



WET TROPICS STRATEGIC PLAN 2020–2030

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Background information

The Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area

The Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area (the Area) stretches from just south of Cooktown to Townsville. The almost 900,000 hectare World Heritage Area is famous for the rainforests which cloak its rugged mountain ranges and some coastal and tableland sections. The Area also contains numerous other vegetation communities such as wet sclerophyll forests, open woodlands, riverine communities, melaleuca swamps, wetlands, coastal scrub and mangroves. It is home to the world's oldest rainforest and one of the world's oldest living cultures.

The Area is a special landscape where we can trace and see living examples of some of the earliest flowering plants, primitive marsupials and the emergence of songbirds. Rugged mountain ranges, fast-flowing rivers, deep gorges, numerous waterfalls and expansive vistas provide spectacular scenery in this particularly beautiful region. The Area is also culturally rich, comprising the lands of at least 20 Rainforest Aboriginal¹ tribal groups, including 120 clans and 8 language groups. These tribal groups have been an integral part of the land and seascape, living in and around the region for many thousands of years and using traditional practices to manage country.

The Area supports the highest vertebrate biodiversity of any region in Australia. Nearly a quarter of the region's vertebrate species (155 of 669) have significant conservation value. The Area supports over 2,800 vascular plant species, of which 700 are endemic. Animal diversity is also outstanding, with the Area home to approximately 669 species of vertebrate animals, half of which are birds. A number of these species have restricted ranges and specialised habitat requirements while others are ancient species considered relicts from the time of the Gondwana supercontinent.

World Heritage listing

World Heritage listing is the highest level of international recognition that can be afforded to a place. The Area was inscribed on the World Heritage List on 9 December 1988. Recognised as being of

outstanding universal value, it is of such exceptional significance 'to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity'.

The Australian Government, in partnership with the Queensland Government, has made a commitment on behalf of the Australian people to identify, protect, conserve, present and transmit Area for current and future generations. In accepting its nomination, the World Heritage Committee recognised that the Area is stunningly beautiful and extremely important for its rich and unique biodiversity. It also presents an unparalleled record of the ecological and evolutionary processes that shaped the flora and fauna of Australia, containing the relicts of the great Gondwanan forest that covered Australia and part of Antarctica 50 to 100 million years ago.

A World Heritage-listed site must be managed in accordance with the [World Heritage management principles](#) listed in Schedule 5 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Schedule 5 presents the Australian World Heritage management principles.

Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

To be considered of outstanding universal value, a property needs to meet one or more of ten criteria, meet conditions of integrity, and have an adequate system of protection and management to safeguard its future. This is summarised in a [Statement of Outstanding Universal Value](#) prepared by the State Party to the World Heritage Convention (Australia) and approved by the World Heritage Committee and this is included in Appendix A.

Statements of outstanding universal value include examples of key attributes that contribute to the property's [outstanding universal value](#), but may not document all attributes protected by World Heritage listing. Attributes may be too numerous to list individually, may be referred to in broader descriptive terms (for example, waterbirds may be mentioned rather than each individual species of waterbird) or may be identified after the property is inscribed on the World Heritage List (for example, new species may be

¹ Throughout this document the term Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples is used by the Authority to refer specifically to Traditional Owners/Custodians of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area. However, the Authority recognises that Traditional Owners/Custodians of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area may identify themselves at local, state, national and international scale using a diversity of terms. These include but are not limited to: clan groups (at least 120), tribal groups (at least 20), language groups (at least 8), 'Bama', 'Traditional Owners', 'Custodians', 'First Nations Peoples', 'First Peoples', 'native title holders' and 'common law holders'.

discovered or their conservation status may change).

Attributes that contribute to the outstanding universal value for which the property is included on the World Heritage List are considered to contribute to the property's World Heritage values under the Commonwealth [Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999](#).

Throughout this document the terms World Heritage values and integrity will be used to refer to the outstanding universal value of the Area.

World Heritage criteria

The Area meets all four of the natural [World Heritage criteria](#) to:

- contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance—criterion (vii)
- be outstanding examples representing the major stages of Earth's history, including the record of life, and significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features—criterion (viii)
- be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals—criterion (ix)
- contain the most important significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation—criterion (x).

Integrity

At the time of its World Heritage listing the property also met the World Heritage conditions of integrity. It was, and still is, identified as being an essentially intact ecosystem with the level of human impact low—especially when compared to other tropical forest regions—with 80% remaining of the estimated cover originally present at the time of the first European settlement.

Protection and management

In 1990, the Australian and Queensland governments agreed to jointly fund and coordinate management of the Area. The Queensland [Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993](#) and the Commonwealth [Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Conservation Act 1994](#) together give effect to the administrative and operational aspects of the agreement and facilitate the implementation of Australia's obligations under the [World Heritage Convention](#) (the Convention).

The Convention is the primary influencer of the work of the Wet Tropics Management Authority (the Authority). It calls for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of World Heritage properties such as the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area. The Convention also calls for World Heritage to have a function in the life of the community. The Authority's responsibility is to focus its attention and resources to achieve the objectives of the Convention in relation to the Area.

The vision of the Authority is 'to protect the values of the Wet Tropics through collaboration, culture, knowledge and passion'.

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

The Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) provides a legal framework to protect and manage matters of national environmental significance (MNES), such as listed threatened flora, fauna and ecological communities, National Heritage places and World Heritage properties.

Any action that is likely to have a significant impact on any MNES must be referred under the EPBC Act and may require approval. Actions that may impact on the Area may need to be referred under the EPBC Act for several reasons. As World Heritage properties (and National Heritage places) such as the Area are MNES, any activity that may have a significant impact on the World Heritage values of the World Heritage Area needs to be considered under the EPBC Act.

Further, a number of other MNES, such as listed threatened species and migratory species, are found within the boundaries of the property, and potential impacts on these matters may also require referral. This applies to actions that are proposed either within, adjacent to or outside the World Heritage property boundary, including indirect and cumulative impacts.

Where a proposed action is determined to be a controlled action (i.e. likely to have a significant impact), assessment and approval under the EPBC Act are required. All assessment processes under the EPBC Act include a public comment period. Exemptions under the EPBC Act may be applicable based on prior authorisation and existing use, as determined by the Australian Government Minister for the Environment.

More information on the EPBC Act is available at www.environment.gov.au/epbc

National Heritage listing

The Area was included on the National Heritage List for its natural values in 2007 and Indigenous values in 2012. The National Heritage listing for Indigenous values recognises that the Area provides insight into Australia's cultural history as the only area in Australia where Aboriginal people lived permanently in the rainforest—adapting to seasonal abundance and lean times. Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples were able to permanently occupy the Wet Tropics region because they had developed *tecāiques* and *tecāology* which allowed them to process toxic plants throughout the year. In addition to these unique practices, fire management was essential for Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' permanent occupation of the rainforest in the region. This includes the use of fire to convert patches of rainforest into open forest and placing hot coals at the base of lawyer vines to kill them so walking tracks and camp sites are kept clear. Both of these *tecāiques* are unique to the Wet Tropics region.

A National Heritage listed place must be managed in accordance with the National Heritage management principles listed in [Schedule 5B of the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2000](#) and management plans must be consistent with World Heritage management principles of the regulations.

Partnerships

The Authority leads and coordinates management of the Area with a wide range of partners. The management approach on page 6 sets out a framework for a partnership approach to achieve best practice World Heritage management. The Authority will maintain and strengthen collaborative partnerships to improve the quality and depth of work undertaken to achieve desired outcomes. All of the actions in the Strategic Plan will be supported by a commitment to working in close partnership and collaboration with our key stakeholders and partners including:

- Australian Government
- Queensland Government
- local government bodies
- Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples
- on-ground land managers
- infrastructure agencies
- research organisations
- conservation sector
- tourism industry
- agriculture sector and farmers
- other landholders and neighbours.

To ensure that the Area continues to play a function in the life of the community, the Authority will actively seek new partners to strengthen collaboration and leverage positive outcomes for the Area. Other sectors of interest will be in the health and social sectors, the arts sector, and financial and philanthropic organisations.

Strategic Plan context

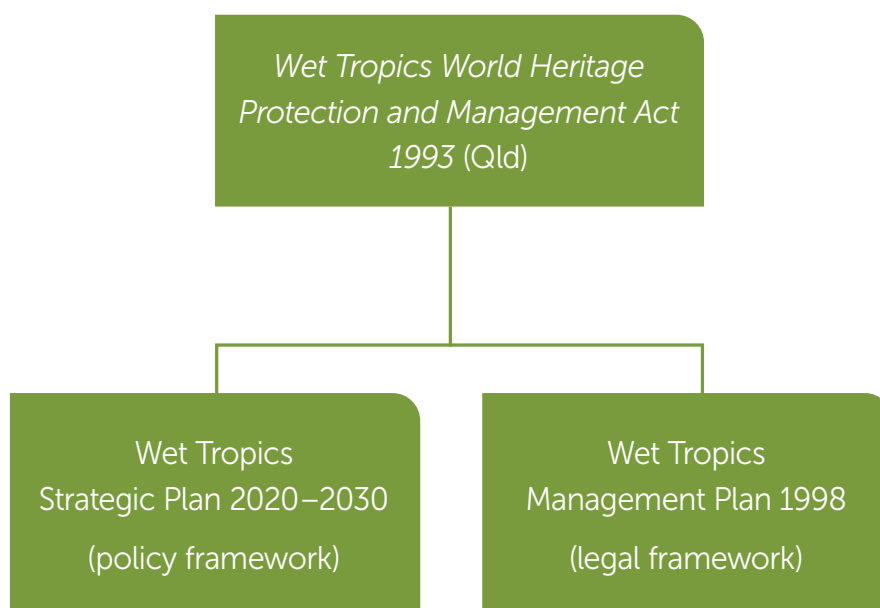
The Strategic Plan sets out the strategies that the Wet Tropics Management Authority will implement to continue to meet its obligations to protect and present the World Heritage values of the Area.

The functions of the Authority are guided by two plans:

- **Wet Tropics Strategic Plan 2020–2030 (this document)**—provides a 10-year policy framework to guide the Authority’s decision-making under the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993* (Qld). It states the desired outcomes that the Authority will deliver and outlines the actions that will achieve this. The performance of the Authority will be measured against the key performance indicators which will be regularly monitored. Progress towards achieving the outcomes will be reported annually through our Annual Report. Though it is a 10-year plan, the actions and management strategies will be reviewed after five years to ensure delivery and relevance.

- **Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998 (the Management Plan)**—subordinate Queensland legislation which provides the legal framework for management of the Area. It regulates development activities that have the potential to impact on its World Heritage values, and integrity, and includes principles and criteria for deciding permit applications.

These plans in combination are a new approach to World Heritage management. They embrace the opportunity to work with our partners and empower the community and Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples to participate meaningfully in the management of the Area.



Wet Tropics Strategic Plan—an overview

Purpose

The primary purpose of the Wet Tropics Strategic Plan 2020-2030 (the Strategic Plan) is to enable the Wet Tropics Management Authority (the Authority) to identify, protect, conserve, present, transmit to future generations and, if appropriate, rehabilitate the World Heritage values of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area (the Area). This is in accordance with Australia's obligation under the World Heritage Convention. Under section 41 of the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993* (Qld), the Authority must prepare a management plan for the Area.

10-year outcomes

The Authority will ensure that by 2030:

Outcome 1	Outcome 2	Outcome 3	Outcome 4
World Heritage values and integrity of the Area are maintained and/or enhanced.	Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' rights, interests, traditions and cultures are embedded in World Heritage management, with aspirations for Traditional Owner-led management to advance Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' livelihoods and wellbeing—spiritually, emotionally, culturally, socially, economically and environmentally.	Management of the Area is a shared responsibility of an engaged and informed Wet Tropics community.	The Area is recognised as a world-class sustainable natural and cultural tourism destination.

Strategies

1. Climate change and other threats	2. Support Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples	3. Involve the community	4. World-class tourism and recreation	5. Minimise impacts
Respond to the impacts of climate change and priority cross-tenure threats to the Area. (Page 9)	Promote and incorporate the rights, interests and aspirations of Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples in the management of the Area. (Page 14)	Optimise community participation and connection with the Area through innovative interpretation, with a focus on education, volunteering and social inclusion. (Page 17)	Enhance World Heritage presentation and support opportunities for natural and cultural tourism and recreation. (Page 20)	Manage activities that may have an impact on the Area appropriately through a regulated permit and zoning system. (Page 24)

Actions

(detailed under each strategy)

Measuring success: key performance indicators (page 27)

- Reported on annually
- Reviewed every five years

Implementation approach

Delivering actions through partnerships

The Wet Tropics Strategic Plan 2020-2030 (the Strategic Plan) is delivered through partnerships with the Wet Tropics community. Under each of the strategies, the Wet Tropics Management Authority (the Authority) has identified issues to be addressed as actions and outlined the Authority's likely role in delivery. Specific partners and delivery arrangements have not been identified here—this will occur over the course of the 10-year life of the Strategic Plan, depending upon interest of partners, timing of opportunities, and availability of resources. We encourage Wet Tropics stakeholders to review and contact us if any actions are of interest to you..

Evidence-based planning

Planning and delivery will be informed by best available information. The Authority recognises that research and ongoing consultation with the community will provide the best available information to deliver actions under the Strategic Plan. The Authority will continue to engage with diverse professional and research networks, support and engage with Wet Tropics community groups, support research through small grants programs, and support our statutory committees (Scientific Advisory Committee, and Community Consultative Committee) to provide strategic direction and the most contemporary advice.

Resources to deliver the Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan will be delivered through a combination of existing and additional resources that will need to be secured over its life. The Authority currently receives funding under a 5-year agreement between the Australian and Queensland governments. The current funding agreement is from 2018 to 2023. The Authority will be seeking to secure ongoing funding from the Australian and Queensland governments, particularly through demonstrating timely and effective delivery of actions and outcomes in the Strategic Plan.

Additional resources will be identified through government and non-government sources. Government funding may be through budget allocations, grants, or in-kind. In many cases, the Authority may play the role of securing resources for partners to deliver actions, or subcomponents of actions, directly. Examples of specific grant funding sources include:

- [Australian Government's Heritage Grants Program](#)
- [Australian Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy](#)
- [Queensland Government's Land Restoration Fund](#).

Measuring success

The Strategic Plan identifies four key performance indicators against each outcome to be achieved (pages 27–28). While it has identified a suite of actions that could be implemented to achieve these outcomes, there is a chance that not all actions may need to be delivered over the life of the Strategic Plan to achieve outcomes. Also, some actions are dependent upon the interest of stakeholders, and the availability of resources. The Authority will report annually on progress towards achieving the outcomes through our annual report. Major reviews will occur after 5 years (2025) and after 10 years (2030).

Strategy 1: Climate change and other threats

Respond to the impacts of climate change and priority cross-tenure threats to the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area (the Area).

Adapting to climate change

Climate change poses one of the most significant future threats to the Wet Tropics region. Climate change will likely result in widespread, unavoidable and substantial ecological change, which will impact upon the biodiversity values that underpin the World Heritage listing of the Area. The natural assets of the Area are critical to the region's tourism industry and provide direct and indirect 'cross-sectoral' economic benefits of more than \$5.2 billion to the regional economy annually.

Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples have rich and living bodies of laws, spiritual connections, knowledge, practices and custodial obligations to the waters, lands, plants and animals of the Wet Tropics biocultural region, including to the Area. Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' identities, their values, livelihoods and custodial obligations are fundamentally threatened by the escalating impacts of human-generated climate change.

The Authority will play a leadership role in responding to climate impacts on the Area. In collaboration with partners, the Authority will develop an adaptation plan and take responsibility for delivering upon priority actions.

Addressing priority cross-tenure threats

The Area is managed on the ground by a number of partners across a range of tenures. Each of these partners is responsible for managing their respective areas of land. The Department of Environment and Science through the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) manages 85% of the Area and dedicates significant resources to undertake day-to-day management (such as weed and pest animal control, visitor management, road maintenance, capital works, wildlife management, research.) across

the parks and forestry estate. The Authority has an ongoing partnership agreement in place with QPWS with associated funding to help manage the World Heritage values of the Area. Approximately 10% of the Area is managed as private lease or freehold, and the remainder is managed by local councils (for council water supply assets, visitor facilities, public infrastructure, and road corridors) and community service infrastructure providers. The Authority also acknowledges the important role that Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples, community organisations, conservation organisations, land holders, and the tourism industry play in the ongoing management of threats to the Area.

Despite the great work undertaken by partners, problems often arise when issues cut across tenure boundaries. Without adequate coordination, responses to issues may be ad hoc and ineffective as they only address the extent of the problem up to the respective tenure boundaries and organisation responsibilities. The Authority has a strong interest in shared governance and management outcomes across all land tenures in the Area, and as such is well positioned to respond to a number of key cross-tenure issues. Consultation with the Wet Tropics community have identified some key issues where we can play a lead or coordinating role in progressing the following actions.

Action 1.1: Develop a climate change adaptation plan for the Area and coordinate delivery of priority actions

The issue to be addressed

A solid body of work has been undertaken to date by many Wet Tropics stakeholders to understand current and future impacts of climate change on the Area, and to enhance landscape resilience. However, a number of gaps still exist in our response, particularly:

- how to apply more flexible principles and management approaches that will minimise negative change to the Area's World Heritage values and integrity
- moving thinking beyond 'business as usual' and identifying adaptation actions, associated timescales and resource implications
- engage key stakeholders, including conservation organisations and community organisations, in a practical way that results in increased awareness of climate impacts, bio-cultural knowledge and action on the ground.

Action we will take

To address these gaps the Authority will:

- develop, in collaboration with the community, a climate change adaptation plan for the Wet Tropics
- support delivery of priority actions with our key collaborators, with the goal to be recognised as a national and global leader in adaptive management of a World Heritage property.

Action 1.2: Establish a biosecurity taskforce to coordinate strategies and responses to major biosecurity threats across the Area

The issue to be addressed

Tropical North Queensland and the Wet Tropics are particularly susceptible to biosecurity incursions—the tropical climate offers favourable conditions for exotic tropical plants and animals. Despite this there is little coordination to tackle major biosecurity issues at a 'whole of Wet Tropics' scale. There is a need for a strategic approach to improve surveillance networks and systems and coordination of response mechanisms for incursions into the Area.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- advocate for and support the establishment of a biosecurity taskforce in collaboration with major land managers and relevant agencies to develop strategies to address major biosecurity incursions
- dependant on resources, act as the secretariat and work with land managers to address priority issues and threats. Examples of these may include:
 - developing a response to Phytophthora and myrtle rust
 - assisting regional efforts to control feral pigs
 - coordinating responses to existing and emerging weeds, pest animals and diseases that may impact upon the region's biodiversity.

The biosecurity taskforce will need to work closely with Commonwealth and State biosecurity agencies, and link to appropriate systems (e.g. national biosecurity system) to ensure there will be no duplication of roles and responsibilities.

Action 1.3: Eradicate yellow crazy ants from within and adjacent to the Area

The issue to be addressed

Yellow crazy ants are listed as one of the top 100 worst invasive species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the Global Invasive Species Database. They are a major threat to the rich biodiversity of the Area, as well as agricultural crops and the quality of life for local residents. Yellow crazy ants were first detected in the Area in 2001 and infestations have since spread to cover over 1,688ha south of Cairns and about 70ha near Kuranda. In 2013 the Authority established the Yellow Crazy Ant Eradication Program to protect the Area. The program has worked successfully with landholders, community and industry to detect additional infestations and prevent further spread of the ants. It has eradicated several small infestations and demonstrated that it can reduce ant numbers significantly through baiting over large and complex forest areas.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- continue effective treatment programs to reduce yellow crazy ant numbers, improve detection methods, seek out any additional infestations, build capability and expertise, and engage the community in the eradication program
- eradicate the yellow crazy ant infestations within and adjacent to the World Heritage Area by 2030.

Action 1.4: Support the recovery of threatened species across the Area

The issue to be addressed

The Area has a high proportion of threatened species, many of which are also rare or endemic. They include some iconic species (such as the southern cassowary and the mahogany glider) but most of them are little known, particularly the plants, frogs and invertebrates. The high level of threatened species is related to the unique evolution of the flora and fauna in the Wet Tropics, as well as loss of habitat due to forest clearing and changes to water and fire regimes. Threatened species recovery plans outline research and management actions to address the decline of these species. These plans are implemented by recovery teams—multi-stakeholder teams that combine efforts and resources to deliver plans for particular species. These teams require ongoing coordination and support in order to be successful, but not all are adequately supported.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- continue to support recovery teams as resources allow, including collaboration with Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples who have cultural connections with some of these threatened species
- continue to provide secretariat support to the Cassowary Recovery Team and Northern Bettong Recovery Team, and will seek further resources to assist other recovery teams on an ongoing basis.

Action 1.5: Rehabilitate degraded areas to improve integrity of the Area

The issue to be addressed

The Area has recovered well over the last few decades from historical logging and land clearing that occurred before the Area was declared as World Heritage. Good management has greatly assisted this process—particularly controls on activities within the Area under the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993* (Qld)—as has the rapid expansion of the nature conservation estate in national park and other reserves. The other major factor is the extraordinary efforts of a multitude of community groups, the not-for-profit conservation sector, Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples and others undertaking restoration and enhancement activities at various scales across the Area. Despite these efforts significant areas of the Wet Tropics still require further works (e.g. new plantings of native species, enhancement, managing threats such as invasive species, erosion control) to improve the condition and integrity of previously cleared areas, enhance connectivity for the movement of biodiversity, and to contribute to Australia's efforts to reduce carbon emissions through sequestration of carbon in biodiverse plantings.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- continue to actively support rehabilitation of degraded areas through:
 - finalising a connectivity plan and decision support framework in collaboration with Terrain NRM to prioritise and direct restoration actions
 - support threatened species recovery teams to develop and implement connectivity and restoration plans for individual (or groups) of species
 - seek to develop and implement a partner-driven 'whole of Wet Tropics' landscape scale restoration project, through funding from the Queensland Government's Land Restoration fund or other funding sources yet to be identified.

Action 1.6: Support all Wet Tropics land managers to implement appropriate fire regimes in response to a variable and changing climate

The issue to be addressed

A changing climate and environment are creating increasing challenges for land managers in undertaking planned burns (also called controlled burns) to manage fuel loads or achieve certain ecological outcomes. As weather becomes more variable and unpredictable, land managers are finding that the 'windows' when they would usually burn are changing, or disappearing altogether, creating new challenges in how land managers need to adapt planning and resourcing to this unpredictable fire context. The most complete and comprehensive guidance informing planned burns are through the [Wet Tropics Bioregion of Queensland Planned Burn Guidelines](#) (State of Queensland, 2012). However, these guidelines do not adequately address cultural burning practices or new challenges presented by climate change, and require updating. Consequential changes are also required by land managers in terms of how they plan and allocate resources for planned burns.

Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples have managed the landscape through the use of fire for thousands of years. Traditional knowledge around the use of fire must be considered and incorporated into contemporary land management, including increased involvement of Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples in planning and undertaking controlled burns.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- work with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples to update the Planned Burn Guidelines to adequately consider climate change
- work with Wet Tropics land managers to embed these guidelines in land management frameworks (e.g. operational plans, management plans, farm plans, country-based plans)
- support better integration of traditional ecological and cultural knowledge systems and western science in planned burns
- advocate for more involvement of Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples in planning and delivery of planned burns.

Strategy 2: Support Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples

Promote and incorporate the rights, interests and aspirations of Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples in the management of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area (the Area).

Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples are the Traditional Custodians of the Wet Tropics region. For many thousands of years before European settlement, the Wet Tropics rainforests were one of the most populated areas of Australia, and the only area where Australian Aboriginal peoples lived permanently in the rainforest. Today, there are at least 20 Rainforest Aboriginal tribal groups, 120 clans and 8 language groups—currently over 20,000 people—with ongoing traditional connections to land in the Area. Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples have adapted to a range of climatic, environmental and social changes and continue to have obligations for the management of their country under traditional lore and customs.

Much has changed in terms of Rainforest Aboriginal land interests in the Wet Tropics since the Area was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1988.

- Native title was introduced in 2003, recognising under common law a set of rights and interests over land or waters where Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples practised traditional lore and customs prior to European settlement.
- Native title and other Rainforest Aboriginal land interests now cover at least 87.5% of the Area.
- The Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area Regional Agreement (the Regional Agreement) was signed in 2005 for the involvement of Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples in the management of the Area.
- The Australian Government announced the recognition of the Wet Tropics Indigenous values as part of the existing National Heritage listing for the Wet Tropics of Queensland in 2012.

- Rainforest Aboriginal governance arrangements have shifted from a regional approach to a local and sub-regional approach in support of self-determination and leadership in land management.
- Registered native title bodies corporate (RNTBCs), Cultural Heritage Bodies and a range of other Aboriginal corporations and business enterprises are now operating in the Area.
- A number of Rainforest Aboriginal groups are becoming land owners in the Wet Tropics region. This has created pathways for Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples to undertake master planning processes for community development, achieve return to country aspirations, develop economic opportunities and enter into joint management arrangements for national parks (currently in the Daintree area only) through tenure resolution processes.

In addition to strengthening the involvement of Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples in the management of the Area, the Wet Tropics Management Authority (the Authority) will also support a range of Traditional Owner-led activities such as traditional knowledge maintenance and practices, presentation and management of cultural values, return to country through cooperative management agreements, and enhanced livelihoods and wellbeing through collaborative partnerships. This is enabled through the Strategic Plan, further strengthening of provisions in the Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998 and refreshing the Regional Agreement.

Action 2.1: Implement a rights-based approach to World Heritage management in the Wet Tropics

The issue to be addressed

The strategic objective of the 1972 World Heritage Convention is 'to enhance the role of communities in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention'. This highlights the need to respect and support community involvement in World Heritage processes. Where these rights are not addressed appropriately, a range of issues can emerge. The Authority recognises Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' roles in management of the Area and is committed to engaging with Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples in a rights-based approach. This means being sensitive to both natural and cultural factors and the realisation of related human rights. The Authority continues to collaborate with Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples to increase understanding of rights-based approaches, to identify effective approaches and to develop possible tools that would ensure rights issues are appropriately considered in all of the Authority's programs.

Action we will take

The Authority will reinforce and strengthen relationships with our partners, including Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples, and continue to collaborate with Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples, government and non-government organisations to:

- increase implementation of rights-based approaches (e.g. in the context of the Authority's functions: address relevant articles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and use free, prior and informed consent processes)
- identify and support culturally appropriate engagement protocols
- acknowledge, recognise and endorse the range of Traditional Owner decision-making processes
- partner with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to align with best practice ethical guidelines to resolve concerns around research and commercial activity permits.

Action 2.2: Support and coordinate implementation of a refreshed Regional Agreement

The issue to be addressed

The Regional Agreement was signed on 29 April 2005 by 18 Rainforest Aboriginal tribal groups, the Authority, and the Australian and Queensland governments. The Regional Agreement recognises the significant contribution that Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples make to the management of cultural and natural heritage values in the Wet Tropics and commits all parties to mechanisms for cooperative management of the World Heritage Area. The Memorandum of Understanding within the agreement was updated in March 2006, however a great deal has changed across the Wet Tropics landscape since this time. Changes in governance arrangements have meant that the agreement has not been effectively implemented. Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples at a regional workshop on 21–22 October 2017 called for the support of the Authority, North Queensland Land Council and Terrain NRM to refresh the Regional Agreement with all partners.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- support the Traditional Owner Leadership Group to negotiate an Implementation Agreement (to refresh the 2005 Regional Agreement) with partners
- facilitate annual Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' forums and support a regional Indigenous expertise-based committee to review progress with the Implementation Agreement and its achievement
- develop joint funding submissions with partners to secure resources to support Implementation Agreement priorities.

Action 2.3: Empower Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' wellbeing and livelihoods

The issue to be addressed

Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' wellbeing has been deeply harmed by colonisation and the subsequent loss of lands, loss of language and loss of culture. Achieving optimal conditions for health and wellbeing requires a holistic and whole-of-life view of health that encompasses the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community.

The Area is part of a series of living cultural landscapes that have important social, economic and spiritual significance for Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples. Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples seek the opportunity to derive economic and social benefit from their country.

Action we will take

The Authority will partner with Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples to ensure positive livelihood outcomes, so that long-term social, economic, cultural, spiritual and environmental aspirations are realised through:

- support for biocultural tourism projects
- revenue raising initiatives
- fee for service opportunities
- expanded land and sea ranger programs
- other emerging Traditional Owner-led initiatives.

The Authority will collaborate with Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples to develop a framework for measuring wellbeing in a World Heritage context.

Action 2.4: Support Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples to uphold and strengthen their primary substantive rights and their custodial relationships between their peoples and customary landscapes

The issue to be addressed

The *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993* (Qld) acknowledges the significant contribution that Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples make to the future management of the cultural and natural values within the Area, particularly through joint management agreements. Cooperative management currently occurs across 46.9% of the Area through Indigenous land use agreements and cooperative management agreements. Indigenous Protected Areas have been declared across 29.2% of the World Heritage Area. Land tenure resolution negotiations have commenced in some parts of the Area (i.e. north of the Daintree River) providing an opportunity for joint management of national parks within the Eastern Kuku Yalanji estate. Limited progress has been made in establishing formal cooperative management arrangements in the central Wet Tropics (includes the Atherton Tableland) and further resources and support are required, in particular to support Indigenous ranger groups, country-based planning and land management activities..

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- support Traditional Owner-led cultural and natural resource management initiatives (e.g. joint management, sole management or other management models)
- embrace Rainforest Aboriginal tradition and contribution to the management of the Area (e.g. through accessing country, permitting processes, cooperative management agreements, cultural heritage management plans, master plans, other Traditional Owner management plans, and employment opportunities within the Authority)
- support programs (including through grants) to enhance knowledge, fulfil cultural responsibilities to country, and improve Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' capacity to manage cultural and natural values on their traditional country (e.g. collaborate on clan-based planning and mapping)
- promote Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' achievements in the management of the Area through culturally appropriate communications (e.g. Rainforest Aboriginal News).

Strategy 3: Involve the community

Optimise community participation and connection with the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area (the Area) through innovative interpretation, with a focus on education, volunteering and social inclusion.

As a World Heritage site, it is important that the Area continues to play an important role in the life of the community. To help achieve this, the Wet Tropics Management Authority (the Authority) works with a diverse range of Wet Tropics stakeholders and recognises the valuable role various state government land management agencies, land holders, Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples, the private sector, conservation groups and the wider community have in managing the Area.

The Authority promotes and supports community organisations and volunteers to participate in the management of the Area. Information about our

successful management partnerships can be found at wettropics.gov.au/management-partners. This valuable work will continue over the life of the Strategic Plan. We also recognise that optimising community participation and connection with the Area can be community-led and further strengthened through recognition.

Future engagement efforts will be expanded to target businesses, youth, the arts and health sectors, visitors to the region, science and social networks that have an influential and global reach. A particular focus will be to engage youth in ways that resonate with their interests and encourage their participation and future leadership in the management of the Area.

Action 3.1: Empower volunteers and support community contributions to World Heritage management

The issue to be addressed

There is an incredible amount of social capital in the Wet Tropics region. Volunteers have always played, and continue to play, an important role in protecting and rehabilitating the Area for future generations. Community organisations contribute skills and labour to a variety of activities, making them a vital and substantial partner in conservation. They participate in projects ranging from field studies to rehabilitating important corridors to allow movement of wildlife and dispersal of plants. Community organisations and volunteers require information, resources and support to undertake their work and remain sustainable. The Authority currently supports over 20 community organisations and actively promotes volunteer recruitment activities. Whilst there are a number of long-term, highly dedicated organisations—such as the Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, (CAFNEC), the North Queensland Conservation Council (NQCC) and Trees for the Evelyn and Atherton Tablelands Inc, (TREAT)—volunteers often burn out and community organisations are left seeking new members.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- develop or deepen partnerships with existing community organisations to enhance and promote volunteer opportunities across the Wet Tropics
- engage with organisations that can help boost training, development and career pathway opportunities for volunteers
- support citizen science and junior ranger group initiatives in the Wet Tropics
- disseminate and make available credible, up-to-date information and advice about World Heritage management to help manage external threats and impacts
- celebrate the great work of community organisations and volunteers through events (e.g. Cassowary Awards) and publications.

Action 3.2: Support our statutory committees and non-statutory committees to empower them to participate in decision making

The issue to be addressed

There are two statutory committees that provide advice to the Authority's Board of Directors (the board): a Community Consultative Committee (CCC) and a Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC). The Authority can also establish non-statutory committees, such as reference and working groups, to address threats to the Area and/or to address other community issues. These groups comprise of members of agencies, interest groups, Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples, conservation, tourism and community groups, and/or subject matter experts, who collaborate to plan, develop, guide and implement targeted actions. Current groups include the Yellow Crazy Ant Eradication Program Steering Committee and Reference Group, Indigenous Advisory Members, Traditional Owner Leadership Group and the Cassowary Recovery Team.

Action we will take

- support good governance and decision-making through providing secretariat support to all committees
- regularly seek feedback from committees on how to improve their operation
- ensure engagement with committees is meaningful and purposeful
- seek advice from committees on key and emerging issues, to inform decisions and directions of the board
- periodically convene sector roundtables or meetings to inform the board on particular issues or opportunities as required (for example a youth forum, conservation roundtable or tourism roundtable).

Action 3.3: Deliver at least five high-profile education or awareness campaigns to influence attitudes and behaviour change

The issue to be addressed

The Authority needs to go beyond disseminating information and move towards influencing and then measuring behaviour change as part of our work to better manage and protect the Area. This may involve targeting new stakeholder groups (i.e. beyond the ones we commonly work with). Ambassadors and social media heroes may play an important role in successful education and awareness campaigns.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- develop and implement at least five major education or awareness campaigns over the next decade, with the aim of influencing attitudes and behaviour change of target groups to support outcomes for the Area. Each campaign will:
 - establish a goal, identify target audiences and ambassadors if appropriate
 - develop concern, awareness and a specific call to action
 - provide information with simple and inspiring messaging that utilises strong visual storytelling and a physical element or exhibit
 - utilise social media networks and innovative multi-media
 - evaluate the impact and adapt the messaging as appropriate.

Action 3.4: Revitalise the Wet Tropics Youth Engagement Program

The issue to be addressed

Young people are the future managers of the Area. However, many young people are disconnected from nature due to increasing urbanisation and technology use. To encourage youth to be the next generation of conservationists, scientists, advocates, rangers, tour operators and politicians that look after our land and seascapes, we must target youth through methods and platforms they prefer to use (such as apps, online sharing, social media and youth-targeted activities). There are currently numerous resources available for youth to learn about plants, animals and landscapes but very few youth-targeted programs and resources on World Heritage, the Area, Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples or protected areas.

It is important to optimise youth participation and connection with the Area through innovative interpretation and youth leadership development. There is an opportunity for the Authority to learn from and collaborate with those people who know how to reach youth (e.g. youth themselves, educators, environmental education centres, conservation groups, ranger programs, universities, youth organisations and others). This will help us develop effective methods for increasing youth awareness and interest in the Area, as well as facilitating their participation and leadership interests in World Heritage protection.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- develop strategies in partnership with the education and youth sector that encourage youth to understand, value, care for and become advocates and supporters of the Area
- develop and disseminate youth-friendly Wet Tropics World Heritage Area content to the education and youth sectors
- support existing organisations and programs that promote participation of youth in caring for the Area
- through its workforce plan, ensure attraction of qualified young professionals to work with the Authority.

Action 3.5: Strengthen social inclusion through a 'Healthy Parks, Healthy People' initiative in the Wet Tropics

The issue to be addressed

'Healthy Parks, Healthy People' is a global movement that recognises the fundamental connections between human health and environmental health. Growing scientific evidence and generations of traditional cultural knowledge show that contact with nature is critical for our physical, mental, social and spiritual health. Healthy nature sustains our life, livelihoods and liveability. Parks that are valued and maintained are also fundamental to economic growth and vibrant and healthy communities.

The Area plays a vital role in our identity and the development of strong, cohesive communities. The Wet Tropics community should be able to access benefits from the Area through a greater variety of organised programs. This approach encourages those from the health, environment, parks, tourism, Indigenous, community development, education, business and other sectors to work together to develop and support 'Healthy Parks, Healthy People' initiatives across the Area..

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- develop a 'Healthy Parks, Healthy People' plan with customised messaging and outreach materials then build awareness and advocacy for the initiative
- engage with partner organisations and develop partnerships with existing and new sectors (i.e. health, arts and others) to explore opportunities for a 'Healthy Parks, Healthy People' initiatives in the Area
- activate 'Healthy Parks, Healthy People' in the Area then evaluate and measure results.

Strategy 4: World-class tourism and recreation

Enhance World Heritage presentation and support opportunities for natural and cultural tourism and recreation.

The Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area (the Area) is an exceptional landscape. It warrants concerted efforts to provide the highest quality standards in presentation, including a diversity of experiences to allow residents and visitors to enjoy and appreciate the values of the Area. This needs to be balanced with ensuring that there are no negative impacts on the World Heritage values or integrity. Achieving this potential requires the Wet Tropics Management Authority (the Authority) to take a leading role, working with our partners in government, tourism agencies, local businesses, Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples and the conservation sector to achieve excellence in World Heritage presentation. The Authority will continue to partner with local and state tourism bodies as well as the state government (such as Tourism Tropical North Queensland, Queensland Tourism Industry Council) as well local tourism agencies and operators in delivering this strategy.

This collaborative approach will:

- identify new ways to ensure that people have the opportunity to better appreciate and understand the World Heritage values of the Area
- motivate and inspire the community and agencies to make a deeper connection with the Area and take an ongoing interest in its care and protection
- create pathways for Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples to participate more in tourism and presentation activities in the Area.

The needs of visitors are constantly changing, and the tourism industry is required to evolve accordingly. In recent years, the Wet Tropics region has seen record visitor numbers. Visitor surveys highlight that the experience of the rainforest is a major drawcard for visitors to the region. However, surveys also highlight that many people visiting the Area are not aware of its World Heritage status or the reasons for its listing. This suggests that more must be done to communicate what is special about the Area and help raise its potential as a globally significant destination.

Action 4.1: Develop and promote a world-class Wet Tropics 'brand' to promote the Area as a natural and cultural tourism destination

The issues to be addressed

There is no coherent profile of the Area as a tourism destination and brand. Good branding involves the art of storytelling. It consists of developing and shaping story lines about why the Area is special. A powerful brand helps communicate the meaning and significance behind the Area's National Heritage and World Heritage values. It helps build greater interest and involvement among residents and visitors, encourages return visitation and inspires ongoing efforts to present and conserve the Area.

Along with our partners, the Authority seeks to promote rich messages to profile the Area and support partners to use the World Heritage brand consistently and widely in marketing and presentation projects.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- identify, develop and promote the brand story for the Area in partnership with the tourism industry
- investigate the need for certification or other requirements about how the tourism industry presents the brand
- identify opportunities to diversify visitor experience opportunities across the Area
- develop, install and maintain world-class information and interpretive materials (including signage), new technologies and other innovative approaches in association with the tourism industry, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, local government, Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples and the conservation sector
- expand the advocacy role of the Authority to influence marketing strategies and campaigns developed by Tourism Australia and Tourism Events Queensland, to promote the Area consistent with its nature-based presentation opportunities and values.

Action 4.2: Improving the visitor experience through immersion in the Wet Tropics story

The issue to be addressed

An essential component of World Heritage presentation for the Wet Tropics is ensuring that the World Heritage values of the Area are communicated clearly and effectively to ensure visitors can appreciate the story. Storytelling and quality interpretation are critical tools to help engage and inspire people. This in turn will result in ongoing support for the protection and management of the Area. The Wet Tropics has many incredible, unique stories to tell. It is important to ensure these stories are communicated consistently, clearly and in an engaging/interactive way to all visitors.

There is a lack of quality communication products about the Wet Tropics as a destination. However, there is considerable interest from industry and the community for the Authority to produce a range of communication products. The Authority's website and social media channels, along with those of our key partners, provide an important vehicle for delivering these communication products. As many as 80% of visitors research their visit and prepare an itinerary before they arrive. This underlines the great value in investing in digital presentation formats including apps, eBooks and web pages. These platforms are highly mobile and can reach multiple audiences. They are also easily updated and shared to new audiences to support dispersal and as resources to enrich people's experience of the Area.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- seek out sponsorship and collaborative opportunities with the tourism industry to produce engaging and powerful interpretive products (e.g. seasonal calendar)
- grow our partnerships with the private and public sectors, Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples, tourism agencies, media, film and communication companies—supporting them to also become story-tellers and presenters of the Area
- explore the value and feasibility of a partnership with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the tourism industry to develop an 'experience' guide that presents and guides opportunities to explore the Area, including, for example information about birding, mountain bike riding, long walks and wildlife encounters.

Action 4.3: Support capacity building for Wet Tropics champions—tour guides and hosts/ambassadors

The issue to be addressed

Capacity building is identified by the World Heritage Committee as the most cost-effective way to support World Heritage presentation. The Authority relies on and supports capacity building through a network of excellent, well-trained tour guides and volunteers. There is the opportunity to extend this support to a wider cohort of tourism and community hosts who can be supported through training to be partners in presentation.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- ensure that visitors have access to great experiences in the Area through Authority accredited and industry recognised Wet Tropics Tour Guides
- continue to deliver the Wet Tropics Tour Guide Program in partnership with Savannah Guides to further develop tour guide confidence and competence to provide access to up-to-date, high standard and culturally appropriate information
- review and develop core units of the Wet Tropics Tour Guide Program to meet World Heritage standards
- support Savannah Guides to extend the delivery of the Wet Tropic Ambassadors program to visitor information centre staff, volunteers, schools, community groups and the tourism industry
- facilitate mentoring and broker support for Indigenous rangers aspiring to become tour guides and to emerging Rainforest Aboriginal tourism products focusing on presentation, including developing partnerships with potential investment partners.

Action 4.4: Support increased diversity and quality of natural and cultural tourism opportunities in the Area

The issue to be addressed

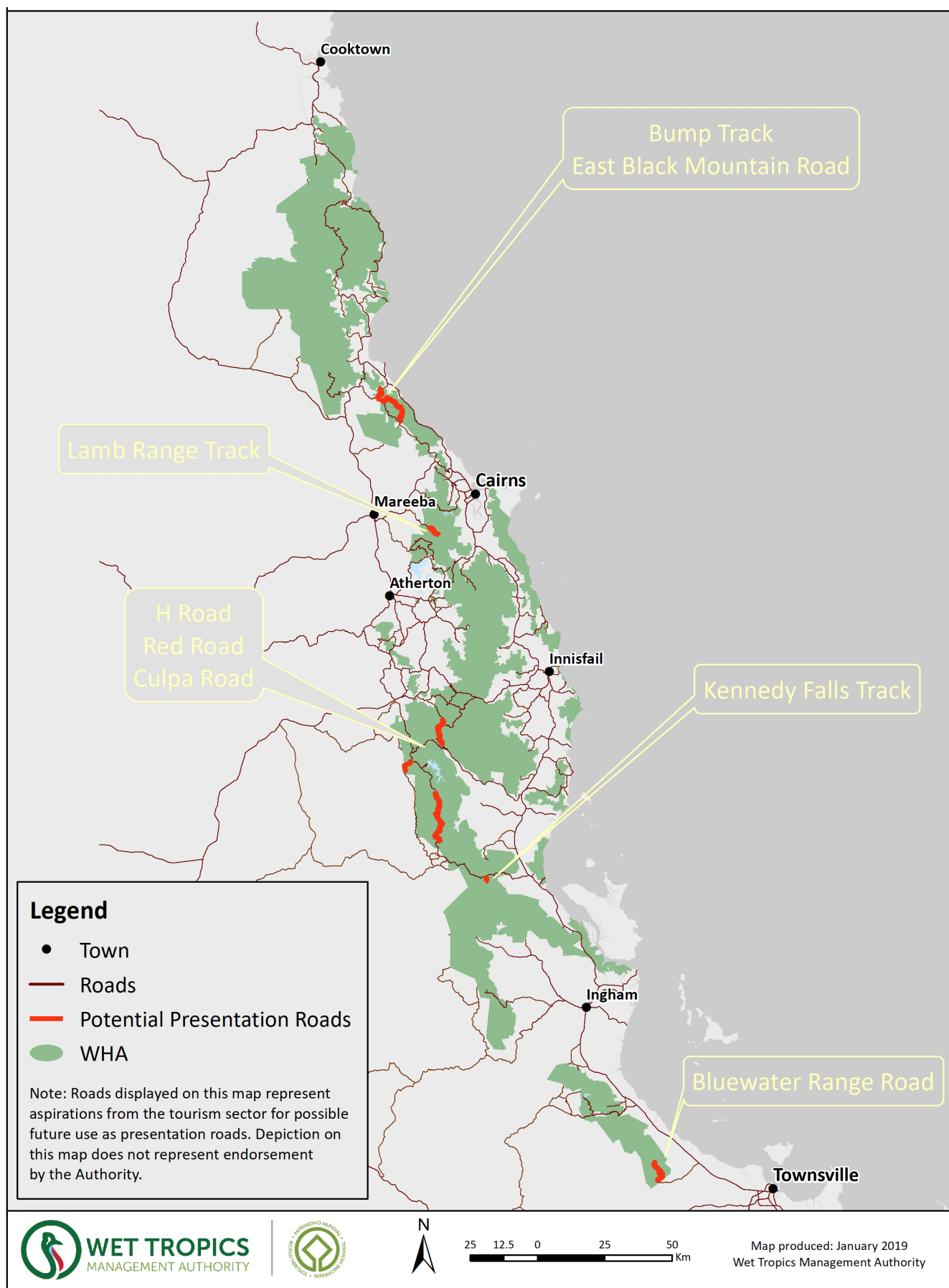
An Australian Electoral Commission experience audit of the Wet Tropics (2012) identified that the regional offerings were limited, and much more could be done to deepen and enrich visitor experience to highlight the range of experience opportunities in the Area. At the same time, tourism markets have matured and are seeking richer, more meaningful experiences, including Aboriginal cultural experiences. There is also an identified need for longer multi-day walking tracks and diversification of experiences.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- Develop a tourism destination plan in partnership with the tourism industry, Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples, land managers and the conservation sector to identify appropriate tourism opportunities for presenting the World Heritage values of the Area. This could include:
 - jointly investigating potential opportunities such as those identified in the Nature Based Tourism Strategy, Walking Strategy (e.g. Misty Mountains, H-Road, Bartle Frere, Cape Tribulation to Mission Beach walking trail) and other strategies
 - identifying new opportunities within the existing zoning system in which small, medium and larger-scale tourism opportunities could be developed without compromising the Area's World Heritage values or integrity of the Area
 - supporting Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples to better link with mainstream tourism business to develop and establish new cultural tourism ventures and ensure that all tourism activities are operating in a culturally appropriate way
 - continuing to explore and advocate for a Wet Tropics Gateway and World Heritage Centre in Cairns
 - clarifying zoning in the revised Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998, and definitions around what kinds of infrastructure is allowed in each zone
 - maintaining a map (see map 1, page 23) of old roads that may have the potential to be restored and used as presentation roads. This action also includes potentially building a database of old forestry roads, and other previously disturbed areas, or future visitor sites (e.g. roads or sites identified in the Wet Tropics Nature Based Tourism Strategy 2000 and the data recorded in documents prepared by the Wet Tropics Ecotourism Strategy Steering Committee in 1996).

Map 1—potential future presentation roads identified by tourism industry



Strategy 5: Minimise impacts

Appropriately manage activities that may have an impact on the World Heritage values and integrity of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World heritage Area (the Area) through a regulated permit and zoning system.

Since its inscription on the World Heritage List, the Australian and Queensland governments have worked cooperatively to put in place a comprehensive management regime for the Area. The Wet Tropics Management Authority (the Authority) has delegated powers under the provisions of the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993* (Qld) to ensure active measures are taken to meet Australia's obligations under the World Heritage Convention to protect, conserve, present, rehabilitate and transmit to future generations the natural heritage of the Area.

The Authority prepared a management plan for the Area—the Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998 (the Management Plan)—which is subordinate legislation to the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993*. The Management Plan regulates activities that might impact on the Area's World Heritage values and integrity, particularly those associated with the soil, water, vegetation and scenic attributes. The Management Plan prohibits certain activities, allows certain activities which would otherwise be prohibited (either under a permit or without a permit) and exempts certain activities that destroy forest products.

The Authority works actively with Wet Tropics stakeholders to get the balance right between protection of the Area's World Heritage values and integrity and allowing appropriate development for essential community and visitor infrastructure (including for tourism and recreation), to support Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples to achieve aspirations to live and work on country, and other commercial and non-commercial land uses by private landholders within the Area.

It should be noted that the Management Plan does not regulate scientific research, nor provide authority to issue permits for commercial activities, such as tourism (this is undertaken by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service).

The revised Management Plan, to the greatest extent possible, will reduce complexity, make zoning and associated rules (i.e. what activities can and cannot be undertaken in each zone) simpler to understand, and place a much stronger emphasis on outcomes, with a reduced focus on prescriptive conditioning of permits.

Action 5.1: Support appropriate community service infrastructure and activities in the Area

The issue to be addressed

With the Area covering almost 900,000 hectares, and being home to significant numbers of people, the Authority recognises that a range of community services infrastructure (CSI) is required, such as roads, utilities, telecommunications and water supplies, including the need for ongoing maintenance of this infrastructure. To facilitate this, the Authority will work with CSI providers to ensure impacts on World Heritage values and integrity are minimised from construction and ongoing maintenance.

Action we will take

The Authority will continue to work with CSI providers to enable best practice construction, operation and maintenance of their infrastructure to ensure minimal impact on the Area by:

- facilitating education and training about the World Heritage values and integrity and the Management Plan for stakeholders involved with constructing or maintaining infrastructure in the Area
- encouraging and supporting CSI providers to appropriately engage with and involve Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples in the permit application process, to ensure native title duty of care and free, prior and informed consent responsibilities are met
- developing and reviewing environmental management plans with local government and CSI providers
- developing guidelines and codes of practice to ensure any works proposed are operating to the highest standards of environmental practice within the Area
- providing pre-lodgement advice and assess applications for permits
- issuing permits in accordance with parts 3 and 4 of the Management Plan
- providing documented advice to the Authority's board regarding activities that might impact on the World Heritage values and integrity of the Area in accordance with the Management Plan
- ensuring science is used to support decision making
- clearly defining what activities can occur where in each management zone within the Management Plan.

Action 5.2: Undertake a renewed program of prioritised and strategic compliance

The issue to be addressed

The Area currently experiences a range of activities that are not allowed under the Management Plan, such as illegal use of roads (causing damage to road surfaces, wildlife impacts, etc), collection of plants and animals, dumping of rubbish and illegal hunting using dogs and firearms. While agencies such as Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), local councils and the Authority provide 'boots on the ground' to undertake compliance, these resources are often stretched.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- develop a compliance plan/strategy to enable the Authority to work with other agencies and Indigenous rangers to boost compliance outcomes, and public awareness
- provide advice to QPWS staff and Indigenous rangers undertaking assessments for activities within the national park estate and when undertaking assessments for issuing permits to third parties as a permit entity under part 6 of the Management Plan
- liaise with the Department of Environment and Energy on the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999*, and other matters of national and international environmental and cultural significance
- monitor and assess efficacy of this action by working with local government to access monitoring data about the keeping of dogs and cats within the Area and the presence of undesirable plants and animals.

Action 5.3: Support negotiations of cooperative management agreements

The issue to be addressed

The Area is comprised of a number of different land tenures, including freehold and leasehold. The Authority recognises that some landholders may have aspirations for their land that would otherwise be prohibited by the controls of the Management Plan. A cooperative management agreement (CMA), negotiated in good faith with the Authority, may lead to a variation of the controls of the management plan to allow certain activities.

In this way a CMA may be used to consider and manage the impact of activities or actions on World Heritage values to improve the management and presentation of the Area.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- develop broader awareness of the opportunities available through CMAs (e.g. sustainable ecotourism activities and associated infrastructure)
- work collaboratively with Wet Tropics stakeholders to simplify and streamline the process of developing CMAs
- assist Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples to realise native title rights and other aspirations such as deriving economic benefits from country.

Action 5.4: Ensure the Wet Tropics legislative context is contemporary and best practice

The issue to be addressed

One of the important ways the Authority manages impacts on the Area is through the administration of the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993* (the Wet Tropics Act) and subordinate legislation the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998* (the Management Plan). The Wet Tropics Act and the Management Plan require periodic review and updating to ensure they are contemporary, best practice, and enable the Authority to effectively manage the Area.

Action we will take

The Authority will:

- review and update the Wet Tropics Act and the Management Plan as required
- use the five-year review of actions and strategies of the Wet Tropics Strategic Plan 2020–2030 to determine if legislative change is required
- consult the Wet Tropics community on the effectiveness and appropriateness of the legislative context (ongoing), including applying free prior and informed consent processes with Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples
- develop communication materials to ensure the legislative context is well understood by Wet Tropics stakeholders
- use best endeavours to apply an Indigenous rights-based approach to the management of the Area.

Measuring success: key performance indicators

The Strategic Plan identifies four key performance indicators (KPIs) against the four outcomes to be achieved.

These outcomes are the 'big things' the Wet Tropics Management Authority (the Authority) wants to collectively achieve to improve management of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area (the Area) by 2030, and include some broad indicators that will quantify (and the KPIs qualify) our progress towards achieving these. The Strategic Plan identifies a suite of actions that could be implemented to achieve these outcomes, however not all actions may need to be delivered to achieve these outcomes.

As the Strategic Plan will be delivered in partnership, the KPIs have been developed to measure success

in a way that is meaningful to all our partners (i.e. will help to achieve individual and organisational goals of partners).

The Authority will report annually on progress against achieving these outcomes through our annual report. Major reviews will occur after 5 years (2025) and after 10 years (2030). This will inform ongoing adaptive management of delivery of the Strategic Plan, and indicate what role the Authority played in achieving these outcomes, where we might need to refocus our efforts, or simply do better.

It should be noted that baselines for a number of indicators may need to be established so that we can measure our progress. The Authority will be responsible for this body of work.

Outcome 1—World Heritage values and integrity of the Area are maintained or enhanced

KPI 1:

Success for achieving this outcome by 2030 is that trends for the condition of World Heritage values will remain stable, and may improve in some degraded areas of zones B and C. We will adopt the measures used in periodic reporting by the Australian Government to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Examples of possible measures include:

- state of conservation of natural assets
- management effectiveness
- invasive species
- quality of life for local communities.

Outcome 2—Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' rights, interests, traditions, and cultures are embedded in management of the Area, with aspirations for Traditional Owner-led management, livelihoods and wellbeing

KPI 2:

Success for achieving this outcome by 2030 is that Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples are strongly involved in management of the Area in partnership with the Australian and Queensland governments. This arrangement will likely be enabled through implementation of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area Regional Agreement, and will involve a broad range of approaches that increase the involvement of Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples directly in land management, and also increase the range of opportunities where Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples can improve wellbeing and access economic benefits. Examples of possible measures include:

- increased number of formalised land management partnerships between Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples and government (e.g. cooperative management agreements, joint management of national parks, Indigenous Protected Areas)
- culturally-appropriate governance mechanisms that ensure free, prior and informed consent of Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples on matters relating to the Area
- employment of Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples in World Heritage management
- increased number of Indigenous ranger groups or Rainforest Aboriginal businesses.

Outcome 3—Management of the Area is a shared responsibility of an engaged and informed Wet Tropics community

KPI 3:

Success for achieving this outcome by 2030 is that there is a net increase in active community involvement in the management of the Area (e.g. a net gain of capacity in volunteer groups who are actively engaged in management). Examples of possible measures include:

- improved trend in volunteer numbers (groups and number of people participating)
- increased education and engagement initiatives
- increased levels of research, and adoption of this in management
- increased participation rates of young people (under 35) in volunteering.

Outcome 4—The Area is recognised as a world-class sustainable natural and cultural tourism destination

KPI 4:

Success for achieving this outcome by 2030 is that the Area will be recognised nationally and globally as a must-see natural and cultural tourism destination and an example of best practice World Heritage presentation (where the visitor experience is rich, enjoyable, and fosters a sense of responsibility to care for the Area). The Authority will advance opportunities for people to better appreciate and understand the World Heritage values of the Area and create pathways for Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples to participate more in tourism and presentation activities across the Area. Examples of possible measures include:

- number of tourism opportunities that embrace and protect the natural and cultural values of the Area
- number of Rainforest Aboriginal owned and operated business enterprises that embrace and protect the natural and cultural values of the Area
- quality of visitor experience (as measured by surveys and other qualitative approaches) and number of accredited Wet Tropics Tour Guides.

Appendix A: Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis:

The Wet Tropics of Queensland, or Wet Tropics, stretches along the northeast coast of Australia for some 450 kilometres. Encompassing some 894,420 hectares of mostly tropical rainforest, this stunningly beautiful area is extremely important for its rich and unique biodiversity. It also presents an unparalleled record of the ecological and evolutionary processes that shaped the flora and fauna of Australia, containing the relicts of the great Gondwanan forest that covered Australia and part of Antarctica 50 to 100 million years ago. All of Australia's unique marsupials and most of its other animals originated in rainforest ecosystems, and their closest surviving relatives occur in the Wet Tropics. These living relicts of the Gondwanan era and their subsequent diversification provide unique insights to the process of evolution in general. They also provide important information for the interpretation of fossils of plants and animals found elsewhere in Australia, and about the evolution of Australia's sclerophyll flora and marsupial fauna in particular.

The property supports tropical rainforests at their latitudinal and climatic limits, and unlike most other seasonal tropical evergreen equatorial forests, is subject to a dry season and to frequent cyclonic events. Many of the distinct features of the Wet Tropics relate to its extremely high but seasonal rainfall, diverse terrain and steep environmental gradients. In addition to its complex array of species and life forms, the Wet Tropics is also recognised as an area possessing outstanding scenic features, natural beauty and magnificent sweeping landscapes.

Criterion (vii): The Wet Tropics exhibit exceptional natural beauty, with superlative scenic features highlighted by extensive sweeping forest vistas, wild rivers, waterfalls, rugged gorges and coastal scenery. This is particularly apparent between the Daintree River and Cedar Bay, where exceptional coastal scenery combines tropical rainforest and white sandy beaches with fringing offshore coral reefs. The winding channels of the Hinchinbrook Channel contain the most extensive mangroves in the region, providing a rich visual mosaic of rainforest and mangroves, and a terrestrial continuum with the Great Barrier Reef.

Criterion (viii): The Wet Tropics contains one of the most complete and diverse living records of the major stages in the evolution of land plants, from the very first pteridophytes more than 200 million years ago to the evolution of seed-producing plants including the cone-bearing cycads and southern conifers (gymnosperms), followed by the flowering plants (angiosperms). As the Wet Tropics is the largest part of the entire Australasian region where rainforests have persisted continuously since Gondwanan times, its living flora, with the highest concentration of primitive, archaic and relict taxa known, is the closest modern-day counterpart for Gondwanan forests. In addition, all of Australia's unique marsupials and most of its other animals originated in rainforest ecosystems, and the Wet Tropics still contains many of their closest surviving members. This makes it one of the most important living records of the history of marsupials as well as of songbirds.

Criterion (ix): The Wet Tropics provides outstanding examples of significant ongoing ecological processes and biological evolution. As a centre of endemism for the region (second only to New Caledonia in the number of endemic genera per unit area), the Wet Tropics provides fundamental insights into evolutionary patterns both in isolation from and in interaction with other rainforests. Its tall, open forests on the drier western margins of the rainforest are also significant as part of an evolutionary continuum of rainforest and sclerophyll forests. Eucalypts, that now dominate the Australian landscape, are considered to have evolved from such rainforest stock and radiated into drier environments from the margins of closed forests.

Appendix A: Outstanding Universal Value

The area supports an exceptionally high level of diversity of both flora and fauna, with over 3,000 vascular plant species in 224 families, of which 576 species and 44 genera are endemic, including two endemic plant families. Vertebrate diversity and endemism are also very high, with 107 mammal species including 11 endemic species and two monotypic endemic genera. In terms of avifauna, there are 368 bird species, of which 11 species are endemic. For reptiles, there are 113 species of which 24 species are endemic, including three monotypic endemic genera. The diversity of amphibians includes 51 species of which 22 are endemic.

Criterion (x): The Wet Tropics holds a largely intact flora and fauna with hundreds of endemic species restricted to the property, of which many are classified as threatened. The majority of plant species have restricted distributions, and many monotypic plant genera and several species of marsupials, frogs and reptiles have very restricted distributions either as isolated or disjunct populations, reflecting the refugial nature of the rainforests found in several locations. The diversity of the plant communities and animal habitats of the Wet Tropics is recognised as being the most floristically and structurally diverse in Australia and is also outstanding on a global scale. Among many emblematic species occurring in the property is the flightless Australian cassowary, one of the largest birds in the world.

In an Australian context, the Wet Tropics covers less than 0.2% of Australia, but contains 30% of the marsupial species, 60% of bat species, 25% of rodent species, 40% of bird species, 30% of frog species, 20% of reptile species, 60% of butterfly species, 65% of fern species, 21% of cycad species, 37% of conifer species, 30% of orchid species and 18% of Australia's vascular plant species. It is therefore of great scientific interest and of fundamental importance to conservation.

Although the Wet Tropics is predominantly wet tropical rainforest, it is fringed and in a few places dissected by sclerophyll forests, woodlands, swamps and mangrove forests, adding to its diversity.

Integrity

At the time of its inscription the property was identified as being an essentially intact ecosystem with the level of human impact low, especially when compared to other tropical forest regions, with 80% of the estimated cover originally present at the time of the first European settlement remaining. A substantial amount of lowland forest, however, had been cleared for agricultural purposes. A number of human disturbances that cumulatively detracted from the overall natural integrity were scattered throughout the property and included infrastructure such as transmission lines, access roads, abandoned mine sites and more extensive areas which had been selectively logged. However the evaluation also noted that these disturbances accounted for only a small proportion of the total area of the property. In addition other local management issues that needed attention included invasions of exotic plants, animals and forest diseases.

Since inscription, the Australian and Queensland governments have worked cooperatively to put in place a comprehensive management regime for the property, outlined in the following section. Logging has been prohibited since 1987 with the infrastructure associated with this activity removed and the impacted forests allowed to recover. Maintenance activities associated with the provision of community infrastructure are now regulated under a statutory management plan and guided by environmental codes of practice.

A number of threatening processes still impact on the overall integrity of the property including invasive species, fragmentation, and altered hydrological and fire regimes. In addition, a key emerging threat to the integrity of the property is climate change, as with even a small increase in temperature, large declines in the range size for almost every endemic vertebrate species confined to the property are predicted.

Appendix A: Outstanding Universal Value

Protection and management requirements

In 1990 the Australian and Queensland Governments agreed to jointly fund and coordinate management of the Wet Tropics, signing an agreement that established the Wet Tropics Management Scheme. The agreement outlined the broad structural and funding arrangements for the management scheme, including the establishment of the Wet Tropics Management Authority. The management scheme also establishes a scientific advisory committee to provide advice to the Authority and a community consultative committee to report to the Authority on matters relating to the management of the property from the viewpoint of representative interest groups and the community at large.

The Queensland Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993 (Wet Tropics Act) and the Commonwealth Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Conservation Act 1994 together give effect to the administrative and operational aspects of the agreement and facilitate the implementation of Australia's obligations under the World Heritage convention. These Acts require the Authority to produce an annual state of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area report for the Queensland and Commonwealth parliaments respectively.

The Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998 (WT Plan) was subsequently developed under the Wet Tropics Act. This statutory Plan provides for the regulation of potentially damaging activities within the property. The Plan includes a zoning system and a system for administration of permit applications and a penalty regime for any infringements. Under the WT Plan, the Authority is required to consider a set of principles and criteria for deciding permit applications of which the most important consideration is the likely impact of a proposed activity on the integrity of the property.

While the WT Plan applies to all lands within the Wet Tropics, the property contains a diversity of different tenures, and a corresponding range of government agencies and private land holders with responsibilities for managing these tenures, under different legislation. Since listing, the Queensland Government has transferred the majority of former forestry tenures to protected area tenure. This has resulted in the total of protected area estate being increased from 14% at listing to over 65%. The conversion to protected area estate ensures a more compatible conservation management regime.

The Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) now provides an additional layer of protection for all World Heritage properties in Australia. Under the EPBC Act, any action that has, will have or is likely to have a significant impact on the World Heritage values of a World Heritage property must be referred to the responsible Minister for consideration. The EPBC Act applies whether the activity is inside or outside of the boundaries of a World Heritage property. Substantial penalties apply for taking such an action without approval. In 2007, the Wet Tropics was added to the National Heritage List, in recognition of its national heritage significance under the Act.

As well as the regulatory protection mechanisms described above, the Authority has prepared a number of strategies to guide management of the property, including: the Wet Tropics Nature Based Tourism Strategy (2000); the Wet Tropics Conservation Strategy (2004); and the WTMA Research Strategy 2010 – 2014.

The Wet Tropics Management Authority is committed to promoting and developing partnerships with people and stakeholders with rights, responsibilities and interests associated with the Wet Tropics. The Wet Tropics Act recognises the important role that Aboriginal people can play in the management of natural and cultural heritage in the property. The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area Regional Agreement 2005 provides for the cooperative management of the property between 18 Rainforest Aboriginal tribal groups, the Authority and the Australian and Queensland governments. This Regional Agreement has seen the formal establishment of a Rainforest Aboriginal Advisory Committee under the Wet Tropics Act and the inclusion of two Rainforest Aboriginal directors on the Authority's Board. The Authority has also established a conservation sector liaison group and a tourism industry liaison group to promote improved communication and liaison with these key stakeholders.