



Community Network Areas Boosting Traditional Owner Engagement

Photo: Community Network Area 2 meeting 2015 © NQ Dry Tropics

2015 Case Study

For tens of thousands of years, Traditional Owners have managed and held valuable knowledge about the Burdekin Dry Tropics region. NQ Dry Tropics proudly works in partnership with regional Traditional Owner groups to build their capacity to care for their country. Traditional ecological knowledge and land management techniques can play a key role in protecting our natural and cultural resources, and effective Traditional Owner engagement is needed to incorporate it into current and future strategies.

The Traditional Owner Management Group (TOMG) has been running for more than 10 years and comprises representatives from most of the 15 Traditional Owner groups with country in the Burdekin Dry Tropics region. The TOMG recently helped to develop a strategy to collect and use traditional ecological knowledge, and create a framework to implement a significant \$30,000 per year Traditional Owner Grants programme administered by NQ Dry Tropics. This new grants programme aims to maximise skills and opportunities for Traditional Owners to work on country.

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Together with NQ Dry Tropics, the TOMG also approved a new approach for indigenous natural resource management (NRM) engagement, based on Community Network Areas (CNA) which are groupings, or hubs, of Traditional Owners. The Gudjuda Reference Group Aboriginal Corporation developed the CNA engagement model and is working in partnership with NQ Dry Tropics to deliver the Engaging Traditional Owners project.

There are four CNAs containing Traditional Owner groups that are geographically and culturally linked.

- CNA 1: Gugu Badhun, Warungnu, Gudjal/Kudjala, Nywaigi
- CNA 2: Wulgurukaba, Manbarra, Bindal, Juru
- CNA 3: Jangga, Gia, Birri, Wiri
- CNA 4: Yirendali, Bidjara, Wangan/Jagalingou

This CNA approach allows for more focused, targeted engagement with Traditional Owner groups to find out about their key issues and hear their views about how to tackle them. It encourages and strengthens sub-regional collaboration and mutual support between Traditional Owner groups and key stakeholders such as local councils, state and federal government representatives, industry, and community groups.

Traditional Owner groups in each hub attend annual network meetings with these key stakeholders. Prior to the most recent network meetings, Leah Saltner, the Gudjuda Project Officer, visited each Traditional Owner group individually to explain the new engagement approach. She also gathered information on the issues that impact Traditional Owners' participation in NRM.



Photo: Traditional Owner Management Group Meeting 2015 © NQ Dry Tropics

Individual meetings have taken place in CNA 1 and 2 with group members and representatives of Prescribed Body Corporates for groups that have Native Title determinations. Engagement is also underway with groups in CNA 3 and 4. So far, these actions have tripled the number of Indigenous people in the region that had previously been engaged in NRM.

The CNA meetings aim to:

- involve Indigenous participants in NRM planning;
- generate ideas for on-ground projects and capacity building that the devolved grants programme could support;
- promote partnerships between Traditional Owners and other stakeholders to deliver natural and cultural resource management activities;
- build capacity for particular skills that support enterprise development; and
- source funding for organisations through grants or corporate sponsorship.

Early feedback about the CNA meetings suggests this is a positive step towards encouraging engagement and building relationships. Following the first CNA 1 and CNA 2 network meetings, one participant said: "It's a worthy method to initiate the start of an engagement and relationship building process".

So far these meetings have resulted in Traditional Owners accessing training on 'tendering success' from the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. Indigenous Business Australia has engaged Nywaigi to develop a cattle logistics project, and plans are also in place to support Juru to develop a website.

Anthony Contarino, Senior Ranger, Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing said: "This networking group is one of the best ideas for a long time to find contacts to further involve Traditional Owners in parks management."

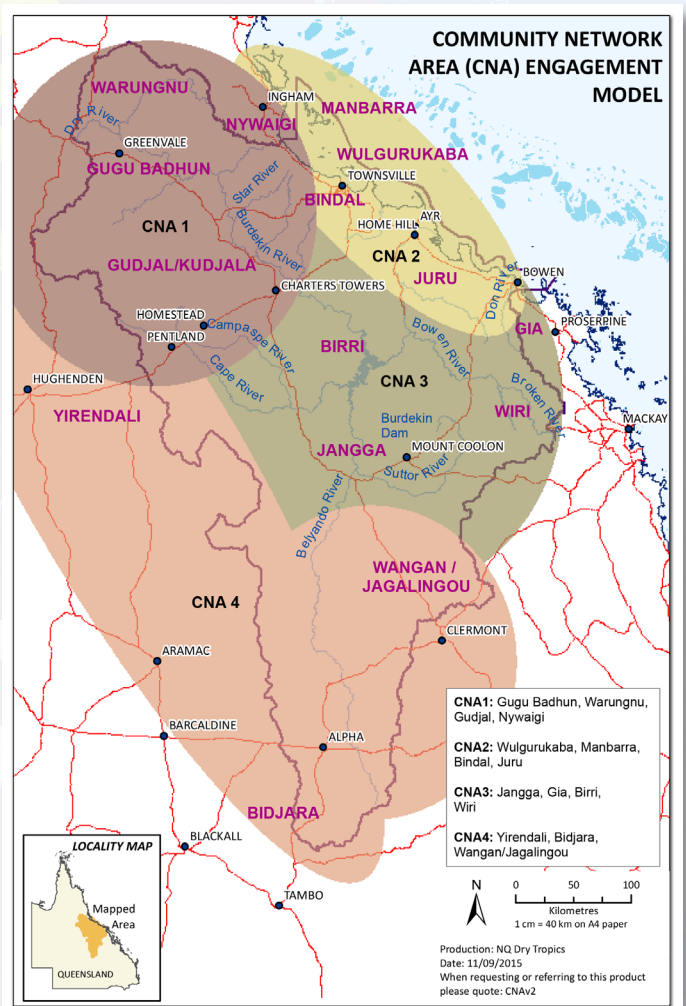
Several Traditional Owner groups have identified a goal to establish an NRM ranger team to undertake cultural and NRM activities. Leah has since helped Gudjal / Kudjala and Manbarra with funding applications from a variety of sources to try and achieve these aims.

Leah said: "The concept of the CNA engagement model is based on Gudjuda Reference Group's

desire to contribute to Traditional Owners' long-term capacity to look after country. This engagement model builds stronger, localised relationships between Traditional Owner groups, NRM organisations and government. Gudjuda envisions that even if there is limited funding in the future, Traditional Owner groups will have formed strong relationships 'on-the-ground' to continue to look after cultural and environmental responsibilities for country".

This new engagement model supports Traditional Owner groups to take a leadership role in delivering and managing relevant projects under the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme. For the Engaging Traditional Owners project, the Gudjuda Reference Group facilitates the TOMG meetings and assists Traditional Owners in the CNAs to build relationships and capacity to work on country.

This investment by NQ Dry Tropics in staff capacity within Traditional Owner organisations, and contracting for Indigenous employment, training and enterprise development, supports the Australian Government's commitment to "Closing the Gap" on Indigenous Disadvantage.



Map: Community Network Areas (CNA) in the Burdekin Dry Tropics © NQ Dry Tropics.