



Australian Government

Great Barrier Reef  
Marine Park Authority

# Managing the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park





## An international icon

Big, beautiful, diverse, amazing — the Great Barrier Reef has outstanding universal value and is recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Area.

The Reef's natural beauty, heritage, social and economic values are immense and it's one of the world's most unique and biologically diverse ecosystems. It attracts more than 1.9 million visitors each year.

The Reef is a place of great significance and unique connection for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are the First Australians and Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef.



As a multiple-use area, the Reef supports recreation, industries and activities like fishing, boating, shipping, research and tourism. It generates \$5.6 billion for the Australian economy each year and 69,000 full-time jobs.

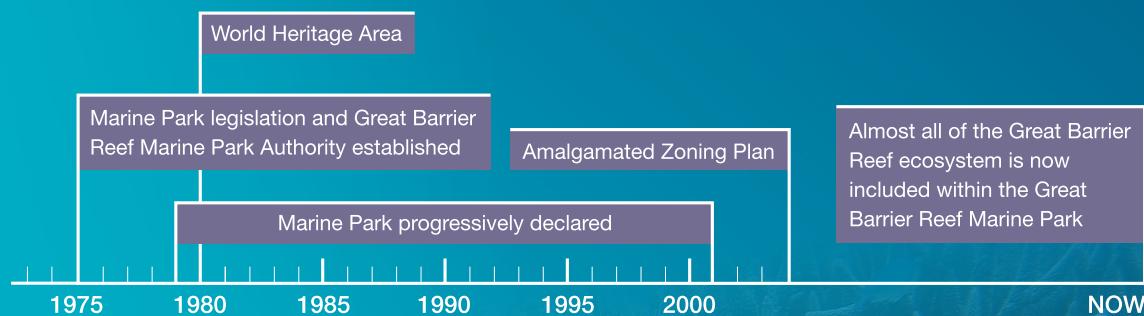
The Great Barrier Reef received world heritage status in 1981, the first coral reef ecosystem in the world to have this distinction. In 2007 it was placed on the National Heritage List.

# World class management

For 40 years the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has managed this great natural treasure, using the best available scientific information and input from marine managers, researchers, experts, and Traditional Owners.

Our work managing the Reef is guided by a range of plans, policies, regulations and legislation. The *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* sets out our functions and responsibilities.

We directly manage activities in the Marine Park, implement plans and policies for Reef use and protection, and work with communities and industries that depend on a healthy Reef for recreation and their livelihoods.



## Fast facts

### COMPOSITION

3000 coral reefs, 600 continental islands, 300 coral cays and about 150 inshore mangrove islands

### AREA

346,000 square kilometres  
(Great Barrier Reef Region)

### LENGTH

2300 kilometres long

### SIZE

70 million football fields or roughly the same area as Japan, Germany, Malaysia or Italy

### BIODIVERSITY

about 650 types of soft and hard corals, 1625 types of fish, 136 varieties of sharks and rays, more than 30 species of whales and dolphins



## Challenges for the Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is a rich mosaic of plants, animals and habitats and retains the qualities contributing to its world heritage listing.

Climate change, land-based run-off, coastal development, and some fishing activities are the major threats to the Reef.

Cumulative impacts from a range of threats over time, scale and duration are diminishing its ability to recover from disturbance.

The northern third of the Reef has good water quality and its ecosystem is in good condition, however central and southern inshore areas are deteriorating from the cumulative effects of impacts.

Now, more than ever, a focus on building the Reef's resilience by reducing all threats is vital.

### Tackling crown-of-thorns starfish

Tourism operators are tackling an outbreak of coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish on the Reef, with support from the Australian and Queensland governments. While it is native to the Reef, this starfish, like plague locusts, can cause problems when its population explodes. Control work is successfully protecting coral cover on target reefs. A new single shot, replacing multiple injections, makes the work two-and-a-half times more efficient.

*"This work is critical to the health of the Reef and the tourism industry."*

Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators Executive, Col McKenzie

# Focus for management

Building the Reef's resilience is central to our work. Given the Reef's size and complexity this involves ensuring environmental protection while allowing for national, state and community interests in sustainable use.

Our Outlook Report and strategic assessment highlight threats to the Reef and its values, helping us understand the priority areas to target our management effort.

Our 25-year management plan outlines the mix of on-ground work, policies, strategies and engagement we're taking.

Among the actions are:

- increasing compliance focus to ensure zoning rules are followed
- controlling crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks
- ensuring cumulative impacts are considered when assessing development proposals
- setting clear targets for action and measuring our success
- monitoring the health of the ecosystem on a Reef-wide scale
- implementing a Reef Recovery program to restore sites of high environmental value in regional areas — regional action recognises the variability of the Reef over such a large area and the variability of the issues and the interests of communities and industries in each area.

We're working with other Australian and Queensland government agencies, industries and the community on the Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan, an overarching framework for Reef management.

The Australian Government's Reef 2050 plan will also include a Reef Trust, which will use Australian Government and private funds to focus on improving coastal habitats and water quality throughout the Reef and adjacent catchments.

Regulatory tools — such as our zoning plans, plans of management, permits and policies — enable us to manage activities such as fishing, tourism and other direct uses that take place in the multiple-use Marine Park which extends over 99 per cent of the World Heritage Area.

The entire Marine Park is covered by a zoning plan, with each zone having different rules for the activities that are allowed, the activities that are prohibited, and the activities that require a permit.

Out on the water, field management is undertaken jointly with the Queensland Government. The field management team monitors compliance with the zoning rules, protects and maintains island ecosystems, provides visitor facilities, manages heritage values and responds to incidents and animal strandings.

## More and larger fish

We increased no-take areas — where fishing is not allowed — on the Reef from five to 33 per cent in 2004. This international benchmark for marine conservation is continuing to reap rewards. Now, research is showing more and larger fish are found in areas closed to fishing, and are spilling over into neighbouring areas open to fishing.

"Larger fish have four to five times as many babies as fish half their size. That's why marine reserves are good for the marine environment."

University of Queensland ecologist and laureate fellow, Hugh Possingham



# Reef research and monitoring

Having access to the best information is essential to high-quality, science-based management of the Marine Park in the future.

We work closely with research partners like the Australian Institute of Marine Science, James Cook University, CSIRO and the University of Queensland to align and coordinate research priorities.

We draw upon research and monitoring of Reef health, climate change and extreme weather impacts, and water quality to help us understand the pressures faced by the ecosystem.

We deliver a marine monitoring program, as part of broader government efforts to improve the quality of water running off the land. It's used to assess the condition and trend of inshore water quality, seagrass and coral health, which is documented in an annual Reef Plan report card.

## Keeping an eye on the Reef

A network of volunteers who care about the Reef are involved in our Eye on the Reef program — they report on reef health, animals and incidents through formal monitoring and broader citizen science. It's a quick and efficient way to get a snapshot of reef health at any time on any reef, which is beneficial when assessing impacts of natural disasters. Anyone can get involved by submitting animal sightings through a smartphone application or conducting underwater Reef health surveys.

"It's like an early warning system for what may come and when one little thing changes, because you see it every day, you notice that change and you can report it straight away."

Eye on Reef participant and Port Douglas tourism crew member, Emma Scott



## Reef Ranger reports for duty

It's sleek, big and fast — this \$5 million, 24-metre aluminium catamaran improves our ability to protect the Reef and its biodiversity. The *Reef Ranger* can operate away from port for 12 weeks, has a range of up to 2000 nautical miles and a speed of up to 25 knots, enabling it to access remote areas of the vast Marine Park. It will be used for compliance, maintaining visitor sites, fire and weed control on islands, surveying crown-of-thorns starfish, monitoring the health of the Reef, and responding to boating or shipping incidents.

"It's twice as fast as its 24-year-old predecessor, more environmentally friendly and more cost-effective."

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service ranger, Pat Kirby



# Rich heritage

The Reef's scientific, social, Indigenous, cultural and ecological values and experiences overlap to tell a story of our past society, customs, culture and history.

Indigenous heritage is the continuing legacy of cultural property and intangible attributes maintained by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners today in managing and cultural use of their sea country estates.

There are also aspects of historical significance, including areas where historic voyages took place, shipwrecks, lighthouses, World War II features and sites, all of which are protected for their heritage values.

## Connections to sea country

The eternal connections Traditional Owners hold to their sea country estates are a fundamental part of the heritage of the Great Barrier Reef.

We work with Traditional Owners to legally enforce the customary lore they observe within their traditional estates through Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements.

These agreements outline, among other things, how marine resources are sustainably managed by Traditional Owners in their sea country in accordance with their customs and acknowledged traditional lore.

We also provide Traditional Owners with compliance education and training to protect species, habitats and culturally significant heritage places on the Great Barrier Reef.

## Maritime heritage unlocked

Six ship wreck sites, believed to be from the period between 1818 and 1854, were recently located and surveyed on Great Detached Reef, about 80 kilometres east of Cape Grenville on Cape York Peninsula. Despite anecdotal reports of their existence, this expedition — involving our staff, the Silentworld Foundation and the Australian National Maritime Museum — is the first time these wrecks were surveyed.

"We've added these wrecks to the Australian National Shipwreck Database; it's significant new maritime heritage knowledge in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park."

Maritime archaeologist, Pete Illidge



Traditional artwork by Patricia Galvin and Henry Epong Jr.

# Working with communities and partners

Australians are lucky to have the Great Barrier Reef right in their backyard and many people depend on the Reef for recreation or their livelihoods and are active in its protection.

Community members are active in marine management through our 12 Local Marine Advisory Committees from Cooktown to Bundaberg — they provide input on local issues.

Reef Advisory Committees, comprising key stakeholders, also provide us with technical advice on Reef management.

The marine tourism industry is a key partner in protecting the Reef. Operators help enhance visitor experiences of the Reef and many ensure their activities have minimal impact on the marine environment.

## Guardians of the Reef

Through our Reef Guardians program we work with local councils, farmers, graziers, fishers and schools to guide everyday actions and local decisions to protect the Reef catchment and its long-term health.



In Townsville, our national education centre, Reef HQ Aquarium, has world-class exhibits and interactive experiences to teach visitors about the Reef's national, social and economic value.

To manage the Great Barrier Reef effectively in the future we will continue to work with a wide range of government agencies, Reef users, industries, Traditional Owners and other community representatives.



“I want my grandchildren to experience the kind of childhood I had and be able to enjoy a ‘great’ Great Barrier Reef and I hope they will grow up to be Reef Guardians too.”

Gordonton cane farmer and Reef Guardian, Paul Gregory

## Further information

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