

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.



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.



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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.

