



# Great Barrier Reef Water Policy: Current developments



EIANZ Leap Summit  
4 June 2015



Queensland Government



## Outline of presentation

- Background
- Current policy developments
- Continuing policy and programs

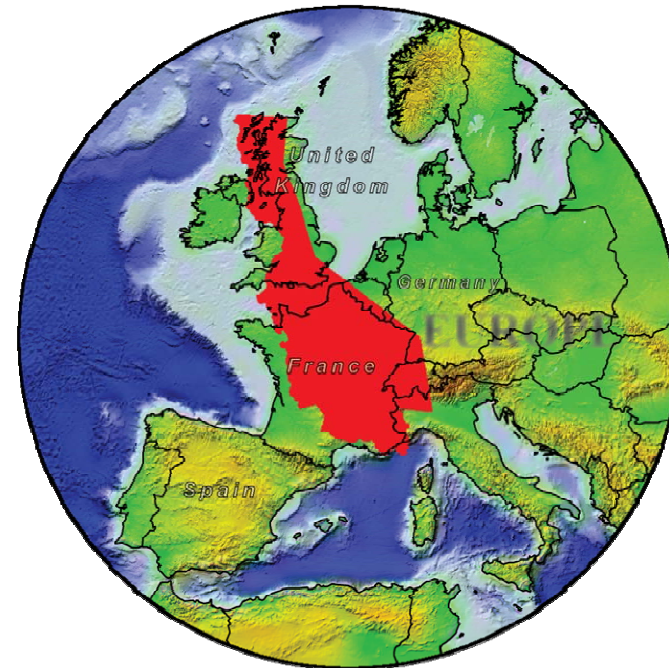
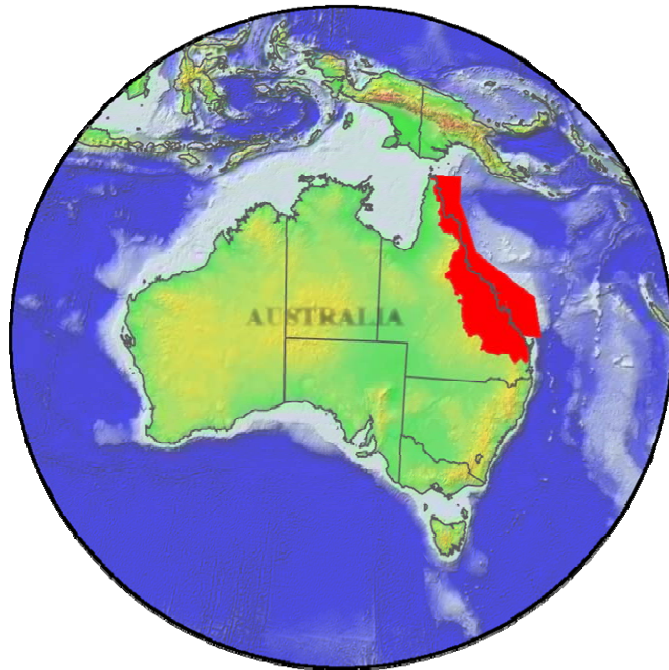




- World Heritage Area:
  - covers 348,000 km<sup>2</sup>
  - 2300km of coastline
  - 70km to 250km wide
  - 3000 coral reefs
  - 1050 islands.
- Major pressures:
  - climate change
  - Poor water quality
  - coastal development
  - fishing



## Relative size of the Great Barrier Reef







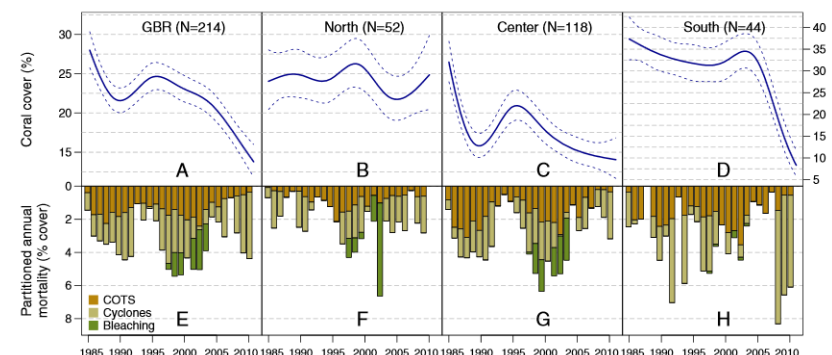
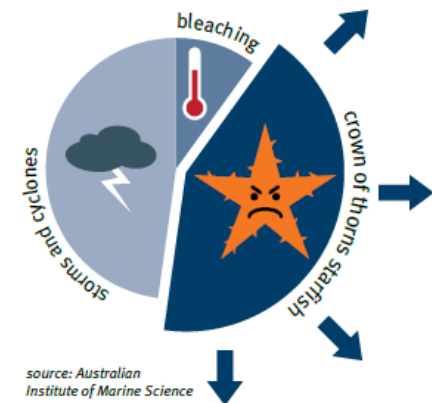
# Risks to reef health

- 50% decline in coral cover over 27 years
- Northern part of the reef in good condition, poor condition south of Cooktown.
- Greatest water quality risks to the GBR are from nitrogen discharge, associated with crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks, and fine sediment discharge which reduces the light available to seagrass ecosystems and inshore coral reefs.

## Major impacts

Major causes of coral loss since 1985

- 48% storms and cyclones
- 42% crown of thorns starfish
- 10% bleaching from ocean warming





# History

2001 – Independent panel of experts prepared a report on impact of land based pollutants on the GBR

2003: First Reef Water Quality Protection Plan released

2008: Summit to discuss the future direction of Reef Water Quality Protection Plan.

2008: Scientific Consensus Statement prepared

2009: Reef Water Quality Protection Plan 2009 endorsed

2013: Scientific Consensus Statement updated

2013: Reef Water Quality Protection Plan 2013 endorsed

2015: Reef 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan – Reef Plan embedded



## UNESCO considerations

- Listed as a World Heritage Area in 1981 for its “Outstanding universal value”.
- Queensland and Australian Governments have addressed all of the World Heritage Committee’s recommendations
  - Additional funding
  - Ban on dredge disposal in World Heritage Area
  - Continued efforts to improve water quality
- Draft 2015 decision recommends no ‘in danger’ listing
- World Heritage Committee meet late June 2015 to consider status of the GBR





# Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan



Reef 2050 Long-Term  
Sustainability Plan



- Australian and Queensland government's overarching framework for managing the Reef from 2015 to 2050
- Addresses all values within the World Heritage Area from species and habitats to Indigenous values and historic heritage
- Builds on initiatives such as Reef Water Quality Protection Plan.
- The 2050 water quality outcome reflects Reef Water Quality Protection Plan's goal





## New funding

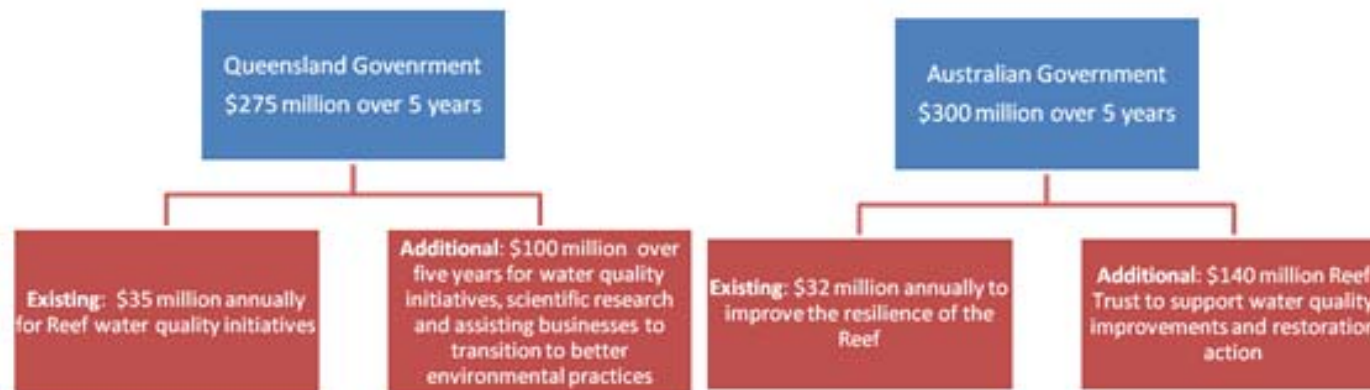
- Additional \$100 million over five years towards:
  - water quality initiatives,
  - scientific research
  - helping businesses transition to better environmental practices in the primary production and fishing industries
- Includes \$10 million to fund buy backs for 3 net fishing closure areas:
  - St Helens Beach to Cape Hillsborough
  - Keppel Bay to Fitzroy River
  - Trinity Bay





## Government investment

- Government investment will total \$2 billion over the next 10 years
- In early 2015, both Queensland and Australian Governments committed a further \$100 million each.







## New targets

- GBR Water Science Taskforce established to provide advice on best approach to meet new targets:
  - Reduce nitrogen run-off by up to 80% by 2025
  - Reduce sediment run-off by up to 50% by 2025
  - Targets apply to key catchments - Wet Tropics and Burdekin
- Task:
  - Identify best, most cost effective combination of actions
  - Identify funding priorities for \$100 million



## **GBR Water Science Taskforce**

- Chair - Dr Geoff Garrett, Qld's Chief Scientist
- Expert based – fields include:
  - industry expertise,
  - water quality science
  - Economics
  - Community and regional expertise.
- Interim report to government December 2015
- Final report May 2016





## **New governance**

- First ever Minister for the Great Barrier Reef – Hon. Steven Miles
- Established the Office of the Great Barrier Reef within the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection
- Key functions:
  - Coordinate all Qld government actions for Reef 2050
  - Administer new funding
  - Support Environmental Taskforce



## Capital dredging

- Sustainable Ports Bill 2015 introduced this week
- Legislated ban on sea dumping of ports related dredge spoil within the GBRWHA
- Complements Commonwealth ban  $>15,000\text{m}^3$  within GBR Marine Park
- Confines capital dredging for ports related purposes to existing 4 major ports





## Commitments re other laws

- Reintroduce vegetation clearing laws
- Reinstating coastal planning laws
- Repeal water laws which have a detrimental effect on the GBR catchment systems





## **Continuing laws and programs**





## Best Management Practice (BMP) Program

- Industry-led programs that promote adoption of best practices in cane and grazing industries
- Supported by EHP. Partnership between industry, regional NRM bodies and government.

*'BMPs are a positive step forward but should not be seen as the **single mechanism** to achieve necessary water quality outcomes'.*

*'The BMPs need to be considered as part of a package of measures to improve water quality, including **incentives, extension and potentially regulations**'.*

(Independent Science Panel – review 2013)



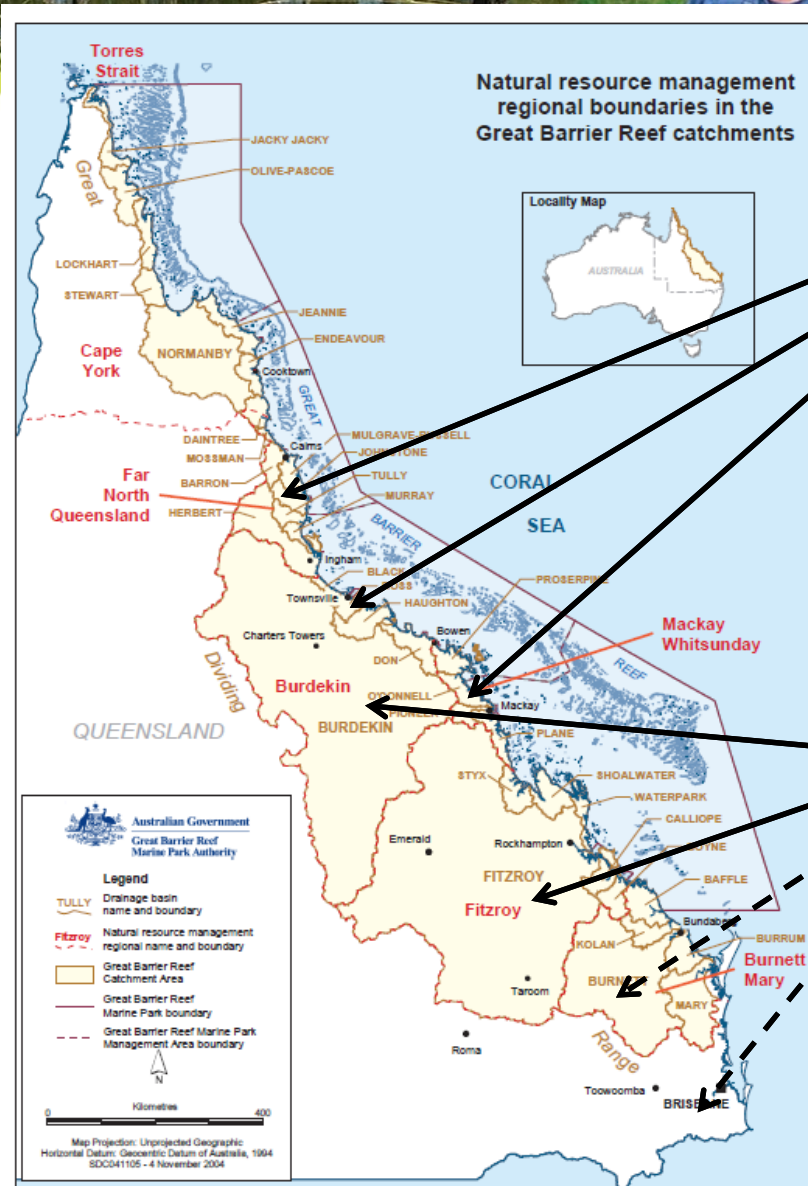
## Best Management Practice (BMP) Program



**Targeting sediment, chemical and nutrient run-off through partnerships with cane and grazing industries (\$5.7M expended, \$11.6m committed)**



# BMP uptake targeted across priority catchments



## Cane



- Soil health and plant nutrition
- Irrigation and drainage
- Pest disease and weed management
- Natural system management
- Farm business management
- Crop production
- Workplace health and safety.

## Grazing



- Land management
- Soil health
- Animal production
- Animal welfare
- People and business

Extended to Burnett Mary and SEQ in 2015





## Reef regulations

- Regulations introduced in 2009
- Includes 'strict requirements' e.g. record keeping, pesticides management, calculating fertiliser input
- Requirement for ERMPs for certain operators
- Not enforced while BMP program developed and assessed
- Government will develop a compliance program as an interim step while Taskforce considers future actions



## Measuring success

- Paddock to Reef Integrated Monitoring, Modelling and Reporting Program measures and reports on progress towards Reef Plan's goal and targets through annual Report Cards.





## **Paddock to Reef program**

- Innovative approach to collecting and integrating data and information on management practices, catchment indicators, catchment loads and the health of the GBR.
- Funded jointly by the Australian and Queensland governments.
- Collaboration involving governments, industry bodies, regional natural resource management bodies, landholders and research organisations.

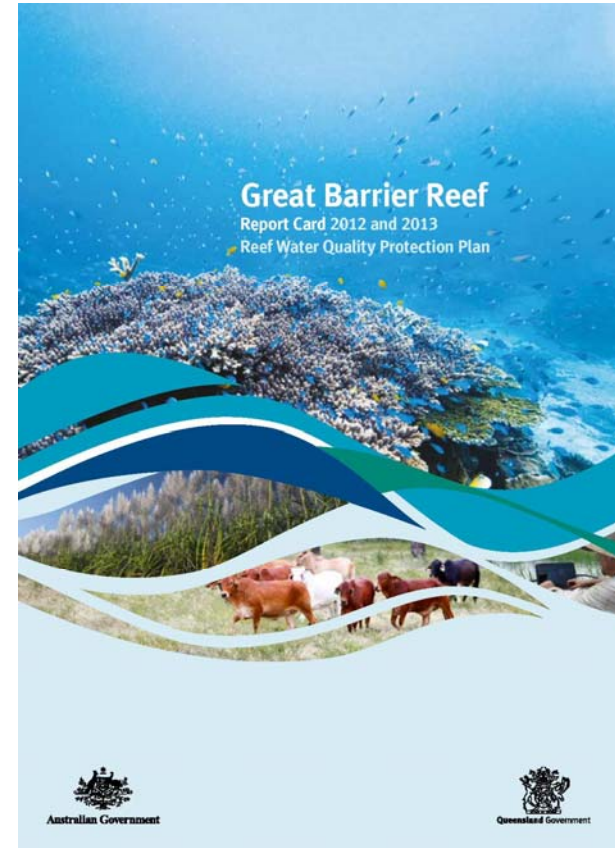




# Latest results

Report Card 2012 and 2013 shows:

- 49% of sugarcane growers, 59% of horticulture producers and 30% of graziers adopted improved management practices between 2009 and 2013.
- Annual average sediment load reduced by 11%, pesticide load by 28%, nitrogen load by 10%.





# Regional report card partnerships



Gladstone Healthy  
Harbour Partnership



HEALTHY RIVERS TO  
REEF PARTNERSHIP  
MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY





# Expansion of report cards

- Nested approach to report cards
- Reef 2050 Plan action to expand regional report cards – Cairns and Townsville
- Consistent approach, but flexibility for regions to tailor to their area and needs





## More information

- Reef Water Quality Protection Plan website

[www.reefplan.qld.gov.au](http://www.reefplan.qld.gov.au)

- Living Wonder (Great Barrier Reef – Department of Environment and Heritage Protection)

<http://www.gbr.qld.gov.au/living-wonder/>