

## A classroom on the reef

*Learning excursions for schools visiting the Great Barrier Reef.*

**EMBARGOED TILL 2 FEBRUARY 2022, 11AM**

The Great Barrier Reef is one of the seven wonders of the natural world – containing an abundance of marine life and over 3,000 individual coral and reef systems. This makes it a unique educational opportunity.

The Australian and Queensland Governments have introduced two programs for tourism operators to help turn the ocean into an engaging classroom setting for students.

Member for Mackay Julieanne Gilbert said it was vitally important to boost the next generation's understanding of Queensland's greatest living asset.

"The Palaszczuk Government's Great Barrier Reef Education Experience Program has helped more than 8,000 Queensland students get onto the Reef for the school excursion of a lifetime," Ms Gilbert said.

"We've turned the Great Barrier Reef into Australia's biggest outdoor classroom to deliver a unique, hands-on learning experience for students and new tour opportunities for reef operators.

Since launching in mid-2021, the Great Barrier Reef Education Experience has delivered more than \$5.6 million to regional Queensland's visitor economy.

It's fabulous to see our city join the program's school excursion destinations with the recent launch of Wild Cat's Great Barrier Reef and island tours from Mackay.

Last year, the Palaszczuk Government's Growing Tourism Infrastructure Fund supported Wild Cat to get into the water with an investment of almost \$1 million to add to Mackay's many visitor experiences." Ms Gilbert said.

Developed by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Be a Marine Biologist for a Day is a program that offers 'high quality experiential learning excursions', designed to be delivered by Tourism Operators for students visiting the Great Barrier Reef.

The curriculum-linked program is a comprehensive suite of educational resources that delves well below the surface to provide an in-depth knowledge about the rich biodiversity of the reef and its marine life.

Assistant Director Reef Education Holly Lambert said we're excited to launch the suite of educational resources that give students and teachers a taste for what it is like to be a marine biologist on the Great Barrier Reef.

"We worked with teachers, Master Reef Guides and High Standard Tourism Operators to create curriculum aligned education products that enable students of all ages to learn about the Reef from the classroom to the coral.

We have Reef Guardian Schools, High Standard Tourism Operators, Master Reef Guides, and our Eye on the Reef Program all working together on this program

The project aims to increase students understanding of the Reef, inspire a love for citizen science and share knowledge with the next generation of Reef custodians. "She said.

The Queensland Government has also invested over \$1 million in a 3-year program – Great Barrier Reef Education Experience Program which sees \$150 per student, paid directly to schools to go towards the cost of a school excursion which includes a reef experience.

Multi-national, award-winning Hall of fame 2021 winners, Red Cat Adventures is a certified business operator in the reef program.

Schools in the Mackay region are now able to claim tours on Wildcat Mackay.

With their years of experience in tourism and training, Wildcat Mackay aims to immerse students in an authentic natural classroom.

Red Cat Adventures Owner Julie Telford is excited for her Wildcat team to inspire and educate young minds about the world's largest natural wonder.

"Learning can be fun and we are so lucky to have The Great Barrier reef as our playground. We must teach the future generation and allow them the opportunity to develop a deeper connection with the reef through interactive and hands-on immersive learning experiences" Julie Telford said.

One of the many advantages of the reef program is that it adds value to the Mackay region by increasing the level of education and awareness of the Great Barrier Reef.

Mackay Isaac Tourism Chief Executive Officer, Tas Webber said having an accessible education experience allows students to have a permanent platform to study the reef ecosystems.

"When it comes to reef education, inspiring our next generation of reef warriors is important. As they are ones that will be protecting the reef for our future generations" Tas Webber said.

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