



Faye C Chapman
Secretary, Whitsunday Conservation Council
PO Box 260
CANNONVALE QLD 4802

REF: FAI-23-004

Dear Faye

Re: Concerns over the population of sharks in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park

Thank you for your letter of 15 May 2023 regarding the protection of shark populations within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (the Marine Park).

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (the Reef Authority) is committed to improving the ecological and economic sustainability of fisheries in the Marine Park.

The Reef Authority, as the primary managers of the Marine Park, are continuing to work with the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF) and the Department of Climate Change, Energy the Environment and Water (DCCEE) to reform fisheries management and reduce the threats from high-risk fishing practices.

DCCEE are responsible for the listing of species under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Under the EPBC Act fisheries are assessed to ensure fishing activities are not having a detrimental impact on protected species. QDAF, as the lead fisheries manager, are continuing to implement the *Sustainable Fishing Strategy 2017-2027* which is an ambitious reform agenda that aims to strike the balance between maintaining ecologically sustainable fish stocks while minimising impacts on fishing activities and harvest. The Reef Authority encourages and supports these important initiatives to deliver sustainable fishing in the Reef.

Sharks are a vital part of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem and play a critical role in maintaining the health of coral reefs. On 5 June 2023, the Albanese and Palaszczuk Labour Governments announced critical funding to better protect threatened species in the Great Barrier Reef. As part of these reforms, the Albanese Government will request the Palaszczuk Government to declare threatened hammerhead sharks a no-take species for commercial fishers within Queensland waters. Once enacted, this will mean Hammerhead Sharks will be a no take species in all Queensland waters. The Reef Authority welcome this decision and will continue to work with the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments on the assessment of fisheries and listing of threatened species within the Marine Park, including sharks.

The reforms announced by Queensland will also make significant progress in addressing some the recommendations of the UNESCO Reactive Monitoring Mission Report. These reforms include:

- Making the Reef gill net free by mid 2027.
- Creation of additional net-free zones in key areas of the Marine Park and Gulf of Carpentaria to better protect threatened species;
- Accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy; and
- Introduce legislation to mandate the use of independent data validation on commercial fishing vessels to ensure the balance between sustainable fisheries with protecting threatened species.

While the implementation of these reforms is the responsibility of the Queensland Government, the Reef Authority will continue to work with Queensland to provide advice on the potential implications for the species and habitats of the Marine Park.

The Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2019 identified six fishing-related threats as very high and high risk to the Reef. These are: the incidental catch of species of conservation concern, illegal fishing and poaching, extraction from spawning aggregations, extraction of particle feeders, extraction of predators, and discarded catch. The process to identify and assess fishing risks is now underway to prepare for the 2024 Outlook Report. A high priority for the Reef Authority will be addressing interactions and incidental catch of species of conservation concern. A key step in this process is better understanding fishing risks to threatened and endangered species through independent data validation.

These reforms, in addition to the \$1.2 billion boost for the Great Barrier Reef (announced October 2022) aim to ensure ecologically and economically sustainable fisheries are operating within the Reef and threatened and endangered species are monitored and protected. The Reef Authority are committed to ensuring the outstanding universal value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area is maintained for the benefit of the Reef and the communities that rely on it.

If you have any further concerns or queries, please contact our Sustainable Fishing team at fishing@gbrmpa.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Dylan Horne, Acting Director, Strategic Policy

7th June 2023

cc: Leanne Fernandes – Director, Policy and Planning team