

# Labor's Reef Rescue Plan



New Leadership.

# Labor's Reef Rescue Plan

**Election 2007**

Policy Document

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# Labor's Reef Rescue Plan

## Overview

Australia's Great Barrier Reef is one of the natural wonders of the world.

The Reef is the world's most extensive coral reef system and contains habitats that are significant and critically important for the conservation of biological diversity.

More than 63,000 people are employed in Great Barrier Reef tourism, fishing and cultural and recreational related industries, which together generate more than \$6 billion in Gross Domestic Product each year.

But all of this is under threat.

Unless we take decisive action to tackle climate change and cut greenhouse gas emissions now, the future health of the Great Barrier Reef will be at serious risk.

But the Howard Government has been asleep on climate change, ignoring its potential to destroy both the environmental values of the Reef and the economic benefits it generates for Queensland.

The Government has refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, and has failed to take any meaningful action to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

The Howard Government has also ignored warnings about the impact of declining water quality on the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

Excessive nutrients, pesticides and sediments from run-off from land based activities are degrading inshore reefs and making the entire system more vulnerable to the impact of climate change.

In 2002, the Prime Minister and Queensland Premier announced a joint approach to the issue of land-based pollution affecting reef water quality, signing the 10-year Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Protection Plan.

In 2003, the Howard Government said it would "be making a major contribution to the plan".

Four years on, the Government has failed to commit any funding to implement the Plan.

A Rudd Labor Government will implement a comprehensive **\$200 million five-year Reef Rescue Plan** to tackle climate change and improve water quality in the Reef through a range of activities, including:

- Providing grants to farmers, cane growers, Indigenous communities and landholders for improved land management.
- Building partnerships with Indigenous communities and industry groups.
- Monitoring water quality and land condition monitoring.
- Investing in research and development.

Labor's *Reef Rescue Plan* represents the largest single commitment ever made to address the threats of climate change and declining water quality to the Great Barrier Reef.

It will have enormous benefits for the Reef, local landholders and farmers, the tourism and fishing industries and Indigenous communities living adjacent to the Reef.

Labor's *Reef Rescue Plan* has six key elements.

- A **Water Quality Grants Scheme**, at a cost of \$146 million over five years.
- A **Reef Partnerships Program**, at a cost of \$12 million over five years.
- A **Land and Sea Country Indigenous Partnerships Program**, at a cost of \$10 million over five years.
- A **Reef Water Quality Research and Development Program**, at a cost of \$10 million over five years.
- A **Water Quality Monitoring and Reporting Program**, at a cost of \$22 million over five years.
- The publication of an annual **Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Report Card**.

A Rudd Labor Government will implement a comprehensive \$200 million five-year **Reef Rescue Plan** to tackle climate change and improve water quality in the Great Barrier Reef

## The Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef was inscribed on the World Heritage list in 1981 as an example of “superlative natural phenomena”.

It is the world's largest World Heritage Area, extending 2,000 kilometres and covering an area of 35 million hectares.

The Reef is the world's most extensive coral reef system and contains critically important habitats for conservation of biological diversity including<sup>1</sup>:

- Extensive areas of seagrass, mangrove and island communities.
- 2,900 individual reefs, of which 760 are fringing reefs.
- Nesting grounds of worldwide significance for the endangered green and loggerhead turtles.
- Several hundred bird species, including reef herons, ospreys, pelicans, frigate birds, sea eagles and shearwaters.
- The internationally endangered dugong and critical breeding areas for the humpback whale.
- 1,500 species of fish, 350 species of hard corals, 4,000 mollusc species and 500 species of sponges.

The Great Barrier Reef World Heritage property is also of cultural importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

More than 63,000 people are employed in the Great Barrier Reef tourism, fishing and cultural and recreational industries which together generate more than \$6 billion in Gross Domestic Product each year<sup>2</sup>.

## Challenges for the Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is under significant threat from pollution and climate change. Scientists have found that the Reef could face devastation by mid-century from coral bleaching caused by rising temperatures.

Even if the global community succeeds in dramatically reducing greenhouse gas emissions that are causing global warming, emissions already in the atmosphere mean that some temperature increases are already locked in, with profound consequences for the Reef.

The Reef will be more vulnerable to these impacts if reef waters are polluted from water entering the sea from agricultural activities on the mainland.

In order to protect the outstanding natural heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef, it is necessary to take urgent action to reduce the twin threats of climate change and declining water quality.

### Climate Change

The Great Barrier Reef could be one of the first and most significant victims of climate change as greenhouse gas emissions from human activity drive increasing global temperatures and wilder weather.

More than 63,000 people are employed in Great Barrier Reef related industries, generating more than \$6 billion in GDP each year

The Great Barrier Reef could be one of the first victims of climate change

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was recently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its work on communicating the consequences of human-induced climate change.

Its 2007 Assessment Report concluded that:

- Sea temperatures on the Great Barrier Reef have warmed by about 0.4 degrees over the last century.
- The Great Barrier Reef has experienced eight mass coral bleaching events since 1979.
- Coral bleaching is projected to occur each year by as soon as 2030 and there is little evidence that corals have the capacity for genetic change to adapt within this timeframe.
- Substantial impacts on biodiversity and the fishing and tourism industries are likely.
- Improving reef water quality is an important measure to enhance the ability of coral reefs to adapt to the effects of climate change<sup>3</sup>.

It is expected that sea temperatures will increase further as a direct consequence of human-induced climate change, which will result in more extensive coral bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef.

The risk of bleaching is magnified if Reef waters are polluted from increased nutrients and sediments associated with catchment run-off.

Yet for 11 long years, and in the face of numerous compelling reports, the Howard Government has denied and downplayed the science of climate change and its potential impact on our natural environment and the Australian economy.

As recently as August 2006, the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources said, "well I am a sceptic of the connection between emissions and climate change,"<sup>4</sup> and John Howard said, "I am sceptical about some of the more gloomy predictions"<sup>5</sup>.

But according to the Government's own forecast – by the Australian Greenhouse Office – our greenhouse gas emissions are set to soar by 27 per cent by 2020<sup>6</sup>.

Despite these warnings, the Howard Government has repeatedly refused to set a long-term target for reducing our emissions.

The only action the Howard Government has taken is to commit to a nuclear powered Australia, through its plans to build 25 nuclear reactors on our coastline and to take nuclear waste from other countries.

## **Water Quality**

There is a growing body of scientific evidence linking the declining health of the Great Barrier Reef to poor water quality. Major run-off events lead to blankets of mud and excessive fertiliser run-off which cause coral bleaching, pesticide pollution and algal blooms.

Water pollution also impedes the natural ability of coral to feed, reproduce, combat disease and recover from disturbances such as bleaching events.

Science has shown that coral can adapt to some climate changes – but only if it has clean water to live in.

To help the Great Barrier Reef cope with predicted climate changes, it will be critical to clean up the run-off from the mainland – which means changes to current land management. Recent studies have identified where, when and how farm pollution threatens the Reef.

Scientists, conservation groups, farmers, and the tourism and fishing industries all agree that more can be done to clean up run-off waters to the Great Barrier Reef. Best farm practice can reduce reef pollution and also improve farm productivity by helping farmers keep their fertiliser, soil and chemicals on-farm.

Labor's *Reef Rescue Plan* will fast track and substantially expand efforts to improve farming practices in the Great Barrier Reef catchment.

By implementing new leading edge farming practices, we can boost productivity and reduce the input costs of North Queensland's agricultural sector to ensure it remains competitive on world export markets in the future.

Modelling by the CSIRO, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and James Cook University has identified run-off hot spots which pinpoint where, when and how pollution is being delivered to the Reef<sup>7</sup>.

These include areas of high fertiliser and herbicide use as well as areas of high grazing erosion, as illustrated in the map over the page.

In recent years significant advances have been made by the sugar cane, cattle and banana industries to identify new ways of enhancing yields while reducing inputs and off-farm impacts.

Some of the leading edge practices proven to reduce pollution and boost farm incomes include:

- Soil management – including green cane trash blanketing, minimum tillage, properly managed buffer distances around drains and headlands and suitably sized, placed and maintained detention basins.
- Nutrient management – including slow release and split application fertiliser, granular inorganic fertiliser applied below the surface to replace fertiliser as it is used, legume fallow, mill mud and ground water accounting in fertiliser application, and suitably sized, placed and maintained detention basins.
- Herbicide management – including strategies to ensure no residual herbicide, and suitably sized, placed and maintained detention basins.
- Grazing management – including assessment of stock carrying capacity based on long-term weather forecasts and maintenance of high grass cover to ensure retention of soil moisture and fertility.

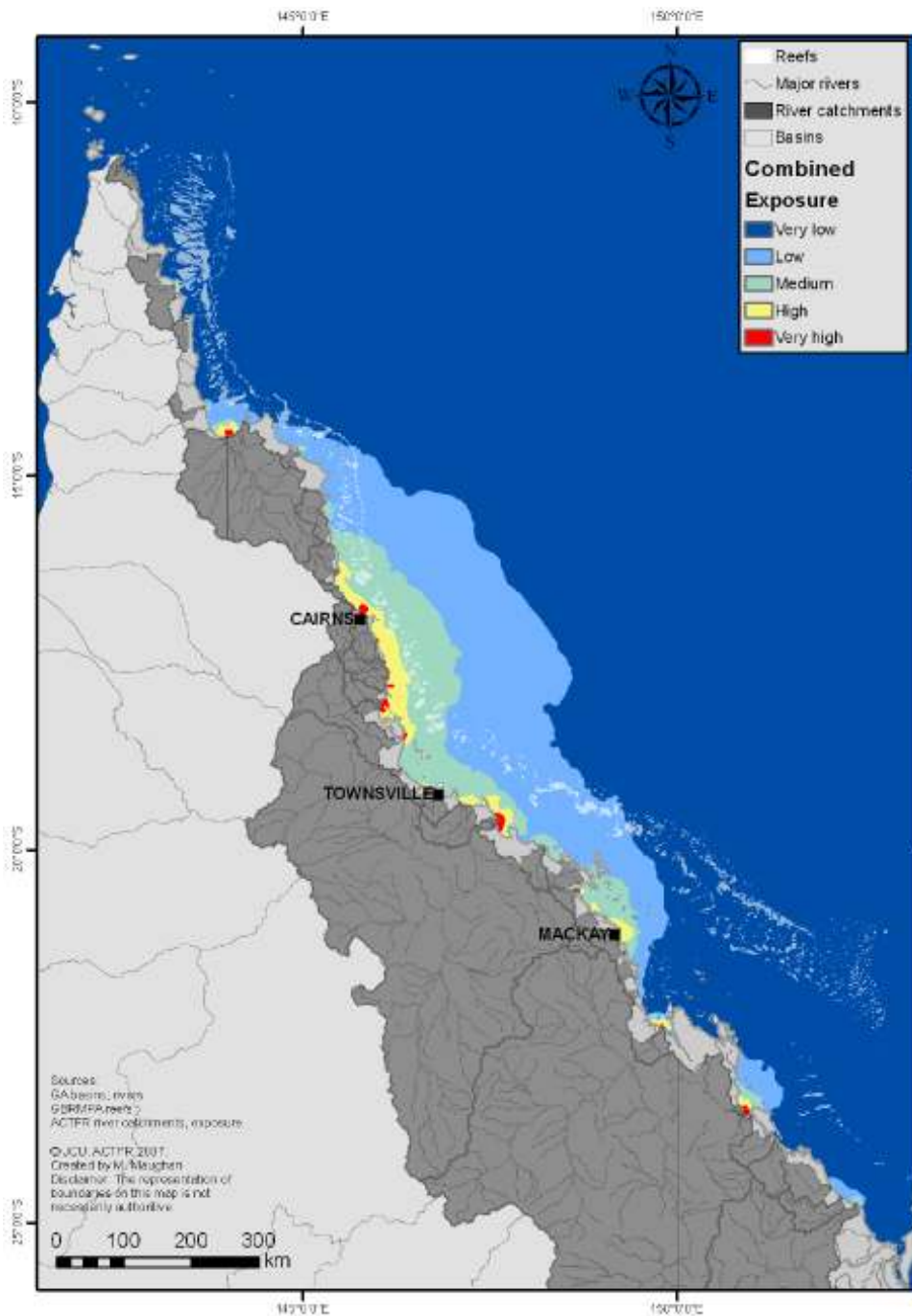
While there have been significant local efforts to promote the uptake of these practices, new investment is needed to ensure these proven new practices are adopted on the scale needed to protect the Reef.

Just as it has ignored the threat of climate change to both our natural environment and our economy, the Howard Government has failed to heed

Labor's Reef Rescue Plan will accelerate efforts to improve farm practices in the region

warnings about the serious threat of declining water quality to the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

**MAP 1: REEF RUN-OFF HOTSPOTS**



Source: Australian Centre for Tropical Freshwater Research Report No. 07/19 Reef Exposure Model for the Great Barrier Reef Lagoon (2007)

In 2002, the Prime Minister and Queensland Premier announced a joint approach to the issue of land-based pollution affecting reef water quality, signing a memorandum of understanding to develop a water quality plan for the Great Barrier Reef, with the objective of “stabilising and reversing the decline in the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef”<sup>8</sup>.

In 2003, the Howard Government announced that it would make “a major contribution to the plan”<sup>9</sup>.

Four years later, the Government has failed to commit any funding to implement the Plan.

Labor's *Reef Rescue Plan* will fast track and substantially expand efforts to improve farm practices in the Great Barrier Reef catchment to clean up the water that runs off into the sea.

## Labor's Reef Rescue Plan

### Summary

A Rudd Labor Government will invest \$200 million over five years in a **Reef Rescue Plan**.

Labor will work with farmers, Indigenous communities, conservation groups, tourism operators and the fishing industry to dramatically improve water quality and keep the Reef healthy in the face of climate change.

Labor's comprehensive *Reef Rescue Plan* has six key elements.

- A **Water Quality Grants Scheme**, at a cost of \$146 million over five years.
- A **Reef Partnerships Program**, at a cost of \$12 million over five years.
- A **Land and Sea Country Indigenous Partnerships Program**, at a cost of \$10 million over five years.
- A **Reef Water Quality Research and Development Program**, at a cost of \$10 million over five years.
- A **Water Quality Monitoring and Reporting Program**, at a cost of \$22 million over five years.
- The publication of an annual **Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Report Card**.

Labor \$200 million Reef Rescue Plan will tackle climate change and improve water quality in the Great Barrier Reef

### Water Quality Grants Scheme

Labor recognises that significant capital investment to reduce run-off in action such as rehabilitation of riparian zones and wetlands is needed to improve the quality of water that runs off from the mainland into the Great Barrier Reef.

That is why a Rudd Labor Government will help landholders by investing \$146 million over five years in a **Water Quality Grants Scheme**.

The majority of these funds will be provided in the form of direct grants to landowners and managers who commit to implementing proven practices to reduce the amount of toxic pesticides, nitrogen and mud in the water run-off leaving their farms.

The *Water Quality Grants Scheme* will provide land managers with matching funding to implement a land management activity which will improve water quality run-off from the property.

The type of activities that may receive funding will vary from catchment to catchment, but will include:

- Establishing buffer zones.
- Improving fertiliser efficiency on farm land.
- Developing alternatives and/or using herbicides more efficiently.
- Retaining nutrients and sediment within the catchment.
- Reducing and managing salinity.
- Undertaking strategic fencing activities such as off-stream watering points for stock management and pasture/stock monitoring.

Labor will help landholders by investing \$146 million in a Water Quality Grants Scheme

- Improving water-use efficiency through irrigation management, stormwater management, wetland restoration and making better use of precipitation according to the relevant regional plans.
- Revegetating and managing weeds in major waterways and remnant bushland.
- Developing Indigenous land and sea country management projects.

The Mackay Whitsunday Natural Resource Management (NRM) Group has developed a very impressive incentives program, known as Sustainable Landscapes. The program builds on industry based extension services to work intensively with producers, while using incentives to link on-farm actions back to catchment-level priorities identified in its regional NRM plan.

A Rudd Labor Government will work with existing regional NRMs to encourage the uptake of incentive models similar to those established by the Mackay Whitsunday NRM Group.

A Rudd Labor Government will establish an overarching administrative process to ensure the *Water Quality Grants Scheme* is delivered in a coordinated manner across the Great Barrier Reef catchment. This process will include close consultation with relevant industry and stakeholder groups.

### Reef Partnerships Program

A Rudd Labor Government will invest \$12 million over five years in a **Reef Partnerships Program** to build partnerships between peak industry organisations and non-government organisations that support landowners with increased local expertise and extension staff.

The *Reef Partnerships Program* will build on already existing programs in rural industry bodies and will deliver:

- Extension services to assist landowners with development and implementation of on-site sustainability and water quality programs.
- On-site risk assessments such as Farm Management Systems, Environmental Management Programs or Farm Productivity Assessment programs that assess existing land management activities for sustainability and water quality impact, and propose changes aimed at both financial and environmental benefits.
- Industry and community wide environmental management and awareness programs which are linked to improving water quality in the Great Barrier Reef catchment.

### Land and Sea Country Indigenous Partnerships Program

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef region.

For over 60,000 years the traditional connection of Indigenous communities with the marine environment of the Reef has been evident<sup>10</sup>.

Traditional customs and spiritual lore continue to be practised in the use of sea country today.

A Rudd Labor Government will invest \$5 million over five years in a **Land and**

Labor will boost partnerships between peak industry organisations and non-government organisations that support landowners with increased local expertise

Labor will build partnerships with Indigenous communities to better protect the Great Barrier Reef

**Sea Country Indigenous Partnerships Program** to strengthen communications between local communities, managers and reef stakeholders and build a better understanding of Traditional Owner issues about the management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

There are more than 70 Traditional Owner clan groups along the Queensland coast, from the eastern Torres Strait Islands to just north of Bundaberg.

Each of these groups hold a range of past, present and future cultural and heritage values for land and sea country, and for surrounding sea countries.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) and Traditional Owner groups along the Reef currently work together on cooperative arrangements for sea country management.

Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreements (TUMRAs) are developed by Traditional Owner groups to describe formal management arrangements for a range of issues, including hunting, and other issues of concern and interest.

A TUMRA may describe, for example, how Traditional Owner groups wish to limit their take of turtle and dugong, their role in compliance, and their role in monitoring the condition of plants and animals, and human activity in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

An additional \$5 million will also be available for the GBRMPA to allow for the expansion of the TUMRA program across the Great Barrier Reef catchment.

A Rudd Labor Government will also restore Indigenous representation and the independence of the GBRMPA, which was removed by the Howard Government in June 2007.

### **Reef Water Quality Research and Development Program**

A Rudd Labor Government will invest \$10 million over five years to establish a **Reef Water Quality Research and Development Program** to improve understanding of the link between land management practices and environmental impacts.

Research priorities will be determined in consultation with the Queensland Government, universities and research organisations, and other key stakeholders.

These priorities may include the trial of new technologies or land management techniques which may improve water quality in the catchment and the development and application of new water quality monitoring techniques for nutrients, chemicals and sediments.

### **Water Quality Monitoring and Reporting Program**

A Rudd Labor Government will provide \$22 million in additional funding over five years to the Great Barrier Reef **Water Quality Monitoring and Reporting Program**.

This will continue and expand of existing monitoring and reporting of water quality in the Great Barrier Reef through partnerships with the Queensland State Government, Reef NRM groups, local government and research organisations.

Labor's research and development funding will build on work already underway through the Reef Water Quality Partnership

This funding will allow further development and implementation of a coordinated catchment-wide water quality monitoring and measurement program with established criteria and targets.

This will also include monitoring and reporting of land use, land condition and uptake of best management practices.

The additional funding will also provide for the annual publication of a **Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Report Card**.

Labor will publish a  
Great Barrier Reef  
Water Quality Report  
Card each year

### **Water Quality Management**

A Rudd Labor Government will improve interagency coordination and increase the capacity of the Departments of Environment and Water Resources and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and the GBRMPA to provide high level advice on program implementation and policy development.

This will include close consultation with local councils, Indigenous communities and Reef NRM groups and the Queensland State Government.

The agencies will be responsible for reporting on delivery of the program, including reporting on the outcomes against milestones and return on investment.

In the first year of the *Reef Rescue Plan*, a Rudd Labor Government will work closely with the Queensland State Government, research agencies, Reef NRM groups and other stakeholders to:

- Review and update actions and milestones of the *Reef Rescue Plan* to incorporate new knowledge and scientific information.
- Identify priority areas and activities for investment of *Water Quality Grant Scheme* funds.
- Identify priorities for investment of the *Reef Water Quality Research and Development Program*.
- Establish processes for administration and reporting of the *Reef Rescue Plan*.

## Financial implications

Labor's Reef Rescue Plan is fully costed and funded.

Funding is over five years and will come from Labor's new approach to the Natural Heritage Trust, commencing in 2008-09.

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS – IMPACT ON UNDERLYING CASH BALANCE (\$M)

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	Total
Water Quality Grants Scheme	0.0	29.2	29.2	29.2	87.6
Reef Partnerships Program	0.0	2.4	2.4	2.4	7.2
Land and Sea Country Indigenous Partnerships Program	0.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	6.0
Reef Water Quality Research and Development Program	0.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	6.0
Water Quality Monitoring and reporting Program	0.0	4.4	4.4	4.4	13.2
<b>Gross Total</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>40.0</b>	<b>40.0</b>	<b>40.0</b>	<b>120.0</b>
National Heritage Trust	0.0	-40.0	-40.0	-40.0	-120.0
<b>Total Offsets</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>-40.0</b>	<b>-40.0</b>	<b>-40.0</b>	<b>-120.0</b>
<b>Net impact</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Johnson JE and Marshall PA (eds) (2007), *Climate Change and the Great Barrier Reef*, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Australian Greenhouse Office and <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/worldheritage/sites/gbr/index.html>.
- <sup>2</sup> ACCESS Economics (2005), *Measuring the Economic and Financial Value of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park*.
- <sup>3</sup> Hennessy, K, Fitzharris B, Bates BC, Harvey N, Howden SM, Hughes L, Salinger J and Warrick R (2007), Australia and New Zealand Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- <sup>4</sup> *Sunday*, 20 August 2006.
- <sup>5</sup> *Four Corners*, 28 August 2006.
- <sup>6</sup> Australian Greenhouse Office (2006), *Tracking to the Kyoto Target 2006*, Australian Greenhouse Office, Canberra.
- <sup>7</sup> Maughan M, Brodie J and Waterhouse J (2007), *Reef Exposure Model for the Great Barrier Reef Lagoon*, CSIRO, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, James Cook University.
- <sup>8</sup> Howard J and Beattie P (2002), *Commonwealth and Queensland Join Forces to Protect Great Barrier Reef*, media release, 13 August 2002.
- <sup>9</sup> Kemp, D and Beattie P (2003) *Governments Move to Improve Great Barrier Reef Water Quality*, media release, 5 December 2003.
- <sup>10</sup> Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Online State of the Great Barrier Reef Report, [http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp\\_site/info\\_services/publications/sotr/latest\\_updates/indigenous](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/info_services/publications/sotr/latest_updates/indigenous)