



# Walking Side-By-Side: A New Model for Indigenous Partnerships

A social value analysis of the Woppaburra Coral Project

Front cover image: © AIMS, Gus Burrows



## Acknowledgment of Country

Social Ventures Australia acknowledges and pays respect to the past and present traditional custodians and elders of this country on which we work.

‘After the Rains’ by Richard Seden for Saltwater People 2024

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## **Project acknowledgements**

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Our team is passionate about what they do and use their diverse experience to work together to solve our society's most pressing challenges.

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# 1. Executive summary

The Woppaburra Coral Project represents a landmark collaboration between the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) and Woppaburra people, the Traditional Owners of the Keppel Islands. As one of the first initiatives under AIMS' Indigenous Partnerships Plan (IPP), the project set a new standard for Traditional Owner engagement in marine research and demonstrated the transformative potential of genuine partnership.

Commencing in 2019, the 5-year \$11 million research project co-funded by AIMS and BHP, investigated coral reef restoration strategies in reefs around the Keppel Islands in the southern inshore Great Barrier Reef. Beyond its scientific aims, the project embedded a suite of partnership activities - relationship building, two-way learning, and support for Woppaburra aspirations - designed to foster mutual respect, cultural exchange, and long-term impact.

Upon project completion in June 2024, AIMS engaged Social Ventures Australia (SVA) to undertake a social value analysis to better understand what changes occurred for the people and organisations involved in the Woppaburra Coral Project, and how partnership activities contributed to those changes. Prior to commencement, research approval was secured from the James Cook University Human Research Ethics Committee (ethics Approval Number H9684). Through a comprehensive document review, participant interviews and valuation activities, SVA identified 24 material outcomes across six interconnected value themes: establishing a genuine partnership, returning to Country, building pathways, learning about marine science, learning about Woppaburra culture, and sharing the partnership model.

The analysis found that the Woppaburra Coral Project created significant social, economic and cultural value. For Woppaburra people, the opportunity to return to Country was deeply healing and strengthened connections to family, culture, and sea Country. The project also supported aspirations for training and employment, with tangible outcomes including new roles, certificates, and increased confidence to pursue careers on Country. These findings are particularly powerful given Woppaburra people were forcibly removed from their Country in 1902, and for many Woppaburra people, this project provided an opportunity to go back to their Country for the first time.

For AIMS, the project catalysed institutional change. It demonstrated the value of Indigenous partnerships not only in achieving scientific outcomes but in enhancing cultural competence, ethical research practices, and organisational reputation. The success of the Woppaburra Coral Project contributed to AIMS' increased funding and the expansion of its Indigenous Partnerships team, positioning AIMS as a national leader in establishing and nurturing Traditional Owner partnerships.

This project used economic valuation techniques to value the six value themes. While financial proxies were used to estimate value, the valuation approach went beyond simple monetisation. The social value methodology started with a detailed understanding of the outcomes and the evidence to support the value themes and the outcomes. Once this was completed, financial proxies were used to help understand the value of the themes. Assessments of deadweight (what would have happened anyway) and attribution (who else contributed to the outcomes) were completed to ensure that the unique value created from the activities and partnership were highlighted. The process also involved qualitative insights from stakeholders to validate the outcomes and ensure they were meaningful, not just measurable. As a result, the valuation reflects not only economic benefit but also cultural, emotional, and institutional change, dimensions that are often overlooked in traditional evaluations or cost-benefit analyses.

While a single monetary figure could not capture the depth and complexity of the value themes or the outcomes, the financial proxies help tell the story of value creation. For example, the return to Country activities alone were valued at approximately \$6.4 million, based on comparable healing programs. Critically, this would not have happened without the partnership activities of the Woppaburra Coral Project. This was also true for most of the outcomes identified for Traditional Owners and other stakeholders – the Woppaburra Coral Project created positive *and* unique outcomes.

The Woppaburra Coral Project shows that when the inherent cultural obligations and rights of Traditional Owners are recognised and respected in scientific research, the outcomes are more impactful, enduring, and equitable. It offers a compelling model for how institutions can work alongside Traditional Owners to care for Country and create shared value.

## 2. Background to the analysis

This section provides an overview of events leading up to this analysis. It includes an explanation of how the Woppaburra Coral Project came about, who was involved and a snapshot of partnership activities. It also includes a summary of the purpose and approach of social value measurement, and the methodology applied to analyse the social value created by the Woppaburra Coral Project.

### 2.1 The Australian Institute of Marine Science Indigenous Partnerships Plan

The [Australian Institute of Marine Science](#) (AIMS) is Australia’s tropical marine research agency. Established in 1972, AIMS is a corporate Commonwealth entity accountable to the Minister for the Environment and Water. AIMS’ strategic objective is to provide research, knowledge and capabilities about Australia’s tropical marine estate to improve ocean health, protect coral reefs from climate change and create national benefits.

In 2019, AIMS introduced an [Indigenous Partnerships Plan](#) (IPP). In the two decades prior, AIMS had successfully engaged with First Nations peoples on science projects. The goal of the IPP was to facilitate an organisation-wide shift from engagement to genuine partnership. The driver for this shift was recognition that Traditional Owners have inherent rights and responsibilities and an enduring spiritual and cultural connection with their land and sea Country, and that their responsibility for sea Country strongly aligns with AIMS’ core values and strategic objectives. Another driver was to create the context (roadmap) for meaningful engagement with Traditional Owners that would lead to development of more co-designed partnership projects.

The IPP outlined

1. the steps required for AIMS and its staff to become culturally competent (a necessary foundation for successful Indigenous partnerships)
2. a tiered engagement approach ranging from bronze through to platinum, where bronze projects were AIMS-led with minimal engagement, while platinum projects represented Traditional Owner-led research (see Figure 1).
3. guidance on expected partnership activities associated with each tier.

The tiered approach recognises that an appropriate level of engagement and the types of activities will differ by project on a case-by-case basis. The Indigenous Partnerships team (IP team) were made available to support implementation by helping scientists to identify the appropriate tier for a new project, undertake partnership activities and upskill their cultural competency, as required.

Figure 1: AIMS’ tiered engagement approach

Bronze	Silver	Gold	Platinum
AIMS led projects with basic engagement	AIMS led projects, Traditional Owner consultation, consent and (optional) participation	Joint AIMS-Traditional Owner co-led projects Consent, co-design, co-delivery	Traditional Owner-led projects with AIMS support
AIMS Driven		Collaboration	Traditional Owner Driven

AIMS has continued their commitment to Indigenous partnerships, setting the ambitious goal of 90% of research projects at IPP tier silver and 10% tier gold by 2030 in the [AIMS Strategy 2030](#). Noting that, there is no intention for *all* projects to shift towards platinum to be externally driven by Traditional Owners. In addition to the IPP, AIMS is also investing in Indigenous training and employment pathways and Indigenous-led science and innovation across its science portfolio.

## 2.2 The Woppaburra Coral Project

The [Woppaburra Coral Project](#) was one of the first projects undertaken using the new IPP engagement approach. Commencing in 2019, the 5-year project investigated coral reef restoration strategies in reefs around the Keppel Islands in the southern inshore Great Barrier Reef. The Woppaburra Coral Project was undertaken in partnership between AIMS and Woppaburra people, who are the Traditional Owners of the Keppel Islands, and was co-funded by AIMS and BHP.

### Introducing Woppaburra people

For at least 5,000 years, Woppaburra were sea-faring saltwater people, moving between Konomie (North Keppel Island), Woppa (South/Great Keppel Island), and Burye (Humpy Island). They knew these islands and sea Country intimately, passing on their knowledge from one generation to the next for millennia, until European colonisation in the 1800s. The last 19 Woppaburra people remaining on-Country were forcibly removed in 1902. Woppaburra people of today are descendants from six apical ancestors who primarily reside along the East coast of Australia.<sup>1</sup>

In 2007, Woppaburra people negotiated a Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement (TUMRA) with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Queensland Government. A TUMRA sets out how Great Barrier Reef Traditional Owner groups work in partnership with the Australian and Queensland governments to manage activities on their sea Country. A Woppaburra TUMRA Steering Committee was formed (WTSC), who were delegated to manage sea Country business on behalf of Woppaburra people, in consultation with Elders. The WTSC is comprised of one representative of each of the six apical ancestors, creating representation for each of the family lines. The WTSC became an incorporated body, the [Woppaburra TUMRA Aboriginal Corporation](#), in September 2022, and maintained the same role. AIMS engaged with the WTSC as the Woppaburra point of contact and decision-making body for Woppaburra Coral Project governance.

### Introducing BHP

[BHP](#) is a resources company with worldwide operations. BHP seeks to contribute to the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of land and waters in the regions in which they operate. The Keppel Islands are of strategic interest to the company as they operate assets in the Fitzroy Basin area, and the Keppels are where the Fitzroy Basin expresses into the sea. BHP and AIMS co-funded the project, contributing \$5.5 million each.

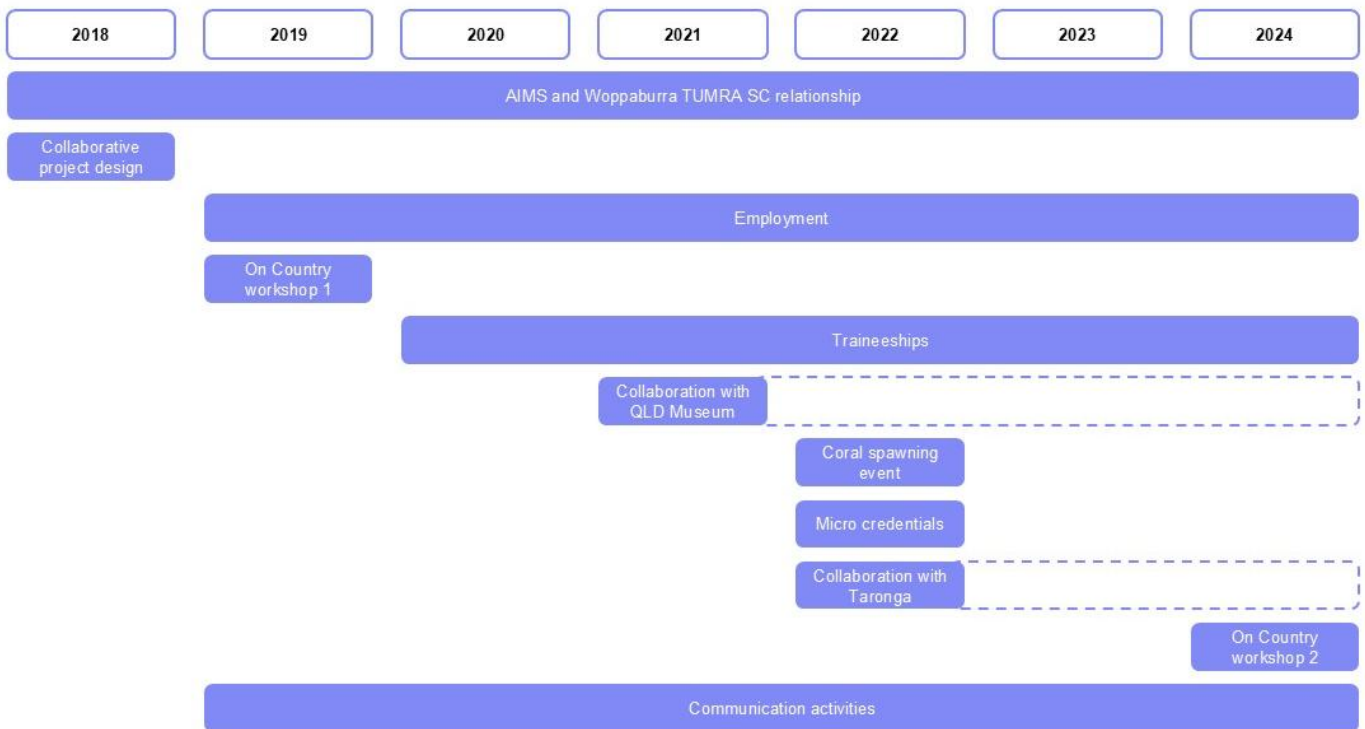
### Partnership activities

The project was IPP silver-tier, meaning that AIMS led the reef restoration research activities, with Woppaburra consultation, consent, and participation. Some of the research activities, in fact, were gold-tier, such as culturally informed site selection and the development of cross-cultural scientific protocols. In addition to reef restoration research activities, a number of partnership activities were built into the Woppaburra Coral Project. Partnership activities centred around building an effective partnership, supporting Woppaburra aspirations, and two-way learning (see Figure 2). The details of the partnership activities are outlined in [section 3. The social value of the Woppaburra Coral Project](#) below.

Image: © AIMS, Jo Hurford



Figure 2: Timeline of partnership activities



## 2.3. Social value analysis

### 2.3.1 The purpose of this analysis

The Woppaburra Coral Project evaluation activities and anecdotal evidence identified that a range of positive outcomes were created through the partnership. To better understand what changes occurred and how the partnership led or contributed to those outcomes, AIMS engaged Social Ventures Australia (SVA) to undertake a social value analysis upon completion of the project in June 2024.

### 2.3.2 How we define and account for social value

Social value refers to the broader societal benefit of investments, actions or policies, beyond monetary worth. It captures the positive changes experienced by individuals, communities, and the environment, addressing aspects such as societal well-being, environmental sustainability, and economic equity. Unlike traditional financial metrics such as profit, social value emphasises what truly matters to people, measuring outcomes that enhance their quality of life and create meaningful, long-term impact for present and future generations.

Measuring the social value or social impact of policies and programs is a movement that has grown rapidly around the world over the past decade. Most people understand the importance of doing it, and acknowledge that it is hard to do. There are a number of challenges.

First, unlike financial value, social value is not an objective or fixed concept. It depends on the specific societal, cultural, and individual priorities within the context in which the value is being measured. These can often only be discerned through a deep understanding of that context from multiple perspectives. An additional complication is that many of the social or cultural outcomes we are most interested in are those experienced by people who have little or no power in decision-making.

Second, unlike most financial metrics, many social outcomes have complex non-linear cause-and-effect relationships, making it difficult to isolate and quantify specific impacts. Also, many social outcomes can take a long time to materialise, making them more difficult to measure and value.

Third, accompanying the growing interest in measuring social value is a proliferation of tools and standards, which can sometimes add to the confusion. There are ongoing initiatives within the social value measurement community to standardise how social value is measured. At SVA, we are closely aligned with Social Value International, the global network for social value and impact measurement, whose approach is centred around the [Principles of Social Value](#) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: The Principles of Social Value



The Principles are a combination of accounting principles, for measurement, and management principles, for decision-making. They are drawn from existing disciplines such as financial accounting, sustainability reporting, evaluation, and social research. What distinguishes the Principles from other approaches is their explicit focus on ensuring that the people who experience the changes to their wellbeing are informing the measurement and management of those changes.

The Principles are deliberately designed to be flexible, so that they can be applied to any scope of activities, large or small, dependent upon the decisions they are designed to inform. Key to the approach is understanding clearly why the analysis of social value is being conducted, who the audience is, and then determining the appropriate level of rigour of the analysis required for the purpose and audience. Analysing social value inherently relies on human judgment and requires discernment on what is appropriate to include and how far to go at every stage. The Principles aim to guide this process.

Social value is best accounted for through a combination of qualitative and quantitative information. While quantitative metrics such as financial proxies offer concrete measurements that can be easily compared and analysed, these metrics alone can fall short in capturing the full essence of social value, which is often nuanced and intangible. Those aspects of social value can be better understood through qualitative information, in the form of contextual narrative about the changes experienced by people in their lives, and what those changes mean to them. This holistic understanding of the social value of an organisation’s activities or government’s policies can then be used to intentionally inform future decisions in a way that benefits society.

### 2.3.3 Our approach to this analysis

There are three main steps in any social value analysis that we undertake. We start by **understanding the change**: identifying the outcomes that matter most to key program participants and developing ‘logic models’ that illustrate how the organisation’s activities lead to the changes experienced by participants. Next, we **measure the change**, determining appropriate indicators and collecting evidence, ideally directly from the participants, to demonstrate that the changes have occurred. Finally, we **value the change**, assigning a relative importance and financial proxies (if appropriate) to outcomes based on participants’ preferences.

To undertake this analysis of the social value of the Woppaburra Coral Project we first secured approval from the James Cook University Human Research Ethics Committee (ethics Approval Number H9684). Dr Sarah Lawless, Postdoctoral Research Fellow: Ocean Governance, James Cook University, Libby Evans-Illidge, Indigenous Partnerships Program Leader, AIMS and Dr Carly Randall, Woppaburra Coral Project Science Lead, AIMS were integral to the development of the ethics application.

To understand the changes experienced by the people and organisations involved in the Woppaburra Coral Project, we reviewed existing program documentation, promotional materials, reporting to funders, and evaluation activities. Then, to measure the changes, we conduct semi-structured interviews with a range of participants who were involved in partnership activities (see Table 1).

Participant recruitment involved a mix of purposive sampling (20 key team members at AIMS and external organisations) and snowball sampling (opportunity for up to 30 Woppaburra people, 5 per family line, who participated in partnership activities). We worked with the WTSC to develop an appropriate recruitment method for Woppaburra people and engaged WTSC member Meaghan Cummins to support with implementation. Participation was optional and completely voluntary. Woppaburra interview participants were provided a \$50 gift card in recognition of their contributions. The interviews were ~1 hour via phone or online meeting and involved a combination of yarning and interview questions. An information sheet, interview questions and consent form were sent to all participants prior to interview. The aim of the interviews was to seek participants’ perspectives on:

1. what changes occurred for the people and organisations involved in the Woppaburra Coral Project?
2. how valuable were these changes to project participants?
3. what activities or ways of working enabled these changes?
4. what lessons can be drawn to improve future partnerships?

Table 1: Overview of Woppaburra Coral Project participant interviews

Overview of participant interviews		
Participant group	Description	# of interviews
Woppaburra people	Woppaburra Traditional Owners who participated in project activities. This included a mix of WTSC members, Elders, adults, and young people (aged 18-35). Five of the six apical ancestor family lines participated in interviews.	12
Australian Institute of Marine Science	The core Australian Institute of Marine Science team who participated in project activities. This included a mix of the leadership team, Indigenous Partnerships team, scientists, non-Indigenous PhD students and trainees.	8
External stakeholders	Organisations who contributed to partnership activities. This included staff from Taronga Conservation Society Australia and Queensland Museum Tropics.	2

Image: © AIMS, Gus Burrows



### Defining the changes that occurred

An 'outcome' is a change that occurs for participants of a specific program or activity. Outcomes may include new experience, knowledge, skill, attitude, behaviour or feeling. Through the document review, interviews and subsequent analysis, we identified 24 outcomes that occurred for and were important to Woppaburra Coral Project participants. Outcomes are written as affirmative statements identifying the participant group and what change occurred for them. Each outcome did not necessarily occur for each individual person in the group.

Outcomes are typically displayed in a sequential order, and each sequence of outcomes is unique. In the Woppaburra Coral Project, activities of varied length took place intermittently over a 5-year period and different combinations of participant groups were involved in different activities. As such it was not possible or logical to present the outcomes in a sequential order. Instead, we have grouped the outcomes into six value themes.

In addition to the outcomes resulting from partnership activities, a number of significant scientific outcomes were generated through the research activities undertaken during the Woppaburra Coral Project. These outcomes, however, were beyond the scope of our analysis and are not included in this reporting.

### Valuation approach

Having understood and measured the change, the final step was to value the change. Our professional judgment was that calculating a Social Return On Investment (SROI) ratio - a single monetary figure claiming to represent the overall social value of Woppaburra Coral Project - was not appropriate for several reasons.

First, the Woppaburra Coral Project generated a range of interdependent cultural, social, and environmental outcomes that are deeply intertwined with self-determination, reconciliation, and environmental initiatives. Reducing these complex and nuanced outcomes to a single monetary figure would oversimplify the real-world impact and fail to capture the depth of the changes experienced by participants.

Second, the Woppaburra Coral Project involved multiple participants who participated in different activities over the course of the 5-year project. An SROI ratio would require defining a discrete investment period and understanding

changes relative to that investment, which is challenging given the nature of Woppaburra Coral Project activities and the diverse outcomes experienced within and between different participant groups.

Third, many of the outcomes most valued by Woppaburra Coral Project participants do not have existing marketplace values, for example, strengthened connection to Country, family or culture. Applying economic valuation techniques to ascertain their value using financial proxies is an emerging practice globally. Simply adding these valuations together and dividing by the investment would give a false sense of precision and rigour, misleading the reader.

Another key consideration is attribution and deadweight. To arrive at a fair value that does not overclaim would require an understanding of what portion of the impact can be reasonably linked to Woppaburra Coral Project activities and what would have happened anyway – and this is complex.

While we did not calculate an SROI ratio, we have used financial proxies to translate social value into monetary terms for each of the six value themes. Choosing a financial proxy requires human judgment. We have chosen financial proxies that, in our judgment, reflect participant perspectives. Where there has been doubt, we have erred towards undervaluing rather than overvaluing the change, to minimise the risk of overclaiming the value created by the change. We have also added commentary about what could have happened anyway and who else contributed to the value theme.

This balanced, evidence-informed approach ensures that the social value of the Woppaburra Coral Project is communicated in a way that is both credible and actionable - offering insight beyond numbers.

Image: © AIMS, Styledia



### 3. Woppaburra Coral Project Theory of Change

A Theory of Change illustrates how a project creates impact. It tells the story of how the opportunity, participants, activities, outcomes and impact are linked. It is a critical tool to help us map and understand social value. The Woppaburra Coral Project Theory of Change is presented on the subsequent pages in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Woppaburra Coral Project Theory of Change

# Woppaburra Coral Project Theory of Change

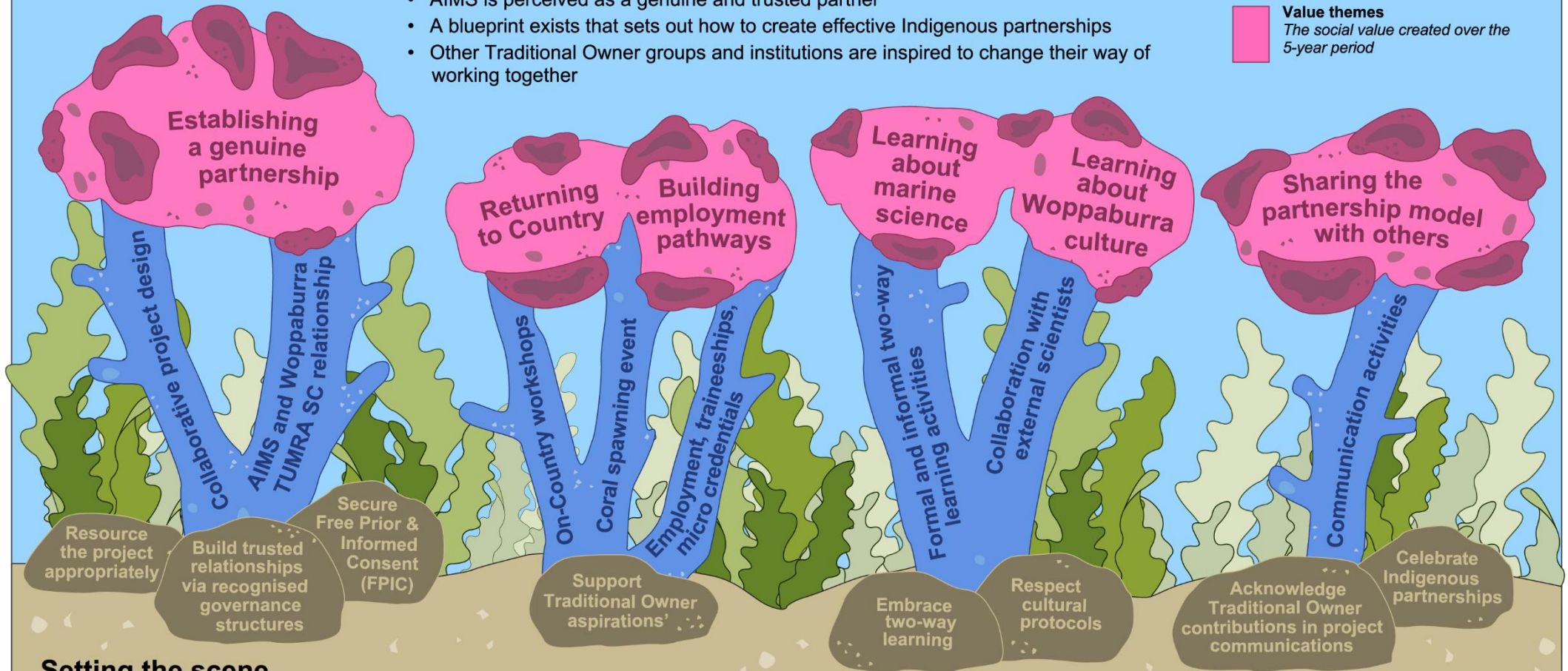
## Impact

The big picture change created through the Woppaburra Coral Project

- AIMS and Woppaburra people form a meaningful and lasting working relationship
- Woppaburra people determine what happens on their sea Country
- Woppaburra people, Country and culture are strong
- AIMS is perceived as a genuine and trusted partner
- A blueprint exists that sets out how to create effective Indigenous partnerships
- Other Traditional Owner groups and institutions are inspired to change their way of working together

## Key

-  **IPP partnership activities**  
A new way of working guided by the new Indigenous Partnership Plan
-  **WCP partnership activities**  
How the IPP activities were enacted in this project
-  **Value themes**  
The social value created over the 5-year period



## Setting the scene

The conditions in place for project success

Woppaburra people negotiate a Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Queensland Government in 2007. A Steering Committee is formed, who are delegated to manage sea Country business on behalf of Woppaburra people, in consultation with Elders.

The Australian Institute of Marine Science seeks to transform the way they work with First Nations peoples from engagement to partnership. The Indigenous Partnerships Plan (IPP) is endorsed in 2019, setting out a new standard for Traditional Owner engagement in marine research.

BHP prioritises investment in the environment and Indigenous partnerships as part of their social value framework.

# Woppaburra Coral Project Outcomes

## Establishing a genuine partnership

- Partners and stakeholders build trusted relationships with each other
- Woppaburra people determine what happens on Country
- Woppaburra people feel heard and respected by their partner
- Partners better understand how to conduct a genuine and ethical partnership
- Partners believe that scientists and Traditional Owners working together is an effective approach to research and reef restoration

## Returning to Country

- Woppaburra people spend time on Country with their extended family
- Woppaburra people strengthen their connection to Country and each other
- Woppaburra people participate in Woppaburra affairs
- Woppaburra people feel mixed emotions upon return to Country

## Building employment pathways

- Woppaburra people study and work on Country
- Woppaburra people gain experience, confidence and credentials to facilitate future employment
- AIMS science and IP team members gain professional development

## Learning about marine science

- Partners and stakeholders learn about the science of sea Country
- Partners and stakeholders learn about reef health, resilience and restoration
- Woppaburra people increase their capability to make informed decisions about what happens on Country
- Woppaburra people feel inspired and confident to take up new opportunities



## Learning about Woppaburra culture

- Woppaburra people share cultural knowledge and practice
- Woppaburra people rekindle and generate new cultural knowledge and practice
- Partners and stakeholders learn about Woppaburra history, culture and experience
- Scientists develop a personal investment in the project
- Partners and stakeholders incorporate cultural protocols into research activities

## Sharing the partnership model with others

- Partners and stakeholders role model a new way of working to others
- Partners experience reputational growth
- Partners experience organisational growth

### Key

-  **Value themes**  
The social value created over the 5-year period
-  **Outcomes**  
The changes generated for the people and organisations involved in the Woppaburra Coral Project

## 4. The social value of the Woppaburra Coral Project

This section presents the social value created through the Woppaburra Coral Project. Our analysis and findings are structured by the six key value themes articulated in the Theory of Change:

1. Establishing a genuine partnership
2. Returning to Country
3. Building employment pathways
4. Learning about marine science
5. Learning about Woppaburra culture
6. Sharing the partnership model with others

Within each theme, we present the following content:

**Indigenous partnership activities.** Activities are what was done during the Woppaburra Coral Project that generated outcomes for participants. The activities featured are not an exhaustive list, but the ones which interviewees consistently raised as being meaningful to them and/or critical to project success. This section firstly identifies and defines the IPP activity, and then explores what this looked like in practice in the Woppaburra Coral Project, and how it contributed to the project's success.

**Outcomes generated for the people and organisations involved.** Outcomes are the changes that the people - Woppaburra Traditional Owners, AIMS team members and the staff of external organisations – and organisations – WTSC and AIMS – experienced as a result of participating in the Woppaburra Coral Project. This section describes the range of outcomes that were generated and discusses the value that people placed on the changes they experienced and observed. As well as a description, we have included a number of supporting quotes. Our aim is to centre the voice of participants that we interviewed and share their experience of change in their own words.

**Valuing the changes experienced by people.** Valuation is a core component of a social value analysis. Through the use of financial proxies, we understand and account for the social value created. Financial proxies consider how else an outcome could be generated and the cost of doing so. This section identifies the cumulative value created by the different outcomes (within the specific value themes), explores financial proxies and the calculation logic, and considers whether the Woppaburra Coral Project was the direct cause of the cumulative outcome, or if other events contributed to the outcomes. This does not result in a single number, but a story about value creation using numbers and proxies.

**Lessons and ideas to inform future partnerships.** The Woppaburra Coral Project was the first large project under the IPP, and all parties learnt valuable lessons on how to conduct a genuine and effective silver-gold tier partnership. This section shares people's reflections on ways of working that supported the effectiveness of this partnership as well as ideas for improvement. We have selected reflections that can be extrapolated and applied in the design and delivery of future partnerships. Some are specific to the type of activities that took place in the Woppaburra Coral Project and so may not be relevant to all future partnerships. Subjective reflections, for example, whether a participant liked the food served at a specific venue, have been omitted. Not all value themes include lessons.

### 4.1 Establishing a genuine partnership

The 'establishing a genuine partnership' value theme is centred on the partnership itself – the efforts put into establishing a trusted and effective working relationship. Our analysis found that the partnership between AIMS and Woppaburra Traditional Owners represented a significant divergence from business as usual. The fact that AIMS chose to embark on this new approach (as opposed to it being a regulatory or funding requirement) was particularly meaningful for those involved in the partnership.

### 4.1.1 Indigenous partnership activities

#### IPP activity - build trusted relationships via recognised governance structures

This activity can be defined as follows:

- Establish the partnership with the people and/or organisations who have recognised cultural authority to speak on behalf of the Traditional Owner group. Engaging with the right people from the outset is critical to the legitimacy of a project.

#### Putting things into practice

Woppaburra people have three key representative bodies: the Woppaburra Land Trust, Woppaburra Saltwater Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC and the Woppaburra TUMRA Steering Committee (WTSC). They have publicly communicated clear consultation protocols that direct people to engage with the WTSC for all matters relating to marine issues (e.g. in the [Woppaburra Traditional Owner Heritage Assessment](#)). As such the AIMS IP team initiated a relationship with Woppaburra people via the WTSC and worked with them to collaboratively design the proposal and pitch to BHP. Once the project commenced, AIMS continued to engage with the WTSC, who in turn liaised with and communicated project matters to the wider Woppaburra community.

There were a number of activities that helped to build trust between AIMS and Woppaburra people. The project design process, the initial and ongoing FPIC process, as well as regular communication, contributed to AIMS staff (both science and IP team members) and WTSC members building effective working relationships. A key communication method was AIMS staff sharing project updates at WTSC meetings. This kept the WTSC informed and supported ongoing FPIC as research activities evolved across the life of the project. This project set a precedent at AIMS for science staff to be involved in Traditional Owner engagement from the beginning, as anticipated in the IPP.

Further, the multi day intensive on-Country workshops where all participants shared accommodation and meals and participated in a range of two-way learning activities established strong personal connection between the AIMS staff, WTSC members and other Woppaburra attendees. Spontaneously one night during on-Country workshop 1, a 'sharing session' evolved, where attendees took turns to talk about what had led them to this workshop. People shared very personal stories and anecdotes from their lives. This particular session developed deep and meaningful interpersonal connections.

Being honest about the past also helped to build trust. A truth telling session at on-Country workshop 1, where AIMS staff shared research activities undertaken to date on Woppaburra sea Country without any engagement with Woppaburra at the time, played an important role. Although learning of specific activities caused some distress, it was important to recognise what had previously occurred and draw a line in the sand to be able to embark on a new way of working together. Additionally, being transparent about mistakes made during the project reinforced trust. For example, when it was identified that a research activity breached the scope of consent, this was immediately brought to the attention of the WTSC and their direction sought. The AIMS team's willingness to answer all questions and provide additional information also facilitated trust.

Woppaburra participants noted too the vicarious trust that was granted through a Woppaburra Elder and WTSC member being employed by AIMS and senior Woppaburra people facilitating sessions during the on-Country workshops because, if they were willing to work with AIMS, then AIMS 'must be good people'.

Trusted relationships were critical to project success. A foundation of trust underpinned high levels of Woppaburra engagement across the life of the project. Examples of engagement include consent to proceed, the WTSC's significant time investment in the project and prioritisation of it over other pieces of work, as well as Woppaburra Traditional Owners' participation in the on-Country workshops and two-way learning activities (most notably, willingness to share stories and cultural practice).

**IPP activity - secure Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)**

This activity can be defined as follows:

- Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) enacts First Nations peoples' right to self-determination by respecting their right to give or withhold consent to projects that affect their land and sea Country.

**Putting things into practice**

Free Prior and Informed Consent process is a core element of AIMS' IPP. The approach is that, if Traditional Owners do not want an activity to go ahead, then it does not, regardless of the scientific or financial implications. This may sound simple, but is in a way, quite revolutionary. Institutions seeking to undertake research on the Great Barrier Reef require a permit to conduct activities from the Marine Park Authority. As part of the permit processes, they are obliged to engage with Traditional Owners in order to explain the intended activities and provide opportunity for comment. However, while the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is obliged to take Traditional Owner comments or objections into account when making their management decisions, they are not obliged to follow any directions or advice provided by Traditional Owners. AIMS is the only institution in the sector that seeks and respects Traditional Owner consent to proceed, in addition to seeking regulatory permission from the Marine Park Authority.

During the Woppaburra Coral Project, AIMS practiced a process of ongoing consent. This included providing regular updates to the WTSC to keep them fully informed about project activities as they unfolded, as well as seeking revised consent for any new activities or changes to the research approach as new opportunities arose or external organisations were brought in. The AIMS IP team prioritised translating technical information into clear and plain language to ensure the committee could make genuinely informed decisions. AIMS respected and enacted all WTSC decisions.

As noted above, the FPIC process including the right of the WTSC to withhold or withdraw consent, was critical to establishing trust between partners.

**IPP activity - resource the project appropriately: allocate sufficient and flexible financial resources and delivery timeframe**

This activity can be defined as follows:

- Allocate a sufficient amount of project funding to support partnership activities to be designed and implemented in a meaningful way. Allow staff some flexibility to make values-based decisions about how to best utilise funding to achieve partnership aims.

**Putting things into practice**

There were two components to adequate resourcing – time and funding. Firstly, a sufficient portion (approximately 10%) of the project budget was allocated to the partnership. This meant that the IP team had adequate resourcing to invest in relationship building and to be able to support Woppaburra aspirations and undertake two-way learning in a meaningful way. Secondly, the 5-year timeframe, as opposed to a more common 3-year funding cycle, meant that the project design wasn't rushed and that deeper relationships were established over the project lifespan.

The significant financial investment to host the on-Country workshops demonstrates how sufficient resourcing contributed to successful relationship development. Our participant interviews repeatedly highlighted that the support for the Woppaburra aspiration to return to Country was deeply appreciated by Woppaburra people. This then translated into reciprocal engagement, for example, members of the WTSC noted that they prioritised AIMS in their meeting agendas, and fostered project buy-in, good will and active participation from the wider community.

The 'chartering the pillows' case study below illustrates the importance of funding flexibility, as it supported the team to make values-based decisions that enacted the spirit of the partnership. Although a small amount relative to the project's overall budget, the investment in procuring the pillows supported all on-Country workshop attendees to be

comfortable and rested, and therefore ready to participate in workshop activities. It also made people feel valued and cared for, which contributed to goodwill in the relationship.

## Case study

### Chartering the pillows

The on-Country workshops took place on Konomie. Konomie is undeveloped apart from the Konomie Island Environmental Education Centre which accommodates educational groups, namely school camps. The Centre's cabins provide beds, but no linen or pillows due to hygiene reasons. At workshop 1, many Woppaburra people did not bring pillows with them, and subsequently had a terrible first night sleep, which dampened spirits and people's enthusiasm to participate in activities when they awoke on the second day. The AIMS IP team quickly bulk ordered pillows from the mainland and had them chartered to Konomie by boat. Participants were thrilled when the pillows arrived, and they utilised the boat to take people snorkelling and swimming on the reef. For many people this was their first time experiencing the reef, or even for some, putting their head underwater, which was a very meaningful experience. When everyone returned to shore, the mood had completely lifted, and people were refreshed and ready to engage in the scheduled workshop activities.

#### 4.1.2 Outcomes generated for the people and organisations involved

The outcomes generated through partnership building efforts are set out below. The different types of outcomes include new knowledge about how to create an effective partnership, and what that meant to the different people involved (see outcomes listed under 'establishing a genuine partnership' in Figure 4: Woppaburra Coral Project Theory of Change).

##### Partners and stakeholders build trusted relationships with each other

AIMS staff, Woppaburra Traditional Owners and the staff of organisations who supported research and partnership activities built personal connections and established trust amongst each other, which enabled them to work together effectively on the project.

*"I know all of these individuals pretty well, they've met members of my family on field trips and I've met theirs." Dr Carly Randall, Australian Institute of Marine Science*

##### Woppaburra people determine what happens on Country

FPIC was a core part of initial Woppaburra Coral Project design, as well as throughout the life of the project as research activities evolved. Through this process, the WTSC made the final decisions about which research activities could or could not go ahead. They also actively contributed to the design of two-way learning activities and workshopped how broader Woppaburra aspirations could align with the project, which led to the prioritisation of return to Country and building employment pathways.

*"I think AIMS do a pretty good job in terms of trying to co-design projects and genuinely getting our people to have a say on what they can and can't do, how to move forward, the duration of things, being fully informed along the way - like if there are any problems around damaging coral and the ongoing effects etcetera. So for this project, I feel that we were very well informed all along the way and when there was an issue we could raise it quite quickly and say, 'look, there's an issue here, I think it needs resolving' and they would jump on it very quickly to deal with it now before it festers and get worse. So I think we had a fairly strong voice through the whole project." Sonny Van Issum PhD, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*"Especially with AIMS and what they're trying to do with the coral restoration, it's a new industry and we're being part of that pioneering group to really nut it out. And I think it's pretty cool to be on that forefront of things and genuinely*

*feeling like you're walking side by side with these people, these different scientists and these big organisations. They've definitely got a genuine feel. It's a co-design thing, co-led. Yeah, it's good it's not feeling like you're getting pulled along or that we have to push them to follow our agenda or concerns. You're just walking hand in hand. It has been a good journey in that aspect." Rob Muir, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

### **Woppaburra people feel heard and respected by their partner**

Having a voice in what happens on their Country was incredibly meaningful for many Woppaburra people, who don't often feel that organisations they engage with genuinely listen to or enact their views. Being involved in the project design and activities, as well as being provided ongoing project updates and consent requests as activities evolved, helped to make Woppaburra people feel included, heard and respected.

*"FPIC is showing the respect that Traditional Owners should be the final decision makers as to whether you can or can't do a particular activity. What we're hearing is that just being given that decision making role is an enormous benefit." Libby Evans, Australian Institute of Marine Science*

*"I think it's because we were involved in it. They asked us, they approached us. And they were respectful too. And I think that's why we got along so well. There were no assumptions, cultural way, they'd ask if this is appropriate, or if that's appropriate, you know. They always acknowledged that. So that was really good. They were very respectful that way, cultural way." Anonymous, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*"Unfortunately, in this country, most places don't have to touch base with us as Traditional Owners. They don't need to connect with us and get our permission and ideas legally. It's the first time I've been invited to the table and that a lot of our family members had been invited to the table. I thought that gesture and that buy in of them doing that was massive. I was grateful for that opportunity, and I think moving forward anyone else wanting to work with our people and on our sea Country that's the way to work together." Josh Morris, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

### **Partners better understand how to conduct a genuine and ethical partnership**

As the first major project under AIMS' new IPP, it was a significant learning opportunity for AIMS and Woppaburra people. Majority of the AIMS team and Woppaburra people who participated in the project feel that the new way of working has 'set the standard' and established a blueprint for how to conduct a genuine partnership. From an AIMS perspective this includes significant cultural uplift and lessons learned about how to (or not to) implement different elements of the new IPP. For Woppaburra people, and particularly the WTSC, it demonstrated what they could and should expect from other organisations and institutions that they engage with.

*"We don't get opportunities to work with companies like this. Especially when it's not mandatory for them to. They weren't forced to or told by the government; they chose to. It's set a blueprint - if you're not at that level, you're not genuinely invested." Josh Morris, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

### **Partners believe that scientists and Traditional Owners working together is an effective approach to research and reef restoration**

The success of the project led many of the AIMS team and Woppaburra people involved to believe that partnership between Traditional Owners and scientists is an effective approach to conducting research and reef restoration projects.

*"[This project] gave me a focus on who the science was going to benefit. This doesn't necessarily have to just be about science. It can be about, 'where would we do restoration? Who would benefit? How would they benefit? How can we involve them in that decision making process?' It also demonstrated that you could work effectively with Traditional Owners and still achieve your science outcomes." Dr Cathie Page, Australian Institute of Marine Science*

*"It was almost like a proof of concept, something that we've already been thinking about. It was a nice validation that it would work. It ran smoothly and everyone was really engaged. I think it was a really positive experience for everyone involved." Taylor Whitman, Australian Institute of Marine Science*

*"I feel that partnerships are definitely important because we can't do it on our own. We might have some up and coming scientists, but we need the big established orgs who can assist us. And as we know, the reef might be on our Country but it doesn't just belong to Woppaburra people, it belongs to everyone, and we need to look after it." Brenda Boustead, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

### 4.1.3 Valuing the changes experienced

These outcomes sit under the theme of 'establishing a genuine partnership'. There exist market prices for building effective, trusted partnerships between two or more parties. Partnership brokers are third party professionals who are engaged to strengthen the partnering process and support partners to achieve their goals.

A financial proxy for this theme is the cost of engaging a partnership broker to facilitate a new partnership. The cost of such an engagement is variable and context specific. To identify a suitable financial proxy we explored the cost of partnership development for other government funded entities. The School Business Community Partnership Brokers program was funded by the (former) Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to build partnerships that improve education outcomes for young people. Analysis of data in a Social Return on Investment evaluation of the program conducted by SVA identifies that the program spent an average of ~\$172,000 per partnership over a 3-year period to create, develop and sustain an effective working relationships between partner organisations.<sup>ii</sup>

Both AIMS staff and Woppaburra people highlighted that their current understanding of how to establish an effective Indigenous partnership was developed solely through the Woppaburra Coral Project, which created a new standard for both parties.

### 4.1.4 Lessons and ideas to inform future partnerships

#### Role model the Indigenous Partnerships Plan from the top

AIMS staff described how the former CEO's staunch advocacy for the new IPP and commitment to FPIC set the tone of what was expected by the institute and its staff. This was significant in a research institute where scientists were concerned about partnerships and FPIC affecting the scope, potential impact and funding of their work. The clear endorsement of this new approach from senior leadership helped buy-in to flow down the organisation.

#### Demonstrating commitment to FPIC

*"We were the only federal agency that required Free Prior and Informed Consent. Indigenous partnerships were seen as risky, which can be true. We were invited to be part of a project from another agency and the local Traditional Owners said no. The agency had obtained the legal permits but not cultural authority. So we said no, the project couldn't go ahead. In the end they brokered a deal and it was all resolved. With FPIC, you have to take the hits, but you gain a reputation as a fair player." Dr Paul Hardisty, Australian Institute of Marine Science, former CEO*

#### Lesson

- Role modelling the values of Indigenous partnerships from the top will help to set a new standard or way of working throughout an organisation.

## Build a culturally capable and dedicated team

Engagement with Woppaburra people was led by AIMS' IP team, which included Traditional Owners and non-Indigenous staff with significant experience collaborating with First Nations peoples. The IP team set the tone and terms for the partnership, and role modelled cultural competency for the AIMS scientists and external organisations involved in the project. Woppaburra people described the AIMS team members that they engaged with as culturally capable. Examples of this in practice included listening to Woppaburra perspectives, being respectful and open to different points of view, directing decision-making to those with cultural authority and trusting their decisions, actioning ideas and/or requests that were important to Woppaburra people, incorporating cultural ways of being, knowing and doing into the science.

*"I think AIMS is doing a good job, I haven't been involved as much, but I hear from others and can feel that they're good allies. They are respectful and genuine. I can't speak for everyone. But in my experience and my children who have attended, I think they're doing a good job and culturally respectful too. Coming from an education background we try to build cultural capability with teachers and I don't feel that we had to teach AIMS much because they gave us the floor and listened. I feel that they are very culturally capable." Brenda Boustead, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

### Lesson

- Establishing a culturally competent team through recruitment, training and role modelling, will help the institutional partner to enact the values of Indigenous partnership and for the partnership to run more smoothly.

## Designate clear cultural authority about who may speak on sea Country matters

The AIMS IP team noted that the clear Woppaburra consultation protocols made establishing a partnership in the 'right way' culturally more straightforward than other projects, because it was clear who had cultural authority to speak on sea Country matters. This was incredibly important because, in line with their FPIC process, AIMS will not proceed with a project if the appropriate people or organisation to engage with is disputed.

### Lesson

- Having a designated body with clear cultural authority to make decisions about Country will help to establish a partnership more quickly and with fewer complications.

## View mistakes as a learning opportunity

The AIMS IP team explained that, with hindsight, they made mistakes along the way and that there were aspects of the partnership that could have been handled differently or 'better'. Examples of this included AIMS allocating shared accommodation groupings for Woppaburra on-Country workshop participants, initially not incorporating closed sessions for Woppaburra to discuss matters privately during on-Country workshops, or breach of FPIC when conducting research activities. They noted that WTSC were very generous when mistakes occurred, which meant that they were able to work together to adjust their approach or resolve issues quickly and amicably.

### Lesson

- By building genuine trust, your partner will assume good intentions when a mistake is made, and it can become a learning opportunity to update the 'ways of working' together, rather than an ongoing point of tension.

## Invest in relationship building up front to support true co-design

Both Woppaburra and AIMS staff reflected on what 'co-design' means. Woppaburra people did have genuine input, and decision-making and cultural authority in the Woppaburra Coral Project, but it was initiated and led by AIMS. People felt that the trust and understanding established through the project has put them in a position to now create a Woppaburra Coral Project 2.0 that is more fully co-designed. Some people suggested that in future partnerships,

more time be spent investing in relationship building up front, so that co-design could take place from the beginning. It is unknown whether the level of trust, understanding and rapport established over the 5-year project lifetime could be created within a 6-12 month pre-project relationship development period. Depending on the particular Traditional Owner representative body that is being engaged with (e.g. where their members live, how frequently they currently meet, their obligations and availability) it may be logistically difficult to bring people together with sufficient regularity to effectively build the relationship prior to project resources being available.

#### Idea for future partnerships

- Invest resources into relationship building prior to developing a proposal. Bring decision-makers together regularly over a 6-12 month period to establish rapport and trust, and to identify areas of mutual interest.

#### **Expand the scope of participation**

People were generally thrilled by their experience with the project and suggested providing the opportunity for greater involvement. Ideas included Woppaburra people contributing more to field work, more Woppaburra people participating in on-Country workshops, AIMS scientists working on other projects participating in relationship development or two-way learning activities, or bringing in additional stakeholders (relevant to the project purpose). Of course, expanding the scope of participants is subject to budgetary constraints and implications need to be considered. One participant shared that they wished they could have brought their children and would have been happy to cover the cost for them to attend.

#### Idea for future partnerships

- First, work with the Traditional Owner representative body to identify who their **ideal** participant group would be (without consideration to budget or other constraints). Next, seek to understand participants' priorities and needs. Lastly, consider various methods to be able to finance the desired level of participation e.g. reallocating resources to increase the budget for this particular activity, fundraising or grants, Traditional Owner funded, in kind support from external stakeholders.

Image: © AIMS, Libby Evans-Illidge



## 4.2. Returning to Country

The 'returning to Country' value theme is about the recognition and incorporation of this Woppaburra aspiration into the project through two on-Country workshops. It's hard to overstate the significance of return to Country for Woppaburra people. When asked what the most significant outcome of the project was, the most frequent response from interviewees (across all participant groups) was return to Country and the resultant strengthened connection to family, culture and Country.

### 4.2.1 Indigenous partnership activities

#### IPP activity - support Traditional Owner aspirations

This activity can be defined as follows:

- Look for ways that Traditional Owner aspirations can be incorporated into and/or progressed by research activities.
- Where possible, leverage institutional knowledge and connections to support aspirations that fall outside the scope of research activities of a specific project.

#### Putting things into practice

Due to the legacy of forced removal, Woppaburra people live in various locations along the east coast of Australia. For many people it is logistically complicated and expensive to travel to the Keppel Islands, so they have never been on Country. Return to Country was a key aspiration of Woppaburra people that was proposed by the WTSC to be incorporated into the Woppaburra Coral Project. As such, the project was designed so that two-way learning (another IPP activity) took place at two weeklong on-Country workshops held on Konomie in December 2019 and April 2024.

For each workshop, an agreed number of representatives from each of the six family lines were invited to participate. The WTSC members coordinated with their families to determine who would attend. As the Woppaburra priority was to maximise the number of people to have the opportunity to return to Country, some families nominated a largely new group of representatives to attend each workshop. In order to help eliminate barriers to attendance, the cost of attendance was provided for and the family member(s) of people with caring responsibilities were supported to attend also.

AIMS support for, and financial investment in, this aspiration was recognised and valued by Woppaburra people and played a very significant role in their positive perception of AIMS' commitment to the partnership.

### 4.2.2 Outcomes generated for the people and organisations involved

The outcomes generated through supporting Woppaburra aspirations to return to Country are set out below. The different types of outcomes include new experiences and opportunities created, and the way that people feel after participating in them (see outcomes listed under 'returning to Country' in Figure 4: Woppaburra Coral Project Theory of Change).

#### Woppaburra people spend time on Country with their extended family

76 Woppaburra people were supported to come together on Konomie to participate in an on-Country workshop. This was described as a rare and important opportunity. Since their forced removal in 1902, there have only been a handful of occasions where Woppaburra people have come together in the same way.

*"Our number one issue for us as Woppaburra is access to Country... [AIMS] gave everyone that time and space to be on Country and just be able to sit there and really take it in." Rob Muir, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*"Going back on Country, where our people were totally removed, and returning to Country. That's been a wonderful thing. Especially given all the trauma and all the bad things that happened to our ancestors at that time."*  
Anonymous, Woppaburra Traditional Owner

*"A key milestone for the mob. Our extended family got together and reconnected, or connected, on Country. That will be remembered for generations."* Jermayne Williams, Woppaburra Traditional Owner

*"At the most fundamental level, it gives someone an opportunity to come back on Country. It allowed people that stronger connection to country. Getting on country, walking it and getting underwater, it changes people from their normal daily grind, you know, if they're working or sitting in suburbia somewhere. They just actually get this truly liberating experience of going on Country and enjoying it."* Sonny Van Issum PhD, Woppaburra Traditional Owner

*"From my perspective, providing people with that opportunity felt more important than whatever the scientific outcome was at the end of the day. People got to go to their Country for the first time or get underwater for the first time."* Anonymous, Australian Institute of Marine Science

### **Woppaburra people strengthen their connection to Country and each other**

Spending time on Konomie during the workshops strengthened Woppaburra people's connection to their land and sea Country. Two activities particularly contributed to this - sharing and hearing cultural stories whilst being in the locations spoken of and being immersed in sea Country whilst snorkelling. For many Woppaburra people, this feeling of connection has lasted beyond the workshops, and continues to be felt whether they are on or off Country. The on-Country activities also provided an opportunity for extended family to spend time with one another. Some people met for the first time and others reconnected with family who live far away. This time together strengthened many Woppaburra people's feelings of connection with each other. Strengthened familial connections have lasted beyond the workshops too, with an increased number of people staying in touch via phone calls and social media.

*"Being a part of the family as a whole and creating a sense of community and connection, that grounded me."*  
Jermayne Williams, Woppaburra Traditional Owner

*"People interacting on Country, that's the wellbeing, being there, back to where your ancestors were. Being in that environment and connecting with the rest of your family, it gives people a real boost. I've got a cousin I haven't seen for 30 years and she came to a project earlier this year, and she was so overwhelmed by it. Just reconnecting with people that she hadn't seen for so long...So the emotional, the social, and the spiritual wellbeing is probably the biggest thing that happened...The connection between people and relatives and connecting back to country, I think is the best thing that's come out of it."* Sonny Van Issum PhD, Woppaburra Traditional Owner

### **Woppaburra people participate in Woppaburra affairs**

Several Woppaburra people feel they are unable to participate in Woppaburra affairs as much as they'd like because they live far away from the Keppel Islands, they aren't a member of the WTSC or other Woppaburra governance bodies, or are a young person. The on-Country workshops provided these people with the opportunity to be involved in Woppaburra affairs. The session on the Strong Peoples-Strong Country framework at workshop 2 was particularly validating for young people who shared knowledge and insights from their professional lives and felt recognised by their Aunties and Uncles.

*"It was cool to see the leaders step back and let the next generation step forward. It was an opportunity to see true leadership come through. I think it was a key milestone for the younger generation to see that and be a part of it."*  
Jermayne Williams, Woppaburra Traditional Owner

*"I think it was kind of the first time that some of the Aunties and Uncles got to see the younger people that they fought for to have an education, put that into action. There's still a pretty big generational gap between what they fought for us to do, what we've gone and done, and then them recognising that and letting us step up a bit. I feel like we got to shine." Tahlia-Rose Van Issum, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

### **Woppaburra people feel mixed emotions upon return to Country**

Return to Country created mixed emotions for many Woppaburra people. Being on the island that their ancestors were forcibly removed from caused people to feel upset and grief about what had occurred. Simultaneously, spending time on Country with family generated a range of positive emotions for many Woppaburra people, who described feeling peaceful, strong in themselves, complete and/or a deep sense of belonging. Some Woppaburra people also describe participating in on-Country workshops as a healing experience. Spending time on Konomie, being immersed in sea Country, reconnecting with extended family and sharing stories about the old people who had lived on the island were central to their sense of healing and wellbeing.

*"There's been a lot of sadness too. Because you know that they lived there. You can see that they've lived there. You can see the sacred sites. You know that they were there. To come back, that's really affected me." Anonymous, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*"When I snorkelled, for the first time in my life there was peace in my mind. I can never just focus - always a million things in the back of my mind. When I snorkelled, there was nothing, silence, I focused just on the coral, just on the workshop, there was no external issues. I realised I had found a lot of healing through the workshop there. It was my first time attending a workshop of that sort. And I thought, I've been going about it wrong. People don't need people, people need Country for healing. It reminded me that that is what our old people were always saying. Without that workshop I don't think I would have realised that. So I am very thankful for that. It opened my eyes on the value of what my Nana had said about us not owning the land, we are the care takers because it takes care of us. In that moment I was like 'I hear you.'" Meaghan Cummins, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*"When a big group of us get together, it's healing for us and for Country, the land and the sea. When you sit on the waters edge you can almost hear kids laughing, and that's what we need." Brenda Boustead, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

### **Experiencing an alternative respite model of care**

*"I am Mum's disability carer. She is dependent on me, and I constantly worry about her. We attended the on-Country workshop together. Once her cousins were all around her, they naturally began to look after her - they went and got her a drink, they went and did all those things she needed, they yarned with her and included her. I didn't have to worry about anything. It was like a form of respite care.*

*This week was amazing for my mental health, but also for hers because she was actively contributing (without being dependent on me) while on Country. It had a really positive impact on our relationship because we were still together, but she wasn't dependent on me. I think that there is gold in that.*

*Being there also led me to do other things to improve our relationship because when you have space you can think about things more clearly, analytically, and come up with different solutions to implement. Since we've been back and I organised a cleaner, we haven't had any arguments. We had been arguing weekly, which was negatively affecting our relationship, so that's a pretty big difference.*

*My Mum doesn't present as disabled. Since we all stayed together in the cabins at the workshop and they saw how much support she needed, the cousins have really stepped up. I've noticed that Uncle checks in on her more and she speaks with her cousins who were on the island for weekly or fortnightly chats.*

*This experience shows us what respite care that's centred in values of family, inclusion and connection to Country could look like. It would be way cheaper, and safer, than institutional respite care."*

*Anonymous, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

### 4.2.3 Valuing the changes experienced

These outcomes sit under the theme of 'returning to Country'. Supporting Woppaburra aspirations to return to Country is invaluable. As a part of this analysis, we heard consistently that the outcomes described in this section were incredibly important to Woppaburra people. This does not lend itself to a straightforward financial proxy to value these outcomes. But we can first describe comparable experiences that do have market prices.

For example, one way to value this theme is the cost to participate in a Healing Centre. The Healing Foundation is currently supporting the establishment of 13 Indigenous Healing Centres across Australia. A Healing Centre is a space which supports the healing work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Restorative activities may include reconnection with country, building cultural strength, reconciliation, providing good role models for children, and genuine consultation – all of which took place during the on-Country workshops and coral spawning event. A Cost Benefit Analysis of Healing Centres commissioned by the Healing Foundation estimated an average cost per participant of \$78,400.<sup>iii</sup> A total of 82 Woppaburra people participated in the on-Country workshops and coral spawning event, which equals a total value of \$6.4 million.

Woppaburra interviewees believed that their extended family spending time together on Country (which precipitated strengthened connections) would not have occurred without the Woppaburra Coral Project. Some people posited that they would be in a position to coordinate and fund it in the future, but not for many years.

*Image: © AIMS, Gus Burrows*



## 4.2.4 Lessons and ideas to inform future partnerships

### Make values-based decisions

There were many decisions to be made when designing how the partnership activities - on-Country workshops, employment pathways and two-way learning - should be run. And even more to be made when requests, unanticipated changes or challenges arose during those activities. The AIMS IP team described using values-based decision making that enacted the spirit or intent of the IPP as their guidance. In practice this meant that things which were originally out of scope or unplanned took place. These ended up being some of the things which were most valued and appreciated by Woppaburra people.

Examples of this included Woppaburra people who otherwise wouldn't have been able to participate due to caring responsibilities bringing their children or family member to an on-Country workshop, or utilising a supplies charter boat to lead a snorkelling trip during workshop 1, which was such a popular activity, it was then incorporated into subsequent workshops.

#### Lesson

- When deciding how to proceed, think about the intent or spirit of Indigenous partnerships and be open to doing things that may be out of the original scope, plan or budget.

### Create a flexible workshop schedule

Woppaburra people had a variety of perspectives about what the on-Country workshop schedule could or should have contained based on their personal preferences and interests. Some people with a strong interest in coral and marine science anticipated that there would be more educational content. Others felt like there could have been more time dedicated to learning about how Woppaburra people can undertake effective partnerships with other external parties or how to advocate for the reef so that a broader range of community members have the skills and knowledge to become involved in the WTSC into the future. And others felt that, since it is such a rare opportunity for Woppaburra people to come together on Country, more time could have been dedicated to being on and exploring Country, connecting with each other and for cultural activities such as women's and men's circles. In a similar vein, AIMS team members reflected that it would have been beneficial to create more time and space for Woppaburra people to first arrive and be on the island before their team joined, as well as for Woppaburra only conversations and decision-making to take place.

#### Idea for future partnerships

- Ensure flexibility and down time are embedded in the workshop schedule so that participants can tailor the experience to best meet their needs. This could include two-way learning activities in the morning and then a variety of free time, cultural activities or relationship building activities post lunch. Alternately, create a conference-style schedule with multiple sessions that people can opt into. In this instance, hold a session multiple times across the week, to maximise opportunity for participation.

### Provide scheduling information well in advance so people feel prepared and can make informed decisions about what they would like to participate in

Some Woppaburra people felt that they weren't provided sufficient information about the on-Country workshop schedule or content of specific activities or educational sessions in advance. This resulted in people feeling apprehensive prior to the workshop and some people missing out on sessions they would have enjoyed because they didn't know what was planned.

#### Idea for future partnerships

- Work with the Traditional Owner representative body to prepare workshop itineraries and agreed distribution strategy in advance, so people feel prepared and confident to participate. A key to this approach is to provide sufficient detail about the content of each session so that people can make an informed choice about what to join.

### Consider the details and individuals' needs

On-Country workshop participants stayed at the Konomie Island Environmental Education Centre, which is designed to accommodate large school groups. Some participants raised that the beds were uncomfortable, which impacted on people's ability to have a good night sleep. They observed that this impacted people's capacity to engage in activities, particularly towards the end of the week. Several people also raised concerns that the Centre's requirement for all guests to have a blue card created an administrative barrier to participation.

#### Idea for future partnerships

- Select facilities that support people to feel comfortable and ready to engage in activities. This is not just a 'nice-to-have' but essential to establishing a trusted relationship and generating other outcomes.

### Ensure workshop delivery is culturally safe, accessible and trauma-informed

Some participants reflected on the accessibility and inclusiveness of the on-Country workshops. Snorkelling was presented as an example of a key activity that was not accessible for Elders, children or people with disability. Recommended solutions included organising a glass bottom boat so that people could experience the reef in another way, chartering boats designed for people with mobility difficulties, or scheduling alternative activities at the same time. Participants also noted the importance of having mental health support available for people as well as ensuring that the staff of external organisations engaged to support delivery are also culturally competent and trauma-informed.

#### Ideas for future partnerships

- Request that participants complete a medical form prior to workshops and field trips and then design activities to meet their individual needs. Provide appropriate supports or alternative activities so all participants can be involved.
- Engage with the Traditional Owner representative body prior to field trips to identify any cultural or interpersonal considerations and then design activities to meet these needs.
- Include medical and cultural considerations in a field trip risk assessment process and then engage a cultural safety officer (a professional support person with mental health training or other desired skills) as required.
- Consider the cultural competence of external organisations that are brought in to support project delivery before engaging them.

### Collaborate with Traditional Owners to design a communications strategy

A couple of Woppaburra people and AIMS team involved in limited activities felt there wasn't sufficient engagement post workshop. People became very invested and were interested to hear how the project progressed, what the research outcomes were and Woppaburra reflections on the experience. They recommended utilising a variety of platforms to communicate with community and providing ongoing debriefs with AIMS about longer term project impacts.

#### Ideas for future partnerships

- Work with the Traditional Owner representative body to develop a communications strategy that sets out agreed activities for all partners during the project design stage.
- Create regular communications materials sharing project updates for distribution.

### Collaborate with Traditional Owners to design a media engagement plan

A range of media including multiple TV stations were invited to the Welcome to Country to open the first on-Country workshop. For many Woppaburra people, return to Country was an emotional experience and personal matters were

shared and aired during the Welcome. The AIMS IP team reflected that it would have been more appropriate to invite media to a closing ceremony to share project achievements, rather than at the beginning before people had connected and established trusted relationships.

#### Idea for future partnerships

- Work with the Traditional Owner representative body during the project design stage to determine what media engagement activities are appropriate and develop a plan that outlines when and how they should be conducted.

Image: © AIMS, Gus Burrows



## 4.3 Building employment pathways

The 'building employment pathways' value theme is about the creation of pathways for Woppaburra people to care for, and/or work, on Country. This is an important, but long term, aspiration. Due to the legacy of forced removal, few Woppaburra people currently reside close enough to the Keppels to work there and, with limited development on the islands, there are few accommodation or employment options available.

### 4.3.1 Indigenous partnership activities

#### IPP activity - support Traditional Owner aspirations

This activity can be defined as follows:

- Look for ways that Traditional Owner aspirations can be incorporated into and/or progressed by research activities.
- Where possible, leverage institutional knowledge and connections to support aspirations that fall outside the scope of research activities of a specific project.

### Putting things into practice

Creating training and employment pathways for Woppaburra people was a key aspiration identified by the WTSC. This was built into the project in three key ways. Firstly, the employment of a Woppaburra person on the AIMS IP team to coordinate the on-Country workshops. They were subsequently hired in a permanent role to progress the IP team's work more broadly. Secondly, two traineeships were established. These were open to First Nations people with an interest, but not necessarily prior qualifications or experience in, marine science. The traineeships included shadowing scientists as they conducted research activities, participating in the on-Country workshops and coral spawning event and support to complete a Certificate III in Aquaculture. One Woppaburra person participated in the traineeship program. Thirdly, the development of micro credentials to recognise learning that occurred during the coral spawning event.

The creation of tangible positions and educational offerings that would support Woppaburra people to achieve their current and future goals was highly valued by Woppaburra people. It demonstrated AIMS' willingness to listen to, prioritise and support Woppaburra aspirations and invest in their people. Again, this contributed to Woppaburra buy-in to the project and belief that AIMS was a genuine partner to work with.

### **4.3.2 Outcomes generated for the people and organisations involved**

The outcomes generated through supporting Woppaburra aspirations to generate employment pathways are set out below. The different types of outcomes include new knowledge, skills and experience (see outcomes listed under 'building pathways' in Figure 4: Woppaburra Coral Project Theory of Change).

#### **Woppaburra people study and work on Country**

Several Woppaburra people had the opportunity to study and work on Country during the Woppaburra Coral Project. Examples of this included recruitment into the AIMS IP team, the establishment of an inaugural trainee program and the development of micro credentials to recognise the skills and knowledge that Woppaburra people developed during two-way learning activities.

#### **Woppaburra people gain experience, confidence and credentials to facilitate future employment**

Woppaburra people's participation in research activities, traineeships and employment boosted their skills and confidence. Woppaburra people who participated in the coral spawning event learnt a range of scientific knowledge and techniques. These participants were awarded a micro-credential in recognition of their learning.

Trainees gained a breadth of experience including, working in a professional institution, laboratory and in the field, performing as a science assistant, learning to build tanks and systems for research experiments and studying to achieve a Certificate III in Aquaculture. Supervisors consulted for this project noted the growth in trainees' knowledge and confidence throughout the placement. It is believed that this combination of experience, credentials and confidence will facilitate the trainees to secure future employment, with at least one trainee utilising their knowledge in a new role that they secured post Woppaburra Coral Project.

#### **AIMS science and IP team members gain professional development**

A positive unintended consequence of the project was that several scientists improved their science communication skills. This occurred through two-way learning activities, such as presentations on reef health, restoration, and research findings at the on-Country workshops, teaching coral spawning techniques to Woppaburra people during the spawning event, and providing clear technical information to the WTSC to seek FPIC for ongoing research activities. Some scientists were also responsible for supervising the trainees, during which they developed management and mentoring skills.

The non-Indigenous PhD students involved in the project also gained fieldwork experience and knowledge of coral spawning techniques as part of their research.

A number of IP team members, including a Woppaburra person employed in the team, presented on the Woppaburra Coral Project to local and international audiences as part of communication activities to share and celebrate the partnership. They have also contributed to the design and implementation of a range of new initiatives to enhance AIMS' partnership offering.

*"I think a lot of being a scientist is learning how to communicate your research, what you're doing and the findings, in a way that's easy for a broad group of people to understand. So I think general science communication is something that I've gained through multiple trips throughout the project and time on Woppaburra Country. Not just engaging with Traditional Owner groups, but over multiple trips where we engaged with a lot of the students at the Konomie Education Centre to talk about what we were doing. So it was a broad group of people, but also a broad range of ages." Taylor Whitman, Australian Institute of Marine Science*

*"It was a very big opportunity at the time for a student to learn a whole lot about really complex science and getting to be hands on for coral spawning. It's definitely given me opportunities. I've worked for AIMS as a research technician for two years in a row now. I've had spawning duties here and experiments with coral larvae. And that was my first, big, every step of the way experience with it. I definitely think it helped me get a job. You know, I was a candidate that had this hands-on experience not only with AIMS, but with this really complex process that can be applied to many different corals. I was able, with the help of my advisors, to write a whole paper about the research we did. I've been on other field trips because it's helped me get my foot in the door – 'hey, he's already been on this three-week trip. He knows what it's like to do field trips with AIMS now.'" Anonymous, Australian Institute of Marine Science*

### 4.3.3 Valuing the changes experienced

These outcomes sit under the theme of 'building employment pathways'. Training occurred for two distinct groups of people: training opportunities for Traditional Owners (traineeships, micro credentials) and professional development opportunities for AIMS employees (traineeship supervision, science communication, presentations). As such, two separate financial proxies have been identified. Regarding the traineeship program, people who observed the growth in capacity and confidence of the trainees likened it to the development achieved through a higher education degree. A relevant degree is the 3-year Bachelor of Marine Science at James Cook University which costs \$24,960 to undertake.

In terms of professional development, we can apply a figure that AIMS has invested in their staff to achieve this outcome. For example, one AIMS scientist who participated in the Woppaburra Coral Project was recently supported by the institute to participate in the Melbourne Business School New Leader Development Program. The 5-day course develops participants skills and confidence to become an effective leader, costing \$9850 per person.

For the majority of Woppaburra people, the opportunity to undertake training and/or employment on-Country would not have happened without the Woppaburra Coral Project. In regard to AIMS staff, the opportunity for further training would exist regardless of the project, as the institute provides a development budget for professional training, relationship building and experience. However, on-the-job opportunities to engage with Traditional Owners, practice science communication to a varied audience or undertake staff supervision is highly project dependant and may not arise.

### 4.3.4 Lessons and ideas to inform future partnerships

#### Approach the partnership with a learning culture

The traineeship program created as part of the Woppaburra Coral Project is a helpful example of how establishing a learning culture can benefit a new partnership. This initiative provided the opportunity for Traditional Owners without a higher education degree in marine science to gain practical experience working with AIMS and support to obtain a Certificate III in Aquaculture. Scientists conducting research in the field and in the Sea Simulator were responsible for supervising the trainees. Both the AIMS staff and trainees reflected that it was valuable program resulting in professional development for all involved.

However, some of the AIMS team shared concerns around the capability of scientists to provide educational support and the associated increased workload, as well as the relevance of the traineeship content to trainee's broader goals. Ideas for how the traineeship program could be improved included: (i) providing cultural competency training and additional resourcing to reflect increased responsibilities for supervisors, (ii) creating a dedicated educational/pastoral support role within the team, (iii) establishing a peer support network for trainees, and (iv) identify trainees' interests and ambitions prior to commencement and tailor a training and development plan that supports this. In line with feedback provided during the project, AIMS established a new role within the IP team to provide mentorship to trainees, which was separate to the supervision provided by scientists.

Ideas for future partnership:

- Manage expectations about new activities or ways of working under the partnership early and clearly, with regular touch points to reflect on what is working well, identify challenges and share ideas for improvement.
- Assess whether the team who will be delivering new activities under the partnership have the necessary skills, aptitude and resourcing to perform their new role. Create a plan to upskill and provide additional support, as required.

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## 4.4 Learning about marine science

The 'learning about marine science' value theme is about including Woppaburra people in science and research activities. Interestingly, the knowledge sharing activities ended up supporting Woppaburra aspirations to create pathways for people to work on Country. By showing people the restoration efforts that were currently happening, this demonstrated possibilities and inspired people to become involved.

### 4.4.1 Indigenous partnership activities

#### IPP activity - embrace two-way learning, which merges modern scientific and traditional knowledge systems

This activity can be defined as follows:

- The phrase 'two-way learning' holds different meaning in different contexts. In the context of the AIMS IPP, two-way learning is about the sharing of modern science and traditional knowledge systems between partners.
- The intent is to expand Traditional Owners' marine science knowledge and skills, expand all partners' cultural knowledge and understanding, and to experiment with how modern scientific and traditional knowledge systems may be integrated together to inform research design.

#### Putting things into practice

Marine science education predominantly took place at the on-Country workshops. These featured a range of informational sessions about the science of sea Country, climate change and reef health, and research activities and outcomes. In response to WTSC desire for greater engagement in research activities, a group of Woppaburra people participated in the subsequent coral spawning event in 2022. Coral spawning is an annual event in which corals simultaneously reproduce. The 2022 event was a critical time for AIMS scientists to conduct Woppaburra Coral Project experiments during spawning in the field. Eight Woppaburra people participated in the coral spawning event and related research activities, during which they learnt about the spawning process, and helped to assemble the technical equipment and capture and process coral samples.

Woppaburra people explained that, although many other institutions have sought consent to undertake a project and some have invited them to witness an activity, none had sought to 'include them in the science' until this project. The educational sessions across all workshops and the inclusion of Woppaburra people in the spawning event signified a shift in this dynamic. This was noted as another way in which AIMS acted as a 'genuine' partner.

Marine science education also supported the WTSC's aspiration to create opportunities for training, education and employment that would allow Woppaburra people to work on Country, in that it showed Woppaburra people the variety of reef restoration work happening, the different types of organisations involved, and potential jobs that existed. This was valued by Woppaburra people as contributing to a pathway or pipeline for their young people.

### 4.4.2 Outcomes generated for the people and organisations involved

The outcomes generated through including Woppaburra people in science activities are set out below. The different types of outcomes include new knowledge and confidence, and the behaviours people enact with them (see outcomes listed under 'learning about marine science' in Figure 4: Woppaburra Coral Project Theory of Change).

#### Partners and stakeholders learn about the science of sea Country

The science of sea Country was shared with Woppaburra people through formal science presentations and informal conversations during on-Country workshop sessions and WTSC meetings. It was also shared with broader stakeholders through a variety of means including (i) student presentations and hands-on demonstrations with students at the Konomie Island Environmental Education Centre, (ii) through formal and informal science presentations at scientific conferences, and (iii) through informal discussions during on-Country visits (such as conversations with local tour operators, vacationers at Great Keppel Resort, other visiting researchers, marine

police, marina and ferry staff). The topics were broad and tailored to the particular audiences, including the science of climate change, coral restoration and seeding, coral reproductive biology and ecology, and the health status of local reefs.

Image: © AIMS, Gus Burrows



### Partners and stakeholders learn about reef health, resilience and restoration

The AIMS team shared information about the impact of climate change on reef health and the restoration techniques being developed through research activities. At the on-Country workshops, this was done through presentations from scientists and guided snorkelling, while during the coral spawning event attendees contributed to experiments trialling innovative restoration techniques. These educational activities sparked a particular interest in coral for some Woppaburra people, while others found the impact of climate change eye opening. Research findings were also shared more broadly to school groups attending the Konomie Island Environmental Education Centre and through the Queensland Museum, Taronga Conservation Society Australia and SECORE International.

*"There was a lot to learn - what I got a lot out of was the spawning event. When it finally did happen all the scientists were 'yahooo-ing' on the boat, we could hear them from the beach. That was really interesting, seeing that for the first time and being a part of it, which a lot of people don't get to experience at all, that was a big, exciting change. And I'm still learning about coral. That's really opened my eyes to the importance of coral and the reef and how damaging bleaching can be." Anonymous, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*"We learnt about the change in temperatures and how it impacts on a timeline. So, in 70 years from now, if things continue with the change in water temperature and the waste from the Fitzroy River, the global warming, the sea line is going to come up an extra 4-5m. There won't be a beach anymore. I'm getting emotional now. There will be no marine animals or corals, everything will die off. I got heart sore hearing that. In 150 years, it would be past the cabins. It was a shock." Anonymous, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*"It was interesting to hear what was going on. I took photos of things during the talk so I could remember. I found it interesting learning about the coral and sea grass; to walk around the island was good; and to be at the water. It was good to see how it was going. When the cyclone came and made a mess of things they had to redo it all. I love learning and being on the beach." Rebecca Simon, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

### **Woppaburra people increase their capability to make informed decisions about what happens on Country**

Deepening their understanding of the science of sea Country and reef health during two-way learning activities and ongoing project communication has supported some Woppaburra people to be able to make more informed decisions about what happens on Country. This was particularly significant for WTSC members, who receive frequent requests for a range of projects on Woppaburra sea Country.

### **Woppaburra people feel inspired and confident to take up new opportunities**

The health of sea Country holds spiritual and existential significance for Woppaburra people. Learning about the impact of climate change on reef health, as well as the restoration activities of AIMS and other programs inspired many Woppaburra people to take up an active role in caring for Country. Several people have subsequently gone on to participate in reef restoration, Fitzroy River health and local land care projects, or commence employment in the newly established Woppaburra Land and Sea Rangers Program. Through the WTSC, some Woppaburra people have commenced a Woppaburra Youth Program titled Yilum and participated in turtle rehabilitation. Their new knowledge gained through two-way learning activities and the positive relationship established with AIMS (the institution and its individual team members) underpinned their confidence to act. There were also several instances of younger people saying they now aspire to be scientists, rangers or work with AIMS when they grow up.

*"Seeing AIMS talk about their skills and careers, my daughter wants to be a marine biologist now, she's only 10, she loved being on the island, buddied up with one of the scientists, she says 'I really want to do that.'" Jermayne Williams, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*"She's our first female ranger on Country and now she works there. We couldn't get to our women's places when we were on North Keppel because they were so overgrown. And no one had maintained them because the men aren't allowed out there and we only had male rangers." Tahlia-Rose Van Issum, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*"The applicant who went for the traineeship was fearful of the water, didn't know anything about coral, but was inspired to see what it was all about. During the traineeship she had the opportunity to work and learn on Country." Meaghan Cummins, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*"At the workshops we learnt about marine and land revegetation. It put the fire back into my spirit, to our spirit, my nieces and nephews, cousins. Two of them are rangers now. Before the workshops they were living their normal lives and jobs as a labourer and allied health nurse. They've changed their career path. Knowing that they are working for our Country and people, I can't put a name on that, it's heart warming and I'm proud." Anonymous, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

#### **4.4.3 Valuing the changes experienced**

These outcomes sit under the theme of 'learning about marine science'. Two types of educational settings occurred: on-Country workshops sessions and the coral spawning event. As such, we have considered two different approaches to account for value.

The workshop sessions are akin to an introductory course in marine science. Global Volunteering International (GVI) offers Marine Conservation course costing \$495 per person. The course is 10 - 15 learning hours and covers topics including the many challenges facing marine life, how these factors have contributed to a decline in coral reefs, and real-world marine conservation projects. Like in the Woppaburra Coral Project, the course is unaccredited but includes a certificate of completion.

Participation in research activities during the spawning event can be likened to citizen science. GVI also offers a coral reef research volunteer program. The two-week Coral Reef Conservation in Thailand volunteer program costs \$3,595 (excluding travel). Participants engage in 35 hrs of fieldwork per week, and activities include forest mapping,

seed collection, coral propagation and snorkelling. Noting that travel costs were provided for on-Country workshop and coral spawning event participants, estimated at ~\$1,480 per person. As participant locations varied from Canberra to Cairns, travel costs were highly variable.

Many Woppaburra people identified that the marine science education portion of the project, particularly the spawning event, as 'interesting' and 'exciting'. For a couple of Woppaburra people though, learning about the impact of climate change on the reef and restoration efforts had a profound impact on their life. It sparked a deep interest which inspired them to become actively involved in restoration efforts. Some of these people attributed this change solely to the Woppaburra Coral Project, while others noted it was one of several events or activities they had partaken in which cumulatively inspired them to act.

#### 4.4.4 Lessons and ideas to inform future partnerships

##### Utilise a range of communication modes to make two-way learning engaging

Woppaburra people had different views on the appropriateness of two-way learning activities about reef health and restoration depending on their personal preferences. For example, some people suggested there was too much scientific jargon, while others said of the same presentation that it was really clear for a lay person. A common thread was that people were most engaged when educational content was interactive rather than a speech or presentation. Examples of what worked well included (i) using coral samples, props, and microscopes, (ii) snorkelling post presentation (to be immersed in the reef and identifying new knowledge in the real world), (iii) sharing photographs of trainees or rangers performing activities that applied the new knowledge to create personal connection, and (iv) an interactive activity aimed at kids involving costume and role play. People suggested more content like this should be included, and particularly more content tailored to younger kids.

*"They loved the outfits. It was interactive and a really easy and engaging way of educating. Once the kids were involved the adults loved it too. It put a smile on their face." Jermayne Williams, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

##### Idea for future partnerships

- Tailor educational content to suit a variety of learning styles and ages. Prioritise the use of visual aids, props and interactive activities.

## 4.5 Learning about Woppaburra culture

The 'learning about Woppaburra culture' value theme is about valuing and incorporating Woppaburra cultural knowledge and practice into marine science research. Intended to be shared from Woppaburra people to scientists, due to the historical context of Woppaburra people, this also resulted in the sharing of knowledge between Woppaburra generations and across family lines, as well as the revitalisation of cultural practices, for example the Woppaburra coral dance. Another (positive) unintended consequence was the establishment of new cross-cultural biobanking protocols, which have been published and begun to be adapted for other projects.

### 4.5.1 Indigenous partnership activities

#### IPP activity - embrace two-way learning, which merges modern scientific and traditional knowledge systems

This activity can be defined as follows:

- The phrase 'two-way learning' holds different meaning in different contexts. In the context of the AIMS IPP, two-way learning is about the sharing of modern science and traditional knowledge systems between partners.
- The intent is to expand Traditional Owners' marine science knowledge and skills, expand all partners' cultural knowledge and understanding, and to experiment with how modern scientific and traditional knowledge systems may be integrated together to inform research design.

### Putting things into practice

Sharing of relevant cultural knowledge and practice predominantly occurred during the on-Country workshops and coral spawning event across a mix of both structured activities and spontaneous or informal interactions. The cultural mapping activity provides an example of structured sharing of cultural knowledge. This activity took place during workshop 1 to identify culturally significant sites on Country, which then informed planning of scientific research activities. Cultural stories being shared organically as people spent time together on Konomie during meals and walks around the island is an example of more informal knowledge sharing. This also occurred between Woppaburra employees and trainees and the AIMS team members as they performed their roles together over the course of the project. It should be noted that the cultural knowledge shared was always select and appropriate to the specific audience present.

In terms of partnership effectiveness, learning about Woppaburra history and culture was particularly significant for AIMS scientists. It shifted their understanding of Australian history, the colonial experience of First Nations people and the sociocultural implications of their work. In turn, this increased the priority they placed on FPIC (a key research and Indigenous partnership principle) and the way that they factored this into their research planning. It also increased their personal commitment to the partnership and its success.

### **Respect cultural protocols**

This activity can be defined as follows:

- Respect for cultural protocols is the adoption of practices that hold cultural significance. Requests to incorporate cultural protocols into a project should be treated as a priority.

### Putting principles into practice

Respect for cultural protocols was a key way of working that underpinned the success of the Woppaburra Coral Project. There were three main examples of how this was implemented in practice. Firstly, a cultural mapping exercise undertaken at workshop 1 highlighted areas of cultural significance around the island. This mapping then informed where research activities could and could not take place. Secondly, spawning practice was updated to reflect men's and women's business including the adoption of the phrase 'male seed', and the practice of men harvesting the coral spawn and women returning the spawn that would not be utilised in research back to sea Country. Lastly, Woppaburra people, AIMS and Taronga Conservation Society Australia staff collaboratively developed a cross-cultural approach to manage the transfer and banking of coral and samples from one Country to another for reef restoration purposes, as well as the governance of future access to samples, which may remain viable for centuries.

Woppaburra people shared that they felt the AIMS team adopted cultural protocols upon request quickly and without question. They also referred to examples of external organisations that contributed to research activities e.g. the Taronga Conservation Society Australia, investing time and effort into exploring how they could adopt cultural protocols into their field of work, within and beyond this specific project. This made Woppaburra people feel respected and that AIMS brought in sound people to work with, which reinforced that AIMS could be trusted.

## **4.5.2 Outcomes generated for the people and organisations involved**

The outcomes generated through sharing Woppaburra culture are set out below. The different types of outcomes include creation of new knowledge and its applications, as well as people's shift in perspective (see outcomes listed under 'learning about Woppaburra culture' in Figure 4: Woppaburra Coral Project Theory of Change).

### **Woppaburra people share cultural knowledge and practice**

Many senior Woppaburra people shared cultural knowledge and practice during the on-Country workshops and coral spawning event. What was shared, and by whom, differed depending on who attended the workshop (a largely new group of participants went to each of the workshops) and what was appropriate for the specific audience present e.g.

a particular family line, men's or women's business, AIMS team or other non-Woppaburra people. This sharing of cultural knowledge and practice was predominantly through retelling of story that had been passed down.

### **Woppaburra people rekindle and generate new cultural knowledge and practice**

There were multiple instances throughout the project where new cultural practices were established. These were grounded in tradition and adapted to current circumstances. Prominent examples of this include the creation of the Woppaburra coral dance and naming a new coral species identified as part of research activities in Woppaburra language.

*"So the interesting thing about it is, a lot of people when they talk about culture, they see it as something static like you've seen in the museum. But you know culture is dynamic. It's changing all the time. It's being invented. It mutates in several different forms." Sonny Van Issum PhD, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*"Part of continuing culture is finding a way to recreate and share big events that happen with our people and pass that information down through song and dance. And I guess in a way that's how we've written down what happened at that event and started to pass it on to the next generations. It was a special moment." Josh Morris, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*"Some of us don't know of any dances or ceremony that happened before they were removed off the islands. The [Woppaburra coral dance] that they did was very significant, it was brilliant, emotional but so good to see... I can remember when my youngest son joined a dance group years ago and after a while he used to say, I don't feel right dancing these dances because they're not ours. He used to ask about ours and I said we don't know them." Brenda Boustead, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

### **Creating the Woppaburra coral dance**

*"As I learnt about the science of coral in the workshop I thought, that's the story of our mob and Aboriginal people Australia wide. You have the healthy reef - which is the healthy, strong Aboriginal community, and then coral spawning occurs where the full moon rises and the coral disperse across the seabed. So, the coming of the moon represents the European invasion when we were dispersed across Australia. Then, the coral larvae put out its feelers to find its home, where it needs to go. The larvae are put through the rising water temperatures, changing water quality, and the effects of man on the seabeds – these are the atrocities experienced by our people. We're trying to find our home, but we don't, which creates turmoil.*

*Creating the dance was a gesture of gratitude to our Elders, the marine scientists and workshop participants. Woppaburra all met after the workshop under the long seed tree to practice. For a lot of them it was their first corroboree ever. That was liberating to see. The dance made mob feel more connected to the science of it all. And now there is a connection between AIMS, the coral, and Woppaburra people. It is more than just a research project."*

*Meaghan Cummins, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*"They found this rare coral and they wanted us to name it, which was really cool. So that was really interesting, and it was exciting to have the name. So we had to put that to our Elders, and what name they would want." Anonymous, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

## Case study

### Naming a new coral species in language

The Queensland Museum holds one of the world's largest collections of reef corals. The museum's Coral Bank project aims to create a repository of Australia's threatened coral reefs. Identifying and understanding the diversity of coral species is critical to conservation efforts, particularly when conservation techniques include transplanting corals. The QLD Museum team collaborated with the Woppaburra Coral Project to identify the coral species in the Keppel Islands. During a field trip in 2021, the QLD Museum team identified new coral species and then invited Woppaburra people to name the new species in language. On-Country workshop 2 participants, Woppaburra Elders, the WTSC, AIMS IP team and QLD Museum contributed to development of a name that was scientifically and culturally meaningful. This will be forthcoming in a scientific journal.

#### Partners and stakeholders learn about Woppaburra history, culture and experience

Woppaburra people, AIMS staff (both science and IP team members), as well as external organisations involved in research activities, had the opportunity to learn about Woppaburra history, culture and experience. This occurred organically as people built trusted relationships across this life of the project as well as in structured two-way learning activities during on-Country workshops.

*"For me it was the first time meeting a lot of our family because everyone had been removed off the island. They were moved to different missions all over the state of QLD and then family had separated from there. So, it's been a long journey for a lot of our family to re-find where we originated from and to reconnect with our other old people who were able to maintain their stories and their culture. For me it was actually a big learning lesson because it was the first time for me to meet all our Elders and family on Country where they were able to show the areas and talk about the stories at the same time." Josh Morris, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*"I'm much more aware of the fact that Woppaburra people were forcibly removed from their sea Country, enslaved, and dispersed... It gave me a better understanding of the harm that's been done to Traditional Owners through colonisation." Dr Cathie Page, Australian Institute of Marine Science*

#### Scientists develop a personal investment in the project

Some scientists from AIMS and other external organisations that collaborated on research activities experienced shifts in perspective that changed their work practices and level of personal investment in the project. By learning about the Woppaburra world view, the scientists began to understand the sea Country where they conduct their research through a biocultural lens, not just a biophysical one. This was a 'profound shift', that changed the way they viewed the coral specimens that they worked with (their treatment and removal from Country) as well as the significance of FPIC. No scientist was previously opposed to FPIC, but it wasn't until this project that they felt it was meaningful or fundamental to their work. This shift, combined with close professional relationships developed with Woppaburra people led scientists to become more personally invested in the success of the project.

*"We've always been supportive of FPIC process, but not fully understanding the implications. Now it's a more personal understanding. Our experience with the Woppaburra Coral Project has made us think more about ensuring that permission and consultation processes are really done properly, not rushed through. It's created a renewed push. For example, to find the FTE to have a dedicated engagement person on staff. This isn't solely from the Woppaburra Coral Project, but it's definitely been an impetus to push that position further down the line." Jon Daly, Taronga Conservation Society Australia*

*"Now I think that FPIC is fundamental to what we do." Dr Carly Randall, Australian Institute of Marine Science*

*"I think for a lot of the other researchers it felt bigger than just going down and collecting data. It had more of an emotional component to it. You wanted to see it succeed. People really give a lot of themselves, too, you know, working long hours on these projects that they have a bit more investment in. It drives you to want to do the science correctly. Be diligent and accomplish your timelines and goals because it's not just about your paper, it's also contributing to this larger project." Anonymous, Australian Institute of Marine Science*

### **Partners and stakeholders incorporate cultural protocols into research activities**

AIMS and external organisations adapted their terminology and research methodologies to incorporate Woppaburra cultural protocols. In some instances, this was initiated during partnership activities, but then turned into a larger piece of work developing cross-cultural protocols that can be adopted in future projects, and by other Traditional Owners and institutions.

*Image: © AIMS, Gus Burrows*



## Case study

### Establishing a cross-cultural approach to biobanking

Taronga Conservation Society Australia utilises cryopreservation technologies for Great Barrier Reef management, restoration and research. The CryoDiversity Bank at the Taronga Institute of Science & Learning on Cammeragal Country in Sydney store and care for frozen coral cells until they are needed to re-seed the reef. The Taronga team collaborated with the Woppaburra Coral Project to collect coral samples from the Keppel Islands and store them in the CryoDiversity Bank. They joined the coral spawning event to collect samples. Whilst there, the Taronga team set up a lab in the Konomie Island Environmental Education Centre to process the collected samples. This provided an impromptu setting for two-way learning. Woppaburra people joined the lab to observe, ask questions and discuss the biobanking process and to share their perspectives. This initiated an in-depth discussion around the cultural protocols of removing coral from Country which eventually led to the development of a cross-cultural approach to biobanking of living coral cells and publishing of a journal article co-authored by Taronga Conservation Society, the Australian Institute of Marine Science and Woppaburra Traditional Owners.

The following provides accounts of the cross-cultural approach from Woppaburra Traditional Owner and Taronga Conservation Society Australia perspectives.

*“As coral male seed is going to another people’s Country, we need to have that communication with them. AIMS has had communication with the zoo, but it’s coral from our sea Country. We believe that what happens to Country happens to us. We will get sick if Country is mistreated. So, we asked for a meeting with the Traditional Owners down there, to create a respectful transition. To find out, ‘what we should do from our end before it reaches your Country, and then on arrival’. We had a Zoom meeting the next day with Taronga’s Aboriginal Advisory Group. There was an open discussion about Welcome to Country, smoking, who should be invited, and how it was to be conducted. It was very thorough, and every step was considered between the two Traditional Owners, not just between AIMS and a Traditional Owner. We were respectful and let the mob down there decide who we would meet with. In the end we met with the Cammeragal people who are the Traditional Owners of the land that Taronga Zoo lays upon. When we went down we had an exchange of Country - sand from us and leaves from them. We gave them a gift with our sand and the leaves that they used in the smoking ceremony. A glass with four components. Each glass represented the steps taken in the Woppaburra and AIMS workshop. The first glass was our Woppaburra people, so I asked Woppaburra Elder Auntie Marlene Cummins to come and put sand and a leaf into that glass, the second glass represented AIMS partnership with us so they did that one, the third glass was Taronga, the fourth was Cammeragal Rangers, who are now looking after our Country. The glass symbolised all the partnerships involved.” Meaghan Cummins, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*“A year after the spawning event, in September 2023, we held a workshop with the Woppaburra Traditional Owners, the AIMS team and Taronga cultural programmes and science teams to discuss what it meant to move samples from a cultural understanding - that the Keppel Island samples remain connected to Country even when they’re down here. Also, governance. How do you make sure that samples maintain that link to Country? How do you make sure that they’re not used in a way that doesn’t have FPIC? How do you ensure the ongoing consultation and safety for those samples because these cryo-preserved samples, in theory, can be available indefinitely. As they’re stored long-term in liquid nitrogen, we could use them in 12 months or 12 years or, 50 years. So how do you make sure that if you come back to a sample in 10 years time that actually has permission for your intended use? After the workshop we created a White Paper on the topic which was published as a journal article: [Cross-cultural approach to biobanking of living coral cells on Woppaburra sea Country in the southern inshore Great Barrier Reef.](#)” Jon Daly, Taronga Conservation Society Australia*

#### 4.5.3 Valuing the changes experienced

These outcomes sit under the theme of ‘learning about Woppaburra culture’. Like the earlier theme ‘supporting Woppaburra aspirations- return to Country’, trying to account for culture, something priceless, is inherently

complicated. Furthermore, we heard about two distinct practices that occurred throughout the project: sharing existing cultural knowledge *and* the regeneration or creation of new knowledge based on traditional practices. We have attempted to account for the value created by these different practices, by looking at existing markets where knowledge is shared or created.

The sharing of story by Woppaburra Elders and knowledge holders could be compared to a lecture given by a university professor as both hold specialised knowledge and are experts in their areas of interest. One way to account for knowledge sharing is the cost to provide a lecture. The Australian Government's Fair Work Ombudsman identified the pay rate for delivery of a one hour specialised lecture as \$267.50 in the 2024 Higher Education Industry-Academic Staff-Award Pay Guide.<sup>iv</sup>

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing' is one of the current Closing the Gap outcomes. A number of government and philanthropically funded grants have been established to support revitalisation efforts. The Australian Government Indigenous Languages and Arts (ILA) Program provides grants for a range of projects, including those which involve traditional storytelling, the use of Indigenous languages in a range of fields, traditional Indigenous arts and craft production, and the development of new Indigenous dance or theatre pieces – all of which took place throughout the Woppaburra Coral Project. Based on the ILA's FAQ guide, the cultural revitalisation activities undertaken through the Woppaburra Coral Project would be classified as an 'intermediary' project, which is eligible for grant amounts of up to \$150,000 per annum for a maximum of 24 months.

To understand the unique changes generated by the partnership and activities, it is critical to ask what would have happened anyway and who else contributed to these changes. Woppaburra people expressed that the sharing and revitalisation of culture would not have occurred without everyone being together on Country. One interviewee shared the example that this type of sharing did not occur when family got together for native title discussions and held in hotel meeting room type venues.

In terms of scientists shifting their practice with the knowledge they had gained, they shared that there was already a movement in the field of research to become better at engaging with First Nations people (for example through FPIC processes), but that this was not a priority for them until they built personal connections and a deeper understanding through the Woppaburra Coral Project. Several scientists at AIMS and external organisations shared examples of new ways of thinking and behaving that they now apply to their work beyond this project.

*Image: © AIMS, Gus Burrows*



## 4.6 Sharing the partnership model with others

The 'sharing the partnership model with others' value theme is about AIMS and the Woppaburra Traditional Owners raising the profile of Indigenous partnerships and sharing new knowledge about how to engage in effective partnerships that they developed through the project. Presentations on the Woppaburra Coral Project and partnership activities at conferences has boosted the partners' profiles leading to requests for specialised presentations and a series of new opportunities.

### 4.6.1 Indigenous partnership activities

#### IPP activity - celebrate Indigenous partnerships

This activity can be defined as follows:

- Raise the profile of Indigenous partnerships by seeking or creating opportunities to present on projects at conferences and forums.

#### Putting things into practice

AIMS leadership, IP team and WTSC members have presented on the Woppaburra Coral Project at many local and international conferences and forums, and to individual organisations upon request. These opportunities have raised the profile of the AIMS and Woppaburra partnership, as well as the organisations and individuals involved, and role modelled this new way of working to a wide audience. Additionally, many team members have shared new ways of working established during the Woppaburra Coral Project with their professional networks. For example, internal communications within AIMS have shown scientists who were not involved in this particular project how they can enact the IPP in their work. Furthermore, the Taronga Conservation Society Australia team shared the coral spawning cultural practices they learnt with their partners on a project in Tahiti. The practice of men harvesting coral spawn and women returning additional samples to sea Country has since been adopted in their work too.

A raised profile through communication and promotional activities has benefited both AIMS and Woppaburra people, leading to increased capacity to generate new opportunities. This has contributed to the sense that the partnership has created a legacy of success.

#### IPP activity - acknowledge Traditional Owner contributions in project communications

This activity can be defined as follows:

- Acknowledgement of Traditional Owner contributions is the recognition of Traditional Owners in all project outputs and communications, particularly in instances that feature Traditional Owner information gathered through consultation or partnership activities. Senior Woppaburra people involved included Aunty Francis Gala, Aunty Julie Blair, Uncle Bob Muir, Dr. Sonny Van Issum, Aunty Della Gibson, Aunty Valmai Smith and Meaghan Cummins.

#### Putting things into practice

This principle was applied in communication of project activities in two key ways. Firstly, an acknowledgement of Woppaburra people was undertaken at the beginning of all presentations and featured in project publications and research articles. AIMS scientists shared that an acknowledgement sparked discussion and reflection by audience members at forums, conferences and organisational presentations. Secondly, select Woppaburra people who were deeply involved in partnership activities, were invited to contribute to research articles and their contributions were recognised by being named co-authors.

Being a named author was identified as particularly significant by Woppaburra people as it expanded their credibility in the marine sector which could be leveraged to secure future opportunities and progress their aspirations in this space. The inclusion as named authors further contributed to Woppaburra perception of AIMS as a genuine partner, because, as one Woppaburra person with an extensive history in academia noted, it is uncommon for researchers or

institutes to offer to bring in more authors because it can be seen as diminishing their clout, so the fact that AIMS did so was another example of their commitment to the partnership and respect for Woppaburra people.

#### 4.6.2 Outcomes generated for the people and organisations involved

The outcomes generated through sharing the partnership model are set out below. The different types of outcomes include new knowledge, perceptions and experiences (see outcomes listed under ‘sharing the partnership model’ in Figure 4: Woppaburra Coral Project Theory of Change).

##### Partners and stakeholders role model a new way of working to others

AIMS team members, WTSC members and Taronga Conservation Society Australia staff have shared the partnership model with a range of internal and external audiences. This has led to growing interest in the concept of Indigenous partnership, as well as how IPP activities could be applied in other projects or areas of work.

##### Partners experience reputational growth

AIMS and Woppaburra people have experienced significant reputational growth from the success of the Woppaburra Coral Project. AIMS has become recognised as a culturally competent and trustworthy organisation and the WTSC as reliable and engaged. AIMS has subsequently received many requests from other non-Indigenous organisations to teach them how to effectively engage with Traditional Owners, while the WTSC has received an increased number of requests to participate in new research (and other types) of projects.

Media and communications activities during the project also helped to raise awareness of, and knowledge about, Woppaburra people more broadly.

*“It’s worked so well, and that process has done that good for us that now we’ve got triple the offers coming in.” Rob Muir, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

*“Even though media is not our thing, there was media at the first workshop, and since then I have noticed a lot more people have heard of Woppaburra people. [For example] In my work, when I show a slide with family pictures to introduce who I am, people will come up to me afterwards to say that they’ve heard of Woppaburra, or other Woppaburra people pop up to come and say hi.” Brenda Boustead, Woppaburra Traditional Owner*

##### Partners experience organisational growth

AIMS, the WTSC and affiliated Woppaburra bodies have experienced organisational growth from their increased profile through the Woppaburra Coral Project.

AIMS secured an increased funding rebase in 2023. AIMS’ reputation for Indigenous partnerships, significantly built upon the institute’s track record in the Woppaburra Coral Project, played a significant role in obtaining this new funding. It is further believed that their reputation as a leader in First Nations partnerships has helped to increase the value of opportunities that AIMS can generate, and therefore to increase its revenue. AIMS’ IP team has grown from 1.4 FTE to 17 FTE as a result of the additional funding, including 15 First Nations team members. With this increased capacity, the team has been able to embark on a range of new initiatives that will benefit future Traditional Owners that the organisation partners with. This includes the development of VET accredited courses, strengthening Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property protection measures, broadening the scope of First Nations-led science, and supporting the pipeline of First Nations scientists.

The Woppaburra Coral Project also contributed to the growth in the number of projects in which the WTSC is engaged. This includes additional work with AIMS and external organisations that they built relationships with through the project, as well as new partnerships with other external organisations resulting from their increased profile. There are also examples of increased engagement with Woppaburra bodies by Woppaburra people after

participating in the on-Country workshops for example, being employed in the Woppaburra Land and Sea Rangers Program.

### 4.6.3 Valuing the changes experienced

These outcomes sit under the theme of 'sharing the partnership model with others'. One way to account for the value created is AIMS' financial growth resulting from their burgeoning reputation as culturally capable and leaders in the Indigenous partnership space. There are different ways in which AIMS' financial growth could be represented. One expression is an estimation of the increased revenue and value of opportunities that AIMS is now able to generate. A boost of 10% to external revenue would equate to an additional \$5 million per year (at minimum). While the value of subsequent projects undertaken with BHP (a Woppaburra Coral Project co-funder) have a combined value of \$20M. Another is the \$163.4 million rebase funding which AIMS secured in 2023. Alternately, the growth of the IP team, which has been funded through this increased revenue and rebase. The current combined salaries of the IP team members are \$1.588 million, plus operational costs. Prior to commencement of the Woppaburra Coral Project, total salary costs for the IP team were \$20,9798.

Although other Indigenous partnerships occurred simultaneously, they did not have the same depth of engagement and so did not contribute to the growth in institutional capacity or profile in the same way. And of course, while AIMS reputation for Indigenous partnerships played a significant role in obtaining the funding rebase, the scientific merit of AIMS' activities and the outcomes they generate underpin the funding increase.

## 5. Concluding remarks

The Woppaburra Coral Project has demonstrated that when partnerships are grounded in trust, respect and openness, they can generate profound and lasting change. What began as a coral restoration initiative evolved into a deeply human story of connection, learning, and institutional transformation. The project's success was not incidental - it was the result of deliberate investment in relationships, culturally safe practices, and a willingness to embrace new ways of working.

While the context of this partnership is unique, the principles that underpinned its success are widely applicable. The Woppaburra Coral Project provides a compelling model for how research institutions, governments, and other organisations can engage with Traditional Owners in ways that are ethical, effective, and empowering. The lessons from this work, particularly around deep listening, consent, and walking side by side, can inform future partnerships across Australia and beyond. The legacy of the Woppaburra Coral Project is not just in what was achieved, but in how it was achieved.

## 6. Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), Woppaburra Traditional Owner Heritage Assessment, GBRMPA, 2017, accessed 26 June 2025.

<sup>ii</sup> The [Partnership Brokers Program Baseline Social Return on Investment Analysis](#) was undertaken by SVA in 2013. The average cost of partnership was ~\$125,000 AUD, which has been updated to reflect a 2025 inflation adjusted value of ~\$172,000 applying Australian annual inflation rates.

<sup>iii</sup> The [Cost Benefit Analysis](#) commission by the Healing Foundation was undertaken in 2014. It estimated an average cost per participant of \$57,827, which has been updated to reflect a 2025 inflation adjusted value of \$78,400 applying Australian annual inflation rates.

<sup>iv</sup> Fair Work Ombudsman, [Higher Education Industry-Academic Staff-Award \[MA000006\] Pay Guide](#), Fair Work Ombudsman, 2024, accessed 28 May 2025.



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