

Great Barrier Reef Traditional Owner Steering Group sign Agreement to Partner with the Commonwealth and the State government to Protect the Future of the Reef

Thursday 16th November 2023 – One year on from the launch of the Reef 2050 Traditional Owner Implementation Plan, a principles-based ‘Agreement to Partner’ has been signed by the Reef 2050 Traditional Owner Steering Group, the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment and Water, the Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP, and the Queensland Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, the Hon. Leanne Linard MP.

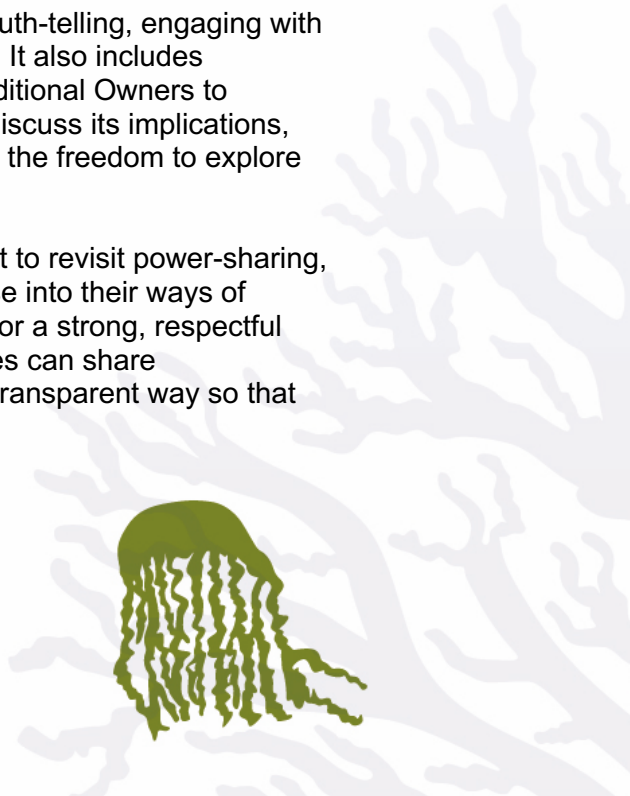
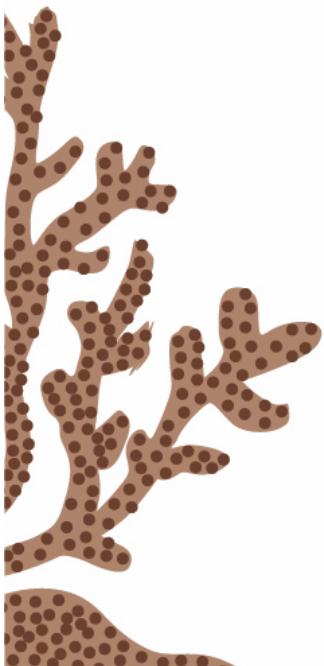
Chrissy Grant, Kuku Yalanji and Mualgal Traditional Owner and Steering Group co-chair shares “Last year, we launched our Reef 2050 Traditional Owner Implementation Plan – our roadmap for a way forward to heal and care for Country and People. We called on government to join us as partners as we honour the work of those who have come before us and fulfil our cultural obligations as Traditional Owners of the Reef.”

The Agreement is designed to give effect to the rights, interests, and aspirations of Traditional Owners for the Reef in delivering the Reef 2050 Traditional Owner Implementation Plan. This is done in full and genuine willing spirit of partnership between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Commonwealth and Queensland government agencies.

Youth member and Butchulla and Erub Island Traditional Owner, Jessie Courtney says “the signing today is a signifier of the commitment from the government partners to working better together to enact cultural change and shift the balance of power”. Principles embedded in the document include decisions being reached through Free, Prior and Informed consent (FPIC), the promoting of self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with a focus on accountability, transparency, and relationship and trust building.

Protocols for working together include centring truth-telling, engaging with an open mind, promoting curiosity and reflection. It also includes commitment to allow for appropriate time for Traditional Owners to consider a proposed approach or a project and discuss its implications, and creating space for us to find our way, having the freedom to explore and navigate uncharted waters.

“We have advocated for the need for government to revisit power-sharing, co-benefits, and cultural capability and uplift these into their ways of working. This Agreement provides a foundation for a strong, respectful and durable two-way partnership where all Parties can share responsibility and accountability in an open and transparent way so that



we can navigate the cultural shift together” says Duane Fraser, Steering Group co-chair and Wulgurukaba and Bidjara Traditional Owner.

The Implementation Plan is building on work of Elders and leaders, past and present – those who have tirelessly continued to show up to the table with government in good faith, holding government to a standard that is more inclusive, and advocating for needed systems-level changes. As Malachi Johnson, Gooreng Gooreng Traditional Owner says, “we stand on the shoulders of our Elders, and carry our ancestors on our backs”. Working from this foundation, the Plan is a *how* to go respectfully together, as much as a *what* to do. Importantly, it’s by Traditional Owners for Traditional Owners.

There has never been a more urgent need for holistic approaches to Reef management, grounded in the knowing that as Reef Traditional Owners, we are inherent rights holders with deep and unwavering connections to Country and each other.

Steering Group member and Darumbal Traditional Owner Malcolm Mann says “the pathway forward is clear. We know what the actions are. Success relies on an uplift in resources, support for self-determination and recognition of our rights and goodwill to move forward in genuine partnership.” The signing of this Agreement signifies the start of a journey on this pathway and is something to celebrate.

We welcome and celebrate the articulation of these commitments and take this time also to honour and remember those who have paved the way for us. We also acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters that make up the Great Barrier Reef and interlinking Countries surrounding the Reef, and we pay respects to their Elders past, present and emerging Leaders.



For any media enquiries, email info@reefto.com.au

Further info on the Reef 2050 Traditional Owner Steering Group and their work can be found at <https://reefto.au>

To read the agreement, see <http://reefto.au/resources>

