

Great Barrier Reef Restoration Symposium

Outcomes/Position Statement

Contributors: Great Barrier Reef Restoration Symposium Organising Committee

The Great Barrier Reef Restoration Symposium (16-18 July 2018, Cairns) brought together 300 leading scientists, engineers, experienced practitioners, environmental managers, industry professionals, NGOs, community members and youth representatives from 14 countries for the first international conference on coral reef restoration.

The symposium recognised the rapidly increasing interest in reef restoration and adaptation reflects the growing realisation that coral reefs are in trouble globally and need our help. All around the world, coral reefs are experiencing unprecedented decline due to the combined effects of global climate change and local pressures such as pollution and overfishing. These declines undermine food security, cultural heritage and economic opportunity. They are impacting livelihoods and the wellbeing of hundreds of millions of people. There is much we can do. Many reef regions, like the Great Barrier Reef, are still beautiful, and these are sources of hope for us all. They are the inspiration to accelerate and intensify efforts to address the big challenges of climate change, pollution from land, coastal development and unsustainable fishing.

Efforts to restore damaged reefs, and help intact reefs survive in future warming conditions, encompasses many approaches and are done for many reasons. Australia can learn much from the history of reef restoration in other regions, such as the Caribbean and Pacific, but we need to adapt and innovate, and develop methods appropriate to the scale and context of the Great Barrier Reef. We need to be specific about the objectives, risks and limitations of restoration efforts, and recognise that tradeoffs will need to be made. We need to specify and measure outcomes from restoration, and we need to ensure we take an adaptive learning approach to all our restoration efforts. Strategic and sustainable restoration will require a portfolio approach that matches methods and scales to the specific objectives and conditions at different sites across the reef landscape.

There are many challenges ahead. Restoration raises important questions about the role and risks of interventions in coral reef ecosystems, it places new demands on environmental regulators, and requires us to consider the implications of new technologies such as genetic engineering. We must take care to ensure restoration is not seen as the sole solution to the coral reef crisis, and that we do not distract from the essential efforts to address the range of pressures that are driving reef decline, especially climate change. We must carefully manage risks associated with restoration, balancing these against the risks of inaction.

And we must engage meaningfully to work in partnership with traditional owners and reef communities in the design and implementation of restoration actions.

Australia is well-positioned to lead global efforts to help reefs survive into the coming decades. Through the collaborative and coordinated approach that has been galvanised through the Great Barrier Reef Restoration Symposium and the Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program, we will energise a new era of collaboration between scientists, engineers, private enterprise and citizens to develop, test, demonstrate and scale-up restoration that will help build ecological and social resilience in the Great Barrier Reef.

Abstracts available [here](http://bit.ly/2MrF9mH): (<http://bit.ly/2MrF9mH>)