



Hon Dr Steven Miles MP  
Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and  
Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef

Ref CTS05819/15

27 APR 2015

Mr Neil Laurie  
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Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to your letter of 12 April 2015 enclosing a copy of Petition Nos. 2328-14 and 2362-15 lodged in the Queensland Legislative Assembly. Please find my response to the petitions below and I request that under Standing Order 125 that you table the response by Monday, 27 April 2015.

The Petitions draw to the attention of the House the current and future threats to Moreton Bay's habitat, wildlife and social sustainability. The Petitioners request that the House direct the Queensland Government to initiate an independent enquiry into the current and future threats to Moreton Bay's habitat, wildlife and social sustainability. They also ask that in the interim a moratorium be placed on any hunting and killing of endangered animals for whatever social or economic justification, until information gathered by the enquiry can be properly evaluated and appropriate decisions enacted.

Moreton Bay is home to an array of precious wildlife including dugongs, marine turtles and humpback dolphins. Both the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP) and Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing (through the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service) have a significant oversight on key elements of Moreton Bay's habitat, wildlife and social sustainability associated with natural values of the area.

I believe the oversight currently provided by the departments is sufficient to ensure the current and future threats are properly identified and managed and as such an independent enquiry is not necessary. More detail on the existing programs is provided below. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service works closely with the Traditional Owners for the Moreton Bay area, the Quandamooka people, in respect to the management and protection of dugong and marine turtle and their habitat.

The Quandamooka people are able to take dugong and marine turtle in Moreton Bay under custom and tradition in accordance with s.211 of the Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993*. However, they take a very conservative approach towards utilising these species and also have involvement in a number of research programs in the area, such as sea grass monitoring. In light of this I do not believe a moratorium on the hunting of dugong and marine turtle is warranted at this time.

Current activities by EHP and NPSR relevant to ensuring the sustainability of Moreton Bay habitat, wildlife and social values include:

## **STRANDNET**

EHP maintains a state-wide database that collates the temporal and spatial occurrence of sick, injured and dead marine wildlife (whales, dolphins, dugong, seals, turtles, threatened sharks and grouper), with information, where available, on the cause of death.

This database includes a comprehensive overview of reported “strandings” for Moreton Bay since 1996.

EHP has also reviewed the factors causing marine mammal mortality in eastern Queensland, which has established that the primary cause of mortality of dugong and inshore dolphins in eastern Queensland was extreme weather-driven river runoff.

## **HUMPBACK DOLPHINS**

In response to an increase in deaths of humpback dolphins in the Moreton Bay region from 2011-2013, a year long joint study was undertaken between EHP, academics and veterinarians to examine the health and status of the population.

The preliminary results of this study indicate that the Moreton Bay humpback dolphin population is seasonally transient, with stable residence patterns in winter, but movement outside of Moreton Bay in summer.

An expert panel has been formed to assess the exposure of the population to current and projected threatening processes and analyses of population size and contaminant loads are ongoing.

Until now, humpback dolphin populations in South East Queensland (SEQ) have been considered discrete populations, best managed in separate Marine Parks. More recently, there are indications that genetic connectivity across the region may be greater than previously thought.

EHP is developing a project to address movements of humpback dolphins between Moreton Bay and the Sandy Straits, and to use a coordinated approach to address the status of humpback dolphins across the region.

## **DUGONG STUDIES**

EHP has reviewed the status of dugong populations in SEQ and this study concluded that dugong populations across Moreton Bay and Hervey Bay have been stable or possibly increasing over the past three decades.

This has occurred even though there have been low levels of dugong mortality from a range of human activities including Indigenous hunting, boat strike and entanglement in fishing gear. The study concluded that a low level of human-related mortality was sustainable within the Moreton Bay population.

EHP is also a collaborating partner in the following university-led dugong studies:

- **Dugong health:** (University of Queensland: School of Veterinary Science)
- **Satellite telemetry investigation of habitat use:** (James Cook University)

## **MARINE TURTLE**

EHP manages a long-term tagging-recapture study of marine turtles in Moreton Bay. This study site provides key data from this major foraging area to give an understanding of the functioning of migratory threatened turtles (loggerhead, green and hawksbill turtles) that

breed in Queensland. This study which began in 1990 is one of the most comprehensive and long-running studies of its kind globally and is approaching a time scale of studies that encompasses one generation for these long-lived animals.

Results of these turtle studies are reviewed periodically in conjunction with data from other phases of the life history of these migratory species. These data are used to provide advice to government policy and management, in particular for marine park management.

EHP is a collaborating partner with university researchers in the following marine turtle studies in Moreton Bay:

- **Turtle health:** University of Queensland: School of Veterinary Science and National Research Centre for Environmental Toxicology; Griffith University; James Cook University
- **Satellite telemetry investigation of habitat use:** James Cook University
- **Diet and habitat use:** University of Queensland
- **Impact of toxic algal blooms on turtle health and population function:** University of Queensland.

Should you have any further enquiries, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Michael Devery, Acting Director Threatened Species of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection on telephone number (07) 3330 5257.

Yours sincerely



**DR STEVEN MILES MP**  
**Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and**  
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