



Reef Rescue Indigenous Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program

Background

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef region and evidence of their sea country connections goes back over 60,000 years. Today there are approximately 70 Traditional Owner groups whose sea country includes the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has been working with Traditional Owners for many years and recognises that establishing effective and meaningful partnership with Traditional Owners is essential in order to protect heritage and cultural values, conserve biodiversity, and contribute to the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef.

In December 2008, the Australian Government committed \$10 million over five years towards the Reef Rescue Indigenous Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program. The program will engage Indigenous communities in collaborative sea country management that conserves biodiversity and protects cultural and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef.

It is designed to:

- Expand the Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreement program across the Reef catchment
- Develop sea country plans, and
- Strengthen communication between local communities, managers and Reef stakeholders and build better understanding of Traditional Owner issues about the management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

The program is delivered by the GBRMPA.

Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee

The GBRMPA has established the Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee (IRAC) to provide strategic advice on the delivery of the Land and Sea

Country Indigenous Partnerships Program and other related Indigenous partnerships matters. The membership brings together expertise and experience in Indigenous partnership initiatives and sea country management from within the Great Barrier Reef and from elsewhere around Australia.

The IRAC has recommended the following as areas of priority which have formed the basis for this program:

- Sea Country Planning including Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreements
- Partnerships and Communications Strategy
- Leadership Development including youth forums and young hunters forums
- Knowledge Management including support for knowledge and information exchange, recording and people exchange
- Evaluation and Monitoring Frameworks, including reviews and co-investment
- Compliance activities required to support Traditional Owners in management of their Sea Country.

Complementary Programs

The Reef Rescue Indigenous Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program is closely coordinated with other Caring for Our Country Indigenous partnership initiatives, and in particular the Indigenous Protected Areas initiative and the Working on Country initiative, both of which provide opportunities for longer term funding and employment of Land and Sea Country Rangers. The Program will also contribute to the Australian Government's Closing the Gap for Indigenous Australians.

Program Overview

The program's activities will enable Traditional Owners and the GBRMPA to enter into collaborative partnerships arrangements to protect the cultural and natural heritage values and conserve biodiversity of the Great Barrier Reef. The program also recognises the varying aspirations for sea country management between Traditional Owner groups.

Five activity areas have been developed with this, and Caring for our Country targets in mind, these being:

1. Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreements
2. Strengthening of communications and knowledge sharing
3. Enhanced compliance
4. Engaging with communities
5. Grants and Sponsorship

Further explanation of these activity areas are provided below.

1. Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreements

Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreements (TUMRAs) are a form of Sea Country Plan that are developed by Traditional Owners and are accredited under the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975 and the Queensland Marine Park Act. They:

- Identify the Traditional Owners and the boundaries of their Sea Country,
- Identify the Traditional values to be protected, and
- Describe how Traditional Owner groups wish to protect their cultural values, and manage culturally important species in accordance with Traditional lore and to ensure sustainability.

An Implementation Plan describes the process for implementing a TUMRA, including:

- The arrangements for Traditional Owners to partner with management agencies in compliance activities and monitoring the condition of plants and animals, and human activities in their sea country,
- Communication activities required to inform other Indigenous members of the community, and the public, about their traditional connections to sea country and the management arrangements established by the TUMRA.

Approach

The Program is providing additional resources to facilitate the development of TUMRAs by Traditional Owners groups along the Great Barrier Reef coast.

Support will be provided to facilitate development of TUMRAs including funding for meetings, facilitators, scientific workshops, training, and to support networking and communications within and amongst Traditional Owner groups.

Support will also be provided in the form of "seed funding" to establish management systems as set out in implementation plans and to help Traditional Owners establish their management capacity.

2. Strengthening of Communications and Knowledge Sharing

This activity focuses on communications, education, monitoring and knowledge sharing between Traditional Owners, management agencies and with the broader community.

Approach

The Communications and Education Program will support the development and implementation of TUMRAs and build public awareness on issues and initiatives that relate to sea country management. Specific communications tools will be developed to support Traditional Owners in their efforts to establish co-management arrangements and increase wider community support and Indigenous endorsement of the program.

The program's monitoring activities are aimed at enhancing the capacity of TUMRA holders (and aspiring TUMRA holders) in holistically managing sea country through training and monitoring. Wherever possible, these monitoring programs will be integrated with existing programs such as: the GBRMPAs Eye on the Reef program that monitors Reef health; the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service's turtle monitoring; and the Fisheries Queensland Seagrass Watch program.

Knowledge sharing will be achieved through conducting workshops between Traditional owners, managers and scientists. WEB based systems will also be developed to facilitate ongoing access to scientific and management information by Traditional Owners.

3. Enhanced Compliance

The enhanced compliance activities will address illegal activities that threaten cultural and natural heritage values and culturally important species such as dugong and green turtle.

Approach

Indigenous Communities Compliance Liaison Officers (ICCLOs) will be appointed to work closely with elders and other members of Indigenous communities to address poaching and other illegal activities that are of concern to Traditional Owners. Intelligence provided through this work will be used to set priorities and to program existing Great Barrier Reef Marine Park compliance resources to address compliance issues identified; including close coordination with other agencies such as Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol and Queensland Police. Funds will also be allocated to undertake additional surveillance and patrols activity where required.

A comprehensive compliance training program will be developed to ensure Traditional Owners, ranger groups, residents of Indigenous communities, and government employed marine park field officers have the necessary skills to support this program.



Figure 1: Field Management staff working with Traditional Owners prior to a patrol

4. Engaging with Communities

Engaging with communities is a strategy to work with communities to enhance leadership in Indigenous communities in the context of sea country management

Approach

The key factor to ensuring the success of the projects related to this activity is the successful engagement and involvement of Indigenous community members to re-establish the respect for Traditional lore, share knowledge and to develop future leaders.

A Sea Country Guardians project will be implemented in Cape York communities and centre on the existing concepts of Reef Guardian Schools and Reef Guardian Councils. The foundation of the program's success will be the emphasis placed on the community. The program will encourage community participation and centre on localised issues and aspirations for sea country management in the context of education and councils.

Initiatives such as a reef-wide workshop will invite representatives of Traditional Owner groups to share their successes, lessons learned and future needs between themselves and with the broader community.

Indigenous communities

Sea Country Guardians aspires to:

- ∂ generate and inform the future community leaders and guardians of sea country so they have a sense of ownership of the part they play in sustainable management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
- ∂ engage young people with what they want to take responsibility for and what they will do
- ∂ access and use traditional and contemporary knowledge to help children learn and accept Sea Country Guardian responsibilities
- ∂ create a self-sustaining community centred culture of Sea Country learning engaging families and schools
- ∂ complement other capacity development and training programs in a community
- ∂ foster stewardship and a community culture of young people caring for

Education

The Education component of the Sea Country Guardians project builds on the existing Reef Guardian Schools program. The program will be adapted in a way that recognises the capacity limitations and priorities of Indigenous communities.

Consultants will develop a Sea Country Guardians educational program for each community that will engage and educate children to understand and appreciate the reef and connected ecosystems. A 'tool kit' will also be developed with each community including a suite of actions and activities tailored to the community as appropriate. Reef HQ, the GBRMPA's primary educational facility, will also play an important role by hosting visits from Indigenous community schools and potentially through its video conferencing based education programs.

A number of individual community learning units or actions that can be adapted for use in all of the communities based on community identified themes and messages will be developed. The units will be suitable for community members, new and existing teachers, and others, without deep science knowledge to understand and implement. The toolkits will contain all relevant community contacts and resources.



Figure 2: Children undertaking Sea Country activities



The Councils component of the Sea Country Guardians project builds on the existing Reef Guardian Council program. Representatives from Aboriginal Shire Councils have met with the GBRMPA and identified that the existing program will need to be adapted in a way that recognizes the capacity limitations and priorities of Aboriginal Shire Councils.

The council component of the Sea Country Guardian project will create opportunities for communities within the local government areas to become recognised "Reef Guardians".

Consultants will begin the process of identifying and implementing the Reef Guardian Council program as well as developing the necessary Action Plans for Aboriginal Shire Councils.

For Aboriginal Shire Councils, Sea Country Guardians aspires to:

- ∂ raise community awareness of the pressures facing the Great Barrier Reef and what the community can do to help
- ∂ identify the opportunities, requirements, gaps and critical issues for Councils to be involved in natural resource management.
- ∂ identify opportunities to apply traditional knowledge for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef, including supporting links to TUMRAs
- ∂ determine the minimum standard /capacity for AICs to be involved in the Reef Guardian Council program and how this may be facilitated

5. Grants and Sponsorship

The Grants and Sponsorship Activity will fund opportunities for all Traditional Owner groups of the Great Barrier Reef, regardless of whether they are TUMRA holders or not, to access training and attend meetings to effectively engage in sea country management. The activity will, through competitive processes, provide applicants with funding opportunities to effectively manage sea country.

Approach

The Sea Country Partnerships Grants Program will provide small grants to fund projects that enable Traditional Owners to better manage sea country. Successful applicants might, for example, use the funding to develop sea country plans, enhance their management and technical skills, manage traditional knowledge, execute community projects, or possibly establish committees and working groups that are critical to the development and implementation of sea country management arrangements.

The Sea Country Sponsorships Program is aimed at providing Traditional Owners with opportunities to participate in mainstream conferences, training, and capacity building forums with reef managers and scientists.

Foundational Activities

Indigenous Liaison Officers

The GBRMPA will appoint additional Indigenous Liaison Officers to work with Traditional Owners and Indigenous communities to facilitate their engagement with the Program.

MERI Plan

The program follows processes in regards to management and implementation support according to the Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) framework that has been adopted by the Caring for our Country initiative.

A draft MERI Plan has been developed and evaluation tools will be developed for the program to better report and improve the program.

"The primary aim of the Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee is to provide advice to the Authority on the implementation of its program to work with Traditional Owners to protect the Great Barrier Reef. The committee will provide advice on application of world's best practice principles to Sea Country planning and implementation and advise on ways to facilitate partnerships, build capacity and engage with Traditional Owners in the management of marine resources in the Great Barrier Reef."

Other Links

- Indigenous Protected Areas Program

<http://www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/ipa/funding.html>

- Working on Country Program

<http://www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/publications/pubs/workingoncountry.pdf>