



# Reef Facts

FOR TOUR GUIDES

## Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef



Above: Mr Russel Butler Snr providing a guided interpretive tour to GBRMPA staff (and visitors)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef region and evidence of their sea country connections dates back over 60,000 years. Their connections continue to be practised and maintained today according to their traditional customs and spiritual lore.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) works in partnership with Traditional Owners to conserve biodiversity,

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners continue to assert inherited rights and responsibilities over their land and sea country. They do not need to physically live on their land or sea country to do this.

Sea country refers to the areas of the sea that each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group is particularly affiliated with through their traditional lore and customs.

The GBRMPA is working with Traditional Owners for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef: expanding the Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement (TUMRA) program and strengthening communications between local communities, managers and reef stakeholders.

protect heritage and cultural values, and contribute to the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef.

There are more than 70 Traditional Owner clan groups situated along the Queensland coast from the Torres Strait Islands to just north of Bundaberg. Their sea country includes areas within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.





Above: Hunting in the Torres Strait  
Left: A Traditional Owner cast netting on sea country

Even though Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples use more modern tools, these activities are still considered traditional. While the method used in these activities may have changed, the purpose remains the same.

## What is Traditional Use?

Traditional use of marine resources is defined as activities which are part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures, customs or traditions, for the purpose of satisfying personal, domestic or communal needs.

Traditional use of marine resources activities may include fishing, hunting, collecting (such as shellfish), looking after cultural and heritage sites, storytelling, languages, cultural names for places, trade routes or ceremonies.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples undertake traditional use of marine

resources activities to continue the practice of their living maritime cultures. This can include, educating younger generations about a range of things like traditional lore, how to hunt and gather traditional foods and the protocols for using their sea country.

## Traditional Hunting

Hunting for culturally significant animals, such as dugong and turtles using modern equipment, is still regarded as a traditional practice provided it is undertaken by Traditional Owners in their own sea country.

Traditional hunting and the use of marine resources is a way for Indigenous people to continue to practice and maintain their cultural connections to the land and sea country where their ancestors hunted and lived. Access to traditional foods is also important for health and nutrition.

The *Native Title Act 1993* recognises certain Traditional Owners' right to hunt and gather in their sea country and Native title holders may, as of right, undertake traditional use of marine resources.



Left and above: Traditional Owners working with GBRMPA on their Sea Country management

Traditional use activities in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park are managed under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*, and the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983*.

While Traditional Owners have certain Native Title rights to take resources, they also recognise conservation concerns in relation to green turtle and dugong populations and some Traditional Owners have voluntarily restricted traditional hunting.

## Illegal take

Illegal take, or poaching, is the unauthorised take of marine resources by persons who do not have Native Title rights or appropriate permissions. Illegal take of marine resources by non-Traditional Owners is an area of great concern to Traditional Owners in the management of their sea country.

## What is a TUMRA?

A Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement (TUMRA) is a formal agreement developed by Traditional Owner groups and accredited by the GBRMPA and the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM).

The TUMRA framework recognises certain rights under the *Native Title Act 1993*. It complements existing community based measures developed by some Traditional Owner groups to manage their use of sea country resources.

TUMRAs provide collaborative opportunities to protect cultural values, manage culturally important species in accordance with traditional lore and address other activities that impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' sea country areas. Once implemented, an accredited TUMRA enables Traditional Owners and management agencies to conduct compliance activities, monitor plants, animals and human activities, as well as develop communication strategies, interpretive signage, and hunting systems that collect annual harvest data.

A number of Traditional Owner groups have developed agreements with the GBRMPA. These agreements have limited take of green turtle and in some cases restricted the take of dugong to zero.



Above: Traditional weaving



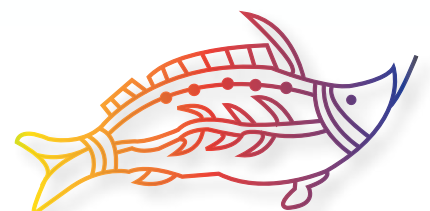
Left: Indigenous Australians identify with these official flags of Australia



## Traditional Owner engagement

A compliance training package has been developed under the Australian Government's Caring for our Country Reef Rescue Land and Sea Country Indigenous Partnerships Program which is being administered by the GBRMPA. The training is just one of several key projects actively engaging Traditional Owners and Indigenous communities in the management and protection of the Reef's marine resources and cultural diversity.

Part of this package delivers a series of comprehensive compliance training courses that have been developed to provide Traditional Owners, government employed Marine Park field officers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rangers and members of Indigenous communities with the knowledge and skills to respond to and report suspected incidents occurring in their sea country.





## The complexity of cultural knowledge

Understanding Aboriginal culture and Torres Strait Islander culture is complex. Working out the correct Traditional Owners to speak with, the right person within that group to contact and what particular topics can be discussed or not are important parts of the engagement process.

Some Indigenous communities may have separate men's and women's business, specific cultural responsibilities to undertake or at times groups may be carrying out sorry business if a member of their community passes. There may be an elders group, community council or a corporation established that you could talk to. Overlapping native title claims in a region may mean you'll need to speak to more than one Traditional Owner group about a certain matter. Meeting with the wrong people could be counter-productive so finding the right person or group is the first step.

Once engaged, remember that the people who have shared their cultural information with you are the keepers of that knowledge or story which often can be culturally sensitive or sacred in nature. If you are permitted to record information, Indigenous communities should understand how you will use their information and any photographs or recordings should be obtained under written consent.



Below: Communicating through dance



## How Traditional Owners participate in Marine Tourism

The GBRMPA works with Traditional Owners and Native Title Representative Bodies on Marine Park permit and management issues.

Marine tourism operators and other agencies are also encouraged to be involved in fostering Indigenous participation in marine tourism. A number of Indigenous Special Tourism Permissions have been set aside under the Plans of Management for Cairns (5 permits), Hinchinbrook (3 permits) and the Whitsundays (5 permits). These permits are intended for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have traditional affiliations with the relevant planning area and wish to conduct a commercial tourism operation. The GBRMPA allocates these permits through an expression of interest process.

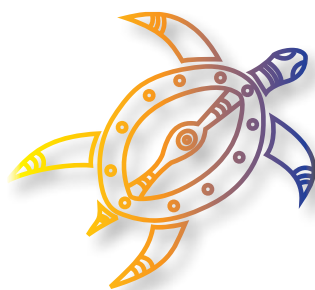
Facilitating a better understanding of Indigenous community and tourism industry perspectives and aspirations regarding Indigenous participation in marine tourism can contribute to the ongoing care of the Marine Park.

*The sea, its natural resources and our identity as Traditional Owners, are inseparable... Our ancestors have hunted and fished in this sea country since time immemorial... Our concerns about the health of our people are directly connected to the ability of our people to access our traditional country. Being healthy means looking after our spiritual health and our physical health...*

Girringun Aboriginal Corporation 2005.

## Telling the story – what are the facts?

Many visitors now come to the Great Barrier Reef for an Indigenous Australian experience and may have questions on traditional hunting. For tourism operations that traverse Traditional Owner sea country areas it is important to answer questions in a factual manner. Each region has different environmental issues and concerns. Remember that each of the 70+ Traditional Owner groups has distinct cultural characteristics and sea country that identify them and make them unique.



Right: Turtle Canning Factory  
Heron Island (Early 1925-29)  
Old boilers remain on the site



FACTS	HOW TO TELL THE STORY
<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef region and scientific evidence of their sea country connections dates back over 60,000 years. – FACT</p>	<p><i>Point out key messages...</i></p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the two Indigenous groups of Australia. There are more than 70 Traditional Owner clan groups along the Queensland coast from the Torres Strait Islands to just north of Bundaberg that continue a long-standing connection with the Great Barrier Reef region and its natural resources.</p>
<p>The <i>Native Title Act 1993</i> recognises certain Traditional Owners' right to hunt and gather in their land and sea country. – FACT</p>	<p><i>Talk about the law that recognises Native Title Holders' rights...</i></p> <p>Traditional Owners have managed their traditional areas for a very long time and are working with Government agencies to marry their cultural knowledge with western knowledge to better protect their sea country areas in the Great Barrier Reef region. Some hunting, gathering and traditional use of marine resources can be undertaken as of right, under the <i>Native Title Act 1993</i>.</p>
<p>Due to the introduction and adoption of new technology, Indigenous people today may live more modern lifestyles than in the past. - FACT</p>	<p><i>Talk about technological changes and traditions...</i></p> <p>A common misconception is that traditional hunting relates only to the use of traditional tools and equipment, such as wooden spears and bark canoes. Indigenous people may prefer to use small motorised boats, fishing rods and spear guns to gather resources. Traditional hunting and the use of marine resources is a way for Indigenous peoples to practice continuing cultural connections to the land and sea country where their ancestors lived and hunted.</p>
<p>Illegal take, or poaching, is the unauthorised take of marine resources by persons who do not have Native Title rights or permission to hunt from the Traditional Owners of a particular sea country. – FACT</p>	<p><i>Talk about what's being done...</i></p> <p>There is a multi-agency approach to compliance and enforcement in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and action may include officers from GBRMPA, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol. The GBRMPA is working in partnership with Traditional Owners to identify incidences of illegal take, and take appropriate actions to follow up reported incidents.</p>
<p>A wide range of activities are having an impact on green turtle and dugong populations. - FACT</p>	<p><i>Point out collective threats...</i></p> <p>All of the threats including coastal development, habitat degradation, boat strikes, netting, extreme weather events, sedimentation and pollution are impacting on green turtle and dugong population numbers. These threats need to be addressed collectively without singling out traditional hunting.</p>
<p>Some Traditional Owner groups have developed a Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement (TUMRA) or an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) with the GBRMPA and Department of Environment and Resource Management. - FACT</p>	<p><i>Talk about these agreements...</i></p> <p>The GBRMPA is working with Traditional Owners to expand the TUMRA program across the Great Barrier Reef catchment and further develop these sea country management plans. There are five accredited TUMRAs and one signed ILUA which cover 20 Traditional Owner groups. These agreements have limited take of green turtle and in some cases have stipulated no take of dugong.</p>



## Worth a look:

### Great Barrier Reef Traditional Owners

[www.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-partners/traditional-owners/traditional-owners-of-the-great-barrier-reef](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-partners/traditional-owners/traditional-owners-of-the-great-barrier-reef)

### Sea Country Management

[www.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-partners/traditional-owners/traditional-owners-activities](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-partners/traditional-owners/traditional-owners-activities)

### Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements

[www.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-partners/traditional-owners/traditional-use-of-marine-resources-agreements](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-partners/traditional-owners/traditional-use-of-marine-resources-agreements)

### Indigenous Participation in Tourism

[www.gbrmpa.gov.au/about-the-reef/how-the-reefs-managed/tourism-on-the-great-barrier-reef/indigenous-participation-in-tourism](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/about-the-reef/how-the-reefs-managed/tourism-on-the-great-barrier-reef/indigenous-participation-in-tourism)

### Native Title Representative Bodies

[www.ntrb.net](http://www.ntrb.net)

### Story Place

[www.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-partners/traditional-owners/story-place](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-partners/traditional-owners/story-place)

*We have a lifelong spiritual and physical connection to the land and sea... (and) a lifelong responsibility to our ancestors to care for land and sea country... Through countless generations, our forbears have passed down traditional knowledge of the islands and their natural resources, the seasons, the tides and ocean movements, the flora and fauna, and also what used to be here...*

Woppaburra Peoples 2006

## How to contact a Traditional Owner

There are distinct Traditional Owner groups along the Great Barrier Reef coast who through their inherited rights and responsibilities, traditional lore and custom, speak for their area of sea country.

As a first step, contact the local Native Title Representative Body. They represent Traditional Owners in native title matters and may help to identify the correct people for you to meet.

You can also visit the GBRMPA website for information and updates on our programs undertaken with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef.



Native Title Representative Bodies and Service Providers can be found by going to:  
[www.ntrb.net](http://www.ntrb.net)



Your contributions, ideas and feedback are welcome.

Please email the GBRMPA at:

[tourrec@gbrmpa.gov.au](mailto:tourrec@gbrmpa.gov.au)

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