



# Reef 2050 Plan

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## INDEPENDENT EXPERT PANEL – COMMUNIQUÉ 5 MAY 2017

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The seventh meeting of the Reef 2050 Plan Independent Expert Panel was held today in Brisbane, chaired by Professor Ian Chubb AC. The meeting was a dedicated workshop to develop advice on protection of the Great Barrier Reef in light of widespread coral bleaching in both 2016 and 2017.

The Panel were united in their concern about the seriousness of the impacts facing the Reef and concluded that coral bleaching since early 2016 has changed the Reef fundamentally. There is great concern about the future of the Reef, and the communities and businesses that depend on it, but hope still remains for maintaining ecological function over the coming decades.

Members agreed that in our lifetime and on our watch, substantial areas of the Great Barrier Reef and the surrounding ecosystems are experiencing major long-term damage which may be irreversible unless action is taken now. The planet has changed in a way that science informs us is unprecedented in human history. While that in itself may be cause for action, the extraordinary rapidity of the change we now observe makes action even more urgent.

The Panel considers that action to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases must be central to the response. This needs to be coupled with increased efforts to improve the resilience of the coral and other ecosystems that form the Great Barrier Reef. The focus of efforts should be on managing the Reef to maintain the benefits that the Reef provides.

The Panel agreed that the Reef 2050 Plan is a strong foundation to strengthen the long-term strategy for Reef protection through the mid-term review in 2018. Changes should include:

- Inclusion of climate change adaptation and mitigation actions
- A focus on a sustainable, functional Reef in the face of emerging cumulative impacts
- Greater emphasis on empowering local people and communities to deliver on-ground action that will benefit the Reef.

In the short-term, continued efforts should include:

- Improving water quality
- Reducing local pressures
- Increasing efforts to control crown-of-thorns starfish
- Exploring an innovation challenge approach for mechanisms to improve Reef health
- Developing criteria for the assessment of innovative proposals.

The advice will be consolidated over the coming weeks and will be presented by the Chair of the Independent Expert Panel to the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum in July. The Panel is scheduled to meet twice more in 2017, in August and October.



## **Panel members**

### **Professor Ian Chubb AC (Chair)**

Australia's former Chief Scientist.

### **Associate Professor Eva Abal**

Program Director of the Global Change Institute's Sustainable Water Program.  
Chief Scientific Officer of the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.

### **Dr Andrew Ash**

Chief Research Scientist.  
CSIRO Agriculture.

### **Professor Mike Bell**

Chair of Tropical Agronomy.  
University of Queensland.

### **Professor Damien Burrows**

Director of TropWATER.  
James Cook University.

### **Professor Bill Dennison**

Professor of Marine Science and Vice President for Science Applications.  
University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science.

### **Dr Stefan Hajkowicz**

Natural resource policy and economic analyst.  
CSIRO's Sustainable Regional Development.

### **Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg\***

Director of the Global Change Institute and Professor of Marine Science.  
The University of Queensland.

### **Professor Terry Hughes**

Director of the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies.  
James Cook University.

### **Professor Helene Marsh**

Dean of Graduate Research Studies and Professor of Environmental Science.  
James Cook University.

### **Dr Russell Reichelt**

Chairman and Chief Executive.  
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

### **Dr Britta Schaffelke**

Research Program Leader.  
A Healthy and Resilient Great Barrier Reef, Australian Institute of Marine Science.

### **Adjunct Associate Professor Stephan Schnierer**

Southern Cross University.

### **Dr Roger Shaw**

Independent consultant.  
Chair of Reef Water Quality Protection Plan Independent Science Panel.

### **Professor Natalie Stoeckl**

College of Business, Law & Governance.  
James Cook University.

\* Apologies, Friday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2017.