Agreement and better codifying of its intent may prove beneficial. Likewise a clearer separation of responsibilities between the Authority’s Board and Executive may be beneficial. However, I am opposed very strongly to any proposal that would see GBRMPA become a division or executive agency of an Australian government department.

Over the coming years there are a number of major challenges facing us to ensure the long term integrity of the GBR Marine Park. To meet these challenges and achieve our goal I believe it is essential that the Marine Park is managed by an adequately resourced entity with strong links to both the local Queensland coastal communities and the wider Australian community, that delivers an integrated, ecosystems based management framework in close collaboration with

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other relevant Australian government agencies and the Queensland State and Reef catchments local governments. This cannot be done from an entity based primarily in Canberra, and will require governance and management arrangements that can be maintained and supported through changes in the political persuasions of governments in particular the Australian and Queensland governments.

I welcome the opportunity to speak with the Review Committee to discuss any of the above points, and assist with the development of ideas to ensure that any revised governance and management arrangements for the GBR Marine Park are such that these challenges reasonably can be met.

Yours sincerely,

Diane Tarte