

AURUKUN WATERWAYS WETLANDS AND COASTAL DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN 2009 (Review Doc)



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Cover Photograph: Big 'Ootuk' Lake and wetlands, north of Kirke River

This draft report was produced by Wik Projects Ltd on behalf of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT). Consultations for this report were conducted by Tim O'Reilly with members of the Aurukun Waterways, Wetlands and Coastal Advisory Committee (previously Aurukun Waterways Steering Committee).

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been compiled without the support from the various members of the Aurukun community who comprise the Waterways, Wetlands and Coastal Advisory Committee. Support has also been provided by Aurukun Wetland Charters and the Aurukun Bauxite Project office. Previous land and sea coordinators based in Aurukun, as well as key individuals involved with land and sea management initiatives in Cape York have contributed their first hand knowledge of the area.

Planning work of huge importance has been carried out by various organisations in Cape York and at the regional level. Much of the supporting information provided in this draft document was compiled by various natural resource management planning initiatives funded by the Natural Heritage Trust.

ACRONYMS

AWWCAC	Aurukun Waterways, Wetlands and Coastal Advisory Committee
ASC	Aurukun Shire Council
CYMAG	Cape York Marine Advisory Group
CYWFAP	Cape York Weeds and Feral Animal Project
NAKAC	Ngan Aak Kunch Aboriginal Corproation
PCB	Prescribed Body Corporate (PCB)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wik Projects was contracted by the Department of Natural Resources and Water to complete this draft plan on behalf of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT). Based on a literature review and consultation work completed in Aurukun, project officer Tim O'Reilly was appointed to conduct this work between October 2008 and April 2009.

The two major facets of this project were to reconvene the Aurukun Waterways Steering Committee (now the **Aurukun Waterways, Wetlands and Coastal Advisory Committee**) and to produce a draft Waterways, Wetlands and Coastal Management Plan.

Smaller group meetings were held with the Advisory Committee based on areas of representation (on country where possible), followed up with group meetings in Aurukun. Section 2 deals with outcomes and initiatives of the Advisory Committee

Issues concerning the Advisory Committee were identified and discussed, while other important points for discussion were highlighted by the literature review. Some of the content and pictures included in this report were compiled during river and coastal field visits over a six month period.

This aim of this draft document is to identify the key issues effecting Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people in relation to their water resources, coastline and rivers. Recommendations provided throughout should be thought of as a work in progress. Rules, regulations and the times change quickly in Aurukun, so natural resource management planning must also evolve.

It should be remembered this report focuses on the experiences and aspirations of Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people, however the general principles of scientific collaboration that are outlined should be broadly applicable.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The intrinsic nature of water is summed up in the way Aboriginal people revere it. Both fresh and salt water environments are a true source of spiritual wealth, a source of life and of sustenance. Water is the very thing which maintained life for the people living on the land.

Maintaining healthy waterways, wetlands and coastline are of huge importance to all Australians, however within the scope area of this project it is the Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people who will have their views and aspirations represented in relations to water resources.

The relatively pristine nature of the waterways, wetlands and coastline surrounding Aurukun means this region will receive greater interest as time goes on. Conservation, land management, tourism and a strong resource base will ensure Aurukun is not left out of the picture.

Past efforts to control and monitor access and to effectively manage land and sea activities have invariably failed due to a lack of adequate, sustainable levels of funding and resources. There has been a failure by external agencies and the local council to build capacity within the community for land and sea management functions. On top of this, the community of Aurukun has its own unique characteristics which add to difficulties in planning.

To understand the importance of water resources in the area, they must be considered in a broader social and cultural context. The waters are linked to all aspects of the local Aboriginal culture – it is the habitat of their totems, source of food and sustenance and the location of dreamtime stories and sacred sites.

Human impact on the water resources of this area come predominately from mining, tourism and commercial fishing. This may certainly change into the future depending on the various economic and social influences at the time.

Land and sea management must be an amalgamation of both scientific and traditionally based systems that respect the cultural traditions of the Wik, Wik Waya Kuugu peoples (Smith 2005)



Wild Horses and egrets at Bullyard wetlands



South of Pera Head



Rainbow and sunlight hit near the Aurukun landing



Red cliffs tumble into the water near Amban



Rock formations at low tide

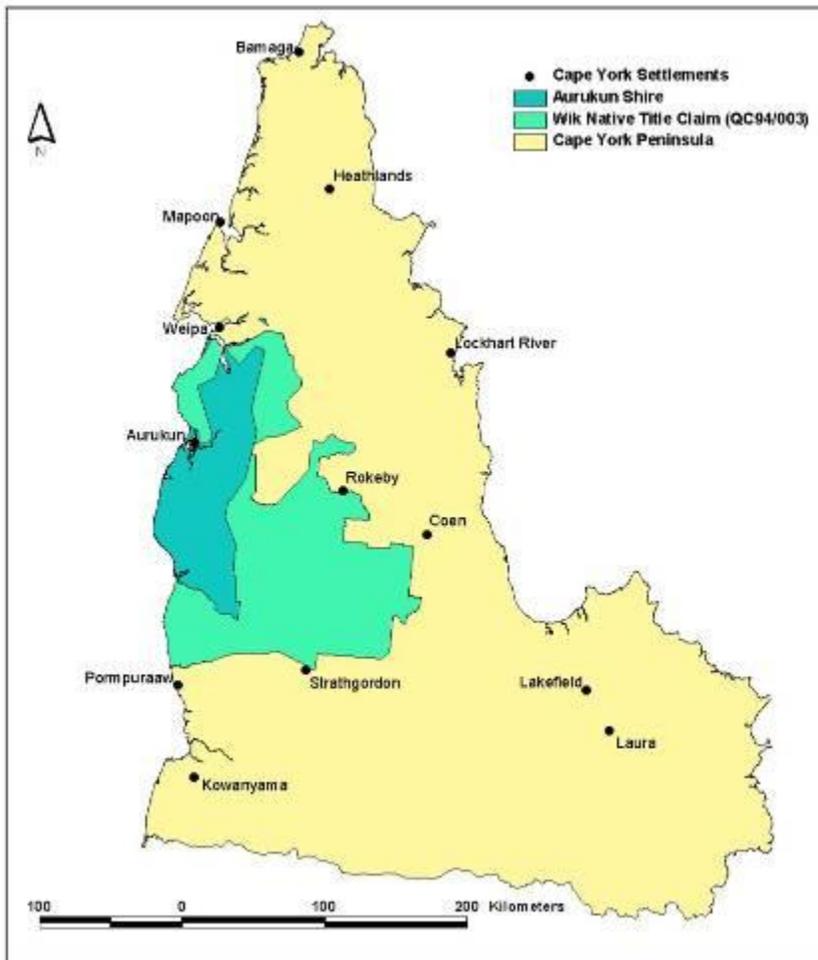
1.1 Focus Area

The territories of Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people comprise an area of around 280 000km². On the west coast of Cape York, this territory extends south from the Embley River as far as the Holroyd River and east as far as the Strathgordon outstation, to Coen and Myall Ck in the north

The Native Title process has allowed the Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people to re-gain control over the majority of their homelands, however more than half of these territories are under pastoral and or mining lease.

For this planning document to maintain relevance, it must be acknowledged that the State (rivers, creeks and waterways) and Commonwealth Governments (up to the mean low watermark) control the coastal and river systems. Clearly a cooperative approach between government and traditional owners will be required for effective management in all instances.

Figure 1: Map shows location of Aurukun Shire and Wik Native Title Claim in Cape York Peninsula.



Access to the majority of the study area is severely restricted between December and May, with the main access into Aurukun often closed during this period. A large percentage of the lowland

wetlands country is flooded for extended periods, in some cases, restricting access to people's country in the wetter coastal areas to only 2-3 months of the year.

1.2 Aurukun and its people

Aurukun people have a traditionally close relationship to the water which still binds clan groups together today. Rivers, water holes and coastline form the boundaries by which families and clans estates differentiate themselves and linkages to land and sea are still hugely significant.

The Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people are the traditional owners of the coastal and associated inland areas from Leithen Point on the Embley River down to the Holroyd River in the south (see map 1). When Aurukun mission was set up in 1904, it very slowly began to draw in people from the north and south. People still group themselves through traditional riverine groups despite the majority of people now living in the community of Aurukun.

Wik people have a long history of defending their traditional lands from the incursions of Europeans. In the seventeenth century the coastal people played a role in preventing Dutch explorers from landing at Cape Keerweer. The Cape takes its name from a Dutch word meaning to 'turn back', so named because hundreds of armed warriors engaged them in skirmishes that forced the Dutch to retreat.

The main period of European contact commenced when a Presbyterian mission was established in 1904 at Archer Bay. This mission had many visitors, mostly Wik people. With the coming of the missionaries children were confined to dormitories to isolate them from the influence of their people (ref).

However, many people remained outside the mission up until the 1950's and 60's, ensuring that the culture remains strong, even today (Smith 2005). Even in 1949 two thirds of Aurukun's population were still classed as 'nomadic' in the official census and most of these would have been from the southern end of the reserve (Sutton 1994)

The Wik people became widely known in Australia in the 1990s through their historic native title case – The Wik Claim. Following the determination of the Wik native title case¹ the land tenure has been reverted to native title held by the Wik people. The significance of this successful claim cannot be underestimated. The determination of native title under common law confirmed the Wik as the original and rightful guardians and managers of their traditional lands.

In the Wik nation there are approximately 50 clan estates clustered intensively along the narrow coastal flood plain and occupying a very large expanse in the forest and savanna woodland country of the upland (Sutton, 1978). Each of these clan estates sees the cultural and physical maintenance of the landscape, waterways and coast as being basic to their survival. (Aurukun Ref)

A clan is a social category formed on a principle of descent. This was classically, and for the most part remains, patrilineal descent. That is, a person at birth acquires a primary landed

estate, a set of clan totems, and a set of clan totemic names (differing according to gender) through her or his father (Sutton 1997).

Clans with estates on the same riverine drainage system are typically significant allies who for a long time past have closely intermarried and who identify with each other, both in times of conflict and at other times, by reference to their common river of origin (Sutton 1997).

At the present time the main and active riverine group terms are (Sutton 1997):

- 'Archer River' (subdivided into, 'Small Archer' and 'Main Archer', the latter again subdivided into 'Top Archer' and 'Bottom Archer'; 'Archer Bend'; 'Running Creek' area may be referred to broadly as 'Ku'-aw' or, further up, 'Meripah')
- 'Love River' (subdivided into 'Bottom Love' and 'Top Love'),
- 'Cape Keerweer' (lower Kirke River system), 'Kencherrang' (middle Kirke River, an outstation name), 'Oony-aw' (upper northern Kirke tributary, a site name), 'Ti Tree' (upper eastern Kirke River tributaries),
- 'Knox River',
- 'Kendall River' (subdivided into 'Top Kendall', 'Bottom Kendall' and 'South Kendall', the latter being the 'Holroyd River' of official maps),
- 'Thuuk (Snake) River' (the Hersey Creek of official maps),
- 'Christmas Creek' (the Balurga Creek of official maps), and
- 'Holroyd River' (the Christmas Creek of official maps, subdivided into 'Top Holroyd' and 'Bottom Holroyd').

The political and linguistic groups in this area are not clearly defined. The people do own, by right of clan birth and country, a recognised variety of languages. In the case of the Wik, all of these languages belong to a simple generic language family known to linguists as the Wik group (Sutton 1978). There is around twenty-two distinct language groups associated with the area, however despite healthy knowledge of other languages still existing, Wik Mungkan is the language formally adopted by Aurukun residents today.



Angus Kerindun a Sara dancer

In the Wik Nation there are various clan groups from the five major ritual complexes or alliances: Winchanam, Wanam, Apalache, Pootche and Sara. These ritual complexes involve songs, dances and creation stories that link clan groups in charge of totemic centres along mythical tracks. (Sutton, 1978). One senior Wik man explains that Winchanam is "like university where young people learn from old people" (Ralph Peinkinna, 2000).

In a planning context, it must be acknowledged that the majority of Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people now live within the township of Aurukun. Others live in Napranum, Pormpuraaw and Coen with only

small numbers of people living on outstations with any consistency. This however, does not diminish the connections people have to their country. Perhaps one of the greatest unrealised disruptions to the people living in Aurukun is this lack of visitation to homelands. The benefits for such a trend reversing are too numerous to mention. Not least of all health, education and cultural maintenance.

Numerous social challenges also face the community of Aurukun, affecting the ability of local people to engage in land and sea management activities. These include socio-economic drivers such as passive welfare, poor education levels, substance abuse and the loss of cultural identity of young people.

Despite these challenges, the people of Aurukun are resilient. Proud people who speak their native tongue and still fight hard against great adversity for the native title rights they are finally realizing. Even the casual observer will notice the land and waters remain central to the hearts and minds of people.

Knowledge transfer is a vitally important feature of effective land and sea management in a traditional sense. Traditional knowledge is in danger of being lost, so the need to formally educate young Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people in such knowledge must become a matter of urgency (Smith 2005)

1.3 Waterways, wetlands and coastal resources

Wik country covers an area of approximately 280,000 sq. km. These lands run from the coast through seasonal wetland areas and into extensive tropical savannah areas dominated by *Eucalyptus tetrodonta* (Messmate) open-forest communities. The lands, particularly the large wetland areas, have been accorded high conservation values by the Australian Heritage Commission (Abrahams et al, 1995)

Situated around 100km south of the mining town of Weipa, Aurukun is a community surrounded water. The wetlands which stretch south from the Archer River are of monumental proportions with their pristine nature and relative isolation largely hiding them from public



Aurukun landing

attention.



Archer Bay

Managing these precious water resources has emerged as a priority in recent years. Throughout Australia, too many rivers and valuable coastal wetlands to mention are suffering under the weight of dams, poor water allocation, erosion and a host of other threats.

Marine plain is located between the Archer River in the north and Kendall River in the south. This marine plain is around 100km in length and varies in width from 2km to 18km, its widest point being at Cape Keeweer. The marine plain is seasonally inundated by king tides and wet season floodwaters. At the height of the wet season, water covers the majority of this plain.

Littoral vegetation and habitat surrounding the marine plain grows predominantly on sand ridges. These ancient dunes run in a north south direction the length of the marine plain. Vegetation communities within these sand dunes vary considerably.

North of the Archer River *E. tetradonta* woodlands in some places grow to the very edge of the coastline and in other places to coastal sand dunes. South of the Archer River *E. tetradonta* woodlands grow to the eastern edge of a thin marine plain that runs from the Archer River to the Holroyd River or southern arm of the Kendall River.

Besides this marine plain, many timber country wetlands are near permanent and form important dry season refuge for aquatic and terrestrial birds as well as mammals.

Table 1: Overview of Landscape Statistics within Aurukun Shire

Landscape	Statistic
Shire	780,000 ha
<i>Eucalyptus tetradonta</i> (Darwin Stringybark) dominated forest	730,000 ha
<i>Eucalyptus clarksoniana</i> (Bloodwood) dominated forest	7870 ha
Marine plain (seasonally inundated)	9660 ha
Woodland, herbland sand dune	3900 ha
Mangrove forest	1560 ha
Wetland	510 ha
<i>Mealeuca viridiflora</i> woodland on depositional plains	7500 ha
<i>Melaleuca</i> spp. woodland on seasonally inundated plains	2890 ha
Gallery closed forest and <i>Melaleuca</i> spp	10410 ha
Closed forests of coastal dunes	260 ha
Estuarine lakes (Kirke and Love River lake systems)	3700 ha

Table 2: Limited biological survey work conducted in the area revealed

Species type	Number of species
Birds	173
Snakes	19
Frogs	18
Lizards	16
Arboreal mammals	8
Small ground dwelling mammals	9
Large ground dwelling mammals	3
Microchirpoteran bats	7
Megachiropteran bats	3
Freshwater turtles	2
Sea turtles	4
Crocodile	1
Short beaked echidna	1



Dolphins play in the waters off Waterfall (Ina Creek)

1.4 Land and Sea management, tenure and governance

Where not too far in the past, Cape York was divided into cattle stations, Aboriginal communities, tiny towns and not much else, recent changes in law and perception have dramatically changed the equation. Cattle stations have diminished in number, with many in the far north now filling tenure other than pastoral.

This has created a patchwork of possible land uses and land tenure is now a very scrambled process, with pastoral lease, mining leases, shire council, national park, Wild Rivers and most importantly the area granted as Native Title coexisting over the territory of Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people.

Aurukun as a community has been through many changes and vast social upheaval has been the norm, rather than the exception. Land and sea initiatives have been stifled and ad hoc. A situation escalated with the wavering support of the Aurukun Shire Council

Governance relating to management of the natural and cultural resources of Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people's estates has collapsed. Little or no management is undertaken across land and sea country and Aurukun people are not consulted in relation to those programs which are undertaken. There is a pressing need to establish a new, properly collaborative and consultative management arrangement between Aurukun and a multitude of external parties. For this to occur, it is critically important to have issues of governance clarified over Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu homelands..

Within the Aurukun Shire Boundaries, the Council currently fills the role of land and sea management, determining access, managing infrastructure, administering grants and funding. This is set to change dramatically when functions of land and sea management fall to the "Wik PBC" (Ngan Aak Kunch Aboriginal Corporation) as soon as is practically possible.

In the years since the conclusion of the NHT-funded Land and Sea Centre program in 2005, the ASC has failed to demonstrate a commitment to land and sea management. The Shire has failed to secure ongoing support and resourcing for land and sea management, has failed to recruit and *support* specialist land and sea management staff and neglected to involve traditional owners in decisions relating to the management of their own estates.

This lack of input from traditional owners has resulted in land degradation on a large scale, with wildfire continuing to go unmanaged, *Parkinsonia* spreading unchecked across the Kirke River and Knox River catchments, feral animals continuing to degrade Wik people's country, and fish stocks continuing to be decimated by the actions of professional fishers and illegal entrants.

Adding to this has been a total collapse of management and maintenance of essential plant and infrastructure across the Shire, including outstations, roads, vehicles, boats and barge transportation. This includes the assets and infrastructure at Wathiniin and Blue Lagoon.

A very modern, functional facility exists in the Blue Lagoon Land and Sea Management Centre, located adjacent to upstream reaches of the Archer River. Due to a range of circumstances, this facility sits dormant with zero key outstation and management functions being filled. Not even

barge transportation to ferry vehicles across the Archer River is functioning, effectively prohibiting any management and enforcement activities occurring over the vast Aurukun wetlands.

The Blue Lagoon Land and Sea Management Centre has its lease up for tender by the Shire Council at the time of writing. There have been expressions of interest with a predominately tourism-driven focus.

Aurukun Shire Council has been unresponsive to partnerships, private enterprise and the engagement of specialists to help with land and sea management activities. The failure of ASC to follow up offers of staff and operating budgets from the EPA and DNRM following the Negotiation Table held in June 2005, or to maintain and resource a Land and Sea Centre are indicative of the lack of capacity within the ASC to manage land and sea functions.

It is hoped land and sea management of the extensive Wik homelands will be more progressive and inclusive under the Ngan Aak Kunch Aboriginal Corporation.

Wik and Wik Way country north of the Archer River is located on bauxite-rich land. In 1975, despite the protests of the Wik people in the community of Aurukun, the Queensland Government passed legislation authorising mining on the Wik estate². The Shire was also placed under the direct control of the State Government in that year. In 1978 the Shire was granted a 50-year lease on the land. Although nominally under the control of an elected Aboriginal Council, the land remains under the administration of the Shire clerk and other State-appointed staff.

There are three parcels of land comprising the Aurukun Shire Council boundaries, with their extremities bordering the coastline stopping at the mean-high water mark. The State Government has authority over rivers, creeks and waterways and the Commonwealth Government controls Gulf waters up to the mean low watermark.

When the area constituting the Wik Native Title Claim is fully settled, the land will be handed over to the Prescribed Body Corporate, currently registered as the Ngan Aak Kunch Aboriginal Corporation (NAKAC) . This means the responsibility for land and sea management over Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu homelands will be transferred to a new entity. Effectively reducing such functions currently performed by the Shire Council to the areas encompassing the Aurukun township/

The Ngan Aak Kunch Aboriginal Corporation (NAKAC) holds Native Title to those areas of Wik and Wik Way peoples estates currently determined. NAKAC has the broad support of Wik Wik Way and Kuugu people to hold Native Title and deal with Native Title matters. This means the responsibility for land and sea management over Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu homelands can be transferred to a new entity. Effectively reducing such functions currently performed by the Shire Council to the areas encompassing the Aurukun township.

Utilising human resources within Aurukun, matched up to key government, scientific and philanthropic partners is the key to successful management of Aurukun's wetlands, waterways and coastline. Partnerships which help foster constructive, working outcomes between the community and external agencies.

What is becoming clear through the many disruptions of tenure resolution is that the conservation and management of the areas vast and pristine natural features is becoming ever-more important. It will continue to do so as Queensland and Australia's natural resources are utilised and areas of pristine wilderness continue to dwindle.

Land and sea management is still highly significant to the Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu peoples who continue to be reliant on the natural environment for their spiritual and physical well-being (Aurukun Land and Sea Management 2000).

After the collapse of Aurukun Community Incorporated (ACI) in 1996, the ability of local people to manage outstations and community businesses was severely diminished. During the period in which ACI operated the community store, a plane supply service and was responsible for outstation management, Aurukun people spent much more time on outstations. This coupled with the Manth Thayan Association which conducted land and sea initiatives on country, including traditional knowledge recording, biological survey work and vegetation mapping made for a very different attitude to looking after country than is seen today.

Gary Clark who was the coordinator for Manth Thayan Association, pointed out that at any one time, there was in excess of 70 people living more or less full time at Kencherang outstation with others such as Bullyard, Walngal having up to 30 people.

In 1992 the CYPLUS (Cape York Peninsula Land use Strategy) set out principles of ecological sustainability for Cape York. The proponents of this project took the view that the ownership and management of the natural resources on Cape York were the responsibility of the state. Aboriginal people, the actual owners and managers of the land, were simply viewed as 'residents' on land for which they held no responsibility or authority (Smith 2005). Put simply, this approach has led to little or no effective management over areas now controlled under native title.

The health and proper management of our land and sea and their natural resources are intrinsically linked to our social and spiritual identity.

Just ask any old person in Aurukun today and they will undoubtedly tell you about how much time people used to spend healthy, happy lives, living out on country at outstations.

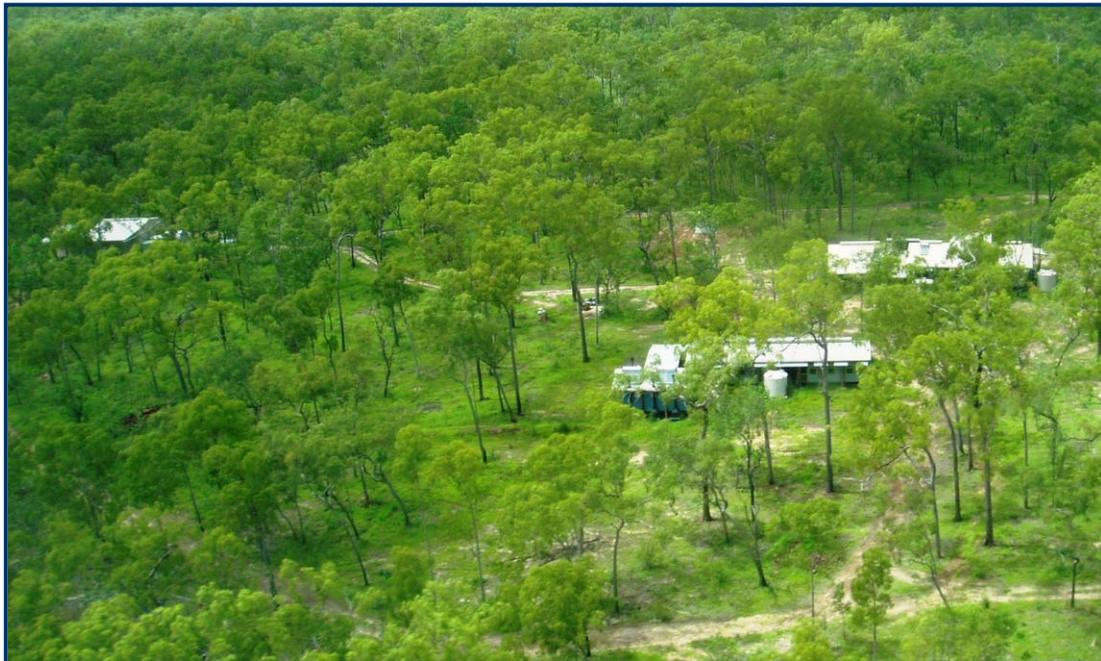
The establishment of proper management is critical to future well-being of all Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people. AWWCAC

A need for collaborative management and research has arisen due to the nature of changes resulting from European colonisation. These issues, principally exotic weeds, feral animals and commercial land use (e.g. fishing and pasture), had not previously figured in Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu land management regimes (Smith 2005). Collaborative efforts which encompass

traditional practices as well as utilising western scientific knowledge will produce the most effective management outcomes.

There has been a general decline in visitation of homelands and outstations by Aurukun people in recent years. Access to the more remote outstations has become problematical with the lack of road maintenance and inadequate transportation.

The combined roles of Outstation Coordinator and Land and Sea Coordinator have become little more than an administrative position within the local Shire Council. Under resourced and faced with transportation difficulties, this position is in need of review, based on the semi-permanent lives of Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people in Aurukun community.



Blue Lagoon Land and Sea Management Centre

Currently there are numerous government funded initiatives occurring simultaneously in Aurukun, nearly all of which are aimed at ameliorating social and health issues. These issues cannot be ignored; however addressing them at the expense of on-country natural resource management will exacerbate socio-economic difficulties within the community.

The lack of any true focus on land and sea management activities has left a gaping hole in the ability of Aurukun to manage and monitor its pristine areas of wetlands, waterway and coastline. There is a general lack of acknowledgement from within Aurukun of the potential resourcing options for land and sea management.

Alternative management options are beginning to emerge, especially with regards to rivers, wetlands and coastal areas. The recent declaration of the Archer Basin Wild River area by the Queensland Government and the forecast proposal of the Watson Basin will incorporate new management principles over a large area of Wik, Wika Way and Kuugu lands.

Government money will never be reliable, it will come and go (AWWCAC)

Key recommendations

Empower and resource the Wik Native Title body – Ngan Aak Kunch Aboriginal Corporation to coordinate management of land and sea functions, separate from Aurukun Shire Council. The NAKAC is grossly underfunded to achieve its current aims, and will require support to develop land and sea management capacity.

Look at a formal withdrawal of ASC from all land and sea management programs outside the town of Aurukun and facilitate the Queensland and Australian Governments to work directly with Wik Wik Way and Kuugu people to develop land and sea management administrative structures, funding arrangements and management programs which recognise the primary role of traditional owners in managing their own estates

All infrastructure on current Aurukun Shire lease and associated with land, sea and outstation management should also be transferred including – outstations, Wathiniin, Blue Lagoon, roads, airstrips, boats, vehicles, barges, tractors, all plant and equipment.

We do not recognise the jurisdiction of Aurukun Shire Council over the resources associated with land and sea management, tourism or other activities across our estates (AWWCAC)

- Wik Projects is a not-for-profit company operated through a board of Wik and Wik Way people. Wik Projects is uniquely placed to provide implementation of land and sea management programs on behalf of the Ngan Aak Kunch Aboriginal Corporation
- Adequate long term resourcing for locally determined programs – get away from the stop-start approaches of the past
- Appointments made to the roles of Outstation Coordinator, Land and Sea Coordinator or Ranger should only be made where a clear pathway exists for resourcing, economic development and linkages with non-government organisations.
- Issues around land tenure must be addressed, in particular the Native Title determination and the transfer of land from the Aurukun Shire Council to the
- Prescribed Body Corporate (PCB). This will have far-reaching implications for natural resource management in the area.
- Before continuing with tender process for Blue Lagoon Land and Sea Management Centre, ASC should have a full understanding of transfer of land and infrastructure to the Prescribed Body Corporate and the obligations which come with this transfer.
- Leasing out Blue Lagoon Land and Sea Management Centre should only be attempted with the support and knowledge of traditional owners. Potential lessees should be given appropriate review and the facility should at the very least retain some of its original intent; performing land and sea management functions and providing the means for traditional owners to access their country. This could still be achieved alongside tourism enterprise development and scientific monitoring.
- Build capacity for incorporated clan groups who can take on land and sea management responsibility. Possibly operating under the governing Ngan Aak Kunch Aboriginal Corporation.

- Building capacity of local residents to fulfil monitoring, management and enforcement roles should be a priority for both government and non-government organisations looking to conduct activities in this area.
- For truly successful outcomes in Aurukun, the injection of funds, rangers and coordinators must be linked to economic development and fulfilling working roles on country.
- The Aurukun Bauxite Project retains funding for land and sea management initiatives. One of the sub-components of the Sustainable Development Plan is environmental management and maintenance of cultural integrity. This funding may be utilised to progress management initiatives highlighted in this planning process and allow for the continuation of the AWWCAC

2.0 AURUKUN WATERWAYS, WETLANDS AND COASTAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The management of fresh water and marine resources is an integral part of healthy ecosystems and this understanding has brought about the Aurukun Waterways, Wetlands and Coastal Advisory Committee (AWWCAC). Perhaps the primary reason for setting up the Advisory Committee is to provide culturally appropriate representation for all traditional owner groups within the Aurukun community as they apply to marine and fresh water resources.

Struggling against inconsistent funding and poor management of our lands and waterways as well as a lack of consultation and control over their management and use.

Numerous threats face the coastal and fresh water regions surrounding Aurukun including weeds and feral animals, changing fire regimes, commercial pressures, tenure resolution, mining and legislative regulation over land. These are issues which did not exist in a traditional context and there are not clear cultural parameters for dealing with such introductions. It is here that collaboration with external bodies and western science can play a role in assisting people to manage and maintain their resources.

Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people are of the firm conviction that they, with their depth of local environmental expertise, are the best placed and best qualified people to manage their resources.

It is hoped this Advisory Committee will guide the appropriate use and management of our rivers, wetlands and coastal areas. This organization will be governed by representatives of each clan group (AWWCAC).

**Representative areas:
Aurukun Waterways
Wetlands and Coastal
Advisory Committee**

- Ward - Embley River
- Archer Bay
- Watson River
- Small Archer River
- Love River
- Archer River – top Archer
- Kirke River – top Kirke
- Knox River
- Kendell – Holroyd River



2.1 AWWCAC Terms of Reference

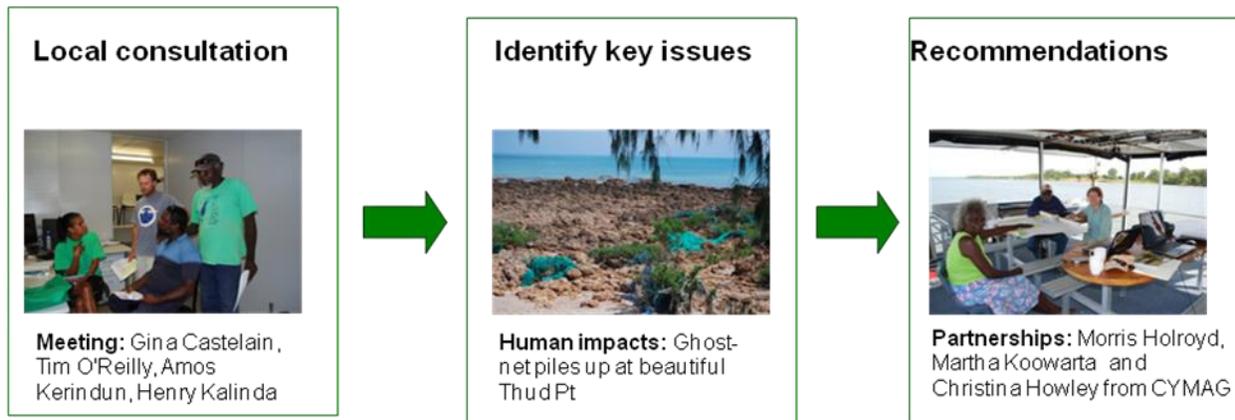
The primary reason for the instigation of the Aurukun Waterways, Wetlands and Coastal Advisory Committee is to provide culturally appropriate representation for traditional owner groups. Refer to Appendix 1 for local representatives.

Advisory Committee Roles

- Provide forum for waterways, wetlands, and coastal environment issues
- Discuss potential issues arising out of Wild Rivers Legislation. Help formulate submissions to the Minister for DERM
- Provide advice to external interests e.g. Mining companies, government and representative bodies
- Provide feedback to the wider Aurukun community regarding management
- To facilitate a strong working relationship with a variety of stakeholders
- Provide advice on employment and training opportunities related to river and coastal areas
- Support, facilitate and provide advice for developing businesses
- Channel for communicating project initiatives to wider community
- Be a decision making body

Responsibilities

- Ensure effective communication between parties with an interest in the aquatic environment (Council, Police, QDPI&F, DNRW, Aurukun Wetland Charters)
- Develop awareness with local people of the responsibilities of other agencies managing waterways, wetlands and the coastal environment
- Oversee activities and projects occurring on key representative areas
- Be the channel for all communications to and from external parties
- Guide research and new projects - e.g. assessment of marine resources, baseline studies
- Participate in monitoring and enforcement activities – boats, fisheries, water quality - pre/post-mine operations
- Ensure greater participation of local people in all projects
- Working with Aurukun Wetland Charters to facilitate management aspirations has been a focus of the steering committee.



Aurukun Waterways Wetlands and Coastal Advisory Committee Meeting April 2009

2.2 Summary of Advisory Committee feedback

The WIK CASE involved a Federal Court determination which ruled that Native Title could co-exist while the land was subject to a pastoral lease

But our struggle for the recognition of our land rights is NOT over

- We need to have our traditional rights to waterways, wetlands and coastline recognised
- Greater control over access is needed
- To participate fully in management activities and economic development

Why have land and sea functions not worked in Aurukun?

- Not based on traditional structure – people speaking for country
- Based on short-term grant funding from government
- Funding administered purely by Aurukun Shire Council
-

What are some of our Strengths and Resources?

- A rich and diverse marine base
- Internationally significant wetlands
- Pristine waterways
- Charter boat operation
- Huge eco-tourism potential
- Strong culture
- Youthful and energetic population
- Recognised native title
- Mining agreements
- Real employment opportunities
- Blue Lagoon Land and Sea
- Management Centre

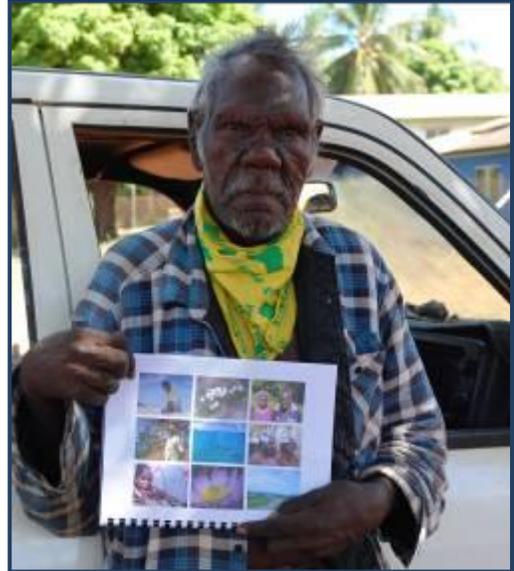
“Rangers need to be appointed and located appropriately for each traditional clan area in the Archer and Watson Basins, not just in Aurukun” **Gin Castelain, Ward – Embley River**

Issue	Hey Pt – Warbod y Pt	Archer Bay	Ward River	Watson River	Archer River & Wetlands	Love River	Kirke River & Wetland	Knox River	Kendall/ Holroyd River
Recreational Fishing	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	High	Low	Low	Medium
Commercial Fishing with nets	High	High	Medium	Low	High	High	High	Medium	High
Illegal fishing camps along rivers	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Medium	High	High	Low	Medium
Tourist access	High	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	High	Low	Low	Medium
Manage local permits, access and fishing regulations	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
Need for river and coastal patrols by local rangers	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Impacted by Wild Rivers legislation	High	Low	High	High	High	High	High	Low	Low
Ghost nets and marine debris	High	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Need for weed and feral animal eradication	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	High	High	High
Turtle and dugong populations	High	High	High	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Low
Potential impacts on water quality	High	Medium	High	Low	Medium	Low	High	Low	Medium
Buffer zones and dams for mining	High	Low	High	High	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Low
Sea Grass monitoring	High	High	High	Low	Low	High	High	Low	Low
Story place protection	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Concern for outstation maintenance	Low	High	High	Low	High	Low	High	High	High
Importance for traditional hunting and fishing	High	High	High	High	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium



Silus Wolmby points out wetland information to Christina Howley from CYMAG

“Government aren’t gonna tell us, you fella look after the rivers and wetlands. Not gonna happen mate. We have to think for ourselves and look after these places.” Silus Wolmby



Arthur Pambegan viewing AWWCAC report



Pastor Ralph Peinkinna gives feedback on AWWCAC report



Lindsay Kooarta ready to head out camping

2.3 Commercial operators and Legal Issues

Until the land is formally handed over to the Prescribed Body Corporate (NAKAC) decision making by Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu peoples in the remainder of their territories is currently restricted to the area bounded by Aurukun Shire which is 7,800 km² or 780,000 hectares in area.

The *Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Act 1978* (Qld) was the legislative instrument that provided for the creation of the Shire of Aurukun³. Under s 3(1)⁴, the Council of the Shire of Aurukun⁵ was granted a 50 year lease⁶ of the land within the Shire's current external boundaries⁷. Under the terms of the lease, the Council is trustee for the land within the Shire boundaries, excluding Crown Reserves. (Ref)

As of 9 June 2005, the Council resolved to implement Local Law No. 6 which facilitates the restriction of access to persons outside the community. At present, the Council requested that the Minister for Local Government undertake a State interest test on *Local Law No. 6*. If the Minister for Local Government is of the opinion that the local law will not fall foul of any state interests, the final step for the Council will be to formally adopt the local law.

If the Council were to lawfully enact *Local Law No. 6 (Control of Entry) 2005*, that local law would successfully control the entry of recreational fishers and other charter boat operator into the Shire's waters.

For all the rivers, bays and gulfs that form part of the Shire's external boundaries, the land included in the Shire area is limited to that of the high water mark. According to the common law, the Shire does not include the beds and banks of waters forming part of its external boundaries to the extent that they are situated lower than the high water mark. This is codified in s 21(1) of the *Water Act 2000* (Qld), which provides that the "the bed and banks of all watercourses and lakes forming all or part of the boundary of land are, and always have been, the property of the State".⁸ (Ref)



Makeshift wharf constructed without permission, Love River

Research Papers looking into issues of river closures and restrictions to access were conducted by Caroline Joo (UNSW) and Shannon Torrens (USyd) in 2004. In summary, the Aurukun community believes that it should have the first priority to control and manage its natural resources under the grounds of cultural and environmental preservation and economic development and self-sufficiency.

It is possible to present arguments that closure of rivers to commercial fishing can benefit all three sectors of the fishing industry: commercial, indigenous and recreational. The arguments in favour of river closure include those based on Indigenous self-determination and economic development; Indigenous 'rights to commerciality'; and socio-economic and environmental benefit.

Lobbying government to close rivers to commercial fishing, buy back licenses and promote an indigenous 'right to commerciality' were the preferred options outlined in these papers. This could be achieved by seeking avenues under the Fisheries Act 1994. Adding to the argument for the right to commerciality is the existence of an expanding community owned charter boat operation. The ability of this and other tourism related ventures to exist within Aurukun's waterways, wetlands and coastal areas will be directly affected by the existence of commercial fisherman and other tourism operators in the area.

At present, monitoring of both commercial and recreational fishing in the area is neither effective nor comprehensive enough. In the instance that the Aurukun community is unable to close the waters to commercial fishing, the Department of Fisheries should increase the levels of monitoring and enforcement in the area. Doing so would reduce the instances of illegal fishing, overfishing and pollution of the waterways.

Avenues under the Fisheries Act 1994 (Qld)

The Minister for Fisheries can enact a Fisheries Management Plan under the *Fisheries Act 1994* (Qld) to either

1. Close the waters to commercial fishing (operating within the Gulf Of Carpentaria Finfish Fishery)
2. Close parts of the rivers so as to make commercial fishing in the area unviable or;
3. Revoke the licences of the commercial licence holders.

Fisheries Management Plan (FMP)

The entitle the repository of the power to make a Fisheries Management Plan⁹ under which waters may be declared to be closed waters¹⁰ where the taking or possessing of fish¹¹, engaging in specified activities¹² and/or using or possessing a boat, aquaculture furniture, fishing apparatus or anything else¹³ may be regulated. It also permits the repository of the power to issue commercial fishing licenses¹⁴ or authorities¹⁵ that can regulate the permitted range of species, areas and fishing.

An argument can be made to have the rivers and their tributaries declared Wild Rivers closed to commercial fishing on numerous grounds. **HOWEVER** the Beattie government has pledged that in spite of the *Wild Rivers Act* (Qld), it “**would honor existing agreements, permits, lease**

conditions and undertakings¹⁶, meaning that existing commercial licenses to fish in designated wild rivers would remain unaffected.

Although State Government regulations ensure commercial fishing license holders can still function within rivers unless closures occur the Aurukun Shire Council currently holds the power to prevent non-community sanctioned commercial and charter operations anywhere inside the mouths of the Embley, Hey, Norman Ck, Archer, Love, Kirk, Kendall / Holroyd Rivers.

The Aurukun Waterways Wetlands and Coastal Advisory Committee would like to create a Fisheries Management Plan with the assistance of the DPI &F. It is envisioned this Management Plan would provide a framework for current and future rivers closed to commercial fishing and access controlled by the Ngan Aak Kunch Aboriginal Corporation.

The State Government may look at license buy backs for commercial licenses fishing the Archer (2), Love (1), Kirke (1) and Kendall Rivers (1) in recognition of the commercial arrangements and potential for personal hardship faced by commercial fishers across rivers affected by potential closures. This is supported by the AWWCAC

In the Northern Territory, research has shown that the catch per unit effort of the commercial barramundi sector outside the rivers that have been closed to commercial fishing (the Daly, Mary and Roper Rivers) has increased. It showed that once the gill nets were removed from the river systems, the barramundi and other species were able to build in numbers and increase the stocks of fish in other waters as the fish naturally move throughout the rivers (Joo & Torrens 2004).

If the Embley, Hey and Watson Rivers have been closed to commercial fishing for the reason of giving mine workers and local residents a viable recreational fishery into the future, then closure to rivers further south (e.g. Archer, Love and Kirke Rivers) should result from mining development encroaching on these rivers also.

Mission River, Embley River and Hey River

s 3 om 2008 SL No. 84 s 81

Watson River (designated closed in 1989)

s 4 om 2008 SL No. 84 s 81

Kirke River

s 4A ins 2003 SL No. 215 s 26

om 2008 SL No. 84 s 81

Research has indicated the importance of controlling the use of resources and access to rivers within the Aurukun Shire. The Aurukun community's "commerciality" argument means Aurukun people can regain management rights and responsibilities that can be exercised without

increasing the environmental or resources burden¹⁷. This is in accordance with the principle that the need to develop a strong, growing and diversified economy must enhance the capacity for environmental protection (Adams 2005).

The Queensland government has an official policy document entitled the *Fisheries Resource Allocation Policy* and it is suggested that a proposal can be made to the State government to have the waters closed to commercial fishing and other users of the waters. It also recognises the special needs of indigenous related economic development opportunities.

Given that alcohol restrictions apply to the Kendall River, Archer River, Watson River and the upper reaches of the Hey River¹⁸ to the extent that lie within the Shire's external boundaries, there is a strong argument that if these waters are part of the Shire for the purposes of the *Liquor Act 1992*, the waters are part of the Shire for all purposes, including the Council's right to control entry into the Shire.(Ref). This has not been tested as a means of restricting commercial operations in Shire waters.



Professional fisherman's camp at Love River after season closure (Dec 2008)



Professional fisherman's camp on the banks of the Kirk River

2.4 Wild Rivers legislation

The Queensland Government gazetted the Lockhart, Stewart and Archer Basins on Cape York under its Wild Rivers legislation on April 3, 2009.

The declared Archer Basin Wild River Area covers an area of approximately 13756km² (see Map 2). The area encompasses the catchments of the Archer River, Love River and Kirke Rivers. Advice suggests the Watson River Basin will be proposed at some stage in 2009.

The nine major tributaries identified are the Dry River (tributary of the Archer River), Geikie Creek (tributary of the Archer River), Hull Creek (tributary of Geikie Creek), Piccaninny Creek (tributary of the Archer River), Scrubby Creek (tributary of Piccaninny Creek), the Coen River (tributary of the Archer River), Tadpole Creek (tributary of the Coen River), Scrubby Creek (tributary of the Coen River) and Running Creek (tributary of the Coen River).

Special features include off-stream features that have significant hydrological connections to the wild rivers, major tributaries or nominated waterways. On-stream features that are connected to or form part of the wild rivers and major tributaries may also be designated as special features.

The special features identified in the proposed wild river area are:

- Green Swamp
- Shady Lagoon Complex
- Lake Archer
- Whistlers Lagoon
- Lower Archer Wetland Complex
- Love River Estuarine Complex
- Kirke River Estuarine Complex

The proposed wild river area has near-natural; water flow, sediment deposition and erosion processes. These processes maintain a diverse range of freshwater and estuarine habitats, supporting relatively undisturbed ecosystems along the waterways and in the proposed wild river area.

Water quality in the majority of rivers in the proposed wild river area is near natural, due to the minimal release of pollutants and the relatively unaltered sediment movement. This is supported through fish studies and the condition of the basin estuaries.

Riparian function and wildlife corridors are relatively intact in the proposed wild river area, due to free flowing rivers and continuous, dense native vegetation along streams and across the area.

This helps to preserve stable watercourse beds and banks and maintain healthy aquatic and terrestrial habitats, many of which are important refuges during the dry season and times of flood.

The proposed floodplain management area encompasses areas prone to



Stunning lagoons in the upper reaches of Watson River

flooding along the Archer River, Piccaninny Creek, Scrubby Creek and the Coen River. It extends over 160 km upstream from near the mouth of the Archer River. Abundant waterholes and lagoons occur along many of these channels which are dependent on flood events for replenishment. Extensive flooding is a feature of the Archer River system due to its relatively low relief and the periodically high rainfall which results in high flows.

Summary of important points and issues affecting Aurukun

- “Traditional Activities: A Wild River Declaration will not regulate or restrict traditional Indigenous activities such as camping, fishing, hunting or conducting traditional ceremonies and fire management practices. Similarly, the declaration will not effect gathering plant materials and plant products, ochre and timber for traditional activities”
- Native title and cultural heritage: A Wild River Declaration does not limit a person’s rights to the exercise or enjoyment of Native Title. Neither does it affect the Native Title process.
- A Wild River declaration does not affect the cultural heritage in a Wild River area, or the functioning and operation of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act.
- Outstations and other buildings including houses, cottages and cheds, can be erected in a wild river area. They will only be subject to the Wild Rivers Code if a development permit is required by the local council.
- Aquaculture not deemed to be an environmentally relevant activity within the High Preservation area will not be approved. Effectively blocking off aquaculture within 1km of all major rivers and tributaries in the Archer Basin.

Leading up to the Archer Basin declaration, traditional owners were unclear what decision making authority they might have and what level of consultation and participation they will have during and after Wild River Declarations.

We consider ourselves full custodians and owners of the land and waterways within the Archer and Watson River basins with full rights as conferred under Native Title

The AWWCAC would like to highlight the inconsistency that seems to allow existing commercial fishing operators to operate and derive economic benefit from these same areas. How can the continuation of these, short term, licence based operations be recognized and allowed but not the permanent, native title based rights of traditional owners. (AWWCAC)

Wild Rivers legislation creates a number of opportunities for Wik and Wik Way people to protect their natural and cultural heritage whilst benefiting from land management incentives. However it does not address issues around the commercial exploitation of fisheries resources.

“If these new rules which come to the people of Aurukun in black and white, means that it’s harder for us to make a living from our rivers, then these same rules must make sure commercial fisherman do the right thing by our rivers.” Richard Ornyengaia

The Wild Rivers Bill argues, “the ecological cycles of a river system replenish natural and cultural values. Reducing the health and environmental values of a river system erodes cultural values and can result in the loss of connection to country and the natural world. This in turn undermines the basis of Indigenous connection to traditional lands and the transmission of ecological and cultural knowledge through the generations.”

Aurukun Uniting Church, which welcomed the legislation but was wary of an exemption for the Aurukun Bauxite Project, has also weighed into the debate over Wild Rivers Legislation. The Elders submit to the Minister that for the Wild Rivers Legislation to be effective in protecting the pristine Archer River and Basin in the face of an unprecedented threat from mining then the mining project must come under the full power of the intent and purpose of the legislation with no exemptions or concessions (ABC News online).

Key recommendations

- In recognition of the significant cultural and environmental values of the Archer and Watson River Basins, the AWWCAC strongly recommend appointing Wild Rivers resources to Aurukun in a culturally appropriate manner.
- A Watson Basin Wild Rivers proposal should incorporate cultural heritage as well as ecological information summaries. Cultural heritage information can be supplied by Wik Projects Ltd which is registered as Cultural Heritage body. The Archer Basin proposal did not incorporate this much needed information.
- While management strategy is being formulated for Archer Basin, support proposal for Archer Basin Wild Rivers Consortium (traditional owners, Aurukun, Coen, pastoralists) and Wild Rivers Coordinator based in Cape York, not Cairns. To begin with, working between Aurukun, Coen and Lockhart River and then appointing independent coordinator to each basin.
- Any Wild Rivers resources based in Aurukun will need dual roles for effective outcomes. The same people representing Wild Rivers for their customary waterway, can also be completing river and coastal patrols, ghost net and tourism guiding roles.

“If they are calling this a wild river area, then they should do something about those pigs. Even turtles nesting all along the beach, right down to Holroyd River, getting their nests dug up by those pigs.” Joel Ngallametta

“Rangers should be out there, protecting that place” Clarence Peinkinna, Love River

- Instigate a 12 month trial, housing a Wild Rivers ranger with Aurukun Wetland Charters to fill roles outlined above.
- Traditional Owners strongly believe that Wild River Rangers need to be appointed to support each clan group area to effectively manage and monitor these areas. It is not culturally appropriate or logistically feasible for effective monitoring and control to simply base 1 or 2 rangers in Aurukun with responsibility for the whole Archer Basin
- Provide ongoing re-current funding to ensure Wild Rivers Ranger representation for all Traditional Owner clan groups in the Archer and Watson Basins. It must also be clear that this involves Love and Kirke River traditional owners.
- The advent of the community operated charter boat business (Aurukun Wetland Charters) provides an avenue for employing Wild Rivers resources and utilising the skills

and knowledge of traditional owners to effectively manage and monitor waterways. It also addresses the issue of access to country with vehicle and boat usage a feasible option.

- Wild Rivers rangers should be linked to specific waterways in line with traditional rules of custodianship. “We cannot have someone from Archer River doing ranger activities in the Love River without a Love River person there.” (Cecil Walomby)
- Having access south of the Archer River is essential to effective Wild Rivers management. Utilising Blue Lagoon Land and Sea Management Centre as a dry season base for monitoring, research and tourism may prove beneficial for the Aurukun Shire Council, tourism operators and external organisations looking for access into this remote and pristine wilderness.
- The committee would like to ensure that a process is in place for the Archer Basin declared area that provides all impacted traditional owner groups with decision making authority for matters impacting on their waterways.
- Full participation and consultation regarding decisions made under the Wild Rivers legislation is a basic requirement of the AWWCAC.
- There are typically poor levels of literacy and numeracy within the cross section of people living in Coen, Aurukun and Pormparaaw. Indigenous people are far less likely to apply for development approvals in these areas than other Australians and foreign investors. Resources should be made available to assist with development applications, water allocations and a multitude of requirements set out in Wild Rivers Legislation.
- Ensure Wild Rivers rangers are given appropriate levels of authority to report and monitor illegal fishing activity.
- “Rangers need to be appointed and located appropriately for each traditional clan area in the Archer Basin, not just in Aurukun”
(Gina Castelain: Wik Waya)



Melaleuca swamp inland of Merkunga Creek (Watson River)

High Preservation Area (special features & 1km either side of rivers and major tributaries)

Activities potentially allowed in HPA

- tourism such as fishing charters, tours, facilities such as accommodation and camping grounds
- outstations
- residential and commercial developments

- specific works such as roads, railways, power lines
- low impact exploration for mining
- vegetations clearing for necessary infrastructure
- small scale fuel storage

Activities not allowed in HPA

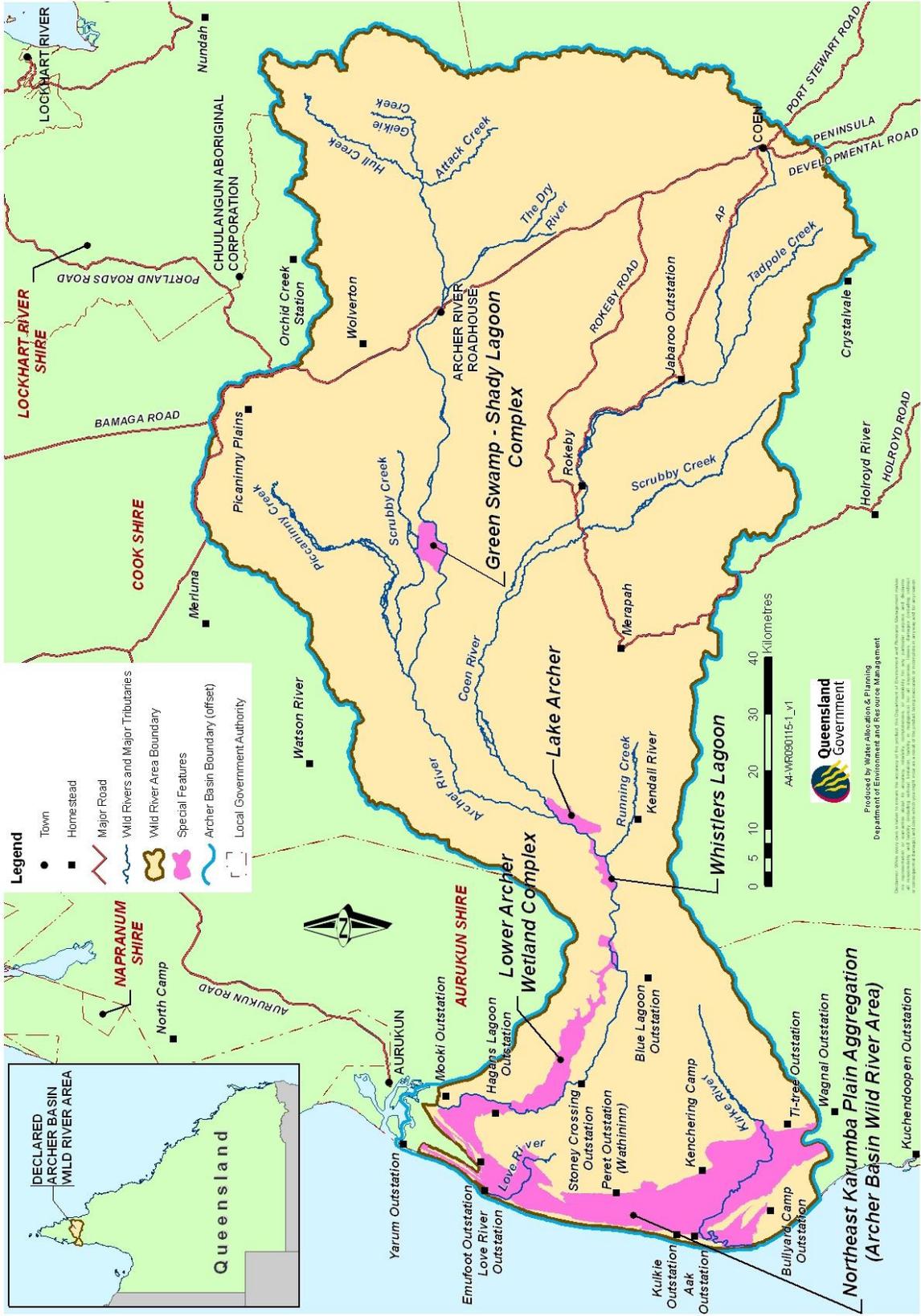
- instream dams and weirs
- stream re-alignment and de-snagging (except for safety)
- surface mining and exploration (except limited hand sampling)
- intensive agriculture
- animal husbandry and aquaculture
- native vegetation clearing (except for specified exemptions)
- instream quarry material extraction if there is no existing quarry material allocation

Preservation Area (less restricted)

“Activities in the preservation area are less likely to affect the wild river’s natural values. Applications for new activities in the preservation area will generally be accepted, but will be subject to the wild river requirements described in the relevant Act and wild river declaration. This will ensure that development can continue and that the natural values of the wild rivers are preserved.”

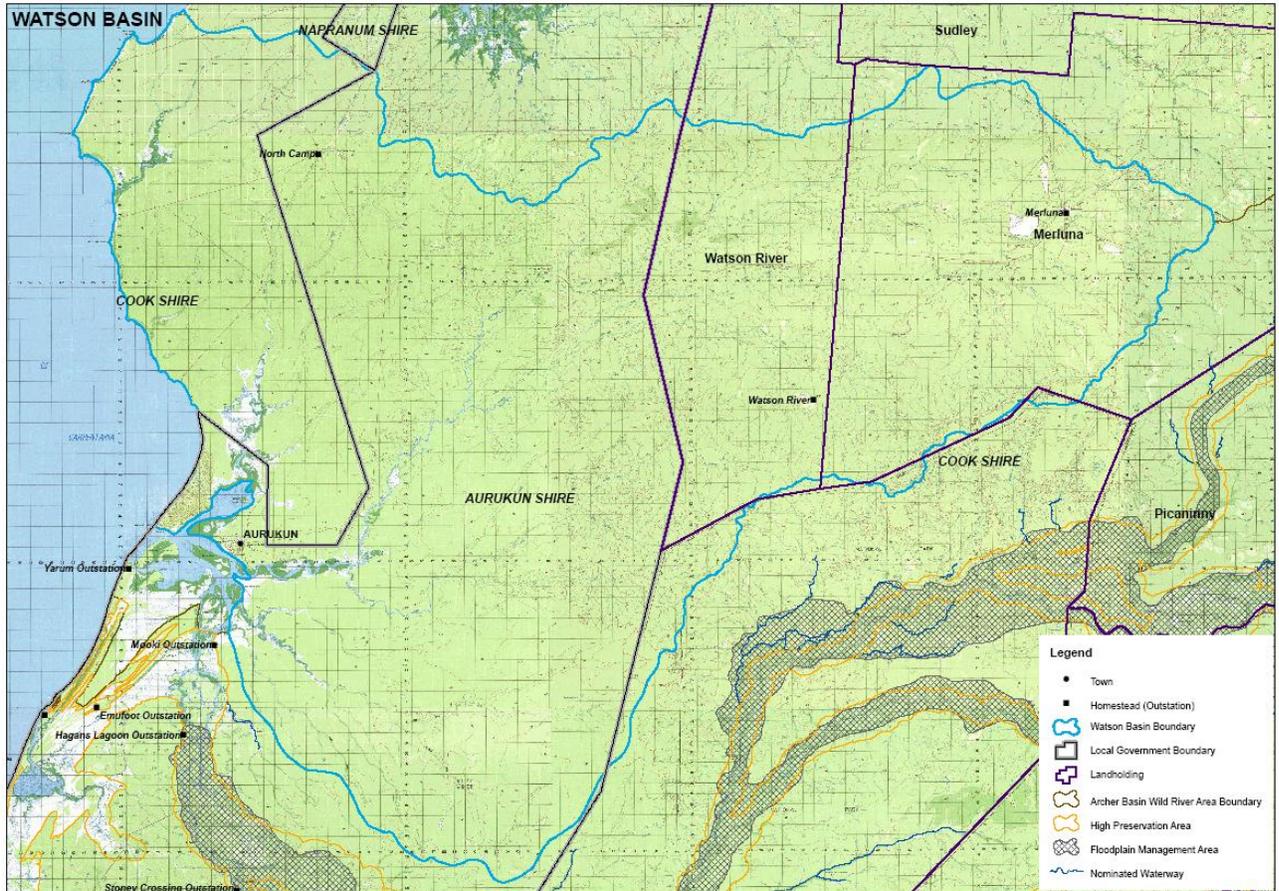
Activities potentially allowed in Preservation Area

- agriculture such as cropping
- animal husbandry e.g. feedlots
- instream dams and weirs
- aquaculture e.g. grow out ponds, fish farms
- mining and petroleum activities



The Watson Basin map shown below is believed representative of the final Watson Basin Wild River Declaration. Consultation work carried with a number of stakeholders in the Watson Basin will be necessary and the exclusion of Rio Tintot ML and Chalcoe MDL from Wild Rivers Legislation will be tested.

There are no guarantees that all waterways within a Wild River Area will form part of the High Preservation Area. Norman Creek and the Ward River are expected to be within the High Preservation Area.



3.0 KEY ISSUES

The following issues were identified during the consultation period and have been discussed individually in the following sections

- Land and Sea management status
- Conservations Values
- Cultural Heritage, sites of significance
- Weeds and feral animals
- Aquatic habitat and water quality
- Commercial fishing
- Recreational fishing, visitors and permits
- Access: legal and illegal
- Riparian and coastal vegetation
- Ghost nets, marine debris
- Buffer zones, erosion, fire management
- Mining and potential dams
- Economic development opportunities
- Traditional fishing and hunting
- River Closures and Legal Issues
- Wild Rivers legislation
- Capacity Building
- Resourcing and Development
- Monitoring, patrols, enforcement

3.1 Recognised Conservation Values

Recently recognised by the Wilderness Society and Queensland State Government in the Archer Basin Wild River legislation, the vast network of rivers and wetland areas surrounding Aurukun is of great significance. Foremost to the people of Aurukun, who sustain themselves through healthy land and water.

Threats facing the natural ecology and hydrological functions of the area are few and all can be addressed with appropriate levels of management and protection.

At the time of writing, Cape York Peninsula has been put on the short list for World Heritage Listing, with outstanding ecological and cultural values represented in areas such as the, Archer and Holroyd river basins.

The key things world heritage listing would bring:

- Recognition of cultural heritage and Indigenous people as primary land managers
- Recognition of the rights of Traditional Owners and aspirations acknowledged by the national and international community

- Real resources and support to manage country – World Heritage compels Governments to do this
- A real boost to employment and development opportunities including for eco-cultural tourism, such as Aurukun wetland charters
- Protection from destructive threats like mining (World Heritage comes with a management plan for natural and cultural values – anything that is incompatible with the management of those natural and cultural values, like mining south of Aurukun, will be protected by this)

Initiatives from the commonwealth government recently outlined in their Caring for our Country 2009-10 business plan, identified the Northern Holroyd plain aggregation as a High Conservation Value Aquatic Ecosystems (HCVAE). In the first five years, the plan identifies \$2.5 Billion dollars for natural resource management initiatives, with high priority areas standing a better chance of receiving funding.

Ramsar listing has few resources attached, but would be of benefit from a promotional viewpoint, and make the area more attractive for tourism and developing partnerships with universities and researchers (e.g. for using MV Pikkuw and Blue Lagoon as research bases). This could be added to a CFoC application, but there may be other funds available for this, I would need to look into this.



Coastal Wetland located near Ina Creek

Funding for Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) has also received greater attention through this business plan. At present there is only one IPA in Cape York and a recognised capacity for more engagement in this process has been recognised. *Through Indigenous Protected Areas, the Government supports Indigenous communities to manage their land for conservation - in line with international guidelines - so its plants, animals and cultural sites are protected for the benefit of all Australians (Caring for our Country website).*

Ethno/ ecology/ biology/ botany

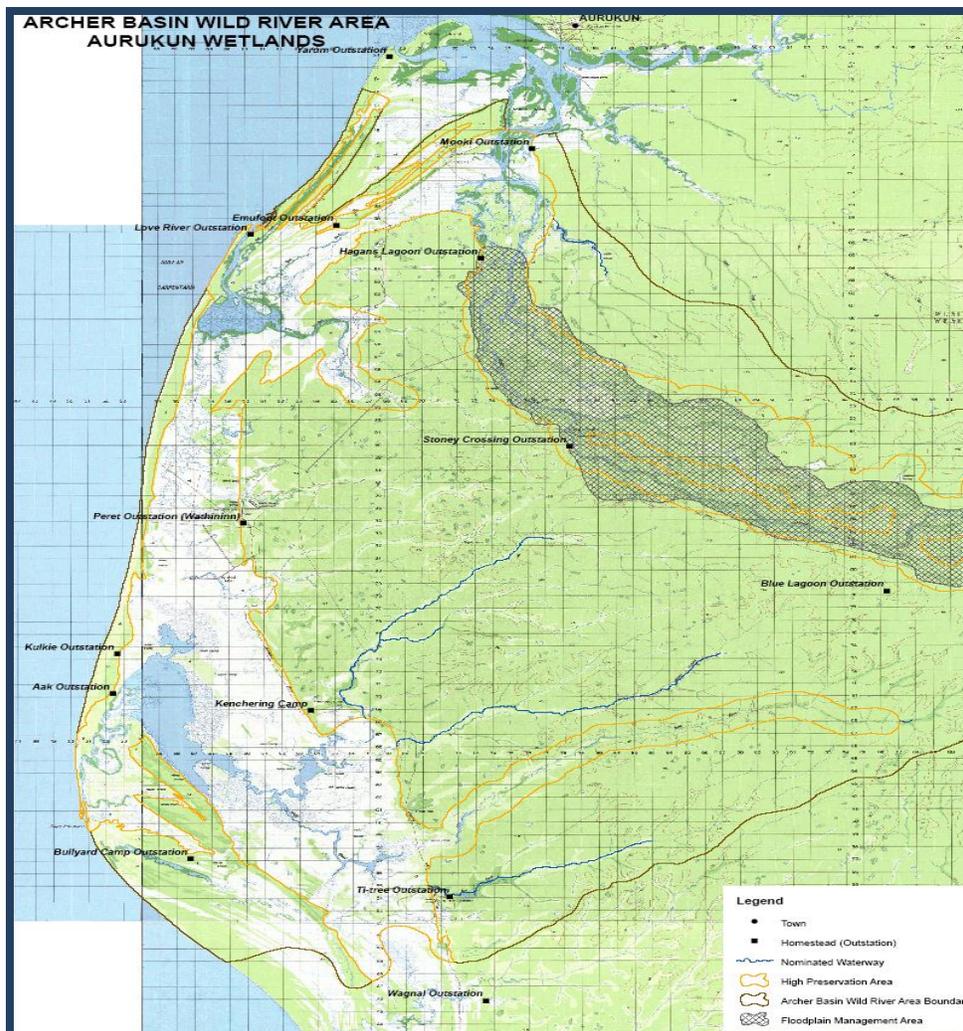
The importance of applying traditional knowledge to contemporary planning situations has been highlighted by researches the world over in recent years. Incorporating principles which tie the landscape together, highlighting links between ecosystem health, biodiversity and botanical preservation are well understood by Wik, Wik Waya and Kuugu people.



Continuous occupation of the land and generation upon generation of traditional knowledge and custom places local people in the best position to maintain ecosystem health.

Key recommendations

- Look at Archer and Holroyd River Basins for an increased level of protection which will aid native title holders with management and conservation of their resources.
- If truly representative bodies can be engaged via the Ngan Aak Kunch Aboriginal Corporation, then an IPA and the resources it would bring could be beneficial for the management of waterways, wetlands and coastal areas surrounding Aurukun. Complete funding submission to Caring for Our Country 2009-10, if support is provided by AWWCAC to explore the concept of IPAs over areas under native title.
- Build strong relationship with the Wilderness Society, State and Commonwealth Governments to ensure consultation and appropriate research goes into World Heritage Nomination process. Having a management plan in place is mandatory for world heritage listing. Following up this draft management plan with an all encompassing Wik Nation Land and Sea Management Plan should get underway as soon as practically possible.
- Ramsar listing has few resources attached, but would be of benefit from a promotional viewpoint, and make the area more attractive for tourism and developing partnerships with universities and researchers.



3.2 Existing Infrastructure in planning context

Aurukun people are very nostalgic regarding their country and the human footprints which have shaped the landscape. Of special importance are the outstations, roads, buildings, river landings, camping places and old cattle infrastructure. This infrastructure is crucial in relation to access of homelands and managing the more remote areas surrounding Aurukun.

Of particular importance are:

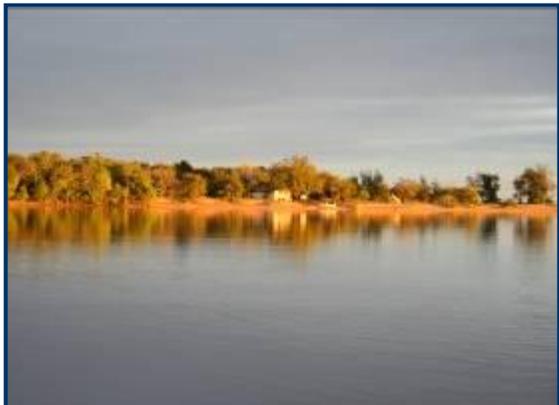
- Blue Lagoon Land and Sea Management Centre:
- Wathinhiin
- Outstations: Ti-tree, Bullyard, Walngal, Kencherang, Hagen's Lagoon, Stoney Crossing, lyke, Sth Arm, Waterfall



Bullyard Outstation



Ti Tree Outstation



South Arm camp



Walngall Outstation



Stoney Crossing outstation



Blue Lagoon Land and Sea Management Centre

A clear recommendation coming from the AWWCAC is that infrastructure relating to outstations and land management should be formally handed over from the Aurukun Shire Council to the Wik PBC (NAKAC). People effectively need the responsibility for managing this infrastructure before they can be expected to utilise it fully.

3.3 Cultural heritage and sites of significance

Shell mounds, such as those in the Weipa and Love River areas, appear to have been generally formed between 2500 and 500 BP when local conditions were conducive to the development of intertidal shell beds. The oldest radiocarbon date for a Cape York shell mound comes from the eastern Hey River where the sample was dated at 2700 BP (Sutton 1994).

Although archaeological data in the area is quite limited, a large amount of relevant information is contained in sites data recorded by anthropologists since 1970, where surface archaeological



observations are common, particularly for the coastal and pericoastal areas. These observations relate to shell middens, oven mounds, cremation grounds, burials, wells, wet season shelter depressions, and other material evidence of past occupation such as occasional stone artefacts (Sutton 1994)

Anthropological evidence indicates clearly that Cape York Peninsula, has been inhabited by Aboriginal people for thousands of years (Sutton 1994). This implies that the floodplains and prograding beach systems of the Wik area, formed in recent geological times

(Rhodes 1980) have probably never been without human inhabitants.

Cultural mapping serves as a means of recording and documenting the relatively complex social networks, spiritual beliefs and traditional customs and behaviours of the Wik Way people.

The importance of cultural heritage and traditional knowledge is now being incorporated into contemporary planning framework. The challenge exists to make this acknowledgement meaningful and to utilise the capacity of local people who maintain strong links to country.



Arthur and Alair Pambegan at Bonefish story place, Small Archer River

There is a strong focus from the federal government to increase the amount of IPAs. The 2009 Caring for our Country outlines funding which will be provided to facilitate this process.

Key recommendations

- Wik Projects Ltd has been engaged by Department of Infrastructure (State Government) as part of the Cultural Mapping Project to undertake a cultural heritage program which facilitates a cultural heritage management plan. Ongoing support and funding and will be required to complete all aspects of this cultural heritage project.
- Past anthropological research must be updated as a platform for current and future commercial opportunities. Cultural Mapping work already undertaken should be built upon to avoid any problems arising in the future.



Ralph Peinkinna at Yaanan Dugon Storey Place

- Consider nominating certain areas from the Watson River south to the Holroyd River as Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs). Ensure adequate participation from traditional owners in any applications made.

“This is our land, it owns us and we are responsible for it. We need the authority to decide how it is managed” **Joel Ngallametta**

- Further work conducted by anthropologists, Wik Media (traditional knowledge recording) and Wik Projects (cultural heritage mapping) to record the traditional practices of Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people, in terms of traditional hunting, gathering, burning, medicines, and relationship with their resources.

3.4 Weeds, feral animals and cattle

The abundance of pigs, cattle and horses are of huge concern to the wetlands south of Archer River. Erosion, sedimentation and pollution of creek banks, lagoons, shallow marshes and wetlands are severe in places.

Traditional owner groups from Kendall River, Dishyard, Aayke, Kawkie, Kencherang, Titree, Walgnall and Bullyard maintain strong links to their country. Of these outstations Titree, Walgnall and Bullyard are occupied for extended periods throughout the year.

Community discussions and pest management focus groups have shown that these traditional landowners have seen their country change over time due to weeds and feral animals. They have expressed aspirations to get their country back to a condition that supports native wildlife and plant life. Traditional owners at Titree, Walgnall and Bullyard particularly wish to rid their country of Parkinsonia and Noogoora Burr and bring a balance to feral animal populations (Wik and Kuugu Pest Management 2004).

"We're worried about the spread of weeds...especially that Parkinsonia around Bullyard and Wulngul" Jasper Kowearpta

A joint initiative between traditional owners and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines in 2004 proved successful in reducing feral animal numbers and understanding the extent of invasive weed distribution in the area. The project enhanced the knowledge and practical skills of rangers and traditional owners on their own country. On ground works involved community rangers and traditional owner groups from Walgnall, Bullyard, Kuchendoopen, Thankuniin, Aayke, Kencherang and Titree Outstations

Feral Pigs

Responsible for disturbing huge areas of valuable wetland, destroying habitat, disrupting natural wildlife populations and heavily predated turtle nests along beaches, feral pigs are a high priority for elimination.

The very health of wetlands and the rich biodiversity they maintain is under constant threat from high feral pig populations.

"Little barra, they need this grass, this me-pa to play about in. They move from place to place, new grasses grow up and get washed away, year after year. Pigs make a terrible mess of the swamps and wet areas where these little fish grow up"
- Silus Wolmby (Kirke River)

On two coastal patrols conducted in 2008 between Love River- Kirke River and Pera Head-Boyd Pt, 100% predation of recent turtle nesting sites by feral pigs was evident over a 1km stretch of beach.

Both sites had nests freshly laid during the previous night (evidenced by fresh tracks on low tide) which had been predated the following morning.

CYWFAP in conjunction with the Department of Natural Resources and Water have commenced feral pig control along the west coast of Cape York targeting areas around turtle nesting sites to reduce the impacts of feral pigs on the turtle nests. For this initiative to be successful into the future, the capacity of Wik and Wik Waya people to undertake these programs on their own country should be built upon.

“Those pigs are an introduced animal. We don’t want them out there in those wetland areas. Shooting them is the only way to keep those numbers down.” **Joel Ngallametta**



Pigs dig up a fresh batch of turtle eggs near the intended bauxite loading facility at Boyd Pt

Since the marine turtle conservation program started in June 2006 approximately 15,000 feral pigs have been destroyed in control programs along the west coast of Cape York. Results from the program show a decrease in nest predation by feral pigs and a significant increase in the amount of turtle hatchlings reaching the water (CYWAFAP online 2009)

Cooperative agreements to muster cattle and horses have failed in the past between Aurukun and nearby cattle stations. However if a binding agreement could be made with local station owners (Merapah, Kendall River and Holroyd Stations) and supported by traditional owners, strategic outcomes could be met.



Pigs forage on beach south of Archer River

Cattle were shot out in the 1980’s because of tuberculosis scare. They have proved resilient, with original stock and those drifting out from nearby stations.

Wild horses left over from cattle days through the 60s, 70s, 80s have grown in number and now represent a large feral population of animals, herding together



Feral Pigs damage wetland areas (photo courtesy of CYWFAP)

across the wide, dry season plains south of the Archer River.

Many of the older people in Aurukun feel nostalgic towards the horses and cattle, suggesting that these animals were part of their recent history and not troublesome animals for them in any way. Wild cattle and pigs are also used as a source of protein by the people of Aurukun.



Wild horse damage to soft ground (CYWFAP)



Wild horses on the plains south of the Love R (CYWFAP)

Cane toads cannot be overemphasised in their ability to do harm to waterways, wetlands and wildlife. Populations are epidemic in some areas and any control methods possible would be welcomed. However this is a problem endemic in much of north eastern Australia

Key recommendations

- Holding populations of feral animals and invasive weeds at bay in the Wik homelands is of vital importance to people and country. Improving health of country and wetland areas in turn brings health and vitality to the people. Nothing is worse for these wetlands areas kept pristine by Aboriginal people through countless generations, then having them overrun and altered by pests, many of them imported in the name of economics.
- Comprehensive aerial and on-ground surveys of weed and feral animal distribution. Focus on introduced and invasive plants, weeds, pigs, horses, cattle, cats and cane toads in initial surveys.
- Inclusion of traditional owners at all levels of weed and feral animal eradication will provide training, employment and enhanced knowledge. Traditional owners combined with Cape York weeds and Feral Animal Program (CYWFAP).
- Information on cattle, horse and pig distributions will provide information for potential meat trade ventures. Identify potential for commercial opportunities in meat trade if in existence.
- If cattle and horse culls can be avoided through sale or distribution, this should be looked at before aerial shoots.
- Coordinate mixture of aerial cull and baiting programs for feral pigs, focusing on eradication around key turtle nesting and wetland areas in conjunction with

- CYWFAP
- Cape York Sustainable Futures have shown a willingness to conduct on country baiting projects in conjunction with traditional owners.
- Horses and cattle should also be culled as directed by traditional owners. Further reducing feral animal numbers concentrating in significant wetland areas south of Aurukun is a problem which must be addressed by many concerned parties.
- Invasive weeds and feral animals are notoriously difficult to get rid of. Culturally sensitive methods for extraction of weeds and feral animals from wetland areas must be met with rational scientific application. For example, Parkinsonia presents a huge environmental disaster for the wetland area around Kirke and Knox River. Practical experience has demonstrated that for effective clearing, the affected areas need to be bulldozed, the ground reaped, weeds burned and then spray applied for years afterwards. Halfway measures will not rid the land of these infectious problems.

3.5 Aquatic habitat and water quality

Aquatic habitat, marine and fresh water resources are of great significance to Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people. Preventing the degradation of these resources is a key reason in the establishment of the Waterways Wetlands and Coastal Advisory Committee.

Reducing the health and environmental values of these river systems erodes cultural values and can result in the loss of connection to country and resources. This in turn undermines the basis of Indigenous connection to traditional lands and the transmission of ecological and cultural knowledge through the generations (Adams 2005).

At the time of writing, the primary risks for water quality and aquatic habitat degradation come from mining, earthworks, dumping sites, waste treatment, commercial fishing and marine debris. Some of these impacts are covered under different sections within the plan.

Commercial fishing in the rivers has been identified in conjunction with the disposal of unwanted dead fish and marine organisms into the waters as well as accumulating net in the rivers and on the banks. Commercial boats dump their rubbish and waste in the same fashion. In addition, the motors of their fishing vessels are two-stroke outboards, continually discharging oil into the water.

Members of the AWWCAC have shown concern for the high amount of nutrient run-off from the Aurukun sewage treatment plant and nearby areas. An old dumping site also has runoff issues into a wet season swamp situated below the treatment plant.



Aurukun Waste Treatment Plant



Swamp below waste treatment plant

Key recommendations

- Utilise specialist resources to establish water quality, aquatic biota and wetland health benchmarks by which changes in the future can be monitored.
- Look for partnerships with research institutes: TRaCK (Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge), Australian Rivers Institute, Griffith University, James Cook University and Cape York Marine Advisory Group to update scientific knowledge in relation to riverine areas within the study area. Information on natural flow regimes, data treatments, spacial variation, group classification systems, aquatic flora and fauna are lacking for most of the fresh water systems.



Sam Kerindan and Christina Howley taking water quality samples in upper reaches of Ward River

- This is of particular importance in areas to be affected by mining and potential dam construction. Norman Creek and Ward River plus their associated swamps and wetland areas should have sampling work carried out as soon as possible.
- Earth works related to mining around the upper Ward River and Norman Creek areas should be thoroughly investigated for ensure no acid-sulphate soil disruption.
- Any run-off from sewage treatment plan or old dumping site should be tested and an alternative sought if testing highlights risks to water quality. Water quality samples taken from the adjacent swamp.

3.6 Commercial fishing

The Advisory Committee is concerned by professional fishing camps set up on the Love, Kirke and Kendell Rivers. They are often substantial developments including cleared vegetation, permanent and semi-permanent dwellings and jetties. Fishermen using these camps have been noticed to leave rubbish, fuel drums, dead fish, sharks and crocodiles and drive 4-wheelers on the beach.

“For too long now we have been telling these fisherman not to make a mess in the Love River. Too much wasted fish, dead sharks, nets left on the beach. Now they build a jetty and leave fuel drums piled up.

- Cecil Walmbang (Love River)

“We want to make a rule that these professional barramundi fisherman stay on their boats and don’t come onto the land. Onto our land.”

- Silus Wolmby (Kirke River)

“Commercial fishermen are setting up illegal ‘base camps’ along the Kirk River, clearing vegetation, building jetties, leaving rubbish. We need to stop this happening and prevent illegal activities in these places.”

- Silus Wolmby (Kirke River)

“I told them blokes, that’s not bloody right. You gotta keep this place clean (of the fisherman who constructed a jetty at Love River). There’s all this rubbish and drums laying around. Some been washed all over the river.”

- Ron Yunkaporta Love-Kirke River



Barramundi fisherman from Kendell River check nets to the north at Knox River mouth



Piles of dead fish, shark and crocodile found at Love River



Professional Barramundi fishing boats at the Sth Arm of Archer River



Winston Mapoondin at Love River barra-fisherman's camp

Each commercial fishing operation has its own transport infrastructure. Three have erected illegal wharves and jetties. All commercial fishing operations based in the river systems of Wik traditional owners focus on catching the more lucrative species, such as barramundi, using gill nets. However, in the process of using gill nets, the operations catch and dump large quantities of commercially unviable species of fish.

The Aurukun community is not at all dependent on commercial fishing. The commercial licence holders enter the region during the fishing season (between February and October), set up to 6 nets per license across stretches of river and coastline, then send fish to Weipa and on to Cairns where it is sold. The interaction of the commercial fishers with the Aurukun community is minimal and none of the benefits of the industry return to the community where the natural resources are sourced.

Furthermore, protected species, such as dugong, saw sharks and crocodiles have been sighted in the nets. Once caught in the nets, the animals can only be released by killing them or allowing them to struggle and drown. Wasted and discarded fish plus the high concentrations of net in traditional fishing areas are all frowned upon by members of the community (AWWCAC).

Under s 140A of the *Fisheries Act 1994*, an inspector has the function of conducting investigations and inspections to monitor and enforce compliance with the *Fisheries Act 1994* (Qld).

At present, monitoring of both commercial and recreational fishing in the area is neither effective nor comprehensive enough. The Department of Fisheries may increase the levels of monitoring and enforcement in the area. Doing so in partnership with the AWWCAC would reduce the instances of illegal fishing, overfishing and pollution of the waterways (Joo and Torrens 2004).

Key recommendations

- Fisherman should be restricted to their vessels and prevented from constructing illegal permanent and semi-permanent camps along the Love, Kirke and Kendall Rivers.

"Fisherman should not even touch the land unless they have a permit. They should stay on their boats at all times"

*"Nets are not checked often enough and fisherman from Kendall River put nets at Knox River mouth... too far away to check" **Winston Mappoondin, Knox River**"*

*"Fisherman should stick just to the boats and not come onto the land. Love, Kirke, Kendall River all have camps. We don't want these fisherman staying on the land." **Morris Holrovd, Holrovd River***

- Ensure Wild Rivers rangers are given appropriate levels of authority to report and monitor illegal fishing activity.
- Enforcement of fisheries regulations should include analysis of net setting away from commercial vessels.

- A clean-up of the Love River is required following a major storm surge during the 2008-09 wet season. Forty-four gallon



- drums left behind by commercial fisherman who constructed a makeshift camp and jetty are now scattered over a 1km stretch of river bank on the eastern side of the river.
- Analysis of income generation from commercial fishing activities compared with forecast revenue generated from current and forecast tourism operations. If community-owned charter boat operations continue to expand between Embley River and the Holroyd River in the south, will social and economic opportunities outweigh revenue earned by commercial fisherman?

3.7 Recreational fishing, visitor influx and permits

Visitation to Wik lands is expected to increase markedly in coming years. A range of different reasons are attributable to this including mining, tourism, fishing and environmental management. The Aurukun Bauxite Project (if it proceeds) and the development on the south side of the Rio Tinto mining lease will see recognisable population influx in the immediate area. Camping, fishing and hunting activities can be expected to increase at the same rate as population increase in the area

“More people used to stay up at the beaches to the north. Now many people come down to Love River from Weipa for fishing.” **Cecil Walmbang, Love River**

“Lots of people come from Weipa for camping and fishing. Camping permits are collected by the council – but this is over our country and it is in a mining lease.” Henry Kalinda, Amban

Due to competition between fishing charter operators and recreational fisherman around Weipa, systems like the Archer River and Love River are receiving an increasing amount of fishing pressure as time goes on. In the south, the Holroyd and Kendall Rivers are accessed by recreational fisherman driving in from Pormpuraaw and Cairns. This trend can be expected to continue in coming years. It will be important to have management systems in place to avoid similar issues which have arisen in Weipa over recent years.

Careful management of the beaches, fauna and flora of the coastline, rivers and waterways is critical. Expanding the current permit system to include fishing, hunting and camping activities on Wik land may be required in the near future.

The permit system currently in place requires visitors to contact council prior to departure and organise payment before entering Aurukun Shire land. Most do not go through this process. The AWWCAC have estimated less than fifty percent of campers actually get a permit or permission. Unauthorised access into Wik and Wik Way and Kuugu homelands is an issue of extreme importance to the people of Aurukun. They feel responsible for the lands and for people visiting. If something bad happens, it is the traditional owners who are responsible. Story places and poison country have the ability to make uninitiated people sick.

Key recommendations

- AWWCAC to hold a forum deciding on the many issue relating to current and future permit system. A decision on which is the most appropriate and most likely body to administer and control permit system is required.

Questions addressed by forum:

- Where are visitors allowed
- Access through Chalco and Rio Tinto mining leases
- Permission to hunt
- Local fishing regulations
- Restricted areas and notification of river closures
- Permit allocation and amount
- Notification of relevant traditional owners

"If people want to camp, they have to get permission and a permit. That payment should go into a trust fund through the PCB (Prescribed Body Corporate). That way on both the north and south side, money will go back to help outstations and people getting back onto country" **Janine Chevathun, Holroyd River**

- Collaborate on a pamphlet or booklet which gives visitors information, maps, local fishing and camping regulations and permit information over Wik homelands.
- Under the current permit system, it has been suggested the right person from the Aurukun Waterways Wetlands and Coastal Advisory Committee should be notified when campers receive a permit and identify where they are staying.

- Create an MOU with Rio Tinto to have restrictions placed on recreational fishing within their lease over the water. The community may be able to take advantage of this agreement by creating lodge and safari camp infrastructure along the coast in coming years.

3.8 Controlling Access: legal and illegal

All people without clan affiliations to this person's country must first ask for permission to visit the country or to hunt or gather food resources. Even members of the same clan will usually ask the senior owner for formal permission to carry out activities on that country. The access by others to one's own country is policed in an extremely strict manner. The importance of asking for permission has been documented extensively by Sutton (1978). On Wik country one simply cannot go anywhere one pleases. Totemic centres can be very dangerous places, both to those familiar with them and to outsiders or strangers.

If traditional owners are not allowed to build infrastructure in High Preservation Areas without prior approval, then commercial fishing camps must not be allowed in these locations without written consent or proper legal process – AWWCAC

There are no formal lease arrangements or permits for commercial fishing 'camps' which exist on the Kirke and Kendell Rivers and another abandoned in the Love River. Fishermen operating on both the Love and Kirke Rivers have been told their camps were not allowed to remain and these requests have gone ignored.

Any person (such as commercial and/or recreational fishers) not authorized to enter the Shire under s 19, 20 and 21(a) and/or prohibited from entering the Shire under s 21(1)(b), and who does enter the Shire, may be summarily removed from the Shire.

Access to beaches by 4WDs and 4-wheeler bikes is a huge concern to traditional owners. Besides the more obvious signs of beach erosion, dune instability and litter, there is an obvious need to prevent these vehicles disturbing turtle nesting sites. Vehicle tracks were evident on many of the beaches within Rio Tinto's lease, concerning Wik Way traditional owners that these areas are not being properly restricted.

Concerns have been raised over the influx of Weipa residents accessing beaches and rivers south of Albatross bay with 4-wheelers and boats. Controlling access through southern cattle stations has been mentioned repeatedly by members of the AWWCAC.

"Too many tourists are coming to the Love River without permits or permission from the traditional owners. They leave rubbish, camp wherever and take too much fish. We want to use these Wild Rivers rules to stop this from happening. At the moment, nobody is stopping these people." Cecil Wambang, Love River

"Any tourists go up there (Archer) without permission, or permit, we should chase them out." Jim Koongottema, Archer River

"People have been going camping up the Archer River. This is no good without permission. We need to fix up this permit system properly." Beatrice Koongottema, Archer River

Key recommendations

- Aurukun Shire Council has recently placed signs at the Love River (see Fig...) stating the council's intention to prosecute if camps are set up without a permit. Signage should also be placed at:
 - Archer River (Katra)
 - Kirke River (where breakthrough north mouth joins the main river)
 - Knox River mouth
 - Kendall / Holroyd River (northern bank)



Let's get signs out on country. White man might get sick and die from being on poison country. Is there any signs up to tell people about country? We've got to work together, from both sides, north and south of the river" **Ralph Peinkinna, Sth Arm**

- Through effective means, Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people require legal avenues to regulate access to waterways and adjacent lands and effectively monitor and enforce compliance. This should include regular surveillance to detect illegal fishing (from foreign and local vessels).
- Recommend that regular waterway and coastal patrols are carried out (monthly). Utilising local rangers and members of the Advisory Committee in conjunction with human resources and guides provided by Aurukun Wetland Charters. There is strong support for this amongst traditional owners and the benefits from regular visitation are numerous.
- Wik Way traditional owners wish to have an agreement in place with Rio Tinto in order to prevent/ restrict visitor access onto their lease from Weipa residents and tourists. A zero tolerance on infringements from mine employees has been suggested.

"Access to story places such as the reef outside Norman Ck should be controlled" **Henry Kalina, Wik Way**

- Partnerships with Fisheries, Customs, Coastwatch and Quarantine have proved valuable outcomes to other coastal communities around northern Australia. These models should be researched further and capacity built within the community to fill monitoring and enforcement roles.
- In the best interest of managing the areas more remote wetland, riverine and coastal resources, it is important to maintain the network of dirt roads south of the Archer River in passable condition.
- Utilise Blue Lagoon Land and Sea Management Centre for its intended purpose of controlling access both for local residents and visitors. Supporting the homeland movement is an integral part of controlling access.
- Build cooperative relationships with Merapah, Kendall River and Holroyd stations in terms of controlling and allowing access

3.9 Ghost nets, marine debris



Float used to mark drift net snagged up on reef at Pera Head



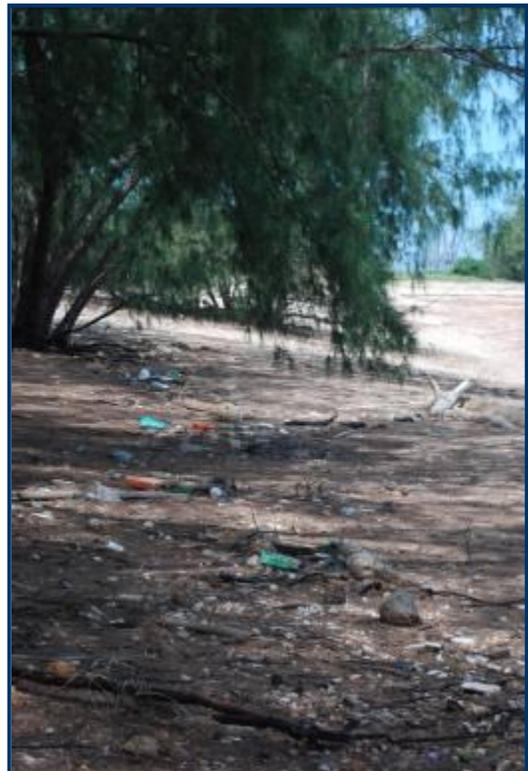
Marine debris concentrates on certain beaches north of Aurukun



Ghost-net piles up at beautiful Thud Pt



Saltwater crocodile drowned in ghost net near Pera Head



Rubbish collects on high storm-surge tides

Concentrations of the net around certain beaches, river mouths and headlands, also correspond with key turtle nesting areas. They collect on reefs with cultural significance and otherwise pristine places with huge aesthetic appeal.

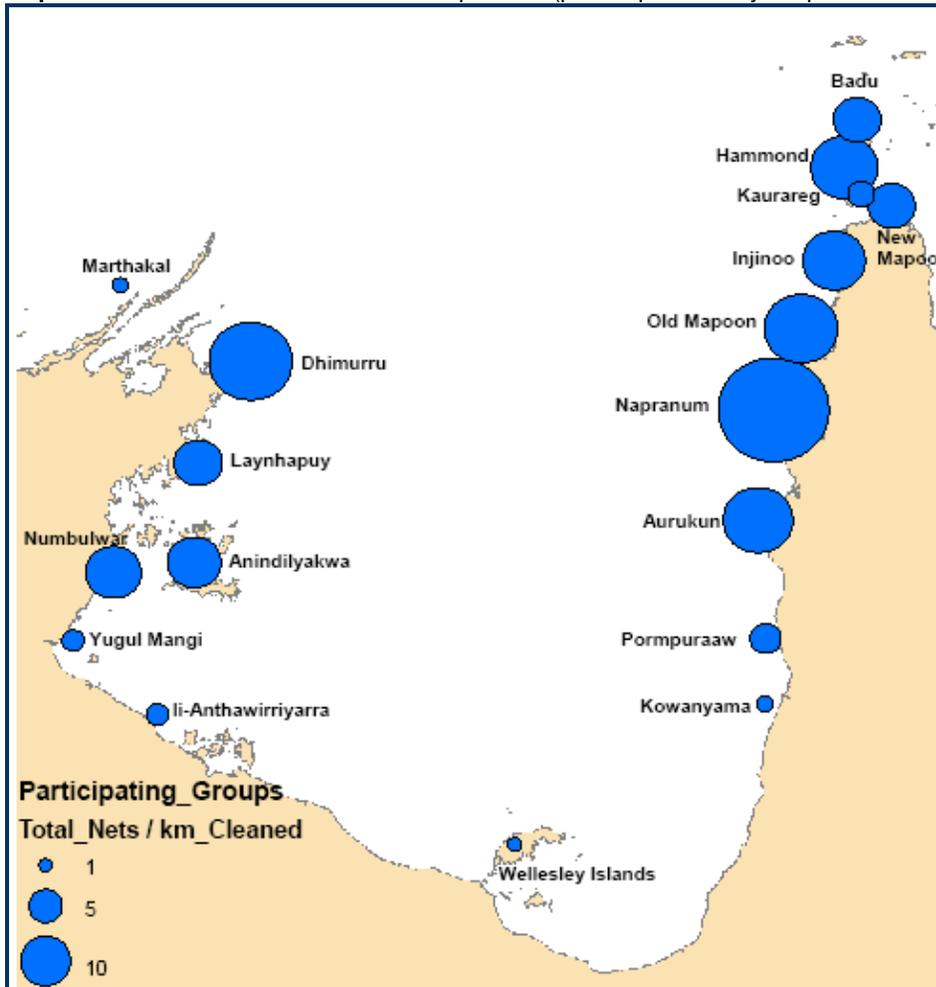
Circulating currents in the Gulf of Carpentaria deliver an ever increasing amount of debris to certain key locations.

A huge amount of net and debris can be found at Thud Pt after each wet season. Other marine debris can be found over a huge expanse of beaches and headland areas.

Not only are these ghost nets defacing the coastline, but more importantly have severe environmental consequences where, turtles, crocodiles and sharks for example, get trapped and cannot escape.

Many of the nets which become stranded on beaches and rock outcrop are swept back into the sea during the following wet season, concentrating nets further at sea and then again at strategic points along the coastline.

Map 5: Ghost net distribution in Gulf of Carpentaria (picture provided by Carpentaria Ghost Nets Programme)



Carpentaria Ghost Nets Programme

Key recommendations

- Ghost net sampling, clean-ups and participation with the Gulf of Carpentaria Ghost net Project should be an ongoing concern for Aurukun.
- Thud Pt. Initial work should be conducted here and spread out in order of significance. Further surveillance work should be conducted between False Pera Head and Boyd Pt.
- Look for avenues to source a barge and skid loader for this work. Joint-ventures with mining companies should be considered
- Two representatives from Aurukun community should attend all meetings held by the Carpentaria Ghost Nets Programme whenever possible. Include these people in training for use of I-trackers and modern monitoring equipment. Seek funding if necessary
- Tie in activities on country which include pig eradication, ghost net clean-up and turtle nest monitoring to boost local employment

3.10 Riparian and coastal vegetation

Riparian function and wildlife corridors are relatively intact in the Watson, Archer and Holroyd river basins, due to free flowing rivers and continuous, dense native vegetation along streams and across the area. This helps to preserve stable watercourse beds and banks and maintain healthy aquatic and terrestrial habitats, many of which are important refuges during the dry season and times of flood (Wild Rivers 2008).

“Rainforest areas of significance extend along many watercourses, including much of the Archer and Coen rivers. These riparian rainforests are considered some of the most important on Cape York Peninsula for their conservation significance. They support unique plants and animals and provide migratory habitat for animals moving from the east of the peninsula to the west coast (Winter and Lethbridge 1994, Abrahams et al.1995). These riparian corridors can also be important refuges during the dry season and in times of flood. Analysis of aerial photos provides evidence of intact and continuous riparian vegetation extending along rivers.”

Coastal vegetation within the study area is varied with Casuarina lined beach, vegetated coastal dunes and patches of coastal rainforest and vine thicket predominating.

The vegetation surrounding waterways, wetlands and the coastal strip is of huge importance to the stability and biodiversity of these areas. Many of the plants found concentrated in these areas are well known to traditional owners, many with multiple uses.

Cultural heritage and the many storey places mapped by anthropologists, point out the significance of coastal and riparian vegetation to Aboriginal people of the area. People maintained themselves through the richness these areas provided and form the living environment in which people have lived over thousands of years.

Key Recommendations

- Ensuring sufficient buffer zones to protect the integrity of coastal and riparian vegetation adjacent to mining areas south of the Embley River is of huge importance. This buffer should be compliant with those stipulated in Wild River Legislation i.e. >1km
- Further work conducted in the fields of ethno-ecology/botany/biology should be concentrated in these rich and diverse areas.
- Collaborative relationships with research bodies on Wildlife Corridore functions, protection from dry-season fires and biodiversity would be greatly beneficial.

3.11 Erosion and fire management

Country is burnt because it is part of the law. This is not negotiable. Managing the country is an obligation and the use of fire is one of the many ways that country is managed (Smith 2002).

Whereas maintenance of strict burning practices by the correct traditional owners was an integral part of traditional life on country, these practices are increasingly limited to areas accessible to Aurukun. The importance of maintaining regular burns in ecologically sensitive areas cannot be underestimated.

Riparian zones (vegetation adjoining creeks, rivers, swamps and lagoons) and vegetation clinging to elevated coastal areas perform valuable functions of stability, prevent erosion and act as wildlife corridors. Hot burns and fires allowed to burn out of control have the ability to devastate these areas late in the dry season and cause major environmental disruption.

The inappropriate burning regimes of neighbouring landholders, particularly on pastoral leases and National Park in the Wik Nation, are of great concern to traditional owners.

Traditional owners are often unable to get onto their own country in order to manage burning correctly, for example to burn at the right times, because of access and transportation difficulties (Smith 2002).

Environmental management practices, developed in-situ over millennia, should be recognised as appropriate and effective by western scientific authorities (Smith 2002). Western based land management practices have shown scant regard for traditional burning practices despite the fact that they have successfully sustained local ecology over untold generations.

“Country is not being cared for in the traditional way, fires are too hot and burn everything”

Gary Namphoonan, Knox River

Constructive work has been undertaken around the Lakefield NP where traditional owners are consulted and actively involved in traditional fire management techniques. Other projects are underway across northern Australian which may be duplicated over the Wik homelands.

Key recommendation

- Wik elders have expressed the desire to show other people how to burn country correctly; to teach people that control Wik country, such as Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and pastoralists.
- Cape York Sustainable Futures are funded to coordinate fire management and burning controls in Cape York and should be engaged to work with traditional owners in the Aurukun area.



“Traditional burning patterns are not being followed and the burning that is being done is often too late in the season and too hot.” Lex Nampoonan



Hot burn-off in Boyd Bay

Dry season burning off



Beach disturbance from feral pigs and vehicle tracks,



Hundreds of Casuarina trees blown over in 2009

3.12 Mining, buffer zones and potential dams

There are numerous socio-economic benefits and costs associated with proposed mining projects south of the Embley River. What is certain is that the landscape and situation in Aurukun is sure to change with the onset of mining activities.

“Having a mine might be good for our families. Our children and grandchildren might be able to work and some good opportunities can come to our people from this mine.” Hudson Comprabar, Watson River

Mining bauxite is an invasive process performed in shallow mines, which scar the surface of the region. It involves clearing all surface vegetation and excavating raw material to a depth determined by the concentration and width of the bauxite band.



Bauxite pebbles picked off the ground at Boyd Point

It will take years of rehabilitation to restore this land back to a condition acceptable under the State environmental requirements. Alteration of biodiversity, vegetation and natural drainage patterns can be expected in mined areas.

Not only is the land impacted. The eastern borders of the mining lease extend right out to the coastline and in some areas spill into the sea. A Bauxite loading facility is proposed on a site adjacent to Boyd Pt.

Bauxite is formed from an intense weathering process. The hydrology of the bauxite plateau, where water filtering through the bauxite and ironstone layers, sit above the kaolin layer, storing huge amounts water, aiding in the establishment of Eucalyptus tetradonda tall forests. By stripping the bauxite layer, the hydrology of the landscape is fundamentally changed. Thus affecting the ability to regenerate these forested areas and changing the flow dynamics of local watercourses and aquatic ecosystems.

The strip of coastal vine thicket, beach and reef will be subject to the effects of mining activity very nearby

Implications of Wild Rivers Legislation on mining leases

Queensland law states that both the Rio Tinto lease and the Aurukun Bauxite Project will be exempt from implications of Wild Rivers legislation, even where Wild River declarations have been made over areas covered by the lease. This is a contentious issue for some members of the Aurukun community and members of AWWCAC.

Government of the day considers a river only to be wild if it has no function within the mining industry?

With legislation dealing so directly with restrictions on dams and industry which alters the flow of rivers as well as providing 1km high preservation protection either side of watercourses, the legislation stands in stark contrast with proposed activities on the mining leases. Concurrently, bauxite mining operations in the area will require dam construction in high preservation areas and surface mining to occur with only a 200m buffer from water courses and wetlands.

Dams



Gina Castelain, Tim O'Reilly, Amos Kerindun and Henry Kalinda discuss potential dam locations

At the time of writing, Rio Tinto and Chalco are proposing the construction of two dams each. This means there is potential for 2 dams in the upstream reaches of Norman Ck and 2 dams in the upper catchment of the Ward River.

Some effects which can be expected:

- Preventing the movement of fish and recruitment of aquatic organisms into wet season spawning and feeding grounds.
- Preventing wet season flushes, fundamental for maintaining the integrity of far northern creeks and rivers. These wet season flushes are also responsible for maintaining the salt / freshwater interface, which in turn effect flora and fauna adapted to these specific conditions.
- Affecting geomorphic processes, which maintain the water coarse habitat.
- Water quality: turbidity, oxygen content, temperature and nutrient runoff
- Damming would permanently flood riparian vegetation adjacent to the watercourse

At this stage, traditional owners have been provided with little information on environmental impacts of dam construction (both in its catchment due to clearing vegetation or the downstream on the aquatic environment) or the on-going environmental management of the dam once operational.

Rio Tinto has negotiated with State Government on acceptance of high preservation areas around water courses and special features in the Wenlock and Ducie River basins north of Weipa. This implies that a buffer zone minimum of 1km applies within the Rio Tinto ML for that area.

Similar negotiations over the Watson Basin have not yet proceeded, however traditional owners may seek to duplicate such agreements over both the Ward River and Norman Creek in the near future.

Have independent scientific analysis completed on proposed dam sites to ensure sufficient base flows, fish recruitment and dam stability. There are many issues which effect water quality and the cycle of water when dams are created. Wik Way people should have a good knowledge of these issues before damming commences.

It is crucial that mining interests understand this coastline's natural systems and are committed to protecting and rehabilitating important areas.

Turtle nesting during the winter months is concentrated around the area proposed for the Bauxite loading facility. Impacts on turtle nesting and hatching should be mitigated where possible. Vehicle access to beaches in the areas should be restricted.

Have independent scientific analysis completed on proposed dam sites to ensure sufficient base flows, fish recruitment and dam stability. There are many issues which effect water quality and the cycle of water when dams are created. Wik Way people should have a good knowledge of these issues before damming commences.

Key recommendations

"We have said all along that we don't want mining right on the river. The mine should only happen on the top side of the river (Watson) because we still want our river and lagoons healthy for fishing and camping. It is very important to us that there is no mining on the southern side of the river." **Hudson Comprabar, Watson River**

Government and mining companies should recognise fully the nature of Wik and Wik Way association with the land, sea and their resources. It is also essential that Wik and Wik Waya people are provided with every opportunity to participate in mining projects, and the associated contracting and employment opportunities. (AWWCAC)

"Pera Head is a feeding and nesting place for the turtles, dugongs and lots of fish." **Henry Kalinda**

- Potential for Chaclo ILUA (Mining Lease ML) and WACCA agreement to support land and sea management initiatives highlighted by joint steering committees.

- Further negotiation between Wik Way traditional owners and Rio Tinto to discuss the prospect of increased buffer zones for coastline and waterways to distance greater than 200m. This will ensure natural coastal and riverine functions continue and potential eco-friendly businesses, such as coastal lodges, cabins or campgrounds, are left in a position to operate.

“We should have an agreement with those mining companies saying no development close to the rivers” **Hudson Comprabar, Watson River**

- Any dams constructed for bauxite mining operations in the Watson River basin should have best environmental practice and appropriate community consultation carried out as a bare minimum before construction.
- Wik Way people require more than an occasional brief from water supply engineers on dam location and construction when environmental considerations are integral to the decision making process.
- Dam construction and bauxite mining should not be considered in isolation to one another in relation to implications on hydrology. Impact assessment work should incorporate this very important point, rather than allowing effects to be considered in isolation.
- Present a better visual presentation of what the dam would look like for traditional owners

“They are going to dam our country up to the north but nobody is standing in the way of that. What protection will the Wild Rivers legislation give our waterways?” **Richard Ornyengaia**

- Turtle nesting during the winter months is concentrated around the area proposed for the Bauxite loading facility. Impacts on turtle nesting and hatchlings should be mitigated where possible. Vehicle access to these beaches should be completely banned. Collaborative arrangement between Rio Tinto and traditional owners to prevent damage to turtle nesting sites from humans and feral animals.
- Can the Marine transport and infrastructure used to build the loading facility also be used for beach and headland clean ups. Rio Tinto may look to provide a barge and skid loader and contract Aurukun people to complete this work. Trials around Thud Point and Pera Head initially.



Looking south from the proposed Bauxite loading facility location



Tappelbank Creek

Map 6: Norman Creek/ Boy Bay Drilling



3.13 Economic development opportunities

Environmental, land and sea management were an integral part of our life 200 years ago, and the biodiversity of our coastal waters, estuaries, rivers and land has sustained us for millennia. Properly implemented and managed, economic opportunities presented by the use of our traditional country can provide the means to maintain the biodiversity of these ecosystems, as well as providing an economic return to traditional owners and a way for current and future generations of Aboriginal people to maintain their connection with their traditional country (Castelain 2009)

Want a mix of opportunities for land management, eco-tourism, conservation and mining activity can



Craig Koomeeta's aluminium crocodile display at Cairns Civic Centre

produce long term positive outcomes for the community of Aurukun.

Land tenure resolution in the short term will have important consequences for economic development in the region. Organisations contracted by the Prescribed Body Corporate can become influential in economic development based on the wishes of traditional owners

Conservation and management

Wild River Ranger programme may be extended to include ghost net; turtle nest protection, water quality testing, weed and feral animal eradication around wetlands and traditional knowledge recording activities. Similar to the Mapoon Turtle rescue camp, visitors can be encouraged to join in these activities in conjunction with the charter boat operation.

RAMSAR listing (internationally significant wetlands) for the wetlands south of the Archer River has few resources attached, however from a promotional viewpoint, it would make the area more attractive for tourism and developing partnerships with universities and research groups

Planning

An example of economic development opportunities in a planning context is provided by Wik Projects Ltd, which had become registered as a Cultural Heritage Body in 2008.

Monitoring, Management and Enforcement

Partnerships with external bodies are the key to progressing economic development opportunities in the region.

The potential to link management outcomes with Aurukun Wetland Charters, Wik Media and external organisations, allow land and sea management to occur in a viable state, rather than relying on the shire council and government funding.

Tourism

The opportunities presented to traditional owners of the Wik homelands from tourism are innumerable. Intact Aboriginal language and culture mixed with an amazing array of nature-based tourism attributes places Aurukun in a prime position to capitalise on existing and emerging facets of tourism.

Established in 2005, Aurukun Wetland Charters has been successfully running a charter boat offering fishing and eco/cultural based trips to a predominately domestic market. Built by the local community, the predominately catch-and-release fishing charters have proved very easy to market and bookings in peak periods (April-June and September-December) have been solid over the past 3 years.

International support for the wetland charter product has begun to build steadily. The nature-based Wetland Charters give tourists an opportunity to meet and learn from a host of Aurukun based guides.

“Tourism is good when you have locals working together on that one.”

“Tourists come and we don’t like it. They might come and get sick.. we have to put smell in the river to make it ok.” **Dawn Koondumbin, Archer River**

Opportunities for further expansion exist with the influx of visitors expected from mining developments south of the Embley River. If the Aurukun Bauxite project proceeds, there will be an influx of workers both in Weipa and in closer proximity to Aurukun at Beagle Camp.

Suggestions include but are not limited to:

- Expansion of Aurukun Wetland Charters business. Another vessel in survey to access the wetland areas of the Love, Kirke and Kendall Rivers
- A lodge built on the coastline north of Aurukun (False Pera Head)
- Blue Lagoon Land and Sea Management Centre: has been put out to tender by the ASC

“My family would like to do some ecotourism and catch and release fishing around Kencherang. We would need to restrict access to run tourists here and have agreements with other Aurukun people not to pass through the site” **Craig Koomeeta, Knox River**

Limitations to tourism development in the area include:

- Access: a large percentage of the lowland wetlands country is flooded for extended periods. In some cases the period of time available to visit peoples country in the wetter coastal areas was restricted to only 2-3 months of the year
- Alcohol restrictions in Aurukun Shire
- Capacity of Aurukun residents to deliver reliable tourism product. Due in part to commercial interests shown by Aurukun Shire Council

Key recommendations

- A transition from centralised , welfare-based programs run by government at all levels to support for programs developed and operated by Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people is essential. As is support for businesses and business partnerships established and operated by local people
- Look at enterprise development, education and training aimed at realistic tourism, mining and land management opportunities
- Expansion of community owned charter boat operation. Focus training and employment for Aurukun people primarily on wetland charters and secondarily on fishing charters
- The current protective and revenue-driven approach taken by Aurukun Shire Council to the operation of independent businesses such as Aurukun Wetland Charter s is contrary to the development of viable independent business on Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu estates, and must not continue
- Government programs and businesses associated with commercial opportunities within Aurukun and across Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu estates be devolved to business entities owned and operated by Wik and Wik Way people
- Look at IPAs and RAMSAR listing (wetlands of international significance) to help promote wetland areas for potential tourism, research and monitoring partnerships. The Aurukun charter boat operation could be expected to prosper from such inclusions.

Wik Projects Ltd (an example of sustainable economic development)

- Functions of Wik projects in relation to mining negotiations
- Negotiation of the a new Indigenous Land Use Agreement with Queensland Government and Chalco (Chinese Aluminium Company)
- Ongoing negotiations with Rio Tinto
- Development of a Wik Way Vision of the Future
- Development of a range of new businesses both on traditional country and beyond
- Development of a range of “work readiness” and training initiatives
- Development of a range of Community and Cultural Development initiatives
- Record of meetings and negotiations with government
- Record of research and fund raising

Sustainable Heartlands Project

This project is about reestablishing a sustainable presence of Wik Way people on their traditional country, their heartlands. This project therefore looks at how to make the attachment that Wik Way people have with their traditional country permanent and sustainable in the modern world.



Leslie Walmbang and Ron Yunkaporta dancing for boat opening



Tourists enjoying a swim up Kokiala Creek



Jasper Kowearpta hold up a barramundi caught at the South Arm



Official Charter boat opening

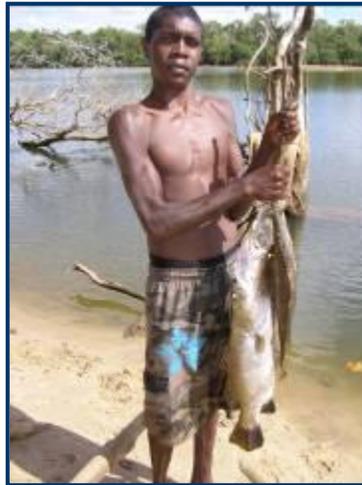
3.14 Traditional fishing and hunting

Creation ancestors form part of a living landscape and practices such as hunting and foraging play an extremely important role in contemporary Wik and Kuugu life. Hunting birds, reptiles, mammals and fish remains a hugely important and is critica to the healt and well being for local people.

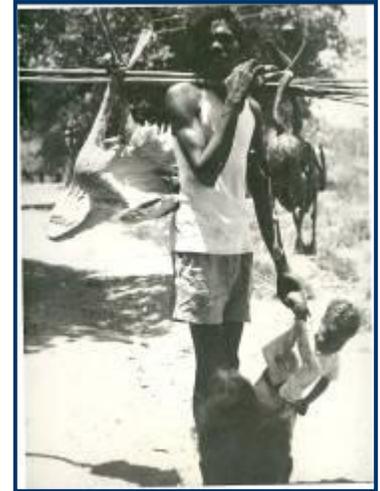
FINISH OFF JC



Little girl clutches mud shell
(*minh ochangan*)



Byron Koongotema with barramundi
(*minh wuungkam*) caught up the
Archer River



Hunter with geese, kangaroo and
child



Boiled turtle-eggs ready for eating at Knox
River



Spearing fish at Stoney Crossing



Gladys with spear and net in Aurukun

4.0 HIGH PRIORITY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Capacity Building

The importance of a new approach to land and sea management must be underpinned by a close inspection of the socio-economic drivers leading to the current limitations. These include:

- Passive welfare
- Lack of employment opportunities and generally low incomes
- Poor educational outcomes
- Leadership vacuum
- Loss of cultural identity of young people
- Substance abuse and health issues

A pattern has emerged of governments and other agencies developing and implementing programs 'for the benefit' of the Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people in Aurukun, rather than empowering Wik and Wik Way people to manage their own affairs. This approach has been increasing since the demise of Aurukun Community Incorporated in the late 1990s, and continues within the ASC and the vast majority of social, economic and environmental programs currently operating across Wik and Wik Way people's lands. This approach has contributed to a pervasive attitude of dependency and helplessness among the people of Aurukun.

Government programs staffed by external 'experts', which are undertaken over short time periods or by 'flying visits', do not adequately train or resource local people. These projects are formulated and imposed by external agencies, and do not significantly build the skills, knowledge and capacity of Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people to become independent in the future running of the programs

While government agencies and their approved externally-based service providers retain the resources and capacity to undertake programs such as feral animal control, fisheries surveillance, border surveillance, quarantine and inspection services and wildlife management, Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people will be unable to properly develop their own capacity to manage their own lands.

Aurukun is poorly resourced because there is a simple lack of perceived and real capacity from both within the community and outside. Basic resources required for effective land and sea management have either been squandered, unsupported or did not exist in the first place.

"The kids are the future for this place and we need to get them better trained and better able to take up jobs on offer here in Aurukun. It's ok if they have to leave this place to get that training."

"That's it. It is important to have training and opportunities for our young people. When I was young, I left Aurukun and did an apprenticeship down in Brisbane. Stayed there for a good while. After I came back, I had a team of rangers here in Aurukun doing land and sea management."

"We need to start sitting together and thinking about what will happen long term"

Jonathan Korkatain

Education and training are the basic foundation for building the capacity of individuals within the community to engage with government, business partners, land and sea management, and real employment.

Many of the original land and sea rangers and coordinators have moved into other roles both inside and outside of Aurukun. However many of the following people remain active within the community:

- Jasper Kowearpta
- Jonnathon Korkatain
- Cecil Palembang
- Neville Pootchemunka
- Donald Pootchemunka
- Leslie Walmbang
- Ron Yunkaporta
- Sidney Wolmby
- Morris Holroyd
- Joshua Woolla

Capacity within Aurukun will only be strengthened by the acknowledgement of traditional knowledge and management techniques from outside the community. Very little collaborative scientific research, involving both indigenous knowledge and western science, is currently being carried out in Cape York Peninsula. This is the case across much of northern Australia where major educational institutions and research organisations could benefit greatly from indigenous knowledge (Nick Smith).

Training for the sake of training has proved both ineffective and costly in Aurukun, over quite a long period. Links to employment and economic opportunity are crucial in the training process.

On a more positive note, the strengths and resource identified by AWWCAC give reason to build capacity within Aurukun community. They are:

- A rich and diverse marine base and resources
- Internationally significant wetlands
- Pristine waterways
- Charter boat operation
- Huge eco-tourism potential
- Strong culture
- Youthful energetic population
- Recognized native title
- Mining Agreements
- Real employment opportunities
- Outstations and a road network south of the Archer River
- Blue Lagoon Land and Sea Management Centre

Key recommendations

- Projects, training and development should be geared towards building the skills, knowledge and capacity of Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people to become independent in the future running of various land and sea management programs.
- Work with community organisations such as Wik Projects, Wik Media and Aurukun Wetland Charters to match training and development aspirations with real employment opportunities.
- Successful training and development programs often have the same factors in common
 - Programs target younger people
 - Residential programs held outside Aurukun
 - Programs focussing on on-the-job training
 - Paid training programs
 - Provide progression to real work outcomes
- Continue working with Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Project and the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) on weed and feral animal eradication the benefits of the project will flow to the traditional landowners who have been involved in the associated training and practical implementation of skills.
- Traditional knowledge recording is crucial to the process of natural resource management in remote places such as Aurukun. Contemporary knowledge and scientific research is severely limited in such areas, placing traditional owners in the position of being reservoirs for information about the areas water resources. Traditional knowledge recording must be interactive and suggestions of a “VIRTUAL KEEPING PLACE” should be appropriately supported.

4.2 Resourcing and Development

For people to exercise their right and responsibility to look after country and manage their resources, real employment opportunities must be made available. It will not be easy, but Aurukun needs a long term commercial base for activities on a platform of natural resource management, minerals and tourism.

Private enterprise from within Aurukun matched with opportunities arising out of mining, tourism and natural resource management have the ability to provide significant employment. The Caring for our Country initiatives currently being implemented alongside Wild River declaration for the Archer River Basin should ensure job creation within Aurukun community. Mining negotiations currently underway afford the community opportunities for employment and the ability to create enterprise through wealth generation provided by mining royalties. Land and sea management initiatives will form part of the ILUA between Aurukun community and mining companies.

Funding for land and sea management activities in Aurukun has been sporadic in recent years. The community is currently without a land and sea coordinator or a ranger program. Evidence in itself, that government funding for such activities is sporadic and cannot be relied upon to complete necessary management initiatives.

It is clear that alternatives to government grants for such activities must be sought. A new era of land and sea management is emerging where economic development and key external partnerships are the drivers for activity.

Except for the promise of funding, there is little incentive for the Aurukun Shire Council to support land and sea initiatives on country. Indeed funding administered through a centralised body, whose primary objective is the functionality of Aurukun community, is not an effective method for managing the remotely situated water resources of the area.

Government at all levels (Federal, State and local) should begin the process of devolving responsibility for programs such as fisheries management, weeds and feral animals, fire management, quarantine and border surveillance to traditional owners. Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people assigning management staff to various roles on country is a crucial distinction for management initiatives into the future.

Likewise the transfer of infrastructure located on Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu lands to the individual land trusts under the PCB will add an extra dimension to the resourcing and development issue. The focus on outstations and homelands has lost much of the support and emphasis it once held. Changes in government policy such as the Federal Government's erosion of funding for outstation programs during the 1990s has created a vacuum, however it is not too late to reverse this trend.

Without exception, members of the AWWCAC acknowledge the importance of outstations and maintaining connection to country. As part of the Outstations program still underway in Aurukun the following responsibilities have been identified:

The main responsibility of the government is to:

- Provide the necessary resources to achieve outstation development.

The responsibility of the Council is to:

- Ensure that the government provides resources towards outstation development
- The council will manage the resources that the government provides
- The council is committed to provide their services to outstation

The responsibility of the people is to:

- To participate in one or more of the economic activities or other related programs
- To have a flow of income by having meaningful employment
- Individuals and families commit themselves to live on their outstation
- To make sure that all rubbish will be cleaned on a regular basis
- People will enjoy and commit themselves to their native title right to hunt, fish, and look after their country
- To develop economic base on their outstation (micro-business)
- To be committed to looking after their children
- To save money for themselves and for their children's future

Further consultation should be completed in Aurukun to explore conservation and resource management options in the area. In particular, look at IPAs, RAMSAR wetland nomination, World Heritage Listing and management implications of Wild River declaration and joint management of Mungkan Kaanju National Park.



Joshua Woolla near Orn yawa lagoons

4.3 Research, monitoring, patrols, enforcement

In 1992 the CYPLUS (Cape York Peninsula Land use Strategy) set out principles of ecological sustainability for Cape York. The proponents of this project took the view that the ownership and management of the natural resources on Cape York were the responsibility of the state. Aboriginal people, the actual owners and managers of the land, were simply viewed as 'residents' on land for which they held no responsibility or authority. Put simply, this approach has led to little or no effective management over areas now controlled under native title.

In a report to Tropical Savannas CRC, (Smith ...date...CYDC) discussed re-directing planning, research and management efforts to become more in-tune with traditional customary linkages. Effectively

This paper argued that if western scientific researchers wish to form constructive, collaborative research relationships with indigenous people then new, socially relevant methods of doing research must be adopted. (

The report suggests that for effective solutions to land management issues facing the indigenous people of Cape York, research must take into account the depth and accuracy of traditional ecological knowledge. This is certainly still the case in modern day Aurukun. People have custodianship

Indigenous knowledge systems have in many instances shown to provide descriptions of local environments and ecological processes at a far more detailed level than presented by western scientists (Stillitoe (1998),

For this to occur, skilled people from outside Aurukun need to work collaboratively on activities to best achieve outcomes desirable for everybody. A level of trust will be needed both inside and outside of Aurukun and external agencies will only be effective if they have the community's support.

Equally important for western researchers and management bodies is that their methods reflect the changing scientific, environmental, social and legal situation existing on the Cape today. Outcomes will be bound by a collaborative approach between western and indigenous systems (Nick Smith ...)

The major impediments to conducting research, monitoring, patrols and enforcement on Wik country are limited access due to conditions and a lack of resources to make access practical.

Information Gaps

- Collation of all previous Floral studies conducted in the area;
- Comprehensive site mapping (plant and animal surveys) of all areas directly and indirectly affected by mining to the north of Aurukun
- Documentation of all mangrove species and threats faced by clearing / pollution
- Riparian studies of all vegetation surrounding the many creeks, rivers and landlocked water within the Archer and Watson River basins and the Kendall / Holroyd Rivers.
- Expand previous sea grass mapping work conducted in Albatross Bay and Kirke River to include Love River, Ward River, South Arm (Archer Bay) and coastal areas.
- Water quality testing, hydrological functions and catchment flow analysis around Aurukun and areas impacted by mining proposals
- Wetlands health monitoring
- Fish surveys (recruitment, spawning, and distribution) conducted primarily in fresh water and estuarine lakes within the study area, building on work already.

- Comprehensive fauna studies at select locations distinguished by biodiversity concentration
- Research on Turtle, Dugong, Crocodile, and Dolphin populations in the area
- Comprehensive study of bird populations, nesting areas and migration

Research Project and Data Collection (CYMAG & AWWCAC)

- Water quality testing focusing on waterways from Norman Ck in the north to Holroyd River in the south. Including training initiatives to ensure accurate periodic testing by Aurukun residents
- Review proposed sites for dam constructed by mining companies; including location, habitat destruction, flow rates, acid-sulphate soils, water quality testing.
- Biological Surveys: birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, mammals, marsupials, marine animals
- Riparian and coastal vegetation mapping....
- Ethno-botanical / biological research
- Sea grass mapping and monitoring
- Acid-sulphate soil analysis, predominately in proposed mining areas
- Monitor effect of weeds and feral animals before and after eradication

4.4 Key Partnerships

As the situation stands, individual and community capacity are not sufficient to provide the economic and social capital for successful management across Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu estates.

Utilising human resources within Aurukun, matched up to government, scientific and philanthropic partners is the key to successful management of Aurukun's wetlands, waterways and coastline. Partnerships which help foster constructive, working outcomes between the community and external agencies.

We need to form partnerships with a range of external organisations to assist us to gain skills, resources and management expertise in achieving proper management of our estates. We further resolve that all such partnerships must be entered into understanding the interests and priorities of Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people

Partnerships with government in which programs and priorities are determined by Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people are supported

Programs which have been formulated externally and imposed on the community without full knowledge and consent of the Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu people are not supported.

(AWWCAC)

Private enterprise from within Aurukun matched with opportunities arising out of mining and tourism have the ability to provide significant employment. The Carine for our Country initiatives currently being implemented alongside Wild River declaration for the Archer River Basin should ensure job creation within Aurukun community.

CYMAG has been responsible for key planning initiatives such as the Cape York Peninsula Marine and Coastal Natural Resource Management Action Plan (June 2006). CYMAG has applied for funding from the Australian Government's *Caring for our Country* initiative in April 2009. A successful submission will see a partnership with Wik Projects and the Aurukun Waterways, Wetlands and Coastal Advisory Committee and the following organisations

Potential Partnerships emerging

- Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM)
- Wild Rivers representatives: Cairns, Brisbane, Cape York
- Carpentaria Ghost Net project
- Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Program
- Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries
- Customs / Quarantine
- Aurukun Outstation workers
- Aurukun Wetland Charters and Wik Projects Ltd
- Australian Rivers Institute
- Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge (TRaCK)
- Cape York Marine Advisory Group (CYMAG)
- Cape York Sustainable Futures (CYPDA)
- Architectural and tourism development advisors

- Aurukun Bauxite Project office
- Cape York Turtle monitoring group
- Rio Tinto and Chalco mining representatives
- Department of Environment and Heritage (DE&H)
- Pastoral, Timber and Fisheries (commercial and recreational fisheries groups);
- Aurukun Shire Council (local Aboriginal Lands Act 1978);
- Cape York Land Council
- NGO's (including Wilderness Society and World Wildlife Fund)
- Cape York Indigenous Fisheries Forum
- Cook Shire Council

4.5 Actions and priority table (Completed following review)

Issue	Recommendation/ Action	Responsible
Research and Monitoring	Conduct comprehensive wetland health, water quality and biological surveys, focussing on key areas south of the Archer River and areas affected by mining north of Archer River	Cape York Marine Advisory Group (CYMAG) Aurukun Wetlands Charters AWWCAC Research bodies (ARI, TRaCK)
Conservation Listings	Follow up work conducted by project officer in Aurukun looking at RAMSAR (Internationally significant wetlands), World Heritage Listing and Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs)	
Land Tenure and local authority	Make provisions for the transfer of land under the Native Title to the PCB ()	Phillip Hunter Ngan Aak Kunch Aboriginal Corporation Aurukun Shire Council

High Priority Issues and Recommended Actions

Issue	Actions	Partnership required
Governance and management authority		
Capacity Building		
Conservation		
Weeds and feral animals		
Commercial Fishing		
Access		

Any ranger or land and sea based activities (including Wild Rivers) on country should have multiple objectives including:

- River an coastal patrol work stipulated by Wild Rivers declaration and local agreements
- Water quality monitoring
- Traditional knowledge recording
- Ghost net recording and clean-up activities
- Research, monitoring and biological survey work over wetland areas
- Survey and eradications of weeds and feral animals
- Monitoring commercial fishing activity
- Patrolling for illegal fishing boats
- Monitoring visitation from recreational fisherman, hunters and vehicle usage on beaches
- Activities conducted by Wild River Rangers maybe extended to include ghost net, turtle nesting, water quality testing, weed and feral animal eradication around wetlands and traditional knowledge recording activities

- The Aurukun Bauxite Project retains funding for land and sea management initiatives. One of the sub-components of the Sustainable Development Plan is environmental management and maintenance of cultural integrity. This funding may be utilised to progress management initiatives highlighted in this planning process and allow for the continuation of the AWWCAC
- Planning initiatives arising out of this information should best be thought of in line with legislation and government policy existing at the time.
- Buffer zones
- IPAS & RAMSAR LISTING
- Traditional knowledge recording must be interactive “VIRTUAL KEEPING PLACE”
- Bio-cultural biodiversity protection on Wik Way homelands submission to Caring for our Country: conserve and transfer knowledge primarily getting people back out on country, assisting people to maintain themselves back out on country. Measuring engagement of people on country is not tangible and therefore not easily funded
- Further consultation should be completed in Aurukun to explore conservation and resource management options in the area. In particular, look at IPAs, RAMSAR wetland nomination, World Heritage Listing and management implications of Wild River declaration and joint management of Mungkan Kaanju National Park.
- The issue of knowledge transfer has become vitally important; traditional knowledge is in danger of being lost and the need to formally educate Wik, Wik Way and Kuugu youth in such knowledge has been identified as an urgent priority.
- Issues surrounding access to conduct research, monitoring, patrols and enforcement are crucial.....
- Make provisions and build capacity to allow smooth transfer of land to the PCB
- Wik Projects established in 2007 for community and economic development initiatives
- Mining Royalties will ensure long term sustainability of funding for Land and Sea management initiatives
- Development of enterprise which facilitates land and sea management activities e.g. Aurukun Wetland Charters
- Look at possibility of joint use of helicopter to conduct monitoring and pest control activities

4.6 Summary

Conceding that recommendations made in this document may soon be obsolete, it is hoped that parallels can be drawn between these and the relevant situation at the time.

Wik Projects received a Natural Heritage Trust grant in late October to convene the Aurukun Waterways Wetlands and Coastal Management Advisory Committee. A Project Officer was engaged to take on this role from Oct 2008 – Apr 2009.

Planning work, field work and consultation undertaken during this time have been incorporated in this Draft *Waterways Wetlands and Coastal Management Plan*. Longer term aspirations of the Advisory Committee and planning work will depend on the participation of traditional owners and the ability of the project to create funding possibilities.

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APPENDIX 1

NAME	CLAN GROUP	REPRESENTATIVE AREA
Amos Kerindun	Sara	Ward R -
Sam Kerindun	Sara	Ward R -
Henry Kalinda	Sara	Ward R -
Edgar Kerindun	Sara	Archer Bay
Richard Ornyengaia	Sara	
Ralph Peinkinna	Winchanam	Archer Bay
Hudson Comprabar	Apalache	Watson River
Caroline Peinkinna	Winchanam	Watson River
Lyall Kawangka	Winchanam	Small Archer
Alair Pambegan	Winchanam	Small Archer
Dawn Koondumbin	Winchanam	Lower Archer
Janet Koongotema	Winchanam	
Beatrice Koongotema	Winchanam	Lower Archer
Martha Koowarta	Pootche	Top Archer
Lindsay Koowarta	Winchanam	Top Archer
Victor Lowrance	Winchanam	Rokeby
Joshua Woolla	Winchanam	Ornyawa Lagoons
Cecil Walmbang	Apalatche	Love River
Leslie Walmbang	Apalatche	Love River
Clarence Peinkina	Winchanam	Love River
Ron Yunkaporta	Apalatche	Love to Kirke R

Silus Wolmby	Apalatche	Kirke R
Jasper Kowearpta	Winchanam	Top Kirke
Winston Mapoondin	Winchanam	Top Knox
Craig Koomeeta	Apalatche	Knox R
Dion Koomeeta	Apalatche	Knox R
Lex Namponyin	Apalatche	Bottom Knox
Gary Namponyin	Apalatche	Bottom Knox
Jonathan Korkatain	Pootche	Nth Kendall
Stuart Korkatain	Pootche	Nth Kendall
Stan Kalkeeyorta	Pootche	Kendall - Holroyd
Sydney Wolmby	Aplatche	Kendall - Holroyd
Joel Ngallametta	Wanam	Kendall R
Morris Holroyd	Wanam	Holroyd R
Janine Chevathun	Wanam	Holroyd R
