



## BOARD COMMUNIQUE 114

The Board of Directors of the Wet Tropics Management Authority met online on 26-27 February 2021 to discuss:

- **Wet Tropics Sustainable Tourism Plan**
- **Honouring former Director**
- **Board strategic priorities for 2020-2023**
- **Green and Blue Economic Stimulus Package and Reef Assist**
- **Yellow Crazy Ant Eradication Program**
- **Future State of Wet Tropics Report themes**
- **Conran Review**
- **18th Cassowary Awards**

### **Wet Tropics Sustainable Tourism Plan**

A sustainable and resilient future for tourism in the Wet Tropics was discussed as the Board considered the draft of the Wet Tropics Sustainable Tourism Plan. The Plan provides the strategic framework to bring together partners, Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples, the tourism industry and conservation sector to develop a framework to support tourism in the Area. The Board thanked the Steering Committee and congratulated the Authority on its inclusive approach to developing the Plan in collaboration with the tourism industry, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Partnerships (QPWS&P), Rainforest Aboriginal People and the community.

This project was supported by an Australian Heritage Grant through the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment (DAWE). A launch is being planned for June 2021 and discussions are being held with the Minister's office.

### **Honouring former Director – John Courtney**

The Board acknowledged the significant contributions that the late John Courtney made during his time as Director on the board. The Board valued the vast knowledge and experience that John brought to the Authority and sent condolences to the Courtney family. The Wet Tropics Sustainable Tourism Plan has been dedicated to John Courtney in recognition of his extensive advocacy and achievement for Australian sustainable tourism. John was an enthusiastic champion of this Plan.

### **Board Strategic Priorities for 2020-2023**

The Board approved the Wet Tropics Strategic Plan 2020-2030 in late 2019. This meeting presented the opportunity to reflect on the delivery of former board priorities. Highlights since 2019 included:

- Finalising the Wet Tropics Management Plan 10-year review
- Streamlining the Authority's permit approval process
- Launching the Accept Act Adapt Climate Adaptation Plan
- Preparing a draft Sustainable Tourism Plan
- Collaborating with partners to develop the Green and Blue Economic Stimulus Package
- Maintaining mountain top climate monitoring with Professor Steve Williams (JCU)
- Eradication of yellow crazy ants from three locations adjacent to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area
- Co-designing and delivering a Scientific Research Protocol with Rainforest Aboriginal people and QPWS&P

Using an online digital whiteboard, Directors collaborated remotely to identify and prioritise the Board's strategic priorities for the next three years, taking into account extensive consultation during the management plan review and input from the CCC and the SAC. These priorities will be used to inform business planning and will be published on the Wet Tropics Management Authority's (the Authority's) website in the near future.

### **Green and Blue Economic Stimulus Package and Reef Assist**

The Authority continues to work with partners Terrain NRM, Cairns Regional Council and the Cairns and Far North Queensland Environment Council (CAFNEC) to advocate and seek support for the Tropical North Queensland [Green](#)

[and Blue Stimulus Package](#). The Queensland Government responded with a Reef Assist program. Projects sponsored by the Authority were awarded \$2.6M of the \$4 million secured through the Reef Assist program to create jobs and deliver environmental projects in the Wet Tropics.

The Board is thrilled that the \$2.6 million auspiced by the Authority will employ 19 ranger trainees/field officers, three Indigenous ranger coordinators/supervisors and five Elders/mentors. Five thousand trees have been planted to date and more on-ground work is scheduled. The Board discussed turning the Green and Blue package into an investment prospectus with partners to try and leverage additional investment into the Wet Tropics region to continue this work.

### **Yellow Crazy Ant Eradication Program**

The yellow crazy ant eradication program is a successful exemplar of an integrated invasive species program. Eradication is on track for the program with staff intensifying efforts in surveys and treatments in line with seasonal yellow crazy ant foraging activity.

A new infestation was found along Wrights Creek in December 2020 and another in January 2021. These detections were both the result of a successful data-sharing partnership with the Mulgrave Central Mill. Using data about machinery movement of harvesters over the past few years, the Authority has been able to target survey efforts and prioritise searches for potential yellow crazy ant infestations.

The Board noted the achievements of the program and acknowledged the role of staff, Fury the detection dog, partners, contractors, the community and investors in their collaborative efforts to keep the program on track towards achieving the overall goal. Securing continuing funding post 2022 will now be a key focus of the Board.

### **Future State of Wet Tropics Report themes**

An ecological restoration theme will be the focus of the next State of the Wet Tropics Report (SOWT Report). The Board recommended that the SOWT Report 2020-21 recognise the significant community contribution to landscape resilience in the Wet Tropics. The report will also highlight the innovation of restoration practitioners in identifying effective longer-term and broader-scale revegetation techniques to support the carbon economy, deliver biodiversity outcomes and build landscape and community resilience.

Each year the Authority produces a SOWT Report to highlight the condition and trends of the Outstanding Universal Values of the wet tropics area. The SOWT Report is tabled in the Queensland and Australian parliaments and provides an opportunity inform our community, influence management decisions and advocate for World Heritage policy and resources. The 2019-2020 SOWT report, *Creating our Climate Future*, is available [here](#).

### **Conran Review**

In 2020, the National Cabinet sought a review of COAG Councils and Ministerial Forums. The subsequent Conran review made recommendations to rationalise Ministerial Councils and reset their work. The recommendations will affect how the Wet Tropics Ministerial Council has been operating since 1993. To ensure a collaborative State and Commonwealth approach to World Heritage management continues, the Board will work with other property managers to ensure that World Heritage matters become a standing item in future Meetings of Environment Ministers (Commonwealth and State Environment Ministers).

The Board noted that there may be some consequential amendments required to update the Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993 (the Act) as a result of the Review. The Authority will work with other agencies to determine the required action. The Board also considered other legislative amendments needed to support implementation of the Wet Tropics Management Plan.

### **18th Cassowary Awards**

The Authority's prestigious Cassowary Awards will be held in Cairns in June 2021. The Awards, which celebrate and support the outstanding contributions made towards the conservation and presentation of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area were postponed in 2020 due to COVID-19. The event will be live streamed to increase participation. Nominations for the 18th Awards will begin soon, with the community encouraged to nominate Wet Tropics champions.

### **Board meeting 115 will be held on 26-27 May 2021.**

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