# Cape York

# Healthy Country

### **NEWSLETTER**

Issue 40 2020

Peer to Peer learning through on ground trials



# ARSCINE SACRIME

it impacts people, property and our environment



#YourFireYourResponsibility #ArsonAwareness

If you see someone illegally lighting a fire call Triple Zero (000) immediately













# Welcome to the Cape York Healthy Country Newsletter



This edition of the Cape York Healthy Country Newsletter highlights how coordination and working locally can make a big difference across Cape York.

The article on the coordinated burning program organised by our Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitator, Andy Hartwig, emphasises how supporting landholders to partner across tenure and property boundaries has delivered our largest early burning program to date.

We also have an article from Charmaine Hill that outlines the work between partners South Cape York Catchments and Tangaroa Blue to deliver for the Cape, despite the COVID-19 travel restrictions, and demonstrating again how partnerships are key to getting great outcomes on ground.

This issue additionally highlights some of the innovative land management that is occurring on pastoral properties across the Cape. Work at Jungle Creek, Merluna Station, and the Peer to Peer Focus Farms—Normanby and Valley View—highlight how land managers are looking for new and more effective ways to manage country and work together to share information.

At Cape York NRM we are always looking for ways improve our delivery, and in October last year we restructured the organisation so we could better deliver projects.

We have created two program teams—one focussing on Sustainable Agriculture and Water Quality and the second focusing on Biodiversity and Fire Management.

Kerri Woodcock, who is well known to many through her work with the Western Cape Turtle Threat Abatement Alliance, has provided an update on the Biodiversity and Fire program activities that she now manages. In the next edition of the Cape York Healthy Country Newsletter, Michael Goddard will provide an outline of the Sustainable Agriculture and Water Quality program.

While we have had reduced ability to deliver on ground action since March, we have been working hard to increase support for Cape York communities. We have been raising awareness of the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 restrictions, including supporting calls for stimulus programs that provide real jobs and have direct on ground benefits to the communities and environments of the Cape. This is a challenge, with most attention going to areas further south where big increases in the unemployment rate have occurred, but we continue to make sure that the Cape voice is heard.

Cape York NRM continues to raise the issue of feral pig impacts across the Cape. We have submitted a response to the Senate Inquiry into feral animal management and have also been able to raise the profile of this issue through the media and the new National Feral Pig Coordinator. We are calling for a well-funded, coordinated control program to protect the environment, businesses, and the health of people on the Cape, and to protect Australia from the spread of introduced diseases. This work will continue, and in the mean time we will continue to support smaller scale localised action where we can.

Once again, thank you for following and supporting the great work across Cape York and I hope you find this newsletter interesting. Travel restrictions permitting, I look forward to seeing you somewhere on the Cape soon.

Warm regards John Gavin



Cover photo | Fishing boats, Cooktown | Photographer Jessie Price-Decle









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### 2020 Old Agriculture Awards now open

The search is on for worthy nominees of the 2020 Queensland Agriculture Awards.

There are two awards—the Peter Kenny Medal and the Minister's Emerging Leader Award—each with \$3000 up for grabs.

Nominations are sought from people who have made outstanding contributions to an even better future in Queensland agriculture, fisheries or forestry.

Applicants may come from any agricultural, fisheries or forestry field, like agribusiness, education, farmbased production, supply chain operations, research or policy.

### Nominations close 20 July 2020

Full information is available on the Queensland Government AgFutures site. Go here to register: daf.engagementhub.com.au/agfutures



### Basalt Bash ~ Bloom & Prosper

### We're back on track for 4-6 September 2020 at Mount Carbine

This is a fantastic event for rural and remote women, so update your calendar. Women from both the Northern Gulf RMG and Cape York NRM regions are invited to come along. Loads of updated and new info to share during the days' workshops, and great fun to be had at night—particularly the cocktail hour on the first night!

Head over to Northern Gulf's Events page on Facebook to book your place







Normanby catchment 'Peer to Peer Grazing Group' activities may have stalled during the coronavirus travel restriction period, but its Focus Farm initiative is going strong.

The Focus Farm initiative aims to assist land managers to achieve their goals with the assistance of a peer support group of farmers, and specialist service providers.

The initiative of two very keen Focus Farms grazing families on Cape York is to complete on ground erosion control trials using ultra-density cattle grazing to remediate gully erosion. Normanby Station and Valley View Station owners have been working above and beyond to reach their goal, with the support of Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc. and South Cape York Catchments.

Although quite close geographically, our two Focus Farm stations are very different—Normanby Station receives less annual rainfall than Valley View Station, which sits at the head of the Endeavour Valley on rich, massive basalt clays.

Normanby station is tucked into the back of a sandstone escarpment with duplex sandy soil on highly dispersive clays. Under guidance from consultant grazier Dick Richardson, the Irwin's on Valley View and the Harrigan's on Normanby codesigned trials with the project team to reflect the land and pasture differences.

Overnight, the cattle are 'camped' in small paddocks at the gully heads, intensifying the number of cattle within a small area. They are then let out into larger paddocks to graze during the day.

This practice of camping the cattle increases the intensity of ground trampling and the concentration of manure, resulting in the smoothing of the gully head and banks and the improvement of ground fertility which encourages vegetative regrowth. This method is referred to as regenerative grazing.

Preliminary results are outstanding, despite a slow start and a limited wet-season. At the Normanby site, the gully head was battered and smoothed and well covered in manure, and on Valley View, creeping grasses had begun encroaching on gully banks after the first late-season shower post treatment.

Next season will see even further benefits following wet season rainfall and potential re-treatment of sites

The Focus Farms are both accessible in the dry season, and the trial sites will be utilised for future extension activities including field days and the creation of demonstration films.

As a matter of interest, concentrated, ultra-density grazing is being trialled in the Fitzroy and Lower Burdekin basins, and other areas around the world, as a tool of regenerative agriculture.

A big thanks to Dick Richardson for providing advice, and to Peter and Judy Irwin of Valley View Station, and Vince and Cliff Harrigan of Normanby Station.

This initiative is funded by the Queensland Government Reef Water Quality Program and delivered by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries with partner organisations Cape York NRM and South Cape York Catchments











Thanks to funding from a combination of programs, Andrew Hartwig from Cape York NRM recently coordinated aerial burning across a number of Cape York properties.

The early burns were designed to reduce fuel loads and connect fire breaks on a landscape-wide scale, and were carried out by Cape York NRM in partnership with South Cape York Catchments and Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc.

Effective breaks were installed from Melsonby and Bonny Glen right through to Holroyd Plains, and tied in with National Park and Olkola early burns on Rinyirru (Lakefield) and Oyala Thumotang (Rokeby) National Parks.

Andrew said that the COVID-19 restrictions created some out-of-the-ordinary planning logistics, but the operation accomplished its goal, with over 20 thousand ignition points launched across 17 properties.

'Less road traffic because of the travel restrictions meant we were able to do some roadside burns to further protect properties from wildfires' he said.

If further funding is secured, it's anticipated that aerial burning operations will continue next year, and will expand to include more properties.

While the aim of the program is to ease the threats of wildfires on Cape York, the effectiveness of the

program will become more evident at the end of the 2020-21 wildfire and storm burn season when an evaluation will be conducted.

This project is supported by Cape York NRM through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program; The Reef Alliance Program—a partnership between agricultural industry, regional NRM bodies, and facilitated by the Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF), with a common goal of securing the future health of the Great Barrier Reef. The Reef Alliance Program is funded by the Australian Government and delivered through the Reef Trust; and the Queensland Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger Program.











Recently, grade 12 student Ella Hartwig took on a volunteer position with Cape York NRM to help deliver a coordinated burn project on Cape York. Here's her record of her experience. Ella's dad Andrew, known to us all as Andy, is Cape York NRM's Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitator (RALF). Andy coordinated the multi-property early burning program in partnership with South Cape York Catchments and Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc. Read Andy's story on page 8!



# Ella's burning experience

Story and aerial photos provided by Ella Hartwig

Being able to go along to help dad on this project was one of the coolest things I've ever done. I'm so grateful to have been given the responsibility of the ground support role, which included driving to transport the food, fuel, and swags to different stations up and down the Cape.

The first trip included two nights' camping, a drive of around 700 km all up, and visiting four stations. To get to one of the stations I had to travel there and back by chopper!







Some of the highlights were when I got to hold a baby goat, meet some 'sausage dogs', and fly above the Peninsula Development Road—a view I'd never seen before. It was an experience I'll never forget.

In late June we headed out to Normanby Station, and this time I made sure I packed my fishing rod.

I got to hang out with the very hospitable station owners, and to see how the 'Red Dragon' worked.

It's a helicopter-mounted device used to distribute aerial ignition devices to ignite controlled or prescribed burns.

Even though I almost got motion sickness, it was awesome helping out in the chopper by following a GPS coordinate to fly us to the burn sites.

As well as being able to tag along, I really do appreciate that each time we went out I was able to

One of the hurdles to overcome in putting the logistics together for this coordinated burn project was how the COVID-19 1.5 metre social distancing rule impacted travel. As Andrew's daughter, Ella was able to travel with Andrew without breaking any COVID-19 rules. South Cape York Catchments officially took Ella on as a volunteer, with all Safe Work Method Statements completed and in place.

The helicopter pilot had plenty of notice of the project and self-isolated for a two-week period prior. These processes in place meant that we could

actually help my dad by being ground support and driving for the crew.

go ahead with the burn.

It meant they saved chopper fuel and time in the day for burning because I was right there with them with the supplies.

I was a bit overwhelmed by the amount of planning that goes into these jobs.

Not to mention that while we were actually out on the job, the plan was ever-changing! So many variables such as humidity, old and new grass, temperature, wind speed and direction, and time of the day!

I am so grateful to Cape York NRM and South Cape York Catchments for the opportunity to volunteer with my dad, and I hope to work in a similar area to him when I finish school at the end of the year.



# Your Cape York Life

We want the Cape York Healthy Country Newsletter to include you—the Cape York community.

There are some very talented story tellers, artists, photographers, plus wonderful land manager projects, across the Cape community—and we have hundreds of readers who'd love to read, or see, your work.

Or maybe your school or community group has something exciting to showcase, or an event coming up that you'd like to promote more widely. They may be innovative online events!

For consideration for upcoming editions, submissions will need to reach me before the end of August and October 2020.

Your submission should be natural resource focused—that is topics such as people, water, plants, animals, soil, and minerals.

Please call me for a chat, or send me an email Robyn May | Communications Officer 0499 405 558 robyn.may@capeyorknrm.com.au

## **North Shore beach** clean up

Story by Charmaine Hill Photos provided by South Cape York Catchments

Thank you to South Cape York Catchments' trainee Charmaine Hill for sending in this story about the recent beach clean up at North Shore beach in Cooktown. The team of trainees did a tremendous job,



The Cooktown community is passionate about keeping our beaches clean. For many years, different Cooktown organisations have held volunteer beach clean-ups. For the past seven years, South Cape York Catchments and Tangaroa Blue have worked together to continue holding beach clean ups, and collect as much important data as possible. Cooktown's North Shore beach is a rubbish hotspot, last year SCYC, Tangaroa Blue and Cooktown's eager volunteers dragged 1.9 tonnes off.

Recently, because of the Coronavirus and the social distancing, myself and the other two trainees, Ben and Angus along with our coordinator, Jason, had to work without our volunteers. We still managed to drag more than 590 kg off North Shore beach! It took us three days to remove all the rubbish on foot. We sorted through some of the rubbish and recorded what it was. This data was then uploaded into Australian Marine Debris Initiative database.

I believe our beach clean ups are important because it helps keep our beach and marine environment as healthy as possible and protects our wildlife from harming themselves by either eating or becoming entangled in the rubbish.

Over the years, the rubbish on our beaches has decreased a little but cleaning a beach is like cleaning your house, there's always more to do. A lot of the rubbish that washes onto the beaches around Cooktown is from countries to our north because of the ways our tides and ocean system flows.

We hope we can keep protecting our beaches into the future!

This clean-up was part of ReefClean which is funded by the Australian Government's Reef Trust and delivered by Tangaroa Blue Foundation and South Cape York Catchments.





# Harrigan brothers take culture to classrooms



Normanby Station's Vince and Cliff Harrigan recently visited 12 primary schools in Victoria to share information about culture, country and life in Far North Queensland. The 'classroom connections', organised by Aboriginal cultural tour company *Culture Connect*, occurred over two weeks in March across Melbourne schools, and gave Victorian kids a rare opportunity to learn about Aboriginal culture and the unique features and history of the Balnggarrawarra homelands on Cape York.

The idea of a classroom initiative came about after a group of Melbourne teachers visited Normanby Station on a Cape York outback trip. The Harrigan brothers have run tours for years through Culture Connect, showing tourists the diverse natural and cultural heritage of Balnggarrawarra country and providing insights into their ranger programs.

Vince Harrigan recalls, "during the tour, all the teachers were talking about how great it would be to have their students come to Normanby. Since that wasn't possible, we thought the next best thing would be for us to come to them."

Cliff and Vince travelled to Melbourne with Culture Connect owner Roger de Vos. Vince says they spent a full day at each school and covered a wide range of topics.

'We started off at assembly, introducing ourselves, where we grew up, and our heritage. Then we split off into classroom sessions for the rest of the day, from Prep right up to Grade 6.

'We brought ten topics and let the classes choose what to learn about. A lot of them were interested in rock art, bush foods and medicines and Traditional music—didgeridoos and clap sticks. With some of the older age groups we also shared about black history and the battles between white people and local Aboriginal people that happened around Normanby and Battle Camp.'



'Many students were surprised to hear about how many Aboriginal languages there are. We put up a map of Europe and explained that just like there are lots of cultures and languages in Europe, the same is true for Aboriginal people across Australia'

Culture Connect owner Roger de Vos says that Normanby's Ranger program, and particularly their fire management activities, drew a lot of interest from students.

'These kids were still shell-shocked by the recent fires, but when they learned about fire management at Normanby, how fire can be used safely as a way to maintain country, it set their minds at ease. It was really fascinating for the kids.'

'They also enjoyed hearing about the erosion control work at Normanby and how it's helping to save the Great Barrier Reef. Vince says the students were thrilled to learn about Aboriginal culture.

'The students were rapt, they gave us such a good response. It was really satisfying passing on cultural knowledge to young people. It was also an eye opener for us, because there are things here that we take for granted. The kids were amazed to hear that in Far North Queensland we have the only place in the world where two World Heritage Areas are side by side, the rainforest and the Reef.'

Vince says they would like to do similar visits with more schools next year.

'The visits happened at a good time for us, being in the wet season, and it's a great opportunity to raise cultural awareness. We're hoping this can be an ongoing program.'





2019–2020 has been a big year for the Biodiversity and Fire Program. After a number of staff changes, the team now consists of Biodiversity and Fire Program Manager Kerri Woodcock who is based in Cairns, and Biodiversity Officer Dr Helen Penrose, and Community Engagement Officer Joey Dix who are both based in Cooktown.

The team has been focused on threatened species work including working with Traditional Owner groups to progress understanding of Cape York populations, and to put threat remediation activities in place for the cassowary, golden-shouldered parrot, ant plants and coastal littoral vine forest.

Highlights include meetings with the Cassowary and Golden-shouldered Parrot Recovery Teams, spending time on Country with Traditional Owners, and a week in the Kutini Payamu (Iron Range) National Park with Traditional Owners and CSIRO surveying cassowary numbers.



The team also held a highly successful Fire Forum in Cooktown in December. Attended by around 100 land managers, Traditional Owners, carbon farming specialists and Queensland Fire and Rescue representatives, the Forum provided a great opportunity for networking and prioritising action areas for improving fire management on the Cape.

While the COVID-19 outbreak prevented on ground activities, the team has spent the last few months engaging with stakeholders remotely, developing training materials, and fine-tuning plans for on Country work on eastern Cape York, once the access restrictions are eased.

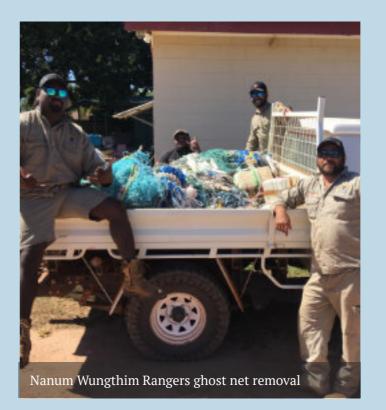




With the support of Cape York NRM, the Western Cape Turtle Threat Abatement Alliance, a collective of five western Cape Indigenous Ranger groups, spent the 2019 nesting season (June – September) monitoring seven beaches, managing feral pig numbers and installing turtle nest cages to protect eggs and hatchlings.

WCTTAA's end of season meeting for 2019 was held in Cairns in December with special guest Threatened Species Commissioner Dr Sally Box in attendance. The first half of 2020 saw two businesses in Western Sydney manufacture and donate 50 turtle nest cages to WCTTAA as well as a successful Community Benefit Gambling Fund bid which will enable the collective to purchase additional cages as well as equipment for monitoring sand temperatures.

WCTTAA's funding ended in June 2020, with an official announcement about future funding imminent.





# Jungle Creek-breeding cattle and change



Change and challenge *is* life on the land, and Garry and Lee-ann Stonehouse have been up for both. They moved from their property in a drier region of Queensland to Cape York in 2017, where they were assured of more regular and predictable rainfall due to the Cape's annual wet season.

'Where we lived before, rain was always the topic of conversation—mainly the lack of!' Garry said.

Garry and Lee-ann now own and manage Jungle Creek, an 18,000 hectare grazing property in southern Cape York, where they raise breeding cattle.

The property is host to 35 km of permanent creeks so, to protect the creeks, the Stonehouses have moved away from traditional practices of allowing cattle to access waterways, and put land management techniques in place that let them control the cattle's access to water.



They've put up fences on the property to create smaller paddocks, and laid poly pipe 250mm below ground to transport water from the creeks to watering points within these paddocks—the poly pipe laid underground to protect it from fires.

One of the upshots of the installation of the watering points is the regrowth of good quality native grass on the creek banks, resulting in soil stabilisation and decreased runoff of topsoil into the creeks, which in turn reduces sediment runoff to the Great Barrier Reef.

Having more control over their cattle in the smaller paddocks also means feral cattle are excluded from their herd, producing a quieter herd that is easier to manage reducing mustering time by about 50%.

There is also a smaller percentage of feral crossprogeny leading to increased quality and higher prices for their cattle.

Garry and Lee-ann welcome grazing technique changes that will increase the quality of their product.

'No change equals no change!" Garry says, "and if you're smart enough to listen you can learn from anybody.'

Cape York NRM was initially able to support the Stonehouse's property improvements with funding provided by Australian Government through Queensland Farmers' Federation Reef Trust program.





# Grazing Naturally on Merluna Station Sunrise at Merluna

Cameron and Michelle MacLean have owned Merluna Station, a north western Cape York grazing property, since 2004. Cape York NRM's Andrew Hartwig started working with the couple in 2019 as part of the Healthy Farming Futures project which supports graziers in the Cape's western flowing catchments to improve ground cover, soil condition, and vegetation biodiversity in order to reduce erosion and improve the water quality of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Cameron MacLean spoke to Cape York NRM about what this means for Merluna.

Michelle and I have owned Merluna for 16 years and it's under a grazing lease. Our key goal for the property is to keep it pristine, as well as productive. I believe we can do both.

We've got a small grazing operation and are practicing Dick Richardson's Grazing Naturally techniques to improve the health of soil, the grass, the cattle and the country.





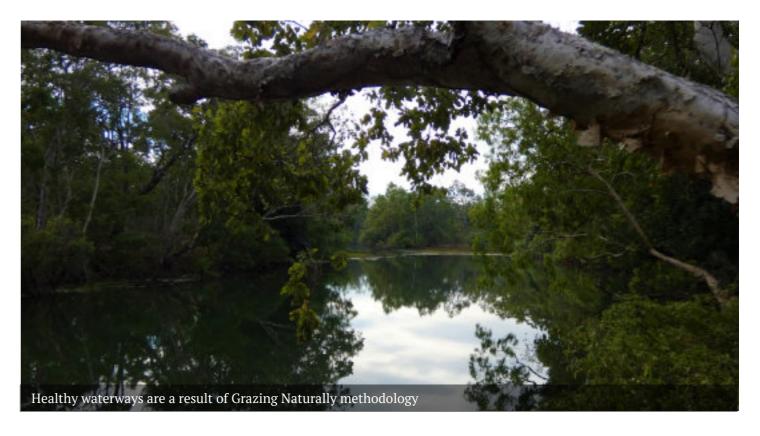
The main principle of the Grazing Naturally methodology is paddock rotation, varying grazing pressure on individual paddocks to drive grass growth and provide cattle with fresh green grass, while occasionally allowing each paddock to have a rest year.

Natural grazing means looking after the country and in turn, the country will look after the cattle.

This leads to an increase in biodiversity, a decrease in costs, and eventually, a sustainable business.

Natural grazing means the country will get stronger and stronger, and if you get it right, it can take a hit, a drought or cyclone, and still feed cattle.

This project is supported by Cape York NRM through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.





Have we returned to normality? Not sure we know what 'normal' looks like, but what we do know is that our project delivery teams can get out and about a little more now to work with the broader Cape York community.

Directors met mid-June via teleconference and have caught up via video link a few times to make sure that the organisation continues to progress, despite the fact that some on ground delivery was late starting.

Challenges resulting from COVID-19 have been felt across Cape York with many community groups experiencing the pressures from the tough start to the year. Usually June would hear us discussing the outcomes of the wet season and how the dry season is looking in the context of fire, vegetation, and the general health of the country.

June 2020 sees us all focusing on how we can do what needs to be done while abiding by regulatory requirements around movements within Cape York, and while ensuring the care and consideration of every single person in our region, including our staff, is the priority.

Your Directors have not ventured too far from home but are still here for you to communicate with, as and when you like. Director Polly Smith has stayed up in Mapoon most of this year, taking part in local seed collection activities and attending meetings appropriate to her roles. Polly is keen to get to know members across her region and encourages new memberships across Zone 2, from Lockhart to Coen and beyond. Director Sally Gray, Conservation Director, has spent a considerable amount of time revisiting the strategy and approach for Piccaninny Plains with the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. The pandemic has encouraged all land managers to revisit this year's approach.

Director John Charlton, Director for Tourism, Small Business and Mining, has really felt the kick personally from this year's hit to the tourism industry. For many years John has owned and operated a small tourism business and 2020 is a tragedy business-wise for him. John continues to keep the Directors in the loop with updates around the tourism, small business and mining sectors, and is always there to chat to you across the whole Cape around bringing businesses and natural resource management together.

Director Desmond Tayley will end his role as Local Government Director in the next few months and invest his efforts and energy into campaigning hard for a seat at the state Government table. Watch out for his face around the Cape and do not be shy to approach him!

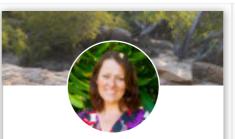
Community Director Trevor Meldrum has also felt the impacts on his work with Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc. with the organisation not being able to get out and about due to the travel restrictions of COVID-19. Trevor is also keen for community members to get in touch.

Director Eric Rosendale, who has strong roots to Bonney Glen Station but is now living in Cooktown, has felt the impact of restricted travel regulations. Eric is very keen to see more memberships across that southern Cape York area, and is always happy to talk to anybody around the subjects of landscape, burning, weeds, or even his beloved golf.

We finally say a huge thank you to Director Joseph Elu for his contributions to the organisation over the past ten years. Joseph was Cape York NRM's inaugural Chair, later stepping away from the Board, but then returning for a final directorship three years ago. Joseph, although aspiring to retire from all his roles one day, is committed heavily to the Indigenous Land and Sea Council (ILSC) and the Uluru Statement Committee. We wish him the very best and are incredibly grateful for all he has invested into Cape York NRM.

Finally, as your Chair and Director for Primary Industries, I am here to continue talking to all of you around how you are doing and how your country is going, but more importantly how better we can work with you and keep you informed. Stay well and check out our website for regular updates!

Warm regards Emma Jackson, Chairperson



Emma Jackson Chairperson Primary Industries Sector



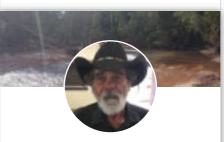
**Trevor Meldrum**Vice Chairperson
Community Sector



Joseph Elu Indigenous Sector Zone 1



Pauline Smith
Indigenous Sector
Zone 2



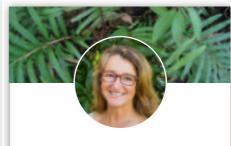
**Eric Rosendale** Indigenous Sector Zone 4



**Desmond Tayley**Local Government Sector



John Charlton
Tourism, Small Business, Mining
and Other Industries Sector



**Sally Gray**Conservation Sector



Currently Vacant Indigenous Sector Zone 3









### **CONTACT US**

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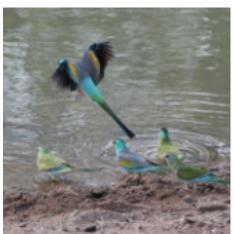














Helping people to work together to care for the natural environment and to promote the sustainable use of Cape York's natural resources



Improving the quality of water flowing into the northern **Great Barrier** Reef



Protecting threatened species and threatened ecological



Supporting best practice management of Cape York's lands and



Championing cultural and burning



partnerships



Working in partnership with Aboriginal and



Cape York NRM



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