

REEF JOINT FIELD MANAGEMENT PROGRAM ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN SUMMARY 2025-26

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Reef Joint Field Management Program (Program) safeguards the Great Barrier Reef 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 intergrade traditional knowledge with contemporary management practices. The Program also works closely with government agencies, research institutions, Reef-dependent industries and local communities.

In 2025-26, 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 2025-26 is \$38,089,324.

In addition, the Program will oversee approximately \$9 million in funding from other sources.



REEF 2050 VISION



WORK AREAS EXPECTED OUTPUTS

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 species and cultural heritage.

- Planned burns and hazard reduction activities reduce bushfire risk, protect property and promote healthy vegetation and other values.
- Pest prevention and management reduces threats to islands and species of conservation significance, as well as visitor and cultural values.

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 condition and the extent of existing or emerging threats.

- Reef surveys inform reef health awareness and management.
- Crown-of-thorns starfish surveillance identifies outbreak extent and severity, informing control efforts.
- Increased understanding of the condition and trend of 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.

WELCOMING PEOPLE

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

- Timely risk-based joint assessment and administration of the permission system.
- Community stewardship and involvement in field management delivery.
- Moorings and reef protection markers are maintained.
- Well maintained and contemporary visitor infrastructure that meets user needs.

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 by the Program and partners detect and deter illegal activity.
- Compliance efforts are focused on high-risk illegal recreational fishing periods.
- Marine park permit conditions are followed.
- Visitors in the World Heritage Area are engaged on-water.
- Education is provided to community and industry on World Heritage Area rules and responsibilities.

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.

- Traditional Owner groups are involved in field management delivery.

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.

- Training needs identified for Program staff.
- Strong safety culture.
- Operate across the entire World Heritage Area.
- Financial management well-planned and delivered.

DELIVERING CONSERVATION ACTIONS



ACTIVITIES

- Develop a *Reef Rehabilitation Strategy*.
- Support the Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program (RRAP) transition to the pilot deployment program.
- Support development of Country-based planning activities by Traditional Owners.
- Develop or review national park thematic strategies using the Values-Based Management Framework.
- Deliver the priority burn and pest programs.
- Implement biosecurity principles including quarantine and surveillance into field management activities.
- Implement the Raine Island Recovery Project Phase 2.
- Collaborate with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation to implement reef and island recovery projects.
- Commence actions to improve management and protection of key seabird breeding sites.
- Support implementation of the Reef Authority's site based Sea Country values mapping project.
- Support implementation of the *Caring for Raine Island Country and Culture Strategic Plan*.
- Together with Traditional Owners implement management actions to protect cultural heritage.
- Progress development of heritage management plans for Commonwealth islands.
- Maintain island historic heritage.

PRIORITY PROJECTS

- Restoration of Reef Islands: implementation of the *Bajjgal (Stephens Island) Restoration Plan 2025* with Manduburra Traditional Owners.
- Reef Islands Rehabilitation: continue implementation of the *Lady Elliot Island Ecosystem Resilience Plan 2020* and planning for the clean-up of Pine Islet.
- Island Arks: planning will continue for works at Long Island at Broad Sound; rehabilitation works for St Bees and Wild Duck islands.

CHECKING FOR CHANGE



ACTIVITIES

- Deliver Reef Health Impact Surveys.
- Deliver crown-of-thorns starfish surveys.
- Undertake subtidal seagrass surveys.
- Undertake biosecurity surveillance using Island Watch surveys.
- Undertake health checks of island national parks.
- Undertake management effectiveness evaluation reporting for planned burn and pest projects, and adapt management via the Fire and Pest Referral Group.
- Address gaps identified in values assessments and thematic strategies.
- Use technology solutions in island and species monitoring programs.
- Implement the seabird and shorebird monitoring strategies.
- Deliver, or support others to deliver, monitoring at key turtle nesting and foraging sites.
- Provide vessel and logistical support for underwater historic heritage surveys by partners.
- Integrate Program data into the Reef 2050 Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program.

PRIORITY PROJECTS

- Island health checks consolidation: improving implementation of health checks.
- Great Barrier Reef Green Turtle Research Program.

RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS



PREPARE

- Pilot a risk assessment framework to prioritise Program response to incidents in the World Heritage Area
- Maintain an incident management framework with systems, plans, procedures and equipment.
- Build capacity to undertake the roles and functions for managing environmental and maritime incidents.
- Finalise and implement the coral bleaching incident response procedures.
- Maintain situational awareness of reef health using established systems.
- Implement biosecurity principles of quarantine and surveillance when responding to incidents.
- Develop a framework for management of turtle stranding volunteers.
- Support delivery and review of the *North-East Shipping Management Plan 2014, National Plan for Maritime Environmental Emergencies 2020* and *Queensland Coastal Contingency Action Plan 2021*.

RESPOND

- Facilitate removal of vessels that pose a risk to environment or heritage values.
- Respond to high priority marine animal strandings.
- Undertake health surveys of critical habitats and species after severe weather events.
- Support responses to marine pest outbreaks.
- Undertake site assessments following maritime incidents.
- Assess severity and extent of damage following environmental incidents.

RECOVER

- Coordinate damage mitigation or rehabilitation of key sites. Respond rapidly to contain new infestations of ecosystem-changing pests.
- Undertake protection, preparedness, response and recovery associated with bushfire containment and suppression.
- Ensure necropsies of marine animals are undertaken to inform species management.
- Maintain a Turtle Volunteer Coordinator to engage and support community and volunteer groups in the marine animal strandings program.

PRIORITY PROJECT

- Review Site Assessment of Damage procedure.

WELCOMING PEOPLE



ACTIVITIES

- Progress permit streamlining priorities.
- Maintain the 366 public moorings and 293 reef protection markers.
- Continue the 'Be Reef Smart' messaging and the 'Be pest-free' campaign.
- Deliver island visitor infrastructure and maintain existing infrastructure.
- Develop and implement the Program's *Communication Plan 2025-26*.
- Attend advisory committee meetings.
- Educate and engage the community and industry using a range of communication methods.
- Support the campground host volunteer program for North West and Lady Musgrave Islands.

PRIORITY PROJECTS

- Multi-day trails development: improvements to the Thorsborne Trail on Munamudanamy (Hinchinbrook Island) and finalisation of Phase 2 of the Ngaro Track on Whitsunday Island.

UPHOLDING COMPLIANCE



ACTIVITIES

AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

- Develop the *Recreational Fishing Communications Strategy*.
- Increase awareness on finding marine parks zoning information.
- Undertake education and field audit inspections.
- Develop a strategy to coordinate communication products and activities.

PLANNING, EXECUTING AND REPORTING

- Deliver dedicated compliance patrols with partners aligned with key risks.
- Support surveillance and compliance activities by Indigenous ranger groups.
- Conduct special operations targeting high-risk offenders, issues and activities.
- Update compliance strategic risk assessment and review threat/response assessments quarterly.
- Utilise unmanned aerial vehicles in compliance activities.
- Enhance the Penalty Infringement Notice Scheme.
- Review the use of Vessel Monitoring Systems and strengthen commercial fishing compliance with marine protected area regulations.
- Develop a *Recreational Fishing Compliance Framework*.

INVESTIGATIONS AND COMPLIANCE ACTIONS

- Maintain effective relationships with the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions and the DETSI litigation section.

PRIORITY PROJECTS

- Finalise implementation of the integrated compliance management system.

WORKING WITH TRADITIONAL OWNERS



ACTIVITIES

- Implement Indigenous Land Use Agreements and jointly managed national park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) islands with Traditional Owners.
- Support implementation of the Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreement (TUMRA) program.
- Work with Traditional knowledge holders to investigate illegal hunting, other activities and communication of compliance intelligence and outcomes.
- Implement the Program's *Traditional Owner Partnership Strategy 2023-2028*.
- Support a First Nations culturally safe workplace with all Program staff undertaking cultural capability training.
- Provide work placements for Traditional Owners within the Program.
- Incorporate Program work into Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger groups annual work plans.
- Engage Traditional Owners for paid services to deliver field activities.
- Support Indigenous Land and Sea rangers and TUMRA groups to gain qualifications and skills.
- Facilitate alignment of business with Traditional Owners across agencies.
- Produce videos with Traditional Owners to promote staff cultural awareness.
- Implement the cultural heritage permit referral program.

PROGRAM INPUTS



ACTIVITIES

- Undertake quarterly reviews of the workplace health and safety risk register, as well as incident and hazard reports to identify trends and inform Program initiatives.
- Develop and commence the *Training Strategy 2025-28*.
- Create and implement a qualification database accessible across both agencies.
- Commence the use of the new integrated Learning Management System to all Program staff.
- Maintain a safe and efficient vessel fleet.
- Implement recommendations of the 2024-25 large vessel governance review to realise efficiencies
- Maintain the compliance incident and information reporting system.
- Maintain Memoranda of Understanding and Deeds of Agreement with other agencies.
- Align business planning and reporting priorities to reflect new *Business Strategy 2025-2030*.
- Investigate and implement measures that contribute to Reef Authority and DETSI sustainability strategies.

PRIORITY PROJECTS

- Health and safety: embedding the Human Factors Safety Program framework and training.
- Technology transformation: trialling and implementation of drone technologies; ReefScan Phase 2; machine learning for vessel detection.
- Review of the Field Management Reporting System.