



WET TROPICS MINISTERIAL FORUM NO 27 COMMUNIQUÉ

The Australian and Queensland Environment Ministers met recently to discuss the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, home to the world's oldest tropical rainforest (over 100 million years old), and a cultural landscape for the Rainforest Aboriginal peoples of Tropical North Queensland.

The Wet Tropics Ministerial Forum, comprising the Australian and Queensland Environment Ministers, held its 27th meeting in Melbourne on 28 July 2017. The Forum meets annually to provide oversight to the strategic operation of the Wet Tropics Management Authority, approve annual budgets and consider future directions for meeting the property's World Heritage obligations.

The Forum discussed opportunities to support increased involvement of the Rainforest Aboriginal peoples, as Traditional Owners of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, in the management of their traditional lands. Rainforest Aboriginal peoples have expressed aspirations for greater involvement in land management, including, for example, through economic participation and access to country. The Wet Tropics Management Authority provides some financial and on-ground support through a devolved grants program as well as providing training to assist cultural planning and land management. Members were pleased to note these initiatives and encourage the Authority to continue to work with relevant State and Commonwealth agencies to increase opportunities for Indigenous participation and employment opportunities in the region.

The Ministers approved the Wet Tropics Management Authority budget for 2017-18. The budget will enable important work to continue. This includes the review of the statutory *Wet Tropics Management Plan*. Importantly the Plan will identify areas for future tourism and presentation potential, improve recognition of Aboriginal tradition, while continuing to protect the outstanding natural values of the Area.

Other vital work includes the continuation of the yellow crazy ant eradication program, in and around the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. In August 2016, the Wet Tropics Management Authority was able to ramp up the program with a commitment of over \$10.5 million in funding from the State and Commonwealth governments over the next three years. This investment has enabled the continuation of the local eradication program, through intensive treatment; an improved research and monitoring; and the rollout of community education and capacity building programs.

Membership of the Wet Tropics Ministerial Forum comprises the Hon Dr Steven Miles MP, Queensland Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection (Chair), and Hon Josh

Frydenberg MP, Commonwealth Minister for the Environment and Energy. Ms Leslie Shirreffs, Chair, Wet Tropics Management Authority, attends the forum as Secretariat.

Background

The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1988. It stretches over 900,000 hectares from Cooktown to Townsville.

The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area is a stunning landscape with magnificent vistas; a domain for ancient rainforests, unique animals and the highest biodiversity of endemic rainforest plants in the world. It is home to the world's oldest tropical rainforest (over 100 million years old), and is recognised as a cultural landscape for the Rainforest Aboriginal peoples

In 2013, an international scientific study identified the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area as the second most irreplaceable natural World Heritage site on the planet, when it comes to protecting biodiversity and preventing extinctions of the world's mammals, birds and amphibians

The World Heritage Area plays a strong role in the social, environmental and economic life of the far north Queensland community and a recent study identifies the collective worth of the Wet Tropics region's natural values to Queensland to be \$5.2billion annually.

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