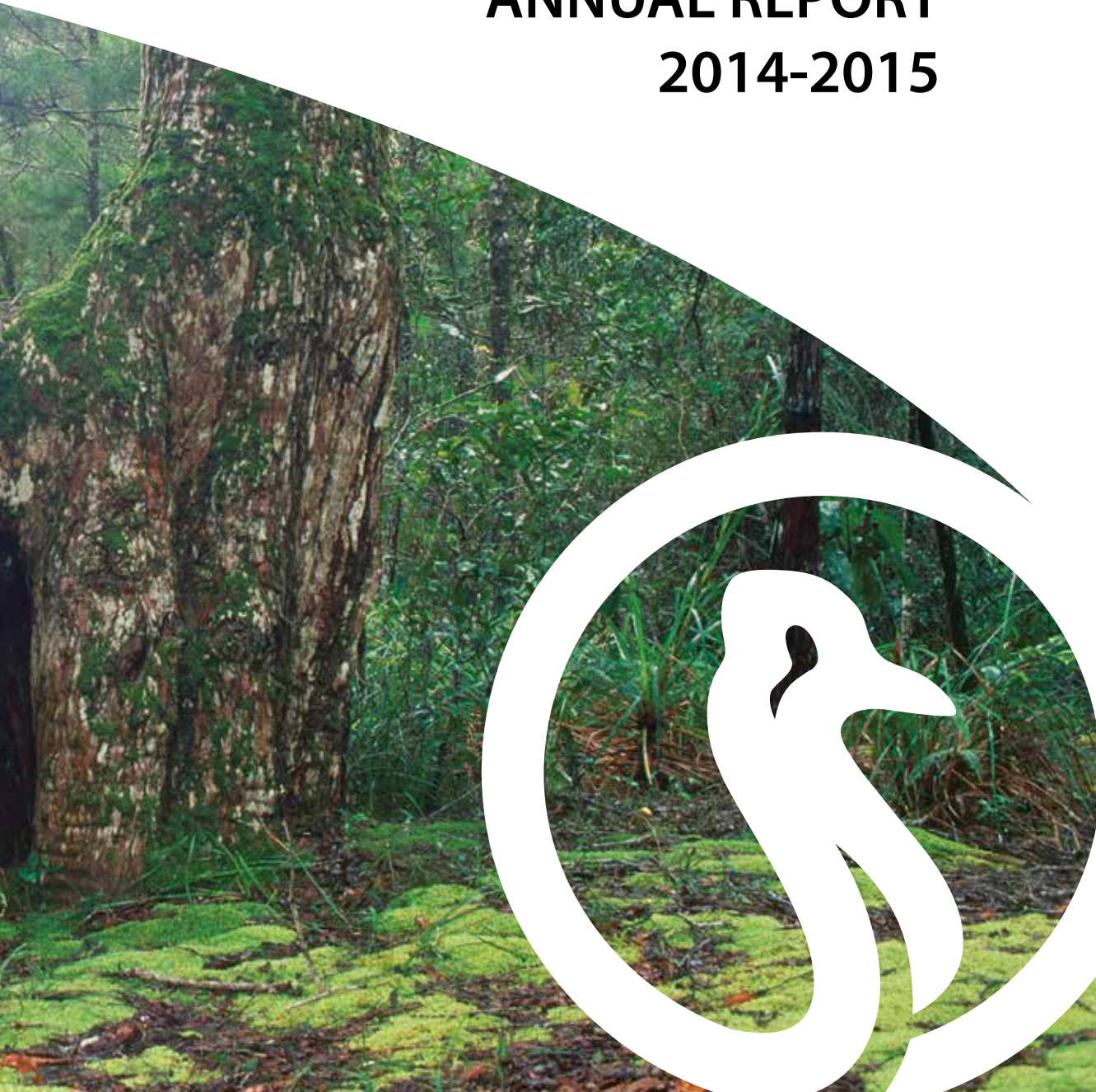




ANNUAL REPORT 2014-2015





**WET
TROPICS**
MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

**ANNUAL REPORT
2014-2015**

Purpose of the report

This annual report details the financial and non-financial performance of the Wet Tropics Management Authority from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015. It highlights the work, achievements, activities and strategic initiatives of the Authority, and satisfies the requirements of Queensland's *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993* and Financial Accountability Act 2009; and the Commonwealth's *Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Conservation Act 1994*.

Feedback

The annual report is an important document representing communication and accountability. The Authority values comments and welcomes feedback from readers.

Public availability

This publication can be accessed and downloaded from our website at www.wettropics.gov.au. Alternatively, hard copies of this publication can be obtained by emailing wettropics@wtma.qld.gov.au.

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Further information



Wet Tropics Management Authority
PO Box 2050, Cairns QLD 4870
Phone: (07) 4241 0500
wettropics@wtma.qld.gov.au

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30 September 2015

The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for the Environment
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

I am pleased to present the Annual Report 2014-2015 for the Wet Tropics Management Authority.

Under the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Conservation Act 1994*, section 10 (1) 'annual report' means a report given to the Australian Government under section 63 of the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993* (Qld).

Section 10 (2) requires you, as the Minister, to cause a copy of the annual report to be laid before each House of Parliament within 15 sitting days after the report is given to the Australian Government.

In submitting this report to you today the Authority is fulfilling its responsibilities under Australian Government legislation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S Buchanan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Scott Buchanan

Executive Director

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DIRECTOR

Highlights from the Executive Director

The Wet Tropics of Queensland is internationally recognised as one of the world's outstanding natural landscapes making an extraordinarily important contribution to nature conservation in Australia on behalf of the global community. Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1988, the Wet Tropics is an area of spectacular scenery and biodiversity, a habitat for numerous rare and endemic species, and of great scientific significance.

It is also important to acknowledge that in 2012 the Indigenous cultural values of the Wet Tropics were included in Australia's National Heritage List. The Authority pays its respects to the Rainforest Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of this important landscape and in particular to elders past and present.

The Wet Tropics Management Authority was established to assist the Australian and Queensland governments to fulfil Australia's obligations under the World Heritage Convention in relation to the Wet Tropics. The Authority is jointly accountable to the Commonwealth and State government environment and heritage ministers.

The Authority has diverse roles in support of the Wet Tropics community. As well as ensuring protection through administration of the statutory Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998, the Authority builds meaningful partnerships with the community, Rainforest Aboriginal people, researchers, the tourism industry and with government departments and agencies to advance the conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

The year 2014-15 represents another period of achievement for the Authority and its partners in world heritage management. Some highlights of the year are summarised below.

Supporting State and Commonwealth Governments

The Authority welcomed the appointment of the Hon Dr Steven Miles MP as the new Queensland Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef following the State election in January 2015. Minister Miles, who is also the Chair of the Wet Tropics Ministerial Forum, took an early interest in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

Minister Miles and the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment, the Hon Mr Greg Hunt MP, as the responsible Ministers for the Wet Topics World Heritage Area comprise the Wet Tropics Ministerial Forum. The Forum met in June 2015 and dealt with a number of issues, including the decision to approve the appointment process for re-establishing the Board of the Wet Tropics Management Authority and the endorsement of the Authority's budget for 2015-16.

The Authority looks forward to supporting the Queensland minister in his responsibilities for world heritage management and to the government in maintaining their reputation as international leaders in protecting the Outstanding Universal Value of the Wet Tropics.

The Authority also remains grateful to the Australian Government for its financial support for the Authority under the World Heritage Grants program. The Government's commitment to fund the Authority until June 2018, and its invitation for proposals for additional investments into the Wet Tropics region through the National Landcare program is most welcome; potentially increasing financial stability to the management of the World Heritage Area.

Board of directors

Division 2 of the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993* (the Queensland Act) establishes the Board of Directors for the Wet Tropics Management Authority. Directors are appointed by the Queensland Governor in Council upon the nomination of the Australian and Queensland governments. The term of the final two Wet Tropics Management Authority Board members, Dr Ro Hill and Ms Leah Talbot expired on 15 February 2015. Prior to that, and since that time, the Authority's Board was inquorate. Despite being without a Board the Authority has continued in its role to ensuring that Australia's obligation under the World Heritage Convention in relation to the Wet Tropics is met. I take this opportunity to thank the directors for their efforts in support of the Authority over the past year.

Yellow crazy ant eradication

The Authority remains gravely concerned at the risk that the exotic pest, the yellow crazy ant, poses for the Outstanding Universal Value of the Wet Tropics. In 2013, the Authority secured a \$1.9 million grant from the Australian Government to support a five-year project to eradicate yellow crazy ants from areas within and adjacent to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. This project has progressed to its second year, with the Authority completing four rounds of aerial baiting inside the World Heritage Area and ground treatment in areas adjoining the World Heritage Area. The Authority strengthened connections with its stakeholders, fostering ties with landholders and maintaining a network of collaborators from state and local government agencies, research institutions and the sugar industry.

Wet Tropics tourism

Tourism based on the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area makes an enormously important contribution to the economy of Far North Queensland. As well as benefiting economically from the World Heritage Area, the tourism industry is a vital partner in the presentation of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area - a duty of State parties under the World Heritage Convention.

The Authority's tour guide program, developed and delivered in partnership with industry association Savannah Guides ensures world heritage tour guides have all the knowledge and skills they need to deliver world class world heritage interpretive experiences. The training and associated workshops have strong support within the industry and the Authority is particularly gratified at the significant interest shown by Rainforest Aboriginal tour guides.

The Authority has continued to provide regional leadership for the National Landscapes program. The program is now project managed by Ecotourism Australia with funding support from Parks Australia and Tourism Australia. The program aims to strengthen and deepen the experience opportunities and to build partnerships between tourism and conservation in highlighting the best of the best of Australia's nature-based tourism experiences. In January 2015, in recognition of our leadership role and active involvement, the Authority was invited to oversee Chairing of the program.

World Parks Congress

A number of Authority staff were among the 6000 people from over 170 countries who attended the IUCN World Parks Congress from 12-19 November 2014. They presented at the congress on behalf of the Authority, discussing major projects and issues regarding management of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

Andrew Maclean facilitated a session on 'Keeping the Outstanding Exceptional - The Cairns Communique', which promoted the benefits of the communique for world heritage managers throughout Australia, and recommended it be adapted for use worldwide by the World Heritage Committee.

M'Lis Flynn facilitated a demonstration by Mandingalbay Yidinji Traditional Owners in developing a participatory 3-dimensional model (P3DM) of their traditional land. Each day the Traditional Owners created, painted and labelled a large model of their lands from Yarrabah south along the Malbon Thompson Range. This enabled elders and knowledge holders to share important cultural heritage, reflecting the way in which Aboriginal people see and understand 'country' with both younger Mandingalbay Yidinji people and with visitors from across the world.

Campbell Clarke presented a reporting framework for the Outstanding Universal Value of the Wet Tropics as part of a broader discussion about how best to incorporate Outstanding Universal Value into the nomination and management of World Heritage Areas. He also delivered a short presentation

about mobilising landholders– the Authority’s recent rainforest restoration project on the southern Atherton Tablelands.

The executive director was invited to make a presentation on Australia’s management of the Wet Tropics rainforests at the Asia-Pacific rainforest summit hosted by Australian Minister for the Environment, The Hon Greg Hunt MP in the two days prior to the World Parks Congress.

In an address on ‘International and Civil Society Perspectives’ by the Director General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova mentioned the Wet Tropics Management Authority and its associated legislation as an exemplary case of best practice for its approach to working with Aboriginal people in the management of natural and cultural heritage.

Learning Landscapes

The Authority recognises that scientific research plays a critical role in providing the knowledge for evidence-based informed decision making and for the community to understand and appreciate the importance of the World Heritage Area. The Authority seeks to support continued research, to build on the legacy of past research investment and to ensure knowledge generated in the Wet Tropics is accessible to rainforest and protected area managers elsewhere. In order to support this, the Authority is promoting the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area as an international ‘learning landscape’.

The Outstanding Universal Value of the Area, together with the favourable research environment found within the region, provides outstanding opportunities for collaborative research across a range of disciplines such as ecology, climatology, tourism, sociology and economics based on tropical ecosystems.

Appropriate investment into rainforest research remains a high priority. The Authority played an active role in preliminary planning for the National Environmental Science Program (NESP), in particular, the Northern Australia Environmental Resources Hub and the Threatened Species Recovery Hub to ensure decision makers are better able to understand, manage and conserve the Wet Tropics environment through world class science.

Importantly, the Authority plays a role in presenting contemporary scientific research to share with the broader community. It does this through various means. Our quarterly e-bulletins and the Wet Tropics website provides a wealth of information for the interested public.

The ‘Repairing the Rainforest’ publication, collaboratively authored by the Authority in 2013/14 is now an educational resource and fund raiser for local rainforest restoration groups. The book is currently used as a text book for the undergraduate Restoration Ecology course run by James Cook University.

Our annual ‘State of the Wet Tropics’ report takes a thematic approach to reporting the state of knowledge on management issues. The selected

theme for the 2014-15 State of the Wet Tropics Report is *'The value (economic contribution) of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area to regional, state and national communities'*.

Thanks

Achieving the objectives of the World Heritage Convention in the Wet Tropics would be entirely impossible without the support and collaboration of a huge network of partners in community, industry and government. Examples include community volunteers restoring rainforests through revegetation and pest control activities; Rainforest Aboriginal people working to preserve and pass on their cultural heritage; researchers building knowledge about the World Heritage Area and its management; infrastructure providers making positive choices about design and maintenance that protect rainforest values; tour guides and the volunteers in information centres who share their knowledge with visitors; the international volunteers working at the Authority and with its partners; and the hard-working staff of numerous Commonwealth, State and local government agency partners, in particular the rangers in the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing.

It is important that I also acknowledge and thank the current and outgoing staff of the Authority itself for their efforts over the past twelve months, all of whom are dedicated to achieving the highest standards of management appropriate to a World Heritage Area. With the collective effort and support of all of these people, Australia's pride in the Wet Tropics of Queensland remains strong.



Scott Buchanan

Executive Director

Our organisation

World Heritage and National Heritage listing

The World Heritage List includes 1031 properties forming part of the cultural and natural heritage which the World Heritage Committee considers as having Outstanding Universal Value. These include 802 cultural, 197 natural and 32 mixed properties in 161 State Parties.

As of 30 June 2015, 163 State Parties have ratified the World Heritage Convention. Australia became a signatory in 1974 and at 30 June 2015 there were 19 Australian properties on the World Heritage list. World Heritage listing is recognition by the international community that a place is such an outstanding example of the world's natural or cultural heritage that its conservation is of value to all people.

The Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area ('the World Heritage Area' or 'the Area') has outstanding natural values, meeting all four natural criteria for World Heritage listing and fulfilling the necessary conditions of integrity. The Wet Tropics of Queensland is considered to:

- contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance - *Criterion (vii)*
- be an outstanding example representing the major stages of Earth's history, including the record of life, and significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features - *Criterion (viii)*
- be an outstanding example representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals – *Criterion (ix)*
- contain the most important significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation - *Criterion (x)*.

In May 2007 the Area was also listed on Australia's National Heritage List. The Area was listed for the five National Heritage criteria that correspond to its World Heritage (natural) criteria. The National Heritage criteria include:

- the place's importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's natural or cultural history - *Criterion (a)*
- the place's possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of

Australia's natural or cultural history - *Criterion (b)*

- the place's potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's natural or cultural history - *Criterion (c)*
- the place's importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of (i) a class of Australia's natural or cultural places; or (ii) a class of Australia's natural or cultural environments - *Criterion (d)*
- the place's importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group - *Criterion (e)*.

On 9 November 2012, the Australian Government announced the inclusion of the national Indigenous heritage values as part of the existing National Heritage listing for the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. The Aboriginal Rainforest people of the Wet Tropics of Queensland have lived continuously in the rainforest environment for at least 5000 years and this is the only place in Australia where Aboriginal people have permanently inhabited a tropical rainforest environment. The criteria are:

- the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period – *Criterion (f)*
- the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance as part of indigenous tradition - *Criterion (i)*.

National Heritage listing provides protection under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* which dictates the Commonwealth must use its best endeavours to ensure a management plan that is consistent with the management principles is prepared and implemented in cooperation with the State.

Administration of the Act

Enabling legislation

The Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area is managed under the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993* (the Queensland Act) and the *Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area Conservation Act 1994* (the Commonwealth Act). These Acts implement Australia's international duty for the protection, conservation, presentation, rehabilitation and transmission to future generations of the World Heritage Area.

The Queensland Act establishes the Wet Tropics Management Authority and provides the legal basis for the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998* (the Plan) that regulates land use activities in the Area through a zoning and permit system. The *Wet Tropics World Heritage Area Management Scheme* is an intergovernmental agreement signed by the Prime Minister of Australia and the Premier of Queensland in 1990. It sets out broad structural and funding arrangements for the management of the Area. The agreement is incorporated as Schedule 1 to the Queensland Act and given effect by section 3 of the Commonwealth Act. An amended version of the intergovernmental agreement was adopted in 2011.

The Wet Tropics Management Authority

The Wet Tropics Management Authority ('the Authority') was set up to ensure Australia's obligation under the World Heritage Convention is met in relation to the World Heritage Area. It is funded by the Australian Government and the Queensland Government, reporting to both on its performance against agreed outcomes. The Authority is a body corporate, with statutory powers defined under the Queensland Act. The Authority's functions, as defined under section 10 of the Queensland Act, are to:

- develop and implement policies and programs for management of the Area
- formulate performance indicators for the implementation of approved policies and programs
- advise and make recommendations to the Minister and the Ministerial Council
- prepare and implement management plans for the Area
- administer funding arrangements
- facilitate and enter into Cooperative Management Agreements
- rehabilitate and restore the Area

- gather, research, analyse and disseminate information on the Area
- develop public and community education programs
- promote the Area locally, nationally and internationally
- liaise with the Australian and Queensland Governments, agencies and international organisations
- monitor the state of the Area
- advise and report to the Minister and the Ministerial Council on the state of the Area.

Subject to performing its functions in a way which is consistent with the protection of the natural heritage values of the Area, the Authority must, as far as practicable, also perform its functions in a way that is consistent with the objectives and principles of the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development and with the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment.

Our contribution to government objectives

Consistent with its legislative roles and functions, the Wet Tropics Management Authority endeavours to ensure that its service delivery initiatives contribute to the Australian and Queensland Government objectives for the Wet Tropics community.

Statutory reporting obligations

Each year the Wet Tropics Management Authority prepares a report on the administration of the Act during the year, financial statements for the year, and a report on the state of the Area, as required under section 63(1) of the Queensland Act and section 10 of the Commonwealth Act.

Management structure

The intergovernmental agreement provides for, *inter alia*, the establishment of the Wet Tropics Ministerial Forum consisting of Commonwealth and State Ministers. Its function is to coordinate policy and funding for the Area. The agreement recognises that both the Australian Government and Queensland Government have joint interests in and responsibilities for the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area.

A board of directors is set up under the Queensland Act and consists of seven directors, six of whom serve in a part time capacity. Two directors are nominated by the Australian Government and two by the Queensland Government. The Chair and a designated Aboriginal director are nominated by the Wet Tropics Ministerial Forum. The executive director of the Authority is a non-voting board director. The Board's key function is to implement programs to meet Australia's international obligations for the Area under the World Heritage Convention.

The Authority operates as an administrative unit within the Queensland Government's Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. As part of the Queensland public sector, the Authority is subject to public sector legislation, regulations, standards and guidelines governing administrative functions and arrangements. The Director-General of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection is the accountable officer for the Authority under the *Financial and Performance Management Standard 2009*. The Authority is responsible to the Director-General regarding compliance with State Government administrative and financial standards.

The Authority is a small organisation and works in partnership with other agencies, stakeholders and the wider community. The Authority has produced a range of strategic policy and planning documents which guide management of the World Heritage Area, consistent with its legislative responsibilities.

While the Authority is the lead agency responsible for policy, planning and the coordination of management in the Area, it is not directly responsible for on-ground management. Day-to-day management activities such as infrastructure maintenance and pest control are the responsibility of the relevant land managers which include the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing; the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection; the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; and community infrastructure service providers for power, water and roads and twelve local governments.

An annual partnership agreement is developed each year between the Authority and the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing and the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection; to prioritise and coordinate management activities in the protected area estate within the World Heritage Area. The partnership agreement outlines products and services to be delivered by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) under funding provided by the Queensland Government for world heritage management.

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- 10 The Authority also works in partnership with the regional community as a means of building a sense of ownership and sharing both the benefits and burdens of best practice management. In particular, the Authority consults with the community, both through its committees and directly and extensively on matters with significant community impact, such as management plans.

Wet Tropics Ministerial Forum

At June 2015 Ministerial Forum comprised:

- The Hon Dr Steven Miles MP, Queensland Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for the Great Barrier Reef (Chair)
- The Hon Greg Hunt MP, Australian Minister for the Environment.

Ministerial Forum met on 10 June 2015. At this meeting the Ministers agreed to:

- recommend a suitable nomination for position of Chair of the Wet Tropics Management Authority Board as a priority matter
- endorse the appointment process for the vacant director positions on the Wet Tropics Management Authority Board for filling until December 2016 via an Expression of Interest process
- approve the Wet Tropics Management Authority budget for 2015-16.

Wet Tropics Management Authority Board of Directors

Division 2 of the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993* (the Queensland Act) establishes the Board of Directors for the Wet Tropics Management Authority. Directors are appointed by the Queensland Governor in Council upon the nomination of the Commonwealth and Queensland.

The board of directors is set up under the Queensland Act and consists of seven directors. Two directors are nominated by the Australian Government and two by the Queensland Government. The Chair and a designated Aboriginal director are nominated by the Wet Tropics Ministerial Forum.

The term of the final two Wet Tropics Management Authority Board members, Dr Ro Hill and Ms Leah Talbot expired on 15 February 2015. Prior to that, and since that time, the Authority's Board was inquorate. No board meetings were convened during 2014-15.

Committees and liaison groups

The Authority has two statutory advisory committees appointed by the Board under section 40 (1) of the Queensland Act. They are the Community Consultative Committee (CCC) and the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC). These committees generally meet prior to Board meetings and advise the Authority on programs and research for the management of the Area.

Under Section 40(1) the Queensland Act, the Board has the power to establish advisory committees as it considers appropriate. The Conservation Sector Liaison Group (CSLG) has been established as a regular forum involving the Authority and key conservation groups to identify, discuss and, where possible, resolve conservation issues relating to the Area.

2013-2018 Strategic Plan goals

The Wet Tropics Management Authority is organised around the seven strategic goals that describe the ultimate outcomes the Authority aspires to. The goals are as follows:

1. The Outstanding Universal Value of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area is protected and maintained consistent with Australia's obligation under the World Heritage Convention
2. Communities derive benefit and value from the World Heritage Area, are effectively involved in planning and management and their stewardship of the World Heritage Area is recognised and supported
3. Rainforest Aboriginal people are supported in expressing their knowledge, culture and management practices on country
4. The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area is used, enjoyed and celebrated as the world's finest learning landscape for tropical rainforest and its sustainable management
5. World Heritage Area values are supported and presented through sustainable tourism
6. Enduring partnerships enhance the integrity of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, its presentation and its function in the life of the community
7. The Wet Tropics Management Authority is an accountable and capable organisation.

Progress towards the goals, objectives and milestones in the 2013-2018 Strategic Plan provide the framework for 2014-15 annual report.

The Outstanding Universal Value of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area is protected and maintained consistent with Australia's obligation under the World Heritage Convention

The Outstanding Universal Value of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area lies at the heart of its governance and management regime. The protection and conservation of the value of the Area requires an effective management and regulatory regime. The Authority has an important role in coordinating the contribution of others in support of the Area. Pests, weeds, disease and climate change are identified as currently posing the greatest threat to the integrity of the World Heritage Area.

Administration of the Wet Tropics Management Plan

Activities within the World Heritage Area are regulated under the Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998 (the Plan). The Plan is subordinate legislation to the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993*. The Plan regulates land use activities in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area that have the potential to impact on the integrity of the Area, and includes criteria for the assessment of permit applications for construction and maintenance of roads, powerlines, water supplies and communication facilities.

As a component of administering the Plan, Authority staff regularly liaise with contractors and officers responsible for the planning, building and maintenance of community services infrastructure inside and adjoining the World Heritage Area. As part of this liaison, the Authority provides advice on actions that could be taken to avoid or mitigate impacts on the Area.

Authority staff undertook regular auditing and provided advice to a number of agencies or organisations undertaking activities in the World Heritage Area under existing permits, particularly in regard to work being carried out on the Main Roads network. For example, this included pre-lodgement advice to agencies in regard to various proposals under consideration. A significant example was the completion in late 2014 of the upgrade to the Kirrama Range Road by the Cassowary Coast Regional Council which was done in accordance with an Environmental Management Plan approved by the Authority.

Authority staff also worked with Cook Shire Council to ameliorate the impact of road widening works on the Rossville to Ayton road and monitoring the revegetation of batters at the recently completed Woobadda River bridge.

Authority staff assessed and issued new permits under the Plan to the following agencies:

- WTMA14006 Douglas Shire Council to maintain community services infrastructure
- WTMA14008 Department of Defence to construct a foot-bridge at Tully Training Area.

The de-amalgamation of some local government Councils required the re-issuing of infrastructure maintenance permits to the new and former entities and additional training was provided to Council staff in regard to the implementation of permit conditions.

In addition, staff reviewed and provided policy advice on over thirty proposals that were deemed to have only minor and inconsequential impacts on the Area. These activities do not require a Wet Tropics permit to be issued.

The Authority successfully developed a business case to obtain funding from government to purchase land for a lookout on the Cardwell Gap section of the Bruce Highway. The lookout, constructed by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, has been named 'Panjoo' which means 'beautiful place' in Banjin, the Traditional Owners of the Hinchinbrook area. The new lookout offers uninterrupted, panoramic views of Hinchinbrook Island.

Rainforest Aboriginal people

Staff provided advice and support to Aboriginal organisations and Councils to support their management of natural resources and mitigate threats to the integrity of their country. Staff facilitated consultation between local government and agencies undertaking construction and maintenance activities in the Area with relevant Traditional Owner groups. These discussions help all parties better understand the potential impact of projects and maintenance activities on cultural and natural heritage values.

Ten Mile Station

Ten Mile Station is a grazing lease in the upper Bloomfield Valley within the Area. The lease is subject to a natural resource management agreement with the Authority to protect the natural values of the lease from grazing impacts. Fencing work has progressed and Authority staff continue to monitor plots at different sites as indicators for any emerging natural resource impacts resulting from grazing.

Investigation and enforcement

Authority and QPWS staff investigated excessive clearing associated with the upgrade of a bridge over Flaggy Creek on Black Mountain Road near Kuranda in October 2014. The work was not considered to be covered by the existing maintenance permit. The Council have undertaken to rehabilitate cleared sections of the site and implement reforms to their operational plans to ensure such incidents do not occur in future.

Training provided to local government and State agencies

The Authority provided training to four local governments in the Wet Tropics

region to assist them to meet their obligations under the Plan and to protect the Outstanding Universal Value of the Area. Training was also provided to QPWS conservation officers on their investigation and enforcement powers and responsibilities under the Plan.

Land dealings

The Authority provided advice on development proposals, including those outside the Area that may affect the world heritage natural values. Authority staff provided formal advice on seven occasions to the State Land Asset Management group within the Department of Natural Resources and Mines regarding land dealings including proposed lease renewals, free holding applications and proposed road closures.

Eradication of yellow crazy ants in and around the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area

The program to eradicate yellow crazy ants from in and next to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area progressed to its second year, completing four of nine rounds of aerial baiting, as well as ground treatments in areas adjoining the World Heritage Area. The five-year program is funded by a \$1.9 million grant from the Commonwealth. The Authority strengthened connections with its stakeholders, fostering ties with landholders and maintaining the network of collaborators from state and local government agencies, research institutions and the sugar industry.

Yellow crazy ants are considered to be one of the world's 100 worst invasive species and pose a serious threat to the Outstanding Universal Value of the Area. The impact of yellow crazy ants (*Anoplolepis gracilipes*) remains a significant issue for the Authority. There are two main areas of infestation threatening the Area. The main area is located around the southern suburbs of Cairns with a total area of infestation of approximately 822ha including 266ha in forested hillslopes, 230ha in sugarcane and about 150ha within residential areas. The ants have infested about 50ha of the World Heritage Area. The other infestation of about 30ha is at Russett Park, a rural residential area north of the Barron River near Kuranda and within 500m of the World Heritage boundary.

Landholders championing the eradication and containment from different community groups led to the establishment of a 74 member community taskforce to assist the Authority in managing the Russett Park infestation.

Local government planning

The Authority provided general advice and formal comments on several local government planning schemes during 2014-2015, particularly for Cairns Regional Council and Cassowary Coast Regional Council.

Natural resource management

The Authority participated in cross-agency activities associated with the management of natural resources including Natural Resource Management (NRM) bodies, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, and the Cairns Hillslopes Fire Management Committee. Staff also provided advice to landholders within the Area about activities regulated by the Wet Tropics Plan on their land.

A reporting framework for Outstanding Universal Value

In light of the increased emphasis on protection and management of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, the Authority developed a draft reporting framework which reflects the three pillars of OUV. The three pillars are:

- The property meets one or more of the ten World Heritage criteria
- The property meets the conditions of integrity
- The property meets the requirements for protection and management to ensure its safeguarding.

The draft reporting framework aims to satisfy the World Heritage Committee requirements for assessing condition, integrity, protection and management of the Area.

Communities derive benefit and value from the World Heritage Area, are effectively involved in planning and management and their stewardship of the World Heritage Area is recognised and supported

Community support for the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and engagement in its stewardship is vital to ensuring the Area is protected and that it remains a valued global asset. Community groups in and around the Area actively participate in enhancing the natural and cultural values of the Area and need to be recognised and appreciated. Landholders and neighbours of the Area have an important role in monitoring threats and are valuable partners to management agencies.

Working with the Wet Tropics community

Public engagement

In July 2014 the Authority provided a stall at Ecofiesta in Townsville which was important in engaging residents and visitors from the southern part of the Wet Tropics. Staff also attended a stall at the 2014 Cairns Show with our partners in the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection Wildlife Unit. In May and June of 2015 the Authority participated in the Cairns Boating, Camping and Caravan Expo as part of an information mega stall which incorporated government departments throughout the region. The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area information stall at the Cairns EcoFiesta in May 2015 was successful in attracting a lot of interest from the community.

Authority participation at community events such as these are positive engagement opportunities that provide the chance to promote world heritage values and activities with a wide variety of audiences. The Authority takes the opportunity to educate on topical issues such as yellow crazy ants, threatened species conservation and world heritage management.

Cassowary Recovery Team

The Authority chairs and provides secretariat support for the Cassowary Recovery Team which oversees the implementation of the Recovery Plan for the endangered southern cassowary under the Commonwealth's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Membership includes a broad range of government agencies, organisations and individuals who are working for cassowary conservation in the Wet Tropics. A recent CSIRO population study has estimated there are 4381 cassowaries remaining in the Wet Tropics, with the species listed nationally as endangered owing to habitat loss and interactions with humans, cars and dogs.

Wildlife care workshops

The Authority partnered with FNQ Wildlife Rescue and Boongarry Vets to present a series of six wildlife care workshops during 2014-15. Sponsored by the FNQ Wildlife Trust and held at the Cairns Botanic Gardens Visitor Centre the workshops included information about basic and advanced care for birds,

macropods and mammals. Over 200 people attended these Saturday sessions. Another two workshops are scheduled for the remainder of 2015.

Snake information workshops

The Authority provided wildlife posters to the audience of a workshop about world snakes and their habitats presented by the Tablelands Wildlife Rescue in Malanda in March 2015. Approximately 160 people attended the fundraising event. Another snake information workshop is scheduled for late 2015.

Education

Newspapers in Education

The Authority has sponsored the Newspapers in Education (NiE) section of the Cairns Post newspaper for eleven years. Wet Tropics wildlife posters were inserted into two editions of the Cairns Post newspaper (circulation of over 50 000 readers) and the Keep It Wild poster competition was also promoted to launch the competition.

Keep it Wild poster competition

The Authority partnered with Skyrail Rainforest Cableway, Cairns Harbour Cruises and Cairns Regional Gallery in supporting the 2015 Wet Tropics poster and photo competition. The theme for the competition was 'Loving every moment'. The competition opened in the first 2015 school term and closed in late June.

Over 150 entries were received from young artists from primary schools around the region with many whole of class entries; demonstrating the ability for young people to work together in presenting the Wet Tropics. Messages expressed through the posters focused on why the region is special and needs protecting. The event and winning entries will be promoted on the Wet Tropics website and Facebook page.

Communications

News and media

A priority of the Authority is to maintain its media presence to raise awareness of the Outstanding Universal Value of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and its management and protection.

The yellow crazy ant eradication program continued to receive considerable media attention. The most notable was the formation of the Russett Park yellow crazy ant community taskforce. Updates and articles about the eradication program were broadcast and featured regularly through regional media outlets that have been very responsive to the issue.

The Wet Tropics Tour Guide Program and the associated field schools were popular with the tourism industry and were cross promoted through regional tourism networks. The news and events section of the Wet Tropics website was regularly updated so the public were aware of issues relevant to the Area.

Wet Tropics eNews

The Wet Tropics quarterly newsletter features activities that the Authority is involved in and those of stakeholders who assist in the management and conservation of the World Heritage Area. The eNews is delivered quarterly and is one way the Wet Tropics community and national and international subscribers are kept abreast of events in the region.

Website

A new homepage was designed for the Authority's website in April 2015. The new homepage is the first step towards the review and redesign of the entire website. The focus of the new homepage design was to present information clearly and succinctly to increase the site's navigability, and be in line with users' expectations. The homepage redesign has incorporated optimisation for mobile devices, a component that will be carried over to the entire website redesign once it is complete.

Social media

The Authority currently operates three Facebook pages. The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, Wet Tropics Tour Guides and the Yellow Crazy Ant Information Group. Each page is updated daily to keep the community engaged and aware on current issues, trends and themes that pertain to conservation, environment and world heritage.

Since its inception in June 2011, the Authority's Facebook 'friend' engagement has grown steadily. The most popular post was in relation to the reopening of the Kirrama Range Road in early December 2014, which reached almost 4000 people. This is the highest reach on Facebook for the Authority so far. To date we have around 1400 page 'likes'.

An analysis of the audience who 'like' the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area on Facebook shows us that most are from Australia (predominately Cairns region) followed by the USA and India.

Rainforest Aboriginal people are supported in expressing their knowledge, culture and management practices on country

Rainforest Aboriginal people have been an integral part of the land and seascape of the Wet Tropics region, living in and around the World Heritage Area for thousands of years, using traditional practices to manage 'country' and live sustainably from the natural resources. The Authority recognises the contribution Rainforest Aboriginal people continue to make to the contemporary management of the World Heritage Area. The Authority works closely with Rainforest Aboriginal people, respecting their traditional lore and cultural knowledge, rights, interests and aspirations regarding best practice management of the Area.

The Authority participates in negotiations with Rainforest Aboriginal peoples and their organisations, including Native Title Representative Bodies (NTRB), Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC), Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate (RNTBC) Land Trusts and Land/Sea management corporations, Australian and State government agencies, local government councils, research institutions. The Authority also coordinates and supports, where appropriate, Rainforest Aboriginal peoples' engagement with NRM bodies and other non-government organisations. These negotiations reconciles the Authority's responsibility to manage the Area with the native title rights of Traditional Owners.

The Authority collaborates with Traditional Owners to ensure equitable and culturally respectful participation in protected area management. The opportunity for Traditional Owners to express their knowledge, cultures and practices helps advance social and economic benefits for the broader community.

Native Title, Indigenous Land Use and other agreements

20

The Authority builds sustainable relationships at local, sub-regional, regional and national levels based on engagement pathways developed through strategic resource allocation. During 2014-15 the Authority continued to consult with Traditional Owner representatives through attendance at Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) Board meetings, regular consultations, Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) steering committee meetings and other forums.

The Authority continued to engage in implementation arrangements for Native Title determinations and associated Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) and IPAs. For the reporting period this included collaborating with Mandingalbay Yidinji Aboriginal Corporation, Djunbunji and other partners of the IPA Steering Committee to progress implementation of the IPA Management Plan and ILUA arrangements and Giringun Aboriginal Corporation by continuing to support the Giringun IPA Co-management

Committee in implementing the IPA Management Plan. The Authority also participated on the Gunggandji Independent Advisory Committee.

Traditional Owner small grants scheme

During 2014-15 the Authority provided small grants to Traditional Owner organisations totalling nearly \$20 000. Grants focussed on bio-cultural activities by Rainforest Aboriginal people that benefit Wet Tropics World Heritage Area management. This program supported Traditional Owners to express or enhance their knowledge, culture and management practices through planning, management, monitoring and research on their traditional country. Successful recipients and their projects include:

- Girramay: Youth Language and Cultural Workshops
- Mungalla Aboriginal Business Corporation: Maintenance and re-vegetation of Molonga Creek
- Watsonville Aboriginal Corporation: Weed identification and management training for young Mbabaram and Wadjanbarra Yidinji Traditional Owners.

Two projects from the 2013-14 funding round were completed and included:

- Choorechillum Ngadjon PBC: Tourism opportunity partnership development on Ngadjon traditional country
- Gunggandji (Yarrabah Arts Cultural Precinct): Cultural heritage boardwalk signage design and interpretation.

Supporting Traditional Owner organisations

The Authority provided staff support and training for a number of Traditional Owner organisations to manage and present their traditional lands. Training included social enterprise, project planning and grants writing skills workshops. On-ground support included: development and launch of the Yalanji Community Development Plan; technical support for Jirrbal walking tracks in Koombaloomba; and the Ngadjon Tourism Forum.

The Authority assisted Traditional Owner organisations to prepare for and/or partner grant applications for bio-cultural 'looking after country' projects including:

- Yarrabah Arts and Cultural Precinct – Revitalising the precinct project through the Gambling Community Benefit Fund
- Djiru Warrangburra Aboriginal Corporation – participatory 3D modelling project through the Gambling Community Benefit Fund.

Supporting economic development and tourism opportunities

The Authority engaged Rainforest Aboriginal people who had interests or

aspirations to participate in the Wet Tropics tourism industry. This included supporting Mandingalbay Yidinji through their Djunbunji Land and Sea Program, and Yamini Wiinggina Aboriginal Tours and Jaban Bugal Aboriginal Tours in kick-starting their tour businesses and associated marketing activities. The Authority's efforts to support the planning of the Yarrabah Boardwalk in the first half of 2014 will come to fruition when the boardwalk is expected to be completed during the second half of 2015.

The Authority supported the participation of Traditional Owners in Tour Guide training at several separate Field Schools and Field Days across the Wet Tropics enabling them to gain skills and knowledge unique to the World Heritage Area. Collaborating with Girramay elders and Giringun Aboriginal Corporation, the Authority also provided an opportunity for Traditional Owners to play a leading role in developing content and design of interpretative signage for the Kirrama Range.

The P3DM project

Under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Global Environment Programme (GEF) project, *'Inspiring Protected Area Solutions (GEF – IPAS)'*, and as part of the World Parks Congress 2014, the IUCN engaged the Authority to implement a Participatory 3D Modelling (P3DM) project with an Australian Aboriginal community. The Mandingalbay Yidinji Aboriginal people were selected to develop a P3DM of their traditional lands.

P3DM is a discipline being utilised by Indigenous peoples globally for applications such as climate change planning, protected area management, cultural heritage recording and safeguarding, and resource and wildlife management. In Australia, P3DM has rarely been used, and it is believed that Mandingalbay Yidinji were the first Aboriginal people in Australia to undertake and complete a P3DM activity.

The P3DM exercise and training workshop held with Mandingalbay Yidinji forged a new participatory 3D planning network. The project motivated Mandingalbay Yidinji people to promote and highlight their culture as well as the work they are undertaking to protect and present the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area in Australia and abroad. Travelling to the IUCN World Parks Congress in mid-November 2014 and demonstrating how to undertake a P3DM exercise, Mandingalbay Yidinji generated extensive interest in their work. This proved to be one of the highlights of the Congress which, apart from drawing global attention to the Wet Tropics Rainforest Aboriginal communities and world heritage, also proved to be a valuable platform for engaging practitioners and extending their network.

During project implementation, the Authority drew upon technical support from the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) and Partners with Melanesians (PwM).

The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area is used, enjoyed and celebrated as the World's finest learning landscape for tropical rainforest and its sustainable management

Accumulated knowledge about the values of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and its governance and management represents a major asset. There is an opportunity to better capitalise on this to contribute to the future management of the Wet Tropics and to other natural landscapes. While the knowledge generated and shared by formal research organisations is a key focus in these strategies, the knowledge held and shared by communities, including Rainforest Aboriginal people is also important.

Wet Tropics Learning Landscape

The Authority recognises that scientific research plays a critical role in providing the knowledge for evidence-based informed decision making and for the community to understand and appreciate the importance of the World Heritage Area. The Authority seeks to support continued research, to build on the legacy of past research investment and to ensure knowledge generated in the Wet Tropics is accessible to rainforest and protected area managers elsewhere. In order to support this, the Authority is promoting the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area as an international 'learning landscape'. The Outstanding Universal Value of the Area, together with the favourable research environment found within the region, provides outstanding opportunities for collaborative research across a range of disciplines such as ecology, climatology, tourism, sociology and economics based on tropical ecosystems.

Some of the key objectives of the learning landscape project include:

- the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area is recognised as a globally significant site for research into rainforest ecology, management and societies
- research investment is directed to research questions that are relevant to the management and policy needs of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area
- research findings are presented and communicated in ways that maximise uptake and impact for management and policy
- knowledge from a wide variety of formal and informal sources is respected and shared for the benefit of the World Heritage Area and its communities
- land managers and communities are active participants in research and learning processes.

Student research grant scheme

This was the fourth year that the Authority has offered a competitive small grants scheme to Australian post graduate students. Funding of up to \$4000 was made available for PhD and Masters research projects and up to \$1500 for Honours projects to support environmental, social and cultural research which will benefit Wet Tropics World Heritage Area management, policy

development and operational decision making.

Many well-conceived projects, meeting the priorities identified in the *Wet Tropics Management Authority Research Strategy* and demonstrating scientific rigour and innovative research were received. Twenty-one post-graduate students from six Australian universities were successful grant recipients. The student, their affiliated research institution and projects include:

- Christina Beulow, James Cook University: The role of mangrove birds in coastal ecosystem connectivity
- Alice Buhrich, James Cook University: Preservation and Practice of Rock Art in the Wet Tropics since 1900
- Meg Collis, James Cook University: The effect of yellow crazy ants on native invertebrates: An analysis of pitfall trap contents from the 'Wet Tropics Management Authority Yellow Crazy Ant Eradication Campaign'
- Oscar Crowshaw, James Cook University: The phylogeny and hybridisation of the dingo (*Canis dingo*)
- Rebecca Exl, James Cook University: Population connectivity in the Kuranda tree-frog (*Litoria myola*)
- Melinda Greenfield, James Cook University: The diversity and functional role of fungi in the Australian ant-plant *Myrmecodia beccarii* Hook.f)
- Sasha Greenspan, James Cook University: Do natural body temperature fluctuations help Wet Tropics frogs beat a deadly disease?
- Heather Haines, Griffith University: Reconstructing rainfall in the Wet Tropics from Hoop Pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*) tree rings
- Jing Hu, University of Queensland: Effects of selective logging and silvicultural treatments on tropical forest dynamics and structure in the Atherton Tablelands, North Queensland
- Fleur King, La Trobe University: Investigating firewood strategies and palaeovegetation using charcoal analysis in the rainforest of the Atherton Tableland
- Denise McGregor, James Cook University: Greater Glider (*Petauroides volans*) mechanisms for adaptation in extreme environments
- Susan Nuske, James Cook University: Is the endangered northern bettong, *Bettongia tropica*, a keystone ectomycorrhizal fungi disperser?
- Himali Ratnayake, University of Melbourne: Understanding how climate affects the heat budgets of Australian flying foxes (*Pteropus spp*): the roles of behaviour, morphology and physiology
- Rismita Sari, James Cook University: Phylogeny of Australian Garcinia (Clusiaceae)
- Joann Schmider, James Cook University: Collecting, cognitioning and capitalising local cultural knowledge for residential and visitor supply and demand: A Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area - Traditional Owners rainforest Aboriginal peoples' study - regional overview context to the case study

- Shawkat Sohel, University of Queensland: Does water uptake by trees from various depths of soil affect rainforest tree productivity?
- Ayla Turner, James Cook University: Investigating differences in the behavioural syndromes of *Melomys cervinipes* from different habitat types
- Trevor Volp, James Cook University: Partner quality of an invasive ant in a nutritional ant-plant mutualism
- Tegan Whitehead, James Cook University: Microhabitat use and movement patterns of the endangered northern bettong: influence of resource availability and predator density
- Jarrah Willis, University of Queensland: Functional traits guidelines for predicting species performance in secondary tropical forests of the Atherton Tablelands, North Queensland
- Jie Xie, Queensland University of Technology: Analysis of acoustic data for the monitoring of wet tropical environments.

Wet Tropics Research e-bulletin

Two editions of the Learning Landscape e-Bulletin were published on-line in December 2014 and June 2015. The December edition reported on the rainforest research being undertaken as part of the National Environmental Research Program (NERP) and highlighted management challenges and opportunities facing the region.

The theme of the June edition of the Research e-Bulletin was threatened species. The Wet Tropics is home to numerous threatened species which are a vital element of the World Heritage Area's Outstanding Universal Value. This edition featured articles about species declines in the Wet Tropics and across Australia and included a comprehensive Wet Tropics threatened species list.

In producing the research e-bulletin, the Authority aims to establish the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area as an important centre for research synthesis and establish the Authority as a valuable contributor to knowledge brokering. The purpose of the research e-bulletin is to promote science for management; help identify management issues and scientific solutions; emphasise application and relevance of research; and translate, interpret, synthesise and convey research findings to better inform decision making.

The research e-bulletin was distributed to over 1000 individuals, Commonwealth, State and local government bodies, managers of other Australian World Heritage properties, and research, conservation and Indigenous organisations. Readership of the research e-bulletin extends into 12 countries.

Researcher directory

The Wet Tropics Researcher Directory was compiled and made available online in March 2015. The directory lists and profiles researchers, including

postgraduate students that have professional interests in Queensland's Wet Tropics. It is a multi-disciplinary resource that highlights the breadth of research undertaken in the region.

The directory includes a brief profile of each researcher and their contact details. It has been designed to facilitate and encourage collaboration and networking amongst researchers, government agencies, land managers, industry bodies and the broader community.

National Environmental Research Program

The Australian Government's National Environmental Research Program (NERP) funded a portfolio of public good environmental research throughout Australia.

The NERP Tropical Ecosystems (TE) Hub was focused on addressing issues of concern for the management, conservation and sustainable use of tropical rainforests including the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, the Great Barrier Reef and its catchments, and the Torres Strait, through the generation and transfer of research and knowledge. The Authority was represented on the NERP TE Hub Steering Committee and also chaired the NERP TE Hub Rainforest Implementation Group. The NERP program concluded at the end of 2014 and is currently transitioning into the new Australian Government funded National Environmental Science Program (NESP).

In 2014, the Authority was successful in obtaining funding from the NERP TE Hub for a project to facilitate communication of rainforest research to the Queensland Government with the aim of maximising policy and management uptake.

The project involved organising forums in Brisbane and Cairns to brief relevant Queensland Government staff (policy and operational) of current Wet Tropics NERP rainforest research and its likely management implications. There were five partners involved in the project, all of whom were NERP TE Hub program and/or project leaders as well as being members of the Authority's Scientific Advisory Committee. The aim of the project was to encourage high level Queensland Government support for managing current and emerging threats to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

The Authority and the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC) co-hosted a Symposium in Brisbane on 5 September 2014. The event informed Queensland Government agency staff and non-government stakeholders of the NERP rainforest, reef and Torres Strait research outputs, tools and other potential applications for policy, planning and management. Sixty-five attendees from various agencies attended.

Terrestrial Ecosystem Research Network

The Terrestrial Ecosystem Research Network (TERN) is supported by the Australian Government through the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy and the Super Science Initiative. TERN provides the research infrastructure and standardised procedures through which a wide array of ecosystem research data and knowledge can be stored, accessed and analysed.

TERN is establishing two Rainforest SuperSites in the Wet Tropics; one on the Atherton Tableland centred on a 25ha monitoring plot at Robson Creek; and one in the Daintree lowlands centred on James Cook University's Daintree Rainforest Observatory. The Rainforest SuperSites are providing information on rainforest dynamics and changes in biodiversity.

The SuperSite also includes a biophysical monitoring program which includes automatic weather stations, soil moisture sensor systems and instrumented soil pits. A 40m tower with an OzFlux station constructed adjacent to the 25ha plant dynamics plot monitors energy, water and carbon balance. A Wet Tropics Cooperative Management Agreement (CMA) and *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* approval were necessary to allow for the construction of the tower within the World Heritage Area.

Authority staff attend regular meetings and field inspections to discuss research progress and project management issues. The Authority is also a member of the TERN Rainforest SuperSite User Group which was established to discuss how to optimise the research relevance and data accessibility from the Robson Creek and Daintree Rainforest Observatory monitoring nodes.

Australian Research Council Linkage Grant

In December 2011 the Authority entered into a three year partnership agreement with James Cook University, the Queensland Herbarium, the University of Queensland and Biome5 Pty Ltd in an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage project: *Accelerating species richness gains and carbon sequestration in secondary regrowth in north Queensland*. The aim of the project is to devise strategies to accelerate rainforest recovery and regrowth on degraded land.

Many tropical rainforests are being cleared and subsequently abandoned. Secondary forests often regenerate in these abandoned sites but are a poor substitute for the original rainforest, lacking both high species richness and exceptional carbon storage. This ARC Linkage project investigated the barriers to rainforest regeneration.

The research sites were located on private land on the Atherton Tableland and involved the cooperation and support of many landholders. The Authority's contribution to the project involved the allocation of staff time and access to digital spatial coverages and data sets. The partnership agreement officially ended on 31 December 2014. As well as providing base data on how to

accelerate the restoration of these forests to increase their biological diversity and carbon sequestration, the project resulted in over nine published manuscripts, seven conference presentations and supported five post graduates.

Tropical rainforest plant identification courses

In a partnership with the Australian Tropical Herbarium (ATH) a series of plant identification workshops have been developed that provide hands-on training to teach and develop skills in identifying the flora of the Wet Tropics. The workshops introduce participants to the skills and resources needed for rainforest plant identification, teach the use of interactive plant identification keys and are designed to improve participants understanding of identification, distribution and ecology of Wet Tropics native and invasive plant species. The workshops are based on the *Interactive Key to Australian Tropical Rain Forest Plants* (RFK) which is the largest interactive key in the world and covers 10 per cent of the Australian vascular flora (over 2530 species).

Workshop materials have been developed in a module format, to enable them to be presented as 'stand-alone' or to be combined with others on an as-needed basis. While targeting land managers in the World Heritage Area, workshops are also open to the public.

Geographic Information Services

The Authority provided Geographic Information Services (GIS) and products to a varied client base during the year. Clients included Commonwealth, State and local government departments, universities, research organisations, consulting companies, Traditional Owner groups and organisations, tourism organisations, community groups and individuals. A large proportion of the Authority's GIS resources are currently dedicated to providing data management and mapping services in support of the yellow crazy ant eradication program.

World Heritage values are supported and presented through sustainable tourism

The Authority has made a strong contribution to support world heritage presentation by encouraging, strengthening and engaging with the nature-based tourism industry. Our key contribution has been to ensure the highest standards of presentation of the World Heritage Area and its natural and cultural values. The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and its management is an important part of the natural advantage that helps define the Queensland tourism experience. Sustainable tourism and ecotourism have featured strongly in our project activities. We are also guided by the World Heritage Convention which requires us to protect and present this special landscape and to ensure it has a role in the life of the community.

Regional agencies seek and expect the Authority to engage and cooperate on specific site management and for key entry points and visitor sites in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. The Authority has also supported practical initiatives in tourism presentation, marketing and promotion of key regional road networks, including the Great Green Way, the Bloomfield Track redevelopment and the re-opening of the Kirrama Range Road. This cooperation extended to major private sector partners including the Daintree Discovery Centre, the Skywalk at Mamu, Ingan Tours, as well as developments at the Cairns Aquarium with whom the Authority are working to seek opportunities for rainforest presentation and interpretation.

Tourism and presentation has accomplished key milestones placing the Authority as a major stakeholder in the Wet Tropics tourism landscape. Strategic outcomes achieved through the tour guide program in collaboration with Savannah Guides, and through development of signage and presentation of key visitor areas, has raised the standard of presentation of the World Heritage Area. This, along with the Authority's strong relationship with Ecotourism Australia in the National Landscapes Program reaffirms the Wet Tropics as a key destination.

At local and regional levels the Authority works closely with councils and Aboriginal organisations to develop innovative interpretative resources that ensure tourists, visitors and the local community gain the most from their experiences and encounters with the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

Support for Rainforest Tour Guides

In partnership with Savannah Guides, the Authority conducted two successful Tour Guide Field Schools and six successful Tour Guide Workshops in locations throughout the Wet Tropics. Around 70 guides have graduated from the online school and participated in the field schools and workshops; thus securing their status as certified Wet Tropics guides. This cohort of guides regularly interact through a tour guide Facebook page and ongoing field activities.

As a network, this strengthens their commitment to excellence in world heritage presentation and interpretation. Through the Tour Guide Program, and by supporting guides in delivering high standards of presentation that assist visitors to understand the World Heritage Area, the Authority aims to improve the international competitiveness of the Wet Tropics nature based tourism industry. The Authority is producing a Wet Tropics seasonal calendar and a new Wet Tropics Experience Guide which showcases outstanding visitor experiences provided by Wet Tropics guides. In collaboration with James Cook University, the Authority has also revised and printed the Wet Tropics Tour Guide Handbook. These products have contributed to the program receiving national recognition for ensuring a high standard of service delivery in the guiding industry.

Kirrama Range Road

State funding was secured to support the re-opening of the Kirrama Range Road after a long period of closure (since prior to Tropical Cyclone Larry in 2006). The Authority recognises the tourism and presentation benefits of the road that links Cardwell to Mount Garnet via Blencoe Falls, in addition to its function as a local access road.

Working in partnership with Cassowary Coast Regional Council, Girramay Elders and community groups, the Authority led the development of signage, bookmarks, maps, and a detailed website with information to help visitors learn about the natural, cultural and historical features of the route. The interpretative work was finalised to coincide with reopening of the road on 6 December 2014.

Bloomfield Track

Major upgrades to the Bloomfield Track were finalised in 2014. The road management plans confirmed that the route will be an adventure driving route, primarily suitable for four wheel drive use while also meeting local community needs. The plan also noted that despite its status as an important presentation road, information provided for road users is inadequate.

The Authority has since been working with local tourism operators, Jabalbina Aboriginal Corporation and Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Council, and the Douglas and Cook Shire Councils to develop a digital tool to provide interactive information and interpretive resources to contribute to tourism outcomes for communities along the route.

The project has engaged with Jabalbina Aboriginal Corporation to ensure that appropriate regard is given to cultural heritage values of the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people. A digital eBook is nearing completion and contains interpretative information and stories from Traditional Owners that provide rich insights into the local history, culture and natural world heritage values along the road.

National Landscapes program and world heritage presentation

Over the past two years, the Wet Tropics has been recognised as one of the most active and successful of the 16 national landscapes in Australia. This has been as a result of the Authority's commitment to working with diverse stakeholders to support new products and promote world heritage values. The Authority has been recognised for driving an increase in the quality of interpretation, visitor awareness and conservation outcomes in the Wet Tropics region. In the new phase of national landscapes, where the impetus for the program is driven by the regional committees and landscapes, the Authority has taken another leadership role in chairing the National Steering Committee in 2015.

Cooperating with local businesses and industry

The Authority plays an important role in supporting business and visitor centres that showcase the Wet Tropics. The Authority supported the rebuild of the Malanda and Kuranda Visitor Information Centres by providing world heritage information and input for interpretive displays. The Authority is supporting the development of interpretative displays for the Cairns Aquarium and the redevelopment of presentations at Skyrail.

Enduring partnerships enhance the integrity of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, its presentation and its function in the life of the community

The Wet Tropics Management Authority is a small organisation with limited operational roles. It relies on the commitment and cooperation of its partners in government, the community and in industry to ensure that the goals of the World Heritage Convention are achieved in the Wet Tropics.

Some of the Authority's most important partners for the Authority in its work are:

- *Land owners and managers within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.* Most prominent among these is the Queensland Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing, which is responsible for the national parks, conservation reserves and other lands that comprise the bulk of the Area. Private land comprises a relatively small proportion of the Area. The Authority is particularly conscious of the commitment of these owners whose land management practices benefit the entire community.
- *Local government.* The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area intersects with eleven local government areas. Through sensitive design and management of transport, water and other council and community services infrastructure, sympathetic planning and regulation of development and leadership in matters such as pest control and community engagement, councils make a vital contribution to the Area.
- *Commonwealth and State environmental agencies.* Numerous Commonwealth and State agencies contribute to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Prominent among these in the Queensland Government are the Departments of Environment and Heritage Protection; Natural Resources and Mines; Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; and Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games. In the Commonwealth, the Departments of Environment and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry also play particularly important roles.
- *Universities, research institutions and schools.* Through research and teaching, universities and schools build and communicate knowledge about the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. They play a central role in achieving the World Heritage Convention goal calling for the transmission of world heritage properties to future generations. CSIRO, James Cook University and other universities have made a vital contribution through research over many years, ensuring that the Wet Tropics is strongly positioned as one of the World's premier learning landscapes for rainforest ecology and management.
- *Rainforest Aboriginal people.* The Rainforest Aboriginal tribes that recognise the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area as their traditional country continue to have a vital interest and role in the protection and management of the landscape which lies at the centre of Rainforest Aboriginal culture.

- *The tourism industry.* The Far North Queensland tourism industry, and through this a large proportion of the regional economy relies heavily on the globally significant natural values of the Wet Tropics rainforests. In turn, the tourism industry is a vital partner in presenting the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area to millions of visitors and communicating its values.
- *Regional community organisations.* Many community organisations in the region play an important role in supporting the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. These include Terrain NRM and Cape York NRM (the regional natural resource management bodies); numerous catchment coordination groups; regional and local scale catchment management and landcare groups; and community conservation organisations. Recreation, arts and cultural organisations are also important partners for the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

The Authority's partnerships are evident in almost all elements of its work so feature in other parts of this annual report. Partnership activities that are not otherwise reported are summarised below.

Regional Managers coordination Network

The Authority is an active participant in the Far North Queensland Regional Managers Coordination Network. This network, comprising senior public sector leaders in Commonwealth, State and local governments in the region plays an important role in supporting collaboration between government agencies by sharing information relevant to implementation of government programs.

Australian Committee for IUCN

The Authority is a government agency member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Along with other Australian IUCN members, the Authority participates in the Australian National Committee for IUCN (ACIUCN). ACIUCN plays a valuable networking and information sharing role between government and non-government members of IUCN in Australia.

Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing

Through the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing (NPSR) is responsible for the national parks, conservation reserves and others areas of public land that total around 80 per cent of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area making it a vitally important partner for the Authority.

In 2014-15, the Authority provided NPSR with \$1.8 million of Queensland Government funding that had been appropriated for world heritage management purposes. This arrangement helps to ensure NPSR is able to

address any particular priorities of the Authority in relation to the world heritage status of the Wet Tropics landscape.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was developed to support a partnership agreement between the Authority and NPSR. NPSR and the Authority agreed that:

1. The purpose of the MoU is to identify and fund protected area management services to be delivered by NPSR in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area that contribute to the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.
2. NPSR and the Authority will collaborate in the development of a MoU for 2014-15 (and beyond) that is consistent with the above purpose and conforms with the *Management Scheme Intergovernmental Agreement for the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area and the Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993*.

The Authority continues to work with NPSR to ensure its operational functions are appropriately aligned to the world heritage priorities of the Area, as determined by the Authority.

Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee

The Authority collaborated with other Australian world heritage properties through the Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee (AWHAC). AWHAC advises the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment on policies, programs and appropriate cultural protocols which benefit world heritage properties in areas of common interest and on national or crosscutting issues. In addition to the opportunity to contribute to national policy for World Heritage, the Authority's participation in AWHAC helps increase capacity in the Wet Tropics and elsewhere by information sharing. During 2014-15 the Authority played a leading role in support of the development of AWHAC advice on research needs for World Heritage.

Australian World Heritage Indigenous Network

Wet Tropics Traditional Owners participate in the Australian World Heritage Indigenous Network (AWHIN) that assists in ensuring Traditional Owners associated with world heritage properties have a proper influence in national management and policy. The Authority assisted the secretariat of AWHIN within the Department of Environment and Wet Tropics AWHIN representatives with advice and information as required.

The Wet Tropics Management Authority is an accountable and capable organisation

The Wet Tropics Management Authority continued to pursue high standards of business planning to ensure resources are allocated to the strategic priorities established by the Wet Tropics Management Authority Board, through the 2013-18 Strategic Plan, and that progress is regularly monitored.

World Heritage funding

The State and the Commonwealth have jointly committed to the obligations that flow from Australia's participation in the World Heritage Convention in relation to the Wet Tropics.

In late 2013, the Commonwealth Minister for Environment, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, demonstrated the Australian government's continuing support for the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and the role of the Authority through the provision of a \$13.4 million World Heritage grant over five years 2013-18.

The Queensland Government provided \$1.8 million to the Authority in 2014-15. These funds are allocated to the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing to conduct on the ground operations in support of the World Heritage Area.

This funding enables the Authority to continue building partnerships that conserve, present and support the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, and bring benefits to the tourism industry, Traditional Owners, land managers, researchers and the wider community.

New investments and funding proposals

The Authority continued to seek new funding into projects that contribute to its strategic goals. During 2014-15, the Authority secured the following additional investment:

- \$550 000 (as part of the five year \$1.9 million funding commitment) from the Australian Government to eradicate yellow crazy ant infestations that threaten the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Key activities include a baiting program, and a targeted community engagement and education program. The knowledge and expertise gained during the project will allow for adaptive management as well as improve capacity to respond to any future yellow crazy ant infestations, not only in the Wet Tropics region, but also in other tropical forests.

International links

As a World Heritage Area, the Wet Tropics has an international profile. The Authority was pleased to host a number of international visitors seeking

to learn about the values of the World Heritage Area and its system of management. Through this, the Authority contributes to strengthening global capacity for world heritage management and helps Australia's and Queensland's reputation in support of the World Heritage Convention. The Authority also welcomes the opportunity to learn from the experience of visitors.

The Authority's contribution is often in support of the Commonwealth Department of the Environment or the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Creating linkages with other environment and heritage managers in Asia and the Pacific also represents a contribution the Authority can make to Queensland's objective of sharing tropical expertise.

As examples, in August 2014 the Authority hosted a delegation of officials from the Paraguay Environmental Conservation Australian Leadership Awards Fellowships Programme to discuss world heritage management issues. Authority staff were pleased to share their experiences in relation to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and to learn of the approach Paraguay is taking to establish tactical measures to effectively engage communities in developing a strategy for integrating environmental conservation and sustainable development.

Business Administration

Business planning systems

The Authority gives a high priority to developing a business plan that creates the highest possible value for the Wet Tropics community and stakeholders. The Authority is committed to developing and adapting its own capabilities to ensure it maintains capacity to meet the needs of the Australian and Queensland Governments and the Wet Tropics community. The Authority's project management approach encourages clear identification of outcomes, objectives and milestones. It requires purposeful allocation of staff and other resources to organisational priorities and establishes a clear basis for organisational performance management.

Financial management

As the Authority is a Statutory Authority, its general-purpose financial statements and details for 2014-2015 are incorporated in the overall Department of Environment and Heritage Protection financial statements. Total funding of \$5.2 million for 2014-2015 was provided to the Authority, principally by the Australian and Queensland Governments, and supplemented by other forms of income. The Authority realised an operating deficit of \$34 000. A summary of the Authority's operating statement for 2014-2015 is provided in Table 1. The increase in depreciation predominantly relates to the Authority's office fit out. This is a non-cash expense.

The Australian Government's allocation to the Authority for 2014 -15 was \$3.25 million. These funds were allocated to the Authority's programs. The Queensland Government through the Department of Environment and Heritage contributed \$1.8 million to the Authority to support management of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. These funds were then allocated to the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing for on-ground and field management services.

Overseas travel

There were no overseas trips by Authority staff during 2014-2015.

Staffing and contractors

At 30 June 2015, the approved staff establishment of the Authority totalled 22 permanent positions of which three were vacant and two temporary positions of which one was vacant.

Contract staff supplemented staff resources during the year to provide a range of services. These services included information technology, workforce management, and tourism activities. Table 2 shows expenditure on consultancies and contractors for 2014-2015 compared to the previous financial year.

Table 1. Wet Tropics Management Authority Operating Statement

CONTROLLED REVENUE AND EXPENSES		
	2014-15	2013-14
Revenue	\$'000	\$'000
Revenue from government		
Payments for outputs	1959	1922
Asset assumed/liabilities transferred		232
SUB-TOTAL GOVERNMENT REVENUE	1959	2154
Owns revenue		
User charges	54	
Grants and other contributions	3250	3083
Taxes fees and fines		
Gain on disposal of fixed assets		
Other Revenue	6	
Interest		
SUB-TOTAL OWN SOURCE REVENUE	3309	3083
TOTAL REVENUE	5268	5237
Expenses		
	\$'000	\$'000
Operating expenses		
Program		
BBA Business Management	5162	4834
Sub-total operating expenses	5162	4834
Non-operating expenses		
Depreciation	140	119
Asset write-downs'/loss on disposal		
Sub-total non-operating expenses	140	119
TOTAL EXPENSES	5302	4953
OPERATING RESULT		
	-34	284

Audits

Three operational audits were conducted by PGL Financial Services Pty Ltd in 2014 -2015 for Commonwealth Funds received.

Table 2. Expenditure by contracts

EXPENDITURE	2014-2015	2013-2014
Consultancies by Category*	\$	\$
Business Management	0	0
TOTAL	0	0
Contract Staff by program*		
Business Management	800	9 622
Communities, Aboriginal Partnerships and tourism	42 451	32 102
Planning and Conservation	0	5 942
TOTAL	43 251	41 724

* Excludes expenses incurred against the NPSR/Wet Tropics Management Authority Partnership Agreement.

Workplace health and safety

The Authority adheres to the Queensland Government’s health and safety management systems and procedures. The Authority recorded no accidents for 2014-15. Regular workplace health and safety inspections are conducted with no significant issues arising. Authority staff attended regular education, awareness and training sessions to ensure current accreditations are maintained.

Staff training and professional development

The Authority is committed to developing the capability of its employees and recognises that training and development is critical for delivering Government priorities, objectives, and outcomes; developing high performing teams and the attraction and retention of employees. In 2014-15 the Authority developed a training and professional plan for all staff, allocating \$30 000 to implement. All training needs were identified through individual Performance and Development Plans.

Equal Employment Opportunity

All recruitment and selection recommendations are monitored and reviewed to ensure compliance with Queensland Government policies and procedures including current human resources directives. All appointments during 2014-2015 complied with directives and no equal employment opportunity complaints were received. At 30 June 2015 the Authority had ten females and ten males on staff and four positions vacant. Table 3 gives a profile of the Authority’s staff.

Wet Tropics volunteers and internships

The Authority recognises that volunteers make a valuable contribution to the organisation and as such, is committed to planned, supported and appropriately managed volunteer arrangements. During 2014-15 the Authority hosted four graduate placements via formal arrangements through the Aurora (Native Title Internship) Program. The Authority is pleased to continue to provide support for a regular work experience opportunity through ARC Disability Services. This placement enables people with a disability to actively participate in the workplace.

Table 3. Employment by gender, occupation stream and salary

Employment by gender and occupational stream as at 30 June 2015 based on actual occupants		
Stream	Female	Male
Senior Executive Service		1
Administration	9	4
Professional	1	3
Technical	0	2
Operational	0	0
Total	10	10

Employment by gender and salary level as at 30 June 2015 based on substantive positions		
Salary Range	Female	Male
\$179 433 +		1
\$106 131 - \$112 247		2
\$95 789 - \$102 716		1
\$85 607 - \$91 592	1	5
\$74 613 - \$81 099	4	1
\$64 383 - \$70 796	3	
\$54 451 - \$60 718	2	
Total	10	10

Terms and abbreviations

ARC	Australian Research Council
AWHAC	Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee
AWHIN	Australian World Heritage Indigenous Network
CCC	Community Consultative Committee
Commonwealth Act	<i>Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area Conservation Act 1994</i>
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific, Industry and Research Organisation
CSLG	Conservation Sector Liaison Group
NPSR	Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing
DTMR	Department of Transport and Main Roads
EHP	Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (Queensland)
GIS	Geographic Information System
ha	Hectare
ILUA	Indigenous Land Use Agreement
IPA	Indigenous Protected Area
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JCU	James Cook University
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NERP	National Environmental Research Program
NESP	National Environmental Science Program
NiE	News in Education
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NTRB	Native Title Representative Bodies
PBC	Prescribed Body Corporate
OUV	Outstanding Universal Value
QPWS	Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
Queensland Act	<i>Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993</i>
RFK	Interactive Key to Australian Tropical Rain Forest Plants
RNTBC	Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate
SAC	Scientific Advisory Committee
TERN	Terrestrial Ecosystem Research Network
The Area	Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area
The Authority	Wet Tropics Management Authority
The Plan	<i>Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998</i>
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WTMA	Wet Tropics Management Authority



Ground Floor, Cairns Port Authority
Cnr Grafton and Hartley Streets
Cairns Q 4870

Po Box 2050 Cairns 4870

Ph: 07 4241 0500 | Fax : 07 4241 0550
wettropics@wtma.qld.gov.au
www.wettropics.gov.au

IMAGE : PAUL CURTIS