



Monitoring stewardship in the GBR

Priorities, motivations & barriers for organisations involved in community Reef protection

In partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation (GBRF), the University of Queensland are working with CSIRO and the Queensland University of Technology on a project to develop and pilot monitoring and reporting tools that can be used by organisations that work with the community to protect and restore the Great Barrier Reef (the Reef). This is part of a larger project called People and Reef Organisations Tackling Environmental Change (PROTECT) to design useful and practical tools and frameworks for monitoring community stewardship.

While the overall project will be completed in 2024, the PROTECT team are currently working with organisations involved with the Reef Trust Partnership community Reef protection component as part of an early project stage to help inform broader work and develop plans, tools and frameworks specifically for them that can be used to monitor the outcomes and impacts of their stewardship activities.

The information collected can then be used for planning purposes, funding applications, evaluation and adaptive management, and to celebrate successes. For more information on the project download the [PROTECT factsheet](#). Before plans, tools and frameworks can be developed however, we need to first understand the priorities, motivations and barriers of organisations involved in community Reef protection.

Between June and July 2022, the PROTECT team spoke to 15 different organisations from all along the east coast of Queensland. This factsheet is a high level summary of the findings.

The insights and experiences shared by the organisations interviewed will be used to develop a monitoring toolkit for community stewardship. We gratefully acknowledge and thank those organisations for their time and contributions.



What are organisations doing to protect and restore the Great Barrier Reef?

The organisations that participated in the interviews nominated a range of actions and activities, including beach clean up days, citizen science events, research, protection of significant and sensitive sites, leadership capacity building and mentoring, community workshops and festivals, school events and university placements, land regeneration and erosion control. The organisations involved are working a diverse range of community members from divers to farmers, young to old, local residents to tourists, as well as partnering with local Traditional Owners and First Nations people. Some of the outcomes are described below:

- ✓ Raising local community awareness of Reef and Reef-related issues
- ✓ Playing a role in securing a protected status for vulnerable areas
- ✓ Providing an evidence base for Reef management and informed decision making
- ✓ Raising the profile and recognition of volunteers
- ✓ Enabling and increasing the capacity of groups and individuals to take actions to protect and care for the Reef, both within their activities but also beyond
- ✓ Contributing to the wellbeing of community members, either as the beneficiary of activities or as a result of enabling them to be stewards for the Reef
- ✓ Building ongoing relationships and networks with local community members and partner organisations

Rather than directly taking action to improve outcomes for the Reef, many organisations see their role as **enabling** the community to take action, in other words, helping the community to become **stewards** for the Reef.

What does stewardship mean for community Reef protection programs?

While stewardship is not an everyday term used by the organisations or a term that is familiar to the communities that the organisations work with, everyone interviewed was familiar with the word stewardship. When we asked what it meant, people said:

“It’s about holding carriage of and looking after a particular part of the ecosystem... in this case the Reef”

“It’s about managing or assisting in the overseeing of the environment for the greater good.”

“Caring for an environment and essentially standing up for its right”

“To take responsibility for something”

“Respecting our country, and caring for our country”

“Stewardship is more of a proactive rather than reactive approach to managing the environment.”

“You can think broadly from a global perspective, all the way down to the particular habitats or particular locations.”





“A community that actually values and cares for an asset”

The common thread underlying the responses was that stewardship involves taking **responsibility** for the **care** of a **place**. Many recognised the diversity of places being stewarded – sometimes it’s the whole of the Great Barrier Reef but more often, it’s a much smaller place. For example, a wetland or a beach or a farm. Some important points were raised in relation to stewardship generally being a voluntary/unpaid action. Moreover, recognising that there is often a strong sense of connection, or custodianship, between the stewards and the place being ‘stewarded’.

Community Reef Protection

The Reef Trust Partnership community Reef protection program aims to turbo-charge the positive impact that community action has for the Reef and for people.

The program is working with a range of community partners to deliver outcomes, including:

-  Projects deliver effective outcomes for the Reef and community
-  Community informs decision making through collaborative planning and community data use
-  A suite of tools for funding and models of community action are available and useful
-  Community action project contributions are recognised, valued and celebrated

Supporting ways to better measure, communicate and celebrate valuable outcomes from community Reef protection activities was identified as a key activity in designing the program. This project will help support community partners to measure and monitor the impact of projects and activities.



What enables stewardship?

Access was the described as most necessary ingredient for enabling stewardship. Specifically, access to:

Information & Education



Before people and organisations can be good stewards, they need both declarative or factual knowledge (i.e., the what) and procedural knowledge (i.e., the how).

“We need to know what we're going to deal with, and how we're going to deal with it.”

“I think just giving them the information to start with is probably the first one.”

Resources & Power



This can refer to access to the actual volunteers and/or other organisations but also access to time and financial resources. Often these resources are dedicated to increasing individuals capacity and capabilities.

“You need the people and you need the funding and you need the organisations.”

“Knowing about it and caring about it, but also having the power to do something about it.”

Tools & Equipment



The tools and equipment needed to support stewardship are highly variable, from tractors and fences, to diving equipment, to online tools such as apps and data bases.

“Not all of them have access to internet or computer...it's often one of those things that's overlooked.”

Place



This primarily referred to access to the location or system being cared for, but it also encompasses a recognition of the connection between people and place, and that local people are best placed to be stewards.

“You can't protect what you can't see.”

“The people that know best about their environment are the people that live there.”

Do organisations currently monitor community stewardship for the Reef, and why?

Beyond the number of people engaged, and in some cases, the number of hours that people spend engaged in an activity, **very few organisations reported active and ongoing monitoring of community stewardship** for the Reef. For those organisations that run capacity building workshops, many ask the participants to complete a post-event survey to evaluate the outcomes specific to the workshop.

For those groups that monitor stewardship, when asked about what tools or methods they use: surveys, excel spreadsheets, written journals, photo monitoring, and/or online databases/apps were all mentioned.

Stewardship data is primarily used in **reports** back to investors as part of the contract or grant agreement. Some organisations use the data to understand **the amount of effort generated** as a result of activities (particularly in relation to volunteers and citizen science) as well as for **adaptive management purposes** (that is, using the information to inform the design of future programs and projects).

What are the priorities for monitoring stewardship?

Many of the organisations reported that, beyond the number of people that engaged in the activity and the hours spent, they would like to monitor a range of things related to stewardship. For example:

- What topics and issues do local communities care about? What **motivates** them to become stewards?
- Have people's **attitudes, knowledge** and/or **capacity** changed as a result of their participation/involvement in stewardship projects or activities?
- What **actions** do people undertake as a result of their involvement/participation?
- What impact is the organisation and it's activities having on the **environment**, but also in regards to the community and the **social, cultural and economic impacts**?

While understanding motivations and changes to capacity were mentioned by many organisations, **understanding the social and environmental impacts** were the most common response. Especially in terms of uncovering **stories and narratives** that describe those impacts.

Motivations for monitoring stewardship

While there was diversity in terms of the things organisations would like to monitor, the underlying motivations for wanting to monitor stewardship were generally the same.

- To **understand** the impact of activities, especially in terms of raising awareness and capacity.
- To use the information to **improve** the delivery of future programs, projects and activities.
- To **communicate** and celebrate stories of **impact** and **success**.
- To use the information to **gain support and access** to additional resources and funding.

What types of tools or support would help?

While there was general support for online tools such as apps and databases, the response from the participating organisations was very clear: Any developed plans, tools or frameworks need to be **practical, quick and easy to use**.

A few organisations raised important considerations when developing tools for monitoring stewardship. Firstly, that the collected data needs to be **valid** and **reliable**. Second, that the community involved must be able to give **Informed Consent** before any data can be collected. Lastly, any tools or frameworks that are developed need to be **flexible and fit for purpose**, given the diversity of organisations and activities that fall under the stewardship umbrella.

Barriers to monitoring stewardship

A lack of time and capacity was the most significant and widespread barrier to monitoring stewardship. Some organisations felt that **greater funding** was needed to support monitoring stewardship. Many organisations rely on volunteers and will prioritise on-ground actions over additional monitoring and evaluation. Other barriers were more technical or procedural in nature: essentially, not knowing what to measure, how to measure it nor what to use monitoring for. The fact that there is currently **no simple, well-accepted, validated and/or extensively used measure of stewardship** was also raised as a key challenge that needs to be addressed.

Where to from here?

The PROTECT team will use the insights and experiences that the community Reef protection organisations have shared to create a simple and easy to use monitoring plan that can be used to monitor community stewardship for the Reef. The monitoring plan will be a step-by-step guide to support organisations to:

- ✓ Understand what aspects of stewardship are relevant to the organisation and the activities that being delivered
- ✓ Identify core components or indicators of stewardship that can be monitored, including why it's important to monitor, and what the information can be useful for
- ✓ Explain the different ways stewardship can be monitored, including exemplars, tips and tricks, as well as tools and templates

Can I be involved?

Yes! The PROTECT team are looking to assist the organisations and can help with:

- ✓ Trialling and implementing the stewardship monitoring plan
- ✓ Selecting and amending specific tools or frameworks for monitoring stewardship
- ✓ Analysing, summarising and interpreting the results of monitoring activities
- ✓ Creating and sharing stories that demonstrate the impacts of community stewardship for the Reef and help celebrate success.

Over the coming months, the PROTECT team will be in contact with all participating organisations to share the monitoring plan, and to offer our assistance with using the plan.

Who can I contact for more information?

To get involved, or if you have any questions, please contact:

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