



Chair's Report

December 2008

SIXTH EDITION: COMMUNITY SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND ENGAGEMENT

Western science meets traditional eco-knowledge

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) and James Cook University (JCU) recently held a three-day workshop on Thursday Island to explore tools for community-based management of dugongs and turtles in the Torres Strait.

The workshop brought together key stakeholders to develop a mutual understanding of various management tools and the degree to which they are being used in dugong and turtle management plans.

TSRA chair, Toshie Kris, said a range of tools have been incorporated into the eight management plans developed so far. These include culturally appropriate management options which can involve spatial and seasonal closures.

"Designing spatial closures requires information about native title, information from traditional owners, and information from researchers so it is important that there is mutual understanding by all stakeholders," Mr Kris said.

The largest spatial closure developed to date is the dugong sanctuary in the western region of the Torres Strait. JCU research found this area is likely to be an important source of dugongs for the rest of the Torres Strait. The workshop discussed the need for this region to be better

protected and for Papua New Guinea villagers to be involved in discussions.

Terrence Whap, a dugong and turtle project officer from Mabuiag Island, said his community is a centre for dugong culture and the communities are aware of the importance of managing dugong populations.

"Spatial closures are one of many appropriate management tools but good management requires government and communities to be involved together in a practical way. Our dugong and turtle management plans are working documents and everyone needs to be involved in implementing them," Mr Whap said.

Dr Helene Marsh, Professor of Environmental Science at JCU, said she was very impressed with the progress that had been made in the Torres Strait region in the management of dugong and turtle.

Turtle management.
Photo courtesy of TSRA.



Queensland's regional NRM bodies are working with many community organisations, industry groups, Indigenous groups and government agencies to enhance community skills and knowledge and to engage them in effective partnerships to deliver landscape-scale change.

During the 2007 to 2008 financial year, Queensland's regional bodies supported 2,284 awareness raising events with over 110,000 participants. These events informed and involved people in looking after their local environment and community.

About 2000 training events were held with over 26,000 participants across a range of areas like mapping and weed management. This training has equipped people across the state to make informed, sustainable decisions in natural resource management.

Over 4000 community groups and projects were also assisted by regional bodies. Engaging the community across Queensland is boosting the capacity of the grass roots sector, who are largely volunteers and the backbone of NRM.

The following stories show a sample of the extensive, collaborative efforts of regional NRM bodies and partners, which continue to strengthen our programs with communities across Queensland.

MIKE BERWICK, CHAIR,
QUEENSLAND
REGIONAL NRM
GROUPS COLLECTIVE



QMDC's regional Caring for Country Plan

A new plan to help guide investment in activities that support the meaningful involvement of Aboriginal communities in natural resource management will soon be implemented through the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee (QMDC).

The Regional Caring for Country Plan was launched on October 3, 2008 and constitutes a significant milestone for QMDC, Aboriginal communities and the region, as well as supporting the ongoing implementation of the Regional NRM Plan.

QMDC Regional Aboriginal Advisory Group member Robert Lacey said the document was highly important to the Aboriginal communities of the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin.

"The Plan is a very accurate portrait of many conversations that have taken place over several years," he said.

"We hope that this will be a working document with the commitment and responsibilities of the whole community to make this Plan a reality."

Department of Natural Resources and Water acting director Lamond Graham, who officially launched the Plan, said he was impressed and pleased to have the issue of Aboriginal engagement in natural resource management so addressed, and commended the work undertaken by QMDC and the Aboriginal communities involved.

Plans for the implementation of components of the Caring for Country Plan are already underway. QMDC developed an implementation component of the Caring for Country Plan which was used to secure funding to assist Aboriginal Traditional Owners and communities to be more meaningfully involved in natural resource management.

It is hoped other organisations, communities and governments will also refer to the Caring for Country Plan when engaging with Aboriginal communities on natural resource management.



The Regional Caring for Country Plan launched with representatives from the QMDC and the Dep. of Natural Resources and Water on hand.



Capacity building in aquatic ecosystem training and education for Healthy Waterways volunteers

Healthy Waterways Volunteering Monitoring

Reef Catchments has been working with the local Mackay Whitsunday community to identify and address a wide range of water quality issues across the region.

Over the past five years, Healthy Waterways volunteers have amassed a wide range of skills in water quality and aquatic ecosystem health monitoring. Regular training has been given to volunteers and a great deal of understanding of river processes and water quality issues has been shown by individual volunteers. Reef Catchments has sought to capture this understanding through its new Healthy Waterways monitoring program.

Since 2002 Healthy Waterways community volunteers have been collecting quality assured water quality data from across the region. Monthly monitoring has occurred at more than 30 sites and flood events have been sampled at more than 20 sites over the past five years. The Healthy Waterways volunteer monitoring

has provided valuable data on the region's waterways. This information has been used in combination with other data sets to establish water quality objectives and targets for the 33 Catchment Management areas within the Mackay Whitsunday region. Data collected by volunteers has also informed the development of the Mackay Whitsunday Water Quality Improvement Plan.

In July 2008 Reef Catchments and the three catchment and landcare groups in the Mackay Whitsunday Region ran workshops in each integrated catchment area to identify and prioritise key water quality issues across the region. Healthy waterways volunteers worked to identify water quality issues and prioritise these for projects. The group then went to seek funding for priority projects.

Reef Catchments believes that the knowledge held by Healthy Waterways volunteers is a valuable resource and that by addressing key concerns raised by the community we can more successfully engage the community in natural resource management.

Landholders learn how to control lantana

More than 80 attendees at a lantana control field day in the Boyne Valley gained improved knowledge and skills needed to combat the weed.

The day attracted local landholders, and people from as far away as Monto and Toowoomba, interested in learning more about the best ways to control lantana.

The event was organised by the Boyne Calliope Sub Region (BCSR) of the Fitzroy Basin Association

Inc., in partnership with Gladstone Regional Council, the National Lantana Management Group and was supported by Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments Inc.

BCSR Coordinator Kristy Dalton said landholders were enthusiastic about the chance to interact with experts and discover the most effective weed control methods.

"We got calls from across the state in the lead-up to the event, with people from locations including Crow's Nest, Toowoomba, Brisbane, Monto and Miriam Vale – a number of whom

Mining the community for grey power

In a move that is perhaps appropriate for a region with mining activity, the wealth of knowledge of local retired professionals will be 'mined' as part of a novel project, called "Grey Power: Networking community wisdom in environmental management".

In recognising that an ageing demographic can be an advantage, Condamine Alliance designed a project to engage the skills and knowledge of retirees in a network that can be tapped by Landcare and other community-based volunteer groups engaged in natural resource management.

The project is being funded with a \$20 000 contribution from Blueprint for the Bush.

Minister for Main Roads and Local Government Warren Pitt, who approved the funding, said "The purpose of the funding is to assist the organisation to conduct a feasibility study into using an existing group of skilled retirees to

achieve land management practices with minimal environmental impact on rural residential communities."

While the network will be a resource for the whole catchment, initially it will concentrate on the rural residential or peri-urban areas on the outskirts of the main urban centres such as Toowoomba.

Not only are population growth rates high, but these populations are extremely diverse and challenging to engage in natural resource management.

Condamine Alliance CEO Phil McCullough said "The land they occupy is often critical in relation to environmental impact, but the land owners often lack management skills and access to information targeted to their needs."

"This project will help fill the gaps and boost the capacity of the community to identify and manage critical natural resource management issues in the Condamine catchment," Mr McCullough said.



Daniel Stock (DPI&F) demonstrating how to use the splatter gun.

attended," Ms Dalton said.

"On the day there was lots of interaction and questions, and it also sparked a lot of one-on-one conversations and information sharing between landholders.

"The most popular items on the agenda were the demonstration of the Ellrott Plough by Peter Hinchliffe from Alternative Woody Weed Control, and the opportunity to try out the new splatter guns," she said.

Ms Dalton said six splatter guns had

recently been purchased by BCSR to help landholders in the fight to control lantana in the Boyne Calliope region.

The splatter guns were funded through the Rainforest Recovery Program were available for hire through the Gladstone Regional Council.

Ms Dalton said that based on the success of the lantana control field day, BCSR planned to conduct a series of weed control workshops in collaboration with council to help target problem weeds around the Boyne Calliope catchment.

Traditional knowledge enters the digital history books

Traditional Aboriginal history has been recorded using the latest digital technology.

During a four day workshop funded by the Burnett Mary Regional Group, audio recordings and films were made which feature aboriginal elders talking to young people about their identity, history and culture.

The Group's male traditional owner Board representative Mal Collinge said that is was very important to record stories and sites of cultural significance.

"This workshop gave the youth empowerment and bridged the generational divide by engaging in culture on their traditional country" he said.

The recordings were made on Aboriginal land at Thorn Hill Station, north-west of Bundaberg.

The Group's Aboriginal Land Management Facilitator Selina Hill said that Traditional Owners have always cared for country.

"This project reveals that Aboriginal affinity remains strong; that spiritual connections via stories and songs remain and that respecting the landscapes, animals and plants continues to ensure responsibilities as custodial guardians."

She said that the company managing the project, Goorie Vision, had proven successful in assisting Traditional Owners to capture, record and store their cultural wealth before more is lost.

Workshop co-facilitator Chris Peckham said that although indigenous people traditionally tell their history orally, the digital medium could be used for radio, print or television.

"It's great to offer training in the use of digital recording equipment to indigenous people, as it enables families and friends to record each others stories in a way that is natural to them," Mr Peckham said.

Workshop participant Nakoa Pitt said that she enjoyed learning how to use cameras professionally, spending time in the bush and meeting new people.

"I'm taking my culture more seriously now which is a big step for me because I was always ashamed of my culture," she said.

"This has taught me to be proud of it instead of ashamed."



Judging of the Clean Beach Challenge

Empowering the Community Coastcare Movement

Burdekin Dry Tropics NRM was recently awarded a grant of almost \$42,000 to help empower the community coastcare movement in the Burdekin Dry Tropics region.

This Community Coastcare funding will have a strong educational aspect as well as help train coastal community groups on how to develop projects, apply for grant funding and implement these projects.

Dr. Rachel Allan, Burdekin Dry Tropics NRM (BDTNRM) Coastal and Marine

Programme Coordinator, said: "This project raises the awareness and capacity of the Burdekin Dry Tropics coastal community to implement future projects - specifically volunteer community groups, traditional owner groups, schools and the broader community. It will also help to understand the significance of migratory shorebirds, and appreciate the relationship traditional owners have with dugong and turtles, which are all issues of national significance," she said.

The Burdekin Dry Tropics region's coastline spans 15 coastal townships including Townsville, Ayr and Bowen. The area has over 20 active

community coastcare groups and traditional owner groups. BDTNRM supports these volunteer groups to be actively engaged in the management of their coastlines. This has happened through the NHT2 and Caring for our Country programmes.

BDTNRM supports these groups by building regional networks and administering funding for on-ground works. It also hosts a series of events and training workshops as well as providing an avenue for support and advice.

An organisation that BDTNRM has supported is the Queens Beach Action Group in Bowen who recently won the 2008 regional 'Partnerships award' for the Keep Australia Beautiful Clean Beach Challenge.

BDTNRM has also recently entered into a partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's Reef Guardian Schools project. This now enables direct engagement with the youth of the community.

"BDTRNM will continue to support and acknowledge the vital role that community play in coastal management, recognising the amazing breath and diversity of community groups and their dedicated individual volunteers," said Rachel.

To find out more about natural resource management projects, visit the 14 Regional Bodies directly or via the Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective website: www.rgc.org.au

Digital Chair's report movies are available at www.landcare.placestories.com

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