

Heart of the Reef – A Call for Healing

Healing Country Statement by Great Barrier Reef Traditional Custodians - July 2021

If there was ever a time for us to come together that time is now.

If there was ever a time for the voice of Traditional Custodians to be heard - this is that time.

There has been so much damage to our Country and she is struggling to recover from threats on a scale never faced before.

Country is stressed, Country is crying.

Country is land, sea, air, stars, rocks, plants and animals – all things living and non-living. She is our spirituality. Country is Us.

The Reef is Country. The Reef is our Heart and the water is the life-blood that connects us all.

She is our Family. The Reef is an extension of Us and we are an extension of Her.

The Reef looks after us, feeds and protects us, and keeps us healthy. She's the keeper of our stories, our Lore.

Without her we will suffer irreversible effects to our identity.

For millennia, Country and People were healthy.

We lived harmoniously according to our cultural Lore.

Our collective connections were strong and balanced through our songlines and interactions with each other.

We looked after Country according to our seasonal calendars and she looked after us.

Today Country is sick.

We are losing our culturally significant plants and animals and places.

For many of us, separation from Country has meant a loss in intricate connections and knowledge.

The imbalanced condition of Country is the result of the ongoing impacts of colonisation and climate change.

The seasons are changing beyond our control no matter how hard we try to help Country heal.

We are all suffering and we can't continue this way.

The world is now turning to Us, as Traditional Custodians, for our unique leadership, traditional knowledge and cultural practices.

And we call on you to listen to Us. To learn from Us and to do it our way.

To recognise, respect and accept our LORES.

To understand that healing is about the relationship between Country and its People. That one can't heal without the other.

Country needs to hear our children running around – hear our laughter and happiness.

In some places this has been missing from our Country for many generations. This was not our choice and never will be.

We call on you to stop using the poison frameworks that have made Country and People sick. Frameworks that fragment Country and split families.

Learn how to holistically manage Country, People. To honour everything as one.

We recognise that healing Country means starting with ourselves.

We need to rebuild pathways of connection between ourselves and Country.

There must be presence of mob on Country.

Families and Elders must come together. Hold each other dear.

It means placing our young ones at the heart of change.

It means using our own languages that tie us to our place on Country, where we belong and who we are.

It means recognising education, justice and health are all crucial parts of healing.

It means employment and opportunities that get you close to Country, to homeland and saltwater.

It's about being honest and seeing that we can't do it all on our own.

We need to see the real threats posed by climate change and face these challenges head on.

All Australians need to come together and show the Reef the respect she deserves. To help her heal and to make us who we are all meant to be.

We call on our Saltwater brothers and sisters across the Pacific and throughout the world to join and support us.

We need everyone's feet and mouth pointing in the same direction and we need talk to be followed by action.

The time to save our future is now.

We need to stand up as one mob, one Country, one spirit, one voice.

And heal.