



Australian Government

Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority

Protecting the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area

AUSTRALIA'S GREAT BARRIER REEF IS ONE OF THE RICHEST AND MOST DIVERSE NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS ON EARTH AND HOME TO THE WORLD'S LARGEST CORAL REEF.

In 1975, the Australian Government established a statutory agency, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), to protect this natural treasure for future generations. GBRMPA's authority is legislated through the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*.

In 1981, the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area was inscribed on the World Heritage List in recognition of its outstanding universal value. It is listed for all four natural criteria:

- Exceptional natural beauty
- Significant geomorphic features
- Significant ongoing ecological and biological processes
- Significant natural habitats for the conservation of biological diversity.

The extraordinary variety of species — many of them threatened — and habitats in the Great Barrier Reef make it one of the richest and most complex natural ecosystems on Earth. Though similar habitats occur elsewhere, no other World Heritage Area contains such biodiversity. The area is of enormous scientific and intrinsic importance.

Today, the Great Barrier Reef is one of the world's best managed natural wonders. It attracts more than 1.6 million visitors each year, contributes more than AUD \$5 billion to the Australian economy and generates 63,000 jobs.



VITAL STATISTICS

The Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area:

- Covers an area of 348,000 square kilometres — the equivalent size of Italy or Japan
- Is more than 2300 kilometres long
- Extends to the low water mark on the mainland coast along northern Australia
- Includes more than 3000 separate coral reefs, some 900 islands and all the waters within the outer boundaries of the Marine Park
- Is a multiple-use area that supports a variety of activities managed through zoning and regulations.

Relative size of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area





Coral reef habitats are most vulnerable. Impacts are already occurring and there's likely to be future stressors to challenge the Reef's health.

The extraordinary biological diversity within the Great Barrier Reef includes:

- Six of the world's seven species of marine turtle
- The largest green turtle breeding area in the world
- One of the world's most important dugong populations (about 14,000 dugong)
- More than 43,000 square kilometres of seagrass meadows, including 23 per cent of the known global species diversity
- Some 3000 coral reefs built from more than 450 species of hard coral
- More than one-third of all the world's soft coral and sea pen species (150 species)
- 630 species of echinoderms, including 13 per cent of the known global species diversity
- 2000 species of sponges representing 30 per cent of Australia's diversity in sponges
- More than 3000 species of molluscs, including 2500 species of gastropods
- A breeding area for humpback whales and some 30 other species of whales and dolphins
- 14 breeding species of sea snakes, including 20 per cent of the known global species diversity.

OUR APPROACH TO REEF MANAGEMENT

The Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area is managed through an ecosystem-based approach, and is widely recognised as one of the best managed marine protected areas in the world.

The cornerstone of the management approach is a comprehensive multiple-use zoning system that provides high levels of protection for 33 per cent of the total area, while allowing a variety of other sustainable uses to occur in other zones. Zoning also helps to separate conflicting uses.

Various Australian (federal) and Queensland (state) Government agencies cooperate for the field management of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Under national environment law — the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* — any proposal likely to have a significant impact on the World Heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef, and the environment of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park requires a decision by the Australian Environment Minister on whether the proposal should be approved.

A five-yearly Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report provides an important stocktake of the Reef, its management, and its longer-term outlook.

The Outlook Report 2009 highlighted that the Great Barrier Reef remains one of the most healthy coral reef ecosystems in the world.

However, issues affecting the health of the Reef include climate change, continued declining water quality from catchment run-off, loss of coastal habitats from coastal development and a small number of impacts from fishing.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Management of the Great Barrier Reef focuses on increasing the resilience of the Reef against the effects of climate change.

- Climate change and *the Great Barrier Reef: A vulnerability assessment* analysed the risks and formed the basis for the AUD\$9 million Great Barrier Reef Climate Change Action Plan. The first of its kind for coral reefs, the Action Plan included strategies for building ecosystem resilience and supporting dependant industries and communities.
- Other resilience-building programs include the Zoning Plan to regulate uses, the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan to improve catchment run-off, and the Reef Guardians Program to promote stewardship across industry and the community.

WATER QUALITY

The Australian and Queensland Governments are working together to halt and reverse declining water quality entering the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

- The Australian Government committed AUD\$200 million to improve the quality of water entering the Reef, and the Queensland Government committed AUD\$50 million to a Reef Protection Package to protect the Reef from impacts of chemicals and other farm run-off.
- Reef Guardian Farmers are encouraged to adopt practices that reduce impacts on water quality.
- Wetlands, which filter water from the land to the ocean, are being restored to improve water quality entering the Reef.
- Reef Guardian Councils are improving waste management and run-off water quality.
- Land-based aquaculture facilities are managed to minimise water quality impacts on the waterways that flow into the Reef.

COASTAL DEVELOPMENT

Coastal areas are an important part of the suite of ecosystems that make up the Great Barrier Reef. Various measures reduce the impact of growing populations and development activities on the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem.

- Coastal development is regulated by the Queensland Government, which oversees land use planning and assesses environmental impacts of developments. The GBRMPA assesses developments that occur within the Marine Park.
- Any activity likely to have a significant impact on the World Heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef, or the environment of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, requires the approval of the Australian Environment Minister.
- The GBRMPA assesses the roles and functions that coastal ecosystems play in maintaining a healthy Great Barrier Reef ecosystem, and ensures this information is available to the relevant agencies in both the Australian and Queensland Governments.

FISHERIES

Fishing in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is well managed to ensure it remains an important pastime and a source of income for both Queensland coastal communities and the Queensland seafood industry.

- Improvements across many fisheries have boosted ecological performance.
- Management actions are better protecting fish, dugong and turtles. These include zoning, Dugong Protection Special Management Areas and changes to fisheries legislation.
- Beneficial changes to management practices adopted for the trawl fishery in the Great Barrier Reef over the past 10 years have resulted in a reduced area for trawling, reduced fishing effort and fleet size, turtle excluder devices and other by-catch reduction devices, and a satellite-based vessel monitoring system.

TOURISM AND RECREATION

Millions of people visit the Great Barrier Reef each year for tourism and recreation, and the tourism industry works closely with us to ensure their operations are sustainable.

- All tourism activities in the Marine Park require a permit. Plans of Management are in place for areas where there is high tourism use to protect and preserve sensitive areas.

• Reef-wide policies manage tourism permits, cruise shipping, bareboats and moorings. There are also public moorings and 'no-anchoring' areas .

• Tourists contribute to protecting the World Heritage values through an Environmental Management Charge, which is collected from visitors by operators and used to help manage the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

CONSERVING THREATENED SPECIES

Many activities protect the Reef's amazing plants, animals and habitats, including:

- No-take zones covering 115,600 square kilometres, representing examples of all 70 bioregions across the Reef
- 16 Dugong Protection Areas
- A policy to protect whales and dolphins
- A policy on the direct take of protected species in the Reef
- Guidelines for seabird nesting sites.

SEA COUNTRY PARTNERSHIPS

As Traditional Owners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a long and close connection with the Great Barrier Reef. Sea country refers to particular areas of the sea that each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group is affiliated with through traditional lore and customs.

In 2008, the Australian Government announced a five-year Reef Rescue Indigenous Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program under Caring for our Country to:

- Develop Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreements (TUMRAs) and sea country plans
- Strengthen communication between local communities, managers and reef stakeholders
- Build a better understanding of Traditional Owner issues about the management of the Great Barrier Reef.

The GBRMPA uses various management tools to manage activities in the Marine Park, including legislation, policy, permits, education, partnerships, and evaluation of the risks to the environment.



WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES

The Great Barrier Reef is important to nearby communities. They are engaged and encouraged through voluntary Reef protection activities.

- Community members are involved in four Reef Advisory Committees and 11 Local Marine Advisory Committees to guide decisions affecting everyday actions that ensure the Reef's long-term health and resilience.
- Since 2003, the voluntary Reef Guardians Program has involved the community. Beginning with Reef Guardian Schools, the program expanded to local councils, farmers, fishers and graziers. Showcasing the environmental actions being taken by these groups fosters practices that improve the Reef's resilience.

COMMERCIAL SHIPPING

Ports and shipping are important to Queensland communities and the economy, and their use of the Marine Park area is part of the multiple-use ethos.

- Shipping in the Great Barrier Reef Region is managed by several Australian and Queensland Government agencies. Shipping rules are uniform nationally and there is a high-level coordination of everyday activities and incident response.
- The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) in 1990 designated the Reef as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area, allowing Australia to implement special protective measures. This includes ship reporting system, coastal vessel tracking service, compulsory pilotage, navigational aids, marine pollution response plans and Designated Shipping Areas.
- The GBRMPA works closely with port authorities and shipping management agencies to continuously improve our management of the World Heritage Area.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT

The GBRMPA uses various management tools to manage activities in the Marine Park, including legislation, policy, permits, education, partnerships, and evaluation of the risks to the environment.

Some activities do not require a permit. Higher-risk activities are managed to ensure sustainability. Permits are required for commercial activities such as: tourism operations; infrastructure development such as marinas, dredging, jetties and pontoons; and business operations such as aquaculture. In addition, activities such as research and educational programs require permits.

REEF RESEARCH AND MONITORING

The best available information for decision-making is essential to high-quality, scientifically-based management of the Marine Park.

- Reef-wide research and monitoring results are periodically updated.
- Most research is carried out by partners including the Australian Institute of Marine Science, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, James Cook University and the University of Queensland.
- The Australian Government is investing \$25.8 million over four years through the National Environmental Research Program. This supports environmental, economic and social research to improve our understanding, management and conservation of the biodiversity and ecosystems of the Reef, rainforest and Torres Strait.

COMPLIANCE WITH ZONING RULES

Effective and efficient compliance and enforcement are important in ensuring the zoning rules are upheld.

- Educational materials are available to help people understand and comply with the rules.
- Intelligence gathering and analysis helps focus compliance efforts and increases the detection and prosecution of illegal activities.
- Various penalties can also be applied.

RELATED INFORMATION

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
www.gbrmpa.gov.au

Reef Heritage Values
www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/great-barrier-reef/values.html

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The Great Barrier Reef
celebrating 30 years
as a World Heritage Area

