

# How knowledge networks can improve collaborative governance across wet tropics country

November 2014 Research towards Policy Brief

Rainforest Aboriginal peoples work with partners to manage their traditional estates across multiple tenures in wet tropics country according to their own law and culture. A three and a half year co-research project involving Traditional Owners, social scientists, spatial analysts, government and non-government organisations investigated the health of these partnerships (Figure 1).

## Key findings

- Traditional Owners move at different rates through similar stages on the journey to collaborative governance:
  - pre-native title determination, organising, negotiating.
  - post-determination, reconnecting with country.
  - country as the basis of economic, cultural and social development.
- Traditional Owner groups are at different places and using different vehicles on this journey:
  - some groups have secured rights over country, are moving ahead with their own vision and businesses.
  - others are still seeking recognition of native title and other ways to access their country.
- government, community and industry partners are at different places on this journey:
  - some have collaborated with groups as they reconnect with country and develop their own Indigenous vision and plans.
  - others have only experienced adversarial native title negotiations.
- knowledge networks provide flexible and diverse ways for people working on similar issues to share experiences and help one-another for example through dialogues, workshops, websites and social media.
- knowledge networks, sometimes called innovation platforms, are widely used to assist with equitable access to information and understanding for innovations such as collaborative governance of wet tropics country (see Further Reading on page 2 for examples).

## Key opportunities

Opportunities were identified for a knowledge network to support:

- established Aboriginal businesses and Native Title Corporations to share:
  - stages in the journey.
  - quality governance and different organisational structures for business.

**“Its a multi-lane highway with multiple destinations, and different vehicles, buses, mini-vans and motorbikes.”**

*Traditional Owner*

**“We need something like a brokering hub, one-stop shop or T-intersection where the roads meet and we can share learnings.”**

*Traditional Owner*



Girringun knowledge-sharing.  
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- business development for micro and small enterprises.
- marketing and communication.
- Indigenous Protected Area managers and those with Ranger groups to share:
  - Indigenous-driven planning and strategic visioning.
  - relationship building.
  - mediation and conflict resolution.
- research organisations, natural resource managers, and heritage protection agencies to share:
  - practicing free prior and informed consent.
  - preparing funding applications and acquittals.
  - upskilling the broader community about Aboriginal roles on wet tropics country.
- Rainforest Aboriginal networks and other groups involved with the many aspects of partnerships on wet tropics country:
  - genealogies, kinship and cultural mapping systems.
  - family groups knowledge of story and culture.

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**Figure 1** Health of different parts of collaborative governance on a scale from excellent to very sick, based on participatory evaluation through four workshops. Both graphs below show the health of structures, processes and results. The left graph shows the 6 parts that make **Rainforest Aboriginal People Keeping Strong**. The right graph shows the 7 parts that make up **Keeping Engagement Strong**. The cross hatching on the bars refers to the four different workshops.

**Good health (dark green and green)** indicates that people have knowledge to share with others, whereas **poor health (orange and red)** indicates where people may benefit from gaining knowledge.



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**“Leadership training by Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples’ Alliance was very useful, now we need workshops to build leadership at the local level.”**

*Traditional Owner*

## Co-research team



**“We’ve set Djunbunji with a vision, this hub could actually help traditional owners who have native title determinations, talk about our experiences, not doing their business, it’s more about enhancing capacity.”**

*Traditional Owner*

## Further reading

See <http://www.nerptropical.edu.au/project/indigenous-peoples-and-protected-areas>

- ▶ Hill, R., P. L. Pert, K. Maclean, T. Bauman, E. Bock, A. P. Dale, M. Flynn, A. Joyce, S. McDermott, V. Mundraby, P. Rist, B. Rampton, J. Schmider, L. D. Talbot, and L. Tawake. 2014. Indigenous peoples and biodiversity protection in wet tropics country: from co-management to collaborative governance. Volume 1 interim policy-relevant findings. Volume 2 participatory evaluation results. Report to the National Environmental Research Program. Reef and Rainforest Research Centre Ltd, Cairns Online: <http://www.nerptropical.edu.au/publication/project-121-technical-report-indigenous-peoples-and-biodiversity-protection-wet-tropics>.
  - ▶ Pert PL, Hill R, Maclean K, Dale A, Rist P, Talbot LD, Tawake L, and Schmider J (2014 accepted) Mapping cultural ecosystem services with Rainforest Aboriginal peoples: integrating biocultural diversity, governance and social variation. Ecosystem Services.
  - ▶ RAPA (2013) Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples. Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples’ Alliance, Cairns.
- Examples of knowledge networks:
- TransForum (<http://www.transforum.nl/en/>) is using knowledge, networks and resources to transform Dutch agriculture.
  - Future Earth (<http://www.futureearth.org/>) is supporting co-production of sustainability-oriented knowledge through development of networks of exchange and mutual learning
  - Oneida County (<http://oneida.uwex.edu/>) connects people with the University of Wisconsin, to share knowledge and engaging with them in transforming lives and communities