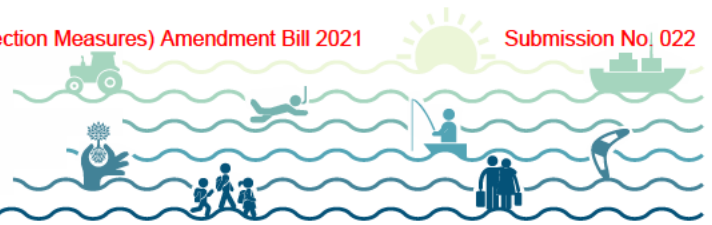


## Whitsundays Local Marine Advisory Committee



June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021

To the Secretary of the Healthy and Environment Committee,

**Re: WLMAC Submission on the Environmental and Other Legislation (Reversal of Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) Amendment Bill 2021 (Bill)**

On behalf of the Whitsunday Local Marine Advisory Committee (WLMAC), please accept this submission regarding the Environmental and Other Legislation (Reversal of Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) Amendment Bill 2021 (Bill)

Based in the Whitsundays, the WLMAC is a voluntary community-based committee advising the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority on local level Marine Park management issues.

WLMAC would strongly urge the committee not to approve the new aforementioned amendment Bill, which we believe attempts to downgrade regulations that are helping to improve agricultural land runoff into the Great Barrier Reef.

Good quality water is critical for our Great Barrier Reef's health. Urgent and rapid compliance with Reef protection regulations is required to give the inshore Reef ecosystems the quality of water it needs to survive, sustain its social and economic benefits, and build resilience to warming waters.

The Whitsunday region, a major tourist destination, is a prime example of the need to retain the previous environmental legislation. Over 40% of all Great Barrier Reef visitors pass through the Whitsundays. The nearshore Whitsunday Islands, including the internationally famous Whitehaven Beach, make the region (and its ecosystems) unique. The health of the island reef system is paramount to the ongoing success of the local tourism industry.

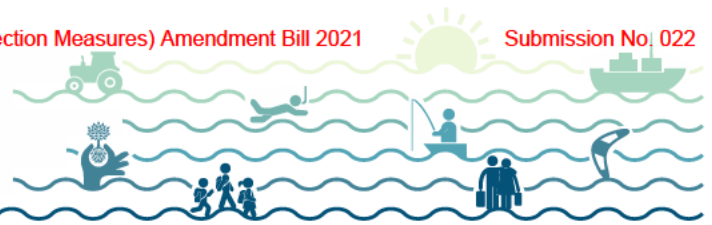
Unfortunately, the nearshore islands are more prone to land-sourced pollution than offshore destinations. Historically, poor water quality has been a serious problem for the Whitsundays and has seen little (if any) improvement in the past 20 years.

There is an overwhelming scientific consensus on the detrimental impacts of poor water quality in the GBR. This fact is reflected in numerous plans to protect the Reef, most of which have bipartisan political support.

The WLMAC believes that management of the GBR is one of the best national and international examples of science-informed, evidence-based adaptive management enhanced by regular and public reporting. The WLMAC also believes there is ample evidence based on good, quality assured, regularly reviewed and updated science to show that there is an urgent need to minimise the impacts of land-sourced pollution, and that the agricultural industries in the GBR catchments all need to be part of this solution. Furthermore, there is strong evidence linking the impacts of farm water runoff on the health of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) and adjacent catchment areas. The *2017 Scientific Consensus Statement, Land Use Impacts on Great Barrier Reef Water Quality and Ecosystem Condition* provides the most comprehensive, consolidated analysis and synthesis of the evidence linking the impacts of water runoff from both agricultural and urban-industrial land uses.



## Whitsundays Local Marine Advisory Committee



Chapter 6 of the 2019 Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report prepared by GBRMPA provides a good overview of why the increased pollutant loads from land-based run-off are affecting the GBR, and reef-dependent industries.

In Recommendation 5 of their 2016 report, the GBR Water Science Taskforce states clearly the case for regulation, as noted in the following quote:

*"...to be an important part of the mix of policy instruments to accelerate progress towards meeting the Reef water quality targets. Across many sectors in society there is a consistent pattern that voluntary practices either by industry or individuals need to be underpinned by adequate regulation to bring about changes in behaviour or improved management outcomes."*

The Australian and Queensland governments have committed a significant amount of funding towards improving the water quality of the Great Barrier Reef. Important progress has been made, including with the adoption of voluntary initiatives. However, the GBR Report Cards show that the load reductions are not on track to achieve the 2025 targets.

It is clear now that the 2025 water quality targets will not be met by relying solely on voluntary adoption of best management practices. The 2019 GBR Report Card shows that, after more than a decade of investment, 36.2% of grazing land and 12.7% for sugarcane is using best management practice systems. This is currently well behind the target of 90% of land at best management practice systems by 2025.

We believe that from this present rate of adoption, whilst many farmers are participating and making a difference, it appears that there are graziers and canegrowers who have decided not to participate in government and industry programs to support adoption of best management practices. We believe that those choosing to not participate are undermining the effort and investment made by their peers.

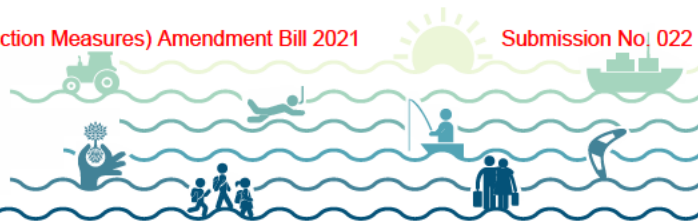
This is a key reason why the WLMAC has strongly supported effective regulations to help get practice change on track to achieving GBR water quality targets. We hold that effective regulation, along with long-standing government and industry investment supporting adoption of best management practices, provides the right policy and investment formula to achieving the 2025 water quality targets.

Lastly, we would like to note that given the recent draft decision by UNESCO to list the Great Barrier Reef as "in danger", Australia has a responsibility to work harder to ensure the future health of the Reef. In their report, UNESCO noted that *"the draft decision concluded that, despite many positive achievements by the Australian Government, progress has been insufficient in meeting key targets of the Reef 2050 Plan. The Plan requires stronger and clearer commitments, in particular towards urgently countering the effects of climate change, but also towards accelerating water quality improvement and land management measures."*

WLMAC strongly urge the committee to refuse this "Reversal Bill" to help safeguard the future of our Reef and to recommend improvements to ensure the achievement of the 2025 water quality targets.



Whitsundays Local Marine  
Advisory Committee



Kind regards

Olivia Brodhurst  
Chair, Whitsunday Local Marine Advisory Committee

