

25 July 2017

Australian Marine Parks Management Planning Comments
Department of the Environment and Energy
Reply Paid 787
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear colleagues

Please accept this brief submission which focuses on the Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Park.

Southern Gulf NRM is the regional natural resource management organisation for the Southern Gulf region in North West Queensland. Our region extends over 195,000 square kilometres and includes the catchments of the Flinders, Leichardt and Nicholson rivers and smaller coastal catchments, all of which drain into the Gulf of Carpentaria. Our role is to work with land managers and partners to achieve sustainable natural resources management in the region. See our website: www.southerngulf.com.au.

Catchment management makes an important contribution to Marine Park values

Water quality in our rivers and streams has a direct impact on the receiving environment. Nowhere is this clearer than in relation to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, where governments have recognised that improvements in land management in the catchment make an important contribution to the health and resilience of the Great Barrier Reef. There is no reason to assume that the condition of the waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria and therefore the environmental values of the Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Park are not also affected by adjacent catchment land use. Indeed, the shallow, confined waters of the Gulf may be particularly sensitive to the influence of the major rivers in its catchment.

Table 2.2 includes appropriate, if generalised recognition of the risk of alterations to catchment hydrology to marine parks, but there seems little in section 2.5 detailing management actions that would address that risk. Achieving marine park conservation outcomes requires action outside of park boundaries, even if these are outside the direct role of the Director of National Parks. The management plan should specify these needs.

The bulk of the Southern Gulf region is currently used for extensive cattle grazing. We know that maintenance of good pasture cover as part of best practice management systems can have a positive effect on reducing sediment runoff into streams and rivers.

There is strong interest in the development of irrigation in the upper Flinders system, with the Queensland Government issuing significant new water licences over the past couple of years. Communities in the region face the challenge of ensuring that the development of

irrigation is conducted in a sustainable way, minimising the risk of adverse impacts on river flow or water quality. These and other pressures and land use changes in the catchment must be well-managed to protect the values of the Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Park. These matters are a core interest of Southern Gulf NRM, which is well placed to deliver programs that mitigate risks to the marine park and other values.

The status of sediments, pesticides and other pollutants in the Gulf of Carpentaria is incompletely understood. We note that there is some National Environmental Science Program research currently underway into the hydrology of the Flinders River in the context of upstream irrigation development. This is a positive step, but considerably more effort is needed to develop a sufficient understanding of the hydrology of these rivers and the Gulf in relation to the marine park.

Recommendations:

1. Additional text should be included in the management plan:
 - Recognising the importance of ensuring best practice pastoral land management in the catchments of the Gulf of Carpentaria and supporting the work of NRM bodies and others to achieve this
 - Recognising the importance of best practice in the development of irrigation in the Flinders Catchment and supporting the work of NRM bodies and others to achieve this
 - Highlighting the importance of better research and monitoring to understand the status and flows of nutrients, sediments and pollutants in the Gulf of Carpentaria that affect the Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Park
2. While not directly a matter for the management plan, the Director of National Parks should work to ensure that the catchment management needs of the new marine parks are recognised in determining investment priorities under the National Landcare Program.

Implementation resources must be adequate and appropriately engage with regional communities

The management plan and associated website make a number of references to implementation planning but it is silent on the issue of implementation resources. There is a long list of proposed implementation actions, but it is most unclear on how these will be put into place. As far as Southern Gulf NRM is aware, the Director of National Parks has no staff based in the region – or anywhere nearby – other than staff at Kakadu National Park. It is difficult for regional stakeholders to have confidence that a marine park management team based in Hobart will provide effective stewardship for the Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Park, 3000 km to the north. It is important that appropriately senior National Parks staff are based in the region and that they regularly engage with regional stakeholders.

The management plan refers to partnerships with other Commonwealth and State agencies as a means of achieving effective management. Most of the listed agencies themselves have

a very limited presence in the Gulf of Carpentaria region, reinforcing the need for direct investment in resourcing by the Director of National Parks.

Recognition of the role of Indigenous ranger programs is welcome and we observe the good work done by the rangers working under the umbrella of the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation. Support for the involvement of these teams is welcome, but success will depend on the continuing support by the Director of National Parks, and the establishment of robust management systems.

Recommendation

1. The Director of National Park should ensure the deployment of marine park management staff appropriately based in northern Australia to lead the implementation of management plans.
2. The management plan should include additional text explaining how and where park management staff will be deployed.
3. The Director of National Parks should ensure that where Indigenous rangers are engaged in marine park management, they must be appropriately supported, trained and authorised.

Regional Advisory Committees should include NRM expertise

The notion of a regional advisory committee is a welcome one that will help ensure management is relevant to the needs, concerns and opportunities of the regional stakeholders most directly affected. In view of the importance of the management of the Gulf catchments to the future of the Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Park, Southern Gulf NRM would be pleased to nominate a representative to participate.

I would be pleased to discuss these comments should you wish. I can be reached at 0417 052 495 or ceo@southerngulf.com.au

Yours sincerely



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