

South-east Cape York

# REEF COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

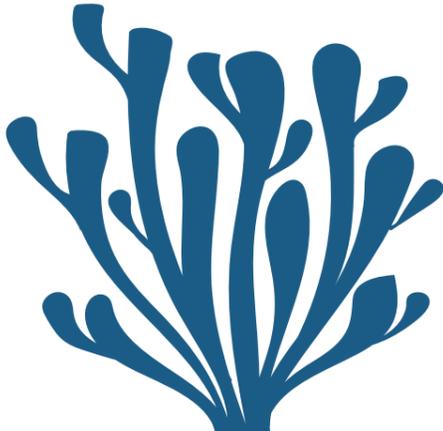
March 2021

# Acknowledgment of Country

The Cape York and adjoining regions are home to many languages, clan estates and tribal groups. Cape York NRM and South Cape York Catchments would like to respectfully acknowledge the region’s Traditional Owners and Elders both past and present. We acknowledge their deep and lasting connection to land, sea and waters, and recognise the important role of Traditional Owners in natural resource management. We also recognise those whose ongoing effort to protect and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures will leave a lasting legacy for future Elders and leaders.

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# Executive summary

Cape York Peninsula is one of five Queensland regions developing a Reef Community Action Plan for the community to take part in meaningful local action to benefit the Reef and local environment. This Community Action Plan (CAP) was developed through a review of existing plans combined with the contributions of Traditional Owners, youth and community members at seven workshops from October 2020 to January 2021.

Across the workshops, 13 priority strategies were put forward, which fall into four themes:

- Reducing visitor impacts and restoring country
- Engaging youth to care for the Reef, coasts and catchments
- Restoring customary care of turtle and dugong populations
- Strengthening heritage protections and management practices

The 13 suggested strategies will deliver substantial benefits to local catchments, rivers, beaches, important species and the Great Barrier Reef. The strategies also extend opportunities for partnerships between Traditional Owners, ranger groups, councils, management authorities, community organisations, NRM groups, landholders, scientists and young community members. Through these strategies, this CAP provides a shared vision for benefitting the local environment in the south-east Cape York region.



Community beach clean-up on Cooktown’s North Shore



# Introduction

Cape York Peninsula is an important and iconic place. Cape York's eastern catchments flow directly to the top third of the world heritage Great Barrier Reef (GBR), including ten of the Reef's 30 unique bioregions<sup>1</sup>. The Cape York region has exceptional, intact wilderness areas and a rich cultural landscape, with Traditional Custodians maintaining strong connections to country.

Yet there are also growing pressures on the region. Visitors bring litter and waste and damage cultural and natural areas. Roads and other disturbances cause erosion that washes sediment into waterways. Land managers continue to tackle the spread of weeds and feral animals. Severe cyclones and extreme weather, driven by climate change, threaten the health of corals and coastal vegetation. There is a need to address these pressures and take meaningful local action to preserve the values of the region.

Cape York Peninsula is one of five Reef regions developing a CAP, with a main focus in the south-east (Endeavour, Jeannie and Normanby catchments). The purpose of this CAP was to build on previous plans and combine the voices of Traditional Owners, community members and youth to identify

priorities for practical, on-ground activities that will benefit the local marine and coastal environment.

This Community Action Plan (CAP) aims to:

1. Establish shared goals for community Reef protection
2. Identify critical projects to strengthen and accelerate community Reef protection

To build the CAP, Cape York NRM and South Cape York Catchments held seven workshops from October 2020 to January 2021. At the workshops, participants shared strategies for community action, prioritised these strategies and collaboratively developed 'roadmaps' to map out how their priority strategies will work.

This CAP documents the community's proposed priority strategies to benefit the local marine and coastal environment, as well as the key values and pressures relevant for local action. We provide a prospectus of community projects developed during the workshops in Appendix 4.



Lizard Island and surrounding reef

# Planning context

## About the Region

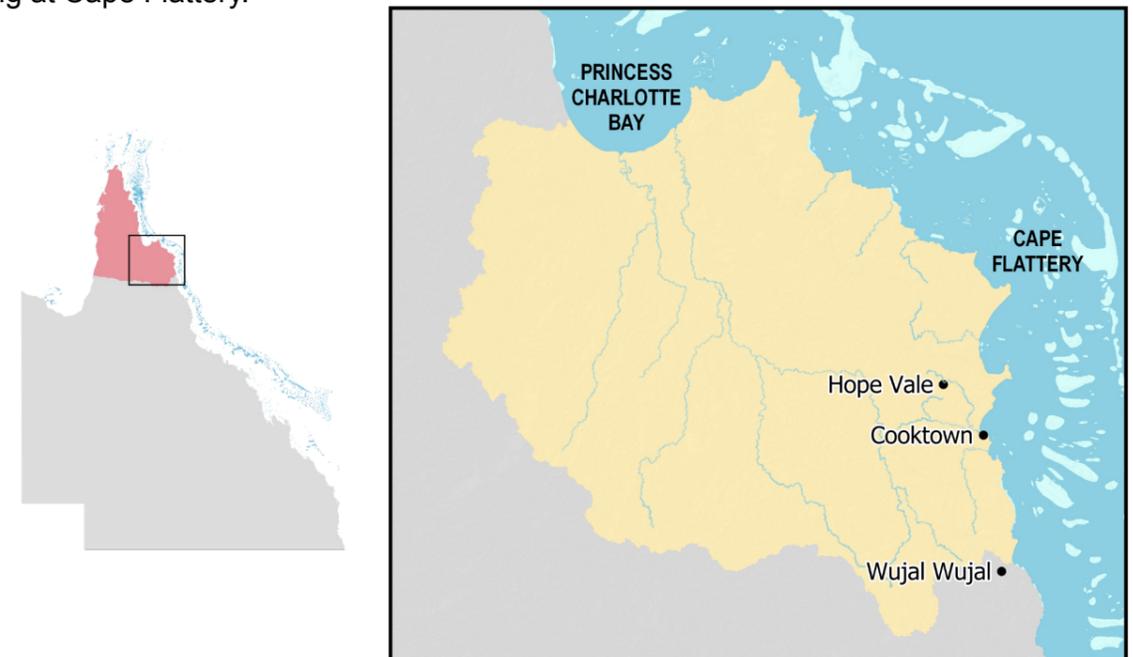
Cape York Peninsula is the northernmost region of Queensland, Australia, extending north from the Mitchell River catchment to 'The Tip'. The region's three south-east catchments (Endeavour, Jeannie and Normanby) are the main focus of this plan.

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<sup>2</sup>. Cape York Peninsula has over 40% of the coral reef area for the GBR and over 30% of seagrass area<sup>3</sup>, some of the highest densities of dugongs in Australia<sup>4</sup>, and many critical nesting sites for sea turtles<sup>5</sup>. The region's remoteness, small population (<20,000)<sup>6</sup> and limited development pressure has helped keep these values intact.

Most people in south-east Cape York live in Cooktown and nearby communities including Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal, Rossville, Lakeland and Laura. The major land uses in the region are nature and culture conservation (mostly jointly managed National Park (CYPAL) and Aboriginal freehold) and grazing. Other land uses include horticulture in Lakeland and silica mining at Cape Flattery.

Cape York Peninsula's emerging tourism industry relies on the Reef and natural areas. Over 100,000 visitors travel to the region each year<sup>7</sup>, mainly for camping, four-wheel driving, boating, fishing and other recreational activities. These activities can bring detrimental impacts, including erosion of tracks, litter and waste, damage to sensitive sites, spread of weeds and illegal fishing. Without careful management, these impacts may worsen as road access improves and services expand in the region.

There are also strong commercial and recreational fishing industries in the region. As the closest town to the GBR, Cooktown and its surrounds are renowned for reef fishing. Traditional Owners in the area maintain a strong connection to both land and sea, and traditional harvest of species such as turtle and dugong is common. The close proximity of the Reef (<10 km) also results in high connectivity with the Endeavour, Mclvor and Annan catchments, exposing fringing reefs, in-shore reefs and seagrass meadows to land-based runoff<sup>8</sup> from flood plumes.



## Building on existing plans

We designed this CAP through a review of existing plans combined with community input from the workshops. This ensures that community priorities are aligned with existing plans, and that we are not 'planning for planning's sake' but instead building on what has already been done in the region. For example, the pressures discussed in the survey and workshop discussions are aligned with disturbances identified in the Eastern Cape York Water Quality Improvement Plan.

GBR-wide plans:

- Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan
- Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan
- Great Barrier Reef blueprint for resilience

Regional plans and resources:

- Eastern Cape York Water Quality Improvement Plan
- Cape York Living NRM Plan
- Cape York Regional Investment Strategy 2018–2023
- Endeavour, Jeanie and Normanby Catchment Stories
- Local Healthy Country plans and IPA plans

## Community engagement

In the first stage, we administered a community survey among Traditional Owners, youth and a wide range of community members. There were 33 responses to the survey, which we used to guide the seven CAP workshops:

- Two community workshops in Wujal Wujal and Cooktown (October 2020)
- Three small group workshops for stakeholders in Hope Vale (January 2021)
- Two youth workshops at Endeavour Christian College and a community hall (October and December 2020)

In the workshops, participants refined the priority strategies for community action in the region and built 'roadmaps'—visual diagrams that show the steps involved in implementing these strategies.

Representatives at the workshops included those from local government, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), Aboriginal corporations, ranger and NRM groups, Cape York Local Marine Advisory Committee (LMAC), as well as Traditional Owners, scientists, primary producers and young Reef enthusiasts. We provide a full list of attendees in Appendix 1.



Roadmapping: SCYC's Jason Carroll and Yuku Baja Muliku Ranger Joallan Seagren

# Community Action Plan

## Vision

Cape York Peninsula's Reef, marine and coastal environment is protected, appreciated, sustainably used and enjoyed, for the benefit of Traditional Owners, local community and visitors.

## Scope

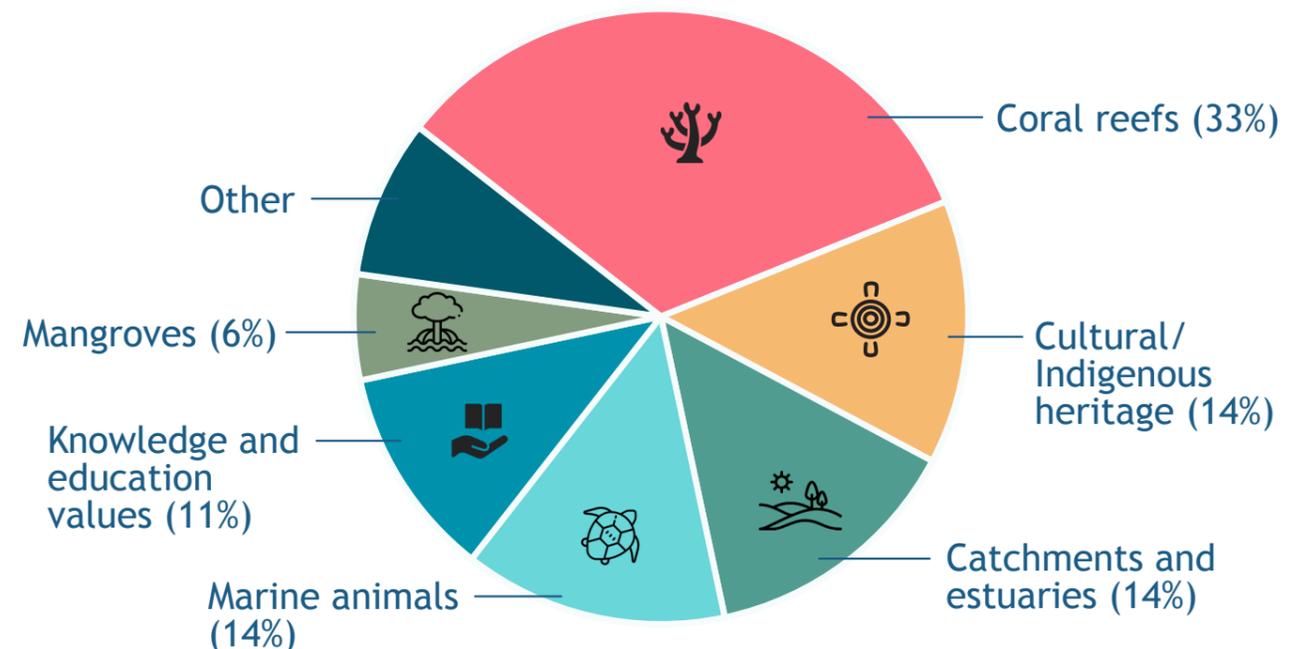
This plan identifies community-based actions to benefit Cape York Peninsula's Reef, marine and coastal environment.

This plan focuses primarily on the south-east (Endeavour, Jeannie and Normanby catchments). There are, however, several projects that could be implemented across the entire Cape York NRM region, with an outlook to extend the CAP process into the central and northern sections of Cape York Peninsula.

## Community values

South-east Cape York communities have a strong connection with the region's environment. Traditional Owners in Wujal Wujal and Hope Vale expressed the importance of cultural sites, landscapes and story places, Traditional ecological knowledge, waterways and wetlands, and marine species such as turtle and dugong. Cooktown workshop participants emphasised the value of natural, unspoilt areas—beaches and coastal ecosystems, spectacular reefs and remote camping areas. Young people placed particular value on coral reefs and the animals that inhabit them. Survey responses regarding community values for the CAP are shown below.

## Priority Reef-related values for community action



## Pressures

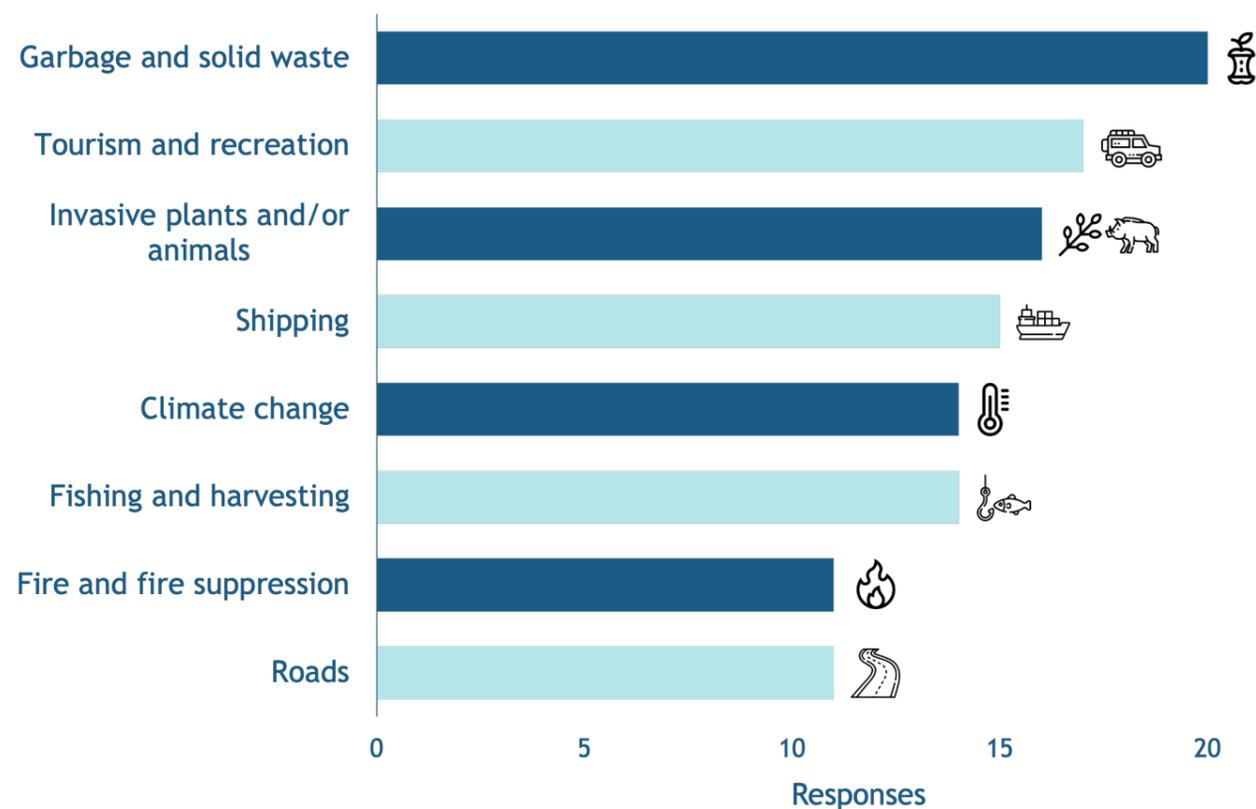
Community members are concerned about a range of pressures. When asked which pressures most needed to be addressed, the top three survey responses were:

1. Garbage and solid waste
2. Tourism and recreation
3. Invasive plants and animals

Participants at all workshops shared considerable concern for the detrimental impact of tourism on camping areas, roads, and sensitive areas such as beaches, waterways and cultural sites. The prevalence of litter was a related issue, including plastics washed onto beaches from overseas. Similarly, weed spread, especially on roadsides, was a common pressure discussed.

Traditional Owners in Wujal Wujal and Hope Vale shared about the prevalence of wrong sea harvesting, and particularly, too many turtles being taken by Indigenous people. Some Hope Vale Traditional Owners also raised concerns about the impacts of proposed mining developments in the area. Young people were concerned about a range of pressures on the Reef including boating and shipping, household waste and sewage, and crown-of-thorns starfish.

### Priority pressures for community action



\*Only the top 8 responses are shown

## Strategies

Participants suggested a wide range of strategies for community action. We prioritised strategies first through participant surveys and then at the workshops through a group voting process. Participants considered several factors in prioritising strategies, including:

 <p><b>Passion</b></p> <p>What do you really care about and want to see improved in the region relating to the Reef environment?</p>	 <p><b>Impact</b></p> <p>How well will this strategy address the pressure and deliver benefits to the Reef environment and community?</p>	 <p><b>Fit</b></p> <p>How well does the strategy align with regional plans and/or build on work that has already been done in the region?</p>	 <p><b>Delivery</b></p> <p>Will the strategy be achievable, considering the cost, existing capacity, scale of actions and timeline?</p>
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Over the seven workshops, participants put forward 13 strategies as priorities for action. We grouped these strategies into **four themes**, which are summarised below. The roadmaps and Project Prospectus provide more detail on these strategies (see Appendices).

### Theme 1: Reducing visitor impacts and restoring Country

These strategies focus on improving catchment and coastal ecosystem condition by reducing recreational and tourism impacts (including litter, waste and 4WD damage) and by controlling weeds and feral animals.

<b>Visitor infrastructure upgrades at Emmagen Creek, Woobadda Creek and Kaway</b>	This project will install toilets and signs at three culturally significant, high-visitation areas on the Bloomfield Track to stop people from damaging the area.
<b>Jajikal Ranger beach protection on Jalunji-Warra Country</b>	This project will protect culturally significant Jalunji-Warra beaches by reducing feral species, revegetating dune areas, closing inappropriate tracks, and installing signage and facilities.
<b>Cape York sustainable tourism</b>	This project will implement a sustainable tourism strategy, reducing impacts to visitor areas through a regional workforce trained to undertake compliance and upgrade infrastructure.
<b>Coastal visitor management in Yuku Baja Muliku Country</b>	This project will reduce the impacts of recreational activities on the coastal environment of Archer Point through clean-ups, revegetation, installing infrastructure and other activities.
<b>Hymenachne control in Cape Melville National Park</b>	This project will tackle infestations of highly invasive hymenachne through fly-in wet season control.



## Theme 2: Engaging youth to care for the Reef, coasts and catchments

These strategies focus on youth-based on-ground actions, including monitoring and protecting the Reef, cleaning up beaches and tackling weeds across to improve catchment condition.

<b>Community and youth coral monitoring</b>	This project will empower young people to monitor coral reefs off Cooktown to support GBR-wide monitoring programs.
<b>Crown-of-thorns education, monitoring and control</b>	This project will create a crown-of-thorns starfish monitoring and control program in the Cooktown Reef Community.
<b>Youth-led beach clean-up program</b>	This project will support youth-led beach clean-ups in the Cooktown area to reduce marine debris.
<b>Pilot weed team program</b>	This project will build a team of young people to support land managers in strategically managing weed infestations.

## Theme 3: Restoring customary care of turtle and dugong populations

These strategies focus on caring for turtle and dugong populations through permits, compliance programs, education and monitoring to reduce illegal and unsustainable take.

<b>Sustainable turtle management in Jalunji-Warra Country</b>	This project will implement a permit and compliance program to minimise illegal turtle and dugong take and make legal take sustainable.
<b>Sustainable turtle and marine management in Hope Vale</b>	This project will resource an Indigenous Ranger program for marine and coastal areas, with a special focus on restoring sustainable sea turtle and dugong harvesting in the area.

## Theme 4: Strengthening heritage protections and management practices

These strategies focus on reducing human impacts through stronger legislative protection and guidelines. This includes protecting cultural sites through National Heritage listing, and reducing erosion and weed spread through road best management practices.

<b>National heritage listing for culturally significant areas</b>	This project will strengthen protection and recognition of Binthi Country and surrounding Hope Vale areas through attaining National Heritage Listing.
<b>Road BMPs for Cape York</b>	This project involves designing and implementing best management practices (BMPs) for roads and roadsides across eastern Cape York to reduce erosion and weed spread.



## Next steps

Participants at the workshops were excited to be involved with implementing the priority strategies. The 13 priority strategies put forward provide a great variety of potential projects that would bring substantial improvements to local catchments, rivers, beaches, important species and the Reef.

With a Project Prospectus developed, these projects will be available for community groups and individuals involved in the CAP process to develop into formal proposals and seek funding for implementation. It is recommended that the community priorities detailed here also contribute to the Cape York Regional NRM Plan 2021–2025.

## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge all of the Traditional Owners, youth and community members involved in workshoping and developing this plan, as well as Conservation Management for their planning and training support.

Development of this Community Action Plan was funded by the partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.



Cooktown CAP workshop



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Dabu Jajikal Aboriginal Corporation attendees discuss their roadmap with SCYC's Jessie Price-Declé

# Appendices

- Appendix 1: Workshop Attendees
- Appendix 2: Workshop Photos
- Appendix 3: Project Roadmaps
- Appendix 4: Project Prospectus



Sea Scape, Roy Mclvor



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Front cover photograph: Fringing Reef at Archer Point (Jessie Price-Decle)

Development of this Community Action Plan was funded by the partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.



Great Barrier  
Reef Foundation

