



Fisheries management on the Great Barrier Reef

Report of the Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Great Barrier Reef

The *Report of the Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Great Barrier Reef*, a collaboration between the World Heritage Centre and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), referenced the need for sustainable fisheries, improved data validation and to address threats to protected species and habitats from fishing. The Report recommendations focus on commercial fisheries operating in the World Heritage Area.

Both the Australian and Queensland governments' have had constructive and fruitful dialogue with the World Heritage Centre and the IUCN over the past few months in relation to their recommendations.

Both the Australian and Queensland governments' have considered these recommendations and have further enhanced fisheries management and protection on all fronts through recent investments and strengthened policies.

Advancing our world class fisheries management

Australia's fisheries are among the best managed in the world and we produce some of the world's most sought-after seafood to domestic and overseas markets. The industry supports jobs and investments throughout Queensland, especially in regional communities. Our management approach includes comprehensive zoning plans, strong regulations and strict enforcement approaches.

The Queensland Government, through its Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, is responsible for managing commercial and recreational fisheries in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. This includes commercial licencing, assessing fish stocks, setting sustainable total allowable commercial catch limits, seasonal closures, and limits to the size and number of fish kept by recreational fishers.



The Australian Government, through the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, is responsible for implementing the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003*, which defines where activities, including fishing, are allowed. The Australian Government also assesses the environmental performance of Australia's fisheries under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, including the impacts of fishing on protected marine species, and export approvals for fisheries products.

Marine Park zoning helps to manage and protect the values of the Great Barrier Reef. Evidence shows no-take fishing areas help protect biodiversity and habitats which are vital to support fisheries. They also provide additional protection for migratory and vulnerable species, such as dugong and marine turtles.

Many reef fish species rely on catchment, coastal and marine environments for different parts of their lifecycle. The Australian and Queensland governments are working together to ensure both fisheries habitats and fish populations are monitored, protected and sustainably managed.

To manage illegal fishing, stringent regulations are in place, with risk-based compliance and enforcement activities delivered across the Reef and adjacent waters. Compliance and enforcement has been strengthened through the implementation of electronic vessel monitoring systems on all commercial fishing vessels and an expanded Reef Joint Field Management Program, with new patrol vessels increasing our presence on the water. Australia also invests in education programs to make sure fishers know and understand the rules and do the right thing. Compliance with fishing rules and regulations are high and consistently over 90%, showing a strong stewardship amongst fishers.



Photo: Recreational fisher on the reef fishing with a lure (Credit: Tourism and Events, Queensland)

Supporting stronger fisheries management to protect the Reef

All fishing activities are regulated within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, however some activities continue to have an impact on the Reef and on some protected species.



The Australian and Queensland governments are taking steps to address fishing impacts through new investments which support and strengthen sustainable fisheries management. These improvements will better protect marine life and support healthy marine habitats.

The *Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017–2027* is the largest fisheries reform in Queensland's history and is delivering on a number of commitments under the *Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan*. Its actions include:

- harvest strategies for each fishery
- satellite tracking on all commercial fishing boats
- regional-specific fishing rules
- more effective use of new technologies
- independent data validation and environmental risk assessments
- setting sustainable catch limits based on achieving maximum economic yield (60% biomass) to build stock resilience
- improved monitoring and research to underpin evidence-based management, determine impacts on non-target species and ensure responsive decision-making and adaptive management is performed to maintain sustainable fisheries.

To date the Queensland Government has invested a total of \$45.5 million to support implementation of the Strategy, with a further \$20.7 million committed in 2022-23 and 2023-24 to advance and streamline actions and activities. The total commitment over this 7-year period is \$66.2 million. The Strategy is currently at its halfway point and has already implemented two-thirds of its 33 actions.

The Australian Government has invested long-term funding to ensure sustainable and trusted fisheries are operating within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. In October 2022, the Australian Government announced a boost of \$36 million to help achieve this, taking the total investment in sustainable fisheries to \$62.7 million from 2023-2030. This investment will help trial and deliver improved independent data validation for fisheries which interact with threatened and protected species in the World Heritage Area and surrounding rivers. Co-designing this in partnership with fishers and across government is essential. This funding will:

- enhance monitoring of high-risk fisheries and quantification of commercial fishery interactions with protected species
- inform by-catch reduction actions to decrease the number for protected species caught or impacted by fishing gear (including gill nets, trawl, and crab pots).
- deliver traceability assurance for the coral harvest fishery.
- provide support for commercial fishers to transition to best-practice regulatory standards and support reform under the Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027.



Photo: Example of electronic vessel monitoring to independently verify catch and monitor bycatch.

Queensland fisheries are now managed by 17 approved [harvest strategies](#) and one protected species management strategy. Decisions made under the harvest strategies are now part of routine management for each fishery, providing Queensland with a modern, responsive and best management framework for fish stocks into the future. These include new [management arrangements](#) for the coral harvest fishery to increase reporting and independent data validation and strong new management measures to recover the Spanish Mackerel stock and protect spawning aggregations.

Action is also being taken to improve fisheries management in the coral fishery, which is a hand collection harvest fishery operating from the tip of Cape York to the southern border of the Great Barrier Reef.

- As part of the Australian Government’s accreditation of the Queensland coral harvest fishery in 2021, improvements have been made to deliver best-practice fisheries management in partnership with the Queensland Government.
- The improvements include species-specific quota-reporting, development of a harvest strategy and a revised Ecological Risk Assessment.
- Funding from the Australian Government is also progressing the development of a traceability system for the coral harvest fishery to deliver greater transparency and sustainability assurance which will advance fisheries management.

These measures will ensure that fisheries within the Great Barrier Reef are managed effectively, are sustainable, and that threatened species are protected.

For more information visit:

[The Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017–2027](#)

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[Remaining impacts from fishing | gbrmpa](#)