

CASE STUDY

Pilot in the Reef:

[Woppaburra Traditional Owner estate assessment guidelines](#)

The Great Barrier Reef Region is rich in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage, from ancient fish traps and middens to languages, songlines and deep connections with the plants and animals of the Reef.

Traditional Owners have cared for their Sea Country and heritage for tens of thousands of years and have intricate knowledge of its systems and heritage.

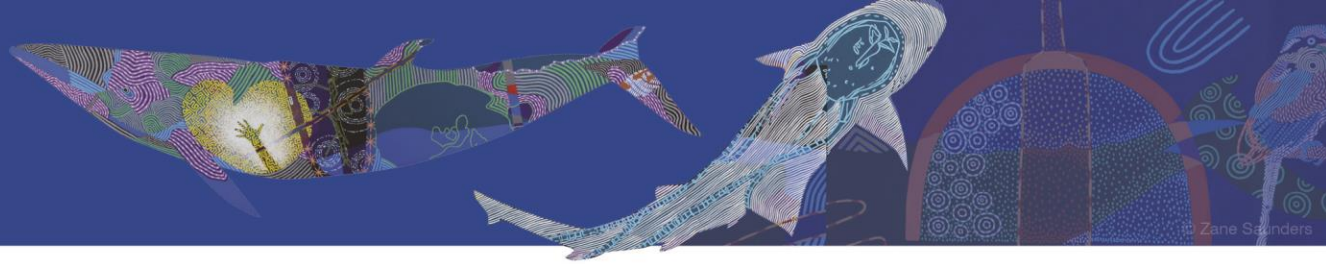
Today, protecting Indigenous heritage and the Reef needs partnerships between Traditional Owners, who hold knowledge, and government managing agencies, who have tools that can help protect values of the Reef.



Through a collaborative and cooperative approach, Woppaburra Traditional Owners and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (the Authority) joined together in a groundbreaking pilot to improve Traditional Owner knowledge and advice directly into decisions the Authority makes through its permissions system regarding access and use of the Marine Parks for activities requiring a Marine Parks permit.

The '[Woppaburra Traditional Owner estate assessment guideline](#)' (the Guideline), developed between Woppaburra people and the Authority, promotes Woppaburra Indigenous heritage values, increases heritage protection by including Woppaburra expertise in permissions considerations, and enhances partnerships and engagement between Woppaburra Traditional Owners and other Reef users.

The Guideline supports Woppaburra to publically share their history and knowledge of Indigenous heritage to the level they want with government, commercial operators, and the public. This information can be considered when using their Sea Country. The Guideline sets up culturally appropriate contacts, engagement and referral processes for people to work with Woppaburra people.



Project highlights:

Over three years, the Guidelines have proven to be successful in involving Traditional Owner expertise in Authority decisions and influencing permission decisions and conditions.

The sharing of information by Woppaburra has strengthened and has helped the Authority better understand their values and concerns. The Guidelines also led to other partnerships with research institutions which brought employment and investment into Woppaburra Sea Country.

Woppaburra Traditional Owners' meaningful and useful information through responses to permission referrals resulted in changes in permit conditions, such as excluding access to specific locations, and increasing protection and conservation.

For example, Woppaburra Traditional Owners identified Balban Dara Guya (Leekes Creek) as a place of cultural significance. The use of motorised water sports in the Leekes Creek is now excluded from new commercial tourism permissions.

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“Receiving the information gives us the understanding of what is happening on country. It’s the opportunity to see what’s happening on country. Plus the ability to influence where things happen on our country.”

“It opens opportunities that we don’t even know yet.”

- Woppaburra TUMRA Steering Committee

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