

How would value-adding to Indigenous Protected Areas improve management of wet tropics country?

November 2014 Research towards Policy Brief

An **Indigenous Protected Area** (IPAs) is declared through an agreement between **Indigenous** Australians and the Australian Government to manage an area for conservation and community benefits, based on a Management Plan. The Australian Government funds IPA planning and management, including Ranger groups to work on the ground. Three IPAs with 4 Ranger groups are currently operational across the wet tropics region, and another 2 Ranger groups are supported by the Queensland Government (Figure 1). The contributions of these IPAs and Ranger groups to management were investigated through a three and a half year co-research project involving Rainforest Aboriginal people, social scientists, spatial analysts, government and non-government organisations.

“IPAs is the ‘what’, Rangers is the ‘how’ ...IPA, it’s deadly, a good thing, a really good thing, it translates to self-determination.”

Traditional Owner

Key findings

The co-research identified that IPAs:

- have increased steadily from 2008 to 2014 but do not yet encompass all of wet tropics country.
- enhance the recognition of Indigenous knowledge and values.
- are led by Traditional Owners based on their cultural values and customary institutions for governance to:
 - provide a strategic vision for managing country and the means to implement this vision through Rangers and partnerships.
 - protect natural and cultural values.
 - deliver multiple social, economic and cultural benefits.
 - build capability underpinned by the security of multi-year funding agreements with the Australian Government.
- are multi-tenure in the wet tropic, declared across national parks, leases, reserves and private land, with the consent of the relevant owners.
- bring the partners working across these different tenures ‘around the table’, often for the first time, with Traditional Owners driving the agenda through:
 - partnerships that build trusting relationships and break down jurisdictional boundaries.
 - enabling Traditional Owners to deliver land management, disaster response and educational services that are valued by the whole community.
- are flexible and can respond to changes that affect country, including climate change, habitat loss and fragmentation, and invasive species.



Rainforest Aboriginal women protecting country.
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Key opportunities

Opportunities to value-add to IPAS:

- expand the area of IPAs to encompass all the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.
- provide higher-level and more focused protection for the nationally-significant Indigenous Cultural Values and the globally-significant natural World Heritage Outstanding Universal

“In IPAs we have something that can be adapted, it evolves.”

Traditional Owner

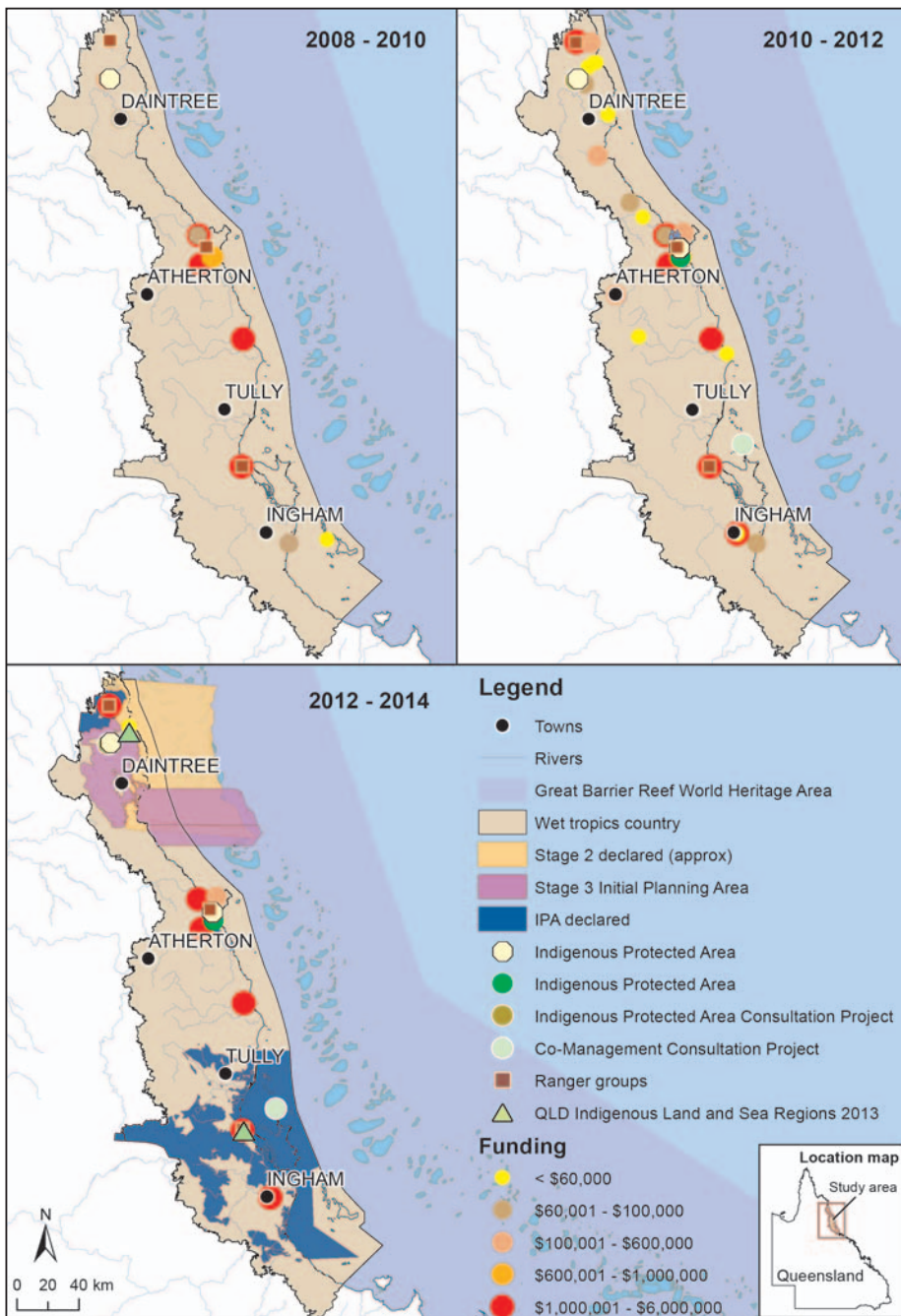
Values to deliver greater multiple benefits.

- provide commensurately more resources for IPAs that provide higher-level protection.
- delegate and devolve State and Australian on-ground responsibilities for wet tropics country to IPA managers, including fire and pest management.
- develop an Australian and Queensland Government coordinated co-investment framework for IPAs and Rangers.
- extend the reach of IPAs to guide operational activity in parks, inform other planning instruments and drive service delivery to maximise benefits from IPAs.



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Figure 1 The growth of Indigenous Protected Areas, Rangers and funded projects 2008 through 2014.



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Co-research team



Further reading

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

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