

# Connecting communities in the Mackay Whitsunday Isaac to take action for the Reef

*A Case Study of the Community Action Plan 2020-2023*

*“The CAP brought people together in more ways than I expected. This included a cross section of community members and it helped get people out of siloes and gave people space to work together to identify shared goals.”*

*Cass Hayward, Reef Catchments Coordinator*

## Background

The Mackay Whitsunday Isaac (MWI) region is a gateway to the Great Barrier Reef and surrounding islands, drawing visitors from all over the world. The region’s economy is centered around agriculture, natural resources and tourism. It is home to an abundance of iconic species and landscapes, and the coastline is a key habitat for migratory shorebirds and turtles.

In 2020, Reef Catchments led the development of the MWI Reef Community Action Plan to empower the community to work together to enable effective community action for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef.

The three natural values deemed most important to the community were coral reefs, catchments and estuaries, and mangroves. The top priorities that emerged from Traditional Owner and community feedback were climate change, litter and waste, revegetation, and water quality.



*Marine classroom in the Whitsundays.  
Credit: Emma Maxwell*



*Sarina State High School students learning about coastal rehabilitation at Grasstree Beach.  
Credit: Saskia von Fahland*

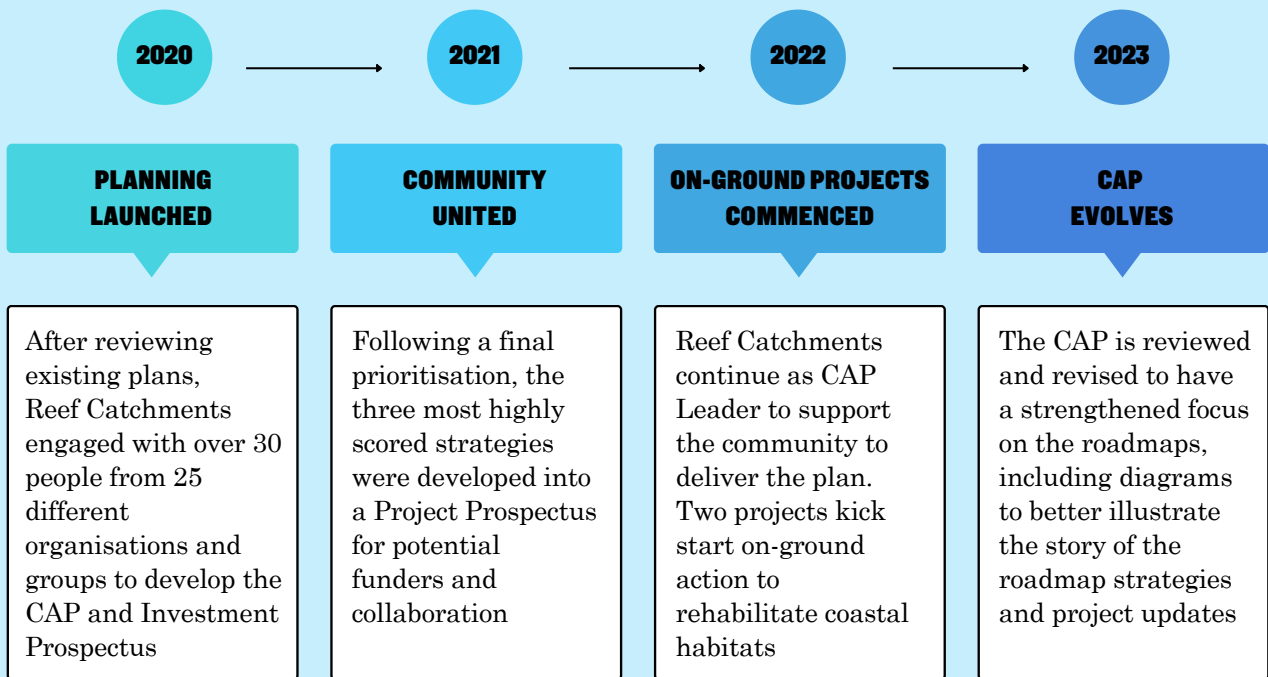
The Community Action Plan (CAP) Program is a pilot program for place-based collaborative planning and delivery to enhance community Reef protection and delivery to enhance community Reef protection for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. CAPs connect community aspirations with regional and Reef-wide priorities by:

- establishing shared goals
- designing better ways to work together
- identifying critical projects
- measuring and celebrating the impact of community on-ground action
- exploring ways to enable investment.





The timeline outlines key steps in the CAP process:



CAP community and youth workshops.  
Credit: Cass Hayward

Top: The Mackay Whitsunday Isaac Community Action Plan. Bottom: Community Tree Planting Day  
Credit: Cass Hayward



# Community Action Impacts

The community-led plan and actions are already positively impacting the Reef and community.

## Launch of new on-ground projects

The Community Action Plan process kick-started several new, on-ground and capacity building initiatives including:

- Lowering carbon footprint by reducing food waste – Whitsunday Regional Council are leading the Whitsundays Waste Education Program, which is working with local schools on trialing ways to reduce food and garden organics. A waste stream analysis will provide a baseline for building on this work to target broader community actions in the future.
- Expanding collaborative revegetation events – Sarina Landcare Catchment Management Association are working with community on on-ground rehabilitation activities at Grasstree Beach and Carmilla Beach.
- Increasing soil carbon on grazing properties – Increasing and holding carbon in soils was a high priority for the community. Reef Catchments were successful in securing funding under the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program to start this project.

## Improved communication and coordination of citizen science projects

Reef Catchments developed an online hub to connect the community with opportunities to get involved in citizen science projects in the region. The regional citizen science calendar provides a centralized and coordinated platform for community groups to advertise community participation opportunities and for community members to discover what events and initiatives they can get involved with.

## Improved knowledge transfer

CAP Leader staff have taken knowledge and skills they developed during the CAP development process and embedding them into new organisations they are currently working with. Additionally, Reef Catchments continue to translate the needs of the community into ‘shovel ready’ prospectus documents which can be marketed to private investors.



Waste education program at Cannonvale State School.  
Credit: Hannah Fuzier

**86**



participant engagements in planning and action, including through online platforms to adapt during Covid-19

**25**



partners helped to deliver key project activities such as beach restoration and developing a waste education program

**1**



new school program piloting community climate action

**5**



schools funded to undertake a waste reduction program





## Ingredients for success

Many factors have enabled the success of the Mackay Whitsunday Isaac CAP. Unique factors include:

### Active citizen science community

There are multiple active citizen science programs that understood which critical gaps needed to be addressed.

### Clear and simple prioritization process

The CAP development process used a structured decision process to prioritise the development of roadmaps. Criteria included alignment with strategic plans, readiness to commence, feasibility, and impacts the project would make for the Reef and community. This transparency helped groups make plans together.

### Bringing voices together

Understanding community priorities was key to the development of the CAP. Reef Catchments brought together groups and individuals to collaboratively plan and work together effectively.

### Continuous and effective communications

Reef Catchments used a Storymap to visualize their CAP and make it a dynamic online document. In the review and revision process, they used input from the LMAC, Landcare Australia and the Traditional Owner Reference Group to make roadmaps more visual as a more effective tool to share the CAP work and guide actions.

### Partnership with local council to trial climate actions

A strong connection and shared values with Whitsunday Regional Council is helping guide community-led carbon emissions reduction actions.

## What are we working on?

The CAP program is designed to be an adaptive and responsive program. The next areas of growth identified for the Mackay Whitsunday Isaac CAP are:

### Maintaining and growing momentum

It is critical for the CAP to maintain momentum and to grow the on-ground projects underway to strengthen positive impacts for the Reef and community. The CAP will focus on strengthening connections between groups for coordinated action.

### Supporting future planning and partnerships

A core focus is encouraging the community and Reef decision makers to incorporate the priority strategies into future planning processes to help build new partnerships and secure resources for growth.

### Increasing communications

Communications through the CAP will focus on increasing awareness and understanding of the community's priorities identified in the CAP and the achievements of on-ground projects towards those goals.

### Expanding engagement

Expanding community participation is key for success to support delivery of on-ground CAP projects. A citizen science calendar is being piloted to bring more visibility for participation opportunities.



*Sarina State High School students removed 90kg of weeds at Grasreef Beach so native coastal vegetation can grow. Credit: Saskia von Fahland*



## People driving change

*A diverse range of people are driving the work by bringing their local knowledge, identifying priorities, delivering activities and coordinating efforts to harness community contributions.*



“The community really stepped up and came up with innovative ideas to get these action plans out, but just doing it in a different way and manner, which was awesome. It's been really impressive to see how it's just all rolled along and things have actually come to fruition in a really effective way. We've all learned different tools and techniques that we're still using today and we'll probably continue to, no matter what happens in the world.”

**Carolyn Roche, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority**

“Engaging key stakeholders including Landcares and the Local Marine Advisory Committee to guide the CAP review enabled the refinement of the storymap to be more fit-for-purpose and action orientated for our community partners. The CAP review process offered a fantastic opportunity to discuss priorities for 2023 and has already informed the development of two additional project roadmaps for funding.”

**Kellie Best, CAP Leader Reef Catchments**



“The roadmaps are good for helping people think through the linkages. We ended up with a list of great projects which will help the community be more proactive in seeking investment. The CAP process has given us a list of shovel-ready projects that have been well thought out and are ready for funding opportunities.”

**Cass Hayward, Reef Catchments Coordinator**

“The WLMAC members were invited to attend Community Action Planning workshops and it was great to see the collaboration and problem solving shared by the group to work out how to actually make projects come together and measure their success. Funding community groups to champion projects is a great way to empower action and ensure longevity of outcomes.”

**Olivia Brodhurst, Director Whitsunday Environmental**



“It was great to see the CAP process come to fruition and lead to meaningful activities being undertaken in the catchment. Our local CAP project was a great opportunity to undertake a range of onground activities at local beaches and engage with the local community to raise awareness of the importance of having a healthy, resilient coastal zone, as the interface to the marine environment.”

**Saskia von Fahland, Sarina Landcare Catchment Management Association Inc.**





## A collaborative approach

*The Mackay Whitsunday Isaac Community Action Plan is funded by the partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.*



Great Barrier  
Reef Foundation

*Technical expertise for the program is provided by Conservation Management and social science support from Queensland University of Technology and the University of Queensland.*



*The Mackay Whitsunday Isaac Traditional Owner Reference Group prioritised values to protect in their region through the CAP Program. Credit: Cass Hayward*

### Contacts

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We extend our deepest respect and recognition to all Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef and its Catchments as First Nations Peoples holding the hopes, dreams, traditions and cultures of the Reef.

