

The background of the newsletter cover is a scenic photograph of a tropical coastline. In the foreground, there are lush green trees and palm fronds. The middle ground shows a calm blue body of water, likely a bay or lagoon. In the background, there are low, hilly islands under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The text is overlaid on this image in white and light blue colors.

Cape York

# Healthy Country

NEWSLETTER

Issue 42

2021

*Coastal habitat  
protection for the  
eastern Cape*

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ready to run*

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# YOU ARE OUR EYES IN THE BUSH

**If you see someone illegally lighting  
a fire call Triple Zero (000) immediately**

#ArsonAwareness #ArsonIsACrime #YourFireYourResponsibility

## Welcome to the Cape York Healthy Country Newsletter



Welcome to our first newsletter for 2021. Some people will be glad to see the back of 2020, but there were many good things to come out of the previous 12 months. During 2020 Cape York NRM was able to restructure its operations and program support so that we are able to deliver the best on ground projects possible and we have an incredibly busy year planned for 2021. We welcome four new staff to the team and the Cooktown office is now bursting at the seams.

We have an exciting new Reef Trust project that will be commencing this year (see page 7). Unlike previous projects that were focussed on reef water quality, the Catchments to Coral project will focus on the health of our significant coastal vegetation and wetlands and will work with landholders in the Great Barrier Reef catchments to deliver on ground activities such as weed and feral animal control, fire management and other actions that are the priorities of local land managers. Cape York NRM will also be contributing our time and money to try and broaden this project to as many landholders as possible, focussing on the central and northern peninsula areas.

In this edition we also outline the update of the regional NRM Plan (more on page 5). The Cape York Regional NRM Plan is due for review and we will be out and about talking to people and organisations across the Cape, about the changes that need to be made. It has been 5 years since the plan has been reviewed and there are bound to be changes, but we also know that many discussions and actions have already occurred. We will incorporate all of this knowledge into the draft before seeking input and feedback, but if you have a specific interest in the review of the regional NRM plan, please get in touch. The plan is used by people across the Cape to plan their on ground activities and support funding applications. Importantly, we also use the plan to highlight the priorities for action with potential funding partners.

Our work to support coordinated fire management across Cape York is continuing and this is a big focus for the coming 12 months. We are working with partners with the ongoing arson awareness campaign, increasing the coordination of the fire management across land tenures, supporting the implementation of traditional burning practices and working to increase the ability to proactively fight wildfires across the Cape. Alex Debono, the new Fire Program Coordinator (page 9), will be working to increase fire management with an initial focus in the Normanby Catchment.

Once again, thank you for your interest and support for this important work across Cape York. If there is anything you would like to know more about, please get in touch. We have an exciting year ahead and I hope to see you somewhere on the Cape soon.

Warm regards  
John Gavin





Cover photo | Coral Sea view from Cooktown



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# Natural resource management direction for the Cape

Cape York NRM will commence consultation on the revised Cape York Regional NRM Plan in March–April 2021.

You may be asking yourself, why is the plan important and why should I be involved?

The challenge on Cape York is the enormous diversity of views, and often conflicting views, on what is important from a natural resource perspective.

People of Cape York all have their own plans for Country, some based on thousands of years of cultural occupation and obligation, some with newer aspirations on economic development.

But, we all share and are dependent on the effective stewardship of the natural resources that support the people of Cape York.

What is the shared vision for Cape York's natural resources and how do we propose to ensure the ongoing sustainability and resilience of these resources for all and future generations?

In addition, the people of Cape York and globally are subject to new threats and opportunities. COVID-19, for example, has fundamentally changed tourist activities on Cape York—how do we as a community address this threat?

How will it impact the natural resources and day to day lives of the people on Cape York?

Does it mean that there will be greater interest in industries such as mining to compensate for the loss of tourism?

Equally, there are new opportunities for payments for ecosystem services providing new incomes for the effective management of the land and sea.

How accessible are these incomes and what types of regional coordination and governance will be required to effectively manage these new assets for all?

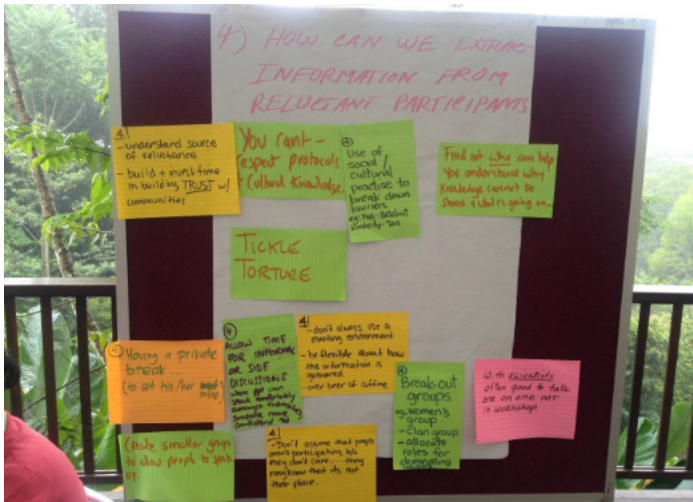
The 2016–2020 Cape York NRM Plan provided the foundation for our effective engagement and investment in the natural resource management of Cape York. But plans are not static. The world has changed.

This is the opportunity for Cape York communities to have their say on what is important and how land, freshwater and coastal marine areas should be managed.

It's an opportunity to review the existing plan, and ask ourselves what's working and what do we need to change? Equally, what's missing from the previous plan and how do we effectively accommodate and address new threats and opportunities.

Cape York NRM will notify the Cape York community in the near future regarding dates, times and locations for consultation regarding the Cape York Regional NRM Plan 2021–2025.

For further information, please contact Geoff Lipsett-Moore - 0476 667 170 or [geoff.lipsettmoore@capeyorknrm.com.au](mailto:geoff.lipsettmoore@capeyorknrm.com.au)







## NORTH QLD THREATENED SPECIES SYMPOSIUM

16 - 17  
FEBRUARY  
CAIRNS  
COLONIAL  
CLUB

The North Queensland Threatened Species Symposium will be held on 16-17 February 2021 at the Cairns Colonial Club.

The objective of the Symposium is to increase knowledge exchange and collaboration between organisations and individuals working to conserve threatened species and ecological communities in Northern Queensland.

The symposium will include presentations from the Threatened Species Recovery Hub researchers, and will include workshops focussing on threatening processes that impact the threatened species in our region.

Presentations and workshop themes will include:

- Challenges & Opportunities for NQ Threatened Species Recovery
- Threatened Species Management & Recovery Planning
- Community & First Nations Engagement
- Policy & Planning
- Habitat Management
- Research Opportunities

Tickets to the event are \$50 each and include admission to the two-day event, all catering, as well as a networking dinner.

Numbers will be limited due to COVID-19 restrictions and for the Cape York NRM region will be allocated based on submission of an Expression of Interest.

Please contact Kerri Woodcock (Cape York NRM Biodiversity & Fire Program Manager) on 0428 354 700 or email [kerri.woodcock@capeyorknrm.com.au](mailto:kerri.woodcock@capeyorknrm.com.au) to register your interest in attending the event.

The event is co-hosted by the members of the NQ NRM Alliance (Terrain NRM, Northern Gulf RMG and Cape York NRM) with funding through the Australian Government's National Landcare Program, and the National Environmental Science Programs Threatened Species Recovery hub.



An Event for  
Recovery Teams  
and Action  
Groups

Image Liz Gallie

## Coastal habitat protection for the eastern Cape



Muck River mouth

The Communities and coastal habitats of eastern Cape York will benefit from the Australian Government's Reef Trust funded, Catchments to Coral program. Running from 2021-2023, the project will invest in a broad range of activities that focus on improving the health and resilience of eastern Cape York catchments and coastal ecosystems.

David Preece, Coastal Ecosystems Coordinator, said "Previous Great Barrier Reef programs have focussed purely on improving water quality, but over the next three years (2021-2023) we will be tackling the big issues facing coastal ecosystems and wetlands across eastern Cape York."

"The activities delivered by the project will be decided by local land managers and could include weed and feral animal management, fire management, threatened species protection, reduction in visitor impact, control of stock access, and the destocking of unmanaged cattle."

The program, administered by Cape York NRM, is getting underway by engaging eastern Cape York land managers, developing a prioritisation framework of program activities, establishing an expert panel for project delivery, and will provide support and funding for communities to plan and implement projects.

Cape York land managers will be involved to identify the priority ecological values that they aspire to protect, and to support the implementation of strategic and targeted actions to reduce negative impacts on fragile ecosystems beyond the life of the program.

**To discuss how you might become involved, contact David Preece, Cape York NRM Coastal Ecosystem Coordinator | 0418 464 487 | [david.preece@capeyorknrm.com.au](mailto:david.preece@capeyorknrm.com.au)**

*This project is funded by the Australian Government*





#### COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS COORDINATOR

David is responsible for coordinating the delivery of the 'Catchment to Coral: Great Barrier Reef coastal ecosystems and species protection on Cape York' project, which aims to support eastern Cape York land managers to implement threat mitigation actions that affect significant wetlands, floodplains, coastal habitat and threatened species.

David has 25 years' experience in protected area management and planning in both national parks and Indigenous Protected Areas.

Contact David on 0418 464 487 and [david.preece@capeyorknrm.com.au](mailto:david.preece@capeyorknrm.com.au)



#### FIRE COORDINATOR

Alex will support land managers across the Cape by building and maintaining networks and partnerships across tenures and stakeholders. He has worked in natural resource management for over 20 years, working the last four years of that time in fire management in West Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory and in the Kimberly region of Western Australia.

Alex has worked with a range of land holders, including Indigenous owners, on public land and in private conservation estates and is keen to help develop effective fire management partnerships across Cape York.

Contact Alex on 0419 148 426 and [alex.debono@capeyorknrm.com.au](mailto:alex.debono@capeyorknrm.com.au)

## Meet our new team members

Our revised organisational structure and new projects have seen several new staff come on board. With an exciting and busy year ahead of us, we already have boots on the ground getting us off to a great start.



#### SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIES OFFICER

Natalie will work with Cape York farmers, graziers and peak industry bodies—with a focus on the Lakeland agricultural area and north western Cape—to improve the sustainability and productivity of farming systems and improve the condition of natural resources. A key focus area is on improving Great Barrier Reef water quality through encouraging and voluntary improvement in soil, nutrient and pesticide management, water use efficiency, and also targeted pest and weed management.

Natalie graduated with a Bachelor of Environment Management from the University of Queensland in 2018. She has spent time working in Fiji in fisheries management and, prior to joining the team at Cape York NRM, she worked as an irrigation extension officer in Mildura.

Contact Nat on 0419 655 780 and [natalie.mason@capeyorknrm.com.au](mailto:natalie.mason@capeyorknrm.com.au)



#### KNOWLEDGE AND PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER

Geoff contributes to all aspects of Cape York NRM's Corporate Strategic Plan, and is responsible for building and maintaining meaningful and productive strategic partnerships. He is overseeing the NRM planning, communications and knowledge management systems within the organisation.

Geoff previously worked in a broad range of conservation and natural resource management organisations across three decades. Over the last 14 years he has worked for The Nature Conservancy focusing on savanna burning and climate change adaptation and mitigation initiatives, working with Indigenous people in Australia and the Pacific.

Contact Geoff on 0476 667 170 and [geoff.lipsettmoore@capeyorknrm.com.au](mailto:geoff.lipsettmoore@capeyorknrm.com.au)



# River recovery: Projects ready to run

*Drone photograph of the river bend at Scrubby Creek*

Three large projects to repair riverbank sites severely damaged by the 2019 monsoon trough will commence on the Endeavour River at the beginning of the 2021 dry season.

Rehabilitation of the sites will be aided by the use of proven techniques such as bank battering, rock armouring, and revegetation with appropriate riparian plants.

One large river bend located at Scrubby Creek will be rehabilitated using lines of timber piles vertically driven into the reshaped bank to reduce the velocity of water as it moves around the bend.

The site will be further stabilised by sediment trapped in the riparian vegetation as it matures.

The stabilisation of these streambanks will be of enormous benefit to landholders who are currently losing valuable water-frontage land as a result of the erosion.

Importantly, sediment flow to Cooktown Harbour and the Great Barrier Reef will be greatly reduced.

It is estimated that the combined fine sediment loss from the three sites due to the 2018–19 wet season was over 27,000 tonnes—this would fill the Cooktown swimming pool about twenty-five times over.

To find out more, contact Harry at  
[harry.james@capeyorknrm.com.au](mailto:harry.james@capeyorknrm.com.au)  
0427 994 333

*The Riparian Recovery Program is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA)*



*Riverbank erosion at Mt Olive Station*



*Cape York NRM's Michael Goddard and landowner Fred Woods during a site visit at Mt Olive Station*



2020 saw Cape York NRM reach ten years of supporting people on the Cape.

To celebrate, we invited people of Cape York to send us photos they felt illustrated something special to them.

We were thrilled at the response! 50 amazing photos were submitted.

Cape York NRM Chair Emma Jackson said the initiative was designed to showcase the close relationship between people and country on the Cape, and to help raise awareness of the environmental, social and cultural values of our region.

This page features the twelve primary photos featured in the calendar, which were chosen by independent judges.

All 50 of the photos submitted on our website at [capeyorknrm.com.au/campaigns](http://capeyorknrm.com.au/campaigns)

A small print run enabled us to send printed calendars to everyone who submitted photos and to all our members.



Endeavour Straits looking west towards the Jardine River | John Charlton



Famous Aurukun Dogs | Wik and Kugu Art Centre Aurukun



Pormpuraaw levee mudflats | Christine Howes



Pearl farm on Friday Island | Alison McClelland



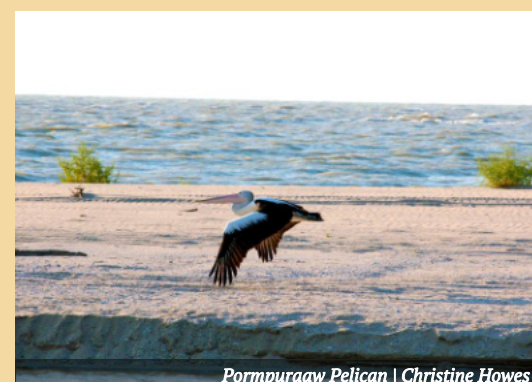
Twin Falls | Alex Winter



Sunset in Aurukun | Bernie McCarthy



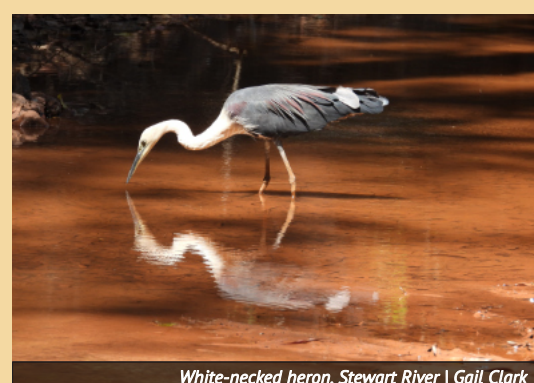
Lockhart River—roadside creek | Christine Howes



Pormpuraaw Pelican | Christine Howes

# CAPE YORK : MY PLACE

## 2021 CAPE YORK CALENDAR



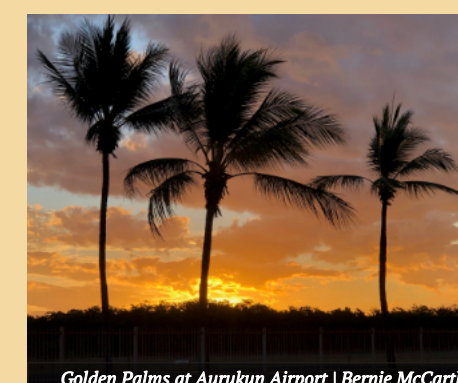
White-necked heron, Stewart River | Gail Clark



Peaceful Aurukun | Bernie McCarthy

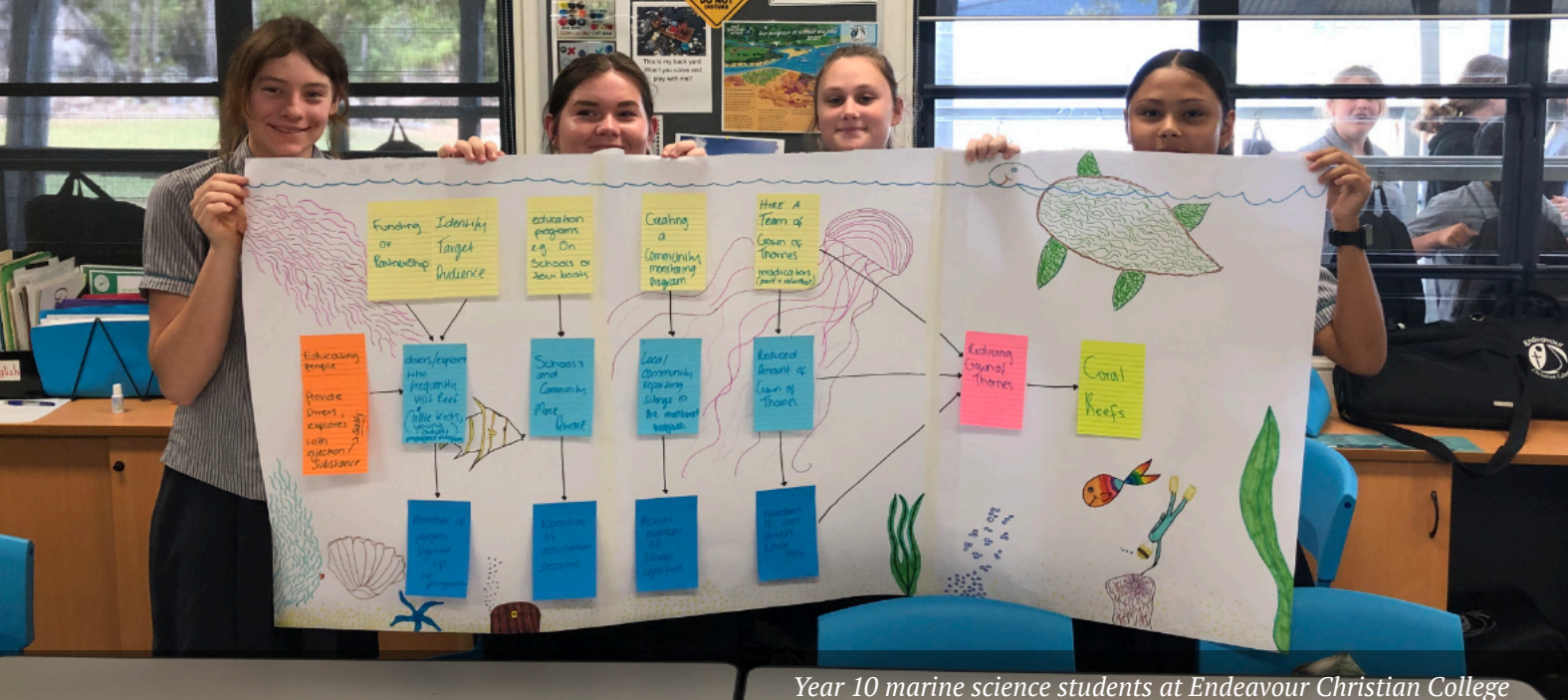


Skateboards Bamaga | Year 11 Bamaga



Golden Palms at Aurukun Airport | Bernie McCarthy





Year 10 marine science students at Endeavour Christian College

Over the past several months, community members in south-east Cape York have come together during five interactive workshops to develop the Cape York Reef Community Action Plan (CAP).

The workshops included community events held in Wujal Wujal, Cooktown and Hope Vale, as well as a school workshop at Endeavour Christian College and a school holiday session with young Reef enthusiasts, and were well attended by a range of community members including Traditional Owner Groups, land managers, scientists, local council members and ranger groups.

Participants worked through the process of developing 'roadmaps' for a marine-related environmental value or issue that they cared about.

A 'roadmap' will illustrate the path to a proposed project outcome—an example being the reduction of marine debris washing ashore onto Cooktown beaches. The roadmap will provide a strategic overview of the major elements of a project, and can be used in the production of an application for project funding.

Cape York NRM Project Officer Harry James was thrilled with the workshop results.

'We had a fantastic turnout at all of the workshops. It was so much fun guiding the process and everyone was enthusiastic, engaged and ready to share their ideas.'

'We had an impressive range of roadmaps made by the community—from improving turtle management to reducing the impacts of visitors at tourist areas.'

'I'm excited to compile these roadmaps into a Reef Community Action Plan that is a valuable resource for local people. The end goal is to see these ideas funded, and implemented on the ground by the community attracting so many great benefits for the local environment and the people who enjoy it.'

Dabu Jajikal Corporation's Marie Shipton who attended the Wujal Wujal workshop found the experience very valuable.

'The CAP Workshop gave our Traditional Owners the opportunity to work towards more funding so we can ensure the right people are in the right place doing the right thing.'

The CAP will be a resource for communities to voice their greatest needs and aspirations, providing a platform to take targeted actions and apply for future funding opportunities. The Great Barrier Reef Foundation will compile input from six Queensland regions to create the state's overall Plan that will identify shared goals for community Reef protection.

The final Community Action Plan will be launched by April 2021

**To find out more, contact Harry at**

**0427 994 333 or**

**[harry.james@capeyorknrm.com.au](mailto:harry.james@capeyorknrm.com.au)**

*The Cape York Reef Action Plan is funded by the partnership between the Australian Government's Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, and delivered by Cape York NRM with support from South Cape York Catchments*



Dabu Jajikal's Kathleen Walker, Marie Shipton and Calvin Olbar found the workshop in Wujal Wujal very valuable



South Cape York Catchments Jessie Price-Decle and Cook Shire Council's Jenni James discuss priorities at the Cooktown workshop

## Action planning workshops a success



Great turnout at the Cooktown CAP workshop at Hillcrest Guest House



Yuku Baja Muliku Ranger Joallan Seagren and South Cape York Catchment's Jason Carroll share a laugh during the roadmapping process



# Your Cape York Life

We want the Cape York Healthy Country Newsletter to include you—the Cape York community.

There are some very talented storytellers, artists, photographers, plus wonderful land manager projects, across the Cape community—and we have hundreds of readers who'd love to read, or see, your work.

Or maybe your school or community group has something exciting to showcase, or an event coming up that you'd like to promote more widely.

Your submission should be natural resource focused—that is topics such as people, water, plants, animals, soil, and minerals.

Please call me for a chat anytime, or send me an email  
Robyn May | Communications Officer  
0499 405 558  
[robyn.may@capeyorknrm.com.au](mailto:robyn.may@capeyorknrm.com.au)

*Helping people to work together to care for the natural environment and to promote the sustainable use of Cape York's natural resources*



## Working on the Wetland—Keatings Lagoon, Cooktown *Story by Charmaine Hill, South Cape York Catchments*

Wetlands on Cape York are very important because they are a filter for water flowing from land to the Great Barrier Reef, they are a refuge and a breeding ground for many different animal species, and also home to many aquatic species, both plants and animals. Some threats to coastal wetlands are feral animals, erosion, pollution, fire, and loss of oxygen in the water from aquatic weeds. Along with the threats comes the problems or issues caused, such as a decrease in native animal and plant species and a decline in water quality.

Traditional Owners, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc, and South Cape York Catchments have been working to protect Keatings Lagoon since 2007. As it's a coastal wetland, it's home to many native plants and animals. Before a fence was built protecting the area, feral pigs and cattle were doing a good job of destroying the amazing wetland. The fence was put up in 2008 to keep pigs and other feral animals out, and the wetland bounced back to health.

Throughout the year of 2020 people have worked to do everything in their power to make Keatings Lagoon weed and pest free.

Myself, the other two trainees Ben and Angus, our coordinator Jason, and Robert from QPWS have worked together, spraying hymenachne after the wet season, trapping and removing pigs that broke through the fence, and doing cool early burns to minimise the fuel load inside the lagoon.

It is important to remove the feral pigs so they do no further damage by digging in the wetland and eating native animals and plants, and to control the hymenachne to reduce its spreading into Keatings Lagoon or going further down our rivers.

Good fire management around wetland areas to minimise the threat of wildfires is important, as these special habitats are not supposed to have fire in them. Late season wildfires can destroy the vegetation on the edges of the water, making erosion in the wet season more likely.

At the start of my traineeship I had a bit of an idea how everything works and how it all happens, but my time with South Cape York Catchments has helped me to learn heaps of new things. Our Conservation and Land Management (CALM) Trainee Team has worked with different people from different areas and organisations. It's been such a good experience working with Robert from QPWS at Keatings Lagoon, watching the wetland become less damaged by feral animals and weeds. Knowing I was a part of helping the wetland thrive this year is one of the best feelings. I would like to say a huge thank you to Robert at QPWS for giving his time and helping us learn new things along our journey, it's been a pleasure.

*This story was written by Charmaine Hill at the conclusion of her twelve-month Conservation and Land Management traineeship with South Cape York Catchments.*

*Cape York NRM congratulates the CALM students on a successful year and wishes you all well with your future in sustainable land management.*





# Update from the Directors

Has it been a soggy start to 2021 for most across Cape York Peninsula? It is wonderful to see so much of the landscape come alive early on in the year, and it is certainly flourishing. March flies, mozzies and flying ants are out in force making sure we all know that the rainy season has embraced us.

Following quite a short-lived wet season for three quarters of our region in 2020, I am sure the consistent rainfall is welcomed by those who are receiving it.

Those living and working on the land, with so much rainfall unfortunately comes the erosion, washouts and damage.

It gets tricky to access the areas you may want to reach to spray weeds or manage pests and it means the few months of the year where you should be playing ‘catch up’ with the maintenance on fences and equipment after a busy dry season are slowly being sucked away.

It means for the town folk, your access out becomes more of a challenge, your veggie garden is swamped, and the kids go stir-crazy because they are stuck indoors.

For many employed across the region working outside, including Rangers, those in earthworks and volunteers—your ‘every day’ just got a little more challenging and for some of you, work’s stopped because it has become too wet.

I think this is referred to as ‘balance’ and accepting we have no control over wonderful Mother Nature is all we can do. We enjoy what we can and persevere through the rest.

Coming into 2021 though, your Board of Directors has begun to embrace who we are as a Board and how we consider the design and role into the future.

We acknowledge that the whole organisation was designed through broad community consultation over ten years ago and believe it is now time to rethink our identity today.

We have reflected over successes and challenges over the last few years and will continue discussions over the next few months before approaching Members for input.

Our landscape evolves according to the hand Mother Nature plays every single year, and the Board is confident that we too have evolved over the past decade, however now need to sit back and objectively consider efficiency, effectiveness and quality from a governance structure which will best work for our Members.

We welcomed two new Directors towards the end of 2020, Kathi Steffensen and Marilyn Morris and thanked Eric Rosendale and Trevor Meldrum for their commitment and efforts towards the organisation.

Our landscape will continually change and evolve. It is important that what we do, how we do it, and why we do it also changes and evolves. A healthy environment is an ever changing one, whether on the land, in the office, in the home or within an organisation. This reflects life.

Let’s see what 2021 has in store for us, but for you all, we hope it is a safe and successful one, however that looks for you.

Warm regards  
Emma Jackson



**Emma Jackson**  
Chairperson  
Primary Industries Sector



**Pauline Smith**  
Indigenous Sector  
Zone 2



**Katherine Steffensen**  
Indigenous Sector  
Zone 4



**John Charlton**  
Tourism, Small Business, Mining  
and Other Industries Sector



**Sally Gray**  
Conservation Sector



**Marilyn Morris**  
Local Government Sector

# DATE CLAIMER

## 2021 Cape York Grazing Forum

18–19 May

Laura Rodeo Grounds





## CONTACT US

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