

Queensland Productivity Commission
Queensland Government
enquiry@qpc.qld.gov.au

13 July 2026

Dear Queensland Productivity Commission,

Reference: Impact of the Australian Government's 2025 Environment Protection Reforms on Queensland

The Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Queensland Productivity Commission's (the Commission's) inquiry into the impacts of the Australian Government's 2025 reforms to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act).

Introduction to AIMS

AIMS is Australia's national tropical marine research agency and has been delivering world-leading tropical marine science for more than 50 years. Headquartered at Cape Cleveland near Townsville, Queensland, AIMS undertakes research across Australia's tropical marine estate, with a particular focus on the Great Barrier Reef (GBR), northern Australia and adjacent ocean ecosystems. Guided by [AIMS Strategy 2040](#), we deliver science to impact through trusted science and innovation. Our research is focused through five strategic themes, *Future Reefs, Coastal Futures, Blue Economy, Digital Oceans, and First Nations Innovation*, generating the knowledge, tools and evidence needed to support sustainable ocean management, strengthen the resilience of tropical marine ecosystems, and contribute to thriving communities, industries and environments.

Impact of EPBC Reforms on AIMS

As a publicly funded research organisation, AIMS do not anticipate that the Australian Government's environment protection reforms will have a significant direct impact on its operations. AIMS' principal role is the generation of independent scientific knowledge and environmental information rather than the development or operation of projects requiring environmental approvals. However, the Institute has a strong interest in ensuring that environmental assessment, monitoring and decision-making frameworks continue to be informed by robust, transparent and independent science.

AIMS' primary interest in this inquiry is the role of science in supporting effective environmental governance and the importance of maintaining protections for the GBR and associated marine ecosystems. The GBR is a globally significant natural asset that provides substantial environmental, social, cultural and economic value. The Reef supports tourism, fisheries and regional communities while contributing billions of dollars annually to the national economy. Effective stewardship of this asset depends upon decisions informed by the best available scientific evidence.

AIMS emphasises the importance of transparent, credible and contemporary scientific evidence in supporting effective environmental regulation and decision-making. Evidence-based decision-making provides governments, communities and industry with confidence that environmental assessments are

proportionate to risk, focused on measurable outcomes and responsive to new knowledge. Scientific monitoring, environmental data and long-term research programs are essential for understanding cumulative impacts, assessing ecosystem condition and resilience, and evaluating the effectiveness of management actions.

AIMS notes that the development and implementation of National Environmental Standards present an important opportunity to establish clear, consistent and scientifically informed expectations for environmental assessment, protection and restoration. The effectiveness of these standards will be enhanced through access to robust environmental data, long-term monitoring and independent scientific expertise.

The complexity of marine ecosystems, particularly in the GBR region, requires decision-makers to consider both immediate and long-term consequences of environmental change. Climate change, declining water quality, coastal development, marine pollution and other pressures interact in ways that can be difficult to predict. Scientific evidence provides the foundation for identifying risks, prioritising management responses and evaluating policy effectiveness. Environmental reforms provide an opportunity to further strengthen the integration of independent scientific expertise, environmental monitoring and trusted environmental information into assessment, approval and management processes, helping to deliver robust environmental outcomes and increased confidence in decision-making.

Opportunities for AIMS to Support Implementation of the Environment Reforms in Queensland

Environmental Monitoring and Reporting

AIMS delivers long-term environmental monitoring and water quality programs that provide trusted information on the condition, trends and drivers of change in Australia's tropical marine ecosystems. Under the reformed environmental framework, AIMS is well positioned to provide independent environmental monitoring, water quality assessment, development of environmental indicators and performance measures, and reporting against environmental outcomes and targets.

This includes AIMS' Long-Term Monitoring Program (LTMP), which has been continuously monitoring the Great Barrier Reef for 40 years and has generated one of the world's longest running and most comprehensive coral reef datasets. The LTMP measures the status and trends of reefs across the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, providing robust, repeatable, long-term data on coral cover, crown-of-thorns starfish, reef fish and other key indicators of reef condition. This data is critical for understanding change over time, identifying emerging threats, assessing the impacts of disturbances, and informing evidence-based management and protection of the GBR.

Through the Marine Monitoring Program, AIMS plays a key role in monitoring and reporting on water quality for a total distance of 1000 kilometres along the Queensland coastline, including the impacts of land-based runoff, nutrients, sediments and other stressors on marine ecosystem health. By combining field observations, advanced technologies and data science capabilities, AIMS helps improve understanding of the links between water quality, ecosystem condition and resilience, supporting targeted management interventions and adaptive decision-making.

Environmental Data and Decision Support

AIMS maintains extensive environmental datasets and analytical capabilities that support evidence-based decision-making. Through programs such as ReefCloud and eReefs, AIMS contributes to integrated

modelling and forecasting tools that provide information on water quality, ecosystem condition and environmental change across the GBR.

These capabilities could assist governments and regulators to better understand cumulative impacts, assess environmental risks, and support strategic assessments, regional planning processes and environmental reporting frameworks envisaged under the reformed EPBC Act.

Climate and Ecosystem Risk Assessment

Climate change remains the most significant long-term threat to the GBR and many Queensland marine ecosystems. AIMS is internationally recognised for its research on coral reef resilience, coral bleaching, recovery dynamics and adaptation pathways.

This expertise could support environmental assessments, environmental standards and policy development by providing a stronger understanding of ecosystem vulnerability, resilience and likely responses to environmental pressures.

Restoration and Adaptation

On the GBR, AIMS' Pilot Deployment Program is trialling and evaluating interventions designed to support coral recovery and reef resilience in the face of climate change and other environmental pressures. AIMS has commenced taking millions of young corals from the laboratory onto the GBR in partnership with trained industry operators and Sea Ranger groups. This represents the largest real-world reef restoration testing effort undertaken to date, providing critical evidence on the feasibility, effectiveness, environmental outcomes and scalability of coral restoration interventions. Through rigorous monitoring and evaluation, the program is generating the trusted scientific knowledge needed to inform adaptive management, future investment decisions and the responsible deployment of restoration actions at scale, helping to build the resilience of reef ecosystems.

As governments consider environmental restoration, nature repair and other mechanisms to improve environmental outcomes under a reformed environmental framework, AIMS can provide trusted scientific expertise, monitoring capability and evaluation frameworks to ensure restoration and deployment activities are informed by robust evidence and deliver measurable ecological benefits.

Partnerships with Traditional Owners and Stakeholders

AIMS works closely with Traditional Owners, government agencies, industry and regional communities across Northern Australia. These partnerships support the co-design of research, integration of multiple knowledge systems and practical application of scientific knowledge to management challenges.

Implementation of environmental reforms will require strong collaboration between governments, communities and knowledge holders. AIMS can assist Queensland by providing independent scientific expertise and facilitating partnerships that support informed and transparent decision-making.

Marine Protected Areas and Ecosystem Resilience

AIMS also highlights the important role of marine protected areas in supporting the health and resilience of the GBR ecosystem. Marine protected areas are widely recognised as an important management tool for conserving biodiversity, protecting critical habitats and maintaining ecosystem functions. Within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, protected areas form a key component of the broader management framework

that supports the protection of representative ecosystems and contributes to the resilience of marine species and habitats.

Scientific research, including studies undertaken by AIMS, demonstrates that well-designed and effectively managed marine protected areas can deliver ecological benefits, including supporting biodiversity conservation, increasing fish biomass and enhancing the capacity of some ecosystems to recover from disturbance. As environmental pressures on the Reef continue to increase, marine protected areas remain an important component of broader, integrated management approaches aimed at maintaining ecosystem health and resilience alongside actions addressing climate change, water quality and other cumulative pressures.

Conclusion

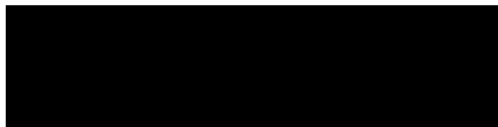
AIMS recommends that the Commission recognise the central role of independent science, environmental information and evidence-based decision-making in achieving the objectives of the Australian Government's environmental reforms and the ongoing importance of evidence-based management arrangements, including marine protected areas, in supporting the long-term health and resilience of the GBR.

AIMS' long-standing investment in environmental monitoring, ecosystem modelling, climate science, restoration research and conservation planning provides a valuable capability that can support both Queensland and Commonwealth governments as the reforms are implemented. Ensuring that scientific expertise remains embedded within environmental assessment and decision-making processes will strengthen environmental outcomes while providing greater certainty for governments, communities and industry.

Environmental regulatory frameworks are most effective when they are informed by robust scientific evidence, supported by long-term monitoring and focused on achieving measurable environmental outcomes. Such an approach provides the strongest foundation for balancing environmental protection with sustainable economic development.

AIMS would be pleased to provide further scientific advice or information to assist the Commission in its consideration of the impacts of the Australian Government's environment protection reforms on Queensland. Please engage with the AIMS Government Relations team (coordination@aims.gov.au) where we can further support the Commission's efforts to ultimately deliver benefits and prosperity for Australians for decades to come.

Yours faithfully,



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Chief Executive Officer
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