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Media Release

REEF WATCH - PROTECTING QUEENSLAND'S NATURAL HERITAGE

A new Labor Government will renew and strengthen the State's focus on protecting the Great Barrier Reef and marine life for future generations of Queenslanders.

Premier Anna Bligh said the Government would extend landmark programs to protect the reef from chemicals and sediment and introduce new measures to protect marine life.

"The Great Barrier Reef is one of the most valuable pieces of natural heritage in the world and we have a duty to protect it for future generations of Queenslanders," she said.

"In the last two years we have implemented a program to protect the reef from dangerous chemicals and sediment.

"But we know we must be ever vigilant to new threats to the reef and to our marine life."

Under the *Reef Watch* regime the Bligh Government will:

- A \$12 million voluntary buy-out of netting licences and a structural adjustment of the netting industry will be carried out to protect turtles and dugongs and promote recreational fishing.
- Extend funding to support reef protection officers (\$10 million per year for support and enforcement) to 2020;

Ms Bligh said Reef Watch would build on Labor's work to improving the health of the Reef.

"My government has moved decisively to protect the reef. Two years ago we implemented new regulations to limit the worst practices causing dangerous run off into the reef immediately, whilst ensuring that every property raises its standards over time," she said.

"Our plan is working and we have delivered a real reduction in nitrogen run off right across the critical reef catchments.

"Currently the Government has allocated funding to support reef protection and support officers who enforce reef regulations and help farmers, until 2013/2014.

"To build and lock in the success we have achieved that funding will continue until 2020 - with another \$10 million allocated in the forward estimates.

Ms Bligh said Labor had introduced 16 dugong protection areas in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

“Both dugongs and marine turtles are iconic native species of Queensland waters but some accidental catching in commercial netting continues to be a threat to both species.

“At the same time, there is great conflict between recreational and commercial fishing in some areas of Queensland and evidence that there are too many netters to make this particular sector successfully viable.

“That’s why we will work with industry to begin a buy-back of net fishing licences, with \$10 million on the table to significantly reduce the number of nets through a voluntary tender process.

“It will be followed by a structural adjustment of the industry so that the commercial net fishing industry is more profitable and allows different management approaches to be developed into the future that provide greater flexibility and certainty for those fishers who remain.

“We will consult with Queensland Seafood Industry Alliance, Sunfish and WWF on designing the buyout package.

“With the buy-out of netters achieved, new areas will be declared for netting closures and restrictions.

“These will serve as much needed sanctuaries for dugongs and turtles and we will see significantly reduced entanglement and by-catch for these precious species.

“It will also increase the line fishing opportunities for recreational fishers along our coastline.

“This initiative will be deployed in close consultation with key stakeholders, particularly the Commonwealth, the fishing industry and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.”

Funding for this initiative will come from savings from the carbon geo-storage initiative.

MEDIA CONTACT: 07 3224 4500

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