

South-east Cape York

REEF COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

PROJECT PROSPECTUS

March 2021

Acknowledgments

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.

We acknowledge all of the Traditional Owners, youth and community members involved in workshopping and developing these projects, 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.



King Plains Lake



Overview

Cape York Peninsula is an important region. Its eastern catchments are highly intact compared with other coastal regions in Queensland and flow directly to the top third of the World Heritage Great Barrier Reef (GBR). Over 100,000 people visit the region each year, and the health of the environment is of great importance to local communities.

The community have identified many pressures that are impacting the health of the Reef and coastal areas, including erosion, littering, weeds and unsustainable hunting. Cape York NRM and South Cape York Catchments held seven workshops from October 2020 to January 2021 to develop a Community Action Plan (CAP). The CAP identifies priority strategies to address these pressures and provide benefits to the marine and coastal environment.

This Project Prospectus details 13 priority strategies developed at the CAP workshops, which fit 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

These strategies represent the priorities of CAP workshop participants, including Traditional Owners, ranger groups, local government, scientists, NRM officers and other community members. Importantly, these strategies may not reflect the views of all community members and organisations in the region. The strategies presented here are also not intended to be comprehensive, and other activities not listed here may be required to support or enable implementation of the strategies.



Cape York NRM and South Cape York Catchments intend to work in partnership with community groups to develop the strategies into projects that will have an impact and be owned by the local community. Collectively, the projects will provide enormous benefits to local catchments, rivers, beaches, important species and the Reef. Implementing these projects will engage the community in meaningful local action and employ Traditional Owners to manage their Country.



Theme 1: Reducing visitor impacts and restoring country

Visitor infrastructure upgrades at Emmagen Creek, Woobadda Creek and Kaway (Cowrie Beach)

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.

Context

Waterways are very important places on Eastern Kuku Yalanji Jalunji-Warra Country, from Walsh Bay in the north down into the Daintree. Scattered along rivers, creeks and springs are sacred sites and story places for Jalunji-Warra People. These waterways are important habitat for fish and prawns, but also flow directly to the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. Coastal ecosystems in the area are similarly important to Jalunji-Warra People and include important habitat for mangroves and tropical rainforest plants.

Emmagen Creek, Woobadda Creek and Kaway (Cowrie Beach) are popular places for visitors travelling on the Bloomfield Track between Cairns and Cooktown. These sites are frequently spoiled by visitors leaving behind waste and defecating in the area. This is not only disrespectful to the cultural significance of these sites, but is also posing a health concern and having detrimental impacts on water quality and recreational amenity.

The project

Permanent or seasonal amenities blocks will be constructed at Emmagen Creek, Woobadda Creek and Kaway (Cowrie Beach). Signs will also be installed at each location to educate visitors about the significance of these areas and the expectations for appropriate use. Local community members will be made aware of the new facilities through local radio and/or community noticeboard and online media announcements.

The installation of new facilities will restore visitor amenity at the sites, while also respecting cultural significance of the area and improving the quality of water flowing to the GBR lagoon. Upgrades to these areas have been put forward as a priority by the community in the Eastern Kuku Yalanji Indigenous Protected Area Plan for Jalunji-Warra Land and Sea Country.

“
I want to see toilets there before I am sixty-five!
”
Kathleen Walker, Wujal Wujal



Visitor signage in Eastern Kuku Yalanji Country

Outcomes

- Culturally significant waterways and coastal areas in Jalunji-Warra Country are respected and used properly by visitors
- Restored visitor amenity of waterways and coastal areas is restored
- Improved water quality in Emmagen Creek, Woobadda Creek and Kaway (Cowrie Beach)
- Visitors are educated about Jalunji-Warra culture and the significance of the area

Key activities

1. Consult with Traditional Owners, Council and community members
2. Conduct a site survey
3. Develop and submit a proposal
4. Obtain permissions
5. Work with Traditional Owners to design signage
6. Construct facilities and install signs
7. Inform community about new facilities
8. Maintain facilities and monitor use

Indicative budget

\$60,000–\$300,000

Timeframe

3 years

Potential delivery partners

Douglas Shire Council, Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council, Dabu Jajikal Aboriginal Corporation, Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation, Cape York NRM, South Cape York Catchments, Wet Tropics Management Authority.

Jajikal Ranger beach protection on Jalunji-Warra Country

This project will protect culturally significant Jalunji-Warra beaches by reducing feral species, revegetating dune areas, closing inappropriate tracks, and installing signage and facilities.

Context

The Jajikal Traditional Owners, of the Eastern Kuku Yalanji Jalunji-Warra People, are saltwater people. The coastline of their country holds great cultural significance. The beaches, including Balabay (Weary Bay), are places to hunt and gather food, spend time with family, and also have significant sacred sites—some of which are not to be visited. Important species such as turtle and dugong frequent this area, and many bush foods and medicines are found on and near the beaches.

The Jajikal people are saddened by the impact that recreational users have on these areas, and by the degradation that has been caused. Other threats, such as feral pigs and weeds, are also impacting the health of these coastal ecosystems and connected habitats, which include two World Heritage Listed sites – the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree Rainforest. Further degradation could lead to a loss of biodiversity, coastal erosion, and damage to cultural sites.

The project

Balabay (Weary Bay) will be managed more effectively by the Jajikal Traditional Owners, with dune areas and unwanted or inappropriate tracks closed off for rehabilitation; interpretative signage installed for visitors with information for reducing impacts; an amenities block installed inside the Jajikal Traditional Owners Reserve Area for use by families; and strategic feral animal and weed management activities undertaken.

This increased management will help the wider community understand the expectations of the Traditional Owners and improve the health of the coastal ecosystem. The project activities will grow the land management capacity of the Jajikal people, and increase their ability to work to protect their sea country.

Outcomes

- Culturally significant coastal areas of Jajikal Country experience increased management by Traditional Owners
- Visitor impacts to Balabay (Weary Bay) are managed and minimised
- Traffic on Balabay (Weary Bay) beach is reduced and controlled to designated tracks, reducing impacts to dunes and vegetation
- Impacts by feral animals and weeds are reduced
- The land management capacity of the Jajikal Traditional Owners is increased

Key activities

1. Identify relevant people for consultation.
2. Consult all relevant people
3. Design management plan
4. Engage potential funding and delivery partners
5. Install signage at visitor areas

6. Close off inappropriate tracks and install gates where required along Balabay (Weary Bay)
7. Erect an amenities block in the Traditional Owners Reserve—The Heads
8. Close off damaged areas for rehabilitation
9. Remove weeds and replant dunes with native plants
10. Control feral pigs in the beach swamps

Indicative budget

\$100,000–\$300,000

Timeframe

3–5 years

Potential delivery Partners

Dabu Jajikal Aboriginal Corporation, Jabalbina Rangers, Cape York NRM, South Cape York Catchments, Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council, Cook Shire Council, Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc.



Jajikal Traditional Owners Lizzie Olbar, Marie Shipton and Calvin Olbar

“

The CAP workshop gave our Traditional Owners the opportunity to work towards more funding so we can ensure the right people are in the right place doing the right thing.

Marie Shipton, Dabu Jajikal Aboriginal Corporation

”



Cape York sustainable tourism

This project will design and implement a sustainable tourism strategy for Cape York, reducing impacts to key visitor areas through a regional workforce trained to undertake compliance and upgrade infrastructure.

Context

Cape York Peninsula is considered a last frontier, with rugged landscapes that draw tourists seeking a wild adventure in remote Australia. Of the over 100,000 annual visitors to the Cape York Region, most bring their own vehicles and stay at caravan parks or remote camping areas.

While the positive impacts of tourism are substantial, there is growing community concern about visitors who do not respect the area and do not behave responsibly. Illegal access to private areas, camping in sensitive areas, dumping rubbish, arson and taking vehicles off designated tracks are some of the problems arising from irresponsible visitors. As visitor numbers continue to increase, there is a need for a region-wide effort to ensure visitors enjoy Cape York Peninsula in a sustainable and responsible way.

The project

This project will manage visitor impacts on Cape York Peninsula through a collaborative education, compliance and infrastructure improvement strategy.

The project will bring together Traditional Owners, land management organisations, rangers, law enforcement officials, landholders and local government to identify priority visitor management issues and locations across Cape York Peninsula. A regional workforce will be established and trained to respond to these priorities by upgrading infrastructure, enforcing rules and educating visitors.

The regional workforce will be a partnership consisting of individuals working in land management across Cape York Peninsula, who will receive additional resources and training to undertake priority visitor management actions, such as restoring tracks and gates, upgrading amenities blocks and disposal facilities, and providing an educational presence in key visitor areas. The project may also involve working with police to give the workforce capacity to issue warnings and infringement notices.

A visitor education strategy will also be rolled out, focusing on signage at key visitor areas. This will integrate with the new Gateway to the Cape rest and information stop in Lakeland and with other educational initiatives such as the Cape York Keep it Clean project.



Cape York NRM team on the road

Outcomes

- Restored respect for environmentally and culturally sensitive areas
- Reduced erosion and damage to sites
- Reduced rubbish in visitor areas
- Improved visitor awareness of responsible travelling in Cape York Peninsula

Indicative budget

\$400,000–\$600,000

Timeframe

5 years

Potential delivery partners

Thoughtful Travelling Cape York Alliance, Cape York NRM, South Cape York Catchments, Cook Shire Council, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Queensland Police Service, Aak Puul Ngantam (APN), Laura Rangers, Lama Lama Rangers, Pormpuraaw Rangers, Mapoon Rangers, Melsonby Rangers, Normanby Rangers, Yuku Baja Muliku Rangers, Jabalbina Rangers.

Key activities

1. Establish steering committee
2. Bring together collaborative organisations and individuals
3. Develop governance structure and seek resources
4. Undertake consultation and surveys to identify priority issues and locations
5. Expressions of interest to join regional workforce
6. Run training sessions for regional workforce
7. Implement recovery actions, infrastructure upgrades, compliance
8. Disseminate educational materials at key visitor areas

“
Here we promote tourism, but not responsible tourism. We need more than awareness raising, we need to stop people doing the wrong thing. People need to respect our backyard.
 ”
 Judy Irwin, Valley View



Coastal visitor management in Yuku Baja Muliku Country

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.

Context

Yuku Baja Muliku Country is located south of Cooktown, and includes the area of Archer Point. Archer Point boasts fringing reef, seagrass meadows, beautiful beaches, mangroves and saltmarsh, and she-oak forests. This section of coast is culturally significant to its Traditional Owners, with sacred sites and story places, and is also a popular recreation area for the local community and with tourists.

This popularity has led to some damage to the area, including impacts from littering, off-road driving (cars and motorbikes), and small-scale vegetation clearing. Archer Point is known to be a free-camping area, and many travellers take advantage of this, some staying for weeks at a time. This, combined with the lack of visitor amenities, has led to littering and public health concerns. The Yuku Baja Muliku Traditional Owners have a very active ranger program that will undertake actions to properly protect this special area from further degradation.

The project

Visitor activities at Archer Point of Yuku Baja Muliku Country will be actively managed to reduce impacts to cultural sites and the coastal environment. An existing management plan developed by Yuku Baja Muliku Traditional Owners will be reviewed to ensure that areas being impacted are protected through increased management. The Rangers will implement the management plan, including activities such as beach clean-ups, coastal revegetation, and visitor management infrastructure installation (signs, barricades etc.). The Rangers will also undertake compliance patrols to ensure visitor management requirements are being met.

Active management of visitors on Yuku Baja Muliku Country, particularly at Archer Point, by Rangers will help reduce degradation of the area, improve the relationship between the Traditional Owners and wider community, and improve the health of the coastal environment.

Outcomes

- Culturally and environmentally significant coastal areas of Yuku Baja Muliku Country experience increased management by Traditional Owners
- Visitor management understanding of the wider community is increased
- Visitor impacts to Archer Point are managed and minimised.
- Coastal revegetation is completed, protecting the beach from erosion.

Key activities

1. Yuku Baja Muliku hire a consultant to help review existing management plan
2. Consultant to review management plan in consultation with Yuku Baja Muliku Traditional Owner Negotiating Committee
3. Secure funding and resources
4. Build partnerships and networks with organisations
5. Develop and deliver training program

6. Implement Management Actions:
 - a. Beach Clean-Ups
 - b. Compliance Patrols
 - c. Land management activities within a youth program
 - d. Install signs and barricades to increase visitor awareness
 - e. Coastal revegetation

Indicative budget

\$200,000–\$300,000

Timeframe

3–4 years

Delivery arrangements

The project will be delivered by Yuku Baja Muliku Land Owner and Reserves Ltd and Yuku Baja Muliku Rangers, with potential support from Cook Shire Council, Cooktown schools, local organisations and consultants.



View at Archer Point

“

We provide opportunities for community involvement and provide protection of our cultural sites so that younger generations can benefit from the conservation of the area and maintenance of our culture for many more years to come.

”

Excerpt from the Yuku Baja Muliku Vision



Hymenachne control in Cape Melville National Park

This project will tackle infestations of highly invasive hymenachne in Cape Melville National Park through fly-in wet season control.

Context

Cape Melville National Park has a near-pristine coastal environment with valuable ecosystems including extensive wetlands, unique boxwood country and saltpan alluvial flats. The adjacent marine area also includes the largest preservation zone in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, with vital seagrass habitat for dugongs and turtles. The area is jointly managed by both Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Cape Melville, Flinders & Howick Aboriginal Corporation, who maintain a strong ongoing connection to Country.

In the last two years, rangers have identified an outbreak of hymenachne in Cape Melville National Park. Hymenachne is a major weed of wetlands in northern Australia. It spreads rapidly and outcompetes native species, altering natural flow regimes and creating a physical barrier that restricts the movement of aquatic and semi-aquatic animals. Control of hymenachne is challenging and habitat mapping suggests there is a high risk of it becoming established in the national park if rapid action is not taken.

The project

This project will support Cape Melville, Flinders & Howick Islands Aboriginal Corporation Rangers to spray herbicide on active hymenachne infestations in Cape Melville National Park. The most effective time for hymenachne control is in the wet season before plants set seed. However, infestation areas are inaccessible by road during the wet season, posing a challenge for control.

To overcome this, the project will support helicopter fly-in and fly-out of ranger staff. All control equipment including vehicle and sprayers will be left at the ranger base prior to the wet season. Control activities will include two stages of spraying for each infestation over a two-week period, with before and after monitoring undertaken to measure impacts and stay on top of any potential resurgence.

This project will maintain the exceptional natural and cultural values of the area's wetlands while also building the capacity of Indigenous rangers.



Hymenachne spraying (Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc.)

Outcomes

- Reduced presence of invasive weeds in Cape Melville National Park
- Improved wetland ecosystem integrity and habitat for aquatic species
- Restored cultural values of wetland areas
- Increased capacity for Indigenous rangers to undertake on-Country management

Key activities

1. Hold joint management meeting with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
2. Develop a project plan and with monitoring and budget
3. Survey potential infestation areas
4. Develop on-ground work plan
5. Undertake hymenachne control
6. Complete monitoring and follow up control

Indicative budget

\$20,000

Timeframe

1 year

Potential delivery partners

Cape Melville, Flinders & Howick Islands Aboriginal Corporation, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Cape York NRM, South Cape York Catchments.

“
With hymenachne, we need to get in there and spray it in the wet season before it sets seed. Otherwise it will only keep spreading.
 ”
 Regan Hart, Cape Melville, Flinders & Howick Islands Aboriginal Corporation



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

Community and youth coral monitoring

This project will empower young people of Cooktown and surrounding communities to monitor coral reefs off Cooktown to support AIMS and GBRMPA monitoring programs.

Context

The Northern Great Barrier Reef (Northern GBR) is the third of the Great Barrier Reef least impacted upon by human activity and use, such as agriculture and mining, urban development, and fishing. While it may be less impacted, it is still under pressure from reduced catchment water quality (mainly due to elevated sediment loads) and climate change (mainly due to warming water temperatures, but also due to ocean acidification).

Currently, there is no frequent, regular monitoring of coral reefs and their associated ecosystems in the Northern GBR. The major research and management bodies can only visit the region sporadically due to the remoteness and distance from Townsville and Cairns.

There are existing community-led, on-ground groups that collect water quality and ecosystem health data for the major research and management bodies, including the Cape York Water Monitoring Partnership.

The project

Coral reefs in the Northern GBR Region off Cooktown will be regularly monitored by a group of passionate young people, who are mentored by local scientists and organisations. Monitoring methods will be appropriate for data to feed into the monitoring programs of major research and management bodies, to ensure it is used to guide management decisions and to develop reef knowledge. This project will engage young people in reef science, and help to instil a passion for reef and marine conservation in the next generation.

Young people from Cooktown and surrounding communities will be invited to join the group, and the group will be guided by local scientists and organisations to develop a Monitoring Plan. Contact will be made with the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) to ensure they support the program, and will make use of the data collected. Opportunities for mentoring by AIMS scientists may also be available.

This project will engage young people in reef conservation and science, increase knowledge of the under-monitored Northern Great Barrier Reef, and feed important data into wider Great Barrier Reef Monitoring Programs.

Outcomes

- Coral reefs in the Cooktown area of the Northern Great Barrier Reef are monitored more regularly, allowing for quicker identification of future bleaching events
- Young people in Cooktown and surrounding communities are engaged in reef science and conservation, increasing their awareness of reef issues
- Great Barrier Reef Monitoring Programs receive extra data about this region

Key activities

1. Create a team of passionate young people
2. Educate the team about reef science and monitoring methods
3. Source equipment and funding (boat, snorkel gear, monitoring equipment)
4. Engage local organisations and major research and management bodies
5. Engage local dive club
6. Create a Monitoring Plan
7. Implement the Monitoring Plan
8. Review data, and send to research bodies for inclusion in larger monitoring programs

Indicative budget

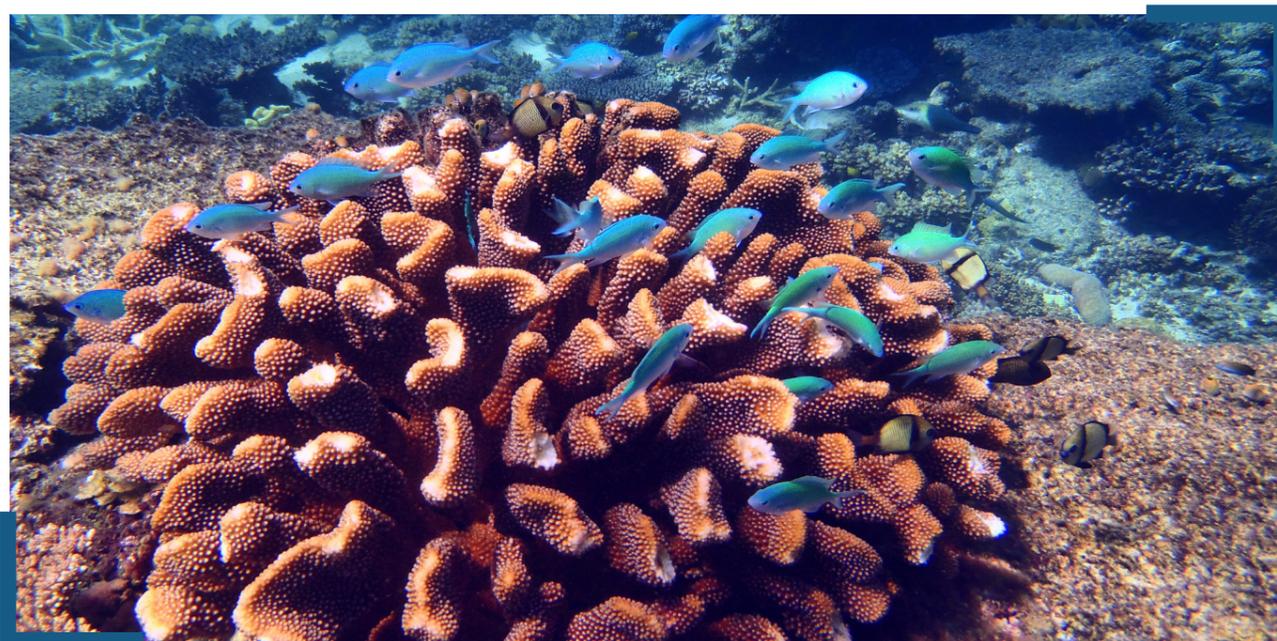
\$10,000–\$100,000

Timeframe

2+ years

Potential delivery partners

Cooktown Dive Club, Cape York Water Monitoring Partnership, Cape York NRM, South Cape York Catchments, local Traditional Owners and Ranger Groups, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Australian Institute of Marine Science, local school teachers.



Boulder Reef

“

I love the Reef, and I'd love to help make sure it stays healthy into the future.

”

Year 11 student, Cooktown State School



Crown-of-thorns education, monitoring and control

This project will create a community crown of thorns starfish (COTS) monitoring and control program in the Cooktown Reef Community.

Context

The Northern Great Barrier Reef (GBR) is an incredibly diverse area, supporting many different inter-connected ecosystems and species. While lower levels of development (compared to regions to the south) result in less direct impacts to our marine ecosystems, there are still threats to our reef health, including elevated sediment loads, impacts of climate change, and crown-of-thorns starfish (COTS) outbreaks.

While COTS are a native species on the GBR and a normal population is important for reef health, there are periodically outbreaks where populations reach plague proportions. As they feed on coral, these ‘plagues’ of COTS can do significant damage to coral cover on reefs. Research by the Australian Institute of Marine Science has shown that when phytoplankton becomes more abundant (generally due to elevated nutrient loads being delivered to the GBR), there is greater potential for COTS outbreaks.

Since 1962, there have been four significant outbreaks, most of which started in the area to the north of Cooktown then moved south through the whole GBR.

This area is remote, with less monitoring conducted than in regions to the south. Regular monitoring of this area could ensure early detection of the next COTS outbreak.

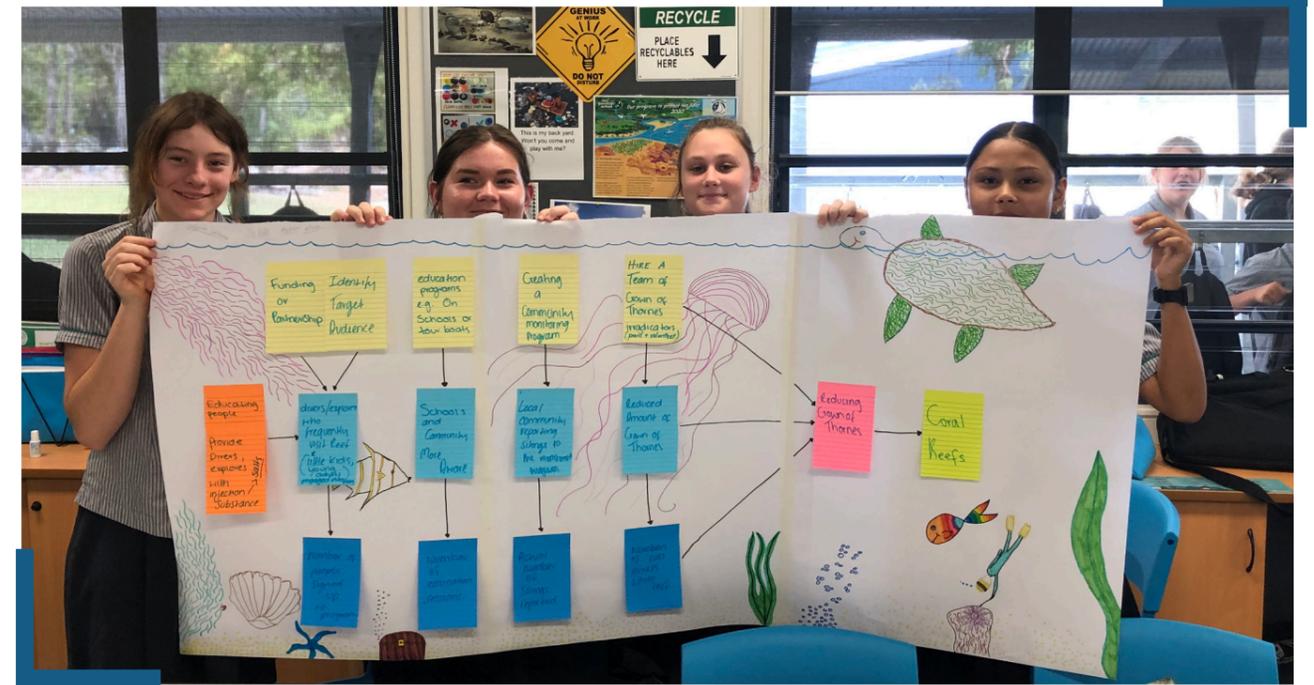
The project

COTS outbreaks will be monitored and managed by local community members who have been trained in monitoring and control techniques. A team of volunteers will work with local organisations to ensure the wider Cooktown Reef Community is informed about COTS and engaged. This will ensure that any future outbreaks of COTS will be identified and reported quickly, enabling control activities to begin rapidly.

A target audience will be engaged in the project, including local youth, Cooktown Dive Club members, recreational fishermen and spear divers, and local organisations and scientists. The benefits of having a wide target audience will be the spread of information, the increase in the number of people ‘keeping an eye out’ for COTS, and then the increased capacity of local people to be able to control COTS numbers if/when there is another outbreak.

“
It would be great to teach everyone in our community about the threat of COTS.
 ”

Year 10 Marine Science student, Endeavour Christian College



Year 10 Marine Science students at Endeavour Christian College show off their crown-of-thorns roadmap

Outcomes

- A community, on-ground COTS monitoring program created
- Better understand of the COTS problem in the wider Cape York community
- Earlier identification of future COTS outbreaks, with rapid reporting to major management and research bodies
- Rapid, locally-based control of future COTS outbreaks
- Reduced impact by next COTS outbreak, leading to better reef health

8. Recruit a team to undertake COTS control
9. Train team in COTS control
10. Monitoring participants report COTS sightings
11. Control team undertake COTS control activities when/if there is an outbreak

Indicative budget

\$10,000–\$50,000

Timeframe

2+ years

Key activities

1. Build funding partnerships
2. Identify target audience
3. Engage local Reef Community to get involved
4. Design education program
5. Educate the community about COTS
6. Run education sessions (e.g. on dive boats, in schools)
7. Train participants in COTS identification and recording

Potential delivery partners

Cooktown Dive Club, Cooktown Bluewater Club, Cape York Local Marine Advisory Committee, Cape York NRM, South Cape York Catchments, Cape York Water Monitoring Partnership, local Traditional Owners and Rangers, Australian Institute of Marine Science.



Youth-led beach clean-up program

This project will support a series of youth-led clean ups at beaches in the Cooktown area to reduce marine debris and improve habitat for turtles, dugongs and other marine life.

Context

Cape York Peninsula is a marine debris hotspot, receiving more sea-based plastic and other garbage than any other GBR region. Turtles, dugongs and other marine life can either ingest or become entangled in marine debris, presenting a key threatening process to local populations.

There are many young people in the Cooktown area who are passionate about marine protection. Students at Endeavour Christian College have been very involved in local initiatives such as beach clean ups, and there is an opportunity to start a regular program of clean ups at local beaches, as well as raising awareness with other students to improve youth engagement in Reef protection activities.

The project

This project will support a youth-led beach clean-up program at beaches and waterways in the Cooktown area.

The project will consist of a big annual school clean-up day, and two community clean up days per year. These community clean-up days will be organised by the students through partnerships with existing organisations such as Tangaroa Blue. Clean-up locations will vary and will focus on local beaches such as Walker Bay and Finch Bay, but also river banks and other sites identified by students and community members.

The community clean-up days will be a great opportunity to engage the wider community in Reef protection activities and build a strong 'pride of place' for Cooktown beaches and waterways. There will also be opportunities to partner with long-term organisations in the Cape York region such as Tangaroa Blue, to complement and support existing clean-up activities.

Beach clean ups will be supported by an awareness raising campaign in Cooktown schools, focusing on innovations and actions that young people can be part of to improve the local environment and protect the Reef.

Outcomes

- Increased youth engagement in Reef protection activities
- Increased community engagement in Reef protection activities
- Increased awareness among young people of potential innovations and their role in protecting the Reef
- Reduced marine debris at Cooktown beaches and waterways

Key activities

1. Get funding and support
2. Develop a plan for clean-up events
3. Advertise the clean-up events
4. Run beach clean-ups
5. Install signs and monitoring points at clean-up sites
6. Design educational content for schools
7. Put up posters and present innovative technology to help the Reef

Indicative budget

\$10,000–\$15,000

Timeframe

3+ years

Potential delivery partners

Endeavour Christian College, Cooktown State School, Holy Spirit College, Tangaroa Blue, Cape York NRM, South Cape York Catchments, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown PCYC.



Beach clean up at Cooktown's North Shore

“

We have done beach clean ups before and they are a great way to get the community involved and keep our beaches clean.

Year 10 Marine Science student, Endeavour Christian College

”



Pilot weed team program

This project will support land managers to strategically manage weed infestations on their properties, therefore improving biodiversity and ecosystem health in the reef catchments of Cape York Peninsula.

Context

Cape York Peninsula is a mosaic of contrasting ecosystems supporting exceptional biodiversity, but these ecosystems are under threat from land use disturbances. One of these threats is the many invasive weeds that impact wetlands and waterways, including Weeds of National Significance such as hymenachne, pond apple, gamba grass, and rubber vine. These weeds have the potential to degrade catchment water quality and our riparian areas and coastlines, which has flow-on impacts to Great Barrier Reef water quality.

Under the Queensland Biosecurity Act, landowners are responsible for controlling weeds on their property. On Cape York, many properties are very large (100,000+ hectares) and the logistics of controlling weed outbreaks are enormous. Additionally, land owners must deal with weed spread that is brought by visitors, trespassers, and from road reserves.

The project

This project will create a small team (up to five people) of field officers to support landowners across eastern Cape York to strategically tackle weed infestations on their properties. The team will be made up of one experienced operator, and four trainee-level personnel who will be trained and develop skills in weed identification and control. This will give young and/or disengaged people in our community an opportunity to engage in meaningful work and training.

The Weed Team will work with landowners, Cook Shire Council, Cape York Natural Resource Management and other local organisations to develop a prioritised action plan, then work to that plan for up to six months to reduce weed infestations on Cape York Peninsula.

“ We would really appreciate some help to tackle the weed problem, especially because we’re not responsible for introducing a lot of the weeds to our place. ”

Cape York Station Owner



Basal barking to control woody weeds (Kerry Trapnell)

Outcomes

- Reduce size of weed infestations across eastern Cape York Peninsula
- Young/disengaged people will be given work opportunities, with meaningful training
- Landowners supported to tackle weed infestations on their properties
- Relationships between landowners, Cook Shire Council and NRM Organisations will improve
- Improved water quality and biodiversity in Cape York reef catchments, which increases the condition of reef water quality in the Northern Great Barrier Reef

Key activities

1. Secure funding for program.
2. Develop partnerships with relevant organisations, Cook Shire Council, and landowners.
3. Employ a supervisor/mentor and a team of young/disengaged people.
4. Identify and engage landowners.
5. Determine priority actions and locations with a prioritised work plan.

6. Procure vehicles and equipment.
7. Six months of ‘hard yakka’ on the ground!

Indicative budget

\$250,000–\$350,000

Timeframe

2 years

Potential delivery partners

Cook Shire Council, Cape York NRM, South Cape York Catchments, Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc., local landowners/land managers



Theme 3: Restoring customary care of turtle and dugong populations

Sustainable turtle and dugong management in Jalunji-Warra Country

This project will implement a turtle hunting permit and compliance program to minimise illegal take and reduce legal take to sustainable levels. This will be backed up by a community education program to change community attitudes towards turtle hunting.

Context

Jalunji-Warra Sea Country provides feeding and nesting habitat for several sea turtle (*ngawiya*) species, including green turtles, which are nationally listed as vulnerable. Green turtles have been traditionally hunted by Jalunji-Warra People and are an important species for their culture.

In recent years, the local community have raised concerns about hunters taking too many turtles (>5 at a time) and not respecting the right seasons for hunting. There are also concerns that non-local Indigenous people are entering Jalunji-Warra Sea Country and hunting turtles without permission, which goes against Jalunji-Warra lore.

There are currently no legal restrictions on traditional hunting of sea turtle in the area.

However, considerable planning has been completed to implement sustainable hunting in the region, including a local land and sea plan and the 2013 Cape York Turtle and Dugong Regional Plan, which includes annual quotas on turtle take decided by local Traditional Owners. There is a need for a formal, funded program to regulate turtle take and ensure the sustainability of local green turtle populations.

The project

This project will implement a turtle hunting and compliance program to ensure sustainable hunting of turtles and dugongs (*kirrbaji*) in Jalunji-Warra Sea Country, from south of Cooktown at Cairns Reef to Port Douglas. The program will first involve the development of a Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement (TUMRA) that stipulates the requirement for a permit program to regulate turtle and dugong hunting.

The project will then deliver a permit system that limits traditional take to one turtle per boat and to agreed annual quotas (approx. 48 animals per year, including 1–2 dugongs). This will be achieved through employment of one or more Sea Country Traditional Owners as project officers to educate, undertake patrols and monitor compliance.

Finally, the project will deliver an education program alongside the permit system to train the community in sustainable hunting practices, ensuring that traditional hunting of turtle can continue in the future. This will include workshops at schools and youth community groups and signage at boat ramps.

Outcomes

- Reduced hunting of turtles to sustainable levels
- Restored community respect for traditional hunting practices and seasons
- Increased opportunity for Jalunji-Warra Traditional Owners to work on Country
- Increased engagement of young people in land and sea management issues

Key activities

1. Review existing plans
2. Survey local community on turtle take attitudes
3. Develop an action plan
4. Engage with partner organisations and other TUMRA groups
5. Apply for a TUMRA
6. Recruit and train project officers
7. Implement permit system
8. Undertake compliance patrols
9. Install signs at boat ramps
10. Hold community education workshops

Indicative budget

\$200,000–\$300,000

Timeframe

2–5 years (with ongoing ranger activities)

Potential delivery partners

Dabu Jajikal Aboriginal Corporation, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Cape York NRM, South Cape York Catchments, Wujal Justice Group, local schools, Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council, Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation, Yuku Baja Muliku Rangers.



“

I remember how the old people used to cut minya-ngawiya (turtle meat). One ngawiya could feed three camps. Now you see young people take six or seven at a time. They're wasting that minya-ngawiya.

”

Lizzie Olbar (from the Eastern Kuku Yalanji Indigenous Protected Area Management Plan 2012)



Sustainable turtle and dugong management in Hope Vale

This project will resource an Indigenous Ranger program for marine and coastal areas in the Hope Vale region, with a special focus on restoring sustainable sea turtle and dugong hunting in the area.

Context

Traditional Owners in the Hope Vale Aboriginal Community have traditionally hunted turtles (*ngawiya*) and dugongs (*girribithi*) sustainably and with respect for the wellbeing of the species. These species, as well as being ecologically important, hold special cultural significance for Traditional Owners in Hope Vale.

Community members have recognised the problem of overhunting in the region for over twenty years, yet there are still no enforced limits on turtle or dugong take and there is limited understanding of their respective local populations. A local turtle and dugong plan was produced by the Hope Vale Aboriginal Community in 1999, but lack of funding has limited its implementation. Other marine species are also being harvested unsustainably, and there is a need for active management of the area by Indigenous Rangers who know the Country.

The project

This project will support Indigenous Ranger marine activities in the Hope Vale region, from north of Cooktown to Lookout Point. The focus of ranger activities will be on implementing a permit and compliance program for turtle and dugong hunting in the region.

Permits will be allocated at a defined quota (e.g. 20 permits/year) to local hunters with feedback mechanisms to record take and regular patrols to educate and monitor activities.

The project will also support several related ranger-led initiatives:

1. Monitoring and research to inform and improve turtle and dugong management, through partnerships with South Cape York Catchments. Research will include nest counts and track counts, tagging of nesting turtles and water quality monitoring at selected important seagrass and flood-plume affected sites. This will expand existing water quality monitoring undertaken by a local environmental consultant and South Cape York Catchments.
2. Educating young people in land and sea management, through presentations in schools and a junior ranger program.
3. Community beach clean ups through partnership with Parley and/or Tangaroa Blue. Rangers would identify hotspots for rubbish and help organise activities and mobilise community members. This would also improve nesting habitat for turtles.



Elim Beach, a popular fishing and recreational area with habitat for turtles and dugongs

Outcomes

- Reduced hunting of turtles to sustainable levels
- Restored community respect and unity between clan groups regarding traditional hunting practices and seasons
- Increased opportunity for Hope Vale Traditional Owners to work on Country
- Better education of young Traditional Owners in land and sea management
- Better understanding of turtle and dugong populations and water quality in the area
- Reduced rubbish on local beaches

Key activities

1. Hold planning and community meetings
2. Develop a management plan
3. Finalise TUMRA
4. Recruit and train rangers
5. Implement permit and compliance program
6. Partner with SCYC to monitor turtles and water quality

7. Partner with Parley and Tangaroa Blue to arrange beach clean ups
8. Support and train junior rangers
9. Present education sessions in schools

Indicative budget

\$200,000–\$400,000

Timeframe

2–5 years (with ongoing ranger activities)

Potential delivery partners

Hope Vale Congress Aboriginal Corporation, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Cape York NRM, South Cape York Catchments, Parley, Tangaroa Blue, Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council, Cape Melville, Flinders & Howick Islands Aboriginal Corporation, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, local schools

“

I would hate to have to pull a photo of a dugong or a turtle to show my child or grandchild, when approached and asked, ‘What is a dugong? What does it look like? Where does it live? What does it eat?’

Robbie Deemal (from A Guugu Yimmathirr Bama Wii: Ngawiya and Girribithi—Hope Vale Turtle and Dugong Plan 1999)

”



Theme 4: Strengthening heritage protections and management practices

National Heritage listing for culturally significant areas

This project will strengthen protection and recognition of Binthi Country and surrounding Hope Vale areas through attaining National Heritage Listing.

Context

Binthi Country is situated approximately 40 kilometres north of Cooktown on the Mclvor River. The area is rich in cultural diversity and significance to Binthi Traditional Owners, with many ceremonial sites, story places and blue ochre cave paintings still yet to be comprehensively surveyed. Binthi Country and the surrounding areas also include undisturbed catchments with diverse ecosystems including vine forests, rainforests, mangroves, swamps and woodlands. A prominent feature of the landscape is outstanding dune systems.

Binthi Land Holding Group Aboriginal Corporation (BLHGAC) is a small organisation that is building a platform for proactive land management on Country.

In the first stage of their seven-year strategic plan (2020–27), there is a focus on collating and mapping information for their Country and building recognition of the areas' values. This will lay the groundwork for detailed land management planning and a funded ranger program.

The project

This project will involve development and submission of Binthi Country and surrounding areas for National Heritage listing. The project will collate existing research on the heritage values for the area, and may involve additional cultural or natural heritage surveys of the area to assess and document values to support the nomination.



Guti—sacred sand dune and lake on Binthi Country

BLHGAC have recently submitted an application for National Heritage listing for 2021, however there are strong aspirations to include surrounding clan groups in a combined National Heritage Listing. This will require further consultation with clan group representatives and Hope Vale Congress Aboriginal Corporation. Should the Binthi Country heritage nomination be successful, BLHGAC supports neighbouring clan groups to consult with the Heritage Council for the assessment report to have their Country included too. Should the Binthi Country nomination be unsuccessful, this project will provide support for a combined nomination.

National Heritage listing will lay the groundwork for better recognition of the areas' natural and cultural values, leading to strengthened protection of the areas and resourcing for Traditional Owners to educate visitors, maintain cultural values and proactively manage Country.

Outcomes

- National recognition of Binthi/Hope Vale natural and cultural values
- Strengthened protection of Binthi/Hope Vale natural and cultural values
- Improved capacity for BLHGAC and other groups to work towards funded land and water management on their Country
- Improved collaboration between Hope Vale clan groups

Key activities

1. Consult with relevant groups to agree on governance arrangements
2. Compile heritage value research and conduct surveys
3. Consult with broader community regarding heritage nomination
4. Complete heritage application

Indicative budget

\$10,000–\$50,000

Timeframe

1–1.5 years

Potential delivery partners

Binthi Land Holding Group Aboriginal Corporation, Hope Vale Congress Aboriginal Corporation, Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council, neighbouring clan groups, Cape York NRM, South Cape York Catchments, cultural and environmental consultancy.

'Binthi Warra Bamaa-nga Bubu Thanangan-ngu Dabarrgu Ngarra-thinhu Magu-badaaygu – Forever Protecting and Respecting the Sacredness of our Land'

—Binthi Motto

“

National Heritage listing is very important for us to develop education for cultural maintenance and recognition for our Country to work towards proactive management.

Ramona Mclvor, Binthi Land Holding Group Aboriginal Corporation

”



Road best management practices for Cape York

This project will design and implement best management practices (BMPs) for roads and roadsides across eastern Cape York to reduce erosion and weed spread, including all council-managed roads, main roads, roads in conservation areas and private roads.

Context

Road management in remote regions like Cape York Peninsula has enormous impacts on land condition and water quality. Dirt roads represent the largest area of human-disturbed bare ground in the region, and are a major source of annual erosion and soil loss. For example, there are over 10,000 km of roads, tracks and fence lines in the Stewart and Normanby catchments alone, with 2,700 road drains (150 km), 9,000 road-stream intersection points, and 380 borrow pits that pollute waterways. The Endeavour catchment has an even higher density of roads.

Washouts and gullies formed off roads not only pose a safety risk for vehicles; they also contribute to declining land condition and wash thousands of tonnes of sediment into rivers and out to the Reef.

Roadsides are also a prime environment for the spread of weeds. Weeds such as grader grass, gamba grass, snakeweed and sicklepod thrive and spread rapidly on roadsides that have been graded and disturbed. Every year, road machines and other vehicles spread weeds on roadsides, which quickly spread to adjacent properties.

Spraying herbicide on roadside weeds and vegetation rather than using a grader to manage vegetation could reduce soil disturbance and weed spread on greater than 80% of the roadside length needing annual

management. There is a need for effective, standardised road management practices to reduce erosion and the spread of weeds.

The project

This project will design and implement BMPs for roads and roadsides across eastern Cape York. The BMPs will be developed through research into the latest road management protocols to minimise erosion and weed spread, and consultation between experts, shire councils and other key stakeholders. The BMPs will include a hotspot prioritisation that identifies particular problem areas for erosion or weed spread, in order to maximise the efficient use of resources.

The BMPs will be backed up by an education and compliance program, that:

1. Educates road managers on the new BMPs and their obligations, through practical information days
2. Enforces the BMPs through regular checks and reports of work by a field compliance officer

Implementation of the BMPs will reduce erosion and weed spread across eastern Cape York, leading to improved catchment condition and importantly, having a profound impact by stopping weed spread at an early stage.

The project could initially focus in one shire and/or on specific road types before being extended to other areas and road types.



Example of an erosion-prone road and roadside on Cape York Peninsula that could be improved with BMPs

Outcomes

- Reduced erosion on and from roads
- Reduced sediment runoff to the GBR and improved water quality
- Reduced spread of weeds in roadside areas
- Increased efficiency in managing weeds and erosion
- Better land condition for adjacent properties

Key activities

1. Identify and develop BMPs through research and consultation
2. Work with government to prioritise BMP implementation
3. Educate road managers
4. Develop compliance strategy
5. Identify hotspot areas for weed and erosion work
6. Develop an annual work plan
7. Implement BMPs
8. Undertake regular compliance checks

Indicative budget

\$250,000–\$400,000

Timeframe

3 years

Potential delivery partners

Cook Shire Council, Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council, Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council, Lockhart River Aboriginal Shire Council, Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council, RoadTek, Department of Transport and Main Roads, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, local erosion and weed consultants, Cape York NRM, South Cape York Catchments, Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc., private land owners.



If it were up to me, I'd be doing something about roadside weeds. That's where a lot of our weed problems start.

Grazier, Normanby catchment



Cape York Natural Resource Management

2/122 Charlotte St, Cooktown QLD 4895 and
47–49 Maunds Rd, Atherton QLD 4883
Contact admin@capeyorknrm.com.au

South Cape York Catchments

2/122 Charlotte St, Cooktown QLD 4895
Contact admin@scyc.com.au

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.