Great Barrier
Reef Foundation

Reef Trust Partnership
2026-2027 Annual Work Plan – Components 2-7

Summary

This is the eighth Annual Work Plan for the Reef Trust Partnership (RTP), outlining the investment priorities associated with the Australian Government's 2018 commitment of $443.3 million.

The majority of RTP Components have now formally concluded. The 2026-2027 Annual Work Plan sets out expenditure across the two remaining program components: continuing bridging activities under the COTS Control Component (Component 3), and new activities under the recently established Reef Resilience Activities Component (Component 7) which utilises unspent grant funds as at 30 June 2026 and RTP interest earnings.

An accompanying Annual Work Plan is prepared for administration and contract management activities defined as Component 1.

2026-2027 Annual Work Plan activities at a glance:

COTS Control Component (budget $1.106m)
Comprised of funding which utilises a previous allocation of RTP interest and co-investment from DCCEEW.

- Completion of 13 bridging projects and successful integration of project outcomes into the COTS Control Program.
- Identification of priority investment areas for additional bridging funding.

Reef Resilient Activities Component (budget up to $8.5m)

- Design and delivery of a Heat Tolerant Corals R&D program to boost the resilience of corals to warming ocean temperatures.
- Advance marine nature finance instruments through piloting of new models and methods that support sustainable financing for coral restoration projects.
- Map current reef restoration regulatory, policy and approvals pathways, and the enablers and barriers, from a Great Barrier Reef Marine Park perspective.
- Deliver to the Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water, a roadmap to transition reef restoration R&D and pilots to deployment and delivery, developed through consultation with key stakeholders, partners and rightholders.

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Crown-of-Thorns Starfish (COTS) Control Component

Partnership Budget: $60.7m (includes an additional $2.9m of funds derived from interest earned on the RTP investment to specifically fund CCIP bridging activities from 2024-2027).

2026-2027 budget: $1.106m (includes $0.94m co-investment for CCIP bridging activities and interest).

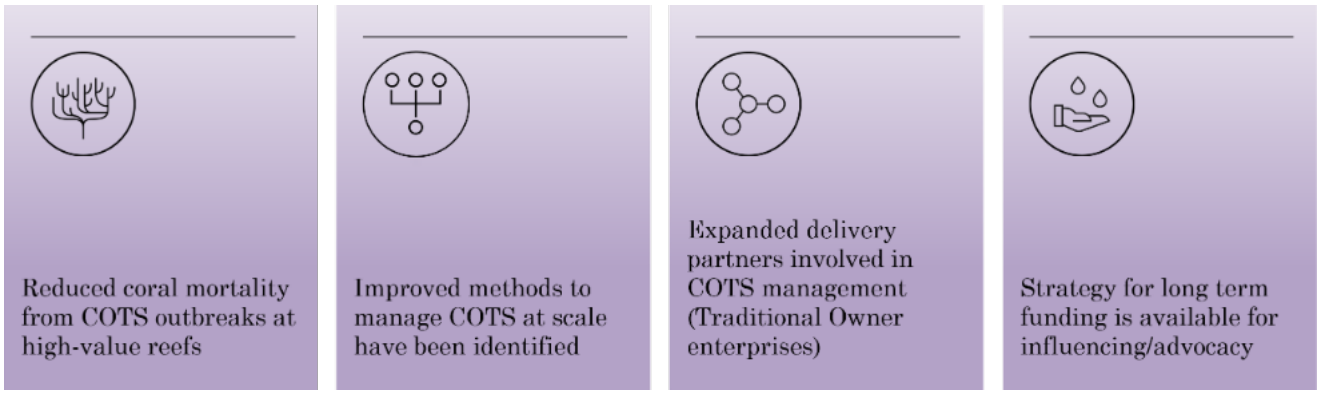
Component Purpose: To expand efforts to control Crown-of-Thorns Starfish (COTS) to reduce coral mortality from COTS outbreaks, in order to protect high ecological and economic value coral reefs in line with GBRMPA's COTS Control Strategy.

Priorities under the Partnership Investment Strategy

- Support existing in-water COTS control and drive improved efficiency.
- Lead a step change in surveillance for early COTS detection and early intervention.
- Explore alternative control methods to address COTS management at a broad scale in the future.

End-of-Partnership Outcomes

The Reef Trust Partnership's COTS Control Component has resulted in:



COTS activities to date:

- In 2024-2025 an independent expert evaluation found that all contractual end of Partnership outcomes for the COTS Control Component had been achieved, and in many cases exceeded. Work also commenced on delivery of eight research translation projects.

- In 2025-2026 bridging funding was secured through additional interest earned and co-investment through DCCEEW and AIMS. This enabled momentum to be maintained in the COTS Control Innovation Program (CCIP), a synthesis and impact report for CCIP to be completed and an Investment Case for a new 5 year COTS R&D Program to be developed. Delivery of eight research translation projects were also completed, and 13 new research projects were launched that started addressing research priorities identified when designing CCIP Phase 2.

COTS activities in 2026-2027

In 2026-2027 the focus will be on finalising 13 bridging research projects, with the majority of projects due for completion by 31 December 2026. Key outcomes of these projects will include the successful integration of new detection and monitoring technologies (e.g. eDNA, robotics, AI), decision support tools and modelling in COTS Control Program systems and processes.

In addition, with additional bridging funding for COTS Control R&D announced in the 2026-2027 Federal budget, CCIP partners and COTS managers will work together to prioritise investment in new bridging research that will maintain cross-institutional collaboration, deliver priority research that supports the COTS Control Program, and ensure readiness for a longer-term R&D program. This will include coordinating activities across related programs through the CCIP Steering Committee and engagement with Traditional Owners to support their priority bridging activities.

Table 1: COTS Control Component investment areas and budget for 2026-2027

Partnership Activity	Description	Budget
COTS Control Innovation Program – Bridging Activities Funded through co-investment from DCCEEW, AIMS and RTP interest.	Activities will focus on prioritising and managing coordinated investment in research that supports ongoing improvement in COTS management. Targeted investment in bridging research ensures continuity of COTS innovation and maintains capability while securing long-term funding, including partnerships with Traditional Owners. ***Deliverables:*** *13 bridging projects successfully delivered and outputs integrated into the COTS Control Program. Innovation capability sustained. Next phase of priority CCIP investment areas identified. Report to funders and partners on progress and outcomes.*	$1.106m
	TOTAL INVESTMENT	**$1.106m**

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Reef Resilience Activities Component

2026-2027 budget: up to $8.5m

Component Purpose: To advance science and enabling frameworks and mechanisms that protect and promote reef restoration and resilience for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Priorities:

- Advance adaptation science and deployment activities to support coral reef resilience, including targeted research, trials and synthesis to improve understanding of effective, scalable and durable resilience and restoration interventions.
- Progress and test nature finance instruments for coral biodiversity, including mechanisms, valuation approaches and partnerships that mobilise public and private investment while maintaining environmental integrity.
- Support the development of strategic frameworks and planning to enable at-scale reef restoration and resilience activities, which may include but is not limited to, analysis of recently updated regulatory policy, legislation and approvals frameworks.

Overview:

Over the past five years, the Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program (RRAP) has delivered significant advances towards at-scale reef restoration through scientific breakthroughs focused on coral sexual reproduction. Innovations such as the ReefSeed high-throughput aquaculture system, OSCAR—the autonomous coral-seeding robot—and Seedboxes, which can increase coral settlement rates by up to 80 times, have fundamentally changed what is possible. Together, these technologies have shifted reef restoration from the outplanting of thousands of juvenile corals to the potential deployment of millions.

As marine heatwaves and mass bleaching events increase in frequency and severity, the next frontier for reef restoration is enhancing the heat tolerance and adaptive capacity of corals. Building on the Assisted Adaptation Roadmap developed through CORDAP (the Coral Research & Development Accelerator Platform), we will develop and deliver a Heat Tolerant Corals Research and Development Program focused on strengthening coral resilience to warming ocean temperatures and accelerating the readiness of promising adaptation interventions.

At the same time, the momentum generated through RRAP's R&D and Pilot Deployment Programs must now be translated into a pathway for large-scale implementation. To realise the full potential of these emerging restoration technologies, work is needed to establish the enabling conditions for deployment on the Great Barrier Reef.

Over the next 12 months, we will support the design of a future reef restoration delivery model by developing fit-for-purpose regulatory and approval pathways, exploring sustainable financing mechanisms, and creating an inclusive deployment roadmap that reflects the roles and aspirations of key stakeholders, partners and rights holders. This work will bring together leading experts to develop the frameworks, options and investment models required to support future decision-making.

By laying these foundations, we will help maintain momentum in reef restoration innovation, provide governments and investors with a clear pathway to scale, and ensure that promising restoration and adaptation technologies are positioned to contribute meaningfully to the long-term resilience of the Great Barrier Reef.

Table 2: Reef Resilience Activities Component investment areas and budget for 2026-2027

Partnership Activity	Description	Budget
Heat Tolerant Corals R&D Program	With significant progress in scaling reef restoration the next challenge is to develop more heat tolerant corals. In partnership with KAUST, CORDAP and scientific experts we will co-design and deliver a $10M (this includes a $5m co-investment from CORDAP) Heat Tolerant Corals Program. **Deliverables:** Assisted Adaptation program co-designed with a global expert panel; Prioritised projects contracted and delivering outcomes.	$5.5m
Reef Restoration transition to deployment roadmap	With increasing climate impacts on the GBR we must increase the scale at which we can deploy reef restoration interventions. This roadmap will be developed together with key stakeholders, partners and rightholders, building a transition to deployment roadmap that is grounded in the Reef 2050 Plan and has collaboration at its core. **Deliverables:** Stakeholder and rightholders workshops completed identifying potential roles and responsibilities; An inclusive transition to deployment roadmap developed and delivered to DCCEEW.	$1.5m
Develop marine biodiversity crediting methods	Marine ecosystems are overlooked when considering blended and sustainable financing instruments. We will progress foundational work on a high-integrity, science-based methods for coral biodiversity credits. **Deliverables**: Accredited coral reef biodiversity/ecosystem and seagrass restoration methods ready for adoption.	$0.5m
Support partners to establish accounting and marine credit pilots.	Marine nature markets require a proof of concept to catalyse policy development as well as establish a demand pipeline / buyer confidence. At the same time, readiness on the supply side is currently lacking and there is a significant risk of missed opportunities as the market develops. **Deliverables**: At least one domestic and one international pilot demonstrate in-field application of marine biodiversity accounting for crediting, reporting or financing. Demand pipeline and buyer confidence established	$0.5m

Partnership Activity	Description	Budget
Development of frameworks to enable at scale reef restoration and resilience.	RRAP has demonstrated a step change in reef restoration, but regulatory processes and approvals frameworks can be highly complex and involve multiple agencies. To achieve restoration at scale more transparent and cohesive pathways will be required. **Deliverables**: Process maps detailing current pathways and barriers for approvals of restoration and resilience activities at scale; case studies and learnings from other successful at scale environmental restoration programs; and recommendations for decision-makers.	$0.5m
	TOTAL INVESTMENT	Up to $8.5m

Approved by the GBRF Board 26 June 2026