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MEDIA RELEASE

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NQCC supports World Heritage Committee Reef recommendation

NQCC supports with sadness the World Heritage Committee's recommendation, released overnight, that the GBR World Heritage Area remain under threat of being listed as 'In Danger'.

"It would be far better if things had improved so much since the Committee first talked about putting the World Heritage icon on the 'In Danger' list, that this recommendation was no longer necessary" said NQCC Coordinator Wendy Tubman.

In its report the Committee included the statement that 'The proposed dumping of dredged material from the proposed Abbot Point development is ... noted with concern'. NQCC is currently challenging the Minister for the Environment in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal on his approval of such dumping.

"The Federal and State governments need to take the threat to the Reef and its World Heritage status much more seriously", said Ms Tubman.

"Rather than playing down the situation with comments such as cyclones do more damage than dredging, the Minister needs to listen to UNESCO and to what the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) and his own Department have been saying with increasing frequency over the years about the cumulative impacts on the Reef of numerous developments and activities.

As far back as 2009, GBRMPA put out its first Outlook Report (the second is due very soon). The Executive Summary to the Report closed with the words:

Further building the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef by improving water quality reducing the loss of coastal habitats and increasing knowledge about fishing and its effects, will give it the best chance of adapting to and recovering from serious threats ahead, especially from climate change.¹

¹ Great Barrier Reef outlook report 2009 / Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

Even back then, it was recognized that the threat of adding more and more relatively small pressures would result in death by 1000 cuts. Scientists had 'got it' – remove the pressures that we can so that the Reef has more chance of dealing successfully with 'the biggy'.

Three years down the track, scientists at the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) found that 50% of the Reef has been lost over the last 30 years. The heart-stopping finding resounded around the world.

Move on a another couple of years and a Strategic Assessment of the condition of the Reef undertaken by the Australian and Queensland governments, found the condition of the inshore Reef, particularly south of Cooktown, to be 'poor and declining'. It identified port development as 'of particular concern' and management of ports in the main only partially effective'.²

That same year, a report for GBRMPA and the Minister's Department of the Environment, undertaken by scientists from AIMS, GBRMPA, CSIRO and the University of Melbourne opened with the words:

*The Great Barrier Reef is facing unprecedented pressures, and supporting the resilience of the Reef has become a central focus in its management. A key challenge for managers is to understand the cumulative impacts of multiple stressors and incorporating this knowledge into management decisions.*³

The Minister needs to focus on the fact that, if our Reef is to survive, we must take steps to protect it from all negative pressures.

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² Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Draft Report on the Strategic Assessment of the GBRWH region, Ch.8

³ A framework for understanding cumulative impacts, supporting environmental decisions and informing resilience-based management of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (2013) Anthony, K.R.N.; Dambacher, J.M.; Walshe, T.; Beeden, R. Australian Institute of Marine Science, Townsville; CSIRO, Hobart ; NERP Decisions Hub, University of Melbourne and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Townsville.