



# YIRRGANYDJI KULPUL-WU MAMINGAL

“LOOKING AFTER YIRRGANYDJI SEA COUNTRY”

## YIRRGANYDJI SEA COUNTRY PLAN

Prepared in collaboration between the  
Dawul Wuru Aboriginal Corporation  
and Yirrganydji People

Cairns to Port Douglas Region,  
North Queensland

WARNING: We wish to advise that the names and photographs of people who have passed on are contained within this plan.



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#### Disclaimer

This Sea Country Plan has been produced to aid discussions about our values, concerns and future management of Yirrganydji sea country. It in no way binds the Yirrganydji people or Dawul Wuru Aboriginal Corporation in relation to any future position that may be adopted in relation to any matter addressed in this plan or any negotiated or litigated outcome of any native title application or land claim.

#### Acknowledgements

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**Queensland  
Government**

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Copies of this Sea Country Plan are available from:

Dawul Wuru Aboriginal Corporation

[www.dawulwuru.com.au](http://www.dawulwuru.com.au)

Front Cover

Wangetti Beach

Design and layout by ingeous studios

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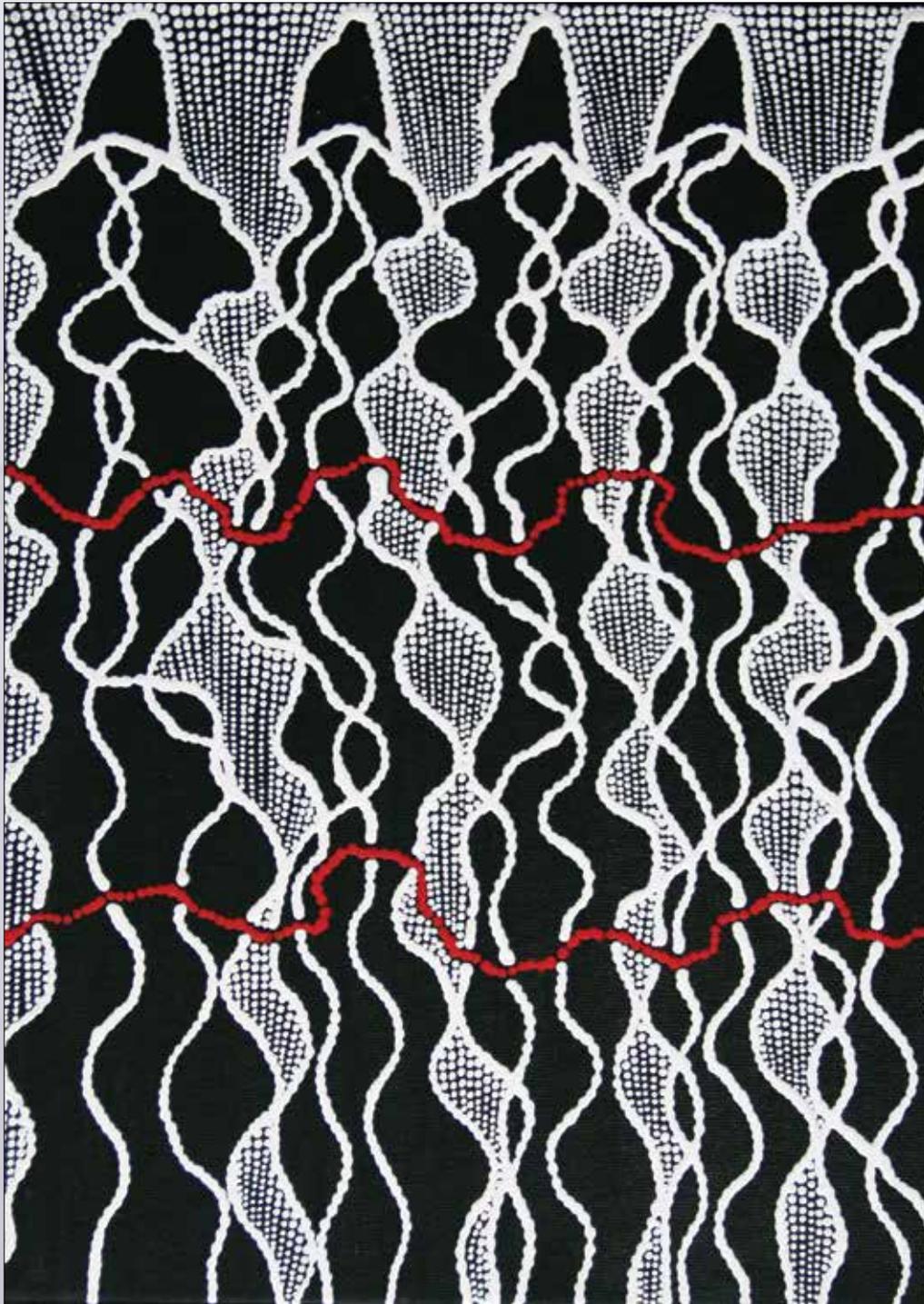
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## Irukandji Jellyfish Story

The painting depicts the story of the Irukandji jellyfish, which was named after the Yirrganydji (Irukandji) tribe in the 1950s by Dr. Hugo Flecker and his team of scientists. The kapa (white clay) and pukan (black charcoal) represents the jellyfish while the wupa (red ochre) lines symbolises the kalpal (blood) of the Yirrganydji People.

Courtesy of Mundejah

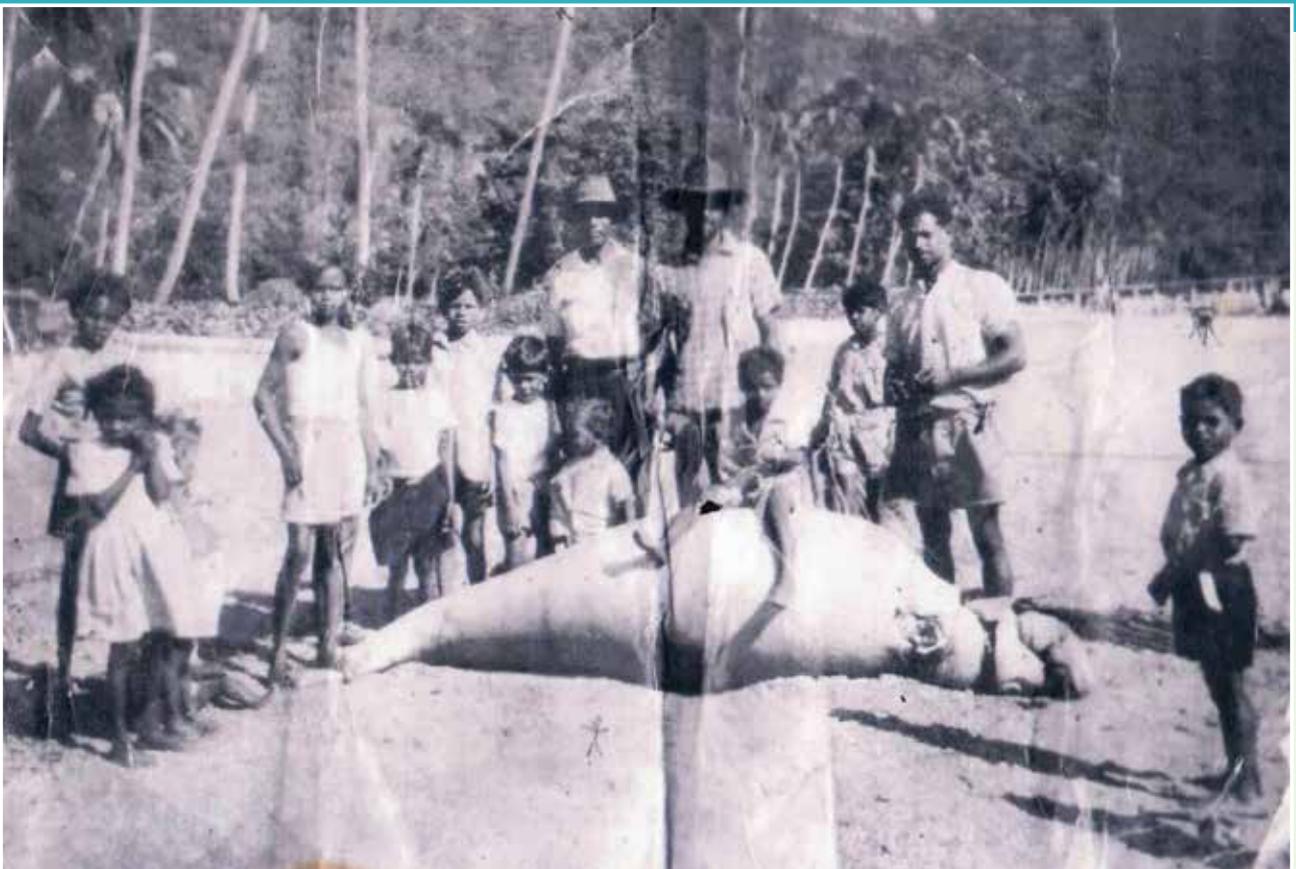




Sea Coral.

## Dedication

This Plan, Yirrganydji Kulpul-wu Mamingal – “Looking after Yirrganydji Sea Country”, is dedicated to the Yirrganydji Pulpu (elders) past and present who have made it through the hard times of struggle and have continued to guide their people through to today. The plan is also dedicated to the Pipunpay nguma-parra, children and future generations, who will inherit the responsibility on looking after Yirrganydji country and carry on their legacy.



*Singleton and extended families in Yarrabah, 1950s ~ Courtesy of Mary Brown and supported by Singleton family*

They are the “People of Tomorrow”.

This Plan is dedicated to you.



Trinity Beach looking at Wangal Jungkay (Double Island), 2013.

## What we want for our Sea Country

We are the Yirrganydji Traditional Owners, pama kulpul-parra (saltwater Aboriginal people), of the Yirrgay dialect, spoken along the coast from Pana Wangal (Cairns Trinity Inlet) to Diju (Port Douglas) in North Queensland. Our customary knowledge, practices, lores and identities as Traditional Owners are inter-connected with our pulmpa (land) and kulpul (sea) country.

For Yirrganydji sea country, we are committed to:

- Fostering protection, conservation and sustainability of the reef, resources and sea country;
- Continuing, preserving, expressing and sharing cultural values, knowledge and practices including the management of cultural sites;
- Being recognised and respected as Traditional Owners for country;
- Benefiting from country and creating business, employment and other economic opportunities for Yirrganydji People;
- Promoting awareness and education on the importance of social, cultural and environmental values of sea country;
- Being actively engaged, building partnerships and working together with others to efficiently and effectively manage sea country;
- Having access to information to make informed management decisions; and
- Preserving qualities for future generations and Yirrganydji People to enjoy their sea country.

# 1. Introduction

We are the Yirganydji Traditional Owners, pama kulpul-parra (saltwater Aboriginal people), of the Yirrgay dialect, spoken along the coast from Pana Wangal (Cairns Trinity Inlet) to Diju (Port Douglas) in North Queensland. Our customary knowledge, practices, lores and identities as Traditional Owners are inter-connected with our pulmpa (land) and kulpul (sea) country.

Our sea country has sustained us for thousands of years and continues to be a vital part of our lives. Our cultural values are interconnected and inseparable with our sea country. Our sea country is rich in sacred sites and places and we still hold a wealth of traditional ecological and bio-cultural knowledge of our sea country. We have rights, responsibilities and obligations to look after sea country, which we continue to pass from one generation to the next.

Our sea country has significant natural and cultural values including the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics World Heritage listed areas, fish habitat areas and important habitat for threatened and rare species including marine turtles, dugongs, dolphins, whales, fish, crustaceans, molluscs, invertebrates, migratory shorebirds and seabirds.

We as the Yirganydji Traditional Owners, guardians and custodians of this strip of coastline, are concerned for the future health of our sea country. We observe with worry the ever increasing intensive human uses of our sea country and the growing impacts on the many marine resources and habitats found in our sea country and coastal estates. We recognise that activities, over which we have no control, both offshore and well inland in the catchments, can significantly affect our marine and coastal environment.

We have developed this plan so government agencies, natural resource managers, researchers, industry and the wider Australian community can better understand what sea country means to us, the concerns we have and how they need to be dealt with. It is critical that Traditional Owners have recognised leadership, responsibilities and management roles for country, that we get active out on country and that we can access country into the future.

We want to continue in the footsteps of our ancestors passing down our knowledge and inherited responsibilities so we as Traditional Owners can empower today's generations for tomorrow's future.



Yirganydji Trail, Holloways Beach, 2013.

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We want full, effective and equitable participation in all aspects of land and sea management including decision making.

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Ngalungkurr 'Sea poison' near Oak Beach, North Queensland, 2014.

## 2. Our Sea Country Plan

### 2.1 Yirrganydji Sea Country

Our plan relates to all sea country extending from Cairns (Trinity Inlet) to Port Douglas, which is located in Far North Queensland. Our sea country extends from the coastline to the horizon and includes the estuaries, mangroves, bays, beaches, coastal waters, offshore islands (such as Admiralty Island, Double Island, Haycock Island and Low Isles), cays, coral reefs and ocean (refer to Figure 1).

### 2.2 Plan Development

In 2013 Dawul Wuru Aboriginal Corporation applied successfully for funding to develop a sea country plan for Yirrganydji People through the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection's Indigenous Sea Country Management Grants Program.

The development of this plan has involved talking with Yirrganydji People and others with an interest to sea country through a range of forums including workshops, meetings, consultations and back to country trips as well as taking into account existing information, reports and research findings that relate to the area.

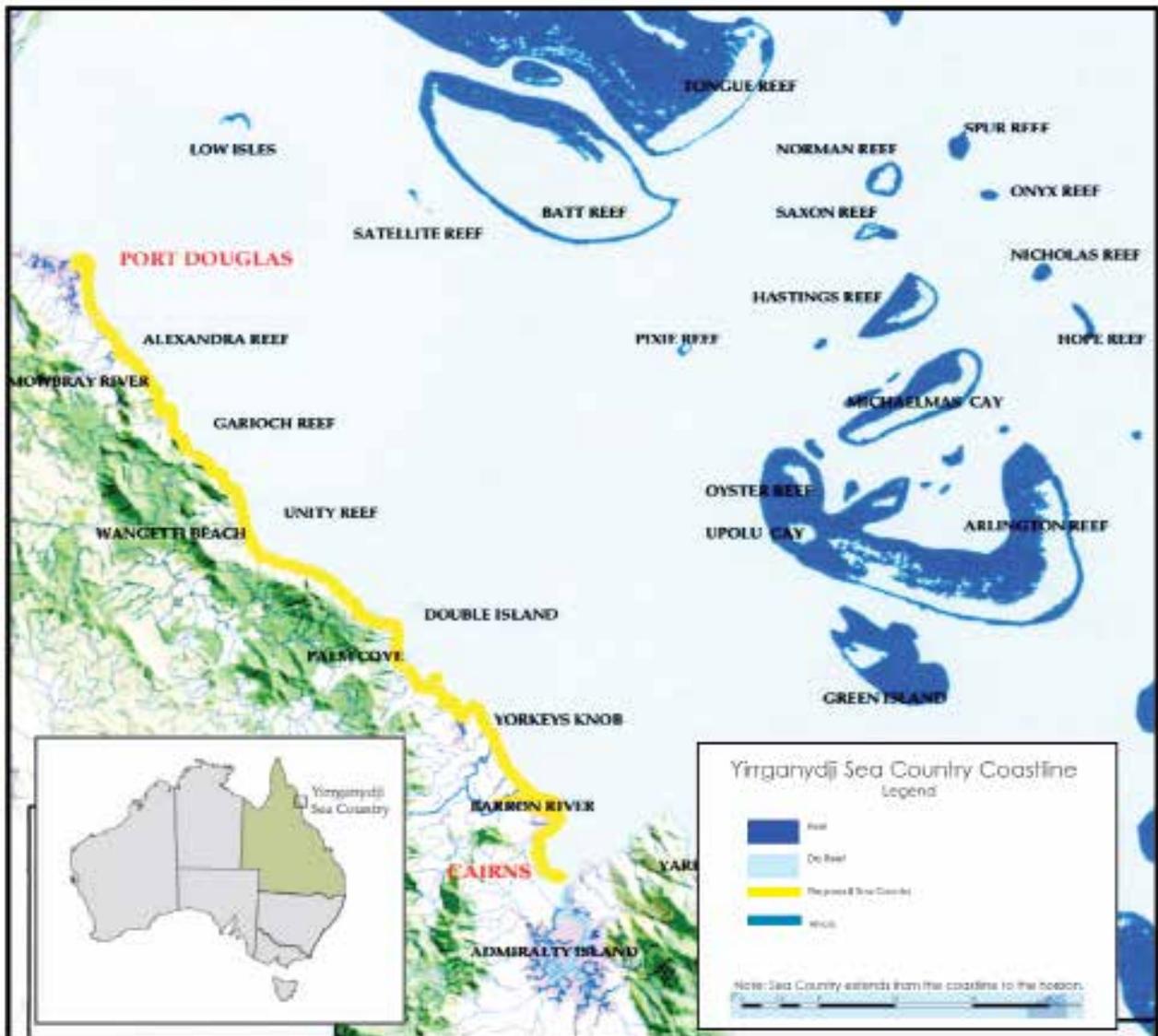


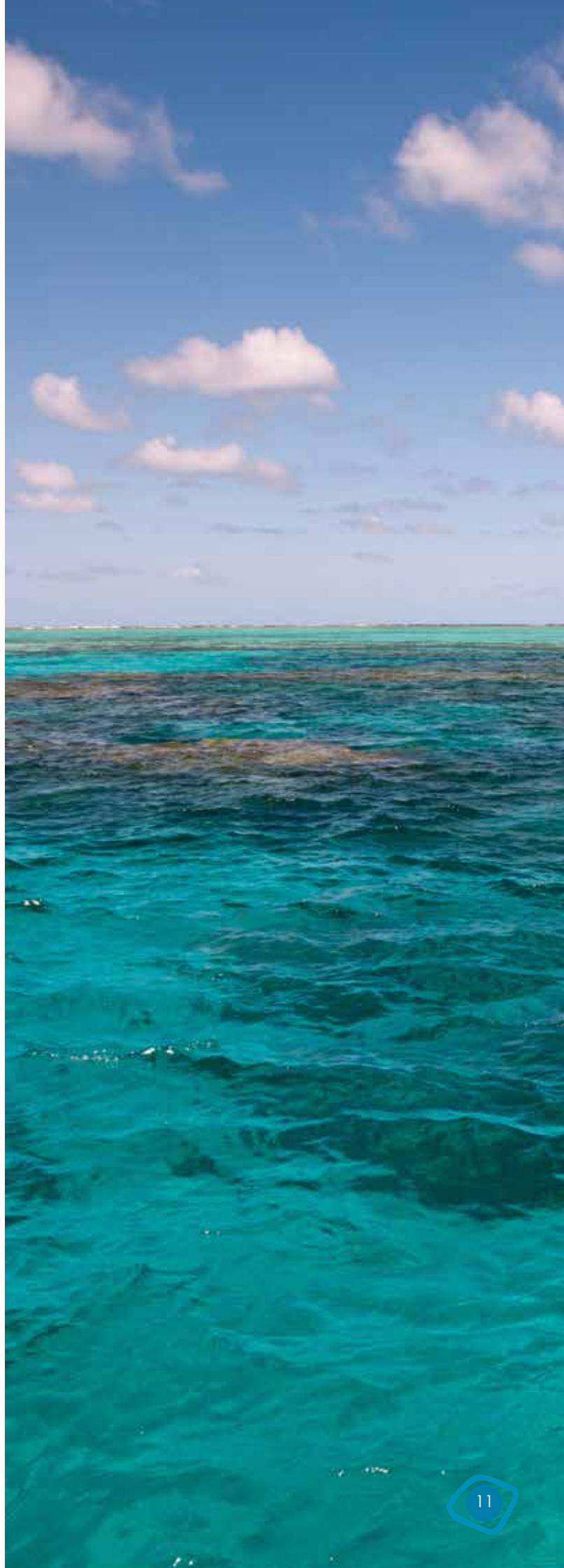
Figure 1. Yirrganydji sea country planning area.

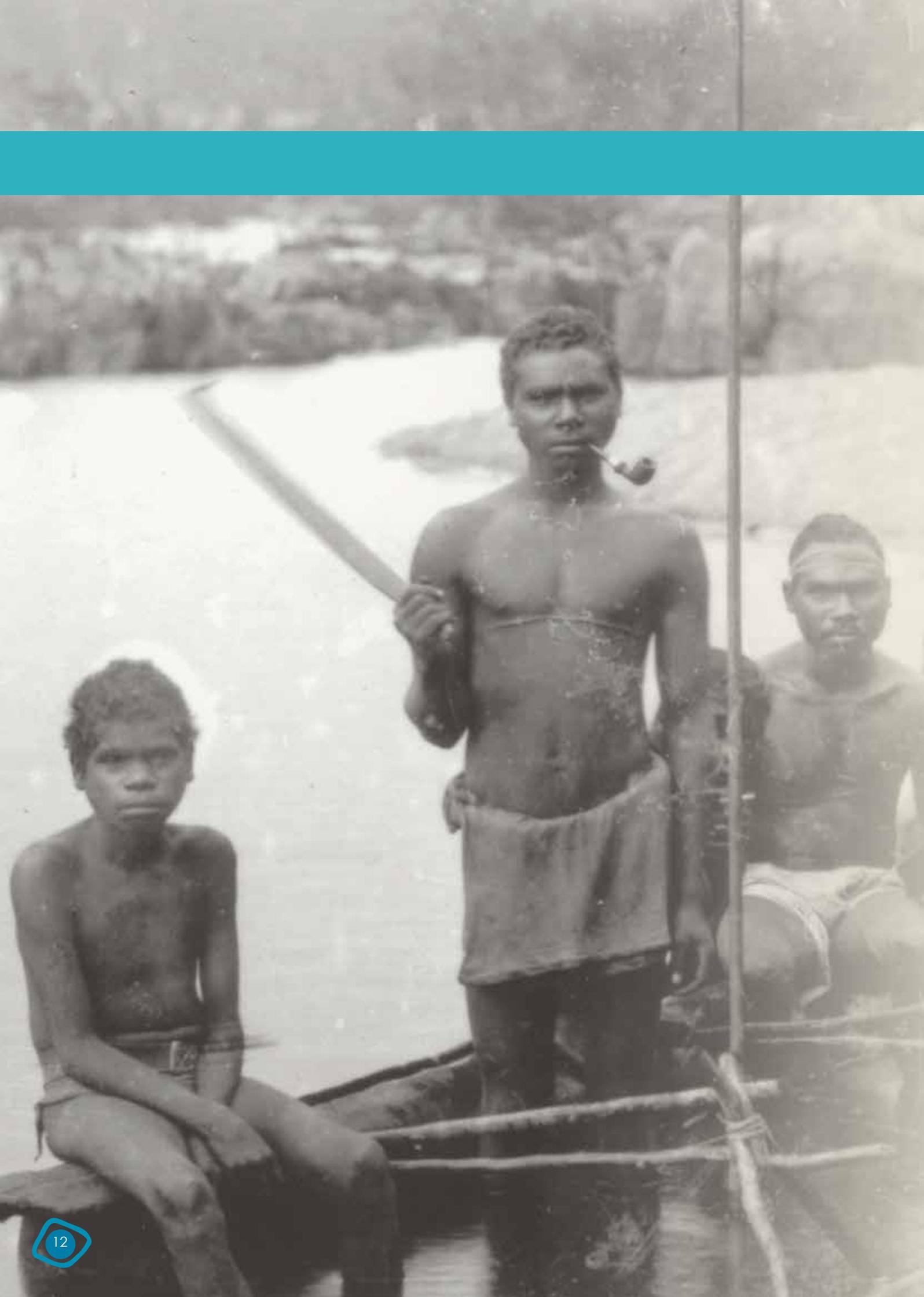
## 2.3 What we hope the plan will achieve

By developing our own sea country plan, we hope to assist government agencies, resource managers, researchers, industry and the wider Australian community to:

- understand what sea country means to Yirrganydji People;
- understand Yirrganydji rights, responsibilities and interests in looking after our sea country;
- understand important coastal, marine and cultural values of Yirrganydji sea country;
- share concerns we have and how they need to be dealt with;
- provide a strategic framework to build partnerships and work together in caring for our sea country; and
- guide Yirrganydji Traditional Owners and rangers on managing country.

We want to develop partnerships with others who use or have an interest in our sea country. We need to work together for the benefit of our country and culture.





## 3. Our Peoples

### 3.1 Pre-settlement: the Durrin day period

Prior to European settlement, our kurra kurra (ancestors) came to this region a long time ago. Some of these ancestors were kuju kuju (rainbow serpent), puda: ji (scrub python), and kuya: la and dama: rri (the two brothers).

They travelled through our sea country and sang this land and seascape into being, shaping the mountains, rivers, islands, cays, reefs and the animals found along the coast. They gave us our lore and customs. They fished, gathered and harvested minya ma: -jada (food) for ceremony and survival.

Over thousands of years, our people, the Yirrganydji, have witnessed and adapted to the changes in our country. We still recall stories of how the original coastline stood out beyond Michaelmas Cay, Batt Reef and Arlington Reef and how our people moved up and down the coastal strip between Pana Wangal (Cairns Trinity Inlet) and Diju (Port Douglas). We occupied the mangroves, lowland coastal flats and reefs and maintained the country in accordance with customary lore. We moved from place to place

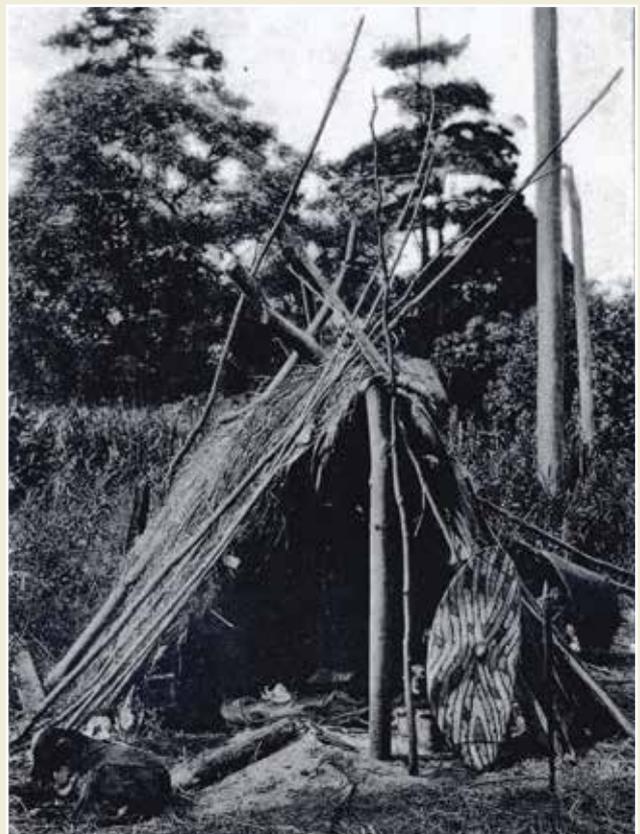
within our traditional country using our intimate knowledge of the country, its plants and animals, its moon and stars, and its weather patterns following the seasons and food resources. We also travelled to meet and trade with neighbouring tribes, burning off the country and fulfilled our obligations through lore and ceremony.

We travelled and hunted in yulal or bida (dug-out outrigger canoes) made from dungkal (red cedar) seeking food from rivers, creeks, the coast and sea such as kuyu (fish), ngawuyu (green sea turtle) and duyun (dugong). On our coastal lands, our men hunted dulpil (wallabies), kanyal (goannas), jarryy (birds) and jama (snakes), while our women gathered mundimay (long beach yam), yiwurra (black bean), padil (cycad), julkay (pippi shells) and julwa (black mangrove mussel). Scattered along the coastline are ancient middens, places where shells and other food debris have accumulated over time.

While all Yirrganydji country has cultural significance, some places have special spiritual value and are often referred to as sacred sites.



*Yirrganydji Fish Trap at Taylor Point, Trinity Beach, 1944 ~ Courtesy of Cairns Historical Society.*



*Jimuru (Traditional shelter) ~ Courtesy of Cairns Historical Society.*

Some of our significant sites are Kujukum (Ellie Point), Jakal (Palm Cove), Wangka: rri (Wangetti Beach) and Diju (Port Douglas), where we made our pulmpa (camps). Our jimurru (shelter huts) were erected using yapulam (lawyer cane), which were tied with strips of pukul (fish tail lawyer cane) and kidi (tea tree paperbark) for the roofing. Although, we have observed and adapted to the changes in our country, the different technologies and management practices, we still continue our culture, values, traditions and knowledge today and will carry it into the future.

### 3.2 European Settlement

In 1770, James Cook first mapped the future site of Cairns, naming it Trinity Bay. Lieutenant Phillip Parker King made three marine surveying expeditions to northern Australia in 1819, 1820, and 1821. On King's first visit, he drew attention to the availability of drinking water and the presence of Aboriginal people in the area.

In June 1848, Captain Owen Stanley undertook a ten-day hydrographic depth sounding survey of the Trinity Bay region. His consequent official map listed "Native Huts" at present-day Palm Cove, and "Many Natives" and "Native Village" on the stretch of coast immediately north. In 1872, William Hann led a prospecting expedition in the Palmer River, where an extensive gold field was located. Announcement of this location in September 1873 resulted in an influx of prospectors.

In 1873, the extensive and detailed reports of George Dalrymple's exploration party indicated the assets and potential of Trinity Inlet. George Dalrymple also noted the number of Aboriginal groups in the area. In 1876, three years after the Palmer River discovery, James Mulligan announced that an even larger and more extensive gold field had been found at the Hodgkinson River on the Atherton Tableland. An access track was cut from the tableland to the coast, which was completed in 1876, and was later named the Douglas Track.

In 1876, the Governor of Queensland, William Wellington Cairns, proclaimed a new northern port at Trinity Bay and the township was inaugurated. By 1885, there was a sufficient local population base for the borough of Cairns to be declared a municipality. Construction of a railway line from Cairns to Herberton in 1886 brought many immigrant workers to the area. These new residents, in turn, generated demand for opening up land to be used for agriculture.



*Governor William Wellington Cairns, 1876  
~ Courtesy of Cairns Historical Society.*

As a result Yirganydji's traditional lifestyle changed following European expansion onto their traditional country. They were subjected to government policies ranging from forced employment through to many of their ancestors, Elders and relatives being forcibly removed from country and held in non-Aboriginal settlements including Yarrabah and Mona Mona Missions. The 1897, Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act (Qld), saw our Leader of the Yirganydji, Billy Jagar, receiving two breastplates with the inscription of 'King of Barron' in 1898 and 1906. Despite these enforced changes, Yirganydji have retained their connections to their traditional lands and waters. Some families were fortunate to avoid removal from their traditional lands and remained in the Cairns and Port Douglas areas.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the agricultural production of the local Chinese community had risen to tens of thousands of bushels of rice, corn, bananas and pineapples. The construction of the tramway from Cairns to Mulgrave in 1897 linked areas immediately south of Cairns to the port. A local natural gas supply company was established in 1899.

In 1903 the memoirs of R. A. Johnstone were first published in the Brisbane-based Queensland newspaper. These memoirs, later collectively published under the title, *Spinifex and Wattle*, were significant because of the details given of many Aboriginal customs observed by Johnstone in the Trinity Bay and Barron River area during the Dalrymple expeditions of 1872–1873.



Cairns Harbour, 1882 ~ Courtesy of Cairns Historical Society.

The town's first water supply opened in 1911 and in July 1912 the Cairns District Hospital was opened. During World War II, the Cairns region played its part supplying the Allied forces and becoming a training base for mainly American troops. The region was pivotal during the battle for the Coral Sea.

Over the next decades, the area between Cairns and Port Douglas has continued to grow and has now become an international tourist destination today.



Yirrganydji camp in the Cairns area, 1910 ~ Courtesy of Cairns Historical Society.



Lake Morris Lookout overlooking Cairns, 2013

### 3.3 Present Day

Today, we as the Yirrganydji Traditional Owners, guardians and custodians of this strip of coastline, are concerned for the future health of our sea country. We observe with worry the ever increasing intensive human uses of our sea country and the growing impacts on the many marine resources and habitats found in our sea country and coastal estates.

For thousands of years, Yirrganydji People have observed, lived and adapted to the coastal and marine environment and its ecological processes.

Over time, Yirrganydji People have developed and followed strict protocols to ensure its resilience into the future. Sustainability and conservation were embedded in Yirrganydji Aboriginal lore and traditions, so that the use and practices on the country were beneficial and had minimal effects on the environment. We wish to carry on this legacy into the future and continue our identities as Yirrganydji saltwater people of the Cairns to Port Douglas region.



Aboriginal Performers at Cairns Jubilee Celebrations, 1926 ~ Courtesy of Cairns Historical Society.

## 4. Our Sea Country

### 4.1 Yirrganydji Sea Country Region

The Yirrganydji sea country region contains significant Aboriginal cultural values. It is a cultural land and seascape with creation storylines interweaving the country from Cairns to Port Douglas. They bind to land and sea environments, flora and fauna. This connectivity between cultural values and biodiversity is called 'bio-cultural diversity'.

The region also has a variety of tenures and is part of the Wet Tropics Rainforest and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park World Heritage Listed Areas making our country of outstanding universal value and a world-renowned destination.

There is a range of legislation, policies and guidelines at the international, national, state and local levels that apply to our sea country. Coastal and marine management is complex and involves many different administrative jurisdictions.

### 4.2 Bioregions

Yirrganydji sea country is within the wet tropics bioregion and the wet tropic coast biogeographic region.

The wet tropics bioregion is situated along the tropical east coast of northern Queensland and covers approximately two million hectares or 1% of Queensland. Most of the wet tropics bioregion

consists of narrow coastal floodplains flanked by mountains up to 1,600m high but commonly at 600-900m, with steep slopes. The western margin of the region is an elevated, undulating to low hilly plateau. This bioregion is of a tropical climate, with high to very high rainfall summers and drier winters. Intense tropical cyclones are expected during the summer months.

The wet tropic coast biogeographic region comprises the coastal and island waters from approximately Cooktown to Lucinda, QLD including Hinchinbrook Island. The inshore coastal region is dominated by very complex and extensive mangrove forests and very high littoral faunal diversity. Sediments are very muddy, of terrestrial origin, from very high but seasonal rainfall and has poorly developed inner shelf reefs.

#### Bioregions

- Wet tropics bioregion
- Wet tropic coast marine biogeographic region



Double Island and Coral Reefs, 1950s ~ Courtesy of Cairns Historical Society.

### 4.3 World Heritage

The Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics of Queensland which are listed on the World Heritage and National Heritage lists are within and adjacent to the planning area.

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“70 Traditional Owner groups with connections to the Great Barrier Reef”.

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The Great Barrier Reef is the world's most extensive coral reef ecosystem and is a globally outstanding and significant entity covering an area of 348,000 square kilometres. The Great Barrier Reef includes extensive cross-shelf diversity, stretching from the low water mark along the mainland coast up to 250 kilometres offshore. This wide depth range includes vast shallow inshore areas, mid-shelf and outer reefs, and beyond the continental shelf to oceanic waters over 2,000 metres deep encompassing a globally unique array of ecological communities, habitats and species.

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“Significant ongoing geological processes, biological evolution and man's interaction with his environment...” ~ *Criterion ii (1981) for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area*

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The Wet Tropics of Queensland, or Wet Tropics, stretches along the northeast coast of Australia for some 450 kilometres and is included in the terrestrial component of our sea country. Encompassing some 894,420 hectares of mostly tropical rainforest, this stunningly beautiful area is extremely important for its rich and unique biodiversity. It also presents an unparalleled record of the ecological and evolutionary processes that shaped the flora and fauna of Australia, containing the relicts of the great Gondwanan forest that covered Australia and part of Antarctica 50 to 100 million years ago.

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“19 Traditional Owner groups with connections to the Wet Tropics”.

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In 2012 the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area's Indigenous heritage values were included as part of the existing Wet Tropics of Queensland National Heritage Listing.

#### World Heritage

- Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area
- Wet Tropics Rainforest World Heritage Area

### 4.4 Protected Areas

The land and waters of our sea country has a variety of tenures and is managed by a number of different agencies under the provisions of relevant legislation. Our sea country is within a range of protected marine areas including the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (including islands such as Low Isles, Double Island and Admiralty Island), Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park, Wangetti Beach Marine Reserve and Michaelmas and Upolu Cays National Parks. Declared fish habitat areas on our country protect inshore and estuarine habitats and adjacent terrestrial protected areas including the Macalister Range National Park protect a rugged, forested range along the coastline.

#### Protected Areas

- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
- Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park
- Michaelmas and Upolu National Parks
- Trinity Inlet Fish Habitat Area
- Barr Creek Fish Habitat Area
- Yorkeys Creek Fish Habitat Area
- Half Moon Creek Fish Habitat Area
- Macalister Range National Park
- Wangetti Beach Marine Reserve

## 4.5 Catchments

Our sea country is within the north east coast drainage division. The surrounding catchment areas include the drainage basins of Cairns Trinity Inlet (Mulgrave – Russell Catchment), Barron and Mossman.

The Barron River originates on the Atherton Tableland, where there is extensive clearing for intensive agriculture. A large impoundment (Tinaroo Falls Dam) at the head of the catchment supplies irrigation water to a wide area. The river then flows down the range, through a confined coastal plain (mostly under sugarcane cultivation) and into the sea just north of Cairns. Freshwater Creek is a small tributary that flows through cultivated areas and then through some urbanised areas in its lower reaches. The Cairns Esplanade was the original mouth of the Barron River until it shifted north due to heavy rain and flooding associated with a cyclone in 1939.

The Trinity Inlet was once the river mouth of the Mulgrave River. Volcanic activity that resulted in the rise of Green Hill in the Mulgrave Valley blocked the river from entering the sea near present day Cairns. The Mulgrave River catchment now flows in a southerly direction from the Bellenden Ker Ranges through Gordonvale and emptying into the Coral Sea 30 km south at the southern extremity of the Yarrabah Hills range where the Mulgrave meets the Russell River. There are no major rivers draining to the Trinity Inlet. Its catchment comprises a number of small creeks draining either the urban areas of Cairns to the west, or rural areas to the south and east. Chinaman Creek receives a treated sewage discharge at its mouth and there is another discharge at the mouth of Skeleton Creek.

The Mossman catchment is comprised of a confined coastal plain with a mountainous and largely forested upper catchment. Agricultural development (mainly sugarcane) is extensive in the coastal plain. Just like the Barron River catchment, the Mowbray River has changed course a number of times in the past including Dickson Inlet and Yule Point being once the mouth of the Mowbray River.

Estuaries are an important link between marine and terrestrial ecosystems and provide important habitats and nursery grounds for many species. Key estuaries in the general area include the Trinity Inlet, Barron River, Half Moon Creek, Mowbray River and Dickson Inlet.

### Catchments

- Barron River Catchment
- Mossman-Mowbray Catchment
- Russell-Mulgrave Catchment

## 4.6 Wetlands of National Significance

There are two wetlands of national significance on Yirrganydji country which are the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the Port of Cairns and Trinity Inlet.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park contains a variety of habitats in a number of ecosystems. The area is recognised for its seagrass beds, estuarine wetlands, mangrove woodlands, island cays and coral atolls. The Port of Cairns and Trinity Inlet is adjacent to a major urban area and supports large populations of birds, fish and prawns. The tidal flat off the Cairns Esplanade is regarded as one of four main wader sites between Townsville and Cairns. The wetlands of the inlet provide a valuable sediment and nutrient sink for runoff from Cairns and surrounding agricultural areas.

### Wetlands of National Significance

- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
- Port of Cairns and Cairns Trinity Inlet

## 4.7 Habitats, Plants and Animals

Our sea country supports a wide variety of habitats from mangroves and beaches to deep open water.

Beaches provide nesting grounds for seabirds and nationally threatened marine turtles. Our beaches are highly dynamic habitats. They have natural cycles of accretion and erosion driven by tides, winds, waves and storms. They are therefore sensitive to any change in coastal water movement (for example through the installation of groins and seawalls) and are prone to degradation from coastal construction activities.

Mangroves provide nursery grounds for many fish species and are the habitat for an extensive array of birds and other terrestrial wildlife. Mangroves play a major role in the prevention of coastal erosion and act as a filter system for water before it enters our sea country.



*Mi: may (water lily), Cairns, 2012.*

Seagrasses are the main food source for dugongs and green turtles. They are also habitat constructors and provide nursery areas for juvenile prawns, fishes, crabs and marine crayfish. Seagrass habitats on our country have been lost and are sensitive to sediments from flood events.

Coral reefs provide a vitally important habitat for an enormous diversity of plants and animals, such as small fish, invertebrates, and stand out as the iconic attraction for most reef users. Our corals are naturally very dynamic habitats, with cycles of disturbance and recovery. Many species of invertebrates have been recorded on our country and it is likely many more are yet to be discovered.

Our sea country has declared fish habitat areas to protect critical habitats. A wide range of fish species occur in our sea country including nationally threatened species such as dugongs, whales, dolphins, sharks and rays. Estuarine crocodiles occur in the coastal waters of our country.

Islands and cays within our country support breeding populations of seabird species.



*Red Mangrove, Cairns, 2012.*

#### Biodiversity

- Wide variety of habitats
- Significant plants and animals
- Declared fish habitat areas
- Significant breeding populations



*Native Kapok Tree, Wangetti Beach, 2013.*



*Pulnyan (Grass Tree), Cairns, 2013.*

## 5. Our Key Concerns and Future Management

Our region boasts significant natural, environmental and cultural values, including a bio-diverse land and seascape of habitats, flora and fauna. We are concerned with a range of accumulative issues and threats impacting within and adjacent to our country. Through the implementation of this sea country plan we wish to address the key concerns affecting our people and country.

### 5.1 Cultural Heritage

#### Objectives

- Protect and manage cultural heritage and cultural heritage values.

#### Key Concerns

- Loss and degradation to sites and places of cultural significance
- Diminishing and loss of language, traditions, practices, lore, customary knowledge and traditional ways
- Depletion of traditional marine and cultural resources (e.g. food & medicine)
- Loss of access to country

Yirrganydji sea country is itself a cultural land and seascape. There are creation storylines that are interlinked with the country and criss-crossing each other from Cairns to Port Douglas. They bind to land and sea country, plants and animals.

Our cultural values are interconnected and inseparable with our sea country. The environment, plants, animals, habitats, places, reefs and water are all part of country, and therefore significant cultural values. There are also many cultural heritage sites, which have now been submerged underwater for thousands of years after the rising sea 15, 000 years ago. We have continued our cultural responsibilities and what happens on it through customary lore – a lore that is ‘written’ in the country.

Our relationship with our sea country involves a complex of rights, responsibilities and obligations such as the right to access sea country and to use its resources according to lore and custom, responsibilities to our ancestors and for certain places on country and obligations to our traditional land and sea country.

There are many important sites and places to us including story places (single and inter-connected), secret / sacred sites, traditional fish traps, rock shelter sites and paintings, midden sites, fish spawning and breeding habitat, ceremonial sites, camp sites and traditional tracks. We are concerned about public access and the associated degradation of our culturally significant areas. We want to provide effective recognition, protection and conservation of our cultural heritage.

For thousands of years, we have sustainably managed the land and sea and its resources for many years. We still hold a wealth of traditional ecological and bio-cultural knowledge of our sea country. This includes the traditional seasonal calendar, harvesting, and the traditional use of plants for food, medicine and tools. We are concerned about the loss of our traditional knowledge and practices. Together with our rights, responsibilities and obligations to look after sea country, we as Traditional Owners must be able to maintain and pass on cultural knowledge, skills and practices, including knowledge about marine animals now protected and proper sea country management. Our identity is closely tied to caring for places on country, and being actively involved in looking after animals and plants on country. We want people to respect our cultural and traditional practices. It is important to us that we preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of our people and to promote an understanding of our heritage to the wider community.

We are concerned about loss of access to country and therefore connection to country. We worry about the depletion of our traditional marine resources. Being healthy means looking after our individual spiritual and physical health and the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community.

#### Objectives

- Protect and manage cultural heritage and cultural heritage values.

#### Strategies

Priority will be given to:

- Ensuring that activities in areas of significance take all reasonable and practicable measures to avoid harming cultural heritage in accordance with the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003.

- Ensuring that activities in areas of significance take all reasonable and practicable measures to avoid harming historical cultural heritage in accordance with the Queensland Heritage Act 1992.
- Recording traditional knowledge including sacred sites, language, traditions, stories, practices, lore, customary knowledge and traditional ways.
- Supporting Yirrganydji Peoples' aspirations to progress cultural heritage and native title rights and interests in accordance with the Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993 and the State Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003.
- Supporting the development of a cultural heritage management plan for country to assist in the identification, protection and preservation of our cultural heritage.
- Establishing a Cultural Heritage Unit, "keeping place" to preserve, protect, and promote our traditional knowledge.
- Developing Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country Yirrganydji protocols.

Our sea country encompasses a globally unique array of habitats, plants and animals. The waters provide habitat and feeding and nesting grounds for marine and terrestrial species which are of global conservation significance including marine turtles and dugongs. We are concerned about the loss and degradation of their habitat due to coastal development and declining water quality, collisions with boats, illegal hunting, entanglement in nets and marine pollution.

The surrounding catchment areas include the drainage basins of Mulgrave – Russell, Barron and Mossman. Human use of the upper catchments affects the wellbeing of the rest of the catchment area and our sea country. Our estuaries such as the Trinity Inlet, Barron River, Half Moon Creek, Mowbray River and Dickson Inlet are an important link between marine and terrestrial ecosystems and provide important habitats and nursery grounds for many species. We are concerned about alteration of natural flows, bushfires, catchment and coastal development, dredging and sea dumping, exposing acid sulphate soils, loss of habitat, excess nutrients, overfishing, sedimentation, pollution by agriculture, oil, heavy metals and other chemicals, storm water pollution, infestation by pests, diseases and pathogens.

## 5.2 Marine and Coastal Environment

### Objectives

- Protect and manage the coastal and marine environment.

### Key Concerns

- There are a wide range of key threats to the marine and coastal environment that we have including but not limited to loss and degradation of the unique array of habitats, plants and animals, coastal development, declining water quality, inappropriate fire regimes, pest plants and animals, inappropriate visitors activities, illegal activities, population growth and climate change.
- Lack of knowledge about the marine and coastal environment

The introduction and spread of marine pests poses a threat to our marine environment. A few instances of fish disease have been reported from the Great Barrier Reef and a small number of stranded marine mammals and turtles show signs of disease. Outbreaks of crown-of-thorns starfish have been one of the major causes of coral death and reef damage on the Great Barrier Reef since surveys began in the 1960s. We all have an important role in the monitoring and early detection of marine pests in and around our sea country. Together with other accumulative impacts, we are concerned of the rising decline of our coral reefs and potential coral bleaching events.

We worry about the increasing development footprint with the population growth in the coastal area and the cumulative and combined effect. We are concerned about important coastal habitats that have been in filled, modified or cleared for the purpose of allowing coastal development. Most of the freshwater swamps adjoining saline swamps in the area have been destroyed and what remains is now fragmented and degraded.

Yirrganydji sea country is within and adjacent to the globally outstanding Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics of Queensland world heritage sites.



*Pana Wangal (Cairns Trinity Inlet) and the Port of Cairns, North Queensland, 2014.*

Some brackish wetland systems have been converted to saline drains, acid sulphate soils have been disrupted and coastal erosion has occurred.

We know that the Earth's climate has always been changing. We are concerned about the effects of climate change and would like to better understand the effects of rising sea temperature, rising sea levels, ocean acidification and increased frequency of severe weather events.

### Objectives

- Protect and manage the coastal and marine environment.

### Strategies

Priority will be given to:

- Developing a whole-of-country based plan for land and sea identifying values (including cultural and natural), assessing the threats and condition or integrity of the values and outlining a management approach to conserve the values.

- Developing specific management plans for priority areas of management such as wetlands, areas containing threatened ecosystems and species and sites of cultural significance.
- Undertaking a strategic assessment of land and sea country to identify values (including cultural and natural) and condition or integrity of these values and assessment of the threats to assist Yirrganydji Traditional Owners make informed decisions.
- Increasing our knowledge about marine and coastal conservation management issues.
- Developing partnerships and programs to undertake a range of natural resource management activities including but not restricted to fire, pest plant and animal, threatened species, pest animals and weeds, cultural heritage, training and development, visitor management, sea country, research and monitoring and business development.



Yirrganydji families at Thomatis Creek, Holloways Beach, 2013.

### 5.3 Use of Country

#### Objectives

- Ensure the protection and sustainability of our sea country and marine resources.

#### Key Concerns

- Exploitation of resources by a wide range of user groups
- Genuine opportunities for employment, income and business development
- Competing uses of our land, sea and resources and the resulting pressures that our sea country faces
- Access to our country and its resources

Prior to European settlement we had a sustainable society based on close connections to both terrestrial and marine environments. Since European settlement, our sea country's resources have been exploited by a wide range of user groups. We want to share the economic and social benefits currently derived by the wider community from various uses of our sea country.

We want to create genuine opportunities for employment, income and business development on our country. We encourage enterprises consistent

with this plan, which facilitate the generation of revenue and strengthen management resources to care for our sea country.

There are a wide range of user groups of our sea country including tourism, marine transport, commercial and recreational fisheries to name a few. We are concerned about the competing uses of our land, sea and resources and the resulting pressures that our sea country faces. Our sea country is increasingly being impacted by pressures that are local, regional, national and in some cases global. Our country faces a range of pressures, from development, shipping traffic, overharvesting, visitors, invasive species, damage and interference to cultural sites, fragmentation, disturbance and impact on marine turtles and dugongs, commercial fishing, limited scientific knowledge, extraction of water, altered hydrological and fire regimes through to extreme weather events, made more acute with a growing population. We understand that some impacts are beyond our ability to manage such as activities that are occurring long distances away in the catchments which impact on the health of ecosystems and species in our sea country downstream or shipping or mining which will be difficult for us to regulate or control.

A significant element of our disadvantage is the loss of a sense of place and spiritual connectedness. It is important to us to maintain a physical connection to country, to pass on cultural knowledge, for community and individual wellbeing, for ceremonies

related to particular places and to collect food. We are concerned about the lack of access to our country and its resources, which are essential for the continuation of cultural practices and to maintain links with the land and care for country.

Whilst others have now legal rights to our country, we the Yirrganydji People have rights also to access, use and protect country. Appreciating the Aboriginal connection to country should underpin all considerations of access needs and involvement in the management of land and sea. The recognition, promotion and practice of culture and maintenance of links between people and country are critical to us. It is important to us that we formalise cooperative management of our traditional lands through agreements.

We want to talk with other people and build an economy that enables our people to remain on their country and supports the ongoing reproduction of culture whilst providing opportunities for jobs, income and business development.

### Objectives

- Ensure the protection and sustainability of our sea country and marine resources.

### Strategies

Priority will be given to:

- Partnering with the Australian Government to investigate and explore the establishment of an Indigenous Protected Area across country to promote biodiversity and cultural resource conservation.
- Seeking co-management arrangements of national parks, reserves etc. to enable the government and Traditional Owners to share responsibility for the area's management.
- Implementing the Yirrganydji Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement which outlines how Yirrganydji Traditional Owners will work with the Australian and Queensland governments to manage traditional use activities in sea country.
- Developing an economic participation framework to maximise opportunities for Yirrganydji Traditional Owner engagement, ownership and control in the use of country. The framework could explore opportunities for business development, ventures,

enterprises, commercial partnerships and fee for service opportunities in many different industries including tourism, research, monitoring, fisheries, natural resource management, protected area management, education and the arts, grant funding, sponsorship, in-kind support and sustainable income generation opportunities which could include donations, ecosystem service offsets, permit revenue and environmental management charges.

- Negotiating economic and social benefits for our people with those that commercially utilise our sea country.
- Developing partnerships with relevant government agencies to develop an integrated marine surveillance, monitoring and enforcement program for our sea country.
- Increasing awareness and education of users of sea country to build recognition, awareness and to promote an understanding of, and respect for, Yirrganydji culture and country.

## 5.4 Research and Monitoring

### Objectives

- Increase engagement in, access to and equal benefits of research, data collection and monitoring.

### Key Concerns

- Access to research and monitoring information
- Increasing awareness, recognition, acknowledgement and acceptance of Traditional Owner customary, ecological and bio-cultural knowledge
- Awareness, recognition, acknowledgement and acceptance of Traditional Owner cultural protocols and country
- Rights to full ownership and control over cultural and intellectual property
- Engagement in training, employment and capacity building opportunities
- Lack of partnerships and communication with research institutions and agencies
- Lack of equal benefit sharing of research



*Kurra: pulay (Kamerunga), Barron River, 2014.*

We understand that a wide range of individuals and organizations conduct research and monitoring across our country. We need and encourage research and monitoring to improve our knowledge of the marine and coastal environment and to provide input into effective management.

We need to provide guidance on our research and monitoring needs in order to focus the research and monitoring effort in a coordinated and cost-effective manner. We want to ensure that we have objective, comparable and reliable information that improves our understanding of what natural values occur on country, where they are located, the risks to them and the type and level of management intervention required for their long-term viability. It is important to us that all research effort be captured and results made available to us.

Given the range of management issues that our sea country faces, we need to apply two sets of knowledge to land and sea management—traditional ecological knowledge and contemporary, science-based knowledge. We are concerned that our traditional ecological knowledge is not recognized or acknowledged. For thousands of years we have had a unique cultural and spiritual connection with the land and an intimate knowledge of the habitats, plants and animals. We have a wealth of knowledge of biota,

landscapes, weather, seasonal cycles, and their links with culture and land uses. It is important to us that researchers respect our values and customary obligations and recognize our rights to full ownership and control over any cultural and intellectual property. We want to ensure that our people benefit from research and monitoring activities conducted on country and in our community through employment, training, and capacity building opportunities.

There are gaps in our scientific knowledge about our marine and coastal habitats, plants and animals and ecological processes across our country as well as effects of threats and other drivers. Therefore to prevent long term and irreversible damage a precautionary approach to managing our sea country should be taken. We want to fill our knowledge gaps as we recognize the vital role research plays in delivering effective environmental management, policies and programs. We need to better understand and manage the cumulative impacts of multiple pressures on our country.

We want to form partnerships with research organizations, government, academic institutions and community groups, which are essential in building the knowledge base for caring for our country.

## Objectives

- Increase engagement in, access to and equal benefits of research, data collection and monitoring.

## Strategies

Priority will be given to:

- Undertaking a review of existing and current research and monitoring activities.
- Developing a strategic research and monitoring framework to provide guidance to the research community that outlines Yirrganydji research and monitoring priorities and knowledge gaps.
- Developing protocols for researchers to provide guidance in engaging and conducting research and monitoring activities on country.
- Building research and monitoring partnerships with research institutions and relevant agencies to plan, develop and implement research and monitoring activities.
- Increasing awareness, recognition, acknowledgement and acceptance of Traditional Owner customary, ecological and bio-cultural knowledge
- Ensuring that researchers provide opportunities for Traditional Owners to develop skills and participate in research and monitoring activities.
- Ensuring that authorities approving research permits are aware of the Yirrganydji research protocols and have actively notified and engaged Traditional Owners prior to issuing permits.
- Investigating opportunities to develop fee for service arrangements with researchers and relevant agencies for Traditional Owners to undertake research and monitoring activities on behalf of agencies or research institutions.
- Encouraging researchers to apply two sets of knowledge to land and sea management—traditional ecological knowledge and contemporary, science-based knowledge.

## 5.5 Representation and Participation

### Objectives

- Ensure full, effective and equitable engagement in all aspects of looking after country.

### Key Concerns

- Lack of recognition as the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of our cultural heritage
- Lack of full, effective and equitable participation in all aspects of land and sea management
- Lack of representation of our people in decision-making bodies, local advisory committees and processes in relation to the management of our sea country

Our involvement in sea country management is vital if we are to safeguard the coast and our cultural heritage, and to protect our traditional ways of life for the benefit of future generations. It requires collaboration and partnerships between us, government and other stakeholders, and a sustained effort to actively involve us in planning, management, and the day-to-day care of our country.

Past dispossession from our land and culture combined with factors overtime of an economic, social and historical nature have tended to limit our ability to participate fully in planning and management on our lands. We should be recognised as the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of our cultural heritage. Respect and recognition is critical to us. As the original custodians, we have never given up sovereignty over or connection to our lands and waters.

We want full, effective and equitable participation in all aspects of land and sea management including decision making, representing the interests of our members in wider decision making processes, information sharing, planning, management and monitoring and evaluation. We want you to recognise the interests of Yirrganydji People in managing country and take our perspectives, knowledge and skills into account in decision-making and management.



Yule Point, 2013.

Where appropriate, we should be involved and represent our people in high-level government decision-making bodies and local advisory committees. We need to ensure that adequate resources are provided so that our people can participate in decisions that affect sea country, and support them with the means to communicate back with our community.

It is critical that we have recognised leadership, responsibilities and management roles for country. It is vital that government management agencies actively support Traditional Owners in creating real, meaningful management roles to meet our customary responsibilities to country so we as Traditional Owners can empower today's generations for tomorrows future.

#### Objectives

- Ensure full, effective and equitable engagement in all aspects of looking after country.

#### Strategies

Priority will be given to:

- Encouraging Government agencies, resource managers, researchers, industry and the wider Australian community to respect and recognise Yirrganydji Traditional Owners as the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of our cultural heritage.

- Ensuring that Yirrganydji Traditional Owners are represented on decision-making bodies such as government and non-government committees, advisory groups and boards, and ensure that resources and support are provided to enable us to be fully and equitably involved in all aspects of land and sea management.
- Ensuring that Yirrganydji Traditional Owners are consulted in the planning, development and implementation of projects, programs, plans, policies and decisions that relate to our sea country, and ensure that resources and support are provided.

## 5.6 Education and Awareness

#### Objectives

- Effectively engage with the wider community to build recognition, awareness and to promote an understanding of, and respect for, Yirrganydji culture and country.

#### Key Concerns

- Limited understanding by government, industry and the wider community about what sea country means to us, our concerns and our aspirations for the future

- Lack of awareness, understanding, recognition, respect and acceptance of Yirrganydji Traditional Owners as custodians
- Lack of information, interpretation and educational materials, services and products

We are concerned that there is limited understanding by government, industry and the wider community about what sea country means to us, our concerns and our aspirations for the future. We recognise that effective public education and awareness of issues facing our sea country and our people is critical to gain support as well as motivating a change in behaviour and attitudes among individuals.

A deep understanding of belonging and knowing one's place results from our people living in their country and knowing their song cycles, lore and culture, all of which are interconnected. Thus in one sense, the increased efforts by our community to maintain our heritage is a prerequisite for the general community in growing awareness of and understanding of our culture. It is important to us that you understand the relationship between our people and the land as well as the values and risks to our country, which should be acknowledged, understood and respected.

We want to work in partnership with government agencies, resource managers, researchers, industry and the wider Australian community to improve the coordination and integration of education programs, products and services about our country and culture. We are concerned that there are large gaps in the development and delivery of education programs to ensure their applicability and on-ground effectiveness. We want to develop a range of information, interpretation and education products including through media, internet, radio, school based programs, participatory community programs, posters and brochures.

Education is not just about learning. It is about understanding the issues confronting our country and changing behaviours so we can pass on our country to future generations. The importance of education in schools is fundamental to the development of the skills and attitudes necessary to help people make sound decisions throughout their lives. We want to ensure that strong cultural, environmental and sustainability values are

incorporated in curriculums. We want to support this in a practical way, by providing resources, training for teachers and other educators, and demonstration of an integrated approach. Education and training has a key role to play in caring for our country.

We have an important leadership role to promote to the wider community an understanding of, and respect for our culture, our country, our people and the contemporary issues that affect our people and community.

## Objectives

- Effectively engage with the wider community to build recognition, awareness and to promote an understanding of, and respect for, Yirrganydji culture and country.

## Strategies

Priority will be given to:

- Developing a range of informative, interpretative and educational materials, services and products to promote to the wider community an understanding of, and respect for, Yirrganydji culture and country.
- Providing Indigenous cross cultural awareness training programs to public sector organisations and corporates to broaden employees' understanding of the cultural factors common to most Aboriginal peoples and the cultural factors of our community.
- Developing a range of early childhood, primary and secondary educational and awareness programs that can be utilised by schools to ensure that strong cultural, environmental and sustainability values are incorporated in curriculums.
- Increasing awareness and recognition of Yirrganydji culture and country through providing cultural services such as welcome to country, presentations, cross cultural awareness training and artistic performances and arts.



Mexican delegates from Cozumel with Yirrganydji members at the Cairns Turtle Rehabilitation Centre, 2014.

## 5.7 Governance and Capacity

### Objective

- Build governance and capacity to effectively manage our sea country.

### Key Concerns

- Lack of capacity, staff and skills
- Lack of resources and funds
- Lack of collaborative agreements and governance structures
- Lack of communication between the Traditional owner group(s) and its/their affiliated organisations

We understand that we will need to continue to build our capacity to implement this plan.

We are committed to developing the capacity of our people and our corporation to care for country. We are building strong foundations through our governance, which is underpinned by principles of accountability, transparency and openness, integrity, leadership and commitment. We need to continue to build our technical skills, systems, equipment, infrastructure and financial resources.

We recognise that protecting and conserving the environment and our cultural heritage is a shared responsibility. We need to establish a sustainable land and sea ranger program to undertake a range of activities across land and sea country.

We want to actively contribute to the improvement and maintenance of our biodiversity and cultural values of the land and sea. To do this we need to develop a sustainable resource base for the planning and management activities identified in this plan as well as provide consideration of future additional needs to enable us to properly care for our land and sea country.

It is important to us that in developing our resource base that we coordinate and collaborate with resource providers including government, industry, research institutions and the wider community. We want to work together in the coordination, planning and management of our land and sea country.

We understand that no individual sector or funding source can be relied upon to provide assistance with all the resources and therefore we want to create new partnerships while formalising and strengthening our existing partnerships. We encourage and support openness and diversity in developing a cooperative approach to caring for our country.



Yirrganydji Holloways Beach Camp, 2013.

## Objectives

- Build governance and capacity to effectively manage our sea country.

## Strategies

Priority will be given to:

- Establishing a Yirrganydji Caring for Country unit which will include a Land and Sea Ranger program to undertake various activities including natural resource management, protected area and marine park management, cultural heritage management, compliance, and research and monitoring.
- Negotiating and developing long-term collaborative partnerships with government and non-government agencies, research institutions and others to implement the sea country plan.
- Providing a range of 'hands-on' educational and vocational programs and training experiences with a focus on areas of potential employment within conservation and environmental resource management.
- Accessing scholarships and grants to support our people to complete educational studies that are relevant to their career path.
- Enhancing governance arrangements through establishing a working group to implement, monitor, evaluate and review the sea country plan.
- Actively seeking long term funding and support to implement the sea country plan and its objectives and strategies.
- Developing sustainable income opportunities to support and empower Traditional Owners in caring for country.
- Ensuring the integration of the sea country plan with existing and future land and sea management programs and frameworks to effectively, efficiently and appropriately manage country.
- Completing further strategic and operational planning in a range of areas including governance, business and natural and cultural resource management.



*Kangkul (Loggerhead turtle) hatchling.*

## 6. Implementing Our Plan

### 6.1 Implementation

We want to take a leadership role in managing our country and improve social, economic, health, political and cultural outcomes for our community. Building partnerships is important for implementing this plan in a strategic framework. We wish to develop collaborative arrangements and partnerships with those interested in assisting us to implement our sea country plan.

Some of the key partners that could, and may, assist and support our plan include:

- Commonwealth, State and Local Government Agencies
- Non-government organisations
- World Heritage bodies
- Natural Resource Management bodies
- Research institutions
- Community groups
- Indigenous organisations
- Traditional owner groups
- Schools
- Philanthropic bodies
- General public; and
- Individuals

We need to have adequate infrastructure and resourcing to enable and support Yirganydji People in managing country. Implementation of the plan will be dependent on available resources and partnerships with other agencies.

We invite you to talk to us about ways we can work together, as we all have a responsibility to empower today's generation for tomorrow's future.

### 6.2 Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

Monitoring, evaluation and review will be undertaken annually to ensure that the plan is progressively being implemented and continues to be used as the ongoing guide to the management of our sea country. The sea country plan will be reviewed 3 years after publication, pending availability of resources.



*Cairns Northern Beaches, North Queensland.*



*Yakal (Pandanus).*

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