



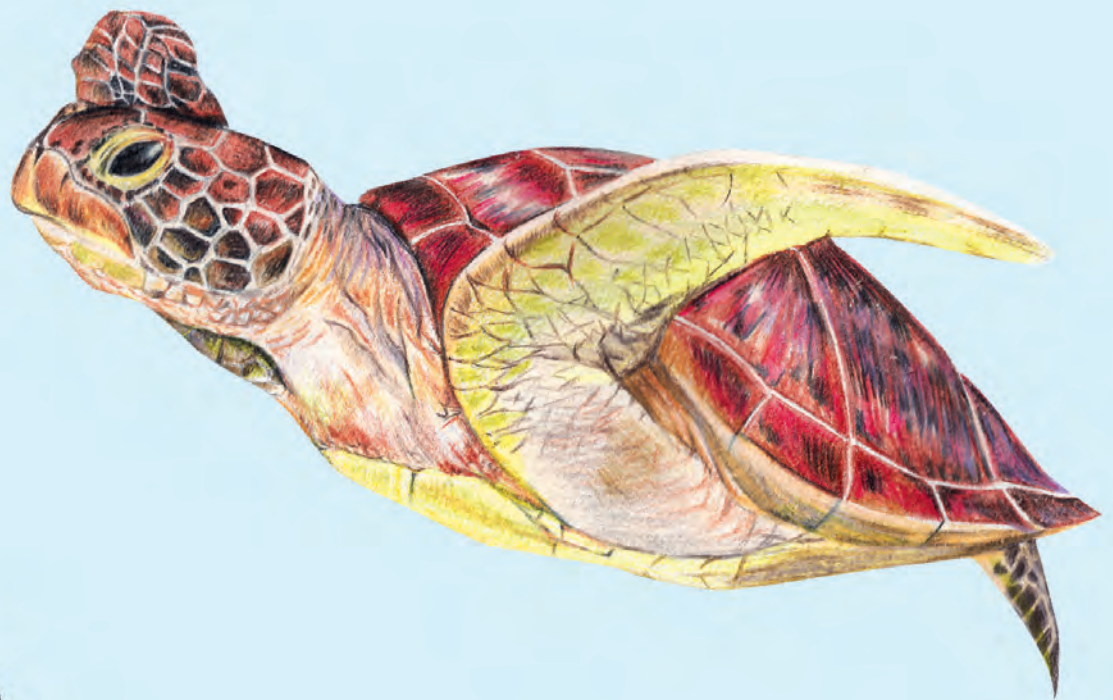
Australian Government

Great Barrier Reef  
Marine Park Authority

GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK AUTHORITY

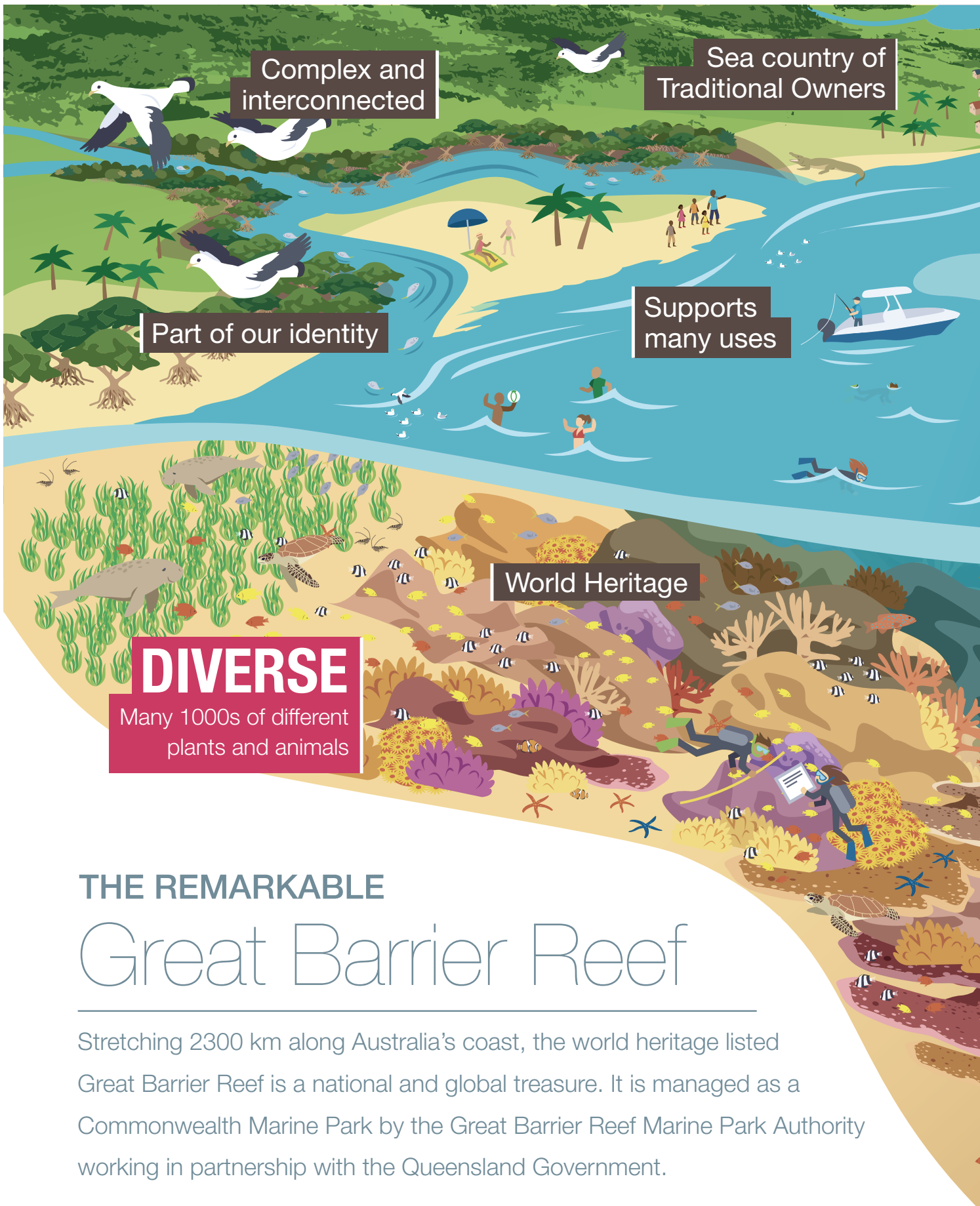
# ANNUAL REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

## 2014-15



**40** YEAR  
ANNIVERSARY  
1975 - 2015

# Celebrating 40 years



## THE REMARKABLE

# Great Barrier Reef

Stretching 2300 km along Australia's coast, the world heritage listed Great Barrier Reef is a national and global treasure. It is managed as a Commonwealth Marine Park by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority working in partnership with the Queensland Government.

# of Reef management

**LARGE**

Covers 346,000 km<sup>2</sup>  
~ 70 million football fields

Internationally  
significant

Rich heritage

A precious part  
of our lives

Managed through  
partnerships

**PROTECTED**

Almost all of the  
Great Barrier Reef  
ecosystem is now  
included within the  
Great Barrier Reef  
Marine Park

Resilient but  
under pressure

Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan  
World Heritage Committee recommends  
Great Barrier Reef retains world  
heritage status

World Heritage Area listing

Outlook Report 2014  
Great Barrier Reef Region  
Strategic Assessment Report

Marine Park legislation and Great Barrier  
Reef Marine Park Authority established

Amalgamated Zoning Plan

Marine Park progressively declared

1975 1980 1985 1990 1995 2000 2005 2010 2015





Map of the Great Barrier Reef Region

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# OVERVIEW

## THE GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK AUTHORITY

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is an Australian Government statutory authority within the Environment portfolio.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is responsible for managing one of the world's premier natural resources, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The agency implements a range of policies and programmes, management strategies and legislative measures to work towards the following outcome:

*The long-term protection, ecologically sustainable use, understanding and enjoyment of the Great Barrier Reef for all Australians and the international community, through the care and development of the Marine Park.*

Delivery of this outcome is through three objectives set out in the agency's strategic and corporate plans:

1. Protect and restore the Reef's biodiversity
2. Safeguard the Reef's heritage values
3. Ensure use of the Marine Park is ecologically sustainable and benefits current and future generations.

In 2014–15, a focus for the agency has been showcasing its innovative management of the Marine Park and the World Heritage Area to an international audience. Informed by the latest, most up-to-date reports on the Reef's health, the *Outlook Report 2014* and the strategic assessment, the agency engaged with Marine Park managers from other countries, World Heritage Committee delegates and international media to highlight the range of actions and strategies in place to safeguard the Reef's heritage and outstanding universal value.

This programme of engagement culminated with the World Heritage Committee's decision in June 2015 to retain the listing of the Great Barrier Reef.

Key to this decision was the *Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan*, released in March 2015. The Reef 2050 Plan provides a shared pathway to the future management



of the Great Barrier Reef by bringing together actions across government, Traditional Owners, industry, researchers and the community. It contains targets, actions, objectives and outcomes along with defined areas of responsibility to protect and improve the Reef's health and resilience, while allowing ecologically sustainable use. The plan has been appended as a schedule to the Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement between the Australian and Queensland governments.



*The Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment and the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2014 provided the most comprehensive information about the Reef's values, impacts on those values and current condition and have identified the actions needed to improve Reef health and inform the agency's forward plans.*

## OBJECTIVE 1

### Protect and restore the Reef's biodiversity

The priorities for the reporting period have included a range of actions designed to restore, protect and maintain the outstanding universal value of the Great Barrier Reef.

These actions have been determined by the agency's strategic assessment which then informed the *Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan*, the overarching framework for Reef's protection and management for the next 35 years. Work has focused on improvements to water quality monitoring, research to improve knowledge about the long-term effects of local impacts, strengthening permissions, and new integrated monitoring and reporting to help inform the condition and trend of the Reef's values.

## SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS FOR OBJECTIVE 1

- Pilot Reef Recovery Plan for the Mackay–Whitsunday region has started, which will guide development of similar plans for other areas.
- Ecological Processes Calculator and hydrological mapping have been refined to help develop revised Water Quality Improvement Plans across natural resource management regions.
- Supported *Rivers to Reef to Turtles* project, investigating the stranding of green turtles in Upstart Bay, with health screening information recorded for more than 983 turtles.
- Total number of species vulnerability assessments now at 16, with dugong, marine turtles, humpback whales and snapper completed during the reporting period.
- Integration of Great Barrier Reef Climate Change and Adaptation Strategy 2012–17 into the Reef Recovery programme and *Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan*.
- Partnership project with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service on adaptation work at Raine Island to help reduce mortality of adult female nesting turtles.
- Coral disease surveys done in partnership with James Cook University and the United States of America's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
- Participated in a collaborative project to undertake a situational analysis of commercial fisheries and how well they are positioned for future challenges including climate change.
- Reef Report Card 2014 developed, due for release in August 2015.
- Review of marine monitoring programme to document long-term changes in condition of inshore water quality, seagrass and coral reefs.
- Integrated monitoring and reporting programme established to help achieve integrated Reef-wide monitoring and reporting network.
- Publication of the Science Strategy and Information Needs 2014–19 to communicate priority science information needs.
- Water Quality Guidelines for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park 2010 incorporated into state legislation.
- Partner in the development of a social and economic long-term monitoring programme with James Cook University and CSIRO to map, measure and monitor the activities and dependencies of people on the Reef.
- Coastal Bird Monitoring and Information Strategy revised to incorporate seabird populations along east coast.
- Crown-of-thorns starfish control programme resulted in 92,313 crown-of-thorns starfish culled.
- Great Barrier Reef Clean-up weekend being planned for all areas of Reef during October as part of Great Barrier Reef Marine Debris Clean-up project.
- New regulations to ban the disposal of capital dredge spoil in the Marine Park came into effect in June.
- Permissions system that regulates the multiple uses of the Marine Park has been reviewed.



More than five tonnes of marine debris were cleared from Yeppoon beaches as part of a four day clean-up after tropical cyclone Marcia crossed the coast north of the area in February 2015. ©GBRMPA in partnership with Tangaroa Blue and the Australian Marine Debris Initiative.

## CASE STUDY

### FIVE TONNES OF MARINE DEBRIS CLEARED FROM LOCAL BEACHES

Fragments of hard plastic and a derelict catamaran were among the 5.43 tonnes of marine debris cleared from Yeppoon beaches after tropical cyclone Marcia crossed the coast just north of the area in February 2015.

The four-day clean-up by Tangaroa Blue Foundation was part of a broader \$700,000 project by the agency, funded by the Australian Government's Reef Trust, to reduce the amount of marine debris entering the Great Barrier Reef lagoon from land-based sources. It also tackles debris that is carried ashore by tides.

Agency Chairman Dr Russell Reichelt praised the work of volunteers.

"We were delighted to see on-ground action that directly protects the Great Barrier Reef. All actions, big or small, are vital to ensuring the Reef is protected for the future," Dr Reichelt said.

"The efforts of these volunteers prevented more than five tonnes of rubbish, mostly plastic, entering the ocean from land-based sources. It also prevented re-entry of debris washed ashore from the intensified oceanic activity where it can affect turtles, seabirds and the reef ecosystem."

Heidi Taylor from Tangaroa Blue Foundation said 67 marine debris hotspots were identified from an aerial survey of 320 kilometres of coastline, helping target clean-up efforts.

"Our volunteers covered more than 17 kilometres of coastline and most of the debris collected was fragmented hard plastic, along with a few unusual items such as a cement pontoon," she said.

"It was wonderful to see such a broad cross-section of the community taking part — Traditional Owners, rangers, council staff and community members took to local beaches for the clean-up."

Marine ecosystems worldwide are affected by human-made refuse, much of which is plastic.

According to the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2014, plastic bags, discarded fishing gear, plastic and glass bottles, rubber thongs, aerosols and drink cans are commonly found in the Reef region.

Between 2008 and March 2014, about 683,000 individual items of marine debris, weighing over 42 tonnes, were collected from the region's beaches by volunteers in the Australian Marine Debris Initiative.

## OBJECTIVE 2

### Safeguard the Reef's heritage values

For the first time, the *Outlook Report 2014*, a five-yearly overview of the Reef's health, considered the Reef's heritage values. This assessment is new and responds to the revised requirements of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* and the World Heritage Committee's request of an explicit assessment of the area's heritage values, including outstanding universal value.

The Outlook Report, together with the Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment report, informed the development of the *Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan* which was a key part of the Australian Government's response to the recommendations of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. The Reef 2050 Plan provides an overarching national framework for protecting and managing the Great Barrier Reef for the next 35 years. The plan was submitted to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in March for consideration at the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee meeting in June–July 2015. In June, the Reef 2050 Plan was appended as a schedule to the Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement which outlines joint arrangements between the Australian and Queensland governments for managing this iconic natural asset.

The agency has also taken steps to protect the Reef's heritage values through the development of special management areas to protect key historic sites in the Marine Park. Working with Traditional Owners continues to be an important focus for the agency through marine resource agreements which describe how Traditional Owners wish to manage their traditional sea country estate. These can address the take and use of natural resources, their role in compliance and their role in monitoring the condition of plants, animals and human activities in the Marine Park.

## SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS FOR OBJECTIVE 2

- The *Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan* is a key component of the Australian Government's State Party report to the World Heritage Committee.
- The Reef 2050 Plan is appended to the Australian and Queensland governments' Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement, reflecting the shared vision for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area's long-term protection.
- Eight Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements in place with Traditional Owner groups.
- Range of compliance training delivered to Traditional Owners and five joint patrols with Indigenous rangers.
- Presentation of sea country management by Traditional Owners as part of G20 activity and World Parks Congress.
- First meeting of Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee in Townsville in June 2015.
- Four Indigenous compliance officers employed to provide support to Indigenous communities and up to 20 Indigenous rangers trained.
- *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act* amended to create two Special Management Areas to protect two Royal Australian Air Force Second World War Catalina plane wrecks in the Marine Park.
- Statements of significance prepared for two important heritage sites — the historic wreck *Foam*, on Myrmidon Reef off Townsville, and Princess Charlotte Bay.
- Site assessment completed for Second World War minesweeper HMAS *Warrnambool* off Cape York to help preserve the area.
- Reef off Mission Beach named in honour of acclaimed researcher, the late Dr Bob Endean, a pioneer in crown-of-thorns starfish research.
- Led the marine cross-cutting theme at the 2014 International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Parks Congress in Sydney in November.
- Hosting a Reef trip and information sessions for G20 Finance Ministers as part of international G20 Summit in September 2014.
- Draft moorings policy revised and approved, providing a framework for the management and use of moorings in the Marine Park.
- Draft cruise ship policy developed.
- Draft site management arrangements for Lady Musgrave Reef released for public comment.



## CASE STUDY

# REEF 2050: A LONG-TERM PLAN TO MANAGE THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

A long-term plan to protect and manage the Great Barrier Reef was released in March 2015.

The Australian and Queensland governments' *Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan* is the overarching framework to manage the Reef for the next 35 years.

The plan, a key component of the Australian Government's response to the recommendations of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, was developed in consultation with tourism, fishing, ports, agriculture, Indigenous, local government, resources, research and conservation partners. More than 6000 submissions were received through a six-week public consultation process.

Informed by the agency's Outlook Report 2014 and strategic assessment, the most up-to-date reports on Reef health and management, the plan responds to the challenges facing the Reef and presents actions to protect its values, health and resilience while allowing ecologically sustainable use.

It includes seven overarching themes and clear actions, targets, objectives and outcomes for each that will achieve the plan's vision:

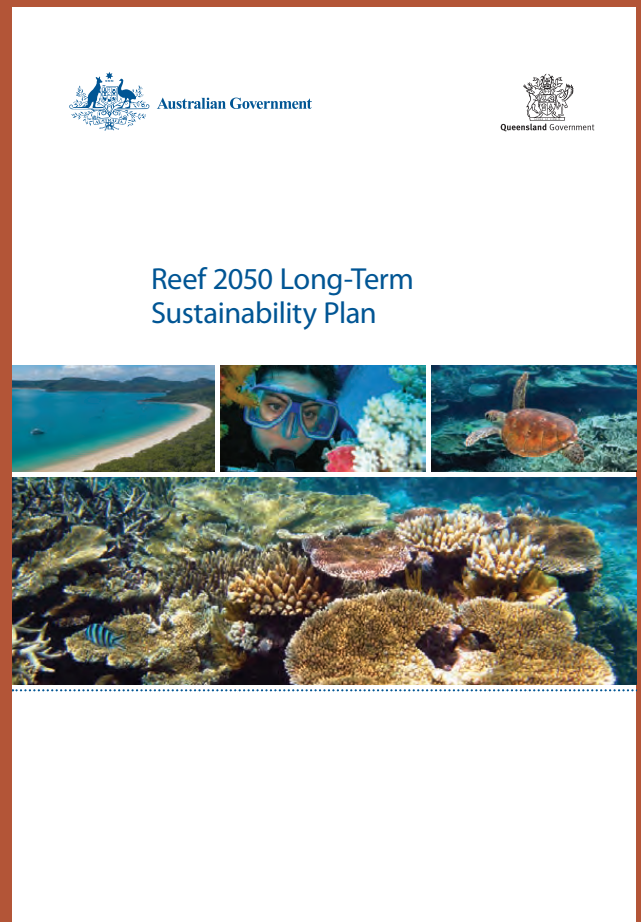
*"To ensure the Great Barrier Reef continues to improve on its Outstanding Universal Value every decade between now and 2050 to be a natural wonder for each successive generation to come."*

The plan acknowledges the biggest threat facing the Reef is climate change, and sets out a strategic, management approach to address the challenges it poses.

It also recognises the Reef is large and complex — an area bigger than Italy — and that its many competing uses must be ecologically sustainable.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is a partner in the implementation of this plan by the Australian and Queensland governments, along with a range of government and industry sectors.

The agency is leading a new integrated monitoring and reporting programme that will provide a mechanism for Australia to report to the world on progress in meeting targets and outcomes under the plan.



*The agency is leading an integrated monitoring and reporting programme that will provide a mechanism for Australia to report on its progress in meeting the targets and outcomes identified in the Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan.*

## OBJECTIVE 3

Ensure use of the Marine Park is ecologically sustainable and benefits current and future generations

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park supports a range of recreational and commercial activities — from recreational fishing, snorkelling and scuba diving, to tourism, commercial fishing, ports and shipping.

A key focus during the reporting period has been delivering smarter, more efficient ways to effectively manage the multiple uses of the Marine Park in the most sustainable way possible.

This has been achieved by increasing Marine Park users' awareness of zoning rules and responsible reef practices through education and engagement programmes such as Reef Guardians, the continued development and refinement of field reporting tools, and legislative reform.

## SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS FOR OBJECTIVE 3

- *Outlook Report 2014* published, the second in a five-year series, providing an overview of the Reef's health, use and management, and long-term outlook.
- Regulator Performance Framework developed to allow the agency to self-assess its annual performance.
- Work commenced on a five-year project to enhance the permissions system.
- Amendments were made to the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* to:
  - ban the disposal of capital dredge material in the Marine Park
  - create two Special Management Areas to protect two Royal Australian Air Force Second World War Catalina plane wrecks in the Marine Park
  - increase ability to take enforcement action against commercial fishers who breach conditions in the Conservation Park Zone
  - provide additional protection for dugong and turtle populations from threats of poaching, illegal trade and illegal transportation.
- First phase of development of a single Marine Park Tourism Permit completed, with a trial about to start with commercial activity permit holders.
- Specialised field reporting software developed and incorporated into existing systems to improve data collection and increase efficiencies.
- 36 Field Management staff participated in a joint Field Management Foundation programme in December 2014 and March 2015.
- New vessel tracking technology successfully trialled on field management fleet.
- Number of high standard tourism operators increased from 62 to 64, with 64 per cent of all visitors to the Marine Park carried by high standard tourism operators.
- Local Marine Advisory Committees played an instrumental role in providing hands-on guidance and management advice to communities who live alongside the Marine Park.
- Reef Guardian Fishers programme expands to cover all major fishing operations, and the first trawl fisher joins the programme.
- Reef Guardian Schools programme continues to grow, now involving more than 127,000 students across 310 schools in Queensland.
- More than 4500 Eye on the Reef surveys received.
- 60 rangers and tourism crew trained in Reef health monitoring as part of in-water training days.
- Reef HQ Aquarium received 133,405 visitors during the year, an 11 per cent increase on previous year.
- More than 70 per cent of visitors reported that the visit gave them a better understanding of how they can help protect the Reef.
- 78 media releases issued.
- 16,190 phone calls were answered.
- 125,395 zoning maps were distributed.

## CASE STUDY

# MAJOR REPORT RELEASED ON REEF HEALTH AND MANAGEMENT

Climate change, declining water quality, catchment runoff and some fishing impacts are the key threats to the Reef identified in a major report released in August 2014.

The *Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2014* provides an overview of the Reef's condition, use, management and resilience, along with consideration of risks and the long-term outlook for the Reef's ecosystem and heritage values.

This five-yearly report, first published in 2009, is required under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* (section 54) and aims to provide a regular and reliable means of assessing the state of the Reef and its management in an accountable and transparent way.

For the first time, the report specifically considers the region's heritage values, including Indigenous heritage, historic heritage and world heritage values. This assessment is new and responds to both revised requirements of the Act and a World Heritage Committee request for an explicit assessment of the Reef's World Heritage Area outstanding universal values.

The Outlook Report concludes that the outstanding universal value of the Reef remains in good condition overall, although the condition of some key attributes is poor.

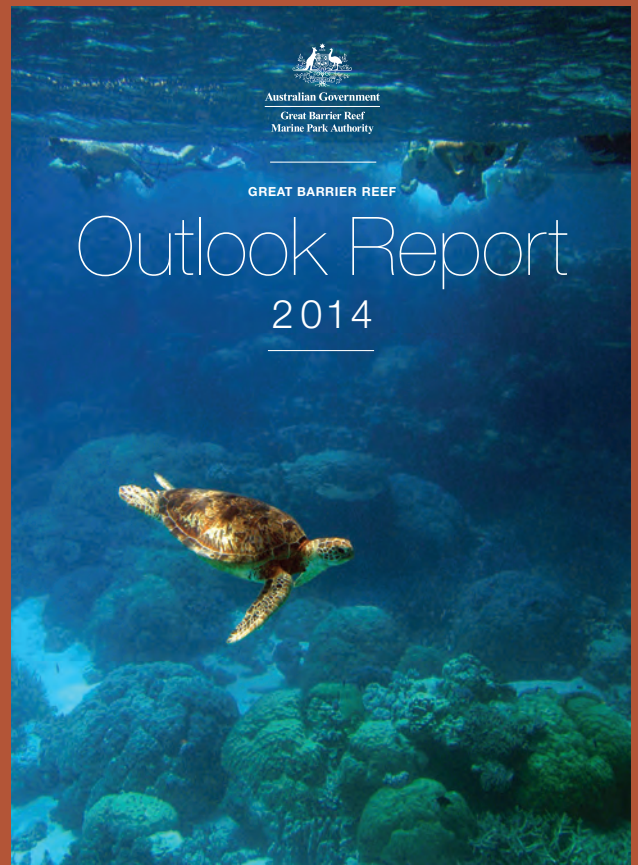
The report identifies positive actions since the 2009 report, such as improvements in agricultural practices in the catchment leading to less nutrients, sediments and pesticides entering the Reef.

The report highlights how a series of major storms and floods have affected an ecosystem already under pressure, with the accumulation of all impacts on the Reef having the potential to further weaken its resilience.

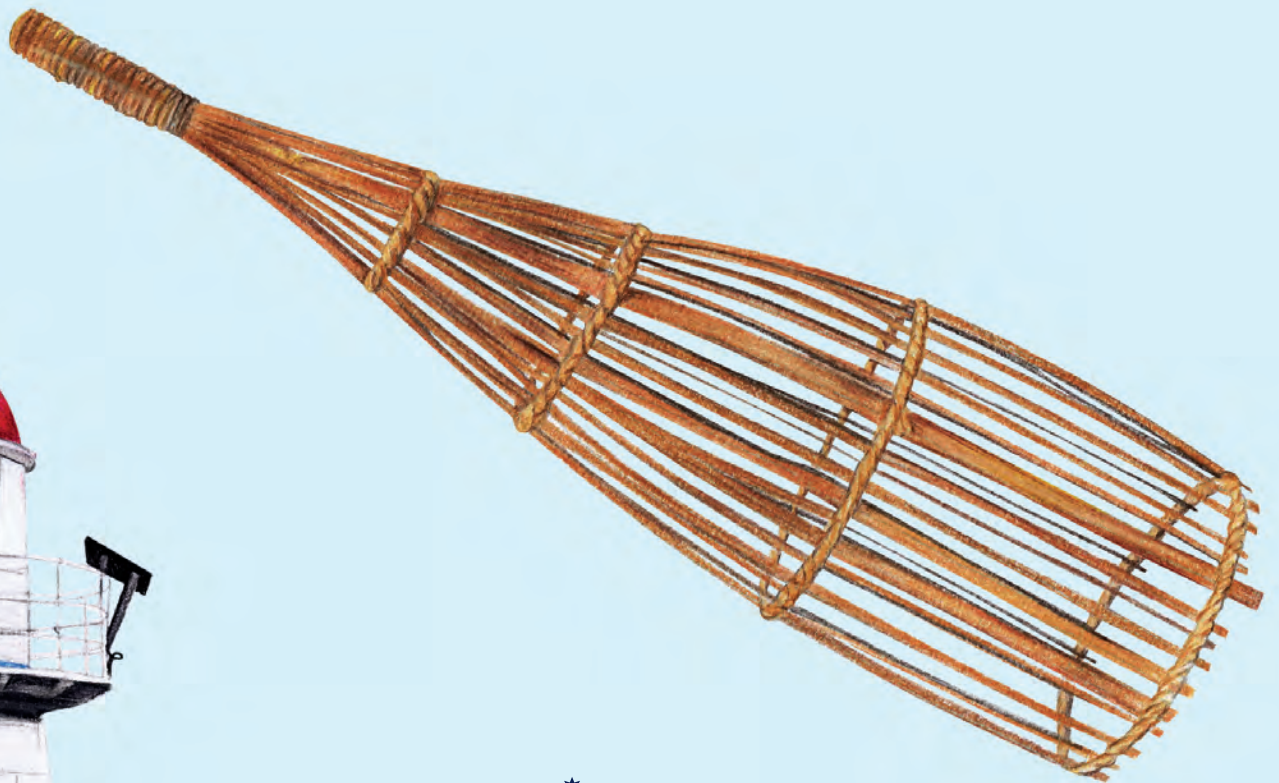
The report recognises more needs to be done to look after the values that define the Reef as a World Heritage Area — everyone's actions, whether big or small, to reduce threats and help restore the Reef's condition will improve its outlook.

The Outlook Report and the *Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment* together provide the most comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the Reef's health and management.

The findings from these reports underpin the Australian and Queensland governments' *Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan* (see previous case study).



*The Outlook Report 2014 recognises there's been a range of positive actions since the first report in 2009, including government and landholders focusing on improving the quality of water that runs off the land.*



**Australian Government**

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Marine Park Authority**

[www.gbrmpa.gov.au](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au)