RESILIENT REEFS INITIATIVE

Successes and lessons from the first six years

October 2024

Great Barrier
Reef Foundation

Introduction to the Resilient Reefs Initiative

Over the past decade, global awareness of the need to protect and enhance ocean resilience has grown significantly[1]. In particular, increasing attention has been given to the critical role coral reef habitats play in preserving biodiversity and protecting coastal communities. These critical habitats have been well understood by island nations and Indigenous Peoples for millennia, and by those in marine conservation for decades. Recently, international climate policy conversations and negotiations are also increasingly acknowledging their significance.

And for good reason: coral reefs are home to 25% of the ocean's biodiversity and support nearly a billion people worldwide. Quite simply, they are essential to ocean health, which is essential for a healthy planet and heathy people.

As this tide of recognition has been rising, an unconventional group of global partners has been hard at work piloting a new way of working. The Resilient Reefs Initiative (RRI) is a unique effort partnering with reef managers around the world to design resilience projects and partnerships and build a more adaptive reef management practice. The following report summarises the history, impacts and learnings from this pilot initiative, as well as important new future directions.

1. *https://climatechampions.unfccc.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Ocean-Climate-Tracker-Report-WRI-_-HLCs.pdf; https://www.iucn.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/unfccc-ocean-climate-options-2023.pdf; https://icriforum.org/icri-contribution-ocean-decade-24/.*

Cover Image: Belize Barrier Reef system (Credit Jenn Loder). This page: Rock Islands Southern Lagoon, Palau (Credit Ocean Image Bank)

What we do

Local climate action will be required for global change

The Resilient Reefs Initiative is a AUD$14 million global partnership working with local governments to design a more resilient future. We bolster local capacity and partner on the design and delivery of integrated solutions that build the resilience of coral reefs and the communities that depend on them. The work is led and delivered by local governments and communities and is informed by global experts and the best science available.

RRI partners with UNESCO World Heritage coral reef sites and the communities that depend on them to adapt to climate change and local threats. We leverage and connect global resources to enhance the local knowledge, skills, partnerships, political will, and overall capacity to design and deliver resilience projects and institutionalise resilience-based management (RBM). RRI's commitment to sites includes:

Local Leadership

Funding and support for a new Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) embedded within local reef management organisations

Strategic Planning

Technical support and partnership in the development of a holistic Resilience Strategy

Global Expertise

Connection to a Knowledge Network with the best available science and policy

Action Implementation

Funding and design support to implement solutions with community on the ground

Mantas in Coral Bay, Ningaloo (Credit Sam Lawrence)

As a result of their partnership with RRI, sites have a better understanding of their threats and opportunities, a pipeline of projects and clear plan of action for mitigating risk and building resilience, an engaged community in doing this work moving forward, and greater government capacity to develop partnerships with global funders and innovators.

In all of this work, partnerships are at the core. First and foremost are the local partners: local and state authorities that understand business as usual approaches to management are no longer sufficient and are ready to chart a new path forward. These local partners are supported by a global network that brings diverse expertise in science, policy, finance and planning — a multidisciplinary network unlike traditional conservation programs. This includes support from the BHP Foundation and its network **Ampliseed**, which connects the RRI program to environmental resilience efforts working across other landscapes and seascapes globally. RRI is also supported by an independent, skills-based Project Board who have provided valuable oversight and expert guidance since RRI's inception.

Finally, the Resilient Reefs Initiative and its partners recognise that urgent global action to drastically and rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions is needed now, in conjunction with local resilience-building efforts, if we are going to have any chance of protecting coral reefs.

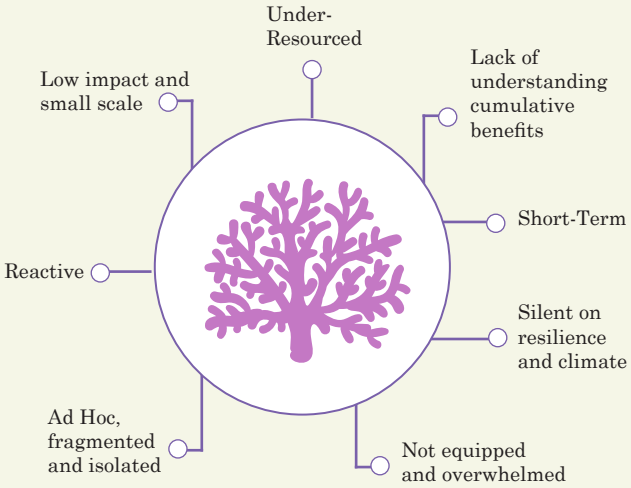
Great Barrier Reef Foundation · unesco · The Nature Conservancy · Reef Resilience Network · Columbia Center for Resilient Cities and Landscapes · Resilient Cities Catalyst · AECOM · BHP Foundation

Resilient Reefs Theory of Change

BARRIERS TO MANAGE FOR RESILIENCE

CURRENT STATE

Shocks and stresses compromise the ability of reefs and their associated communities to thrive



CHANGE AT THREE LEVELS

- **REEF MANAGERS**
- **REEF COMMUNITY**
- **GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE NETWORK**

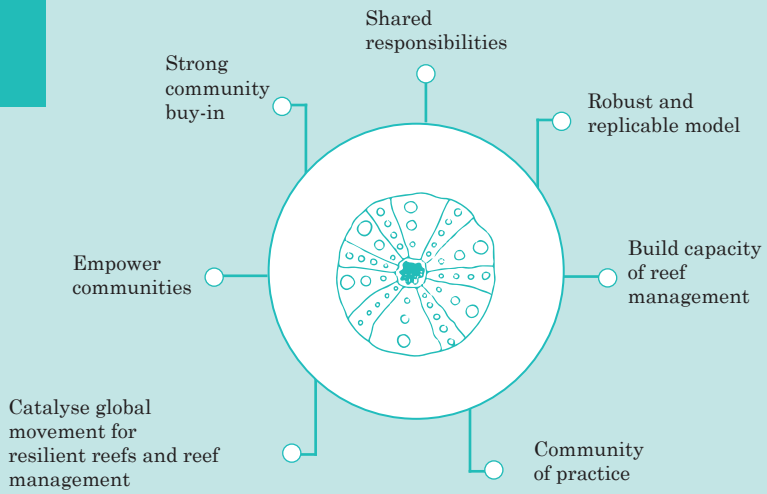
CHANGE PATHWAYS

1. Build capacities of reef managers to be agents of change and institutionalise resilience planning
2. Empower and equip local communities to take action
3. Implement solutions that have a measurable impact on reefs and reef communities
4. Foster global network of reef resilience leaders and inspire others to build reef resilience.

REEFS AND REEF COMMUNITIES THAT WILL SURVIVE, ADAPT AND THRIVE

INTENDED FUTURE

The world's most enigmatic coral reefs are managed to maintain biodiversity, ecosystem function and social value to associated communities in the long term and inspire similar approaches across coral reefs world-wide.



Origin of the Resilient Reefs Initiative

In 2016, at UNESCO's Marine Managers Conference, there was an explicit call to action from global reef managers entrusted with protecting some of the world's most important reef habitats. Despite past bleaching events and clear threat of future climate impacts on reefs, these managers felt ill-equipped to develop climate resilience plans — indeed, only one site globally had a climate resilience plan in place at that time.

The timing was fortuitous – the BHP Foundation had just launched a new global Environmental Resilience Program and was looking for innovative, bold ideas. The Great Barrier Reef Foundation, in conjunction with a set of global partners, set to work on developing an initiative that would directly support these managers. For the first time, combining activities to build the resilience of communities as well as corals, the result was the Resilient Reefs Initiative.

Launched in 2018, RRI sought to address these challenges head-on by building the capacity of reef managers to develop climate resilience plans and design and deliver meaningful solutions. By working directly with a handful of innovative coral reef managers and showing the world what was possible, the hope was that the program would deliver transformation in the broader field as well.

The first step was engaging a diverse set of perspectives and applying a little bit of out-of-the-box thinking. Reef management authorities have traditionally been fairly siloed — they have a clear remit to manage their local reefs but often aren't included in broader development or conservation questions. While leading reef resilience scientists and practitioners agree this old approach will not be sufficient in tackling climate threats[2], shifting entrenched ways of doing the work takes time, resources, and partnership.

Palau CRO, Andrea Uchel, at the launch of their Resilience Strategy (Credit Joel Johnsson)

RRI partners gather at a communications workshop in Palau (Credit Joel Johnsson)

2. *Mcleod et al. (2019). The Future of Resilience-Based Management in Coral Reef Ecosystems. Journal of Environmental Management.*

Given the complexity of climate challenges facing reef managers, the Great Barrier Reef Foundation sought to infuse new thinking and tools to support that shift and build the capacity of managers to design reef resilience solutions that also build the resilience of human communities and governance structures. To do this, we:

- Reviewed best-practice approaches to resilience planning and capacity building globally, including from a range of sectors like the 100 Resilient Cities Initiative, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation.
- Developed a new holistic **Reef Resilience Framework** to influence the resilience-based management field and to guide program delivery. RRI was the first global effort to develop a practitioner-focused framework illustrating how the resilience of coral reefs is interwoven with the health of communities and trust and transparency of governance arrangements.
- Built a coalition of key, multidisciplinary global organisations. In addition to regular contributors in this space, like The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Reef Resilience Network (RRN), we brought together resilience planners and engineering experts like AECOM and resilience experts used to working across a range of socio-ecological systems like those from Columbia University's Center for Resilient Cities and Landscapes.

RRI partners at the annual Solution Exchange event in Brisbane, Australia (Credit Bec Taylor)

A reef restoration workshop with First Nations reef managers in Carnarvon, Australia (Credit DBCA)

Community engagement workshop in Ningaloo (Credit Joel Johnsson)

RRI visit the site team in Palau (Credit Amy Armstrong)

Site Partnerships

In 2018, RRI selected five unique and important UNESCO World Heritage sites with which to partner on this ambitious new effort:

- Ningaloo Coast, Australia
- Lagoons of New Caledonia, France
- Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System, Belize
- Rock Islands Southern Lagoon, Palau
- Great Barrier Reef, Australia (as a knowledge partner, not a pilot site)

These five sites include three of the five largest barrier reefs in the world. They represent over 37 million hectares of coral reef, over 500 species of fish and more than 100 groups or clans of First Nations Peoples. They collectively hold 37% of the blue carbon stored in all World Heritage marine sites.

Across the five sites, there is tremendous diversity — culturally, ecologically, economically and in terms of management and governance approaches. Yet also many commonalities. For all sites, the impacts of climate change — coral bleaching, ocean acidification, extreme weather events, erosion and sea level rise — pose the greatest threat. In addition, these coral reef communities face challenges with coastal development, run-off from agriculture or industrial activities, a need to diversify local economies and limit reliance on the reef, and siloed decision-making with a lack of collaboration across science, management, community, and government.

By partnering with these unique pilot sites to overcome common challenges and institutionalise resilience-based management, we have developed new tools and approaches that will be game changing for the broader field of reef management and vulnerable reef communities globally.

The site partnerships that emerged in each site looked different and were based on local needs, capacities and interests:

- Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) in Ningaloo
- New Caledonian Biodiversity Agency (ANCB) in New Caledonia
- Coastal Zone Management Authority & Institute (CZMAI) in Belize
- Koror State Government (KSG) in Palau

In each pilot site, we supported our partners to create a new role in their reef management authority: a Chief Resilience Officer (CRO). The CRO was not just an additional staff resource in typically under-resourced agencies (though that was very well received!), it was also someone tasked with looking across the management authorities' work and helping to identify key gaps or opportunities for delivering impact.

Across the four pilot sites, these CROs directly engaged 3,000+ local community members in the development of strategies and the design of resilience actions that will reach 300,000+ beneficiaries.

In addition to connecting stakeholders within sites, we worked hard to connect and convene site partners with each other and with global stakeholders to exchange learnings and build our collective capacity to develop new solutions. This was done in many ways, big and small, and included the development of several global convenings and exchanges, including:

- **Resilience-based management training** and project design accelerators
- Strategies for **sustainable tourism** approaches
- Integrated and effective **planning for climate disasters**

Reef fish in New Caledonia (Credit Marla Tomorug and Adam Moore, Edges of Earth)

Ningaloo

Whale Shark, Ningaloo (Credit Joel Johnsson)

- Longest fringing reef in the world (260km long) with >200 coral and 500 fish species, and located 100m offshore from the beach
- The Baiyungu, Thalanyji and Jinigudira people are the Indigenous Peoples of this land, which has been inhabited for at least 32,000 years
- Very engaged community, and a local economy highly dependent on the reef
- Home to three of the world's seven species of sea turtles

Palau

- Diverse habitats including: lakes, lagoons, barrier and fringing reefs, channels, tunnels, caves, arches and cove all within close proximity of each other
- Palau was the first nation on earth to change its immigration laws for environmental protection, through the **Palau Pledge**
- Home to approximately 400 species of hard corals, 300 species of soft corals, 1400 species of reef fishes, seven out of nine of the world's species of giant clams, the world's most isolated colony of dugongs, and Micronesia's only saltwater crocodiles

Local children at the Rock Islands Southern Lagoon, Palau (Credit Andrea Uchel, KSG)

Belize

- One of the most diverse collections of reef types in the world
- Belize is a leader in conservation policy and finance, having been one of the first countries globally to execute a Blue Bond Debt-for-Nature Swap
- Three distinct communities of Maya people, each speaking a different dialect of the ancient Mayan language
- The second largest reef system in the world, supporting a unique array of reef types and providing habitat for several threatened marine species

Project delivery partners on site in Belize (Credit Amy Armstrong)

- Among the most pristine coral reefs in the world, known for its exceptional water quality
- The Kanak people, the Traditional Owners of New Caledonia, have had a strong link with the reef for over 30,000 years
- Global biodiversity hotspot with species endemism rate of nearly 80%

New Caledonia

New Caledonia's "Turtle Days" event on the Isle of Pines (Credit Matthias Balagny)

Resilient Reefs Initiative Successes

Created a new set of tools for holistic resilience planning and action design for reef communities globally

To achieve the goal of transforming reef management efforts from siloed to integrated, and from reactive to adaptive, we needed practical tools and processes to make these concepts meaningful and achievable. Building on the Reef Resilience Framework as a foundation, we developed the following processes and tools to support reef managers in this hard work:

- A reef resilience tool that enabled partners to conduct a holistic resilience assessment of their site, including: its key assets and challenges; primary shocks, stresses and their interdependencies; and how they might affect the reef and reef community over time.
- A comprehensive resilience strategy development process. Developed through a robust, multi-stakeholder process and drawing from global best practice, the strategy provides a roadmap for building reef resilience within each partner site. Distinct from a reef management plan, this strategy looks across sectors and stakeholders and attempts to articulate some key shifts necessary for the reef and the community to thrive in the future.
- Finally, we know that so much can get lost in the translation from strategy to action. To support the design of resilient actions, we developed a resilience-based management project design curriculum to support managers and community stakeholders to ensure project ideas were reflective and holistic and designed to be adaptively managed.

Belize Barrier Reef system (Credit Jenn Loder)

Designed best in class holistic reef resilience strategies

Working with the CROs and a broad range of stakeholders, we partnered to develop tailor-made resilience strategies for each site. These four reef resilience strategies globally — the first of their kind — each reflect the unique assets and challenges facing their reefs and reef communities and articulate a unique vision for reef resilience. They move beyond the limits of a traditional reef management plan and seek a more integrated view of the key steps necessary to build the resilience of their treasured reefs and the communities that depend on them.

At some sites, like Ningaloo in Western Australia, there was desire to develop an overarching strategic document including a large number of possible actions — essentially developing a long-range action plan for government and a menu of project options for future funders. In other sites, like Belize, where there were many similar planning efforts underway, the strategy was used to focus energy on a few key areas of opportunity and the flagship actions the local partners had identified.

Influenced the field and mainstreamed resilience-based approaches in reef management

In addition to the dedicated work the Resilient Reefs Initiative has led on-ground with our four place-based partners, there has always been an ambition to share and scale learnings and approaches with managers globally. RRI has built several partnerships with other networks to support that goal, one of which is TNC's Reef Resilience Network (RRN).

Working closely with our partners at TNC we co-developed **a course on resilience-based management** to share our methodologies and lessons with reef managers globally. When it was first launched in 2023, TNC and RRI co-led a mentored course in both English and French, which reached more than 750 managers from 100 countries. Now available online in three languages, the course has the potential to reach thousands of managers around the world.

Another significant sign of mainstreaming this approach, the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) has adopted the Reef Resilience Framework into their **policy documents** and recommendations for resilience-based management, reaching even more managers globally.

Project partners on site in Belize (Credit Amy Armstrong)

Funded 30 diverse projects and built capacity for resilient project co-design

Across the four global sites, we partnered closely with a range of stakeholders to understand existing gaps to action, and to co-design and deliver climate resilience projects. The 30 projects we funded reflect the diverse challenges coral reefs and coral reef communities face, including: techniques for restoring key ecosystems, opportunities to diversify livelihoods for coastal fishing communities, approaches for embedding co-governance with Indigenous Peoples, among many others. Half of these projects were designed and delivered in partnership with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IP&LC), and the design and delivery of these projects engaged more than 75 delivery partners. All of these figures underscore the RRI's commitment to respond to local priorities and support community organisations to build their capacity and deliver enduring outcomes.

It is also important to note that in many cases we don't yet have a complete picture of the impacts of these projects. Nearly half are still being implemented and will continue to be implemented over the next few years. We are working closely with our partners to track outcomes and will continue to report and share those stories and data in the future.

Funded Projects

The following is a sample of projects funded by RRI.

Co-developing climate-smart adaptive management actions for Palauan coral reefs

Reefs throughout Palau are considered to be relatively resilient to local stressors and disturbances, evidenced by strong recoveries. However, ocean warming over the coming decades poses a threat that will likely overwhelm this inherent resilience on account of more intense disturbances and shorter recovery intervals.

Stakeholders gather for the inaugural project workshop in Palau (Credit PICRC)

Palau is currently in the fortunate position where it can position itself ahead of the coming threats. This project aims to develop and test an adaptive management framework that builds local community capacity to implement both proactive and reactive actions to strengthen the ecological resilience of Palauan reefs.

The Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC), in partnership with TNC and seven other technical partners, is leading this initiative that will see a wide range of stakeholders brought together through workshops, training and outreach activities, culminating in a demonstration coral out-planting site to a degraded reef.

This project features a collaborative and integrated approach to enhancing reef resilience, emphasising the importance of local communities and the need to equip them with knowledge, technical know-how and suitable governance structures in advance of major reef disturbances. Mobilising political and community buy-in is a key challenge being addressed through regular engagement at a high level, wide consultation and accessible outreach.

Mapping the adaptive potential of thermotolerant corals

The increasing frequency and intensity of marine heatwaves brought about by climate change is a major threat to reef systems everywhere. This collaborative project between research and conservation organisations in New Caledonia, France, Switzerland and Australia is identifying genetic markers of heat-tolerant corals through DNA sequencing of samples from the Great Barrier Reef, Chesterfield-Bellona reef system and systems on the west coast of New Caledonia.

The sequencing will then inform the development of maps highlighting the probability of coral adaptation to heatwaves in the three studied regions, their inward and outward connectivity and any transfer of genetic markers between reefs. In particular, the project will evaluate the influence of protected "wild" reefs around the Chesterfields-Bellona Islands including the west coast of Grande Terre and Entrecasteaux via this marker transmission.

Researchers collect data on heat-tolerant corals in New Caledonia (Credit William Roman)

Sites have been selected for their high degree of environmental variables and available remote sensing data, and genetic sampling of the two New Caledonia reef systems has been completed with planning underway to develop prototype maps.

The project highlights the crucial importance of intra and inter-regional collaboration to map responses to coral stresses in order to better manage them. It is hoped that reef managers elsewhere in the Pacific will seek to replicate a similar project using the same coral species to produce a complete regional overview of genetic markers.

Sustainable management of green turtles in New Caledonia

Green turtles have been classified as an endangered species since 1982 due to fishnet drowning, boat strikes, egg harvesting and human destruction of nesting grounds. Yet their consumption is an important element of many traditional and customary practices throughout the Pacific.

To help alleviate these pressures in New Caledonia, a three-day community event was held to reconcile the importance of maintaining traditional customs with the need to protect and preserve the green turtle population. The "Turtle Days" event was an opportunity to identify the habitats under greatest pressure, raise awareness of the marine environment with local school children, and enable meaningful engagement between community members and scientific organisations.

The "Turtle Days" event underway in New Caledonia (Credit Matthias Balagny)

In an historic show of solidarity, the event culminated in all eight local tribes signing their own agreement for the sustainable management of green turtles, inclusive of specific protocols and allowances for their harvesting and customary use.

This outcome underscores the importance of integrating cultural practices and community needs with scientific knowledge to develop locally-contextualised and highly effective management approaches.

Coastal-marine land tenure mapping in Belize

Development and land-use pressures along coastal areas in Belize are fuelling deforestation and negative impacts on reef systems via harmful stormwater run-off. Better understanding of existing land tenureship along the coastal zone is needed to inform policy and decision-making for sustainable and climate-smart development.

Community stakeholders gather to discuss land tenure in Belize (Credit WWF Mesoamerica]

Hence, the Coastal Zone Management Authority & Institute, the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Lands & Surveys Department are undertaking a national land tenure analysis for areas within 10km inland of coastal areas of interest. This multi-disciplinary approach draws on empirical analysis and assessment of development footprint and threats, as well as contributing to strengthening the capacity of stakeholders to replicate the assessment in the future.

Funded projects

Since the project commenced in late 2023, the project stakeholders have undertaken a review and validation of existing land tenure information and convened community workshops to identify areas of degradation and buffering communities that may be suitable for restoration. The project aims to inform policy frameworks related to coastal and marine planning (particularly the development of a national Blue Carbon framework), strengthen governance (within the Lands and Survey Department) through an updated land inventory, increase the transparency of land sales (and introduce a new level of accountability) and raise awareness among landowners and communities regarding the benefits of carbon sequestration and blue carbon projects.

Minimising vessel strike for marine megafauna on the Ningaloo Coast

The Ningaloo region is world famous for its wildlife and marine megafauna (large sea creatures like manta rays, whale sharks, humpback whales, dugong, dolphins, and turtles). Tourist boats seeking to find these sea animals are increasingly colliding with them (known as boat strikes), which can not only injure and disturb marine megafauna, it can also impact their survival.

To ensure the resilience of both marine megafauna populations and the economic activity brought by tourism in the region, research was needed to understand how to reduce the occurrence of boat strikes. Ningaloo Marine Interactions engaged with Behaviour Works Australia to fulfil that research gap.

Through a very collaborative approach, this project delivered: (1) A literature review that identifies key factors influencing the occurrence of boat collisions, (2) Interviews with relevant practitioners to explore approaches for reducing boat strikes and, (3) A behavioural identification workshop with relevant stakeholders.

This workshop was received with overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants including environmental managers, local shire members, conservation organisations and tourism operators. Working with a behaviour change organisation highlighted that a paradigm shift is necessary in our approaches for successful environmental management.

A whale shark swims alongside tourists in Ningaloo (credit Sam Lawrence)

The project was successful in engaging stakeholders, raising awareness, fostering collaboration, and contributing to the knowledge base of marine megafauna vessel strike in the Ningaloo. The project's **final report** shares specific strategies that can be put in place to reduce boat strikes and to address issues of non-compliance (regulations and licensing, sanctions, visible enforcement and awareness raising).

Lessons and Insights for Future Work

Aligning and activating political will across key actors is essential for driving action

This needs to be done in a way that recognises the challenge of competing demands and short political timelines. Strategies we used to engage and align diverse stakeholders included:

- Start early. Prioritise stakeholder engagement from the outset, especially with Indigenous Peoples
- Listen to elders and those that have come before to ensure we are building on the past for a robust future
- Create diverse and collaborative steering committees
- Tie the work to other political processes or imperatives that already have momentum

Consider timing, and build a foundation for future action

Not everyone will be ready for action at the same time, so focus on work that can be done to prepare communities and governments for future efforts, when they are ready. This includes:

- Build the cohesion of communities through robust stakeholder efforts
- Fund feasibility studies or analysis to inform future work
- Co-design frameworks for collaboration action
- Leverage these foundational efforts for action design and delivery when the political time is right

Take absorptive capacity challenges seriously and fund the less flashy priorities

Common across many governments, but particularly acute in Island nations, is a limit to the absorptive capacity to take on new projects and deliver multiple priorities well and all at once. Across all our place-based partnerships there was a common theme — a handful of amazing leaders were running several global programs, simultaneously, for state or national agencies, often throwing themselves into a state of total exhaustion.

Taking absorptive capacity challenges seriously and thinking about how to use our partnership and funding to address them, was a core tenet of the pilot and is highlighted in many of the projects we funded. Practically, that meant funding the building blocks for strong governance such as human resources, data, technology infrastructure, etc. For example:

- supporting the digitisation of land tenure records in Belize to enable future outreach to property owners on restoration and protection of coastal habitats, and
- funding new staff to deliver a new flagship fisheries management policy in Palau, while working with state managers to develop more adaptive and effective enforcement techniques.

These types of funding asks are often overlooked for flashier projects that better lend themselves to photo-ops and social media posts, but building enduring capacity often means prioritising the less flashy work.

3. *OECD (2023), "Capacity Development for Climate Change in Small Island Developing States", OECD Publishing, Paris.*

Be adaptive and locally responsive in program delivery

A strong value of RRI's delivery has been flexibility and the capacity to adapt and be responsive to local context. For example:

- When COVID hit and it was clear we were not going to be able to make progress at speed on the development of resilience strategies, we pivoted and created a capacity-building fund that could be used to resource short-term needs. This engendered significant good will and resulted in some very valuable projects.
- Likewise, when we noted sites were overwhelmed and simply didn't have the absorptive capacity to manage strategy and project design, we appointed new Advisors to augment government capacity.
- When the Caribbean saw unprecedented bleaching, we moved funds to enhance monitoring efforts with our Belize partners.

As we move into new partnerships and future work, we seek to maintain that value. This includes experimenting with reporting and monitoring and evaluation in ways that reflect local context and don't add unnecessary burdens on local partners, as well as maintaining a high level of flexibility in resourcing and delivery to ensure we can pivot when it will lead to more impact.

Moving at the pace of trust

Central to an effective partnership is taking the time to listen and learn up front — to test and ground truth assumptions one might hold about needs, capacities, values, and constraints of partner organisations before moving forward. In some of our partnerships in the RRI pilot, the time that took was substantial. But essential. Without a common foundation based in trust, this kind of work will fall over — either because it doesn't account for the root causes of the challenges, participants won't give authentic feedback, or it won't be designed in a way that understands local context.

Where to from here

Through the pilot, the Resilient Reefs Initiative has proven to be a model for improving connection, uplifting capacity, and delivering resilience actions across reef communities and local governments. We are exceptionally grateful to the BHP Foundation for their ongoing commitment, including funding a forthcoming second phase.

This next phase of the RRI will build on the success of the pilot — particularly deepening our focus on driving investment to design and deliver resilience actions at greater scale — and focus partnership in a place critically important to global reefs.

Nowhere is the plight of the worlds' reefs more evident than in the Pacific. Home to 27% of the world's coral reefs, 94% of the Pacific's 12.7m population rely on reefs for food and economic security. Indeed, coral reef health is at the forefront of the region's strategic focus. Responding to this challenge, Pacific Island countries and territories have developed and endorsed a *2021-2030 Pacific Coral Reef Action Plan*, aligning and prioritising a region-wide approach to coral reef conservation, restoration and adaptation. Despite significant regional coordination, this roadmap is largely unfunded and several capacity gaps persist.

With escalating climate impacts, we must urgently resolve barriers to ensure solutions can be delivered at scale. Learning to adapt to this uncertain future will require us to focus on the twin tasks of taking urgent, scalable action, now, and building system readiness to navigate what lies ahead. That is precisely where our focus lies. As we embark on this next phase of the work in the Pacific, we will deepen our focus on co-designing resilience solutions with local communities and governments and unlocking capital to accelerate action. If you'd like to learn more about our future work, please reach out at **projects@barrierreef.org**.

Belize Barrier Reef System (Credit Jenn Loder)

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