

Placemat for tables

20 REEF 25 FORUM



27-29 October
Townsville

The 2025 Reef Forum brings together Traditional Owners, government, researchers, industry, policy makers and conservation leaders to discuss the best approaches to strengthening the Reef's resilience in the face of climate change and other cumulative pressures. Over two days participants will reflect on the breadth of our work and help shape program delivery and policy advice.



Traditional Owner Recognition

Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef hold enduring rights, responsibilities, and connections to the Land and Sea Country. Their cultural authority is recognised under Lore, and Australian law. The Reef Authority is committed to strong partnerships with Traditional Owners, including through the Reef 2050 Traditional Owner Implementation Plan and Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements (TUMRAs). For more than 20 years, TUMRAs, developed and led by Traditional Owners, have provided a framework for co-managing Sea Country, supporting Indigenous Ranger programs, and ensuring meaningful participation in governance. Today, 10 accredited TUMRAs cover 43 per cent of the Great Barrier Reef coastline. Work is also underway to co-design the Southern Plan of Management, which will cover about one-third of the Marine Park, supporting localised, culturally informed solutions for a healthy Great Barrier Reef.



Reef Joint Field Management Program

On and in the water, on the ground, and in the sky, the program oversees a Marine Park that includes more than 3000 individual reefs and 470 island national parks and Commonwealth islands. In partnership with the Queensland Government, the Reef Joint Field Management Program monitors Reef health, delivers surveillance and compliance to uphold Marine Park zoning and management plans (and deter illegal activity). It responds to maritime incidents, implements conservation actions, maintains visitor infrastructure, and educates Reef users.



Crown-of-thorns Starfish Control Program

The Crown-of-thorns Starfish (COTS) Control Program is one of the most effective, evidence-based actions to protect coral on the Great Barrier Reef. Since 2012, highly trained dive teams have spent over 135,000 hours culling more than 1.26 million starfish across 421 reefs, helping protect over 814,000 hectares of coral habitat. In 2023–24 alone, more than 230,000 hectares were protected, with current operations employing over 100 people through regional Queensland businesses, including an Indigenous enterprise.



Tourism Stewardship

Tourism operators play a vital role in protecting sites on the Great Barrier Reef. Over 70 eco-accredited tourism operators deliver sustainable experiences to 1.4 million visitors each year. On board, 150 trained Master Reef Guides share stories, science, and practical ways people can help protect the Great Barrier Reef. Through the Tourism Reef Protection Initiative, 26 tourism operators are undertaking daily site stewardship actions including recording Reef health, removing crown-of-thorns starfish, fine-scale biodiversity assessments and rehabilitation projects. Since 2022, tourism operators have dedicated more than 3,200 days to this work, helping protect 270 high value reef and island sites.



Responsible Reef Practices

Responsible reef practices are a series of Marine Park user behaviours that help reduce harm to the Great Barrier Reef. These practices include following marine park zoning rules, low impact boating and anchoring, responsibilities around marine life, best practice diving and snorkelling, responsible fishing and waste, low impact water sports and island visiting. These practices are available on the Reef Authority website, are included in the Eye on the Reef App, and social media.

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Scan here for more information on the Reef Authority and the 2025 Reef Forum.



Outlook Report Figure 9.3

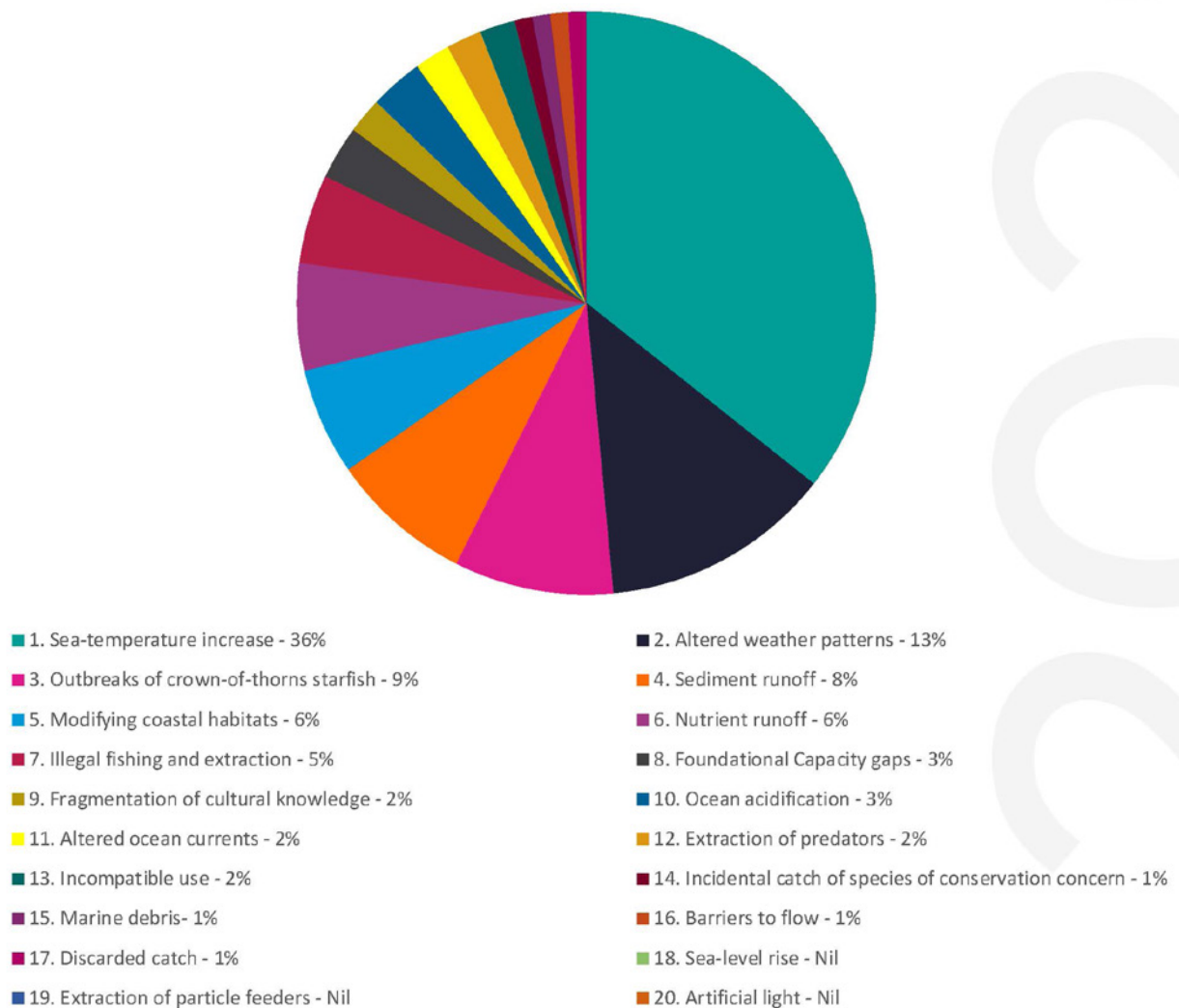
Threats	Ecosystem	Heritage values	Timing	Climate change	Coastal development	Land-based runoff	Direct use
Altered weather patterns	■	■	▲	●			
Ocean acidification	■	■	▲	●			
Sea-temperature increase	■	■	▲	●			
Sea-level rise	■	■	10+	●			
Modifying coastal habitats	■	■	▲		●		
Nutrient runoff	■	■	▲		●	●	
Sediment runoff	■	■	▲		●	●	
Illegal fishing and extraction	■	■	▲				●
Altered ocean currents	■	■	▲	●			
Barriers to flow	■	■	▲		●		
Discarded catch	■	■	▲				●
Extraction of particle feeders	■	■	▲				●
Extraction of predators	■	■	▲				●
Foundational capacity gaps	■	■	▲				●
Fragmentation of cultural knowledge	■	■	▲				●
Incidental catch of species of conservation concern	■	■	▲				●
Incompatible uses	■	■	▲				●
Marine debris	■	■	▲		●	●	●
Outbreak of crown-of-thorns starfish	■	■	▲			●	●
Artificial light	■	■	▲		●		●
Behaviour impacting heritage values		■	▲				●
Damage to reef structure	■	■	▲				●
Extraction from spawning aggregations	■	■	▲				●
Outbreaks of disease	■	■	▲	Cumulative effect of many factors			
Pesticide runoff	■	■	▲			●	
Illegal activities — other	■	■	▲				●
Acid sulfate soils	■	■	▲		●	●	
Damage to seafloor	■	■	▲				●
Disposal of dredge material	■	■	▲		●		●
Dredging	■	■	▲		●		●
Exotic species	■	■	▲		●	●	●
Genetic modification	■	■	▲				●
Grounding — large vessel	■	■	▲				●
Grounding — small vessel	■	■	▲				●
Noise pollution	■	■	▲		●		●
Outbreak of other species	■	■	▲	Cumulative effect of many factors			
Spill — large chemical	■	■	▲		●		●
Spill — large oil	■	■	▲		●		●
Terrestrial discharge	■	■	▲			●	
Vessel strike	■	■	▲				●
Vessel waste discharge	■	■	▲				●
Wildlife disturbance	■	■	▲				●
Extraction of herbivores	■	■	▲				●
Atmospheric pollution	■	■	▲		●		●
Spill — small	■	■	▲				●

Threat	Risk	Timing
■ Region-wide	■ Low risk	▲ Now
□ Local or regional	■ Medium risk	10+ More than 10 years
	■ High risk	
	■ Very high risk	

Participant poll results

2025 Reef Forum – Poll Results

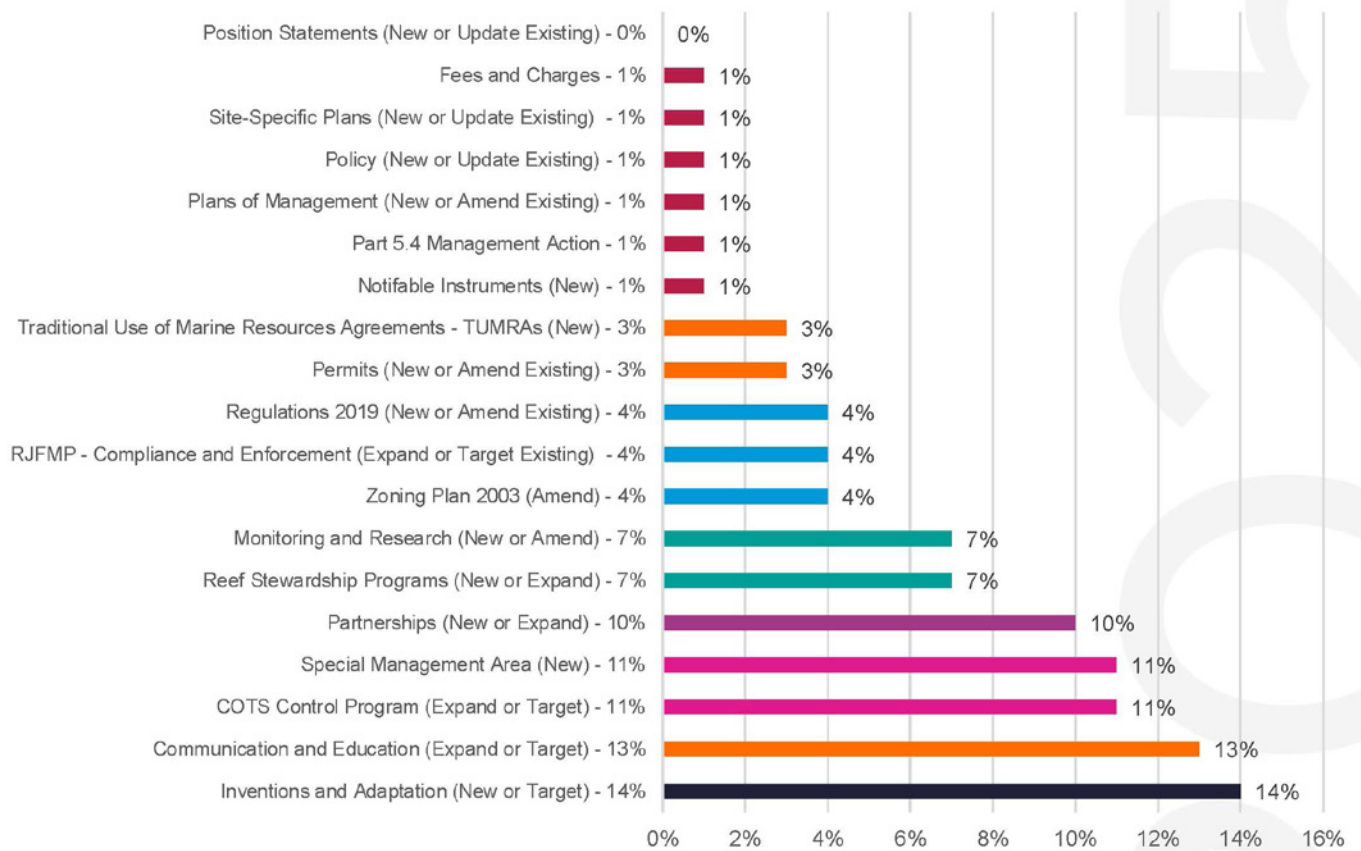
Figure 1: Which of the top 20 key threats to the Great Barrier Reef are of most concern to you/your sector



Participant poll results



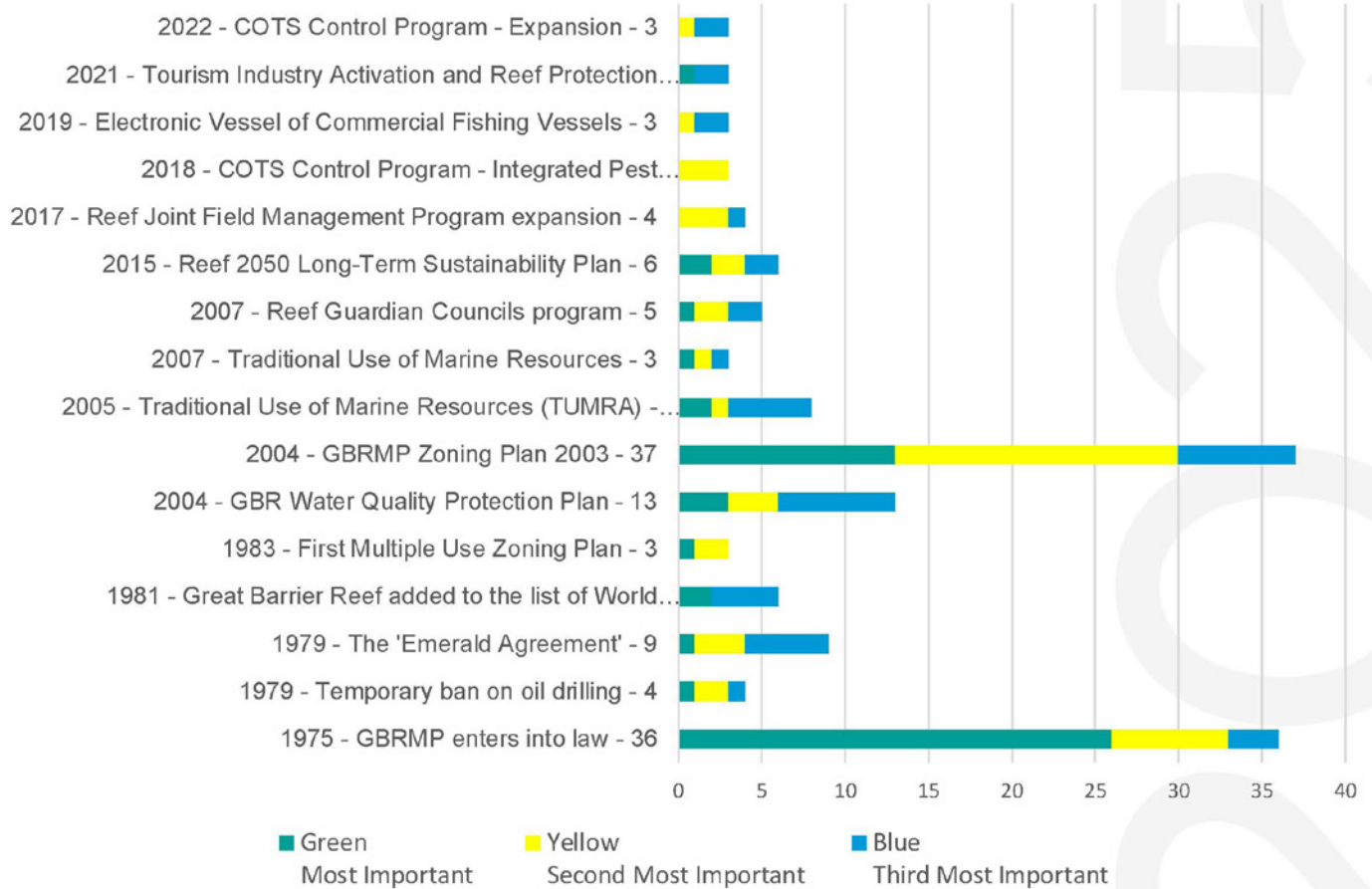
Figure 2: Which management tools should the Reef Authority focus capability on in response to future scenarios? (Select three responses)



Participant poll results



Figure 3: Timeline Wall Results – The Most Significant Reef Authority Management Action



Factsheet: Crown-of-thorns starfish



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CROWN-OF-THORNS STARFISH CONTROL PROGRAM

The Crown-of-thorns Starfish (COTS) Control Program delivers a targetable, adaptive, scalable and proven effective coral protection action that supports the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef.

Vessels with highly-skilled dive teams are strategically deployed across the Great Barrier Reef to survey more than 200 reefs annually and reduce numbers of the coral-eating starfish to sustainable levels via manual culling.

Since 2012, the Program has delivered more than 155,000 diver hours, culled over 1.4 million starfish, and suppressed outbreaks across 452 reefs – protecting coral from COTS predation across more than 832,000 ha of Reef habitat.

During the 2024-2025 financial year, six (6) Program vessels collectively delivered 1,247 on-water days and almost 20,000 diver hours to action 234 reefs for surveillance and culling where required. Over 18,000 manta tow surveys and 3,448 cull dives were deployed across more than 56,000 ha of Reef habitat. More than

73,000 COTS were culled, and sustainable densities were achieved at 84 per cent of actioned cull sites.

The Program currently contracts four small to medium enterprises, including one Indigenous business, to deliver on-water operations, providing direct employment for more than 100 people in regional Queensland.

Strengthening Reef resilience through evidence-based management actions, including the COTS Control Program is vital as climate change pressures on the ecosystem amplify.

All Program contracts support the Australian Government's Indigenous Procurement Policy and the Net Zero Emissions by 2030 Strategy.



Scan the QR code for more information on the Crown-of-thorns Starfish Control Program.



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Factsheet: Reef stewardship



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REEF STEWARDSHIP

Management of the Great Barrier Reef (Reef) requires a collective effort. Through targeted education and engagement initiatives, the Reef Authority works to ensure Reef values are understood and protected through mutually beneficial relationships with Traditional Owners, local, state and Australian government agencies, Reef dependent communities and industries, schools, and the broader national and international community.

- Local Marine Advisory Committees since 1998 – 171 members
- Reef Guardian Schools since 2003 – 380 Schools
- Reef Guardian Councils since 2007 – 21 Councils
- High Standard Tourism Operators since 2004 – 72 Operators
- Eye on the Reef since 2007
- Master Reef Guides since 2019
- Tourism Reef Protection Initiative since 2022

Local Marine Advisory Committees

Local Marine Advisory Committees are a network of community members and management partners who meet regularly to provide advice to the Reef Authority on Marine Park management. There are nine committees stretching across the Reef catchment.



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Reef Guardian Councils

The Reef Guardian Councils program supports environmentally sustainable practices undertaken by councils in the Reef catchment. There are 21 councils between K'gari and Cooktown involved in the program, representing more than one million people and covering more than 75 per cent of the Reef catchment.

Reef Guardian Schools

Established in 2003, the Reef Guardian Schools program encourages teachers and students to take actions that help protect the Reef and its connected ecosystems. Through the Reef Guardian School Portal, the Reef Authority shares curriculum and creative educational material with over 380 schools from across Australia and the world. These schools then share their actions and achievements with other Reef Guardian schools nationally and internationally.

Tourism Stewardship

The Reef Authority harnesses tourism as a force for Reef protection via initiatives encouraging marine tourism operators and visitors to be ambassadors for the Reef. Every visitor to the Reef supports the Reef Authority's work via the Environmental Management Charge (EMC) applied to Reef tourism experiences. The Reef Authority has developed several impactful programs to encourage sharing the Reef's values through best-practice sustainable tourism.



Factsheet: Reef stewardship



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REEF STEWARDSHIP

These include the High Standard Tour Operator program recognising operators for their commitment and dedication to sustainable tourism practices, site stewardship and showcasing the Reef, and its Master Reef Guide program, which provides intensive training to an annual cohort of professional Reef guides to provide them with the latest knowledge and guiding methods.

In 2023-24, 72 High Standard Tourism Operators carried 1.4 million visitors to the Reef, and the Reef Authority supported them with training Master Reef Guides to expertly educate tourists and visitors about the Reef and the actions needed to protect it.

The Tourism Reef Protection Initiative engages tourism operators to implement Site Stewardship Plans that support industry adaptation to the increasing impacts of climate change. By providing an evidence-based, synthesis process that integrates the best available scientific data with on-site monitoring data collected by the tourism operator, the Site Stewardship Plans inform a whole-of-site understanding which guides effective stewardship actions in response to impacts, building site resilience and industry capacity.

Stewardship actions include Eye on the Reef - Tourism Weekly Surveys, Photo Point Enhancement of Tourism Weekly Surveys with machine learning and advanced image analysis, Reef Health and Impact Surveys, crown-of-thorns starfish control, Drupella snail removal, site research and rehabilitation.

The Reef health data collected through the Tourism Reef Protection Initiative goes directly to the Reef Authority's Eye on the Reef database contributing to situational awareness and informing the COTS Control Program, Reef health situational awareness, the Reef Summer Snapshot and the Outlook Report.

Since June 2024, 26 Reef tourism operators have:

- delivered 3240 days of Reef protection / stewardship
- protected 272 high-value tourism sites at 109 priority reefs
- removed 4049 COTS and 278,560 Drupella snails
- completed 23,293 Eye on the Reef – Reef Health Surveys
- contributed 118,596 images in 926 photo transects
- facilitated 425 visits for Traditional Owners
- facilitated Reef visits for 1592 students and over 115 school education excursions.



Scan the QR code for more information on Reef Authority stewardship programs.



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Factsheet: Responsible Reef practices



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RESPONSIBLE REEF PRACTICES

The Great Barrier Reef is one of the most complex and spectacular marine ecosystems on the planet, and a bucket list destination unlike any other for those who enjoy snorkelling and diving, fishing and boating, or any of the myriad marine activities on offer.

Responsible Reef Practices are a series of steps all visitors can take to minimise their impact when visiting the Great Barrier Reef. These practices include following marine park zoning rules, low impact boating and anchoring, acting safely and responsibly around marine life, best practice diving and snorkelling, responsible fishing and waste disposal, low impact water sports and island visiting.

These practices are available on the Reef Authority website, through the Eye on the Reef app, and regularly promoted through our social media messaging.

Responsible Reef Practices

1. Follow boating guidelines: When boating, anchor on sand or mud away from coral, or ideally use designated moorings. This helps to prevent coral damage.
2. Operate all motor craft safely: Follow all speed limits and be aware of marine life, specifically around whale season and turtle nesting periods. Go slow for those below.
3. Know your zones: Some activities and operations occurring in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the Great Barrier Reef (Coast) Marine Park may

not be allowed or may require a permit. Make sure you know what activities are permitted in different zones and ensure you have the correct permission – where required – for your activity.

4. Respect wildlife: Observe marine animals from a distance without chasing or feeding them, which can alter their natural behaviours and create unsafe conditions, particularly where crocodiles or sharks are present.
5. Dispose of waste properly: Litter, especially plastics, pollutes the Reef environment and harms marine animals. Take your waste home with you and use recycling and waste facilities on land.
6. Take only photos: Taking shells and marine creatures disrupts the ecosystem and is illegal in protected areas. Corals are fragile and can be easily damaged by physical contact, which can lead to disease and death. Avoid touching where possible.
7. Tell us what you see: The Eye on the Reef app enables you access zoning maps and rules and record Reef health, animal sightings or incidents. The app also works outside of mobile range. By using the app, you contribute valuable data to help Reef managers understand and protect these ecosystems.



Scan the QR code below to see the step by step guide to Responsible Reef Practices.



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Factsheet: Reef Joint Field Management Program



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REEF JOINT FIELD MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Reef Joint Field Management Program (the Program) is responsible for the planning and delivery of in-field activities and field operations within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (World Heritage Area). This includes Commonwealth and state marine parks, plus Commonwealth islands and state island protected areas.

The Program is delivered jointly by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (Reef Authority) and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service — part of the Queensland Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation. There are also established and evolving collaborative arrangements with allied government agencies, First Nations peoples, research institutions, industry and the community to work together to protect the World Heritage Area.

The Program employs more than 178 staff who oversee the delivery of in-field activities across the 344,000 km² of marine parks and 470 island national parks and Commonwealth islands through five key work areas:

- delivering conservation actions
- monitoring environmental changes
- responding to incidents
- enhancing visitor experiences
- upholding compliance.

These efforts mitigate threats, maintain the Reef's values and support ecosystem resilience through monitoring Reef health, delivering surveillance and compliance to uphold Marine Park zoning and management plans (and deter illegal activity), responding to maritime incidents, implementing conservation actions, maintaining visitor infrastructure, and connecting with Reef users.

Central to this is the Program's commitment to supporting and building the capacity of Traditional Owners to manage Land and Sea Country, integrating their Traditional Knowledge and custodianship into management practices.

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RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024–25

- Delivered 1,109 dedicated compliance days to deter illegal activity — including 970 vessel, 52 land and 87 aerial days.
- Delivered compliance training to 38 Indigenous Land and Sea Rangers from 5 groups to address non-compliance in their Sea Country.
- Conducted aerial surveys of 281 reefs from Townsville to the Torres Strait to assess the summer coral bleaching event.
- Managed risks associated with 50 maritime events, including 23 groundings and 15 sinkings.
- Gazetted 434 ha, now totalling 2,026 ha over 25 national parks, as protected area through the Island Arks project.
- 5,803 contacts with users while on patrol—97% of these visitors had access to marine park zoning information.
- Over 64 days of dedicated COTS monitoring activity and 1,013 in-water surveys delivered across 94 reefs covering 641 km of Reef margin.
- 2,000 Reef Health Impact Surveys (RHIS) delivered across 206 reefs, including 310 surveys during the summer coral bleaching event.

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee's decision on the Great Barrier Reef (dated 24 June 2024) recommended the Reef Joint Field Management Program be maintained, and funding for innovation and scaling up of priority solutions increased.



Scan the QR code for more information on the Reef Joint Field Management Program.



Factsheet: Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements (TUMRA)



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TRADITIONAL USE OF MARINE RESOURCES AGREEMENTS (TUMRA) PROGRAM

For more than 20 years, the Reef Authority has created enduring partnerships with Traditional Owners across the Great Barrier Reef catchment, underpinned by Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements (TUMRAs).

TUMRAs, developed and led by saltwater Traditional Owners and clan groups, are instrumental in managing their Sea Country estates and are designed with clear strategic direction, governance structures, and strong leadership.

There are 10 accredited TUMRAs, co-designed with the Reef Authority and Queensland Government, covering 43 per cent of Reef coastline, with a further three groups working towards a TUMRA.

Each Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement has a steering committee to manage the agreement and Traditional use of marine resources in their Sea Country, including Traditional take (if any) of important species such as dugongs and turtles. Their management of Traditional use is based on both cultural lore and contemporary science and are also used for broader Sea Country planning and management.

TUMRAs also provide a framework for Traditional Owners to engage meaningfully with the Reef Authority's programs such as the Crown-of-thorns

Starfish Control Program and Reef Guardian stewardship initiatives through local councils and schools.

They recognise and uphold Native Title rights, capturing the interests and responsibilities of Traditional Owners who possess an intrinsic spiritual connection to the Reef. There are some 70 Great Barrier Reef Traditional Owner groups across the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park; all of whom have been actively supporting and protecting their Sea Country for thousands of years.

TUMRAs have also supported the development of the Indigenous Ranger program and facilitated Traditional Owner collaboration with other government agencies, the private sector, and local communities.

Moreover, students in year 11 and 12 across Queensland high schools now explore TUMRAs as part of their marine science curriculum, where applicable.

We look forward to the next decade and beyond of increasing co-management, as we deepen our relationships with Traditional Owners to keep Sea Country strong, safe and healthy.



Scan the QR code for more information on the Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements (TUMRA) Program.



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