

Climate Change and the Capricorn Coast: an analysis of stewardship potential

Summary

The building blocks of adaptive capacity and stewardship are in place within the Capricorn Coast community. However, a large proportion of stakeholders are uncertain about their vulnerability to climate change impacts on marine resources and their livelihoods. These were the findings of a small survey to explore the potential of the Capricorn Coast community to be adaptive and to further grow their marine stewardship. Fostering stewardship may help both marine ecosystems and dependent communities withstand, recover from, and respond positively (be resilient) to the impacts of a changing climate.



Background

The Great Barrier Reef is predicted to change significantly over the next 50 years as a result of climate change. These changes will alter the nature and dynamics of the marine ecosystem and will consequently affect the operations and activities of Reef-reliant communities. Stewardship involves acknowledging shared responsibility for the ecosystem. Stewardship approaches are being used in international contexts as one way to build climate change resilience in communities reliant on natural systems. Understanding the motivations, influences and mechanisms that drive successful stewardship action will allow for innovative strategies to build adaptive capacity and community resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Objectives

This project sought to identify ways to increase the community and marine ecosystem's resilience to climate change impacts in the Keppel Bay and Capricorn Coast region through stewardship approaches.

Actions

The University of the Sunshine Coast was engaged to run an exploratory study of: (i) how stewardship potential within a community might be assessed; (ii) to what extent the building blocks for stewardship are already present in the Keppel Bay and Capricorn Coast region; and (iii) what barriers and opportunities around stewardship exist.

An online survey was used to assess the attitudinal and behavioral responses of stakeholders on the Capricorn Coast to the impacts of climate change on the Great Barrier Reef and the mechanisms required to realise effective stewardship potential.



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Outputs

A framework was developed to understand and evaluate the potential for an increase in the shared responsibility towards the quality of the marine environment. Using this framework, a preliminary evaluation of the marine stewardship potential of the community associated with the Keppel Bay and Capricorn Coast region was produced. This identified barriers and opportunities to the development of effective stewardship of marine resources in the area. The researchers also gave a seminar on the approach at the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA).

Outcomes

Study findings: Although stakeholders considered themselves reasonably well-informed on climate change issues and were quite concerned about climate change generally at a community level, almost a third indicated they were uncertain about their vulnerability to climate change impacts on marine resources and on their livelihood.

In some cases, there was a high degree of confusion and a lack of understanding about climate change. Lack of trust between community and government organisations was commonly seen as a barrier to stewardship. Some respondents considered this the result of poor information flow to the community to motivate them towards taking stewardship action, or a need for greater leadership. Often the respondents were pessimistic about the level of engagement required to make stewardship changes in the region. Many respondents thought that their contributions were not sufficiently significant to foster stewardship within the community.

Findings relevant for those interested in supporting or progressing climate change resilience at the community level, and fostering stewardship within Keppel Bay and the Capricorn Coast (or other communities) include:

- a need to provide convincing stakeholder-specific information on the impacts of climate change;
- generic information, lacking in details and specifics, is unlikely to encourage attitudinal and behavioural change;
- a need for key organisations/individuals to provide practical and strong leadership in



addressing climate change in the Capricorn Coast region;

- a need for community networks and communication channels to facilitate information flows and to foster action to address climate change impacts;
- a need for governments to acknowledge that individual, group, and/or community action is essential for the realisation of stewardship potential; and
- a need to take a coordinated and unified approach to fostering stewardship that engages all of the community, industry leaders and government agencies and promotes the building of trust and connectivity.

Project outcomes: The project has helped develop an understanding of ways the GBRMPA can work with the community to increase community resilience to climate change through fostering stewardship approaches.

Future directions

Information from the study will be shared so that it can be considered during development of any future use of stewardship approaches in the Capricorn Coast and other regions. The research report is available as a technical publication from the GBRMPA website (www.gbrmpa.gov.au).

*For further information contact the:
Climate Change Group
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
PO Box 1379, Townsville Qld 4810
07 4750 0759
www.gbrmpa.gov.au*