

# KANTRI LAIF

News for Indigenous Land and Sea Managers  
across North Australia

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KIMBERLEY....NORTHERN TERRITORY....GULF OF CARPENTARIA....CAPE YORK....TORRES STRAIT

## INTRODUCING NAILSMA

*The North Australian Indigenous Land & Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) was an idea that came from the former leaders of North Australian Land Councils during the 90's.*

The concept of NAILSMA was enhanced in late 2002 when the Northern & Kimberley Land Council's and Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation became partners in the Cooperative Research Centre for Tropical Savannas. The relationship with the CRC, allows NAILSMA to act as an agent for change in supporting practical natural and cultural resource management activities and initiatives across the wet/dry tropics of north Australia. NAILSMA core membership currently consists of the Kimberley and Northern Land Council's and Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation. We are hoping that the Carpentaria Land Council and Torres Strait Regional Authority will also become formal members of the alliance. This membership does not exclude other Indigenous organizations across north Australia however and membership is open to discussion.

The alliance is coordinated out of Darwin by Joe Morrison (see page 3 for further description of governance structure for NAILSMA) and a steering committee made up of representatives of core partners, plus the Indigenous Land Corporation, CRC Tropical Savannas and the Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment. NAILSMA is housed at the CRC for Tropical Savannas located on the Charles Darwin University campus in Darwin.

NAILSMA is currently embarking upon 3 major projects focused on Dugong and Marine Turtle Management, development of a strategy for Indigenous Knowledge conservation and application across north Australia and the development of a Indigenous led Fire management agenda.

NAILSMA's focus is to support Traditional Owners with on-country management of natural and cultural resources, developing support structures for future managers of the Indigenous estate, development of effective communication across the top, engaging TO's into the research agendas and indeed lead them, and finally supporting TO's to explore economic opportunities.

NAILSMA Coordinator Joe Morrison has nurtured the NAILSMA concept from 2002, when Peter Cooke, David Epworth and Mark Horstman asked him to sit on the CRC Board of Management and take up the Coordinator position. This has in simple language, enabled Indigenous people to have a seat at the negotiating table of a very important initiative across north Australia.

For the last 18 months, Joe has been developing working relationships with partners and community groups across North Australia.

Lisa Binge, NAILSMA Project Officer will be coordinating Indigenous leadership, communication initiatives, including *Kantri Laif* and developing a scholarship program aimed at supporting people on country get access to education.

NAILSMA Fire Project Officer Wayne Davis commenced employment with NAILSMA on the 28th July and his job requires him to work with Indigenous and other sectoral groups including pastoral, tourism, mining and parks, to develop a voice for Indigenous fire managers across North Australia. Wayne has worked in land management for nearly 20 years as a ranger in Kakadu National Park and has spent time in the centre managing community-based landcare projects with Tangentyere Landcare.

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Joe Morrison & Lisa Binge



### KIMBERLEY



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### TOP END



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North Australia to meet for the  
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### GULF OF CARPENTARIA



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### SPECIAL FEATURES

P3... A message from Henry Reynolds

Stephen Johnson, Indigenous Knowledge (IK) Project Officer, will be working with Traditional Owners, Indigenous groups and others across the NAILSMA region to develop a strategy for conservation and application of IK.



Stephen Johnson

The aim is to increase investment into IK from local, regional, national and international sources, for improved engagement but also recognition that IK does contribute to better management of country. Steve is currently a Phd candidate at the University of Queensland, supervised by Dr John Bradley. He has been working with the Yanyuwa people at Borroloola for many years.

In September, NAILSMA held its first annual Forum on the Menngen Aboriginal Land Trust (old Innesvale Station). See inside for story.

If you would like more information contact:

**NAILSMA: Building 41, level 3, room 27  
Charles Darwin University NT 0909**

Research in communities can result in two-way information exchanges, which have more practical benefits for both communities and researchers alike. People know their country intimately and more concerted efforts should be made in integrating traditional knowledge into research and mainstream natural resource management activities. Peter sees some real opportunities in incorporating traditional skills and values into the CRC activities but at the same time Indigenous people can utilise and appreciate new and contemporary resource management skills.

“People have intellectual knowledge and understandings of their own environments and this puts them in a position to dictate or negotiate their position in terms of what external pressures or interests may come into their areas. It brings home the authority, gives recognition and respect.” Peter said.

Peter recently stepped down from his position of 10 years as the Director of the Kimberley Land Council. He is now Chairman of the Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Council, Western Australia. Peter explained that the Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Council works closely with ATSIC Regional Councils and is responsible for the program management of housing and other infrastructure development in remote communities of Western Australia.

Privately, he is also investigating Indigenous prospects in aquaculture, mining and exploration areas, but most importantly he is working hard on developing commercial partnerships and relationships between the private sector and Indigenous communities. Peter is also aiming to develop new models that will attract investment from institutional and private investors to community related projects, as well as engaging mentoring roles to get Indigenous people involved and therefore gain experience in commercial areas.

“Communities should start looking at commercial alternatives, rather than those that only attract public funds. People shouldn’t be afraid to engage directly in a robust fashion with industries, government or other third parties that want to use their land.”

Having so much on he’s plate, Peter remains well balanced and grounded, he acknowledges that there are real opportunities in research and commercial enterprise but Indigenous people need to actively seek out these opportunities.

“We shouldn’t assume the victim position where we wait and anticipate for others to make the first move, we need to be alert and creative, people need to understand the rights agenda is still very much important, but it’s not the right’s agenda alone, it’s a matter of being able to balance that with getting immediate outcomes that improve the lifestyle of our mothers, fathers, auntie’s, uncle’s and grandparents.” Peter said.

Peter’s closing comments to us were that we need to be thankful for the endeavours and efforts our families have given us and we should be aiming to repay them through investing in education and meaningful jobs. We look forward to catching up with Peter in the near future and finding out how his projects are going.

*Interview by Lisa Binge 16/03/04*



Peter Yu

## Peter Links Up with NAILSMA

*On a trip to Western Australia we caught up with Peter Yu to see what he’s up to and to get some words from our chair.*

Peter was recently endorsed by NAILSMA partners to represent them on the CRC Tropical Savannas board. It has become apparent from Peter’s short time in the job that he will be highlighting Indigenous aspirations in relation to research undertaken by TSM-CRC and how this fits into the broader context of capacity development and economic development on the Indigenous estate across the north.

“It’s an area that I’m extremely interested in, it has the potential to do things in new ways that will provide more support for Indigenous communities and improve their involvement in environmental, ecological and mainstream business issues.” Peter said.

# NAILSMA GETS READY FOR THE FUTURE

*NAILSMA prepared for a crucial period of development in the north by setting the scene through a workshop in Darwin.*

Held on 25-26<sup>th</sup> May, NAILSMA's existing and possible future partners met to workshop a strategic direction for the future. The workshop was chaired by Peter Yu and facilitated by Bevan Bessen. The meeting was attended by representatives from the Northern Land Council, Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation, Kimberly Land Council, Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Indigenous Land Corporation and CRC Tropical Savannas staff.

The workshop discussed current and future projects including Indigenous Knowledge conservation, Marine Turtle and Dugong management, Fire Management, Leadership support and the need to begin working on water issues across north Australia. An important outcome was the development of an operational framework and governance arrangements to move forward.

Importantly, it is seen as a strategic and positive move to have Peter Yu contribute to the direction of NAILSMA as all workshop participants expressed their desire to continue to work with him in the future.

Other outcomes of the workshop were the targeting of partnerships driven by NAILSMA and the endorsement of the first north Australian Indigenous land and sea management forum.

From the respective members, each land and sea unit manager also gave a report on regional activities to workshop attendees.

Their contributions made for interesting collaborative decision making with a North Australian focus. Tropical Savannas CRC Co-Theme Leader and NAILSMA coordinator Joe Morrison said "the workshop was very much needed in a time when development across the north is at a crucial period for Indigenous people to access meaningful engagement and to then have their aspirations met on their terms".

The detailed outcomes of the workshop are available from: Joe Morrison [joe.morrison@cdu.edu.au](mailto:joe.morrison@cdu.edu.au) or Lisa Binge (08) 89466754 or email: [lisa.binge@cdu.edu.au](mailto:lisa.binge@cdu.edu.au)



*Left to right: Peter Yu, Jim Davis (BCYDC), Ariadne Gorrington (KLC), Micheal Storrs (NLC), Peter Cooke (NLC), Joe Morrison (NAILSMA), Lisa Binge (NAILSMA), Paul Jenkins (ILC), Kelly Gardner (CLCAC), Paul Josif (NLC).*

Photo: Bevan Bessen

## MESSAGE FROM HENRY REYNOLDS

*The formation of NAILSMA is a most important development both for indigenous communities and for North Australia.*

It is also the necessary and logical development to follow on from the Mabo and Wik judgements. It is also vitally necessary at this time when there is little to be hoped for from the politicians and the parliaments. The era of reform in indigenous affairs seems to be over...and many issues have simply not been resolved...questions about sovereignty and autonomy and self determination have simply disappeared off the politician's radar. And yet the underlying issues have not gone away. So it is up to the indigenous people to set their own agenda...and not wait to be asked or 'consulted'...yet again. And the regional focus is exactly what is required. North Australia has forever been exploited...has been an economic colony of the south and of overseas investors. So much wealth has come out of the north and so little was left behind...it has enriched people who have either never been in the north; have flown over it or have made a quick dry season visit.

It is time too for indigenous communities to both protect the north from bad developments and to gain the benefit from appropriate ones. We should never forget the enormous contribution made by indigenous men and women to the economy of the north. We should never forget that thousands of workers were not paid for their work, that they experienced outrageously bad working conditions...violence...sexual exploitation...malnutrition...and little thanks or even respect. The time has arrived for indigenous communities to take their own destiny in their own hands...NAILSMA may provide an avenue to further this ambition.

*Henry Reynolds 29/10/04*

Photo: Jane Rapkins



### Ribbons of Blue

*A program to educate students and the community about waterway values and health, as well as Aboriginal connections with the land and water, has been trialled in the East Kimberley.*

On 5 and 6 May, Halls Creek District High School Year 7, 8 and 9 students participated in the Ribbons of Blue Pilot Project. This project was initiated by the Kimberley Land Council and Ord Bonaparte Program, and supported by the Department of Environment, Natural Heritage Trust, Ribbons of Blue and the Kimberley Language Resource Centre.

Classroom introductory sessions were run by Michelle Martin (Kimberley Language Centre) and Jane Rapkins (Rivercare Officer), followed by field excursions to Caroline Pool and the Elvire River at Old Halls Creek.

Students conducted Visual Site Assessments and testing of the chemical and physical parameters of the water. Aquatic macroinvertebrates (small animals without backbones) were netted and identified.

The macroinvertebrates found give us a lot of information on how healthy the water environment is. These bugs, beetles, snails and worms are the middle of the food chain so they are used as indicators for the rest of the ecosystem.

Also because some of these animals are sensitive to pollution, they are a good test of water quality. The amount of oxygen in the water as well as the native plants around and in the waterway also have a big effect on what macroinvertebrates can live at a site.

The main concerns identified during the sampling activities related to litter, land use, human use and animal life.

“This program is really important, teaching kids about their own area and how to look after land and water for the future”, said Michelle Martin.

The East Kimberley Ribbons of Blue project has been successful in obtaining funding for 2004-05 through the Natural Heritage Trust. Any schools or community groups interested in participating, please contact Jane Rapkins, Rivercare Officer on 08 9168 1082.

*StoryBy: Jane Rapkins*

Photo: Kylie Pursche



### Looking after country along that Ord River

*Jack Lannigan, Stan Brumby, Bonnie Deegan, Joe Blythe & Glenn Wightman recording traditional knowledge of plant and animals.*

The *Aboriginal Management and Planning for Country Program* began in 2001 and was a subprogram of the Ord Bonaparte Program (OBP). The OBP was an integrated natural resource management research and development program looking at sustainable development in the East Kimberley. Partners to the program were Land & Water Australia, CSIRO, Kimberley Land Council (KLC), WA Department of Agriculture, WA Department of Environment, Water and Catchment Protection (formerly the Waters and Rivers Commission), WA Department of Conservation and Land Management, Ord Land and Water, and the Australian government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

The Program worked with three main traditional owner groups, the Miriwoong Gajiwaraong people based around the Kununurra region; Kija people from Warmun (Turkey Creek) and Halls Creek and Jaru people from the Halls Creek area.

Three research projects were developed based on traditional owners aspirations for looking after country now and in the future.

The Kija and Jaru Plants and Animals project was a collaboration between the KLC and the Kimberley Language Resource Centre (KLRC).

**“Plant names and uses need to be written down and put into a book so that they will be there in the future. When young Jaru people get older they will want to know the names and uses of the plants, if all the old people are gone they will be able to get it from the book”.**

*(Bonnie Deegan, Jaru traditional owner)*

Over 90 traditional owners worked with Glenn Wightman (biologist) and Joseph Blythe (linguist) on the project conducting field trips to traditional country estates over a one year period. Traditional owners would like to see a range of information products come from this work including a book, video, CD-Rom, audiotapes, signage with language names and stories. Posters have been developed of the field trip for use in both Warmun and Halls Creek community and schools.

The data management and GIS project developed a cultural mapping database with the Kija and Jaru people. Using similar databases developed by Indigenous people in north America. The project aims to build a community based GIS system in Warmun to assist in land management and looking after traditional knowledge about country.

A Capacity Building and Two Way learning project for Kija, Miriwoong-Gajirawoong people focused on ranger training and building stronger relationships between traditional owners, researchers, government agencies and community groups. Ranger training was carried out with the Kimberley College of TAFE. Miriwoong people were mostly concerned about pesticide use in the Ord River Irrigation and regional decision making processes.

An Aboriginal Steering Committee was formed with traditional owners from the catchment and also with government agencies and community groups. It is the first of its kind providing a forum for traditional owners to

discuss land use issues, aspirations for future management and planning and to monitor research projects. Most importantly it saw traditional owners come together as one strong voice for land use and land management in the Ord River Catchment.

A Final Report has been completed with the findings of these projects and includes recommendations for the continuance of this work in the East Kimberly and also includes the development of an East Kimberley Aboriginal Resource Management Strategy; the continuance of the Aboriginal Steering Committee; funding of ranger training and employment programs by the WA state government; ongoing collaborative research and development; resource allocation from both WA and Commonwealth funding agencies.

Land & Water Australia continues to support research in the area with the funding of a new project in 2004 *Integrated Natural and Cultural Resource Management Options for Pastoral Land in the East Kimberley*. Partners in the research are the CRC for Tropical Savannas Management, the KLC, the WA Department of Agriculture and the ILC.

*For more information contact Dr Catherine Mobbs at Land & Water Australia or Prof Gordon Duff at the Cooperative Research Centre for Tropical Savannas Management. Visit the LWA website: [www.lwa.gov.au](http://www.lwa.gov.au) or, CRC website: [savanna.cdu.edu.au](http://savanna.cdu.edu.au)*

*Report by Kylie Pursche*

# Kurungal Walk takes kids back to country



***During the July holidays 2004 the Kurungal people, Kimberley Regional Fire Management Project, Yiriman 'Youth' Project, NAILSMA and Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture (KALAC) teamed up for a walk through country on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert.***

The trip aimed to get youth 'at risk' out on country with old people. Over 100 people joined the walk that stretched over 6 days covering 70kms of country, on the Christmas Creek pastoral lease. Each day was a new adventure passing through Spinifex country and stopping off to look at waterholes including an underground waterhole, wetlands and escarpment country that edged the Great Sandy Desert.

There was plenty of opportunity for hunting, with the boys coming back with kangaroo and turkey at the end of the day. The women shouted to stop the car when they saw bush potato on the side of the road, the women made digging for bush potato look easy work but the ground was dry and tough.

Caitlan Laword from Fitzroy Crossing said she she enjoyed walking with the old people and learning how to find bushtucker. Caitlan thought it was important to go bush with old people, "To learn their culture and what they eat out in the bush, how to survive, how to catch stuff, how dig up [bush potato]" Caitlan said. *(cont...next page)*



The young people enjoyed learning more about important cultural places, learning how to get bushtucker and swimming in the rockholes.

Charnelle Pindar, from Bayulu said “[I like] coming and learning different culture, being in the bush and walking around. Going swimming at the rockhole, hunting, walking.”

Nathan Dolby from Kupartiya said it was important to bring kids on country “cause a lot of kids have started drinking alcohol and smoking, but I don’t think it’s a good thing. Bring them out here to dry out. They learn hunting and how to make Aboriginal things.”

Senior man Ned Cox remembers walking the country when he was young and on his return noticed a lot of changes. Ned said “[bush tomato] been here, they’d been finished a long time ago there never grow again. Lightning kill that bushtucker too. We’ve been getting plenty goanna here and kangaroo and these kids been making me very happy when they been start walking, proper really good one. I’ve been happy to see them kids, and really good walker – more fast than me. Long time good walker when I was a young man, but this time I’m too weak now, can’t walk (laughs).”

**“Kids gotta know their country, gotta walk the same way as us.”**

Ned knows this country well, he grew up at Christmas Creek when he and his family were brought in from the bush to work for stations.

“When I was a young fulla I was proper real good walker, I was there takin the lead when I was a young man...I been good walking all the way. (My mother) Not trying to carry me, no, not drive with Gudiya – keep walkin a long way. At sundown we been eatin that bushtucker, it been make me good to walk.” Ned said.



*The Bossmen (Ned Cox front left)*

Johnny Nargoodah from Jimbalakudunj community said it’s good to bring kids on country, “They hang around in town doing nothing...getting board...while they should be out seeing their grandparents country, lookin out and teachin them how to dig for yams. At the moment they’re eatin chips and takeaway when they could be out bush getting bushtucker. When they grow up at least they’ll teach their kids and look at their great, great, grandparents country.”



*Olive Knight*

Olive Knight, coordinator of the women’s shelter, Marninwarntikura in Fitzroy Crossing said that being on the Kurungal walk was a wonderful experience.

Olive agreed it was important to bring kids to learn about their country. “They’ve [the kids] have got elders who are able to teach them and bring them into culture again...because they get disorientated with western culture. May it be an example for other areas to possibly try out...I think this is the beginning for us.” Olive said.



*Tom Lawford*

Tom Lawford from Kupartiya brought his family on the trip hopes they can learn and when they’re older take their own kids out bush. He would also like to see more regular trips. “I think this should happen more, not once a year, should be twice a year or every holidays...take them out.

You teach them respect, their skin name, learn that culture side of things, not only hunting but that culture side.”

The walk finished at Two Dogs Dreaming everyone split up and made their way home. Everyone agreed a great time was had and have already started planning for another trip next year.



Olive Knight wanted to thank Doodie and the fire team and said they had made a true mark of leadership in this project.

Thanks to the Kurungal people and all the project collaborators for allowing NAILSMA to be a part of the walk.



*Kids on the first day on the Kurungal walk*

*Story by Lisa Binge*

**A**lan Lawford “Doodie” is the manager of Bohemia Downs Station “Kupartiya”, located southeast of Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley region.

Traditional owners regained control of Bohemia Downs 13 years ago when it was handed back. Doodie’s father initiated the handback when he asked the Western Australian government give back his peoples land.

“My dad was thinking about getting Bohemia back he’d written a few letters to the government and Jerry Hand was the minister for Aboriginal Affairs, that’s when it got passed in. It used to be 2 million acres before they only gave us 98,000 hectares.” Doodie said.

Doodie runs 1500 head of cattle on Bohemia, but knows the property can support twice that number due to improved pastures since the reintroduction of Aboriginal land management.

Doodie, previously a grader operator and yard builder has managed Bohemia for 13 years. “We do our own cattle sales, mustering, monitoring sites more or less looking after the land.” Doodie said.

Doodie and his partner Selena are also involved in providing pastoral training courses at Mt Pierre, Louisa and Bohemia Stations with Management Service United (MSU).

Doodie says “I not only do cattle stuff, but I do self governance, teaching the roles and responsibilities of any community councils, to have proper meetings the Gudiya way, but we still sit down at the campfire and talk about our little Aboriginal meetings.”

If that doesn’t keep him busy, he also is a committee member of the Kimberley Regional Fire Management Project. He praises Jeremy Russell-Smith and says he is the backbone of this project, along with project officer Will Phillipiadis and GIS officer Nat Raisbeck-Brown.

“Fire Will and Nat really opened my eyes, not only from looking at the country from the ground, but also looking from the satellite...you can track your fires and the Fire Faxes really work well. It gives you time to get to the fire and put firebreaks.” Doodie said.

The Kurungal Fire Team works with Doodie to manage fire on Bohemia, burning early in the year to prevent dangerous late fires.

Doodie says, “Try and get early in before someone chucks a match later on in that off season like middle of the year, dry season hot-burn. One match can destroy the whole of your life, and your dollars and herd. Not only that birds pick up little twigs chuck them around the place they hunt for themselves as well. When there’s a fire it brings out the turkeys cause they usually come out for the grasshoppers, lizards and snakes.”

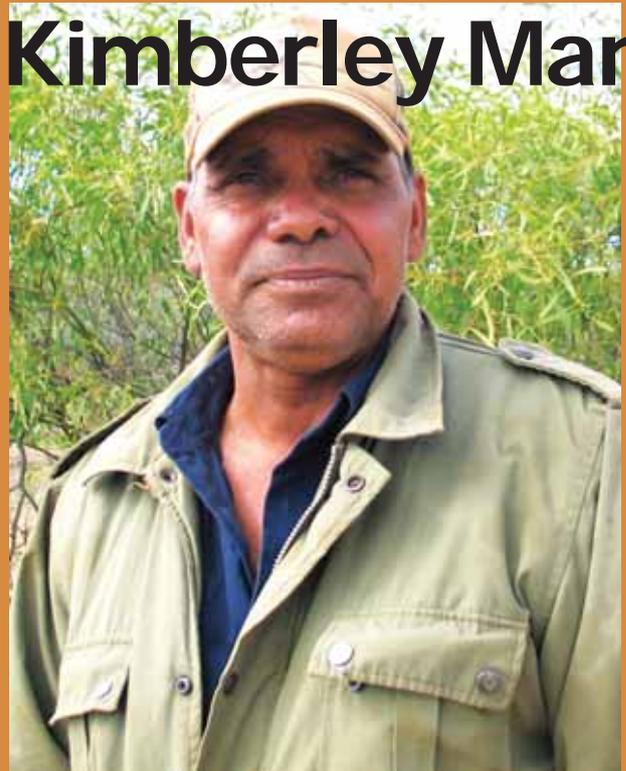
Doodie has worked with scientist on numerous projects and acknowledges that Indigenous Knowledge and western scientific knowledge can work side by side.

Doodie says “The scientist thought that the grass [fire] had a lot impact on country, little did they know a few trees out there too. Fire travels not only on the ground but travels at the tree level. There’s a few trees out there they call Cork Trees they got stuff like seeds so they can light, they can start a fire that was put to the scientist.”

We met Doodie while he was out on a back to country camp, accompanying elders and young kids, back to the land Doodie grew up on. Doodie says “The last time I’ve been through here was 30 years ago, so we’re getting access to the land through the fire project.”

**“It’s important to get old people back on the land [it’s also] good to get the kids out to country and having something to do.”**

# Kimberley Man



*Alan Lawford*

Doodie says “We visit country and teach these kids about hunting, fruits...animals and... types of tree’s you can use to make boomerangs. I was born in the bush, stock camp at that time we knew about language skin groups what our boundaries are for our language groups these kids don’t know, so that needs to be taught to them, how to respect the elders, respect your culture and I think you’ll be one hell of a leader one day.

**We connect with the land, we’ve got to connect our culture to the land and the stories and tell them [the kids] we’ve got stories out there.**

More or less lookin after country, lookin after animals, stories about our rockholes, dreamtime stories and with all these together with scientists involved I think we can make Kimberley a better place, [to] come back and visit.”

*Interview By Lisa Binge*



*Kimberley Regional Fire Team GIS Officer Nat Raisbeck-Brown and Project Officer Will Phillipiadis*

# Fire Team On Fire



*Terrance Nargoodah, Claude Carter, Johnny Nargoodah, Nathan Dolby, Alan (Doodie) Lawford, & Will Philippiadis*

*The Kimberley Regional Fire Management Project (KRFMP) was initiated in October 2000 and overseen by a large management committee including the Kimberley Land Council, Pastoralist & Graziers Association, Fire and Emergency Services Authority WA and Department of Conservation and Land Management and representatives of land owners and holders in the Kimberley, to name a few.*

There are currently two Aboriginal fire teams, incorporating Kurungal people (Kupartiya, Wangkatjungka, Ngumban communities) and the Nyikina/Mangala people (Jarlmadangah and Looma communities). The fire team promotes the use of traditional and cultural fire practices and the teams consist of young Aboriginal people being trained in fire management.

NAILSMA met the Kurungal fire team on the Kurungal walk. The fire team's Claude Carter from Bawoorrooga has been working with the fire team for one and half years, he said

**"You see a lot of different country that a lot of people never been to, it's pretty good going out to those places."**

Johnny Nargoodah from Jimbalakudunj community said the fire team "Mainly does firebreaks, you need to clear after the wet, which is good and when it's still green it doesn't burn real wild...it won't jump over the next boundary. Plus it makes it green for animals, kangaroo...bring in more grasshoppers for the turkeys. They (countrymen) know when to light it and when to go hunting and what time for goanna hunting and what time for turkey hunting...they don't just go and light a fire."

"White people reckon them just lighting wildfire, they lighting fire for animal...they don't light a big patch, I reckon just for hunting really." Johnny said.

The fire teams have undertaken training with Fire and Emergency Services Authority WA (FESA) and a Senior First Aid training course with St John's Ambulance (NT).

The fire team also completed contract burning on Bohemia Downs, Bulka, Christmas Creek, Mornington and Mt Pierre Stations, involving the use of both traditional and contemporary fire management practices. Nathan Dolby has just joined the Kurungal fire team and said they

**"Do a lot of travelling, to different places that you wouldn't see all the time, I went up to the ranges. I might think about taking this up as a career."**

Through the threatened species network, WWF the Nyikina/Mangala people are gathering information on the threatened Bilby and also feral animals.

The fire teams plan to undertake more training and create a business plan for contract burning and feral animal and weed control work for stations in the Kimberley.

*For more information contact Kimberley Regional Fire Management Project: Will Philippiadis on 08 9193 6550 or [email: will@kimberley-fire-project.com.au](mailto:will@kimberley-fire-project.com.au).*



*Nathan, Tom, Jason, Ishmal & Will on Kurungal Walk*

# Cane Toad Class

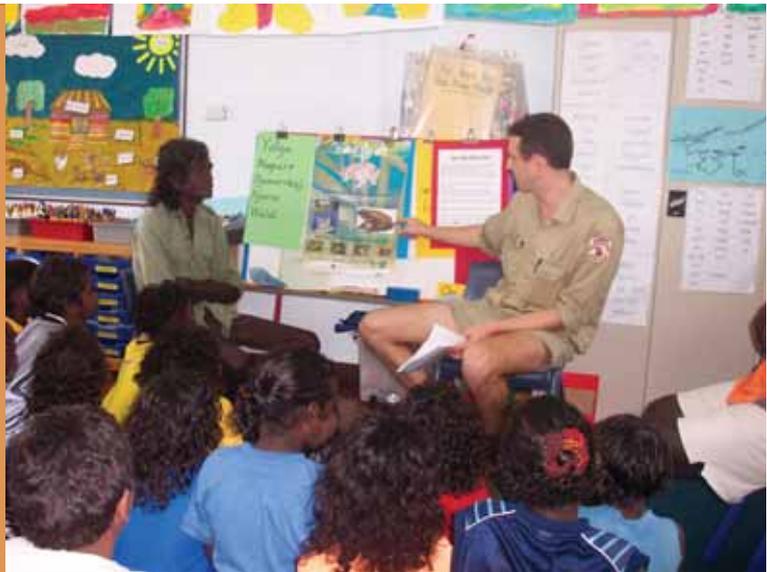


Photo: Bill Pantton

*Gumurru Marthakal Rangers and Parks and Wildlife recently completed an extensive education campaign at Galiwin'ku, Elcho Island to raise awareness of cane toads and the conservation significance of the islands.*

All classes at Galwinku's Sheperdson College were given bilingual presentations on identifying cane toads, the threat they pose to the island's wildlife and steps to help prevent their accidental introduction. Dave Rochford from Parks' Community Education section said that rarely had he come across a more enthusiastic group.

"I have been presenting these talks around Darwin and other mainland schools for some time, but the reality is there is little that can be done to prevent cane toads from spreading throughout. The Islands, like Elcho for example, present a real opportunity to have large areas cane toad free. Our talks were made all the better because local Yolngu rangers translated and presented their own culturally relevant examples to the Students."

During the week long exercise Marthakal and Parks rangers carried out mammal trapping and patrols searching for cane toads. "There had been several reports of cane toads on the island so we wanted to determine their extent. Night-time searches of the main roads, local swamps and the barge landing found no cane toads but many native frogs which could be mistaken as cane toads. Two reports have been verified however, one from a toad presumed washed up on the town beach and killed by local children and another killed on the road north of the community. These occurrences are worrying but we were not able to see or hear of any others. We hope the continuing efforts to raise community awareness of the issue will enable a quick response if other incursions occur," said Bill Pantton, Parks and Wildlife Officer. "We believe that the best protection from cane toads is to have high community awareness and skilled local people who can respond and communicate effectively with other Yolngu.

The visit to Galiwinku coincided with the signing of an agreement between the Marthakal Homelands Resource Centre and Parks and Wildlife.

*Bruce Lirrwa Ganamba and Dave Rochford at Sheperdson College.*

The agreement provides funds for the development of the Gumurru Marthakal Ranger Program. The program has been several months in the planning phase with workshops facilitated by the Northern Land Council's Caring for Country Unit and involving Traditional Owners and other government departments such as AQIS, and NT Fisheries. Ocsar Datjarranga, General Manager of Marthakal Homelands said the funds would be used to Top-Up CDEP payments and provide operational expenditure for the ranger program.

"We have been waiting a long time for something like this to happen and we welcome the support provided by Parks and Wildlife. The rangers are very keen and its great to see something so positive happening. The Rangers will continue their cane toad awareness activities with Outstation and community schools and participate in the on-going monitoring of translocated Quolls to nearby islands."

The trip has also provided some new insights to the Island's biodiversity. With permission from Traditional Owner, Alfred Wunbaya, the Marthakal rangers set mammal traps in Rainforest and Sand dune habitats near the Dhudupu Outstation. During the trapping several Water Rats and native Mice (*Melomys burtoni*) were captured. The water rats were unusual as they were well away from their preferred mangrove habitat and were inhabiting rainforest. These animals were brought back to the community and shown to elders and school children. The water rats drew great attention as they are large and noisy with a formidable set of front teeth. No records existed of the animal on Elcho Island and it was not known to the Traditional Owners. Alfred said that he knew of many native animals on the island but had never seen this one. Other people knew it from the mainland and called it "Guthin" but had not seen it for many years. Such experiences highlight the gains to be made through co-operative activities between Yolngu and Western Scientists.

*Story By Bill Pantton*

*In a landmark meeting in the Northern Territory, Indigenous land and sea managers from northern Australia came together recently to formally endorse an alliance of Australia's peak Aboriginal land councils to further the interests of Traditional Owners and their communities in the maintenance of land and sea country.*



Photo: Todd Condie

Peter Yu, traditional owner Billy Harney & Joe Morrison

## NAILSMA FORUM

Northern Australia Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) co-ordinator Joe Morrison said the recent meeting held at Innesvale Station, owned by the Menggen Aboriginal Land Trust, 145kms south-west of Katherine, represented a new alliance in the north of the country.

“There already exists over 30 ranger groups in the Northern Territory alone, focusing on local issues and this meeting is to develop an alliance in the formal sense, across state boundaries.”

Morrison said core members of the alliance the Northern Territory-based Northern Land Council (NLC), the Western Australia-based Kimberley Land Council (KLC), Queensland-based Carpentaria Land Council, the Cape York-based Balkanu Aboriginal Corporation would give Indigenous land and sea managers ‘on the ground’ a voice at a higher level when negotiating with State/Territory and Federal Governments, and industry groups.

NAILSMA representative on the Tropical Savannah CRC Board, Peter Yu, said it was a historic time in Australia in relation to the future use, management and access to Aboriginal-controlled land.

“It’s a new era, a watershed period, where there exists an opportunity to be better organised to assert traditional ownership and cultural knowledge,” Yu said.

Yu said that a lot of intellectual knowledge, and knowledge of cultural and land management practices, were being lost through the passing of too many Aboriginal Elders.

He said that the existing knowledge systems held by Elders and their families had to be recognised in financial terms.

“We have to repay the old people in real terms, not just in words and rhetoric,” Yu said.

An issue repeatedly raised throughout the two-day meeting was the lack of adequate wages for Indigenous rangers, who mostly receive CDEP wages, or ‘top-up’ payments, coupled with a lack of recognised qualifications.

Another issue discussed were recent reports of ‘overharvesting’ of dugong and sea turtles by Traditional Owners, which, delegates said, failed to acknowledge the impacts on numbers from coastal development, irrigation run-off, and strikes by leisure and commercial sea craft.



Tommy George



Djelk Women Rangers

Photo: Todd Condie

**“We are coming together to form one voice for land and sea management for Northern Australia”**

To clarify and quantify the issue, NAILSMA has secured \$3.8 million in funding to conduct dugong and turtle research across northern Australia.

Other issues also included fire management, intellectual property, weed and feral animal management, aquaculture, coastcare, eco-tourism, sustainable use of wildlife and bushfoods, transfer of traditional knowledge from Elders to young people, fostering leadership amongst young people and customary use of native resources.

NLCs ‘Caring for Country’ manager Paul Josif said the job of land councils was to provide ongoing support for ranger groups, and to initiate partnerships between NAILSMA and bodies such as Australian Quarantine, Australian Customs, universities, and the World Wide Fund for Nature.

“As an alliance NAILSMA will also look at accessing new streams of funding to protect Indigenous knowledge, and to help Indigenous peoples get back to country and make a living off their country, if that is their intention,” Josif said.

“We are also looking at issues such as increased Indigenous control over research funding, and increased Indigenous participation in research work.”

Josif said Aboriginal people were the biggest landowners in northern Australia, and by that fact alone should have the primary role in managing coastlines and inland areas.

Organisers said membership is still open, and were expecting the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) to come on board in the future.

NAILSMA is expecting to hold its next full meeting in the dry season next year, where it will present its board structure to stakeholders.

*Report by Todd Condie  
Courtesy of the Northern Land Council*

# Daluk (Womens) Conference



Photos: Kay Carvan

*In May, 150 women travelled from all over the Northern Territory to participate in the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Daluk (Women’s) Land Management Conference held at Nimirrili on the Blyth River near Raminering in Arnhemland.*

The Conference has become an important opportunity for women to acknowledge their achievements and share ideas and approaches to environmental and resource management issues.

The Djelk women rangers hosted the Conference, which provided a good opportunity for the women to show participants their ranger projects at Djinkarr and Maningrida township. Projects included turtle breeding for aquarium trade, processing *Morinda Citrifolia* as a health product and the revegetation of a barge landing.

Rangers from Wadeye, Minyerri, Borroloola, Bulman, Tennant Creek and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, to name a few, discussed their Ranger activities and raised many issues relating to caring for country work, relationships to land and culture. These included the importance of getting old people and young people on country, keeping culture strong, collecting bush food for aged care programs, proposed developments in the Daly River region, the lack of resources for ranger groups, commercial and recreational fishing and pressures on local resources, Aboriginal owned and operated tourism enterprises and the importance of commitment and improving skills and knowledge and the need for recognition of ranger roles and real wages. Junior Ranger programs are also being established to support young people’s participation and raise awareness of traditional and scientific land management tools.

Left: Group photo of conference participants  
Right: Chief Minister Clare Martin and minister Marion Scrymgour fly in for the day.



The troopies line up and wait for the buffalo to be delivered by helicopter

Emma demonstrated how to look for diseases and collect samples for testing in the laboratory. The meat was later butchered by the women and taken back to the camp kitchen.



Emma Watkins  
NAQS Vet  
demonstrates  
the post-mortem



Photo: Kay Carvan

Women participating in the conference

Emma Watkins, a Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) veterinary officer, performed post-mortem examination of two buffaloes, which had been shot and transported by helicopter to Djibalbal airstrip.

Workshops were also held on topics such as how to use the Northern Territory Weeds Management Tool Kit and the North Australian Fire Information (NAFI) site.



Photo: Robin Knox

Then the women take over

**For information on next years conference contact: Robin Knox, Women’s Land Management Coordinator, Northern Land Council Ph: (08) 89205198 or [robin.knox@nlc.org.au](mailto:robin.knox@nlc.org.au)**

# AQIS PROTECTS THE NORTH

*Ray Petherick comes from Wagait Finnis River and Fog Bay area, Woolungi is Rays home community. Ray has been the Aboriginal Liaison Officer for the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) as part of the North Australian Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) for 3 years.*



Photo: Courtesy of AQIS

AQIS Aboriginal Weeds Liaison Officer, Neville ..... and Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Ray Petherick.

AQIS works to prevent exotic plant and animal diseases, for example Siam weeds, screw worm flies, foot and mouth disease and others, from entering Australia through the North Australian coastline.

“We’re trying to keep these out, if these diseases and weeds come in here they could destroy our cattle industry the environment, tourism, Aboriginal bushtucker – so it’s very important for the whole of Australia.” Ray said.

Ray negotiates with landowners, to access Aboriginal land along the North Territory coastline, for AQIS to carry out it’s surveillance work. When he’s not doing that he’s shooting buffalo from helicopters and helping the AQIS vets to do post-mortems and blood collection on feral animals.

AQIS works with around 16, land management and community ranger groups around the north coast of the Northern Territory. Including groups from Timber Creek, Wadeye, Peppimenarti, Daly River, Bulgul, Woolayin, Oenpelli, Maningrida, Ramingining, Croker Island, Goulburn Island, Galuwinku on Elcho Island, Nhulunbuy, Groote Eylandt, Numbulwar, Ngukurr, Borroloola and three communities on the Tiwi Islands.

Ray and AQIS Weeds Aboriginal Liaison Officer Neville ..... recently visited the Lianhawirriyarra Sea Rangers, in Borroloola. Ray wanted to meet with the Lianhawirriyarra rangers to discuss their logistical capabilities to undertake surveillance work in the Gulf of Carpentaria as part of their day-to-day ranger work. The rangers attended an AQIS workshop a couple of years ago. “We trained them on how to post-mortem feral pigs and collect blood samples and look for exotic diseases.” Ray said. “They took us around and Neville was able to collect a few weeds around Macarthur River, from old boat landings. Then they took us down to Manangoora station where the Aboriginal station owners were concerned about feral pigs moving into the area. We were able to organise a big training workshop for that area and the Mabunji rangers were instrumental in organising that for us. Now they’re working with landowners and station owners in the Gulf region and they’ll be able to survey that area on AIQS and NAQS behalf and we’re really very happy about that. Lianhawirriyarra rangers are really moving ahead very quickly.” Ray said.

## Threatened Species Network



The Threatened Species Network’s (TSN) role is to offer advice and funding to groups that would like to do land management work that will help threatened species. Threatened species are those plants and animals that are disappearing across Australia, due to impacts from feral animals, weeds and changing fire patterns. A lot of these disappearing species can be found on Indigenous owned land (over 40 types of animals in the NT). In general Aboriginal land is in better condition than other areas, and that’s why these species can still be found there but have disappeared from other places.

Some projects that have been helping threatened species on Indigenous land and have received funding from the Threatened Species Network are:

- Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Centre Lianhawirriyarra Sea Ranger Unit – undertaking surveys for 5 small animal species that are found on the Sir Edward Pellew Islands near Borroloola. One of these species, the Carpentarian Antechinus, only lives on these islands and one other place in the world (near Mt Isa in Qld).

- Dhimurru Aboriginal Land Management – have done surveys for threatened animals, turtle work and also looking for a threatened species of Butterfly. The project also wrote up a management plan to look after the rainforest patches where the butterfly lives.
- Northern Land Council – working with Traditional Owners and the community to look after Northern Quolls that have been moved onto islands to protect them from Cane Toads.
- Kimberley Land Council – working with Traditional Owners and the community to survey and manage a threatened fish, the Freshwater Sawfish in the Fitzroy River.

### For more information on threatened species and funding/grants available contact:

TSN coordinator Jarrad Holmes on 08 89417554 or [jholmes@wwf.org.au](mailto:jholmes@wwf.org.au) / [www.wwf.org.au/tsn](http://www.wwf.org.au/tsn)  
The TSN Grants call for applications around April each year.

*The Threatened Species Network (TSN) is a joint project of the Australian Government’s Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) and the World Wide fund for Nature Australia (WWF).*

# Weeds on Aboriginal Land Workshop



*A successful 3-day weeds workshop hosted by Albert Myoung and the Malak Malak people from Wooliana Community on the Daly River was held from the 2-4<sup>th</sup> November 2004.*

The workshop brought together Aboriginal Rangers groups in the Top End, in particular those working as part of the Top End Aboriginal Land Management and Employment Strategy (TEALMES), and other agencies working to manage weeds on Aboriginal Lands.

Forty-five people came from all over the Top End including Rangers from Wooliana, Acacia Gap, Timber Creek, Wadeye, Wudikapildiyerr, Gunbalanya and Peppimenarti. Representatives from Natural Heritage Trust, the Indigenous Land Corporation, Tropical Savannas CRC, Northern Land Council, DIPE Weeds Branch, DIPE Bushfires Council and Batchelor Institute also attended the workshop.

Albert Myoung- the senior Ranger of the Malak Malak Land Management Team, welcomed everyone, opening the workshop. Albert is a mentor to other Rangers as he has worked on mimosa for over 20 years and has stopped it from taking over his country.

Andrew Calma, an experienced senior ranger from Acacia Gap Land Management Team, talked about the progress of contract work controlling mimosa on the Adelaide River. On the second day Andrew demonstrated herbicide safety and mixing which was particularly useful to the Yantjarrwu Rangers from Wudikapildiyerr who are just starting out.

Neville Gulay Gulay (AQIS) and Michael Schmid (NT Government's Weeds Branch) spoke on the importance of early intervention when a new weed is discovered. Legal obligations under the Weeds Management Act (2001) were also discussed. Michael Storrs (Caring for Country Unit at the Northern Land Council) talked about the current program and future opportunities in land management. Sean Hawkins from Batchelor Institute discussed training opportunities in Land Management and Larry Johns, the Aboriginal weeds officer from Timber Creek, spoke of his life working with weeds and enterprise opportunities in the VRD.

On the final day we went on a field trip to the nearby Shark Swamp and Red Lily to see the work that the Malak Malak Land Management Team had been doing to reduce the extent and density of mimosa.

As a practical activity the rangers developed and implemented a Weed Management Plan for Brown's Creek (Diggireyett) campground, near Daly River.

The plan assessed the overall situation (i.e. how weeds interacted with the land), weed priorities were identified; methodology for action determined and future monitoring was discussed.

Specimens of all the plants in the area were collected for identification and divided into introduced and native. Nine introduced species were identified with three declared noxious weeds (Parkinsonia, Noogoora Burr and Coffee Senna) and Poinciana- a naturalised tree along the Daly River. The Parkinsonia was treated with herbicide,

it was decided to leave the Noogoora Burr until after wet and the Coffee Senna was pulled out by hand. Large Poincianas have value as shade for the campers so were left whilst smaller ones were cut down and herbicide applied to their stump.

The workshop allowed the rangers to network and share information as well as gain a better understanding of weeds occurring on their country. It was also a great opportunity to meet and talk with other agencies working to manage weeds on Aboriginal Lands.

Many ranger groups are interested in developing enterprises to generate further income to support future work. Currently, the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) funds ranger groups working under the TEALMES strategy to undertake land management, however core government funding will be essential for this work to continue in the future.

*Story by Mark Gardener, Tropical Savannas CRC*



*Left: Kenny Ah Fat (senior ranger) from Wudikapildiyerr Right: Patrick Banjo (Wooliana)*



*Larry Johns Weeds Officer, Timber Creek*

*Eric and David at the weeds workshop*

*All Photos: Mark Gardener*



Alfie Johnny, Roger Mick, Marian Joe and April Peter at the Mornington Island workshop.

# GULF RANGER PLANS

*Traditional owners continue have a strong voice in natural resource management processes in the Southern Gulf of Carpentaria.*

Traditional owners from Garawa, Gangalidda, Waanyi, Kurtijar, Lardil and Yangkaal came together to plan for future land and sea management units and ranger groups, also to talk about other projects they want to be involved in across the Southern Gulf of Carpentaria.

The Envirofund workshop was organised by the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (CLCAC) based in Burketown, with traditional owners from surrounding tribal groups. Murrundoo Yanner chaired the workshop while Paul Memmott facilitated the discussion. The workshop allowed traditional owners to set their priorities for progressing their interests in land and sea management and for tribal groups to exchange ideas and experiences. It was also an opportunity to hear about other projects in the Southern Gulf.

Traditional land owning groups in the Gulf have been waiting a long time for ranger groups and land management units to be established so they can have the resources to get on with looking after country. Developing a land and sea centre and employment for local rangers where agreed to be the highest priority. Traditional owners would like to see training delivered within communities by training providers with input from other experienced Aboriginal rangers.



Wunun (Mornington Island) talking about fire management with Wayne Davis (NAILSMA)

A steering committee of traditional owners, originally set-up through Native Title will overlook the ranger programs. Wayne Wunun Williams, traditional owner from North East Mornington Island (Murinyanda) said

**“We’ve been trying for a long time to get things going because we’re under pressure and**

**we really want to look after our land for our children and our children’s children.”**

The call for rangers groups is also a result of increased pressures on natural resources in the area caused by increased tourism, commercial and recreational fishing.

Wunun explained that ranger work could involve checking on fishing boats that go up the river. “They leave their nets overnight and when the tides go out the turtles and dugong get caught in the nets...I found a lot of boats from trawlers catching crab in my country, we chased them out, cause they’re overfishing the place.”

Young people on the island would also like to be involved in future ranger programs. Grayson Williams, said “I like to see a start for the ranger business, for myself and other young local fellas..go out and see different communities, different areas to see how they work so we can get ideas off them to help us with our goals and our aims for the future. We got to come together and share ideas as Aboriginal people. If we come together and share our ideas than we’ll be more recognised.”

NAILSMA was invited to attend along with representatives from Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation, Southern Gulf Catchments Inc, National Oceans Office, WWF and Coastcare. Each organisation gave a brief background to their organisation and projects that are about to start – which led to greater discussion in smaller groups with traditional owners voicing what they wanted out of the projects for the southern gulf.

In smaller groups people talked about Marine Parks, through the Northern Marine Planning process, the National Oceans Office will be working with TO’s to identify the conservation needs for sea country. Also discussed was the management of tourists, fire management, turtle and dugong (reviving old hunting ways, agreements with fishers), cross-cultural exchange and researching marine plants and animals. (cont next page...)



Murrundoo Yanner (CLCAC) talks with Paul Woodhouse (SGC)



Brendan Moon reports back to the workshop group

Photos: NAILSMA



Grayson Williams

Wunun sees ranger jobs playing an important part in getting the next generation of children to be caretakers for their country.

"I like to have peace and quiet in my country and be able to help people (white people and Aboriginal people) when they come to our community so we can show them our custom and way of life ... it's important for us and if it's important for us than it's important for the whole of Australia and all Indigenous people from this country." Wunun said

Murrundoo Yanner of CLCAC said "Aboriginal people are the safest long-term investment, which must be realised through funding (land management) groups on the ground. They are also the only people not impacting or exploiting the Gulf."



## Borrooloola first to track Flatback Turtles



Right: Damien Pracy & Dickie Dixon tagging a flatback

Above: Flatback Hatchling

*The Lianthawirriyarra Sea Ranger Unit, World Wide Fund for Nature, NT Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Environment and Heritage, and WildlifeLink (Tony G. Lisette Lewis Foundation) have formed a partnership to undertake a Flatback turtle tracking project on West Island, south-west Gulf of Carpentaria.*

Satellite transmitters have been attached to the turtles to monitor their interesting movements and their migration route from the nesting beach. The three turtles involved were named "Wundunyuka", by the school and "Karrubu" the Borrooloola community. The third turtle "Terrisita" was named by the traditional owners of West Island. The Lianthawirriyarra Sea Ranger Unit at Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Association are very excited about the response from the Borrooloola community to the Flatback turtle tracking project. A presentation given by Rangers Richard Dixon and Damien Pracy was popular with the students at the Borrooloola Community Education Centre.



Community members get involved

During the last school holidays, the turtle tracking team including Dr Scott Whiting (WWF) and West Island traditional owners and their families and Borrooloola community members, met each turtle that came to nest on the beach each night.

Over the 10-day period, over 30 people camped on West Island to join in the turtle research project, to watch turtles nesting, and assist with the attachment of the 3 transmitters.

One of the most captivating sights for the group was to watch the Flatbacks and the delicate manner with which they used their back flippers to dig their egg chambers before laying their eggs. Some were lucky enough to hold hatchling turtles before they were released to the sea.

Each night, the team would walk along the beach into the early hours of the morning, looking for fresh turtle tracks and nesting turtles. After waiting patiently for each turtle to finish nesting, the Rangers measured the turtle shell or carapace, and tagged each front flipper with a metal tag. By recording these measurements, the research team can study how the turtles grow over the years and the tags help to tell how often the turtles nest.

The Borrooloola tracking study is very unique. Flatback turtles only occur in Australia and Terrisita, Wundunyuka and Karrubu are the first Flatback turtles to be tracked in northern Australia. Little is known about Flatback turtles, and where their feeding areas are. Studies done on Green turtles have shown they nest in one area and migrate thousands of kilometres to another area to feed. In the past few years Green turtles have also been found feeding around the islands off Borrooloola (Sir Edward Pellew Islands) they had traveled from their nesting area, Raine Island, northern Great Barrier Reef in Queensland.

*Story By Felicity Chapman*

If you would like more information, contact:  
Lianthawirriyarra Sea Ranger Unit

Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Association  
Felicity Chapman  
0427 970 834

[felicity.chapman@mabunji.com.au](mailto:felicity.chapman@mabunji.com.au)

*To check the turtles progress visit [www.seaturtle.org](http://www.seaturtle.org)*

*Click on 'tracking' icon on the top menu bar  
Select 'Flatback turtles-Gulf of Carpentaria-Australia'*

*Click on Terrisita, Wundunyuka or Karrubu for individual tracking maps.*



Flatback Turtle with transmitter attached

# Chuula Going Strong



**The Kaanju Ngaachi homelands cover 470 000 hectares, stretching over the Wenlock and Pascoe Rivers in central Cape York Peninsula. The biodiversity of Kaanju homelands supports many**

**species of fish, birds, insects, plants and animals, including rare and threatened species including the North Eastern Tree Kangaroo.**

The Wenlock River has great cultural importance to Kaanju Pama (Aboriginal people) and under Kaanju law Pama are required to look after Ngaachi (country) and use it in a sustainable way, then in return country looks after people.

During colonisation and under official removals and assimilation policies of government many Kaanju people were taken forcibly from their traditional homelands to either Lockhart River Mission in the east or Cowal Creek Mission in the north of Cape York Peninsula, or more than 800 kilometres to the south to Yarrabah mission and Palm Island. A number of people walked home from the missions, but were sent back into incarceration. In the late 1980s, Kaanju people returned to their homelands permanently to reaffirm their position as primary land managers and to re-establish 'proper' Kaanju governance.

The Kaanju community of Chuulangun or Chuula (Frisled-neck Lizard Story) was re-established with limited resources and support from government. In the early years people used bush timber and donated corrugated iron to build sheds for houses, cooked over fires and used pit-toilets. Kaanju people initially struggled to re-occupy their traditional lands, but can now be proud of their achievements and enjoy being on country with family. The community



*The Home Office*

now has more permanent infrastructure and adequate communication services including phone, Internet and satellite TV and radio.

Chuulangun is occupied throughout the year, although the wet season makes it difficult for families to stay when the roads are cut-off by a number of flooded rivers and creeks. During the wet, access to food, mail and emergency services becomes difficult but despite this there are people whose commitment is strong and continue to live on homelands even during the wet.

During the dry season, a number of Kaanju families visit Chuula however it is difficult for some people to make a permanent commitment to living on homelands as government continues to focus funding for housing and essential



*Chuula Lagoon*

services such as education and health in the centralised communities. Further, outside influences, such as alcohol and 'town life', are still strong for some people. These are two of the major challenges facing Chuulangun – the focus of government on centralisation and the commitment of the people to move away from towns and live permanently on homelands.

The Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation was established in 2002 to represent the interests of Kaanju people on land management issues and to facilitate sustainable homelands and economic development. The Corporation was formed from the grassroots level on homelands and with the family-based group or clan as the basis for membership and governance. The corporation's founding principle is "One must live on their particular homeland in order to have say in its management." (See Kaanju website). David Claudie is a Kaanju traditional owner and Chair of the Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation and said "Government can support homelands development by shifting the focus of funding strategically from centralised communities to homelands, by acknowledging the many benefits derived from living on homelands, by acknowledging their role in forcibly removing people from homelands and their obligation to support and fund appropriately the permanent movement of Aboriginal people back to homelands."

By reoccupying homelands Kaanju are demonstrating the reaffirmation of Kaanju land and resource management and Kaanju governance. The results of permanent communities on homelands are self-reliance, self-sufficiency and autonomy of Kaanju people. Kaanju want to show other Aboriginal people what can be achieved from the grassroots level from homelands, and to be an example and a springboard for other Aboriginal groups wanting to re-establish themselves permanently on homelands.



*Flooded Wenlock River*

All photos: www.kaanjunguachi.com.au



*The meeting & working shed*

Kaanju people continually inform the government and public about the need for support and the importance of relationships to homelands through the Kaanju web site;

letters, emails and telephone calls to Ministers, government agencies, bureaucrats, academics; via conference papers, academic publications, reports and plans; word-of-mouth (i.e. in the community and with neighbouring landholders on Kaanju homelands and other traditional owners) and through strategically placed signage on homelands.

Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation is localised and based on Kaanju governance structures. The corporation's governing committee too is indigenous and the leaders and decision-makers under Kaanju law and custom form this committee. The executive and governing committee are elected every year and the committee meets regularly to consider project proposals and general community development issues.

The corporation's guiding objectives include the development of homeland economic enterprises, the development of homeland-based projects, education and training that will build the self-esteem of Kaanju people, promotion of improvements in the health, economic, social and spiritual well-being of Kaanju people, and encouraging others to return to homelands and be self-reliant.

Current projects underway include the completion of the community's airstrip; funds are being sought from the Governments Regional Partnerships Program in partnership with Rural Airstrip Development Program for commencement of the project in 2005. Chuula also wants to build a multi-purpose centre, but is having difficulties finding the right program to fund the project.

David said "We are striving for the development of further housing at Chuula to accommodate the community's growing needs. With the abolishment of ATSIC we are yet to see whether the new system for funding will be able to adequately accommodate our housing and infrastructure needs, i.e. cost efficient and environmentally appropriate housing. A major obstacle for us is that government programs continue to focus funding for housing development in centralised communities and towns thereby keeping our people in town."

In addition the development of a renewable power system that will deliver the community's power needs has been a battle. The hard work has finally paid off and a solar power system is currently being set up at Chuula with assistance from the Bushlight program.

David said "This project has been an important achievement for the Chuula community considering our hard work lobbying over several years for funding and support for a renewable energy system for the community. Since the reestablishment of the community in the late 1980s we have relied on petrol or diesel run generators that are noisy, and very costly due to the fuel and maintenance required."

The community created the *Kaanju Homelands Land and Resource Management Framework*, which covers all aspects of project coordination and Kaanju land and resource management goals.

Under this framework the community is currently seeking funds for a number of projects including infrastructure development (e.g. housing programme, airstrip and access) as well as a number of land and resource management projects (e.g. weed management plan, fire management, essential oils and plant extracts).

One of the strategies outlined in the framework is the establishment of an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) over Kaanju homelands. Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation's application to the Commonwealth government's IPA program was approved and an agreement has been signed with the Department of Environment and Heritage. The Chuula community are currently working on a Plan of Management for the area of Kaanju homelands to be investigated for IPA establishment.

David said "Our application to the IPA program has been approved and we are currently working on a Plan of Management for the area of our homelands to be considered for IPA establishment. This project also involves on-ground land management activities including the protection of significant sites, camp site establishment and weed and feral animal control.

Our Chuulangun campgrounds project has also been progressed with funding approved under the Queensland Department of State Development and Innovation's indigenous Business Development Grants Scheme. In the coming dry season we will be establishing serviced campgrounds with toilet facilities on the upper Wenlock River to accommodate passing tourists as well as organised tour groups and 'tag-a-long' tours. This project is only the start of the Chuulangun indigenous Cultural Eco-Tourism Venture. In coming years we will be developing 'spin-off' products, such as bush-walks, bird-watching and campfire yarns."

The corporation has also secured funding under the Natural Heritage Trusts Envirofund. The project 'Rehabilitation of Riverine Environments on the upper Wenlock River' will target the revegetation of a degraded section of the river with a rare species of Acacia. The 12-month project will commence in January 2005.

Under the land and resource management framework Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation has also formed partnerships with individuals and organisations including the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), the Tropical Savannas Management Cooperative Research Centre and more. David was the Inaugural CAEPR Indigenous Visiting Fellow in 2003. There were a number of outcomes of this fellowship, including the publication of a CAEPR Discussion Paper (available for download from the CAEPR website), the development of important project collaborations and the establishment of valuable networks with other Indigenous groups.

David says, "If Australia is to move ahead, if Aboriginal people are to move ahead, if the land and resources of Australia are to be sustainable for present and future generations of Australians, both Indigenous and non-

Indigenous, the government has to recognise appropriately the sovereignty of Aboriginal people. Government must recognise Indigenous sovereignty in the land and resources, and Indigenous governance and cosmology that underlie our land and resource management and our kinship system. Importantly, they must recognise that Indigenous governance and cosmology are as relevant today as in the past. Government in Australia must work with Aboriginal people particularly concerned with land and resource management on homelands. They must recognise the different forms of Aboriginal governing bodies, in particular homelands-based organisations, and that funding and support of such organisations results in far better benefits all around including sustainable land and resource management, and improvement in health, social, economic and spiritual well-being.”

Kaanju show that commitment to Ngaachi and commitment to proper ‘Indigenous’ governance can achieve a lot in terms of self-determination and reaffirmation of land and resource management on homelands.

*All information was accessed from [www.kaanjungaachi.com.au](http://www.kaanjungaachi.com.au) and thanks to David Claudie for his contributions.*

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# KANTRI LAIF

## ISSUE 2 !!!

Coming soon.....

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# Finding the Footprints

Your work on country is leaving footprints.

*A Participatory evaluation framework for the Aboriginal ranger programs in the Top End. Many people here in the Northern Territory and in other parts of Australia have been paying particular attention to how Aboriginal people here care for their country.*

Many know about the Caring for Country Unit at the Northern land Council (NLC) and the associated Aboriginal community ranger groups who have been working out bush to make country healthy.

Certainly, events in the past ten years show that ranger groups are popular among communities and more new groups are forming everyday. So people in government and those working in community development have started asking questions. What are these community ranger groups? Why is there such enthusiasm about these groups? How do they operate? What impact have they been having on country and the wellbeing of Aboriginal communities out bush? All these are very important questions but few answers are available.

Very little has been written about the community ranger groups. The research that is available now tells only part but no where near the whole story. It is hard to tell stories that ranger groups will read and say yes this is our story, we see what we do in that story, you have told it just as we would have told it.

We want to look for these footprints with you and we want you to explain them, to show where in your management these footprints come out clear and where they sometimes are much harder to see and to read. We plan to visit women’s and men’s ranger groups. We also plan to visit and talk to the traditional owners and talk to them about managing country, listen to their stories and find out about their hopes and expectations for the future.

If we tell the caring for country story well, we hope that others especially those government will see the opportunities and support your efforts to care for country.

Our group will start work in January 2005 and finish in December 2006. To be able to do this work we have received money and other kinds of support from CSIRO, the NLC the Key Centre for Tropical Wildlife Management at Charles Darwin University and the Northern Territory Innovation Fund of the Northern Territory Government.

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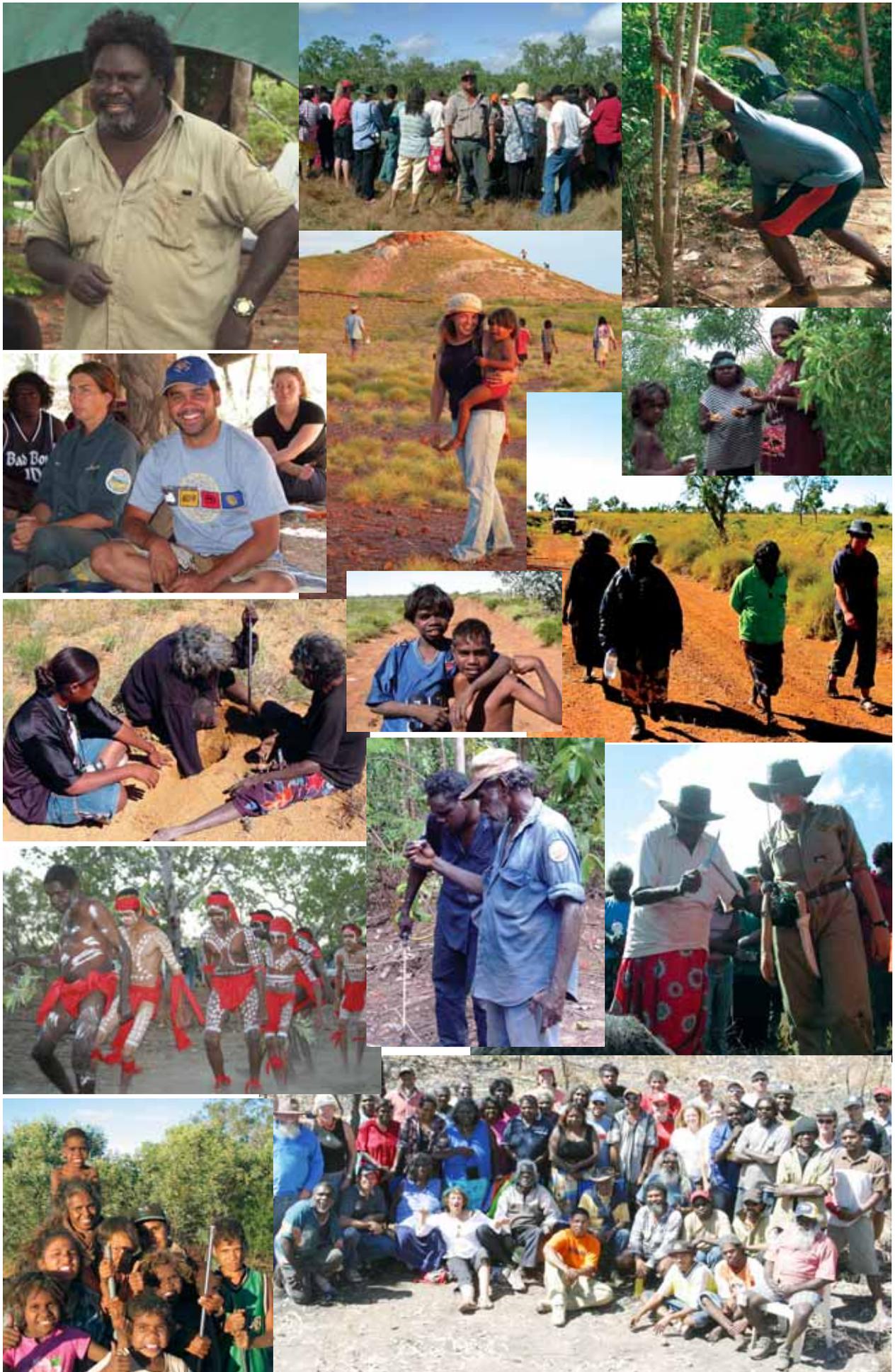
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*By Bev Sithole and Wayne Barbour*

# On country people

See last page for details on where to send your photos



Photos: Todd Condie, Mark Gardener, Kylie Pursche, Lisa Binge, Ray Petherick.

## **Disclaimer**

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