



Larissa Waters

Leader of the Australian Greens
Senator for Queensland

1 July 2026

Dr Caralee McLiesh PSM
Auditor-General, Australian National Audit Office
GPO Box 707
Canberra ACT 2601

By email: external.relations@anao.gov.au

Dear Dr McLiesh,

Request for performance audit of Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

We write to request that the Australian National Audit Office undertake an assessment of the governance arrangements and effectiveness of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA).

GBRMPA is the Australian Government's lead agency for the conservation and restoration of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The Reef is recognised for its world-class environmental and cultural values. Beyond its ecological significance, the Reef also contributes \$9 billion to the Australian economy each year and supports 77,000 full-time jobs.

GBRMPA has a critical role in ensuring the Reef's world heritage values are protected for future generations, engaging First Nations communities in sea country management, and working with farming communities to manage the impacts of runoff. We question whether current management arrangements are achieving these objectives.

Several reviews – including the 2006 Borthwick Review and 2017 Craik Review – have examined GBRMPA, with subsequent reforms shifting governance from an independent Commonwealth entity to a more conventional executive management model, and separating the Chair and CEO roles. The oversight and coordination provided by the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum was also discontinued in 2020.

All of these reforms, compounded by funding changes and intense lobbying from fishing and fossil fuel industries, have diminished the independence, authority and effectiveness of GBRMPA. Stakeholders have shared concerns regarding reduced transparency, and that weakened institutional leadership has made GBRMPA timid and risk averse.

This attitude is not fit for purpose - the Great Barrier Reef faces escalating threats from climate change, water quality, shipping and fishing impacts, and needs an agency that will champion ambitious action.

Level 2, 251 Given Terrace, Brisbane • Suite G 112, Parliament House, Canberra
Ph: 07 3367 0566 • Locked Bag 3004, Paddington Qld 4064 • senator.waters@aph.gov.au

*We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we work: the Turrubul, Jagera and Quandamooka peoples.
We pay respect to their elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge that their sovereignty was never ceded.*

UNESCO, IUCN and the World Heritage Committee have repeatedly expressed concern about the state of conservation of the Great Barrier Reef, and discussion about listing the Reef as World Heritage In Danger are ongoing.

Further, APS staff surveys have repeatedly identified concerns with leadership and independence, and a culture in which expertise is undervalued and conflicts are poorly managed. An efficiency review commissioned by GBRMPA [reportedly found](#) staff were experiencing systemic racism, and the agency lacked capability in several important areas.

The most recent [GBR Outlook Report 2024](#) assesses the Reef's outlook as "very poor". Given the accelerating impacts of climate change and poor water quality, it is time for a thorough review of the effectiveness of the current governance arrangements of GBRMPA and its capacity to manage our iconic, World Heritage listed Reef.

ANAO has not comprehensively reviewed the operation of GBRMPA since 1998. The 2019 review of the award of a \$443.3 million grant to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation explored management of the Great Barrier Reef, but did not examine the governance and management effectiveness of GBRMPA itself. We request that the ANAO consider an audit that:

- Evaluates the implications of changing statutory, financial and governance arrangements on GBRMPA's capacity to protect the Reef;
- Examines the effect of removing the Board as the Accountable Authority, and whether the qualifications, independence, and representation of Board members enables good governance and public confidence in decisions;
- Evaluates the effectiveness of the joint government Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum and the impact of the forum being discontinued;
- Assesses the extent to which GBRMPA decision making is taking into account actions in adjoining catchments that impact the Marine Park; and
- Identifies organisational, cultural and capability interventions that could improve the implementation of GBRMPA's statutory responsibilities (including addressing systemic racism).

Thank you for considering this request. Please do not hesitate to contact my office if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,



Senator Larissa Waters
Leader of the Australian Greens
Spokesperson on Climate and First Nations Justice