



Marine
and Coastal

National Environmental Science Program

PROJECT 4.24

Assessing the ecological values of the reefs of the southern Gulf of Carpentaria

The challenge

The Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Park was declared in 2013. Covering nearly 24,000 km², it is the Sea Country of the Lardil, Yangkaal, Kaiadlit, and Gangalidda peoples.

Within the Marine Park is a controversial Special Purpose (Trawl) Zone for use by commercial prawn fishers. A potential renewal of this permitted trawl-zone is scheduled for 2028 as part of an overall revision of the Marine Park Management Plan.

To inform the review process, more scientific information is needed on the area's environmental values and condition of the various habitats within it.

The rocky and coral reefs within the park were first described in the early 2000's by Geoscience Australia. Interested citizen scientists have since undertaken a series of standardised visual reef surveys and uploaded their data to the online Reef Survey database. This data has not yet been reviewed and interpreted.

The approach

This project will synthesise and analyse southern Gulf Reef Survey data, in combination with relevant published information. The findings will be reported to scientists, managers, and Traditional Owners to inform Marine Park planning and management and shared through community meetings and workshops. Advice and input will be sought, and future research priorities identified collaboratively. Discussions will also explore the potential for exploration of cultural values to be included in future decision-making processes.



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Expected outcomes

- Improved Marine Park management and planning through access to information on values.
- Improved stakeholder understanding of the ecological values of the Marine Park.
- A readily accessible source of information on the Marine Park values to inform management.
- Culturally appropriate communication products that record and share knowledge.
- A defined program of future research for the southern Gulf region.

Project leaders

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*FRONT: Toothy Goby or the Mozambique Ghost Goby (*Pleurosicya mossambica*) by Ian Shaw. BACK: (Clockwise from top) Relict coral reef, Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Park. Decorated Sandgoby (*Istigobius decoratus*) is found on sand patches near reefs by Ian Shaw. Sea snake (*Aipysurus laevis*) on Carpentaria Reef in the Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Park by Graham Edgar. Photo of a diver on a reef at Mornington Island by Rick Stuart Smith.*

