

REEF JOINT FIELD MANAGEMENT PROGRAM ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN SUMMARY 2026–27

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Reef Joint Field Management Program (Program) safeguards the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (World Heritage Area), including Commonwealth and Queensland marine parks and protected islands.

It is jointly delivered by the Australian Government's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (Reef Authority) and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), part of the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation (DETSI). This joint delivery ensures a unified and coordinated management approach across jurisdictions.

The Program addresses direct threats to the World Heritage Area while building ecosystem resilience to broader pressures, including climate change. Through its work areas and partnerships, the Program delivers the 9 outcomes of the *Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement 2024* and contributes directly to the *Reef 2050 Plan*, Australia's long-term strategy for the Great Barrier Reef health and resilience.

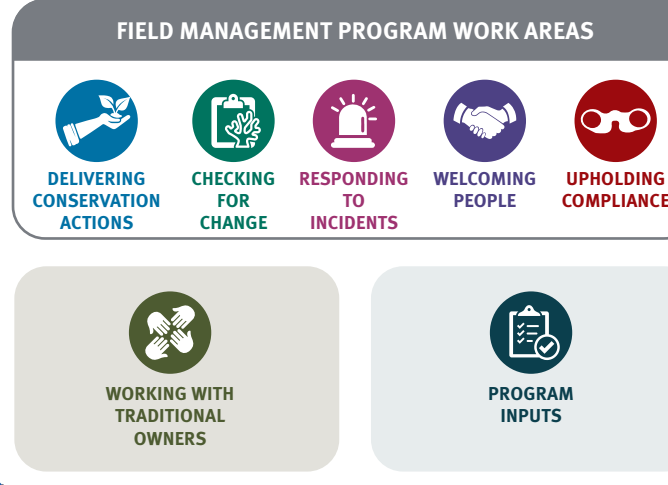
The Program has established and evolving partnerships with Traditional Owners to support Land and Sea Country management. These partnerships build Traditional Owner capacity and integrate traditional knowledge with contemporary management practices. It also works closely with government agencies, research institutions, Reef-dependent industries and local communities.

In 2026–27, the Program will continue to deliver in-field activities and priority projects outlined in this Annual Business Plan Summary. This work will support the protection of the World Heritage Area, strengthen ecosystem resilience, deepen partnerships with Traditional Owners and support ecotourism opportunities.

BUDGET

The Intergovernmental Agreement sets out the Australian and Queensland governments' commitment to jointly fund the Program on a 50:50 basis. Anticipated funding for 2026–27 is \$39,756,443.

In addition, the Program will oversee \$7,286,000 in funding from other sources.



REEF 2050 VISION



WORK AREAS



WORKING WITH TRADITIONAL OWNERS

The Program is actively seeking to strengthen partnerships with Traditional Owners to plan, deliver and report on field management activities across the World Heritage Area and fill gaps where relationships are emerging.

- Increased Traditional Owner participation in field management delivery through a growing number of field days with external Indigenous rangers and paid service delivery by Land and Sea Ranger groups.



DELIVERING CONSERVATION ACTIONS

The Program delivers conservation actions to protect and recover important natural and heritage values, including coral reefs, seagrass meadows, mangrove forests, coral cays, continental islands, wetlands, threatened and iconic species, and cultural heritage.

- Priority burn program and increased planned burns on islands support ecosystem health and cultural burning.
- Pest prevention and management delivered to reduce threats to island ecosystems, species of conservation significance, and visitor and cultural values.
- Consistent Values-Based Management Framework planning and management effectiveness evaluation for key values and uses.



CHECKING FOR CHANGE

Knowing the condition of values is fundamental to effective management. The Program checks for change on islands and in the water to monitor the condition of key values and extent of existing or emerging threats.

- Reef health information generated through reef surveys to inform awareness and management.
- Crown-of-thorns starfish outbreak extent and severity identified through surveillance to inform control efforts.
- Increased understanding of trends in key island values.
- Emerging island threats identified.
- Nationally and internationally significant seabird and shorebird populations are monitored.
- Increased understanding of the condition and trend at turtle nesting and foraging sites.



RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS

The Program responds to a wide range of incidents including ship and vessel groundings, oil and other pollution spills, wildfires, coral bleaching and disease, island and marine pests, stranded marine animals, and severe weather events like cyclones.

- Risk-based response to incidents.
- In-field assessment of the extent and severity of damage from maritime incidents.
- Community stewardship and involvement in field delivery.



WELCOMING PEOPLE

Improving community understanding of values and threats, fostering responsible behaviours, providing visitor facilities and managing risk-based permissions are critical to ecologically sustainable use and positive visitor experiences.

- Timely risk-based joint assessment and administration of the permission system.
- Moorings and reef protection markers are maintained.
- Well-maintained and contemporary visitor infrastructure that meets user needs and supports tourism.



UPHOLDING COMPLIANCE

The Program is the principal driver and coordinator of environmental compliance in the World Heritage Area. Risk-focused, well-planned and intelligence-driven patrols are delivered to detect and deter illegal activity.

- Compliance patrols delivered by the Program and partners to detect and deter illegal activity.
- Targeted compliance coverage during high-risk illegal recreational fishing periods.
- Targeted permit compliance activities delivered.
- Visitors are engaged on water to reinforce voluntary compliance with the rules.
- Education is provided to community and industry on World Heritage Area rules and responsibilities.



PROGRAM INPUTS

The Program requires several inputs to deliver its five work areas and work with Traditional Owners, including funding, staff, vessels, work bases, training and technology.

- Skilled and high-performing workforce.
- Strong safety culture.
- Operations across the entire World Heritage Area.
- Well-planned financial management.

 DELIVERING CONSERVATION ACTIONS	 CHECKING FOR CHANGE	 RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS	 WELCOMING PEOPLE	 UPHOLDING COMPLIANCE
				
ACTIVITIES • Monitor and adapt reef rehabilitation projects. • Support the Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program pilot deployment. • Engage with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, James Cook University and Mandubarra on a northern Great Barrier Reef seagrass restoration pilot. • Deliver the Values-Based Management Framework (VBMF) roadmap: progress island national park management plans and priority values assessments. • Support Traditional Owner-led Country-based planning to strengthen VBMF priorities and management actions. • Develop VBMF thematic strategies for prioritised island parks. • Deliver the priority burn program and increase planned burns on islands to support ecosystem health and cultural burning. • Embed biosecurity principles across field management activities. • Deliver priority pest control on key islands. • Work with Wuthathi and Meriam Nation peoples to complete Raine Island Recovery Project Phase 2 reporting and plan for Phase 3. • Implement the <i>Raine Island Seabird Strategy</i> and broader seabird site actions to improve the resilience of key seabird breeding sites, particularly with the potential incursion of high pathogenicity avian influenza into World Heritage Area populations. • Protect Indigenous and historic heritage values. PRIORITY PROJECTS • Bajigal (Stephens Island): implement the restoration plan with Mandubarra Traditional Owners. • Lady Elliot and Pine Islet: deliver rehabilitation works and commence asbestos removal at Pine Islet. • Island Arks: commence asbestos removal on Collins Island, monitoring at Wild Duck Island and rehabilitation planning for Long Island. • St Bees Island: commence integrated restoration (pest management and a targeted fire regime to restore koala habitat).	ACTIVITIES • Deliver Reef Health Impact Surveys and crown-of-thorns starfish surveillance to inform reef health awareness and management responses. • Undertake subtidal seagrass surveys and implement risk-based biosecurity surveillance using Island Watch during field activities. • Improve the consistency and reporting of Island Health Checks across priority island national parks, including refresher training and use of digital tools to support real-time reporting. • Renew regional ecosystem mapping for Munamudanamy (Hinchinbrook Island). • Monitor and assess impacts of pencil beam LED lantern changes (installed in aids to navigation) on turtle nesting and hatchling behaviour. • Implement seabird and shorebird monitoring strategies. • Support priority turtle nesting monitoring in partnership with specialist teams and external partners. • Fill priority knowledge gaps through targeted surveys and contributions to Reef 2050 and other monitoring frameworks. PRIORITY PROJECT • Strengthen Island Health Checks on priority islands.	ACTIVITIES PREPARE • Strengthen readiness for environmental, maritime and wildlife incidents. • Implement risk assessment and incident response frameworks including coral bleaching and biosecurity. • Maintain capability through exercises and partner coordination under relevant contingency plans. • Improve marine wildlife strandings management with volunteers, training, data systems and reporting. RESPOND • With partner agencies, participate in the removal of wrecked and abandoned vessels where practicable and supported by legislation. • Undertake benthic impact assessments and shoreline assessments where required. • Respond to environmental, maritime and wildlife incidents to protect World Heritage Area values. • Coordinate (where appropriate and feasible) marine pest and disease outbreak responses with partners and stakeholders. • Manage wildlife strandings with volunteers and specialist rehabilitation organisations. RECOVER • Where feasible, coordinate damage mitigation or rehabilitation for impacted high conservation value reefs, islands and key tourism sites. • Support post-incident monitoring, data collection and reporting to inform recovery and future management. PRIORITY PROJECT • Continue reviewing benthic impact assessment processes to assess, document and support response to vessel grounding impacts on reef and benthic environments.	ACTIVITIES • Maintain the Reef Protection Program including 369 public moorings and 293 reef protection markers, and continue updating regulatory signage to strengthen enforceability. • Deliver joint permissions management and progress practical improvements to permissions processes and system efficiencies. • Deliver priority visitor infrastructure projects and statutory maintenance, including continued investment in multi-day trail development for the Thorsborne Trail on Munamudanamy (Hinchinbrook Island). • Commence a project to assess sustainable visitor use on iconic island national parks. • Support key volunteer programs and participants, such as campground hosts, to deliver Program activities. • Develop and implement the Program’s Communication Plan 2026–27. • Deliver targeted communications and education (e.g. zoning information, ‘Be Pest Free’ messaging). • Educate and engage the community and industry using a range of communication methods. PRIORITY PROJECT • Continue upgrades to the Thorsborne Trail on Munamudanamy (Hinchinbrook Island).	ACTIVITIES AWARENESS AND EDUCATION • Implement the <i>Recreational Fishing Communications Strategy</i> to improve understanding of marine park zoning. • Deliver targeted education and field audit inspections to improve permit holder compliance, guided by the <i>Annual Permissions Compliance Plan</i>. • Produce coordinated compliance communication products and activities. • Support responsible Reef use through engagement with users and visitors to promote sustainable practices and compliance with marine park rules. MONITORING AND SURVEILLANCE • Deliver partner surveillance and patrol priorities under the <i>Annual Compliance Risk Plan</i>. • Use and enhance vessel tracking analytics to support timely, targeted responses. • Operationalise unmanned remote monitoring integrated with intelligence-led planning and digital evidence systems. • Strengthen cross-agency arrangements. • Support surveillance and compliance activities by Indigenous ranger groups. PLANNING, ENFORCEMENT AND REPORTING • Undertake targeted permit compliance activities. • Implement an enhanced compliance enforcement framework to deliver timely, consistent responses across priority risks. • Strengthen commercial operator oversight through improved monitoring, permit assessment and enforceable conditions. • Undertake planning and transition activities to prepare for replacement of the Field Reporting System. • Develop data warehouse and business intelligence capabilities to improve compliance reporting and analysis. • Maintain effective relationships with the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions and the DETSI litigation section.
 WORKING WITH TRADITIONAL OWNERS			 PROGRAM INPUTS	
ACTIVITIES • Support implementation of Traditional Owner agreements across the World Heritage Area. • Engage Traditional Owners for paid services to deliver field management activities. • Work with Traditional Owners to identify and implement measures that protect cultural heritage values. • Implement the revised <i>Traditional Owner Partnerships Strategy 2023–2028</i> and develop a reporting mechanism. • Build cultural capability across the workforce. • Provide work placement opportunities for Traditional Owners across administration, governance and operations.	• Work with Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger groups to align field management priorities with ranger annual work plans. • Develop a project plan to improve coordination, tracking and delivery of commitments under Traditional Owner agreements.	ACTIVITIES • Undertake quarterly reviews of the workplace health and safety risk register. • Integrate the Human Factors in Safety Program into current operational protocols, procedures, risk assessments and hazard reporting processes. • Deliver the <i>Annual Training Plan 2026–27</i>. • Deliver vessel replacements as per the rolling five-year program and implement recommendations from the large vessel governance review. • Implement a streamlined data management system and reporting dashboard for bird monitoring activities. • Maintain MOUs and Deeds of Agreement with other agencies. • Manage projects funded by Reef Trust and Curtis Island Indirect Offsets with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.	• Develop costed project plans for new priorities endorsed through governance groups. • Investigate and implement measures that contribute to the DETSI Carbon Neutral Parks 2030 Program and the Reef Authority’s <i>Sustainability Strategy</i>. PRIORITY PROJECT • Technology transformation: automated drone deployment systems, ReefScan Phase 2, machine learning for key natural values monitoring, drone use in natural resource monitoring, data management, and research into emerging technologies to enhance compliance outcomes.	