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RESOLUTION URGING THE GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA TO PROTECT SEA TURTLES FROM INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE GREAT BARRIER REEF WORLD HERITAGE AREA

Recognizing that the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA) in Queensland, Australia, provides nesting, feeding and/or migration habitat for globally significant populations of six species of sea turtles; and

Acknowledging that all six species of sea turtles that utilize the waters of the GBRWHA are protected by the State of Queensland and Australian governments; and

Realizing that leatherbacks, loggerheads, and olive ridleys are designated as endangered and Australian flatbacks, greens and hawksbills are designated as vulnerable by Queensland and Australian conservation laws; and

Applauding the internationally recognized long-term research, monitoring and protection of sea turtles in the GBRWHA by Australian government and university researchers; and

Aware that all sea turtle species including populations in the GBRWHA are experiencing serious threats to their long-term survival; and

Concerned that increased environmental stressors, loss of habitat including sea grass beds, and harm to adult sea turtles due to increased human activity, specifically fossil fuel development and port facilities, pose a serious threat to the long-term survival of GBR's sea turtles; and

Concerned that industrial development in the GBRWHA is a growing threat to sea turtles and marine and nesting habitat; and

Understanding that industrial developments include new and expanded Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) refineries, coal and mineral processing facilities and associated ports and shipping

Particularly, in assessing impacts on the Area's biological diversity, the report expressed "significant concerns located in or near sea turtle nesting beaches and marine habitat; and

Knowing that the threats to sea turtles and their life cycles from industrial developments include but are not limited to disturbance by lighting, loss of marine and nesting habitat, destruction of seagrass beds, vessel strikes, marine debris, noise, and toxic discharges; and

Realizing that in 2012 UNESCO, the international body charged with overseeing implementation of the World Heritage Convention, identified several proposed industrial developments in the GBRWHA with the potential for "a negative impact on the outstanding universal values" of the GBRWHA; and

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Recognizing that Australia has been working hard to address the issues raised in the Committee's decisions and the recommendations of the joint monitoring mission that visited the reef in March 2012; and

Acknowledging that Australia submitted detailed State Party Reports to the Committee outlining: the nature of the threats to the reef, what the Australian Government is doing to improve the resilience of the reef, and how the Outstanding Universal Value of the property is being managed and protected.

Aware that these the reports demonstrate Australia's progress on a wide range of work including the Great Barrier Reef comprehensive strategic assessment, development of the North-East shipping plan as well as important research projects and ongoing adaptive management activities; and

Recognizing that there is still considerable debate within the scientific community regarding the issue of continued port expansion and associated dredging impacts; and that

Acknowledging that since the big die off of seagrass and unprecedented high sea turtle strandings in 2011 and 2012 due to flooding and industrial impacts that seagrass is returning, sea turtle strandings have eased; and

Concerned that a new James Cook University Study that found that expansion of Gladstone harbor within the GBRWAH probably killed dozens of sea turtles, triggering an inquiry from the Australian Environmental Minister; and

Alarmed that the World Heritage Committee at its 38th session in 2014 will consider whether to inscribe the GBRWHA on the List of World Heritage in Danger, a designation made when activities of a host country or outside entities threaten a World Heritage site; and

Realizing that inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger could result in corrective actions to restore the GBRWHA to its full status and that if corrective actions are not successful, could lead to removal of the GBRWHA from the World Heritage List; and

Concerned that removal of the GBRWHA from World Heritage status could decrease direct and indirect protections provided to sea turtle populations in the Great Barrier Reef;

The International Sea Turtle Society, attending the 34th International Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation in New Orleans, Louisiana USA from April 10 to 17, 2014, urges the Australian Government and the State of Queensland to

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1. Fully address and finalize implementation of the corrective actions identified by the World Heritage Committee and thereby prevent the inscription of the GBRWHA on the List of World Heritage Sites in Danger at the 38th session of the World Heritage Committee when it meets in June 2014.
2. To achieve the above, finalize and provide all necessary resources to implement the recommendations of both (a) the GBR Coastal Zone Strategic Assessment (as detailed in the program report) and (b) the GBR Region strategic assessment – especially where the recommendations relate to marine turtles and/or their habitats
3. Immediately adopt a moratorium on all industrial development in the GBRWHA until a strong, internationally supported, scientifically based protection and management scheme for sea turtles and all outstanding universal values of the Great Barrier Reef is imposed.
4. Immediately adopt a moratorium on sea dumping of dredge spoils and sewage and graywater discharges from transiting ships in the GBRWHA.
5. Expedite the completion and implementation of a sea turtle protection and management plan that includes a prioritization assessment and timeline for actions and a funding plan to carry it out in order to ensure the survival and recovery of all sea turtle populations in the GBRWHA.
6. Designate permanent Sea Turtle Protection Areas similar to Dugong Protection Areas in key nesting and marine habitat such as seagrass beds as off limits to industrial development;
7. Develop and implement a coastal light management plan for the Great Barrier Reef coast
8. Develop an oil/fuel spill response plan for the GBRWHA, especially outside of designated port areas
9. Ensure that the data collected as part of environmental risk assessments is provided to government and made available to the public to allow independent peer review.
10. Develop policy mechanisms that ensure that commercial developers and government regulators must consider cumulative environmental risk.
11. Require clean up and recycling of plastics and other marine trash created by industrial projects that enter sea turtle nesting and marine habitat; and prohibit the use of single-use plastic bags, water bottles, and other plastics at industrial sites in the GBRWHA
12. Seek and follow scientific advice and recommendations from sea turtle experts in Australia and from the international sea turtle community to achieve the above.