



## POSITIVE POLICY

# Great Barrier Reef Plan Fact Sheet

Labor recognises the environmental, social and economic importance of the Great Barrier Reef, to current and future generations of Australians. We also recognise that this incredible natural wonder is a delicate ecosystem that needs careful study, management, investment and preservation.

The Great Barrier Reef is the largest coral reef ecosystem on earth and one of the best known marine areas in the world. The Reef attracts more than 2 million visitors each year <sup>[1]</sup>, contributes \$5.7 billion to the economy, and supports approximately 70,000 jobs. <sup>[2]</sup>

Since 1985, there has been a 50 percent loss in hard coral cover across the Reef, as it has been impacted by multiple pressures such as climate change, poor water quality (nutrients, sediments and pesticides), coastal development, extreme weather events, including freshwater inundation, ocean acidification and outbreaks of Crown of Thorns Starfish.

The Great Barrier Reef is World Heritage Listed and is an Australian icon, the protection of which Australians feel passionate about. The Reef contains the greatest species diversity of any World Heritage Area on the planet, including:

- 56% of the world's hard coral species.
- 33% of the world's soft coral and sea fan species.
- 6 of the world's 7 species of marine turtles.
- 54% of the world's mangrove diversity.
- 23% of the world's seagrass diversity.
- 13% of the world's species of starfish, sea urchins and cucumbers.
- Seabird breeding colonies on islands of world significance.
- One of the world's most important populations of dugongs.

Enjoying the natural beauty of our country is one of the best parts of being Australian. The Great Barrier Reef is somewhere many Australians dream about sailing above, snorkelling over or diving amongst. Without a concerted effort, the beauty of the Reef and all it provides, from jobs and income to precious memories, is at risk. We want future generations to come to experience this world heritage area and we want future Australians to have fulfilling careers working in Reef related industries. We also want people from across the globe to keep being drawn to Australia by it, boosting business across Queensland and growing our tourism industry.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority provides an assessment of the outlook for the Reef every five years. The Outlook Report in 2014 found that the overall outlook for the Great Barrier Reef is poor, and the situation has deteriorated since 2009.

The Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce report of May 2016 confirms that climate change is the single biggest threat to the Great Barrier Reef. This report provided 10 recommendations including strategies for improving water quality and structural improvements to governance and management practice.

We face a complex environmental and economic challenge in protecting our Reef for future generations and to rise to that challenge we need to work with all interested and affected parties. Only Labor has a plan that is equal to this challenge.

## Our Great Barrier Reef Plan

Labor understands that to seriously address the issues facing the Great Barrier Reef, we need a long-term, well-coordinated and well-resourced strategy. That is why we will implement our Great Barrier Reef Plan (GBRP).

Labor's plan for the Great Barrier Reef represents a comprehensive and collaborative approach to address all the pressures being faced by this great natural wonder. It will be supported by a fund of \$500 million over 5 years, including the Liberal Government's pledged \$123 million as well as \$377 million of new funding. This represents a down payment on Labor's commitment to protect this great national treasure and the industries and jobs it supports.

Our plan will be implemented in close consultation with the Queensland Government and all other stakeholders, with the Environment Minister taking a direct leadership role in its implementation.

Labor will work with the Queensland Government and stakeholders to implement the recommendations of the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce report, released in May 2016. We will do this as part of our Great Barrier Reef Plan.

Our plan has three pillars:

- **Science and Research:** Improve science and research and monitoring of reef issues to ensure the protection and sustainability of the Reef is based on the latest, specialised science.
- **Direct Environmental Investment:** Integrated direct investment to improve water quality, land management, agricultural and transport sustainability and environmental impacts.
- **Reef Management:** Improve Reef management architecture and incentives to fix the fragmented and uncoordinated approach that has for too long characterised Reef management and conservation.

## Science and Research

Labor understands that our ability to protect and sustain the Reef is determined by the quality of the science that underpins broad policy as well as specific initiatives to improve the sustainability of the Reef. That is why Labor will invest in boosting the Australian scientific community's resources to generate and communicate the latest Reef science.

The Science and Research pillar of our plan will consist of two components:

- Labor understands that to combat climate change and preserve the Reef we should invest in our Reef and climate scientists rather than cut their funding and abolish their jobs. We will commit to directing the CSIRO Marine to conduct Reef-specific science, including climate research, supported by a \$50 million targeted funding boost.
  - This will contrast with the trashing of capability in both climate change and Great Barrier Reef research by the Abbott-Turnbull Government though its \$115 million cut in the 2014 Budget.
  - Our funding boost will allow crucial work into the impacts of climate change on the Reef as well as other important Reef and related research and monitoring.
  - A commitment of up to \$50 million for Reef research, to be allocated through a merit based process between Australia's Great Barrier Reef researchers at institutes such as: the University of Queensland, the Australian Institute of Marine Sciences, the Bureau of Meteorology, James Cook University and others.

Labor understands that in order to protect and sustain the Reef, and protect the 70,000 jobs it supports, we need to expand our knowledge of the Reef and the environmental and climate processes that pose significant threats to its viability.

## Direct Environmental Investment

Labor will work with the Queensland Government and relevant stakeholders to support and implement projects that directly address the pressures being faced by the Reef. Under our Direct Environmental Investment pillar, we will commit up to \$300 million for direct investment in projects to improve water quality, reduce runoff, improve and modernise agricultural practises, combat invasive species like the Crown of Thorns Starfish and restore seagrass and wetland habitats.

Agriculture is a dominant land use in the catchments adjacent to the Reef, employing another 35,000 people and contributing approximately \$3.7 billion annually in gross value of production. But if not managed and mitigated, runoff and other impacts from agriculture present serious threats to the health of the Reef.

That is why Labor will commit to meeting the water quality targets of reducing nitrogen runoff to the Reef by up to 80 percent and sediment runoff by up to 50 per cent by 2025 in key catchments such as the Wet Tropics and Burdekin. In addition, Labor will work with the Queensland Government to develop the proposal for a water quality trading system contained in the Water Science Taskforce Report.

Labor will work closely with the Queensland Government and farmers and graziers to reduce runoff from land used for sugarcane, grazing and horticulture. Our approach will be collaborative and we will provide investment funds and incentives for land users to improve their water quality and reduce levels of runoff into the Reef. We will also provide incentives for the take up of the latest digital technology by farmers and graziers. Technology like remote machinery control, use of IT to connect with markets and suppliers, as well as practices like using GPS tractors that can deliver the right fertiliser loads, so fertiliser is more targeted and in smaller volumes. This will improve the competitiveness of graziers and farmers as well as better manage environmental impacts. This will mean that the agricultural industry in Reef catchment areas will grow its viability, grow the 35,000 jobs that it already provides, while improving farm practises and better protecting the Reef.

We will provide better protection for wetlands, which are crucial to maintaining healthy ecosystems in Reef areas. We will support local conservation and re-habitation efforts to reverse the loss of these precious wetlands. We will also create a program dedicated to improving seagrass habitats, bringing the current restoration work for seagrass habitat to a mature stage.

In 2012 it was estimated that approximately 42 per cent of the 50 per cent decline in live coral cover in the Reef over the past 27 years was due to the Crown of Thorns Starfish (CoTS). <sup>[3]</sup> When in Government, Labor funded two boats to conduct culling of the starfish. In a short sighted decision, the Abbott-Turnbull Government cut this to one boat, which is insufficient to combat this devastating species.

Labor will increase the number of boats combating the CoTS to three, operating year round to cull the starfish. One boat will continue operating in areas in the region near Cairns because they have been prioritised for both tourism and ecological reasons. <sup>[4]</sup> The second boat will focus on other critical Reef areas, including super-spreader reefs. (The spawn from starfish on one reef might actually affect 50 reefs where the larvae drift, whereas on another reef it will be none. The former is referred to as a super-spreader reef). <sup>[5]</sup> The third boat will work in critical runoff locations. Together with our commitment to tackle the issue of nitrogen runoff into the Reef, this additional investment in CoTS culling will finally bring the CoTS and the damage they do to the Reef under control.

## Reef Management

Current action to protect and sustain the Reef is fragmented with multiple organisations, funds and programs doing individual good work, but doing it in an uncoordinated way. This leads to inefficiencies, duplication and a lack of unity in purpose and strategic planning. To seriously address the many and varied issues facing the Great Barrier Reef, we need a long term, appropriately resourced and coordinated sustainable strategy.

A Labor Government will allocate up to \$100 million to bring all relevant parties to the table to review, simplify and improve the complex and fragmented governance and funding systems and to improve accountability and ensure effective and efficient delivery of outcomes. Our funding will not only support a new Reef management architecture, but to implement the priorities coming out of that architecture. Our new Reef management architecture will seize the opportunities to maximise and align all current and potential sources of funding for Reef preservation initiatives, including private, philanthropic, Federal State and local government and various science, innovation and environmental sources. It will also enable coordination and collaboration between the efforts of Federal, State and local governments as well as other Reef stakeholders, such as researchers, farmers and graziers, environmentalists and tourism and other industries.

We must work together and develop an organisational architecture that works effectively and efficiently, with all stakeholders playing their part, if we are to rise to the challenge and truly protect the Reef and restore its health.

Labor will decide on final funding allocations between the three pillars of its Great Barrier Reef Plan in consultation with stakeholders and based on best value for taxpayer money and merit. Our plan is flexible and it will be implemented to meet the dynamic needs of Reef preservation in a fit for purpose and efficient way. Through our flexible but considered and collaborative approach, we will ensure the Great Barrier Reef has the very best change to grow as a national environmental and economic asset, generating more jobs, businesses and memories for countless Australian and overseas visitors for generations to come.

## Labor's record

Labor has a strong record of protecting Australia's oceans, including the Whitlam Government's establishment of the nation's first marine reserve to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

The former Labor Government established Australia's Marine Reserve Network - the largest network of marine protected areas anywhere in the world.

In Government, Labor expanded the surveillance of shipping movements across the Reef. Significantly, Labor's shipping policies - opposed by the Liberals - promote the use of experienced Australian pilots to navigate through the Reef, protecting the Reef in the process and supporting Australian jobs.

Climate change poses the single greatest threat to Reef health, as is evidenced by recent unprecedented coral bleaching. Labor's Climate Change Action Plan is a comprehensive suite of measures to combat climate change, as well as land clearing which has a direct and damaging impact on Reef health. For more about our Climate Change Action Plan, see our 100 Positive Policies website at: <http://www.100positivepolicies.org.au>

Labor will double the number of Indigenous Rangers in the Working on Country program, of which a number of projects are in Reef catchment areas. Our doubling of Rangers includes the Specialised Indigenous Ranger programme which aims to improve marine conservation, particularly for dugongs and turtles, along the Far North Queensland coast.

## Liberals' record

The Abbott-Turnbull government has a terrible record in protecting the environment generally, and the Great Barrier Reef in particular.

As recently as May 2016, it was reported that the Turnbull Government preferred to see climate change issues affecting the Reef pulled from a UNESCO report rather than be honest about the real danger the Reef is in.

The Turnbull Government's refusal to acknowledge the danger that climate change poses for the Reef is a direct result of their expensive and ineffective \$2.5 billion Direct Action climate change policy, that Mr Turnbull has previously referred to as *"...an environmental fig-leaf to cover a determination to do nothing"*.

The Liberals' general willingness to sacrifice our natural environment for short term economic gains is made evident by their attempts to give environmental powers over issues of national importance to the States, as well as sustained budget cuts to environmental programs since coming to power, with the environment portfolio now having around half the resources it did when Labor left power.

## Financial Implications

Net Impact	
2016-17	-\$75.4 million
2017-18	-\$75.4 million
2018-19	-\$75.4 million
2019-20	-\$75.4 million
Total <sup>[6]</sup>	-\$301.6 million

Labor's Great Barrier Reef plan has a total commitment of \$500 million over five years. Labor will provide an additional \$377 million over five years, and re-prioritise \$123 million of additional funding that was provided by the Government in the 2016-17 Budget over the same time period.

[1] [Australia.gov](http://Australia.gov), *Australian Stories Great Barrier Reef*

[2] [Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce, Final Report](#)

[3] De'ath G, Fabricius K.E., Sweatman H, Puotinen M. 2012, *The 27-year decline of coral cover on the Great Barrier Reef and its causes. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 109(44)*.

[4] Senate Estimates, 8 February 2016, page 34

[5] Senate Estimates, 8 February 2016, page 42

[6] Totals may not sum due to rounding



## LABOR. WE'LL PUT PEOPLE FIRST.

These policies (including where relevant their costings from the independent Parliamentary Budget Office) were accurate at the time they were announced. Labor will publish the updated final cost of all policies and their combined impact on the Budget prior to election day.

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