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Coral Indicators for the 2018 Gladstone Harbour Report Card: ISP014

Report Prepared for the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership



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Contents

1	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4
2	BACKGROUND.....	6
3	METHODS.....	7
3.1	Sampling design.....	7
3.1	Survey methods.....	7
3.1.1	Photo point intercept transects.....	7
3.1.2	Juvenile coral surveys.....	7
3.1.3	Scuba search transects.....	8
3.2	Coral community Indicators.....	9
3.2.1	Coral Cover indicator.....	9
3.2.2	Juvenile indicator.....	9
3.2.3	Macroalgae indicator.....	10
3.2.4	Cover Change indicator.....	10
3.2.5	Scoring of indicators.....	11
3.2.6	Aggregation of indicator scores.....	11
3.3	Key pressures.....	12
3.3.1	Thermal bleaching.....	13
3.3.2	Runoff.....	13
3.3.3	Cyclones and storms.....	14
4	Discussion of RESULTS.....	15
4.1	Environmental pressures.....	15
4.2	Coral cover.....	16
4.3	Macroalgae.....	18
4.4	Juvenile density.....	19
4.5	Change in hard coral cover.....	20
5	CONCLUSION.....	22
6	REFERENCES.....	24
7	APPENDICES.....	27
7.1	Appendix 1: Data Tables.....	27
7.2	Appendix 2: Rationale for indicator selection and threshold setting.....	37
7.2.1	Combined cover of hard corals and soft corals.....	37
7.2.2	Cover of macroalgae.....	38
7.2.3	Density of juvenile hard corals.....	39
7.2.4	Change in hard coral cover.....	40
7.2.5	References.....	42

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Coral monitoring sites.....	8
Figure 2 Coral index for reporting zones	15
Figure 3 Trends in coral cover for reporting zones.	17
Figure 4 Composition of benthic cover at each location..	18
Figure 5 Trends in macroalgae cover for reporting zones.....	19
Figure 6 Composition of juvenile coral communities at each location.	20
Figure 7 Trends in Juvenile density for reporting zones.....	20

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Coral indicator scores and 2018 report card grade.....	4
Table 2 Thresholds and bounds for scoring of selected coral condition indicators.	11
Table 3 Conversion of aggregated indicator scores to report card grades.....	12
Table 4 Mean monthly sea-surface temperature anomalies within Gladstone Harbour.....	16
Table 5 River discharge.	16
Table 6 Change in hard coral cover scores.....	21
Table A 1 Site location and transect directions.....	27
Table A 2 Indicator values for Gladstone Harbour.	28
Table A 3 Indicator scores for Gladstone Harbour.	28
Table A 4 Indicator values for reporting zones.....	29
Table A 5 Indicator scores for reporting zones	29
Table A 6 Comparison of scores between methodologies for juvenile density estimates.....	30
Table A 7 Indicator values for individual reefs.....	31
Table A 8 Indicator scores for individual reefs.....	32
Table A 9 Genus level coral cover and abundance of juvenile corals.....	33
Table A 10 Cover of algae, sponges and sand and silt	34
Table A 11 Causes of coral mortality at time of survey 2018.	35
Table A 12 Size-class distribution of juvenile corals.....	36

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents a detailed description of the benthic communities at coral monitoring locations within the Mid and Outer Harbour reporting zones that form the basis of the coral community component of the 2018 Gladstone Harbour Report Card.

In May 2018 the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) resurveyed benthic communities at permanent coral monitoring locations in the Mid Harbour (four locations) and Outer Harbour (two locations). Overall the condition of these communities has declined from a report card grade of 'poor' (D) in 2017 to 'very poor' (E) in 2018 (Table 1, Figure 2).

Report card grades for 2018 are based on the assessment of four indicators of coral condition: the proportion of the substrate occupied by living corals (Coral Cover), the proportion of the substrate occupied by large fleshy species of algae (Macroalgae Cover), the density of juvenile hard corals (Juvenile Density) and the rate of change in coral cover relative to the expected change for a given community (Change in Hard Coral Cover).

With the exception of Juvenile Density observed levels of the indicators were converted to scores based on thresholds developed for the 2015 Gladstone Harbour Report Card. The conversion to Juvenile Density scores were updated to be consistent with those used by the Reef Report Card and now focus on a smaller size range of colonies (<5cm) than the <10cm previously reported.

Table 1 Coral indicator scores and 2018 report card grade.

Juvenile Density	Coral Cover	Macroalgae Cover	Change in Hard Coral Cover	Report Card	
				Score	Grade
0.39	0.05	0.22	0.32	0.24	E

The 'very poor' condition of coral communities is heavily weighted by the continuing extremely low cover of corals on most reefs. Mean coral cover (hard and soft coral combined) across Gladstone harbour is currently 4.23%, substantially lower than the 39% mean hard coral cover estimated by BMT WBM following surveys in the Mid Harbour reporting zone around North Passage and along the western side of Facing Island in 2009 (BMT WBM 2013). Whilst the BMT WBM (2013) report does not provide a mean estimate for soft coral cover, data presented in that report (figure 4.4) indicates that soft coral cover ranged between ~4% - 40%. Considering this in terms of combined coral cover, as reported in the report card, further reinforces the extent of decline in coral cover since 2009. A strong contributing factor to the loss of corals in the harbour was a major flood event in 2013 which almost certainly exposed corals to lethally low levels of salinity and high turbidity.

The other three indicators, Macroalgae Cover, Juvenile Density and Change in Hard Coral, are included in the monitoring program to provide measures of the recovery potential of coral communities from such acute events.

The survey reefs continued to have a high cover of macroalgae, which translates into the 'very poor' assessment for this indicator. Macroalgae can limit coral recovery through a variety of pathways including direct competition with surviving colonies and suppression of the recruitment process. The 'poor' assessment of the Juvenile Density indicator is likely to reflect both the pressures imposed by high cover of macroalgae and the low availability of larvae as a result of low coral cover.

The score for the fourth indicator, Change in Hard Coral Cover, has decreased compared to the 2017 assessment but remains classified as 'poor'. This indicates that conditions since 2015 have not supported the recovery of coral cover on the majority of survey reefs.

Little evidence was observed to indicate broad climatic drivers: flooding, cyclones and or high temperature, had any direct impact on coral condition or the observed trends in indicators over the 2017-2018 period. Although heavy rainfall in the region in October 2017 led to minor flooding of the Boyne, Calliope and Fitzroy rivers, survival of sensitive *Acropora* spp. colonies indicates exposure to freshwater was not the cause of reduced coral cover. It is possible that sediment and nutrient loads delivered by these floods may have had indirect impacts on the coral communities.

Future changes in coral cover within Gladstone Harbour are expected to be small given the current low coral cover, the predominance of slow growing species, the low recruitment (as indicated by low densities of juvenile coral) and the abundance of competing macroalgae. It remains clear, however, that localised pressures of high macroalgae cover, and associated limitations imposed on juvenile recruitment, as well as the prevalence of bio-eroding sponges continue to present as the strongest limitations to the recovery of these reefs.

2 BACKGROUND

Coral communities around the world are under increasing pressure as intensifying land use, urbanisation and industrial development impinge on corals' ability to resist, or recover from, natural disturbances such as floods or storms. Along the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) coast it is well documented that loads of sediments, nutrients and other chemical pollutants carried to the sea in catchment runoff have increased since European settlement (Kroon *et al.* 2012, Waters *et al.* 2014).

Within Gladstone Harbour coral communities are subject to the same range of pressures as other inshore coral reefs in the GBR, with the added potential impact of uniquely local pressures associated with the operations of the harbour and associated industries. It is for this reason that AIMS has co-invested with the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership (GHHP) to monitor and report the condition of coral communities within the GHHP reporting area as part of the Gladstone Harbour Report Card.

The indicators, sampling methodology and scoring system used to derive grades for the Gladstone Harbour Report Card were chosen to be as compatible as practicable to those used for the Great Barrier Reef Report Card (Queensland Government 2015). We note that revisions of the methods used to score coral community condition for the Great Barrier Reef Report Card (Thompson *et al.* 2016) mean that while indicators remain the same, thresholds against which state level as well as regional report card scores are derived now vary between these programs. Consideration should be given to realignment of methodologies. For this report, realignment has occurred for the Juvenile Density indicator with an adjustment in the methodology for collecting juvenile abundance data and subsequent update of the threshold values against which this indicator is scored

This report presents the fourth resurvey of the permanent coral monitoring transects constructed in 2015. The purpose of this report is to provide a detailed description of reef communities as observed in 2018 that expands on the necessarily succinct summary of condition presented by the 2018 Gladstone Harbour Report Card.

3 METHODS

3.1 Sampling design

Coral communities are monitored along permanently marked transects. The selection of sites and construction of transects occurred in July 2015 as reported in detail in Thompson *et al.* (2015). In brief, suitable sites were identified at four locations within the Mid Harbour reporting zone and two locations in the Outer Harbour reporting zone (Figure 1). Within each site a series of five 20m long transects, each separated by a space of 5m, were constructed along a depth contour identified as the most suitable coral habitat; depths ranged between 0 and 1m below lowest astronomic tide (Table A 1) as dictated by the limited depth of hard coral communities within the harbour. To ensure accurate relocation of sampling, the start of each transect was marked with a steel star-picket, with additional transect markers consisting of lengths of 10mm steel rod placed at the midpoint and end of each transect. The starting point of the 1st transect was recorded as a GPS location (WGS84 datum) and compass bearings recorded along each transect to aid future relocation (Table A 1). At each transect the following three surveys of the benthic communities are undertaken annually. This report presents data collected on 5 May 2018.

3.1 Survey methods

3.1.1 Photo point intercept transects

Estimates of the composition of benthic communities were derived from the identification of organisms on digital photographs taken along the permanently marked transects. The method closely followed Standard Operation Procedure Number 10 of the AIMS Long-Term Monitoring Program (LTMP, Jonker *et al.* 2008) and mirrors that used by the Reef Plan Marine Monitoring Program (MMP). Digital photographs were taken at 50cm intervals along each transect. Estimations of proportional cover of benthic community components were derived from the identification of the benthos lying beneath five fixed points digitally overlaid onto these images. Benthic cover of any group of interest is estimated as the proportion of all points that were identified and categorised as that group. A total of 32 images were analysed from each transect. For the majority of hard and soft corals, identification to at least genus level was achieved. Identifications for each point were entered directly into a data entry front-end to an Oracle® database, developed by AIMS. This system allows the recall of stored transect images and checking of all identified points.

3.1.2 Juvenile coral surveys

The number of juvenile coral colonies were counted *in situ* along the permanently marked transects. Prior to 2018, corals in the size classes: 0-2cm, >2-5cm, and >5-10cm found within a strip 34cm wide (data slate length) positioned on the upslope side of the transect line were identified to genus level and recorded. For 2018, reporting of the >5-10cm size class was discontinued, aligning the methodology used here with that used by the MMP (Thompson *et*

al. 2016). Importantly, this method aims to record only those small colonies assessed as juveniles, i.e. which result from the settlement and subsequent survival and growth of coral larvae, and so excludes small coral colonies considered to have resulted from the fragmentation or partial mortality of larger colonies. Limiting observations to <5 cm more accurately focuses on juvenile rather than fragmented colonies and also helps to exclude small colonies of slow growing corals which do not reflect recent recruitment and survivorship dynamics which form the basis for the Juvenile Density indicator. Further, the realignment of methodology allows direct comparison between Gladstone Harbour coral communities and those of other inshore reefs monitored by the MMP.

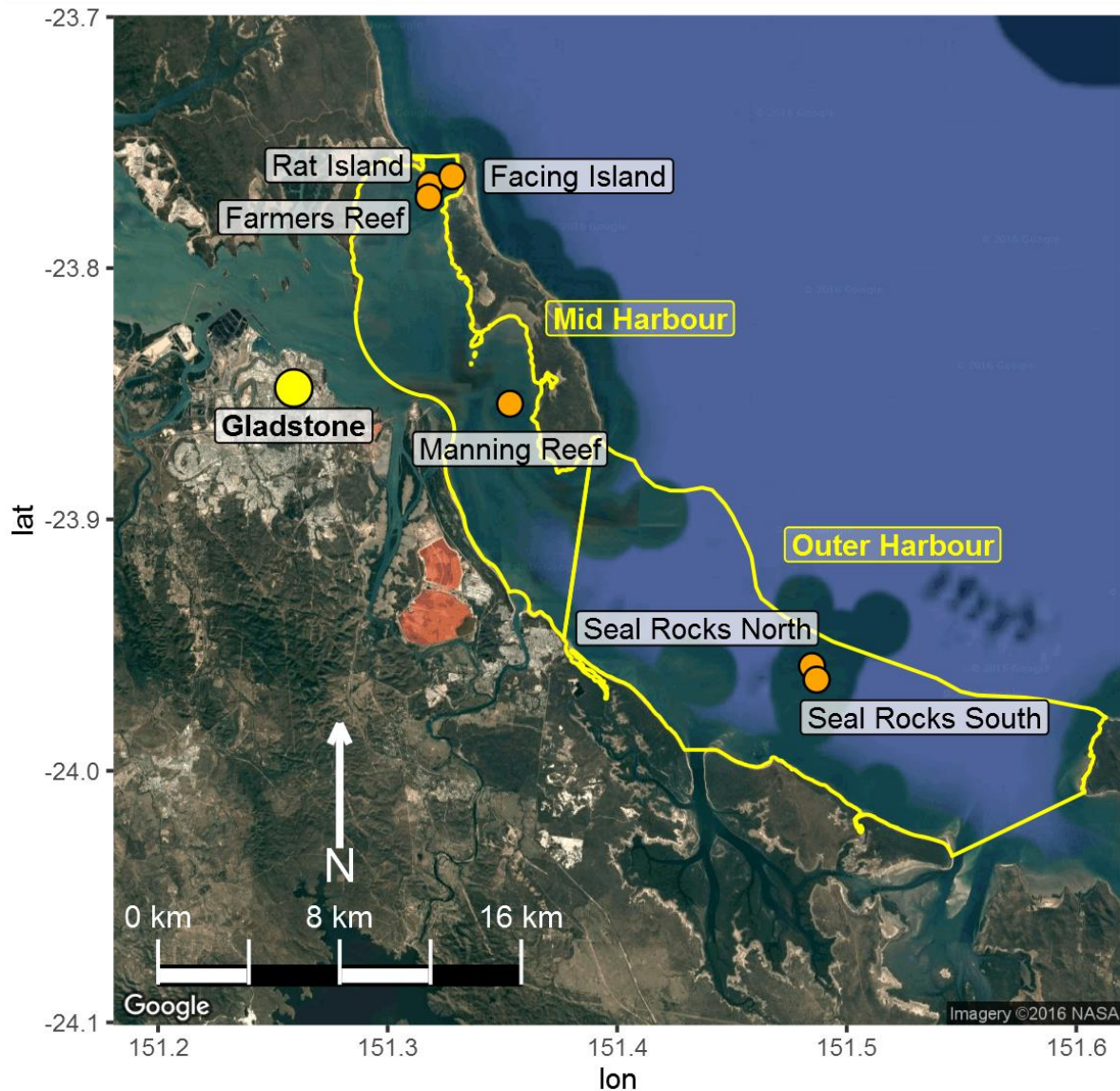


Figure 1 Coral monitoring sites.

3.1.3 Scuba search transects

Scuba search transects documented the incidence of disease and other agents of coral mortality observed at the time of survey. This method closely followed the Standard Operation Procedure Number 9 of the AIMS Long-Term Monitoring Program (Miller *et al.*

2009) and serves to help identify probable causes of declines in coral community condition. For each 20m transect a search was conducted within a 2m wide belt transect centred on the marked transect line and the incidence of: coral disease, coral bleaching, coral predation by *Drupella* or crown-of-thorns seastars, overgrowth by sponges, smothering by sediments or physical damage to coral colonies was recorded.

3.2 Coral community Indicators

The coral index is formulated around the concept of community resilience. The underlying assumption is that a 'resilient' community should show clear signs of recovery after inevitable acute disturbances, such as cyclones and coral bleaching events, or, in the absence of disturbance, maintain a high cover of corals and successful recruitment processes. For the Gladstone Harbour Report Card four indicators of coral communities are included, each representing different processes that contribute to coral community resilience.

This section provides an overview of the methods used to estimate and score each indicator that, in combination, capture both the state and resilience of coral communities. A full description for the rationale behind the selection and scoring of each indicator is included in Appendix 2.

3.2.1 Coral Cover indicator

The most tangible and desirable indication of a healthy coral community is an abundance of coral. The Coral Cover indicator scored reefs based on the proportional area of substrate covered by either 'Hard' (order Scleractinia) or 'Soft' (subclass Octocorallia) corals.

$$\text{Coral Cover}_{ij} = HC_{ij} + SC_{ij}$$

Where, *HC* and *SC* are the proportion of benthos occupied by hard and soft corals respectively, *i* = reef and *j* = time.

While high Coral Cover provides a good indication that environmental conditions are supportive of the growth and survival of corals, low cover does not necessarily indicate the opposite. Coral communities are naturally dynamic being impacted by acute disturbance events such as cyclones, temperature anomalies and, in coastal areas, flooding. The indicators Juvenile Density, Macroalgae Cover and Change in Hard Coral Cover were included as they represent the potential for coral communities to recover from disturbances.

3.2.2 Juvenile indicator

The density of juvenile corals is an indicator of the successful completion of early life history stages of corals from gametogenesis through fertilisation, larval survival in the plankton, settlement to the substrate and then early post settlement survival, all of which may be impacted by poor water quality (reviewed by Fabricius 2005, van Dam *et al.* 2011, Erftemeijer *et al.* 2012). The Juvenile Density indicator was derived from counts of juvenile corals along belt transects and converted to a density per area of potentially colonisable hard substrate,

estimated as the proportion of benthos identified as algae along the co-located point intercept transects:

$$\text{Juvenile Density}_{ij} = J_{ij} / AS_{ij}$$

Where, J = count of juvenile colonies < 5cm in diameter, AS = area of transect occupied by algae, i = reef and j = time.

3.2.3 Macroalgae indicator

High macroalgal abundance may suppress the recovery of coral communities through a variety of mechanisms ranging from competition with surviving colonies through to suppression of the recruitment process (e.g., McCook *et al.* 2001, Hughes *et al.* 2007, Foster *et al.* 2008, Cheal *et al.* 2013, Hauri *et al.* 2010). The indicator Macroalgae Cover was estimated as the proportion of benthos along point intercept transects identified as macroalgae:

$$\text{Macroalgae Cover}_{ij} = MA_{ij}$$

Where, MA is the proportional cover of macroalgae, i = reef and j = time. Macroalgae is here considered to include all algae larger than the filamentous turf or crustose coralline forms.

3.2.4 Cover Change indicator

While high coral cover can justifiably be considered a positive indicator of community condition, the reverse is not necessarily true. Low cover may occur following acute disturbance and, hence, may not be a direct reflection of the community's resilience to underlying environmental conditions. For this reason, in addition to considering the actual level of coral cover we also assess the rate at which hard coral cover increases as a direct measure of recovery potential. The assessment of rates of cover increase is possible as rates of change in hard coral cover on inshore reefs have been modelled (Thompson *et al.* 2016); allowing estimations of expected increases in cover for communities of varying composition to be compared against observed changes.

A Bayesian framework was used to permit propagation of uncertainty through predictions of expected hard coral cover increase from separate models applied to fast growing Acroporidae, and the combined cover of all other hard corals. Note that the example presented below for Acroporidae (Acr), has the same form as that applied for Other Corals ($OthC$) if these terms are exchanged where they appear in the equations.

$$\ln(Acr_{it}) \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu_{it}, \sigma^2)$$

$$\mu_{it} = vAcr_i + \ln(Acr_{it-1}) + \left(-\frac{vAcr_i}{\ln(estK_i)}\right) * \ln(Acr_{it-1} + OthC_{it-1} + Sc_{it-1})$$

$$vAcr_i = \alpha + \sum_{j=0}^J \beta_j Reef_j$$

$$\alpha \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 10^6)$$

$$\beta_j \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_{Reef}^2)$$

$$\sigma^2, \sigma_{Reef}^2 = \mathcal{U}(0, 100)$$

$$rAcr = v\bar{Acr}_i$$

Where, Acr_{it} , $OthC_{it}$ and Sc_{it} are the cover of Acroporidae coral, other hard coral and soft coral respectively at a given reef at time (t). $eskK$ is the community size at equilibrium (100-proportion of area comprised of unconsolidated substrates) and $rAcr$ is the rate of increase (growth rate) in percent cover of Acroporidae coral. Varying effects of Reef (β_j) is also incorporated to account for spatial autocorrelation. Model coefficients associated with the intercept, and Reef (α_i and β_j) all had weekly informative Gaussian priors, the latter two with model standard deviation). The overall rate of coral growth parameters ($rAcr$ or alternatively $rOthC$) constituted the mean of the individual posterior rates of increase ($vAcr_i$ or alternatively $vOthC_i$).

3.2.5 Scoring of indicators

To facilitate the reporting of coral community condition the observed values for each indicator were converted to scores on a common scale of 0 to 1. For each indicator, observed levels were scaled against thresholds which were set based on expert opinion and knowledge gained from the time-series of coral community condition collected by the Marine Monitoring Program (MMP) and the AIMS Long Term Monitoring Program (LTMP). Thresholds represent the boundary between report card grades of C and D (score =0.5) that would indicate the switch between a community in satisfactory condition and one displaying a lack of resilience (Table 2). In addition, upper bounds were set that represent values of indicators that were considered to represent communities in as good a condition as could be expected in the local environment. Conversely, lower bounds were set to represent minimal resilience (Table 2). While observations may exceed these limits, any such values will be capped at the minimum or maximum score (0 or 1 respectively).

Table 2 Thresholds and bounds for scoring of selected coral condition indicators. Note that the thresholds for the Juvenile Density indicator have been updated to account for the change in the methodology described above and are consistent with those used by the MMP on inshore reefs.

Indicator	Threshold (score = 0.5)	Upper bound (score = 1)	Lower bound (score = 0)
Coral Cover	40%	90%	0%
Macroalgae Cover	14%	5%	20%
Juvenile Density	4.6 m ⁻²	13 m ⁻²	0 m ⁻²
Change in Hard Coral Cover	Lower 95% CI	2* upper 95% CI	Below 2* lower 95% CI

3.2.6 Aggregation of indicator scores

The scaling of all scores to the common range of 0 to 1 allowed aggregation of scores across indicators at a hierarchy of spatial scales. Within this report scores are presented at the scale of individual indicators at each reef, individual indicators and report card scores for each reporting-zone and whole-of-harbour. For zone-level scores, a mean score for each indicator was estimated as the mean of indicator scores for each reef within that zone, and report card scores as the mean of the four individual indicator mean scores. Similarly harbour-wide scores

were taken as the mean of the zone-level means for each indicator and the report card score as the mean of these harbour-wide individual indicator scores.

For the Gladstone Harbour Report Card, average scores are derived through aggregation of bootstrapped distributions of indicator scores, where bootstrapped distributions are produced by repeatedly sampling, with replacement, the observed distribution of indicators. This method of aggregating distributions ensures that each distribution has equal weighting on the aggregation.

In practice, to aggregate individual scores for the indicators at each reef to a mean score and estimate of variance for a zone requires that:

1. A bootstrap distribution of 10000 samples is constructed for each indicator within the zone.
2. The resulting bootstrap distributions are added together and the mean score for the zone along with variance extracted from this combined distribution.

Whole of harbour scores were similarly generated by respectively aggregating the indicator distributions within zones, adding the aggregated distributions from each zone together to derive a harbour-level distribution from which mean and variance for individual indicators at the scale of the harbour were derived. Finally, adding the whole of harbour distributions for each indicator yields the distribution from which the whole of harbour score and variance were extracted. Reef level index scores are simply the arithmetic mean of the scores for each indicator.

Grades for coral community condition were derived from the scores estimated above according to the conversions described in Table 3.

Table 3 Conversion of aggregated indicator scores to report card grades.

Score	Condition description	Grade
≥ 0.85	Very good	A
≥ 0.65, < 0.85	Good	B
≥ 0.5, < 0.65	Satisfactory	C
≥ 0.25, < 0.5	Poor	D
0, < 0.25	Very poor	E

3.3 Key pressures

Coral communities are susceptible to a range of pressures. Identifying these pressures and the associated drivers is essential in determining the likely cause of impacts to coral

community condition. For inshore reefs of the GBR common disturbances to coral communities include: physical damage cause by tropical cyclones (Osborne *et al.* 2011, De'ath *et al.* 2012) , exposure to low salinity waters during flood events (van Woesik 1991, Jones & Berkelmans 2014), and anomalously high summer temperatures resulting in coral bleaching (Berkelmans *et al.* 2004, Sweatman *et al.* 2007). It is only once the influences of acute pressures have been accounted for that the potential impacts of chronic pressures such as elevated turbidity and nutrient levels can be inferred.

3.3.1 Thermal bleaching

Thermal stress, resulting in coral bleaching, is an increasing threat to coral communities in a warming world (Schleussner *et al.* 2016). During coral surveys in 2016 AIMS deployed temperature loggers to the pickets marking the first transect at each of Rat Island, Manning Reef, and Seal Rocks North. These loggers are exchanged annually and provide an ongoing record of in-situ water temperature and begin the process of developing an accurate climatology for the coral communities in the harbour. Until this data series matures the likelihood of thermal stress to corals in the harbour can be interpreted from thermal anomalies presented as degree heating days DHD downloadable from [ReefTemp](#) (Garde *et al.* 2014) as published by the Bureau of Meteorology. For this report, annual summaries of DHD from 1 December to 31 March and based on 14 Day IMOS climatology (Garde *et al.* 2014) were downloaded on 24 May 2018. To further interrogate temperature anomalies, monthly mean anomalies were also downloaded. Mean values of DHD and monthly anomalies for Gladstone Harbour were estimated as the average for all pixels falling within the Mid and Outer Harbour Reporting zones.

3.3.2 Runoff

Exposure to reduced salinity has proven lethal to coral communities in the inshore GBR (van Woesik 1991, Jones & Berkelmans 2014, Thompson *et al.* 2016) and is highly likely to have been a key driver of the current 'very poor' condition of coral communities in Gladstone Harbour (Thompson *et al.* 2015, Jones *et al.* 2015). As a generalisation, the presence of coral communities can be interpreted as direct evidence that 'typical' salinity levels do not pose a threat to coral communities; it is deviations to levels below 28 parts per thousand (ppt) that begin to cause coral mortality (Berkelmans *et al.* 2012). As a first step in assessing the likelihood that floods may have led to a direct salinity related stress to corals the seasonal discharge of local rivers is compared to long term median flows. Median discharge for the "wet season" defined here as December-May are calculated from available data 1990-2010 and compared to the current year. Discharge data were sourced from the Queensland Government [water monitoring portal](#) for:

- Station I30005A-Fitzroy River at the Gap
- Station I32001A-Calliope River at Castlehope

As the flow of the Boyne River is interrupted by Lake Awoonga Dam the time and magnitude of over flow of this dam, as reported by the [Gladstone Area Water Board](#), is also considered.

3.3.3 Cyclones and storms

Significant impacts to coral reefs in the GBR have been attributed to cyclone and storm damage (Osborne *et al.* 2011, De'ath *et al.* 2012). Due to the physical nature of damage associated with cyclones impacts are readily identifiable during surveys undertaken in the following winter. In addition, cyclones are well publicised and highly unlikely to go unnoticed. Verification of the potential impacts of cyclones was assessed based on viewing seasonal cyclone tracks published online by the Cooperative Institute for Meteorological Satellite Studies (<http://cimss.ssec.wisc.edu/tropic2/#>).

4 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The Harbour wide report card score for coral communities in 2018 is 0.24 resulting in the index being categorised as ‘very poor’, a slight decline from the score of 0.28 and categorisation of ‘poor’ in 2017 (Figure 2). Coral cover across the harbour remains at very low levels, resulting in a ‘very poor’ grade for this indicator (Table 1, Figure 3). Macroalgae cover has remained at high levels and the grade for this indicator remains ‘poor’. (Table 1, Figure 5.). The trend in the Juvenile Density indicator indicates a decline in this metric reversing the improvements observed previously (Figure 7). The Change in Hard Coral Cover indicator scores declined at most reefs ensuring the continued ‘poor’ categorisation for Gladstone Harbour (Table 1).

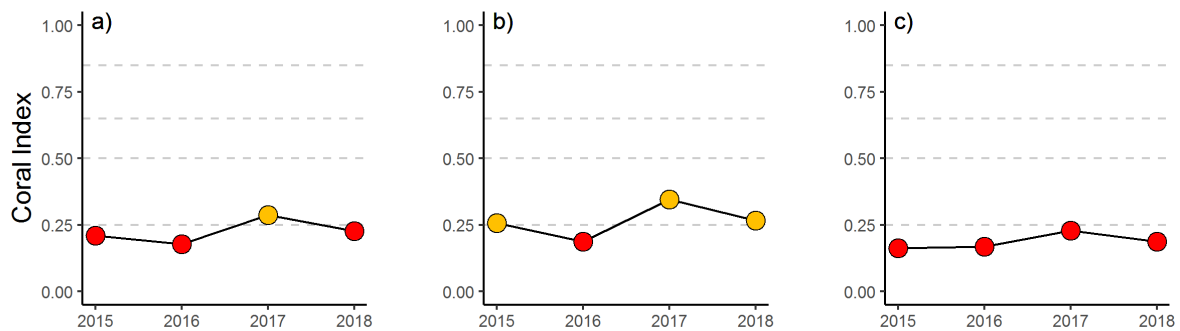


Figure 2 Coral index for reporting zones. a) Gladstone Harbour, b) Mid Harbour, c) Outer Harbour. Colours represent the coral report card grade (see Table 3 for details). Dashed lines indicate the thresholds between report card grades.

4.1 Environmental pressures

Degree Heating Days (DHD, Garde et al. 2014) are calculated as the accumulated positive anomaly of summer sea-surface temperature compared with the historical climatology of the region and provide a reliable indicator of the likelihood of coral bleaching. DHD estimates for the summer period (December to March inclusive) for pixels within the Mid and Outer Harbour reporting zones were 111 for the 2017/2018 summer, indicating a cooler summer than the previous year with 147 DHD. The DHD summary was heavily influenced by substantially cooler conditions occurring during December 2017 (

Table 4). There was no evidence of any impacts from thermal bleaching to coral communities across Gladstone Harbour observed during monitoring in 2018.

River discharge data indicated no flooding of local rivers over the 2017/2018 wet season (December 2017-May 2018) (

Table 5). In contrast, October 2017 saw heavy rainfall across the region which resulted in moderate flooding of the Boyne and Calliope rivers and subsequent overflow of Awoonga dam. Despite this, surveys conducted in May 2018 found no evidence that exposure to low salinity had impacted the coral communities in Gladstone Harbour, with colonies of the salinity-sensitive *Acropora* surviving at all sites. Further, inspection of satellite imagery confirms no significant plumes affecting Gladstone Harbour over this period.

Table 4 Mean monthly sea-surface temperature anomalies within Gladstone Harbour. Values were downloaded from eReef Marine Water Quality Dashboard. Colours are added as a visual guide only to enhance warmer (red tones) and cooler (blue tones) months

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2015	1.63	1.18	1.38	1.80	0.28	1.48	0.87	-0.06	-0.49	-1.33	-1.92	1.16
2016	-0.79	2.0	1.53	2.46	1.83	2.67	0.84	0.59	-1.42	1.59	0.66	-0.03
2017	0.83	1.18	1.57	2.46	1.08	2.19	1.16	0.76	-0.64	0.27	-0.35	-1.97
2018	1.17	1.83	1.75	0.63	2.0							

Table 5 River discharge. Values are annual wet season (December to May) discharge as a multiple of the long-term median wet season discharge for the period (1990-2010).

River	Median (ML)	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Calliope	59249	3.7	2.6	15.5	2.5	4.4	1.1	4	0.3
Fitzroy	1540100	15	4.2	5.9	0.9	1.3	1.5	3.9	0.5

4.2 Coral cover

Extreme flooding of the Boyne River in 2013 caused Lake Awoonga to overflow and in combination with flows from the Calliope (

Table 5) will almost certainly have resulted in mortality of corals within the harbour (Thompson *et al.* 2015, Jones *et al.* 2015). Monitoring of salinity within the Mid Harbour reporting zone by Vision Environment (2013a & b) confirmed modelling results (Jones *et al.* 2015) indicating the presence of water with salinity levels well below the threshold of 22 PSU, lethal to *Acropora* corals (Berkelmans *et al.* 2004), for a period of 3 days.

Given the severity of the 2013 flood event, it is not surprising that coral cover observed in 2015 was either low, or effectively absent, within the harbour. In 2018, mean coral cover has declined to be below that observed during the initial monitoring in 2015. The minor fluctuations observed over the four years of monitoring have all remained well within the levels categorised as ‘very poor’ and the trend in this metric remains relatively stable across Gladstone Harbour (Figure 3a-c). These results should be considered in terms of the threshold of 40% cover at which this indicator is categorised as ‘satisfactory’. This threshold approximates the baseline condition of a mean cover of 39% (maximum 47%) observed at

reefs in the North Passage and along the western side of Facing Island in 2009 (BMT WBM 2013).

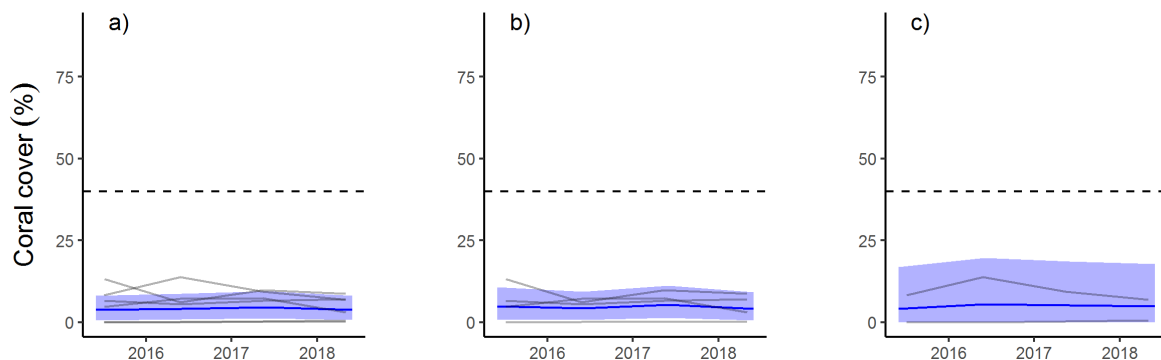


Figure 3 Trends in Coral cover for reporting zones. a) Gladstone Harbour, b) Mid Harbour, c) Outer Harbour. Trends shown by blue lines bound by 95% confidence intervals of those trends (shading), grey lines represent observed profiles for individual reefs. Dashed lines represent the threshold between 'poor' and 'satisfactory' report card scores. Plots are scaled to the upper and lower bounds of the Coral cover metric.

It is important not to over-interpret the minor changes in coral cover observed since 2015. All sampling incurs some degree of sampling error. The use of fixed transects does minimise this error, however some variability in estimates should be expected. In particular, fluctuating abundance of large erect species of macroalgae, can overtop corals excluding them from observation. The result of this increase in macroalgae cover, is that there is likely to be a slight underestimate of coral cover compared to when macroalgae cover is lower.

Within the Mid Harbour declines in coral cover in 2018 **Error! Reference source not found.** were most evident at Farmers Reef where cover of the families Faviidae and Siderastreidae declined (Figure 4). Coral cover at Rat Island and Facing Island remained stable and Manning Reef continues to have extremely low cover (Figure 4). Although the decline in coral cover at Farmers Reef coincides with an increase in macroalgae cover (Figure 4) the comparison to 2016 when both macroalgae cover and coral cover were higher suggests the reduced cover is not fully explained by variation in macroalgae in this instance.

The trend in coral cover for the Outer Harbour remained stable in 2018 (Figure 3c), with very slight increases in cover at Seal Rocks since 2015 contrasting the declines in cover, primarily of the genus *Turbinaria* at Seal Rocks South (Figure 4). Scuba search data indicates that the bio-eroding sponge *Cliona orientalis* continues to impact the coral community across the harbour and in particular colonies of *Turbinaria* at Seal Rocks South (Table A 11).

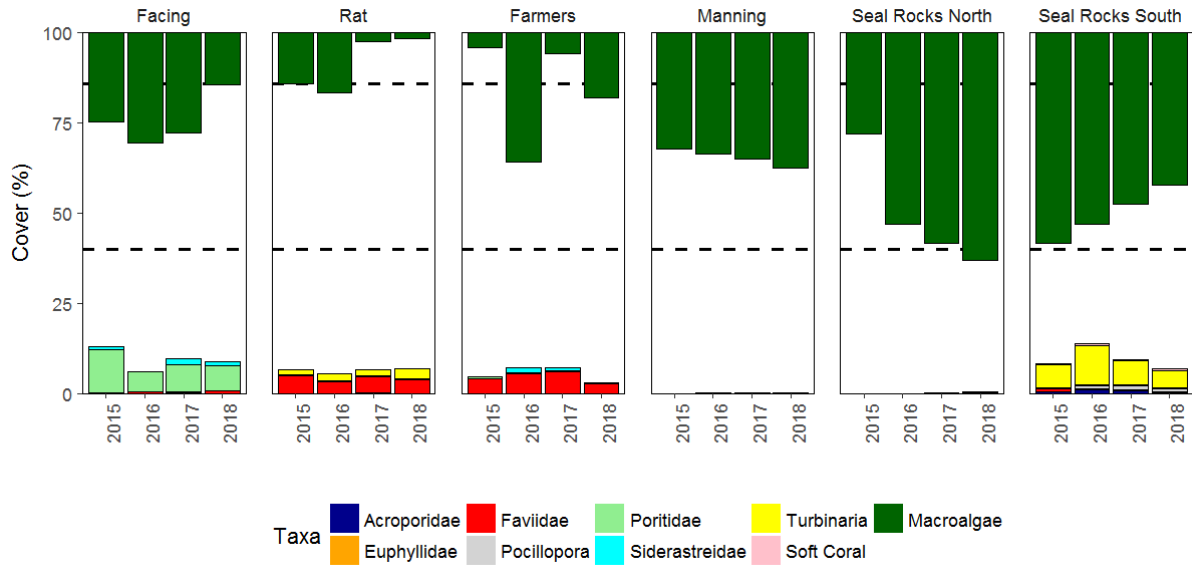


Figure 4 Composition of benthic cover at each location. Rising bars break down coral cover into major taxonomic groups (Families and Genera). Hanging bars represent macroalgae cover and are read in reverse (observed cover is read as $100 - y$ axis value, i.e. 10% cover will appear as a bar between 100 and 90% on the plot). White space is the remaining cover not occupied by indicators and will include: sand and silt substrate, turfing and crustose coralline algae along with other organisms such as sponges. Dashed reference lines indicate the boundary between the condition categories 'Poor' and 'Satisfactory'. Hanging macroalgae cover bars not extending to the upper reference line would be categorised as 'Satisfactory', or better. Rising bars for coral cover would have to extend to, or beyond, the lower reference line to receive a 'Satisfactory', or better, categorisation.

4.3 Macroalgae

The mean cover of macroalgae within the harbour remains high (Figure 5a-c) resulting in the continued 'very poor' assessment for this indicator. Within the Mid Harbour zone, declines in macroalgae cover at Rat Island and Facing Island contrasted a sharp increase at Farmers Reef (Figure 4, Table A 7). In the Outer Harbour the cover of macroalgae has consistently increased at Seal Rocks North since 2015, contrasting the consistent decline observed at Seal Rocks South (Figure 4, Figure 5c). Despite the different trajectories the macroalgae indicator remains 'very poor' for both of these reefs (Table A 7).

The generally high cover across the harbour suggests that despite water quality being generally within guideline values in the both Mid and Outer Harbour (Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership 2015) the availability of nutrients within the harbour is clearly not limiting to macroalgae communities. Given the persistent high cover of macroalgae, and the performance of the other indicators, it is likely that the algal communities are contributing to the suppression of coral community recovery across the harbour.

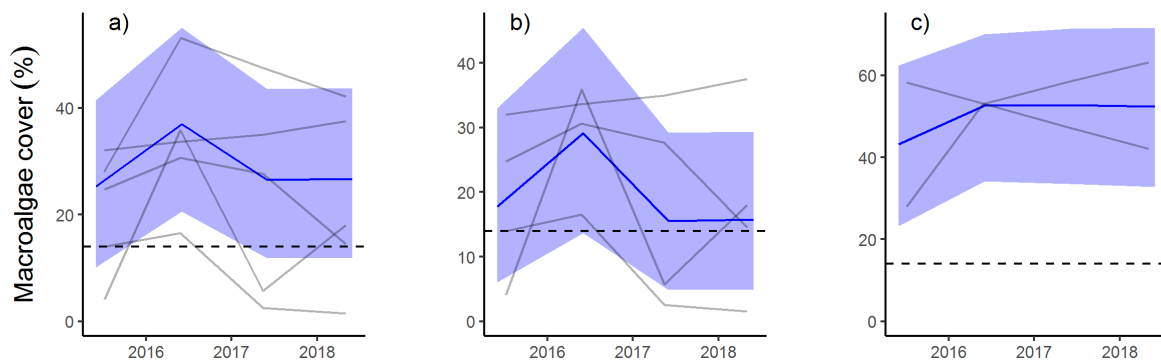


Figure 5 Trends in Macroalgae cover for reporting zones. a) Gladstone Harbour, b) Mid Harbour, c) Outer Harbour. Trends shown by blue lines bound by 95% confidence intervals of those trends (shading), grey lines represent observed profiles for individual reefs. Dashed lines represent the threshold between ‘poor’ and ‘satisfactory’ report card scores.

As with coral communities (Table A 9) differences in the taxonomic composition of macroalgal communities (Table A 10) suggest fine scale differences in the combined physical and chemical environments at the monitoring locations. Monitoring undertaken by the MMP elsewhere on the GBR demonstrates that at reefs predisposed to high cover of macroalgae, cover is typically variable between years (Thompson *et al.* 2016). Within Gladstone Harbour, variability in macroalgae communities is especially evident at reefs in the Mid Harbour zone where cover and composition varies both from year to year within individual reefs but also between reefs (Figure 4 , Table A 10). In contrast, although there is some variability in the overall cover of macroalgae, the community composition at reefs in the Outer Harbour appear relatively stable with communities consistently dominated by the two brown macroalgae genera, *Sargassum* and *Lobophora* (Table A 10).

4.4 Juvenile density

As previously outlined the methodologies for assessing juvenile abundance and subsequent scoring of this indicator have been updated in 2018 to be consistent with methods used in the Reef Report Card, with only colonies <5cm assessed. We have back calculated both the indicator values and scores for previous years to allow comparison with current conditions. At the Harbour and zone levels these changes had little impact on the report card scores, with only minor influence on reef level scores for previous years (see Table A 6 for a detailed comparison of the 2016 and 2017 report card scores). The harbour wide mean density of juvenile corals has declined marginally in 2018, to be below initial densities observed in 2015, and remains classified as ‘poor’ (Figure 7, Figure 7a, Table A 3). Juvenile densities declined from the levels observed in 2017 at all sites with the exception of Manning Reef (Figure 6 , Table A 7). The most notable declines in juvenile densities were at Facing Island and Farmers Reef (Mid Harbour) and Seal Rocks South (Outer Harbour) (Figure 6 , Table A 7). These declines mark the first downturn in the harbour-wide trend of this metric which had shown consistent, albeit modest, improvement since surveys commenced (Figure 7a-c).

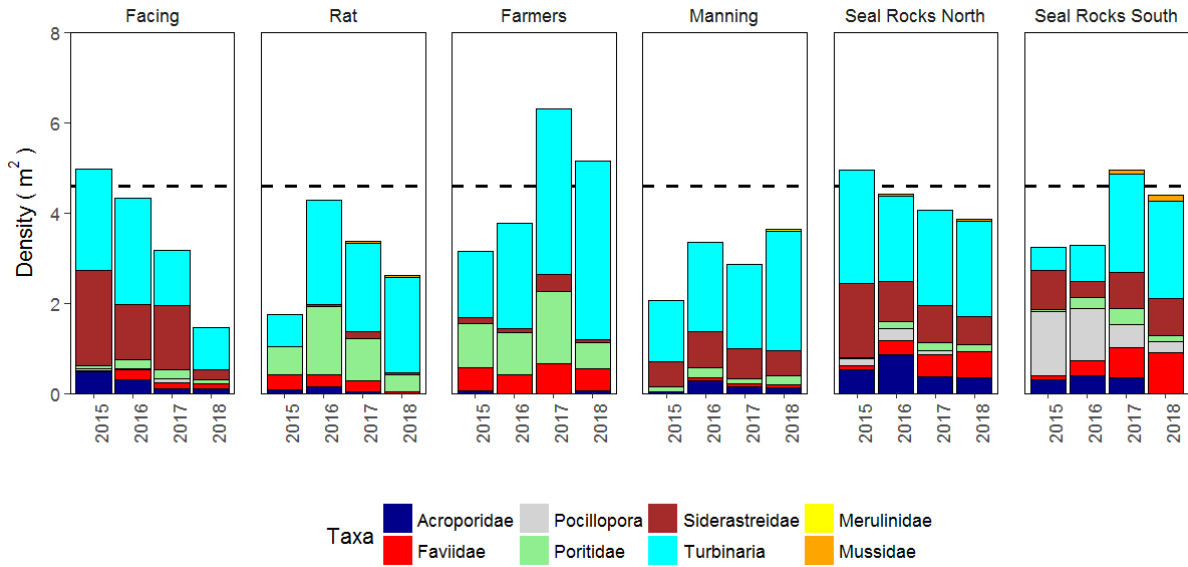


Figure 6 Composition of juvenile coral communities at each location. Bars break down juvenile density into major taxonomic groups (Families and Genera). Dashed reference line indicates the boundary between the condition categories ‘Poor’ and ‘Satisfactory’. Juvenile density would have to extend to the reference line to receive a ‘Satisfactory’ categorisation.

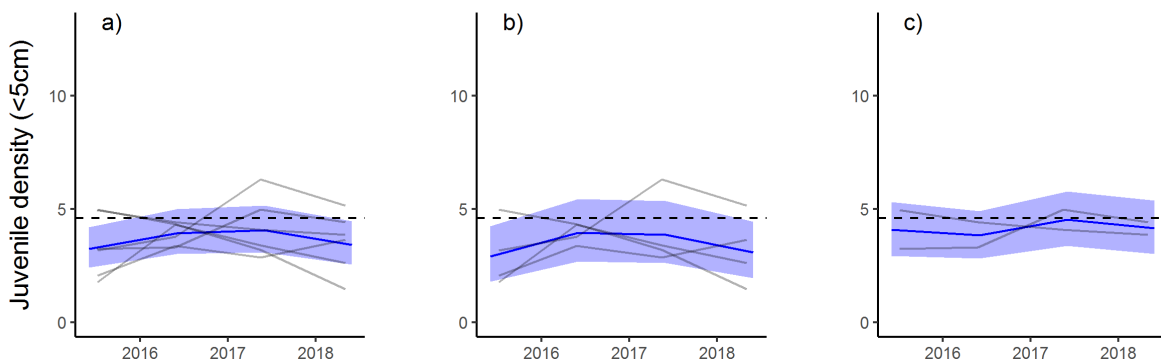


Figure 7 Trends in Juvenile density for reporting zones. a) Gladstone Harbour, b) Mid Harbour, c) Outer Harbour. Trends shown by blue lines bound by 95% confidence intervals of those trends (shading), grey lines represent observed profiles for individual reefs. Dashed lines represent the threshold between ‘poor’ and ‘satisfactory’ report card scores. Plots are scaled to the upper and lower bounds of the Juvenile density cover metric.

4.5 Change in hard coral cover

The harbour-level score of 0.32 for the Change in Hard Coral Cover indicator reflects a decline from the score of 0.40 observed in 2017 (Table 1, Table A 3). Declines in this metric occurred at all reefs, with reef level assessments at four reefs declining from ‘satisfactory’ in 2017 to ‘poor’ in 2018 (Table 6). Despite this consistent decline in the metric at both zone and Harbour-wide levels, the categorisation for this metric remains as ‘poor’ (Table A 5). An important point to note is that the scores for this indicator are averaged over a three year period to compensate for sampling error when observed changes are small. Although the observed levels of change in coral cover are small, as expected when coral cover is low, the

decline in this metric at the majority of reefs indicates that the modelled expectations for increase in cover since 2015 are not being met, indicating that the cumulative pressures to which corals have been exposed since 2015 have suppressed the recovery of coral communities.

Table 6 Change in Hard Coral Cover scores. Reef and zone level scores for 2017 and 2018.

Zone	Reef	Year	Reef-level		Zone-level	
			Score	Condition	Score	Condition
Mid Harbour	Facing Island	2017	0.50	Satisfactory	0.46	Poor
	Farmers Reef		0.50	Satisfactory		
	Manning Reef		0.54	Satisfactory		
	Rat Island		0.28	Poor		
	Facing Island	2018	0.33	Poor	0.30	Poor
	Farmers Reef		0.33	Poor		
	Manning Reef		0.27	Poor		
	Rat Island		0.26	Poor		
Outer Harbour	Seal Rocks North	2017	0.40	Poor	0.45	Poor
	Seal Rocks South		0.50	Satisfactory		
	Seal Rocks North	2018	0.34	Poor	0.34	Poor
	Seal Rocks South		0.33	Poor		

5 CONCLUSION

Results from surveys in 2018 demonstrate the continued very poor condition of coral communities in Gladstone Harbour. At the commencement of coral monitoring in 2015, the condition of reefs in the Mid and Outer Harbour clearly reflected the severe impacts of flooding in 2013 when low salinity caused substantial mortality to the coral communities and the available space was rapidly colonised by algal groups (Jones *et al.* 2015, Thompson *et al.* 2015). Subsequent monitoring demonstrates a clear lack of recovery, indicating that the cumulative impacts of the 2013 flooding and ongoing pressures have undermined the recovery potential of coral communities within Gladstone Harbour.

The magnitude of coral loss that occurred in 2013 dictated the very low scores for the Coral Cover indicator observed in 2015. Whilst the abundance of corals is a key factor in coral reef resilience, as indicative of the potential supply of larvae and corals resistance to the cumulative pressures of the site, following severe disturbance such as the 2013 floods, it is the recovery processes that best describe the coral communities overall condition. The Macroalgae Cover, Juvenile Density, and Change in Hard Coral Cover indicators are all formulated to assess the recovery process and, collectively, demonstrate the limited recovery potential being exhibited by the coral communities within the harbour.

In combination, the continued poor scores for each indicator corroborate studies that demonstrate density dependant feedback mechanisms which promote a persistent shift from coral to macroalgal dominance where conditions allow the proliferation of macroalgae (Mumby *et al.* 2007, Mumby and Steneck 2008). Large fleshy macroalgae such as *Sargassum* and *Asparagopsis* and in particular the lower matt forming species such as *Lobophora* and *Dictyota*, all of which are abundant across the harbour, have been shown to be highly disruptive to coral community recovery (Birrell *et al.* 2008, Diaz-Pulido *et al.* 2010, Hauri *et al.* 2010). The high cover of macroalgae is likely to be affecting coral recruitment processes and contributing to the 'poor' score for the Juvenile Density indicator. High macroalgae cover has been associated with low densities of juvenile corals on a number of reefs monitored by the MMP. Notable examples include several reefs in Keppel Bay where the density of juvenile corals has remained very low since the substantial loss of coral cover, due to flooding in 2011, and the subsequent persistence of a high cover of macroalgae (Berkelmans *et al.* 2012, Thompson *et al.* 2018).

In addition to hampering recruitment, coral-macroalgae interactions are potentially reducing the fecundity of adult corals (Tanner 1995, Foster *et al.* 2008), further limiting the supply of larvae from an already depleted population of adult corals. Ongoing competition between coral and macroalgae for space is also likely to be contributing to the 'poor' score and decline in the Change in Hard Coral indicator. Macroalgae such as *Lobophora* and *Dictyota* have been shown to have direct impact on adult coral colonies that can lead to tissue loss, declines in coral fitness and reduced growth rates (Lirman 2001, Vega Thurber *et al.* 2012, Morrow *et al.* 2017).

The ongoing low density of juvenile corals indicates that the combination of low larval supply and poor survival through settlement and early post settlement processes are a bottleneck for the recovery of these coral communities. The juvenile communities across the harbour do however continue to include a higher diversity of genera than the adult communities, suggesting continued in-flow of larvae from beyond the harbour. This apparent connectivity to more distant brood-stock is a promising sign for the resilience of these communities. The continued presence of *Acropora* juveniles, although in low densities, remains a positive sign. *Acropora* were a key component of the coral communities at most sites prior to the 2013 floods (BMT WBM 2013), and the reestablishment of these fast growing species will be fundamental to the recovery of these communities.

The Change in Hard Coral indicator explicitly accounts for an expected low rate of coral increase as a result of low coral cover and communities currently dominated by slow growing species. Despite these modest expectations, the poor scores for this metric demonstrate that combined pressures imposed by the environmental conditions within the harbour along with likely interactions with macroalgae are limiting the increase in coral cover. Although, direct impacts from acute environmental pressures (e.g. bleaching and flooding) have not been observed during surveys it is likely that high temperatures in the 2016 and 2017 summers and the influence of reduced salinity and increased turbidity associated with flooding in October 2017 will have played a role in suppressing the rate of increase in coral cover as summarised by the Change in Hard Coral metric score in 2018. Further influencing the score for this indicator is the widespread presence of the bio-eroding sponge *Cliona orientalis* which continues to be the most significant contributor to coral mortality within the harbour.

In the broader context of inshore reefs on the GBR, the Coral Index for reefs in Gladstone Harbour falls in the bottom 25% of those monitored by the MMP. The condition of reefs in the harbour are comparable with those in the inshore areas of Keppel Bay where extremely low coral cover, high macroalgae cover and low juvenile densities are also inhibiting the recovery of coral communities (Thompson *et al.* 2018).

Overall the 2018 coral index provides clear indication that the recovery potential of reefs within the harbour is severely limited. Given the depleted state of these coral communities' recovery will depend heavily on the connectivity with reefs beyond the harbour for larval supply. The subsequent settlement and growth of these larvae is likely to be low until the negative pressures imposed by the current high abundance of macroalgae are reduced.

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7 APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix I: Data Tables

Table A I Site location and transect directions. Minor corrections from those detailed in Thompson *et al.* 2015 are included. Required maintenance of transect markers is indicated. At each transect a steel star picket marks the start point, then there are 10mm diameter sections of reinforcing bar at 10m and at the end (20m) of each transect. There is a 5m gap between consecutive transects within each site.

Reef	Date	Depth	Latitude	Longitude	Transect directions
Seal Rocks North	06-July-	1 m	23 57.500	151 29.092	1 295 then 270@10 m 2 285 then 310@10 m 3 300 then 320@10 m 4 30 then 105@10 m 5 50 then 60@10 m
Seal Rocks South	06-July-	1 m	23 57.825	151 29.215	1 0 then 30@10 m 2 30 then 350@10 m 3 260 then 250@10 m 4 190 5 230
Rat Island	07-July-	1 m	23 46.022	151 19.107	1 305 then 300@10 m 2 300 3 330 then 320@10 m 4 330 then 290@10 m 5 300 then 285@10 m
Facing Island	07-July-	0-1 m	23 45.801	151 19.687	1 220 then 210@10 m 2 190 then 180@10 m 3 180 then 210@10 m 4 240 then 230@10 m 5 170
Farmers Reef	07-July-	1 m	23 46.306	151 19.073	1 50 2 40 then 50@10 m 3 60 4 60 then 75@10 m 5 60 then 40@10 m
Manning Reef	08-July-	0-0.5	23 51.239	151 21.199	1 30 then 10@10 m, 50 to T2 2 60 then 0@10 m, 80 to T3 3 60 then 320@10 m, 300 to T4 4 300 then 15@10 m, 350 to T5 5 330 then 60@10 m (replace rods)

Table A 2 Indicator values for Gladstone Harbour. For the change in hard coral cover indicator the tabulated values are the mean of the changes in cover from the previous year, scores for this indicator are based on the mean of these changes and consider also the composition of the communities at each reef.

	Year	Juvenile density (m2) *		Coral cover (%)		Change in hard coral cover (%)		Macroalgae Cover (%)	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Gladstone Harbour	2015	3.7	0.71	5.1	1.40	NA	NA	30.9	17.25
	2016	3.90	0.06	5.8	1.52	0.8	3.0	41.1	16.90
	2017	4.23	0.41	5.38	0.80	-0.35	2.2	35.28	24.86
	2018	3.68	0.65	4.23	0.69	-1.15	0.04	35.25	24.57

* Note: values given for juvenile densities are based on the current methodology and have been back calculated for previous years to allow comparison. This applies to all following tables of indicator values.

Table A 3 Indicator scores for Gladstone Harbour.

	Year	Juvenile Density	Coral Cover	Change in Hard Coral Cover	Macroalgae Cover	Report Card	
						Score	Grade
Gladstone Harbour	2015	0.28	0.06	NA	0.19	0.18	E
	2016	0.40	0.07	NA	0.04	0.15	E
	2017	0.42	0.07	0.40	0.24	0.28	D
	2018	0.39	0.05	0.32	0.22	0.23	E

* Note: Juvenile Density indicator scores are based on the current methodology and have been back calculated for previous years to allow comparison. Report Card scores for previous years have also been adjusted accordingly. This applies to all following tables of indicator scores.

Table A 4 Indicator values for reporting zones

Zone	Year	Juvenile density (m ²)		Combined cover of hard and soft coral (%)		Change in hard coral cover (%)		Macroalgae cover (%)	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Mid Harbour	2015	3.2	1.36	6.1	5.44	NA	NA	18.7	12.24
	2016	3.94	0.46	4.72	3.13	-1.33	4.1	29.16	8.71
	2017	3.94	1.60	5.94	4.04	1.22	1.73	17.71	16.02
	2018	3.22	1.57	4.72	3.89	-1.18	2.06	17.88	14.88
Outer Harbour	2015	4.2	1.15	4.1	5.86	NA	NA	43.1	21.39
	2016	3.85	0.79	6.88	9.72	2.92	4.14	53.06	0.09
	2017	4.52	0.63	4.81	6.45	-2	3.19	52.86	7.58
	2018	4.14	0.38	3.75	4.42	-1.12	2.13	52.63	14.85

Table A 5 Indicator scores for reporting zones

Zone	Year	Juvenile density	Coral cover	Change in hard coral cover	Macroalgae cover	Report Card	
						Score	Grade
Mid Harbour	2015	0.23	0.08		0.37	0.23	E
	2016	0.33	0.06		0.07	0.16	E
	2017	0.33	0.08	0.44	0.5	0.33	D
	2018	0.34	0.06	0.30	0.41	0.28	D
Outer Harbour	2015	0.33	0.05		0	0.13	E
	2016	0.33	0.09		0	0.14	E
	2017	0.44	0.06	0.37	0	0.21	E
	2018	0.45	0.05	0.33	0	0.20	E

Table A 6 Comparison of scores between methodologies for juvenile density estimates. Comparison of the change in methods is presented for 2016 and 2017. Highlighted values indicate where this resulted in a change of report card score for the juvenile metric.

Zone	Reef	Year	Scores						Grade	
			Coral cover	Macroalgae	Change in hard coral cover	Juvenile density <10cm	Juvenile density <5cm	Report card with juveniles <10cm		Report card with juveniles <5cm
Mid Harbour	Facing Island	2016	0.08	0.00		0.37	0.46	0.15	0.18	E
		2017	0.12	0.00	0.50	0.26	0.30	0.22	0.24	E
	Farmers Reef	2016	0.09	0		0.34	0.39	0.14	0.17	E
		2017	0.09	0.95	0.50	0.57	0.60	0.52	0.54	C
	Manning Reef	2016	0.00	0.00		0.24	0.33	0.08	0.12	E
		2017	0.00	0	0.54	0.22	0.31	0.19	0.21	E
	Rat Island	2016	0.07	0.29		0.39	0.46	0.25	0.28	D
		2017	0.08	1	0.28	0.33	0.33	0.42	0.42	D
Mid Harbour Scores		2016				0.34	0.41	0.16	0.19	D
		2017				0.33	0.37	0.34	0.35	D
Outer Harbour	Seal Rocks North	2016	0.00	0.00		0.38	0.47	0.13	0.16	E
		2017	0.00	0.00	0.40	0.35	0.43	0.19	0.17	E
	Seal Rocks South	2016	0.17	0.00		0.28	0.32	0.15	0.18	E
		2017	0.12	0.00	0.50	0.50	0.52	0.28	0.28	E
Outer Harbour Scores		2016				0.33	0.40	0.14	0.17	E
		2017				0.44	0.47	0.22	0.23	E
Gladstone Harbour		2016				0.33	0.40	0.15	0.17	E
		2017				0.38	0.42	0.28	0.29	E

Table A 7 Indicator values for individual reefs. Values for change in coral cover are absolute change in hard coral cover between years.

Zone	Reef	Year	Juvenile density (m ²)	Coral cover (%)	Change in hard coral cover (%)	Macroalgae cover (%)
Mid Harbour	Facing Island	2015	4.98	13.1	NA	24.8
		2016	4.33	6.1	-7	30.6
		2017	3.19	9.75	3.47	27.63
		2018	1.46	8.75	-1	14.50
	Farmers Reef	2015	3.16	4.8	NA	4.13
		2016	3.78	7.13	2.68	35.9
		2017	6.31	7.25	-0.13	5.75
		2018	5.15	3.0	-4.13	18.00
	Manning Reef	2015	2.07	0	NA	32.0
		2016	3.36	0.1	0.14	33.6
		2017	2.86	0.5	0.13	35
		2018	3.64	0.13	-0.13	37.50
	Rat Island	2015	1.76	6.6	NA	14
		2016	4.3	5.5	-1.13	16.5
		2017	3.39	6.6	1.02	2.5
		2018	2.62	7.0	0.52	1.5
Outer Harbour	Seal Rocks North	2015	4.96	0	NA	28
		2016	4.42	0	0	53
		2017	4.07	0.25	0.25	61.2
		2018	3.87	0.63	0.38	63.13
	Seal Rocks South	2015	3.25	8.3	NA	58.2
		2016	3.29	13.8	5.85	53.13
		2017	4.96	9.38	-4.25	47.50
		2018	4.4	6.88	-2.63	42.13

Table A 8 Indicator scores for individual reefs

Zone	Reef	Year	Scores					Report card	Grade
			Juvenile density	Coral cover	Change in hard coral cover	Macroalgae			
Mid Harbour	Facing Island	2015	0.41	0.16		0.00	0.19	E	
		2016	0.46	0.08		0.00	0.18	E	
		2017	0.25	0.12	0.5	0.00	0.22	E	
		2018	0.16	0.11	0.33	0.46	0.27	E	
	Farmers Reef	2015	0.26	0.06		1.00	0.44	D	
		2016	0.39	0.09		0	0.16	E	
		2017	0.53	0.09	0.5	0.95	0.52	C	
		2018	0.53	0.04	0.33	0.17	0.27	E	
	Manning Reef	2015	0.12	0		0.00	0.04	E	
		2016	0.33	0.00		0.00	0.11	E	
		2017	0.22	0.01	0.51	0	0.18	E	
		2018	0.40	0	0.27	0	0.17	E	
	Rat Island	2015	0.11	0.08		0.50	0.23	E	
		2016	0.46	0.07		0.29	0.27	D	
		2017	0.31	0.08	0.24	1	0.41	D	
		2018	0.28	0.09	0.26	1	0.41	D	
Outer Harbour	Seal Rocks North	2015	0.42	0		0.00	0.14	E	
		2016	0.47	0		0.00	0.16	E	
		2017	0.36	0.01	0.25	0.00	0.15	E	
		2018	0.42	0.01	0.34	0.00	0.19	E	
	Seal Rocks South	2015	0.25	0.10		0.00	0.12	E	
		2016	0.32	0.17		0.00	0.16	E	
		2017	0.51	0.12	0.50	0.00	0.28	E	
		2018	0.48	0.09	0.33	0.00	0.22	E	

Table A 9 Genus level coral cover and abundance of juvenile corals at reefs surveyed in 2018.

Sample type	Location	Cover (%)																		
		Acropora (Acroporidae)	Montipora (Acroporidae)	Turbinaria (Dendrophylliidae)	Cyphastrea (Faviidae)	Favia (Faviidae)	Favites (Faviidae)	Goniastrea (Faviidae)	Leptastrea (Faviidae)	Moseleya (Faviidae)	Platygyra (Faviidae)	Acanthastrea (Mussidae)	Hydnophora (Merulinidae)	Pocillopora (Pocilloporidae)	Goniopora (Poritidae)	Porites (Poritidae)	Coccinaraea (Siderastreidae)	Psammocora (Siderastreidae)	Pseudosiderastrea (Siderastreidae)	Cladiella -Soft coral (Alcyoniidae)
Cover (%)	Facing Island				0.75										6.88		1.13			
	Rat Island			2.75	2.63		1	0.13							0.5					
	Farmers Reef			0.13	2.5		0.13								0.37		0.25			
	Manning Reef	0.13																		
	Seal Rocks N	0.25		0.25											0.13					
	Seal Rocks S	0.13		4.88	0.38								0.75	0.13			0.13		0.37	0.1
Juveniles (count)	Facing Island	5		25		1					2				2		6			
	Rat Island	1		45			1				1			1	7		1			
	Farmers Reef	1		73	4		3		2					1	10			1		
	Manning Reef	5		66			1			1					5		14			
	Seal Rocks N			61	2	1	5	6			3	1		1	3	1	17			
	Seal Rocks S	9	1	47	3	2	2	8			5	3		5	3		18			

Table A 10 Cover of algae, sponges and sand and silt

Location	Red macroalgae					Brown macroalgae					Coralline algae	Turf algae	Sand & Silt	Sponge
	Unidentified	<i>Asparagopsis</i>	<i>Peyssonnelia</i>	Calcareous		Unidentified	<i>Dictyota</i>	<i>Lobophora</i>	<i>Sargassum</i>	<i>Styopodium</i>				
Facing Island	1.50	0.00	0.00	0.13		0.25	0.50	7.00	3.50		0.38	56.75	5.5	6.63
Rat Island	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		0.13	0.75	0.63	0.00			59.00	12.18	2.25
Farmers Reef	0.00	17.25	0.00	0.00			0.13	0.50	0.00			32.63	15.56	3
Manning Reef	0.13	20.88	0.00	0.00		0.38	7.38	9.00	0.00			34.25	4.63	0.75
Seal Rocks North	0.13	0.00	3.38	0.00		1.50		13.25	45.25		0.5	19.88	7.19	0
Seal Rocks South	0.00	0.00	1.63	0.13		1	0.13	11.50	26.38	0.63	0.63	20.38	10.43	0.63

Table A 11 Causes of coral mortality at time of survey. Area of survey 200 m² at each reef. Data from both 2017 and 2018 included for comparison. No data are included for Manning Reef or Seal Rocks North where no ongoing mortality was recorded in 2018. Bio-eroding sponge is primarily *Cliona orientalis*

Reef	Year	Damage	Genus	Colonies affected
Facing Island	2017	Bio-eroding sponge	<i>Porites</i>	12
	2018	Bio-eroding sponge	<i>Cyphastrea</i>	1
			<i>Porites</i>	13
Farmers Reef	2017	Bio-eroding sponge	<i>Cyphastrea</i>	9
			<i>Favites</i>	1
	2018	Bio-eroding sponge	<i>Cyphastrea</i>	12
			<i>Plesiastrea</i>	1
Rat Island	2017	Bio-eroding sponge	<i>Cyphastrea</i>	8
		Bio-eroding sponge	<i>Cyphastrea</i>	6
			<i>Turbinaria</i>	5
Seal Rocks South	2017	White Syndrome	<i>Turbinaria</i>	1
			<i>Psammocora</i>	1
		Bio-eroding sponge	<i>Turbinaria</i>	6
		Bleaching	<i>Montipora</i>	1
	2018	Bio-eroding sponge	<i>Turbinaria</i>	5
		Atramentous Necrosis	<i>Montipora</i>	1

Table A 12 Size-class distribution of juvenile corals. Values are number of juveniles observed in 100m x 0.34m belt transects (34m²) at each reef. Data from all four years of surveys included for comparison.

Reef	Year	Size class	
		< 2	2 to <5
Facing Island	2015	107	28
	2016	67	58
	2017	32	58
	2018	19	20
Farmers Reef	2015	32	17
	2016	47	26
	2017	64	39
	2018	56	39
Manning Reef	2015	52	6
	2016	55	40
	2017	49	29
	2018	46	45
Rat Island	2015	19	23
	2016	48	43
	2017	44	28
	2018	30	26
Seal Rocks North	2015	111	31
	2016	80	48
	2017	55	64
	2018	42	69
Seal Rocks South	2015	52	30
	2016	27	55
	2017	58	58
	2018	32	64

7.2 Appendix 2: Rationale for indicator selection and threshold setting.

7.2.1 Combined cover of hard corals and soft corals

For coral communities, the underlying assumption for resilience is that recruitment and subsequent growth of colonies is sufficient to compensate for losses resulting from the combination of acute disturbances and chronic adverse environmental conditions. High abundance of coral, expressed as proportional cover of the substratum, can be interpreted as an indication of resilience as the corals are clearly able to survive the ambient environmental conditions. In addition, high cover equates to a large brood-stock, a necessary link to recruitment and an indication of the potential for recovery of communities in the local area. Corals also contribute to the structural complexity of a reef and as such support increased biodiversity and provide important ecosystem services such as the provision of habitat for fishes. Finally, high cover is the most tangible reflection of a healthy coral community and a desirable state from an aesthetic perspective. The consideration of both hard and soft corals in this indicator recognises that all corals have a place on coral reefs and that the cover of an area by any coral is effectively mutually exclusive of another.

The selection of critical values or thresholds for coral cover about which to base assessments of condition is difficult. From MMP observations since 2005 there are no strong indications that either hard or soft coral cover varies substantially along water quality gradients suggesting a common Great Barrier Reef (GBR) wide threshold for coral cover is appropriate. We do, however, acknowledge that differing disturbance histories in space and time are likely to confound any analysis attempting to quantify such a relationship. For the MMP, the setting of a threshold for coral cover is still under discussion, however is likely to be based on an aspirational target of ~50% cover. This target is informed by two prior assessments of coral cover on nearshore reefs. A broad scale survey of nearshore reefs between Cape Tribulation and the Keppel Islands using the same sampling methods as used in Gladstone Harbour undertaken in 2004 returned a mean cover of hard corals of 33% and of soft coral of 5% (Sweatman *et al.* 2007). This total coral cover mean of 38% was observed following the severe loss of corals that occurred as result of thermal bleaching in 1998 and also 2002 (Berkelmans *et al.* 2004) and so is considered too low as a threshold that would indicate “good condition”. Secondly, a summary of surveys from over 100 sites between Cape Flattery and the Keppel Islands prior to 1996 returned a mean cover of hard corals of 62% (Ayling 1996). In this second study, soft coral cover was not reported and the surveys were based on a range of video and line intercept techniques. AIMS in-house analysis of coral cover estimates using line intercept (LIT) sampling along the same sites as photo point intercept (PIT) used by the MMP reveal a consistent bias with PIT being ~ 78% of that estimated by LIT ($r^2 = 0.99$). Correcting for technique puts the pre-1996 hard coral cover on inshore reefs at a mean of approximately 48%. Allowing some soft coral cover and rounding to an even percentage, the MMP is looking toward a threshold of 50% for the combined cover of hard and soft coral on inshore reefs. Finally, surveys conducted prior to 2009 in the Mid Harbour reporting zone of Gladstone Harbour had mean hard coral cover of 39% (BMT WBM 2013). Although the BMT WBM

(2013) report did not provide a mean estimate for soft coral cover, Figure 4.4 of that report indicates soft coral cover in the Mid Harbour ranged between ~4% - 40%. These figures do not greatly deviate from the 50% combined cover of hard and soft corals likely to be used by the MMP in the future and so we suggest applying a 50% threshold for Gladstone also. No prior data exist for the Outer Harbour reporting zone and so again we suggest a consistent use of the 50% threshold as this will allow comparison of condition across zones but also other regions of the GBR monitored by the MMP.

7.2.2 Cover of macroalgae

Macroalgal (MA) recruitment, growth and biomass are controlled by a number of environmental factors such as the availability of suitable substratum, sufficient nutrients and light, and rates of herbivory (Schaffelke *et al.* 2005). High macroalgal abundance may suppress reef resilience (e.g., Hughes *et al.* 2007, Foster *et al.* 2008, Cheal *et al.* 2013; but see Bruno *et al.* 2009) by increasing competition for space or changing the microenvironment into which corals settle and grow (e.g. McCook *et al.* 2001a, Hauri *et al.* 2010). On the GBR, high macroalgal cover correlates with high concentrations of chlorophyll, a proxy for nutrient availability (De'ath and Fabricius 2010). Once established, macroalgae pre-empt or compete with corals for space that might otherwise be available for coral growth or recruitment (e.g. Box and Mumby 2007, Hughes *et al.* 2007). For the purpose of this indicator, macroalgae are considered as species of the phyla Rhodophyta (Red algae), Phaeophyta (Brown algae) and Chlorophyta (Green algae), excluding the encrusting coralline or short turf like species. The latter two groups are recorded as part of the assessments but are not aggregated into the MA indicator.

The interactions between corals and algae are complex, likely species-specific and, mostly, unquantified (McCook *et al.* 2001a). Because of this it is difficult to determine realistic thresholds of macroalgal cover from which to infer information about the resilience of coral communities. Recent AIMS analysis of MMP data aimed at determining a threshold for the MA indicator gave a threshold of ~23% for communities in less than 3m depth below lowest astronomic tide (LAT), beyond which the density of juvenile corals declines. This direct influence on coral community replenishment could be used to define an upper bound for macroalgae cover. A further consideration is that within the MMP data set MA cover varies along environmental gradients with highest cover found in turbid areas and where wave or current action precludes the accumulation of fine sediments. As turbidity declines or the proportion of sediments with fine grain sizes increase then the cover of macroalgae also declines. This response to environmental conditions is a further constraint to the expectation of the level of MA cover at many locations. Current thinking within the MMP is to include the threshold mentioned above for an influence of juvenile corals as an upper threshold though reduce this to modelled estimates of cover based on observed relationships between MA cover, turbidity and sediment composition, in cases where these predictions are lower than the threshold for influence on juvenile corals. For the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership monitoring, AIMS has collected sediment samples from each monitoring location and determined sediment grain size composition. The depth of these samples was only 1-2m below LAT and so will not be

directly comparable to grain size compositions from MMP reefs that were sampled at the depth of 5m below LAT where wave driven resuspension is generally reduced. The results of the sediment analysis indicate that there is not a substantial accumulation of fine sediments at the coral sampling locations selected in Gladstone Harbour and this along with the limited depth of the reefs suggest turbidity and sedimentation will not be limiting macroalgae cover.

In light of the above considerations an upper bound of 20% cover of macroalgae was adopted for the Gladstone Harbour reefs as this is below the threshold for impacts to juvenile settlement at shallow depths but also recognises that macroalgae cover is a natural component of shallow reef communities in nearshore areas of the southern GBR. The most comparable reef monitored by AIMS to those in Gladstone Harbour is Pelican Island in Keppel Bay. At Pelican Island MA cover declined to ~5% as the coral community at 2m below LAT recovered. The lower bound for cover of MA was set on Gladstone Harbour reefs was set at 5% as this is in line with cover at Pelican Island during a period that corals were showing strong recovery from past disturbance events but also allowing some natural occurrence of MA. We suggest the threshold for cover for MA be set midway between the lower and upper bounds at 12.5%. We point out that the scoring of this indicator is the inverse to that used for coral cover or juvenile densities as high MA cover is considered a poor indication of coral community condition.

7.2.3 Density of juvenile hard corals

Common disturbances to inshore reefs include cyclones (often associated with flooding), thermal bleaching, and outbreaks of crown-of-thorns seastar, all of which can result in widespread mortality of corals (e.g. Sweatman *et al.* 2007, Osborne *et al.* 2011). Recovery from such events is reliant on both the recruitment of new colonies and regeneration of existing colonies from remaining tissue fragments (Smith 2008, Diaz-Pulido *et al.* 2009). Previous studies have shown that elevated concentrations of nutrients, agrichemicals, and turbidity can negatively affect reproduction in corals (reviewed by Fabricius 2005, van Dam *et al.* 2011, Erftemeijer *et al.* 2012) and increased organic carbon concentrations can promote coral diseases and mortality (Kline *et al.* 2006, Kuntz *et al.* 2005). Furthermore, high rates of sediment deposition and accumulation on reef surfaces can affect larval settlement (Babcock and Smith 2002, Baird *et al.* 2003, Fabricius *et al.* 2003) and smother juvenile corals (Harrison and Wallace 1990, Rogers 1990, Fabricius and Wolanski 2000). Any of these water quality-related pressures on the early life stages of corals have the potential to suppress the resilience of communities reliant on recruitment for recovery. For these reasons the density of juvenile corals is an important indicator of coral community resilience, especially in periods following severe disturbance events.

The number of juvenile colonies observed along fixed area transects may be biased due to the different proportions of substratum available for coral recruitment. For example, live coral cover effectively reduces the space available for settlement of coral larvae, as do sandy or silty substrata onto which corals are unlikely or unable to settle. To create a comparative estimate of the density of juvenile colonies between reefs and through time, the numbers of recruits observed along fixed transects are converted to densities per area of transect that is 'available'

for settlement. This standardisation divides the number of juvenile corals observed along fixed transects by the area of those fixed transects that is not occupied by existing corals or deposits of loose sediments to which corals could not settle.

The setting of a threshold against which to assess observed densities of juvenile corals is problematic as detailed demographic studies that allow the estimation of adequate levels of recruitment that are likely to ensure coral community resilience have not been undertaken for the range of communities present in the turbid nearshore waters of the GBR. For the MMP selection of thresholds for the scoring of this metric was based on the analysis of recovery outcomes for MMP and LTMP reefs up to 2014 (Thompson *et al.* 2016), which provided a baseline condition from which changes could be inferred as improvements or declines in condition. Changes to the methods for juvenile density estimates outline in this report requires thresholds are also adjusted. Previously, the thresholds for this metric were based on <10cm juvenile size classes, with a mean of 7.5 per m² of available substrate being the density at which the indicator score went from 'poor' to 'satisfactory'. For the revised estimates of juvenile corals (<5cm), the mean is 4.6 colonies m⁻², with the 10th and 90th percentiles of the distribution being 0 and 13 juveniles per m². These observations serve as a guide to the densities of juveniles that can be expected on inshore reefs.

One study that explicitly focused on estimating the density of juvenile corals (<10 cm) required for coral communities to recover rather than shift to an algal dominated state following severe disturbance suggested a threshold of 6.2 juveniles per m² (Graham *et al.* 2015). Because this work was undertaken in the Seychelles the relevance to the inshore GBR is unknown. However, considering the similarity between the inshore GBR mean and the threshold of Graham *et al.* 2015, the initial value of 7 juvenile colonies per m² of available substrate was adopted for the Gladstone Harbour threshold. As of 2018 a value of 4.6 will set the threshold to account for the reduced size class of <5cm and remains consistent with the threshold of Graham *et al.* 2015.

7.2.4 Change in hard coral cover

This indicator metric is based on the rate at which coral cover increases. While high coral cover can justifiably be considered a positive indicator of community condition, the reverse is not necessarily true. Low cover may occur following acute disturbance and, hence, may not be a direct reflection of the community's resilience to underlying environmental conditions. For this reason, in addition to considering the actual level of coral cover we also assess the rate at which hard coral cover increases as a direct measure of recovery potential. This indicator reflects the coral growth performance on a per reef basis by comparing observed increase in coral growth (in the absence of acute disturbance) to expected coral growth. Estimates are derived by comparing the observed rate of change in hard coral cover at a given reef to that predicted by a multi-species form of the Gompertz growth equation (Dennis & Taper 1994, Ives *et al.* 2003). The equations used were parameterised from the time-series of coral cover from reefs monitored by the LTMP and the MMP over the period 1987-2007.

The growth models used are parameterised in a Bayesian framework to permit propagation of uncertainty from the two models onto the overall growth expected. For the Gladstone Harbour Report Card the model is parameterised specifically for 2m depths. Observations of annual change in benthic cover derived from 47 near-shore reefs sampled over the period 1987-2007 were used to parameterise two multi-species Gompertz growth equations. These models returned estimates of growth rates for corals of the family Acroporidae and the combined grouping of all other hard corals. These two groups were modelled separately as the growth rate of Acroporidae is substantially higher than most other corals. Within these models growth rate estimates are dependent on the cover of each of these hard coral groups along with the cover of soft coral which in combination represent space competitors and so limit the area available for coral cover increase.

Model projections of future coral cover on GBR inshore reefs based on the growth rates estimated by these models coupled with the observed disturbance history for inshore reefs of the GBR over the period 1987-2002 indicated a long-term decline in coral cover (Thompson & Dolman 2010). For this reason the positive score of 1 was reserved for only those reefs at which the observed rate of change in cover exceeded twice the upper 95% confidence interval of the change predicted. Observations falling within the upper and lower confidence intervals of the change in predicted cover were scored as neutral (indicator score 0.5) and those not meeting the lower confidence interval of the predicted change received an indicator score of 0. The rate of change is averaged over three years of observations. As implemented in 2017 only two years of change were used (2015-2016 and 2017-2017), future applications will be based on a rolling mean of three years of observed changes. Years in which disturbance events occurred at particular reefs were not included as there is no logical expectation for an increase in cover in such situations.

7.2.5 References

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