

Committee Secretary
Health and Environment Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000

30 June 2021

Response to the Reversal of Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures Amendment Bill

To the Health and Environment Committee,

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the *Environment and Other Legislation (Reversal of Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) Amendment Bill 2021*, further to the presentation to the Health and Environment Committee at a public hearing on 11 June.

QTIC is the state's peak body for tourism in Queensland, representing the interests of the tourism and hospitality industries. QTIC is an independent, membership-based organisation with more than 3,000 members who operate across all sectors of the tourism industry, including business operators, Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs), sector associations and education providers. Our efforts are aimed squarely at helping the tourism industry to drive sustainable business and product development, stimulate business attraction and investment, develop workforce skills, and support tourism jobs and business.

In 2019-20, the tourism industry contributed \$22.7 billion to Queensland's Gross State Product (GSP) and measured \$20.3 billion Gross Value Added (GVA)¹. Notably, the tourism industry comprises some tens of thousands of businesses across Queensland, of which a majority are classified as small businesses employing less than 20 people². Although the tourism industry has faced many acute challenges in the past year, it is showing signs of a strong recovery, and continues to act as a key driver of the Queensland economy. The *Good to Go* campaign³ announced by Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) will continue to drive visitor demand. In a much more long-term sense, it is important that other factors are not permitted to compromise this period of economic growth and renewal.

¹ <https://www.tra.gov.au/data-and-research/reports/state-tourism-satellite-account-2019-20/queensland-tourism-summary>

² <https://www.tra.gov.au/data-and-research/reports/tourism-businesses-in-australia-june-2015-to-2020>

³ <https://teq.queensland.com/industry-resources/marketing/holiday-here-this-year>

Poor water quality poses an alarming, ongoing threat to the biodiversity of the Great Barrier Reef's fragile ecosystem and to the communities and industries that rely on it. The Great Barrier Reef is a unique part of the natural environment that greatly contributes to the state and national economy. It has an "economic, social, and icon asset value of \$56 billion, supports [approximately] 64,000 jobs, and contributes \$6.4 billion to the Australian economy"⁴. As such, it is critical that measures are put in place to ensure its ongoing health and curtail the runoff of sediment and pesticides. QTIC stresses the vital and urgent need for effective action to mitigate these risks. We support the unamended Bill and its commitment to improving the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef via compulsory minimum regulatory standards in addition to clear benchmarks and identifiable long-term targets.

The perception of a 'dead' reef is extremely damaging to the tourism industry. The *Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2019*⁵ indicates that visitation levels are sensitive and closely linked to the public perception about the reef. Notable declines in visitation have previously occurred following cyclone seasons, back-to-back bleaching events, and related media coverage⁶. Implementing strong protective measures to safeguard the reef ensures the livelihoods of thousands of tourism operators. On a related note, we also highlight that the reef and its surrounding areas are of high cultural significance to traditional owners and consider that any environment-related legislation should be conducted in close consultation. The proposed Bill amendment may contradict existing State Government policy relating to Indigenous heritage and culture. The *First Nations Tourism Plan*⁷, developed by QTIC following extensive consultation with First Nations peoples, tourism industry stakeholders, and key government departments offers a considered guide for future action in relation to the tourism sector. Collaborative stewardship⁸ is key – we point towards the tourism industry as chiefly concerned with operators' own livelihoods and the long-term health of the reef able to contribute to 'future proofing' both economy and environment. Peer education is also critical and will contribute to the long-term implementation of any regulatory measures.

On a final note, QTIC contributed to a review of the *Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan*⁹ in 2018 and consider this strategy to be an invaluable document that should be used to guide all future reef-related legislation. We also draw attention to the fact that the Great Barrier Reef is on the World Heritage register, based on its outstanding natural values. However, as noted by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, our record on water quality and catchment management needs to be strengthened for this status to be upheld.

⁴ <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/articles/great-barrier-reef.html>

⁵ p. 112

⁶ <https://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-work/Managing-multiple-uses/tourism-on-the-great-barrier-reef>

⁷ <https://qticazure.blob.core.windows.net/crmblobcontainer/Version%206%20-%20FNTF%20Final%20Version%20-%20High%20res%20Web.pdf>

⁸ <https://elibrary.gbrmpa.gov.au/jspui/handle/11017/3781>

⁹ <https://qticazure.blob.core.windows.net/crmblobcontainer/200929%20-%20Reef%202050%20Long-Term%20Sustainability%20Plan%20Review.pdf>

We also emphasise that Australia is now a signatory to multiple international reports and goals which directly relate to the protection of environmental and cultural heritage. These include the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Retaining legislation to protect the reef directly related to Goal 13 (Climate Action) and Goal 14 (Life Underwater). More recently, Australia has also become a signatory to the World Heritage Committee report¹⁰¹¹. Implementing the amendments to this Bill would compromise those commitments.

We thank you for your consideration of QTIC's position on the need for forward-facing protection measures relating to the Great Barrier Reef. Please contact QTIC by phone [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED] should you have any queries.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brett Kapernick', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brett Kapernick
General Manager – Business Strategy & Deputy CEO

¹⁰ Relevant pages submitted by QTIC CEO Daniel Gschwind and tabled as part of the 11 June 2021 public hearing.

¹¹ See details in Hansard:

<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/HEC/2021/RGBRPM2021/trns-ph-14Jun2021.pdf>