



Australian Government

Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority



Queensland
Government

**STRONG PEOPLES – STRONG COUNTRY
INDIGENOUS HERITAGE
MONITORING FRAMEWORK**

SUMMARY REPORT



The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority acknowledges the continuing Sea Country management and custodianship of the Great Barrier Reef by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners whose rich cultures, heritage values, enduring connections and shared efforts protect the Reef for future generations.

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Front cover photo: Aerial drone image of Hill Inlet Whitsundays
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Executive summary

This report presents the key elements of the Indigenous heritage monitoring framework for the Great Barrier Reef: **Strong peoples – Strong country**. This summary has been extracted from the Indigenous Heritage Expert Group report, which outlines a proposed design for monitoring of the Indigenous heritage theme under the Reef 2050 Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program. The full report is, *Monitoring Indigenous Heritage within the Reef 2050 Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program: Final report of the Indigenous Heritage Expert Group*.

Introduction

Strong peoples – Strong country is an Indigenous heritage monitoring framework connecting the health of the Reef and its catchment to the quality of life enjoyed by Traditional Owners. It provides a Traditional Owner led approach for systematic monitoring of the condition of the Reef and its catchment as an Indigenous heritage asset. It reflects the Traditional Owner worldview that their quality of life is connected inseparably to and underpinned by, their land and sea country. This monitoring framework aims to measure progress in achieving Traditional Owner objectives and actions in the *Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan*, and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park*.

The framework was developed by the Indigenous Heritage Expert Group (expert group), created to advise on the design of the Indigenous heritage theme of the Reef 2050 Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program (RIMReP). The expert group included six Traditional Owners from across the Reef catchment and two staff from James Cook University (JCU). CSIRO provided an expert group project support team, which included a Reef Traditional Owner and JCU staff.

This is a summary report of the **Strong peoples – Strong country framework**, which details information on the framework. The methodology and processes of the expert group are found in, *Monitoring Indigenous Heritage within the Reef 2050 Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program: Final report of the Indigenous Heritage Expert Group* (Jarvis, Hill, Buissereth et al. 2019).

The Strong peoples – Strong country framework reflects the overall quality of life, including social, cultural, health, economic and environmental aspects, of Traditional Owners, and of the land and sea country on which they live. **Strong peoples – Strong country** is an inclusive framework grounded in Indigenous values. It is based on local context, opinions, community members, and community governance and was developed following best-practice approaches from peer-reviewed literature.

Key elements that give confidence in the **Strong peoples – Strong country** framework are:

- Traditional Owners led its development through the expert group
- Cultural, spiritual and ecological knowledge is recognised and respected
- Traditional Owners identified the interconnected values that are important to them when looking after the Reef and its Indigenous heritage
- Traditional Owners tested a draft of the framework through a Reef-wide workshop
- Indicators, based on surveys with Traditional Owners, that can detect changes and trends in the health of Indigenous heritage
- Other indicators beyond surveys can be included in the future to improve the measurement of changes and trends.

Strong peoples – Strong country

Indigenous Heritage Monitoring Framework

Strong peoples – Strong country sits at the centre of the framework; the concept that the peoples and their country depend on each other for health and well-being. Traditional Owners depend on the health of different aspects of country described by the six hubs around the centre. Conversely, Traditional Owners have obligations to country that create meaning and protect the health of country; the two are inseparable.

The six hubs describe components of Indigenous Heritage:

1. Country health
2. People's health
3. Heritage and knowledge
4. Culture and community
5. Education
6. Empowerment and economics



Figure 1. The Strong peoples – Strong country framework for monitoring Indigenous heritage in the Reef 2050 Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program © Mallie Designs, licensed for use by RIMReP partners.

There is no order to the hubs. Traditional Owners' view their connection to land and sea country as being primary to their heritage information. They benefit from country being healthy, and in turn, the country benefits from Traditional Owners' custodial responsibility to look after country. The six hubs within the framework each have a number of attributes, with 45 attributes identified in total.

The Indigenous Heritage Expert Group tested the 'importance factors' of all the attributes in the six hubs with a group of Traditional Owners from across the Great Barrier Reef region and found no superfluous attributes. On an 'importance' testing scale of zero to 10 all attributes scored highly based on average responses from the group. The lowest average score for any attribute was 7.58 out of 10 (see full report for details).

Strong peoples – Strong country hubs and attributes:

Six hubs – 45 attributes



- **Being on country**
- **'You to country' health**
- **Healthy animals**
- **Healthy coral**
- **Other habitats**
- **Clean saltwater**
- **Clean freshwater**

1. Country health

This hub reflects the need for country (land and sea) to be healthy for Traditional Owners to feel that they have carried out their cultural obligations and responsibilities in looking after country. While this hub encompasses western science concepts such as ecosystem health or water quality, these ideas are expressed using Traditional Owner language and the concepts emerged through the Indigenous-led methodology.

Country health has seven attributes:

- 1.1. Being on country** — the need for Traditional Owners to be physically present on their country as a fundamental underpinning to the well-being of Traditional Owners.
- 1.2. 'You to country' health** — concept that a Traditional Owner's presence is a fundamental requirement for the country itself to be healthy; that country without Traditional Owners will get sick.
- 1.3. Healthy animals** — the importance of maintaining biodiversity and protecting all species, including those species currently threatened and those totemic species of particular importance to Indigenous clans within a Traditional Owner group.
- 1.4. Healthy coral** — the Reef as a whole and its coral composition.
- 1.5. Other habitats** — includes Great Barrier Reef habitats such as mangroves, seagrass beds, and estuarine systems.
- 1.6. Clean saltwater** — this attribute, along with clean freshwater (below), could be considered similar to the concept of 'water quality'. However, Traditional Owners consider their responsibilities to the oceans and the rivers/creeks separately; thus, the importance of separating the concept into two factors.
- 1.7. Clean freshwater** — Traditional Owners consider their responsibilities to rivers and creeks separately from the oceans.



- **Access to traditional medicine**
- **Spirituality**
- **Social and emotional wellbeing**
- **Cultural wellbeing**
- **Access to medical services**
- **Access to traditional foods**
- **Know your mob**

2. People's health

This hub looks through a cultural lens, at physical and emotional needs to keep the body and mind healthy.

People's health has seven attributes:

- 2.1. Access to traditional medicine** — bush and sea medicines.
- 2.2. Spirituality** — beliefs around the meaning and purpose of life depending on connections with ancestral beings, dreaming and Aboriginal cosmology.
- 2.3. Social and emotional wellbeing** — strong social relationships and emotional support contribute to the mental and physical health of Traditional Owners.
- 2.4. Cultural wellbeing** — knowing your cultural traditions and being sure these are healthy and resilient.
- 2.5. Access to medical services** — both physical access (i.e. the service is available nearby) and psycho-social access (that Aboriginal people feel comfortable using it).
- 2.6. Access to traditional foods** — the availability of traditional foods on country and that Traditional Owners are able to collect and use them.
- 2.7. Know your mob** — some of the connections between Traditional Owners and their country have weakened. There are sections of the Indigenous communities who no longer fully understand who their people are and where they come from; without this understanding and the strong sense of identity built upon this, Traditional Owners cannot be fully healthy in mind and body. Thus, rebuilding and strengthening the sense of belonging will enhance the health of the people.



- **Oral history**
- **Knowledge of country and heritage**
- **Managing knowledge and heritage**
- **Protecting knowledge and heritage**
- **Access to heritage sites**
- **Traditional Owner knowledge transfer**
- **Western science**

3. Heritage and knowledge

This hub comprises knowing, managing, protecting, and having access to your country and heritage as well as being able to continue the oral history, transfer of knowledge and interaction with western science. The concepts embedded within heritage and knowledge are so heavily overlapping and inseparable that they are represented by one hub.

Heritage and knowledge has seven attributes:

- 3.1. Oral history** — the songlines and stories for country themselves.
- 3.2. Knowledge of country and heritage** — ensuring this knowledge forms part of daily life and is not lost.
- 3.3. Managing knowledge and heritage** — ensuring the appropriate management of both the oral histories and the physical heritage sites.
- 3.4. Protecting knowledge and heritage** — ensuring protection of the oral history and the heritage sites for present and future generations.
- 3.5. Access to heritage sites** — recognising the importance of Traditional Owners ability to access sites as part of their responsibilities and obligations for the ongoing management and protection processes.
- 3.6. Traditional Owner knowledge transfer** — relates to the transfer of knowledge within Traditional Owner communities, particularly from Elders to the younger generation and between Traditional Owner and non-Indigenous peoples.
- 3.7. Western science** — recognises that western scientific knowledge may be able to offer benefits in conjunction with Traditional knowledge to tell an integrated story.



- **Traditional Owner voices at all levels**
- **Involvement and ownership of community activities**
- **Cultural mentorship**
- **Local mentorship**
- **Cultural authority**
- **Language**
- **Lore and ceremony**
- **Tool making, hunting and gathering**
- **Arts, song, dance**
- **Kinship, family, totems**

4. Culture and community

Culture and community encompass the different aspects of Traditional Owner culture as well as mentorship and community activities. This hub also recognises the need for Traditional Owners to know their kinship structure and totems. Culture and community are strongly interlinked and comprised of overlapping concepts, as cultural practices are generally inseparable from the community undertaking those practices.

Culture and community has 10 attributes:

- 4.1. Traditional Owner voices at all levels** — a requirement for Traditional Owners to be included and able to participate across the multiple levels of our society.
- 4.2. Involvement and ownership of community activities** — getting actively involved in community activities and have some ownership of those activities.
- 4.3. Cultural mentorship** — the important role that Elders and established community leaders can have in developing younger generations understanding of their culture, the history of their people, and their place within their culture.
- 4.4. Local mentorship (business, education, sporting)** — the important role that Elders and established community leaders can have in developing others, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, encouraging and enabling them to take advantage of the opportunities available to them.
- 4.5. Cultural authority** — Traditional Owners have their own distinctive governance arrangements that determine authority over their culture and heritage. This authority needs to be respected by both Traditional Owners, and other Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.
- 4.6. Language** — understanding and speaking traditional languages.
- 4.7. Lore and ceremony** — the ideas and practices that comprise traditional cultural lore and ceremonies are considered as heavily overlapping. Ceremony could be considered an expression of lore; thus, these factors were grouped together.
- 4.8. Tool making, hunting, and gathering** — maintaining the knowledge and practices of making traditional tools, and engaging in traditional hunting and gathering activities.
- 4.9. Arts, songs, dance** — continuing knowledge and participation in traditional cultural practices such as song, dance, painting and rock art.
- 4.10. Kinship, family, totems** — an important element involved in identifying as an Indigenous person is to have a strong knowledge of who their family and kin are, past and present, and understanding the totems that are important to their family.



- **Learning from Elders**
- **Career opportunity pathways**
- **Training**
- **Passion to learn**
- **Two-way sharing**

5. Education

This hub reflects that education includes cultural learning, western education, and the two-way sharing of knowledge in all areas, such as Indigenous science and western science learning from each other, Traditional Owners learning from their neighbours and sharing with each other within their own communities.

Education has five attributes:

- 5.1. Learning from Elders** — actual learning from Elders as well as the concept of growth and learning such that new Elders are grown; that younger people learn enough to enable them to transition to more senior roles within the community and become Elders themselves one day.
- 5.2. Career opportunity pathways** — enabling, creating, developing, pathways toward career opportunities that could include further educational or training opportunities.
- 5.3. Training** — a wide definition of all training that develops skills, as provided by educational establishments such as schools and TAFE, but also including training in cultural practices provided on country by other members of the community.
- 5.4. Passion to learn** — to inspire this passion within members of the community, and to ensure that opportunities are offered to those with the passion to learn; without such passion training opportunities and other pathways to development can become meaningless.
- 5.5. Two-way sharing** — embodies the perspective and approach of Traditional Owners to exchange knowledge, both within Indigenous communities and between Traditional Owners and non-Indigenous people.



- **Ownership**
- **Greater level of management**
- **Better policy**
- **Traditional Owner led caring for country**
- **Better roads, better internet, better buildings**
- **More Traditional Owner led business**
- **Employment on country**
- **Equity in opportunities**
- **Rights, interests and goals**

6. Empowerment and economics

This hub recognises the connectedness between empowerment and economics for Traditional Owners through support and creation of Traditional Owner-led actions. This includes ownership, which could be ownership of land, house, business, or one's own destiny, and Traditional Owner led caring for country. Improvements in economic outcomes for the Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef are underpinned by, and inseparable from, increasing empowerment of the people's of the region. Without the empowerment that comes from a strong sense of identity, personal strength and self-determination, people are unlikely to be in a position to improve their economic situation by establishing their own businesses or taking full advantage of the economic opportunities.

Empowerment and Economics has nine attributes:

- 6.1. Ownership** — ownership of the important things within people's lives, such as their land, homes, businesses, and destiny.
- 6.2. Greater level of management** — greater management by Traditional Owners within non-Indigenous owned businesses as a pathway toward developing economic independence.
- 6.3. Better policy** — better policy reflecting Traditional Owner voices at all levels.
- 6.4. Traditional Owner led caring for Country** — Indigenous led caring for country practices regardless of funding sources.
- 6.5. Better roads, better internet, better buildings** — developing and maintaining required service and facility infrastructure.
- 6.6. More Traditional Owner owned and led business (food, tourism, arts)** — Traditional Owners establish and operate a wide range of Indigenous-led and owned businesses within their community.
- 6.7. Employment on country** — creating jobs for Traditional Owners on country and ensuring that jobs are secure. These jobs may be a result of government initiatives such as Indigenous land management programs and ranger groups, or could be outside of government funding, including but not limited to 'fee for service' organisations.
- 6.8. Having the same opportunities for everyone (age, gender, disability, sexuality)** — encompasses concepts of equity and equality, and the desire to remove stereotypes, across the Indigenous communities and across the country as a whole.
- 6.9. Your rights, interests, goals** — all aspects as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the vision and goals of particular Traditional Owner groups.

Monitoring and indicators

Monitoring

The Traditional Owner concept of 'monitoring' is that it is all about the connections between country and people. It represents a more holistic view of the world and people than western scientific definitions.

Monitoring the attributes of each of the hubs that comprise the **Strong peoples – Strong country** framework can be strengthened by future indicators based on:

- observing what is happening on land and sea country
- interacting with land and sea country
- being present on country
- being part of nature and using nature
- storytelling about country.

Subjective and objective indicators

The **Strong Peoples – Strong Country** framework can measure the conditions and trends of Indigenous heritage on the Great Barrier Reef using subjective and objective indicators.

Subjective indicators measure individual perceptions and evaluation of conditions. Subjective health of people and country is about how people feel about the conditions in which they live.

The Indigenous Heritage Expert Group developed a survey that provides subjective indicators as part of the **Strong peoples – Strong country** framework. This survey asks people to provide a 'satisfaction' score to each attribute. The subjective indicators thus show Traditional Owners' perceptions about the condition of each attribute. The expert group recommends satisfaction surveys with each of the 70 Traditional Owner groups of the Great Barrier Reef to establish a baseline measurement for Indigenous heritage.

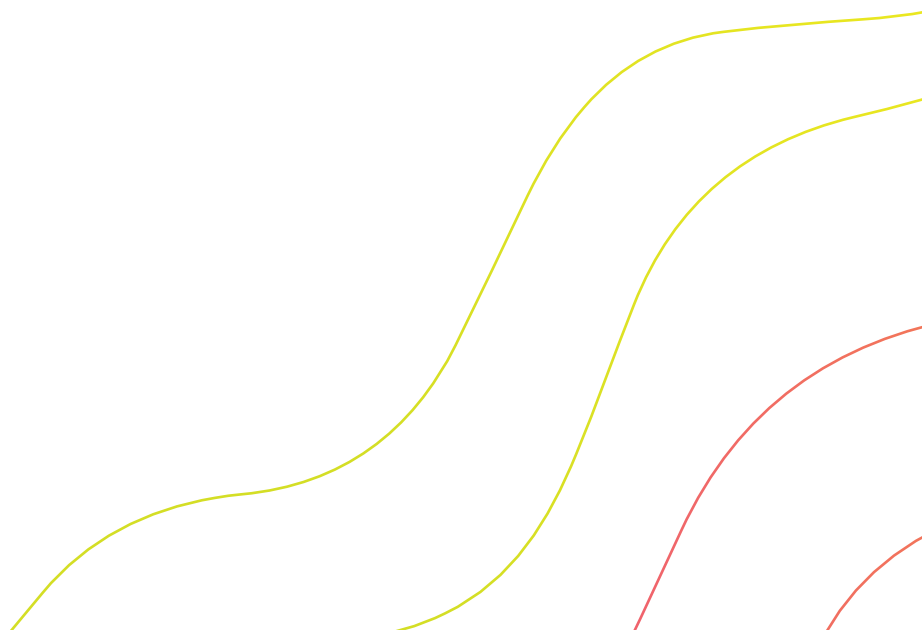
Objective indicators measure observable data using repeatable methods. They do not measure a person's feeling about a condition like subjective indicators. The area of hard coral cover on a reef is an objective indicator. Traditional Owners are already collecting data that can provide objective indicators for the 45 attributes in the **Strong peoples – Strong country** framework. The expert group found three types of indicators already in use by Traditional Owners:

1. Indicators to meet government requirements for a monitoring-evaluation-reporting-improvement approach in order to monitor Indigenous Protected Areas, rangers work plans and other projects.
2. Two-way indicators, where Traditional Owners have developed data sharing arrangements with key researchers and research institutions.
3. Traditional indicators provided by the Elders in situations where people have a greater level of control over their lands and seas. Data generally not shared.

While there are a large number of activities already that monitor condition and trend of sea country, to date these have not been collected systematically or considered in a holistic framework from a Traditional Owner perspective. The **Strong peoples – Strong country** framework is a tool for systematic collection and organization of such information based on a Traditional Owner worldview. Together, subjective and objective indicators provide a social-ecological systems view of the health of country, people and Indigenous heritage of the Great Barrier Reef.

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