



National Environmental
Research Program

TROPICAL ECOSYSTEMS *hub*

NERP Tropical Ecosystems Hub Conference 2013

**Tuesday 7 May 1100-1230
Forum Synopsis**

Implementing the NERP TE Hub Indigenous Engagement Strategy: building effective Indigenous-Science partnerships for bio-cultural diversity conservation

Convener: Prof Helene Marsh
Professor of Environmental Science, James Cook University



Australian Government

**Department of Sustainability, Environment,
Water, Population and Communities**

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The Traditional Owners of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, the Great Barrier Reef region, and Torres Strait are custodians of lands and waters of globally significant biodiversity value. Traditional Owners see caring for their country as an integral to living on their homelands. They have expressed their customary responsibilities for their country via the establishment of dedicated natural and cultural resource management organisations including community ranger groups, and strategic and operational planning. The management of biodiversity is a key task for these Indigenous networks.

Australian governments and others are increasingly investing in environmental and cultural grants and related programs including Working on Country and Indigenous Protected Areas to provide better caring for country alongside meaningful lifestyle, education, training and employment opportunities for Indigenous communities. The capacity and influence of Traditional Owner networks to protect and conserve biodiversity, supported by such measures, far surpasses that of non-Indigenous organisations, especially in the remote regions of northern Australia.

Partnerships between Indigenous agencies and scientists /land and sea managers can improve, and enhance biodiversity outcomes by utilizing the expertise and knowledge of both groups. Merging the two knowledge systems and world views requires respectful, principled, collaborative and integrative approaches that appreciate Indigenous knowledges alongside scientific techniques, and support the capacity of Indigenous communities to again manage their traditional estates. In contemporary times, this means managing country as bio-cultural environments using the knowledge and logistical capacity of Indigenous communities in conjunction with scientific techniques, and other inputs, e.g. the local knowledges of other non-Indigenous networks.

The NERP TE Hub is focused on the sustainable management of environmental assets in northern Queensland including the Great Barrier Reef, the Wet Tropics Rainforests and the Torres Strait. These natural areas are strongly connected to the region's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples. There are an identified 20 Traditional Owner Groups, 120 clans and 6 language groups within the Wet Tropics region alone (Wet Tropics Management Authority, 2012). There are 40 Traditional Owner groups identified within the Great Barrier Reef region (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, 2012). The Torres Strait has 20 Traditional Owner groups (19 Torres Strait Islander Corporations, and one Aboriginal Native title Corporation). Indigenous ecological knowledge must be a fundamental pillar for the sustainable environmental management of the natural resources of north Queensland.

The NERP TE Hub seeks to better recognise the importance of Indigenous engagement in the understanding and management of north Queensland's natural assets. The overall goal of the Hub's incoming Indigenous Engagement Strategy and Implementation Plan is to ensure a meaningful two-way engagement strategy that recognises and respects the interests, rights and Indigenous ecological knowledge of Traditional Owners in lands, waters and sea country and be developed through appropriate working partnerships between the Hub's networks and Traditional Owner groups.

This workshop seeks to illustrate how NERP scientists are recognising and respecting Traditional Owner relationships and knowledge and looking to further undertake co-research with Traditional Owners. The workshop will commence with an introduction to the context for Indigenous co-research in our region, followed by a presentation of the first principles of such co-research from Traditional Owner representatives,

and the NERP TE Indigenous Engagement Strategy and Implementation Plan. The implementation of these principles will be illustrated using three case studies. Each case study will be viewed from the perspective of a Traditional Owner and NERP scientist and will focus on a different phase of the partnership process and a different geographic region: development (GBR), knowledge sharing (Torres Strait) and co-management (Wet Tropics).

The workshop will be introduced by the co-chairs Melissa George and Helene Marsh.

- A context for Indigenous co-research in our region. Helene Marsh
- Indigenous Bio-Cultural Engagement: Principles, Practice and Protocols. Joann Schmider, Phil Rist, Melissa George, Leah Talbot and Gerry Turpin
- NERP TE Hub Indigenous Engagement Strategy and Implementation Plan for 2013-2014, including the Research Guidelines in the Torres Strait: what does this document mean for future research under the NERP TE Hub? Melissa George, Leah Talbot and Frank Loban
- Case Study – Development (GBR)
Phil Rist and Helen Penrose will describe the development of the burgeoning co-research partnership to monitor dolphins and dugongs in Girringun sea country.
- Case Study – Knowledge Sharing (Torres Strait)
Frank Loban and Mark Hamann will illustrate how their teams are working together to inform Torres Strait communities of the outcomes of NERP research on turtles and dugongs.
- Case Study – Co-management (Wet Tropics)
Petina Pert (CSIRO) and Joann Schmider (RAPA) will outline this multi-partner co-research project investigating the potential of collaborative models and tools including IPAs to engage Indigenous values and world views, and to identify the conditions under which these arrangements lead to effective joint management of country.
- Co-Chair Melissa George will draw together the insights from a Traditional Owner point of view and together with Co-Chair Helene Marsh introduce the Focus Question and Discussion Session.

The panel comprises:

- Ms Melissa George, a Wulgurukaba Traditional Owner from Magnetic Island and the greater Townsville region. Melissa uses her experience and knowledge to advise the Queensland and Australian Governments and is a member of a number of NRM committees including the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Board and the Wet Tropics Indigenous Working Group. Melissa is part of the core leadership group of the Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' Alliance, and has been Chair of the national Indigenous Advisory Committee that advises the federal Minister of Environment since 2006. Contact: pandanus_mg1@bigpond.com
- Dr Mark Hamann, a Senior Lecturer at JCU, works with Torres Strait Traditional Owners on community-based projects for monitoring and management of marine turtles and dugongs. Contact: mark.hamann@jcu.edu.au
- Dr Rosemary Hill is a human geographer specialising in collaborative environmental governance and planning research with communities at multiple scales to foster social-ecological sustainability, with a particular focus on Indigenous systems. Dr Hill is a member of the Board of the Wet Tropics Management Authority. Contact: ro.hill@csiro.au
- Dr Petina Pert is a spatial analyst specialising in visualisation, spatial analyses of landscape ecology, ecosystem services and other NRM issues. More recently she has begun working with Traditional Owners assisting with the display of indigenous estates and bio-cultural knowledge.
- Mr Frank Loban, a Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owner, is a Project Manager (Sea) with the Torres Strait Regional Authority's Land and Sea Management Unit. Contact: frank.loban@tsra.gov.au
- Professor Helene Marsh, Professor of Environmental Science at JCU, is a conservation biologist with many

years' experience working with Traditional Owners to inform the sustainable use of marine wildlife, particularly dugongs. Helene is Chair of the national Threatened Species Scientific Committee. Contact: helene.marsh@jcu.edu.au

- Mr Phil Rist, Nywaigi Traditional Owner, is the Executive Officer Girringun Aboriginal Corporation, which represents the interests of traditional owners from nine tribal groups in the region from North Maria Creek to El Arish and south west to the Tully River, north to Ravenshoe and Herberton, south to include country to the east of Einsleigh, south west of Greenvale and east to Rollingstone and the offshore islands and surrounding waters. Phil is one of the core leadership group of the Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' Alliance, and co-chair of the Queensland Traditional Owner Network (QTON). Contact: Executive Officer (Girringun) EO@girringun.com.au
- Dr Helen Penrose, a Research Officer at James Cook University, is working with several north Queensland Indigenous communities on the management of marine mammals particularly coastal dolphins in their sea country. Contact: helen.penrose@jcu.edu.au
- Ms Joann Schmider, is a Mamu Traditional Owner, and coordinates the NERP TE Hub Traditional Owner knowledge management project with the Cairns Institute. Joann is a Director of the Central Wet Tropics Institute for Country and Culture Aboriginal Corporation supporting 9 Traditional Owner groups, one of the core leadership group of the Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' Alliance, and co-chair of the Queensland Traditional Owner Network (QTON). Contact: joann@communityacets.com.au
- Ms Leah Talbot, is an Eastern Kuku Yalanji woman who holds a Masters Degree in Environmental Science. Ms Talbot is a member of the Board of the Wet Tropics Management Authority. She has recently commenced her PhD and is supported as a Research Project Officer with CSIRO. Leah is also a member of the leadership group of the Rainforest Aboriginal People's Alliance, and is co-coordinating the Research and Knowledge Management Portfolio.
- Mr Gerry Turpin is an ethnobotanist at the Australian Tropical Herbarium in Cairns. He documents the traditional uses of native plants by Far North Queensland Indigenous communities and spends a large percentage of his time delivering plant collecting and plant identification training in remote communities. Gerry is also a member of the Rainforest Aboriginal People's Alliance, and is co-coordinating the Research and Knowledge Management Portfolio.

Some focus questions for the session to stimulate discussion. These questions may be replaced by questions from the floor:

- What agreements should be negotiated before commencing co-research with Traditional Owners and/or a local Indigenous community.
- How is it most effective to work with Traditional Owners and/or a local Indigenous community to translate their research priorities into scientifically robust co-research projects?
- What personal qualities, training and experience do research managers and researchers need to operate effectively with Indigenous co-researchers. How should they obtain the expertise required to implement the required way of working?
- How can research partnerships with Traditional Owners and/or Indigenous communities help provide a balanced suite of indicators for successful co-management given the inevitable difference in the values of Indigenous and non-Indigenous managers?
- How can the synthesised results from multiple research projects be successfully repatriated to Traditional Owners, Community and Managers?