

Selected Excerpts and Commentary on:
2006 Review of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*

In view of the many public dissatisfactions involving GBRMPA this is an important document. Few, however, are likely to read through and try to comprehend it's 200+ pages of bureau-speak . The excerpts and commentary here are intended only as an informal contribution to an understanding of the review from the standpoint of an independent observer with extensive reef experience.

At first glance the review appears to avoid criticism of GBRMPA and to endorse its management while acknowledging some minor deficiencies. However, it is more revealing in what it does not say and in recommendations that would impose much greater transparency and accountability on GBRMPA. These would also place it under much closer oversight and require evaluation of socio-economic consequences in its decisions as well as ongoing assessment and reporting of outcomes. Properly implemented the recommendations could bring valuable reform. Whether this eventuates or it fades into the vast never-never land of forgotten government reviews remains to be seen. The full report may be downloaded at: <http://www.deh.gov.au/coasts/publications/gbr-marine-park-act.html>

Note: Review excerpts are in "sans serif font and quotes". My comments are in [serif font and brackets].

Walter Starck
19 October 2006

p.xiv

"Precautionary principle – the principle that lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing a measure to prevent degradation of the environment where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental harm. The precautionary principle is a component part of the concept of ecologically sustainable development."

[It is important to be aware that Australian legislation is intended to employ a 'weak' rather than 'strong' interpretation of the 'precautionary principle'. This requires there to be 'threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage' before precautionary measures are introduced. If applied under Australian government guidelines there should also be an assessment of the risk-weighted consequences of various options. The 'strong' interpretation demands proof that activities pose no threat and since it is impossible to "prove" a negative any possible threat can be used to invoke precautionary measures.

In practice the "weak" and "strong" distinction been not been made and a strong interpretation applied whenever desired to support further restrictions, in particular where there is no evidence of any need for them. Likewise, the requirement to make an assessment of the risk-weighted consequences of various options has tended to be ignored, most especially so with regard to any consideration of the consequences of precautionary measures themselves.]

p.8

"The Gross Value of Production for minerals is around \$7 billion per annum and for tourism \$4 billion, with the value for commercial and recreational fishing being \$359 million per annum."

[The value of tourism usually cited by GBRMPA is the total value for the entire GBR region while the value they cite for fishing is only that of the commercial catch (about \$130 million). The impression of \$4000 million vs. \$130 million is highly misleading. Only about half of all visitors to the region even visit the reef and the actual reef component of most visits is a single day-trip during which 4 or 5 hours is actually spent on the reef. **The value of commercial and recreational fishing together is in fact about twice that of reef tours. Attributing the total value of all regional tourism to a one-day visit to the reef by about half of all visitors is no more justifiable than would be attributing it all to commercial fishing because most visitors eat seafood during their stay.**]

p.9

"the Representative Areas Programme ...has put in place a level of protection that will place the ecosystem in a strong position to maintain its resilience over the longer term. Such resilience will be of paramount importance in helping the Great Barrier Reef withstand the impacts of climate change in particular."

[This is equivalent to saying that having a good diet and exercising puts one in a better condition to survive an automobile crash. Although true it is not a very realistic way to address the problem.]

p.10

"... there is a need for trends in the health of the Great Barrier Reef to be regularly reported and consideration of any changes in future planning and zoning arrangements to be undertaken in a robust, transparent and accountable way."

[This has been a serious shortcoming. Clear definition of problems and proper consideration of options and costs have been lacking. Justification has taken the form of assertions with no provision to examine the methods and evidence on which they are based. Outcomes have tended to either not be assessed or if so only revealed if they support the desired agenda.]

p.11

"...officeholders should not be representational but appointed for their relevant expertise,"

[Expertise is repeatedly cited in the review as being a requirement for GBRMPA officeholders however the executive officers have never embodied any genuine expertise in reef science, tourism or fisheries. It would appear that the only expertise considered relevant to managing the GBR is previous experience of public service administration.]

"... more attention needs to be given to monitoring the use of the Marine Park and the performance of management measures, assessing future risks and pressures, and analysing biophysical, social and economic factors necessary to support consideration of any changes to the level, area or type of protection."

[More attention to the performance of management measures and analysing the social and economic consequences of them would be a most valuable improvement.]

p.20

"The catchment area adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef comprises 22 per cent of Queensland's land area and 20 per cent of its population. Around 80 per cent of land in this area supports agricultural production."

[According to GBRMPA's own 2001 report "Population and Major Land Use in the Great Barrier Reef Catchment Area" the GBR catchment area is 425,964 Km² and the area of sugar cane (by far the dominant crop in the area) was about 360,000 hectares (*i.e.* 3600 Km²) or 0.8%. **GBRMPA's figure of 80% supporting agriculture is exaggerated by about 100 times.**]

p.36

"The Authority's budget for the 2005–06 financial year is \$38.1 million. Revenue from the Reef HQ Aquarium is \$2.6 million, equivalent to 85 per cent cost recovery."

[Despite low inflation over the past decade-and-a-half the GBRMPA budget has grown by nearly 400%. Why should this be when the task of managing the reef has remained little changed?

The Reef HQ deficit is actually even worse than it looks. It has no interest to pay and a portion of its costs are covered by GBRMPA. It is probably the only oceanarium in the world that has never shown a profit. It would appear that this is another area in which some "relevant expertise" in management might be of benefit.]

p.46

“Climate change presents one of the biggest future threats to the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem (IPCC 2001) and consequently to the social and economic welfare of the region. The Australian Government announced a comprehensive climate change strategy in 2004 (DEH 2005), supported by funding of \$1.8 billion, through which it is working to both reduce Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions and build an effective global response to climate change.”

[The threat of disastrous climate change is an increasingly contentious scientific hypothesis. If true its threat to the reef would be the least of our concerns and one consequence could well be a significant latitudinal expansion of reefs. Australia’s contribution to CO2 emissions is less than 2% of the global total. and relatively decreasing due to large increases by developing countries. Nothing we do can be expected to have any discernable effect on global climate beyond whatever influence our example may have on other nations. More likely, any fossil fuel we save through reduced use will be sold abroad for burning by someone else.]

p.59

“The overarching goal of the Representative Areas Programme was to ensure the adequate protection of representative examples of all the areas in the Great Barrier Reef....”

[Unfortunately this goal was set with no evaluation of the actual nature of the threat or threats it was intended to protect against. Most of the GBR is rarely visited by humans and zoning does nothing to address most of the purported concerns regarding the reef such as global warming, water quality, starfish outbreaks, storm damage, siltation, etc. In fact the only real activity being regulated was fishing and even that was at such a low level as to be negligible over most of the reef.]

p.60

“The principles behind Marine Protected Areas have been debated at length by scientists and policy makers over the past two decades (see Chapter 5), with one of the drivers being a steady deterioration of reefs and associated ocean ecosystems in many parts of the world....”

[Principles developed in response to conditions on highly impacted reefs elsewhere are not necessarily appropriate to the GBR. Lack of evaluation of the need for and appropriateness of management measures adopted has been a serious deficiency. **The ongoing imposition of overlapping measures make it appear that current management have never seen a further restriction they did not think necessary.**]

p.61

“In 1998 the Government announced Australia’s Oceans Policy, in which it committed to an ecosystem-based approach to marine protection....”

[Ecosystem-based management is a laudable ideal but comparable in practice to trying to effect a centrally planned economy. Although a currently fashionable buzz word in the eco-bureaucracy in terms of actual implementation it should be recognized as the techno-gibberish it actually is. What it amounts to in practice is just the precautionary principle applied to whole ecosystems primarily by creating extensive MPAs and prohibiting fishing.]

“... over-harvesting and pollution have had major negative impacts on coral reefs.... ...as insurance for sustainability. 30–50 per cent of reefs should be set aside as no-take zones, for long-term protection, not just of fish, but of entire reef ecosystems .”

[See comment for p.60 above]

“...a number of scientific publications on the establishment of ‘no-take’ zones sought to estimate the level of protection required relative to the conservation or management objective. ...a high proportion found that to achieve these objectives a range from 20 to 50 per cent of the area needed to be protected as ‘no-take’.”

[See comment for p.60 above]

p.62

"The underlying objectives of the Representative Areas Programme were ... stated as

- maintaining biological diversity of the ecosystem, habitat, species, population and genes
- allowing species to evolve and function undisturbed
- providing an ecological safety margin against human-induced disasters
- providing a solid ecological base from which threatened species or habitats can recover or repair themselves
- maintaining ecological processes and systems."

[In the absence of any defined threat to such conditions the need and appropriateness of the programme was (and remains) undemonstrated and unevaluated. **The Representative Areas Programme is a hypothetical solution to an imaginary problem.**]

p.93

"Poor water quality can inhibit development and growth of corals and marine plants, and can support organisms that compete with corals or feed off corals (such as the crown-of-thorns starfish)."

[That poor water quality can inhibit development and growth of any living thing is a truism. That it can support crown-of-thorns starfish is a dubious assertion. CoT outbreaks normally occur on healthy reefs with good coral coverage. Outbreaks are common on oceanic reefs where poor water quality is highly unlikely. Large population fluctuations are also common in many other marine species which produce high numbers of planktonic larvae where random fluctuations in conditions affecting larval survival can result in population booms. Attempting to link CoT outbreaks to poor water quality is the kind of agenda serving misuse of scientific claims that has greatly damaged GBRMPA credibility.]

p.95

"Research by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN 2000, 2004) indicates that 11 per cent of the world's reefs have been lost due to human impacts and a further 16 per cent to the massive climate related coral bleaching event in 1998."

[True but irrelevant to the circumstances of the GBR]

"The single largest cause of this loss and threat of future losses is coral bleaching. In 1988, for example, a significant climate-related bleaching event destroyed 16 per cent of coral reefs in the world in nine months. Only around half of these damaged reefs are likely to recover over the next 20 years."

[Most have already substantially recovered. As with oil spills the big news attention always focuses on the predicted damage but little or no attention is paid when actual damage proves much less and recovery much better than originally claimed. Good news is no news.]

"Australian coral reefs are currently in good condition relative to the rest of the world."

"Australian coral reefs are currently in good condition relative to the rest of the world. Healthy coral reefs will be more resilient to human and climate change pressures. For example, only 3 per cent of the Great Barrier Reef was lost in the 1998 bleaching event,"

"Coral bleaching is a natural event. However, the intensity and frequency of bleaching events is likely to increase with global warming. Mass bleaching occurs when the sea surface temperature rises above the tolerance range for the particular coral type, which, in the case of the Great Barrier Reef, is usually in the range of 28 to 32 degrees Celsius. Bleaching also occurs during extreme low tides or heavy fresh water run-off onto reefs."

[Bleaching events result from extended periods of calm weather during which mixing from wave action ceases and surface water becomes exceptionally warm. Such warming is especially marked in very shallow water such as on reef flats. At the same time the absence of waves also eliminates the wave driven currents that normally flush the reef top. Bleaching conditions require at least a week or more of calm weather to develop and this may happen every few years, only once in a century, or never, depending on geographic location. On the outer GBR it is less common due to ocean swell and currents

even in calm weather. It is more likely in the mid-shelf and inshore areas due to the absence of swell and reduced currents. No one has suggested that climate change is expected to bring more calm weather. On the contrary, the trapping of more heat energy would be expected to increase average wind speeds.]

p.96

"In 1998, the worst coral bleaching event in 700 years occurred on the Great Barrier Reef (Lough 2000). This was followed in 2002 by the warmest year for sea water temperatures in north-east Australia since 1870. There was major bleaching in this year affecting 60 per cent of the Great Barrier Reef. By 2004, many of the catastrophic declines in some species as a result of these events had been fully reversed, which demonstrates the current resilience of the reef."

[The 700 year claim is baseless. That bleaching events have often occurred in the past is known from their record in coral skeletons but how extensive such past events may have been has not been determined. Past temperatures as evidenced by isotopic analysis indicate past temperatures as high and even higher than present ones. The recovery mentioned for the GBR has occurred in most other places as well.]

p.100

"The annual catch of recreational fishers throughout Queensland is around 8 500 tonnes of seafood. In some cases the recreational catch is larger than the commercial catch (e.g. coral trout). ... Recreational fishing in Queensland has been trending downwards at 1 per cent per annum since 1996 (Hunt 2005a)."

[The national recreational and Indigenous fishing survey taken in 2000/2001 estimated the annual harvest taken by recreational fishers of Coral trout in Qld. was 549,547 Kg. Queensland DPI statistics record the commercial catch for 2000 to be 1,538,000 Kg. and estimate the total recreational and commercial catch of coral trout to be 1900 t. (*i.e.* 1,900,000 Kg. **The claim that the recreational catch of coral trout is larger than the commercial catch is yet another instance of GBRMPA's repeated misleading of Parliament.**]

p.102

"The Fisheries Management Plan for the Coral Reef Fin Fish Fishery that came into force in 2004 introduced a 37 per cent reduction in total allowable catch and 77 per cent reduction in licences. The implementation of this plan coincided with the introduction of the 2003 Zoning Plan."

[In the Regulatory Impact Statement for the RAP legislation GBRMPA falsely informed Parliament that the commercial harvest had doubled over the preceding decade. The 37% reduction mentioned here came on top of what was an already tiny harvest rate and has actually reduced the harvest to a level below that of a decade before. At the highest year ever the catch was only some 25% higher. No matter how it is viewed the claim is grossly untrue. The same false claim of doubled fishing pressure was also used to mislead respondents in a public opinion poll intended to sample public attitudes on levels of expenditure desirable to protect the reef.]

p.104

"There are clearly many pressures on the health of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The major threat of warming seas from global climate change is the overarching pressure on the Great Barrier Reef."

[Such is not at all clear. The many pressures on the health of the GBR are all only possible but undemonstrated hypotheticals. The actual condition of the GBR is near pristine with evidence of detrimental human impact being only rare and trivial. "Australian coral reefs are currently in good condition relative to the rest of the world.":p.95 of this same review. For comment on climate change see comment for p.46]

p.111

"The framework should also provide for an integrated approach to the management of the Marine Park ... to:

....

- provide a clearer environment for business planning.

....

Consistent with the recommendations of the Uhrig review, the Authority's operations should also become subject to the *Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997* as a prescribed agency."

[Hopefully this would include a genuine consideration of economic values and implementation of clear financial accounting with detail sufficient to determine on what the nearly \$40 million budget of the Authority is being spent.]

pp.114-115

"...the Authority's main functions should be:

- managing the Marine Park on an ecosystem basis, whilst facilitating multiple use
- undertaking or facilitating research, monitoring and reporting to inform management, policy and accountability, which would include:
 - monitoring and assessing the condition of the Marine Park, having regard to the objectives of protection and wise use of the resource
 - identifying long-term research needed to inform decisions by government and understanding by the public
 - regularly and publicly reporting on the management of the Marine Park and the outlook in the context of risks and pressures."

[See ecosystems management comment for p.61. Facilitating multiple use, wise use, monitoring and accessing, plus research for informed decisions are all laudable aims that have been deficient. Genuine reform requires their effective implementation and that ultimately depends on the minister.]

p.116

"A key function of the Authority should be to carry out and/or arrange for research, monitoring and periodic public reporting."

....

[Far too little Authority resources have been allocated to acquiring the information necessary for informed management and far too much on regulation of non-existent threats. Large amounts have also been wasted on activity designed more to promote the Authority than to provide anything of value to the public (e.g. TV ads telling us it's our barrier reef).]

p.118

"... development of management practices and policy directions in future should be more closely integrated with the research and analysis of measures, risks and pressures."

[See comment immediately above.]

p.127

"Overall, the Authority has established effective working relationships with most stakeholder groups. However, relationships with some stakeholders in commercial and recreational fishing sectors are poor or even non-existent."

[It would be more accurate to say they have established effective working relationships with stakeholder groups who support their agenda.]

p.128

"Zoning plans are the primary mechanism through which the Marine Park is managed and regulated."

[Why should this be? Zoning is but one means of restricting activity along with permits and sundry other regulations. Over the years over \$50 million has been spent on zoning and re-zoning the reef. The only real effect of most zoning has been to restrict fishing. Beyond this it is just lines on a map where humans rarely go. It does nothing to address most of the purported concerns regarding the reef such as global warming, water quality, starfish outbreaks, oil spills, siltation, etc. The reef and human activities on it are not changing so rapidly as to require a major portion of the Authority's budget to

endlessly rezone it. The only real reason for the perpetuation of zoning is to continue to justify an established department in a bureaucracy. A major downsizing of this activity and reallocation of resources to research and monitoring should be a priority.]

p.130

“the Review Panel recommends that the Consultative Committee be reconstituted as an Advisory Board to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage. The Advisory Board would provide the Minister with a means to access advice on specific issues related to the Marine Park protection and use from business, community, Indigenous, environmental and other relevant stakeholders. An Advisory Board is consistent with the findings of the *Review of Corporate Governance of Statutory Authorities and Office Holders* (Uhrig 2003).”

[Reconstituting the Committee as an Advisory Board to the Minister seems a good move. Independent advice is needed and should go to an oversight level rather than only to the Authority where it can be simply be ignored.]

p.134

“a key function of the Authority is to carry out and/or arrange for ‘research and investigations relevant to the Marine Park’.

....

The Authority provides some direct support for research and monitoring. In 2004–05 this was around \$5 million... “

[or about 13% which is less than is spent on zoning]

p.140

“In Queensland, as elsewhere, there has been a long-term decrease in recreational fishing of 1 per cent per annum since 1996. In the period 2001 to 2004 the decrease outside the catchment was 4 per cent per annum and in the catchment, excluding Cairns, 5 per cent per annum, with a much greater decrease of 16 per cent per annum in the Cairns region (Hunt 2005a). The trend for saltwater fishing from boats over the period 2001 to 2004 was a slight increase of 2 per cent outside the Marine Park and a decrease of 2 per cent per annum within the Marine Park. Interestingly, the number of recreational boats registered in the catchment in 2004 increased over the previous year, by 8 per cent”

[The relative greater decline in fishing activity in the GBR park is *prima facie* evidence that the restrictions imposed have reached a level that recreational fishers are beginning to decide it isn't worth the trouble and risk. In accord with the principles of multiple use, wise use and sustainable use as well as consideration of socio-economic impacts this seems to be an instance of sub-optimal results.]

p.141

“The Regulatory Impact Statement for the 2003 Zoning Plan concluded that the environmental and economic benefits of the Plan would outweigh its costs.”

[In view of the GBRMPA estimate of a minimal cost to fisheries when the actual cost has been over \$100 million plus an ongoing \$23 million annually in foregone production it seems that either their economic competence or their honesty needs be examined.]

p. 143

- Socio-economic analyses should be a fundamental research priority.
- Socio-economic analyses should be made a formal part of any zoning plan process. They should be undertaken and available prior to consultation on major zoning plan changes and be revised as the options are refined.
- Development of zoning should be based on a set of published Operational Principles approved by the Minister,

[A regulatory impact outline already exists and should be applied (see next page)]

Office of Regulatory Review: RIS Checklist

In order to assist Commonwealth Government agencies with the preparation of their RISs, the ORR has produced the following checklist, which provides an outline of the issues that should be addressed in a RIS:

Problem

- *What is the problem being addressed?*
- *Why is government action needed to correct the problem?*

Checklist for the identification of problems and risks (see below)

Objectives

- *What are the objectives of government action?*
- *Is there a regulation/policy already in place? Who administers it?*

Options

Checklist for the assessment of regulatory forms for their suitability.

Impact analysis (costs and benefits) of each option

- *Who is affected by the problem and who is likely to be affected by its proposed solutions?*
- *How will each proposed option affect existing regulation and the roles of existing regulatory authorities?*
- *Identify and categories the expected impacts of the proposed options as likely benefits or likely costs.*
- *Determine which groups are likely to experience these benefits and costs and what the extent of their impacts are likely to be. Quantify these effects where possible.*
- *Identify distributional effects and attribute these to the group affected.*
- *Identify the data sources and assumptions used in making these assessments.*
- *Summarise outcomes for each option examined.*

Implementation & review

- *How will the preferred option be implemented?*
- *Is the preferred option clear, consistent, comprehensible and accessible to users? Is it sufficiently flexible to adapt to various situations and circumstances?*
- *What is the impact on businesses, including small businesses, and how will compliance and paper burden costs be minimized?*
- *How will the effectiveness of the preferred option be assessed? How frequently?*
- *If the preferred option takes the form of regulation, is there a built-in provision to review or revoke the regulation after it has been in place for a certain length of time?*

Source: Office of Regulation Review (1998)

p.149

“One final consideration is the value of management by a group of statutory officeholders with relevant knowledge, experience and ability for critical thought, objectivity and judgement. This is of particular importance in management of the Great Barrier Reef given its complexity, size,

environmental, social and economic values and the difficult task of managing for multiple use objectives.”

p.150

“All appointees must possess qualifications or experience relevant to the functions of the Authority.”

p.151

“the Minister should preserve a level of independence for the Authority commensurate with the desire to promote objective, scientific and expertise-based management of the Great Barrier Reef.”

[With regard to pp. 149-151 expertise is indeed called for and has been lacking]

p.153

“The Authority’s] role is to undertake functions on behalf of the government. Only a small portion of these functions are done on a commercial basis, specifically the operation of the Reef HQ aquarium and education facility. The revenue raised from these activities is less than the cost of providing the service.”

[See Reef HQ comment p.36 . It might be well to consider either spinning off Reef HQ as a separate entity to privatize or if it is to be retained by GBRMPA to make fuller use of it. In particular encouragement and funding for its use for research could yield valuable benefits as well as enhance its public interest.]

p.158

“Zoning plans are the primary tool for management of the Marine Park.”

[Again, why? As a tool they are like using a sledge hammer on tacks. See comment for p.128 above.]

p.160

“...it is recommended that the basis and procedures for [issuing permits] be consolidated within a single part of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* or Regulations.

This new part of the Act should describe the permitting and assessment process, including permit application requirements, timelines, factors the Authority must consider in issuing permits, and public notification requirements.”

[This is a much needed area of reform. The whole process is far too lengthy expensive, arbitrary, and uncertain. Worse yet there seem to be no attempt at learning from experience to facilitate the process. Routine activities that a quarter century of experience has found to be harmless (*e.g.* mooring a pontoon) still require multiple environmental surveys that cost tens of thousands of dollars and entail an uncertain process lasting months.]

p.162

“The Review Panel recommends that investigation, enforcement and offence provisions be reviewed....”

[Proportionality in particular needs review. Since expansion of the green zones some 300 people have been charged with fishing in them. The conviction rate has been an unbelievable 99%. In addition to a hefty fine the law imposes a mandatory criminal record. Ninety-eight percent of those convicted have been otherwise law abiding citizens with no previous criminal record. They are now banned for life from many activities. Many, if not most, actually caught nothing but were guilty only of accidentally or ignorantly crossing some imaginary line in the ocean when trolling. They would have been much better off to be caught speeding through a school zone where the fine would be less and the infringement only a misdemeanor. It seems we value a child’s life less than that of a mackerel.]

p.164

"8) The Australian and Queensland governments will need to maintain and strengthen their collaborative working relationship for the effective long-term protection and wise use of the Great Barrier Reef."

[Wise use would be especially welcome.]

p.166

"18) The Authority made extensive efforts to achieve effective engagement with stakeholders"

"19) The cumulative regional, social and economic impacts of the State zoning and fisheries management plan changes, that occurred over the same period as the 2003 Zoning Plan, were not assessed, nor were other factors impacting on the viability of business (such as fuel prices and high exchange rates)."

"In relation to recreational fishing there was insufficient attention paid to the effects of restrictions on access for recreational fishing, and in particular the effect on associated businesses."

[This failure again reflects the lack of relevant expertise among Authority management.]

p.167

"The Review Panel recommendsundertaking or facilitating research, monitoring and reporting to inform management, policy and accountability, which would include:

- i) monitoring and assessing the condition of the Marine Park, having regard to the objectives of protection and wise use of the resource
- ii) identifying long-term research needed to inform decisions by government and understanding by the public
- iii) regularly and publicly reporting on the management of the Marine Park and the outlook in the context of risks and pressures."

[Genuine emphasis on an open, transparent, knowledge based approach incorporating wise use would be a major improvement.]

p.169

"6a) The members of the Authority, as statutory officeholders, should be appointed for their relevant expertise and independence."

[Hopefully this repeated call for relevant expertise will actually be heeded.]

p.170

"14) The Review Panel recommends that there be a regular and reliable means of assessing performance in the long-term protection of the Marine Park in an accountable and transparent manner. This should be delivered through a statutory requirement for a periodic *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Outlook Report*.

a) The *Outlook Report* should provide a regular report on the management of the Marine Park and the overall condition of the ecosystem, as well as a risk-based assessment of the longer-term outlook.

b) The *Outlook Report* should include analyses of:

- i) the ongoing commercial and non-commercial use of the Marine Park
- ii) trends over time against baseline and benchmark data, including commercial and recreational use, biodiversity, ecosystem health and resilience and social and economic systems
- iii) the condition of the ecosystem, including health, resilience and biodiversity
- iv) the effect of management measures, including zoning plans and plans of management

c) The *Outlook Report* should be prepared by the Authority and be peer reviewed by an appropriately qualified expert panel appointed by the Minister."

[Assessment of outcomes including provision for independent review has been a major deficit. The current approach of spending ever increasing amounts on management that results in growing impediments to any productive activity with no demonstrated environmental benefit is a travesty of the very concept of management. Nothing would assure better results in resource management than to relate management budgets to outcomes, both environmental and economic.]

p.171

“15) The Review Panel recommends that the Consultative Committee be reconstituted as an Advisory Board to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage.”

“16) The Review Panel recommends that the Local Marine Advisory Committees and Reef Advisory Committees should be formally constituted as committees reporting to the Authority, but a statutory basis is not necessary.

- a) The Authority should establish clear terms of reference and appointment processes for the committees.
- b) The terms of reference should establish that the role of the Local Marine Advisory Committees is to provide area-based advice to the Authority, and the role of the Reef Advisory Committees is to provide issues-based advice on operational issues.
- c) Appointment and dismissal of committee members should be the responsibility of all members of the Authority collectively rather than the Chairperson alone.
- d) To promote transparency and accountability, the terms of reference and appointment processes for the committees should be publicly available.
- e) The Authority could also publish minutes of committee meetings and copies of advice from the committees on its website.”

[Genuinely independent and knowledgeable advice for both the Authority and the Minister would be valuable. Transparency and accountability in appointments is essential in avoiding the selection of handbag Committees that serve only to provide a facade of outside consultation. Publication of minutes and advice on a web page is a trivial task and provides immediate access to any interested party. It should be required, not discretionary.]

p.172

“j) To ensure that the outcome of the zoning plan process is both transparent and accountable it is recommended that, following acceptance by the Minister and Parliament, the Authority make information available to stakeholders on the rationale for the final zoning plan and in particular the reason for changes between the draft and final plans. This could include the publication of a synopsis of the process and its outcomes.”

[This is good with respect to transparency and accountability but unfortunately implies that ongoing zoning and re-zoning the reef will continue to be a major activity of the Authority (see comment for p.128 above.)

An excellent report on MPAs which includes OECD and Commonwealth guidelines for good regulation is available at <http://www.bia.org.au/marine-parks>. These guidelines are particularly relevant to GBR management issues. My excerpts from and commentary on this review as well as copies of the present document are available online at www.goldendolphin.com, where they may be found via the **ECO ISSUES** item in the contents list.

Walter Starck
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