



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef area and have a continuing connection to their land and sea country.

## Reef 2050 Plan

# REEF 2050 POLICIES APPLIED TO TRADITIONAL USE OF MARINE RESOURCE AGREEMENTS

## Purpose

### **Applying Reef 2050 policies to Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreements**

Traditional Owners have their own cultural values for the Reef. They also use the Reef's resources as a source of food. Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreements (marine resource agreements) can be used to investigate and understand the cumulative impacts of various activities on the Great Barrier Reef and deliver net benefits to the Reef's health and condition.

*This case study explores how the Reef 2050 policies of cumulative impact and net benefit can be considered when people develop and implement a Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreement.*

## Context and scope

### **The natural environment is fundamental to Indigenous cultural heritage**

The Great Barrier Reef and its catchments form a landscape and seascape that have strong and inextricable links between culture and ecological systems. Traditional Owners, in particular, identify biocultural values for the Reef, which are based on their cultural heritage and their interactions with the land and sea.

Indigenous cultural heritage includes both tangible heritage (such as places) and intangible heritage (such as experiences, traditions, historic events and stories). The natural environment is fundamental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people expressing these cultural heritage values.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people undertake traditional use of marine resources to:

- practise their marine-based culture
- provide traditional food for families
- educate younger generations about traditional and cultural rules, protocols and activities in sea country
- look after country.

Reef management agencies can engage and work in partnership with Traditional Owners through marine resource agreement processes to manage the biocultural heritage of sea country.

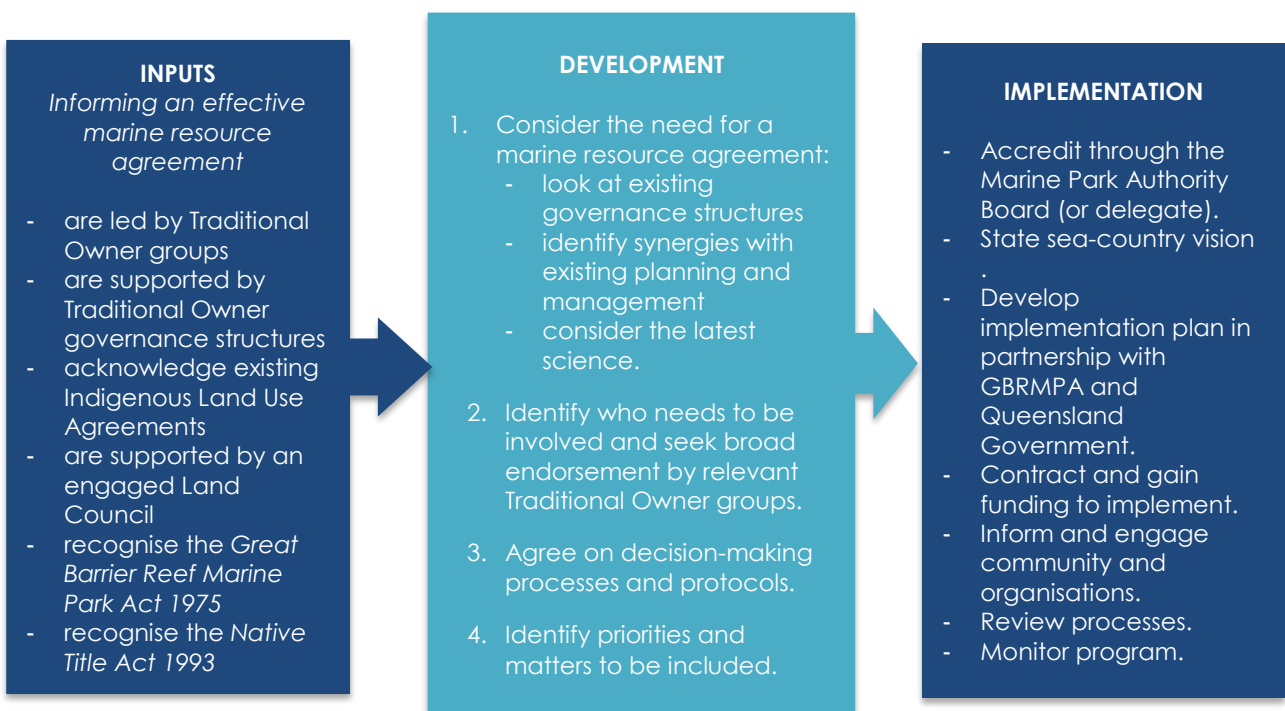
## Application

### **Creating marine resource agreements – a partnership between Traditional Owners and governments**

When Traditional Owners and government agencies develop marine resource agreements, they can jointly identify cumulative impacts of various actions on the Reef, and implement actions that effectively contribute to net benefit outcomes for the Reef's cultural values.

Marine resource agreements use a partnership approach between Traditional Owner groups and Australian and Queensland governments to manage Traditional Owner groups' use of their sea country in the Marine Park, coastal waters and World Heritage Area.

Marine resource agreements include monitoring and review processes, stable governance structures, and an agreed vision for managing the sea country. Traditional Owner groups use a marine resource agreement to describe their aspirations and associated plans for managing their sea country in accordance with their lore and customs. This includes the role of the Traditional Owner group in ensuring compliance with relevant legislation. Key elements to developing a marine resource agreement are outlined in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1:** Elements of developing a marine resource agreement

Marine resource agreements can incorporate specific management strategies including:

- conserving and sustainably using important species and habitats
- restoring and maintaining waterways and coastal ecosystems
- maintaining and protecting significant cultural heritage values including important places, traditional ecological knowledge, culture and language
- researching and monitoring the sea country
- leading governance arrangements, including knowledge management
- educating and exchanging information
- complying with various legislation.

## Outcomes

### **Biocultural Reef values recognised, agreed on and protected**

Through the marine resource agreement, Traditional Owners agree on complex matters such as:

- boundaries of maritime estates (where lore governs boundaries)
- protocols and principles, including for intellectual property
- plans for their sea country
- hunting areas, and management of such traditional hunting (including hunting authorisations and the elimination of unauthorised practices such as poaching)
- cultural heritage management
- economic development opportunities, such as delivery of environmental tourism.

Marine resource agreements help people recognise Great Barrier Reef cultural heritage values by being a legally recognised management framework.

Traditional Owners implementing marine resource agreement compliance plans in partnership with our Field Management Unit can reduce or eliminate unauthorised activities such as poaching or illegal fishing.

Creating a marine resource agreement requires assessing cumulative impacts on the Reef and supporting net benefit outcomes for the Reef's cultural and biological values. The marine resource agreement should detail processes for:

- describing the area and the traditional use of marine resources to be covered by the marine resource agreement, including describing the activities proposed for specific locations in an area of the Marine Park
- identifying and describing Traditional Owners' biocultural values
- identifying other uses or pressures (reasonably foreseeable) on traditional resources
- improving decision-making by engaging the Traditional Owners of the proposed area of the marine resource agreement
- establishing data-collection and monitoring protocols to measure changes to the identified Reef values
- providing a systematic, risk-based assessment of activities, supported by monitoring, enforcement, review and adaptive management
- assessing the effects of cumulative impacts on values and on Traditional Owners' rights to access sea country and to use its resources according to law and custom
- considering how to balance / manage cumulative impacts
- applying governance systems that include co-management approaches to strengthen effectiveness of the Agreement
- implementing management actions that improve the condition or trend in condition of biocultural values (such as increased sharing of stories and languages, restoration of ecosystems or improved compliance) and therefore delivering a net benefit to values in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Existing marine resource agreements have already made progress towards net benefit outcomes through activities including:

- transferring traditional ecological knowledge between generations through on-country culture camps
- planning and implementing sea-country management
- restoring ecosystems
- mapping cultural heritage (particularly on islands)
- protecting targeted threatened species and turtle nesting sites
- monitoring turtle and dugong populations (including turtle hatchlings) and their health
- undertaking compliance activities and improved mapping and protection of at risk habitats (seagrass, corals and mangroves).

## Insights

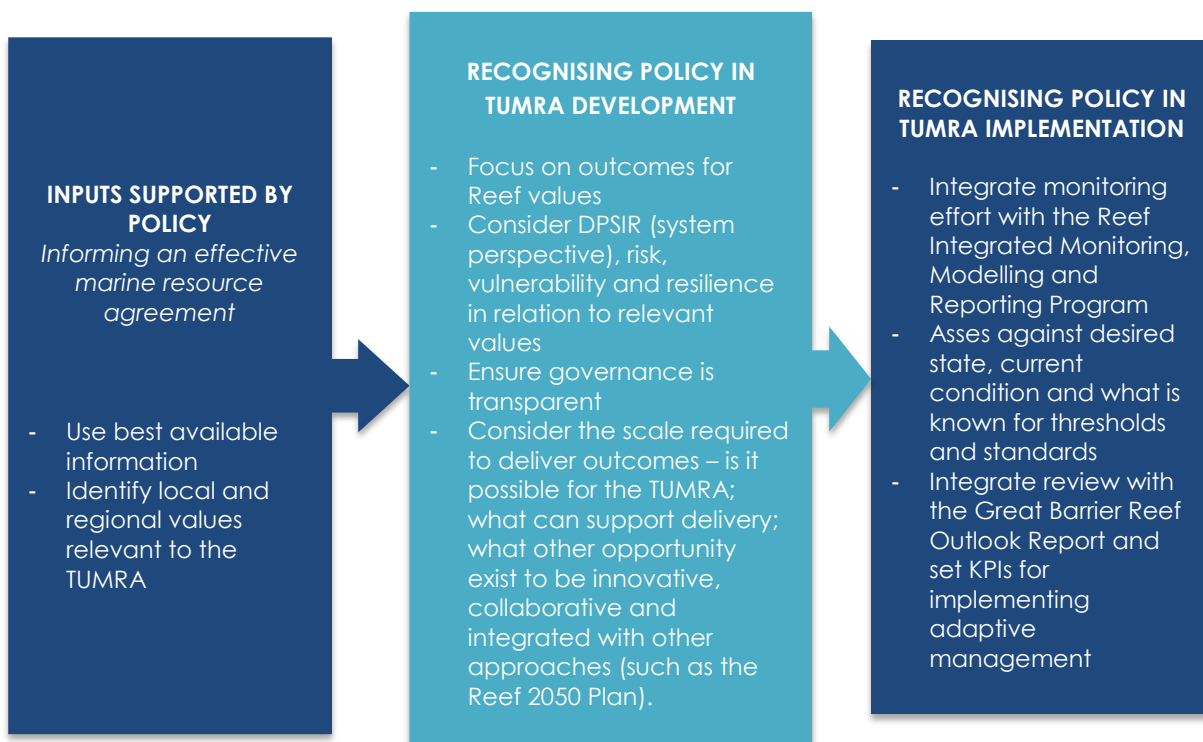
### **Marine resource agreements are critical to supporting the Reef's outstanding universal values**

Policy elements applied to marine resource agreements focus on the type of information collected, the assessment of the risk and vulnerability to identified values within the marine resource agreement area; the types of management actions that could be applied to manage pressures, and processes for monitoring, reporting and transparency (Figure 2).

Maintaining Indigenous cultural heritage supports the outstanding universal value of the Great Barrier Reef. Marine resource agreements capture decisions Traditional Owners make to manage their rights and interests to ensure their biocultural values are not lost in spite of the cumulative impacts of pressures including climate change, poor water quality, loss of coastal ecosystems and direct use.

The strength of a marine resource agreement is that it is led by Traditional Owners who speak for country, identifies biocultural values and their current and desired condition, and establishes a collaborative approach for sea-country management that can lead to achieving net benefit outcomes for identified values.

Although marine resource agreements in their current form are restricted to certain matters, there is scope for marine resource agreements to apply to other values, particularly those that have been identified through other tools such as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan.



**Figure 2:** Key policy elements applying to marine resource agreements development

## Acknowledgments

We greatly appreciate the contributions from our partner, the Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee, in developing this case study.