

Chair Report on ISP Meeting 30

25th of February 2019

Project updates

- Contracts for the 2019 Report Card are being progressively developed, with most now in place
- Data collection has commenced for Fish Recruitment, and will soon commence for Mudcrabs.
- Projects are on schedule.
- The final corrections have been received for Coral Coring, and the project is ready to release.
- The final reports have been received for the two Fish Health projects.

Fish Health

The ISP reviewed the different pilot projects for fish health that were conducted in 2018 by CQU and Infofish. Both contractors have submitted proposals to develop fish health indicators in 2019. Each proposal has particular strengths:

- The CQU proposal relies on a scientific approach to sampling and assessment that involves external and internal assessment of five different fish species in the harbour, in addition to histopathology examination in an external laboratory as well. The CQU approach is scientifically robust, but expensive for a recurrent program.
- The InfoFish proposal relies on a convenience sample through local fishing competitions and external-only assessment of fish health that is automated through machine learning algorithms. The approach has advantages in being cost-effective and engaging the recreational fishing community, but is not as complete as the CQU approach.

The ISP is proposing to develop a fish health indicator that blends elements of both the CQU and InfoFish proposals. This will allow GHHP to have some flexibility about which elements are conducted each year into the future. Both proponents are being asked to revise their proposals to generate some cost-efficiencies, so that the total cost for 2018-19 is no more than \$95,000.

Abnormal values in water quality samples

The ISP has recommended that when Total Metal values in the water quality data set are less than Dissolved values (an abnormal result) the Total value measure is adopted. There are a small number of these cases identified each year, and up until now they have been individually assessed with the larger varying cases deleted from the data set – a time consuming process. The changed rule will be easy to implement through DIMS and will have negligible impact on results.

Water quality guidelines

The ISP met with Jim Fewings and Department of Environment and Science staff in Brisbane in December 2018 to discuss whether the water quality objective in Moderately Disturbed (MD) zones of the harbour should be 50% (the currently used objective) or 80%. While the current objectives for the Port Curtis region appear to set 80% as the relevant target for MD zones, Jim established that his previous and current recommendation was this was an abnormal outcome and that the appropriate target was 50%. He provided the ISP with new draft Guidelines for Environmental Protection (Water) as at December 2018. He also advised that the Department intended to revisit the water quality objectives for the Port Curtis region late in 2019, and promised to engage with GHHP in any review.

The ISP agreed that it would be counter-productive to change the objectives given the pending changes in guidelines and the review of the Port Curtis water quality objectives, and that the current objectives should be maintained.

Indigenous Cultural Heritage

The Chair reported that the ISP had undertaken a careful review of the two proposals that had been received for Indigenous Cultural Heritage, and that a recommendation had been made to the Chair. However the budget shortfall for Fish Health had prompted a reconsideration of whether any contract should be let for 2019, given that little change would be expected.

Project scheduling over time

The ISP discussed the potential for some science projects to be scheduled in alternative years, or less frequently. The needs for scheduling have been prompted by the higher-than-expected Fish Health assessment costs, and the uncertainty about budget availability going forwards into 2020.

The ISP noted that they preferred the full program to be funded. However if savings need to be found with the current science program, the following project areas have most potential to be delayed or staggered, in approximate order of priority area:

1. Indigenous cultural heritage : Baseline data is now collected, and little short term change expected. Could be assessed less frequently.
2. Social and Sense of Place : very stable, so could be assessed less frequently (or assessed annually without associated report)
3. Gladstone Harbour and Connectivity models : could move to maintenance mode with updates every three years instead of annually
4. Mangroves : limited short term change expected, so could be assessed less frequently after 2019.
5. Economic : moderately stable, so could be assessed less frequently (or assessed annually without associated report).
6. Stewardship: Currently extremely stable. Delay at least for 2019 so that the indicator can be revised.

In relation to the 2019 program, the ISP recommended that

- (a) The Indigenous Cultural Heritage is not scheduled for the 2019 Report Card, so that funds can be allocated to completing the Fish Health indicator in 2019, and
- (b) Stewardship is not scheduled for the 2019 Report Card, so that funds can be allocated to reviewing the indicator.

Mangrove Indicator

The ISP noted that the quote for the Mangrove indicator for 2019 had just been received, and was approximately \$15000 more than had been budgeted. The ISP resolved to work with JCU to scope the works so that the cost was more in line with the available budget.

The ISP also considered the option to add another sub-indicator to Mangroves on shoreline habitat risk. The ISP recommended against this option because of the potential for overlap with the existing sub-indicators and the difficulties of assessing risks.

Links between report card and management actions

The ISP noted that there does not appear to be any proactive actions discussed that might improve environmental conditions in the Gladstone Harbour. The ISP recommended that the GHHP Management Committee move towards more consideration of management actions, such as using nets to avoid using fish spills over Awoonga Dam.