

Community Action Plan Program



Great Barrier
Reef Foundation

Summary of outcomes and learnings from Reef Management partners

Community Action Plans

The Community Action Plan (CAP) Program is a pilot that aims to improve the engagement of the broader community in the protection of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area through collaborative planning for community action. CAPs connect community aspirations with regional and reef-wide priorities by establishing shared goals for community Reef protection, designing better ways to work together, identifying critical projects, and measuring and celebrating community outcomes.

From 2020-21, in six areas across the GBR, CAP Leader organisations brought together science, management, business, community, youth, and Traditional Owner partners to explore new ways to work together towards delivery of the Reef 2050 Plan. The process uses the globally recognised Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation and the Collective Impact Framework to establish shared goals, as well as identify critical locally-relevant projects, and develop a tangible and dynamic plan that can continuously evolve to meet community needs and contribute towards delivery of the Reef 2050 Plan.

The CAP program relies on regular input from partners and applies an action learning approach that is continuously refined. A summary of key learnings from the CAP development process (Dean and Uebel 2021) is available on the [GBRF CAP Webpage](#).

Core to the CAP program is building relationships across community partners and relevant Reef decision makers. This paper shares insights from interviews with science, management and government partners who have been involved in the CAP development and implementation process.

Shifting from CAP Development into Implementation

Collectively, the six CAPs developed 52 roadmaps (projects) that outline actions to reduce pressures to protect the Reef, ready for implementation. Projects ranged from local climate action to habitat rehabilitation and protecting cultural values.

CAP Leaders are working with their community networks to translate plans into action and playing a crucial role as backbone organisations to guide, support and enable the community to progress successful CAP projects and outcomes, as well as continuously review and adapt approaches.

Progress to date:

- CAP project seed funding has supported 14 community or Traditional Owner led projects to commence. Projects have developed integrated community monitoring plans, launched new community mangrove monitoring baselines, undertaken litter removal and reduction, launched turtle protection initiatives, contributed to catchment revegetation activities, and built youth leadership.
- Projects have enabled over 2,000 community participant engagements in on-ground and capacity building activities. More than two-thirds of participants were new to the activity.
- Four of six CAP regions have reported on further project investment catalysed through the CAP program.

Insights on impacts and learnings

Seven decision makers that were involved in CAP development and across the GBR regions were interviewed in June 2022 to understand more about their perceptions and experience of the program. This included Reef managers, scientists and local government partners. Interviews were conducted by GBRF staff and results analysed by social scientists at the University of Queensland (Schultz and Dean 2022).



Responses were analysed against the programs' five key evaluation questions:

KEQ 1: To what extent are CAPs fostering community ownership of outcomes?

Most of the respondents provided examples of how the CAP process had enabled participants in the CAP workshops to take charge or have 'ownership' over the process to identify priority actions. However, two respondents expressed that in their region, the central and influential role of the CAP Leaders may have limited community groups from taking greater ownership.

"I think that's what's been good about the CAP...it's almost like building [community participant] self-esteem that - hey, we've got an issue and we can tackle it."

KEQ 2: What was the quality of community engagement in planning and knowledge sharing?

Many respondents praised and recognised the role of the CAP Leaders and their contributions to achieving a high-quality engagement process. The respondents highlighted the collaborative nature of the CAP program, particularly in relation to the engagement of Traditional Owner groups as well as the diversity of the groups involved. Regarding areas for improvement, the comments focused largely on two aspects: looking for alternative/diverse communication methods and opportunities to bring in broader/more diverse stakeholders to the CAP development process, which focused largely on engaging with community Reef protection leaders and some key partners. There was some indication that there are opportunities to further drive innovation for new approaches in project design.

"I think what's already been done is a great testament to how [CAP Leaders] have worked together and they've just made things happen. It's been fantastic."

KEQ 3: To what extent are community contributions to planning recognised and valued?

Almost all respondents indicated that they had observed increased recognition and valuation of community contributions by managers and scientists, with particular recognition of the critical role of youth and Traditional Owners. There was mention that in some areas, there could have been value in having greater government or agency participation in the development process, but recognition that can change dynamics. It is also noted that evidence of changes can take time.

"[I've observed agencies] seeing those communities as community groups or sectors as partners and people as engineers of change."

KEQ 4: Were there improvements in place-based community engagement to strengthen outcomes for the Reef?

Many respondents spoke about the strong role and impact of place-based engagement. Some of the respondents highlighted the success of the program in terms of bringing together local groups, which they saw the right approach for achieving impact and others highlighting that the program has enabled the groups to find a common ground. There was some recognition in the feedback however that there are further opportunities to connect the broader community with the CAP.

"What it has achieved is that community connection. Putting groups together that normally didn't work together or didn't even know about each other."

KEQ 5: To what extent are enduring funding and partnerships available?

There is recognition that the CAP program has potential to be a vehicle for enduring funding and partnerships. There was a strong overlap between the feedback provided by the CAP decision maker responses with the feedback provided by the CAP Leaders around the enabling role of the CAPs. Some key themes included:

- Most respondents indicated that building relationships and networks is foundational for developing enduring tools and partnerships.
- Half of the respondents highlighted that maintaining momentum for the CAP is critical for delivering impact.
- Most respondents indicated that accessing funding and resources is critical to success.
- Three respondents recognised the importance of regional mentors and coordinators (CAP Leaders) that are well known and respected to ensure enduring outcomes. Another recognised how the CAP program has increased volunteerism and capacity to undertake long term projects.



Outside the specific Key Evaluation Questions, the largest theme across feedback was related to the speed and magnitude of outcomes that have been achieved. Respondents recognised that once the CAPs were developed, they were translated into action quickly through the seed funding. This had an impact through maintaining momentum and enthusiasm generated through the CAP development and through the on ground outcomes of the projects.

“And it's more than anyone could have dreamed of really, in terms of getting money happening on the ground and helping, just the small act of even that youth project. You can really change lives at that, for those young people. I just think and you can't go, "Oh, it's just a small group of kids." Well, it really can make those people just such unusual and wonderful human beings. And especially if they could stay in the [region] and bring the changes that the [region] needs, and the young leaders the [region] needs.”

Impacts of the CAP Program were also analysed against the Collective Impact Framework:

A common agenda	Some of the respondents indicated that the CAP process was able to bring together community groups to create a shared vision for change.	<i>“There's so many different groups and I just see it as all disjointed and it's not particularly effective for that reason. So yeah, it's good to see that the opposite has happened as a result”</i>
Effective and continuous communication	Many of the respondents were keen to highlight the positive work of the CAP Leaders in facilitating effective and continuous communication.	<i>“I think, people who would not normally have spoken up in front of a room full of people, working in smaller tables was good, because you really felt like you got to know the people at the table, I think. That was good. I think a lot of people came with issues that they wanted to raise. They did have stuff they wanted to put on the table, perhaps. Yeah. I think also, [CAP Leader] is a very modest kind of facilitator. Some people can try and take over the room or something like that. He was obviously never like that.”</i>
Mutually reinforcing activities	Like the CAP Leaders, many of the respondents appreciated being able to collaborate with others and being part of a greater whole.	<i>“It just seems to be bringing groups together. I don't know exactly how, but it feels like things are really starting to align, which in this community space is incredibly important.”</i>
Strong backbone organisations	A key strength of the CAP Program, identified by respondents, was having a dedicated team to orchestrate and lead the work.	<i>“They have....stepped up and taken on this role really, really well. They've been able to connect with other organizations that they may not have necessarily connected with and they've done it in a nonjudgmental and non-biased way.”</i>
Shared measurement	The respondents highlighted the ongoing challenges and difficulties associated with collecting and managing data on progress/outcomes.	<i>“I think that's the most important thing is that those energies and efforts are consolidated so that you are actually achieving positive, productive, useful outcomes as opposed to collecting data, for example, for the sake of collecting data. Where's it going to go?... If you're going to collect it, is there an existing program already that you can already tap into? Who can you partner with?”</i>



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Ingredients for Success

The interviews identified a number of critical ingredients for program success, including:

- Celebrating success is viewed as important for both mitigating against burnout and to ensure that community contributors feel valued.
- Sharing insights and lessons among the CAP areas is important to build on project learnings and enable opportunities for collective impact.
- CAP Leaders are seen to play a pivotal role in driving the program, and beyond this leadership, there is also recognition of the need for supporting community champions and leaders.
- Central to the success of the CAP program is having a wide range of diverse voices involved in the process and that those voices are working together effectively and collaboratively.
- Empowerment and capacity building for CAP networks is central to program success.
- Building and maintaining engagement can be further supported by understanding motivations and perceptions of value.
- The program framework and delivery must be tailored to local needs.

Challenges and opportunities

Some opportunities to continue strengthening CAPs were identified including:

- To date, the CAP program has focused on engaging with core community project leads and key partners (Traditional Owners, science, management, local government). Through implementation, there are important opportunities to explore around strategically engaging additional key influence groups and using CAPs to enabling participation by a wider range of community.
- The CAP program and projects have some constraints related to capacity, in particular time availability for the program, which needs to be considered for ongoing implementation. There are also some ongoing engagement challenges related to COVID restrictions and impacts on partner operations, although this impact is lessening.
- The collaborative development of the CAP program focused on identifying a set of collective measurements. The implementation phase needs to ensure that the collected data is being used to communicate the collective outcomes.
- The future direction and potential for the CAP program can be supported by strong cross regional collaboration, continued refinement of the CAPs to adapt to needs and ongoing efforts to build momentum in translation to action.

Next steps

In collaboration with the CAP Leaders and key partners, the results will be used to continue adapting and improving the implementation phase of the program and explore opportunities for continuation of impactful program activities beyond 2023.



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