

Traditional Use

What does the Outlook Report say about traditional use activities in the Great Barrier Reef?

Great Barrier Reef Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners hold a range of past and present heritage values for their land and sea country. These values may be cultural, spiritual, economic, social or physical, and demonstrate continuing connections with the Great Barrier Reef and its natural resources.

There are about 70 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owner groups with connections to the Great Barrier Reef.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have lived along the east coast of Queensland for over 40 000 years.

Traditional Owners continue to visit and maintain connections with their traditional sea country, including traditional hunting and fishing, ceremonies, stories and looking after their sea country. This is known as traditional use of marine resources - the undertaking of activities as part of Traditional Owner custom and tradition to satisfy personal, domestic or communal needs. Traditional Owners' inherent ethos to care for their sea country results in environmental benefits to the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem and social and economic benefits to their communities.

Traditional use, mainly through hunting, fishing and collecting, involves a range of marine species but overall levels of take are thought to be low for most species. Some species of conservation concern such as marine turtles and dugongs are targeted, although the numbers taken are unknown. Many Traditional Owners have recognised the decline in dugong populations along the urban coast and have voluntarily decided not to hunt dugongs. Traditional hunting of threatened species such as dugongs and marine turtles is one of many factors that cause mortality, others include disease, incidental catch in fishing gear and boat strike.

Provision for the traditional use of marine resources is made under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003*. Traditional Owners have the opportunity to formalise their wishes for sea country management through agreements such as Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreements, Indigenous Land Use Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding. These are being used to address concerns about the take of species of conservation concern such as marine turtles and dugongs.

Illegal hunting (also known as poaching) of threatened species by people who are not Traditional Owners of the area in which they are hunting is known to occur and is of concern to both Traditional Owners and managing agencies.

A Traditional Owner from the Great Barrier Reef Region is a member of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Board contributing to the setting of policy and management direction for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

How effective is the management of traditional use activities?

While progress by management agencies in the management of traditional use of marine resources has been slow, management and consultation processes are helping to reduce some of the major risks to Great Barrier Reef values.

The complexities associated with this issue are well appreciated by managers, especially as they relate to harvesting threatened and migratory species and the interaction between cultural sensitivities and other management considerations. The knowledge base in agencies relevant to traditional use has increased in recent years.

Four Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements have been finalised, covering approximately 19 000km² of the Great Barrier Reef area. These four agreements have involved engagement with 13 of the approximately 70 Traditional Owner groups in the Great Barrier Reef Region. The Indigenous element of the Australian Government's *Reef Rescue Plan* has recognised the need to provide additional resources for developing land and sea country Indigenous partnerships, providing \$10 million over five years until 2013.