



ANNUAL REPORT 2015-2016

WET TROPICS MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY ANNUAL REPORT 2015-2016



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

Po Box 2050 Cairns Qld 4870

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

IMAGE : WET TROPICS IMAGES/JONATHAN MUNRO





**WET
TROPICS**
MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

**ANNUAL REPORT
2015-2016**

Purpose of the report

This annual report details the financial and non-financial performance of the Wet Tropics Management Authority from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016. 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 2016

The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP
Minister for the Environment and Energy
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

I am pleased to present the Annual Report 2015-2016 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 "Leslie Shirreffs".

Leslie Shirreffs PSM

Chair

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

Highlights from the Chair

One of the world's most outstanding natural landscapes, the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1988. This irreplaceable natural asset boasts spectacular scenery and biodiversity, is habitat for scores of rare and endemic species, and is of great scientific significance, meeting all four of the criteria for natural heritage for selection as a World Heritage Site.

The Wet Tropics Management Authority (the Authority) was established to ensure Australia's obligation under the World Heritage Convention is met in relation to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. The Authority is jointly accountable to the Commonwealth and State government environment and heritage ministers.

A body corporate, with statutory powers defined under the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993* (the Act), the Authority is funded by the Australian Government and the Queensland Government, reporting to both on its performance against agreed outcomes.

The Authority's role is diverse. As well as protecting the Area through administration of the statutory *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998*, the Authority builds meaningful partnerships to advance protection and presentation of its values with the community, industry, and government and non-government agencies, and organisations. It also promotes scientific research and sharing of knowledge, seeks to give the Area a role in the life of the community, and works to support sustainable tourism in the World Heritage Area.

In particular, the Authority places a high priority on working closely with the original owners, the Rainforest Aboriginal people, who shaped the landscape to its current World Heritage significance. The Authority respects Rainforest Aboriginal peoples' traditional lore, and cultural knowledge, rights, interests and aspirations regarding best practice management of the World Heritage Area. The ongoing and significant contribution Rainforest Aboriginal people make to contemporary management and in sharing knowledge about the landscape that is the Wet Tropics is highly valued.

The year 2015-2016 represents another successful year for the Authority and its partners in World Heritage management. Some of the highlights of the year are summarised below.

New Board of Directors

In December 2015, the newly appointed Board of the Wet Tropic Management Authority convened for their first meeting. This followed a commitment by the Wet Tropics Ministerial Forum to re-establish the Board in order to meet State and Commonwealth legislative requirements. The Board comprises seven directors, including two Rainforest Aboriginal directors. I welcome these appointments. The new Board brings considerable knowledge of the Wet Tropics region and of natural and cultural heritage management and is already making a positive contribution to the governance of the Authority.

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. The current yellow crazy ant eradication program activities south of Cairns and in Kuranda has had great success in controlling the spread of the ants and received outstanding support from the community and partner organisations.

The Authority's current Commonwealth-funded program to eradicate yellow crazy ants in and adjacent to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area progressed to its third year. It is very pleasing that through the efforts of the Authority and our partners, there have been significant reductions in ant activity at several locations. A total of 30ha has now been removed from treatment and replaced with post-treatment 'proof of freedom' validation surveys, giving confidence that total eradication is achievable.

A highlight is the impressive community-based partnership approach for delivery of the eradication program, with strong leadership shown by the Authority. This culminated in the Australian Invasive Species Council awarding a Froggatt Award to Lucy Karger (Wet Tropics Management Authority yellow crazy ant eradication project officer), Dr Lori Lach (research fellow, James Cook University), Daniel Bateman (journalist, Cairns Post) and Frank Teodo (an Edmonton cane farmer) for exceptional efforts to eradicate yellow crazy ants from the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Lucy Karger was further recognised in the Queen's Birthday 2016 Honours List with a prestigious Public Service Medal "For outstanding public service to the environment in Queensland" for her role in managing, planning and implementing the yellow crazy ant eradication program.

There is more work to be done, and during 2015-2016, the Authority submitted a funding proposal to the Australian and Queensland governments seeking a further investment to the value of \$15.19 million over the next three years as part of a ten year eradication program. Both levels of government have now made funding commitments to provide for a further three years of treatment and for the program to be reviewed after this period.

Indigenous engagement

Engagement with Rainforest Aboriginal people remained a key area of focus for the Authority in 2015-2016. A refreshed regional engagement framework has been approved by the Board and the Authority has begun work with a working group to refine the framework in keeping with Aboriginal governance aspirations. This will guide the Authority's future programs to support Rainforest Aboriginal people in expressing their knowledge, culture and management practices on country, and enhance participation in management of the World Heritage Area.

The Authority continues to work closely with Traditional Owner organisations, to support land and cultural heritage management and towards development of economic opportunities. In the last 12 months the Authority has provided staff support and training for three Traditional Owner organisations to manage and present their traditional lands. Training was provided for Participatory 3 Dimensional Modelling (P3DM) workshops. In addition, on-ground support was provided, in partnership with the department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, to a number of Indigenous groups to develop business ventures in the region.

Wet Tropics tourism

Tourism remains a strong focal point, as a principal conduit for presenting the Area's Outstanding Universal Value. The Authority continues to work with Aboriginal organisations, industry representative bodies and local and State governments to develop innovative interpretative resources that ensure tourists, visitors and the local community gain the most from their experiences in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

This year, the Authority, in partnership with Douglas Shire Council, Jabalbina Aboriginal Corporation, and tourism and community representatives, launched an innovative Bloomfield Track eBook, an interpretative tool that can be uploaded to smart phones, for visitors to understand key features and World Heritage values as they travel along the route.

The Authority continues to make a strong contribution to support World Heritage presentation by encouraging, strengthening and engaging with the nature-based tourism industry. A partnership with Savannah Guides has seen the delivery of tour guide field schools, and training has also been delivered to Skyrail staff to improve their understanding of Outstanding Universal Value of the Wet Tropics.

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.

Building strong partnerships

Maintaining strong and active partnerships with other government departments, regional natural resource management and non-government organisations is critical to the collaborative management of the Wet Tropics. The Authority has worked closely with Terrain NRM, Cape York NRM, Far North Queensland Region of Councils, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing (NPSR) and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries as well as consulted with relevant local governments and industry bodies to coordinate activities to improve land and pest management in the World Heritage Area.

The Authority has also collaborated with other Australian World Heritage properties through the Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee (AWHAC) and played a leading role in support of the development of AWHAC advice on research needs for World Heritage Areas.

The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area Partnership Agreement with NPSR saw \$1.8 million of Queensland Government funding provided to the department for World Heritage management purposes. The Partnership Agreement 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. The Authority looks forward to continuing and strengthening engagement and collaboration on initiatives and activities into the future.

NPSR and Authority staff have liaised to further streamline, clarify and update a new Partnership Agreement, focusing on key principles and deliverables, detailed later in this report. The 2016-2019 Partnership Agreement encourages collaboration and active consultation, and to continue to facilitate meaningful engagement between the Authority, Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) of NPSR, and Traditional Owners.

Learning Landscapes

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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'.

Learning landscapes has been further enhanced through the offering of a 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 that will benefit Wet Tropics World Heritage Area management, policy development and operational decision making. Many well-conceived

projects, meeting the priorities in the Authority's research strategy and demonstrating scientific rigour and innovative research were received. In funding these projects, the Authority aims to establish itself as a contributor, guide and locus for research to the Wet Tropics.

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 2015-2016 State of the Wet Tropics Report is '*Rare, threatened, ancient and endemic vertebrates of the Wet Tropics*'.

Thanks

Achieving the objectives of the World Heritage Convention in the Wet Tropics would be 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 traditional knowledge and 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; tour operators who promote and share the wonder of the Wet Tropics with visitors from across the world; 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.

I would personally like to thank the Executive Director, Scott Buchanan and the highly professional Authority staff 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.



Leslie Shirreffs PSM

Chair

Our Organisation

World Heritage and National Heritage listing

The World Heritage List includes 1052 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.

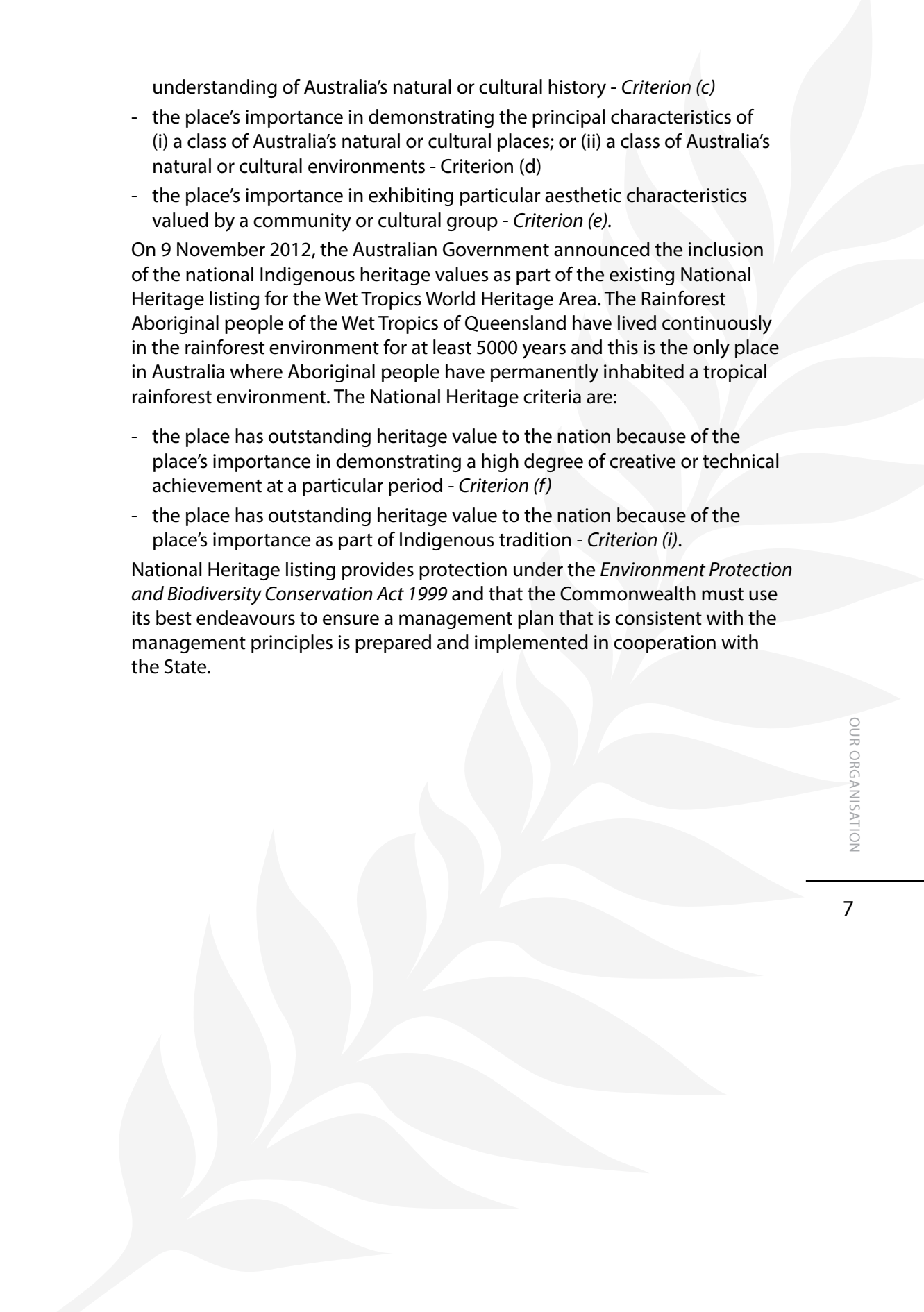
As of 30 June 2016, 165 State Parties have ratified the World Heritage Convention. Australia became a signatory in 1974 and at 30 June 2016 there were 19 Australian properties on the World Heritage List. World Heritage listing is recognition by the international community that a place is such an outstanding 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 Rainforest Aboriginal 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 National Heritage 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* and that 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 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 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 governments objectives for the Wet Tropics community.

Statutory reporting obligations

Each year the Wet Tropics Management Authority prepares a report on the financial statements and administration of the Act, 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 EHP 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, fire, pest and weed control are the responsibility of the relevant land managers which include the departments of National Parks, Sport and Racing (NPSR), Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP), Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) and community infrastructure service providers for power, water and road, and twelve local governments.

A partnership agreement has been developed between the Authority and NPSR and EHP; 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 Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) under funding provided by the Queensland Government for World Heritage management.

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 on matters with significant community impact.

Wet Tropics Ministerial Forum

As at 30 June 2016 Ministerial Forum comprised:

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

Ministerial forum did not meet face to face between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2016.

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, six of which work 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.

In late 2015, the Authority welcomed the appointment of a new Chair and the appointment of four new directors. This followed a commitment by the Wet Tropics Ministerial Forum to re-establish the Board in order to meet State and Commonwealth legislative requirements. In June 2016, a second Indigenous director was appointed, resulting in a fully functional Board. As at June 2016 the Board of Directors comprised:

Ms Leslie Shirreffs (Chair)

Mr Scott Buchanan (Executive Director)

Ms Anne Clarke

Mr John Courtenay

Prof Iain Gordon

Mr Phil Rist

Ms Leah Talbot

The Authority's Board meet quarterly or as required. Three meetings were held during the year on 8 December 2015, 11-12 February 2016 and 3-4 May 2016.

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. The Board has appointed a director to chair each committee, providing a direct two way line of communication between the committees and the Authority.

During the year, the new Board reviewed the role and operation of the committees with a view to more purposeful engagement. At June 2016, the Board was in the process of seeking expressions of interest from suitable persons for appointment to the two committees.

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.

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 Wet Tropics Management Authority is established under the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993* to ensure Australia's obligation under the World Heritage Convention is met in relation to the Wet Tropics. Protecting and managing the Outstanding Universal Value of the Area lies at the heart of the Authority's governance and management regime.

Protection 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 (the 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 electricity network. Also included was pre-lodgment advice to agencies in regard to various proposals under consideration. Positive outcomes from pre-lodgment advice meetings resulted in successful completion in late 2015, of bridge upgrades on Danbulla Drive by the Tablelands Regional Council and the significant reconstruction of the Mt Lewis Road by Mareeba Shire Council. Staff also worked with Stanwell Corporation to revise the Environmental Management Plan for their electricity generation and reticulation infrastructure.

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

- WTMA15002 Tablelands Regional Council to reconstruct Maunder Bridge
- WTMA15003 Mareeba Shire Council to undertake repairs to Mt Lewis Road
- WTMA15004 Stanwell Corporation to widen the approach road to the Tully Falls Weir

- WTMA16002 Douglas Shire Council to construct new approaches at Meelele Creek Bridge
- WTMA16001 Ergon Energy to replace buildings and power supplies with new infrastructure at Mt Mackay.

Training was provided to various councils in regard to the implementation of permit conditions (see below). Audits of permit conditions were conducted on four permits including bridge works on the Bloomfield Track and Danbulla Forest Drive, road widening at Wangetti and a slip repair on Mount Lewis Road. Further remedial works were recommended and these measures were monitored.

In addition, staff reviewed and provided policy advice on twelve 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.

Investigation and enforcement

Authority staff attended formal compliance training and were subsequently authorised as officers under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993*. Authority and Queensland Parks and Wildlife (QPWS) staff investigated excessive clearing and watercourse siltation associated with the upgrade of a bridge over Maunder Creek on Danbulla Forest Drive. The Tablelands Regional Council have undertaken rehabilitation of the site and implemented reforms to their contractual systems and reporting to ensure such incidents do not occur in future. Further training was provided to Council infrastructure maintenance staff.

Authority and QPWS staff investigated the establishment of a fire-break and fence line within the World Heritage Area near Molloy Lagoon without prior approval from the Authority. Following investigations and a site visit, it was evident this mistake was the result of miscommunication between the landholder and QPWS. Impacts were considered not to be threatening natural values and the fire-break will improve fire management. The Authority required the inclusion of additional information in the property resource plan to protect the natural values.

Training for 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 sixteen enquiries regarding 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.

Natural Heritage Conservation

Making Connections

Ecological connectivity is important for the long term health of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. The Authority has worked with land managers and the community to develop a range of priority corridors to restore ecological connectivity between the numerous sections of the World Heritage Area and other rainforest outliers. The restoration of these corridors will help to address the impacts of climate change, ecological fragmentation, invasive pests and changes in fire and water regimes.

The Authority also works closely with a wide range of community conservation groups and non-government organisations who are actively involved in planting trees and purchasing land for conservation in the Wet Tropics. Their efforts focus mainly on restoring rainforest connectivity and providing habitat for endangered species such as the southern cassowary and mahogany glider or reconnecting habitat in important climate change refugia such as the southern Atherton Tablelands.

Biosecurity

The Authority produced a 16-page brochure entitled *Invasive pests – a threat to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area*. The brochure highlights the importance of biosecurity and management of invasive pests. The brochure also emphasises the need for research, education and community participation to help control a range of weeds, feral animals and diseases in the Wet Tropics. This includes collaboration between government agencies, natural resource management bodies, landholders and industry groups. The brochure has been widely distributed throughout the Wet Tropics.

Yellow Crazy Ants

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 Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. 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 800ha which includes forested hillslopes, sugarcane and residential areas. This includes about 61ha of the World Heritage Area. The other infestation of about 31ha is

at Russett Park, a rural residential area north of the Barron River near Kuranda and within 500m of the World Heritage Area boundary.

The Authority's current Commonwealth-funded program to eradicate yellow crazy ants in and next to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area progressed to its third year. Five of eight rounds of aerial baiting have now been completed, as well as ground treatments in areas adjoining the World Heritage Area. Survey results have shown significant reductions in ant activity at several locations. A total of 30ha has now been removed from treatment and replaced with post-treatment 'proof of freedom' validation surveys.

The Authority submitted a funding proposal to the Australian and Queensland governments seeking a further investment to the value of \$15.19 million over the next three years as part of a ten year eradication program. Both levels of government have now made funding commitments to provide for a further three years of treatment and for the program to be reviewed after this period.

The Authority strengthened connections with its stakeholders, fostering ties with landholders and maintaining the network of collaborators from State and local government agencies, non-government natural resource and environmental organisations, research institutions and various industry groups affected by yellow crazy ants including the agricultural, tourism, development and pest control industries.

Capacity within the Yellow Crazy Ant Community Taskforce (Kuranda) strengthened and volunteer membership has now risen to 105, representing an outstanding contribution by the community to eradicating this pest. With assistance from the Authority, treatment and monitoring activities at the Russett Park infestation have transitioned to the Community Taskforce, significantly increasing efficiencies.

Natural Resource Management

Rainforest Aboriginal people

Staff provided advice and support to Aboriginal organisations and local governments to assist in their respective management of natural resources and mitigate threats to the integrity of the Area. 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. Authority staff continue to monitor plots at different sites as indicators for any emerging natural resource impacts resulting from grazing.

Inter-agency collaboration

The Authority participated in cross-agency activities associated with the management of natural resources including Terrain Natural Resource Management, QPWS and the Cairns Hillslopes Fire Management Committee. Staff also provided advice to landholders within the Area about activities regulated by the Plan on their land.

Threatened species

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 throughout the Wet Tropics.

The Authority also works with the land managers and researchers and community groups on a range of other threatened species, primarily through the recovery teams for the northern bettong and Mabi forest and the Australian Quoll Conservancy. The Executive Director played a significant media role through the year raising awareness of issues related to cassowary recovery.

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 (the 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 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

The Authority participated in a number of public events in 2015-2016. These included the Cairns Regional Council's Carnivale on Collins event at the Botanic Gardens and the Cairns Ecofiesta. The Authority also held joint stalls with Queensland Parks and Wildlife (QPWS) at the Cairns Home Show and Caravan Camping and Boating Expo, and the World Cassowary Day celebrations at Mission Beach.

Authority participation at community events such as these provide positive engagement which promotes World Heritage Values. The Authority provides information about its activities and events, and interacts with a wide variety of audiences. Events are also an opportunity to jointly engage with partners such as QPWS and to demonstrate support through participation in cultural events.

Wild Talks

The *Wild Talks*, *Wild Discoveries* and *Wild Exposures* concepts were developed in 2015 and 2016 to brand talks and displays organised by the Authority at the Cairns Botanic Gardens.

Wet Tropics Wild Talks is a series of events scheduled to occur quarterly at the Cairns Botanic Gardens Visitor Centre as part of the Authority's efforts to bring the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area into the hearts and minds of the community. The talks are designed to encourage everyone to discover and enjoy the outstanding qualities of the region,

The first *Wild Talks* titled *Outstanding and Irreplaceable* was launched on 5 March 2016 and included presentations by: Traditional Owner Leah Talbot; the Authority's Terry Carmichael; first Executive Director of the Authority, Peter Hitchcock AM; author of *'Eternal Endemism The Wet Tropics: Endemic Terrestrial Vertebrates of Australia's Wet Tropics'*, Craig Ward; and interactive wildlife experience 'Zoo to You'.

On 4 June 2016 the Authority held its second *Wild Talks*, the first of an 'Under the Canopy' themed series. This featured presentations by Traditional Owner Gimuy Walaburra Yidinji Elder, Gudju Gudju, Roger Martin, and Alberto Vale from Wildcam who provided the premiere showing of his film 'Quolls: Fast and Furious'. Parts 2 and 3 of the *Under the Canopy* series are scheduled for the second half of 2016. The Authority also collaborated with Cairns and Far North Environment Centre (CAFNEC) to hold a *Wild Discoveries* talk which featured recent scientific discoveries. The interest in the talks has been phenomenal, with full houses on most days.

Wild Exposures

Wild Exposures provides an array of interesting and informative displays for the general public to learn and become more involved in understanding World Heritage values. The first *Wild Exposure* titled *Hands on Culture - Rainforest Aboriginal people managing country* demonstrated how Rainforest Aboriginal people make a significant contribution to the management of cultural and natural heritage within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. The exhibition was on display throughout April 2016 until early May 2016 at the Cairns Botanic Gardens Visitor Centre and featured the Participatory 3-Dimensional Model developed by Mandingalby Yidinji in collaboration with the Authority, along with cultural arts and crafts, and information. The display also provided an opportunity for Mandingalby Yidinji to launch their new tour business.

The second *Wild Exposure* titled *Hike'n'Bike the Wet Tropics* went on display from mid-May 2016 until the end of June 2016. The Authority produced several communication products to support the display including a *Hike'n'Bike* pamphlet outlining key walks in the Cairns region, two banners and a large wall panel also of the key walks in the region. A creative display of bikes provided an engaging feature of the display. The display featured communication material provided by QPWS and TTNQ to promote walking and cycle tracks and mountain bike trails. Information on Nature Play was also provided to encourage parents to facilitate outdoor activities for their children.

As part of the *Hike'n'Bike Wild Exposure* and in collaboration with Cairns Regional Council, a guided community bike ride and a guided walk along the Red, Blue and Green Arrow tracks was organised. Both events were well attended and provided the Authority with an opportunity to continue to communicate the values of the World Heritage Area.

Keep it Wild poster competition

Over 160 school students throughout Far North Queensland entered the 2015 *Keep it Wild* Wet Tropics poster competition. The theme for 2015 was *Loving every moment*, and students were asked to draw a persuasive poster or to take a photo that captures a special moment in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

The 12 finalists comprising of students and classes were presented with prizes donated by the Authority's partners, Skyrail Rainforest Cableway and Cairns Harbour Cruises, in a ceremony at the Cairns Regional Gallery.

Communications

News and media

A priority of the Authority is to maintain and enhance its media presence to raise awareness of the Outstanding Universal Value of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and its management and protection. New communication items developed over 2015 and 2016 included the Bloomfield eBook, Invasive Species booklet, *Hike'n'Bike* booklet, several display banners and marquee panels, and three tour guide school modules.

The Authority was invited to speak on radio throughout the year which provided an opportunity to discuss topical issues including cassowaries and yellow crazy ants. *Wet Tropics Wild Talks* and *Wild Exposures* were also promoted during these media opportunities. The news and events section of the Wet Tropics website was regularly updated ensuring the public were aware of issues relevant to the Area.

The successful bid for new funding to support the yellow crazy ant eradication program received considerable media attention and articles about the eradication program featured regularly through regional media outlets.

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

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. To date the Wet Tropics World Heritage page has up to 1949 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 and UK.

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

Rainforest Aboriginal people make a significant contribution to the management of natural and cultural heritage within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (the Area). The Authority acknowledges the Area is a significant living cultural landscape. Empowering Rainforest Aboriginal people as the traditional land owners is essential to the long term sustainability and integrity of the Area.

Achievement highlights for 2015-2016 include:

- The appointment of two Rainforest Aboriginal people to the Board of Directors to ensure the Authority's functions are performed in a way that has appropriate regard to the rights and interests of Rainforest Aboriginal people in the Area
- An internal review of Rainforest Aboriginal engagement in the Area and progress towards a refreshed and supported engagement approach that increases on-country livelihood opportunities through ranger programs, tourism and scientific research.

Respecting native title rights and interests

Rainforest Aboriginal people have a long history of advocating for their rights and interests in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Around 80% of the Area is claimable under Native Title. Up to 37% of the Area is now recognised by the Federal Court or High Court of Australia as being Native Title determined and another 24% of the Area is under Native Title application.

The Authority plays an important role in promoting the Native Title rights and interests of Rainforest Aboriginal people in the Area through management partnerships across diverse tenures. This includes continuing to support these rights and interests through:

- Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) arrangements with Registered Native Title Bodies Corporates (RNTBCs)
- Memorandums of Understanding for Indigenous Protected Areas
- permit processes under the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998*
- a Partnership Agreement with the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing.

The Authority respects and works closely with a broad range of Aboriginal organisations and networks across the Area representing local, sub-regional and regional interests.

Fulfilling land management responsibilities

The Authority has an on-going commitment to ensure meaningful involvement of Rainforest Aboriginal people in the management of the Area. This is achieved through partnership with Australian and Queensland government agencies, Aboriginal organisations, partners such as Terrain Natural Resource Management and communities.

April 2015 marked the ten year anniversary of signing the historic Wet Tropics Regional Agreement. The Agreement for the cooperative management of the Area was between 18 Rainforest Aboriginal tribal groups, the Australian Government, the Queensland Government and the Authority. Whilst many aspects of the Regional Agreement have been achieved, some protocols, processes and objectives have not reached their full potential. This is due to a failure to institutionalise commitments into government policies, systems and processes; and also as a result of significant changes in the governance arrangements for parties to the Regional Agreement. The Authority is currently seeking advice from Rainforest Aboriginal people on how priority Regional Agreement aspirations should be progressed in this context.

During the reporting period, the Authority invested \$40,000 in four Aboriginal organisations to support the following cultural heritage and tourism presentation projects:

- Buda:dji Aboriginal Development Association Aboriginal Corporation: *Djabugay Bulma Development Planning*—including the development strategies and actions for the management of country.
- Abriculture (Gimuy Walubara Yidinji): *Baseline survey of Minjilji (Lake Morris)*—for the development of cultural tours.
- Giringun Aboriginal Corporation: *Cultural capability in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area*—including a Land and Sea Managers/Indigenous Rangers workshop.
- Djunbunji Ltd: *Mandingalbay Yidinji walking tracks*—including opening up the Pine Creek tracks for tourism.

These activities will all contribute to World Heritage management in the Wet Tropics by improving the presentation and protection of the Area.

The Authority also facilitated:

- Five workshops for Rainforest Aboriginal people: cultural heritage mapping techniques, telling the story, participatory techniques, designing cultural capability training, and project planning.
- Participatory 3 Dimensional Modelling (P3DM) projects with two Rainforest Aboriginal groups, Mandingalbay Yidinji and Djiru.
- Rainforest Aboriginal people involvement in the yellow crazy ant eradication program: included participation of Gimuy Walubara Yidinji, Mandingalbay Yidinji and Gungandji Rangers in taskforce activities.

Formally recognising cultural heritage values

The Authority is responsible for ensuring Australia's obligation under the World Heritage Convention is met in relation to the Area. The World Heritage Convention encourages the integration of cultural and natural heritage protection into regional planning to ensure that World Heritage continue to have a function in the day-to-day life of the community.

In 2012, Rainforest Aboriginal people successfully achieved a National Heritage listing of Indigenous values for the Area. The Authority is currently considering best practice approaches to the management of natural and cultural values and has identified an opportunity to provide additional guidance for this in the upcoming review of the Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998.

Subject to the free, prior and informed consent of Rainforest Aboriginal people, the Authority will also support Rainforest Aboriginal people in their pursuit of a World Heritage listing of the Wet Tropics for its cultural values.

Supporting on-country livelihood opportunities

The Authority supports collaborative projects that contribute to the social, economic and cultural development of Rainforest Aboriginal people while contributing to the conservation or presentation of the Area.

In 2015-2016 the Authority worked cooperatively with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP) to identify and support enterprise development, business growth and employment opportunities for Rainforest Aboriginal people.

Through a strategic partnership with Culture Connect, an established tourism venture that seeks to incorporate local Aboriginal product and experiences, the following Aboriginal organisations are now involved in developing commercial tourism itineraries in the World Heritage Area:

- Wadjanbarra Tablelands Yidinji Healing Waters Tours at Danbulla National Park
- Kuku Yalanji Cultural Habitat Tour at Cooya Beach
- Janbal Gallery at Mossman
- Jitta Art Gallery basket weaving workshops at Innisfail
- Janban Bugal Aboriginal Tours at Koombuloomba National Park.

The Authority continues to offer the Wet Tropics Tour Guide program and encourages the participation of Rainforest Aboriginal people. In 2015-2016, fifteen Rainforest Aboriginal people enrolled in the Wet Tropics Tour Guide program. The Authority also updated the field school program to help trained tour guides source relevant protocols for working with Rainforest Aboriginal people and visiting their traditional country.

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 represents a major asset for the protection and management of the Area. There is an opportunity to further capitalise on this knowledge to contribute to the future management of the Wet Tropics and to other natural landscapes.

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
- the Outstanding Universal Value and international importance of the property is emphasised and World Heritage branding of the Wet Tropics is strengthened
- regional, national and international communities are inspired, motivated and educated.

World Heritage Family project

The World Heritage Family Project is an exciting initiative that elucidates the obvious evolutionary, geological, biogeographical and botanical links between the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and several other World Heritage areas in Australia. It will tell the World Heritage Story and inspire, motivate and educate locals and tourists alike with information that demonstrates how special and unique Australia's World Heritage areas are.'

Initial stories have already been delivered to stakeholder groups over the past 12 months, including tourism businesses, tour guides and visitor centres, and have received universal accolades. The links and connections with other World Heritage properties are based around and connected to the Wet Tropics 'Outstanding Universal Value'. These links and connections have not been elucidated previously. The stories provide opportunities for a range of communications products and are designed to inspire, motivate and educate local communities and tourist alike with information that has not been articulated before.

This year two stories have been produced and presented on the 'Outstanding Universal Value' of the Wet Tropics—the Wet Tropics and the breakup of Gondwana, and the Wet Tropics and its relationship with the Australian Fossil Mammal Sites.

Student Research Grant Scheme

Through its Student Research Grant Scheme, the Authority seeks to encourage and support post-graduate research which builds on the legacy of past research investment in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area; and to ensure that knowledge generated in the Wet Tropics is accessible to rainforest and protected area managers elsewhere.

This was the fifth 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. These grants are to support costs associated with field work, purchase of equipment, field data collection, laboratory research and analysis of data. Grants are for a 12 month period.

Many well-conceived projects were received, meeting the priorities identified in the *Wet Tropics Management Authority Research Strategy 2014-2018* and demonstrating scientific rigour and innovative research. Eleven post-graduate students from three Australian universities were successful grant recipients. The student, their affiliated research institution and projects include:

- Heather Bryan, James Cook University: *Is dense grass a barrier to mammal recruitment into regenerating rainforest areas?*
- Renee Cassels, James Cook University: *Physiological effects of habitat fragmentation on a rainforest understory insectivore, the Pale-yellow Robin (*Tregellasia capito*).*

- Gracie Charlton, James Cook University: *Mapping Stakeholder Values and Objectives in the Walter Hill Range Corridor.*
- Gabrielle Davidson, James Cook University: *Spectral assessment of canopy water content in the Queensland rainforest.*
- Alexia Dubuc, James Cook University: *Dissolved oxygen as a constraint for fish utilising mangrove forests.*
- Claire Gely, Griffith University: *How will increased drought affect herbivory-based insect communities in Australia's tropical rainforest?*
- Melinda Greenfield, James Cook University: *Interactions among fungi, ants, and the ant-plant *Myrmecodia beccarii*.*
- Susan Nuske, James Cook University: *The impact of fire and *Allocasuarina* thinning on the soil fungi community, with implications for the endangered northern bettong, *Bettongia tropica*.*
- Jennifer Peters, Western Sydney University: *Assessing Vulnerability to Water Limitation of Australian's Tropical Rainforest.*
- Terence Purkiss, James Cook University: *Blooming deadly: Inflorescences acting as dispersal platforms for pathogens.*
- Misha Rowell, James Cook University: *Does the emotional state of male *Melomys cervinipes* affect their spatial learning and navigational abilities?*

Wet Tropics Research e-bulletin

Two editions of the Learning Landscape eBulletin were produced and released online in March 2016 and June 2016 respectively. In producing these research eBulletins, the Authority aims to establish the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area as an important centre for research synthesis and establish the Authority as recognised knowledge broker with respect to World Heritage management and tropical natural heritage management. The purpose of the research eBulletins 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.

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

The March edition reported on research occurring in the Wet Tropics which is increasing our knowledge of the complex issues surrounding extreme weather events. The research focus of the June edition was on findings from an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grant looking at species richness and other ecological characteristics of secondary regrowth forests. This research supports land managers and policy makers with valuable information to assist in enhancing the resilience and resistance of the Wet Tropics landscape.

Researcher directory

The 2016 edition of the Wet Tropics Researcher Directory was compiled and made available online in June 2016. The directory lists and profiles researchers, including post-graduate 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 has been designed to facilitate and encourage collaboration and networking amongst researchers, government agencies, land managers, industry bodies and the broader community.

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 a Rainforest Super Site in the Wet Tropics comprising of two nodes—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 Super Sites are providing information on rainforest dynamics and changes in biodiversity.

The Super Site also includes a biophysical monitoring program that has 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.

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.

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 to identify rainforest plants including how to use interactive plant identification keys. The workshops 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% of the Australian vascular flora (over 2530 species). While targeting land managers in the World Heritage Area, workshops are also open to the public.

Two rainforest plant identification courses were run during the year at the Daintree Rainforest Observatory (4-6 September 2015) and at Paluma (27-29 November 2015).

Geographic Information Services

The Authority provided Geographic Information Services (GIS) and products to a variety of clients including 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. Several computer-based mapping training courses were developed and run during the year for staff, volunteers and external stakeholders such as visitor centres and Rainforest Aboriginal groups.

World Heritage Area values are supported and presented through sustainable tourism

The tourism industry is a key partner in ensuring the World Heritage Area is understood and appreciated by visitors and the wider community. Quality tourism experiences also ensure that tourism makes a sustainable contribution to the regional economy. Our tourism projects ensure the Authority enables the tourism industry to present World Heritage Area values, and that we promote the economic and community benefits of tourism.

The Wet Tropics Tour Guide program

The Wet Tropics Tour Guide program strengthens the tourism industry's understanding of the importance of World Heritage presentation by raising tourism industry staff skills and knowledge of the World Heritage Area to ensure high standards of interpretation and presentation of World Heritage values. This also helps the Authority maintain a supportive and collaborative relationship with the tourism industry. By attending guide schools and training workshops under the program, guides can become acknowledged as certified Wet Tropics Tour Guides and ambassadors of the World Heritage Area. In addition to tour guides, the guide schools also benefit rangers, visitor centre staff, government employees and other participants of the program.

The guide schools and training workshops were fully reviewed and revised in 2016. This resulted in the Authority no longer offering an online course component and instead developing additional workshops to deliver essential materials and knowledge directly to participants. This includes workshops on the environment (including research updates), Aboriginal culture and presenting to visitors. New course module and learning resources were delivered at the November 2015 and April 2016 guide schools including information for tour guides on Aboriginal protocols in the Wet Tropics.

The November and April guide schools were well received and attracted a new cohort of participants. Approximately 15 Aboriginal people participated in the guide schools, indicating the schools were broadly accessible and culturally appropriate. In response to the increasing interest in establishing Aboriginal tourism ventures, the program supports Rainforest Aboriginal communities in presenting culture and land to visitors. New groups also attended including school teachers from the region, local café owners and bus drivers working in tourism.

Tourism networks

The Authority maintained a leadership role in the National Landscapes program, and contributed to the development of a new national ecotourism policy and new nature-based tourism alliance. The National Landscapes Committee was centrally involved in plans to develop a new nature tourism strategy and a new grouping called the Nature Tourism Alliance.

National Landscape members based in the Wet Tropics attended the 2015 National Landscape Forum, facilitated sessions, and led the group discussions on future directions. The forum was a positive turning point with representation from 15 landscapes and decision makers from Ecotourism Australia, national park agencies, industry, Tourism Australia, and regional and State tourism organisations. In the role of chairing the National Landscapes Committee, Authority staff led a process of renewal and reform with the following outcomes:

- A positive plan for the future has been mapped out to articulate the vision that delivers the best experience to visitors, and brings strength and vitality to regions.
- A nature-based tourism 2025 action plan that will build on the past 10 years of the National Landscapes program.

The Authority's original focus of bringing conservation and tourism together remains central. It continues to collaborate with Ecotourism Australia through the Nature Tourism Alliance, and with Savannah Guides as key partners in World Heritage presentation, and in the delivery of the Wet Tropics Tour Guide program. Progress has been made in bringing the Tour Guide program under the umbrella of Ecotourism Australia by aligning it with Ecotourism Australia's national Eco Guide framework. The Authority is continuing to cooperate and partner with the Cairns Aquarium, Daintree Discovery Centre and Douglas Shire's gateway project to promote World Heritage presentation.

The Bloomfield Track eBook

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An important focus for the Authority's tourism presentation efforts this year has been its collaborative work to launch an innovative Bloomfield Track eBook. The objective of the project was to enhance the visitor experience with a comprehensive digital resource rich in photographs and information about the 33km Bloomfield Track and the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Area.

There was a high level of cooperation in developing and producing the eBook. The launch was the culmination of significant collaboration with Douglas Shire Council, Jabalbina Aboriginal Corporation, Tourism Daintree and Port Douglas as well as local tourism and community representatives.

The result is an interpretive product that uses new digital platforms to share and deliver information. Tapping into the resources and knowledge of the collaboration partners, the project team developed the eBook and

associated road markers to promote the Bloomfield Track as a wilderness drive experience. Along with audios of wildlife calls that accompany text and images of the area, sections of the eBook are narrated to enable the listener to gain the most from their journey. Also through audio, Traditional Owners share their stories about the significance of parts of the track.

The project is now completed and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service are assisting Douglas Shire Council officers to explore ways to provide Wi-Fi effectively at the newly developed Daintree Gateway so that visitors can download the eBook prior to crossing the Daintree River by ferry. It will also be available for download on Douglas Shire Council's and the Authority's websites.

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 (NPSR), 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, and 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 twelve 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 and Fisheries; and Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games. In the Commonwealth, the departments of Environment; and Agriculture and Water Resources 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, Griffith 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 resources 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) NPSR is responsible for the national parks, conservation reserves and other areas of public land that total around 85% of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area—making it a vitally important partner for the Authority.

In 2015-2016, the Authority provided NPSR with \$1.8 million of Queensland State 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.

Since May 2016, QPWS and Authority officers have liaised to further streamline, clarify and update a new Partnership Agreement (MoU), focusing on key principles and deliverables, detailed below. The 2016-2019 Partnership Agreement encourages collaboration and active consultation, so as to continue to facilitate meaningful engagement between the Authority, NPSR (QPWS), and Traditional Owners. New principles have been negotiated in the MoU, including:

- working together to seek additional funds for initiatives, projects and programs that help to protect, conserve, present and/or rehabilitate the Outstanding Universal Value of the Area
- having due regard to the rights and responsibilities of Traditional Owners and collective obligations to actively engage with Traditional Owners, to ensure Free, Prior and Informed Consent
- acknowledging the significant contribution that Aboriginal people can make to the future management of cultural and natural heritage within the Area
- making the best endeavours to achieve agreed Queensland Government targets for Indigenous employment across the workforce
- making the best endeavours to achieve Queensland Government procurement targets for Indigenous businesses and organisations to provide fee for service, park works and service activities within the Area, in line with approved procurement guidelines and policies.

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 sharing information. During 2015-2016 the Authority played a leading role in support of the development of AWHAC advice on research needs for World Heritage.

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 2013-2018 priorities established by the Wet Tropics Management Authority Board, and that progress is regularly monitored. In February 2016, the Board updated the Strategic Plan's priorities that describe the ultimate outcomes the Authority aspires to. The priorities are to:

- pursue climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies to protect and conserve the integrity of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area
- engage and partner with Rainforest Aboriginal people to develop economic opportunities through ranger programs, tourism and scientific research within the Area
- deepen the relationship with the community and increase relevance and recognition of the work done by the Authority
- ensure science is sought and used to inform decision-making, in partnership with research institutions
- recognise and utilise the outcomes of formal scientific research and knowledge held by Rainforest Aboriginal people to shape management of the Area
- develop a formal mechanism for individuals and institutions conducting research within the Area to give back to Indigenous communities they engage with, through both financial and knowledge transfer arrangements
- improve presentation and marketing of the Area in conjunction with tourism and other stakeholders
- secure sufficient funding to continue baiting programs and further research of yellow crazy ants with a goal of eradication
- progress a three year (2016–2019) Partnership Agreement with NPSR to support management of the protected area estate within the Area
- investigate options for 'user pays' mechanisms and how revenue might be used by the Authority in management, presentation and programs as well as to benefit Rainforest Aboriginal people and other communities within the Area.

World Heritage funding

The Commonwealth and the State 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 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 (2013-2018).

The Queensland Government provided \$1.8 million to the Authority in 2015-2016. These funds are allocated to the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing to conduct on 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 for projects that contribute to its strategic goals. During 2015-2016, the Authority secured \$500,000 (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. An additional \$10,000 was received from Conservation Volunteers (CVA) to assist with project delivery. Key activities of the eradication program include baiting and targeted community engagement and education.

International links

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

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 2015-2016 are incorporated in the overall Department of Environment and Heritage Protection financial statements. Total funding of \$5 million for 2015-2016 was provided to the Authority, principally by the Australian and Queensland governments, and supplemented by other forms of income. The Authority realized an operating surplus of \$31,000. A summary of the Authority's operating statement for 2015-2016 is provided in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Wet Tropics Management Authority Operating Statement

CONTROLLED REVENUE AND EXPENSES	2015-2016	2014-2015
Revenue	\$'000	\$'000
Revenue from government		
Payments for outputs	1826	1959
Asset assumed/liabilities transferred		
SUB-TOTAL GOVERNMENT REVENUE	1826	1959
Own source revenue		
User charges	4	54
Grants and other contributions	3200	3250
Taxes fees and fines		
Gain on disposal of fixed assets		
Other revenue	12	6
Interest		
SUB-TOTAL OWN SOURCE REVENUE	3216	3309
TOTAL REVENUE	5042	5268
Expenses		
	\$'000	\$'000
Operating expenses		
Program		
BBA Business Management	4985	5162
Sub-total operating expenses	4985	5162
Non-operating expenses		
Depreciation ¹	27	140
Asset write-downs'/loss on disposal		
Sub-total non-operating expenses	27	140
TOTAL EXPENSES	5012	5303
OPERATING RESULT	31	-34

Notes

¹ The reduction in depreciation expense in 2015-2016 is due to full depreciation of office fit-out. Potential revaluation will be dependant on lease renewal decision.

The Australian Government's allocation to the Authority for 2015-2016 was \$3.2 million. These funds were allocated to the Authority's programs. The Queensland Government through the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection 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 2015-2016.

Staffing and contractors

At 30 June 2016, the staff establishment of the Authority totaled 25 positions of which two were vacant. Contract staff supplemented staff resources during the year to provide a range of services. These services included Aboriginal Facilitation Services, Workforce Management, and Protection and Conservation activities. **Table 2** shows expenditure on contractors for 2015-2016 compared to the previous financial year.

Audits

Two operational audits were conducted by PGL Financial Services Pty Ltd in 2015-2016 for Commonwealth Grants received.

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 2015-2016. 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.

Workforce planning and performance

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 2015-2016 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.

In 2015-2016 the Authority was engaged in workforce capability planning in conjunction with the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. The purpose of the workforce capability planning process is to ensure the Authority can continue to meet the challenges of the future, in addition to recognising the Authority is in a competitive market when it comes to retaining, attracting and developing the most effective workforce to achieve agreed objectives. Development of a strategic workforce plan will allow the Authority to build both an overall workforce strategy, tailor strategies for particular roles of interest and identify and fill staffing skill gaps.

Table 2. Expenditure by contracts

EXPENDITURE	2015-2016	2014-2015
Contractors by Program*		
Business Management	4860	800
Communities, Aboriginal Partnerships and Tourism	5900	42 451
Planning and Conservation	5742	0
TOTAL	16 502	41 724

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

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 2015-2016 complied with directives and no equal employment opportunity complaints were received. At 30 June 2016 the Authority had 12 females and 11 males on staff and two 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 2015-2016 the Authority hosted four graduate placements via formal arrangements through the Aurora (Native Title Internship) Program. In addition, the Authority hosted four student interns in partnerships with James Cook University, the University of Queensland and Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation. 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 2016 based on actual occupants		
Stream	Female (%)	Male (%)
Administraion and Senior Executive Service	11 (48)	6 (26)
Professional	1 (4)	3 (13)
Technical	0	2 (9)
Operational	0	0
Total	12 (52)	11 (48)

Employment by gender and salary level as at 30 June 2016 based on actual positions		
Salary Range	Female (%)	Male (%)
\$179 433 +		1 (4)
\$108 784 - \$115 054		2 (9)
\$98 184 - \$105 283	1 (4)	1 (4)
\$87 746 - \$93 882	1 (4)	5 (22)
\$76 478 - \$83 126	5 (22)	1 (4)
\$65 993 - \$72 565	3 (13)	1 (4)
\$55 813 - \$62 236	2 (9)	
Total	12 (52)	11 (48)

Terms and abbreviations

ACIUCN	Australian National Committee for IUCN
ARC	Australian Research Council
AWHAC	Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee
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
DATSIP	Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
DEHP	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 Environment Research Program
NPSR	Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing
NRM	Natural Resource Management
OUV	Outstanding Universal Value
QPWS	Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
42 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