

# Sustainability at the heart of Yunbenun-Magnetic Island

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

*“The process has catalysed our community, both adults and children, to future-proof the land and sea country of Yunbenun-Magnetic Island, and is helping to create this leading sustainable reef island community.”*

*Les Sampson, MICDA President*

## Background

Yunbenun-Magnetic Island is known for its golden beaches, coral reefs and rich vegetation. Located 8 km off the coast of Townsville in northern Queensland, it is home to a growing population of 2,500 residents and over 250 animal species. The Island has World Heritage status, with 78% of its incredibly diverse habitats designated as national or conservation parks.

There is a strong sense of connection among the Island’s community, who have long recognised the natural beauty and ecological importance of Yunbenun-Magnetic Island and its contribution to the Great Barrier Reef. Many residents are aware of the challenges the Reef faces, whether from local threats such as coastal development and invasive species, or global threats posed by climate change.

In 2020, the Magnetic Island Community Development Association (MICDA) led the development of the Yunbenun-Magnetic Island Community Action Plan (CAP) to empower the community to nurture, restore and protect the Island’s outstanding social, ecological and cultural values for current and future generations.

The CAP united 12 groups to commit to a whole-of-island approach to protect and restore the Island’s World Heritage values including the rich cultural values of the Wulgurukaba, fringing reefs, mangrove, saltmarsh and seagrass habitats, as well as endangered species such as sea turtles, dugongs and koalas.



*Top: The CAP 'Our World Heritage Island' Steering Group. Bottom: Swimming hole near Endeavour Falls. Credit: Kobie Rhodes, Magnetic Island Photos*

The Community Action Plan (CAP) Program is a pilot program for place-based collaborative planning 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:*



*Magnetic Island State School teachers training for the Adopt-A-Creek Program. Credit: Jo Marks*



*Top: Maggie on Tap event. Credit: Kobie Rhodes, Magnetic Island Photos. Bottom: 16 experts from 14 agencies presented at the Monitoring on Magnetic Workshop. Credit: GBRF*



# 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 initiatives to identify key knowledge gaps and drive action. These include:

- Trek for Trash – Tackling marine debris and microplastics with Tangaroa Blue and AusMap
- Maggie Mangroovers – Establishing the first Island-based MangroveWatch Program
- Under Alma – Pioneering GBRMPA community monitoring of underwater ecosystems
- Maggie on Tap – Accessible, entertaining and informative pub talks from local experts
- Magnetic Island State School Adopt-A-Creek Program – Local school monitoring local waterways through a partnership with Townsville City Council and OzFish

**5**



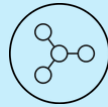
People employed in part-time positions, including two Traditional Owners

**11**



Working groups guiding collaborative design and implementation

**5**



New community initiatives launched to date catalysed by the CAP

## Enhanced community-led decision making and partnerships

A steering group with diverse local representatives guided strategic direction for CAP projects.

Community-based leadership allowed the projects to adapt quickly and achieve practical outcomes on the ground.

The CAP process catalysed a ‘whole-of-island’ approach to help Yunbenun become a leading sustainable island community. This will bring together 11 working groups to tackle challenges such as water, energy and waste management. The group will seek out collaborative and innovative solutions to decarbonisation and climate risks.

The success of the CAP was used to secure funding from the Queensland Department of Environment and Science for a coordinator to develop a whole-of-island plan. Other funding was granted from council, state government and other sources to implement new initiatives and grow existing efforts for island habitat regeneration and cultural education programs. The group is now set up to grow further partnerships, participation, and funding.

## Improved coordination and foundations for growth

Early planning and projects focused on understanding current work and tackling knowledge gaps to help target actions. Enabling community leadership through seed funding for coordinators and projects, harnessed local knowledge and skills. The integrated approach supports collaboration and coordination between Traditional Owners, residents, scientists, managers and community groups. The strong feedback loop of knowledge and action aims to nurture a culture of adaptive stewardship for Yunbenun.

**821**



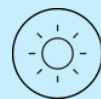
Engagements in planning and action, with more than 60% new to the activity

**26**



Collaborative planning events including community workshops and steering/working group meetings

**31**



Partners delivering key project activities, such as mangrove and coral reef monitoring

**1,564**



Hours of volunteering to launch and deliver CAP and key projects





## Ingredients for success

Many factors have enabled the success of the Yunbenun-Magnetic Island CAP. Unique factors include:

### Targeted spatial scale

The Yunbenun-focused geographic area enabled strong place-based engagement processes, collaborative planning and implementation.

### Highly engaged professionals, Traditional Owners & community members

Yunbenun hosts a large community of marine, terrestrial and social science professionals. Senior Traditional Owners were heavily involved to ensure that Traditional knowledge and values were incorporated into strategies and projects. There is also a strong and active community network of people who know and care about the Island. A diverse range of skilled and knowledgeable people were highly engaged in the process and invested in its outcomes.

### Strong community ownership and readiness

With several long-established programs active on the Island, residents were ready to grow leadership in community-led work. The CAP brought together local groups to build on this by finding common ground and coordinating efforts to achieve outcomes. Readiness was powered by the community's existing capacity, commitment and trust.

### Phased growth planning

Strong collaborative community leadership, commitment to a highly iterative process, and working in phases has been important for maintaining and growing program momentum.

## 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 Yunbenun-Magnetic Island CAP are:

### Maintaining high-quality data through partnerships & mentoring

The CAP is putting into practice a feedback loop of information to translate on-ground data into action. Maintaining these feedback loops will be critical to show how information is being used and what is changing.

### Growing capacity to deliver identified priorities

As the CAP gains momentum, more staff and resources will be recruited to put plans into action.

### Fostering wider and deeper community engagement

Building on a core of highly motivated participants and interested parties is key for success. The program has been expanding engagement through the popular monthly Maggie on Tap events, featuring entertaining evening presentations by local experts. In 2023, the community produced a video for island residents and the CAP is creating opportunities for further involvement in field-based activities. Celebrating success is important for maintaining and growing efforts.



*Maggie Mangroovers collecting data on mangrove trees.  
Credit: GBRF*



## 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 CAP process enabled the community to come together and talk about what impacts we’re having on our marine environment and the Reef and what strategies we need as an island community. It brought the community a focus. There are some very talented people on this island who are very knowledgeable. The funding has brought people together and is building momentum. Without the funding, without people able to dedicate their time and effort, all the good work dissipates without gaining any traction for change.”

**Gemma Wickens, MICDA CAP Leader**

“We’ve got these partnerships and people from this area all on the same page and all wanting basically the same thing – common good for all of us.”

**Lyle Johnson, Senior Wulgurukaba Traditional Owner**



“It’s been really impressive to see how it’s just all rolled along and things have actually come to fruition. The things that have already happened make me quite optimistic that this will continue to be worked out in a really efficient and effective way. I’ve been very impressed with the process. I think they’ve done a really, really good job in identifying what exists already, and then trying to fill those gaps bring relevant groups and people together.”

**Dani Ceccarelli, Australian Institute of Marine Science**

“The grant has allowed us to work independently with partners to achieve positive outcomes to skill our people up to work in the marine sector. Our people now have qualifications that have allowed them to participate in marine projects with AIMS, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, and private marine operators.”

**Brian Johnson, Wulgurukaba Traditional Owner**



“With thousands of individual reefs forming the Great Barrier Reef, knowing how they are faring is a mammoth task. GBRMPA are proud to be working with the Yunbenun community to plan and deliver a community-based Eye on the Reef program for Alma Bay to enable community members of varying skills to learn about the Reef and the marine ecosystems in their area, and help with monitoring the health of their local Reefs.”

**Paul Groves, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority**





# A collaborative approach

*The Yunbenun-Magnetic Island Community Action Plan is funded by the partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.*



MAGNETIC ISLAND  
COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT  
ASSOCIATION



Magnetic  
Island  
Nature  
Care Inc.



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 UNIVERSITY  
OF QUEENSLAND  
AUSTRALIA



*Drone training. Credit: Dr Karen Joyce*

*Banner photo on page 1 – Sunset on Magnetic Island. Credit: Kobie Rhodes, Magnetic Island Photos*

## Contacts

Gemma Wickens, MICDA CAP Leader | [MaggieCommunity@outlook.com.au](mailto:MaggieCommunity@outlook.com.au)  
Jenn Loder, GBRF Community Partnerships Director | [jloder@barrierreef.org](mailto:jloder@barrierreef.org)

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.

