

**Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Submission to House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services on Maritime Salvage in
Australian Waters**

Background

1. As the largest World Heritage property, comprising some 2,900 coral reefs, 940 islands and surrounding waters, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority believes that the protection of the values of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park should be a primary consideration of the Inquiry.
2. The range of economic and social activities, including tourism, fisheries, aquaculture, scientific research, recreational and other cultural pursuits that occur within the Marine Park, or affect it, are of significance to the environmental, social, and economic well being of Australia and Queensland.
3. Whilst other activities have the potential to degrade the Great Barrier Reef, oil, fuel or cargo spills as a result of a shipping incident including collisions, groundings, structural failure, fire and explosion, are likely to cause impacts within a short period of time and have long lasting environmental and social economic effects.
4. The rate of shipping incidents in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is high. Since 1985, over six hundred shipping incidents involving minor pollution events have been reported. During that time, there have been 11 collisions and 22 groundings of ships or 1.9 per incidents per annum in the inner route.
5. Preventing consequential environment impacts occurring as a result of an incident is difficult given the remoteness of significant portions of the Great Barrier Reef. Any delays in the mobilisation of tugs or salvage personnel may increase the adverse impacts on important ecosystems and cultural assets in the event of a spill. Maintenance of an appropriate level of emergency towage and salvage capacity with the Great Barrier Reef would reduce the risk of an environmental incident were a ship to suffer mechanical breakdown or structural failure and require towage assistance.

Issues for consideration

6. The study should consider the implications for mobilisation of salvage resources in distinct geographic regions including remote areas, open seas and inshore waters in conjunction with the potential opportunities for places of refuge.
7. Response times for the mobilisation of salvage resources capable of assisting the full range of stricken vessel types and sizes need to be such that the potential for severe impacts to the marine environment is minimised.
8. Roles, responsibilities and arrangements between government and private companies that will be called upon to provide emergency maritime salvage need to be clarified where a ships owner or insurer fail to enter into a contract with a salvage contractor.

9. Agreements with other countries to ensure salvage capability can be provided for a whole range of incidents should be entered into if necessary.
10. The review should take account of trends in international and domestic shipping, potential changes in shipping activity arising from new technologies, changes to market demand and port expansion plans.
11. An appropriate response to the risk of a shipping incident can only be determined when the nature and consequence of the risk is understood. Regulatory authorities need to be well informed of the types and consequences of damage to the marine environment arising from poor resourcing, investment and maintenance of maritime salvage resources.
12. Contractual arrangements including indemnity and other commercial issues pertaining to the mobilisation of industry resources involving responses to threats to safety of life and threats to the marine environment may be different and should be clarified.
13. The identification of critical ecosystem, habitats and cultural resources is well advanced in the Great Barrier Reef. The Committees' attention is drawn to previous studies – "Oil Spill Risk Assessment for the Coastal Waters of Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park" prepared in August 2000 by Queensland Transport and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority; the "Review of Great Barrier Reef Ship Safety and Pollution Prevention Measures" by the Great Barrier Reef Shipping Review Committee in July 2001; Reef Water Quality Protection Plan produced in 2003; and the "Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait Shipping Impact Study" prepared by the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait Shipping Management Group draft report that provides an overview and summary of key shipping related environment issues. Economic attributes of the Reef are well described in the Productivity Commission report on the costs and benefits of options to address declining water quality entering the Great Barrier Reef Lagoon of 2003.
14. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is able to provide assistance to the committee on identifying and clarifying environmental shipping issues through our extensive knowledge base of the Marine Park.