

Board Communique No 111
19–20 March 2020

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic the board of the Wet Tropics Management Authority held its first meeting of 2020 (meeting 111) on Thursday 19 and Friday 20 March. Board chair Leslie Shirreffs PSM and directors Dr Leah Talbot, Mr John Courtenay, Mr Phil Rist and Ms Anne Clarke joined observers and guests in the first ever board meeting held entirely by video-conference.

On the first day of the meeting, the board was encouraged to learn about the way in which the Wet Tropics Sustainable Tourism Destination Plan is being researched and developed by the Authority. Using human-centred design principles, the plan will draw upon foundational Wet Tropics tourism plans such as the Wet Tropics Walking Strategy, be grounded in IUCN principles for management of protected areas and will reflect best practice and current trends. This bottom-up approach in sustainable tourism planning places emphasis on the inclusion of community, and in the Wet Tropics—particularly the inclusion of Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples. This bottom-up process will help identify new experiences which promote the unique cultural and natural values of the Wet Tropics region while taking advantage of an increasing appetite for sustainable tourism.

The board engaged in a detailed discussion about activities under the Authority’s climate action agenda including those in the 10-point plan and the climate adaptation plan: [Accept, Act, Adapt](#). The directors were briefed on the momentum which is being generated as a result of the board’s successful industry and partner workshop—the Creating Our Future forum —hosted by the Authority at Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park on 6 March 2020. Discussions are now underway with key partners and industry leaders to establish a pathway for collaboratively progressing outcomes from the Creating Our Future forum. Additionally, the board and Authority management are exploring possibilities for private sector partnerships to further facilitate collaborative action and investment.

Partnerships are central to the Authority’s work, so the board was excited to learn that the Authority is now partnering with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Partnerships (QPWS&P) to develop a second mountain-top project focusing on particular species of fauna to research climate change resilience and presence.

The board also learned that the extensive number-crunching and research undertaken to assess carbon farming as an avenue for increasing climate resilience of the Wet Tropics has been beneficial. Using the Queensland Land Restoration Fund as a guide, the Authority now has a much deeper understanding of the way in which carbon farming might be applied and the place of co-benefits in a Wet Tropics landscape example. The directors applauded this work, outlining its value in guiding a way forward. This knowledge will inform future project proposals to improve resilience of the Wet Tropics from climate impacts.

A comprehensive update on the eradication of yellow crazy ants in and around the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area was provided to directors by Project Manager, Lucy Karger. On 13 February 2020 the Queensland and Australian Governments signed the \$6m per year 2019-2022 Intergovernmental Funding Agreement. As part of the agreement the Authority has submitted strategic and implementation plans, a communications and engagement strategy and a high-level design plan. The eradication program is having very positive outcomes enhanced by the training of the first of several proposed odour-detection dogs. Treatment for a new infestation found at Henleys Hill in February will begin soon.

The Aboriginal Partnerships team updated directors on the progress of the refresh of the Wet Tropics of Queensland Regional Agreement being led by the Traditional Owner Leadership Group (TOLG). The COVID-19 pandemic will substantially impact on the TOLG's progress for refreshing the agreement, in particular the community engagement 'roadshow' scheduled for March and April. Effective consultation about proposed governance arrangements is required to ensure completion of a supplementary agreement. It is proposed this agreement would be implemented over two years as the framework for refreshing the Regional Agreement and embedding governance arrangements.

The board was pleased to learn that the Authority and QPWS&P signed a renewed five year Partnership Agreement in January 2020 outlining how the agencies will roll out the \$1.8m yearly commitment to World Heritage Area management in national parks. In alignment with the agencies' strategic objectives and operations, the agreement covers projects relating to compliance, fire management, tourism and presentation, Traditional Owner engagement, researcher protocols and climate change.

The board was also provided with an update of the Wet Tropics Management Plan Review. The proposed amendments for the plan are now proceeding through the process for final approval with implementation anticipated by end of the year.

On the second day of the meeting, Queensland Department of Innovation and Tourism Industry Development's (DITID) Project Executive Director, Darren Scott and Chief Executive, David Edwards, Tracy Rose (QPWS&P) and Tim Hertz (DITID) updated the board on progress of the Wangetti Trail and other adventure eco-tourism trail proposals. The directors were briefed on the process used for the Cooloola Great Walk proposal and how those learnings might be applied in the Wangetti Trail process, particularly in relation to co-design and benefit sharing with Traditional Owners.

The board received an update on the positive changes to the Authority's communications and engagement approach. Jeanette Wormald, Strategic Communication Advisor, explained that since early in the new year the newly engaged team have re-evaluated and refreshed the Authority's communication strategy. The Authority is now creating and delivering a strong corporate identity and voice to promote its work in managing the World Heritage-listed Wet Tropics and to influence attitudes and behavioural change. The fresh approach has included a focus on social media with impressive results. In 13 days (10 to 24 January) the Authority increased Twitter engagement by 217%, Instagram engagement by 47.5%, and Facebook engagement by more than 100%. A Wet Tropics Management Authority LinkedIn page has also been created. The board applauded the team's enthusiasm and congratulated them on the great social media results.

Over both days of the meeting, the board discussed the potential short and medium-term impacts of COVID-19 on staff, our partners—in particular Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples—and the capacity of the Authority to implement its programs as planned. With engagement and consultation at the core of its work, the Authority will need to assess and implement mechanisms for ensuring engagement is maintained and keep projects on track.

In spite of using videoconferencing to conduct meeting 111, the board had a positive and successful meeting and anticipate that meeting 112 in May will be held in same way.

Meeting 112 is scheduled for 20–21 May 2020.

For further information about the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area or the Wet Tropics Management Authority please visit our website at wettropics.gov.au