



PROTECTING THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

Action on global warming, fixing water quality

Clean energy. Clean water. A Healthy Reef.

Our Great Barrier Reef is under threat from global warming and coral bleaching, water pollution, dredging and illegal fishing. The Greens will protect the 69,000 jobs that rely on a healthy Reef. We will transition away from coal, invest \$2 billion to clean up water quality and strengthen our Reef guardians.

Our Great Barrier Reef is at a tipping point. Our leading scientists say that this election is our “last chance” to save the Reef unless we take rapid action on global warming and dramatically cut water quality pollution.ⁱ Our Reef is a national treasure, and the 69,000 jobs and \$6 billion per year which it brings in for our economy are under threat.

Global warming, driven by mining and burning of coal and other fossil fuels, is already destroying parts of the Reef via coral bleaching. The Reef has lost 50% of its coral cover in the last 30 years and experts warn it could halve again in the next 10 years. It has recently suffered from the “worst ever” mass bleaching event affecting 93% of all reefs, and killing about 22% of coral, primary in northern and central areas.ⁱⁱ

Federal and State governments recognise that the Reef is in danger, but their addition to coal and fossil fuels means they have not taken the necessary action. For instance, the Liberal, Labor and National parties all support the environmentally disastrous and economically reckless Adani mega-coal mine.

The Greens are outlining a plan to meet the scale of the challenge we face. Our plan deals with each of the threats to the Reef outlined in the *Outlook Report 2014*: global warming, water quality pollution, coastal development, dredging, and fishing.

> Our plan to save the Reef

The Greens have a \$2.18 billion plan over 5 years to save the Reef. We will:

- **Act rapidly on global warming**, with 90% clean energy by 2030, a ban on new coal mines and fracking projects, a thermal coal export levy, abolition of fossil fuel subsidies and a just transition for workers.
- **Slash water pollution** with a \$2 billion fund over 5 years, significantly increasing existing funding with \$500 million in new grant funding and a \$1.2 billion Reef Repair Loan Facility, a legal cap on water quality pollution, protection against runaway tree clearing, and better monitoring.

- **Stop damaging port expansion and ban all offshore dumping** and capital dredging for fossil fuel port expansion by closing the loopholes in the federal and State government’s existing rules. The Greens will stop the Adani mega-mine and the coal port at Abbot Point.
- **Strengthen the Reef’s champions**, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) and the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) with \$90 million in extra funding, independence and stronger powers.
- **Protect pristine areas** like the Fitzroy Delta and Cape York Peninsula
- **Address illegal fishing** with better compliance, modern technology and education campaigns.
- **Make shipping safe for people and the Reef** with strong protection for our marine environment and our seafarers.

> Coal or the Reef? Action on global warming

We now know that it’s coal or the Reef. The next Australian government must make a choice. Leading scientists agree that we can have new coal mines, or we can have a healthy reef, but we “cannot possibly have both”.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Greens have a plan to build 100% clean energy as fast as possible, with at least 90% by 2030 under our [Renew Australia](#) plan.^{iv} The Greens have also announced policies to [boost battery storage](#), [power up community owned clean energy](#), and [put solar on every rooftop](#).^v

The Greens will stop the environmentally disastrous and economically reckless Adani mega-coal mine, as well as the damaging coal port expansion at Abbot Point.

As part of our [plan to protect the Reef from global warming](#), we are calling for a managed transition away from coal and gas as the thermal coal market enters structural decline. The world is moving towards clean energy, and without careful planning communities, workers and our environment will suffer.

The Greens’ plan calls for:

- No new coal or gas approvals

- A just transition plan for workers including a \$1 billion Clean Energy Transition Fund
- Rapid action to ensure secure jobs in mine site rehabilitation are secured^{vi}
- No more fossil fuel subsidies, saving \$21 billion over 4 years
- A thermal coal export levy, raising \$650 million per year from 2017 to fund clean energy, disaster preparedness and international climate finance for developing nations.

> Slash water pollution

Without rapid action to improve water quality, the Reef may be lost within a generation. Pollution from land-based run-off such as fertilizer, pesticides and sediment from farming, land clearing and urban sources is a major threat to the Reef. The current approach to controlling water quality pollution from farms, tree clearing and urban expansion is not working. We are not on track to hit our 2025 targets for reduction of fertilizer, sediment and pesticide run off, which include an 80% cut in nitrogen pollution by 2025.

Experts are warning that both the federal and Queensland governments must urgently increase efforts to cut pollution and meet the targets set out in the Reef 2050 Plan:

- **The Australian Institute of Marine Science** recently found that “current efforts are not sufficient to achieve the water quality targets set in the Reef 2050 Plan”^{vii}
- The **Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce** has warned that “significantly more investment” and change on “a vast scale” is required if water quality pollution reduction targets which Australian promised to UNESCO “have any chance of being achieved”.

The Greens support the recommendations of the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce, and would implement them in consultation with landholders, the Queensland State government, conservationists and scientists.

The Greens will increase government funding for water quality pollution control to a total of **\$2 billion over five years** (2016-17 to 2020-21) including:

- **\$500 million in new federal grant funding** over five years to assist farmers to transition to more sustainable practices in relation to water quality pollution, to fund ‘landscape repair’ projects like revegetation, wetlands restoration and combating gully erosion.^{viii}
- **\$1.2 billion Reef Repair Loan Facility** over 5 years to help farmers transition to low-pollution farming methods. The Reef Repair Loan Facility would make low interest loans for pollution-reduction activities create a return on investment. This would be a “CEFC for the Reef” and would help highly leveraged farmers who may be at their commercial credit limit to borrow money. The Facility would also de-risk projects for commercial banks.
- GBRMPA would supervise the Facility, but would draw on the expertise of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation in

project management and financing work. This is not expected to require additional funding for the CEFC.

- **Current projected funding** for water quality initiatives totals \$370 million over the next 5 years including \$185 million from the Federal government under the Reef water quality programs and the *Reef Trust*^{ix} and \$185 million from the Queensland State government.^x

We would implement a **legal cap on water quality pollution** on a catchment basis, which gradually decreases over the next 10 years. This would be delivered by regulation which ramps up gradually, starting by making Best Management Practice in agriculture mandatory, not voluntary. The federal government has the power to legislate a cap on pollution entering the Reef’s waters through under section 66 (2) (e) of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act*. As recommended by the expert Water Science Taskforce, should the catchment-scale caps not produce results within 5 years, we would work with industry towards property-scale caps.

Develop world-class water quality monitoring and reporting - with \$15 million over the next 4 years would be for GBRMPA specifically to invest in robust, property-level water quality monitoring, modelling. The Greens would also fast-track scientific research on methods to reduce water quality pollution (under the Greens-proposed \$80 million additional funding for GBRMPA).

The Greens would urgently restore Queensland’s tree clearing protections rolled back by the Newman LNP government. Runaway tree clearing creates extra run-off pollution. As announced in our [Protecting Precious Places](#) policy, the Greens will legislate for a comprehensive “climate trigger” in our national environment laws which will ensure all carbon-intensive proposals will have their impacts on global warming considered, including the ability to stop runaway tree-clearing across Australia, including in Queensland’s Reef catchments where the situation is urgent.

The Greens put the experts in charge by empowering the independent Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority with **ultimate responsibility for cutting water quality pollution**, giving them oversight of Federal and State funding and programs. **We would also expand GBRMPA’s powers** to regulate new coastal development, including urban, industrial or agricultural development where it would impact on the health of the Reef.

> Stop damaging port expansions

The Greens would overturn the federal approval for the Abbot Point coal port expansion, where the Queensland Labor government is planning to dredge up 1.1 million m3 of the sea floor in the Reef’s waters to make way for a coal port which would further fuel global warming and ship 60 million tonnes of coal per year through the Reef.

We could also close the loopholes in the ban on offshore dredge spoil dumping by:

- Banning all **capital dredging** and **offshore dumping** for damaging port expansions. For example, at Gladstone 20 million tonnes of dredging has already been approved, and approval for a further 12 million m³ is being sought, and at Cairns, where the Trinity Inlet dredging project threatens to rip up 4.4 million m³ of the sea floor.
- Banning offshore dumping of maintenance dredge spoil anywhere in the Reef's waters. Currently such dumping is permitted, with no hard limits on how much can be dumped. About 1 million m³ of maintenance dredge spoil is dumped in the Reef every year. Maintenance dredge spoil should be disposed of safely onshore.

> Strong and independent Reef champions

The Greens strongly support the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority – the government agency responsible for looking after the Reef. However, one of Australia's most eminent Reef scientists, Professor Terry Hughes has recently said that the Reef's problem have "outgrown the agency" charged with protecting it.^{xi}

The Greens want to fix that with a package to strengthen the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority including **additional funding of \$90.8 million over 4 years for our Reef champions**.

- **Independence.** Legislative reform to strengthen GBRMPA's independence from government and industry. The Greens would impose a ban on coal and gas industry representatives on the Board and a requirement for a proportion of Board members to hold relevant scientific qualifications.
- **Stronger powers.** The Greens would ensure that GBRMPA has final authority to decide on applications for developments which may have a significant impact on the Reef. GBRMPA's powers would be expanded to regulate new coastal development, including urban, industrial or agricultural development where it would impact on the health of the Reef.
- **Leadership.** GBRMPA will be given responsibility for leading the implementation of the government's long term plans for the Reef, including by, supervising water quality projects.
- **Additional funding of \$20 million per year** to GBRMPA to fund its increased activities, help the Reef deal with the impacts of global warming and coral bleaching, reduce local pressures like water pollution, coastal development and fishing, and to invest in research to reduce those local pressures.
- **Reverse cuts to Reef scientists.** The Greens would reverse the Abbott/Turnbull government's cuts to GBRMPA and the Australian Institute of Marine Sciences (AIMS). These cuts were \$2.8 million over 4 years to GBRMPA and \$8 million over 4 years to AIMS. GBRMPA's *Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2012-2017* was defunded by the Abbott Government and this funding would see it restored.
- **Stronger Reef report card.** The Great Barrier Reef *Outlook Report* is a highly credible 5-yearly scientific report on the

Reef's condition. The Greens would expand the report to analyse and report on the effectiveness of all major Reef programs.

- **Increased funding to tackle crown of thorns starfish** and action to address the root causes of the problem via improving water quality (under the proposed additional funding for GBRMPA).

> Protecting Pristine Areas

UNESCO has asked Australia to protect the most pristine areas of the Reef, but so far Labor and Liberal governments have failed to deliver. **The Greens would immediately protect pristine areas such as the Fitzroy Delta and Cape York from port development and other pressures.**

As announced in the Greens [Protecting Precious Places](#) policy, the Greens will task the Department of Environment with revitalising the World Heritage listing process for areas of outstanding universal value across Australia, including Cape York. We will work with traditional owners, landholders and the broader community to make a nomination for Cape York as quickly as possible.

> Address illegal fishing and overfishing

The 2014 Reef *Outlook Report* highlighted the impacts of illegal fishing on the Reef, including 'bycatch' of important species like dolphins and dugongs. The Reef already has a good network of protected areas called "Green Zones", but the levels of illegal commercial fishing in the Green Zones are still too high. The Greens will address illegal fishing and overfishing:

- **Provide more funding for authorities to stop illegal fishing**, and education campaigns about where it is legal and not. This would come from within our \$20 million per year commitment to increase GBRMPA's funding.
- Ensuring that all commercial fishing vessels carry remote electronic GPS monitors called "**Vessel Monitoring Systems**" (VMS) at a cost of \$5 million. This measure will level the playing field by making sure that all commercial fishing operators act within the law.
- The Greens **support successful policies** like net buyback schemes at the State government level.
- Sharks and other apex predators are a crucial part of the Reef ecosystem. We would **ban shark fishing** in the Reef World Heritage Area and conduct trials of **non-lethal shark control measures** like "eco-barriers" instead of harmful shark nets which are not guaranteed to reduce risk to swimmers.

> Making shipping safer for people and the Reef

The Greens would protect our marine life from the impacts of shipping like dangerous underwater noise and vessel strike by implementing stricter safety standards such as:

- Go-slow areas or speed limits to protect whales and other critical habitat
- Higher standards and propeller design for ships travelling through the Reef
- Compulsory marine pilotage for ships transiting the Reef.
- Support for a strong, safe, local shipping industry^{xii}

We would work towards **doubling emergency pollution response funding** given the dangers of a repeat of the Shen Neng coal ship disaster in 2010. We would task the Australian Marine Safety Authority (AMSA) with doubling the existing emergency response preparedness fund for oil spills and other pollution from \$15 million to \$30 million. This could be funded by increased levies on shipping according to the “polluter pays” principle.

The Greens would clean up the Shen Neng coal ship mess – the Greens would press ahead with the clean-up of Douglas Shoal where the coal ship Shen Neng was grounded in 2010, leaving a trail of toxic TBT which is still contaminating local ecosystems. The head of GBRMPA has described this as “urgent”. The government must start the clean up immediately, and recoup costs later via an ongoing Federal Court case.

> Environment laws to protect the Reef

The Greens have already announced our ambitious [Protecting Precious Places](#) plan for a new generation of national environment laws and a new independent watchdog, the National Environment Protection Authority (NEPA).^{xiii} These laws would actually protect our precious places rather than simply managing their decline. They would place strict limits on the Federal Minister’s powers to approve developments which would harm the Outstanding Universal Value of the Reef, or drive species to extinction.

Our previously announced plan [Protecting our Native Wildlife](#) plan includes a \$130 million commitment to conduct comprehensive field surveys to map the critical habitat for threatened species, and to establish no-go zones for development, and properly assess cumulative impacts. It also includes restoring and doubling the Biodiversity Fund, with \$2 billion in funding over 6 years.

The Greens will keep federal environment powers in federal hands, and oppose the Abbott/Turnbull government’s attempts to silence community voices for the environment via their “lawfare” changes.

> Where do the other parties stand?

Both Labor and the Coalition support new coal mines, more fracking and damaging port expansions, even though global warming is threatening the very existence of our precious Reef. Neither Labor nor the Coalition have ever refused a coal mine or a gas fracking project under our national environment laws.

Pressure from the Greens, community members and environmentalists forced federal and Queensland state governments to implement a ban on dumping of capital dredge spoil which they had previously rejected, and which the Greens had been calling for. Loopholes remain, but the Reef is now a critical election issue which no party can ignore.

The Coalition government cut crucial funding to water quality projects in 2014, before marginally increasing funding after a huge community campaign. Labor has committed \$377 million of new funding for water quality and governance projects, but that is nowhere near the levels required.

> The Greens’ track record defending the Reef

The Greens have been campaigning to save the Reef from the dangers of global warming, dredging, dumping and shipping, and water pollution for many years, including while the Liberal, Labor and National parties worked together to trash our precious Reef by supporting massive new coal mines and port expansions along the coast.

The Greens initiated the Senate inquiry on the Reef which, along with the community campaign, eventually resulted in a historic ban on offshore dumping of capital dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and World Heritage Area.

ⁱ Jon Brodie and Richard Pearson (2016) ‘This election is our last chance to save the Great Barrier Reef’ *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/this-election-is-our-last-chance-to-save-the-great-barrier-reef-59381>

ⁱⁱ GBRMPA (2016) The facts on the Great Barrier Reef coral mortality <http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/media-room/latest-news/coral-bleaching/coral-bleaching/the-facts-on-great-barrier-reef-coral-mortality>

ⁱⁱⁱ Professor Terry Hughes (2015) Government unveils 2050 Great Barrier Reef plan: experts react, *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/government-unveils-2050-great-barrier-reef-plan-experts-react-39172>

^{iv} RenewAustralia plan here greens.org.au/renew

^v More information here <http://greens.org.au/global-warming>

^{vi} Caring for Coal Workers rehabilitation jobs plan is here: <http://greens.org.au/after-coal>

^{vii} ABC Online, 3 April 2016, Great Barrier Reef policies not enough to meet targets set out in Reef 2050 Plan: AIMS <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-03/great-barrier-reef-aust-will-miss-targets-researcher-said/7286466>

^{viii} Some of these funds (\$275 million over 5 years) of these additional funds would be drawn from within the Greens’ other environment election commitments, including the \$2 billion Biodiversity Fund, the balance being an additional commitment of funds.

^{ix} This figure includes budgeted expenditure along with half the government’s proposed additional funding for Reef Trust. See Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce (2016) *Final Report* <http://www.gbr.qld.gov.au/documents/gbrwst-finalreport-2016.pdf> page 32.

^x Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce (2016) *Final Report* <http://www.gbr.qld.gov.au/documents/gbrwst-finalreport-2016.pdf> page 32.

See also the *Interim Report* of the GBR Water Science Taskforce <http://www.gbr.qld.gov.au/documents/gbrwst-interim-report-highres.pdf> page 23

^{xi} ABC Online (2016) *Threats to the Great Barrier Reef outgrowing agencies protecting it, leading expert warns* <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-10/great-barrier-reef-outgrown-agency-protecting-it-terry-hughes/7237752>

^{xii} See <http://janet-rice.greensmps.org.au/category/issues-tags/shipping-industry?page=1> for more information on the Greens’ work defending our local seafarers.

^{xiii} The Protecting Precious Places policy is here <http://greens.org.au/places>