Engagement paper: Review of the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan

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Reef 2050 Plan Review Team
Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

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This submission is provided to:

Reef 2050 Plan Review Team

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

Submitted via email at reef2050consultation@dcceew.gov.au

Our members

- Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers
- Cotton Australia
- CANEGROWERS
- Greenlife Industry QLD
- eastAUSmilk
- Timber Queensland
- Queensland United Egg Producers
- Turf Queensland
- Pork Queensland
- Australian Chicken Meat Federation
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd
- Fairburn Irrigation Network
- Mallawa Irrigation
- Pioneer Valley Water Co-operative Ltd
- Theodore Water Pty Ltd
- Eton Irrigation
- Lockyer Valley Water Users

About the Queensland Farmers' Federation

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of agriculture in Queensland.

Our members are agricultural peak bodies who collectively represent more than 13,000 farmers who produce food, fibre and foliage across the state.

QFF's peak body members come together to develop policy and lead projects on the key issues that are important to their farmer members and the Queensland agriculture sector.

Together, we form a strong, unified voice leveraging our effectiveness by working together to drive policy and initiatives that support a strong future for Queensland agriculture.

Submission

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review of the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan.

QFF supports a healthy and resilient Great Barrier Reef and recognises it as one of Australia's most significant environmental, cultural and economic assets. Queensland agriculture has a long-standing and genuine commitment to protecting the Reef, and the sector has invested substantially in improved land management and water quality outcomes over many years.

Our overarching position is that the revised Plan will be strongest where it recognises agricultural producers not simply as a source of pressure, but as active stewards, partners and part of the solution. Achieving the Reef 2050 vision requires enduring partnerships, evidence-based and regionally tailored investment, shared responsibility, and approaches that keep agricultural businesses viable so they can continue to deliver environmental outcomes over the long term.

Better reflecting multiple and changing values

Q1. What do you value most about the Reef and why is the Reef important to you?

Agriculture values the Great Barrier Reef as one of Australia's most significant environmental, cultural and economic assets. The Reef underpins regional economies, supports tourism and community wellbeing, and forms an important part of Queensland's identity. Agricultural industries recognise that healthy catchments and a healthy Reef are intrinsically linked. Many farming enterprises operate within Reef catchments and hold a strong intergenerational commitment to sustainable land stewardship, working to ensure productive landscapes coexist alongside a resilient Reef ecosystem.

Q2. How could a revised Reef 2050 Plan more clearly recognise and reflect multiple and changing values?

The revised Plan should explicitly recognise the contribution of agricultural producers and regional communities as active stewards of natural resources and as partners in Reef protection. This is best achieved through positive, values-based framing that identifies opportunities and fosters shared ownership, rather than framing that positions land users primarily as a source of risk.

QFF supports the inclusion of case studies and values-statements that highlight successful industry-led stewardship, the adoption of improved farming practices, and collaborative catchment initiatives. These should showcase real producers and real outcomes. The Plan should also recognise that social, economic and environmental outcomes are interconnected, and that maintaining viable agricultural businesses is fundamental to sustaining regional communities and, in turn, long-term environmental outcomes. Recognising these values throughout the Plan, rather than confining them to a single section, will help build and sustain the broad, long-term commitment to stewardship that Reef protection ultimately depends on.

Q3. What actions are critical to be taken in the next 3 to 5 years to protect the Reef and your relationship to it?

QFF considers the following actions to be priorities over the next three to five years:

- Continuing and stable investment in extension delivery and industry-led BMP frameworks such as Smartcane BMP and Hort360. These frameworks are the primary mechanism through which voluntary practice change occurs.
- Maintaining investment in water quality improvement initiatives that are evidence-based, regionally tailored and co-designed with industry, rather than applied uniformly across diverse catchments.
- Supporting innovation, research and the commercialisation of new technologies that improve productivity and environmental outcomes together.
- Strengthening climate resilience across agricultural enterprises and the regional communities that depend on them.
- Ensuring programs are focused on measurable outcomes and are managed adaptively, so effort is directed where it delivers the greatest impact.
- Maintaining strong, enduring partnerships between governments, industry, NRM organisations and producers.

These actions reflect an approach that is targeted, avoids gaps, and directs effort to where it is most needed, consistent with the review's aim of keeping the Plan current and fit-for-purpose.

Q4. What information is important to include in the Reef 2050 Plan, and how should it be presented and kept up-to-date?

To support and empower producers to take action, the Plan must:

- Clearly identify priorities, responsibilities, performance measures and timelines, so that all parties understand what is expected of them and by when.
- Include up-to-date scientific evidence alongside socio-economic information, recognising that both are essential to sound decision-making.
- Present information in accessible formats, including dashboards, regional report cards and online platforms, that communicate clearly to producers and communities, not only to technical audiences.

- Clearly communicate progress, lessons learned and the outcomes of investment, including where approaches have been adjusted in response to experience.
- Include mechanisms for regular review and updating of implementation actions, so the Plan can reflect new science and emerging opportunities without requiring a wholesale rewrite.

Separating the Plan's enduring long-term strategy from its more frequently updated implementation actions would help ensure the Plan remains current and can adapt to change over time.

Clarifying and improving governance arrangements

Q5. What is your or your sector's role in contributing to actions that support the long-term health of the Reef?

Queensland agriculture plays a critical role in supporting the long-term health of the Reef through:

- Adoption of best management practices through established, industry-led frameworks including Smartcane BMP and Hort360, which provide structured pathways for producers to benchmark, improve and verify their practices.
- Investment in improved land, water and biodiversity management.
- Participation in extension, research and innovation activities.
- Contributing to water quality improvements and catchment stewardship.
- Working collaboratively with governments, NRM bodies, research organisations and Traditional Owners to deliver positive environmental outcomes.

Agricultural producers are both custodians of extensive landscapes and essential partners in achieving Reef objectives. Any revised governance framework should reflect this dual role and support genuine, ongoing engagement with industry, including through a stronger place-based approach where local and regional delivery is most effective.

Q6. How should responsibilities for protecting and sustaining the Reef be shared between government and non-government sectors?

Responsibility for protecting the Reef should be shared across governments, industries, communities, Traditional Owners and the broader Australian community.

Governments must provide strategic leadership, policy certainty, sustained investment, scientific research and coordination. Non-government sectors should continue to contribute through stewardship, innovation, on-ground delivery and investment. Responsibilities should be clearly defined, co-designed wherever possible, and should recognise the differing capacities and roles of the various parties involved. Clearer articulation of roles in the revised Plan will help reduce implementation gaps and inconsistent delivery.

QFF supports a partnership model based on shared responsibility. We caution strongly against approaches that place a disproportionate regulatory burden on individual landholders.

Producers are more likely to sustain and deepen their contribution where they are engaged as partners, supported to improve, and recognised for the outcomes they deliver.

Strengthening adaptation, resilience and recovery actions

Q7. Are you or your community already taking actions to increase resilience to climate change or implementing adaptation plans? If so, what are your priorities and timeframes for action?

Queensland agriculture is actively implementing adaptation measures, including:

- Adoption of climate-smart farming practices.
- Improving water use efficiency.
- Enhancing soil health and ground cover.
- Diversifying enterprises and improving business resilience.
- Incorporating climate risk information into business planning.
- Investing in new technologies and management systems.

Our priorities for the period ahead are to accelerate the adoption of these practices through extension, to improve producers' access to relevant climate information, and to strengthen the resilience of regional communities. Adaptation is an ongoing process rather than a single milestone, and the revised Plan should support producers to act early and adjust over time as conditions and information evolve.

Q8. What information, tools or resources could help support your planning and decision-making regarding management of the Reef?

Industry would benefit from:

- Improved regional climate projections and seasonal forecasting tools.
- Accessible decision-support tools that integrate production, climate and environmental outcomes.
- Greater access to extension services and trusted advisors.
- Timely monitoring and reporting data at appropriate spatial scales.
- Continued investment in applied research, demonstration sites and peer-to-peer learning.

To be genuinely useful, information must be practical, regionally relevant, and capable of informing management decisions at the farm scale. Producers are far more likely to act on information that is tailored to their region and enterprise than on generalised, Reef-wide guidance.

Strengthening monitoring and evaluation of the Plan's implementation

Q9. How could Plan-level monitoring and evaluation be improved or supported under a revised Reef 2050 Plan?

QFF supports the development of a clear, Plan-level Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) framework. To be effective and workable, that framework should:

- Link investments and actions to measurable outcomes, with a clear logic connecting activity to results.
- Align reporting across programs to reduce duplication and inconsistency.
- Recognise and incorporate industry-led BMP frameworks, including Smartcane BMP and Hort360, alongside existing programs such as Paddock to Reef. These frameworks already generate practice-level data at scale and represent a significant existing investment. A revised MERI framework should draw on them rather than duplicate them through parallel reporting requirements.
- Include socio-economic indicators alongside environmental indicators, reflecting the interconnected nature of Reef outcomes.
- Provide regular, transparent reporting on progress and effectiveness.
- Support adaptive management and continuous improvement, so that findings genuinely inform future decisions.

Monitoring and reporting requirements should be streamlined to minimise unnecessary administrative burden on landholders and delivery partners. Well-designed monitoring should build confidence and support learning, not become a compliance cost that diverts resources from on-ground action.

Encouraging investment for Reef protection and management

Q10. What would help guide and encourage non-government investment in the Reef?

Participation in mechanisms such as Reef Credits is currently uneven across industries. Where methodologies exist, they have created a pathway for growers to generate revenue that can be reinvested in improved practices. Horticulture, however, has limited ability to participate under existing methods, foreclosing that opportunity. QFF recommends the revised Plan commit to expanding eligible methodologies so all Reef catchment industries can participate, and that BMP accreditation under frameworks such as Smartcane BMP and Hort360 be recognised as a credible basis for participation and streamlined entry.

Additionally, non-government investment would be strengthened through:

- Greater policy certainty and clear, long-term investment signals.
- Clearly articulated priorities and well-defined investment opportunities.
- Robust, credible methods for measuring, reporting and verifying outcomes.
- Reduced transaction costs and administrative complexity.

- Recognition and active support for environmental markets, biodiversity markets and natural capital opportunities.
- Co-investment arrangements that leverage private investment alongside public funding.

Investment frameworks must ensure integrity and transparency and must enable equitable participation by landholders. Producers are well placed to be significant participants in emerging environmental and natural capital markets, but they will only engage where the rules are clear, the returns are genuine, and the compliance burden is proportionate.

Q11. What should be the priority areas for new government Reef investments?

QFF would support new government investment prioritised across the following areas:

- Agricultural extension, practice change and adoption programs.
- Research, development and innovation that delivers measurable water quality and productivity outcomes together.
- Climate adaptation and resilience initiatives for Reef-dependent industries and communities.
- Landscape-scale restoration and catchment management delivered through partnerships.
- Strengthening regional capacity through industry organisations and NRM bodies.
- Improved monitoring, data systems and decision-support tools.
- Support for emerging natural capital and environmental market opportunities.

Conclusion

Queensland agriculture is committed to a healthy and resilient Great Barrier Reef, and the sector has already built much of the infrastructure the Plan depends on. Industry-led BMP frameworks such as Smartcane BMP and Hort360, delivered through trusted extension, are the primary mechanism by which voluntary practice change occurs, and the primary source of practice-level data available to industry and government alike. Sustaining them is not an optional add-on to the Reef 2050 Plan; without them, adoption will slow and the evidence base will erode.

Achieving the Reef 2050 vision requires enduring partnerships, evidence-based and regionally tailored investment, shared responsibility, and recognition of producers as essential stewards, supported to remain viable so they can continue delivering environmental outcomes over the long term.

Kind regards

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