

Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce

Communique 4 March 2016

- The [Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce](#) met for the fourth time for a one-day workshop in Brisbane on 4 March 2016.
- The Taskforce has been established to provide the Queensland Government with advice on how it can meet its ambitious water quality targets and the priority areas for investing an additional \$90 million over five years. The Taskforce's key objective is to ensure clean water flows from the rivers to the sea to ensure a healthy Great Barrier Reef.
- The main focus of the workshop was considering feedback on the Interim Report, refining and providing more detail in its recommendations and considering the costs of implementation.
- Consultation closed on 22 February 2016 and a total of 102 responses were received including written submissions and online surveys.
- Members acknowledged the significant input from stakeholders and valued the public feedback. They also agreed it needed to be bold in its recommendations.
- In general, the recommendations in the Interim Report were strongly endorsed and the level of support for the report's findings was gratifying. There was a groundswell of enthusiasm and desire for action.
- In particular, there was strong support for a major change campaign that involved everyone in the community. Communication would be critical to success. However, agricultural landholders and practitioners needed to be front and centre in driving Reef water quality improvements. They would need assistance through financial and other incentives to do that.
- Consultation confirmed the need for continued and increased levels of sustained agricultural extension (the application of scientific and new knowledge – as well as sharing best practice experiences - to improve land management). This needed to be aligned with other incentive mechanisms. However, concern was expressed around the availability of experienced people to increase extension advisory services.
- A staged regulatory pathway to reduce all sources of water pollution was endorsed, including minimum standards across all industries.
- Monitoring was identified as the highest priority for funding through the consultation and the Taskforce is recommending significant investment in additional and finer-scale (on-farm) monitoring and reporting.
- The Taskforce noted the targets were based on the best understanding at the time. As part of the review of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan, the targets would be refined and evidence-based regional (and potentially basin scale) targets for priority pollutants linked to Reef health would be developed.
- Taskforce members agreed the incentives, regulations and extension approaches needed to be developed as a complete package across all industries to encourage necessary change.
- Taskforce members identified the need for a substantial innovation agenda to deliver the transformational change needed to help meet the targets. Bold interventions will be required.
- The Taskforce confirmed its commitment to two major demonstrator projects that would integrate and evaluate the combined effectiveness of a range of tools and innovative approaches to drive accelerated progress towards the targets. Science has identified hot spot areas that would be used to test the interventions which could be transferable to different locations and scales. They noted implementing the major projects would not delay action on the other recommendations: work would be undertaken in parallel.
- At the workshop, the Taskforce reviewed the feedback on each recommendation and considered the additional scoping work that had been undertaken since the last meeting. They agreed broadly on a number of refined recommendations which included a greater level of detail about the required actions and specific costings. This information would be used to inform the preparation of the Final Report.
- As part of the work moving forward, a concerted effort is being made to determine the total costs of achieving the water quality targets as set out in the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan. A consortium of economic and water quality experts is assessing the total costs and water quality benefits for seven different case studies across

industries and Reef catchments. The Taskforce recognised this was a very challenging assignment which had never been done before and the economic assumptions would be considerable. The policy interventions include the costs of facilitating land practice change, improved irrigation practices, systems repair (gullies, streambanks, wetlands and voluntary land use change) as well as urban stormwater management.

- The Taskforce will meet for a final time in early May to review the Final Report and discuss an implementation path for the actions that clearly identifies who will do what and by when. The final report will be presented to the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef Dr Steven Miles by May 2016.

Background

- The Taskforce consists of experts in science, industry, government and the community and is chaired by Queensland's Chief Scientist Dr Geoff Garrett AO.
- There is also an expert Review Group which is providing peer review to the work of the Taskforce and its outputs.
- The Queensland Government targets are to reduce nitrogen run-off by up to 80% and reduce total suspended sediment run-off by up to 50% in key catchments such as the Wet Tropics and Burdekin by 2025.
- The Queensland Government has committed an additional \$90 million over five years to secure progress towards the targets through water quality initiatives, scientific research and helping businesses to transition to better environmental practices in the primary production industries.
- Agricultural land uses are the main source of nitrogen, sediment and pesticides into the reef. Other sources (e.g. urban, roads, dredging etc) are more minor but can be locally significant.

Members

The members, who have been appointed in their individual capacity, are:

- Steve Banney, Consultant, Grazing land management (Grazing industry)
- Dr Rebecca Bartley, Research Scientist, CSIRO (Sediment movement)
- Professor Susanne Becken, Director of Griffith Institute for Tourism, Professor of Sustainable Tourism, Griffith University (Tourism industry)
- Professor Mike Bell, Chair in Tropical Agronomy, Gatton Campus, The University of Queensland (Cane industry)
- Jim Reeves, Director-General, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (Queensland Government)
- Colin Creighton, Director Greening Australia and Principal research scientist, TropWATER James Cook University (natural resources management)
- Professor Allan Dale, Professor of Tropical Regional Development, Cairns Institute, James Cook University (Regional community expert)
- Dr Rob Fearon, Director, Innovation Partnerships, qldwater, Manager Queensland Water Regional Alliances Program (Local government)
- Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, Director of the Global Change Institute, Professor of Marine Science, The University of Queensland (Tropical marine science)
- Euan Morton, Principal, Synergies Economic Consulting (Economics)
- Dr Steve Morton, Honorary Fellow, CSIRO Ecosystem Science (Conservation planning)
- Dr Chris Rawlings, Director, Queensland Energy Resources (Resources industry)
- Dr Russell Reichelt, Chairman and Chief Executive, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority)
- Dr Britta Schaffelke, Research Program Leader, Australian Institute of Marine Science (Water quality and research)
- Dr Roger Shaw, Independent consultant, Chair of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan Independent Science Panel (Reef water quality science)
- Di Tarte, Independent Chair of the Mackay Whitsunday Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership (Community engagement and partnerships)
- Malcolm Thompson, Deputy Secretary Environment Protection, Department of the Environment (Australian Government) *Observer*
- Jane Waterhouse, Research Fellow, Catchment to Reef Processes, James Cook University (Water quality improvement planning)
- Brad Webb, Director of BM Webb Group (Ports industry)
- Dr Stuart Whitten, CSIRO Croup Leader – Economics, Productivity and Sustainability Land and Water (Economics).