



Bajigal Habitat Restoration Update

Restoration of Reef Islands Project | July–December 2025

We acknowledge and pay our abiding respects to our Ancestors – our Old Peoples; to our Mandubarra Elders past and present; and to all Mandubarra families and Traditional Owners, wherever you may be living across the world.

Artwork by Mandubarra artist Naomi Epong

Restoration begins

The planning stage of the Restoration of Reef Islands (RORI) Project has mostly wrapped up—and it was a big one. Since 2020, the team has carried out seven island-wide ecological surveys, cultural assessments and feasibility studies to understand each island's condition and restoration potential.

This work identified Bajigal (Stephens Island) as a priority restoration site and led to the creation of the *Bajigal Habitat Restoration Plan*.

The plan captures a shared vision for how Bajigal will be cared for into the future, protecting the island's unique cultural and environmental values.

With implementation kicking off in August, we're bringing the plan to life through on-ground restoration and management at Bajigal.



Bajigal (Stephens Island).

RESTORATION SNAPSHOT



538 PERSON HOURS

Worked on restoration activities in 2025



1694 SQUARE METRES

Of weed area treated
769m² manually removed
925m² chemically treated



22 DAYS ON COUNTRY

Conducting restoration activities and seabird surveys

Government partners welcomed

In August, MALSI welcomed officers from the Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) and Reef Authority to Bajigal.

On arrival a Welcome to Country was performed by MALSI cultural advisors and rangers.

Together the group spoke about the significance of Bajigal and the restoration work underway through the RORI project, emphasising the need to understand the island's ecological threats and how they can be tackled.

They highlighted the strength of combining Traditional Ecological Knowledge with western science to help keep Bajigal healthy and resilient.

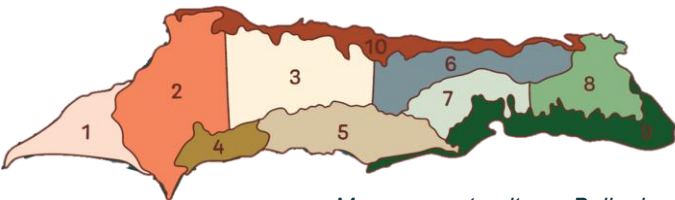


DCCEEW, Mandubarra Aboriginal Land & Sea Inc., Reef Authority and Aestra representatives.

Baseline surveys completed

In August, on-island work officially kicked off with its first major activity: baseline surveys across the island. MALSI rangers joined forces with western scientists to get hands-on; mapping weed hotspots, measuring density, and setting up permanent monitoring points—the essential tools that will track the island’s restoration progress.

The surveys targeted three priority weeds: guinea grass, morning glory vines and coral berry. By pinpointing where these invaders are and how far they’ve spread, the crew now has a clear starting line to tackle them head-on and see the result. It’s the first step in bringing the Bajigal Habitat Restoration Plan to life—and the excitement is only just beginning!



Management units on Bajigal.

Highlights

- 100% cleared!** Singapore daisy completely removed from Management Unit 1 (MU1).
- Mapping in action!** Crews are now using ArcGIS on the ground, capturing the islands vegetation with efficient new tech.
- Nesting season kicks off!** Bridled terns (*Onychoprion anaethetus*) are already nesting on Bajigal, with eggs spotted and recorded.



Singapore daisy in MU1 before and after removal

Bush crew out on Bajigal

MALSI welcomed Joseph Drahm, in the new RORI Project Officer role in September, who’s hit the ground running. One of the first tasks was jumping into a collaborative meeting between the Reef Authority, MALSI and Aestra—a chance to spark the mentoring, teamwork and shared vision mapping that will drive the RORI crew out on Sea Country to implement the restoration plan.

Joseph will coordinate on-ground activities at Bajigal in partnership with Aestra, and the momentum is already building. The RORI Bush Crew kicked off their first official week of restoration on 20 October. *“With perfect weather all week, it’s been incredible working on Bajigal,”* Joseph shared. *“As Land and Sea rangers—and descendants of this place—we feel deeply connected. Doing this work here and honouring our ancestors... we’re living the dream.”*



The Bush Crew and Kurrimine Beach Boat Hire vessel skipper Michael en route to Bajigal to begin restoration.

Seabird nesting survey success

In November, the crew spent three days on Bajigal carrying out annual seabird surveys. Joined by Aestra ecologists, the crew trialed new survey methods, picked up field tips, and built new skills along the way. With MALSI Elders on Country as cultural advisors, the surveys became a vibrant mix of science, culture and shared learning



Bridled terns and nest on Bajigal.

Part of the Reef Joint Field Management Program’s **Restoration of Reef Islands** project, with funding from the Reef Trust.