Assessing Risks in Coastal Governance Affecting the GBR – Priorities for Reform.

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Why Assess the Governance System in the GBR Coast

• Healthy governance systems are the key to delivering sound environment management outcomes.
• There are surprisingly few risk assessment frameworks that can pin point those governance domains and sub-domains that most influence environmental outcomes.
• This paper proposes a clear risk assessment framework for analysing governance systems.
• We are testing this through its application to a significant real world context; coastal management as it relates to the health of Australia’s Great Barrier Reef (GBR).
The GBR Context

• The GBR exists at a supra-regional scale along most of the north eastern coast of Australia.
• Brodie et al. (2012) find overall trends in GBR ecosystem functions are of significant concern.
• At the same time, official international concern over the governance of the reef has recently been flagged through IUCN processes.
• The GBR is an ideal candidate for testing improved governance risk assessment tools.
Understanding Governance Systems

• We have a societal-wide view of governance as the “intentional shaping of the flow of events so as to realize desired public good” (Parker and Braitwaite:119).
• Governance represents a wider set of processes of bargaining and negotiation among differing interests in society, leading to particular system outcomes.
• We need to look at the overall health of the wider governance system if we want to understand GBR health outcomes.
• First, however, need to look at various governance domains and sub-domains of importance to the coast and the GBR.
• We can then look at both the structural and functional health of different governance domains and sub-domains.
Analyzing Risks in the Governance System

Risk analysis is a step in any risk management procedure.

In any risk assessment two key concepts need specific attention:

- **Likelihood:** Events with a very low likelihood or probability of occurring present a low risk to system managers;

- **Consequence:** Highly likely events might actually have limited consequences (or impact) for system outcomes, meaning they also should have a corresponding low risk rating;

Together, likelihood and consequence analysis of the potential failure of key domains in a governance system provides a simple but powerful analytical approach.
Key Steps in Assessing Risk in Different Governance Domains and Sub-Domains

- **Step 1:** Determine the Key Domains/Sub Domains of Governance of relevance to the coast in the GBR.
- **Step 2:** Undertake (Structural and Functional) Health Analysis of Key Domains and Sub-Domains of Governance.
- **Step 3:** Undertake Likelihood and Consequence Analysis of Failure in Key Domains and Sub-Domains.
- **Step 4:** Cost Assessment of Reform Inaction vs Action.
- **Step 5:** Design, Implement and Adaptively Monitor a Progressive Reform Program.

From rapid appraisal to deep analysis, all steps work better through the use of highly participatory approaches.
Broad Preliminary Thoughts:

Higher Order Priorities for Reform:

• Climate Adaptation, Major Projects, Ecosystem Service Delivery and National Education Domains/ Sub Domains.

Sub-Domains on the Divide Between Success and Failure:

• Reef Protection Legislation, Property Planning and Management, Indigenous Land and Sea Governance.

Stable Sub Domains But Need Ongoing Refinement:

• Regional NRM, Water Quality Planning and Implementation.

Sub-Domains With Good Progress and Now Low Risk:

Some Broader Observations:

1. Importance of Australia continuing to play an active leadership role in strategic international conventions.
2. There are major cross-jurisdiction and cross legislative efficiency and integration issues in the system.
3. There are stark differences between governance in GBR versus catchments draining into the GBR.
4. Spatial edge and connectivity issues need constant consideration due to the ecologically artificial boundaries of the World Heritage Area.
5. Seemingly un-related Governance domains (like education) can have a big impact on the Reef.
Applying the Governance Systems Risk Assessment Tool:

- Best applied in a highly participatory context, bringing together stakeholders, researchers and government.
- Can be applied in rapid assessment or in the deep research context.
- Enables the foundation for long term benchmarking of the health of governance systems (e.g. Outlook).
- Can identify redundant parts of governance system.
- Would be a valuable tool in the context of the Reef Strategic Assessment Process (State and Feds).