



Communiqué

Board Meeting No 98

1-2 December 2016

The Board of the Wet Tropics Management Authority (the Authority) convened in Cairns on 1-2 December 2016.

On day one, the Directors were updated on international, national and state obligations and responsibilities for advancing the recognition of Rainforest Aboriginal people and Native Title holders in the Wet Tropics. This important conversation will guide the Authority's refreshed approach for resourcing management initiatives and programs within the World Heritage Area that engage Rainforest Aboriginal people in the management and presentation of the Area. The Directors recognise Rainforest Aboriginal responsibilities in management of the Area and endorsed aligning the way in which the Authority works with rights based approach.

During the afternoon session, Directors developed an action plan to progress a couple of creative resourcing ideas that would boost support World Heritage management, visitor amenities and other initiatives to enhance presentation. Authority staff have been tasked to work with key regional industry, government, Indigenous and community stakeholders to develop a business plan for these proposals. Revenue raising opportunities was one option to be explored. Other opportunities discussed included development of World Heritage events, identification of key hubs to extend visitation to less visited areas of the property, educational activities and attracting funding for threatened species.

The second day of the Board meeting focused on the Authority's strategic work programs, including the proposed approach to reviewing the Wet Tropics Management Plan for 2018. The Plan provides for statutory protection of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, and the 10-year review creates an opportunity for the Authority to consult with landholders, Traditional Owners and the broader community to update and improve the Plan operations. Directors were briefed on potential amendments that would go out for public comment as part of the first round of formal consultation on the Plan Review. Authority staff are now preparing a 'have your say' booklet outlining the review process, potential amendments and issues for public comment. The booklet and maps will be distributed to regional centres, stakeholder groups, and individuals in February 2017.

Directors were very pleased to learn of the positive hearing that the Authority received at the 26th Wet Tropics Ministerial Forum which was convened in Sydney on the 25 November 2016. The Forum, comprising Commonwealth and Queensland Environment Ministers, meets annually to provide oversight to the strategic operation of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and consider future directions for meeting the property's World Heritage obligations. At this meeting the Ministers also approved the Authority's budget for 2016-17 and agreed to work to identify and progress initiatives for the upcoming 30 year anniversary for World Heritage Listing in 2018.

A key focus of the Ministers' discussions at the Forum was about the eradication of yellow crazy ants. The respective governments have committed a combined total of \$11.8 million over three

years to the eradication program (Australian Government has committed \$7.5 million to the Authority for the eradication program, plus a further \$1.3 million provided to Biosecurity Queensland for community capacity building to deal with tramp ants; the State Government has committed \$3.013 million to the Authority). The new funding for the program gives confidence to the Wet Tropics community that the already successful program will continue and be expanded. Scaling up of this program will ensure threats to the World Heritage values from one of the world's most invasive species are addressed. The funding will also allow the Wet Tropics Management Authority to build on its current mobilisation of farmers, local residents, Traditional Owners and the community to achieve regional eradication in and adjacent to the World Heritage Area.

The board was presented with a discussion paper that reviews the Authority's current approach to Wet Tropics World Heritage presentation. A large proportion of the regional economy relies heavily on the globally significant natural and cultural values of the Wet Tropics rainforests, and the Directors are keen to ensure that the Authority's investment into presentation is better targeted to support of key visitor centres and attractions that focus on connecting visitors to the World Heritage Area, its value and experience opportunities. The Directors were keen to develop up a series of narratives about the value of the World Heritage Area and its contribution, locally, nationally and internationally. There are many opportunities for Wet Tropics presentation to be enhanced on the basis of brokering partnerships across the tourism sector. Some of these are already occurring, based on existing programs such as tour guide training as well as support provided to visitor centres and tourism attractions.

This was the last Board meeting for 2016. The final formal job for Directors of the Wet Tropic Management Authority Board was to attend the 2016 Cassowary Awards at Hartley's Crocodile Adventures on the 3 December 2016. Over 180 people attended this prestigious event which celebrates the contributions made by the wider community into the protection and presentation of the World Heritage Area.

The next Board meeting is scheduled for March 2017.