

# Report Card on Reef Protection



Our report card tracks the commitments made by the Australian and Queensland governments to protect the Great Barrier Reef and deliver 12 of the 22 critical recommendations by UNESCO and IUCN.

## URGENT CLIMATE ACTION

Current at 15 November 2023

COMMITMENT	DELIVERY		
<p><b>Strengthen the Reef 2050 Plan to include clear commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions in line with limiting global warming to 1.5°C</b></p>			<p>Australia has updated the Reef 2050 Plan with its legislated 43% emissions reduction target by 2030 and a net zero emissions target by 2050.</p> <p>The 43% target is consistent with a 2°C pathway, which equates to the loss of 99% of the world's coral reefs.</p> <p>In communication to UNESCO in May 2023, Australia committed to set successively more ambitious emissions reduction targets in alignment with efforts to limit global average temperature rise to 1.5°C.</p> <p>While Australia did reject one coal mine in 2023, it approved four new coal mines or expansions.</p>
<p><b>Queensland to ensure the 1.5 degree target is supported with legislation and take clear actionable steps to achieve this target</b></p>			<p>Queensland has announced it will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 75% by 2035 (based on 2005 levels) and that this target will be legislated. This is in line with limiting warming below 2°C but is not the equivalent to 1.5 °C, which is what is needed to protect the Great Barrier Reef.</p> <p>Queensland has announced the Energy and Jobs Plan, which commits to reducing emissions in the electricity sector by 90% by 2035-36.</p> <p>Queensland continues to approve coal mines and has announced \$21 million in grants for new gas exploration.</p>

## IMPROVE WATER QUALITY

<p><b>Reduce Nitrogen to achieve water pollution targets by:</b></p>			<p>Progress has been too slow, and it is unlikely the water pollution targets will be achieved by 2025.</p>
<p><b>Implementing best practice for banana /cane farming</b></p>			<p>The Queensland Government has committed \$270 million over five years to 2025-2026 to addressing water quality, with \$125 million supporting best management practice (BMP) adoption. Voluntary uptake of BMP has been too low.</p> <p>More action on Reef Regulation Protection compliance is needed. While commitments to double compliance activity to enforce landholder BMP is a good start, compliance in some areas, like Proserpine, remains low.</p>
<p><b>Restoring coastal wetlands and riparian areas</b></p>			<p>Coastal wetland restoration has been largely neglected over the past 20 years of Reef water quality plans. Almost no funding has been committed to restore wetland and riparian ecosystems at the scale needed to drastically reduce nitrogen runoff.</p>

## IMPROVE WATER QUALITY CONT.







	COMMITMENT	DELIVERY	
<b>Meet sediment reduction targets by repairing degraded land and gullies to reduce sediment flowing into the Reef's waters</b>			<p>Progress has been too slow, and it is unlikely the water quality sediment targets will be achieved by 2025.</p> <p>The Australian Government has invested \$1.2 billion to the Great Barrier Reef through to 2030, of which \$150m is for reducing sediment from eroded gullies and riverbanks. An announcement is expected in December 2023 which will provide detailed mapping on the highest priority areas for remediation, time-frame of investment and predicted sediment reduction.</p> <p>Place based projects, such as the Burdekin Major Integrated Project, are recognised as providing innovative and long term solutions to sediment runoff. However greater investment is needed to urgently scale-up existing programs that focus on gully repair and grazing land management.</p>
<b>Protect remnant native vegetation and address unrestricted clearing of Category X</b>			<p>From 2018 to 2021, more than 500,000 ha of vegetation was cleared in Reef catchments. Overall, 80% of this clearing occurred in areas known as Category X areas that can be cleared without restriction.</p> <p>Queensland has committed to increase farmer education and incentives. However these initiatives will not rapidly slow clearing.</p> <p>Extra money for compliance is welcome but the clearing laws do not cover Category X vegetation, where the majority of clearing occurs.</p>
<b>Ensure targets in the Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan protect the Reef's OUV</b>			<p>A GBR Scientific Consensus Statement is being updated that will inform a review of the ecologically relevant water quality targets in the current WQIP (2017-2022). Updated targets will be included in the 2023-2028 WQIP.</p>
<b>Require proposed and in-progress dam developments to show clear alignment with water quality improvement for the Great Barrier Reef (GBR)</b>			<p>The new Australian Government revoked the previous government's commitment to fund the construction of the proposed Hells Gate Dam and Urannah Dam in the Burdekin Basin.</p> <p>The Queensland Coordinator General has required the proponents of three water infrastructure proposals (Urannah Dam, raising Burdekin Falls Dam and Big Rocks Weir) to assess cumulative impacts in the environmental impact statements for each project.</p> <p>The Queensland and Australian Government's have jointly funded a Regional Water Assessment for the Burdekin Basin to assess options to meet the region's future water demands, which will include an assessment of potential impacts to the Reef from proposed water supply options.</p>

## SUSTAINABLE FISHING


<b>Phase out destructive gillnet fishing in the Reef and create Net-Free Zones in the interim</b>			<p>The Australian and Queensland Governments have committed \$160m to remove gillnets from the Reef by June 2027. This flags the removal of the majority of licences by the end of 2023 and new Net-Free Zones in place while remaining licences are phased out.</p> <p>After an independent Taskforce provided advice to the government, details of the gillnet phase-out were announced in November 2023. All gillnet licences will be purchased and retired shortly, with up to 40 new net licences (NX) permitted to fish under strict conditions until June 2027.</p> <p>Importantly, critical habitats for dugongs and other threatened species will be protected in a network of new Net-Free Zones including a large area on the northern GBR (Cape Bedford to the tip of Cape York) and all Dugong Protection Areas.</p>
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**KEY**  
 Commitment: Made in full Partially made None made | Delivery: On track Some progress No progress

## SUSTAINABLE FISHING CONT.

	COMMITMENT	DELIVERY	
<b>Accelerate implementation of the Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy to end overfishing and recover fish stocks</b>			<p>Funding has been committed and harvest strategies are in place for all Reef fisheries. The Queensland Government has committed to no depleted fish stocks and building fish stocks to 60% of unfished levels by 2027.</p> <p>While some fish stocks are being managed towards the 60% biomass targets, some recent management decisions, including those made regarding the depleted Spanish mackerel stock, are inconsistent with the targets of the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy.</p>
<b>Independently monitor gillnet and trawl catches using cameras on boats</b>			<p>The Australian Government has committed \$62.7 million to reform GBR fisheries, including independent monitoring of high risk fisheries. The Queensland Government committed an additional \$22 million in the recent budget. The announcement to phase out gillnets also noted a commitment to legislate for independent data validation by the end of 2023.</p> <p>A Taskforce is set to provide advice to the Government regarding the implementation of the commitment to phase out gillnets; More detail is expected to be announced regarding independent monitoring while the fishery is phased out.</p> <p>A voluntary trial of cameras on boats has been put forward for the trawl fishery. While some progress has been made, no vessels are currently operating with cameras in the trial. More work is required from the Queensland and Australian Governments to meet this recommendation.</p>
<b>Advance research into effective bycatch reduction devices</b>			<p>Progress has been made in meeting this recommendation, particularly for the high-risk trawl fishery. Bycatch reduction trials to reduce interactions with protected sea snakes and threatened endemic shark and ray species were successfully awarded funding in March 2023 by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC).</p> <p>The project is set to commence before the end of the year, delivering results in 2025.</p>

## PLASTIC POLLUTION

<b>Effectively enforce the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Act to reduce plastic pollution</b>			<p>Queensland's ban on single-use plastics commenced in 2021, prohibiting the sale of plastic straws, stirrers, plates and cutlery, and polystyrene takeaway food containers (including cups). In 2023, the ban was further expanded to include plastic microbeads, cotton bud sticks, loose fill polystyrene packaging, heavyweight plastic bags, and the mass release of lighter-than-air balloons.</p> <p>The Queensland Government is yet to enforce penalties on retailers that do not comply, taking an education first approach. However, resources have been provided to the National Retailers Association and Boomerang Alliance to educate and support retailers in the transition, and made further investments in marine debris clean ups and recycling infrastructure.</p>
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**KEY**  
 Commitment:  Made in full  Partially made  None made | Delivery:  On track  Some progress  No progress

IUCN & UNESCO's Report on the Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Great Barrier Reef 2022 (Mission Report) contains 22 expert recommendations to protect our Reef. Fight For Our Reef's overarching campaign is focused on securing policy commitments and funding to implement the above 12 recommendations that specifically address the biggest threats to the Reef - climate change, water pollution, tree clearing in Reef catchments and unsustainable fishing.

The recommendations this report card refers to are shown overleaf.



[fightforourreef.org.au](https://fightforourreef.org.au)



**IUCN & UNESCO's Mission Report is an assessment of the Australian Government's management of the Great Barrier Reef, carried out in 2022. It includes 10 High Priority recommendations (P) and 12 Other recommendations (O) for the Australian and Queensland government agencies and associated stakeholders and organisations. The recommendations this report card refers to are:**

**Recommendation P1:** Identify priority areas of grazing land for gully repairs and associated restoration and remediation activities, and significantly scale up activities in these priority areas through extensive mobilization of the necessary engineers and associated personnel, equipment and materials, alongside key engagement with relevant farmers and graziers to achieve existing WQIP18 targets.

**Recommendation P2:** Require proposed and in-progress dam developments to show clear alignment with water quality improvement for the GBR as a condition for approval under relevant legislation, including mandatory compliance with the 2018 Reef 2050 Net Benefit Policy, industrial guidelines associated with the reef protection regulations, and climate-ready design considerations to be assessed by appropriate environmental impact assessment, which also includes consideration of indirect impacts such as associated agricultural expansion. Mechanisms and innovations should also be developed and implemented to address existing dam sediment impacts (from build-up and release) in priority catchments vulnerable to sedimentation (as prioritized for management in the WQIP).

**Recommendation P3:** Increase significantly the scale and pace of adoption, monitoring and enforcement of best management practice in sugarcane and banana farming to achieve WQIP targets; and advance the upscaling of land restoration activities, including where feasible the purchase and/or buy-back of land areas for restoration and return to wetland or riparian ecosystems.

**Recommendation P4:** Prioritise the protection of remnant native vegetation across the GBR catchments through strengthened native vegetation clauses under existing laws, and through improved identification and enforcement of permissible activities in areas of high conservation value (HCV) forests and woodlands. This would include review of sites where clearing is currently allowed without permits (Category X under the Vegetation Management Act 1999) and updating zonation and corresponding permits which limit conversion of HCV areas. Such advances should also incorporate full consideration of traditional owner land management principles.

**Recommendation P5:** Ensure Reef 2050 WQIP water quality targets, to be updated in 2023, and actions implemented through the WQIP are sufficient to ensure the OUV of the property is not further adversely impacted by low water quality, including through hitherto overlooked sources of poor water quality, such as dams, emerging crop industries and marine debris, with associated legislative compliance strengthened.

**Recommendation P6:** Review and strengthen, by 31 December 2022, the Reef 2050 Plan to include clear government commitments to reduce greenhouse emissions consistent with the efforts required to limit the global average temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

**P6(b):** Develop and implement ambitious emissions reductions activities consistent with limiting the global average temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

**Recommendation P9:** Accelerate the implementation of the Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy, including the finalisation of harvest strategies for all key species as a priority, and ensure management mechanisms outlined in the Strategy (including temporary closures of some fisheries areas to enable recovery and promote restocking, particularly in areas of spawning aggregations) are implemented in collaboration with the fisheries industry to achieve the target maximum economic yield (60% biomass) by 2027.

**Recommendation P10:** Phase out destructive gill net fishing in the property through appropriate mechanisms, including purchasing, and/or retiring all remaining industrial (N4) gill-net licences; retiring of other gill-net fisheries (N2) and the establishment of net-free sub-zones in areas of high conservation value for protected species.

**Recommendation O2:** Effectively enforce the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Act, including by developing partnerships with existing civil society initiatives focused at: (a) reducing primary production and consumer purchase of single-use plastics goods; (b) repurposing of waste; (c) reimagining of products to transition to renewable materials (e.g., packaging); (d) recycling; and (e) proactive removal of debris.

**Recommendation O6:** Recommends that the Queensland Government ensure the 1.5°C target is supported by legislation, and clear, actionable steps to achieve this target are set within the state's existing climate related strategies and plans; with associated opportunities optimised to become a 'climate action hub' for the GBR.

**Recommendation O7:** Develop and implement appropriate mandatory independent mechanisms for discard and bycatch monitoring, such as e-monitoring via vessel-based cameras, on all gill-net and trawl vessels within the property.

**Recommendation O8:** Advance research into effective bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) and accelerate the adoption and proactive installation of devices across relevant fisheries, including the production of associated regulatory requirements to ensure the adoption is legislation.