

# **TRADITIONAL OWNERS AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANNING**

Contribution to the Burdekin Dry Tropics Natural Resource Management Plan (2004-2009)

By  
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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Traditional Owners are the historical managers of, and holders of important and valuable knowledge about, the Burdekin Catchment.

As a key regional stakeholder with economic and legal interests and rights, Traditional Owners also have a place at the NRM Planning table.

More broadly however, the protection and maintenance of Traditional Owners cultural resources within the NRM context is critical to the sustainable management of Culture and Country within the catchment.

## **2 WHAT ARE TRADITIONAL OWNER CULTURAL RESOURCES**

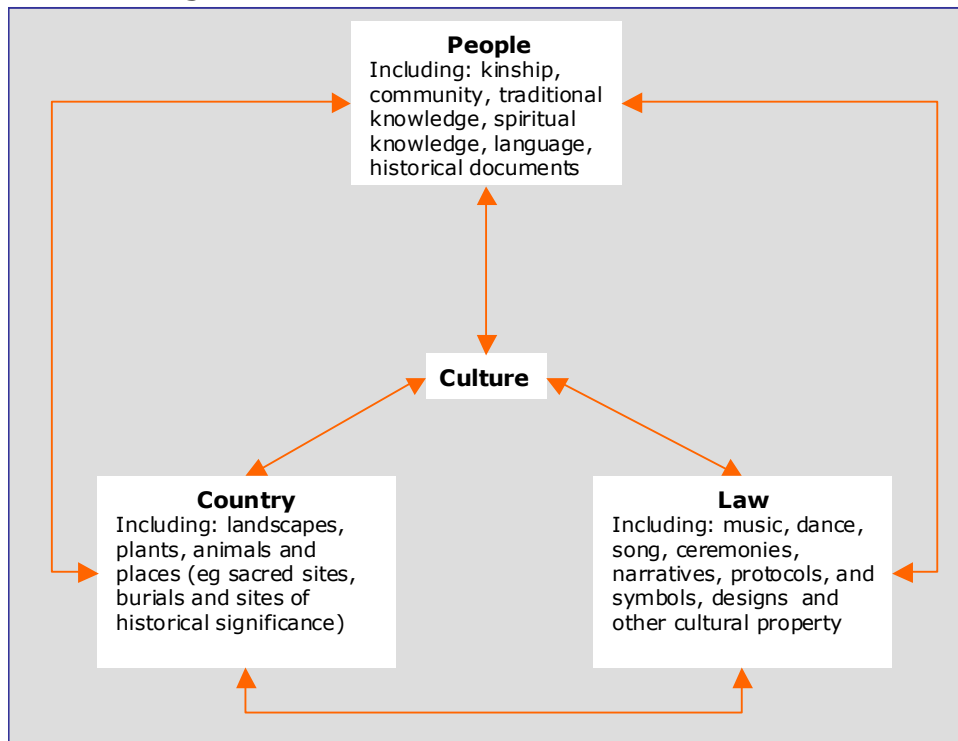
The Cultural Resources of the Traditional Owners of the Burdekin catchment are considerably more than the physical assets of significance to those Aboriginal Communities (eg, ceremonial sites, rock arts, burial sites, fish traps, scarred trees etc.)

While these physical resources are clearly important, they become little more than museum pieces unless they are considered and understood in their broader cultural context.

Certainly, the critical role that Traditional Owners have to play in the natural resource management of the catchment can't be realised unless that broader understanding of "Cultural Resources" is integrated into the NRM Plan for the Region.

For Traditional Owners, Culture is the sum total of all of those things (Cultural Resources) which together define identity and being. (Figure 1)

**Figure 1. Traditional Owners Cultural Resources**



It is this dynamic combination of People, Country and Law and all of the things these represent that make up Aboriginal culture.

While looking after Country is a cultural obligation under Aboriginal Law, the strength of Culture and the wellbeing of Aboriginal people derive from actively looking after Country.

The principles of sustainable resource management are no more relevant than in this case - weaken, neglect or threaten any of these resources and the other resources, and in fact Culture itself, is equally weakened or threatened.

In this context, Country - the land and sea and its all of its resources - is in itself a critical Cultural Resource for Traditional Owners.

*"Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common noun, it is a proper noun. People... speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and look for country... Country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy... Because of this richness, country is home, and peace; nourishment for the body; mind and spirit; heart's ease"*

Ken Taylor, 1998 An Aboriginal Australian Felix: Country, Landscape and Belonging. National Heritage Trust, ACT

As illustrated in Figure 2, Country is the connection that defines identity and belonging by integrating the cultural, biophysical and economic eg:

- Culture, including Law, Ceremony and even language, informs, and is informed by, the relationship with the biophysical aspects of country as well as the socio-economic uses of country.
- Indigenous Knowledge about, and land management practices on, country shape and are shaped by both Culture and the biophysical environment

- Understanding of the biophysical environment is shaped by a person's responsibilities for country and their economic uses of Country as defined by Culture.

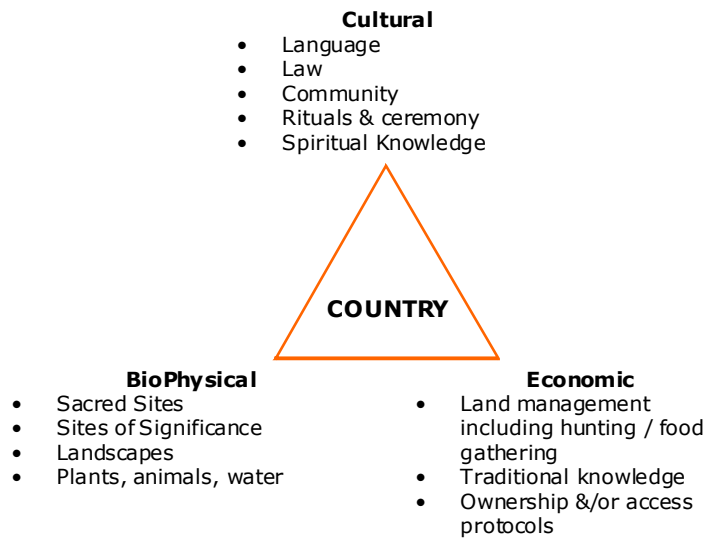


Figure 2

### 3 WHY INCLUDE TRADITIONAL OWNER CULTURAL RESOURCES IN THE NRM PLAN

The inclusion of Traditional Owner Cultural Resources in the Burdekin NRM Plan is driven by four major imperatives:

1. Existing mandates, eg the Queensland Nature Conservation Act.
2. Traditional Owners are a stakeholder with economic and legal interests and rights in NRM decision making – Traditional Owner's are land owners in the region and are exercising their Native Title rights to further land ownership and access in the Region
3. Traditional Owner's are the holders of knowledge about Country within the region that is essential to understanding the condition of the catchment and to achieving sustainable management of its natural and cultural resources.
4. Traditional Owners will play a key role in the implementation of the Region's NRM Plan

While the first two of these imperatives are fairly self-evident and compelling in their own right, it is this third issue of what Traditional Owner's can bring to the Regional NRM Planning process, objectives, implementation and outcomes that may well determine the ultimate success of that Plan.

The Traditional Owners of the country that is the Burdekin Catchment shaped the pre-European biophysical landscape of the region over a period of, at the very least, 10,000 years.

As argued by Flannery<sup>1</sup> and others, the biophysical landscape that the first Europeans saw was a product of those millennia of land management practice by the Traditional Owners of this country. In effect, the fundamental benchmark against which change in the health of the region is measured is one that was established by the Traditional Owners of the region and which they still have custodianship of and knowledge about.

Understanding those traditional land management practices and their cultural context is critical to understanding changes in the catchment since European settlement and to building sustainable NRM practices into the future.

Those millennia of responsibility for and management Country built a Indigenous Knowledge and science base that has a key role to play in informing and shaping sustainable NRM practices into the future.

Critically, however, the maintenance and appropriate use of that Indigenous Knowledge and associated Cultural Resources is also critical to the economic and cultural sustainability of the catchment and the Traditional Owner and other communities within it.

Finally, the integration of Traditional Owner Cultural Resources and their management in the NRM:

- Provides the potential for Traditional Owners and the catchment's economy more generally to access and benefit from the growing \$426 million indigenous tourism market<sup>2</sup>
- Is essential and integral to the maintenance of Traditional Owners Culture (as discussed more fully below)
- Provides a critical role for Traditional Owners in the implementation of the Plan and the achievement of its Targets. In this regard, a key theme in the issues identified by Traditional Owner's through the consultations leading up to this Plan is one of "returning to country" and being "on country".

If appropriately supported, this "homeland movement" has the potential to bring people back to the region who can (and want to) take an active role in the management of the region's Natural Resources – helping to ensure a "critical mass" of people within the region to implement many of sustainable management practices that this Plan calls for.

## 4 TRADITIONAL OWNERS ASPIRATIONS

Aboriginal people, including the Traditional Owners of the Region during the development of this plan, often describe both their beliefs and their aspirations in terms of:

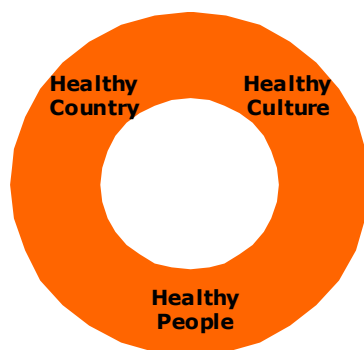
*Health Country = Healthy Culture = Healthy People*

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Flannery What's the name of that book ??

<sup>2</sup> Press Club Address - Indigenous Tourism, Hon Joe Hockey MP, Small Business & Tourism, 19 March 2003

Importantly, the circle is unbroken – you can start anywhere and go in any direction and the relationship and interdependencies holds true.



**Figure 3**

There is however, an additional non-Aboriginal construct that today has an equally important place in this integrated vision for Traditional Owners, their Culture and their Country – their Economic wellbeing

Today, Traditional Owners' Cultural Resources, as broadly defined here, have a very real economic value which, if appropriately protected and exploited can add significantly to the sustainable management of those resources and the catchment more broadly, for example:

- Protection of Cultural Resources is a pre-requisite for Traditional Owner's engagement in eco-tourism providing employment and economic independence for our people, more opportunities to practice and pass-on culture and knowledge as well as more custodians on Country and caring for Country
- If appropriately protected and used, the intellectual property that is Indigenous Knowledge can significantly benefit Traditional Owners while, for example, assisting to lower the impact on the catchment from activities such as bio prospecting. Sixty years and more ago pastoralists benefited extensively from that knowledge when they employed Traditional Owners on their properties.



Figure 4

With the acknowledgement of the economic value of Traditional Owners Cultural Resources, a more complete picture of the aspirations of Traditional Owners for the Burdekin Catchment can be described as in Figure 4 above.

## 5 PRESSURES PUTTING TRADITIONAL OWNER CULTURAL RESOURCES AT RISK

The cultural resources of the Traditional Owners of the catchment have been under significant pressure since European settlement commenced in the 1860's. White settlement was relatively rapid with violent confrontations with troops and settlers, disease and the relocation policies of the Queensland Government all contributing to a rapid decline of the region's Traditional Owner population<sup>3</sup> (Brayshaw 1990). Despite some recorded attempts by Traditional Owners to negotiate retention of access to traditional land<sup>4</sup>, most were living on Stations or settlement fringes before the turn of the twentieth century.

More recently, Traditional Owners within the region were commonly employed in the pastoral industry often on or within visiting distance of their Country. However, the introduction of award wages in the pastoral industry in 1950s resulted in widespread laid-offs which subsequently lead to a further drift to the towns and cities and significantly adding to the broader decline in the Region's rural communities since that period.

The legacy of this relatively recent history now presents a number of significant risks to the sustainable management of the catchment and the Traditional Owner Cultural Resources within it, as illustrated in Figure 5

<sup>3</sup> Brayshaw 1990

<sup>4</sup> Morrill 1963

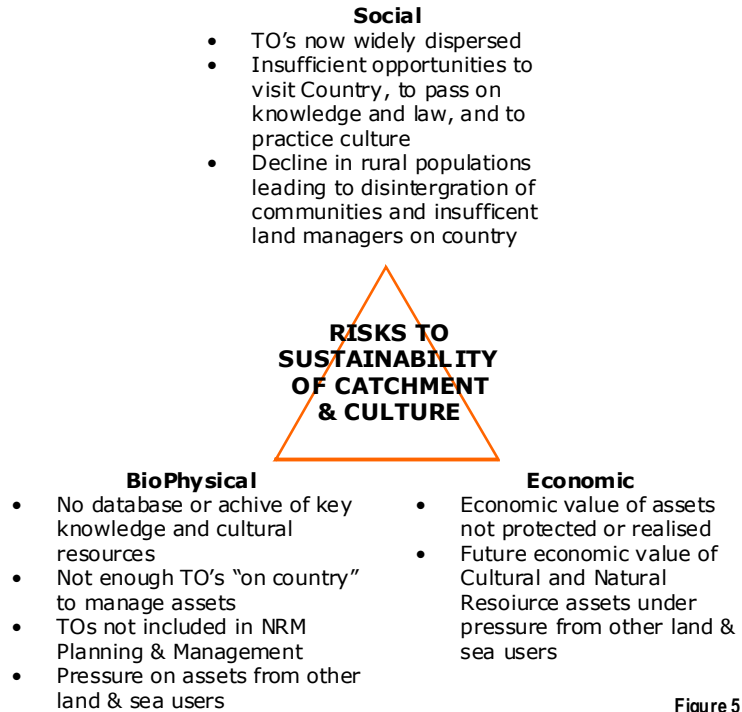


Figure 5

As shown, the risks to the sustainable management of Traditional Owner Cultural Resources within the region are an interdependent set of Biophysical, Economic and Social factors, eg:

- Many Traditional Owners of the Region now live in cities and towns resulting in some instances in there not being enough Traditional Owners on Country to enable the sustainable management of Country or cultural assets or the maintenance of traditional land management practices and knowledge.  
In turn Indigenous Knowledge is potentially lost and the economic value of those cultural assets is neither protected nor realised for the rightful benefit of Traditional Owners.
- There being no "database" or "archive" of Cultural assets and Indigenous Knowledge within the region and a lack of opportunities to pass-on knowledge and culture, means that potentially, with the death of every old-timer, important knowledge is lost to the task of sustainable management of Country and to the economic, social & cultural well-being of Traditional Owners into the future.

## 6 FACTORS THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE GOOD MANAGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS CULTURAL RESOURCES.

The Cultural Resource Issue Packages as summarised in Figure 6 below and identified by Traditional Owners in the consultations leading up to the preparation of this report, are the priorities around which

Traditional Owners have established a number of Condition Targets for inclusion in the NRM Plan.



Figure 6

Again, as illustrated in Table 1 below, the interdependencies between these issues and the targets set to address them are such that they can't effectively be addressed in isolation:

- Without opportunities to access country and connect with culture, Indigenous Knowledge does not get maintained and passed on and the potential contribution of those skills and knowledge needed for the sustainable management of the region's biophysical resources are lost.

Similarly, the capacity of Traditional Owners to appropriately exploit the economic value of their Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Resources is diminished, invariably denying Traditional Owners the ability to create their own opportunities to actively manage their cultural resources, to strengthen culture and community, and to pass on traditional knowledge and in fact to benefit economically.

- Unless Traditional Owner's have a comprehensive record of their cultural resources, culture and Indigenous Knowledge is progressively lost with every passing and the capacity for Traditional Owner's to appropriately exploit the economic potential of those assets

In this way for example, the opportunity to provide employment on Country and in the sustainable exploitation of those resources through activities such as tourism and bio-prospecting is lost.

- Without the capacity or opportunities to appropriately exploit and protect the cultural and economic value of their cultural assets, Traditional Owners will be denied the ability to create their own opportunities to repair and manage country, strengthen culture and pass on traditional knowledge.

Similarly, they will be denied the capacity to participate as equals in NRM processes and decision-making.

ulture  
Biophysical  
Social  
Economic

**Table 1**  
**Traditional Owner Packages & Component Issues**

ulture	Biophysical	Social	Economic	
				<b>1 Weeds &amp; Feral Animals</b>
X				1.1 Terrestrial Weeds
X				1.2 Aquatic Weeds
X				1.3 Damage caused by Feral animals on soil, water quality, vegetation, native wildlife and sites of significance.
				<b>2 Pollution &amp; Pesticides</b>
X				2.1 Pesticides and Chemicals
X				2.2 Industrial Pollution
X				2.3 Agricultural Pollution
X				2.4 Domestic Pollution
X				2.5 Environmental Pollution
X				2.6 Transport Pollution
				<b>3 Capacity Building &amp; Institutional Change</b>
X	X	X	X	3.1 Participation and involvement of young people in the management of Natural and Cultural Resources
X	X	X	X	3.2 Need for training and career development initiatives and strategies in Natural and Cultural Resource Management
X	X	X	X	3.3 Support for the development of representative governance structures
X	X	X	X	3.4 Support for developing partnerships with philanthropic groups, universities, local, state and federal governments
X	X	X	X	3.5 Establishing formal arrangements with various individuals, govt and agencies. (eg MOUs)
X	X	X	X	3.6 Future Act Notification Process
				<b>4. Cultural Maintenance Through Connection &amp; Access to Country</b>
X		X		4.1 Culture and country (Healthy People = Healthy Country) need to structure issue to incorporate health & wellbeing of country and people.
X	X	X	X	4.2 Protection of sites of significance
X	X	X	X	4.3 Preservation of Natural and Cultural resources for future generations
X		X		4.4 Language Revival and maintenance
X	X	X		4.5 Develop opportunities for people in custody to become involved in cultural & natural resource management and activity.
X		X	X	4.6 Recognition of Connection to Country by community (eg Historical and Torres Strait Islander people)
X	X	X	X	4.7 Access to Country – Across all Tenure.
X		X		4.8 Reconnection to Country through Cultural camps
X	X	X	X	4.9 Support for development of Homelands Policy within the BDT.
X		X		4.10 Providing alternatives to education (eg schools on country etc)
				<b>5 Management and Protection of Country – Land &amp; Sea</b>
X	X	X	X	5.1 Observing/Acknowledging protocols for Country
X	X	X	X	5.2 Protection of sites of significance in open public access areas
X	X	X	X	5.3 Appropriate management and use of Protected Area Estate
X				5.4 Management of marine and coastal resources
X				5.5 Land use impacts on inshore environments
X				5.6 Protection & maintenance of seagrass and fish habitat areas
X				5.7 Damage caused by recreational and commercial use of watercraft and facilities.
				<b>6 Sustainable Resource Use</b>
X				6.1 Stopping commercial utilization of resources through the black market
X	X	X	X	6.2 Sustainable hunting management plans and practices
X		X		6.3 Research & Development (eg, turtle and dugong and alternatives to Native Title)
				<b>7 Water Resource Planning</b>
X		X		7.1 Appropriate mechanisms for Traditional Owner Water Allocation
X		X		7.2 Technical training and development for information relevant to Water Resource Planning issues
X		X		7.3 Appropriate mechanisms for proper compensation for Loss of Water rights for Traditional Owners.
				<b>8 Sustainable Economic Development</b>
X				8.1 Support for the development of sustainable economic industries for Traditional Owners
X	X	X		8.2 Support for the development of eco-cultural tourism
X		X		8.3 Support the development of Nursery industry (eg, seed collection, plant propagation for \$\$)
X	X	X	X	8.4 Ability to earn a living sustainable from natural and cultural resources
X				8.5 Support for development of trust funds
X				8.6 Sustainable forestry.
				<b>9 Increase in Cultural Awareness</b>
X		X		9.1 Cultural Awareness of Broader Community eg. Camps etc
X	X	X	X	9.2 Incorporating Local Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge in school/TAFE curriculum
X	X	X	X	9.3 Integration of traditional culture/history within major public displays – Cultural Interpretation.
				<b>10 Intellectual and Cultural Property and Ownership.</b>
X		X		10.1 Support for developing fee for service arrangements with Government Departments and industry through estate management
X	X	X	X	10.2 Support for Traditional Owner groups to develop intellectual and cultural property industries and consultancies.
X	X	X	X	10.3 Protection of intellectual and cultural property (eg, stories, sites, cultural landscapes)

Significantly, as illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 6, Capacity Building & Institutional Change (Package 3) is a thematic issue that strongly impacts in the biophysical, social, Cultural and economic.

Capacity Building is that set of enabling factors which need to be addressed in order for Traditional Owners to be able to effectively engage in the management of the catchment and address the NRM issues and targets identified through this planning process.

As such, Figure 6 below illustrates the central importance of Capacity Building for Traditional Owners in the planning for and design of NRM practices in the catchment.

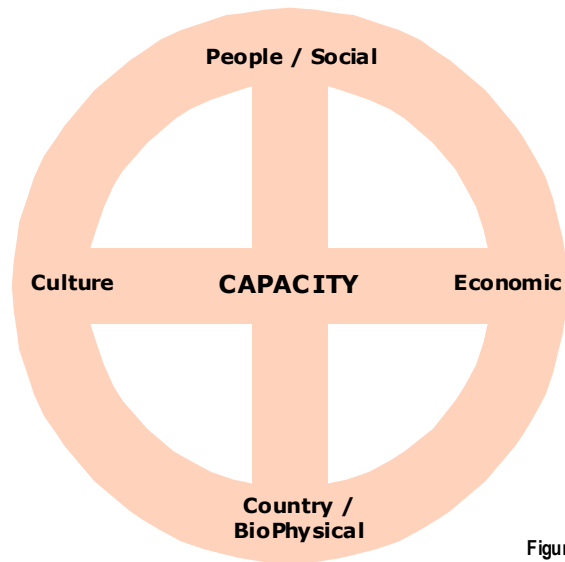


Figure 6