



Australian Government  
Great Barrier Reef  
Marine Park Authority



Queensland  
Government

# INSIGHT STORIES

Reef Joint Field Management Program

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# What is the Reef Joint Field Management Program?



The Great Barrier Reef (the Reef) is one of the most complex ecosystems on the planet and an integral part of Australia's identity. It is home to some of the world's most iconic plant and animal species, some of which are found nowhere else on earth. With more than 2,900 individual reefs and 1,050 islands spread across 348,000 square kilometres, a world class Reef Joint Field Management Program (the Program) is crucial for protecting Australia's greatest natural wonder for future generations.

The Reef is not just beautiful, it's one of the most precious and diverse ecosystems on Earth. Fiercely loved by people within Australia – and worldwide – the area is also critical to the cultural, economic and social well-being of local and regional communities and Australians more broadly.

We all want to see the Reef thrive, both now and in the future, but system-wide declines in the condition of the Reef have put it under pressure. We all have a part to play, this is where the Program comes in.

The Program plans and delivers on-ground actions to protect the Reef, including Commonwealth and State marine parks (plus Commonwealth Island Zones) and island protected areas like National Parks.

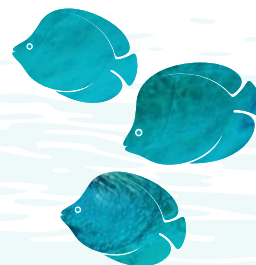
The Program plays a proactive role in maintaining the values and building resilience of the Reef, delivering hands-on results while global efforts to limit climate change and regional actions to improve water quality have the time to take effect.

Run jointly by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Queensland Department of Environment and Science (through the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service), the Program carries out key actions outlined in the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan 2021-25 and Reef Blueprint 2030. To ensure we have the very best people on the job at all times, the Program has established evolving partnerships with Traditional Owners, allied government agencies, research institutions, Reef-dependent industries and communities.






# The five Program priorities are:























	<b>DELIVERING CONSERVATION ACTIONS</b> to protect and recover important natural and cultural values, including coral reefs, seagrass meadows, mangrove forests, coral cays, continental islands, threatened species and cultural heritage.	
	<b>CHECKING FOR CHANGE</b> on islands and in the water to monitor reef and island conditions and determine the extent of existing or emerging threats.	
	<b>RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS</b> involving ships and smaller vessel groundings and sinkings, pollution spills, bushfires, coral bleaching, island and marine pest incursions, stranded marine animals and extreme weather events.	
	<b>WELCOMING PEOPLE</b> to improve community understanding of values and threats, foster responsible behaviour and provide visitor facilities.	
	<b>UPHOLDING COMPLIANCE</b> to manage the impact users pose to the Reef. The Program delivers risk-focused, well-planned and intelligence-driven patrols to detect and deter illegal activity.	






















**The Program is partnering with Traditional Owners and ensuring the best resources are available to successfully deliver all five priorities.**

	<b>WORKING WITH TRADITIONAL OWNERS</b> The Program is actively seeking to strengthen partnerships with First Nations peoples to plan, deliver and report on field management activities and fill gaps where relationships are emerging.	
	<b>PROGRAM INPUTS</b> The Program requires several inputs to deliver the five Program priorities and work with First Nations peoples, including funding, staff, vessels, work bases, training and technology.	

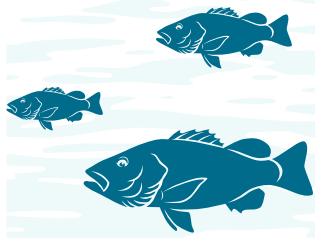
# Our achievements in 2022-23

 <b>DELIVERING CONSERVATION ACTIONS</b>	 <b>RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS</b>	 <b>CHECKING FOR CHANGE</b>
<div data-bbox="140 539 523 685">  <p><b>SAVING FLATBACK TURTLES</b> by eradicating deer from Wild Duck Island on track for 2024</p> </div> <div data-bbox="140 725 523 893"> <p><b>PROTECTING HERITAGE</b> by restoring the Raine Island beacon completed with Traditional Owners</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="140 911 523 1106">  <p><b>PROTECTING CORAL AND SEAGRASS</b> 321 moorings and 293 reef protection markers inspected and maintained</p> </div> <div data-bbox="140 1124 523 1319"> <p><b>EXPANDING ISLAND PROTECTION</b> with three leasehold properties purchased to expand on the protected area estate</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="140 1337 523 1505">  <p><b>PROTECTING KEY ISLAND VALUES</b> with 4 fire strategies and 3 pest strategies developed</p> </div> <div data-bbox="140 1523 523 1659"> <p><b>REEF REHABILITATION</b> including a planting blitz of 1,100 corals across the Reef</p>  </div>	<div data-bbox="582 539 965 685">  <p><b>UNDERSTANDING REEF THREATS</b> pre-summer workshop assessed the risk of coral bleaching and cyclones</p> </div> <div data-bbox="582 759 965 1061"> <p><b>MONITORING REEF THREATS</b> maintaining situational awareness of environmental and reef health conditions and forecasting, with regular checks of conditions, modelling and reef health reporting, with no mass coral bleaching events detected over the 2022-23 summer</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="582 1124 965 1397">  <p><b>PROTECTING ENVIRONMENTS</b> mitigating risk associated with 152 maritime events, including 81 groundings, sinkings, abandoned vessels, up from 117 events in 2021-22</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="1024 539 1407 640">  <p><b>MONITORING REEF HEALTH</b> 1,122 in-water surveys across 169 reefs</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1024 669 1407 904"> <p><b>ENSURING EARLY DETECTION</b> 3,118 manta tow surveys that monitor reefs for crown-of-thorns starfish, covering 618km of reef-margin across the World Heritage Area</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="1024 934 1407 1128">  <p><b>KEEPING TABS ON SEABIRDS</b> 212 bird surveys at 135 locations identified 92 species, including 22 shorebird and 26 seabird species</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1024 1158 1407 1543"> <p><b>UNDERSTANDING POPULATIONS</b> supported or delivered monitoring at 90% of priority marine turtle nesting and foraging index sites within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area — seven nesting index sites (Raine, Wild Duck, Milman, Heron, Lady Musgrave, Curtis and Peak islands) and two foraging sites (Port Curtis and Howick Reefs)</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="1024 1572 1407 1789">  <p><b>WATCHING ISLANDS</b> health checks on 45 islands that haven't been surveyed previously with a total of 159 Island Watch surveys completed</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1024 1818 1407 2002"> <p><b>FILLING KNOWLEDGE GAPS</b> with surveys completed to improve the vegetation mapping of 70 national park islands</p>  </div>
		



 <b>WELCOMING PEOPLE</b>	 <b>UPHOLDING COMPLIANCE</b>	 <b>WORKING WITH TRADITIONAL OWNERS</b>
<div data-bbox="140 539 528 685">  <p><b>ENGAGING WITH WORLD HERITAGE AREA VISITORS</b> 3,045 contacts with park users while on patrol</p> </div> <div data-bbox="140 719 528 931"> <p><b>ENCOURAGING STEWARDSHIP</b> volunteers and Indigenous Land and Sea Rangers responded to 74% of reported marine strandings, down from 84% in 2021–22</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="140 954 528 1200">  <p><b>ENABLING SUSTAINABLE USE</b> decisions made on 285 joint marine parks permit applications, 21 state marine parks permit applications and 79 national park permit applications</p> </div> <div data-bbox="140 1223 528 1525"> <p><b>COLLABORATING WITH VOLUNTEERS</b> supporting 22 volunteers assisting with weed control across protected islands (10 at Heron and Lady Musgrave islands; 12 at Magnetic Island), with 2,000 volunteer work hours delivered</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="140 1547 528 1693">  <p><b>INFORMING THE COMMUNITY</b> 111 social media posts, 22 media releases</p> </div> <div data-bbox="140 1715 528 1962"> <p><b>CREATING NEW VISITOR OPPORTUNITIES</b> Curtis Island Turtle Street campground and Lady Musgrave Island visitor amenities upgraded and new walking track at Orpheus Island completed</p>  </div>	<div data-bbox="582 539 970 685">  <p><b>PROTECTING YOUR PATCH</b> park users provided 61 compliance incident reports of illegal activity</p> </div> <div data-bbox="582 719 970 931"> <p><b>PROTECTING THE REEF AND ISLANDS</b> 1,110 dedicated compliance days to deter illegal activity: 994 vessel, 32 land and 84 aerials</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="582 954 970 1155">  <p><b>UNDERSTANDING REEF USE</b> 74% of dedicated compliance days undertaken during high-risk illegal recreational fishing periods</p> </div> <div data-bbox="582 1178 970 1424"> <p><b>PROMOTING INDUSTRY STEWARDSHIP</b> over 1,000 commercial fisheries vessels tracked, leading to 44 offences prosecuted and 66 advisory letters sent</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="582 1447 970 1693"> <p><b>IMPOSING CONSEQUENCES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HARM</b> 71 court prosecutions, 49 infringement notices, 19 caution notices and 540 advisory letters</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="555 1727 997 2092">  </div>	<div data-bbox="1024 539 1412 730">  <p><b>MANAGING COUNTRY TOGETHER</b> First Nations peoples spent 948 person-days on Program vessels, 431 from outside the Program and 527 from within</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1024 752 1412 1111"> <p><b>SHARING WORKPLACES</b> creating opportunities for Traditional Owners through four temporary ranger placement programs developed between QPWS and Mandubarra, Gimuy Walubara Yidinji, Darumbal and Woppaburra Traditional Owner groups and an additional three embedded Wulgurukaba rangers working with QPWS at Yunbenun (Magnetic Island)</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="1024 1133 1412 1447"> <p><b>RESPECTING COUNTRY</b> Cultural awareness videos produced for the Mandubarra Aboriginal Corporation and Darumbal People Aboriginal Corporation Registered Native Title Body for Program staff to watch before visiting Country</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="1024 1469 1412 1626"> <p><b>BUILDING CAPACITY</b> 28 Indigenous rangers from 14 First Nations groups completed diver training</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="1024 1648 1412 1805">  <p><b>STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS</b> 16 fee-for-service arrangements with Indigenous ranger groups</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1024 1827 1412 2018"> <p><b>ENCOURAGING COMPLIANCE AWARENESS</b> 86 of the 1,110 days of dedicated compliance patrols were conducted with Indigenous Compliance Rangers that are external to the Program</p>  </div>





## A superstar on-screen and off – a day in the life of a Marine Parks compliance officer.

As the morning sun bathes the Keppel Islands in a golden glow, Owen Witt, a Reef Authority compliance officer, prepares for another day safeguarding the southern Great Barrier Reef. Accompanied by Fishing Australia host Rob Paxevanos, Owen sets out to showcase the vital work of the Program and promote responsible practices.

In the episode aired on 17 December 2023, viewers gained insight into the diverse tasks undertaken by Owen and his fellow officers during compliance activities. From covert surveillance to on-water engagement with visitors, their duties are far from ordinary. Owen, an avid fisherman, stresses the importance of adhering to marine parks zoning rules and using tools like the Eye on the Reef app to minimise impact on the precious ecosystem.

Joined by local QPWS rangers the episode highlights the range of skills required to manage and protect the Reef. Compliance operations are driven by conservation, education, and partnerships. Tyler Malone, a Darumbal Traditional Owner and ranger on placement with QPWS, shares her experiences, emphasising the significance of respecting Country and collaborating to conserve it.

As the credits roll, Owen reflects on the day's events with satisfaction. "Every day brings new challenges, but knowing we're making a difference makes it all worthwhile," he says. For Owen and his colleagues, protecting the Reef is more than just a job – it's a calling. With each passing day, they remain steadfast guardians of this natural wonder, ensuring its protection lasts for generations.



**Click the image below** to experience the captivating journey firsthand by watching the episode on Nine Now.





## Empowering Indigenous Rangers: a dynamic approach to placements.

Over the past three years, the Indigenous placement ranger program has been operated as part of the Reef Joint Field Management Program. The aim of the placements, which can be six months or longer, is to give Traditional Owner rangers an opportunity to gain skills, experience and knowledge working alongside Program staff, as well as building relationships and managing Country together.

The first contracted placement was in January 2021 with Darumbal Traditional Owner Colin Hatfield. Following the success of the initial placement, the program has expanded with interest expressed by Traditional Owner groups. There have now been six Indigenous placement rangers from six Traditional Owner groups – Darumbal, Gunggandji-Mandingalbay Yidinji (GMY), Mandubarra, Rinyirru, Lama Lama and, most recently, Woppaburra. Placements have been at the QPWS bases in Cairns and Rosslyn Bay.

The placement program feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Darumbal People Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC Director Malcolm Mann supports the continuation of the program, emphasising its role in fostering stronger partnerships. This program not only offers employment opportunities but also facilitates access to Country and provides avenues for skills enhancement, thereby potentially leading to future employment opportunities with QPWS.

Gunggandji man and GMY ranger Brody Gray says one of the highlights of his placement was getting his dive and machinery tickets. For Usop Drahm, Mandubarra man and ranger, it was about being on Country and getting the rest of the family involved. Colin Hatfield has transitioned into permanent employment with QPWS at Rosslyn Bay and, Tyler Malone, Darumbal ranger, is currently continuing her placement. Additionally, four other rangers have returned to their respective corporations upon completing their placements.

In line with QPWS principles and values, the placement program has demonstrated adaptability and growth by integrating rangers at Yunbenun (Magnetic Island). Three Wulgurukaba Yunbenun Land and Sea Rangers have also been engaged in various capital works projects on the island, as well as additional tasks alongside QPWS rangers.

The placement program has yielded many positive outcomes, including new career pathways, employment, capacity development, enhanced partnerships, and building of relationships and communications skills.



**Click the image below** to hear firsthand about the experiences of some the placement program participants by watching this short video.







## A nautical milestone: *Island Guardian* and *Barcoo* join the Reef's fleet.

In a significant stride to protect the Reef, we are proud to introduce two new vessels to our fleet: *Island Guardian* and *Barcoo*.

Stationed in Townsville, *Island Guardian* is a \$6.3 million, 20-metre barge dedicated to operating throughout the entirety of the Reef, servicing marine parks and protected islands, notably in Far North Queensland.

With a cruising speed of 20 knots and a range of 500 nautical miles, *Island Guardian* boasts a six-tonne cargo capacity and accommodation for seven people for up to 10 days. The vessel facilitates the transport of heavy machinery, tools and materials to even the most remote Reef sections.

This capability is crucial for maintaining the 347 public moorings and 289 reef protection markers as well as preserving essential reef and seagrass habitats. *Island Guardian* will also contribute significantly to the upkeep of infrastructure across the Reef's island network, including 163km of walking track, 111 campgrounds, 21 boardwalks and lookouts, and 15km of public roads.

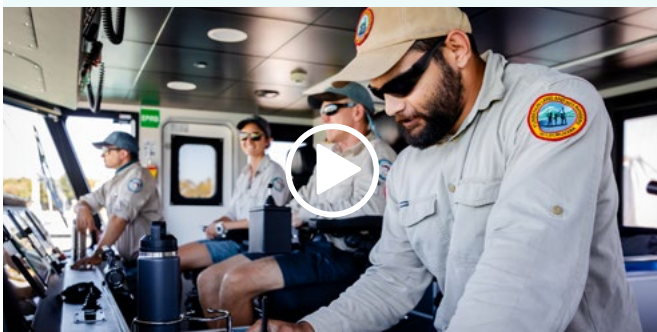
The new \$1.83 million, 12-metre *Barcoo* patrol vessel stationed at Rosslyn Bay on the Capricorn Coast in the southern Great Barrier Reef is equally remarkable. *Barcoo* is tasked with various operations including compliance, public education and monitoring between Yeppoon and Mackay.

Boasting a cruising speed of 25 knots and a range of 350 nautical miles, *Barcoo*'s composite hull, energy-efficient construction and extended life expectancy make it a tailored solution for the Program's needs. Equipped to accommodate two individuals for extended missions and up to 14 on day trips, *Barcoo* is a versatile addition to our fleet.

Both *Barcoo* and *Island Guardian* are valuable additions to the Program's 21-strong vessel fleet. The vessels signify our long-term dedication to management efforts across the Reef. Designed by Incat Crowther and constructed in Brisbane by Norman R Wright and Sons, they represent a significant investment in protecting this natural wonder for future generations.



[Click the image below](#) to learn more about these transformative new vessels.





## Safeguarding the oldest European structure in Australia's northern tropics: the Raine Island beacon.

Last year, a monumental task was accomplished on a remote island in the far northern Great Barrier Reef, restoring the 179-year-old Raine Island beacon. This heritage-listed structure, a significant historical monument, underwent a \$1.3 million restoration project across five visits in 2021 and 2022.

Built in 1844 to aid ship navigation, the beacon is made of stone quarried from Raine Island's phosphate rock and timber salvaged from the wreck of the *Martha Ridgeway*. Supervised by New South Wales soldiers, construction workers endured harsh conditions over four months. Around the beacon, there are approximately 900 inscriptions dating back to the late 1800s, including names and messages:

- J.H. Robinson – Gatton – Aug A. McCallum – Brig 'Prairie' – 1876
- H.M.S. Challenger – Capt. Nares – Aug 1874
- H.M.S. Herald – Capt. H.M. Denham – March 1865
- Fresh water at 7 feet. A. Mac J. Barnett – New York – Aug 1876
- H.M.S. Viraqo – Capt. Bingham – Jan 1866

Mer Gedkem Le Corporation chairman Falen Passi emphasises the tradition of leaving messages for seafarers. His name and his great-grandfather's name are both carved on the beacon. "That's the message that I believe I will pass to my great-great-grandson – to say that I was there, on that island."

Despite skilled craftsmanship, the beacon suffered damage from weather over time. Restoration efforts involved stonemasonry repairs, treatment of algal deposits, and consultation with the Wuthathi people and Meriam Nations. The project used tonnes of materials and equipment, as well as desalinated water transported via marine park vessels. These efforts ensure the beacon's endurance for future generations.



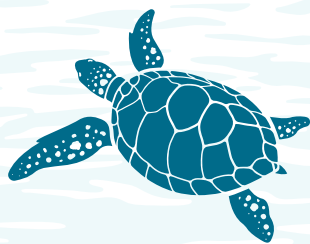
**Click here** to learn more about the beacon and Raine Island National Park (Scientific) by visiting our Parks website.



**Click the image below** to watch a short video of the restoration work.







## Elevating visitor experiences while safeguarding cultural heritage: a remarkable week at Mara-Jumbun.

During July 2023, members of the Program came together to facilitate a special event: the on-Country camp at Mara-Jumbun (Goold Island). This experience brought together the Traditional Owners of Munamudanamy (Hinchinbrook Island) Country for the Bandjin and Girramay peoples. The week-long event was held as part of a \$3 million investment aimed at enhancing and building new nature-based visitor experiences and facilities along the renowned Thorsborne Trail, nestled within the unspoiled confines of Hinchinbrook Island National Park.

The gathering of more than 40 Traditional Owners served as a profound opportunity to forge a deeper connection with their Country. This collaborative initiative was part of an ongoing and genuine partnership with the Program, ensuring that the proposed upgrades not only offer enhanced visitor experiences, but also safeguard and celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the national park.

Throughout this inspiring week, the synergy between Program staff and the Traditional Owners was palpable.

Their shared commitment to the cause was demonstrated through the quarterly working group meetings, insightful site visits to Ramsay Bay and Cape Richards, and the invaluable process of documenting and preserving culturally significant narratives and values. With the generous permission of the Traditional Owners, their aspirations and intellectual treasures will guide the communication strategies for the Munamudanamy project, ensuring authenticity and respect in every message conveyed.

This endeavour was a resounding success – a testament to the relentless dedication of the Program staff. The Traditional Owners expressed how impactful the on-country camp had been on their spirits. The harmonious relationship between the Program and these extraordinary Traditional custodians shows the resolute commitment to co-managing our marine and national parks in genuine partnership.



**Click the image below** to watch the picture book of the event.







## For more information about the Reef Joint Field Management Program

Please visit:

-  [www.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-work/field-management](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-work/field-management)
-  [www.facebook.com/GreatBarrierReefMarinePark/](https://www.facebook.com/GreatBarrierReefMarinePark/)
-  [www.instagram.com/gbrmarinepark/](https://www.instagram.com/gbrmarinepark/)
-  [twitter.com/gbrmarinepark](https://twitter.com/gbrmarinepark)
-  [www.linkedin.com/company/great-barrier-reef-marine-park-authority](https://www.linkedin.com/company/great-barrier-reef-marine-park-authority)
-  [www.facebook.com/qldnationalparks](https://www.facebook.com/qldnationalparks)
-  [www.instagram.com/qldparks/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/qldparks/?hl=en)
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-  [au.linkedin.com/company/department-of-environment-and-science](https://au.linkedin.com/company/department-of-environment-and-science)