



Australia's National
Science Agency



Monitoring human dimensions of the Great Barrier Reef

A snapshot of key findings from the Social and Economic
Long-Term Monitoring Program (SELTMP)

Survey of residents of the Great Barrier Reef catchment region,
November–December 2025

What is SELTMP?

People are a part of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). The Social and Economic Long-Term Monitoring Program (SELTMP) gathers data about Reef users, communities and industries, and their changing relationship with the GBR over time. This information assists Reef managers and decision makers, to help improve planning and management for the Reef's future.

Funding acknowledgement: SELTMP is funded by the Australian Government's Reef Trust and CSIRO, and is being delivered in partnership with CSIRO, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Queensland Government's Reef Water Quality Program.



SELTMP objectives

The key science objectives of SELTMP are to:

- monitor changes in community attitudes towards the GBR, its values and management, and the perceived threats to those values
- predict attitudinal and behavioural responses to future management interventions in the Reef, and changes in Reef health
- monitor changes in social and economic well-being of Reef-dependent communities and the benefits they derive from the GBR
- Assess and monitor social and economic vulnerability, and adaptive capacity of GBR communities to changes in Reef condition and the wider system.

SELTMP contributes to the evaluation of five human dimension objectives of the Australian Government's Reef 2050 Plan, which correspond to indicators under the following headings:

1. Uses of the Reef and benefits
2. Attachment to the Reef
3. People protecting the Reef
4. Reef heritage and values
5. Public perceptions of Reef governance

Methods

The 2025 SELTMP survey was administered online, across the Great Barrier Reef catchment region. The survey was successful in achieving a large and geographically representative sample of residents across the region (see map on page 5).

In November–December 2025, 2,208 GBR residents completed the SELTMP survey. Among these:

- 1,503 were recruited through an online research panel
- 705 were recruited via social media.

Participation in the survey was voluntary and all respondents remain anonymous, in accordance with CSIRO Human Research Ethics (066/25) and Privacy requirements.

SELTMP has surveyed GBR catchment residents in 2013, 2017, 2021, 2023 and 2025. The results in this brochure are mostly from the 2025 survey. Some results from previous years are included for comparison.



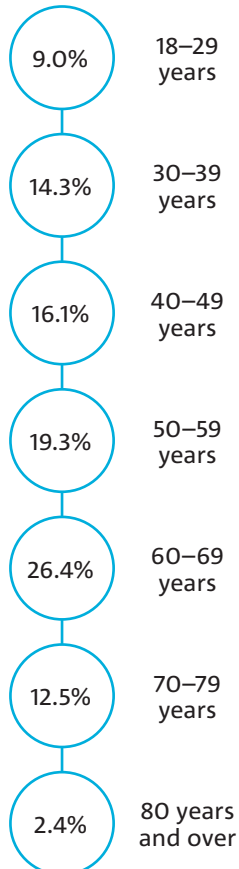
Who we surveyed

2,208

residents participated



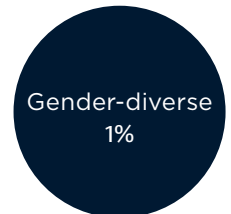
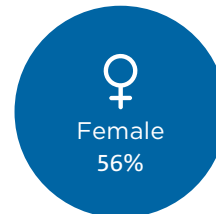
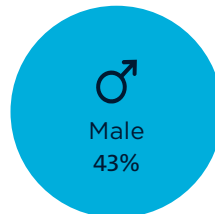
Age



3.3%
of the total
sample identified
as Aboriginal and/
or Torres Strait
Islander

Sample description:

Gender

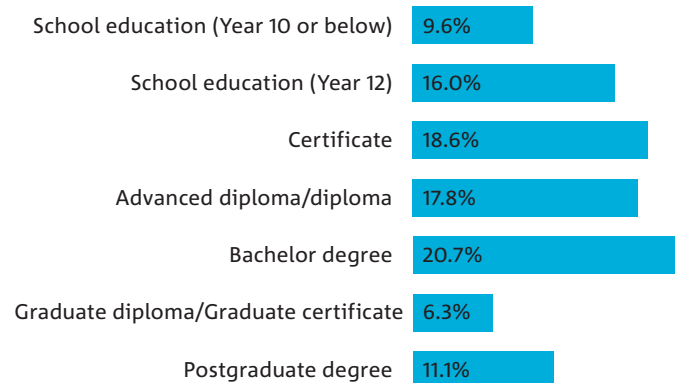


Education



20.7%

have a Bachelor
degree

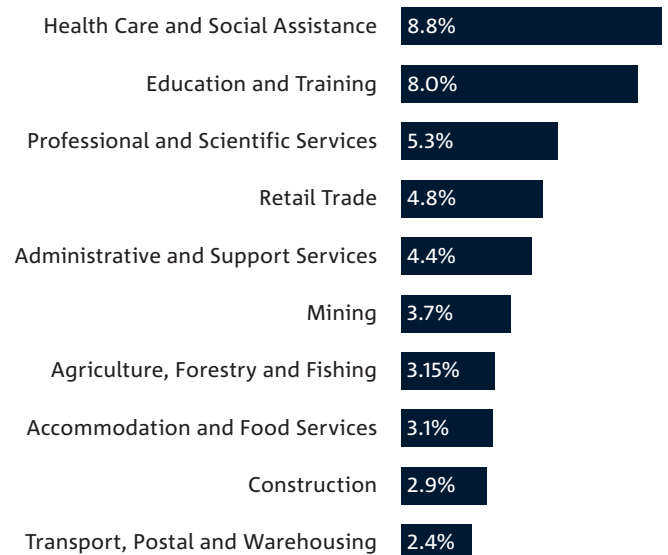


Employment sector*



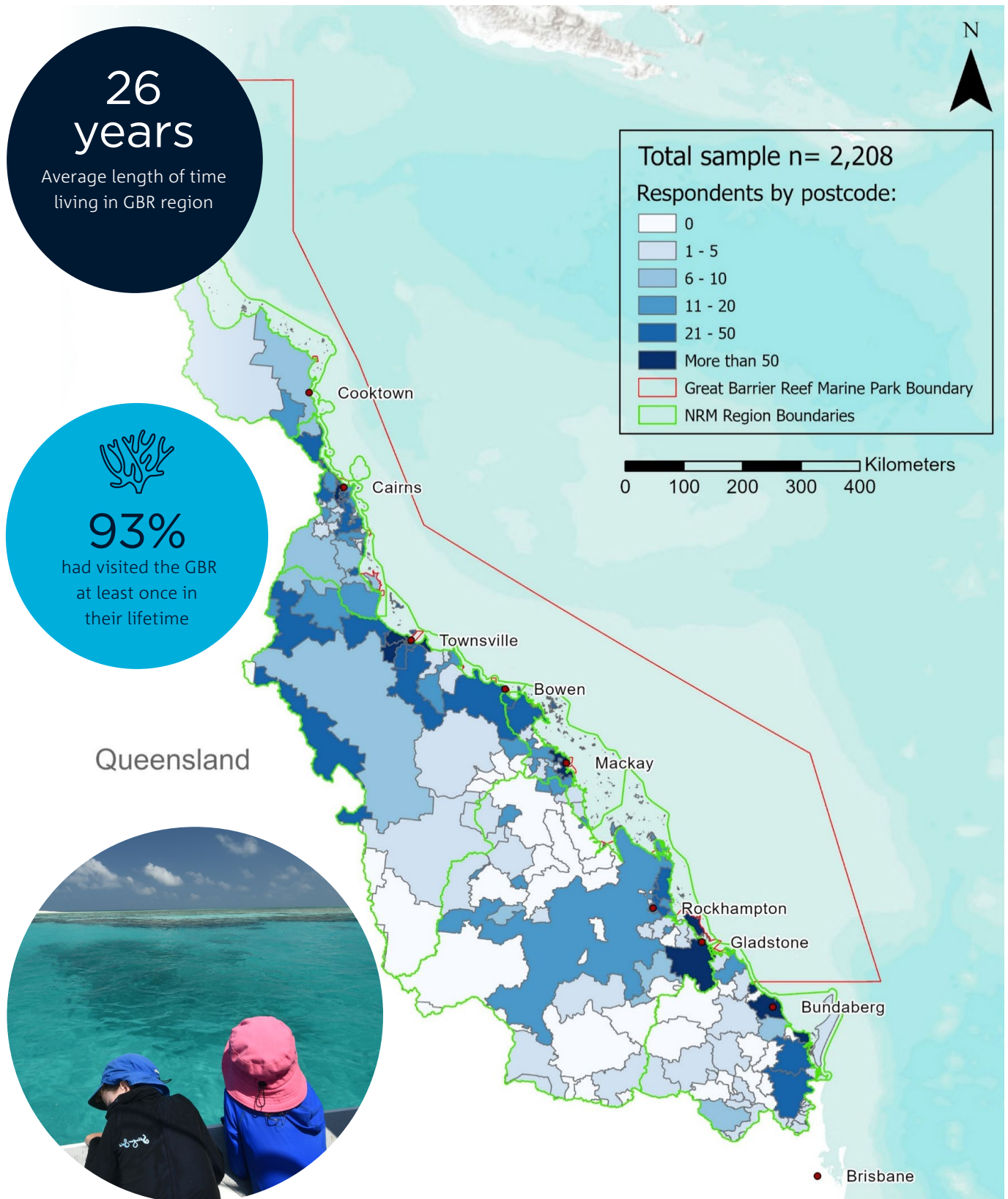
8.8%

were employed
in the Health
Care and Social
Assistance sector



*Top ten employment sector categories, based on the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification system, ranked by number of survey respondents.

Location of respondents



Sources: Environmental Systems Research Institute (Esri), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Where would you rather be?



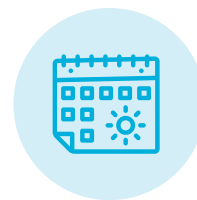
How often do local residents visit the Reef?

78% of catchment residents visited the GBR for recreation in the previous 12 months. This is higher than 2023 (69%) and 2021 (50%), and approaching pre-COVID levels (2013: 82%, 2017: 85%).

Changes in visitation to the GBR from 2020 to 2024 may have been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Importance for recreation

63%* preferred visiting the GBR over other places for their recreation



Self-reported frequency of visiting the GBR in the previous 12 months (2025; n= 2,208)

* Percentage of respondents who showed stronger levels of agreement by answering 7 or higher on a 10-point agreement scale.

Livelihoods and the Reef

18% of catchment residents depend on the GBR for some of their household income:



45% of these people are associated with tourism



15% are associated with fishing



11% are associated with government



10% are associated with science and education

8% are 'strongly dependent' (i.e. the GBR contributes 50% or more to their household income)



The Reef provides many other benefits to people

82%*

agreed that visiting the GBR helps them **unwind and de-stress**



77%**
of residents valued the GBR for **providing fresh seafood**



79%*

agreed that visiting the GBR makes them **feel better physically**



* Percentage of respondents reporting high agreement (7-10 on a 10-point agreement scale).

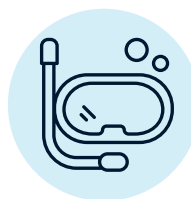
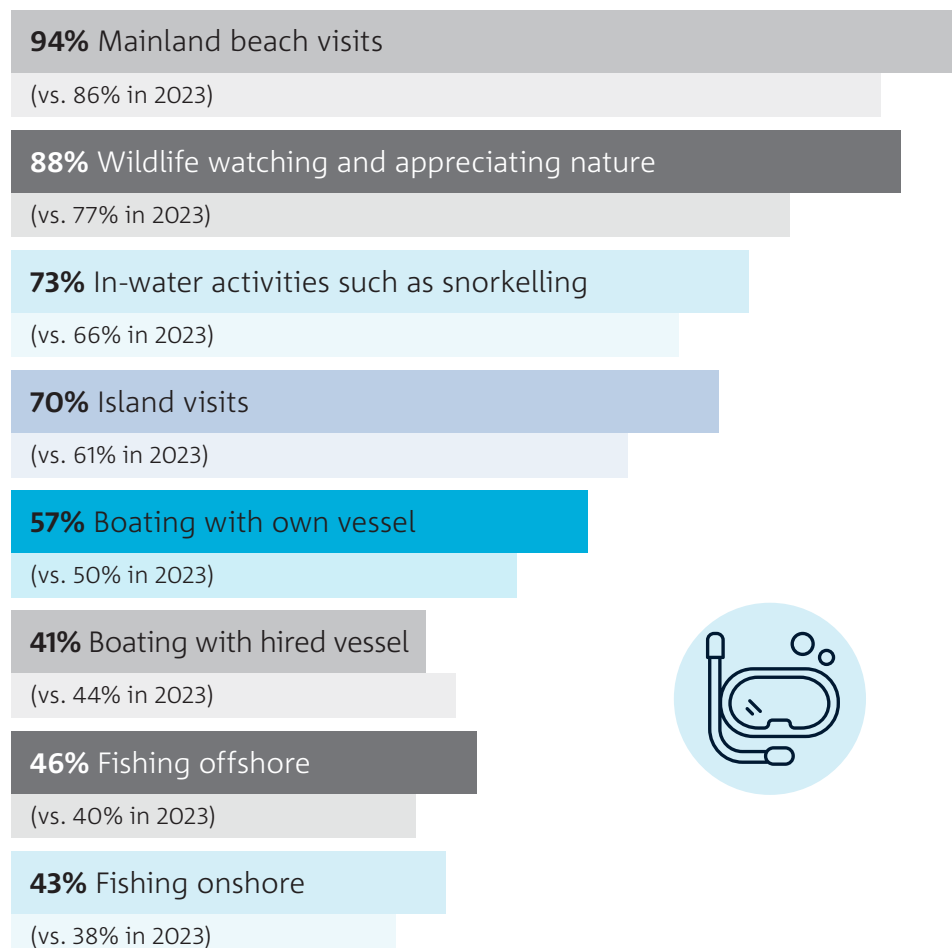
** Percentage of respondents reporting high value (7-10 on a 10-point value scale).

What activities are people doing when visiting the Reef?



“What do people do when visiting the GBR for recreation?”

Recreation Activities



82%* agreed they felt **proud** that the GBR is a World Heritage Area

71%* agreed that visiting the GBR is important for their quality of life and **wellbeing**

64%* agreed that living close to the GBR is important to them because of their **lifestyle**

48%* agreed that the Great Barrier Reef is part of their **identity**

* Percentage of respondents reporting high agreement (7-10 on a 10-point agreement scale).

Reef heritage and values

The Reef has rich and diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural heritage that is highly valued by residents of the catchment region.



96%** valued the Reef's **biodiversity**



88%** valued the Reef's contribution to the **local economy**



89%** valued the GBR as a place that attracts people from **all over the world**



59%** valued the Reef's
Traditional Owner heritage



84% valued the Reef for science and education**



89%* agreed that 'the **aesthetic beauty** of the GBR is outstanding'

Place meaning
attached to the Reef

The Reef means different things to different people. Respondents were asked to write the first words that come to mind when they think of the Great Barrier Reef. The responses here are colour coded based on the sentiment conveyed (blue = positive; grey = neutral; red = negative). Most participants expressed words that were either positive or neutral.

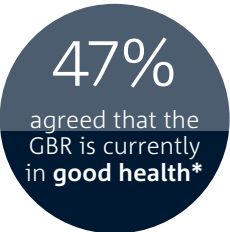


* Percentage of respondents reporting high agreement (7-10 on a 10-point agreement scale).

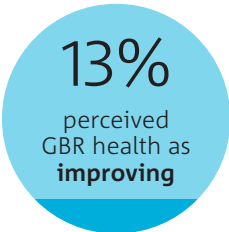
** Percentage of respondents reporting high value (7-10 on a 10-point value scale).

Perceptions of the Reef

Current health

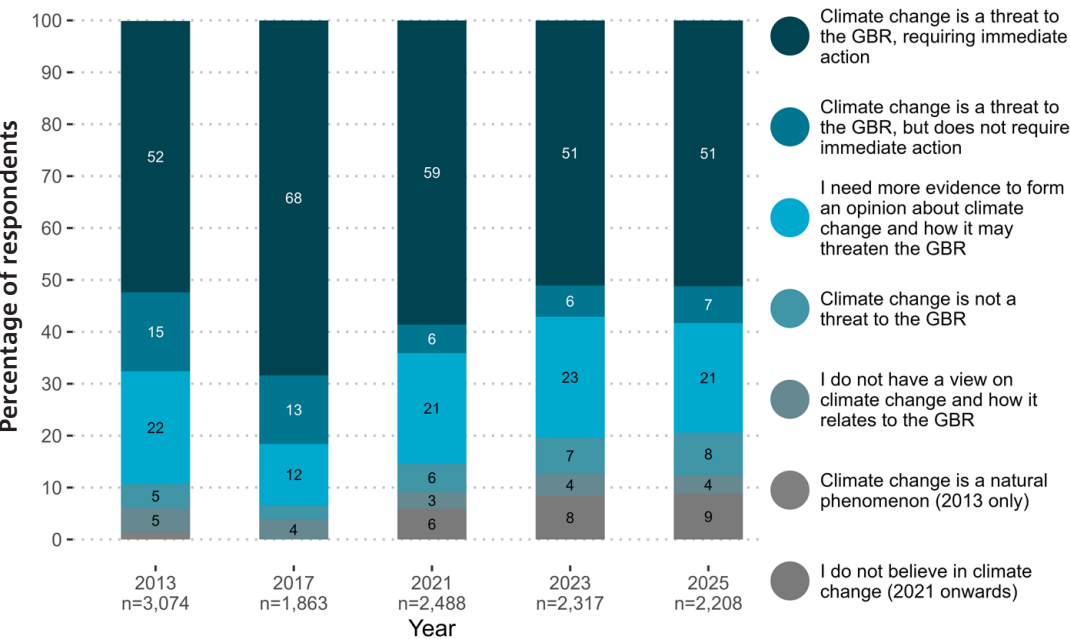
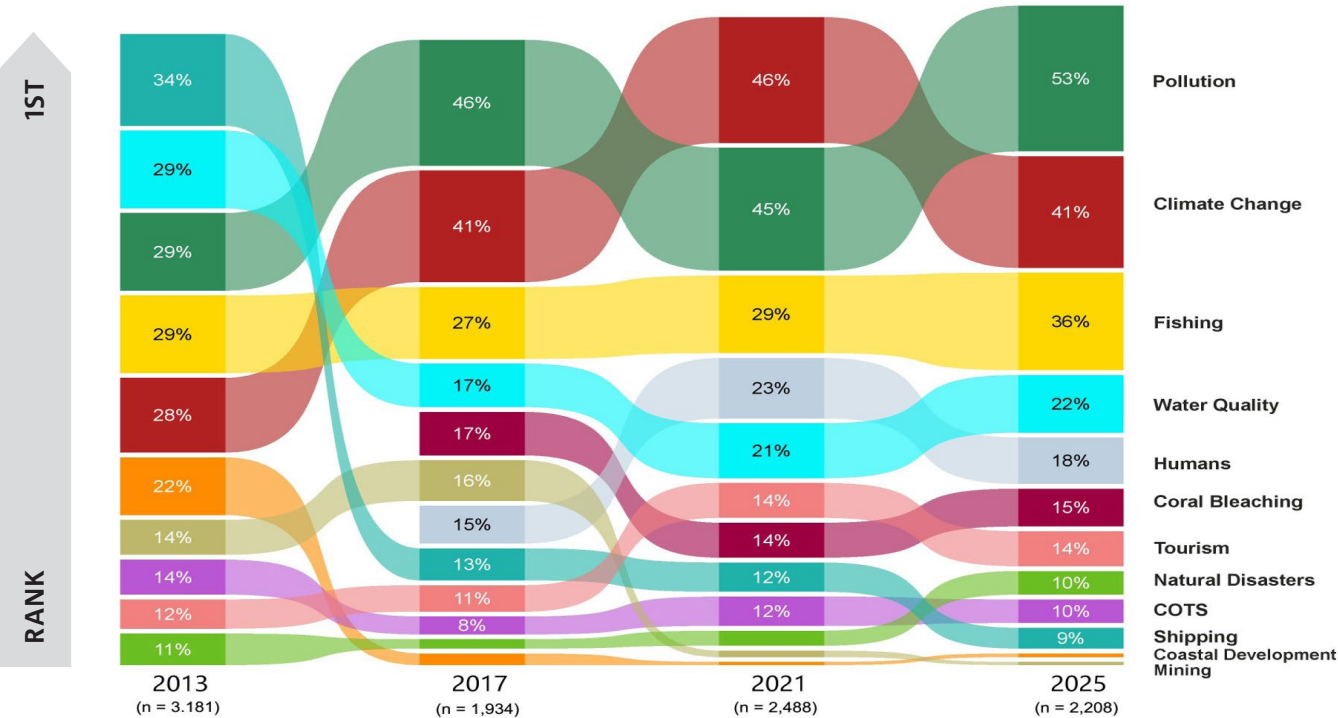


Changing health



Threats

What do you think are the three most serious threats to the GBR?



Climate risk perceptions among residents in the GBR region have changed over time.

* Percentage of respondents reporting high agreement (7-10 on a 10-point agreement scale).

Reef stewardship

What are people who use the Reef doing to help protect the Reef?



93%

of residents reported that they **dispose of food scraps and rubbish appropriately** most or all the time (vs. 94% in 2023)



53%

of residents reported that they encourage others to practice **responsible fishing** most or all the time (vs. 71% in 2023)



27%

of residents indicated that they **report suspicious activity** to the authorities most or all the time (vs. 39% in 2023)

There was a proportion of residents for whom these practices were not applicable. These residents were excluded from the calculation of the above percentages.

Individual perspectives on Reef stewardship

Among residents of the GBR catchment region:



79%*

agreed they felt a **moral obligation** to reduce any impacts they might personally have on the GBR (vs. 71% in 2023)



60%*

agreed that **most people in their local area were trying** to reduce their impacts on the GBR (vs. 50% in 2023)



46%*

agreed they **could make a personal difference** in improving the health of the GBR (vs. 50% in 2023)



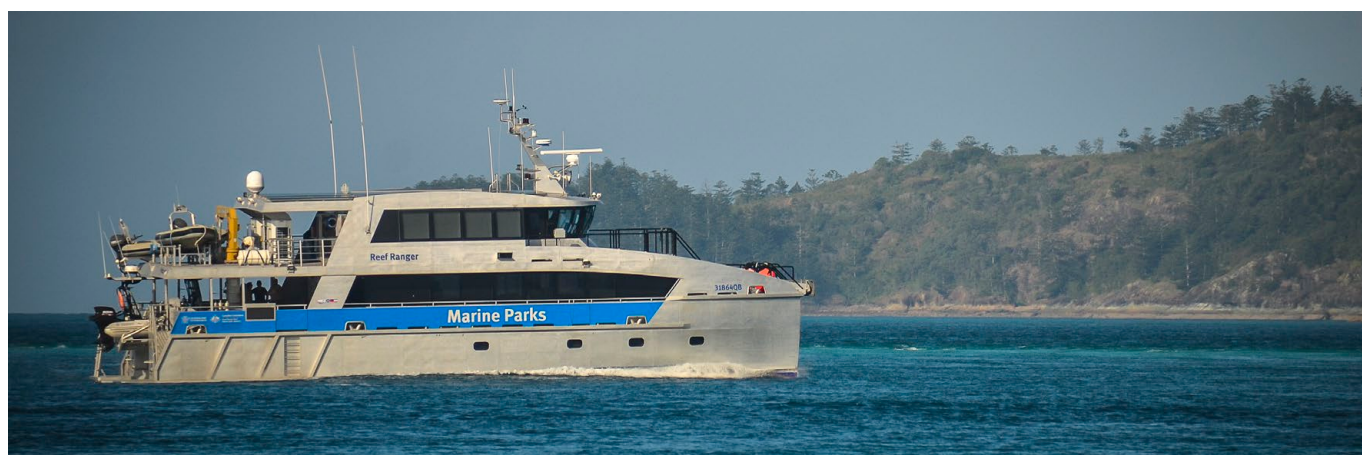
64%*

agreed they had a **good understanding** of the things they can do to help the GBR (vs. 60% in 2023)

* Percentage of respondents reporting high agreement (7-10 on a 10-point agreement scale).



Perceived importance of management initiatives





Residents were divided in their perceptions about how the GBR is managed, with many indicating a lack of understanding of management processes.

43%*

agreed they were **satisfied** with how the GBR is managed (vs. 40% in 2023)

39%*

agreed that decisions about the GBR are made in a **fair way** (vs. 29% in 2023)

38%*

agreed they **understand** how the GBR is managed

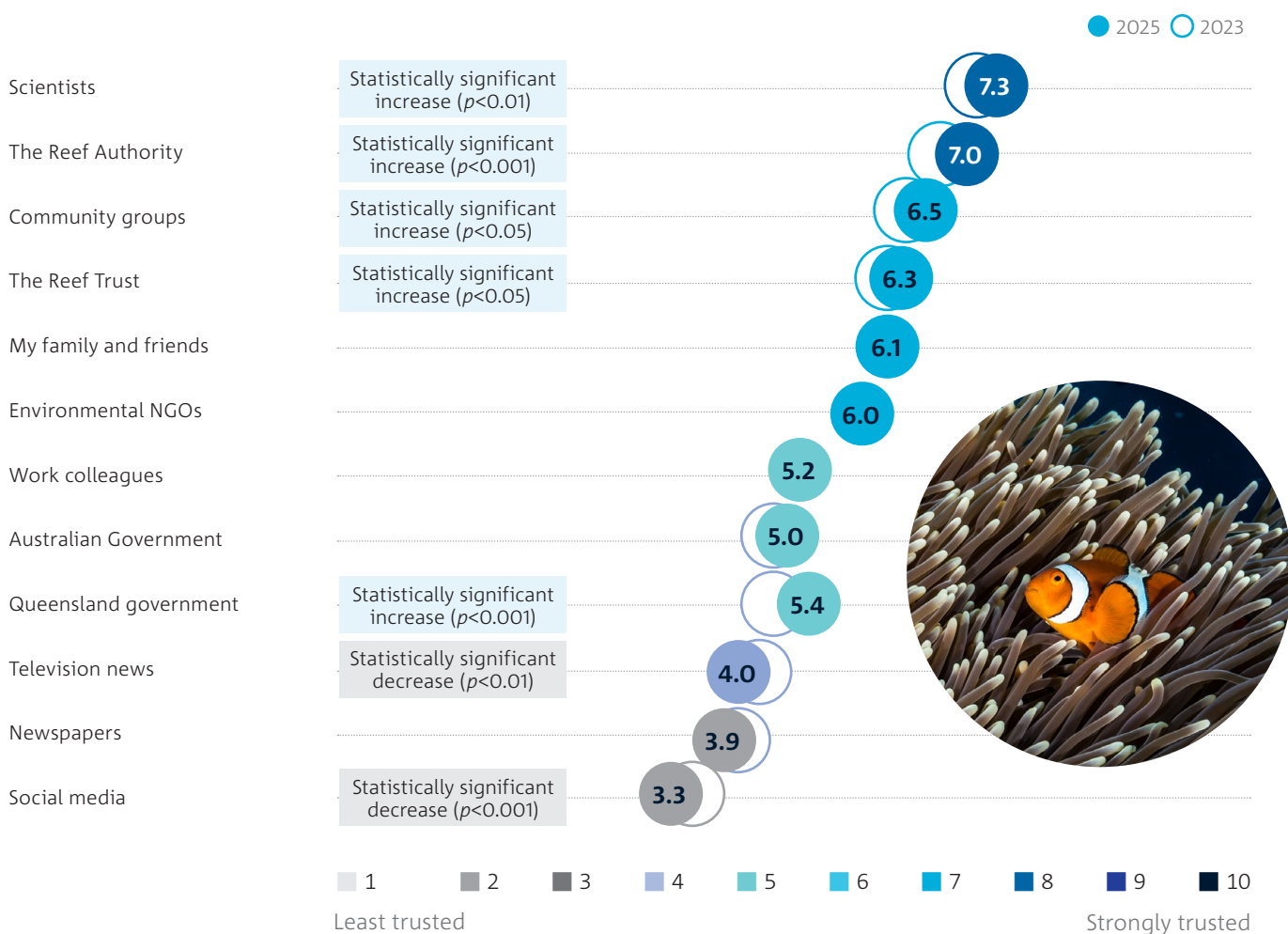


* Percentage of respondents reporting high agreement (7-10 on a 10-point agreement scale).



Most perceived trusted sources of information about the GBR

Our scientists, and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (The Reef Authority), are the most trusted sources of information about the GBR, followed by community groups, local environmental groups, and Australian-based environmental non-government organisations. However, ratings of trust in these and other sources have changed over time.



Average ratings of trust in information about the GBR from various sources (2023; $n = 2,317$) (2025; $n = 2,208$)



Changes over time



Trust

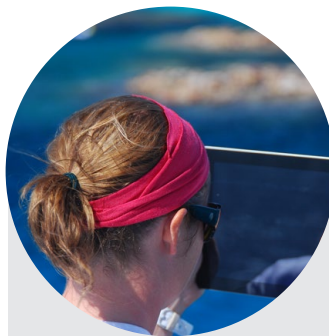
The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is consistently among the most trusted sources of information about the Reef.



Trust in scientists from research institutions remained high across all survey years, although levels in 2023 and 2025 were lower than in 2013 and 2017.



Trust in information about the Reef from family, friends and work colleagues has remained relatively stable between 2021 and 2025.



Trust in newspapers and social media remained the lowest among information sources across all survey years.



SELTMP Research Team



Dr Anthea Coggan

Senior Research Scientist,
Environmental Economist
SELTMP co-leader



Dr Matt Curnock

Senior Social-Environmental Scientist
SELTMP co-leader



Dr Elizabeth Hobman

Senior Research Scientist,
Psychologist



Dr Gabriela Scheufele

Principal Research Scientist,
Environmental Economist



Dr Petina Pert

Research Scientist,
Data and Spatial Analyst



Dr Daniel Grainger

Senior Research Scientist,
Economist



Kerry Collins

Natural Resource Analyst

CSIRO is Australia's national science agency,
delivering solutions for a productive,
sustainable and secure future.

CSIRO. Improving the life of every Australian.

Contact us
1300 363 400
[csiro.au/contact](https://www.csiro.au/contact)
[csiro.au](https://www.csiro.au)

For further information
CSIRO Environment
Matt Curnock
+61 7 4753 8607
matt.curnock@csiro.au

SELTMP is guided by an End-User Reference Group, with representatives from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the Queensland Government's Office of the Great Barrier Reef and World Heritage, the GBR Regional Report Card network, and the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

© Reef photos by Matt Curnock

