

Principles of operation of the Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan Independent Science Panel (ISP)

Vision and objectives

To champion quality science to inform policy, planning and management for supporting Reef and catchment ecosystem health.

Objectives:

- To review the quality of science and critically review evidence on water quality to enhance the health and resilience of freshwater, inshore and marine ecosystems of the Great Barrier Reef and communities through land and water management.
- Ensure that multiple lines evidence are used through monitoring, modelling, focussed research, interpretation and proactive consideration of emerging issues.
- Identify unresolved and uncertain science requiring further research, evaluation or validation and make recommendations on how issues could be addressed.
- Promote a clear and accurate understanding of the science into policy and community fields.

Operating principles

- Champion independent review of the reliability and relevance of water quality and ecosystem health science underpinning Great Barrier Reef activities promoting integrity and confidence in the science.
- Any conflicts of interest are openly discussed and managed.
- Proactively consider emerging issues and suggest actions to address unresolved or uncertain science.
- Transparency in processes and respect for divergent approaches.
- Transdisciplinary approach considering the big picture across environmental, social, economic and indigenous interests.
- Seek Scientific Consensus wherever possible.
 - *Scientific Consensus is seen as a public statement on the scientific knowledge on land use impacts on Great Barrier Reef water quality and ecosystem condition, drawn from multiple lines of evidence. It is generally agreed by a diverse group of experts drawing on the strength of evidence. The consensus does not necessarily imply unanimity.*
 - *Comments and objections are considered during the development of consensus using fair, impartial, open and transparent processes using all the best available, peer reviewed and publicly available science from a range of disciplines.*

Operating approaches

- Seek multiple lines of evidence for conclusions and validation with emphasis on the quality and strength of the evidence.
- Consider the science communication aspects of report conclusions and reporting including potential implications of the report.
- Engage with others when skills required are not available within ISP members or where additional confirmation and expertise is needed.
- Links with the Regional Report Technical Working Group (TWG) for pre-review of regional technical reports and Program Leaders and Coordination and Advisory Group (CAG) for pre-review of Reef Water Quality Report Card technical reports.
- Sub-groups of ISP members work on details of some reports out of session and report to ISP.

- ISP members can work with project leaders and/or teams where there is mutual benefit in outcomes but maintain the principle of independence.
- Representatives from other groups, e.g. TWG, may attend ISP meetings where interests align at the consideration of the chair and secretariat.
- Regular strategic sessions at ISP meetings.
- ISP to be able to keep up to date with recent published science and technical reports relevant to Great Barrier Reef activities through a suitable database system (Mendeley).
- Communication and updates on ISP activities is available on an ISP web page. Summary ISP meeting reports are provided to the Executive Steering Committee, Independent Expert Panel and Reef Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program.

Reviewing reports and proposed initiatives

- Attendance (or by video conference) of author(s) of reports or new initiatives at the nominated ISP meeting is strongly encouraged.
- To maximise discussion time, ISP has a strong preference for written papers over PowerPoint presentations. If a presentation is necessary, it is to highlight a complex component. A copy of the presentation is to be sent to the secretariat before the ISP meeting date for pre-circulation. Maximum PowerPoint presentation time of 10 to 15 minutes.
- Papers to include a record of previous ISP discussions or decisions relating to the issue being presented. When material is reviewed for a second time by ISP, a list of responses and/or changes based on the previous ISP comments is strongly recommended.
- Encourage technical documents for review to have some level of technical review prior to being sent to ISP.
- TWG review regional technical reports prior to ISP. Any unresolved or conflicting statements can be identified. Reporting of significant figures to be realistic based on uncertainty and accuracy.
- Technical reports to identify authors and list where the original data is held and a process for public access to the data.
- Papers to be circulated to ISP at least one week prior to the meeting.

Performance indicators - success metrics for ISP – compiled annually

- What have we done (outputs) and what attributable outcomes has ISP achieved?
- How is ISP perceived – value to stakeholders?
- How is ISP extending science knowledge?
- Issues and unresolved science are being addressed.