

# REEF JOINT FIELD MANAGEMENT PROGRAM ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN SUMMARY 2024-25

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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 Department of Environment, Science and Innovation (DESI). There are also established and evolving collaborative arrangements with Traditional Owners, allied government agencies, research institutions, reef-dependent industries and the community to work together to protect the World Heritage Area.

This Annual Business Plan Summary outlines the activities and priority projects the Program will undertake in 2024–25 to protect the World Heritage Area from threats, build resilience for marine habitats, islands and species, strengthen partnerships with Traditional Owners and support ecotourism opportunities.

## PROGRAM BUDGET

The *Great Barrier Reef Intergovernmental Agreement 2015* (the Agreement) sets out the Australian and Queensland governments' commitment to a joint 50:50 funding of the Program. The Program's anticipated funds for 2024–25 are \$39,584,710. The Program will also oversee around \$12 million in funding from other sources on behalf of the Reef Authority and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

## PROGRAM PRIORITIES

The Program operates under five priorities to deliver nine outcomes identified in the Agreement and mitigate threats to the World Heritage Area. In recognition of the increasing partnership activities with Traditional Owners, relevant activities and priority projects are consolidated into one section 'Working with Traditional Owners' to recognise this important work.

### FIVE JOINT FIELD MANAGEMENT PROGRAM PRIORITIES



WORKING WITH  
FIRST NATIONS  
PEOPLE



PROGRAM  
INPUTS

### NINE INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT OUTCOMES

- 1 PROTECT OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE
- 2 PROTECT VULNERABLE SPECIES AND HABITATS
- 3 EFFECTIVE COMPLIANCE
- 4 EFFECTIVE PERMITTING
- 5 ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE USE
- 6 UNDERSTANDING AND ENJOYMENT
- 7 WORKING WITH TRADITIONAL OWNERS
- 8 INCREASING EFFECTIVENESS
- 9 INCIDENT RESPONSE

### REEF 2050 VISION



## PROGRAM PRIORITIES



### 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.



### 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 reef and island condition and the extent of existing or emerging threats.



### 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.



### 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 good visitor experiences.



### 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 deter and detect illegal activity.



### 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.



### PROGRAM INPUTS

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

## EXPECTED OUTPUTS

- Planned burns and hazard reduction activities reduce bushfire risk, protect property and promote healthy vegetation.
- Pest management reduces threats to islands and species.
- Moorings and reef protection markers maintained.
- Island management is informed by management effectiveness and evaluation.

- Reef surveys inform reef health awareness and management.
- Crown-of-thorns starfish surveillance identifies outbreak extent and severity and informs control efforts.
- Understanding of island condition and trend improves.
- Population trends of seabirds and shorebirds are monitored.
- Emerging island threats identified.
- Understanding of turtle nesting and foraging sites improves.

- Risk-based response to incidents.
- In-field assessment of the extent and severity of damage from maritime incidents.

- Timely risk-based assessment and administration of the joint permission system.
- Community stewardship and involvement in field management delivery.
- Connecting and engaging with World Heritage Area users.
- Maintained visitor infrastructure.

- Compliance patrols by the Program and partners deter and detect illegal activity.
- Compliance effort corresponds with high-risk illegal recreational fishing periods.
- Marine parks permit conditions are followed.
- Educate the community and industry about World Heritage Area rules and responsibilities.
- External Indigenous rangers are engaged in Program compliance delivery.

- Work placement opportunities continue for Traditional Owner groups.
- Traditional Owner groups are involved in field management delivery.

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

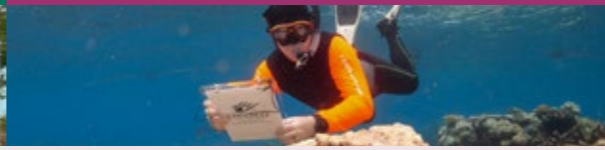
## DELIVERING CONSERVATION ACTIONS

## CHECKING FOR CHANGE

## RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS

## WELCOMING PEOPLE

## UPHOLDING COMPLIANCE



### ACTIVITIES

- Maintain moorings and reef protection markers and make no-anchoring areas enforceable.
- 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 a review of the draft *Queensland Marine Mammal Conservation Strategy*.
- Support implementation of the *Raine Island Indigenous Cultural Heritage Plan 2018*.
- Together with Traditional Owners implement management actions to protect Indigenous heritage.
- Implement heritage management plans for Commonwealth islands.
- Maintain island historic heritage.
- Consider accreditation of the Commonwealth Cairns and Hinchinbrook plans of management for the adjacent state Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park.

### PRIORITY PROJECTS

- Restoration of Reef Islands: addressing threat impacts on islands with *Pisonia grandis*.
- Reef Islands Rehabilitation: implementation of the *Lady Elliot Island Ecosystem Resilience Plan 2020* and planning for the clean-up of Pine Islet and Collins Island.
- Island Arks: demolition and restoration works at Collins Island; planning for works at Long Island at Broad Sound; rehabilitation planning for St Bees and Wild Duck islands.

### ACTIVITIES

- Deliver Reef Health Impact Surveys.
- Deliver crown-of-thorns starfish surveys.
- Undertake sub-tidal 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.
- Complete project using acoustic monitors for key species within Capricornia Cays National Park.
- Deliver marine megafauna projects.
- Review the population status of Loggerhead turtles, consistent with the *Queensland Marine Turtle Conservation Strategy 2021–2031*.
- Collect data on marine wildlife strandings to inform management.
- Undertake necropsies of priority marine animals to inform species management.
- 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.
- Marine Megafauna management: developing a Program implementation plan and reporting tool for the *Queensland Marine Turtle Conservation Strategy 2021–2031*.
- Great Barrier Reef Green Turtle Research Program.

### PREPARE

- Maintain an Incident Management Framework for the World Heritage Area with systems, plans, procedures and equipment and respond accordingly.
- Develop a risk assessment framework to prioritise Program response to incidents.
- Develop standard operating procedures and operationalise systems for site assessment of damage.
- Build capacity within the Program to undertake the roles and functions for managing environmental and maritime incidents.
- Finalise the coral bleaching incident response procedures.
- Undertake protection, preparedness, response and recovery associated with bushfire containment and suppression.
- Maintain situational awareness of reef health using established systems.
- Review marine wildlife strandings response thresholds and the Marine Wildlife Strandings Standard Operating Procedures.
- 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 mammal strandings and investigate response actions if marine megafauna strandings exceed thresholds of potential concern.
- Respond rapidly to contain new infestations of ecosystem-changing pests.
- Undertake health surveys of critical habitats and species after severe weather events.
- Support marine pest response.
- Undertake site assessments of damage following maritime incidents.
- Assess severity and extent of damage following environmental incidents.

### RECOVER

- Coordinate damage mitigation or rehabilitation of key sites.

### ACTIVITIES

- Undertake risk-based complementary environmental assessment, regulation and administration of permits, leases, agreements and authorities.
- Continue to develop and deliver streamlining improvements to permissions management.
- Continue the 'Be pest-free' campaign.
- Maintain a Turtle Volunteer Coordinator in the strandings program.
- Develop an interpretive plan to replace outdated interpretive signs on Low Isles.
- Deliver island visitor infrastructure and maintain existing infrastructure.
- Review existing visitor infrastructure and future demand.
- Develop and implement the Program's *Communication Plan 2024–25*.
- Attend advisory committee meetings.
- Educate and engage the community and industry using a range of communication methods.
- Support the campground host volunteer program.

### 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.

### ACTIVITIES

#### AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

- Develop the *Recreational Fishing Communications Strategy*.
- Deter illegal activity and encourage behavioural change and stewardship.
- Undertake education and field audit inspections.
- Refine campaign performance indicators and analyse data to inform future campaigns.
- Increase community and industry reporting by encouraging advocacy and stewardship.

#### PLANNING, EXECUTING AND REPORTING

- Deliver dedicated compliance patrols with partners aligned with key risks.
- Support aerial surveillance by Maritime Border Command.
- Use and analyse vessel tracking information with partners.
- 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.
- Finalise the framework for managing compliance and update the Compliance Management Investigation Procedures.
- Supervise authorised activities.

#### INTELLIGENCE

- Through collaboration, collect and analyse information on compliance risks to inform threat priorities.
- Analyse and improve effectiveness of the Program's compliance activities in reducing non-compliant behaviour.

#### INVESTIGATIONS AND COMPLIANCE ACTIONS

- Investigate offences and deliver appropriate actions to deter illegal activity.
- Maintain effective relationships with the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions and the DESI litigation section.

#### PRIORITY PROJECTS

- Regulator amendments to the Penalty Infringement Notice Scheme: amendments to promote voluntary compliance and deter non-compliance while minimising negative impact on park users.

## 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 and explore opportunities for Program staff placements within Indigenous Land and Sea ranger groups.
- 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 workplace health and safety risk register, as well as incident and hazard reports to identify trends and inform Program initiatives.
- Develop and commence a three-year training program.
- Maintain and improve management infrastructure.
- Maintain a safe and efficient vessel fleet.
- Review the operation of the four large vessels in the fleet to ensure efficient and effective delivery of Program priorities.
- Finalise the QWildlife Strandings app.
- Maintain the compliance incident and information reporting system.
- Maintain Memoranda of Understanding and Deeds of Agreement with other agencies.
- Review strategic business planning and reporting priorities and products.
- Refine operations of new Program governance groups.
- Investigate and implement measures that contribute to Reef Authority and DESI sustainability strategies.

#### PRIORITY PROJECTS

- Health and safety: developing a Human Factors Safety Program framework and training program.
- Integrated compliance management system: commencing development of system.
- Technology transformation: trialing and implementation of drone technologies; review of capabilities of machine learning in analysis of satellite imagery; review of the Field Reporting System.