



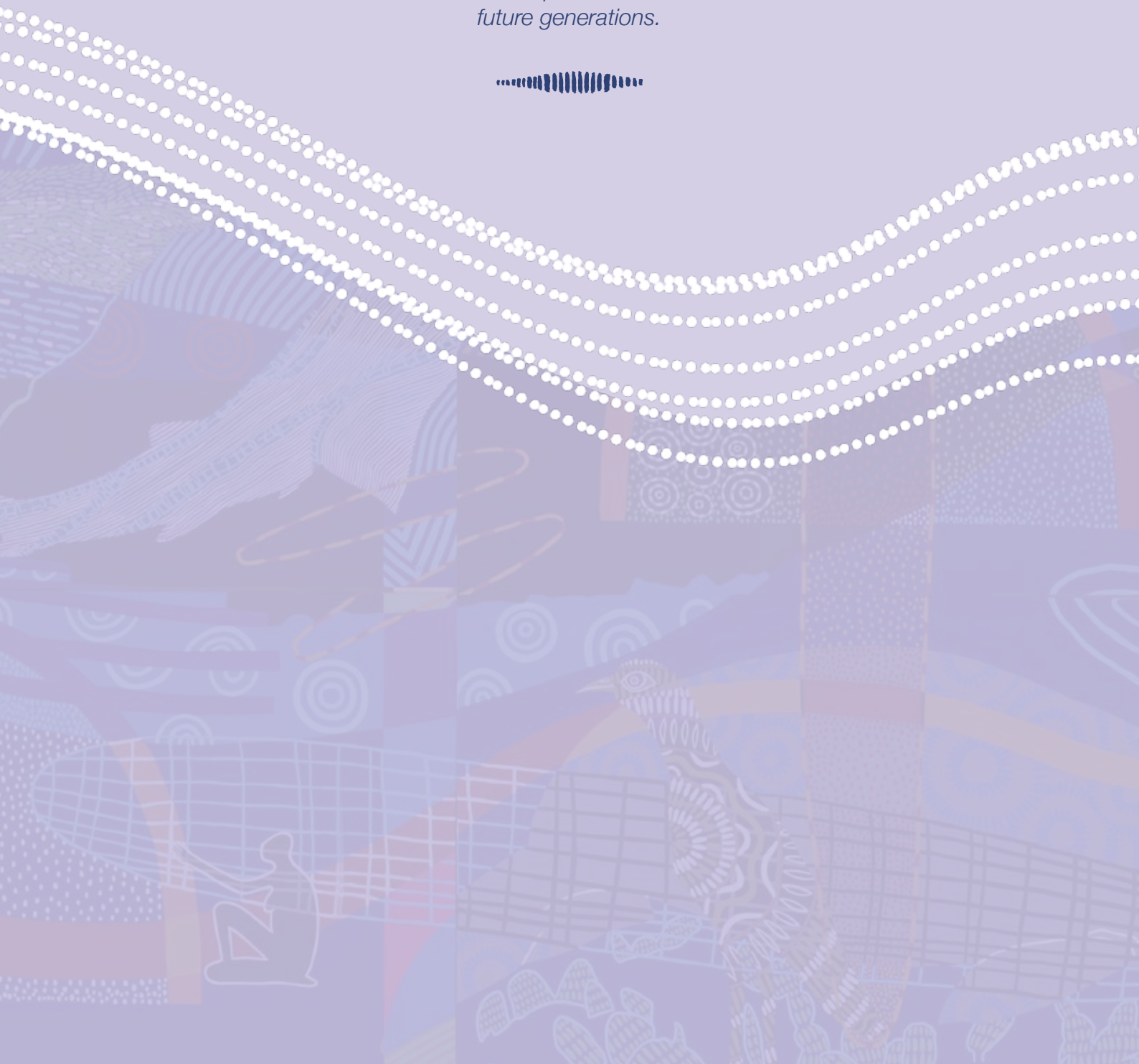
Australian Government

Great Barrier Reef  
Marine Park Authority

# Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park



*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.*







**Australian Government**

**Great Barrier Reef  
Marine Park Authority**

# Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park





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While all efforts have been made to verify facts, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority takes no responsibility for the accuracy of information supplied in this publication.

Artwork © Zane Saunders photographed by Rob Richardson. From public mural artwork installed at the Kuranda Village titled '*Bulmba Maminga*' *Love the country. Care for it.*



## **Australian Government**

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# 1.0 Introduction

*“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.”  
(Girringun Aboriginal Corporation spokesperson, 2005)*

*“It is vitally important that our heritage sites, culturally significant places  
and traditions are kept for our present and future generations.”  
(Gooreng Gooreng Traditional Owner, 2017)*



## 1.1 ABOUT THE STRATEGY

The Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef sets out a vision, guiding principles, objectives, actions and anticipated outcomes for how the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (the Authority) will work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Authority's draft strategy focuses on ways to keep Indigenous heritage in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park strong, safe and healthy.

The *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* aims to provide for the long-term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region. The inscription of the Great Barrier Reef on the World Heritage List in 1981 recognised its outstanding universal value, including ‘man's interaction with his natural environment’.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have cared for their sea country and heritage for tens of thousands of years. Since colonisation, their sea country and cultural practices have come under increasing pressure from other uses.

Many cultural practices remain strong while other Indigenous heritage values have deteriorated with changes in the environment and impacts on heritage.

Partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other land and sea managers are increasingly important to assist with managing these external pressures.



***The strategy's vision is:  
Indigenous heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef are kept strong,  
safe and healthy for past, present and future generations***

This draft strategy has been developed to focus on approaches and actions that support Traditional Owners to protect and care for Indigenous heritage within the scope of the Authority's management responsibilities for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Great Barrier Reef Traditional Owner groups and the Authority's Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee provided essential input into the draft strategy's development, building upon earlier Traditional Owner contributions to the *Great Barrier Reef Strategic Assessment 2014*, the *Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan 2015*, and previous sea country forums.

The resulting document outlines a strategic approach for the Authority to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to keep their heritage safe, strong and healthy, and contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations for sea country and heritage management into the future.

## **1.2 SCOPE**

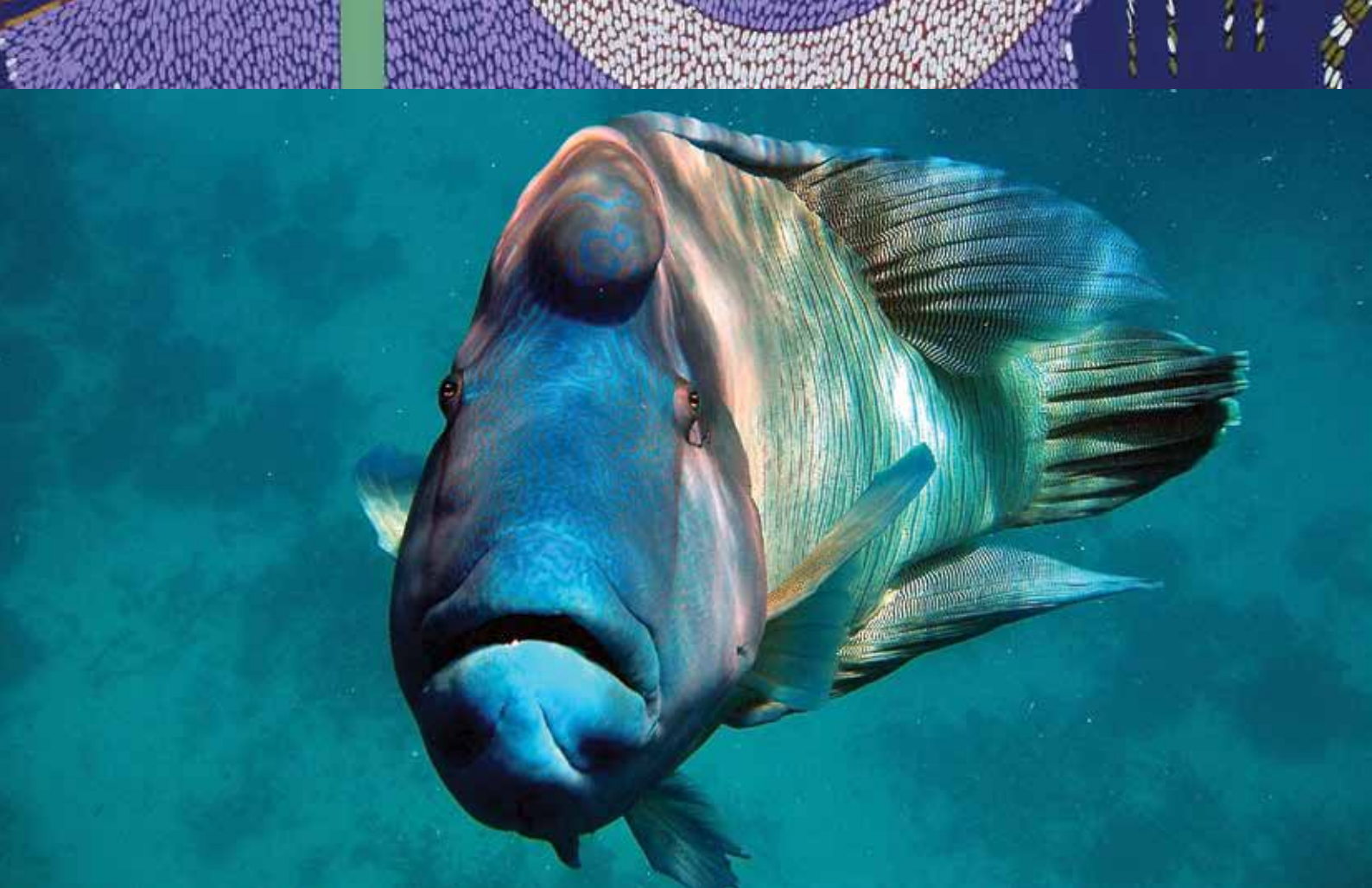
The draft strategy applies specifically to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park as defined in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act. However, the Authority recognises that jurisdictional boundaries do not match natural or Traditional Owner estate boundaries and acknowledges actions under this draft strategy may extend outside the boundaries of the Marine Park.

Indigenous heritage includes tangible and intangible components of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' land and sea country in accordance with their practices,



Photograph © QPWS





observances, customs, traditions, beliefs or history<sup>2</sup>. These components may have natural heritage value, historic heritage value and/or socio-economic value.

Nothing in this strategy affects the operation of the *Native Title Act 1993*, including section 211, which provides that holders of native title covering certain activities do not need authorisation to engage in those activities.



## 1.3 PURPOSE

The purpose of this draft strategy is to outline a plan and actions for the Authority to implement that will lead to better understanding, protection and promotion of Indigenous heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef. The strategy will allow the Authority to contribute to keeping Indigenous heritage values strong, safe and healthy. This is of vital importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestors, current generations and children; as well as to national and international heritage and the health of the Great Barrier Reef itself.

## 1.4 DEVELOPMENT

The Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee<sup>3</sup>, the *Outlook Report 2014*<sup>4</sup> and the *Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan*<sup>5</sup> recommended that the Authority develops an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage strategy, to better recognise and protect Indigenous heritage of the Reef.

The Authority led the development of the Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef over 2016–2018. The Authority's Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee, whose role is to provide advice and guidance to the Marine Park Authority Board, had input into the process and content over three meetings in 2016 and 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Indigenous Heritage Section of the Australian Heritage Commission 2002, *Ask First: A guide to respecting Indigenous heritage places and values*, Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra

<sup>3</sup> Letter by Chair of IRAC Melissa George to chairman Russell Reichelt, 10/9/2012 and Dale A, George M, Hill R and Fraser D 2016, *Traditional Owners and Sea Country in the Southern Great Barrier Reef – Which Way Forward?* National Environment Science Panel Programme, CSIRO

<sup>4</sup> Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, *Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment: Program Report*, Commonwealth of Australia at recommendation 8.3.2

<sup>5</sup> Commonwealth of Australia 2016, *Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan*, Commonwealth of Australia, at Action HA4





Six workshops were held with Traditional Owner organisations, both with and without formal agreements with the Authority from all geographic regions, covering more than 20 Traditional Owner groups and more than 80 participants. The Queensland Land and Sea Country Rangers Forum 2017 provided input. Contribution was also made from previous engagement processes.<sup>6</sup> The Authority engaged other Reef management partners, including the Queensland Government Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, the Queensland Land and Sea Ranger Program, the Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of the Environment and Energy.

The draft strategy was released for public comment by the Marine Park Authority Board on advice from the Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee. The draft is open for public consultation for two months, from 26 February to 26 April 2018. Targeted consultation will further engage Traditional Owners. The final draft document will be considered by the Marine Park Authority Board on advice from the Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee.



6 Dale A, George M, Hill R and Fraser D 2016, *Traditional Owners and Sea Country in the Southern Great Barrier Reef – Which Way Forward?* National Environment Science Panel Programme, CSIRO Gidarjil Development Corporation 2016, *Reef 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan Indigenous Implementation Plan*, report to Department of the Environment, unpublished



# 2.0 Context

*“(Indigenous heritage includes) everything. This contributes to the person I have become and the person I will be in the end of my days, this will exist even after I am gone... it is the remaining and everlasting evidence seen and unseen of our existence in this place.”*  
(Port Curtis Coast Corporation Workshop, 2017)



## 2.1 INDIGENOUS HERITAGE

Traditional Owners view Indigenous heritage as ‘everything in sea country’<sup>7</sup>.

The Authority applies a broad definition of **Indigenous heritage** meaning physical (tangible) and non-physical (intangible) expressions of Traditional Owners’ relationships with country, people, beliefs, knowledge, law, language, symbols, ways of living, sea, land and objects. These all arise from Indigenous spirituality, including heritage places (sites) and/or values<sup>8</sup>. The Authority recognises that the environment is inseparable from cultural identity, with cultural practices inextricably linked to plants, animals and the environment.<sup>9</sup>

The Authority’s *Traditional Owner Heritage Assessment guidelines* outline the importance of Indigenous heritage to individuals, communities, Australia and internationally, and provide many examples of Indigenous heritage components (the things that hold value) within the Reef. The Authority recognises that components can hold many values, including natural heritage value, Indigenous heritage value, historic heritage value and social, economic or aesthetic value.

Examples of components that hold value for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Great Barrier Reef include:



Photograph © Karl Borgelt

- The ocean, plants and animals, views, and sky and stars
- Respect, knowledge, language and stories, lore and responsibility
- People, ancestors, the present and the next generation
- Places significant for sites, plants, animals, corals, burials, birthing, food and totems
- Cultural keystone species, for example, turtles, dugongs, humpback whales
- Technologies, such as fish hooks, stone tools, artefacts, and scar trees
- Cultural behaviours, including traditional hunting, passing down knowledge, working together, remembering ancestors and keeping people, place and heritage safe
- Historical places associated with colonisation, like missions and massacre sites
- Historical connections, for instance between Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, and with South Sea Islanders.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee 2017

<sup>8</sup> Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2017, *Cultural Protocols for Indigenous Knowledge*, under development

<sup>9</sup> Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, *Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2014*, Commonwealth of Australia, p.79

<sup>10</sup> Markwell 2017, *Results of Traditional Owner Initial Engagement Analysis Report*, internal report, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority





Photograph © Hoppen Photography

## 2.2 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES' CONNECTION TO HERITAGE

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been linked with the Great Barrier Reef since time immemorial. Prior to sea level rise and the Reef forming over 7000 years ago, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lived on what is now the seafloor, and cultural knowledge of this time's practices and sites still remains. After the Reef formed, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples cared for their sea country through interweaving their culture and spirituality with sustainable use of its resources.

Despite historical events of dispossession and displacement, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintained connection to their land and sea country. Those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who have spiritual or cultural affiliations with a site or area in the Marine Park, or as holders of native title with that site or area, are termed Traditional Owners.

However, there were also many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who lost their direct connection to their land and sea country during and following European colonisation. These individuals and families may continue to have interests in Indigenous heritage in the region, such as through historic, spiritual or cultural values. They may also have a personal connection through family history with a place, including a mission or a massacre site.

There are some 70 Aboriginal Traditional Owner groups with authority for sea country management in the Great Barrier Reef



Marine Park. Three Torres Strait Island Traditional Owner groups are connected to Raine Island and share responsibilities with the Wuthahi Aboriginal Traditional Owners; the Ugar (Stephen Island), Mer (Murray Island) and Erub (Darnley Island) groups.

European settlement led to a multitude of users and pressures on the Reef and a major disruption to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' custodianship capacity. *The Outlook Report 2014* confirmed that the declining health of the Reef has affected culture.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time as the Reef experienced new pressures, loss of land and sea country rights, dislocation, disease, dispersion and disadvantage disrupted the capacity of people to perform and pass on their cultural responsibilities and care for their sea country.

Despite this recent history, many Traditional Owners remain connected to their sea country and strong in their culture<sup>12</sup>. A vast, rich array of components with heritage value still exist and are actively maintained by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Many work tirelessly through their communities and various Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to maintain the remaining heritage values of the Reef. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are increasingly re-asserting their role in managing their country through active engagement in on-country management and in policy and planning programs.<sup>13</sup>

*“...we’ve had a long, long, long association with the Reef. It is one of the seven wonders of the world but we also have a common culture and obligation to it.”<sup>14</sup>*  
(Traditional Owner from Mamu Country, 2012)



## 2.3 THE AUTHORITY'S CONNECTION TO HERITAGE

For more than four decades, the Australian Government has joined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the task of managing the heritage and other values of the Reef. The establishment of the Great Barrier Reef region in 1975 started the development of a marine protected area system which is now the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The Marine Park is managed to protect and conserve the Reef's environment, biodiversity and heritage values. In 1981, the outstanding universal value of the Reef was recognised with the listing of the Great Barrier Reef as a World Heritage Area for its natural heritage value. The nomination included recognition of Indigenous heritage values, recorded as acknowledgement of 'man's interaction with the environment'<sup>15</sup>.

The Authority's experience managing the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park included the development of a suite of management tools that have primarily been used for ecosystem and biodiversity management. With this strategy, the Authority aims to apply its management capabilities to further understand, respect, protect and manage Indigenous heritage values of the Reef in partnership with Traditional Owners.

## 2.4 CURRENT STATE AND TREND

Traditional Owners with connections to the Great Barrier Reef Region maintain their cultural practices and customs. However, because Indigenous heritage values are closely tied to land and sea country, values have deteriorated with the deterioration of the environment.<sup>16</sup>

- 11 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, *Strategic Assessment Overview*, Commonwealth of Australia, p.12
- 12 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, *Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment 2014*, Commonwealth of Australia, and Markwell 2017, *Results of Traditional Owner Initial Engagement Analysis Report*, internal report, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
- 13 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, *Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment 2014*, Commonwealth of Australia, at section 7.24
- 14 Barry, G. 2012a, *Transcript of an interview with a Traditional Owner from Mamu Country*, in Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, *Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment 2014*, Commonwealth of Australia, at section 7.24
- 15 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 1981, *Nomination of the Great Barrier Reef by the Commonwealth of Australia for inclusion in the World Heritage List*, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Townsville
- 16 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, *Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment 2014*, Commonwealth of Australia





Figure 1: Condition and trend of Indigenous heritage values – Strategic Assessment 2015

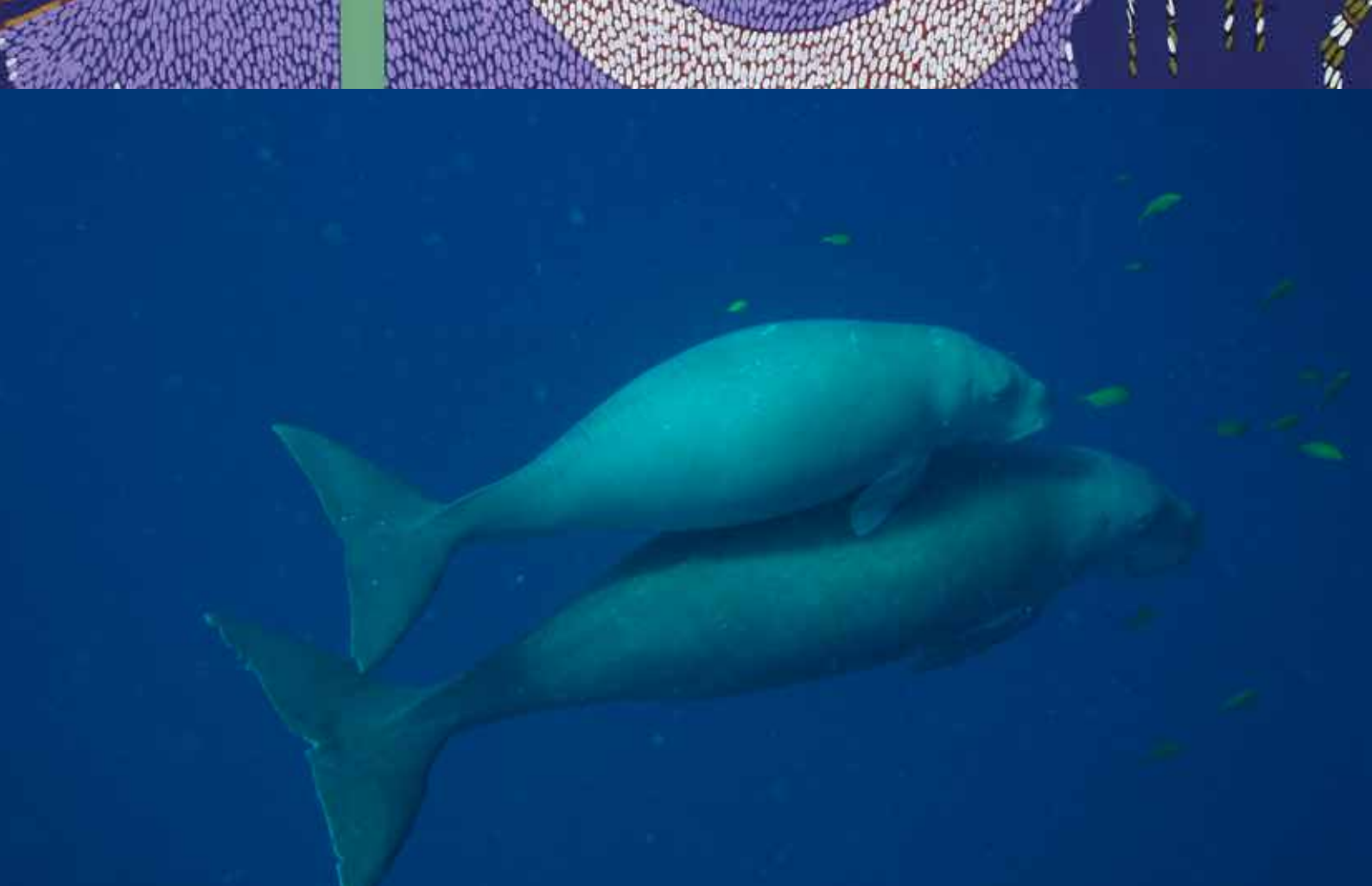
Component	Condition	Trend	Objective
<p>Sacred sites, sites of particular significance and places important for cultural tradition</p> <p><i>Places of Indigenous heritage value have not been systematically identified and many have deteriorated, especially around developed areas and on islands.</i></p> <p><i>There are many places, especially in coastal systems and on islands, where there is pressure on sacred sites and other sites of cultural significance. This is particularly around areas of high development and those exposed to severe weather events. Other sites are intact and in good condition and are being well managed by Traditional Owners.</i></p>	Poor	Deteriorating	Improve
<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander structures, technology, tools and archaeology</p> <p><i>Indigenous structures (for example, fish traps), tools, technologies and archaeology have not been systematically identified. They are under pressure from coastal development and vehicle use. Some specific sites, such as the Hinchinbrook fish traps, are managed by Traditional Owners. The significance of some sites, such as the rock quarry on South Molle Island, is recognised on the National Heritage List.</i></p>	Poor	Deteriorating	Improve
<p>Stories, songlines, totems and languages</p> <p><i>Story, language, songlines and totems are being affected by activities such as shipping, anchoring and dredging. These have a particularly significant impact as they may transgress these traditional systems.</i></p> <p><i>Some species of cultural significance, such as whales, dugongs, turtles, rays, sharks and dolphins, and other coastal resources, are under pressure, especially in areas south of Cooktown.</i></p>	Poor	Deteriorating	Improve
<p>Cultural practices, observances, customs and lore</p> <p><i>Traditional Owners with connections to the Great Barrier Reef Region maintain their cultural practices and customs. There is evidence of inter-generational transfer throughout the Reef.</i></p>	Good	Stable	Maintain



The health of Indigenous heritage components is heavily dependent on the state of the environment, which is in decline.<sup>17</sup> The *Outlook Report 2014* found that the overall outlook for the Reef had worsened since 2009 and was likely to deteriorate in the absence of action to address threats. The report found the most significant factors influencing the values of the Reef were climate change, water quality, coastal development and some fishing impacts.

The *Strategic Assessment 2014* noted a decade of extreme weather, including severe cyclones and floods, had contributed to the decline in Reef health, and reduced the capacity of the ecosystem to recover from these and other disturbances. This trend is continuing, with further extreme weather events causing widespread coral bleaching and cyclonic damage in 2016 and 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, *Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2014*, Commonwealth of Australia



## 2.5 CURRENT MANAGEMENT APPROACHES

### 2.5.1 MANAGEMENT THROUGH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ORGANISATIONS

Indigenous heritage is primarily managed through cultural responsibilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, with some assistance from other managing agencies and Australian regulation. Under Australian law, native title recognises that Traditional Owners have inherent rights and interests over their traditional area of sea country, including a right to continue their own practices such as traditional use of marine resources.<sup>18</sup>

To continue to deliver cultural responsibilities for sea country and lore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups have formed organisations to manage land and sea programs through administration, project officers and rangers. Many organisations are Traditional Owner organisations, following cultural protocols and exercising cultural authority on behalf of specific Traditional Owner groups. These organisations have partnerships with other organisations that also contribute to heritage management. Some organisations have developed on-ground management capacity through ranger programs, such as through the Australian Government's Working on Country Program and the Queensland Government's Land and Sea Country Rangers Program.



### 2.5.2 MANAGEMENT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN TRADITIONAL OWNERS AND THE AUTHORITY

The Authority manages heritage through regulations to avoid impacts on values, and programs to encourage partnerships and support on-ground management and compliance.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act provides for the long term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region.<sup>19</sup> The Act, its regulations and the Great Barrier Reef Zoning Plan 2003 (the Zoning Plan) establish a regulatory framework for sustainable use. The *Traditional Owner Heritage Assessment guidelines*<sup>20</sup> outline how Traditional Owner values are considered in the Authority's environmental assessment and permitting process. *Woppaburra Traditional Owner Heritage*

<sup>18</sup> Native Title Act 1993

<sup>19</sup> Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975 at section A1

<sup>20</sup> <http://elibrary.gbrmpa.gov.au/jspui/bitstream/11017/3241/5/Traditional-Owner-Heritage-Assessment-Guideline.pdf>





*Assessment guidelines* provide place-specific information, as well as a Woppaburra consultation protocol for use when proposing to undertake activities in the Woppaburra Traditional Use Marine Resources Agreement area. *The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*<sup>21</sup> manages significant impact on matters of national environmental significance, which includes the Great Barrier Reef.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act and regulations specifically allow for partnerships with Traditional Owners in management of marine resources. The Zoning Plan expressly acknowledges the rights and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders by providing for the management of the traditional use of marine resources, including traditional hunting, in accordance with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander custom and tradition.

In 2003, the Authority developed a specific regulatory tool, Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreements, to accredit community-based plans for management of traditional use of marine resources.

The Authority also supports heritage management through programs and partnerships with Traditional Owner organisations. For the past decade the Authority has delivered the Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program, providing dedicated staff, technical assistance and funding to develop and implement Traditional Marine Resource Agreements, increase Indigenous compliance capabilities and support development of individuals and groups. The Authority has committed to the long-term future of the program by providing core funding from 2018.

Traditional Owner organisations have partnered with the Authority under the program to expand Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements to cover eight agreements and 25 per cent of the Reef coastline. They have also used the program to facilitate and run a wide variety of cultural and caring-for-country activities, including junior ranger programs, cultural heritage camps, sea country conferences, international conference attendance, training, monitoring and research.

The Authority supports Traditional Owners to control and protect their sea country from illegal activities. A dedicated Indigenous Compliance Unit builds compliance capacity of rangers and organisations across the Reef. The Authority also partners with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rangers on joint compliance patrols, and incorporates Traditional Owners into over 500 days of field management activities annually on the Reef.



Photograph © Hoppen Photography

21 Expectations for engagement are set out in *Engage Early – Guidance for Proponents on Best Practice for Indigenous Engagement for Environmental Assessment under the EPBC Act 1999*, along with *Ask First: A Guide to respecting Indigenous heritage places and values*





### 2.5.3 REGULATION

Traditional Owner heritage values of the Marine Park are recognised and protected by both international (*Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972*) and national legislation (*Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975, Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984*).

In addition, heritage within Queensland's coastal waters is covered by a legislative duty of care, which means a person who carries out an activity must take all reasonable and practicable measures to ensure the activity does not harm Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.6 THREATS TO INDIGENOUS HERITAGE

There are multiple threats already impacting on heritage in the Great Barrier Reef, including to ecosystem health, biodiversity and tangible and intangible Indigenous heritage. The *Strategic Assessment 2015* found Indigenous heritage values were likely to continue to deteriorate, based on the inextricable connections between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and the Reef environment, and the increasing pressures of coastal development<sup>23</sup>.

The condition and trend of the Reef is foundational to maintaining heritage values. The major threats already impacting on the health of the Reef are climate change, poor

water quality from catchment run-off, coastal development, remaining impacts of fishing, and crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks. Most impacts were assessed as increasing into the future, driven mainly by climate change, economic growth and population growth. The future impacts of climate change are predicted to be very serious as greenhouse gas concentrations continue to rise.<sup>24</sup> The resulting coral bleaching, changes in animal and plants distributions and increasing severe weather events all disrupt Indigenous heritage and cultural practices.

In addition, other direct uses – including impacts of fishing (illegal and legal), tourism, recreation, research, environmental works and anchoring – may impact on tangible heritage in the Reef. These include fish traps, middens, burial sites, hunting grounds, feeding grounds, plants and animals; as well as intangible heritage such as songlines, language, customs and lore.

Impacts assessed as very high risk of having a major impact on Indigenous heritage values were:

- increased sea temperature
- ocean acidification
- death of discarded species from extraction
- illegal fishing and poaching
- modifying supporting terrestrial habitats.<sup>25</sup>

The *Traditional Owner Heritage Assessment guidelines* includes a list of potential hazards associated with permitted activities and their possible impact on heritage values and their social values, such as aesthetics, personal connection, and health and wellbeing.

<sup>22</sup> *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003, Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage Act 2003*

<sup>23</sup> Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, *Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment 2014*, Commonwealth of Australia

<sup>24</sup> Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, *Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment 2014*, Commonwealth of Australia, p.13

<sup>25</sup> Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, *Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment 2014*, Commonwealth of Australia





Loss of Indigenous knowledge is a threat to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage values. The passing of Elders loses knowledge irretrievably. Difficulty in exercising cultural rights and responsibilities, such as loss of access and lack of resources since the disruption of their traditional lifestyle, creates challenges in transferring knowledge to the younger generation. Heritage is intricately linked with the people to whom it belongs. Without the systemic passing on of cultural knowledge that occurred prior to European disruption, heritage is at risk of not being passed on to the next generations and thus lost forever.



Photograph © Hoppen Photography

A further risk to heritage is a lack of on-ground management capacity and opportunities for Traditional Owners.<sup>26</sup> Limited access to marine areas due to not having suitable boats, and limited resources to conduct protection and rehabilitation activities prevent active management. On-ground management requires competent organisations with strong governance in place that have cultural authority to make decisions, and resources such as boats and rangers to implement management activities. Programs and funding often lack continuity. Without on-ground management, cultural and legislative rules and responsibilities cannot be implemented or enforced.

The limited consideration of Indigenous heritage in management of the Reef puts heritage at risk of being impacted unintentionally. Without information on heritage, the Authority cannot consider it during assessment or planning processes. Without use of Traditional Owner knowledge in decision making, choices may inadvertently impact on heritage irreversibly.

Poor community awareness and appreciation of heritage values has also been identified as a risk to heritage<sup>27</sup>, with inadvertent damage from a range of activities allowed in the Marine Park risking impact.

With no peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Reef to collectively discuss issues, implement actions and represent Traditional Owners interests in high-level forums, it's difficult for Traditional Owner groups to collaboratively address heritage management issues.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Commonwealth of Australia 2016, *Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan*, Commonwealth of Australia

<sup>27</sup> Commonwealth of Australia 2016, *Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan*, Commonwealth of Australia

<sup>28</sup> Dale A, George M, Hill R and Fraser D 2016, *Traditional Owners and Sea Country in the Southern Great Barrier Reef – Which Way Forward?* National Environment Science Panel Programme, CSIRO

# 3.0 The way forward

## VISION

*Indigenous heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef are kept strong, safe and healthy for past, present and future generations*



### 3.1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In developing and implementing the draft strategy, the Authority applies the following principles:

**1. A broad definition of Indigenous heritage**

The broadest definition of Indigenous heritage is used, which includes everything on sea country. This recognises that Indigenous heritage is biocultural, and includes the environment and intangible components.

**2. Engages respectfully with Traditional Owners on Indigenous heritage matters**

The Authority presumes appropriate Traditional Owners include those identified through the development of a Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement, and those identified through a native title process. Where neither a Marine Resource Agreement nor a native title claim exists, the Authority will seek consensus amongst Traditional Owner groups on which Traditional Owner group can speak for an area.

**3. Recognises that all sea country activities contribute to Indigenous heritage management**

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs within the Authority contribute to the management of Indigenous heritage.

**4. Respects that Traditional Owners own and control Indigenous heritage information**

For any sharing of information necessary for implementation of this strategy, the Authority abides by its cultural protocol on sharing and holding Indigenous knowledge.<sup>29</sup> This includes gaining fully informed prior consent from Traditional Owners with the appropriate cultural authority.

**5. Holds the minimum Indigenous knowledge necessary for management purposes**

For any sharing of information necessary for implementation of this strategy, the Authority applies the principle of holding the least amount of information necessary for management purposes.

**6. Supports moving towards co-management**

The Authority recognises Traditional Owners' aspirations for co-management actions under this strategy are therefore intended to move the Authority and Traditional Owners further towards the goal of co-management. The Authority

seeks to establish formal partnerships wherever possible to implement this strategy. The Authority seeks to empower and support Traditional Owners to contribute to decision-making wherever possible.

### OUTCOMES AND OBJECTIVES

**Outcome 1: Keep heritage strong  
Respect, recognise and promote the connection of  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with the  
Reef**

*Objectives*

- Empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through our governance and advisory structures.
- Respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in all our business.
- Promote understanding of Indigenous heritage values.

**Outcome 2: Keep heritage safe  
Protect Indigenous heritage values through Authority  
processes**

*Objectives*

- Incorporate Indigenous heritage information into our processes.
- Identify and protect Indigenous heritage in policy and planning.
- Protect Indigenous heritage through compliance.
- Integrate Traditional Owner knowledge and input into the environmental assessment and permitting process.

**Outcome 3: Keep heritage healthy  
Partner with Traditional Owners and others in Reef  
management**

*Objectives*

- Support Traditional Owners to identify, assess, map and store knowledge on their heritage values.
- Partner with Traditional Owners to manage the Reef through shared decision-making, agreements and capacity building.
- Facilitate partnerships between Traditional Owners and other Reef managers.
- Support social and economic outcomes through programs and partnerships.
- Monitor, evaluate and report on the health of Indigenous heritage in the Reef

<sup>29</sup> Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2017, *Cultural Protocols for Indigenous Knowledge*, under development



### 3.3 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

#### Outcome 1: Keep heritage strong Respect, recognise and promote the connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the Reef

This outcome envisages a future where the connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with the Reef is respected and recognised by all Reef users. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples freely practise their culture and look after their heritage, passing to the next generation the spiritual practices and Indigenous knowledge that have sustained their health and identity over thousands of years.

Respecting Traditional Owners' rights and responsibilities as past, present and future custodians of the Reef is the foundation for shared management in the future. The Authority recognises the connection Traditional Owners have to sea country and their roles and responsibilities as its custodians. The Authority acknowledges the importance of Traditional Owners, their ancestors and their future generations, and their invaluable traditional knowledge gained through caring for the Reef throughout its 7000-year life.

The Authority recognises the essential place of Traditional Owners in Reef management through involvement in decision making and advisory structures. The Marine Park Authority

Board, which is responsible for care and development of the Marine Park, and the Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee and the Tourism Reef Advisory Committee, which advise the Board. The Authority understands the vital importance to Reef management of having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members well informed and active in advisory and/or decision making processes.

The Authority strives to continuously improve its cultural competence, respect and understanding. The Authority is committed to acknowledging Traditional Owners and considering their interests in plans and policies. The Authority is currently finalising a Reconciliation Action Plan and cultural awareness training to further develop the cultural capability and awareness of the Authority and its people.

Promoting Traditional Owner connection to sea country and the importance of Indigenous heritage values is necessary to build the awareness and sensitivity of the wider public and other Reef users. The Authority will increase its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in Reef HQ Aquarium public displays; improving the understanding of the thousands of annual visitors to the aquarium. The Authority's Reef Guardian program reaches schools, councils, farmers and fishers, and a Reef Discovery course targeted at educating tour operators. In addition, the Authority's communications program could deliver articles, products and promotions to the general public. Actions under this strategy that encourage safe information sharing can support Traditional Owners to share information and cultural knowledge for promotion by the Authority.

#### Outcome 1: Keep heritage strong

#### Respect, recognise and promote the connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the Reef

Objectives and actions	
<b>O1.1</b>	<b>Empower Traditional Owners through our governance and advisory structures</b>
A1.1.1	Maintain and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' effective representation on all Authority governance and advisory boards, including the Marine Park Authority Board, the Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee, the Tourism Reef Advisory Committee, Local Marine Advisory Committees and Reef 2050 Reef Advisory Committee.
<b>O1.2</b>	<b>Respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in all our business</b>
A1.2.1	Implement the Authority's Reconciliation Action Plan to increase Authority cultural competence and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' employment and integration into the Authority.
A1.2.2	Ensure future and revised plans and policies acknowledge Traditional Owners and consider their interests.
A1.2.3	Develop an Authority list of culturally appropriate contacts for each estate within the Marine Park, including engagement protocols identifying the correct contact for each area and issue.
<b>O1.3</b>	<b>Promote understanding of Indigenous heritage values</b>
A1.3.1	Develop a communications package and plan to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional use, connection to sea country and heritage values to the broader public and other users of the Reef.
A1.3.2	Integrate Indigenous heritage information into Reef HQ Aquarium, including a foyer concourse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge throughout displays and regular cultural activities and tours.
A1.3.3	Develop and implement Reef Guardian modules for schools (Aboriginal studies) and councils (cross cultural awareness) to promote understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander connection and culture.
A1.3.4	Finalise and implement modules for the Reef Discovery course and incorporate into the Master Reef Guide certification to increase the cultural awareness of tourism operators.
A1.3.5	Encourage and support Traditional Owner-led sea country naming, signage and language initiatives through Authority programs.

## Outcome 2: Keep heritage safe

### Protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage through Authority processes to keep heritage safe

This outcome envisages a future where Indigenous heritage is identified, considered and protected across the range of Authority tools and processes, such as planning, permitting and compliance.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act has protection of heritage as one of its main objects. However, the Authority is limited in its protection of heritage by information gaps<sup>30</sup>. With greater information on Indigenous heritage values, Authority tools could be expanded to offer the same level of protection to heritage as to the environment. The Authority is committed to working with Traditional Owners, who have the expertise and knowledge on Indigenous heritage, to allow the Authority to optimise protection of Indigenous heritage through existing processes.

To allow the safe sharing of information required to map values, the Authority is in the process of developing systems to store and use cultural information securely. The Authority is working with Traditional Owners to develop best practice protocols for collection and management of information, and data sharing agreements. The Authority has established a secure Cultural Knowledge Management System to hold any information shared by Traditional Owners for use in management decisions.

The Authority is committed to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations to store and

manage their own Indigenous knowledge. The Authority only seeks access to the minimum level of information, shared with appropriate authorisation, to enable protection of heritage through its processes.

The Authority is committed to protecting heritage places through its planning, permissions and compliance programs. Incorporating heritage places into planning will proactively offer protection. The Authority will investigate and trial use of planning tools to protect significant areas, and increase compliance activities on heritage sites.

The Authority is committed to integrating Traditional Owner knowledge and input into the environmental assessment and permitting process. In 2016–17, the Authority conducted a pilot project with Woppaburra Traditional Owners to assess how Traditional Owner expertise could be used to improve the permit assessment process. This resulted in a *Woppaburra Heritage Assessment guideline* that sets out places and species of cultural significance, and trigger further consultation where heritage may be threatened. It also includes a consultation protocol of who to consult when activities are specifically proposed in the Woppaburra Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement area. The Authority aims to work with other interested Traditional Owner groups to develop more place-specific guidelines to guide permitting decisions.

The Authority is committed to Traditional Owners having increasing input into Authority decision making. For this to occur, it is essential that the Authority has the culturally-correct contacts and decision makers for each area and issue. The Authority is committed to developing a consultation process and protocol to get Traditional Owner input into decisions and policies.

30 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, *Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment 2014*, Commonwealth of Australia, at 7.73

## Outcome 2: Keep heritage safe

### Protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage through Authority processes to keep heritage safe

Objectives and actions	
<b>O2.1</b>	<b>Incorporate Indigenous heritage information into our processes</b>
A2.1.1	Develop and implement information sharing agreements and cultural protocols with Traditional Owner organisations to allow culturally appropriate access to traditional knowledge for management.
A2.1.2	Compile information from data agreements, Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement projects, assessment guidelines and planning processes into geospatial data layer of components.
A2.1.3	Develop and implement a cultural knowledge management system for managing shared information.
<b>O2.2</b>	<b>Identify and protect Indigenous heritage in policy and planning</b>
A2.2.1	Investigate and trial use of Authority planning to protect significant places, including through resilience hotspots, Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements, 39ZA arrangements, sea country plans, special management areas, plans of management and site management arrangements.
<b>O2.3</b>	<b>Protect Indigenous heritage through compliance</b>
A2.3.1	Maintain and strengthen the Indigenous Compliance Unit of the Authority.
A2.3.2	Incorporate surveillance of sites having Indigenous heritage value into compliance plans and patrols.
<b>O2.4</b>	<b>Integrate Traditional Owner knowledge and input into our environmental assessment and permitting process</b>
A2.4.1	Develop and implement place-specific Assessment Guidelines which outline and map Indigenous heritage values for specific Traditional Owner sea country and groups, and establish engagement protocols for consultation on permit applications.
A2.4.2	Work with native title bodies to better explain Authority processes and increase effectiveness of native title notification system.
A2.4.3	Develop guidance and templates for applicants on expectations for Traditional Owner consultation, provision of information and the identification of avoidance and mitigation measures.



### Outcome 3: Keep heritage healthy Partner with Traditional Owners and other Reef users to keep heritage healthy

This outcome envisages a future where Traditional Owners and other Reef managers manage the Reef together to keep sea country and Indigenous heritage strong, safe and healthy.

For the Authority and Traditional Owners to partner in Indigenous heritage management, Traditional Owners need to be able to share a certain level of information on their values with the Authority. Indigenous heritage values have not been systematically identified by management agencies. Traditional Owners have been reluctant to share specific information on values because of cultural lore protecting cultural information and reservations around loss of control of information. In addition, physical mapping and recording of attributes requires resources, access to country and resource data systems. The Authority is committed to supporting Traditional Owners to identify, assess, map and store Indigenous knowledge on heritage.

The Authority is committed to moving towards co-management of the Reef with Traditional Owners. Mechanisms include increasing involvement of Traditional Owners in decision making, agreements and capacity building, investigating co-management tools, and supporting sea country planning.

Through the establishment of Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements, the Authority legislatively recognises the rights of Traditional Owners to manage their traditional resources and has provided funding and assistance to increase their capacity to do so. In 2018, 25 per cent of the Reef coastline is covered through eight formal agreements, and the Authority aims to continuously increase this coverage.

In addition, the Authority is committed to increasing the number of service level agreements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, to deliver environmental and heritage protection services to benefit from the expertise and geographic advantage of Traditional Owners.

Capacity building of Traditional Owners is crucial to build a co-management approach and to gain heritage outcomes. The Authority will investigate how our current training programs and tools can be used to build skills in Traditional Owner organisations, and capacity for the Authority.

The Authority is committed to supporting social and economic outcomes through programs and partnerships, recognising that independent, sustainable communities are essential to achieving better heritage outcomes in the long term.

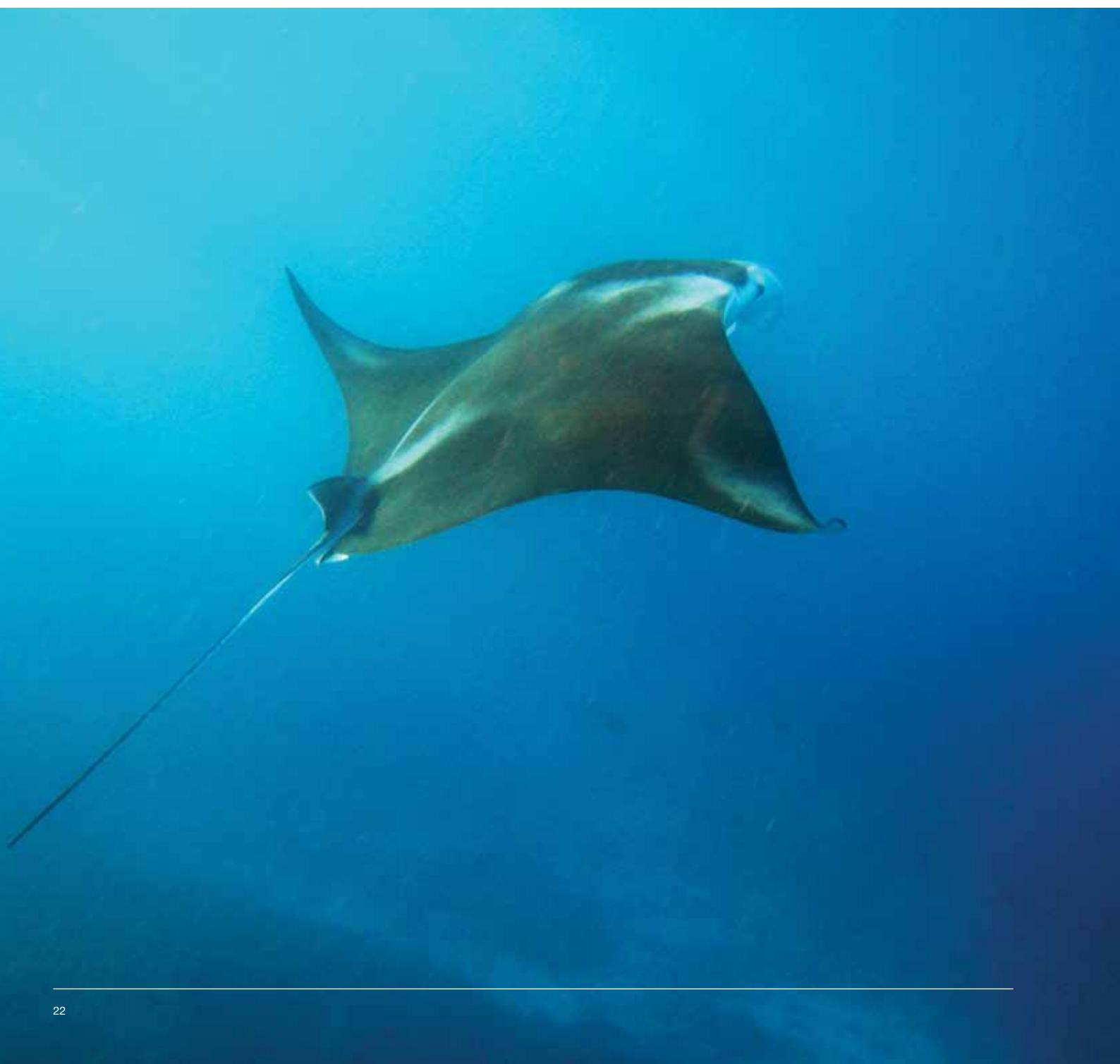
The Authority will monitor, evaluate and report on the health of sea country, culture and heritage, primarily through the Reef Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program and Outlook Report updates.

### Outcome 3: Keep heritage healthy Partner with Traditional Owners and other Reef users to keep heritage healthy

Objectives and actions	
<b>O3.1</b>	<b>Support Traditional Owners to identify, assess, map and store knowledge on their heritage values</b>
A3.1.1	Conduct an assessment of Indigenous heritage values through supporting Traditional Owner-led identification, mapping, recording and storage of information.
<b>O3.2</b>	<b>Partner with Traditional Owners to manage the Reef through shared decision-making, agreements and capacity building</b>
A3.2.1	Expand partnerships with Traditional Owners, including Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements, Indigenous Compliance and education and stewardship programs to increase heritage management and move towards co-management.
A3.2.2	Explore opportunities to support Traditional Owners in sea country planning to assist integrated planning and management of estates.
A3.2.3	Implement a small grants and sponsorship program to develop capacity in areas such as sea management and tourism by supporting localised sea country projects and attendance at training, conferences and events.
A3.2.4	Support secondments, exchanges and internships with the Authority in fields such as communications, compliance and field management.
<b>O3.3</b>	<b>Facilitate partnerships between Traditional Owners and other Reef managers</b>
A3.3.1	Collaborate with other government agencies and the private sector on partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that benefit marine park management, including Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Queensland Fisheries, especially for compliance activities.
A3.3.2	Investigate developing a reporting function specifically for cultural heritage in the Eye on the Reef app.
A3.3.3	Encourage Reef Guardian councils to partner with Traditional Owners through their Council Action Plan, for example, by reporting any work undertaken with Traditional Owner groups.
A3.3.4	Investigate options to increase researcher and tour operator respect for heritage and engagement with Traditional Owners.



Objectives and actions	
O3.4	Support social and economic outcomes through programs and partnerships
A3.4.1	Expand the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations (e.g. through service level agreements) to deliver environmental or heritage protection on the Reef.
A3.4.2	Review current mechanisms and processes (including tourism, research, Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements, Field Management Program and compliance program) to improve benefits to Traditional Owners engaged in sea country management.
O3.5	Monitor, evaluate and report on the health of Indigenous heritage in the Reef
A3.5.1	Develop Indigenous heritage indicators and a monitoring program to assess condition over time, for the <i>Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan</i> and Outlook Report, from the outcomes of the Reef 2050 Intergrated Monitoring and Reporting Program project June 2018.





# Glossary and terms

The **Authority** means Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority established under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*.

**Cultural Knowledge Management System** or **CKMS** means the Authority's infrastructure for housing and managing shared Indigenous knowledge.

**Estate** means areas of country belonging to a particular group. Many sea country estates, and all adjacent coastal estates, have been mapped to particular Traditional Owner groups who can be contacted for information about their heritage in particular areas. Applicants for Marine Park permits can identify the correct Traditional Owner contacts for their activity area by accessing the Queensland Cultural Heritage Register and Database or through the Native Title Tribunal.

**Ethical Standards** means application of each of the principles set out in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies 2012*, including, but not limited to:

- (a) obtaining the free, prior and informed consent of the Traditional Owner group and Indigenous knowledge holders to the sharing of Indigenous knowledge with the Authority
- (b) protecting Traditional Owner groups' and Indigenous knowledge holders' rights to Indigenous knowledge, whether or not those rights are protected in Australian law
- (c) meeting the requirements of the *Privacy Act 1988*.

**FPIC** stands for free, prior and informed consent; an internationally and domestically recognised essential component of best practice engagement with Traditional Owners in relation to the sharing of their Indigenous knowledge.

**Guidelines for Sharing and Safeguarding Indigenous Knowledge** or **Guidelines** means Authority guidelines for advising Authority personnel in relation to:

- (a) implementing the protocol for sharing Indigenous knowledge

- (b) following best practice in developing and implementing Indigenous Knowledge Sharing Agreements
- (c) best practice standards for identification, documentation, sharing, storage, management and use for Shared Indigenous Knowledge.

**Indigenous heritage** means physical (tangible) and non-physical (intangible) expressions of Traditional Owners' relationships with country, people, beliefs, knowledge, law, language, symbols, ways of living, sea, land and objects all of which arise from Indigenous spirituality, including heritage places (sites) and/or values.

**Indigenous knowledge** means knowledge systems embedded in the cultural laws, history, traditions of Traditional Owner groups and includes, without limitation, knowledge of:

- (a) creation stories (Indigenous lores) and contemporary stories
- (b) historical connections to places and stories
- (c) rituals, ceremonies, songs and dance
- (d) traditional technologies (e.g. tools and techniques for hunting, fishing and subsistence)
- (e) ethnobotany and ethnozoology
- (f) ecological knowledge, including knowledge of plants, animals and ecological systems and knowledge of sea currents and marine ecosystem dynamics
- (g) marine and terrestrial genetic resources
- (h) traditional medicine
- (i) ethnoastronomy
- (j) the climate
- (k) Indigenous heritage.

It also includes the rights that Indigenous knowledge holders have to such knowledge.

**Indigenous knowledge holder** is a Traditional Owner within the Traditional Owner group who holds specific Indigenous knowledge and authority regarding the Traditional Owner group's lores, customs and Indigenous heritage values, who is recognised within their Traditional Owner group for this Indigenous knowledge and authority, has the cultural authority to pass on, withhold and speak about Indigenous knowledge to others and holders may or may not be an Elder.

**Indigenous Knowledge Sharing Agreement** or **IKSA** means each agreement established between the Authority and a Traditional Owner group to facilitate the identification, documentation, sharing, storage, management and use of Indigenous knowledge to:

- (a) improve the conservation and cultural use of the Great Barrier Reef Region's biocultural diversity; and
- (b) increase Traditional Owner groups' participation in management of the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of cultural keystone species and biocultural resources within the Great Barrier Reef Region.

**ILUA** stands for Indigenous Land Use Agreement.

**Lores** means the Indigenous stories, customs, beliefs and observances specific to Traditional Owners which are derived from and instructed by their ancestral creation beings.

**Protocol for Sharing Indigenous Knowledge** or **Protocol** means the Authority's protocol for sharing Indigenous knowledge, which establishes the standards and principles by which Authority personnel will operate when developing and implementing Indigenous Knowledge Sharing Agreements, to ensure the safeguarding of Traditional Owners' Indigenous knowledge.

**TUMRA** stands for Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement also referred to Marine Resources Agreement.

**Traditional Owner** has the meaning given by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act. At the time of publishing this draft strategy, the Act provided that Traditional Owner means an Indigenous person:

- a. who is recognised in the Indigenous community or by a relevant representative Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander body:
  - i. as having spiritual or cultural affiliations with a site or area in the Marine Park; or
  - ii. as holding native title in relation to that site or area; and
  - iii. who is entitled to undertake activities under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander custom or tradition in that site or area.

**Traditional Owner group** has the meaning given by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983.



**Australian Government**

**Great Barrier Reef  
Marine Park Authority**

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