

Response to the Growcom Submission to the Productivity Commission assessment of the Regulatory Burdens on Business: Primary Sector.

Implementation of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan (the Reef Plan) has not increased the regulatory burden on the Primary Sector. In finalising the Reef Plan in December 2003 the Governments provided Industry with the opportunity to address identified deficiencies themselves in the first instance and thus the focus of the Strategies in the Reef Plan are on the voluntary uptake by the relevant sectors of their industry's best practice. A Productivity Commission Report and the Science Panel Report, both released in 2003, identified all agricultural industries as contributing to reef water quality problems.

By way of responding to the three recommendations put forward by Growcom the Department of the Environment and Water Resources would note:

1. We recommend that the industry be fully included in any planning process and funded to deliver a long-term, strategic and integrated program to deliver water quality outcomes.

Industry does need to be effectively engaged in the delivery of Reef Plan actions. That the engagement needs to be improved has been identified in an independent Audit of Reef Plan undertaken in 2005 and in the subsequent report developed by the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Council. The recommendations in the Report prepared by the Ministerial Council on the need to improve such partnerships were accepted by the Prime Minister and Queensland Premier. The ways this might be achieved and the proposed actions are with relevant Ministers in both governments for consideration.

2. We recommend that an assessment of the contribution of horticulture to poor water quality entering the reef be undertaken and that any reef plan looks at the potential contributors of diffuse pollution entering the reef catchment rather than focusing solely on agriculture.

The Australian Government supported this position and has been funding the development of Water Quality Improvement Plans (WQIPs) in most of the high priority catchments discharging to the Great Barrier Reef. Over \$20m has been allocated by the Australian Government to these plans since the Reef Plan came into effect. These WQIPs identify the contribution of all sectors, including non agricultural, contributing to declining water quality. The findings of these catchment assessments continue to reinforce the findings of previous work that agriculture is a significant contributor to water quality decline. It is also important to note that governments have been addressing point source contributions, for example, from sewage treatment facilities in parallel processes to the Reef Plan. Local Governments in the Great Barrier Reef catchment are required to upgrade their facilities, through removing nutrients, by 2010 under the Queensland State Coastal Management Plan.

3. We recommend that as part of an integrated water quality program delivered by industry, research is conducted into the link between practice and water quality outcomes and a benchmark of current practice in undertaken to enable effective monitoring and evaluation.

Again government has been supporting this position through the provision of significant funding to provide good information in Queensland through science research programs such as the Marine and Tropical Research Facility, e-Water Cooperative Research Centre and CSIRO's Water for a Healthy Country. This information is being incorporated where applicable into the WQIPs and Regional Natural Resource Management Plans management actions in which we understand Growcom is involved. It should be noted that the Queensland Government has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Queensland Farmers Federation (Growcom's parent organisation) through which industry sought and were given the responsibility for identifying best management practices for their primary production sectors. Governments have been providing financial assistance to industry, including specifically to Growcom, in undertaking this work and one of the responsibilities of industry under the Reef Plan is that they report back to governments on how they are achieving this outcome.