

# Cape York

## Healthy Country Newsletter

Issue 18 - June 2014

### Celebrating the family farm

2014 is the International Year of Family Farming and Cape York NRM will be celebrating by featuring Cape York's farming families in each issue of *Healthy Country*.

This is our first year delivering the Sustainable Agriculture program, and we have started working with beef cattle producers and growers from across the Cape. In addition we will be rolling out the Australian Government Reef Program, in conjunction with East Coast farmers and partner organisations.

The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), say that family farming includes all family-based agricultural activities. Family farming refers to any primary industry production managed and operated by a family which relies on the labour of family members. That is, the farming of crops, trees, fish, cattle and pastoral and aquaculture.

We hope you enjoy getting to know some of our farming families from Cape York.



### Have you liked us on facebook?



Starting in July Cape York NRM will be running a monthly facebook competition. Every week we will be posting obscure pictures from our Cape York trips, and you'll have to guess what they are. Weekly winners will go into a monthly draw for a great Cape York prize. Prizes will vary from month to month. So... look for Cape York Natural Resource Management on Facebook - and make sure you like us to be in the running!

Watching our facebook page is also a great way to keep in touch with events happening around the Cape. You can also follow us on Twitter and Youtube.

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Within this newsletter Cape York Natural Resource Management is shortened to Cape York NRM

# The Sicklepod Dilemma

Sicklepod (*Senna obtusifolia*) is a native to South America that arrived in Cape York in the 1970's. It is used internationally as a food source and has several medicinal uses, however, in Australia, Sicklepod is a Class 2 declared pest plant (see box below).

Sicklepod and foetid senna (*Senna tora*) are closely related annual weeds, very similar in appearance, and often found together. However, it is Sicklepod (*S. obtusifolia*) that appears to pose the greatest threat to Cape York's environment and economy.

Sicklepod's preferred habitat is well-drained fertile soils, grasslands and disturbed areas such as roadsides, drainage channels and overgrazed pastures. It is often found in dense swards along rivers and the edges of wetlands and floodplains.

There is some indication that Sicklepod infestations can degrade native habitats, particularly grasslands and riparian zones, through competition with native species. For agriculture, infestations can completely take over pastures, crops and roadsides and can block access to rivers. Though not generally palatable to cattle, the plant is poisonous and known to be fatal (Queiroz, Gustavo R. et al., 2012). Infestations of sicklepod have also taken over camping and recreation areas on Cape York.

Sicklepod seeds are spread by livestock, water, machinery, vehicles and footwear. Seed reserves of 2000 seeds per square metre of soil have been recorded in dense stands and seeds can germinate at any time of the year under favourable conditions. While research suggests that the seed can remain viable for up to 10 years, there is conflicting anecdotal evidence from Cape York's weed experts around seed viability.

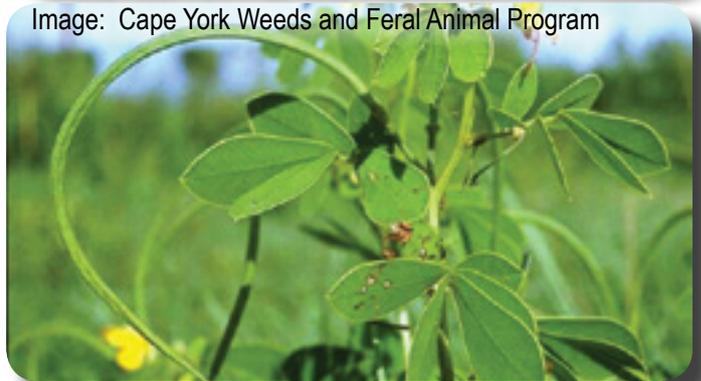
The best control for sicklepod is prevention, but control is also possible through good pasture management, mechanical control such as slashing, appropriate fire management, reforestation and by herbicide control. In some instances, sicklepod has become so widespread that entire pastures are unusable, which then requires containment and prevention of further spread. For advice on how to control the weed, please contact Biosecurity Queensland.

There is a lot we still don't know about Sicklepod on Cape York. Cape York NRM is building a distribution map of the infestations of sicklepod across the Cape. If you know of any locations, wish to find out more about the existing research, or have some insight into sicklepod, please contact **Luke Preece** on 1300 132 262.

Image: Keith Macdonald



Image: Cape York Weeds and Feral Animal Program



## Identifying Sicklepod (*Senna obtusifolia*)

*Senna obtusifolia* is a highly competitive, fast growing woody shrub which grows between 1.5-2.5 metres high, and 1 metre wide. While it is normally considered an annual (lives only for one year), slashed plants can reshoot, flower and last another year.

*S. obtusifolia* leaves are divided into three opposite pairs (4cm long, 2cm wide) with rounded ends and wedge shaped at the end. The small yellow flowers grow to 1cm across with 5 petals. The seed-pod is slender (3-5mm wide) and sickle-shaped, growing 10-15cm long.

Because of the variety of pest and native sennas, sicklepod can be difficult to identify. More information can be obtained by contacting Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry or the Queensland Herbarium.

A **Class 2** pest is one that has already spread over substantial areas of Queensland, but its impact is so serious that we need to try and control it and avoid further spread onto properties that are still free of the pest.

By law, all landholders must try to keep their land free of Class 2 pests and it is an offence to possess, sell or release these pests without a permit.

Source: The State of Queensland, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2013.

# Tough times continue for the Cape's Beef Cattle Industry

Twelve properties from the length and breadth of Cape York were represented at Cape York NRM's inaugural Beef Cattle Roundtable, held in Mareeba in April.

Over 30 people attended the meeting which aimed to bring Cape York's beef cattle producers together to develop a way forward for the industry.

Producers expressed concerns about the viability of the industry, particularly as their 'critical mass' for sustainable production was falling away fast, predominately due to government return of valuable cattle leases to Traditional Owners and for National Parks.

The need for upgrades of Cape York's infrastructure, such as the Peninsula Development Road, was seen as the key limiting factor for a productive cattle industry. Cattle prices, woody thickening, and 'road blocks' to changes of land-use were also of concern.

Speaker, Ian Braithwaite, presented the roundtable with '21st Century management systems for Northern Australia', looking at how to get the best productivity out of breeding stock, and optimal land use through appropriate placement of watering points.

Peter Spies, of Pinnacle Pocket Consulting addressed the group on a 'Move toward a regional brand and beef supply chain' and how producers in the far north could supply directly to local tourist markets.

While the outlook for the industry remains grim, producers supported a continuation of the Roundtable, so long as the group worked towards

Below: Cape York beef cattle producers and agencies at Cape York NRM's inaugural Beef Cattle Industry Roundtable.



Above: Speaker Ian Braithwaite discusses how to make the most of breeding stock.

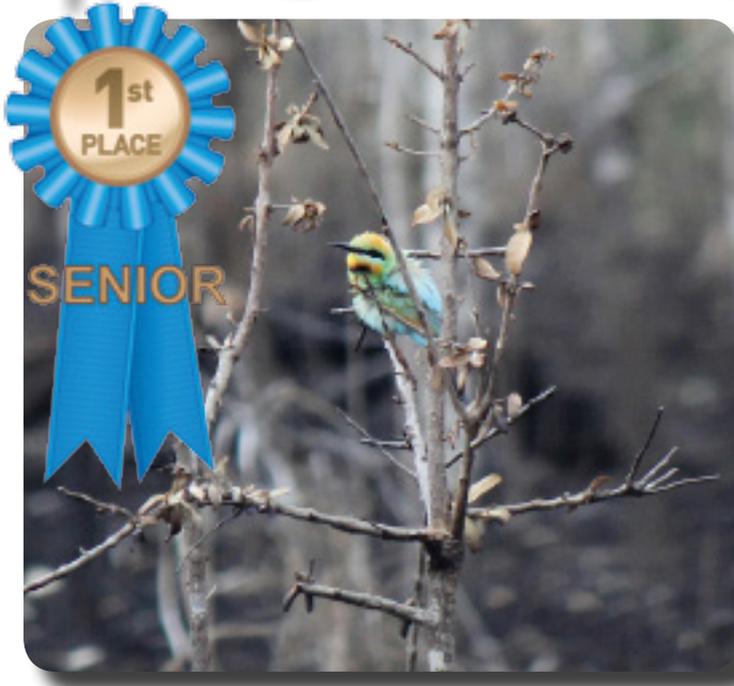
solutions. The involvement of neighbouring landholders in discussions, including National Parks and Traditional Owners, was agreed as integral to development of solutions for the industry.

Cape York NRM will be working with the industry into the future through assistance with property management planning, property trials for weed control and soils, and through representation of the concerns of the group.

The next roundtable is planned for late July - early August in Central Cape York. For more information contact Cape York NRM on 1300 132 262.



# Your Climate Photo Competition



Winners of the *Your Climate* Photo Competition were announced on 28 March in Cooktown.

## **Senior**

First Place: Greta Roberts (picture above)

Runner Up: Robyn Raymond (cover image)

## **Junior**

First Place: Sam Simmonds (above right)

Runner Up: Sienna Thomason - pictured below on left with Greta Roberts (centre) and Teila Winton (right)

**People's Choice Award:** Teila Winton



Cape York NRM and South Cape York Catchments wish to thank everyone who took part in the competition. Congratulations to the winners!

# Busy times around the Cape



**Above:** Zoey and Stan de Jersey sharing a laugh outside their Mapoon home on the Wenlock River in early May.

Photo: Christina Howley



**Above:** Sue Marsh collects water samples from the Normanby River following Cyclone Ita to assist Christina Howley's research into understanding water quality in the Laura and Normanby River catchments, and its impact on the Great Barrier Reef. Supported by Laura Rangers, South Cape York Catchments, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Marine Monitoring Program, the South Endeavour Trust, Balkanu and James Cook University, Christina was able to collect valuable samples during and after the severe tropical cyclone. **Below:** The winds and waters of Cyclone Ita left lasting impacts on the environment in south-eastern Cape York when she crossed on 11 April.



**Above:** It was all hands on deck for Cape York NRM, Landcare, Tangaroa Blue, Western Cape Turtle Threat Abatement Alliance and the Napranum Land and Sea Rangers, when they were inundated by young people at the Western Cape College Careers Day in May.

Photo: Napranum Land and Sea Rangers



**Above:** Napranum Rangers receive a Clean-up Australia certificate for their efforts on Pennefather Beach on 3 May. Over 520 kilograms of rubbish were collected over just a 500 metre length of beach (**see below**). Another Clean-up is planned for later in the year, with Western Cape Land Care Group keen to come on board to help out.

Photo: Napranum Land and Sea Rangers



# Strategic direction for the future of t

## Directors of Oyala Thumotang Land Trust met in Weipa on 6 and 7 May to plan for the future of the land trust.

The directors are intent on providing a strong future for the group, and have commenced planning to get the aspirations of the Land Trust working on the ground.

Rod Burke, chairman of Oyala Thumotang Land Trust said the plan will be a working document, not one that sits in a shelf.

“It will be in plain English and will help lead us into a time of growth and prosperity in the future” he said.

Currently, Oyala Thumotang Land Trust own over 75 854 hectares of freehold land, 456 000 hectares jointly managed with National Parks, and 32 224 hectares dedicated to Yuukingga Nature Reserve.

The Oyala Thumotang Land Trust Directors agree that they want responsibility under the joint management arrangements, to make sure there is meaningful employment for their mob, most of whom are based in Coen. They see opportunities for employment through tourism and cattle, and as rangers in the National Park.

Rod Burke said that Oyala Thumotang want to be the responsible managers of the park, and recognised as such.

Director Allan Creek agrees.

“This plan is showing that we really want to move on, we’re not sitting back and being ‘jacky-jacky – yes boss’

anymore. We’re entitled to get up and speak, especially for our country, for everyone to look to us, especially in the park. There are lots of good things to come out of this” Allan Creek said.

Cultural responsibility for joint management of the park lies with Oyala Thumotang, but the Directors say that it is overlooked in delivery of the ‘joint management’ arrangements. It is accepted in conversation, but not implemented.

“We don’t want to just tell people what we doing” said Allan. “We want to show them.”

Director Phillip Port lives in Coen and wants to be able to do the work that needs to be done when it needs to be done - at the right time, such as weed control.

“We should have local people out doing work in the park during the wet, we will get out there - walk, ride horses. I’ve been 21 years on homelands. We can see what needs to be done, but can’t do anything about it right now” he said.

Oyala Thumotang Directors see the plan as an important step for management of their homelands.

“Direction is sorely needed by us, led by us – a collection of individuals working together, a coalition of the willing” Rod Burke said.

“The Land Trust are grateful to Karrell Ross from the Department of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs for support and assistance through the Land Trust support role she plays, and now Cape



# The Oyala Thumotang Land Trust

York NRM for helping us with this planning process” Rod said.

Rod and Allan share a laugh. “In ten years time, we don’t want to be doing all this work anymore. We want to be sitting on the Archer River fishing, with the younger ones running around doing the work” said Allan. “With our direction and support” Rod finished in seriousness.

The plan is due to be completed by the Land Trust’s AGM later in the year.

*The Oyala Thumotang Land Trust formed in 22 May 2012. The group represent Ayapathu, Wik Mungkan and Kaanju. Directors of the trust include Rod Burke (Chairperson), Allan Creek, Phillip Port, Lawrence Fruit, Victor Lawrence, Peter Pratt, Douglas Ahlers and Stanley Ahlers.*

Below left: (L-R) Phillip Port, Lawrence Fruit, Rod Burke and Allan Creek

## Budget Implications of the future of Natural Resource Management Funding

*With Bob Frazer, CEO, Cape York NRM*

### **The announcement of the 2014-2015 Federal Budget shows significant changes to how money will be allocated to NRM bodies across Australia.**

While the government have indicated they will extend Cape York NRM’s Sustainable Environment funding for a further six months (until 31 December 2014), funding beyond that time remains unclear. The 2014-2015 regional delivery funding, as contracted, is secure. However for 2015-16; 16-17 and 17-18, we are facing a minimum of 20% cut to our contracted programs. This is a significant reduction to Cape York’s Sustainable Agriculture five year allocation, with a probable similar reduction for Sustainable Environment. We will be working with

the relevant Federal Government departments to understand what that means for our programs and for our delivery partners.

Our analysis of other key funding announcements so far:

- \$26 million dollar reduction to the Australian Government Reef Program (Reef Rescue 2)
- Working on Country ranger program moves from the Environment budget to the Prime Minister and Cabinet budget
- National Landcare Program (formerly Caring for our Country) budget incorporates the Green Army budget (creating a reduction in funds for regional NRM).

## Cape York Regional Plan Update

### **The regional planning committee for the Cape York Regional Plan met in Cairns on 14 May for an update on the progress of the Cape York Regional Plan.**

Over 6000 submissions to the plan have been received, which has resulted in very significant changes to the process and timeframes for the development of the Plan.

The new approach will allow for people in Cape York to decide their own economic future – whether that be in agriculture, mining or preservation of the environment.

In a statement released on 14 May, Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning Jeff Seeney, said the Cape community had very clearly said that it wants to determine the most appropriate development for the area.

“In line with that feedback we will plan to protect sensitive river and stream courses, and leave other areas available to provide economic opportunities for Cape residents, especially indigenous communities” Mr Seeney said.

Cape York NRM are a member of the Regional Planning Committee for Cape York and will continue to keep the Cape York community updated on how the plan progresses.



Three generations  
of Jacksons  
keeping the cattle  
industry alive

**Breeding cattle is an extra gene in the DNA of the Jackson family. Passed down from Bill, all four children, Tricia, Sherrill, Neville and Kevin have spent time raising cattle on Cape York. He might have 'retired' to Atherton, but the industry still burns hot through Bill's veins.**

Born in Mareeba, Bill has worked cattle across almost every inch of Cape York. He has ran the camp at Olivevale, spent three years at Starke doing the same, started up Dawnvale as a cattle station, driven cattle from Daintree to Heathlands and walked the bulldozer from Wathanin to Wolverton. He bought Wolverton Station in 1966, with two kids already in tow. Sons Kevin and Neville now manage Wolverton, with grandson Ryan a Wolverton cattleman in the making.

The Jackson family have seen some things on the Cape. What was once barely a cattle pad has now become the Peninsula Development Road (PDR), the backbone of a flailing industry. Families involved in the industry can no longer survive on cattle alone – most have diversified so they can keep doing what they love – raising cattle. For the Jackson's it's earthmoving which helps to keep them breeding cattle on the Cape.

Bill was around for the 'TB massacre' (Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign which ran for 27 years from 1970), which resulted in a turning point for the cattle industry, with a drastic decrease in stock numbers.

He fondly remembers the hey-days of the Cape country race circuit when graziers would go to Cairns to buy their horses then travel to race days

in Chillagoe, Almaden, Laura, Cooktown and Coen, before returning to Cairns for the Amateurs with their by-then-seasoned racehorses.

He has seen what he describes as the best country for cattle handed back to become national parks; he has been a taxi driver in Cooktown where he also sold fuel; and he was a Cook Shire Councillor for 13 years. He has built roads and carted timber, but his passion has always been with cattle.

Wolverton has also changed over the years. Orchid Creek was once a part of the tenure before being sold to government. It is now once again under occupational lease by Wolverton. The Archer River roadhouse, once part of Wolverton, was originally Bill's retirement plan. Four square kilometres was sectioned off for the roadhouse, which is now operated by Brad and Modena Allan and Hughy Atherton, and is a thriving Mecca for Cape York travellers.

Bill's daughter Patricia (Gordon) still lives on Cape York with husband James, successfully running Astrea Station. Sons Kevin and Neville run Wolverton with Kevin's wife Debbie and Neville's wife Emma.

In total Bill's four kids have given him 12 grandchildren and eight great grandchildren (five through Tricia's line and three from Sherrill's). That's a long line of Jacksons with cattle in their blood and Cape York in the bones, making a brighter future for the Cape York cattle industry despite it's significant challenges.



Above: Neville, Ryan and Bill Jackson - three generations of Wolverton cattlemen.



Above: Bill Jackson (right) discusses some of the history of the Cape York cattle industry with Cape York NRM's CEO, Bob Frazer.

## Western Cape Land Care Group: Big Plans, Small Steps

**A clean-up of the Lakes is the first of several key projects scheduled by The Western Cape Land Care Group following their general meeting held on Tuesday 6 May.**

Key to discussions were clean-ups of local beauty spots, including beach areas where marine debris wash ashore, and tidying major intersections of Weipa access roads, where roadside rubbish from travellers is a major concern.

Alex Dunn, president of Western Cape Land Care Groups said a renewed effort to clean up the town lakes was chosen as a key project to pursue, in partnership with Goodline.

"Lake Patricia and Lake McLeod and surrounds continue to need cleaning up despite previous efforts to remove rubbish around the foreshore and in the bush areas" Alex said. "As an area well used by Weipa locals, we are very keen to have regular clean-ups of the lakes".

Western Cape Land Care Group is considering other activities such as tree plantings, community garden schemes, education programs, and recycling and reducing waste initiatives.

There were many ideas provided by the Weipa community to the Management Committee, to

inform project planning well into the future.

"We hope to have some sort of Landcare activity every couple of months and we are working very hard to build a program that will get the Weipa community involved. The first community project will be at the Lakes, sometime next month" Alex said.

"Maintaining our local environment is important for those of us who live in the region permanently. We live in a beautiful part of Australia that attracts many tourists each year who come to experience Cape York. Taking pride in our environment through clean-ups and improvement projects allows tourists to take away a positive memory of the Western Cape" he said.

The Western Cape Land Care Group appreciates the support of Cape York Natural Resource Management, who attended the meeting, in the planning and execution of more complex projects.

Western Cape Land Care Group is a group of enthusiastic locals, committed to caring for the beautiful environment of western Cape York. Project updates are available via social media and the Western Cape Land Care Facebook group.

# Farming Carbon on the Cape

## New opportunities for landholders to

### Building our futures in uncertain times

**A ground-breaking partnership between Olkola Aboriginal Corporation, Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire Council and Natural Carbon, will see early season burning of over 13 000 square kilometres of Cape York savanna country using traditional burning practices.**

The agreement is supported by Olkola Traditional Owners and the respective traditional landholders from Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire Council. Early season burning will enable the organisations to enter into the carbon market through the commercial joint venture.



Traditional Owners sign agreements and enter the Carbon Market.  
Photo: Olkola Aboriginal Corporation

Michael Ross, Chairman of Olkola Aboriginal Corporation said the choice to establish a carbon business is a major step forward and means a great deal to the Olkola people.

“Now we have this opportunity, it is something we have to get started – when I’m too old or my children are too old, the younger generations will be managing the land. It gives us an opportunity to do things in a way that looks after country, in a way we have always talked about” he said.

The Olkola people are the Traditional Owners of approximately one million hectares of land in southern central Cape York Peninsula. Presently their land holdings include the Glen Garland Pastoral Lease and the underlying tenure of Alwal National Park through a Cape York Peninsula

Aboriginal Land (CYPAL) agreement.

Soon, five other former pastoral leases will be re-acquired by Olkola and the combined land holdings will total more than 800,000 hectares. This will make Olkola one of the largest non-government landholders in the region.

Both the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments have directly assisted Olkola through the provision of funding for the acquisition of land and with the completion of the Queensland Government’s tenure resolution program, the Olkola people look forward to returning to country permanently.

The savanna burning project presents a major step forward in creating sustainable livelihoods for remote communities. Amanda Hogbin, CEO of Olkola Aboriginal Corporation, said viable economic opportunities on remote Aboriginal lands in Cape York are limited.

“Entering the carbon market will provide an income to undertake land management and facilitate other economic opportunities to support returning to country” she said.

Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire Council CEO, Edward Natera said the Pormpuraaw Land and Sea Management Rangers conduct an annual burning program across the Shire which protects the intact, unique biodiversity and cultural landscapes of homelands, and protects outstations from wildfire.

“Our Council and our community see savanna burning for carbon income generation as a key part of building a stronger future for our peoples, and to

Elder Freddy Tyore undertaking early burns on his homeland at Pormpuraaw. Photo:Pormpuraaw Land & Sea Management



# ape:

## rough early season savanna burning

### Mapoon Carbon Project

Mapoon Aboriginal Shire Council and North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA), with the support of Old Mapoon Aboriginal Corporation (OMAC) are moving forward with the Mapoon Carbon Project.

NAILSMA are working with Mapoon to investigate opportunities for creating carbon credits through the Carbon Farming Initiative early dry season burning project, and a working group has been established to lead the project.

Councillor Pauline Smith (*pictured right*), project representative for OMAC, said that Mapoon is excited to be working with NAILSMA on the project.

“This is a new initiative for the Cape, and something for Traditional Owners and historical people in Mapoon. It will support the Rangers who do the burning, which is good for our environment, and gets others involved” she said.

NAILSMA’s Andrew Plate and consultant to NAILSMA Hilary Smith, have already conducted several workshops in the community and believe the high capacity of the Mapoon Land and Sea Rangers (MLSR) and overwhelming community support are key to the success of the project. They are now working on a feasibility report for the community.

Mapoon’s Land and Sea Coordinator Jane Blackwood said that Mapoon is looking forward to



working with their neighbours to enable appropriate fire practices across the landscape.

The community are hopeful that the economic benefits from entering the Carbon Market can help fund future work of the rangers, and provide future opportunities for employment.

“We are waiting to see what the federal budget brings, and how it will impact the project” said Ms Blackwood. “It is important that the economic imperatives of the project should not compromise good land management.”

MLSR and OMAC are now planning for this year’s early dry season burning.

For more information contact MLSR on 07 40909124.

### *Olkola-Pormpuraaw Carbon Project cont.*

build jobs to support our long term caring for our traditional lands” said Mr Natara.

Natural Carbon is the carbon farming service provider, working with Olkola Aboriginal Corporation and Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire Council for this initiative. Phillip Toyne, a director of Natural Carbon, is very excited about the project.

“Savanna burning for carbon credits works by conducting early dry season burns in planned mosaics across the country. This results in the prevention of large late season wildfires, responsible for substantial carbon emissions. The difference between emissions from these late season fires to early season burns is what can be traded in the carbon marketplace, under Federal

Government Legislation” said Mr Toyne.

“We are excited to be working closely with each community, with them providing on ground ranger burning programs, and Natural Carbon helping with the regulatory compliance, and with the sale of carbon credits” he said.

Olkola Aboriginal Corporation’s Michael Ross said preventing wildfire was just the start.

“We can then look after cultural sites, weed and feral animal control and other environmental values. If we can look after country and work with our neighbours to manage fire we are moving in the right direction” said Mr Ross.

Proudly hosted on Taepithiggi Country, Cape York Peninsula  
STEVE IRWIN WILDLIFE RESERVE

14 - 18 July

# 2014 INDIGENOUS FIRE WORKSHOP

Be quick to register now on the web address below

[www.mulong.com.au/fire](http://www.mulong.com.au/fire)

Contact: Ben Hister Ph: 4041 6633 Email: [ben@mulong.com.au](mailto:ben@mulong.com.au)

## Coming up on the Cape

[www.capeyorknrm.com.au/calendar.html](http://www.capeyorknrm.com.au/calendar.html)

### June

- 4-8** Captian Billy's Landing Beach Clean-up
- 6-8** Weipa Fishing Classic (Visit our Cape York NRM and Western Cape Land Care Group stall!)
- 6-8** Cooktown Discovery Festival
- 27** Nominations close 2014 Farmer of the Year
- 27-29** Laura Rodeo and Horse Sports

### July

- 4-5** Bramwell Cup Bush Carnival
- 14** Grazing BMP Workshop, Mossman
- 15** Grazing BMP Workshop, Atherton
- 14-18** 2014 Indigenous Fire Workshop
- 18-22** Chili Beach Clean-up
- 29-30** Cooktown and Hopevale Careers Day

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