



**Sea Country photo competition winners unveiled**

**Countries team up to protect  
the world's coral reefs**

**Marine tourism industry prepares for  
reef incident responses**



Cover: 'Fountain of Youth – our waters are also our enjoyment'. Photograph by Kathi Gibson-Steffensen

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this publication may contain names and images of deceased persons.

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ISSN 1834-6774

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We are proud to work with the Government of Belize to host the International Coral Reef Initiative for 2012-13. ICRI sees governments, agencies, non profit organisations, and the private sector work together to promote sustainable use of the world's coral reefs and related ecosystems. Visit <http://www.icriforum.org/>

# Chairman's message



The way in which we manage and care for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park has always been critical — and never more so than now given the growing pressures being placed on this natural wonder.

It is understandable why more than 1.6 million visitors each year make the trip to marvel at this place of outstanding beauty. It is also natural to want future generations to experience the same sheer delight in seeing the life and colours of the Reef.

For these reasons, we cannot shy away from dealing with the risks that threaten the Reef's health and long-term future — including climate change, declining water quality, loss of coastal habitats, urban and industrial development, shipping and extreme weather.

For GBRMPA, our focus on these challenges is being sharpened through a comprehensive strategic assessment.

This work is highly important because for the first time it will create an agreed, long-term plan for sustainable development in the Great Barrier Reef region that ensures world heritage values are protected.

The assessment will take 18 months to two years, and follows the World Heritage Committee's monitoring mission to Australia to look at reef management and coastal development.

I would like to thank representatives from a wide variety of sectors who have aided us in the initial stages of this assessment by contributing to a series of regional stakeholder workshops in August.

Those contributions were extremely valuable, and I look forward to the agency working with our Local Marine Advisory Committees and Reef Advisory Committees to further our work on this all-important project.

Two international forums that took place in Cairns recently have also kept the spotlight on the future of coral reefs worldwide.

The first, the International Coral Reef Symposium, involved more than 2500 leading scientists, researchers and marine managers.

This was only the second time the event has been held in Australia since the symposiums began in 1969.

Throughout the four-day event, marine conservation leaders shared the latest research, while discussing the future of coral reefs, and management challenges and opportunities.

A week later in Cairns, we held the 27th general meeting of the International Coral Reef Initiative, which GBRMPA is hosting over the next two years on behalf of the Australian Government and in partnership with the Belize Government.

It was a valuable opportunity for countries with extensive coral reefs to share an understanding of pressures on these systems, and options for reducing those threats.

Grants were also awarded to help smaller communities undertake reef protection work, recognising that local action is important in protecting coral reefs globally.

This spirit of collaboration is key to managing multiple-use areas and, with this in mind, I welcome our new Local Marine Advisory Committees.

There are now 12 committees between Cape York and Bundaberg that advise us on local marine issues, including a new committee for the Bowen–Burdekin region.

I look forward to working with these communities — we all have a role to play in helping ensure this great natural wonder is protected so future generations can enjoy it just as we do.

Russell Reichelt  
Chairman  
Great Barrier Reef  
Marine Park Authority





A diver removing a crown-of-thorn starfish

## Fight steps up against starfish scourge

The tourism industry will be at the forefront of a new campaign to reduce the potential severity of another crown-of-thorns starfish outbreak.

Floods between 2009 and 2011 have increased the flow of nutrients into the Great Barrier Reef, creating an ideal environment for the coral-devouring sea stars to spawn and flourish.

In response, the Australian Government recently allocated \$1.43 million to crown-of-thorns starfish control.

Under the program, the Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators will send divers to popular tourism sites to inject the native pests with sodium bisulphate.

Also known as 'dry acid', the biodegradable chemical does not affect other plants and animals on the reef.

Association executive officer Col McKenzie said early action was critical for the Reef and the tourism industry.

"Last time this occurred, which was some seven years ago, a lot of the Reef off Cairns was denuded of live coral as a result of the infestation before we started any action," Col said.

"This time around, we're starting the work earlier, which is good news for the tourism industry.

"The industry is already working to handle it as much as it can and we applaud the government for giving us a fulltime boat-based program which will have a significant benefit for biodiversity within the Reef."

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Chief Scientist, Dr David Wachenfeld, said monitoring by the Australian Institute of Marine Science indicates increased starfish numbers between Cooktown and Mission Beach.

"The crown-of-thorns starfish is one of the greatest threats to the Reef because of its ability to eat away at

significant amounts of coral cover," he said.

"While the starfish has always been present in the Reef and will continue to be there, high levels of run-off and nutrients from floods tend to result in more surface algae which juvenile crown-of-thorns starfish survive on.

"More of this algal growth means more crown-of-thorns starfish which then go on to eat their own size in coral cover every day.

"By taking action before the next summer breeding season, we'll be in a much better position to slow down the increase in numbers.

"The situation also highlights the importance of the work by the Australian and Queensland governments to halt and reverse the decline in water quality entering the Reef."

From about six months of age, crown-of-thorns starfish start eating coral, effectively tearing away at the Reef's building blocks and destroying

precious food and shelter for a wide variety of marine creatures and organisms.

"If left unchecked, the coral would be destroyed faster than it could regenerate, leaving us with a devastating scenario," David said.

"And experience has taught us that it would take more than a decade to get on top of the outbreak.

"We've had a very positive and cooperative relationship with tourism operators in spotting and controlling crown-of-thorns starfish over the years, and I'm pleased they'll be able to strengthen their role even further through the extra funding."

The project will be implemented in cooperation with GBRMPA and the Australian Institute of Marine Science.

The Australian Government is also providing the institute with \$300,000 for research into potential new methods for controlling crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks.

# Sea Country photo competition winners unveiled

Stunning photographs showcasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the Great Barrier Reef are now on display at Reef HQ Aquarium.

The images are the winning entries of the first Sea Country Photographic Competition run by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

The photo of four Indigenous boys in a mangrove-lined creek was named the overall winner — see the photo on our cover this month.

Hopevale photographer Kathi Gibson-Steffensen snapped the image at Munbah near Hopevale in Cape York Peninsula.

Judges said the photograph 'Fountain of Youth — our waters are also our enjoyment' was a great visual interpretation of the link between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their sea country.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) Indigenous Partnerships Group Director Liz Wren commended the high calibre of entries.

"The competition was a great opportunity to visually showcase the story connection that Traditional Owners have to the Great Barrier Reef," she said.

"The judges were really impressed by the interpretation of subjects captured in each category, and the thought and feeling behind them.

"The winning photo shows that enjoyment is an important element of people's connection to country."

Ms Gibson-Steffensen said she was honoured to win the competition and acknowledged the Traditional Owners on whose land the photograph was taken.

"The location of this photograph is one of the special places of the Guugu Yimithirr people of Hopevale," she said.

Ms Gibson-Steffensen was awarded a Nikon D-3100 camera and twin lens kit as part of her prize.

The competition attracted more than 80 images from throughout the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the Torres Strait.



Kathi Gibson-Steffensen receiving her prize from GBRMPA board member, Melissa George, for winning the Sea Country Partnerships Photographic Competition

As well as the overall winner, 15 entries won prizes across five categories.

The competition offered more than \$5000 in prizes, including an iPad2 for each category winner.

The competition was funded through the Australian Government's Caring for our Country Reef Rescue Land and Sea Country Indigenous Partnerships Program.



**Category 1 winner: Great Barrier Reef Sea Country**  
'Sacred Rock – protection over the waters' by Kathi Gibson-Steffensen of Hopevale



**Category 2 winner: Traditional Use of Marine Resources**  
'Enjoying the weekend fishing' by Zeila Wallace of Archer Point





**Category 4 winner: Sea Country Art, Music or Dance**  
 'My painting of where the land meets the sea – fish and nets and lore poles' by Claudia Moondoonthi of Aurukun



**Category 3 winner: Elders and Youth**  
 'A grandmother passing her knowledge to her granddaughter using string figures' by Dennis Newie of Moa Island



**Category 5 winner: Working on Sea Country and Partnerships**  
 'Big Bertha' by Larissa Hale of Archer Point

## Consultations begin on strategic assessment

The next critical stage in mapping out future management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park has begun.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has held a series of regional stakeholder workshops with representatives of different sectors, as part of a strategic assessment recommended by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee.

Stakeholders from the tourism, commercial fishing, recreation, conservation, research, ports, shipping, agriculture and local government sectors took part in forums in Townsville, Cairns and Rockhampton.

Held in August, the three events asked invited participants to identify values that need to be protected — such as environmental and cultural characteristics — before analysing the pressures affecting those values.

The Australian and Queensland governments are undertaking the assessment to create an agreed, long-term plan for sustainable development of the Great Barrier Reef Marine World Heritage Area.

GBRMPA will lead the marine component of the assessment, looking at the effectiveness of current management and protection arrangements.

The Queensland Government will lead the

coastal component, looking at urban, industrial and port development planning, as well as arrangements to ensure development occurs sustainably.

GBRMPA Chairman Russell Reichelt said obtaining the views of stakeholders was critical.

"We've always placed high priority on working with diverse interests, and it's an important part of this process," Russell said.

"The workshops were a great opportunity for all of us to take a big picture approach to environment and heritage protection.

"We all have an interest in protecting this extraordinary

place of beauty, but we need to ensure we have the right management tools to deal with the significant pressures being placed on the Reef, while also ensuring a range of activities and industries can continue."

The final assessment will be submitted to the World Heritage Committee.

While the committee acknowledged management of the Reef is considered by many to be international best practice, it also asked Australia to demonstrate 'substantial progress' on the state of the area's conservation by February next year.

The strategic assessment will form a key part of demonstrating Australia's progress.



# Celebrating eight years of Reef-related news

In marking *SeaRead*'s final edition, it seems appropriate to take a look back at the stories and issues we covered about the Great Barrier Reef and the work carried out to protect this great natural wonder.

*SeaRead* began in 2004 after one of the most significant steps in reef protection was introduced — the Zoning Plan that increased no-take areas so as to improve the Marine Park's health and resilience.

It was no surprise this new initiative went on to make the cover of the first edition in October–November 2004.

From there, *SeaRead* chronicled key environmental issues such as climate change, species conservation and declining water quality, just to name a few.

Major activities undertaken by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority also featured prominently — among those was the release of the Outlook Report in 2009.

Celebrating the community's work to protect the Reef for the future has been another important part of *SeaRead*, which has also followed our successful Reef Guardian Schools program and partnerships with Traditional Owners and the tourism industry.

We've also played a role in reminding people what they can do to protect the Reef and why the Reef is special, along with regular features shedding light on some of the Reef's amazing and wondrous animals.

While *SeaRead* is coming to a close, our desire to share information with our readers remains the same.

By embracing new and online media, we hope to communicate with our diverse and geographically dispersed audience in a more timely and efficient way.

**To stay connected with us, subscribe to our e-newsletter, *Reef In Brief* at [www.gbrmpa.gov.au](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au) and join the conversation on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GreatBarrierReefMarinePark](http://www.facebook.com/GreatBarrierReefMarinePark)**



## Oct–Nov 2004

The year new zoning was introduced

## Sep–Oct 2005

30 year anniversary of Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

## May–June 2006

First Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement

New whale and dolphin watching regulations introduced

## Nov–Dec 2006

25 years since World Heritage listing

## Nov–Dec 2007

New Chairman Russell Reichelt appointed

## Jan–Feb 2008

Sightings Network announced

## Sep–Oct 2009

Release of Reef Outlook Report

## May–June 2010

Shen Nang 1 runs aground on Douglas Shoal off Gladstone

## Jan–Feb 2011

Reef impacted by Queensland floods

## March–April 2011

Cyclone Yasi causes patchy damage to the Reef

## Sept–Oct 2011

Better dugong protection through new commercial net fishing regulations near Townsville

## March–April 2012

UNESCO visit to assess the state of the Reef



The recent International Coral Reef Initiative meeting gave marine area managers the chance to share their expertise

## Countries team up to protect the world's coral reefs

Protecting the world's coral reefs was the focus when marine area managers met up in Cairns recently for the 27th annual general meeting of the International Coral Reef Initiative.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, on behalf of the Australian Government, is hosting the

initiative over the next two years in partnership with the Belize Government.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Chairman Dr Russell Reichelt said the meeting provided a valuable opportunity for countries with extensive coral reefs to share an understanding of pressures on these systems, and options for reducing those threats.

"Australia is internationally recognised as a world leader in marine conservation, largely due to the strong management and protection measures in place in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park," he said.

"Hosting the International Coral Reef Initiative enables

us to showcase Australia's management initiatives in coral reef management and to share our experiences."

Belize Fisheries Administrator and ICRI Co-Chair Beverly Wade said the meeting helped emphasise the importance of protecting coral reefs around the world.

"We all have a role to play in ensuring these places of natural beauty are maintained for future generations to enjoy," she said.

"This meeting allows coral reef managers from around the world to provide valuable insights based on their experience."

The International Coral Reef Initiative involves governments, international organisations and non-government organisations who are striving to raise awareness of the importance of coral reefs and threats to their future.

Over the four-day meeting, more than 50 participants from 20 countries discussed topics ranging from lionfish invasion in the Caribbean to Marine Protected Areas in East Asia, and reef monitoring worldwide.

They also saw GBRMPA's Reef Guardian stewardship program in action by visiting participants, such as a local school and sugarcane farm.

## Plan for protecting the Great Barrier Reef's biodiversity

Now is your chance to comment on a roadmap to protect at-risk plants, animals and habitats of the Great Barrier Reef.

In releasing the draft *Great Barrier Reef Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2012*, GBRMPA Chairman Dr Russell Reichelt said the plan identified at-risk species and habitats.

The strategy is supported by vulnerability assessments which give an overview of the species, their health and status, and recommended actions for protecting them.

It follows the *Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2009*, which highlighted a need for a specific strategy to address threats to the Reef's plants, animals and habitats.

"A strong focus of the strategy is improving inshore biodiversity," Russell said.

"It's these inshore areas where species and habitats are under the greatest pressure from a range of threats including coastal development.

"The Reef's zoning plan is protecting biodiversity, and

water quality is improving with the Reef Rescue initiative, but more is needed to address cumulative impacts on inshore biodiversity.

"This strategy's overarching approach is vital when managing such a large, complex ecosystem with so many different species. It allows resources to be directed to those plants and animals that most need our help.

"It also highlights the importance of working with community and industry, improving ecosystem knowledge, and using this to build the Reef's resilience.

"Our priority will be working with government, industry, researchers and the community to restore degraded habitats and re-connect coastal ecosystems along the Reef.

"Local and regional action will be needed to protect species and habitats. For example, we'll work with our partners including scientists, the Queensland Government, natural resource management groups, Traditional Owners and local communities to identify the best ways to rehabilitate wetlands so they are healthy and support the inshore area of the Reef.

"This is especially the case when evidence indicates some at-risk species, including threadfin salmon and snubfin dolphin are highly susceptible to local threats like habitat loss and poor water quality."

The strategy and vulnerability assessments are available at [www.gbrmpa.gov.au](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au).

Public consultation closes Friday 28 September 2012.



# Resort boosts solar power to protect Reef

Climate leader Peter Gash set new benchmarks for sustainable tourism in the Great Barrier Reef when he harnessed solar power to reduce his resort's diesel consumption by 70 per cent.

Now the owner of Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort off Bundaberg is about to boost the resort's solar-generation capacity and slash diesel consumption further.

"The hybrid solar power system we installed in 2008 has a 20kW capacity and produces around 120kW hours of renewable energy per day," Peter said.

"Within two years, the system had paid for itself, producing annual savings of \$120,000.

"We're now investing that money back into more solar power by installing another 96 solar panels onto existing buildings at the resort so we can effectively double our renewable power capacity."

Peter said the project would cut the 150-bed resort's diesel

consumption to 100 litres a day by the end of the year, compared to 550 litres a day when diesel generators powered the resort.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority General Manager Andrew Skeat said Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort was among a number of high standard tourism operators who are working with marine managers to reduce their impact on the Reef.

"A healthy Great Barrier Reef is vital for a healthy tourism industry," he said.

"Peter Gash has worked closely with us to establish a Great Barrier Reef Tourism Climate Change Action Strategy, which guides operators on how they can improve reef health and the viability of their industry.

"Conducting an energy audit and making changes that minimise the operation's impact on the environment is a key action identified in this strategy."



Peter Gash with the hybrid solar power system that powers Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort

Peter took over the lease of Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort, the southernmost reef island in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, in 2005.

His involvement with GBRMPA's Tourism Climate Change Action Group prompted him to conduct a major energy audit in 2007. This kicked off a series of sweeping changes to make the resort carbon neutral.

Peter said one of the biggest benefits of installing a solar power system was the way it had influenced behaviour.

"The fact that we are creating our own electricity has made staff and guests very conscious about the need to conserve power and not waste it," he said.

"People are genuinely eager to see alternative energy working successfully and are prepared to do what they can to help with its progress.

"Apart from the obvious benefits for the Reef, this culture shift has been the most positive spin-off of all."

## Marine tourism industry prepares for Reef incident responses

The marine tourism industry and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) have joined forces to better respond to an environmental incident on the Reef.

The *Marine Tourism Coordination Framework for Environmental Incidents* will guide the coordination of timely information between the industry, community and government during events such as cyclones, coral bleaching and oil spills.

The environmental impacts of these major events, and resulting media coverage, can cause widespread disruption to the \$5.1 billion Reef tourism industry.

GBRMPA Tourism and Recreation Director Chris Briggs said Cairns and Whitsunday industry operators, as well as government agencies and peak tourism associations, worked closely together to develop the framework.

"The overwhelming feedback was that in a region where there are strong economic and social ties between the Reef and the community, it is critical to get the incident response right the first time," he said.

"Getting the right information to where it needs to go during an environmental incident is critical.

"The framework guides the way for doing that with multiple parties.

"Taking a coordinated approach also gives industry operators who depend on the Reef the greatest chance of a speedy recovery."

Under the framework, a new Tourism Incident Response Group has been created.

The group is made up of representatives from the Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators, Tourism Queensland, Queensland Tourism Industry Council, Queensland Government and GBRMPA.



# Awards for top environmental achievements in schools

Taking the lead in caring for washed-up turtles and reducing rubbish entering the ocean has earned a Townsville Year 12 student a prestigious Virginia Chadwick Memorial Foundation Award for Environmental Excellence.

This year the Foundation sponsored three awards for Reef Guardian Schools within the Great Barrier Reef catchment area to recognise outstanding environmental achievements.

- **Nicole Filipic from St Patrick's College** in Townsville took out the Future Environmental Leader Award for an individual student from a Reef Guardian School.
- **Gordonvale State High School** near Cairns won the Reef Champions Award for secondary schools for creek bank regeneration, litter reduction, building community partnerships, and fostering students to be environmental stewards through innovative projects.
- **Beaconsfield State School** in Mackay received the Reef Action and Awareness Award for primary schools for encouraging each grade to take on a different environmental responsibility that connects the curriculum to practical actions.

Winners of the primary and secondary school awards received \$1000 for their achievements, while the winner of the Future Environmental Leader Award received \$500.

Foundation Chairperson Fay Barker said the judges were impressed by the passion and ongoing commitment shown by all the winners for their projects to protect the Reef.

"As the winner of the Future Environmental Leader Award, Nicole Filipic demonstrates enthusiasm, dedication and leadership abilities when it comes to protecting the Reef," Ms Barker said.



The winner of the Future Environmental Leader Award, Nicole Filipic, with Amanda Chadwick (left) and Virginia Chadwick Memorial Foundation chair Fay Barker (right)

"Nicole has excelled as the president of St Patrick's College Environment Committee, taking a leadership role in initiating a turtle stranding workshop and school eco-conference, and being chosen as one of only two Australian students to go to the Asia-Pacific Youth Water Forum in South Korea."

Ms Barker said Gordonvale State High School and Beaconsfield State School could also take pride in the example they had set.

"This year's applications were of a high quality and demonstrated the extent to which many schools have placed importance on environmental education in their curriculum," she said.

"Rather than one or two projects, schools are

increasingly initiating a whole host of activities, both inside and outside school hours."

Ms Barker said the activities of the three winners exemplified the work of the late Virginia Chadwick, Chair of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority between 1999 and 2007.

"Virginia left a lasting legacy through her passion for protecting the Reef, and that's something the Foundation hopes to carry on through support for environmental activities, education and partnerships," she said.

Award winners were chosen based on environmental activities, education and partnerships as well as Indigenous engagement.

## BRIEFS

### More schools join the Reef Guardian program

Eleven new schools are showing their support for the Great Barrier Reef by signing up for the Reef Guardian Schools program.

They join more than 111,000 students from over 285 schools across the state taking part in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's environmental education program.

The initiative gives students the opportunity to get involved in projects in and outside the classroom to improve their local environment and the outlook for the Great Barrier Reef.

Teachers are also given access to environmental-themed curriculum material.

### New Reef Beat education materials

The links between our coastal communities and the creatures and corals of the Great Barrier Reef are the focus of this year's educational resources for Reef Guardian Schools.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) 2012 Reef Beat education series teaches students of all ages about the connection between the inshore, marine and coastal ecosystems.

GBRMPA Chairman Dr Russell Reichelt said it was important to protect the gamut of ecosystems in the Great Barrier Reef Region and acknowledge their interactivity. "The inshore ecosystems are under pressure and conserving our biodiversity is essential for safeguarding the long-term health of the Reef," he said.

"Through projects such as Reef Beat, we are raising awareness about the importance and beauty of the Reef, as well as the impacts of pressures such as coastal development, population growth and climate change."

A range of curriculum-linked activities have been designed to get students thinking about how to protect biodiversity. Schools can access Reef Beat 2012 at [www.gbrmpa.gov.au](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au).

# Vessel traffic service improves shipping safety through the Reef

Ship groundings have reduced dramatically since monitoring started in the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait in 2004.

Since the coastal vessel traffic service called REEFVTS began, groundings have reduced from one per year between 1997 and 2003 to only one case in eight years.

The system is staffed on a 24-hour basis by operators in the Vessel Traffic Service Centre in Townsville. It is run by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority and Maritime Safety Queensland, under joint Australian and Queensland government arrangements.



REEFVTS has helped reduce the number of ship groundings in the Reef and the Torres Strait

REEFVTS Manager Mick Bishop said providing ships with information on potential traffic conflicts and other conditions had successfully boosted navigational safety.

“By minimising the risk of a maritime accident and any resulting ship-source pollution, we’ve helped to protect the marine environment,” he said.

“With the help of sensor

technologies that provide real-time images of ship traffic, we’re able to provide information to on-board crews about the position, identity and intentions of other vessels, as well as weather, hazards and other factors.

“We’re also able to contact individual ships in cases where they may be in danger of running aground because

they’re deviating from a recommended route.”

The ship reporting system requires vessels over 50 metres in length and all oil tankers, liquefied gas carriers, chemical tankers or ships carrying nuclear material to identify themselves and declare their intended passage.

## Coral reef scientists call for urgent action on global warming

The world's top marine researchers have used an international forum to call for urgent action to save the world's coral reefs.

Held in Cairns in July, the International Coral Reef Symposium was attended by 2500 of the world's leading scientists, resource managers, conservationists, economists and educators from 80 countries.

Delegates at the five-day event used the opportunity to release a consensus statement which warned coral

reefs are in decline worldwide due to human activities.

The statement called for action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions which are making marine waters more acidic at a time when the ocean surface is warming.

“This combined change in temperature and ocean chemistry has not occurred since the last reef crisis 55 million years ago,” the statement reads.

“Land-based sources of pollution, sedimentation, overfishing and climate change

are the major threats, and all of them are expected to increase in severity.

“Approximately 25–30 per cent of the world’s coral reefs are already severely degraded by local impacts from land and by over-harvesting.”

The statement went on to call for a concerted effort at global levels, in addition to local protection.

The gathering of coral researchers also heard while the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park was the best managed reef system in the world, it also faced some challenges.

Participants also heard research results showing:

- the first conclusive evidence that no-take protected areas can help restock fish populations on neighbouring reefs
- many parts of the Great Barrier Reef withstood the force of cyclone Yasi
- the number of turtles, dugongs and coastal dolphins has undergone significant decline since European settlement in Queensland.



# Reef HQ celebrates 25 years

The much-loved national education centre for the Great Barrier Reef, Reef HQ Aquarium, is celebrating its 25th birthday.

The milestone comes as the finishing touches are put on a \$4 million refurbishment for the centre.

In a complex engineering feat, the iconic underwater tunnel has been given a makeover, while a new Rainforest to Reef display is now open.

A new 'colours exhibition' will be coming soon to showcase the Reef's most colourful coral and sea-life.

The works further cement the centre's position as one of Townsville's premier tourist attractions – with 145,000 domestic and international visitors visiting the centre in 2011–12.

The aquarium was the vision of former Great Barrier Reef



Volunteer Freda Jeffries and Lucky T Turtle had the cake-cutting honours at Reef HQ Aquarium's 25th birthday in June

Marine Park Authority Chairman Dr Graeme Kelleher who wanted to give people the chance to come face-to-face with the ever-changing wonders of the Reef.

His aim was to create an accessible and affordable Reef experience, and promote public support for protecting this great natural wonder.

Opened in June 1987, the facility was originally known as the Great Barrier Reef Wonderland.

At its heart is the Coral Reef exhibit which contains 2.5 million litres of water, over 100 species of corals and more than 200 species of fish found only on the Great Barrier Reef.

## Bowen-Burdekin given a voice on Reef management

Increasing development in the Bowen-Burdekin region has led to the formation of a new committee to provide community advice on managing the Great Barrier Reef.

The Bowen-Burdekin Local Marine Advisory Committee is the newest of 12 committees established by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) from Cape York to Bundaberg to provide community input on local marine issues.

GBRMPA Chairman Russell Reichelt said there was strong

interest in the local community about how the Reef is managed.

"Stakeholders were keen to come together and form the committee. They will play an essential role in the future management of the Great Barrier Reef," Russell said.

"We will be looking to the Bowen-Burdekin and the other committees for advice on how we achieve a balance between sustainable use and protecting the Reef for the future.

"They will contribute to the strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef World

Heritage Area, helping to identify the Reef's values, the threats, and what we need to do to address them."

The Bowen-Burdekin Local Marine Advisory Committee will cover the coastal and inland area extending from Haughton River in the north to Yeates Creek in the south and includes Giru, Ayr and Bowen communities.

Other committees cover Cape York, Douglas, Cairns, Cassowary Coast, Hinchinbrook, Townsville, Whitsundays, Mackay, Capricorn Coast, Gladstone and Burnett regions.

## BRIEFS

### Website goes mobile

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's website is a great resource for anyone wanting to visit the Marine Park and it's just got better.

With the increase in smart phone use, GBRMPA has developed a version of the website specifically for use on mobile phones.

Information on zoning, things to see and do, how the Reef is managed and how to help protect this natural wonder will be easier to access wherever you can get mobile reception.

GBRMPA's mobile website will automatically come up on a smart phone, but the full site can also be accessed from a link at [www.gbrmpa.gov.au](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au).

### Whale watching season

There are many amazing sights to see while visiting the Great Barrier Reef and catching a glimpse of a whale majestically rising out of the water is one of the more impressive.

Between May and September the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is home to migrating whales that come to the warmer waters from Antarctica to court, mate, give birth or rear their calves.

Being able to use the Marine Park as their nursery free from harassment is critical to the continued survival of these beautiful mammals.

Responsible practices around whales include slowing down to minimise the risk of collision, and not approaching mothers and calves.

Legally, vessels must stay at least 100 metres from whales in the Marine Park and 300 metres in the Whitsunday Whale Protection Area.

Vessels and jet skis must also stay at least 300 metres away from a whale calf throughout the Marine Park.

Since the banning of whaling in Australian waters in the early 1960s, humpback whale numbers has been steadily increasing by about 10 per cent each year, doubling about every seven years.

## What can I do?



Snorkelling is one of the best ways to see the Great Barrier Reef in all its glory.

Here's a few tips to help us keep the Reef in spectacular shape for future visitors:

- For new snorkelers, get used to your equipment before you enter the water.
- Snorkel where the water is at least one metre deep to minimise the risk of your fins hitting the coral.
- Move slowly and deliberately through the water, and avoid making loud noises underwater which might disturb marine life.
- If you need to rest, don't stand on coral – use the designated rest stations or other floatation aids instead.
- Avoid leaning on, holding or touching any part of the Reef.
- Be aware of the marine life around you. Avoid feeding fish, stay at least one metre away from giant clams and keep clear of free-swimming animals such as turtles, whales and sea snakes.
- You must not collect coral, dead coral and protected shell species in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park unless you have a permit.

For more information, go to [www.gbrmpa.gov.au](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au)

## Creature feature

# Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin

Their starring roles in TV series, movies and aquatic shows have made bottlenose dolphins one of the most recognisable and much-loved animals on earth.

The highly social Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin can be found in the inshore waters off the Queensland coast.

As mammals – not fish – they bear live young and nurse their calves with milk produced by the mother.

They also live together in pods where a strong sense of unity means they cooperate in hunting for food and in raising their young, with one dolphin usually helping the mother in a similar fashion to a midwife.

While inshore pods usually have fewer than 10 members, offshore pods may number in the hundreds.



Bottlenose dolphins are social animals that seem to express an interest in interacting with human beings

Dolphins seem to have as much of an interest in humans as we do in them. They are often spotted bow-surfing beside boats and popping their heads out of the water to have a look at the people on the boat or onshore.

Bottlenose dolphins are usually shallow divers because they often hunt fast-moving prey near the surface. While killer whales and sharks are natural predators for these creatures, dolphins also fall prey to fishing nets where they

get entangled.

The loss of habitats and disturbance from boating activity also places additional pressure on these mammals. In the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, all species of dolphin are protected.