

# CAIRNS-PORT DOUGLAS REEF HUB

## DISCUSSION PAPER: IDEAS AND NEXT STEPS

### 1 Background

Throughout August and September 2020, six focus group discussions were held to explore the idea of forming a collaboration hub in the Cairns-Port Douglas region to support local-scale coral restoration and stewardship – and gather views on the hub’s design and development.

Over 30 individuals from more than 20 organisations and businesses contributed, including marine tourism operators; Traditional Owner organisations in the region; conservation groups; other NGOs and marine scientists, including from the Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program (see [Appendix 1](#)). These discussion groups were facilitated by a social sciences research team from CSIRO, JCU and QUT, working with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation. A draft discussion paper was then circulated for feedback throughout October and November 2020.

This final paper – incorporating discussions from the focus group sessions, feedback from the draft discussion paper, and follow-up conversations – intends to help guide next steps in the design of the proposed Cairns-Port Douglas Reef Hub (referred to throughout as the hub, name to be finalised in early 2021).

A **visual summary** of the discussions and content of this paper can be found in [Appendix 3](#).

### 2 What is a Hub?

People discussed the idea of a ‘hub’ and whether it was a physical place, a network of people or a resource or tool. A common view was that the term can be confusing when communicating to the community. However, **a generally shared view was that a ‘hub’ is:**

***an open network of people in the region, working together, supported by a shared vision, a Coordinator, and agreed governance arrangements that are locally driven.***

While the idea of the Hub as a network was consistently shared across discussions, there were also views that a physical space and support structures (e.g. a hosting organisation or location, administrative support and a visual presence) are also important.

### 3 Language Matters

A wide range of views were shared about what language should be used to describe what the hub does. Some groups felt that ‘restoration’ was an accurate and acceptable reflection of the main types of activities that business, communities and scientists were involved in to help the Reef regrow after damage. Others suggested the term ‘restoration’, while broadly understood as repairing a damaged place or ‘bringing something back’, creates an undesirable or negative image of a damaged Reef to people outside the region, or implies poor management.

‘Resilience’ was an important idea for some groups and seen as a goal for building long-term health of the Reef and people. It was also described as a complex word with many and varied meanings to different groups. Achieving the goal of resilience was also seen to need a much broader range of actions beyond local restoration efforts. ‘Stewardship’ was more broadly accepted language to describe the hub’s activities. Positive reactions to language such as ‘care’ and ‘collaboration’ was also common.

## 4 The Opportunity

There was a strong sense from the discussions that the idea of a locally-based and resourced Hub is timely – *yet to be successful, must build on current efforts underway in order to maximise benefits. People described several reasons for this, including:*

- there is a significant amount of stewardship and restoration activity already underway by *experienced practitioners in the region;*
- the Cairns-Port Douglas region is a community *that is deeply committed to a healthy Reef;*
- there is established in-kind and private investment by local businesses and organisations; and
- the timing coincides with *emerging collaborations amongst local groups.*

**There was a strong message that collaborations to support a ‘Hub’ are already occurring, and that it is primarily in governance, coordination and resourcing where there are gaps.**

Several groups stated that creating benefits from the current efforts and the opportunity would require overcoming some competitive behaviours, building new partnerships, and thinking beyond individual projects or ‘patches’ to the ‘bigger picture’. Discussion often focused on the potential to build collective impact from many site-specific, but better-linked projects.

*There was a clear desire to further build trust and improve social cohesion in the region, particularly in difficult economic times. Several groups described the importance of taking positive action, together, to build hope for the future. There were also sentiments shared that working together to help the Reef could also help heal relationships between individuals and organisations in the region.*

It was noted that building the strong foundations for an effective and enduring Hub would take time, and there was support for this process to be given the time to be successful; not to rush the Hub’s development; and allow for inclusive discussions.

## 5 Focus of Activity: What would a Hub do?

There were commonly held views that, in the short-term, the Hub should build on existing cooperation, knowledge and capacity with a focus on four main activities:

### COORDINATION

- Support coordination to build on current local-scale efforts and help make them stronger and more efficient
- Explore ways of reducing transaction costs for operators/local groups trying to implement restoration projects and activities
- Improve ease of engagement with government and Reef managers including advice about seeking permits for activities.

### COMMUNICATION

- Telling the story: support a more collective voice and narrative about the region and positive action taken on the Reef.
- Improve broader national and global visibility of current efforts
- Build a movement for stewardship and restoration actions that are science based, culturally appropriate and provide meaningful engagement activities

### CONNECTION

- Make it easy to share information among the hub network and with other networks (e.g. other local and international programs) including other 'hubs' emerging globally
- Support two-way sharing of knowledge and experience between Traditional Owners, practitioners, researchers, and Reef managers
- Build practical and beneficial links with the larger-scale RRAP work, and explore opportunities for activities that meet shared goals.

### CAPACITY & TOOLS

- Build skills to support innovation in local practice, and explore new techniques and solutions
- Learn from mistakes, work together and share knowledge to improve efficacy of local interventions
- Work with the science community to apply proven frameworks and develop improved tools and shared protocols for monitoring and assessment of progress and outcomes
- Build a shared language for learning through consistent monitoring and evaluation metrics

In the medium to longer term (e.g. 1-5 years), with the right foundations, the Hub could:

- Help leverage investment to resource activities that deliver on priorities identified through strategic planning processes
- Support a movement to help build jobs, capacity and continuity, with a long-term view of being part of a future 'industry' of landscape and seascape repair
- Be a model that others can learn from by supporting capacity exchange, eventually bringing people into the Cairns-Port Douglas region to train and learn.

## 6 Principles for working together

There was much discussion around how the members of the Hub should work together, and some common themes emerged. These common themes could act as principles to guide the overall operation of the hub:

### RESPECTFUL

Respectful interaction and recognition of efforts, rights, knowledge and diverse interests.

### INCLUSIVE

The Hub is an open network, inclusive of different interests and ideas about restoration. It identifies and supports different strengths.

### COLLABORATIVE

Make the hub a neutral space that is non-competitive and focuses on collaboration. Unite many partners towards a shared cause.

### ACTION-FOCUSED

Be focused on supporting positive individual and collective action; accelerate what's already happening and not add complexity or extra work.

### SUPPORT LEARNING

Be committed to learning as we go, share lessons to help strengthen approaches (for projects and for the hub). Trial different approaches and show outcomes before scaling. Open communication of challenges and unexpected outcomes.

## 7 Ingredients for governance of the Hub model

There was general agreement on the parts of the hub model including:

- The hub will support a **knowledge and sharing network** that is broad and inclusive (extending beyond Reef Trust Partnership funded projects).
- A small **Steering Group**, representative of the diversity of hub network participants, should provide leadership to shape the design of planning, setting strategic priorities and implementation of hub network, informed by the broader hub network.
- **Projects funded** under the [Reef Trust Partnership](#) will offer opportunities to trial and explore impactful science-based local-restoration approaches and stewardship, apply frameworks for measurement and strengthen models for collaboration. These projects offer an opportunity to implement key priorities, but are just one work stream for the hub and the selection of funded projects sits outside of the role of the Steering Group.
- An 'independent' **Coordinator**, skilled in working with diverse groups, should help establish the hub with advice from the Steering Group and initiate agreed priority work. The Coordinator could also help to support projects funded through the Reef Trust Partnership.
- A **supporting or sponsoring organisation** or group that is seen as neutral should enable collaboration for the hub.

## 8 Hub Timeline

Hub development began in mid-2020:

**JUNE 2020:** Funding for a Hub for the Cairns-Port Douglas region **was announced** by the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, including \$1.7 million in funding towards local-scale coral restoration and stewardship projects, as well as Hub support.

**JULY 2020:** Expressions of Interest (EOIs) for local restoration projects closed. Short-listed EOIs were notified in September and had an opportunity to join a collaborative session to share their project idea and discuss synergies across proposals. Final proposals were then due October – November 2020.

Hub design steps to date (summarised in this paper):

**AUGUST – SEPTEMBER 2020:** Six focus groups were held to explore the idea of forming a collaboration hub that would support local-scale coral restoration and stewardship – and gather views on the Hub's design and development.

**OCTOBER – NOVEMBER 2020:** A draft discussion paper was circulated for further ideas and input.

**DECEMBER 2020:** Final discussion paper shared and published.

From here, the intended Hub design process is to:

**DECEMBER – JANUARY 2020:** Seek nominations for a small Steering Group to provide locally-driven leadership that will shape the design of planning, strategic priorities, and implementation of Hub activities, informed by the broader Hub network. First actions for the Steering Group member would be to:

- Review and endorse the Steering Group Terms of Reference
- Review and provide input on these proposed design steps, including the development of the Hub Coordinator position description and planning workshop(s)/activities.

**BY JANUARY 2021:** Finalise agreements and announce projects that have been selected to proceed as part of the open grant round held in mid-2020. These projects – funded through the Partnership between the Australian Government and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation – will support science-based local-restoration approaches and community stewardship, offer opportunities for sharing and learning to support hub goals, and strengthen models for collaboration.

**FEBRUARY 2021:** Seek a part-time Hub Coordinator to help support the design and collaborative operations of the hub with advice from the Steering Group and input from the broader network.

**MARCH/APRIL 2021:** Run a process to build a common vision or shared goals within the Hub network through a collaborative planning activity (including documenting existing projects, sharing learnings and exploring spatial planning). There are also opportunities to share existing projects and explore connectivity with the Reef Research and Adaption Program through planning activities. This could be led by the Coordinator. Because communication was a high priority raised in the focus groups, this step could also include a process to develop an agreed communication approach for the Hub as a collective. A work plan for FY2021-2022 with key activities can be developed from the workshop.

**Other actions:**

As a follow-up to a direct recommendation from Hub discussions, the project team will compile information (i.e. a spreadsheet) about existing activities, organisations and network initiatives to be a resource for the emerging hub members. This could help build on work underway and clarify linkage points. It could include other related groups/ activities such as COTS control, citizen science monitoring, research, GBRMPA activities, existing networks (such as the Australian Coral Restoration Consortium), current collaboration approaches (such as the Reef Co-Op), and other relevant management work. This can inform the spatial planning and prioritisation activity in early 2021.

## 9 Project support

The Hub is supported through funding from the Partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation. It is enabled by the Partnership's [Community Reef Protection](#) and [Traditional Owner Reef Protection](#) programs, and the [Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program](#). These three program areas will support and work with local partners to design and deliver the Hub.

### Project support team contacts:

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## **Appendix 1: Organisations contributing to the focus group discussions**

We would like to acknowledge the following organisations for committing time to contribute to discussions about Hub design.

AIMS

AMPTO

Biopixel Oceans Foundation

Cairns and Far North Environment Centre

Citizens of the Great Barrier Reef

CSIRO

Dawul Wuru Aboriginal Corporation

Downunder Cruise and Dive

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

Jabalbina Aboriginal Corporation

JCU TropWATER

MARS

Ocean Freedom

Passions of Paradise

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service

Reef Ecologic

Reef Restoration Foundation

Reef Rainforest Research Centre

Southern Cross University

Terrain NRM

The Cairns Institute

The Reef Society

Tourism Tropical North Queensland

University of Technology Sydney

University of Queensland

Wavelength Reef Cruises

Wet Tropics Management Authority

## Appendix 2: Key priorities raised through feedback and follow-ups

Hub design and project discussions revealed a number of shared priorities for the hub to progress, including:

- Designing restoration approaches
- Designing and implementing standardised monitoring methods (ecological, social and cultural) where beneficial and to help tell a collective impact story across work in the region
- Practical environmental data collection to understand drivers of change and inform site stewardship and interventions
- Traditional Owner engagement and partnerships working with science, conservation & tourism partners for shared benefits and impact
- Identifying shared research priorities with the Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program
- Opportunities for meaningful engagement programs that help communicate restoration as a tool for building Reef resilience alongside other actions, and empower community participation in key project activities



### Appendix 3: Visual summary of the discussion groups outcomes

The picture below is a visual summary of the main themes from the discussion groups described in the paper above. It is not intended to be the hub design.

At the **centre** of the hub model is the collaborative reference group and coordinator; linking to the major partners including Traditional Owners, tourism operators, conservation groups and NGOs, and the science community.

In the **middle circle** are the activities the hub partners would focus on: two-way knowledge sharing; capacity building and tools; communication and activity coordination.

The **outer circle** contains the principles of hub operation that guide partner interaction: respect, inclusion, collaboration, action and learning. The four blue **circles on the outside** are the medium to longer-term term goals or aspirations the partners work towards.

