

GREAT BARRIER REEF FOUNDATION

MEDIA STATEMENT

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Business joins International Efforts to Arrest Global Reef Decline

Comments by Judy Stewart, Managing Director Great Barrier Reef Foundation, on the Coral Reef Targeted Research & Capacity Building Program Synthesis Meeting at the University of Queensland (UQ), Monday 3 November 2008.

*“Globally our current management of coral reefs is inadequate and becoming more so as we place new and greater stresses on these ecosystems. The future looks very dim and yet we have the capacity to do a far more effective job of reef management **if we want to.**”* Dr Peter F. Sale (Chair of the CRTR Working Group on Connectivity and Large Scale Ecological Processes)ⁱ
In Australia, **we want to.**

The Coral Reef Targeted Research & Capacity Building Project (CRTR) responds directly to Dr Sale’s call to action to make the coral reef eco-systems of the world sustainable through management, which is directly informed by targeted research.

Australia’s coral reefs have been under the political spotlight in recent days, recognising how much Australians identify with their own iconic reefs, and especially the Great Barrier Reef. Politicians in Australia recognise that a sharp decline in the health of our reefs will not only generate national economic shockwaves, but bring on a time of reckoning for Australians as a people. Something will shift.

In *The Voyage of the Beagle*, Charles Darwin marvelled:

“We feel surprised when travellers tells us of the vast dimensions of the Pyramids and other great ruins, but how utterly insignificant are the greatest of these, when compared to these mountains of stone accumulated by the agency of various minute and tender animals.”

He described the wonder of just 400 species of coral producing large and beautiful reef structures across the world, describing coral reefs as “the planet’s most successful engineering mechanism of all time.”

Working to protect and preserve the Great Barrier Reef.

We measure coral reef history in terms of civilisations rather than centuries. And yet we are standing on the verge of losing many of our most beautiful reefs so carelessly, in the blink of an eye.

The Great Barrier Reef Foundation was founded to meet this very challenge, bringing business, science and philanthropy together, sometimes for the very first time, to invest in projects that will, in the face of dire threats like climate change, inform how we sustain coral reefs. The Foundation's mission extends to all coral reefs, but we have in our own Great Barrier Reef, thousands of precious, well tended and healthy reefs, which offer much to the custodians of coral communities around the world, in lessons learned and experience able to be shared.

Now almost ten years old, the Foundation is ambitious to forge new partnerships nationally and internationally, to work harder to contribute to this shared cause especially now that we know that the world's coral reefs are at grave risk. Putting the world's best minds to work across the globe to do what they do best - intelligent enquiry and problem solving - is essential, right now.

We have been watching the CRTR project with ever growing fascination and were delighted when the University of Queensland wanted to work with us to broaden the gathering together of its eminent Synthesis Panel to include new people and with them, the perspectives of foreign policy, civil society, the corporate sector and industry and international relations under the banner of this global project.

"Disappearing coral reefs" is a massive global challenge. Climate change and its effects on the world's coral reefs will trouble developed and developing countries alike on an ever escalating scale. And as disturbing the eradication of our coral reefs will be in its own right, what it signals for the planet as a whole is that by 2020, if we do nothing, 60% of the Reef will bleach every second year. By 2040 there may not be a Great Barrier Reef.ⁱⁱ

Among those convened today are Dr John Schubert, who chairs both the Foundation and the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and the Foundation's International Science Advisory Committee (ISAC) Chair and Foundation Director, Professor Paul Greenfield AO. Also important to the Foundation is ISAC Director, Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, whose expertise and eminence in the field of coral and climate was recognised earlier this year with the Queensland Smart State Premier's Fellowship 2008 – 2013.

The interplay of climate and coral is a very real one and the CRTR Synthesis Meeting has generously invited in new voices to help solve the problem. We believe there is great scope for other disciplines to offer up their knowledge to investigations that, up until now, may have been seen as the realm of pure science. Today we see that process tested and opened up to view.



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The potential for rich and substantial yields from this gathering today is immense. The Great Barrier Reef Foundation looks forward to contributing all it can, whenever it can.

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ⁱ Sale, P.F., 2008. *Management of coral reefs: Where we have gone wrong and what we can do about it.* Marine Pollution Bulletin (56) 805-809

ⁱⁱ Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability Working Group 11, Fourth Assessment Report, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007