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## **Fire a hot topic in the Wet Tropics**

Fire will be a hot topic in Cairns at the national Wet Tropics Fire Workshop at the Pacific International Hotel today (Tuesday 24 June).

The Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) has invited over 100 fire ecologists, land managers and members of the community to share their views on the use of fire for biodiversity conservation. The workshop aims to identify research priorities and promote community engagement for fire management.

WTMA executive director, Andrew Maclean, said the Authority was pleased to encourage informed debate about fire management and future research prospects.

“Climate change will alter weather and rainfall patterns, making fire management an increasingly important part of biodiversity conservation.”

“The workshop has generated considerable interest throughout Australia and I am certain it will make a significant contribution to knowledge about fire in the Wet Tropics, improving both management standards and the quality of debate about the matter,” Mr Maclean said.

Acting Regional Manager for the Wet Tropics Region of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Andrew Millerd, said management of fire in the Wet Tropics is complex with a wide array of vegetation and climatic differences and an increasingly urban landscape.

“Agencies such as EPA manage fire to reduce risks to life, property and assets as well as to maintain biodiversity. Various views exist about the most appropriate actions,” Mr Millerd said.

“This workshop will give us the opportunity to share our fire management strategies and gain valuable feedback from others involved in the field,” he added.

Professor Paul Gadek from James Cook University School of Marine and Tropical Biology said the use of fire as a management tool is challenging as conflicts can arise about how best to conserve biodiversity with the limited resources available.

“Fire is and has been a complex influence in Australian ecosystems. The ecology and distribution of vegetation communities and fauna habitats has been shaped, at least in part, by fire. Cultural use of fire as a land management tool by Wet Tropics Traditional Owners has shaped our landscape and will be discussed at the workshop,” Prof Gadek said.

The workshop will be recorded as a DVD set and distributed to council libraries and universities in the region.

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*For more information contact Deanna Belbin at WTMA on 4052 0531 or 0438 187 091.*