

Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership (GHHP) Independent Science Panel (ISP)

Chair's report from ISP meeting #16 held on 25 August 2015

The ISP meeting was held on day 2 and the objectives of the meeting were to provide ISP members with an update on GHHP activities, and to review progress against the GHHP Science Program milestones. In addition the ISP finalised: the 2015 Report Card timeline; the endorsed the recommendation of the GHHP/FRDC fish health workshop held on 22nd and 23rd April; and, recommended the statistical support team for 2015 Report Card. ISP also ratified the out of session update of the ISP Conflict of Interest declarations.

The Science Program is on track to deliver the required science inputs into the 2015 Pilot Report Card. Overall the milestones are on track. Although in consultation with the GHHP Management Committee there have been some revisions of deadlines for data agreements and contracting of projects. ISP agreed to three changes to the timing for the delivery of the DIMS project (ISP009) milestones 4, 5 and 6. The changes will not impact on the timing of the final delivery of the project. The ISP also clarified the geographical scope of the social, cultural and economic indicators and the approach to be taken to the identification of indicator baseline conditions.

The ISP recommended Dr Murray Logan (AIMS) be contracted to provide the statistical support for the 2015 Report Card (Project ISP008) and finalised the list of statistical tasks that Dr Logan would be required to complete.

The ISP discussed and endorsed the recommendations from the GHHP/FRDC Gladstone Harbour Fish Health Research Program workshop held on the 22nd and 23rd April 2015. There had also been some out of session discussions about the recommendations. There were two key recommendations from the workshop. Commission two literature reviews: the first on fish health indicators and the second on the use of biomarkers in aquatic environments. The second is to develop a joint GHHP/FRDC project to develop an Australian approach to fish health monitoring using Gladstone Harbour as a case study.

The ISP finalized the approach it will use to determine confidence ratings for each of the four components of the report card (Environmental, Social, Cultural and Economic) using a three-point scale. The approach will be an expert-opinion approach based on a set of ISP criteria informed by data provided by the Science Team.

The ISP has been investigating the use of mud crab commercial logbook data collected by the Queensland Government as part of their management of the fishery (QFish database). This included a report from mud crab expert Dr Ian Brown regarding quality of mud crab data. Dr Brown examined the mud crab data available for Gladstone Harbour in the QFish database, and found it to be unreliable and unsuitable for GHHP purposes. He recommended that GHHP does not use the QFish data for developing an indicator of mud crab abundance. On the basis of Dr Brown's advice the ISP decided not to include mud crabs in the 2015 Report Card.

The ISP discussed the Queensland State Government desire to align the methodology and content of report cards within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area so as to integrate the report cards and contribute to the overall Great Barrier Reef report card. The ISP agreed that this is a worthwhile aim, while noting that there were regional differences in what indicators were appropriate for different report cards (e.g., herbicides in areas downstream from agricultural catchments, industrial contaminants in harbours with major industrial development). It also noted that a consistent methodology is not appropriate across all components within the Gladstone Harbour Report Card, so it may be more difficult to achieve across the range of indicators used in different report cards.

Dr Angus Thompson (AIMS) presented to the ISP including an account of the data collection, analysis and scoring methodology for the three coral indicators to be included in the 2015 Report Card: 1 Coral cover (%), 2 Macroalgal cover (%) and 3 Density of juvenile corals (no.m-2).

Gladstone Region Environmental Advisory Network (GREAN) representatives joined the ISP for lunch. We discussed the methodology used to collect data and develop scores and grades for the social and economic components of the report card, and how the outcomes of the Fish Health Workshop conducted in April will be implemented.

The ISP acknowledged the significant amount of work the science team had completed since our last meeting, thanked them for their dedication and noted the ongoing high quality of their work. The next ISP meeting is scheduled for the 4 May 2015 in Gladstone.