

Rainforest Aboriginal News

Issue nineteen: April 2023

Strengthening Eastern Kuku Yalanji Country, culture and people

The Eastern Yalanjiwarra or Eastern Kuku Yalanji People (EKY) understand the significance in maintaining traditional lore and custom in the form of strong clan governance structures to make decisions for Country, culture and people.

When Elders were planning to dedicate the EKY Indigenous Protected Area (IPA), they wanted to make sure that decision-making was done by Bama the right way, so that culture and Country always come first and all clans and families were speaking together and for the right Country.

Yalanji People were granted their Native Title Determination in 2007, and by 2008 discussions began to undergo planning for Country.

From 2008 to 2017, EKY Bama developed 3 IPA management plans for the 3 major clan group areas. In these plans the values, threats, and management strategies for Country were identified and discussed in depth. Clan governance was at the center of the process, and this is being strengthened to ensure that Elders are taking the lead.

As IPA Manager, Jabalbina is responsible for supporting the Elders to make decisions, including getting them together to talk about important issues—the main focus is to ensure EKY culture continues as a 'living' culture and to collaborate with all areas of Jabalbina and a range of other important stakeholders.

In providing a space and opportunity for decisions to be made, Jabalbina supports Elders and Cultural Authorities by organising regular meeting to take place through specific clan-settings.



Last year Jabalbina approached the Eastern Yalanji clan governance committees about modifying the way the meetings operated. They wanted to empower Elders and Cultural Authorities to lead discussions for their bubu and jalun by placing culture at the forefront of their meetings.

This meant that instead of Jabalbina leading the meetings with business about projects, discussions would instead revolve around the important topics. Elders have been clear that the most important cultural/clan business is cultural events and activities that support cultural knowledge and education for emerging leaders and young Bama.

The Jabalbina motto is Yalanjiwarra muruku junurrjimaka bamangka bubuku, meaning Yalanji people stand strong together for our people and our land. Yalada!



Congratulations to Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples

The 19th Cassowary Awards were held on Djabugay Country on Saturday 8 October 2022 at Tjapukai Now.

Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples were well represented across multiple award categories, with Jumbun Limited taking home the People. Country. Culture. Award and Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours receiving the Tourism and Presentation Award.

Jumbun Limited (pictured below) has co-created a ground-breaking and transformative program called Gumbudda in our Mala (Cyclone in our Hands), a truth-telling and ecovillage design program with cultural authority. This united approach to economic and community growth has been created from within the Jumbun community. This unique combination of innovative mediation and coaching will identify and develop essential elements as Jumbun community transition into a modern approach to caring for Country and the community.



Mandingalbay Ancient Indigenous Tours is 100% owned and operated by Mandingalbay Yidinji Aboriginal Corporation. It has launched an authentic and accessible Indigenous tourism experience welcoming over 1,500 people on Country in just five months. Their half-day Hands on Country Eco Tour presents Wet Tropics World Heritage values to visitors, provides a direct community benefit through employment and training, and offers access to Rainforest Aboriginal Country while celebrating the region's scenic beauty—both on land and water.

Other nominees included Abiculture, Dulabed and Malanbarra Yidinji Aboriginal Corporation, the Gunggandji-Mandingalbay Yidinji Peoples Prescribed Body Corporate Indigenous Ranger Program, and Mamu Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC:

- Abiculture was nominated for 3 awards—Innovation and Research, Climate Change Leadership, and People. Country. Culture.
- Dulabed and Malanbarra Yidinji Aboriginal Corporation was nominated for the People. Country. Culture. Award.
- Gunggandji-Mandingalbay Yidinji Peoples Prescribed Body Corporate Indigenous Ranger Program was nominated for the People. Country. Culture. Award.
- Mamu Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC was nominated in 2 categories—the Thorsborne Award for Community Conservation and Rehabilitation, and the People. Country. Culture. Award.

World Heritage update

Welcome to issue 19 of the Rainforest Aboriginal News, the first for 2023. I'm excited to introduce two new Indigenous staff who started with the Wet Tropics Management Authority at the end of 2022: Margaret Ross-Kelly and Kieren Sellars, you can read more about Margaret and Kieren in this issue.

At the Wet Tropics Management Authority's first Board meeting for 2023, the Board heard about the more participatory format of the Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' Regional Forum and how well received it was. The annual forum was on Gimuy Walubara Yidinji and Yirrganydji Country in Cairns in October. Sincere thanks to the 80 participants who willingly gave their valuable time, thoughts, and ideas at this two-day regional forum (see page 2).

We were also given an update on the Bama Country and Culture project (formerly known as the Cultural Landscapes Hub project), and were excited to hear that its steering committee has been established and a project plan, engagement plan and budget endorsed.

At our October 2022 meeting, we had a special presentation about an exciting pilot STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) program developed as a collaboration between the Authority, James Cook University and Parramatta State School. About 20 students attended along with teacher Melissa Brolese and Kirsty Cantle from the Authority. The project, which commenced in term 1 of 2022, aimed to give students real-world research opportunities. The focus of the work was on the Authority's Yellow Crazy Ant Eradication Program. The Board was thrilled to see the passion and courage demonstrated by these young people and are excited to see where the next steps lead.

We acknowledge Rainforests Aboriginal Peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and recognise their connection to this cultural landscape. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.



The 19th Cassowary Awards was a fantastic night, and we would like to congratulate all nominees and recipients. Special thanks go to all who contributed to the smooth running of the night and to the new sponsors, including Catalyst Markets as a gold sponsor—a trading platform developed and operated by the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation, Catalyst Markets are the world's first Indigenous trading platform of environmental and allied commodities.

An exciting development in cooperative land management and restoration across the Wet Tropics began with the establishment of the Wet Tropics Restoration Alliance—a coalition of organisations working together to ensure Wet Tropics landscapes and the wildlife they support thrive under a changing and unstable climate. It aims to create a network of organisations to provide ongoing support to members.

Ailsa Lively
Director
Wet Tropics Management
Authority Board



Connecting and Improving Rainforest

“It’s part of our story but nobody’s done work there for years. We want to clean up the weeds. We’ll give it our best to get it back to where it was. This funding allows our generation to go back on more country and work and buy materials and protect our country,” Gunggandji-Mandingalbay Yidinji Rangers.

Twelve new projects are helping to connect rainforests from Bloomfield to Cardwell and west to Wondecla. They are part of Terrain NRM’s ‘Building Rainforest Resilience’ project, focused on nationally significant rainforest areas, and are also part of Terrain’s vision to build one strong, healthy, and intact forest system in the Wet Tropics region.

The Gunggandji-Mandingalbay Yidinji Rangers (pictured below) will be removing weeds, including lantana, giant bramble, and guava, from cassowary habitat on Aboriginal land within the Gunggandji-Mandingalbay Yidinji Peoples’ Prescribed Body Corporate (GMYPPBC) Trustee areas in Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council.

Both Rangers Cadmas Sands and Justin Keyes mentioned that the work area, was around a traditional walking track used for trade.

This project is delivered by Terrain NRM through funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program.



Welcome Authority’s new staff: Margaret and Kieren

Margaret Ross-Kelly is a descendant from the Taepithiggi clan from Old Mapoon in the Western Cape Peninsula, Wepia with family connections across Cape York, Cairns, the Tablelands, and surrounding areas. Margaret is the Senior Project Officer (Cultural Landscapes) for the Aboriginal Partnerships team. Her role is to support the Authority to lead and implement the delivery of the Bama Country and Culture Project through culturally appropriate engagements. The project aims to bring the voices of the Rainforest Aboriginal groups to the forefront to educate and enhance awareness of Indigenous heritage values and the rich cultures of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Margaret has worked in both state and local government and in private sectors supporting and promoting co-beneficial relationship with First Nations peoples.

Kieren Sellars is a proud Olkola, Lama Lama and Rinyirru man and Project Officer with the Aboriginal Partnerships team. His role is to support the Authority to implement an Indigenous rights-based approach, assisting with the implementation of the Regional Agreement, empowering Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples’ well-being, livelihoods and custodial relationships between their people and customary landscapes. Kieren is responsible for delivering the Authority’s Rainforest Aboriginal News and supporting the Rainforest Aboriginal Grants program. He comes to us from QPWS and has 4 years’ experience working as a ranger with a number of Rainforest Aboriginal groups. Kieren has also worked in a Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land (CYPAL) national park and has a passion for protecting Country. If you would like to showcase your good news stories in future issues of the Rainforest Aboriginal News, please contact Kieren.



P: 0477 748 759
E: Margaret.RossKelly@wtma.qld.gov.au



P: 0436 631 397
E: Kieren.Sellars@wtma.qld.gov.au

Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples’ Regional Forum

The 2022 Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples’ Regional Forum took place 28–30 October 2022 on Gimuy Walubara Yidinji and Yirrganydji Country.

This annual forum provides the opportunity for Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples along with partners, stakeholders, and government to come together and discuss topics around the management of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and broader Wet Tropics biocultural region and agree on directions forward.

This year the annual forum focused on the perspectives and experiences of Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples. The forum featured presentations and discussions on important topics related to their communities, including caring for Country, protected area tenures, the path to treaty, Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples’ intellectual and cultural property, and economic prosperity.

Special guests Mick Gooda and Ray Rosendale from the Treaty Independent Interim Body (IIB) focused on Queensland’s Path to Treaty. The IIB are charged with maintaining the momentum of Queensland’s Path to Treaty to provide a solid grounding for the commencement of the First Nations Treaty Institute and Truth Telling and Healing Inquiry.

This year’s forum participants supported the Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples’ Think Tank (RAPTT) as the interim vehicle for progressing towards a consolidated and refreshed Wet Tropics of Queensland Regional Agreement. The draft outcomes report for the 2022 Regional Forum will be mailed out to all participants and made available to Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples.

What is coming up in the Wet Tropics

26 May
National Sorry Day

27 May
1967 Referendum

27 May–3 June
National Reconciliation Week

3 June
Mabo Day



Please send your feedback, ideas and contributions for future issues to wettropics@wtma.qld.gov.au



Mamu’s Indigenous ranger program plus new water monitoring project

The Innisfail region now has Mamu Indigenous rangers caring for Country with the first four rangers already on board, and a new water monitoring project that’s exciting both Elders and the younger generation.

“This is a good feeling, to be moving forward,” senior ranger Francis Joyce says. It is a simple statement but one that is loaded with passion—for the land, the animals, Mamu cultural heritage and the Mamu people’s drive to play a bigger role in the management of their land and sea Country.

Funded through the Queensland Government’s Indigenous Land and Sea Rangers Program, Mamu rangers’ work will include looking after cultural heritage sites, monitoring biodiversity, helping with pest plant control, and leading a new water monitoring project. This project, in partnership with Terrain NRM, is building on existing water quality monitoring in the region, combining cultural knowledge, values and concerns with western science.

“We are doing monthly routine water sampling across the Johnstone catchment from its top to end of catchment, testing for things like nutrients, pesticides and suspended solids,” Francis says.

“We are also monitoring impacts on the rainforest and ecosystems and looking at cultural indicators that came about through consultation with our Mamu people—things like places where there used to be yabby beds but there are not anymore, fish species that have disappeared from certain areas over the years...”

The Wet Tropics Management Authority is able to support this important publication with the assistance of the Australian and Queensland governments.



Images by Terrain NRM

“The information will give everyone a snapshot of waterway health and a better understanding to move towards solutions. By working together and building partnerships we can create a more sustainable future.”

The project is funded by the partnership between the Australian Government’s Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation. It has also involved water monitoring training for rangers and several younger Traditional Custodians through Terrain NRM and the Department of Environment and Science. Rusharne Purcell, 20, and Keith Land, 22, (pictured above) share a passion for conserving the land and water.

“We’re all striving for one goal—to have an environment that’s not destroyed,” Rusharne says. “It’s so good to finally get a chance to help preserve this, and our culture.” Mamu Aboriginal Corporation’s Lorraine Maund says momentum is building, from Elders through to the younger generation.

“Our youth are passionate about the environment and caring for Country—why not harness that to drive things forward?” she says.

“We are all custodians, and we share and pass on our knowledge for the next generation because if the land is sick then we are sick and our people are sick. Our Elders have been sharing what they have seen change over time. Combining their knowledge with new data, we can build a bigger picture for the future.”



Australian Government



Queensland Government