Collaborative Community Action in the Burdekin - Townsville region

A Case Study of the Community Action Plan 2020-2025

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"The CAP process paved the way to understanding the community's priority concerns within our catchments, and the relationships formed with project partners has built a legacy which will remain prevalent within the Partnerships continued collective action." Kara-Mae Coulter-Atkins, Executive Officer, Healthy Waters Partnership for the Dry Tropics

Background

Townsville is within the Burdekin Dry Tropics region, encompassing diverse coastal and marine areas. It is dominated by the iconic Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and nationally-recognised, critically important wetlands like Bowling Green Bay National Park. The coastal ecosystems are important for fish, turtles, dugongs and other marine megafauna.

The region's population of about 240,000 is concentrated along the coast. The region supports agricultural industry such as sugarcane, and there are active fisheries in the region, along with a variety of recreational uses. The Nywagi, Manbarra, Wulgurukaba, Bindal, and Juru Traditional Owners of sea country have a long and enduring connection with the region, and play an important role in protecting it for future generations.

In 2020, <u>NQ Dry Tropics</u> in collaboration with <u>Reef Ecologic</u> led the development of the <u>Burdekin Dry Tropics Coastal Community</u>
<u>Action Plan</u> to bring partners together to enable effective community action for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef.

In 2022, Healthy Waters Partnership for the Dry Tropics (HWPDT) took on the role as CAP Leader, working in collaboration with Reef Ecologic and narrowing the scope to the <u>Townsville region</u>. This built pathways for citizen science data through the <u>Townsville Waterways Report Card</u> and enabled new collective impact approaches for the region to use data to drive action.



NQ Dry Tropics and Reef Ecologic celebrate the launch of the Burdekin Dry Tropics Coastal CAP. Credit: NQ Dry Tropics



Burdekin Primary School students planting native trees at Parkers Lagoon. Credit: Keith Kiloh

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:

2020 ______, 2021 ______, 2022 ______, 2023

PLANNING LAUNCHED

NQ Dry Tropics and Reef Ecologic engaged 31 organisations and 704 community members to collaboratively create the Burdekin Dry Tropics Coastal CAP.

COMMUNITY ENGAGED

3 workshops enabled the community including youth to contribute their ideas, aspirations, and priorities. 6 strategy roadmaps and an investment prospectus with 4 priority projects developed.

ON-GROUND PROJECTS COMMENCED

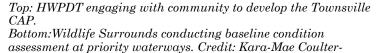
Two priority projects in the Burdekin region are kick started with seed funding from the GBRF to start on-ground action.

CAP EVOLVES

HWPDT develop the new Townsville CAP with six priority projects for action. Three projects received seed funding from GBRF, growing further capacity for action.







Whitsunday Catchment Landcare volunteers cleaning up turtle nesting sites at Cape Upstart. Credit: Christine Peterson



Atkins

Community Action Impacts

5 CAP projects achieved a diversity of environmental and social impacts for the Reef and Reef communities.

1,916

Participant engagements in planning and action 1

Card

Successful pilot of VegCAT methodology proposed for the Townsville Waterways Report 800

Native trees planted at Parkers Lagoon in the Burdekin

1,072

Youth engagements in CAP development and implementation 1



Successful pilot of the Grounds to Grounds project creating a new circular economy model

Community wetland restoration at Parker's Lagoon - Lower Burdekin Landcare

This project brought together Landcare, local schools, and members of the wider community to restore and enhance the natural habitat at the much-loved Parker's Lagoon by removing invasive plants, planting 800 native riparian trees, and adding a new walkway to support educational nature experiences.

Improving Nesting Success for Sea Turtles - Whitsunday Catchment Landcare

Key threats to sea turtle nesting sites at Cape Upstart and Cape Gloucester include vehicles on beaches, artificial lighting, marine debris, and feral animals. Together, project partners removed 300kg of marine debris to protect turtle nesting sites, provided nest protection devices to a local Traditional Owner group for ongoing activities, and delivered a recommendations report to inform future decision making in the key nesting areas.

Riparian Monitoring and Rehabilitation Planning - Wildlife Surrounds

This project successfully piloted the VegCAT method to assess waterway riparian health to address an identified data gap for the Townsville Waterways Report Card. A range of partners contributed to the design and riparian condition baseline assessments were undertaken for the Bohle River, Stuart Creek and Alligator Creek. The recommendations report will guide future riparian rehabilitation actions

Reef Revolution: Empowerment through nature - Envite Environment

This project improved water quality flowing to the Reef through weed management, erosion control, bank stablilisation, rubbish removal and planting native seedlings at Mundy Creek. Envite partnered with Queensland Correctional Services to trial the impact of nature-based community service on low-risk prisoner wellbeing and capacity building, with positive feedback.

Grounds to Grounds: HumiSoil Tuckshop Blend initiative - Atlas Soils

This project piloted a school-led circular economy model, reduced CO₂ equivalent emissions by converting 30 tonnes of school food waste, coffee grounds and Coles organics into HumiSoil® Tuckshop Blend, and reused 170 tonnes of cyclone debris in composting and garden bed applications. Three Big Rivers launched a new education program focused on cultural values and critical connections between healthy soil, healthy Reefs and healthy people.



Ingredients for success

Many factors have enabled the successful development and implementation of the CAPs:



Atlas Soils team creating HumiSoil® Tuckshop Blend. Credit: Jason Lange

Collective impact through partnerships:

The CAP process brought together a diverse range of community groups, scientists, local businesses, and Reef managers to co-develop the plan. As a result, new organisations joined the HWPDT, which is now a collective of more than 20 partners. The collective impact of these partnerships is contributing to the improved health and ongoing maintenance of waterways and marine environments across the region.

Collaborative delivery built on existing efforts:

Each CAP Leader organisation has brought a different yet complementary set of skills and existing plans and networks to the partnership. Connecting these efforts enabled a broader range of community members to be engaged in the process. Partners worked to support a transition between the two planning processes to narrow the geographical scope.

Translating monitoring into action:

The CAP process enabled the HWPDT network to build new approaches for enabling evidence-based action working alongside the community to facilitate collective action on two priority areas — climate action and reducing erosion.

Strengthening inclusive approaches:

Central to the CAP Program is engaging Traditional Custodians. The CAPs have strengthened relationships with Traditional Owner groups in the region and developed skills for future employment opportunities. There was also a strong focus on engaging with youth as the next generation of leaders to guide work and deliver activities.

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 Townsville region are:

Maintaining momentum

The HWPDT continues to seek industry and funding partners to expand on the seed funding that piloted VegCAT, aiming to integrate it into analytical models for riparian vegetation health. This method not only complements spatial extent measures with on-ground health data but also validates satellite imagery and enhances management recommendations through a clearer understanding of vegetation condition.

Scaling up impact

The CAP program is designed to enable ongoing work. Building on the CAP work in Townsville and Magnetic Island, 14 partners have been successful in a three-year community stewardship grant from DCCEEW and the Reef Islands Initiative. The project will build the resilience of key connected coastal habitats and species through onground monitoring, protection and restoration efforts that mobilise efforts for long term community stewardship.



Wildlife Surrounds and HWPDT testing VegCAT survey methods. Credit: Jo Hurford



People driving change

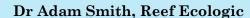
A diverse range of people are driving the work by bringing their local knowledge, identifying priorities, delivering activities and coordinating efforts to harness community contributions.



"The CAP process has really helped us progress on collective impact. Having tangible evidence helps us identify how we can come together to address problems. This process gives the grounding and framework to push the discussion and actions. These are things that were on our radar, but having a framework helped to push forward. It has helped to redefine the partnership and how we work."

Jake Hammeslwang, HWPDT

"There have been significant outcomes from the CAP development process. Engaging with the youth, making them realise their potential impact on the environment and empowering them to be agents of much needed change, has been groundbreaking. You never know how that will translate down the path, whether in 5 years, 10 years, 20 years, they might be the future marine biologists or the politicians. So it was certainly worthwhile and I expect it will have a lasting legacy."







"The community action planning process created new opportunities for local groups to connect and work together. These partnerships drove the projects and were key to delivering great outcomes."

Brett King, NQ Dry Tropics

"Our most significant achievement has been the inclusion of Traditional Owners in the CAP process, catering for that deserved and necessary seat at the table. Looking ahead, my vision is of a Townsville where everyone with a connection to this region from Traditional Owners to community groups, past present and future, are able to collaborate more seamlessly, with the CAP providing the platform for more cohesive and impactful actions."

Dr Keith Noble and Kara-Mae Coulter-Atkins, HWPDT





A collaborative approach

The Burdekin Dry Tropics Coastal and the Townsville Community Action Plans were 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.









Pimlico High School students participating in the development of the Burdekin Dry Tropics Coastal CAP. Credit: Nathan Cook

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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.

