

Terms of Reference for the Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan Independent Science Panel

Background

The Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan Independent Science Panel (Reef ISP) will provide strong independent science based and technical advice, when requested, to both the Queensland and Australian governments on water quality science needs, including on water quality monitoring and reporting programs (e.g. Reef Water Quality Report Card and regional waterway health report cards).

The Independent Science Panel is a working group to the Reef 2050 Independent Expert Panel, which provides broader scientific advice on implementation of the Reef 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan. The Independent Science Panel will report to each meeting of the Independent Expert Panel.

The Independent Science Panel will provide scientific advice to the Reef 2050 Executive Steering Committee, or to other sub-committees and working groups as provided for in their terms of reference.

The Independent Science Panel is chaired by an Independent Chair, appointed jointly by the Australian and Queensland Environment Ministers.

Membership

The Independent Science Panel will have a skills-based membership that may include up to nine members with expertise in the following areas:

- agronomic and landscape processes
- marine and freshwater biochemistry, ecology and modelling
- resource management, water quality and ecosystem health target-setting and monitoring
- information integration, synthesis, reporting and communication
- social and economic methodologies
- statistics and analytics
- coastal ecosystems
- ecotoxicology.

Appointment of members to the Independent Science Panel are made by the heads of agencies (or as delegated) from the departments of the Environment Ministers and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Changes to membership are to be endorsed by the Reef 2050 Independent Expert Panel prior to approval.

Role

The Independent Science Panel will, as requested by the Executive Steering Committee:

- Provide advice on knowledge gaps, science priorities and delivery associated with the overall implementation of the Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan.
- Conduct scientific reviews of the Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan activities and initiatives, including annual and other reports (e.g. Scientific Consensus Statements), and make specific recommendations about the direction, content and details of future activities.
- Conduct scientific reviews of the Wet Tropics Healthy Waterways Partnership, Dry Tropics Partnership and Mackay-Whitsunday Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership activities and initiatives, including annual and other reports (e.g. Program design), and make specific recommendations about the direction, content and details of future activities.

- Provide timely independent scientific advice and review to support Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan implementation, monitoring and reporting to:
 - be scientifically defensible and achievable
 - be undertaken in a scientifically credible and cost-effective manner
 - be designed, implemented and managed according to best scientific and environmental standards
 - use contemporary, fit-for-purpose methods of data collection, quality assurance and statistical methodologies
 - have processes in place to effectively integrate the various Program activities (and where appropriate other related activities)
 - communicate the findings in a timely and appropriate manner to both technical and non-technical audiences.
- Provide advice on the possible inclusion of new and innovative methods to support monitoring and reporting activities.

Changes to the Terms of Reference must be approved by the heads of agencies (or as delegated) from the departments of the Environment Ministers and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

Operation

The Office of the Great Barrier Reef within the Queensland Department of Environment and Science provides secretariat support for the Independent Science Panel.

The Independent Science Panel will meet as required. In consultation with the Secretariat, the chair of the Independent Science Panel will manage the operation of the group's time in an efficient manner. This may involve advising the expanded Executive Steering Committee where tasks would require additional expertise.

If a member is unable to attend a meeting, proxies will not be permitted.

Members will be appointed for a term of five years with the option of extension.

The expectation is that members will attend at least 75% of meetings annually except in unusual circumstances. If a member is unable to meet attendance requirements they will be asked to review their membership of the Panel.

Members will be reimbursed for reasonable costs associated with travel and accommodation for meetings and non-government members will also be eligible for sitting fees in accordance with the Australian Government's Remuneration Tribunal recommendation for the Innovation Australia Committee.

Media

All requests for media responses and media releases must be referred to the Queensland Department of Environment and Science Media Services, and approved through the department to the Minister's office.

Independent scientific advice to other groups where requested

All requests for advice to other partnerships must be accompanied by a separate Terms of Reference that includes provision for remuneration of non-government members. These requests must be approved by the Executive Steering Committee, who will have regard for:

- the potential benefits of providing advice for integrating water quality monitoring and reporting processes and products
- any other potential benefits for Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan outcomes.