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MEDIA RELEASE

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NQCC QUERIES BALANCE AND SIZE OF GBRMPA BOARD

Both the skills base and size of the Board of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority need to be increased according to North Queensland Conservation Council (NQCC).

"NQCC welcomes the Minister for the Environment's recent commitment to looking into possible conflict of interest issues within the Board, but we think he needs to go further" said NQCC Coordinator Wendy Tubman.

"We have written to the Minister, Greg Hunt, noting that, currently, there is only one person on the Board with tertiary training in marine science. That member, Dr Russell Riechelt, is both Chair of the Board and Chief Executive of the Authority, a situation bound to create tensions in that, as Chair, he is effectively overseeing his own work as Chief Executive.

"Two other members of the GBRMPA Board not only have strong links to fossil fuel industries but also have professional careers in major infrastructure development. We query why such skills are required in such abundance, indeed at all, on the GBRMPA Board.

NQCC also suggested to the Minister that the size of the five-person GBRMPA Board be increased. "This would allow for a far wider, deeper and more appropriate skills base, with an increased capacity to contribute to the vital task of overseeing the work of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority" said Tubman.

"Given the size and complexity of the task of looking after the GBRMPA, a wide range of high level skills are essential. This would require more Board members. A comparison would be the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee, another agency requiring a range of specialist skills. That Committee has 17 members. Of these, 15 are high-ranking and highly experienced and specialized medical practitioners, and/or academics teaching in Faculties of Medicine. The remaining two members also work professionally in the field of medicine.

The health of the Reef is crucial, as is the health of Australians. We believe that a bigger Board with a greater range of more appropriate skills would benefit the Marine Park, especially at this critical time.

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