

Board Communique No 109

20-21 August 2019

The board of the Wet Tropics Management Authority held meeting No 109 in Cairns on the 20-21 August 2019. Chair, Ms Leslie Shirreffs PSM was joined by directors Mr John Courtenay, Ms Anne Clarke Dr Leah Talbot and Mr Phil Rist. Professor Iain Gordon attended by video-link.

Day 1 of the board meeting included important discussions regarding the board's climate statement and 10-point plan, and progress in finalising the *Wet Tropics Climate Adaptation Plan*. In late April, the board released a [statement](#) calling for urgent action and investment to improve the resilience and protection of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, following new evidence of escalating climate impacts. The statement highlighted the serious threat of climate change to mountain-adapted species, such as the lemuroid ringtail possum, at threat from extreme temperatures. In response, the Department of the Environment and Science provided the Authority with \$145K in funds to develop a scoping plan for investment in the resilience of World Heritage values and integrity. The final product will include a high value, integrated, collaborative response to facilitate investment. Funds will also be allocated to expedite the finalisation of the *Wet Tropics Climate Adaptation Plan*.

Directors were pleased to note the final draft of the Climate Adaptation Plan will be distributed to directors and key communities of interest imminently. Directors noted the draft includes input from over 40 participants from research entities, enviro-business and organisations, tourism interests, Rainforest Aboriginal organisations, NRM bodies and state agencies, who attended the second climate workshop held in July 2019. At this workshop participants developed new principles of management and strategies based on an 'accept, act, adapt' framework. Planning for a formal launch of the plan is also underway.

The board received an update on the *Wet Tropics Tourism Destination Plan*. The Authority was successful in acquiring \$224,000 through the [Australian Heritage Grants Program](#) to prepare this plan. This project will provide strategic guidance and policy context for identifying appropriate tourism activities in, and adjacent to, the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. The plan will build tourism confidence by identifying new experiences for people to better appreciate and understand the unique natural and cultural values of the area, while preserving those values for visitors and local communities. There is already strong interest for involvement from other government agencies, regional tourism organisations, Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples, the conservation sector and other key stakeholders.

Directors were provided with an update on progress on activities and future planning for the yellow crazy ant (YCA) eradication program following the commitment of both the Commonwealth and Queensland governments of \$9 million each over three years to the Authority for the program. The board remains committed to eradication of YCA in and around the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. The University of Melbourne finalised a cost benefit analysis of the YCA program in March 2019. Their analysis demonstrated that environmental and socioeconomic benefits of YCA eradication will far outweigh the costs of the program.

In the afternoon session of Day 1 directors were joined by members of the Terrain NRM Board including Chair Keith Noble and directors Steve Turton, Pete Faulkner, Peter Rowles and Megan Kadic, and CEO Carole Sweatman. It was the second time the boards had met, although both organisations have been working together to deliver on common areas of interest, including support for Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' aspirations, pest management and integrated landscape management. These

achievements are made possible by the strong working relationships both organisations maintain with their partners and the broader wet tropics community. A joint statement from the boards have been [released](#).

WTMA directors were sad to learn that Terrain NRM chief executive officer Carole Sweatman was stepping down from her role, after nine years leading natural resource management in the wet tropics region. Ms Sweatman has been a driving force in establishing strong and productive partnerships between conservation and production sectors, with governments and across industries and community groups. She was also at the forefront of innovative programs breaking new ground in Great Barrier Reef water quality, both in the wet tropics and nationally. Most recently under her leadership, Terrain was recognised as one of Australia's and New Zealand's [most innovative companies](#). Terrain Chair, Dr Keith Noble advised the recruitment process for a new CEO had begun.

Day 2 of the board meeting was dedicated to discussion of legislative amendments to the *Wet Tropics Management Plan* which seeks to protect the World Heritage Area via a zoning and permit scheme, and by regulating activities with the potential to affect world heritage values. While the management plan is a regulatory instrument that the Authority uses to manage and protect the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, in practice the Authority collaborates with many partners to achieve this. A large component of this work has involved two formal rounds of public consultation, as well as negotiations with representative Aboriginal bodies and corporations, conservation and tourist organisations, community service infrastructure providers, state and commonwealth government agencies and the general public. Comprehensive feedback from a broad range of submissions were reviewed and incorporated into a consultation summary, which will be made publically available on the Authority's website in the near future. The board acknowledged the huge effort from the planning and conservation team in getting the amended plan to this point.

The next step is for the finalised *Wet Tropics World Heritage Plan* to be submitted to members of the Ministerial Council, the Hon Leeanne Enoch MP, Queensland Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts and the Hon Sussan Ley, Australian Minister for the Environment for their consideration.

Directors discussed the function, operation and terms of reference for the statutory committees, the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) and the Community Consultative Committee (CCC). This was a timely conversation, as the current three year terms of both committees expire in November 2019. Chairs of the committees, Iain Gordon (SAC) and Anne Clarke (CCC) noted the opportunity for the Authority to strengthen its role with existing networks and develop new networks, encourage broader local community participation including youth, and generate greater awareness and interest of the Area and its values in the new committee membership, whilst maintaining its current expertise and skills. It is expected that expressions of interest will be released in late September. Watch this space.

The next board meeting is set for 14-15 November 2019.