

Board Communiqué No 104

21-22 June 2018

The Board of the Wet Tropics Management Authority held meeting No. 104 on the Atherton Tableland, the hinterland region one hour's drive west of Cairns. The region is famous for its exceptional farm produce, relaxed lifestyle and spectacular nature, including World Heritage listed national parks, lakes, waterfalls and cool upland forests.

On day one of the meeting, directors held a strategic planning workshop to consider emerging issues, challenges and opportunities for the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area over the next five to ten years, and how the Authority can best prepare for them. There was lively discussion and reflection on the past two and a half years of the Board's current three-year term, followed by a big-picture external issues scan to provide focus for the future work of the Authority. Directors drafted the following strategies for the team to move forward with, including:

- identify and respond to the impacts of climate change and priority cross-tenure threats to the World Heritage Area
- promote and incorporate the rights, interests and aspirations of Rainforest Aboriginal people in the management of the World Heritage Area
- enhance World Heritage presentation and support opportunities for nature and cultural-based tourism and recreation
- establish and strengthen strategic partnerships to enhance the management of the World Heritage Area
- optimise community participation and connection with the World Heritage Area through innovative interpretation, with a focus on education, volunteering and social inclusion
- manage activities that may have an impact on the area's values.

The Board reinforced the need for these strategies to be underpinned by the best available evidence from across a range of knowledge domains, including those of Rainforest Aboriginal people. The strategies require 'road testing' with the Authority's many partners, stakeholders and the community. The strategies will form the basis of the amended Wet Tropics Management Plan and ensure improved World Heritage management. Watch this space.

The highlight of the first day was a community reception in the evening, which provided an opportunity for the local Tablelands community to meet with directors and staff, and learn about the activities and programs for the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Directors spoke about their passion and commitment to the Area and reiterated support for the rich diversity of community and local government programs underway throughout the region.

On the morning of the second day, directors visited [TREAT's](#) Lake Eacham native plant nursery, a fantastic joint rainforest rehabilitation operation with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and local volunteers. Earlier this year, TREAT deservedly received the Chair's Award at the Cassowary Awards. Then it was back to the [CSIRO's Atherton Laboratory Facility](#) to continue formal briefings.

Directors were pleased to endorse a scientific research protocol to strengthen engagement between researchers and Rainforest Aboriginal people, and lead to better research, cultural and economic outcomes. The Authority itself does not issue research permits, but has embraced the role of advancing this work towards demonstrating the government's good faith in implementing the [Wet Tropics Regional Agreement](#). When the Agreement was signed in 2005, a number of engagement

protocols—including a science and education permit protocol—were developed and agreed by Rainforest Aboriginal Elders, but never implemented.

The scientific research protocol reflects the principles of and is consistent with the Regional Agreement, as well as processes and conditions currently applied by QPWS to researcher permits in Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land ([CYPAL](#)) National Parks. The next step is for Authority staff to take the protocol forward to the Department of Environment and Science for implementation, as well as to the Wet Tropics Traditional Owner Leadership Group to advance the refresh of the Regional Agreement. The implementation of the protocol will be evaluated in 12 months' time to gauge its effectiveness.

An update on the Yellow Crazy Ant (YCA) Eradication Program was provided, and directors were pleased to note that YCA surveys have been completed in the forested areas in and adjoining the World Heritage Area with very low to no ants detected. In addition, no ants were detected at all in forested areas of Bentley Park. As a result, 158 hectares have transitioned from treatment to monitoring. This does not diminish the need for vigilance, and the next Ministerial Forum (set for December 2018) provides an ideal opportunity to update the Commonwealth and State Environment Ministers on this important program. The Board will be engaging both levels of Government to garner a commitment for continued investment post June 2019.

The directors were updated on the implementation of the Presentation Strategy including the completion of the first stage of a World Heritage Signage Review. This review highlights the need for appropriate and consistent branding, reference to Aboriginal culture and place names and identifying and promoting World Heritage values. Directors reiterated their commitment to presenting the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area as a primary visitor destination, and were pleased to learn that Authority's officers are working closely with regional organisations, state agencies and private tourism operators to brand and position the Wet Tropics as a national and international 'must see' destination.

The next board meeting is scheduled for September 2018.