



Cape York **Healthy Country** NEWSLETTER

Issue 36
2018

Normanby Fire
Workshop
pages 2-3

The Journey
The National Indigenous
Fire Workshop travels to
New South Wales
pages 10-11

Normanby fire workshop

Fire management training opportunities for land managers on the Cape have increased

STORY PETA-MARIE STANDLEY

As late season fires continued to burn across Cape York, many land managers undertaking best practice savanna burning fire management implemented their early season burns prior to 1 August 2018.

However, sometimes these early burns were not enough to prevent large areas of the landscape from burning in the late dry season.

In order to maintain diversity in vegetation communities, and ensure the abatement of carbon emissions, more work needs to be done to encourage land managers to work together. Improvement could be achieved by combining resources such as reducing individual expenses by sharing aerial runs.

In 2018, Cape York NRM provided a range of training options for Indigenous and non-Indigenous land managers.

Training options included:

- Aerial incendiary bombing
- Cape York specific recognised fire management competencies, such as level one fire training
- Training in Indigenous cultural burning methods which have been honed over thousands of years to maintain biodiversity and landscape health
- Training in on ground monitoring of specific fire regimes, and
- Interpreting satellite imagery as provided by the vital North Australian Fire Information Service.

Cape York NRM has been able to increase collaboration and coordination of fire management practices between land managers, and has increased

training opportunities for land managers on the Cape. This training has been made possible through investment from both the Australian Government National Landcare Programme, QFF Reef Alliance, State Natural Resource Management Program and philanthropic investment from the Nature Conservancy.

One of the projects funded through the National Landcare Programme delivered cultural and western science assessments of Country, including fire management and water quality.

In June 2018, twenty traditional owners from Western Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation, Rinyirru Land Trust, Awu Laya Aboriginal Corporation, Laura Rangers and Gambir Yidinji Cultural Heritage met on Mary Valley Station, north of Laura, over three days.

They were there to undertake Level One fire training delivered by Cape York NRM Regional Fire Management Coordinator Barry Lyon.

This training was combined with training in and sharing knowledge of cultural burning between groups, and was facilitated by Victor Steffensen from Mulong.

As part of this project, monitoring points were established and water quality data recorded as a baseline to measure change over time.

Sub-regional fire management workshops such as this allow groups to come together to share and improve skills and learnings so that they can support each other in the implementation of burns on Country.



VICTOR STEFFENSEN ILLUSTRATING A COOL FIRE | PHOTO PETA-MARIE STANDLEY



BARRY LYON CONVENING TRAINING
PHOTO VICKI WUNDERSITZ



PETA-MARIE STANDLEY
PHOTO BEN LISTER

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OFFICE CLOSURE
Cape York NRM offices in Atherton,
Cooktown and Cairns
will be closed over the Christmas period
from Mon 24 December
and reopening Wed 2 January 2019
We wish you a very Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year

PHOTO THIS PAGE | MITCHELL RIVER
PHOTOGRAPHER | ANDREW BROOKS

COVER PHOTO | NATIONAL FIRE WORKSHOP
PHOTOGRAPHER | SARAH PULLING OF BEAR HUNT PHOTOGRAPHY WWW.BEARHUNTPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

AGM round-up

All sector Directors have retained their roles with Cape York NRM

STORY JULIANA FOXLEE

Directors, members, guests and staff gathered at Hillcrest Guest House in Cooktown on the morning of Friday 26 October 2018.

The official business of the AGM was followed by a casual morning tea where everyone was able to mingle and chat prior to the screening of Kutini.

Kutini is a short, animated documentary about cassowaries on Cape York, and has been produced as part of a CSIRO, Wet Tropics Management Authority, Kalan Enterprises and Cape York NRM project.

Jason Carroll from South Cape York Catchments delivered a presentation highlighting working with school-based work experience students, focusing on the eradication of salvinia weed from an area on Mount Poverty.

Directors and staff headed to Walker Bay following the AGM to see for themselves the success of the

work done by Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc. to rid the location of pond apple.

The Cape York NRM Board meeting held the previous day in Cooktown saw the Board of Directors re-elect Emma Jackson and Chairperson and Trevor Meldrum as Vice Chair.

Cape York NRM Chairperson Emma Jackson said 2019 was going to be a big year for the organisation, seeing a whole range of new projects implemented.

Projects ranging from gully remediation, threatened species research focusing on the southern cassowary, golden shouldered parrot and coastal littoral vine forest, enhanced extension support, science events, and fire mentorships.

With an exciting time ahead, Cape York NRM looks forward to working alongside Cape York people to care for the natural environment and promote the sustainable use of Cape York's natural resources.



DIRECTORS L-R | SALLY GRAY, TREVOR MELDRUM, ERIC ROSENDALE, EMMA JACKSON, JOHN CHARLTON, PAULINE SMITH, DESMOND TAYLEY

Rangers working with kids to fence out pigs on Normanby Station

Curly and Lily Lagoons look great twelve months after exclusion fencing was put in place

STORY AND PHOTOS SOUTH CAPE YORK CATCHMENTS

Last year the Balnggarrawarra Rangers and South Cape York Catchments (SCYC) hosted students from Holy Spirit College on a wetland improvement project at Normanby Station

The Station's Curly and Lily Lagoons were both in really bad condition – they were being badly damaged by feral animals, including pigs, brumbies and feral cattle. It was decided that the lagoons should be fenced to keep the feral animals out, which would help the lagoons recover. The Rangers taught the students how to erect pig fences, and both lagoons were fenced.

Before any works started, the wetlands were monitored using the Cape York Rapid Wetland Assessment Methodology. Curly Lagoon scored 48/100 and Lily Lagoon scored 53/100 – both quite low scores.

It's been a year now since the lagoons were fenced, and they are looking great! With no feral animals in there, the wetland edges are recovering and vegetation is thriving. They have both been assessed again, and the lagoons scores have both improved considerably – Curly improved from 48 to 72/100, and Lily improved from 53 to 75/100. The team will continue to monitor the lagoons into the future, and hopefully see even greater improvements.

This project provided a great opportunity for the rangers to mentor students from the Holy Spirit College, and to pass on knowledge about caring for country. Along with the fencing, the students

also designed interpretative signs to help educate visitors about the lagoons. The students should be proud that their work has had a real impact on these two lagoons.

Big thanks to all the Holy Spirit staff and students involved, to Cape York NRM for funding this National Landcare Program project, to the Department of Environment and Science, and to the Queensland Land and Sea Ranger Program for funding the Balnggarrawarra Rangers.



THE RANGERS REALLY ENJOYED MENTORING THE STUDENTS FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT COLLEGE



INSET ABOVE | CURLY LAGOON WAS BEING BADLY DAMAGED BY FERAL PIGS DIGGING UP THE EDGES
 PHOTO ABOVE | CURLY LAGOON IS NOW RECOVERING WELL



INSET ABOVE | CAMERA TRAPS SET ON THE LAGOONS CAPTURED MANY IMAGES OF HORSES, CATTLE AND PIGS
 IN THE WETLAND
 PHOTO ABOVE | LILY LAGOON IS RECOVERING WELL, WITH THE AQUATIC PLANTS THRIVING

A photograph of a wetland landscape. In the foreground, there are tall, green grasses and reeds. In the middle ground, there are several large, mature trees with thick, light-colored bark, possibly mangroves. The trees are reflected in a body of water in the background. The sky is visible through the branches of the trees.

Battling sediment for our Great Barrier Reef

The good news is that although the reef is facing massive threats, there are people all over Queensland fighting to save it

Working to reduce sediment loss from Country

STORY JESSIE PRICE-DECLÉ, SOUTH CAPE YORK CATCHMENTS | PHOTOS PROVIDED BY SCYC

Everyone knows that our Great Barrier Reef is at risk of having the 'Great' knocked off it. Fertiliser and herbicide runoff, cyclones, sea temperature increase – she's taking a battering. Cape York has some of the best reefs in the system, and while our coastline isn't full of high-rise developments or industry, one thing that is hurting our beautiful northern reef is dirt. Sediment is moving from land, where it should be, into waterways and out into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon – where it shouldn't be.

While there has always been a natural level of sedimentation from the Cape, over the past 150 years, sediment inflow into the Great Barrier Reef has increased by 4 to 5 times.

You might ask, "Why is this a bad thing, it's just dirt?"

Well, yeah, it's not poisoning corals like herbicides do, or causing excessive algal growth like nitrogen does, but the dirt is definitely bad. Increased sediment run-off affects coral by reducing the amount of sunlight they receive, smothering coral organisms and impacting oxygen and pH levels of

the water, all of which reduces the overall health of the Reef.

South Cape York Catchments (SCYC) is dedicated to protecting the Great Barrier Reef, and has been doing this through a range of projects that reduce sediment loss from Country.

The Balnggarrawarra Rangers have been protecting their tracks from being eroded away on Melsonby Station, and are working to repair gullies on Normanby Station.

SCYC, along with Cape York Natural Resource Management and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, is also working with twenty grazing properties to protect river edges, reduce erosion, and improve property tracks. SCYC also protects wetlands, as healthy wetlands act as a filtration system for water.

The good news is that although the Great Barrier Reef is facing massive threats, there are people all over Queensland fighting to save it. Our battle up here is against sediment, and we're going to do all we can to win.



THE BALNGGARRAWARRA RANGERS ARE WORKING TO REMEDIATE GULLIES ON NORMANBY STATION
PHOTO BALNGGARRAWARRA RANGERS



HEALTHY HAPPY REEF - HEALTHY HAPPY ECOSYSTEMS

THE JOURNEY

*Cape York Traditional Owners take the
National Indigenous Fire Workshop to southern
Australia for the first time*

STORY PETA-MARIE STANDLEY



CAPE YORK, WET TROPICS & NORTHERN GULF TRADITIONAL OWNERS AT OFFICIAL WELCOME IN CANBERRA
PHOTO PROVIDED

The 2018 National Indigenous Fire Workshop took place on the New South Wales south coast in July—the first time that it's been held outside Cape York Peninsula—and Cape York Traditional Owners made sure they were there, making the long journey from their home country to Bundanon, near Nowra, in NSW.

Cape York is central to the story of the cultural burning revival across Australia. It is where two respected Elders and traditional cultural fire knowledge holders, the late Dr Musgrave and Dr George, started a traditional knowledge recording project in 1991. In collaboration with Tuguluk descendant Victor Steffensen, this partnership led to the first Indigenous Fire Workshop in 2008.

The National Indigenous Fire Workshop evolved from the Awu-alaya speaking Elders' Kuku Thaypan Fire Management research project in Cape York, and the Elders' foresight and teachings. Their work is acknowledged as leading the revival of cultural fire practice and has gone on to inspire communities all over the country, bringing people together to learn about Aboriginal fire management.

This was the tenth annual National Indigenous Fire Workshop and the first time the event has been held outside Cape York. Twenty-three Cape York and Far North Queensland Traditional Owners, supported by Cape York NRM staff, made the long journey from their home country to Bundanon.

The first Indigenous Fire Workshop was a small event at Rinyirru (then known as Lakefield) National Park in 2008 and now it is an annual Indigenous-led event of major cultural significance.

Descendants of Dr George and Dr Musgrave travelled from Cape York to Bundanon.

"I want to acknowledge the Traditional Owners who are hosting us down there and thank god for the two wise men who made it happen," Dale Musgrave said.

Mr Musgrave and the other Far North Queensland and Cape York representatives were given a traditional Welcome to Country in Canberra by local Ngunnawal Elder Uncle Wally Bell, and greeted warmly by ACT Ranger Murumbung Rangers and Indigenous Community Volunteers, and Community Development Officer Ruth Gilbert who gave significant in-kind support to the organisation of the event.

The group was treated to lunch by the Murumbung Rangers and ACT Parks and Conservation service, followed by a tour around the depot that supports operations for fire management and fire fighting for the ACT government. The Murumbung Rangers did a fantastic job of ensuring that the Cape York and Far North Queensland people were looked after for their entire time at the workshop, along with staff from Bundanon Trust who provided accommodation at the nearby and internationally award-winning Boyd Education Centre. Many friendships were made and rekindled, and strategic partnerships formed, over the week-long journey. The group then travelled by bus with the Rangers to the site at Nowra where their presence was a valued highlight of local hosting group, the Mudjingaalbaraga Firesticks Team.

"We're so proud," said Noel Webster, who started Mudjingaalbaraga Firesticks Team in the Shoalhaven a year ago.

The group is part of the Firesticks Alliance, a national network of Indigenous fire practitioners. Mr Webster said the Workshop was a wonderful opportunity to share knowledge and experiences with Indigenous fire practitioners from all over the country, and to encourage awareness of how cultural burning benefits all Australians.

"The whole community is going to benefit, not just Aboriginal people," Mr Webster said.

"We can reduce the risk of wildfire. A good fire has a lot of benefits to plants, animals and the landscape. It's a holistic goodness."

The National Indigenous Fire Workshop has its roots in Cape York and it will make its way back in 2021. It will be hosted in Victoria in 2019 and Tasmania in 2020.

Regional Cape York Indigenous Fire Workshops will continue to be hosted in Cape York, and the Firesticks Alliance contributed 10% of ticket sales from the national event back to Cape York NRM to help support the Cape York Indigenous Fire Workshop in 2019.

Attendance at the Workshop by Cape York Traditional Owners was made possible through the support and generosity of hosting partners, ticket sales from previous workshops, and the National Landcare Programme.

National Indigenous Fire Workshop 2018

Understanding the cultural responsibility of looking after Country

STORY PETA-MARIE STANDLEY

The 2018 National Indigenous Fire Workshop was held on 12 - 15 July at Bundanon in Yuin Country on the New South Wales south coast, and was attended by over 380 people. The event was convened by the Firesticks Alliance and mentored by Mulong, supported by Cape York NRM and hosted by the Mudjingaalbaraga Firesticks Team and Bundanon Trust—a property left in trust by famous Australian artist Arthur Boyd.

Indigenous fire practitioners from all over Australia shared knowledge about ‘cultural burning’— a recently revived customary method of caring for Country. Participants came from as far north as Napranum (in Cape York in Far North Queensland) to Truwana in Tasmania, and from as far west as the APY Lands in Central Australia. The last day of the Workshop, the ‘Cultural Fire Day’, was open to the public.

Workshop participants learned first-hand how to read Country, animals, trees, seasons, and to understand the cultural responsibility of looking after Country. The 2018 Workshop masterclasses were delivered through practical demonstrations which focused on:

- Monitoring techniques and indicators.
- Ethnobotany—the scientific study of the traditional knowledge and customs of a people concerning plants and their medical, religious, and other uses.
- Understanding invasive native plants.
- Traditional dancing and weaving.
- Sharing of local knowledge.
- Cultural burning of gum and sand Country.
- Reflecting and planning for rebuilding cultural fire practice.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with over 90 percent of respondents reflecting that the Workshop helped them connect to Country and community and increased their

knowledge of Indigenous fire management practices. Over 60 percent of participants said they are likely to change their fire management practices because of the Workshop, with another 30 percent are unsure of their ability to influence current practices but still very supportive of the rebuilding of cultural fire management.

During the workshop and over the fourteen days that followed, 150 hectares of surrounding Yuin Country was treated with cultural fire. That is amazing when you consider there were only four community members walking alongside the fire following the Workshop. No fire trucks or fire suppression resources were required to assist. Host Noel Webster said that walking alongside the fire was empowering, seeing light filtered through an unharmed canopy to open space to create a germination process for native ground covers, thick blankets of leaf litter no longer suppressing the Earth or dominating landscape.

A number of Aboriginal sites were unveiled as a result of the cultural burn including 16 previously unknown sites including grinding grooves, shelters, rock art, open sites, and marker trees and travel corridors exposed by opening up Country.

The National Indigenous Fire Workshop was made possible with the support of many and involved countless months of planning.

The Workshop was sponsored by the NSW Government’s Bushfire Risk Management Research Hub, Saving our Species Program, South East Local Land Services and NSW Rural Fire Service; Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations; and NSW Rural Fire Service Association. Special thanks go to University of Technology Sydney, The Importance of Campfires, Indigenous Community Volunteers Australia, the Murumbung Rangers, Mountain Cattleman’s Association, and ACT Parks and Conservation Service.



PREPARING TO SPLIT INTO GROUPS TO ATTEND VARIOUS WORKSHOPS



TRADITIONAL WEAVING WORKSHOP



INDIGENOUS FIRE MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

PHOTOS THIS ARTICLE | SARAH PULLING OF BEAR HUNT PHOTOGRAPHY WWW.BEARHUNTPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

Cassowary film premieres in Coen

A documentary about Cape York cassowaries premiered in Coen in October

STORY JULIANA FOXLEE

The film *Kutini* (a local Indigenous word for cassowary) was produced as part of cassowary research project undertaken by Kalan Enterprises, the CSIRO, the Wet Tropics Management Authority with the support of Cape York NRM and Coen Campus.

Kalan Enterprises Director Naomi Hobson said the film was designed to demonstrate the ground-breaking cassowary research work on the McIlwraith Range led by Traditional Owner land managers, the CSIRO and Kalan Enterprises.

‘The aim of the film is to raise awareness about cassowaries living in our region and help educate children and the community about the significance of cassowaries,’ Ms Hobson said.

‘We love cassowaries, they’re such a beautiful and mysterious bird. They are so important culturally too; there are some family groups that believe the cassowary formed the landscape. We are so proud that our Kalan Rangers designed this research work and joined up with CSIRO to establish an ongoing research program so we can understand as much as possible about the McIlwraith cassowary.’

The documentary was broadcast at Coen Campus. Principal Monica Hurrell said the project was an exciting opportunity to learn more about the elusive McIlwraith cassowary from rainforests east of Coen. ‘The Cassowary just so happens to be one of our house names for sports days, alongside the Emus,’ Ms Hurrell said.

‘Many of our students are culturally connected to the cassowary or have family ties to the rainforest in which the cassowary lives. Ecologically, the cassowary needs the rainforest as much as the rainforest needs the cassowary. There is an important and delicate symbiotic relationship between the two – a very important thing for our students to understand.

‘Thanks to Kalan Enterprises, the CSIRO and Cape York NRM, our students are well informed about the cassowary’s cultural and ecological significance. The film premiere and the BBQ afterwards encouraged informal discussions between students, parents and specialists in the field. Thank you to all involved - our students have appreciated the wonderful and rare opportunity to be involved in this project.’

CSIRO researchers Matt Bradford and David Westcott said the film was a great way to wrap up the Cape York Cassowaries – Traditional Owners Recording Populations and Addressing Threats to Habitat project, which allowed the cassowary to be explicitly considered in the planning of land management programs.

‘Kalan Enterprises approached CSIRO, which has extensive experience in cassowary survey in the Queensland’s Wet Tropics, following concern about current and future threats to the cassowary. Together, we walked through much of the rainforest on the McIlwraith Range during numerous surveys,’ Mr Bradford said.



‘There appears to be a healthy population of cassowaries in the area as we saw nine individuals, including three juveniles, as well as plenty of fresh droppings and footprints. The rainforest is also in good health.

‘But we cannot be complacent, as the cassowary is still of conservation concern across its range in Queensland. While weeds and habitat loss are seen as future threats, the traditional owners consider feral pigs and cattle to pose the most immediate threat to the cassowary on their land.’

Cape York NRM Operations Manager Peta-Marie Standley said Kutini would help focus attention on the importance of Cape York cassowaries.

‘Cassowaries are iconic species in the Far North’, she said.

‘While cassowaries are well known in the Wet Tropics, they also inhabit sections of Cape York. We have lots to learn about the habitat and health of the Cape York cassowary population and will be working with Traditional Owners over the next few months to gather traditional ecological knowledge about Cape York cassowaries as part a new cassowary project.’

This project is funded through the Australian Government Threatened Species Recovery Fund in partnership with Wet Tropics Management Authority, CSIRO, Kalan Enterprises, the Rainforest Trust - Australia and Cape York NRM.



Western Cape Turtle Threat Abatement Alliance

2018 in review

Securing funding is paramount to ensure the continuation of Rangers' vital work past 2020

STORY KERRI WOODCOCK

PHOTOS KERRI WOODCOCK AND PORMPURA AW LAND AND SEA RANGERS

The Western Cape Turtle Threat Abatement Alliance (WCTTAA) has had another busy year delivering outcomes for coastal ecosystems on western Cape York. The partnership of five Ranger groups from Northern Peninsula Area, Mapoon, Napranum, Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama has been working together for the protection of marine turtles since 2013.

Western Cape York provides internationally significant nesting habitat for the vulnerable flatback (*Natator depressus*), as well as the endangered olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) and hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) turtles.

Nest predation, particularly by feral pigs, remains the greatest immediate threat to nesting turtle populations on the beaches of the western Cape. To this end, WCTTAA groups deliver a full program of predator management, including both aerial and ground culling of feral pigs. In 2018 more than 3,000 feral pigs were removed from western Cape coastal ecosystems by aerial culling alone. Rangers also protect individual nests of the endangered olive turtles by covering them with aluminium cages for the duration of nest incubation. These cages play a critical role in reducing predation on marine turtle nests, particularly during those times when Rangers cannot be physically present on the beach.

Seven beaches, covering 150 kilometres of the western Cape York coast, were patrolled by WCTTAA Rangers during the peak turtle-nesting season this year.

During patrols, Rangers monitor the numbers of turtle nests, species, predation rates as well as the success of the nests for hatchlings. Of the 3,248 nests recorded by WCTTAA during 2018,

approximately 90% of these nests survived to produce hatchlings. This represents a significant improvement to the average 10% nest survival rate reported during the 1990s and early 2000s. This tangible increase in the nest survival rate serves to increase the resilience of local marine turtle populations as they face the threats of the impacts of climate change now and into the future.

Delivering a threatened species program in such remote and geographically vast locations is not without its challenges. It is labour intensive and expensive to deliver this work on beaches that are often difficult to access and tough on vehicles and equipment. Rangers are required to work long hours in often uncomfortable conditions for extended periods of the year, for benefits that won't be known until the turtles return to these beaches to nest in more than a decade's time.

The work of the WCTTAA Rangers on western Cape beaches is undoubtedly also delivering a broader suite of environmental benefits; including improvements to terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems resulting from the removal of substantial numbers of feral pigs. The removal of ghost nets and marine debris during beach patrols is also of benefit to other marine life and shorebirds. With funding from the Nest to Ocean Turtle Protection Program ending in June 2020, a key focus for WCTTAA during the year ahead is to source and secure alternative funding to ensure that Rangers can continue to deliver the significant outcomes achieved to date.

The Western Cape Turtle Threat Abatement Alliance is supported by the Nest to Ocean Turtle Protection Program, a joint initiative of the Australian and Queensland Governments.



WESLEY CONRAD INSTALLING AN ALUMINIUM CAGE USED TO PROTECT INDIVIDUAL NESTS



MANY OF THE TURTLE NESTING BEACHES BEING MONITORED ARE DIFFICULT TO ACCESS



TURTLE TRACKS BEING MONITORED ON A BEACH ON WESTERN CAPE YORK



HATCHLING TRACKS



TRISTAN BALLIE (PORMPURA AW) AND ENDANGERED OLIVE RIDLEY HATCHLINGS



HEALTH OF COASTAL WETLANDS ALSO BENEFITS FROM PIG CULLING (PORMPURA AW)



MAPOON LAND AND SEA RANGERS RECORDING AND REMOVING GHOST NETS WHILE ON TURTLE PATROL



WCTTAA RANGERS MET IN DECEMBER TO DISCUSS THE OUTCOMES FROM 2018 AND PLANS FOR 2019



Water Quality Monitoring to Save the Reef

*The International Year of the Reef 2018
is drawing to an end, but the work is far from over*

STORY SANDRA LLOYD | PHOTO KERRY TRAPNELL

When we turn on the tap, go for a swim in the creek or cook a freshly caught fish, most of us take it for granted that these are all safe actions. The reality is that behind the scenes, community groups, rangers, Traditional Owners, and scientists work tirelessly to ensure that the quality of the world's most valuable resource is as high as possible. From rivers and creeks to coastal waters, estuaries, wetlands, and paddocks, Water Quality Monitoring is a critical practice carried out to ensure that quality. In Eastern Cape York Water Quality Monitoring has a number of important roles, among them: to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

Aquatic ecosystems are valuable resources and none more so than the Reef, precious to all who recognise its scale, beauty and biodiversity. For Australia's Traditional Owners, it is an integral part of their culture and identity. The Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest coral reef ecosystem, including more than 2900 separate coral reefs, 2000 square kilometres of mangroves, 6000 square kilometres of seagrass beds and 1050 islands. There are 1625 fish species, 450 species of coral, six of the world's seven sea turtle species, and one of the world's most important dugong populations.

Over two thirds of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park lies off the coast of the Cape York Natural Resource Management area.

When nutrient, pesticide and sediment - laden runoff enters the reef through flood events it can have a major impact on coral and seagrass habitats, blocking sunlight for photosynthesis, interfering with fish gills, and making the Reef less able to withstand, or recover from, events like the coral bleaching and cyclone and storm events.

So how are we ensuring the water that flows from land to sea has a low sediment load? Much has already been achieved by Natural Resource Management bodies, Traditional Owners, landholders and community but there is more work to do. Reducing erosion, remediating gullies, improving land management practices, and controlling weeds and feral animals all play their part.

Cape York Natural Resource Management's Cape York Water Quality Improvement Plan has targets to ultimately bring the region's water bodies to a High Conservation/Ecological Value (HEV). To realistically achieve HEV requires regular monitoring to understand the effects of land-based activities on the Great Barrier Reef.

This project is supported by Cape York NRM and has been funded by the Queensland Government Reef Water Quality Program.

Reducing sediment load onto the Great Barrier Reef

Reduction in soil erosion on mitigated sites makes a substantial difference to water quality on the Reef

STORY TIM O'REILLY | PHOTO BEN LISTER

The World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef is the planet's greatest living wonder. A vibrant, resilient ecosystem, supporting thousands of jobs and contributing a billions to the Australian economy. Reducing the sediment load flowing to the Great Barrier Reef is a critical part of ensuring its sustainability.

Pastoralists and farmers are rising to the challenge with more than one million hectares of grazing land and 75,000 hectares of farmland in Reef catchments working under Best Management Practice Standards.

Other success stories include a sediment reduction project undertaken by Cape York NRM and Griffith University at southern Cape York's Springvale and Crocodile Stations. Destocking of cattle and exclusion fencing on these properties has substantially reduced the sediment flowing into the Normanby catchment.

The positive outcomes of this initiative were featured at the Cape York Natural Resource Management-hosted Reef Trust Erosion Control Forum in late May 2018.

After three years of on ground works, and water quality monitoring, there was clear evidence of a reduction in soil erosion on mitigated sites at a level which makes a substantial difference to water quality on the Reef.

After surpassing the 50% target set at project commencement for sediment runoff reduction at control sites on Crocodile Station and Normanby stations, monitoring will continue until 2022 to ensure the project's sustainability.

This project is supported by Cape York NRM and has been funded by the Queensland Government Reef Water Quality Program.



Managing pests and weeds in Cape York

Community partnerships are the key to great results

STORY VICKI WUNDERSITZ

Cape York NRM's Regional Natural Resource Management Investment Program 2013–2018 facilitated the strategic management of pests and weeds to reduce their impacts on Cape York environments and livelihoods.

This important work would not have been possible without strong community partnerships.

The Queensland Government funded project helped control targeted species and worked with 27 partners over the five - year program. Success stories included an almost total eradication of rubber vine, a reduction in the number of feral pigs digging up marine turtle nests in west Cape York and the removal of significant numbers of feral pigs from high value wetland areas and adjacent coastal environments on West Cape York.

Cape York NRM Operations Manager Peta-Marie Standley said working community partnerships were key to the program's success.

'Collaboration with local Indigenous and non-Indigenous land managers has been instrumental in pest and weed control in often remote local areas,' she said.

'Land holders know their country and are best placed to undertake localised control. This not only reduces costs it increases knowledge, skills and capacity of land managers to identify and undertake control and early intervention.

'Local partnerships really make the difference when it comes to protecting the natural values of the region — now and into the future.'



GAMBA GRASS BEFORE CONTROL, PALMER RIVER | PHOTO PROVIDED



Strong community partnerships continue to be the key to fulfilling successful project goals.

POND APPLE | PHOTO MICHAEL GODDARD

The below table illustrates the Cape York communities that have worked together to help control targeted species.

Rubber Vine (Cryptostegia grandiflora)	Wunthulpu Aboriginal Land Trust, Yarraden Station, Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc, Willstock Cattle and Astrea Station
Hymenachne (Hymenachne amplexicaulis)	Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire Council Land and Sea Rangers and Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc.
Gamba Grass (Andropogon gayanus)	Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council Apudthama Rangers (northern region) and Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc. and Gummi Junga Aboriginal Corporation (southern region)
Pond Apple (Annona glabra)	Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council Apudthama Rangers, Seymour Out Bush, Hopevale Congress Biodiversity Project Rangers, Balkanu, Hopevale Congress Aboriginal Corporation, Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc., Bromley Aboriginal Corporation, Wuthathi Aboriginal Corporation, Kuuku Ya’u Aboriginal Corporation and Northern Kaanju

Update from the Directors

Cape York NRM Board of Directors meets several times throughout the year. The Board's most recent meeting and AGM was held in Cooktown in October

So the warmer season has arrived. Although we might enjoy the increase in temperatures, it comes at a cost to the land, water and ourselves. Tough months are inevitable for those working and managing the land, however some properties have started receiving rainfall for this coming wet season.

A hot topic over the recent months has been fire and management. Most property owners and land managers have prepared well and initiated a fire management plan but still might suffer from the challenges of very high temperatures, growing winds and others' negligence towards the land.

Fires come about through accidents, intent, and sometimes through mother nature, but with some luck early rains may have extinguished unwanted fires, even hurrying along a little greenery and fresh vegetation.

The Board of Directors hopes you enjoy reading the stories in this issue and wishes all land managers well with the season ahead. It does test the land, the animals, crops and people. Following an early phone hook-up in January, your Board has met face-to-face on three more occasions with the most recent in Cooktown where our AGM was hosted. Directors retained all seats and are looking forward to another year in the NRM world.

As we are a representation Board of Directors, we all look through a very diverse lens, bringing knowledge, skills and suggestions to the table. Although key themes for funding and projects are determined by the State and Commonwealth Governments, we do have some flexibility with how those projects are delivered. Our staff are out in the field chatting to members throughout the year, coordinating the Regional Investment Strategy workshops and engaging at forums and functions to pull that background together.

Staff liaise with the Board on personal levels, and with careful thought, assemble all the information into key priorities for Cape York in order to align these delicately with Government expectations.

We hope you have a great season ahead and we respect the intensity of this time of year. Remember to check out our website to find out more about past or current projects, positions and science, on the land and water across our region.

*Merry Christmas
and Happy New year
from Cape York NRM
Directors and staff*

Board of Directors



Emma Jackson
Chairperson
Primary Industries Sector



Trevor Meldrum
Vice Chairperson
Community Sector



Currently Vacant
Indigenous Sector
Zone 1



Joseph Elu
Indigenous Sector
Zone 1



Pauline Smith
Indigenous Sector
Zone 2



Eric Rosendale
Indigenous Sector
Zone 4



Desmond Tayley
Local Government Sector



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



Sally Gray
Conservation Sector



Currently Vacant
Indigenous Sector
Zone 3



Cape York
Natural Resource Management

Office Closure

Cape York NRM offices in Atherton,
Cooktown and Cairns
will be closed over the Christmas period
from Mon 24 December
reopening Wed 2 January 2019



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