



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 STEWARDSHIP DELIVERS NET BENEFITS

### Purpose

#### **Reef stewardship programs contribute to the Reef 2050 Plan**

Protecting the Great Barrier Reef requires local, national and international effort. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority initiates or supports stewardship programs that engage with and invite collaboration between the community and industry, including Eye on the Reef, Reef Guardians, Reef Advisory Committees and a network of Local Marine Advisory Committees.

*This case study explores how those involved in community and industry Reef-stewardship programs can contribute to the Reef 2050's policies of reducing cumulative impacts and delivering net benefits.*

### Context and scope

#### **Engaging the community and industry to build knowledge and influence attitudes and practices**

Most of our Reef management and protection programs include some element of community or industry engagement or collaboration. This is consistent the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* object to 'encourage engagement in the protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef Region by interested persons and groups, including Queensland and local governments, communities, Indigenous persons, business and industry'.

The community- or industry-based programs we support help maintain the balance between protecting and sustainably using the Great Barrier Reef. We identify leaders who proactively care for their catchment and the Reef. We collaborate with these leaders to build community knowledge, and influence attitudes and practices that can contribute to stewardship of the Great Barrier Reef.

These stewardship programs have an important role to play in how we launch the Reef 2050 policies of (a) identifying and managing the **cumulative impacts** of human actions on the Reef, and (b) helping deliver overall **net benefits** to the Reef's health and resilience from any land- or sea-based activities.

**Environmental stewardship** is an ethic that recognises the explicit, rational, moral underpinning and obligation for the treatment and management of natural resources and natural world that meets wider obligation to community and future generations.

*Environmental stewardship creates net ecological service and human use service value above baseline conditions, with the level of stewardship dependent upon the level to which ecosystem services are provided above and beyond the baseline level.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Nicolette, J. Burr, S. and Rockel, M., 2013. *A practical approach for demonstrating environmental sustainability and stewardship through a net ecosystem service analysis*, Sustainability, 5, 2152-2177.

## Application

### **Local people provide invaluable local knowledge and action**

Stewardship programs are used to implement local projects that are often part of larger strategic programs. Local knowledge and experience is invaluable to the success of these projects in protecting the Reef. We also rely on people involved in these programs for information on local Reef and catchment conditions.

Voluntary, community-based Local Marine Advisory Committees are a forum for local communities to have input into how the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is managed. This local-level advice is crucial to how we manage the Reef. Local Marine Advisory Committees raise awareness about, and encourage participation of local communities in, actions to support the protection of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

The Reef Guardian Program includes schools, local government, fishers, farmers and graziers. Generally, the Reef Guardian program and its participants:

- set a standard (protocol or objective) for participating in the program (the outcome for the Reef they hope to achieve)
- commit to voluntary action beyond what is required by law or beyond an established standard of operation
- facilitate information-sharing, networking and collaboration between participants
- report on environment condition, and successes against standards and commitments
- recognise and promote the efforts of participants who are doing great work to manage their environment.

Eye on the Reef is a monitoring and assessment program that allows anyone visiting the Great Barrier Reef to contribute to its protection, by collecting valuable information about Reef health, marine animals and any incidents. Eye on the Reef participants collect information through real-time smart phone applications, interactive websites, and daily and weekly reports.

Eye on the Reef Tourism Weekly Monitoring Surveys are a successful partnership between the tourism industry, Marine Park managers and researchers. The program began in 1997 with tourism operators undertaking regular surveys of popular areas. Operators taking part supply valuable data that supports effective Reef management.

Eye on the Reef data is also available to all registered users.

## Outcomes

### **Stewardships programs deliver net benefits to Reef**

Volunteers involved in stewardship programs deliver on-ground actions that are generally additional to any statutory activities. In this way, such actions are of net benefit to the Great Barrier Reef.

Through the stewardship programs, local people articulate their values about the Reef and their desired outcomes for these values. This means we can establish the collective local and regional vision for protecting the Reef, including understanding which activities may need to be avoided, mitigated or offset to protect the Reef's health and condition.

Eye on the Reef data provides Marine Park managers and researchers with up-to-date information on Reef condition and trends, the distribution of protected and iconic plant and animal species, and early warnings of environmental impacts. These actions deliver positive actions for the Reef.

Stewardship programs and the people who take part in them help achieve net benefits for the Reef by:

- having a process or structure for reviewing and continuously improving how we respond to environmental threats
- managing multiple impacts to a range of Reef values
- directing their actions at net benefit outcomes
- showcasing leadership, taking responsibility and influencing other people to act.

## Insights

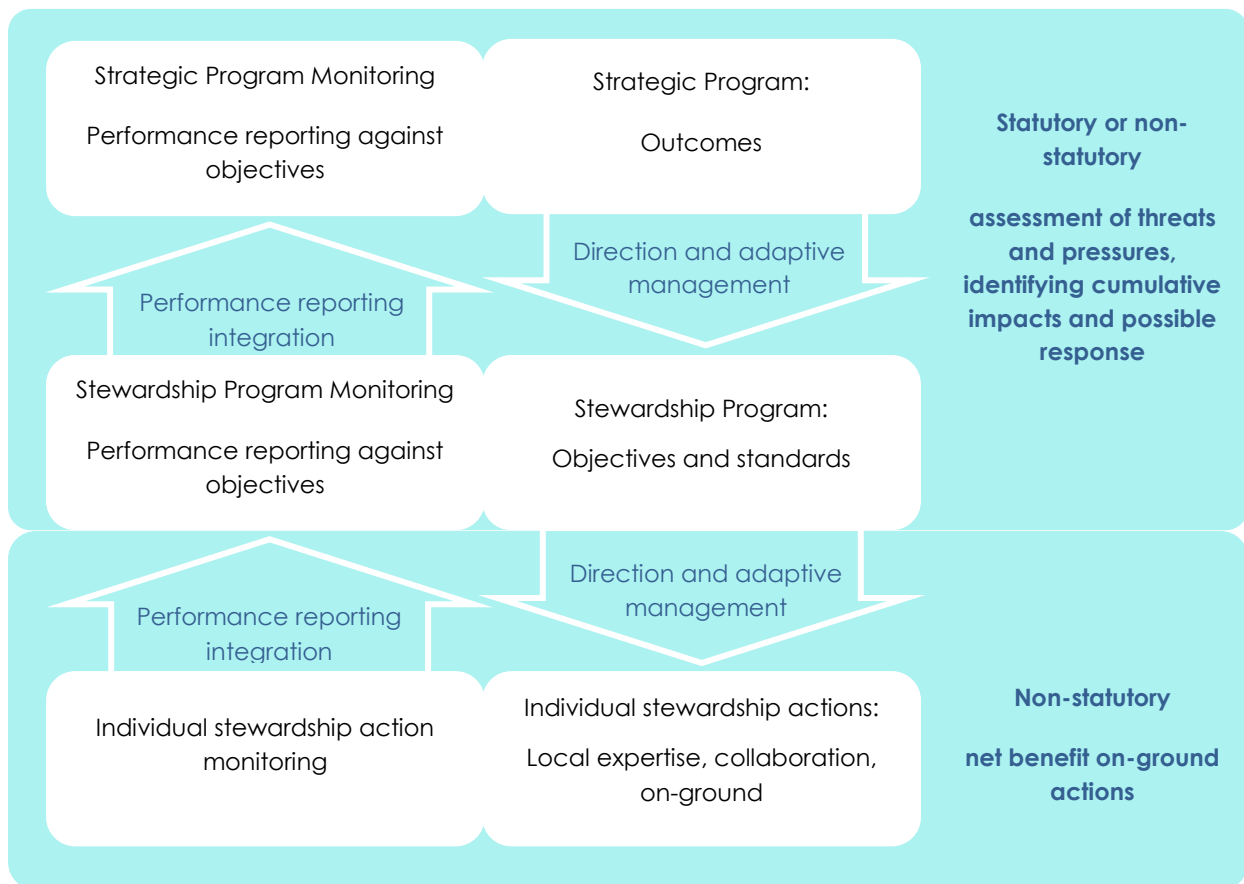
### **Stewardship programs can create cultural change in communities**

Stewardship programs can create cultural change by engaging community leaders to improve knowledge, influence attitudes, and promote the community's role and responsibility for locally improving the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

Because stewardship programs influence community attitudes, they directly affect all decisions that are made about the Great Barrier Reef's health by governments, communities, industry and others. Stewardship programs can achieve this influence by:

- showcasing activities that deliver net benefit outcomes for the values of the Great Barrier Reef
- interacting with networks and partnerships to build understanding of the complex social, economic and environmental factors influencing the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

More generally, Reef 2050 policies are implemented and integrated with strategies, monitoring and reporting that support stewardship action for Reef health (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Reef 2050 policy implementation for stewardship programs

## Acknowledgments

We greatly appreciate the contributions of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's stewardship partners: Traditional Owners, marine tourism industry, Reef Guardians, and Local Marine Advisory Committees.