

Great Barrier Reef coastal zone strategic assessment

Frequently asked questions—August 2014

Why was the Great Barrier Reef coastal zone strategic assessment conducted?

The Queensland Government is committed to protecting the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). As part of this commitment, the Queensland Government has undertaken a strategic assessment of the GBR coastal zone in accordance with the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

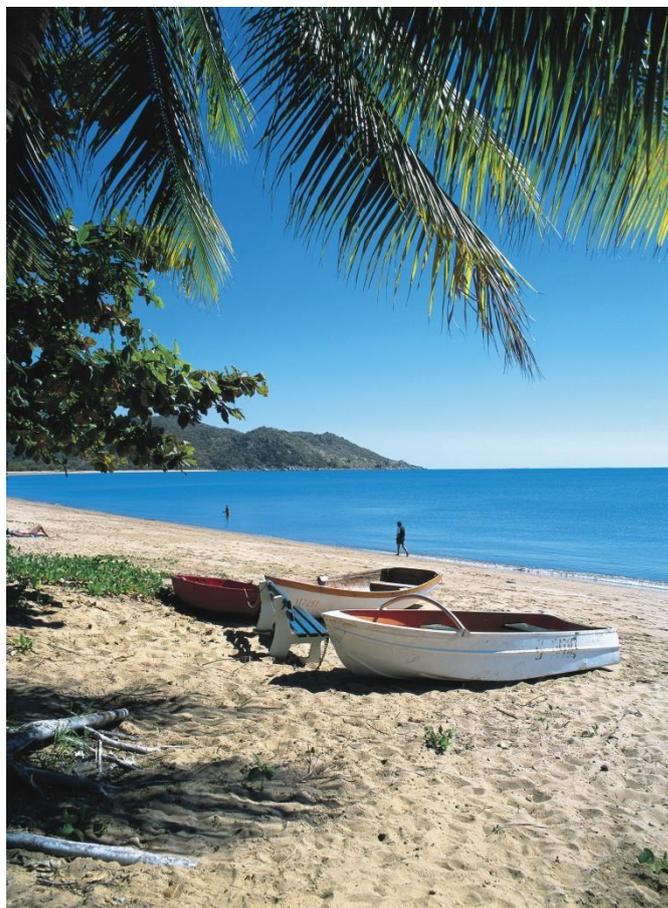
The [GBR coastal zone strategic assessment](#) is part of a comprehensive strategic assessment which included a strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA) undertaken by the [Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority](#) (GBRMPA).

The comprehensive strategic assessment responds to the recommendations of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in July 2011 that Australia undertake a strategic assessment of the GBR and prepare a long-term plan for sustainable development.

What is the GBR coastal zone?

The GBR coastal zone includes Queensland waters, islands and adjacent inland areas which are five kilometres inland or 10 metres Australian Height Datum, whichever is greater. It also includes areas of the GBR catchment to the extent that water quality management arrangements apply. The GBR coastal zone spans an area that is nearly 2 300 kilometres long.

The scale of the comprehensive strategic assessment is vast, covering an area of 348 000 square kilometres. To put this into perspective, the GBRWHA encompasses an area roughly the same size as Japan or Italy.



The GBR coastal zone is largely undeveloped but is a multiple-use area that supports a range of activities and industries, including urban, industrial and port development, tourism and recreational uses, fishing and shipping.

These activities and industries have been subject to an evolving range of Queensland Government regulation and management tools over time.



How is the GBR coastal zone strategic assessment presented?

The GBR coastal zone strategic assessment is presented in a package of final documentation, developed in accordance with the [Strategic Assessment Agreement](#) and the [Terms of Reference](#).

The final documentation includes three reports:

- **Program Report** which describes Queensland's management, planning and development framework relevant to the GBR coastal zone (the Program). The report supersedes the draft program report released for public consultation.
- **Strategic Assessment Report** which assesses the outcomes on matters of national environmental significance (MNES) in the GBR coastal zone from the implementation of the Program. The report was issued in draft for the public consultation.
- **Supplementary Strategic Assessment Report** which provides further information in response to matters raised during the public consultation and recommendations from the independent review.

What is the Program?

The Program is the Queensland Government's coastal management, planning and development framework as it applies to the GBR coastal zone.

The Program involves both legislative and non-legislative components that provide a robust regulatory and management system for the GBR.

It outlines existing management activities as well as commitments / new initiatives that will be delivered for environmental protection, particularly for MNES, in the GBR.

What are Matters of National Environmental Significance?

MNES are described and protected under the EPBC Act. The MNES considered under the Program are:

- world heritage properties
- national heritage places
- wetlands of international importance
- listed threatened species and ecological communities
- listed migratory species
- Commonwealth marine areas
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

The Program identifies, protects and enhances MNES values in line with the requirements of the EPBC Act.

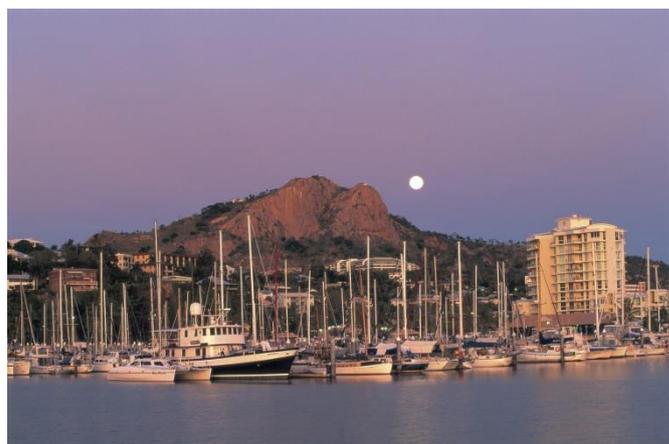
Was the GBR coastal zone strategic assessment independently reviewed?

In accordance with the Terms of Reference, the draft reports were subject to independent review in September-October 2013. The review was managed by the [Australian Department of the Environment](#).

The requirement for an independent review of the draft reports was a strong theme of responses received during consultation on the draft Terms of Reference for the GBR coastal zone strategic assessment.

The purpose of the independent review was to provide a rigorous independent assessment of Queensland's draft reports to ensure they accurately described and demonstrated the effectiveness of the Program.

The independent review found that the draft reports provided a good presentation of a large body of information. Many of the review's recommendations were addressed prior to the public consultation but some were unable to be addressed within the short timeframe between the review's finalisation and public release.





Was the GBR coastal zone strategic assessment subject to public consultation?

Draft GBR coastal zone strategic assessment reports were released for public consultation from 1 November 2013 to 31 January 2014, a period of 13 weeks.

The public consultation, conducted jointly with the GBRMPA, provided the public and stakeholders the opportunity to review the respective draft reports and provide feedback.

A total of 6 616 submissions were received as part of the consultation with nearly 6 500 people from 74 countries visiting a dedicated website. A series of community information sessions were also held along the GBR coast in November and December 2013. A [report on the outcomes of consultation](#) was released.

The outstanding recommendations from the independent review and feedback from the public consultation informed the preparation of the Program Report and Supplementary Strategic Assessment Report.

What were the findings of the GBR coastal zone strategic assessment?

The GBR coastal zone strategic assessment found that the most significant threats to the GBR are climate effects and poor water quality caused by legacy issues such as impacts from agricultural runoff.

Climate effects are influencing the frequency of damaging storms, cyclones and floods and increasing ocean temperatures, while poor water quality is supporting the proliferation of crown-of-thorns starfish.

This assessment is consistent with recent Australian Institute of Marine Science research that found that the loss of coral cover within the GBR since world heritage listing was due to storm damage (48%), crown-of-thorns starfish (42%) and bleaching (10%). The GBR coastal zone strategic assessment demonstrated that the Queensland Program is broadly

effective at protecting MNES and there are strong systems in place to monitor and report on potential impacts. Nonetheless, some aspects of the Program could be improved or enhanced.

Consequently, the GBR coastal zone strategic assessment highlights commitments and new initiatives to strengthen the Queensland Government's existing environment and development management frameworks. These are designed to address the threats to MNES in the GBR coastal zone and to protect Queensland's unique environmental values.

What are the outcomes of the Program, as outlined in the GBR coastal zone strategic assessment?

The Program outlined in the GBR coastal zone strategic assessment delivers five strategic outcomes:

- **improved planning** for urban areas, industry and ports
- **rigorous EIS assessment processes** for major projects
- **better guidance** for development activities
- **enhanced management, recovery and monitoring** programs
- **strong joint management** initiatives.

What is meant by 'improved planning'?

The Queensland Government's existing system provides for the consideration of environmental values in all stages of planning. Regional plans consider the balance between economic development and potential environmental impacts, including MNES.



The Queensland Government's commitment to deliver the [Queensland Ports Strategy](#) (QPS) by limiting significant new port development to five Priority Port Development Areas (PPDAs) further strengthens the protection of the GBR coastal zone against any unacceptable or unsustainable environmental impacts. The QPS also sets out the requirement for ports master planning which will mandate consideration of MNES, Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and cumulative impacts.

What is meant by 'rigorous EIS assessment processes'?

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) assessment processes in Queensland's legislation are used to assess, monitor and enforce the protection of environmental values on a project-by-project basis. These processes utilise the 'avoid, mitigate, offset' hierarchy, are clearly defined in legislation, and provide a thorough assessment of development projects and their potential impacts in the GBR coastal zone.

What is meant by 'better guidance'?

The GBR coastal zone strategic assessment outlines how better guidance for project proponents and approval decision makers will be available through the future development of MNES and cumulative impact guidelines, the enhanced use of the Australian Government's Protected Matters Search Tool, and the development of consistent threatened species listings.

What is meant by 'enhanced programs'?

The Queensland Government has invested significantly in management, recovery and monitoring programs designed to enhance the condition of MNES in the GBR coastal zone. The Queensland Government is also committed to continued and new investment in a range of programs focused on the identification, management and improvement of condition for habitat and species.

What is meant by 'strong joint management'?

Strong joint management of the GBRWHA between the Queensland Government and GBRMPA through a joint field management program has ensured the enforcement of zoning plans and the effective management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, national parks and islands. Other joint responsibilities include marine threatened species management, dugong and turtle management, island and water quality management, and the regulation of Ramsar wetlands.

What does the finalisation of the GBR coastal zone strategic assessment mean?

Queensland's strategic assessment documentation has been endorsed by the Australian Minister for the Environment. Through this endorsement, the Australian Minister has deemed the Program to be an effective system for identifying and protecting MNES in the GBR coastal zone and that strong frameworks are in place to monitor and report on potential impacts.

Through the Program, the Queensland Government will ensure that planning and development in the GBR coastal zone occurs in a sustainable manner, that it is appropriately managed to avoid or mitigate unacceptable impacts on MNES and OUV, and that the GBR continues to be one of the best managed marine areas in the world for future generations.



What is the Reef 2050 – Long Term Sustainability Plan?

In response to the WHC recommendations of July 2011, the Australian and Queensland governments are currently developing the [Reef 2050 – Long Term Sustainability Plan](#) (LTSP) to guide the future protection and management of the GBR to 2050.

The LTSP will build on the findings of the comprehensive strategic assessment and bring relevant programs and activities under one plan to ensure greater coordination, efficiency and effectiveness of efforts to protect and manage the GBR.

Further information

- www.dsdip.qld.gov.au/gbr
- www.gbrmpa.gov.au
- www.environment.gov.au

Images courtesy of Tourism and Events Queensland