

Empowering young leaders in the Capricorn Coast

A case study on the Community Action Plan Program 2020-23

“The ideas that have emerged from the CAP are a testament to the community's active contribution and participation. It signifies the very essence of community-driven change, and that is a remarkable achievement.”
Rebecca French, Partnerships and Strategy Manager Fitzroy Basin Association

Background

The Capricorn Coast is at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef and is well known for its beautiful beaches and the Keppel Islands. It is also home to thriving coastal communities, strong tourism and agriculture sectors, national parks, and internationally significant wetlands. The Capricorn Coast community is situated on Darumbal Land and Sea Country. Darumbal's vast area of Sea Country extends from the Capricorn Coast, Keppel Bay region, north to the southern extent of the Broadsound, and Shoalwater Bay to the Swains Reef. The Keppel Bay Islands National Park is also home to the Woppaburra people.

In 2020, Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA) in collaboration with Capricornia Catchments led the development of the Capricorn Coast Community Action Plan to empower partners to work together to enable effective community action for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef.

Community, Traditional Owner and youth workshops identified the eight top priority values for their region, including Traditional Owner connection to people and Country, protecting coastal ecosystems, reducing emissions, and building youth engagement and stewardship.



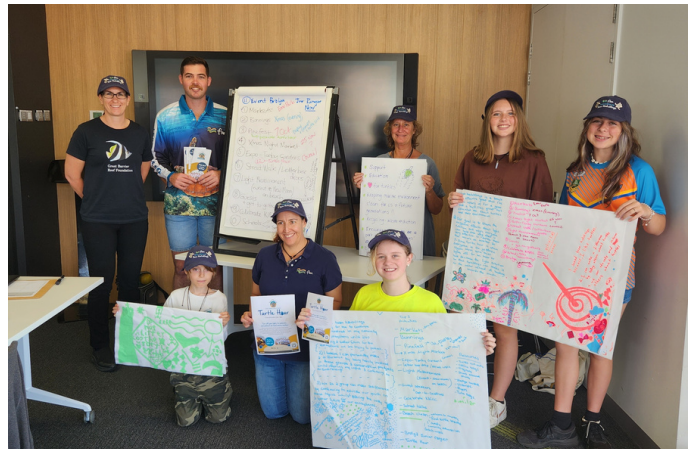
*BROLGA Junior Rangers event at Mt Archer (Nurim).
Credit: Laura Dunstan/GBRF*

The Community Action Plan (CAP) Program is a pilot program for place-based collaborative planning and delivery to enhance community Reef protection for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. CAPs connect community aspirations with regional and Reef-wide priorities by:

- establishing shared goals
- designing better ways to work together
- identifying critical projects
- measuring and celebrating the impact of community on-ground action
- exploring ways to enable investment.



The timeline outlines key steps in the CAP process:



Top: Bluey and Owen Harris turtle education at a community event. Credit: Bluey Harris.
Bottom: Tour of High Valley Dawn Permaculture gardens. Credit: Laura Dunstan/GBRF

Top: FBA Team Hatchlings planning day. Credit: Laura Dunstan/GBRF.
Bottom: Turtle nest behaviour change pledges at community event. Credit: Lisa Del Riccio/FBA



Community Action Impacts

All CAP projects in the Capricorn Coast region had the strong theme of enabling youth-led community Reef protection actions.

BROLGA Junior Ranger Program - Darumbal People Aboriginal Corporation

The BROLGA (Believe. Respect. Openness. Learn. Grow. Achieve.) Program provides unique experiences for youth to learn about the value of identity, culture, language, and a snapshot of the world of looking after country. The school holiday program takes youth to culturally significant places to learn about the management of land and sea Country through the lens of both western and traditional sciences and approaches. Youth meet professionals such as Indigenous Rangers and University staff who inspire them to consider study, training or careers by highlighting the value of school attendance and TAFE/university pathways. Over 100 youth have participated in the program since 2022 which has proven to have long-term impacts. For example, one participant (from a previous version of the program) is now a Darumbal TUMRA Ranger, another is the Darumbal Cultural Resilience Officer who has carriage of the BROLGA Program, and 38 participants have gone on to study at CQUniversity. From 2023, the BROLGA Program is continuing to bring culture and knowledge to youth by increasing exposure to land and sea management activities, supporting non-accredited experiential learnings, and strengthening Darumbal's accredited pathways in the area of traineeships and scholarship programs.

Team Hatchlings - Fitzroy Basin Association

The Team Hatchlings project is a youth-led marine turtle conservation and stewardship initiative which provides a platform for enthusiastic and passionate youth to develop their leadership skills through planning and implementing education and awareness-raising activities. Sixteen 'Hatchlings' ranging from 6 to 13 years old, developed a program of activities to encourage people to turn off their lights during turtle hatchling season. This included a video created in collaboration with Darumbal and Woppaburra Traditional Owners, a social media campaign, a blog, a pamphlet for residents living along the beaches and a TV advertisement, which all reached a wide range of people. As a result, volunteers observed an uptake of new light management behaviours in the beachside communities. The Hatchlings gained confidence, decision making skills, cultural awareness and understanding, learned the power of collective action, and the important role young people have in making an impact for the Reef. From 2023, FBA is recruiting new Hatchlings, supporting new activities to encourage positive community stewardship for marine turtles, and exploring pathways between programs as youth transition from primary to secondary schooling.

6,212



Participant engagements in planning and action, including 1,505 youth engagements

2



New youth programs developed – Team Hatchlings and Cap Coast Eco Warriors

124



Youth participated in the BROLGA Program

300



Trees planted through the launch of new bush tucker garden with Traditional Owner input



BROLGA Junior Rangers event at Corio Bay. Credit: Laura Dunstan/GBRF



Regenerative Land Use Education Project - High Valley Dawn Permaculture

The Regenerative Land Use Education Project has established a 0.6 hectare bush tucker orchard with 300 native plants at High Valley Dawn Permaculture Farm. While preventing runoff and sequestering carbon dioxide, the orchard also provides a new place to host educational programs. The project uses the growth of the orchard as an example of regenerative agriculture principles in practice and showcases how sustainable land management practices benefit the Reef. It is creating an intergenerational awareness and educational program that engages landholders, individuals, community members, school and university students on regenerative agriculture principles and bush tucker awareness. Over 3,000 people have been involved in this project, developing a deeper understanding of regenerative agriculture concepts. They now recognise how these techniques contribute to a healthier Reef and participants intend to implement them in their own properties. For example, one school is building its own food forest and yarning circle. From 2023, High Valley Dawn Permaculture is developing a Youth Leadership Program targeted at schools and youth organisations, offering immersive opportunities and practical hands-on experiences for young people to learn about regenerative agriculture, carbon sequestration, bush tucker plant varieties, and the role of land care for Reef protection.

Cap Coast Eco Warriors

The Cap Coast Eco Warriors are a youth-led, volunteer-run, not-for-profit environmental conservation group. This initiative is promoting awareness and opportunities for young people through hands-on activities focused on creating environmental change, and is fostering cross-culture learning with the First Nations Peoples. Their aim is to give youth a voice and involve them in exciting and fun conservation activities, including rehabilitating dunes, removing invasive weeds and cleaning up marine debris from beaches. These enthusiastic participants are taking ownership of their future and are incredibly dedicated to making a difference. The group launched in June 2022 with active leadership from Owen Harris, winner of the Landcare Australia Steadfast Young Landcarer 2022 Awards for Queensland, and has since gained independent funding and support for ongoing youth-led action for the Reef.



*Tour of High Valley Dawn Permaculture gardens.
Credit: Laura Dunstan/GBRF*

Empowering community action at the Sandy Krak Reef Festival - Keppel Coast Arts Council

The 2022 Sandy Krak Reef Festival strengthened cultural activities for the Capricorn Coast Communities by promoting a youth-led, 100% ecofriendly event intertwining art, music, dance, Indigenous culture and sustainability to raise awareness and encourage positive behaviour changes to look after the Reef. Darumbal and Woppaburra shared cultural knowledge about their TUMRAs (Traditional Use of Marine Resource Agreements), while fifteen ecofriendly artisan market stallholders and eight youth targeted workshops specifically focused on Reef protection and conservation. More than 450 participants including 200 youth attended the festival. They removed 20 kg of marine debris, expanded cultural knowledge, increased awareness of threats to the Reef, and committed to 'Reef Pledges' to take action to protect it.



Ingredients for success

Many factors have enabled the empowerment of youth to take action for the Reef including:

Building confidence, identity and a sense of purpose

The program has provided a platform for young voices to be heard. It has helped instill confidence and recognise their potential, showing they can play an important role and make a tangible difference for the Reef. For example, the BROLGA Program mentors Indigenous youth to develop a strong sense of cultural identity and purpose in looking after Country.

Making it fun

Projects are providing fun experiences for youth to get involved in Reef protection actions through engaging and locally relevant activities. For example, the Sandy Krak Reef Festival combines art and music with conservation activities, introducing a range of participants to local conservation groups and behaviour changes they can adopt at home.

Creating career pathways

The program fostered genuine engagement with youth to build their capacity to be involved in decision making processes and to learn about future career opportunities. All CAP projects are linking youth with professionals in careers such as Indigenous Rangers, marine biologists and ecologists, which is inspiring them to pursue careers in these fields.

Mentoring & forming strong social connections

CAP projects are providing transformational experiences connecting people not only with their local environment and the Reef, but also with each other through storytelling, mentoring, and forming strong social connections. For example, FBA's Team Hatchlings project was built on the foundations and learnings of the Team Turtle CQ project. The adults are not only a role model for the youth, but the older Team Hatchlings are also mentoring and guiding younger kids to build confidence and skills. Together, the community is working collaboratively to make a difference for sea turtle populations.

Promoting wellbeing

In a world faced with challenges that can seem overwhelming and create eco-anxiety, Project leaders recognise that to empower people to take care of their environment and others, they also need to take care of themselves. Projects are providing safe spaces and hands-on experiences to increase wellbeing and learn how many small actions can collectively make a big impact. For example, the High Valley Dawn farm operates on the permaculture ethics of Earth care, people care, and fair share, and parents have reported their children developing a new attitude and appreciation for life as a result of engaging in the education programs.

What are we working on?

The program is designed to be adaptive and responsive. The next areas of growth identified for the Capricorn Coast local action plans are:

Stepping up youth leadership actions

To build on the momentum and scale up opportunities for youth-led Reef protection actions, the Foundation provided additional resourcing for three CAP projects. These projects are investigating opportunities to work together and cross-pollinate their programs and are continuing to grow more impactful opportunities for youth leadership.



People driving change

A diverse range of people are driving the work by bringing their local knowledge, identifying priorities, delivering activities and coordinating efforts to harness community contributions.



“Team Hatchlings is a way for me to continue to be involved in my community and our ecosystems whilst also forming a better future for the ecosystems we are trying to protect. I believe I can personally make a difference by being heavily involved in these groups and offering my input and do fundraising.”

Zahara Evans, Team Hatchlings

“The heart of this initiative was showing these kids that collaboration can bring about change. It’s about understanding their own power to influence community and conservation. Making them realise that they weren’t embarking on this journey alone, but as a collective force. And this sense of community and mutual growth is especially vital for the youngsters of our region, as these experiences aren’t something they could achieve independently.” **Rebecca French, Fitzroy Basin Association**



“We give these children a transformational experience, when they come to the farm, plant a tree, walk them through the orchard, and sit in this sharing circle. Education is key and to do it in the way that gets to the heartstrings. We encourage wellness, the people care factor, so people feel good about themselves, so they can actually have the headspace to be able to think about doing stuff that’s good for the Reef and good for the environment.”

Ross O'Reilly, Owner of High Valley Dawn Permaculture



Ghost net weaving at the Sandy Krak Reef Festival. Credit: Diane Lanyon



Planting native trees in the High Valley Dawn Permaculture garden. Credit: Ross O'Reilly



“The BROLGA Program is like an investment strategy, for 5 years’ time when they graduate from school and go to university. We can tell and see the difference it makes and how their language has changed, their viewpoints have changed, we can see their leadership qualities coming through.”

Malcom Mann, Director Darumbal People Aboriginal Corporation



“I think youth working with our Elders to ensure that cultural knowledge is passed down from generation to generation is very important. And I think learning that at a young age, we will see so many benefits with this area. I want to ensure that one day, my kids will then understand all this knowledge and dreaming and culture to protect our reefs and our environment.”

Jazmin Grant, BROLGA Junior Ranger

“A big impact is being out on country, because most of them probably have never been out on country or on the water, or know anything about the reef. So having that as an impact can lead them to think oh, this is nice. I like it, I might want to become a marine park ranger.”

Kobe Watts, Darumbal TUMRA Ranger



*BROLGA Junior Rangers event at Mt Archer (Nurim).
Credit: Laura Dunstan / GBRF*



A collaborative approach

The Capricorn Coast Community Action Plan is funded by the partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.



Great Barrier
Reef Foundation



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Team Hatchlings education event. Credit: Fitzroy Basin Association

We extend our deepest respect and recognition to all Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Reef and its Catchments as First Nations Peoples holding the hopes, dreams, traditions and cultures of the Reef.

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