



## **MEDIA RELEASE: Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March**

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### **Lemuroid possums found**

Three lemuroid ringtail possums have just been discovered on the Carbine Tableland in Daintree National Park. This is the first time a lemuroid possum has been recorded in this area since 2005 and their population has undergone an extreme decline.

*“They are still clinging on but they are extremely vulnerable. We believe their severe decline is due to a warming global climate. We have detailed records which show increasing heatwaves, the worst being in 2005/2006. I fear the plight of the lemuroid possum is a sign of things to come”* said Associate Professor Steve Williams, Director of the Centre for Tropical Biodiversity and Climate Change (CTBCC) at James Cook University.

*“Five years ago we predicted severe impacts on the biodiversity of the Wet Tropics, now we may be seeing these impacts earlier than predicted. The lemuroid possum has shown itself to be particularly sensitive to rising temperatures and may face extinction if we cannot reverse these trends,”* according to Dr Williams

Lemuroid ringtail possums are a high altitude species found in rainforest mountains of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. They are found in two distinct populations, the southern in the Atherton Tableland and the northern in the Carbine Tableland in the Daintree National Park. The Lemuroid ringtail possum, particularly the white variation, has become an iconic symbol of the potential impacts of climate change in the Wet Tropics, similar to the polar bear’s threatened status in the Arctic.

WTMA board Chair, Lt Gen John Grey AC, said that climate change stands out as the single greatest threat to the Wet Tropics environment over the next 20 years. The Authority’s State of the Wet Tropics Report 2007–2008 highlights the impacts climate change and how we can best adapt to this emerging threat.

*“The report shows that anticipated changes to temperature, rainfall and other climatic conditions will cause major changes to ecosystems and lead to the loss of many plant and animal species for which the Wet Tropics was listed on the World Heritage register,”* said Mr Grey.

*“The discovery of this possum population gives us the perfect opportunity to study how this species is surviving in its mountain home and the importance of this refugial area. Further investment in research and monitoring is vital,”* said Mr Grey.

*“Action is necessary to ensure the forest is healthy and resilient in the face of this major threat. This means restoring habitat and wildlife corridors as well as managing other threats such as weeds and feral animals.”*

Steve Williams’ research to date has been supported by James Cook University, The Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility, Queensland Government Smart Futures Fellowship, Wet Tropics Management Authority, Earthwatch Institute and the Environmental Protection Agency. Dr Williams and his team at the CTBCC have undertaken intensive surveys for the lemuroid possums since 2008.

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State of the Wet Tropics Report:  
Wet Tropics Management Authority  
Lt Gen John Grey AC, WTMA Board Chair  
Please contact Julia Cooper as above.

State of the Wet Tropics Report for 2007-2008, Climate Change: Impacts and Responses:  
[www.wettropics.gov.au/mwha/mwha\\_climate.html](http://www.wettropics.gov.au/mwha/mwha_climate.html)