Reef Guardian Council Communiqué: As communities of the Great Barrier Reef and Reef Guardian Councils we seek State and Federal Government guarantee that coastal development does not damage the Great Barrier Reef any further
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Townsville Reef Guardian Council Communiqué

As communities of the Great Barrier Reef and Reef Guardian Councils we seek State and Federal Government guarantee that coastal development does not damage the Great Barrier Reef any further

A healthy and productive Great Barrier Reef in integral to who we are in north Queensland, we are reef people and its future matters to all of us, even if we are not direct users. As local authorities we naturally support economic development in our cities and regions, however, the reef's economic importance to employment, tourism and lifestyle (recreational fishing, diving and boating) is integral to this future economic development and ongoing employment of reef depended industries.

As we understand, the threats to the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) are real, and some of the threats are now being mitigated by a myriad of effective actions we as local councils, farmers and fishers are proactively committing to, in order to reduce our impacts [(see references1,2,3 below)].

In particular, Reef Guardian and catchment Councils have, collectively, hundreds of programs which reduce the impact of coastal communities and council activities upon the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. These programs address: catchment and water quality management[(22-Case study 30)]; waste management; land management; climate change mitigation; community engagement and/or resident/student/business capacity building[(22-Case study 32)].

These programs help to protect the Great Barrier Reef which brings to Queensland over 60 000 jobs and income of over $6 billion annually – much of which benefits our coastal constituents.

Because we are concerned about recent scientific evidence, about the continued decline in the Great Barrier Reef's coral cover, concerns about the status of key inshore habitats and species, and degradation of the health of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem [(1,2,4-16)], we, as local governments and communities, call on State and Federal Governments to guarantee new coastal developments will not further increase existing impacts of the GBR, as these impacts have been well documented.

We would be highly concerned for our reef, should additional pressure result from the significant expansion of ports and industrial development accompanied by a projected near-doubling in shipping, major coastal reclamation works, massive seabed dredging and dredge spoil disposal – all either immediately adjacent to, or within, the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area [17 - 21].

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We, as Reef Guardian and catchment Councils, believe these activities could further damage our Great Barrier Reef based upon our experience in managing coastal catchments and island communities. Because we know current management systems for mitigating environmental impact are flawed (inadequate), despite best management practices, and we feel strongly that additional impacts from increased coastal shipping and associated coastal development are unlikely to be fully mitigated.

Therefore, we ask State and Federal Governments to work with Councils and industry to create a collaborative community and an integrated community of business, industry, government and citizens[22-Case studies 30 & 32] that:

- Ensures new development and growth within existing ports (including the dumping of dredge materials) does not impact on the World Heritage values of the Reef (including inshore fringing coral reefs and marine wildlife habitats);
- Allows new port developments outside major, long-established port areas if rigorous, independent scientific analysis shows that there would be less environmental impact by spreading industrial port development to other locations;
- Improves environmental standards and technology applied to existing industrial developments along the GBR coastline to ensure maximum environmental protection;
- Requires new development to minimise its industrial footprint through efficiency and resourcing sharing of infrastructure;
- Fosters innovation, creativity and system-based approaches[22-Case studies 32] in: port design; construction materials; addressing ecological design/processes and offsets; and dredging (including sediment, contaminants and marine wildlife safety);
- Improves shipping management to ensure no impacts on World Heritage values of the Reef;
- Recognises potential value of shipping for reducing heavy vehicle road transport;
- Develops and requires social and environmental offsets for identified and potential or unforeseen impacts, including recognition of the opportunity to reverse inshore habiat decline of fringing coral reefs and marine habitats (e.g. Middle Reef in Cleveland Bay, Townsville); and
- Incorporates a collaborative approach to multi-stakeholder involvement, catchment management and collective learning approaches.

Townsville City Council dated 21 May 2013

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