



## **The Reef 2050 Traditional Owner Aspirations Project**

### **Traditional Owners are rights-holders in the Great Barrier Reef**

The “Reef 2050 Traditional Owner Aspirations Project” was led and driven by Traditional Owners and managed through a consortium of organisations and individuals involved in supporting the longer term interests of Traditional Owners in Sea Country governance and management in the GBR.

There are at least 70 Traditional Owner groups with rights, interests and aspirations in Sea Country across the length of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) from the Burnett Mary region to the Torres Strait and spanning family, clan and tribal groupings. Under their own law/ Lore, Indigenous people have been working hard to secure and deliver on their rights and responsibilities in relation to Sea Country, and they seek to have these rights and responsibilities recognised by our broader society and governments. With the future health of the GBR under serious threat from climate change and other stresses, it is now even more critical to harness the capacity of Traditional Owners and their Sea Country institutions for a new generation of reef protection and management into the future.

The project involved a series of meetings and discussions with Traditional Owners all along the GBR coastline in 2018 and provided an opportunity for Traditional Owners to have a say on governance, engagement and implementation of activities managed through the government’s Reef 2050 Plan.

The overwhelming feedback received from Traditional Owners was that, while the actions currently contained in the Reef 2050 Plan reflect a level of recognition of Sea Country management activity in the GBR,

they do not represent a genuine level of agreement making between Traditional Owners and governments. There is a need for a cohesive and coordinated approach to implementing the Reef 2050 Plan which embraces and engages Traditional Owners as real partners in the long-term governance and management of their GBR Sea Country.

Through a review of strategic policy themes, existing literature, previous processes and as a consequence of deep discussions across the GBR, in order of priority (and timing), ten key recommendations and initiatives that reflect the stated aspirations of Traditional Owners were provided to the Australian Government to genuinely meet these aspirations.

Based on what they were told by the Traditional Owners of the GBR, the project team generated ten recommendations for improvements to the Reef 2050 Plan that would better empower Traditional Owners as real partners in the long-term management of their GBR Sea Country.

***A key priority for investment is  
to improve the involvement of  
Traditional Owners in the delivery  
of the Reef 2050 actions***

# 10 recommendations

**1 Resolve Sea Country** claims through collaboration between relevant Federal and State agencies by ensuring adequate resources are available to support the longer term, fair and efficient resolution of Sea Country native title claims across the GBR estate over the coming decade.

**2 Get the foundations right** by enhancing the governance capacities of families, clans, tribes, sub-regions and regions.

**3 Normalise Rights-Based Agreement Making** through policy, procedures and ongoing participation and support to mobilise long term approaches for co-governance and co-management across the GBR at regional, sub-regional, and local scales.

**4 Establish a GBR Traditional Owner Sea Country Alliance** as a basis for negotiating and implementing a Tripartite Agreement.

**5 Negotiate a GBR-wide Tripartite Agreement** to meet obligations for Free, Prior and Informed Consent through the negotiation of a whole of GBR Tripartite Agreement with Traditional Owners.

**6 Establish a GBR Traditional Owners Funding Facility** to underpin long term and sustainable support for achieving Traditional Owner aspirations (from local to regional scales) and support partnership arrangements to enable program delivery and investment leverage.

**7 Traditional Owner Co-design in Programs and Procurement** is required immediately to ensure equitable and effective Traditional Owner involvement and influence in the co-design, procurement and delivery of all current programs and tenders of relevance to their Reef-related aspirations.

**8 Ensure Fit-For-Purpose Delivery Programs** by leveraging the Traditional Owner Funding Facility to establish stable delivery programs that particularly support social, cultural, environmental and economic aspirations.

**9 Towards Research Partnerships** requires GBR leading research institutions to jointly collaborate with Traditional Owners to plan and negotiate a long term strategy for supporting their knowledge and research needs (e.g. data sharing agreements, etc.).

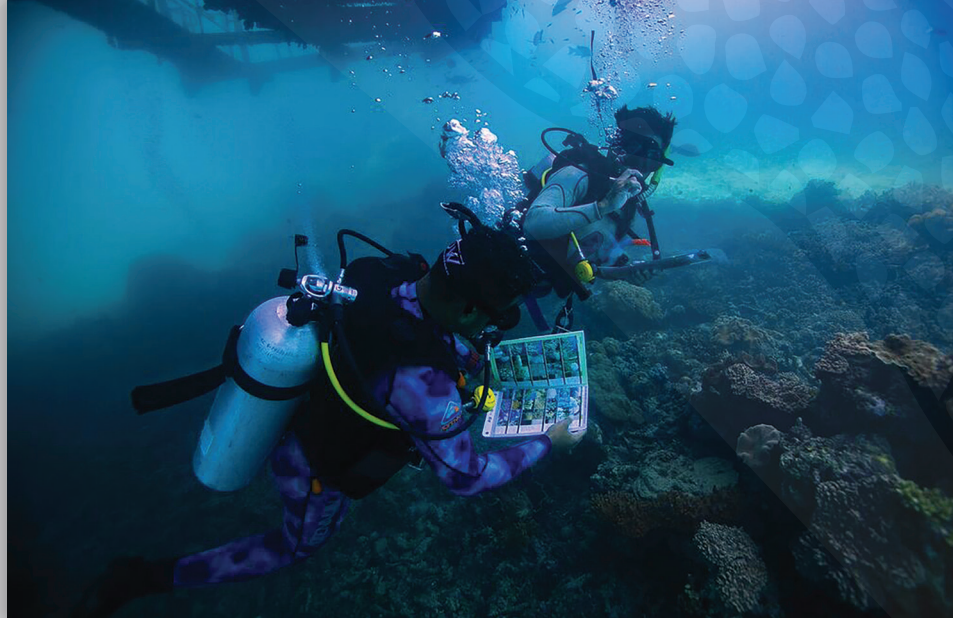
**10 Traditional Owners Embedded in GBR Monitoring** in all aspects and scales (from GBR-wide to local) of monitoring and evaluation, using culturally appropriate approaches (e.g. Strong Country – Strong People Framework).



Yirrganydji rangers conducting clean up at Michaelmas Cay. Photo: Dawul Wuru Aboriginal Corporation



Yirrganydji rangers conducting eye on the reef survey. Photo: Dawul Wuru Aboriginal Corporation



Duane Fraser (Wulgurukaba) and Malcolm Mann (Darumbal) discussing Traditional Owner Aspirations of the Great Barrier Reef. Photo: Liz Wren

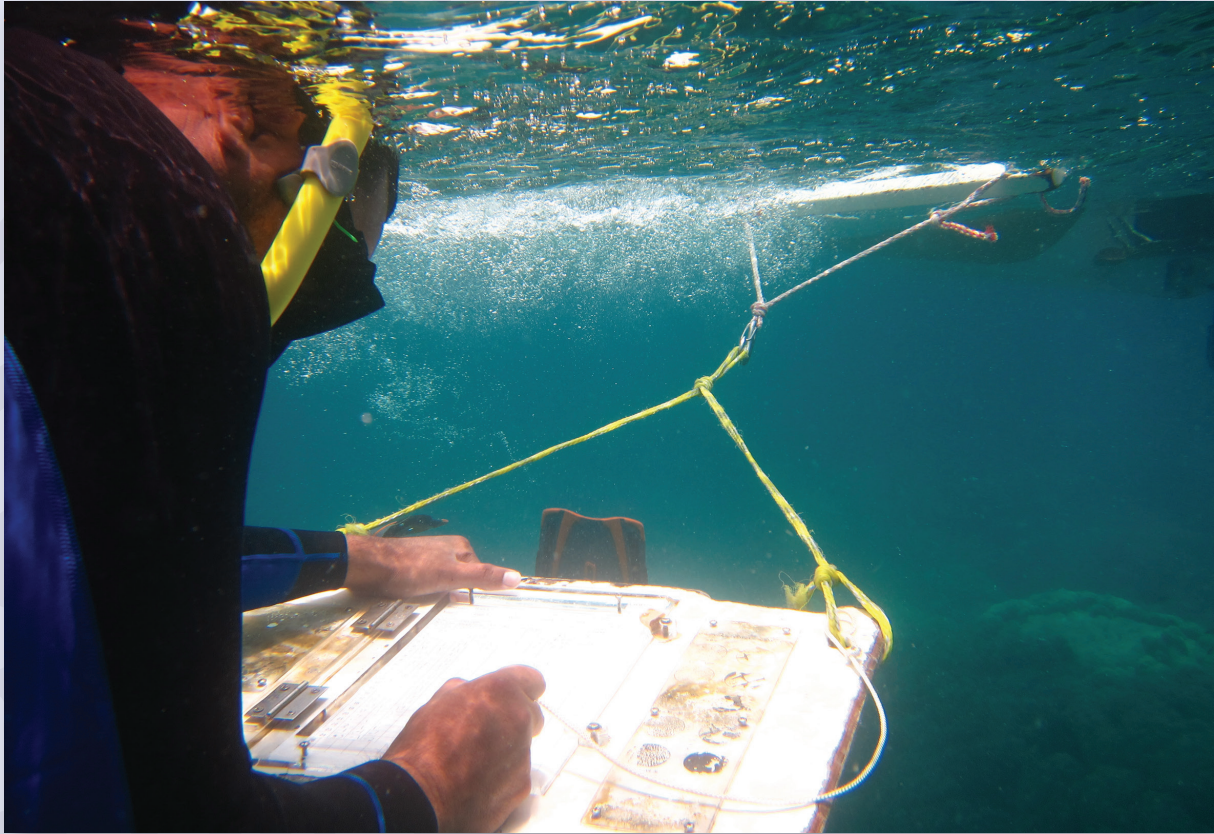
## Impacts of this work

The **Final Report** supports Traditional Owners in celebrating and documenting their achievements in securing a more “joined-up” approach to governance and management across the GBR. Based on the extensive engagement undertaken, the report describes the core aspirations and plans regarding the governance and management of Sea Country. It explores the Traditional Owner actions that the Reef 2050 Plan committed to, reviews its implementation to date, and documents Traditional Owners’ discussions and statements about the best way forward.

This project has contributed to:

- Traditional Owners’ roles in caring for land and sea country results in a more sustainable healthy reef, for the benefit of the nation; and
- Traditional Owners’ economic, social and cultural well-being – sustainable, healthy people who contribute to the management of the GBR for the benefit of the nation.





Manta Tow. Photo: Australian Institute of Marine Science

## More information

The full report is available at <https://www.environment.gov.au/marine/gbr/publications/reef-2050-traditional-owners-next-generation>.

The Department of the Environment and Energy contracted a consortium, led by the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC), to provide advice informed by effective and broad engagement to support the delivery of Traditional Owner aspirations and commitments in the Reef 2050 Plan.

The consortium was led by Traditional Owner Melissa George (Wulgurukaba). Members of the consortium included Duane Fraser (Wulgurukaba), Liz Wren, Larissa Hale (Yuku Baja Muliku), Traceylee Forester (Lama Lama) and Leah Talbot (Eastern Kuku Yalanji).

They were supported by organisations in science and policy including: Allan Dale (JCU), Ro Hill (CSIRO), Libby Evans-Illidge (AIMS), Mike Winer (Cape York Institute), Sheriden Morris (RRRC) and Julie Carmody (RRRC).

