



# Great Barrier Reef

## Strategic Assessment

Great Barrier Reef Coastal Zone  
Strategic Assessment

Background and Final Terms of Reference

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The Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning leads a coordinated Queensland Government approach to planning, infrastructure and development across the state.

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# Background and context to the Great Barrier Reef Coastal Zone Strategic Assessment

## Background

The Queensland and Australian Governments are working together to undertake a comprehensive strategic assessment for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA) and adjacent coastal zone. This strategic assessment will help identify, plan for and manage existing and emerging risks so that the unique environmental values of the Great Barrier Reef are protected and managed.

There are two components to the comprehensive strategic assessment—a marine component and a coastal component.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority will lead the marine component involving a strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef Region. The Queensland Government will lead the coastal component involving a strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef Coastal Zone.

## Purpose

The purpose of the terms of reference (ToR) is to set out the requirements for Queensland in preparing the Strategic Assessment Report.

## Scope

The scope of the Great Barrier Reef Coastal Zone strategic assessment is the Queensland Government's coastal management, planning and development framework, as it relates to the coastal zone adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef.

Queensland's coastal management, planning and development framework is comprised of a number of components:

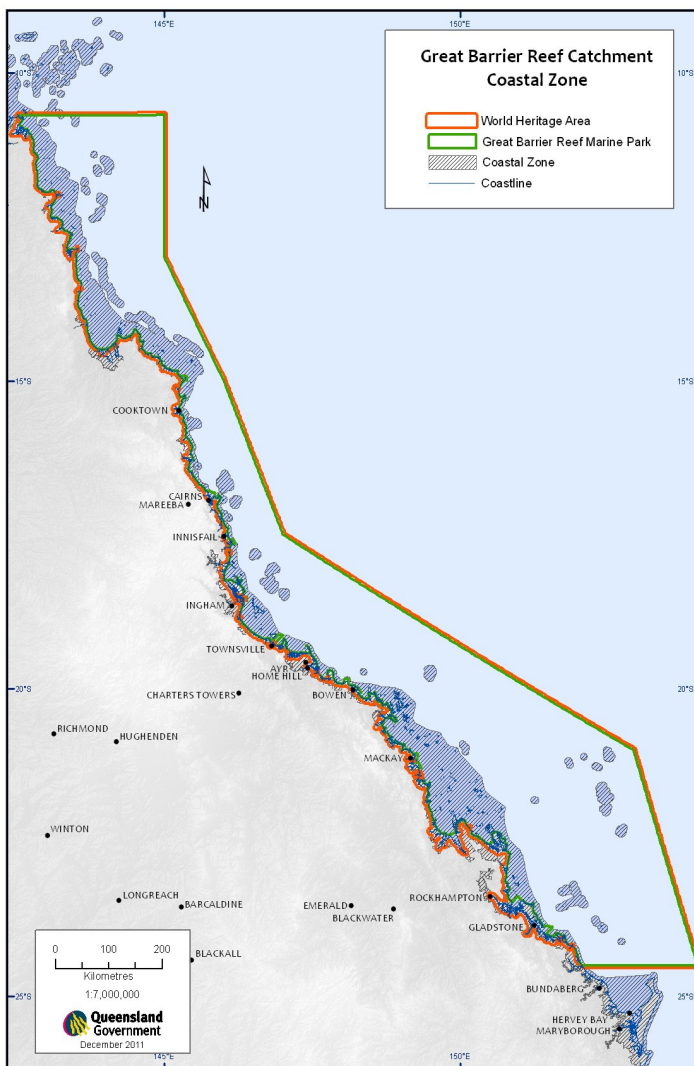
- plans, policies and programs relevant to the broader management of the Great Barrier Reef region and catchments within the State's jurisdiction, including those associated with national park islands, state marine parks, shipping activities and reef water quality initiatives
- identifying areas of importance such as the methodology for mapping areas of national and state environmental significance and the policy requirements that apply to these areas
- avoiding, mitigating and offsetting impacts, including the application of policy requirements to matters of national environment significance (MNES), through:
  - Queensland's coastal policy, regional plans, local plans and development assessment processes under Queensland's *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* (SPA)

- State legislative, planning and development systems relating to urban development areas, state development areas and ports.
- Queensland's offsetting regime.

The geographic area covered in the assessment is:

- the coastal zone adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef, including Queensland waters, islands and adjacent inland areas (5 km inland or 10 metres AHD contour, whichever is further)
- areas of the Great Barrier Reef catchment to the extent that water quality management arrangements apply.

Map 1. Great Barrier Reef Catchment Coastal Zone



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## Context

The strategic assessment is being carried out under Part 10 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)*.

The assessment also responds to the June 2011 decision of the World Heritage Committee that requested the Australian Government to undertake a strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA).

## Great Barrier Reef and Coastal Zone values

In accordance with the EPBC Act, the assessment will address impacts on MNES as defined in the EPBC Act, including world heritage properties, national heritage places, wetlands of international importance, nationally listed threatened species and ecological communities, nationally listed migratory species, Commonwealth marine areas and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

As part of the strategic assessment, there will be consideration of matters relating to the outstanding universal value (OUV) of the GBRWHA, being those exceptional qualities that make the area worthy of special protection<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The Great Barrier Reef is considered to be of Outstanding Universal Value on the basis that it meets all four of the natural criteria specified in the *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage* (the World Heritage Convention), as well satisfying the requirements of integrity.

The natural criteria specified in the World Heritage Convention for World Heritage properties are that they:

- (vii) contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;
- (viii) be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;
- (ix) be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;
- (x) contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of Outstanding Universal Value from the point of view of science or conservation.

The Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area meets the requirements for integrity, meaning that its attributes are considered to be whole and intact. That is, the property includes all elements necessary to express its outstanding universal value, is of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes which convey the property's significance and is protected from threats.

## Reports to be prepared

The Great Barrier Reef Coastal Zone strategic assessment will deliver two reports:

1. Program Report containing a detailed description of the Queensland Government's coastal management, planning and development framework (the Program).
2. Strategic Assessment Report containing an assessment of the impacts of activities under the Program on MNES including the OUV of the GBRWHA.

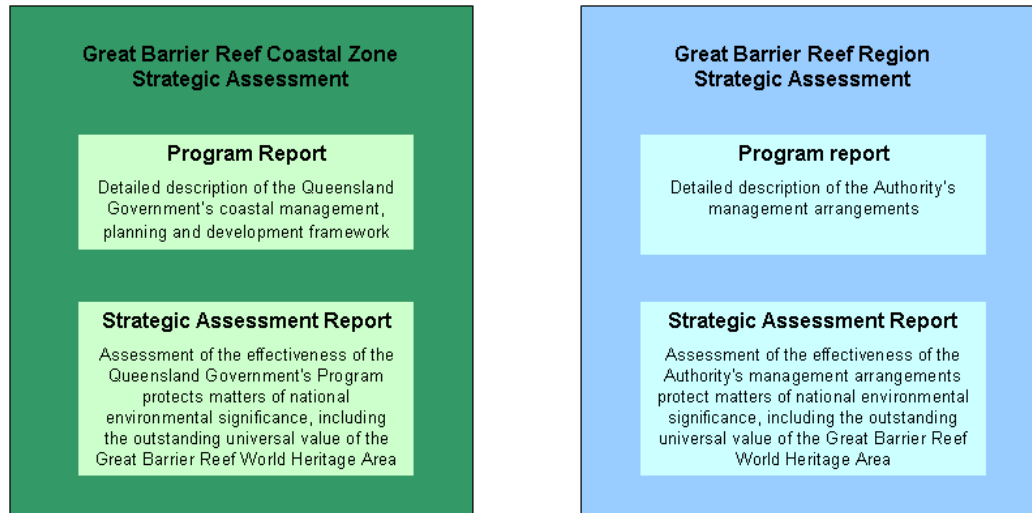
The time horizon of the Program described in the Program Report will be 25 years, during which time there will be monitoring, evaluation and periodic review of the Program.

The Great Barrier Reef Region strategic assessment, led by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, will be made up of two similar reports, as shown in Figure 1. Aspects where there are joint management responsibilities may be considered in both assessments.

Preparation of the Strategic Assessment Report for the Great Barrier Reef Coastal Zone strategic assessment will be in accordance with these ToR.

Where possible, the Queensland Government and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority will work closely together to ensure a complementary approach is taken, including collaborating to prepare components of the strategic assessments where there are joint management responsibilities.

**Figure 1:** Reports of the strategic assessments for the GBRWHA



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## Timeframes

It is anticipated that a draft Program Report and Strategic Assessment Report of the Great Barrier Reef Coastal Zone strategic assessment will be made available for public comment early to mid 2013.

It is intended that the comprehensive strategic assessment for the GBRWHA will be finalised by mid to late 2013.

Prior to finalisation of the strategic assessment, the Queensland and Australian Governments will continue to apply high environmental standards when considering development proposals that may affect the GBRWHA.

## Development of the Terms of Reference

To ensure a consistent approach to developing the two strategic assessments, these final ToR have been developed in close cooperation with GBRMPA and the Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.

Draft ToR were made available for public comment between 18 February and 30 April 2012. A total of 377 submissions were received and have been considered in finalising these ToR. A Consultation Report has been released alongside the final ToR attached.

## Review

Key stakeholders and expert advice will be engaged during development of the Strategic Assessment Report to provide rigour and transparency to the process.

Both the Program Report and the Strategic Assessment Report will be independently reviewed prior to public consultation. Wherever possible the information that supports and underpins the reports will be made publicly available.

A draft Program Report and draft Strategic Assessment Report will be released together for public comment prior to their finalisation.

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# Great Barrier Reef Coastal Zone strategic assessment

## Final Terms of Reference

### 1 Purpose and description of the Program

The Strategic Assessment Report must include an overview of the Program including its purpose and the area in which it will be implemented. For the purposes of the strategic assessment, the life of the Program is 25 years.

The Program Report will include:

1. the purpose of the Program
2. a description of the area to which the strategic assessment applies (the strategic assessment area)
3. the component legislation, plans, policies and other material that make up the Program, including program commitments
4. the likely activities that will occur under the Program
5. the state and regional context (environmental, social, and economic) in which the Program operates, including activities outside the strategic assessment area that may influence the Program
6. other relevant national, state or regional planning or management frameworks that affect the Program
7. a description of how the Program identifies, protects and manages matters of national environment significance (MNES)
8. identification of how long the Program will be in effect and the process for review of the Program, including adaptive management
9. identification of the relevant authorities responsible for the implementation of the Program.



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## 2 Matters of national environmental significance affected by the program

The scale and diversity of the geographic area requires that a tiered, or hierarchical approach be taken that looks at the existing and likely future risks and impacts to the Great Barrier Reef and adjacent coastal zone. It then needs to look in depth at specific locations and initiatives as a means of demonstrating the effectiveness of the Program in protecting matters of national environment significance (MNES), including outstanding universal value (OUV) at a local scale.

### 2.1 Identification of MNES including OUV

The Strategic Assessment Report must describe the extent of the following MNES within the strategic assessment area:

- World Heritage properties (sections 12 and 15A)
- National Heritage places (sections 15B and 15C)
- Wetlands of international importance (sections 16 and 17B)
- Listed threatened species and ecological communities (sections 18 and 18A)
- Listed migratory species (sections 20 and 20A)
- Commonwealth marine area (sections 23 and 24A)
- The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (sections 24B and 24C)

The description must include the key terrestrial, coastal, and marine biodiversity and heritage values and supporting ecological processes considered critical to the functioning of MNES including OUV. This will be achieved in part through:

- (a) an assessment of Queensland's processes for identifying areas of MNES including OUV
- (b) an assessment of Queensland's processes to otherwise represent MNES including OUV as non-mapped descriptions of biophysical attributes.

The Strategic Assessment Report must also:

- (a) describe the current condition of MNES including the values described above, projected trends and existing threats from both within and outside the strategic assessment area
- (b) for World Heritage values, describe the current condition of OUV against the retrospective statement of OUV which describes the state of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA) at the time of listing

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- (c) provide sufficient information to allow an understanding of the connectivity between MNES including OUV
  - (d) identify any key information gaps and the further studies needed
  - (e) identify any proposals or processes to address critical information needs
  - (f) describe the methodologies and data sources used for all of the above.

## 2.2 Identification and analysis of the potential impacts

The Strategic Assessment Report must describe how potential future impacts of activities taken under the Program are identified and taken into account in relevant decision making processes, in the context of past and existing impacts as described in Section 2.1 above.

For illustrative purposes, the activities described in the Program may include the following:

- urban developments within an urban footprint in a region within a statutory regional plan;
- planned tourist developments consistent with a Statutory Regional Plan;
- planned urban development within an urban development area where it is consistent with an approved development scheme;
- planned industrial development within state development areas where it is consistent with an approved development scheme;
- proposed port developments within existing port limits where it is consistent with a port land use plan and the Queensland Government's strategy for port developments; and
- aquaculture development (in aquaculture development areas).

In doing so, the Strategic Assessment Report must:

- (a) analyse the effectiveness of Queensland's framework for mapping or otherwise describing MNES including OUV and the policies for protecting their values
- (b) identify the following areas and the activities that may occur within them:
  - existing developed areas, including ports
  - protected areas
  - areas that may be subject to future development within the life of the Program
  - areas, including protected areas, where certain types of development or activity may be specifically prohibited to avoid impacts on MNES, including OUV
  - priority areas for conservation, that may be acquired as offsets, where development is restricted or excluded for the net benefit of ecological outcomes.

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As part of this the Strategic Assessment Report will:

- describe the Queensland Government's strategy for port development and for managing the safety of vessel movements within port limits and compulsory port pilotage areas
  - identify existing and planned urban and industrial areas having regard to local and regional planning instruments
  - identify planned or potential state development areas and urban development areas
- (c) describe how MNES including OUV are considered in relevant decision making processes, including:
- declaring areas for development, including state development areas
  - planning of development areas
  - approving development proposals, including the consideration of alternative development scenarios and/or locations
  - declaring areas, including protected areas, where certain types of development or activity may be specifically prohibited
  - identifying areas that may be suitable for offsets, where development is restricted or excluded for the net benefit of ecological outcomes
- (d) describe the processes in place to enhance MNES and OUV, including management of existing threats, both within and outside the strategic assessment area where impacts from those activities manifest themselves at the coastal interface
- (e) identify and analyse the potential direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on relevant MNES and OUV arising from implementing the Program in general and more specifically in key demonstration areas
- (f) describe how social and economic impacts and issues are considered and assessed
- (g) consider and assess the effects of climate change and other long term influences on the potential future impacts
- (h) include an assessment of uncertainties and the confidence associated with the likelihood and consequence(s) of potential impacts, including reference to scientific and other information relied upon in identifying and assessing those impacts.

## 2.3 Measures to avoid, mitigate and offset impacts

The Strategic Assessment Report must describe the avoidance, mitigation and offsetting measures that are proposed for future activities taken under the Program and analyse the effectiveness of these measures in protecting and enhancing MNES including OUV. This analysis may use demonstration cases to illustrate the application and effectiveness of particular measures and approaches and must include, but not be limited to:

- (a) describing how impacts on MNES including OUV are avoided, including how alternative approaches are considered, including for restricted or no development
- (b) describing, where impacts of development cannot be avoided, how impacts are mitigated and offset
- (c) describing, where impacts of development cannot be avoided or mitigated, how impacts are offset, including through securing additional areas where development is restricted or excluded
- (d) describing the extent to which cumulative impacts on MNES including OUV are considered and the methods used to determine cumulative impacts
- (e) describing the extent to which measures are considered to enhance MNES and OUV both within and outside the strategic assessment area
- (f) analysing resourcing, monitoring, evaluation and compliance regimes.

## 2.4 Demonstration of the Program

The Strategic Assessment Report must include a detailed analysis of the Program, through the use of demonstration cases to test the effectiveness of the Program in identifying and protecting MNES, including OUV, at a local and/or regional scale.

Demonstration cases will relate to a regional or local plan under Queensland's planning legislation and a development area, such as a port, state development area or urban area. They could also include a transect approach to demonstration cases which extends from key coastal zones through the Great Barrier Reef marine environment.

The locations for the demonstration cases will be chosen by Queensland in consultation with the Australian Government. This should be based on the following criteria:

- (a) there should be multiple impacts acting upon the region, locality or value
- (b) demonstration cases may relate to a specific value, place or pressure/impact
- (c) learning that could transfer to other areas
- (d) there may be an urgent need to act on a particular issue or area
- (e) there is an opportunity to build capacity for future management.

Queensland will work with GBRMPA to identify demonstration cases relevant to both strategic assessments.

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## 2.5 Recommendations for changes to the Program

The Strategic Assessment Report must include an evaluation of the resulting projected condition of MNES including OUV within the strategic assessment area of the Program taking into account:

- (a) the baseline scenario, i.e. the analysis of the current condition of MNES including OUV, projected trends and existing threats
- (b) the likely net impacts on MNES including OUV from implementing the Program and the effects of any ongoing management and enhancement activities.

The Strategic Assessment Report must include recommendations for changes to the Program if the assessment identifies that MNES including OUV are not adequately protected by the Program. The Strategic Assessment Report may include recommendations to:

- (a) modify the state's processes for identifying MNES including OUV either through mapping or non-mapped descriptions of biophysical and heritage attributes
- (b) change the policy framework by which impacts on MNES including OUV are considered by the Program
- (c) change the state's processes for declaring, planning and deciding development including how certain types of development or activity may be specifically prohibited to avoid impacts on MNES, including OUV
- (d) change the state's processes for identifying, declaring and managing protected areas to protect and enhance MNES, including OUV
- (e) change to the state programs to avoid, mitigate and establish offsets<sup>1</sup> for impacts on MNES, including OUV
- (f) establish a program for further strategic assessments of specific areas and plans, policies or programs
- (g) describe and analyse the circumstances where impacts on MNES and OUV are likely to be unacceptable and any process for resolving conflicts.

Recommendations for changes to the Program will seek to achieve a net benefit in terms of how the Program addresses impacts on MNES including the OUV of the GBRWHA.

Note 1: Offsets may include the acquisition of priority areas for conservation where development is restricted or excluded for the net benefit of ecological outcomes.

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## 3 Promoting Ecologically Sustainable Development

The Strategic Assessment Report must describe how the principles of ecologically sustainable development have been applied in the Program<sup>2</sup>.

## 4 Adaptive management: addressing uncertainty and managing risk

The Strategic Assessment Report must identify the key adaptive management measures addressing uncertainties and risks inherent in the decision making process. Uncertainties could include knowledge gaps in scientific understanding and the timing, effectiveness, or capacity to implement, maintain, operate and enforce management measures.

The Strategic Assessment Report must describe how the adaptive management strategies will be implemented under the Program to ensure MNES including OUV are effectively protected over the life of the Program. This includes:

- (a) how the monitoring of MNES including OUV will occur, how the monitoring will be analysed throughout the life of the Program and how the results of the monitoring will influence the Program
- (b) how new information relating to MNES, OUV or the Program is to be assessed and accounted for in management of the area affected by the Program.

## 5 Auditing and reporting

The Strategic Assessment Report must describe:

- (a) a monitoring, review and public reporting process to ensure implementation of the Program continues to adequately protect MNES including OUV
- (b) the parties responsible for undertaking the monitoring, review, reporting and implementation of the activities arising.

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<sup>2</sup> The principles of ecologically sustainable development as described in section 3A of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) are:

- (a) decision-making processes should effectively integrate both long-term and short-term economic, environmental, social and equitable considerations
- (b) if there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation
- (c) the principle of inter-generational equity—that the present generation should ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations
- (d) the conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity should be a fundamental consideration in decision-making
- (e) improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms should be promoted.

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## 6 Review, modification or abandonment

The Strategic Assessment Report must identify and analyse the likely circumstances and procedures that may result in the review, modification or abandonment of the Program. This is to include a discussion of how any commitments under the Program will continue to be met under these situations.

## 7 Endorsement criteria

When deciding whether to endorse the Program, the Commonwealth Minister (Minister) must be satisfied that the Strategic Assessment Report adequately addresses the impacts to which this Agreement relates, and that any recommendations by the Minister to modify the Program have been responded to appropriately.

In determining whether or not to endorse the Program, the Minister will have regard to the extent to which the Program meets the objects of the EPBC Act. In particular, that it:

- protects the environment, especially those aspects of the environment that are MNES;
- promotes ecologically sustainable development through the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of natural resources;
- promotes the conservation of biodiversity;
- provides for the protection and conservation of heritage;
- promotes a cooperative approach to the protection and management of the environment;
- assists in the co-operative implementation of Australia's international environmental responsibilities;
- recognises the role of indigenous people in the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of Australia's biodiversity; and
- promotes the use of indigenous peoples' knowledge of biodiversity with the involvement of, and in co-operation with, the owners of the knowledge.

Without limiting the matters the Minister may consider when making the decision to endorse the Program, the Minister will consider the manner in which the Program:

- identifies direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on MNES
- avoids impacts on MNES
- mitigates the impacts on MNES
- offsets the impacts on MNES
- contributes to the enhancement of MNES and management of existing threats
- demonstrates adaption to reasonable climate change scenarios.

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Commitments in the Program must be adequately resourced throughout its life. The Program must demonstrate an effective system of adaptive management that addresses uncertainty and contingency management as well as procedures for monitoring, independent auditing and public reporting on implementation.

The Program must address all of the above matters for it to be considered for endorsement by the Minister in accordance with the EPBC Act.

## 8 Independent review

The Program Report and Strategic Assessment Report will be the subject of independent review by a suitably qualified party, external to both the Queensland and Australian Governments.

## 9 Information sources

For information and data used in the assessment, the Strategic Assessment Report must state:

- (a) the source of the information
- (b) how recent the information is
- (c) the reliability and limitations of the information.

Wherever possible information underpinning the strategic assessment will be made publicly available.

## 10 Engagement

A draft of the Program Report and the draft Strategic Assessment Report will be released together for public comment prior to their finalisation and submission to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.

The Strategic Assessment Report must describe the strategies employed to engage with the community, specific interest groups and other stakeholders, including but not limited to, the different stakeholder engagement approaches and how community and stakeholder views and comments have been taken into account in the preparation of the Program Report and the Strategic Assessment Report.



