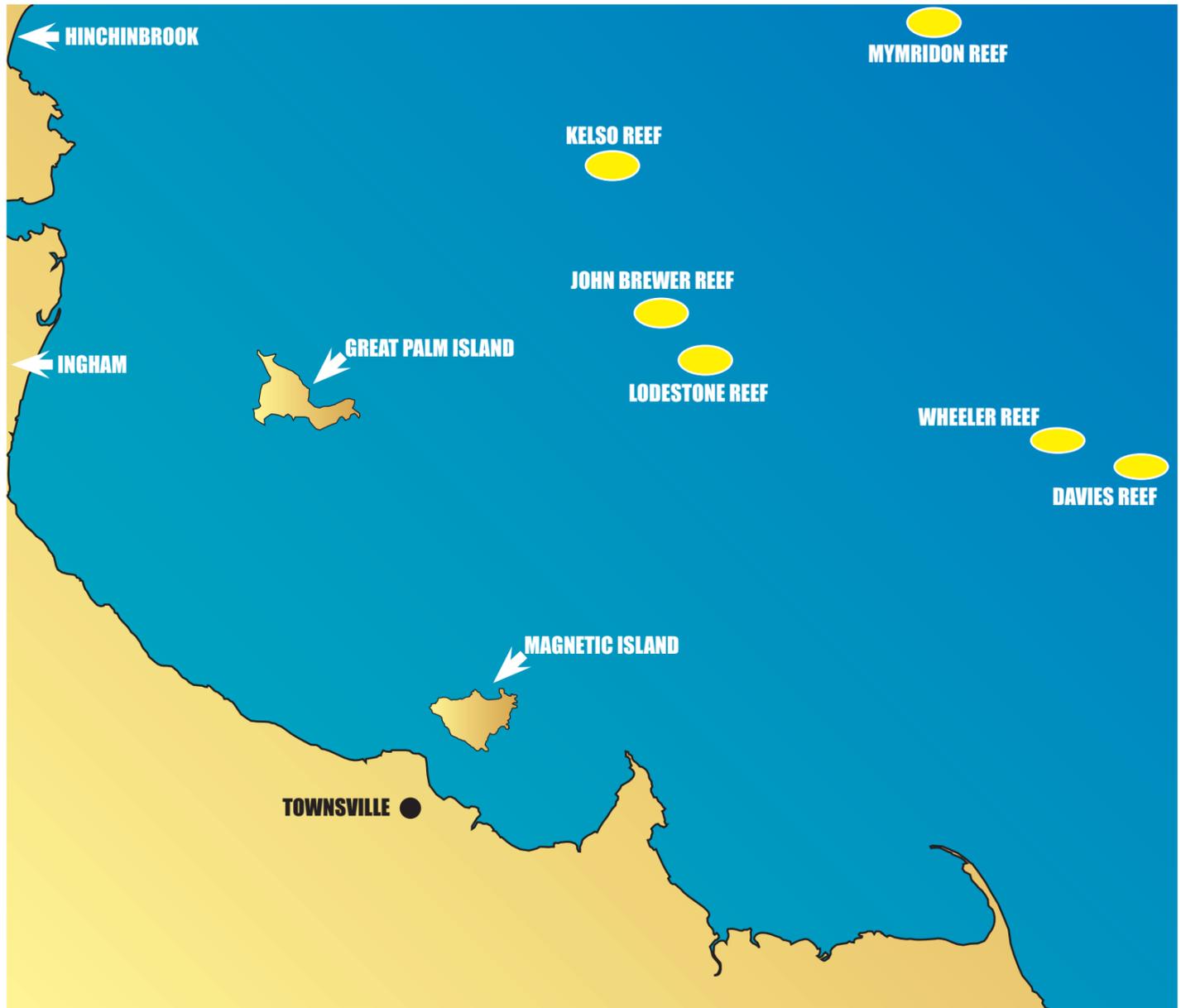


# Testing times ahead for

## Reef facts

- THE Great Barrier Reef extends 2300km along the Queensland coast, covers 3500,000 sq km and contains 2900 reefs.
- IT CONTAINS 400 types of coral, 1500 species of fish, 5000 types of mollusc and more than 175 bird species.
- THE 760 fringing reefs range in size from less than 1ha to more than 10,000ha.
- THE barrier reef has evolved over millions of years on Australia's north-east continental shelf, with 600 islands and 300 coral cays and unvegetated sand cays.
- FIFTEEN species of seagrass grow throughout the reef area forming more than 3000 sq km of seagrass meadows.
- REEF health is monitored by the Australian Institute of Marine Science, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Reef Check Australia and groups such as Eye on the Reef, BleachWatch and Tangaroa Blue.



## Volunteers help keep reef health in check

BROKEN plastic and 317 cigarette butts were among debris picked up during a recent clean-up of Rowes Bay beach.

Volunteers found 9kg of marine debris on a 600m strip of beach in mid-February.

The collection was organised by Reef Check Australia and Tangaroa Blue, which has launched a national campaign to curb marine debris.

The 35 volunteers also attended a workshop led by JCU turtle expert Dr Mark Hamann, who told how debris has harmed turtles along the Queensland coast.

This project was supported by a Caring for Our Country grant through Townsville City Council's Creek to Coral program.

Reef Check Australia general manager Jennifer Loder said this week everyone living along the coast could help keep the reef healthy.

"Most ocean litter originates from the land, which means we can each take the simple step of picking up trash before it makes its way to the sea where it can entangle or be ingested by marine life," she said.

Reef Check Australia volunteers have been collecting standardised reef health data in the Townsville



area since 2003.

Ms Loder, who moved from Townsville to Brisbane about a year ago, said surveys of Magnetic Island had recorded fluctuations in hard coral cover over time, with examples of recovery after major disturbances such as storms.

The most common reef health impacts had been coral bleaching, physical damage and marine debris.

Overall, a lot of life had been found on inshore reef sites, probably more than expected, given

their proximity to the coast.

"The Great Barrier Reef is a vast, complex and incredibly diverse ecosystem with sensitive connections to other ecosystems, allowing reefs to act as an indicator for the health of our land, coastal and marine environments," Ms Loder said.

"This means long-term reef monitoring is particularly important to understand and record measurable changes in reef condition over time."

Reef Check helped lay people to



**The Great Barrier Reef is a vast, complex and incredibly diverse ecosystem with sensitive connections to other ecosystems, allowing reefs to act as an indicator for the health of our land, coastal and marine environments**

Jennifer Loder

take an active role in better understanding and protecting unique marine resources like the Great Barrier Reef.

See [www.reefcheckaustralia.org](http://www.reefcheckaustralia.org) for ideas on protecting reefs and for detailed information on reef survey locations.



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