Cape York Healthy Country

NEWSLETTER

Issue 43 2021

Cape York Healthy Country Plan

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2021 CAPE YORK GRAZING FORUM

DATES: 18-19 May 2021

TIMES: Commencing 8:15 am on both days

TICKETS

This is a FREE event. To speed up registration on arrival, and ensure COVID-19 regulations are met, please get your tickets in advance from our website

CAMPING

Byo camping gear

CATERING

The event is fully catered

BAR

Bar will be running at dinner on the night of Tue 18

PROGRAM

The program and information about our presenters is continually updated on our website

The 2021 Cape York Grazing Forum brings together graziers from across the Cape providing them with the opportunity to network and share achievements and concerns, with a focus on strengthening community resilience in times of disaster management and recovery.

This year's program will include presentations covering a diverse range of subjects including weaner management, climate predictions, dung beetles, technology (what's useful and what's not), rural crime, and much more. The program includes plenty of time for discussion at each workshop.

Cape York NRM supports the use of sustainably sourced and produced products. Single-use plastics will not be available at this event.

For more information and to get tickets, go to our website at capeyorknrm.com.au/news-events/event/2021/1290 or contact Nat on 0419 655 780 or nat.mason@capeyorknrm.com.au



This project is funded by the Commonwealth/State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, through the Community Development Program, with support from Australian and Queensland government's Paddock to Reef Program and Natural Resources Investment Program', and is delivered by Cape York NRM

Welcome to the Cape York Healthy Country Newsletter

It's been a great start to 2021 with plenty of activity and a good wet season seeing the Cape looking fantastic.

This edition of the Cape York Healthy Country Newsletter highlights how the combination of solid planning and good on ground delivery combine to bring about great results.

New staff welcomed into the region in our last newsletter have now settled in nicely and are prepared to get out and about as the drier weather kicks in.

Project development has continued. A fine example is the collaboration with communities in the southern Cape resulting in the development of the Cape York Community Action Plan (CAP). The CAP has been completed and is ready to go to attract support for upcoming projects addressing community priorities for the Great Barrier Reef. You can read more about the Reef CAP in 'News' on our website at capeyorknrm.com.au

Another opportunity for community collaboration is through the Regional NRM Plan review. The development of the Plan is driven by Cape York NRM, but this is not our plan—this is your plan for the whole region.

We have reviewed the existing NRM plan—looked at all the work and changes that have occurred since that plan was developed—and are now looking for your input to the new Cape York Regional NRM Plan. The article on pages 6–7 highlights how you can influence the priorities for the Cape York region.

The work, conversations and thinking that go into documents like the Regional NRM Plan ultimately form the basis of the essential on ground works that Cape York NRM, and other groups across the Cape, can assist you to deliver.

In this edition we highlight the project working with Umpila Traditional Owners to look at the cassowary populations on eastern Cape York, recognising the importance of, and how little is known about, the Cape York Peninsula populations of this magnificent bird.

I hope you find all the articles in this edition interesting and informative, and thank you for your support of the important work taking place across Cape York.

To finish, I would like to draw your attention to the upcoming 2021 Cape York Grazing Forum (flyer opposite). I look forward to seeing you there or somewhere on the Cape soon.

Warm regards John Gavin





Cover image taken at Ninda Creek | Photo provided Annette Marriott





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👠 Cape York NRM

Horticulture Roundtable



Reef Community Action Plan Released



The South-east Cape York Reef Community Action Plan (CAP) is now available on the Cape York NRM website. The Plan is the product of seven workshops held in Cooktown, Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal, at which Traditional Owners, community members and young marine enthusiasts shared their aspirations for local actions to benefit the Reef, marine and coastal environments.

The Plan highlights thirteen strategies, prioritised and designed by the workshop participants, aimed at delivering meaningful benefits to local catchments, rivers, beaches, important species and the Great Barrier Reef.

The strategies cover a range of topics including: reducing visitor impacts at tourist hot spots, controlling problematic weeds, cleaning up beaches, monitoring and improving coral reefs, attaining heritage listing for culturally significant areas, and implementing best management practices for roads and roadsides.

Cape York NRM Project Officer Harry James, who facilitated the workshops, said he is thrilled with the results.





"It was fantastic having such strong community input into this project. I think everyone involved really valued having an opportunity to put forward ideas for local action on issues that are important to them.

"I'm looking forward to seeing strategies funded and implemented for the benefit of the Reef, our marine environment, and our community".

Community groups who were involved in developing the CAP are now eligible to apply for grants to implement these strategies and start translating plans into action. There are two funding streams available, with up to \$75,000 available for community projects and \$75,000 available for Traditional Owner-led projects.

For more information, contact Harry at harry.james@capeyorknrm.com.au

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

An introduction to the Cape York Healthy Country Plan 2021–2030 consultation



We're in the process of updating the Cape York Natural Resource Management Plan and we're keen to get your views. Why does this matter? We'll it's your collective opportunity to tell us and the government about what is important to the people of Cape York – from a natural resources perspective.

We're calling this plan the Cape York Healthy Country Plan, because it's a plan about keeping Cape York Healthy for future generations, so your kids can enjoy the healthy land, freshwater, biodiversity and coastal resources of Cape York that we all benefit from now.

Cape York NRM's job is to help facilitate a process to ensure that the people of Cape York have a say. We've reviewed the old Cape York NRM Regional plan 2016-2020, and taken a look at the Healthy Country Plans and other plans across Cape York to try to capture the important points and to bring them all together in a cohesive picture that everyone can understand. But consultation and meeting people face to face during these Covid-19 times is challenging!

So, we're trying something a little different. To kick off the "consultation process" process we're going to try to determine the most important natural assets, threats and resource management priorities for Cape York. We've tried to make this easy for everyone by **providing a simple online survey with some drop-down tables.**

This little survey asks three questions

- What are the three most important natural assets in your area that you care about? Natural assets

 are the natural features that you care about.
 Natural assets can be: savanna, sea turtles, rainforest, good pasture, good soils, clean fresh water and wetlands, mangrove areas or lots of fish.
- 2. What are the top three things threats, damaging or impacting your natural assets? Threats are all those things that impact the health or destroy the natural assets you care about. Threats might be: pigs wrecking turtle nests, of too much bank erosion in creeks, bad fires, and weeds, or not enough capacity or access to country to manage the threats,
- 3. And finally, what are your top three recommendations to improve the health of the natural assets you care about? This is all about the strategies and actions that we take to reduce the threats and improve the health of our natural assets. This might be things like: feral pig control, or doing early dry season burning or intensive weed management or better managing cattle access to waterways or increasing the capacity of traditional owners to access and manage country.

"This is a plan about keeping Cape York healthy for future generations"

If you can't find the natural assets or threat that are important to you, then we've provided an extra box so that you can add the thing that is most important to you.

Access the survey here

We will put the little survey out for two weeks for people to have their say and then we'll compile all the results into a simple table so that everyone can take a look at the results from across the Cape. We'll then hold a zoom call in early May, so that we can discuss these results with people that are interested.





Our final step will be to hold some face to face or phone meetings (depending on Covid-19 restrictions) in May for those residents that didn't have a chance to have their say and to do some final refinements based on their input to feed into the plan.

If you have any questions, please contact (me) Geoff on 0476 667 170 or email geoff.lipsettmoore@capeyorknrm.com.au

Umpila cassowary project

on eastern Cape York

Cassowaries in Cape York Peninsula are dependent on the isolated rainforest remnants that are interspersed with open savanna and other dry vegetation types in the landscape.

As such, cassowaries are known to occur at various rainforest locations along the eastern Cape York Peninsula from the Lockerbie Scrub (Northern Peninsula Area), south to Kutini-Payama National Park (Lockhart River region) and the McIlwraith Range (west of Coen).

Compared with their southern counterparts - the Wet Tropics cassowary sub-population, we know very little about the Cape York cassowary subpopulation.

To enable an informed assessment of the conservation status of the cassowary in Cape York Peninsula we urgently need information on where they occur, how many there are, their ecological requirements, and the relative impact of threats.

Recognising these fundamental data needs, a collaborative research project was developed in 2020 between the Ngana Malngkanichi Pama (CNCRM) Aboriginal Corporation (representing the Umpila Traditional Owners), independent cassowary researcher Wren McLean, and Cape York NRM.

Umpila Country occurs on the coastal lowlands of the McIlwraith Range where closed canopy forest habitat occurs mainly along watercourses in narrow riparian strips adjacent to dry savannah country.

During the late dry-season of 2020, the Cassowary Team deployed remote camera traps with visual lures and sign surveys to detect the presence of the cassowary.

These motion-activated cameras were positioned within the Nesbit, Chester and Rocky river systems in locations where either cassowary signs were found, or adjacent to the small retracting pools of water on the river edge.

Due to their large body size and dark colouration, cassowaries need to drink regularly throughout the day.

The specific aims of this survey were to:

- determine cassowary distribution across suitable habitat in the coastal lowlands
- individually identify photographed cassowaries (for abundance estimates)
- conduct sign surveys (dung, tracks, sightings, feathers and vocalisations)
- identify threats to cassowaries and their habitat
- train Umpila Traditional Owners in the cassowary survey techniques.





Charles Butcher, Helen Penrose, Lester Butche



Cassowary dung containing at leat five different fruit species

A second field trip to retrieve the camera data occurred approximately 50 days after camera deployment.

The results were exciting! Together we walked for almost 20 kilometres throughout Umpila Country and found 23 cassowary signs (9 dungs, 13 sets of footprints and 1 sighting of a sub-adult).

In addition, the motion activated camera traps photographed 3 individually identifiable adult cassowaries, one sub-adult and three stripy chicks.

Unsurprisingly however, threats to cassowaries were also recorded by the camera traps; 47 capture events recorded a minimum of 54 individual feral pigs and 43 capture events recorded a minimum of 26 individual cattle.

This project is supported by Cape York NRM, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program







These on-ground surveys produced evidence of a breeding cassowary population in the coastal lowlands of the McIlwraith Range and were an invaluable opportunity for the Umpila Traditional Owners to reconnect with Country and for future planning and management.

The persistence of cassowaries in this location is dependent on the health of the riparian rainforest vegetation and the availability of rainforest fruit. Feral pig abatement is a high priority for long-term cassowary conservation in the area.

Feral pigs compete for critical cassowary food resources and have a host of negative impacts on rainforest vegetation. On-ground works to address key threats will be the focus of our next work together (late dry season 2021).

Well fed cattle all year round at Ninda Creek

Ninda Creek is a 3567 hectare grazing property near Lakeland in southern Cape York, and is owned by Peter and Annette Marriott who have implemented some interesting and successful sustainable farming methods to maintain a high quality cattle product all year round. Here, Annette chats to us about how they manage to keep their cattle well-fed all year round in this harsh climate.

Q. How have you achieved the quality of your feed?

A. Like most Cape York properties we could fatten several thousand head during the wet but were unable to run a fat beast during the dry. In 2003 we received a permit to clear. We now have approximately 1200 hectares of cleared country. Of this approximately 350 hectares has been planted to improved pasture (Rhodes and Humidicola grass and Verano, Cavalcade & Siratro legumes). 250 hectares of this is suitable for baling hay.

Q. What's the secret to maintaining the quality beef all year round?

A. Nature provides quality feed during the annual wet every year. We bale this bulk feed to preserve the natural protein and feed the hay back to the cattle during the dry.

Q. So how do you manage through the dry season?

A. After the wet finishes pastures hay off but winter showers and heavy dew on the dry grass makes it go black and unpalatable. By September-October there is insufficient protein left to sustain a cow and calf. We are able to supplement feed with hay.

Q. It must create quite a bit of work to grow the pasture, bale and store the hay, then distribute it as the fresh pasture quality deteriorates in the dry season.

A. We don't move the hay from the paddocks until they're being fed out, unless we need the paddock. The hay will survive two wet seasons where it sits. It's simple and effective and means the cattle continue to have high protein feed all vear. **Q.** Have you been using this method for very long?

A. We started this practice 17 years ago with an old stack hand, just baling enough for ourselves. When we purchased a new baler we began selling hay to assist in paying for the baler.

Q. Have you both always lived on Cape York?

A. I was born and raised in Cooktown before moving to Lakeland. Pure Cape York stock! Peter was born in Orange in NSW. His family was involved in a company that bought Crocodile and Holroyd Stations in about 1969. At the age of only 19, Peter moved to the Cape and managed these two stations with his brother, and has lived on the Cape ever since. Both these properties were sold by 1988.

Q. How long have you owned this Ninda Creek property?

A. Peter's had part of the property, about 600 hectares, since 1989, and together the family bought the balance, of what became Ninda Creek Station, from Bill Reddie and Laura Wallace in 1999.

Q. Thanks for chatting with me Annette. It sounds to me like you and Peter are living a wonderful life here at Ninda Creek.

A. Yes, this is our home, our life, and we love it. We have no plans to ever live anywhere else.

Annette showed me around the property and there's lots more to tell—for another time.

Cattle photos provided by Annette Marriott





Coastal vegetation in Gamaay Country



Littoral Rainforests and Coastal Vine Thickets (also known as beach scrub) is a unique ecological community of coastal vegetation that is directly affected by marine influences (salt spray, tides, storm surge or tropical cyclones).

This community is listed as Critically Endangered under Commonwealth Government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act (1999) due to severe habitat fragmentation, weed invasion and feral animal activity.

This community provides key habitat for biodiversity (including threatened species of plants and animals) and also contains numerous plant species that are of cultural significance to Indigenous people.

Historically, Littoral Rainforests and Coastal Vine Thickets occurred as an almost continuous but fragmented archipelago of patches along Australia's east coast. Today the EPBC Act listed community occurs from south of Princess Charlotte Bay in Cape York Peninsula to the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria in the south.

Mapping of the presence of Littoral Rainforests and Coastal Vine Thickets has been done in the Wet Tropics bioregion. However, within the Cape York Peninsula bioregion, we urgently need to improve our knowledge of the extent and condition of this important ecological community, including north of Princess Charlotte Bay.

The identification and distribution of this community must remain consistent with the federal government legislation listing advice and consider Regional Ecosystem (vegetation) classification, underlying geology and distance from the open coast.

In recognition of this fundamental knowledge gap, Cape York NRM has contracted CSIRO scientists to build capacity amongst the Traditional Owners in Gamaay Country to assess the condition of littoral rainforest and to identify ongoing threats to this threatened ecological community.

Gamaay Country includes the Littoral Rainforests and Coastal Vine Thickets that extend from the Endeavour River National Park at the mouth of the Endeavour River to Knob Point.

Image: The ecological community in Gammay Country in relation to Cooktown and the mouth of the Endeavour River (background)



During November 2020, with the consent from the Gamaay Traditional Owners, CSIRO scientists Andrew Ford and Matt Bradford used Regional Ecosystem mapping within the Endeavour River National Park to characterise the Littoral Rainforest community into 'leading-edge', 'buffer' and 'refugial' rainforest patches based on their frequency of inundation by storm surge and sea level rise. The plant community was described and measurements taken to determine the wood weight (biomass).

In high rainfall areas (such as Gamaay Country), littoral rainforest has a complex rainforest structure and may include large woody vines, epiphytes, palms and trees with buttressed roots.

These forests have the potential to contain high amounts of biomass and therefore carbon. Most of the littoral forest on Cape York Peninsula lies within Indigenous-managed land, therefore presenting communities with the opportunity to attract possible income from carbon credits by practising approved fire management techniques.

The forest showed significant damage from recent cyclones and associated storm surge. Fallen coconut leaves are inhibiting native plant recruitment, and pig and cattle presence is evident.

This project is supported by Cape York NRM, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program Cape York Healthy Country Newsletter 13



Leading-edge littoral rainforest within Endeavour Rive. National Park



'Leading-edge' rainforest type is exposed to frequent inundation and can be critical in protecting communities and infrastructure from the effects of storm-surge, sea-level rise and extreme weather events.

Within the Endeavour River National Park, preliminary results show that the 'Leading Edge' Littoral Rainforest Canopy (10-15m in height) was composed of coast she-oak (Casuarina equisetifolia), mango pine (Barringtonia asiatica), Alexandrain laurel balltree (Calophyllum inophyllum) and coconut palm (Cocos nucifera), which is a weed.

The Understory was composed of: wattle (Acacia crassicarpa), beach almond (Terminalia muelleri), banana bush (Tabernaemontana) and Guinea flower (Hibbertia banksii); and the Ground (20%) contained beach grass (Thuarea), Spinifex, Zornia, goat's foot (Ipomoea pes-caprae), flannel weed (Sida) and pointed spurge (*Phyllanthus*).



Sand cliff | (c) Ian Bell

Thirty years of marine turtle research in the northern Great Barrier Reef

This year marks three decades of marine turtle monitoring in the far northern Great Barrier Reef by the Department of Environment and Science.

Scientists from Queensland Parks and Wildlife have been monitoring nesting turtles, on a remote coral cay called Milman Island since 1990.

This very remote area located almost at the tip of Cape York Peninsula within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, supports some of the world's largest nesting populations of the "Endangered" hawksbill and "Vulnerable" green turtle.

Things have changed a lot over the last 30 years. In the early days safety schedules were called-in on a HF radio, to Charleville, if we could skip a signal off the ionosphere, once or twice a week and if we were lucky, we could get a weather report on an AM radio.

There were no such things as laptops! Now we use satellite phones, "SPOT" trackers and collect data using an App on your phone that has an inbuilt Global Positioning System.

But the month-long camps, late nights walking around a beach in torrential rain and trying to sleep during the day in 43C 0 in the middle of the wet season, have all been worth it because over the last three decades we have collected one of the most comprehensive, long-term datasets for these globally significant hawksbill and green turtle nesting populations.

Why is this important? Don't turtles just do whatever they have done for the last 100 million years? Well yes and no.

Marine turtle populations have been impacted by many human caused things over the last 200 yearsindustrialised fishing, unsustainable take, marine pollution and feral animal predation of their eggs. Now we are looking down the barrel of climate change induced threats including- sea level rise with a loss or degradation of nesting and foraging habitat, and 100% feminisation due to increased incubation temperatures.

In an article recently published in Biological Conservation we have shown that the hawksbill nesting population has declined by about 57%.

"Not only did we look at the number of turtles coming ashore each night to nest, we also looked at the number of eggs laid and size of the turtles nesting" said Dr Bell the lead author on the study. All three indicated a severely declining population.

It's hard to know what the specific cause of this decline was. However the biggest threat is probably the take of hawksbill turtles to feed an insatiable desire for hawksbill jewellery made from their shells called "tortoiseshell" as well as being hunted for food on their foraging grounds in the western Pacific. In fact, between 1844 and 1992, more than nine million turtles were killed, mainly for the tortoiseshell trade, according to a recent study.

A recent island geomorphology study conducted by Professor Scott Smithers and Dr John Dawson at James Cook University, has predicted an approximate 1.5m sea level rise by 2080 in the northern Great Barrier Reef. We know this will impact nesting turtles...but how? We are now working to define specific nesting habitat[s] and trying to determine if and what changes may be happening.

Only by knowing what was there and what is now happening in important turtle nesting and foraging habitats will we be nimble enough to be able to develop sound conservation management strategies to be able to protect them. I wonder what the next 30 years will look like...maybe we can do it using drones?















Community seed collection



The year 2021 is off to a quick start, and so is Cape York NRM's Community Seed Collection Program. It is great to see unfamiliar faces signing up to support their Community and participate in the program. It is even better to see and hear the excitement coming from those who have been looking forward to getting back out on Country again to spend time with their family and collect native grass seeds.

The seeds being collected by community members this year are set to be used for Mine Rehabilitation on the Skardon River by Metro Mining Ltd.

E-Beef Field Day with Northern Gulf RMG



Harry, Andrew, and Nat from Cape York NRM, and Jess from South Cape York Catchments, attended the Northern Gulf Resource Management Group's E-Beef Smart Farm field day in Chillagoe early in March.

Graziers from across the Gulf gathered to hear from Northern Gulf RMG on smart farm technology trials, Farmbot Monitoring Solutions, Agersens (virtual fencing specialists), Gallagher Animal Management, and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Featured technology included virtual fencing, walkover weigh scales, (electronic identification) EID tag readers, data recorders, and remote water monitoring units.

North Qia Indigenous Network

As part of the Indigenous Fire Management Network, Indigenous fire practitioners will participate in sharing knowledge on cultural burning practices and fire management for the conservation of species and ecological communities.

More information is available on our website at cli.re/XdN7nQ or contact Alex Debono alex.debono@capeyorknrm.com.au or 0419 148 426

Extension Model of Practice workshop



Cape York NRM and Terrain NRM have been working together to help farmers learn from each other and bring greater coordination to personal farming support services, also known as extension services.

Known as the Enhanced Extension Coordination project, the three-year initiative which commenced in December 2018 works to enhance extension services to better meet producer needs.

In March this year, nine extension practitioners from Cape York NRM and Terrain regions got together in Atherton to learn about the advancements in the Extension Model of Practice.

The Extension Model of Practice is a framework that was initially introduced by Canegrowers ISIS

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North Qld Indigenous Fire Management



Manager, Angela Williams, in March 2020 and which is now in its first revision, ready for publishing.

This framework puts farmers at the centre of decision-making, providing extension officers with a proven method of engaging with farmers by taking into consideration their individual circumstances and goals for practice change on their farms.

It identifies that *how* extension is delivered is what leads to positive relationships and improved practice change—acknowledging how relationships, technical know-how and processes work together.

This project is funded through the Queensland Government Reef Water Quality program



Update from the Directors

Hopefully you are enjoying this exciting edition which takes you on a journey into the busy season where our teams can get out and about more in communities and on the ground.

COVID-19 influenced 2020, however we did our best under the circumstances. 2021 will see us achieve more, and you will hopefully see more of our guys.

The Board met in March for its final strategic planning workshop. Through the series of workshops we considered our role as your Board, our function in the organisation, and our relationships. We discussed the initial community engagement processes and recommendations that were carried out prior to our formation, and have reflected on the decade following.

We're excited about presenting our members with suggested changes to our Constitution for their consideration. The changes that we are reviewing will provide the organisation with a refreshed approach relevant and appropriate for today. We have made few alterations to our structures and processes over the past ten years and believe the changes will benefit the governance of the organisation. We hope the modifications encourage members to consider nominating for Directorship positions.

We, as a Board, are excited about the wet season coming to an end so our enthusiastic staff can begin delivering on projects. We can travel about a little more allowing our teams to connect with partners and stakeholders in person. The world has become far too 'virtual' and that's certainly one method of engagement we hope to minimise for our connections. We believe in personal engagement, interactions and good solid chit chat.

You will see and hear our teams talking about our NRM Plan. Please prick your ears and get involved as the contributions we receive from you will steer who we are and what we try to achieve. The NRM Plans are invested into by the Australian Government, and are valued by them. You could effectively be influencing the whole country with your contributions.

We hope you have had a wonderful rainy season and are prepared for an exciting dry season.

Warm regards Emma Jackson

Cape York NRM Board of Directors



Emma Jackson Chairperson Primary Industries Sector



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





Please contact Nat Mason to confirm your attendance 0419 655 780 nat.mason@capeyorknrm.com.au

This event is supported by Cape York NRM and funded by the Australian and Queensland Government's Paddock to Reef Program and Queensland Government's Natural Resources Investment Program, and the Australian Government's National Landcare Program



Cape York Natural Resource Management 47–49 Maunds Road | PO Box 907 Atherton QLD 4883 1300 132 262 **To contribute or subscribe** media@capeyorknrm.com.au 0499 405 558



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