

BACKGROUND BRIEFING:
Questions for Environment Minister GREG HUNT
Submitted 25 August, 2015

- How much money has been spent over the past eight years on improving water quality on the Great Barrier Reef and what pollution cuts have been achieved?
- Given the new higher pollution reductions targets (up to 80% nitrogen and 50% sediment), how much further investment will be needed to reach these targets?
- How do you think these higher targets can be achieved?
- The World Heritage Committee noted “as a matter of priority” the Australian Government’s commitment to release an Investment Framework by December 2015 detailing the costs for meeting the new water quality targets, and all other actions under Reef 2050 – will the government meet this deadline?
- How will the government develop this Investment Framework?
- Will the Investment Framework include funding commitments for inclusion in the 2016/17 Commonwealth Budget and forward estimates?
- What happens if the Investment Framework outlines costs the Commonwealth cannot or will not fund?
- Despite the recent \$100m increase by the Commonwealth in investment in reef water quality, important programs being run by partnerships between NRM groups and industry are currently unfunded from July next year. Will the Commonwealth continue to fund these partnership programs at current or higher levels, given they have delivered water quality improvements with significant co-investment by farmers?

In response, the Minister’s office supplied a statement which says in full:

“The Government has so far invested more than \$250 million to improve the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef lagoon.

This investment has paid off. The most recent Great Barrier Reef Report Card confirmed that the immediate goal of halting and reversing the decline in the quality of water entering the reef had been met. It showed substantial improvements in agricultural land management practices and reductions in pollutants entering the reef. The next report card will be released in the coming months.

Water quality is also a major focus of the Government’s \$140 million Reef Trust.

The Reef Trust is funding innovative approaches to improving water quality like the Reverse Tender currently being implemented in the Wet Tropics cane growing region. Farmers are receiving assistance to improve their practices and reduce runoff. This model is now being extended to the Burdekin cane industry.

The first phase of the Reef 2050 Plan Investment Framework is complete. A Reef investment baseline for 2014-15 has been set. Phase two is currently underway which will review available resources and their allocation across priority areas.

Perhaps most significantly, we inherited a Great Barrier Reef that was on the UNESCO watch list and was on its way to being declared in danger.

After less than 2 years the World Heritage Committee not only removed the Great Barrier Reef from the watch list and returned it to the highest level of international standing, but also praised Australia as a role model.

There is certainly more work to be done, but we are taking significant action to improve water quality and we are already seeing results”.