

Further to my discussions with Greg Murtough on 13/9/02, please find following the Mackay Port Authority's initial submission regarding the GBR Water Quality issues paper. As outlined in the submission, should additional information, particularly economic evaluations etc, be required this can be provided at a later date.

The Authority looks forward to the opportunity to review the Interim Report when it is released.

Cheers

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1. What is the nature and extent of research and monitoring activities relating to land and water uses, water quality and GBR health? What are the main areas of scientific agreement and disagreement on these relationships?

The Mackay Port Authority is basically a landlord with regard to activities on its Strategic Port Lands and as such monitoring of individual industries or operations is set by State and / or Local government. It must be pointed out however that in addition to this, the Authority itself monitors Water Quality in its immediate catchments etc to ensure that industry within its bounds are not operating illegally etc. If anything 'out of the ordinary' is identified then the relevant agency is informed so that they can take necessary corrective actions etc.

It is particularly important to note however that the Mackay Port is a coastal port, not on a river as is the case for many of its neighbouring facilities, and as such most 'pollutants' encountered in the Mackay Port are directly derived from inputs from the coastline upon which the port is situated. This can include inputs from River sources etc that are then carried by Tidal currents etc and deposited in the harbour. As part of its dredging program, the Authority presently relocates this material back to sea, under strict conditions imposed by Environment Australia, for natural redistribution.

The predominant 'scientific' disagreement that the Authority is aware of is how to properly evaluate inputs into the GBR lagoon. Often ports are seen as major polluters when realistically input from many northern Queensland rivers have a far greater impact on the potential health of the GBR lagoon than port or shipping operations. Also, the way in which guidelines are applied by different agencies can often lead to more stringent requirements that may have detrimental economic implications. This could be on the port or alternately on the industries upon which the port relies heavily, such as Sugar etc.

2. Are there any particularly useful examples which shed light on the nature and extent of the relationship between land and water uses and the GBR, including areas where multiple factors are seen as contributing to deteriorating water quality?

3. To what extent might Australia's economic, social and cultural values and international obligations be affected by deterioration in the health of the GBR?

Whilst it is important to maintain the health of the GBR lagoon, it is vital to many regional communities and cities that this be undertaken in an economically and socially responsible manner to ensure the viability of regions, particularly those that rely so heavily upon 'cropping' etc. Again, whilst these activities may have an impact on the GBR lagoon, it is important that this be properly assessed with regard to Natural Events, such as cyclones etc, that potentially have a greater and more lasting impact.

4. Should the Commission undertake a more detailed investigation of a few regions or catchments as part of its study to highlight important regional and local issues? If so, which areas are suggested and for what reasons?

It is the belief of the Authority that this would be beneficial as there are such diverse pressures and activities undertaken and experienced along the length of the GBR lagoon. Whilst some regions rely heavily upon tourism, and are generally in close proximity to more sensitive environments of the GBR lagoon, others rely more heavily on production on land and may or may not be having an effect on the lagoon. As such hub areas would be useful to evaluate, such as for example Cairns and region, Townsville and region, Burdekin and the Mackay region.

5. Are the proposed indicators of economic importance appropriate, taking note

of the need for consistent comparison across industries? If not, please suggest alternatives.

Indicators are largely relevant to the type of operation or industry from which they are taken. With regard to transport type operations such as that of the Port, the Bureau of Transport Economics has developed generally acceptable economic indicators that are being broadly applied by most port operations.

6. Are some economic indicators more relevant to certain industries and not to others?

See above comment.

7. Are the proposed indicators of social importance appropriate, taking note of indigenous and non-indigenous values? If not, please suggest alternatives.

Yes.

8. What data sources should be used for recreational fishing, taking note of the need for consistent comparisons across industries?

N/A

9. Are there other useful data sources, in addition to ABS, ABARE and OESR, for the industries noted in the terms of reference?

As previously noted, BTE can provide information with regard to many port operations.

10. Are the proposed levels of regional disaggregation appropriate? If not, please suggest alternatives.

Yes.

11. What growth projections are available for the main industries, particularly in 2010 and 2020?

It is envisaged that projections of growth that have an impact on port and shipping also, will be available from the major stakeholders with which the Authority deals. Obviously at this time that includes Sugar, Grain, Fertiliser products, Mining Support etc. A number of potentially new trades are also identified by the Authority within this time frame that could impact on both port operations and also other catchment based issues. Further information can be provided at a later date should this information be required.

12. What assumptions are used to generate these projections?

13. Are projections available at national, State, regional and local levels?

Whilst this information would generally be available at a State level from many of these industries, the Authority does not have ready access to it.

14. What variables are projected for each industry and are they suitable indicators of economic importance?

The largest single variable that is foreseen in the catchments to which the Mackay Port serves is with regard to seasonal variability in rainfall etc that can have major implications for industry.

15. What are the principal activities of the main industries that have the potential to change water quality in the GBR lagoon, and how do these industries currently manage these?

In the Mackay region this would have to include issues such as general farming practice, urban runoff etc. The Authority is not in a position to provide comment on management practices in this regard.

16. To what extent are management approaches like precision fertiliser application or revegetation being used to limit reductions in water quality, and what are the key incentives behind their use/non-use? Are there significant regional variations in the adoption of such practices?

The Mackay Port Authority uses both revegetation and also maintenance and enhancement of wetland areas as a specific management practice to help control water quality through runoff etc, as well as Stormwater Quality Improvement Devices etc where runoff is capable of having any impacts so as to minimise these.

17. What industry codes of practice and other voluntary measures have been

developed that would influence water quality in the GBR lagoon? Are these effective in terms of their adoption rates and their contribution to improved water

quality outcomes?

The Mackay Port Authority, as for most other ports in Queensland if not all, operate to the Qld Transport Environment Policy for Queensland Ports, as well as relevant legislation and licensing requirements etc. As such, many of these initiatives require stormwater quality for example to be maintained. It must be remembered however that this is relevant only to the port operations and that port users and tenants have individual responsibilities.

18. Are there policy options which should be given priority for analysis by the Commission? If so, why are the nominated policy options of particular interest?

19. To what extent will the assessment of policy options need to take account of variations between and within catchments?

See previous comments regarding variability and also location relevant to sensitive environments etc.

20. What information is available on the costs and benefits of policy options?

21. Could institutional arrangements for managing water quality in the GBR lagoon be improved? If so, how?

Yes. At present there appears to be little cross consultation in development of policy etc which then has implications on both ongoing management of the GBR and also on economic sustainability of various industries etc within those regions.

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