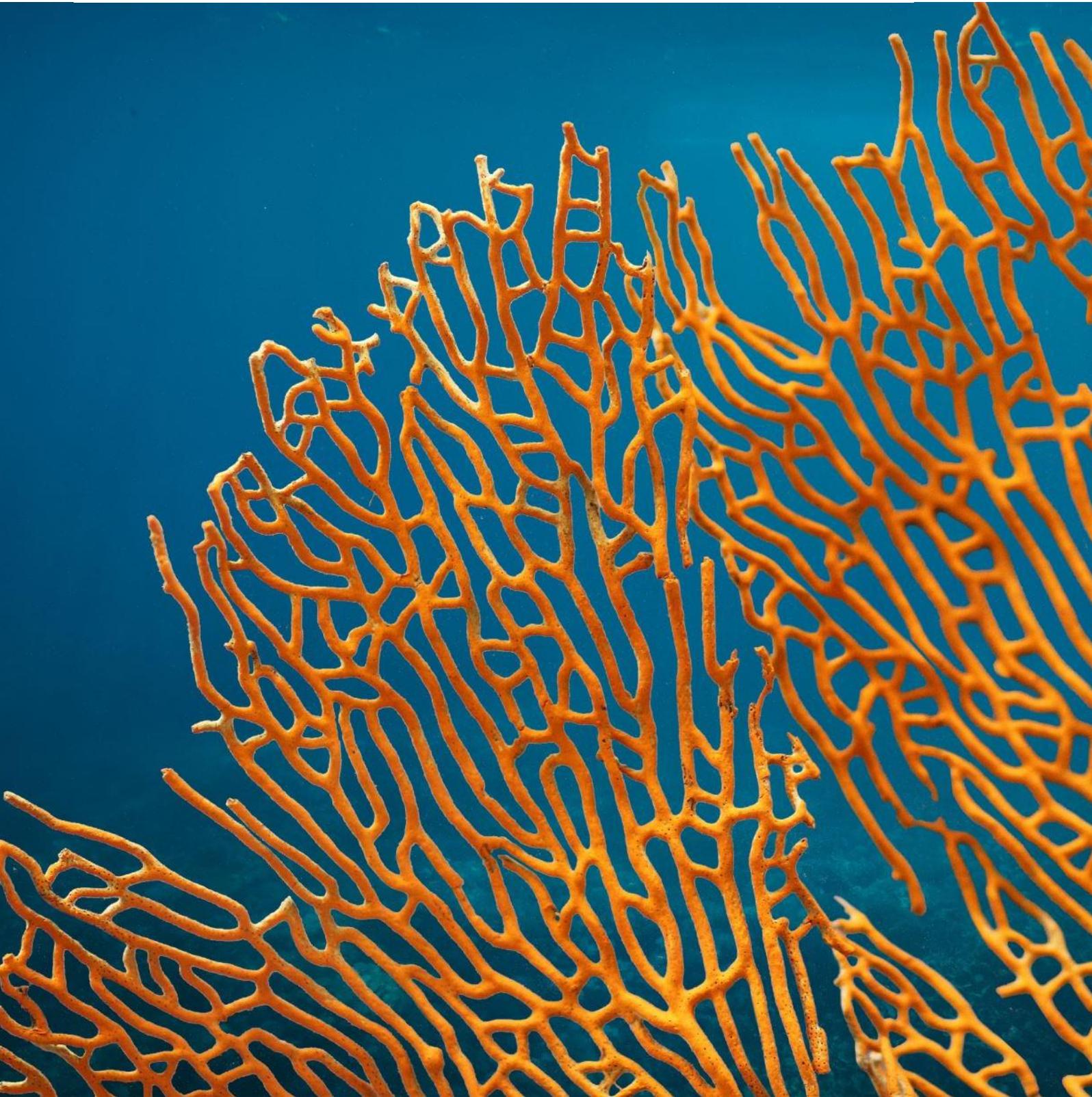


RTP Water Quality Regional Programs: Evaluation of Governance Framework and Management arrangements

Final report



Prepared for the Great Barrier Reef Foundation
by Mosaic Insights

March 2025



Great Barrier
Reef Foundation



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Mosaic Insights recognises and acknowledges the unique relationship and deep connection to Country shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as First Peoples and Traditional Owners of Australia.

We pay our respects to their Cultures, Country and Elders past and present.

Artwork by Melissa Barton. This piece was commissioned by the Alluvium Group, and tells our story of caring for Country, through different forms of waterbodies, from creeklines to coastlines. The artwork depicts people linked by journey lines, sharing stories, understanding and learning to care for country and the waterways within.

This report has been prepared by Mosaic Insights Pty Ltd for the Great Barrier Reef Foundation under the contract titled 'WQ-AD-025 - Mosaic Insights - Social component'.

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Acronyms

Acronym	Full name
DETSI	Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation
DIN	Dissolved inorganic nitrogen
DP	Delivery Provider
FBA	Fitzroy Basin Authority
GBR	Great Barrier Reef
GBRF	Great Barrier Reef Foundation
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NRM	Natural resource management
OGBR/ OGBR&WH	Office of the Great Barrier Reef & World Heritage
RPC	Regional Partnership Coordinator
RPM	Regional Program Manager
RRRC	Reef and Rainforest Research Centre
RTP	Reef Trust Partnership
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
WQ	Water quality



1. Executive summary

This review presents findings from an analysis of interviews with 27 individuals alongside one focus group with four Great Barrier Reef Foundation (GBRF) project managers, all of whom were involved in managing or delivering the Reef Trust Partnership (RTP) Water Quality Regional Programs. Of a total of 31 individuals, 25 were involved in delivering the Regional Programs, five were staff from GBRF and one was a staff from the Queensland Government's Office of the Great Barrier Reef (OGBR) and part of an advisory group to the RTP. Each individual was provided with the opportunity to provide feedback on five aspects related to the unique governance framework and management arrangements of the programs, namely:

- effectiveness and impact
- collaboration
- the role of the Regional Program Manager (RPM) and Regional Partnership Coordinator (RPC)
- skills and capacity
- legacy of the governance framework.

For the purpose of this document, the term "delivery model" will be used to refer to the governance framework and management arrangements of the RTP Regional Programs.

1.1. General findings

The majority of participants expressed positive sentiments about the RTP Water Quality Program's governance and implementation, largely attributing this to the effective management by GBRF. The most significant challenge faced by participants, closely connected to the new governance structure, was the competition pressures between delivery providers¹. However, participants who managed to overcome these pressures reported that the delivery model, with the support of GBRF and RPC/RPM roles, enabled them to develop innovative projects that achieved their contracted targets. The RPC and RPM roles were distinctive components of the governance framework, and most participants found these roles beneficial. Nevertheless, some participants' perceptions of these roles were negatively influenced by administrative overlap and confusion regarding role responsibilities and obligations.

A limited number of participants also mentioned concerns about perceived unaddressed conflicts of interest within the governance framework. These conflicts were largely related to the governance structure, particularly in relation to having organisations (or potential 'competitors') in oversight roles which can create a potential bias.

Beyond these elements, participants found it challenging to isolate influences directly related to the governance framework from other contextual factors. For instance, many challenges mentioned by participants were more closely associated with the specific opportunities and frustrations experienced in different roles and locations, particularly in regions with high staff turnover, limited staff availability, or fewer delivery providers and stakeholders to engage with. Furthermore, there was no clear pattern of different findings across regions. To help address some of the challenges identified, participants

¹ The GBRF regional programs used a competitive approach to selecting delivery providers. Once selected, delivery providers in some of the cane programs were "competing" for the growers they would engage in order to meet their target.

suggested several potential improvements that could be considered for future implementation. Despite the challenges, the majority of participants expressed a preference for retaining most elements of the RTP governance framework and GBRF's management approach, rather than reverting to the previous delivery model whereby project funding was administered directly to and managed by natural resource management (NRM) organisations.

1.2. New elements in the governance and management approach

The majority of participants of the Regional Programs expressed appreciation for new or different aspects in the RTP governance and management approach. The most highly valued positive new element was the flexible approach employed by GBRF during project development and implementation, along with the support and skill sharing facilitated by the various actors within the governance framework. Participants also noted improved planning, task management, and effective oversight as positive changes. However, some participants identified negative differences, such as the introduction of competition and issues with the methodology, pollutant load reductions estimate model, and the GBRF data platform. Additionally, some participants viewed the extra layers of administration and paperwork as drawbacks.

GBRF staff statements about the positives and negatives of the governance framework aligned with those of other participants, identifying enhanced collaboration, increased flexibility and autonomy that allowed for nuances and differences between regions, and increased accountability as key new elements in the model. While GBRF staff did not make any specific statements about negative elements introduced by the governance framework, they acknowledged there were many challenges, particularly in the early phase, in overcoming fears surrounding competition, getting accustomed to the reporting platform and measurement tools, and they recognised the RPM and RPC roles may need to be more clearly defined to ensure the expectations of each role are well understood by all parties in the program. They also acknowledged that the new governance framework represented a change in funding norms (i.e., having contractual water quality targets, steering away from using NRMs to manage the funds unless they won the competitive process on merit, splitting the role of management, coordination and delivery to different entities) and this particularly changed the status quo for the NRM groups, which was initially difficult for the NRMs to accept, and that some regions or NRM personnel were more opposed to the new model than others when the model was first introduced.

1.3. Collaboration

Many participants believed that the governance framework led to improvements in collaboration by maximising synergies between organisations, delivering co-benefits, and making collaboration a requirement of project implementation. However, a significant number of participants mentioned that competition and commercial interests were major barriers to collaboration. Issues such as sharing proprietary and commercial data, gaining access to growers, and being forced to work with less preferred project partners were issues raised as a consequence of competition. Nonetheless, a small number of participants highlighted that these concerns diminished as trust was built and projects progressed and there were benefits to the competition like innovation and increased efficiency. GBRF staff primarily identified positive outcomes of collaboration, including increased accountability, transparency, and shared goals.

1.4. The role of the Regional Project Manager (RPM) and Regional Partnership Coordinator (RPC)

Many participants found the roles of the RPM and RPC beneficial, particularly the synergy between the two roles. However, some participants felt that these roles lacked value or clarity in their responsibilities. Perceptions of the value of these roles were strongly influenced by the specific experiences and personalities of people active in different regions. Overall, many participants recommended retaining these roles in future programs.

1.5. Skills and capacity

Participants reported acquiring new skills and practices throughout the program, particularly in agronomy, technical expertise, software, platform development, project management, and data applications broadly across the different types of projects (e.g., water quality and aquatic ecosystem monitoring, fire and track erosion management). A dominant theme across regions, which although external to the program impacts it profoundly was the shortage of staff, and the challenge of finding qualified personnel to undertake program work in regional Queensland.

1.6. Legacy of the governance framework

When asked about the legacy of the governance framework, participants struggled to separate the model's specific impact from other program characteristics. Suggestions for future programs included maintaining the flexible approach, data focus, and information sharing opportunities. GBRF staff emphasised the importance of bringing in new players, maintaining accountability, and retaining the regional program steering committees and coordinators.

Overall, GBRF staff comments were more consistently positive about the governance framework compared to other participants, although they acknowledged there were significant challenges in implementing the model in the early stages, especially in some regions, and a lot of work went into resolving these issues. They highlighted the model's role in raising delivery standards, increasing accountability, facilitating projects, and upskilling partners. While other participants had mixed experiences and opinions, GBRF staff generally saw the model as an improvement that enhanced collaboration, accountability, capacity building and managed conflict of interest.



2. Background

The Reef Trust Partnership used a novel delivery model for its Water Quality Regional Programs (novel compared to any other investment in Reef water quality previously). For the purpose of this document, the term “delivery model” will be used to refer to the governance framework and management arrangements.

The delivery model was designed to maximise transparency and accountability for regional water quality programs, foster collaboration among regional stakeholders (Delivery Providers (DPs), Traditional Owners, other regional initiatives, etc.), and prevent conflicts of interest. The model promotes the use of separate entities for separate functions to reduce conflicts of interest, while balancing the need to be adaptable to the specific context of each regional program. The approach was expected to better support adaptive management, and the achievement of targeted water quality outcomes. The intention of the delivery model was to build a diverse, yet collaborative delivery network of local players with the capacity and capability to enable water quality improvement activities while meeting the following principles:

1. Applies best practice and does not lead to non-compliance issues (e.g. administration expenditure or financial accountability).
2. Allows GBRF to have visibility of on-ground delivery and project management, while not placing all the workload on GBRF staff.
3. Maximises value by providing a high level of accountability with clear measurable outcomes and performance indicators.
4. Allows for best practice conflict of interest management processes to be embedded, adhered to, and verified.
5. Offers ample opportunities for third parties to engage and compete where appropriate, resulting in higher value for money than previous models where funds were awarded without considering what could be achieved or on merit.
6. Had regional representation and coordination, strategically located within regions and regional organisations.
7. Encouraged and supported third parties to control delivery with a view to achieving a self-sustaining environment in the long-term.

The novel governance framework was also designed to overcome some of the perceived limitations of other water quality program governance arrangements, which included:

- **Accountability and transparency.** Program funders lacked sufficient visibility of what was being delivered within programs, and funding was often bundled together for general ‘delivery’ which resulted in entities cost-shifting funder to subsidise other organisational roles.
- **Conflicts of interest.** Such as where a single entity was responsible for both prioritising between on-ground activities and implementing those activities.
- **Contradicting roles held by the same entity.** For example, a program manager that is to hold delivery providers accountable is also a program coordinator who is supporting and fostering collaboration and engagement.
- **Not having expertise in all the right skills needed to deliver the program.** For example, an organisation that is good at delivering on-ground projects might not be the best at managing a portfolio of projects, or at coordinating partnerships. Or an organisation good at these might not have capacity to provide agricultural extension.

A key aspect of the regional program governance framework was the separation of roles for **program management**, **partnership coordination**, and **project delivery** functions (Table 1 and Figure 1) and it recognises the different and specific services and skills required to effectively deliver each of these roles.

Table 1. Summary of roles and functions of the regional program's governance arrangements

Role	Function
Funder (GBRF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contract and oversee the regional program manager and partnership coordinator Contract and make payments to delivery providers through deeds of grant
Regional Program Manager (RPM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversee the implementation of the projects under the program using best practice management systems, including managing risks, tracking performance, reporting on progress, and ensuring implementation and reporting by delivery providers In some cases, provide technical support to the delivery providers, especially to do with reporting to GBRF Be an interface with GBRF that adds value by having local context and understanding the delivery providers needs and constraints
Regional Partnership Coordinator (RPC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support delivery providers in identifying and connecting with potential partners and other relevant stakeholders, including landholders and Traditional Owner groups Coordinate engagement and alignment between the program and other regional initiatives in order to foster collaboration, deliver co-benefits, maximise synergies and co-investment and minimise duplication and redundancies Establish and coordinate the regional partners forum Play a role in communicating and amplifying the outcomes of the program In some cases, provide technical support to the delivery providers, especially to do with reporting
Delivery Provider (DP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement on-ground water quality improvement projects

Prior to the evaluation, some of the initial goals of the governance framework had been successfully met, including the removal of conflicts of interest, increased accountability, separation of roles, increased visibility of activities on the ground, and opening opportunities for new parties to join the delivery network. However, GBRF wanted to understand if there were negative outcomes of using this governance framework and overall the delivery model of the program (including also management arrangements), and if the goals of supporting adaptive management, supporting achievement of program outcomes, and supporting collaboration and synergies between local players were met. A mixed method evaluation was designed for this purpose (referred to as the 2024 GBRF Social Monitoring and Evaluation Plan). This evaluation of the governance framework focussed on the Regional Program Managers, Regional Partnership Coordinators, and Delivery Providers of six regional programs (Table 2), and a single member from the Working Group (Director Reef Programs, Office of the Great Barrier Reef, Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation, Queensland Government) as the subjects of analysis. In addition, the relevant GBRF program staff were also asked for their perspectives on the successes and challenges of the governance framework.

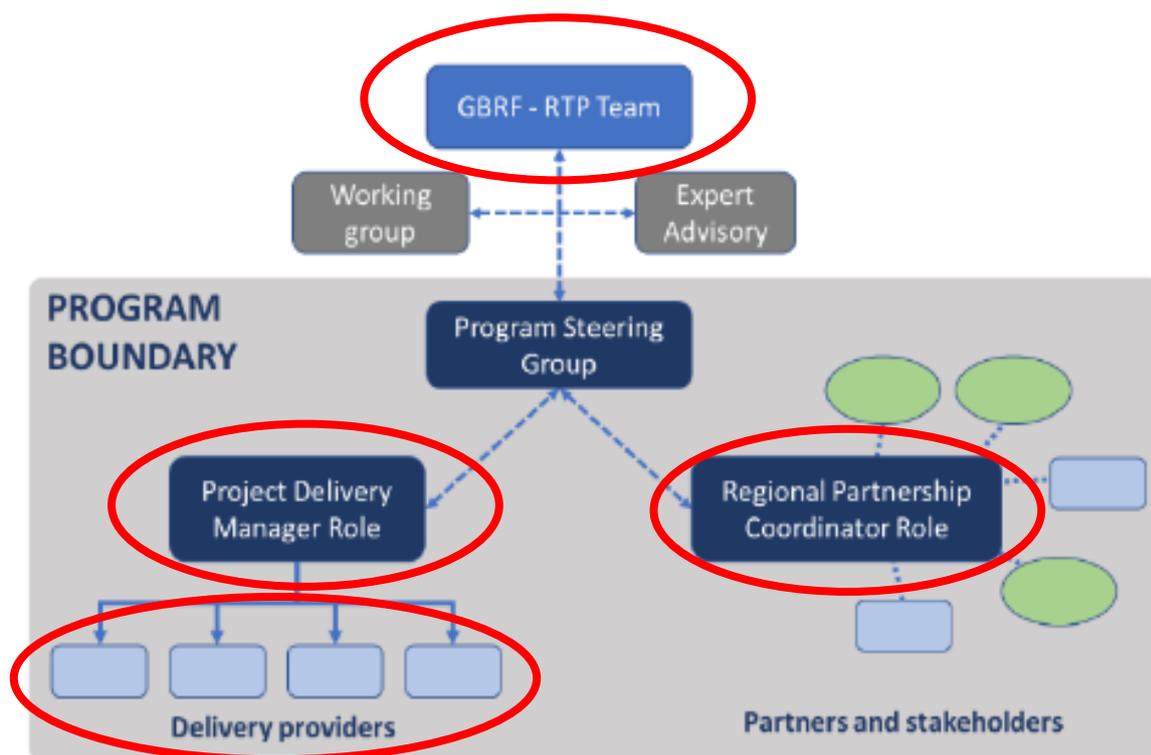


Figure 1. Regional Programs governance framework. In red are the key roles in this evaluation

Table 2. The regional programs utilising the novel delivery model.

Note: DIN - Dissolved inorganic nitrogen; RPM - Regional Program Manager; RPC - Regional Partnership Coordinator

Region	Governance	Stakeholders of focus, program type and pollutant focus	Value, # Projects, # Delivery Providers
Lower Herbert	RPM: None (GBRF)	Sugarcane industry	\$16.2M
	RPC: CANEGROWERS Herbert River	Practice change DIN	5 Projects 4 Delivery providers (HCPSL, Liquaforce, Catchment Solutions, Agro Group)
Lower Burdekin	RPM: NQ Dry Tropics	Sugarcane industry	\$20.4M
	RPC: NQ Dry Tropics	Practice change and landscape restoration (wetlands) Pesticides and DIN	4 Projects 3 Delivery providers (SRA, Farmacist, NQDT)
Mackay Whitsunday	RPM: Reef Catchments initially, Chris Dench currently	Sugarcane industry	\$22.7M
	RPC: Reef Catchments	Practice change, on-farm demonstrations Pesticides and DIN	8 Projects 7 Delivery providers (Reef Catchments, Farmacist, MAPS, Catchment Solutions, Liquaforce, SRA, Canegrowers)

Region	Governance	Stakeholders of focus, program type and pollutant focus	Value, # Projects, # Delivery Providers
Fitzroy	RPM: None (GBRF)	Grazing industry	\$19.2M
	RPC: Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA)	Practice change and landscape restoration	5 Projects
		Fine sediment	4 Delivery providers (FBA, Verterra, Catchment Solutions, Greening Australia)
Tully Johnstone	RPM: Terrain NRM	Sugarcane and Banana industries	\$3M
	RPC: Canegrowers	Practice change, wetlands monitoring, water quality (WQ) monitoring	2 Projects
		DIN	2 Delivery providers (Canegrowers Innisfail, Liquaforce)
Russell Mulgrave	RPM: Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC)	Sugarcane industry	\$3M
	RPC: Canegrowers Cairns	Practice change, WQ monitoring	2 Projects
		DIN	1 Delivery providers (Farmacist)

3. Key Evaluation Questions

The methods used in the evaluation are exploratory in nature, to help understand the impact of the delivery model with particular focus on the government framework. Details of the methods are described further below.

The overarching Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) were:

1. What was the overall **effectiveness** and **impact** of the governance framework? That is, was it successful?
2. To what extent did the governance framework facilitate **collaboration**?
3. To what extent did the delivery model build the **skills and capacity** of those involved (RPM, RPC, DP)?
4. What will be the enduring **legacy** of the delivery model?

To answer these overarching questions, the following sub-questions were used to guide interviews with the relevant participants and GBRF staff.

- How did the delivery governance framework and management arrangements affect each of the partners (delivery providers, regional program managers, regional partnership coordinators, and GBRF)? Of note, comparisons were made with two other investment delivery models:
 - Australian Government model provides funding to NRMs (without a competitive tender process) and NRMs deliver themselves or subcontract local delivery providers.
 - Queensland Government model contracts delivery providers directly but provide no regional management or coordination.
- Did the RPM and RPC feel they could meet the scope of their job description?
- For Delivery Providers, did the delivery model provide value and relevant support and was a useful interface with other parties when it came to operational issues, and links to potential partners?
- What did the RTP delivery model (governance framework and management arrangements) enable or prevent, and was this seen as a positive or negative?
- How effective was the delivery model at fostering an environment of collaboration and cohesion between partners?
- Where there any unexpected impacts, positive and negative, arising from implementing the delivery model?
- Did the participant think it would be a good thing to repeat this delivery model in future investments, and why? If not, why not?

Other issues

For context, issues that have been raised during previous discussions with GBRF in relation to the governance framework include:

- **Collaboration** – some people said the governance framework was fostering collaboration by creating new ways of working between groups, and the model was adapted based on the needs of each region.
- **Competition** – some people said the governance framework fostered competition and this prevented collaboration. GBRF anticipated this would be the case, and the RPC's role was intended to help overcome such competition and foster collaboration once the programs were established.
- **Inefficient** – some people said the governance framework was bureaucratic and “overcooked”, without a need to be.

A notable external factor that will affect the proposed theory of change relates to **workforce factors**. Generally across regional Australia, the agricultural sector is currently subject to skills and workforce shortages and poor worker retention. High staff turnover has had implications for the capacity and capability of the delivery network. It was anticipated that these issues may emerge in the evaluation.

4. Evaluation methods

The regional program managers (RPM) regional program coordinators (RPC), delivery providers (DPs), GBRF project managers and Director Reef Programs (Office of the Great Barrier Reef, Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation, Queensland Government) were the target sample for this evaluation.

The evaluation methods were structured to collect information for each regional program to allow for their uniqueness. The indicators used for evaluating the delivery provider network build upon the Clear Horizon's Water Quality Regional Governance framework report to GBRF (Clear Horizon, 2021).

The methods included interviews with individuals, either separately or in pairs/small groups (27 individuals in total) with RPCs, RPMs, DPs, and Director Reef Programs, plus a single focus group of GBRF program managers (4 individuals). A previous interview conducted by Rachael Eberhard with the GBRF team was also reviewed to fill gaps and provide more context for the GBRF perspectives.

4.1. Delivery provider interviews and GBRF focus group

Online interviews were held with the DPs, RPCs and RPMs for each of the regions (Lower Herbert, Lower Burdekin, Mackay Whitsunday, Fitzroy, Tully Johnstone, and Russell Mulgrave). Interviews were not attended by GBRF staff to ensure participants felt comfortable sharing feedback. All interviews were recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai transcription software. A coding structure was developed based on the Key Evaluation Questions and the transcripts were analysed using thematic coding (Braun and Clarke, 2019). All data was de-identified, and transcripts were assigned ID numbers. The interviews were conducted between December 2023 and May 2024. An interview guide with the interview questions, along with the GBRF focus group questions is provided in Appendix A.

4.2. Review of existing project reporting and data

To help cross-check the findings of the delivery provider focus groups the relevant project reports for each region were reviewed. Relevant project information was extracted on the number of partnerships, number of landholders engaged, approaches to establishing partnerships/collaboration and approaches to engaging landholders as well as any other information relevant to the delivery network reach, impact, capacity, and skills.



5. Findings

The following sections present a summary of findings and indicative quotes related to five elements of the governance framework examined in the interviews and the delivery provider reports:

1. effectiveness and impact
2. collaboration
3. the role of the RPM and RPC
4. skills and capacity
5. governance framework legacy

Each section first presents key findings from participants across the following regions:

- Mackay Whitsunday (n=8)
- Lower Herbert (n=4)
- Lower Burdekin (n=4)
- Fitzroy (n=4)
- Russell Mulgrave (n=3)
- Tully and Johnstone (n=2)

There was also one interview with the Director of Reef Programs, Office of the Great Barrier Reef, Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation, Queensland Government. Within each section a comparison of responses from GBRF program managers (n=5) is also presented. Illustrative quotes from some interviewees are provided in yellow text boxes to provide further context.

5.1. Overall satisfaction with the governance framework

The RPMs and RPCs reported their satisfaction and feedback on the governance framework in their final reports (Table 3). Overall, most RPMs and RPCs were satisfied with the model, however further improvements could be made. The support and communication with the GBRF team was considered to be excellent in most of the reports. A common issue mentioned by RPMs and RPCs was the repetition of reporting requirements, which could be streamlined in the future.

Table 3. General feedback from RPMs and RPCs on the governance framework

RPM/RPC report	Score	Feedback
Lower Burdekin RPM/RPC Final Report	Did not answer	Did not answer None. Comments related to issues with the GBRF database.
Lower Herbert RPC Final Report	Satisfied	Model worked well overall, but connecting with external DPs was challenging; need local contacts to help collaboration. Communication and reporting with GBRF was effective, aiding in clear planning and milestone achievement. While flexibility in work plans was beneficial, it is essential to hire regional coordinators with the right background, skills and mindset to ensure success. GBRF consistently provided timely assistance with queries, fostered a positive and productive relationship with the RPC. Their support and trust in exploring unique ideas in the region was greatly appreciated.
Mulgrave Russell RPM Final Report	Satisfied	While the program is progressing well, it needs better communication and reporting practices, such as consolidating DP reports into one to avoid delays, and better communication between RPMs and DPs. GBRF staff are responsive, and the working relationship is positive. Suggest that payments are distributed by PMs, and PM involvement is needed in contracting decisions. RPC communication to growers was great. The TAG was a useful resource. Increased investment is needed for a comprehensive catchment approach. Additionally, funds should be allocated to collaborate with Traditional Owners on projects they prioritise on native title land, to foster knowledge sharing and sustainable environmental and social benefits.
Mulgrave Russell RPC Final Report	Satisfied	Model worked well and the roles, responsibilities, and deliverables were clear. RPM and RPC roles complemented each other well. Two DPs had different types of projects, which helped clarify the outcomes of each project. Reporting could be improved by coordinating input from the RPC and DPs to reduce repetition. Steering Committee worked well, and regular communication was appreciated. Additional time and resources are needed for the RPC, as this was underestimated initially. Future funding will need to consider the extent of work needed for the level of engagement required to coordinate all stakeholders.
Mackay Whitsunday RPC Final Report	Very satisfied	Model fostered local collaborations, synergies, and efficiencies. It supported transparency and accountability and generated increased ownership of deliverables. Challenges were able to be addressed early. Guidance and support from GBRF and the RPM was appreciated. The program has led to many successes and a lot of learning.
Fitzroy RPC Final Report	Satisfied	The model ensured a regional focus. Good support was provided by GBRF, and the strong relationship between GBRF and FBA contributed to the successful delivery of the program.

RPM/RPC report	Score	Feedback
Tully Johnstone RPM/RPC Final Report	Neutral	GBRF support was very positive. The usefulness of reports and products was not clear, and there was some concern about the value of the planning documents and there appeared to be a disconnect between the KEQs and the progress and final reports. The reports were not made public, which raised a concern about transparency. The governance structure was viewed negatively, as it created challenges in coordinating responses to contractual issues, repetition of reporting and information sharing, and reporting complications as different types of information (e.g., progress and financial reports) needed to be sent to different organisations. They also noted that the procurement process led to some tension among DPs and complicated partnership coordination.

5.2. Effectiveness and Impact

Relevant KEQ

- How has the delivery governance arrangements affected each of the partners (delivery providers, regional program managers, regional partnership coordinators, and GBRF), compared to two other investment delivery models:
 - Australian Government provides funding to NRMs (without a competitive tender process) and NRMs deliver themselves or subcontract local delivery providers.
 - Queensland Government contracts delivery providers directly but provide no regional management or coordination.
- What did the RTP delivery model enable or prevent, and whether this was seen as a positive or negative.
- Where there were any unexpected impacts, positive and negative, arising from implementing this delivery model.

5.2.1. What did respondents identify as new or different about the governance framework established by the RTP Water Quality Program?

Four of the 26 participants stated that they were **too new or had not had experience** of the previous governance framework and were therefore unable to comment on what was new or different. Of the remaining 22 participants, 16 **agreed** that they found new or different elements in the RTP Water Quality Program. One participant said **they did not** find any new or different elements in the governance framework, while five were **unsure or unable to answer** (Figure 2).

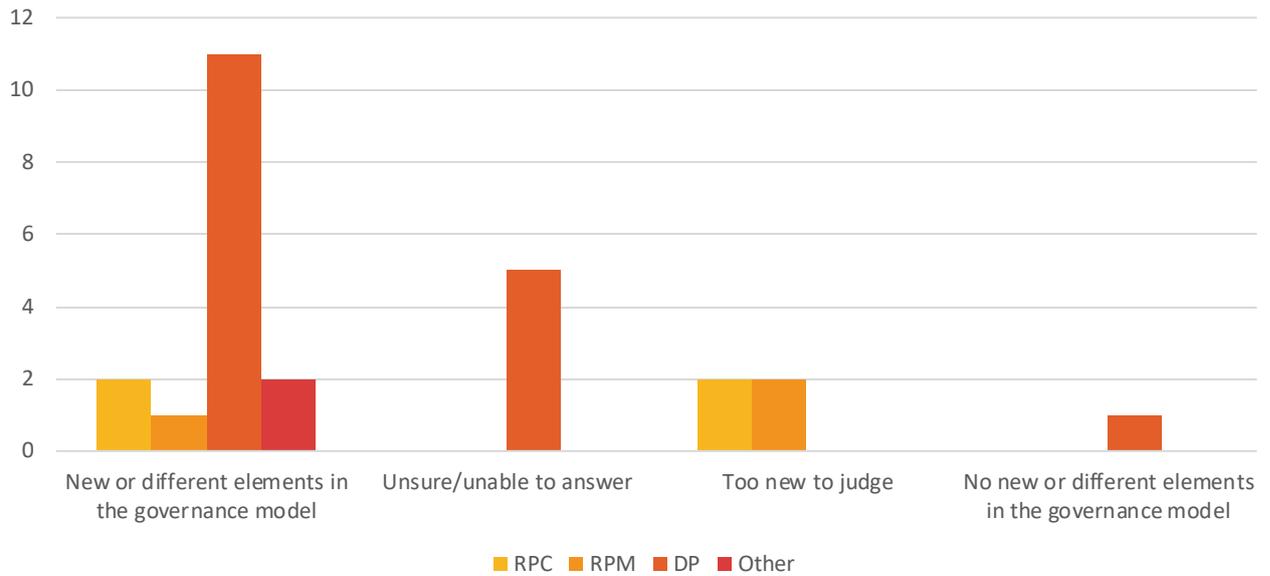


Figure 2: Participant responses regarding whether they identified new or different elements of the governance framework

5.2.1.1. Positive differences resulting from the delivery model (governance framework and management arrangements)

In general, participants found it difficult to tease apart the influence of the delivery model specifically on their organisation's activities, however, throughout the course of their interviews all 26 participants highlighted elements of the model which were new or different in a positive way (Figure 3).

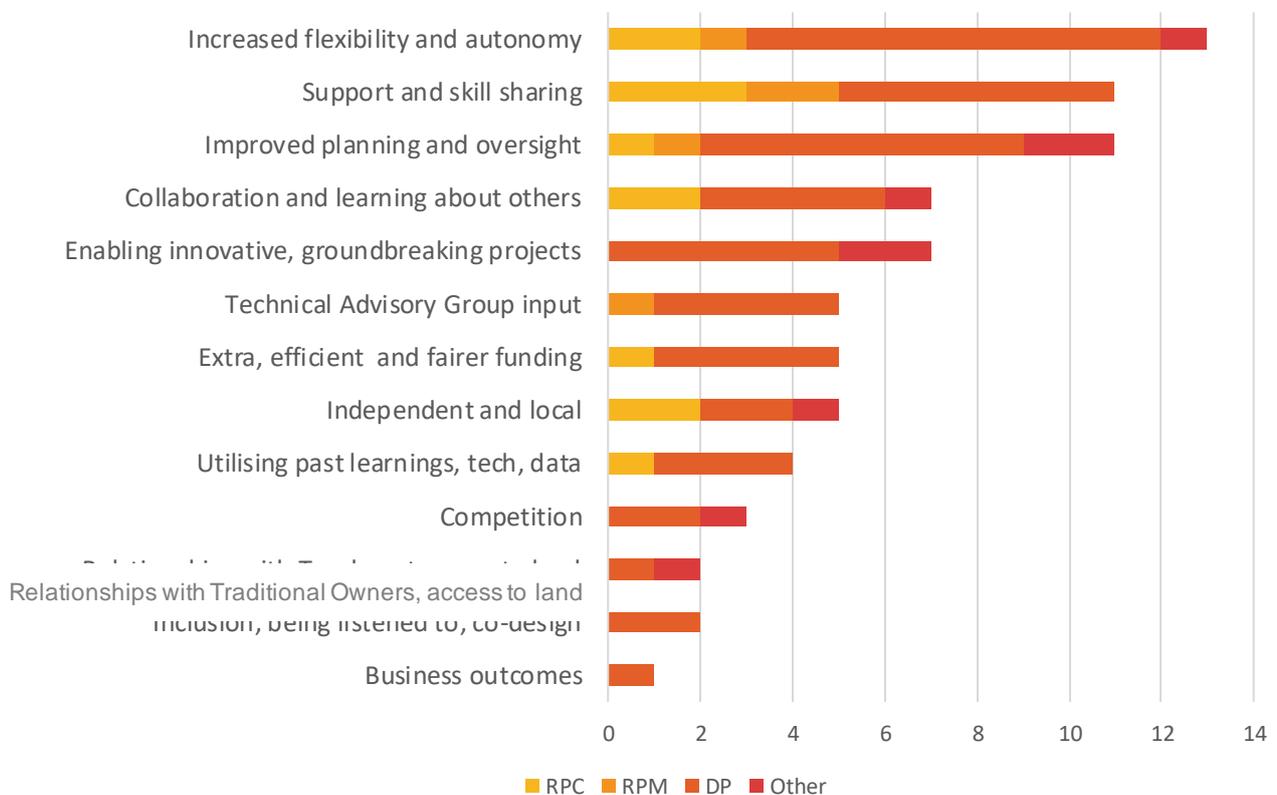


Figure 3: Summary of participant responses regarding positive new elements in the delivery model

Increased flexibility and autonomy

The most commonly mentioned positive difference was the **flexible approach** applied by GBRF during project development stage and throughout each project and programs' lifespan (n=13). These responses appeared to be primarily influenced by GBRF's approach to project oversight, which participants were almost entirely positive about:

'They gave us the flexibility to move if they see that there's value in here and that there's less value in there. You've all got great ideas when you put [them] in the project at the beginning of the four years, but there has to be that flexibility. We didn't use a lot of flexibility but it was good when we needed it' (ID7, DP, Industry).²

Many DPs appreciated how GBRF just *'let them get on and do it'* (ID5, DP, Industry), and that they *'weren't micromanaged'* (ID7, DP, Industry). Participants also valued the flexibility given by GBRF to adjust programs if more benefit was made possible by different approaches. In addition, one RPC noted that GBRF facilitated obtaining insights from growers to then develop innovative programs, as well as adapt and improve, saying *'the biggest advantage of this program [is that] we've been able to really tailor it to the needs of what we're hearing in the feedback and our own learnings ... we can see this is something that's really been in demand and we can pivot to that. And then I think we see great success'* (ID18, RPC, NRM).

The ubiquitous positivity about GBRF's approach appeared to be strongly intertwined with many of the comments about what was new or different about the program. For example, one participant noted that *'the program was managed by really competent people, and I think that makes a difference. They are high level competent, clever, hardworking people'* (ID12, DP, Industry). This competency appeared to substantially help ensure that the new governance framework was given its best opportunity to succeed.

'They had their own networks, their own experience, their own information and opportunities ... that then enabled them to do things differently to government ... giving a bit more freedom to move.'
(ID20, Other)

Support and skill sharing

The second most commonly identified new or different element of the program was the **support and skill sharing** that the model and the GBRF approach provided (n=11). Participants mentioned many examples of support they enjoyed:

- Project managers provided support to a delivery provider to **format a newsletter** and **assist with events**: *'These [annual water quality forums] were so good. They were well organised and attended and facilitated.'* (ID31, DP, Industry)
- Multiple organisations noted the benefit of having someone to ask about **queries around reporting** and other **general guidance**: *'having those other guys there was for me pretty crucial ...[they] gave me feedback on those and made sure that I've included the stuff that I should have included.'* (ID10, DP, Industry)
- Facilitation of collaboration by **scheduling meetings** and being **locally based**: *'Our local delivery coordinator here was a great benefit ...[they] would literally be 20 minutes away.... [also], the*

² Interviewee codes are used to provide anonymity and, for context, the role(s) of the interviewee, and the type of organisation they belong to (e.g., natural resource management (NRM) organisation, industry, etc.). In some cases, multiple roles were held by one person and are indicated in the coding (e.g., DP+RPM).

fact that [they] forced monthly meetings where all the project people got together they're sitting right next to me, and you got it done. So that was great.' (ID16, DP, Industry)

- Enabling others to **step in to help fill roles** if circumstances required: *'If one person falls off and isn't able to complete that role, then there's other people to step in. So that was really helpful.'* (ID17, RPM, NRM).

Another element highlighted by participants, particularly those who began their roles mid-program, was the **personal support** available through the different roles within the governance framework:

'Every time I felt I was out of my depth, or I had concerns or there was an issue, I always could go back to the program manager and ask her questions. And if she didn't know, then she passed me on, for example, to [another individual] to give me more training. So, the support for me, it was second to none. And for them to trust a newcomer like me as well and give me the freedom to make it my own - that was quite helpful for me personally.' (ID4, RPC, Industry)

Improved planning and oversight

Eleven participants also noted a difference in how the model may have assisted in **improved planning, management of tasks and effective oversight** (n=11). This encompassed elements such as good project planning, providing better oversight, and ensuring task requirements were clear and understandable. It also included the introduction of targets in project outcomes. Participants who felt these changes were positive often linked this back to an improvement in overall program oversight: *'There's a lot more line of sight between GBRF and what's happening on the ground throughout the project, whereas previously, it might have just been six monthly reports back to funders. [There was] more interaction throughout those reporting periods.'* (ID6, RPM, NRM). One individual, speaking about their RPC role, described this as a significant shift in accountability:

'What I've loved about the model and what I think has resulted in some monumental or significant shifts is the accountability to deliver the outcomes. The way they structured the governance, I think it had a stronger focus on accountability of delivery, not only for us as an organisation, but then also delivery partners. So, our role, how we work with other delivery partners, and then the nature of having steering committees, and how all that functioned and worked, reaffirmed and held the collective accountable for delivering the outcomes. And I thought that was a really positive thing.' (ID15, RPM, RPC and DP, NRM)

Some DPs in particular appreciated strict reporting timeframes. *"It forced you to sit down and review your own project biannually, which was fantastic.'* (ID16, DP, Industry). Another said *'the one thing that they did that was a massive change was contracts were linked to targets. That's essential. It's an absolute must.'* (ID31, DP, Industry).

Other positive new elements

Ten other new or different positive elements of the delivery model were mentioned by participants. Seven participants believed that the model allowed for **better brainstorming of novel approaches and groundbreaking projects**, as well as the requirement for **collaboration** (see collaboration Section 5.2 below for more detail). Five participants appreciated the **extra funding** that was available and the expertise of the **Technical Advisory Group**. Five others appreciated the **independence** of GBRF, local connections, and lack of government or NRM participation in the model.

'[In the past] when you say this funding has come direct from government, and we report to the government, it's like 'nup, I'm out, I don't want to deal with that'. (ID21, DP, Industry)

Others noted how the model enabled **building on past learnings, as well as existing technology and data tools** (n=4). Others noted improved relationships or outreach to **Traditional Owners** (n=3) and the benefits of **increased competition** (n=2), as well as how the model ensured participants were **included and listened to** (n=2) and boosted their own **business operations and reputation** (n=1).

I think the competition is healthy...in the previous models, there was a real risk that you would just get business as usual. You just get the same project concepts regurgitated. It's the same people. It's the same regional body, the same regional body's staff, the same industry staff. So, I think the main benefit [is that] you get new people with fresh ideas, wanting to compete in the same space. [People] have to up their game, they either have to be more efficient, have more efficient processes to be competitive, or they have to actually start incorporating some of the new ideas ... I think it would have been a big shake up for anybody who wasn't in the habit of competing'. (ID12, DP, Industry)

Great Barrier Reef Foundation reflections on positive new elements

GBRF staff noted three overall categories of improvements that the new model enabled (Figure 4). These also mirrored feedback from other participants described above, as the three key themes of collaboration, flexibility, and accountability were among the top four improvements noted by general program participants as well.



Figure 4: Summary of positive new elements identified by GBRF staff

The most prominent theme was the **enhanced collaboration** among various stakeholders. As one GBRF project manager noted, the model forced people to collaborate, which - once some tensions were overcome - were believed to have resulted in more positive relationships and increased openness between stakeholders.

'Because of the competitive nature of the procurement for projects, we attracted a lot of new players into the tent. And so there were a few new firms that had been not directly involved in doing the reef work, but that during the course of our program became involved.' (GBRF project manager)

GBRF staff also maintained that the regional program approach allowed for cross-pollination of ideas and sharing of best practices across regions. This was illustrated with examples of opportunities for shared learning that were provided, as well as the development of new products such as pesticide fact sheets. New collaborations also facilitated increased grower uptake in programs, and increased opportunities for stakeholders to join projects for the first time.

Another significant theme was the **increased flexibility and autonomy** granted to regional roles. RPMs and RPCs were given the freedom to adapt their approach to the specific needs of their region, which some GBRF staff felt led to cultural change and more constructive feedback. This flexibility also allowed projects to change course when necessary, such as in the Fitzroy region, where a gully-focused project successfully transitioned to a broad-scale grazing land management project, resulting in the

development of a new method for reef credits: 'Which was a huge outcome, a huge change'. (GBRF project manager)

The third theme identified by GBRF staff related to the positive impact of **increased accountability and oversight**. In one example provided by GBRF staff, the management arrangements allowed payment to

'When the NRMs have a project delivery role, as well as a planning and oversight role, there's a real conflict there. And they're not used to being called out on that, and they don't like it. We were trying to get some information out of them to share with the other project teams - and that information was paid for by state government - and they would not share it. And they took a really hard, hard line From a program governance point of view, having the GBRF between the money and the providers I think has been a really important and quite a valuable thing to have, which is a quite different arrangement to the previous Reef Trust programs.' (GBRF project manager).

be withheld from a project partner due to their poor performance. GBRF staff said that their role, in managing the funding source, was crucial in providing a consistent approach across the state, as well as the ability to hold groups accountable that had never been held accountable before. While this generated some negative pushback and resistance initially, particularly from NRM groups, one GBRF participant noted that *'the biggest change this delivery model has caused is accountability. This is a contrast to previous delivery models (where NRMs delivered) where the minimum effort was put in. With our new model people have to show that they are doing the work and doing it well.'* (GBRF participant).

5.2.1.2. Negative differences resulting from the delivery model (governance framework and management arrangements)

Twenty four of the twenty six participants also identified new or different elements of the delivery model that they felt were negative (Figure 5).

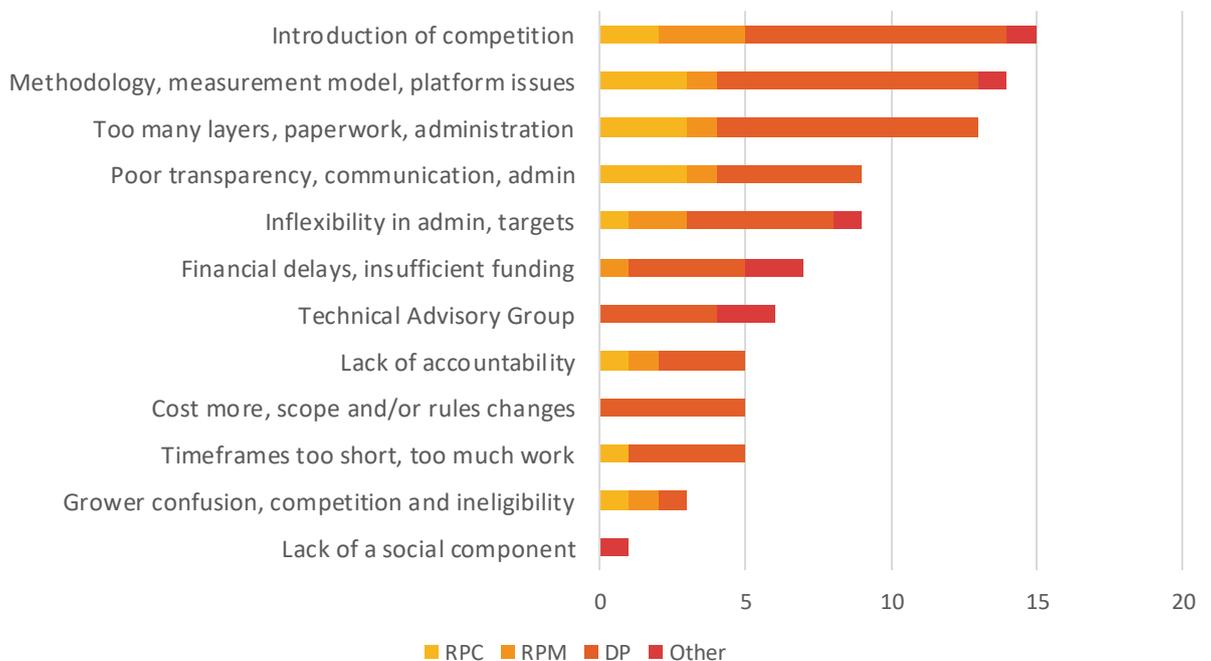


Figure 5: Summary of responses by participants listing negative differences

Introduction of competition

The most prominent of negative new element mentioned by participants was the **introduction of competition** into the project procurement and implementation phases (n=15). Comments in this theme included competition for the grants, as well as growers, difficulties in accessing information on growers, and attribution of results to the project partner.

'The one thing that the GBRF and the Feds just don't seem to have understood is that most organisations that are really reticent to share their information, because like it or not, you are in competition with these people to secure future funding. So, you can't sort of give away too many of your ideas and your thoughts, and this is how we operate'. (ID5, DP, Industry)

Competitive pressures appeared to strongly influence project collaboration outcomes, particularly in the early stages of project implementation. For example, one RPM noted that some DPs did not invite other DPs to their events because *'they're just going to take our knowledge - which we're trying to provide for the greater good - and take it and use it for commercial gain.'* (ID17, RPM, NRM). One participant described the situation as a 'forced marriage', noting that neither party in their projects wanted to share their intellectual property with the other.

However, it is important to note that not all participants highlighted this as a problem, with two participants noting that competition also can foster innovation. Balancing these two perspectives were some participants who identified the need for a reality check on whether competition is necessarily beneficial, and ensure systems are in place to manage it.

We should be crystal clear on what collaboration is and what the benefit of it is for what outcome. I think it's naive to think that everybody will [be], sunshine and rainbows, and we'll all just work together because it's the right thing to do when there's all competing interests. There's a reality of competing interests. So how do you navigate that in a way to kind of get the right outcomes?' (ID15, RPM, RPC and DP, NRM)

Methodology, measurement model, platform issues

The second most mentioned new or different element in the delivery model that was perceived as a negative change was the **measurement methods, most particularly the Paddock to Reef Projector Tool** used to indicate water quality benefits of improvement projects (n=14). Numerous issues were mentioned, including the practical difficulty in attributing savings to delivery partners working on the same sites as well as the perceived lack of a clear methodological understanding of the measurement approach from the beginning.

"The only issue - and it's a pretty big one - was designing a program without understanding exactly what the methodology is. We designed the program with an expectation of what the Projector tool will deliver. Then, looking at the properties that we have on ground, it wasn't achievable. [We had to do] double the number of sites, which completely blew up the budget. It was basically impossible to do.' (ID3, DP, NRM)

Changes and updates to the Projector Tool also caused a substantial degree of frustration for some participants. This frustrating resulted from tasks such as needing to double enter data, as well as deal with updates and changes that dramatically altered projected savings.

"If there's an update, or some something happens to us, it throws everyone out. Then you're down by your numbers. And then you have to then go back to them and explain that to

[landholders]. They don't understand that. They don't want to get involved in all that political stuff.' (ID4, RPC, Industry).

Participants also noted that there are many inputs that were not assessed, and that it was challenging to get farmers to use new platforms. They also highlighted perceived inconsistencies between Projector outputs and GBRF dashboard reporting. Some participants acknowledged that this issue was largely outside of GBRF's ability to resolve and was not directly related to governance. However, it did affect some DPs in the extent to which they were able to deliver the project outputs they had initially believed to be feasible:

'We signed up for a big target. And there's been a lot of water under the bridge since then. There's been massive changes along the way with Projector that had some big contractual issues. [In our sector] overnight, every project was devalued by 50%. Recently, all the grazing land management projects were essentially devalued by 50%, and there's another 50% coming. This is supposed to be world leading science - and I'm not blaming GBRF, or the governance structure - you're trying to build a program around that ...when you've got performance-based contracting, it just creates a lot of hurt, a lot of anxiety. So upfront, I agree with it, in terms of set a target, have some contracted milestones to get you to that target, and then play nice.' (ID14, DP, NRM)

Too many layers, paperwork, administration

The third most common negative new element was the **additional layers and associated admin and paperwork** (n=13). For some participants this related to extra meetings or admin requirements, however this was often quite specific to the particular staff who interacted in different roles across particular regions:

'He wanted to have a fortnightly call with me. I think originally, it was weekly, and then I managed to negotiate a fortnightly call. And my team refused to join, because it was such a waste of their time. I would try to make it as short as possible, because he was lost in the minutiae of stuff that is just not relevant, we just didn't need it. I found myself looking for ways to cancel those calls, but I didn't want to be disrespectful to him to kind of do his job. It's not efficient.' (ID2, DP, Industry)

Others found the reporting requirements to be onerous or confusing. It is important to contrast this with the eleven participants praised the admin requirements such as six monthly reporting, while acknowledging that this was not universally enjoyed across all regions:

'Because you've got those different levels, it can seem like everyone's doing a report on a report, so to speak. Instead, you could have done a collaborative feed-in, or additions to a management report or something like that to get everyone on the same page maybe that doesn't really work in the GBRF hierarchy structure, but I just feel that would streamline some of the reporting bits and pieces from delivery provider, us, coordinator, manager, and then all going through to GBRF.' (ID32, RPC, Industry)

Similarly, while 13 participants praised the flexible management approach, this again was not universally experienced, with some participants arguing that *'OMG there's GBRF, there's the TAG, there's the regional coordinators... a lot of it looks good on paper, but it was hopeless. It just didn't work.'* (ID24, DP, Industry). One RPM noted that DPs reporting to both the RPC and GBRF *'multiplies the amount of meetings and communications I have to have'* (ID17, RPM, NRM), while another DP reflected

that 'milestone reporting needs to be streamlined a little bit... when projects end up back to back to back it makes it really difficult to get any work done.' (ID11, DP, Industry).

Challenges in identifying positive and negative differences in the delivery model

As mentioned above, some of the negative differences were the same as those elements identified as positive by other participants. These conflicts are demonstrated below (Table 4).

Table 4. Examples of conflicting perceptions of elements of the delivery model

Model element	Positive perceptions	Negative perceptions
Flexibility and autonomy	<i>They were more nimble, they don't have all the bureaucratic hoops and hurdles that they have to jump through. They're not ruled by these ridiculous procurement processes and still had all the relevant probity oversight (ID27, DP, Industry)</i>	<i>It put some restrictions on the way that we could operate [regarding] targets and budgets being set, and [we did not have] control of the whole program to move stuff around. (ID19, RPC, NRM)</i>
Technical Advisory Group (TAG)	<i>The TAG was super important ... to actually make sure that whatever they were doing was going to meet a standard....It did show up that different projects were taking different approaches and some of those approaches probably weren't very good. (ID11, DP, Industry)</i>	<i>The worst part of it is the TAG review.... there's no structure to it.... It went backwards and forwards for ages...It doesn't matter your skills, your level of expertise, or any anything like that. This is like, well, you're not me, so you're wrong." (ID31, DP, Industry)</i>
Funding arrangements	<i>In some instances, I think the governance structure ensured that the right decisions got made at the time about which projects got funded. (ID14, DP, NRM)</i>	<i>A lot of all of delivery providers were already kind of contracted and hence there was no opportunity to manoeuvre. So financially, there was nothing left, everything had gone already. (ID1, RPM, Other)</i>

Great Barrier Reef Foundation reflections on negative new elements

Although GBRF staff did not provide specific statements about negative elements that were introduced as a result of the governance framework, they did highlight the challenges of overcoming fears around competition, particularly in the first stage of the program rollout, as well as acknowledging that developing more precise role descriptions for RPMs and RPCs would have enabled clarity around the expectations of actions and outcomes. They recognised the new model was not easy for some NRM groups to adjust to. The comments by GBRF staff reflected the inevitable learnings acquired through designing and implementing a new way of funding programs:

'There has been a lot of learning with the introduction of the governance framework - in hindsight the criteria would be very, very different because there was a lot of faith in the vision

and the Foundation, [when in fact we were] not realising all the stigma and narrow mindedness that's actually out there.' (GBRF project manager)

5.2.2. Influence of the governance framework on the way organisations operate with regard to Reef Water Quality Projects

Q: Did the way the program was delivered and managed in your region influence the way you/your organisation operated with regard to Reef Water Quality projects and activities?

Ten participants said that the model influenced the way their organisations operated with regard to Reef water quality projects, while six said it did not. Six participants did not answer the question directly (Figure 6).

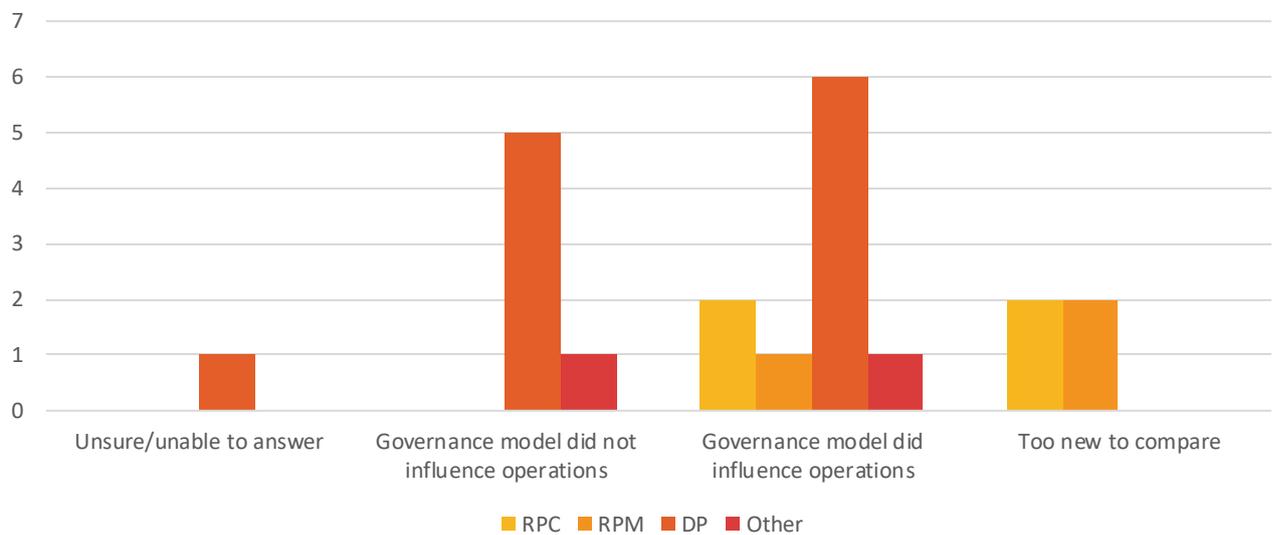


Figure 6: Participant responses regarding whether the governance framework influenced organisational operations

5.2.2.1. Positive influences on organisational operations with regard to water quality projects

Ten participants said that they believed that the governance structure influenced their organisational operations. Of these, seven said it had provided a positive influence. These positive influences were linked to specific components such as the **setting and tracking of targets** for individual DPs as well as the provision of direct contracts with the funders. Two DPs noted that the **support and communication** between different levels across the governance framework helped their organisations by being able to get assistance from both RPMs and RPCs, as well as having greater knowledge about what other projects were undertaking and how they were addressing challenges. This information then flowed into more effective and efficient organisational operations. Another participant noted that the collaborative and local elements of the model were critical positive influences on their organisational operations:

'Obviously, projects are only funded for a certain amount of time. If you have that collaboration and people within the area, you can get the ball rolling a lot quicker than say, if you had some sort of funding provider who's more removed from the area, or just a delivery provider within an

area. I think having those local relationships helps [with] collaborating a bit more. Yes, I think it's a good model'. (ID32, RPC, Industry)

One participant believed that the governance framework was directly linked to their organisational **improvements in recording and quantifying the actual water quality improvements** from their technology, as it provided the opportunity for them to calculate and quantify those outcomes. Another participant believed the model fostered capacity building across their organisation:

'There was clarity around the outcomes, and the expectations ...there's a balance point between here about making it regionally appropriate, but there was a level of structure and accountability to what success looks like. ... [There was also] the identification of where there are gaps in skills and capacity ... [and questions around] how we then start to resource and be more strategic about how we build those things, [rather than] being a bit more reactionary [where we just] pull lever A and B, and we'll get outcome C. My experience has been that it's given us a greater sense of the strategic requirements to deliver lasting sediment reductions'. (ID15, RPM, RPC and DP, NRM)

5.2.2.2. Negative influences on organisational operations with regard to water quality projects

One participant noted both positive and negative influences on their organisational operations, while four said it was an overall negative influence. The negative aspects were all linked to **perceived increased reporting obligations and requirements to go through the regional manager**. *'We've got all this [data and information] that has to be given to the investor - that's fine. But then you've got the middleman who wants to look good for the investor and they have to change things up a bit. It was the same information that is repackaged to look relevant. It was already challenging with the amount of surveys, databases, screens, dashboards... all this stuff is already challenging enough.'* (ID7, DP, Industry).

Two participants also perceived a degree of inflexibility around the setting of targets and cost effectiveness needs underpinning them, which flowed on to *'restrictions on the way that we could operate with targets and budgets being set, and then not having control of the whole program to move stuff around.'* (ID19, RPC, NRM).

5.2.2.3. No influence on organisational operations with regard to water quality projects

Five DPs said that the governance framework **did not influence** the way their organisation operated with regard to Reef water quality projects. They noted that the model may have resulted in additional interactions with various collaborators and partners, however *'it's pretty similar to what we do every day'* (ID3, DP, NRM). Another participant highlighted how their specific role required *'writing good projects,'* and that this governance framework didn't change that goal at all (ID12, DP, Industry). Others noted that they simply saw the model as just one other way of delivering projects.

'[We have] to be on top of everything that's going on in industry anyway. And with the water quality Reef regulations are a big part of that, so we are all over that anyway. It was an easy collaboration with GBRF and us, because we're in that zone already.' (ID23, DP, Industry)

5.2.3. Did these changes represent an improvement?

Participants were asked to summarise their reflections on what new elements were introduced in the governance framework and consider whether these reflected an overall improvement in the way regional water quality programs are run. Despite the many comments summarised in the sections above regarding positive and negative new elements, it was often difficult for participants to state with absolute certainty whether the governance framework was an overall improvement. This appeared to reflect the extremely diverse experiences of individuals in the program across different regions, roles, and organisations. Their overall evaluation of the governance framework often appeared to be influenced more by their organisational roles, the regions in which they operated, and their historical connections and collaborations with other organisations than the overall governance framework per se.

Despite this difficulty, six participants conclusively stated that the model was an improvement. Two participants said it was not an improvement, three said it was neither, four participants said they were too new to have an opinion, and the remaining 11 participants were unable to state a clear opinion (Figure 7).

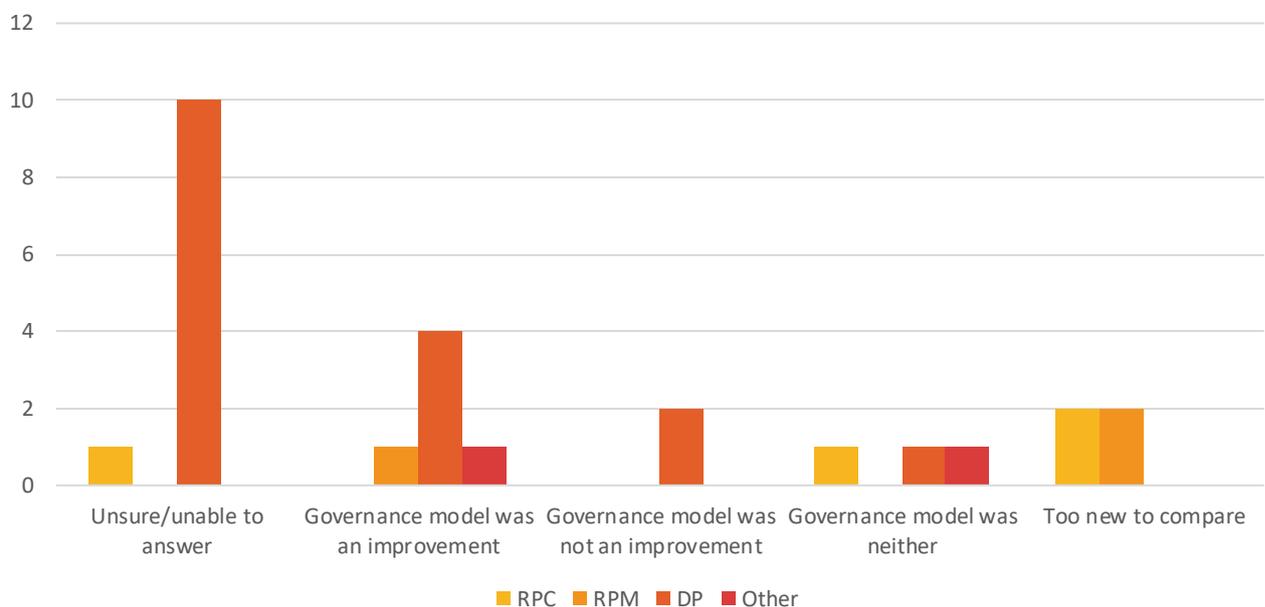


Figure 7: Participant responses regarding whether the governance framework was an overall improvement or not

5.2.3.1. Governance framework was an improvement

Most responses stating that the model was an overall improvement, which came primarily from the delivery partners and industry, were simple statements of fact:

- *'I think it represents an improvement. I think the competition is healthy.'* (ID12, DP, Industry)
- *'I think the governance model has been really effective'.* (ID6, RPM, NRM)
- *'I think the governance model was an improvement in some respects'.* (ID20, other)
- *'I personally think that it was an improvement'.* (ID15, DP, Industry)
- *'It has [been an improvement].'* (ID33, DP, Industry)
- *'It has [been an improvement].'* (ID31, DP, Industry)

One participant elaborated further, stating *'I think I think there's a whole bunch of stuff that came out of that program that wouldn't have. [It] would never have come to light had it not been done by an organisation that wasn't being held at the behest of these hard and fast, very strict bang for buck deliverables'.* (ID20, other).

5.2.3.2. Governance framework was not an improvement

Only two participants stated that they felt the governance framework was definitely not an improvement. One made this assessment due to their disagreements with local subcontracted representatives, while the other felt that competition and collaboration negatively affected their programs:

'I don't think it worked well. I don't think it achieved the synergies that we're looking for. It wasn't all one big happy family while we're working together regionally to deliver on outcomes. I think that having the hard targets attached to all of the delivery providers was not conducive to that happening.' (ID26, DP, NRM)

5.2.3.3. Great Barrier Reef Foundation reflections

As noted above, GBRF staff felt that, overall, the new elements introduced in the governance framework were positive. Their comments reflected a perception that the framework was a definite improvement on the way funding has been delivered in the past, increasing transparency, accountability, and adaptability to respond to regional needs.

5.2.4. Single biggest change seen as a result of how this program was delivered

Participants were asked to reflect on what they see as the single biggest change for landholders, DPs and the Reef/water quality. Their responses appeared to be strongly connected to the particular roles they played within the program structures, and their own experiences with different stakeholders such as farmers or the GBRF directly. No regional patterns in the responses were observed. Three categories of changes were identified for landholders, four for DPs, and three for Reef and water quality (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Biggest changes identified by participants across the three categories

5.2.4.1. The single biggest change for landholders

Attitudinal change

Three overall changes for landholders were described by participants, all of which were positive. The most mentioned biggest change was **attitudinal change** (n=10). This was demonstrated by an increased willingness by landholders to engage in programs as well as increased awareness that programs could deliver both financial and water quality benefits. As one DP noted, *'The biggest change is that we're seeing a lot more acceptance from growers in managing nutrient and chemicals'* (ID7, DP, Industry), while another reported that *'we've got farmers adopting this and ringing me up every day saying, how*

can I be a part of the project? And I'm like, I'm sorry. It's shut, it's finished.' (ID11, DP, Industry). One other DP noted how this attitudinal change is having impact across the broader community as well:

The mindset of the graziers has just changed. They come to me now and say, thank goodness we took part in this, it is the greatest change we've done in a long time. ... it broke down that confidence wall... [so now they say] I can do this by myself, or I could go and help my next-door neighbour implement that. They've got the confidence to talk about it in public - it's no secret hush hush we are working with an environmental based group, where people on the land and environmentalists don't often mix. They're happy to let people know how good the project is and recommend it.' (ID33, DP, Industry)

Long-term benefits

The second landholder benefit related to the **long-term benefits that will be enjoyed due to project-related components** (n=8), while the third theme was changes in on-farm behaviours. As one DP believed, *'I'd like to think that all the growers that we've been involved with are now running more profitable, better businesses'* (ID5, DP, Industry). Examples of long-term benefits mentioned by participants include increased equipment, increased efficiencies, changing norms around farming values, and the flow-on effects of this for on-farm practices.

'I think the legacy of the program is [that] farmers invested, they bought equipment, it's not just going to sit in the shed. They wanted to use it, they put a lot of money towards it, and they're going to use it over years and years to come. And then also what happens is they're going to just share that equipment with the neighbours, so it's going to have a flow on effect.' (ID4, RPC, Industry)

5.2.4.2. The single biggest change for Delivery Providers

Project design and implementation

The most commonly mentioned biggest change for DPs related to **how they designed and undertook their projects** (n=8). Examples include internal improvements within DP organisations, such as general advancement of technical and engagement skills, as well as increased professional best practice governance processes. Other internal benefits included an increase in young people coming through the organisation for work experience.

Other participants highlighted improvements in how their programs were run externally, for example by *'bolstering of on-ground activity all at once'* (ID20, other) and by having demonstrable targets and measures to show to landholders. As one DP noted, they could *'actually engage landholders with certainty about how much sediment savings [they would achieve], because we had targets, we could go to the landholders with the cost effectiveness for it, and say, okay, you're going to save this much sediment calculated like this'*. (ID33, DP, Industry).

Some DPs rated the opportunities available through the program as exceptional. *'It's kind of hand on heart, one of the most exciting projects I've ever been involved in.'* (ID33, DP, Industry). Another DP highlighted the ability to collaborate on challenging projects was the biggest change they experienced:

'[Our] big project, is an extremely successful project. It's a highlight in my seven years, it's one of those really successful, well designed from the ground up. Very smart people involved in the design, very committed people involved in the delivery, and a lot of very careful thinking about what the barriers were and how we could try and mitigate as many of those as we could through

the life of the project, all done at the design end ... and that in itself, I think that that fundamentally is a good idea, it's been helpful.' (ID14, DP, NRM)

Access to data and technical expertise

The second most commonly mentioned greatest change was **access to data and technical expertise**, including the data dashboards and specialist skills available through the TAG or agronomists (n=6). This expertise led to outcomes such as DPs developing their own water quality report cards and writing for industry publications, to better capture practice change and tracking project results. One DP noted that *'having access to the dashboard...that's been a really great innovation of the whole program.'* (ID26, DP, NRM).

Other greatest changes mentioned included increased **access to a base of landholders** to support ongoing business operations (n=3), as well as **increased collaboration, awareness of and respect** among DPs (n=2). In particular, smaller groups who previously had difficulty accessing collaboration opportunities greatly valued this.

'The biggest change to me is probably the respect I have from the big collaborators like [organisation 1 and 2]. I think we've gained a lot of credibility with them, which has just really helped, just having that relationship with them, and knowing that they think of us a little bit better now has helped.' (ID16, DP, Industry)

5.2.4.3. The single biggest change for the Reef and water quality

Seven participants provided a response about the biggest change related to the Reef and water quality. Six of these related to **actual savings in sediment runoff or pesticide use**. As one RPC noted, the single biggest change for the Reef and water quality *'would have to be the savings. We absolutely smashed all the targets'*. That participant also noted that the project also allowed secondary lines of evidence, which incorporated multiple elements such as irrigation and water use efficiency alongside buffer zones and reduction of fertilizer rates. As they summarised, *'I think that's going to be a legacy impact for the Reef program as opposed to just the immediate savings program.'* (ID18, RPC, NRM).

One participant highlighted more general norm change regarding landholder's farming practices that will continue to improve the Reef and water quality outcomes in the future.

'On the water quality side, I truly believe that they're on top of that now, I really do. Our farming practices - if you look through some of the projects - you don't see what we'd done 40 years ago, there wouldn't be one grower who crops their farm that way anymore. It's all green harvest, trash blanket, minimal tillage, by-crops. It's all there.' (ID23, DP, Industry)

5.2.4.4. Great Barrier Reef Foundation reflections

GBRF project managers' reflections on the biggest change resulting from the program were framed in quite general terms and mostly mirrored their comments on what positive new elements were introduced as part of the governance framework. Accordingly, they identified three overall categories of changes (Figure 9).



Figure 9: The three categories of change identified by GBRF staff

Some GBRF staff noted how the **increased collaboration** fostered shared goals: *'people in the regional programs have grown to feel **part of a bigger picture**, because every project has visibility of what everyone is getting and what they are being paid for'*. Others directly perceived that the model **'raised the standard** of delivery and project management'. Finally, one other GBRF participant noted that *'because of the **accountability and transparency**, people believe that what they are doing is actually working and is working well'*.

5.3. Collaboration among the delivery network

Relevant KEQ

- How effective the model was at fostering an environment of collaboration and cohesion between partners to work towards a common goal (i.e., water quality improvement, but also other goals they might have had e.g., engagement or communication), maximising synergies (between delivery providers or with other regional stakeholders), delivering co-benefits, and minimising duplications and redundancies.
- Whether the RPM and RPC feel they could meet their job description, or whether there was anything limiting them in their role.

Q: How has the governance of this program influenced or changed collaboration in your region?

5.3.1. How the governance framework positively influenced collaboration

A total of 19 participants believed that the governance framework had resulted in an improvement in collaboration. DPs predominantly highlighted the **co-benefits** that this collaboration provided, while participants across all roles noted ways in which the governance framework **maximised synergies between different organisations**. Other participants highlighted the value in requiring potential partners to work together (Figure 10).

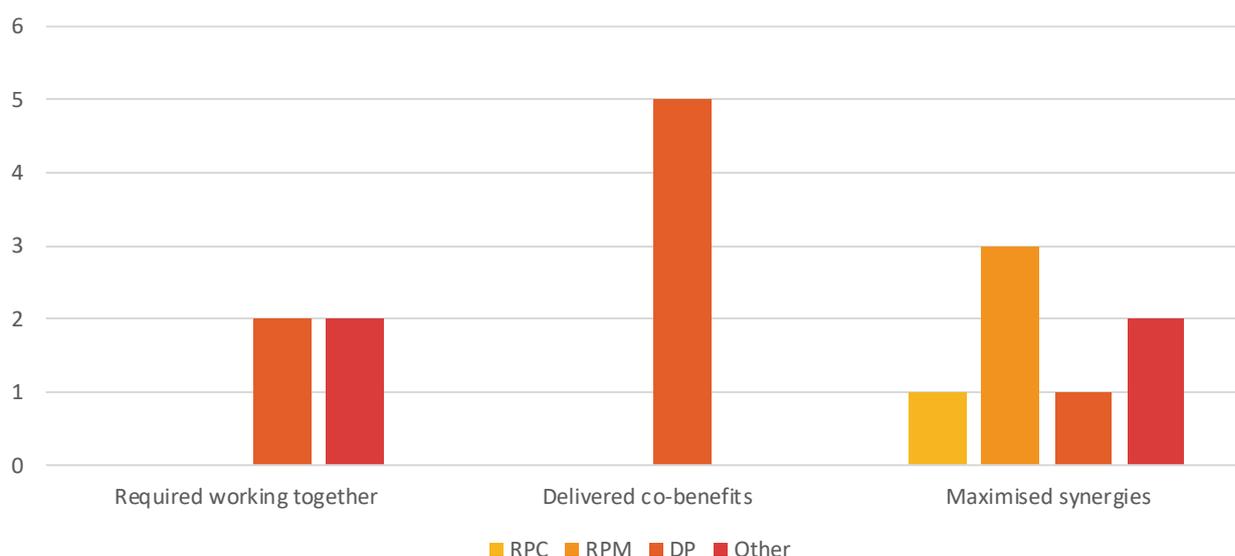


Figure 10: Common themes around positive influences on collaboration identified by participants

5.3.1.1. Maximising synergies

Participants most commonly stated that the governance framework had influenced collaboration in their region primarily by **maximising synergies between organisations** (n=8). One participant noted how these synergies were maximised throughout the entire project cycle:

“Operating at a program level has just provided a lot of synergies and efficiencies and ability to reach outside of individual projects, but also between regions as well. [For example], the gap analysis that they did identified the practice change strategy and [then] they can meet those gaps efficiently by putting on regional workshops and so forth.” (ID6, RPM, NRM)

Other synergies enabled by the governance framework that were mentioned by participants included:

- **Facilitating holistic oversight** *'being weaved the whole way through, it gave us full optics. [We could] help manage and coordinate risks because we were actually deeply embedded in the whole process.'* (ID15, RPM, RPC and DP, NRM)
- **Connecting with others outside the programs**, such as students: *'having the delivery providers go to schools, [was a] really nice way of passing [on] or inspiring the next generation of agronomists and cane farmers as to how can they, you know, hopefully learn something from that'* (ID2, DP, Industry)
- **Building relationships with new organisations** *'[We were able to] shuffle around some of the roles and responsibilities to align them with our strengths. For instance, The PC role had Traditional Owner engagement, and that wasn't something that [our organisation] had much experience with. And so [our partner organisation] took on that, because they've got a couple of relationships there. So that was just one of the roles that we kind of redistributed [and] it meant that we were able to get the contract.'* (ID17, RPM, NRM)

5.3.1.2. Delivering co-benefits

The **delivery of co-benefits** was the second most commonly mentioned benefit linked to collaboration (n=5). Co-benefits were first enabled through learning more about what other organisations were doing: *'it was good to come together and see how other people are brainstorming innovative ideas that actually came out of it.'* (ID3, DP, NRM). Other participants highlighted the importance of the annual forums in sharing this knowledge and updating others on project outcomes and lessons learned.

5.3.1.3. Requiring collaboration

The third benefit was closely related to the way in which the governance framework **forced some organisations to overcome concerns around competition**. As one participant explained:

'I think, what it facilitated based on the model was it forced everyone to come together, and then start to work through how we - to achieve these outcomes - how are we going to do this? And then how do we play to our strengths? Because I think one of the biggest challenges that we have is that the nature of how investments rolled out, they invariably facilitate competition. That's just the nature of [it]. Everybody's running their own race, and they've got their own agendas based on [their] charter and why [they] exist. When these investment opportunities become available, everybody [wants to] grab that to fit into what they're trying to achieve. What this facilitated [was saying] let's all come together - we can still navigate this, and everybody can still win - but we can do it in a more coordinated and collaborative fashion where we play to our strengths, and we achieve these outcomes.' (ID15, RPM, RPC and DP, NRM)

5.3.2. How the governance framework negatively influenced collaboration

Despite the positive outcomes summarised above, 15 participants also noted negative collaboration outcomes. The most common of these related to the difficulties in overcoming competition; while it was often not clear that participants directly linked this to any particular governance framework, 13 participants noted that it was a significant barrier to any attempts to achieve positive collaboration outcomes (Figure 11).

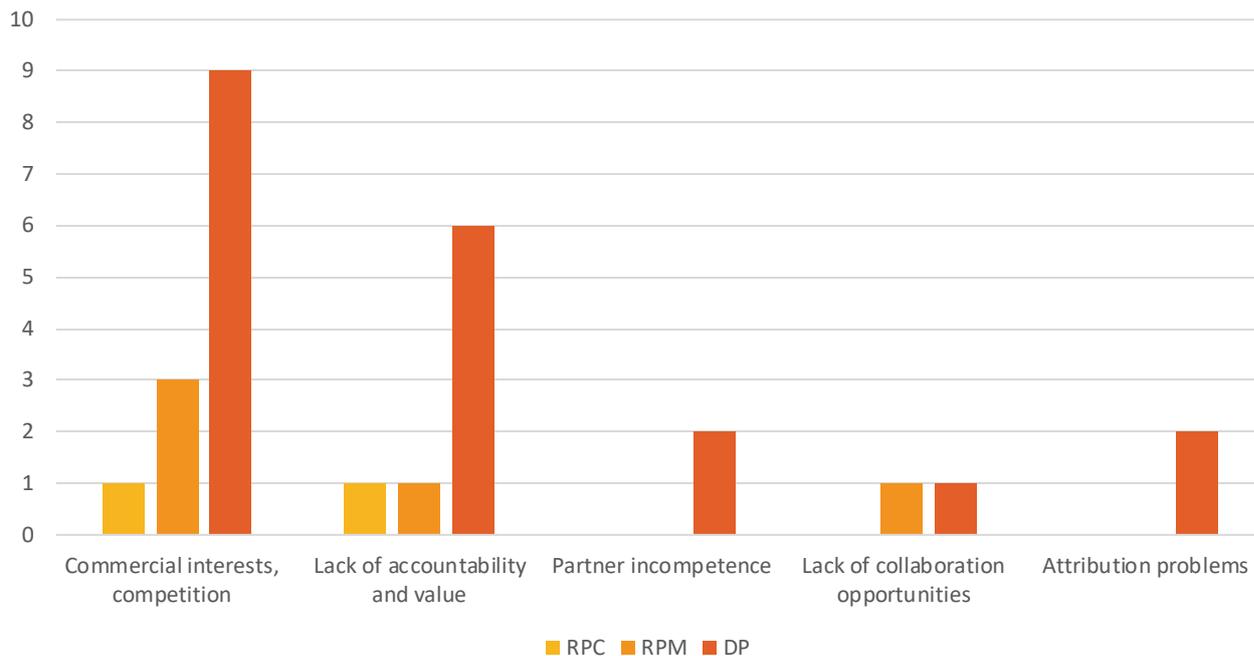


Figure 11: Common themes around negative influences on collaboration identified by participants

5.3.2.1. Competition and commercial interests

As reported earlier, **competition** was a significant issue highlighted by many participants across different roles and regions (n=13). While some participants valued increased competition, the majority found it challenging. There were some commonalities across these experiences, primarily that some organisations did not want to share what was perceived as commercially sensitive data or information, or that different companies had different priorities which caused friction in collaborative projects. As one DP noted, 'you've got two different companies working on different priorities at different speeds on how they want to actually implement some of the work. So, at the end of the day, it didn't really work.' (ID3, DP, NRM).

Other participants felt that collaboration was **hindered** by other stakeholders. 'There are multiple projects, working with the same grower ... I've tried to get them to align and work together with that that grower to provide good outcomes, but they don't seem to be too interested in that. [Also, there are] errors, there is conflicting advice, from delivery providers.' (ID6, RPM, NRM)

Some participants had experienced similar challenges in previous projects, including Reef Trust projects. This longer-term negative experience of collaboration resulted in some participants - particularly DPs - choosing to avoid collaboration wherever possible:

"What happens in reality is that you've got three different organisations competing for grants, right? One organisation saying, don't go with them, we're better and we can do this. When you've got that competition, in a collaborative project, it turns to shit. ... Going forward, if there's another project, or collaborative project with the same people running it, we're going to have a very wide berth, and we're not going to be involved whatsoever. It's just too hard. And reputation is everything - I can't have other people's mistakes falling back on your business.' (ID7, DP, Industry)

5.3.2.2. Lack of accountability and value

The second most common negative outcome of collaboration was linked to the **lack of accountability or value** that the partnership arrangements led to (n=8). This seemed to be largely unconnected to the governance framework arrangements and more closely related to experiences with different staff and organisations. For example, one RPM noted that *'a lot of the delivery providers, they're very busy with their own projects and their own deliverables that are dependent on them getting payments. And so any of the kind of collaborative things we're trying to do, ... they rarely have time for because it's not part of their contract.'* (ID17, RPM, NRM). Others noted that *'we're all working in different places, working on different types of projects, was really hard to collaborate'* (ID33, DP, Industry). Some DPs also felt that their collaborators *'couldn't provide to us what we couldn't provide for ourselves. We were already all set up, so they were redundant.'* (ID33, DP, Industry)

5.3.2.3. Other negative collaboration experiences

Two DPs also noted that the collaboration did not work because *'the attribution of the water quality savings is too hard to share, when both parties are under separate contracts to deliver outcomes.'* (ID2, DP, Industry). In addition, two noted that in their particular region there were **limited opportunities** to collaborate, while another two found that enforced collaboration was ineffective because they believed their **partner organisations were incompetent**.

'The biggest problem has been in this project is that we've got people who have expertise in the subject, and we've got other delivery providers who haven't got the expertise, and that's been the biggest challenge through the project. There's an issue with previous projects, where it's been a tick and flick, whereas in this project that I've been leading on, I don't accept that sort of thing, I want to see quality work come out of the system. So, it's created a lot more work. And to me, it's a whole, it's a negative on the project, because it shouldn't have been that way. If we, if all three service providers were doing what they're supposed to do, we would have been kicking goals with a single long time ago. (ID11, DP, Industry)

5.3.2.4. Great Barrier Reef Foundation reflections

Unlike participants from other organisations, GBRF participations almost **unanimously identified only positive effects** resulting from the increased collaboration facilitated by the governance framework. These positive effects related to increased accountability and transparency, improved project outcomes, a shared goal and purpose, and greater awareness of other stakeholders and project partners activities. Examples of these positive collaboration outcomes include the development of a pesticide fact sheet that *'had never been done before'*, and the ability to *'cross-pollinate, and get learnings about best-practice'*. Much of this was enabled by the governance framework:

'The regional program approach where it wasn't given to one person, and was actually multiple delivery providers, can be very effective. I really think that's how you get better water quality outcomes - by diverse delivery providers. It's so different to what's been done before.' (GBRF project manager)

Very few negative impacts of the governance framework on collaboration were identified by GBRF staff. Those that were mentioned primarily related to the challenge of overcoming competition in the early stages of program design, or the impact of staff turnover and change on program collaboration. One GBRF staff member did highlight shortcomings in the governance framework, which they felt led to negative collaboration outcomes:

'Having that open competitive theme has got its drawbacks - there's a twin, double edged sword to that. One is that it's brought the new players, the other is that competition can drive the prices down, which might sound good, but actually we've found out in hindsight that what that has actually done is drive down the quality, too ... up front you need to have really clear guidelines about the standards for what a project needs to be. And not have a procurement process that kind of eats away at that, and it becomes well how can we do this job cheaper than them. [We need] clear guidelines so they don't cut corners and costs.' (GBRF project manager)

There was also acknowledgment that early experiences with the collaborative approach to the program governance highlighted the importance of having the 'right people' in the roles on-ground for positive collaborations and good outcomes for the program.

5.4. The role of the RPM and RPC

Relevant KEQ

- Whether the RPM and RPC provided value and relevant support to delivery providers and was a useful interface with GBRF when it came to operational issues
- Whether the RPM and RPC provided value and relevant support to GBRF and was a useful interface with delivery providers when it came to operational issues
- Whether the RPM and RPC provided delivery providers links to potential partners in the region including landholders and Traditional Owners

5.4.1. Positive evaluations of the RPM and RPC roles

Given the regional variations in the RPC and RPM roles, it was often difficult for participants to provide feedback on the value and support provided by these roles in a general sense. Most participants focused on their own particular interactions with their relevant RPM and/or RPC. A total of 13 participants provided this feedback (Figure 12).

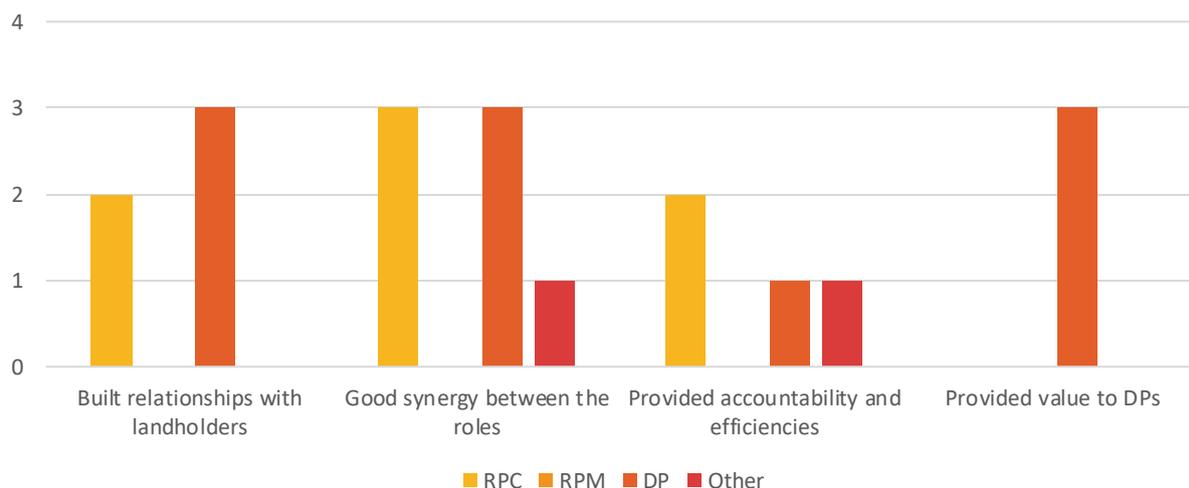


Figure 12: Summary of positive evaluations of the RPM and RPC roles

5.4.1.1. Beneficial synergy between the roles

The most commonly mentioned benefit of the RPC and RPM roles mentioned by participants was the **synergy between roles** (n=7). Participants who regularly engaged with both an RPC and an RPM felt that the different support each could offer was very beneficial. As one DP said ‘they worked together really well. The manager was [assisting] from a technical point of view, whereas the coordinator was from an on-the-ground point of view. And I found it quite clear.’ (ID21, DP, Industry).

Throughout the interviews some participants remained unclear about the distinction between the two roles. However, one participant noted that in their region this was not a problem:

‘I’m very aware the intent was to separate the program managers role from the partnership coordinator role and the delivery providers role, with GBRF sitting over the top. Sometimes the lines can be a little bit blurred between the partnership coordinator and the program manager. But in the end, if you knew what your job was, you knew which one fundamentally you needed to be performing.... so, it hasn’t been complex, or difficult to do that. [It’s been] relatively smooth sailing.’ (ID14, DP, NRM)

5.4.1.2. Other benefits of the RPM and PPC roles

Following this, five participants noted that the RPCs and RPMs specifically **facilitated new or stronger relationships** with growers, while four participants valued the **accountability and efficiencies** that the two roles provided. In addition, three DPs noted that the roles **delivered specific benefits** to them, such as organising forums, catalysing innovative projects, and being available to support project related work. As one participant reflected:

‘That governance structure was really, really important because it clarified those roles and responsibilities. Who does what, at what level - how do we ensure that there’s a level of accountability and oversight to deliver this stuff? Having that was, I think, really critical step moving forward. Because it necessitated that collaborative coming together and understanding who does what, who does stuff better than other people, how do we actually leverage that, where are the gaps, and how do we try to fill those? I think that was really, really positive.’ (ID15, RPM, RPC and DP, NRM)

5.4.2. Negative evaluations of the RPM and RPC roles

Most criticisms of the RPM and RPC roles related to DPs perceiving a lack of value in the services or support they offered (n=10; Figure 13). This was followed by concerns regarding lack of clarity about the role responsibilities (n=7).

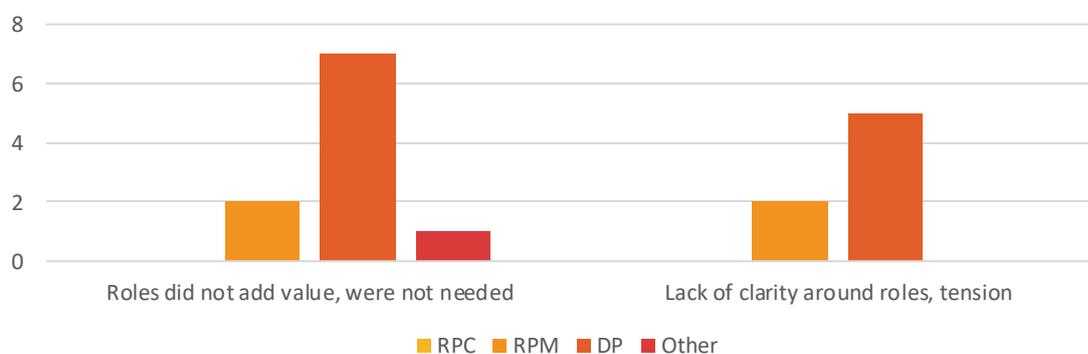


Figure 13: Summary of negative evaluations of the RPM and RPC roles

5.4.2.1. Lack of value of separate RPM and RPC roles

One DP was very upfront about their perceptions of the RPM and RPC roles, and compared the perceived **lack of value of these roles** with the arrangement under the Reef Trust program:

'What the project coordinator what, let me put it this way, I don't know what value the program managers and project coordinators actually added to the overall program. Okay, they seem to suck up a lot of time with additional meetings, and they want to introduce into more reporting than what was originally agreed to. They've obviously got to justify their existence of being involved with the program. But really, did they add any value to the project? I don't think so. Because we've run Reef Trust programs without those layers. And those programs ran quite well.' (ID5, DP, Industry)

Other participants noted that these roles didn't add value because 'we haven't heard from them' (ID7, DP, Industry). Another linked their belief that the roles did not add value because of the nature of contracted targets: *'If we're contracted to a target, it kind of makes the partnership coordinator/ program manager roles a bit obsolete. We're being contracted to form consortiums and deliver a target [so] it's pretty structured already. Playing around with whose title is what is a bit semantic'* (ID14, DP, NRM).

5.4.2.2. Lack of clarity around role responsibilities

All other negative evaluations of the RPC and RPM roles related to a perceived **lack of clarity** around role tasks and lack of decision-making capacity. This was connected also with staff turnover. For example, one RPM noted that *'we've also had three program managers from [the organisation] with people moving roles as well... the line between who's actually project managing projects has been a bit blurred'* (ID17, RPM, NRM). Another participant noted that the RPMs were *'good, good people. But they didn't know the answers. They'd say, 'Oh, we've got to check with GBRF'. They didn't have authority so everything just went around it.'* (ID24, DP, Industry).

5.4.2.3. Perceived conflict of interest

The PRM and PPC structure was noted by several participants with regards to perceived conflicts of interest. Multiple participants expressed apprehension about having competitors or organisations with existing industry relationships serving in oversight and coordination roles. Specifically, participants noted that NRMs and other coordinating bodies "can be biased and can have conflict of interest with providers in their area," (ID5, DP, Industry), potentially showing favouritism toward organisations, they've previously worked with while creating issues for others. For example, "I don't want to invite [them] to my event, because they're just going to take our knowledge" (ID17, RPM, NRM).

'You've got organisations who resent having other organisations working in their area, which creates issues. So, there's a number of the program managers or program coordinators up and down the state that are in direct potential conflict with the businesses that they're supposedly overseeing' (ID5, DP, Industry)

5.4.2.4. Great Barrier Reef Foundation reflections on the RPC and RPM roles

GBRF staff were almost **unanimously positive about the role of RPCs and RPMs**. While acknowledging challenges in finding the right people for the role, as well as more requirements for training and upskilling, once suitable people were in the role they were believed to have delivered substantial benefits. These benefits fell into three overarching categories (Figure 14).



Figure 14: The three benefits of RPC and RPM roles identified by GBRF staff

The most common benefit of the RPC and RPM roles described by GBRF staff was that they **helped facilitate projects**. As one GBRF staff member said, *'having the regional coordinator there has aided in getting that coordination across the region, connecting to the right farmers and facilitating introductions and liaisons and smoothing things out.'*

Other GBRF staff believed that the RPM and RPC roles had played an important part **in upskilling project partners**. This included upskilling in finance procedures, as well as monitoring and evaluation technical work. As one GBRF project manager noted, *'across the board, people have gained technical capacity in reporting, data management and understanding overlaps'.*

Others noted that RPCs played a critical role in **connecting growers** with project partners. For example, one participant said, *'If we have a coordinator from the very beginning joining farm visits, it helps growers to get all options presented to them.'* This flowed on to benefits for DPs, where one GBRF participant noted having received feedback from DPs that *'having that collaborative approach to delivering events where the coordinator got everyone together saved time and energy, increased attendance and had a bigger impact. [It] helped with reaching milestones.'*

5.5. Skills and capacity

Relevant KEQ

- To what extent did the governance framework build the skills and capacity of those involved (RPM, RPC, DP)?

5.5.1. Skills

Q (For RPM/RPC): In what areas, and how, have your skills and capacity changed? What about for others in your organisation? What changes have you witnessed in the delivery providers?

Q (For delivery providers): In what areas, and how, have your skills and capacity changed? What about for others in your organisation?

Q (For GBRF): In what areas, and how, have your skills and capacity changed? What about for others in your organisation? What changes in skills and capacity have you witnessed in the regional managers/regional coordinators? What changes have you witnessed in the delivery providers?

A total of 18 participants highlighted some new skill or practice gained throughout the program. Most of these skills or practices were not specific to the governance framework and related more broadly to the delivery model (including management arrangements and the support received), however, some participants noted that the particular collaboration and partnership requirements helped facilitate learning new skills. Six participants highlighted skills gained by growers, 14 participants described new skills gained by DPs, and six participants noted skills specific to RPM and RPCs. In addition, three participants noted new skills gained by other stakeholders such as Traditional Owners,

agronomists/experts, and other local contractors (Figure 15). The Traditional Owner delivery partner also saw positive outcomes for knowledge and skill development through training in on-ground works and project management.

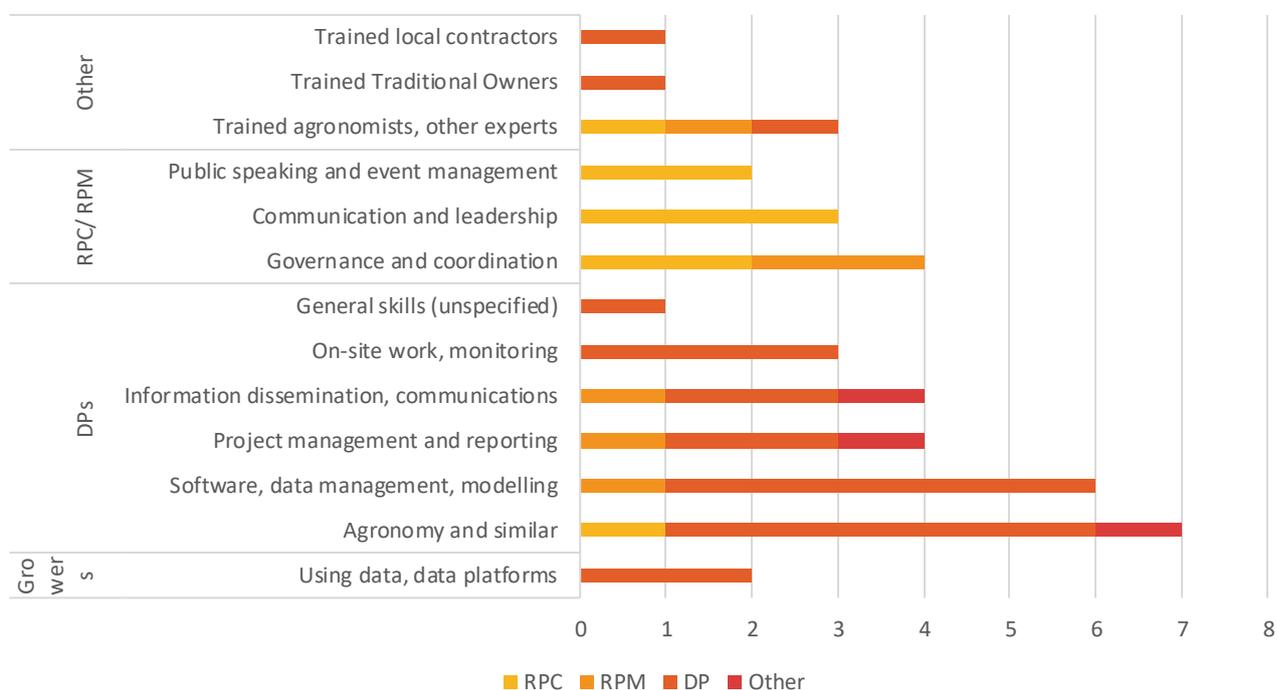


Figure 15: Participants evaluation of skills gained by different groups during the program

The most commonly mentioned skill obtained through the program were those gained by DPs in relation to **agronomy and other technical expertise**. As one DP stated, *'I knew nothing about agronomy before this....my knowledge level around what agronomists do has been exponentially increased'* (ID2, DP, Industry). Others noted how they could now explain concepts such as sediment delivery ratio, the interaction between plants and solute availability in the soil, pesticide application procedures, and creating grazing land management plans.

Six DPs also noted that they had gained skills in **software, platform development, modelling, and other data applications**. One participant noted that they have *'built a data platform that's the best of its kind in the industry'* (ID2, DP, Industry), while another developed a specialised risk model. These skills also flowed onto growers. While only two participants mentioned new skills specific to growers, these were both related to **data**:

'We have absolutely upskilled not only in using the platform, but in educating all of our growers about how to embrace that next level of digital capability. Our growers have certainly become more skilled at using new data and combining data sets to get better principles for their decision making. That's not a silver bullet, but we are increasing their skill level around available data and how to use it in a very practical way on farm.' (ID2, DP, Industry)

Some RPMs and RPCs mentioned specific skills they had gained through the program. The most common of these was **governance and coordination** skills (n=4). As one RPM noted *'I started in this role in an acting position and then got a full position. I've definitely grown a lot and learnt a lot about the different structures and organisations and how things work well, and how things don't.'* (ID17, RPM, NRM). The second most common skill was **communication and leadership** skills (n=3). One RPC said

that they were 'improving my communication, negotiation skills and facilitation skills.... [I know now that] I can actually have tough conversations, stick to my guns, still deliver, and then gain respect as well.' (ID4,

'My background is a very technical one. I've worked in research primarily, so a lot of my projects have been sort of research and trial based. ... So, for me, it's been really good because it's built a lot of skills, especially around facilitating running events, like event management, facilitation, communication materials outside of like technical reports and lab reports.' (ID18, RPC, NRM)

RPC, Industry). The third skill mentioned by RPMs and RPCs related to **public speaking and event management**.

Finally, some participants also mentioned skills obtained by other stakeholders across the projects. One participant mentioned **upskilling Traditional Owners** in working with GBRF and the federal government, while another mentioned skills obtained by other **contractors**. However, the most commonly mentioned skill gained by others was training of experts including agronomists:

'I can say, without a doubt, there are better trained, competent irrigation, agronomy specialists in the region now than there were before this as a direct result of the GBRF investment.' (ID14, DP, NRM)

5.5.2. Capacity

Q: Are there any gaps in terms of capacity and skills that you feel need to be addressed?

While there was positive feedback on new skills gained by different stakeholders, this was overshadowed by a **dominant theme of lack of staff**. Fifteen participants highlighted the broader challenge of finding staff to undertake program work and three participants expressed dissatisfaction with some of the competency of staff already in their roles. These staff challenges were described by participants across all roles and regions, giving examples such as:

- *'There's been so much change in personnel at all levels... It is a little bit frustrating to have to go over the same ground with changing personnel.'* (ID2, DP, Industry)
- *'In that first year our delivery leader and also our coordinator left, because one went to study and the other one going to start a new business. Then you have to pull in a resource to start from fresh [and it] takes another year or so just to get up to speed.'* (ID3, DP, NRM)
- *'All the delivery providers here, they're working at capacity, and they struggle to deliver because they are understaffed. But finding more staff and then taking on new staff for that particular reason just for a couple of years and then having to let them go [is difficult]'*. (ID4, RPC, Industry)
- *'[Our project concept] fell over as the service provider got long Covid and I was unable to find this skill set at short notice.'* (ID10, DP, Industry)
- *'I think there's probably aspects of capacity deficiency that we collectively have overlooked and ignored. Over many years that is now hitting crunch time.... Sediment expertise. Soil conservation. Yeah, it's a significant problem.'* (ID20, other)
- *'I can't afford - at the moment we have three staff - I can't afford to dedicate one to training new staff that are going to leave within 12 months.'* (ID21, DP, Industry)

Three participants also noted that staff shortages were affected by perceived staff incompetence, while five participants highlighted how staff quality really matter:

'I prefer the delivery model of delivery in isolation, rather than as part of that region wide strategy. It's a lot easier to navigate. But I do think that once they had the right person as a program manager in place, that made for a really good delivery model. Without that right person in that role, it's challenging.' (ID26, DP, NRM)

5.5.2.1. Great Barrier Reef Foundation reflections on skills and capacity

GBRF staff attributed some **upskilling** amongst stakeholders to the new opportunities available to project partners. For example, one GBRF project manager stated that *'Some of the new delivery providers that have never been involved in any kind of funded project have said that they've really enjoyed learning how to write a proposal'*. Others noted how DPs learnt how to present projects to different audiences such as school children and Council, while another pointed out that some regions benefited from media training.

Only **two skills that were needed** were identified by GBRF staff. One was developing communication plans, and the other was technical needs: *'In all of our gully and streambank work, we lacked, we had a technical specification approval process that was more in engineering focused, what we lacked is the ability to help them think through and guide them around the Reef vegetation. They still did the same number of projects, but they didn't do it as well... I think that gap could be absolutely plugged by having better guidelines and better technical review.'*

As with the general participants, however, the primary issue around skills and capacity was the **challenge in recruiting and retaining quality staff**. Some regions had consistent staff turnover, while others were unsuitable for the role: *'The existing manager wasn't achieving what they were supposed to do. [We] had some really hard conversations; that person left and [then] a new person was recruited who had zero experience in the cane industry'*. Others noted that many RPCs and RPMs recruited to the roles were new to the industry themselves and required a lot of capacity building and support. However, this was also seen as a positive outcome of the governance framework.

Given this dominance of staffing issues, GBRF staff and other program participants shared a common view around skills and capacity, as exemplified in the following quote:

'I am 100% sure the governance framework isn't flawless. It all comes down to the person. You can have the most perfect model, but if you put the wrong person in that role and everything is going to fall down.' (GBRF project manager)



5.6. Legacy of the delivery model

Relevant KEQ

- Interviewee's perspectives on whether it would be a good thing to repeat this delivery model in future investments, and why, and if they think there would be a better alternative and why.

Q: What components of this model of delivery would you like to see sustained, or continued in future water quality programs? Why?

Q: What components would you not like to see continued/use again? Why?

It was challenging for participants to separate out legacy specifically related to the governance framework as opposed to other characteristics of the program. For example, participants were almost unanimously positive about GBRF's work in this space. As only three participants definitely stated a specific legacy of the program, no figure is provided for this section. Instead of legacy statements, many participants listed positive elements of the program summarised in earlier sections of this report. Many of these positive elements seemed to be linked to the overall positive view of GBRF:

'The program was managed by really competent people, and I think that makes a difference. It's like they are high level competent, clever, hardworking people.' (ID12, DP, Industry)

5.6.1. Legacy of the governance framework

Only three participants were able to describe a legacy specifically stemming from the governance framework. For two of these participants the primary legacy was the way in which the governance enabled competition, while the other mentioned the accountability introduced in the framework.

Competition

- *It's difficult to force them to collaborate and work together and communicate together. For me that's the key difference between what they did and what we have done, and I think that's the different model. And in a world where one of the things we really struggle with is that kind of competition, I think that helped to overcome that. (ID20, Other)*
- *At the end of the day, if the government wants the most cost effective solution, there needs to be competition in the marketplace. There has to be. That competition creates innovation: How can we do this better? How can we do this cheaper? Without that level of competition, then you're not creating change. You're not actually doing stuff to accelerate change towards achieving your targets, you're just merandering along. (ID33, DP, Industry)*

Accountability

- *So what I've loved about the model and what I think has resulted in some, you know, monumental or some significant shifts in the accountability to deliver the outcomes. That's, that's not without its nuances and how to deliver it and all of that sort of stuff. But I think the way they structured the governance, I think it had a stronger focus on on accountability of delivery, not only for us as an organization, but then also delivery partners, and how that how that worked and rolled out. And then, like, I think, I think, I think it's been fascinating (ID15, RPM, RPC and DP, NRM)*

5.6.2. Components to be changed in future programs

Participants did not propose alternative governance frameworks, instead focusing on elements or experiences that they felt could be improved in future program management, which were extremely diverse (Figure 16).

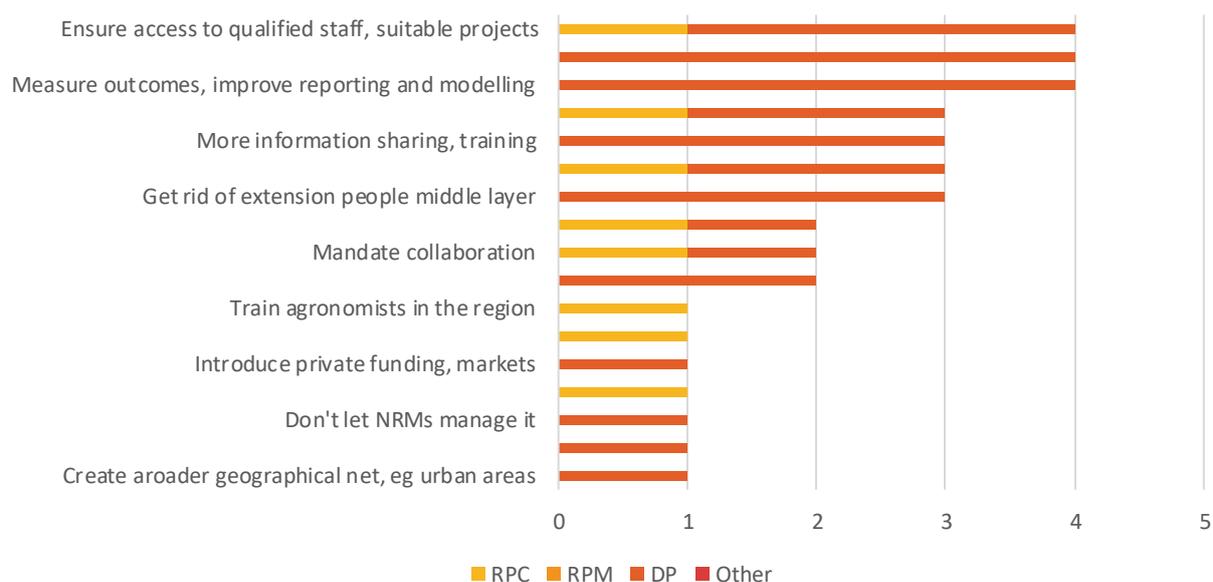


Figure 16: Components suggested by participants to be changed in future programs

Only a small number of the comments around preferences for components to change touched on issues related to governance, yet these were also occasionally contradictory. For example, one participant did not want NRMs to manage programs again while another did. Similarly, one participant did not value the regional-wide approach, although another participant specifically requested keeping the regional-wide approach. These findings highlight the difficulty that participants had in teasing out characteristics of the governance framework versus the particular experiences and context in their own programs and organisations.

5.6.3. Components to be kept in future programs

As with components to change, participants identified a very wide range of components to keep (Figure 17).

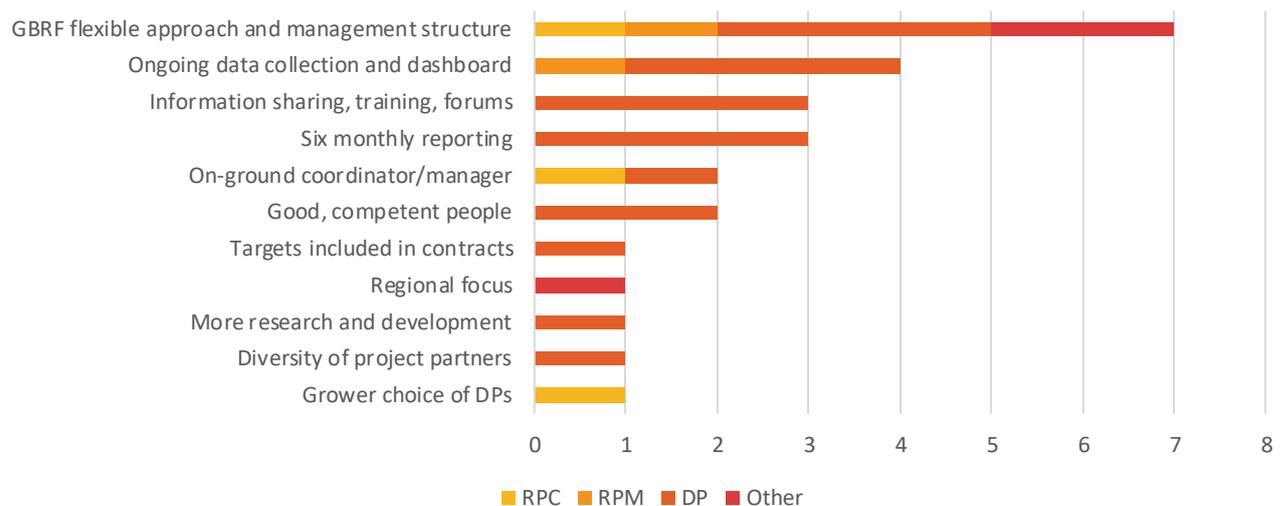


Figure 17: Components suggested by participants to be kept in future programs

The most commonly valued component that participants requested retaining in future programs was the **flexible approach** that GBRF brought to the program design and implementation (n=7). These sentiments were also connected to a **desire to retain GBRF management** of future programs, as expressed by one DP, who said *'I would much prefer it if the GBRF were running it. Whoever it is, what I would keep is the flexible approach to control and management... I think that's been critical to the success and wellbeing of people involved.'* (ID2, DP, Industry). Similarly, one RPC noted that *'I really think that the management structures worked really well. The biggest benefit is that agility and adaptation of the program to the needs [of project partners].'* (ID18, RPC, NRM).

Other common components that participants requested to keep include the focus on **data, data collection, and the dashboard** (n=4), as well as the **information sharing opportunities** that were enabled through the governance structure (n=3). A range of suggestions were provided by single participants only, such as that from a DP who highlighted the value of the overall GBRF approach in fostering diversity among the program participants:

'It's a shame it's going to go back to regional body arrangements... because I think GBRF have worked really hard to have scientific rigor in the process, to have a tendered process for the coordinator and manager roles rather than just give them to regional bodies. And it's really good to see the different players... You've got some regional body projects, you've got some research projects, you've got agricultural consulting companies, you've got fertilizer manufacturers, you've got industry organisations, all with projects. And that's a good thing surely.' (ID12, DP, Industry)

5.6.3.1. Great Barrier Reef Foundation reflections on legacy

GBRF staff had a small number of suggestions for components to keep and change. The components to keep included:

- Bringing industry and new players into the program delivery
- Maintaining accountability and milestone payments linked to performance and good reporting
- Ensuring accountability in producing a communications plan, and less 'fluffy' plans in general
- Maintaining the regional program steering committees and TAG
- Maintaining the Regional Coordinators, particularly in smaller regions where experience indicated that it can be difficult to connect and liaise with the right farms as well as provide adequate support to them.

Two suggestions for changes were specifically made:

- To be more prescriptive in defining the role of the RPCs and RPMs in order to have stronger grounds to request what is needed. As one GBRF project manager stated, *'the NRMs sometimes still try to get away with doing business as usual'*
- To avoid *'forced marriages'* by connecting independent groups that have bid on projects and requiring collaboration. A GBRF participant reflected on the ongoing challenges this caused for a project in one region.





6. Summary and Recommendations

The intention of the governance model was to build a diverse, yet collaborative delivery network of local players with the capacity and capability to enable Reef water quality improvement activities. This evaluation has allowed an examination of the extent to which it achieved this goal. At the same time, the governance model was guided by the following principles, each of which are reflected on in light of the evaluation evidence provided in this report:

1. **Applies best practice and does not lead to non-compliance issues (e.g. administration expenditure or financial accountability).**

Reflection

Overall, the governance model achieved this principle, however some concerns about partners not engaging or delivering on their project components were raised. While the need to compete and then collaborate with other organisations was a significant challenge for many DPs, some highlighted the value of competition in supporting more innovative projects, increasing the achievement of project outcomes, and building stronger regional partnerships once competition issues were resolved.

2. **Allows GBRF to have visibility of on-ground delivery and project management, while not placing all the workload on GBRF staff.**

Reflection

The new governance framework supported this principle well. Many participants noted that increased 'line of sight' that the governance framework provided, both for GBRF as well as OGBR and DPs. RPCs and RPMs were, in some cases, able to support stakeholders in different regions, while GBRF staff were almost unanimously praised by participants in this evaluation process.

3. **Maximises value by providing a high level of accountability with clear measurable outcomes and performance indicators.**

Reflection

This principle was also achieved to a high level of success. Most participants praised the increased accountability that the model placed on different stakeholders. Others also praised the introduced of contracted targets. Challenges with the Paddock to Reef Projector model led to significant frustration in project participants ability to deliver these targets however, with some DPs finding that the modelling and data hindered their ability to plan and deliver specified outcomes.

4. **Allows for best practice conflict of interest management processes to be embedded, adhered to, and verified.**

Reflection

The new governance framework enabled notable improvement in conflict of interest management in contrast to previous arrangements. However, some challenges in managing these issues remain. Concerns around perceived conflicts of interest were raised by a limited number of participants in relation to having perceived 'competitors' serving in oversight roles. The participants acknowledged the inevitable existence of such conflicts but provided some recommendations for better addressing them in the future.

5. **Offers ample opportunities for third parties to engage and compete where appropriate, resulting in higher value for money than previous models where funds were awarded without considering what could be achieved or on merit.**

Reflection

The governance model increased competition and engagement with third parties, however this evaluation was unable to ascertain the extent to which higher value for money was achieved. Some participants found that competition increased project goals and outcomes, as well as fostered new collaborations that previously would have been impossible. Some DPs strongly valued the new opportunities they were given to grow their businesses through the program, while ECY participants, in particular, strongly valued the new opportunities provided through the funding injection.

6. **Had regional representation and coordination, strategically located within regions and regional organisations.**

Reflection

This evaluation was not designed to ascertain the extent to which this was achieved.

7. **Encouraged and supported third parties to control delivery with a view to achieving a self-sustaining environment in the long-term.**

Reflection

This evaluation was not designed to ascertain the extent to which this was achieved.

6.1. Recommendations

- **Retain independent funding management.** Many participants valued GBRF as a funding body that was perceived as fairer and more transparent in its funding decisions than some NRMs in the past. Some participants were concerned that historical relationships with NRMs would reduce their opportunities to engage in future programs, or that too much money would be wasted in the NRM management rather than be applied to the projects themselves. They felt unable to contest these decisions and believed too much power was held by NRMs within the program structure. Considering how to ensure that the NRMs select and disperse funding equitably will be critical for maintaining project partner's support and positive view of future RTP programs.

- **Retain GBRF's flexible management approach** . Participants were exceedingly positive about the impact of GBRF's flexible and professional management approach. They believed that it allowed for change across projects, while also helping build skills and capacity amongst project partners across the regions. Some participants were concerned that Reef Trust was very fixed in its project management approach and did not allow for unforeseen changes (such as weather cycles), nor for new and innovative approaches. Ensuring these are allowed for may help continue the innovative, long-term changes that have been achieved through the GBRF management cycle.
- **Improve data modelling systems** . Many DPs felt frustrated at the changes that occurred throughout the program as the result of modelling system updates or changes (particularly P2R Projector). Participants requested a modelling or measurement system that was fit for purpose, that would allow for input control and outputs that could be attributed to different project partners. Others requested a better understanding of how data inputs were devised, and a method to ensure that outputs could not be manipulated.
- **Provide more long-term funding** . Many participants were worried that the achievements gained through this funding cycle would be lost if funding dries up, or that they are not successful in gaining further funding. Many highlighted the multi-year process involved in achieving water quality outcomes, and requested a funding model that took a longer-term view to provides certainty for landholders and DPs. We recognise this is outside of the control of GBRF.
- **Address conflicts of interest** . More than one region felt that conflicts of interest - while likely to be always present - were not adequately acknowledged and addressed. This includes by GBRF. Developing a more transparent process and ensuring this process is followed by all stakeholders and managed by an outside observer would help alleviate these concerns.
- **Foster, but do not enforce, competition and collaboration** . Participants recommended continuing to foster collaboration by facilitating partnerships. This facilitation can include considering ways to protect commercially sensitive information, while sharing project components that best maximise the skills and expertise of different groups. This requires dedicated facilitation and therefore specific funding to support brainstorming, project design, and project implementation across multiple partners. However, some participants also noted that there are times that collaboration will just not work. Enforcing collaboration is therefore not recommended, particularly between groups that have not successfully collaborated in this funding cycle. Identifying successful and unsuccessful collaborations will help guide potentially beneficial collaboration opportunities for the next funding cycle. Many participants noted that the challenges of competition were able to be overcome in many instances, but if collaboration stops then those competitive pressures will result in the loss of those collaboration gains.

Interview and Focus Group Questions **A**

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Date: _____ **Interviewee Name:** _____ **Role:** _____

Purpose: We are helping to evaluate the governance of the RTP regional water quality programs. The purpose of this interview is to specifically gather insights on how the delivery arrangements (i.e. direct contracts between GBRF and delivery providers and having a local regional program manager and/or regional partnership coordinator) affected how program partners worked individually and collectively.

Reminder: This interview will be audio-recorded to ensure we capture the important points during the discussions. However, your responses will remain confidential, and no names will be included in the report provided to GBRF. You can choose whether to participate in the interview, and you may stop participating at any time.

Confidentiality

All responses will be kept confidential and used solely for the purpose of this evaluation. Researchers within Mosaic Insights will analyse the data and no names will be included in any reports. Where we use quotes from this discussion, the identity of the speaker will remain anonymous in reports to GBRF.

START RECORDING in Teams and phone/other device

CONSENT - verbal - are you happy to proceed with the interview?

A bit about you

Q: To begin, would you mind telling us a brief bit about yourself and your involvement in the GBRF water quality program?

- What is your role and key responsibilities? What organisation do you work for?
- How many years have you been involved in the program?
- How many years have you been involved in Reef water quality projects? What Reef water quality programs and projects have you been involved in previously?

Q: What was new/different about the way this program was delivered and managed in your region?

Overall success

Q: Did the way the program was delivered and managed in your region influence the way you/your organisation operated with regard to Reef Water Quality projects and activities? Yes/No

If yes, please describe what changed.

Q: Did this represent an improvement? In what ways?

Q: Did anything not work? What has challenging about the way it was delivered?

- If yes, how could this have been overcome?

For RPM or RPC ONLY Q: Did you feel like you could meet the scope of your role description? If no, why not?

Partnerships and collaboration

The next set of questions are specifically about the how the governance of this program influenced collaboration and relationships between you and other partners (whether they are RTP partners or organisations more widely).

Q: How has the governance of this program influenced or changed collaboration in your region?

- (a) Between organisations that deliver RTP projects, (b) between the organisations that deliver RTP projects and regional project manager and/or regional partnership coordinator, (c) between organisations that deliver RTP projects and all other Reef WQ stakeholders in the region?
- Can you provide examples?
- How is this different to how you have worked in the past? [OR if appropriate] How is this different to how you have worked with past Reef WQ programs?
- Does this represent an improvement or not? In what ways?
- How much do you attribute to the way the program was implemented and managed versus what may have occurred anyway or due to other factors? Was there anything particular about the RTP model of delivery that influenced this? What other factors might have contributed to this?
- Are there any factors that could be limiting further collaboration?

Skills and capacity

These next questions are about how the skills and capacity of the program partners have changed since the program began.

Q (For Scott): What changes in the skills and capacity of the regional managers/regional coordinators have you witnessed? What changes have you witnessed in the delivery providers?

Q (For GBRF team): In what areas, and how, have your skills and capacity changed? What about for others in your organisation? What changes in skills and capacity have you witnessed in the regional managers/regional coordinators? What changes have you witnessed in the delivery providers?

Q (For RPM/RPC): In what areas, and how, have your skills and capacity changed? What about for others in your organisation? What changes have you witnessed in the delivery providers?

Q (For delivery providers): In what areas, and how, have your skills and capacity changed? What about for others in your organisation?

PROMPTS FOR ALL QUESTIONS:

- Can you provide examples?
- How much of this change would you attribute to way the program was delivered and managed, as opposed to what would have happened otherwise? What other factors might have contributed to this?

Q: Are there any gaps in terms of capacity and skills that you feel need to be addressed?

- What's missing and for who?

Looking forward

Q: What components of this model of delivery would you like to see sustained, or continued in future water quality programs? Why?

Q: What components would you not like to see continued/use again? Why?

Q: What has been the single biggest change that you have seen as a result of how this program was delivered? This can be positive or negative!

- For people involved in the delivery? Why was this significant for you?
- For landholders? Why was this significant for you?
- For the Reef/WQ? Why was this significant for you?

Any other comments?

Q: Is there anything else anyone would like to share?

Thank you for your time today. Please feel free to get in touch if you think of anything else you would like to share. There will be a number of interviews conducted with delivery providers across different regions and these interviews will also be analysed to draw out key insights and findings, which will inform the future recommendations for future programs.

End of discussion/stop recording

GBRF Focus group questions

Participant information about their involvement in the GBRF water quality program

- What is your role and key responsibilities? What organisation do you work for?
- How many years have you been involved in the program?
- How many years have you been involved in Reef water quality projects? What Reef water quality programs and projects have you been involved in previously?

Q: What was new/different about the way this program was delivered and managed in your region?

Q: What changes in skills and capacity have you witnessed in the regional managers/regional coordinators? What changes have you witnessed in the delivery providers?

Q: Are there any gaps in terms of capacity and skills that you feel need to be addressed?

Q: What components of this model of delivery would you like to see sustained, or continued in future water quality programs? Why?

Q: What components would you not like to see continued/use again? Why?

Q: What has been the single biggest change that you have seen as a result of how this program was delivered? This can be positive or negative!

Q: Is there anything else anyone would like to share?