

Strengthening Traditional Owner and community-led action in South-East Cape York

A Case Study of the Community Action Plan 2020-2023

“It brought a diverse range of participants together including Traditional Owners, scientists, primary producers, rangers, young Reef enthusiasts, NRM experts, and representatives from local government, Aboriginal Corporations, the Cape York Local Marine Advisory Committee and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority...the end result of the process was a plan that is useful for the community, and a community more engaged and involved in Reef protection activities.”

Harry James, Cape York NRM

Background

Cape York Peninsula, Queensland’s northernmost region, extends north from the Mitchell River catchment to the tip of Australia. The region has outstanding natural heritage values: globally significant savannas and dune systems, stunning wetlands and rivers, extensive tropical rainforests and a rich diversity of fauna and flora. It encompasses over 40% of the Great Barrier Reef’s coral reef area and over 30% of its seagrass area, supporting some of the highest densities of dugongs in Australia, and many critical nesting sites for sea turtles.

The region’s remoteness, small population (<20,000 residents) and relatively limited development pressure has helped keep many values intact. However, as more people visit Cape York, there are concerns about the increased threats to the region’s cultural and natural areas. These include additional sediment entering waterways due to higher rates of road erosion, direct use pressures from visitation, as well as increasingly severe cyclones and extreme weather driven by climate change. It is critical to proactively address these pressures and take meaningful local action to preserve the values of the region.

There were four key focus areas that emerged from the original CAP, including: reducing visitor impacts and restoring Country, engaging youth to care for the Reef, coasts and catchments, restoring customary care of turtle and dugong populations, and strengthening heritage protections and management practices.



*Top: Binthi Country. Credit: Kerry Trapnell.
Bottom: Wallaby Creek Festival Tree Planting.
Credit: Harry James*

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:



Top: Welcome to Binthi Country sign. Credit: Binthi Land Holding Group Aboriginal Corporation. Bottom: Cooktown State High School students learn about monitoring waterway health for Reef protection. Credit: Harry James

Top: Dabu Jajikal and Tangaroa Blue cleaning the beach at Weary Bay. Credit: Chris Patterson. Bottom: Students created a roadmap on protecting coral reefs by reducing threats from Crown-of-Thorns Starfish. Credit: Harry James



Community Action Impacts

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

Strengthening Traditional Owner leadership and voice

The CAP planning process involved 59 Traditional Owners from eight groups and produced six Traditional Owner-led strategy roadmaps. The CAP development process strengthened relationships with Queensland Government to help catalyse opportunities for Indigenous ranger roles, with one group undertaking training and establishing compliance officers on Country. Binthi Land Holding Group Aboriginal Corporation developed a Healthy Country Plan to unite their voices, pave the way in protecting country, and leverage additional funding. They were successfully nominated for National Heritage Listing and won a Cape York Peninsular Heritage Assessment Grant.

Growth of youth leadership

As part of the CAP, young members of the community developed ideas for meaningful youth-led local action. To further support this work, Cape York NRM created a youth leader position to be an ambassador for the CAP Program and encourage other youth to get involved in on-ground projects. The Cape York Young Reef Leaders CAP project is developing and piloting a new youth leadership program that offers high school students the chance to connect with a mentor involved in Reef protection and deliver their own project. They have engaged five project partners including Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, and Indigenous Ranger teams to mentor 10 students in 2023.

Boosting the focus on community climate action

CAPs are intended to be dynamic plans that are regularly refined to apply new information, recognise achievements, and adapt to community priorities.

The South Cape York Plan was reviewed with community members, including the GBRMPA Local Marine Advisory Committee in June 2022 and now includes three community-led climate action roadmaps.

Enabling coordinated investment

One benefit of the CAP is being able to coordinate and share progress on how actions led by multiple people and organisations are collectively contributing to looking after the Reef. Thirteen roadmaps for community action were developed in the CAP process, and to date, seven identified priority projects have received funding and are underway. This includes \$300,000 of investment outside of the CAP program for reducing soil erosion, weed management and sustainable tourism practices. Building relationships and networks are an important foundation for developing enduring tools and partnerships.

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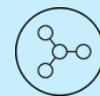
Participant engagements in planning and action, with 63% being Indigenous participants

38



Partners helped to deliver key project activities such as beach restoration and strengthening heritage protections

7



CAP project have now received funding through RTP and other sources

1,438



Hours of volunteering to develop the CAP and implement projects



Ingredients for success

Many factors have enabled the success of the South-East Cape York CAP. Unique factors include:

Tailored mentoring plans with community groups

These plans enabled targeted, specific support for CAP projects funded through GBRF seed funding.

Ensuring language and process is aligned with community

The CAP Leaders focused on using local language to strengthen engagements and speak in a way that connects with local people.

Strong ongoing community engagement

The Local Marine Advisory Committee is a voluntary community-based committee that discuss issues and provide locally-specific input into Marine Park management. The CAP process has tapped into this network who have been engaging strongly in guiding plans.

Flexible approach to engagements

Multiple approaches were implemented to facilitate community input and help ensure a safe and productive space for meaningful engagement. This included surveys, small group exercises during workshops to enable many voices to be heard, and adapting approaches to ensure all Traditional Owner groups could provide input.

Quick translation of plan to action

Some of the priorities tackled in the CAP were ongoing topics of discussion and concern in the community. Feedback indicated having a plan that helped develop collaborative solutions facilitated a shift into delivering action.

What are we working on?

The CAP program is designed to be an adaptive and responsive program. We're learning along the way and the next areas of growth identified for the South-East Cape York CAP are:

Wider and deeper engagement

This includes broader engagement with community by making it easier for people to contribute while balancing other commitments, as well discussions with government partners to build stronger relationships and understanding across groups and individuals involved in Reef protection.

Growing community champions and leaders

The CAP Leader role is important for enabling work, but sharing leadership will be vital to support a strong and enduring network. This helps limit burnout risks for coordinators and volunteers, and supports succession planning.

Continuing to celebrate achievements

Communications to showcase community champions driving efforts and the progress towards collective goals will continue. Boosting communications about the work and the why will be important to demonstrate the value of the CAP as an organising framework.



*Water quality testing at Isabella Falls.
Credit: Harry James*



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 planning process was a fantastic opportunity for different community members to come together to brainstorm ways we can address the challenges of our region. The roadmap method was new to everyone, but we quickly saw the value in planning this way, step by step with an end goal in place. The unique knowledge and perspectives that each participant shared in the workshop are reflected in the diverse range of projects that were produced.”

Jessie Price-Declé Program Manager, South Cape York Catchments

“We’re very grateful for what the CAP has done to help us. It’s our Elder’s legacy for us to look after. The stories of Binthi are exemplary at a National level, we’ve got unique stories of our natural and cultural values.”

Ramona McIvor, Binthi Land Holding Group Aboriginal Corporation



“I get to play a capacity-building role, helping community groups plan and deliver some fantastic Reef protection projects...it’s a grassroots approach that gives the capacity back to local people. I do this job because I love seeing people motivated and equipped to care for their environment, whether that’s a local catchment group keeping beaches clean or a grazier stopping soil eroding into waterways and flowing out to the Reef.”

Harry James, Cape York Natural Resource Management

“I’ve had lots of different opportunities through becoming a CAP ambassador, it’s a great opportunity to be able to get involved and get other youth involved in community projects to protect the Reef. No matter how small of a change you think you’re making, in the long run, it’s really a big change if everyone gets in and has a go.”

Sienna Thomason, Cape York Natural Resource Management



“It’s been a game changer for so many Traditional Owner and community groups. I’m observing some agencies shifting perceptions – seeing community as partners and recognising community members and organisations as engineers of change. As such, community partners are feeling heard and that their issue is being recognised and taken seriously.”

Doon McColl, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority



A collaborative approach

The Cape York Island Community Action Plan is funded by the partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the 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.



Binthi Seasonal Plant Calendar. Credit: Binthi Land Holding Group Aboriginal Corporation

Banner photo on page 1 – Fringing Reef at Archer Point. Credit: Jessie Price-Declé

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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.

