

CAPE YORK PENINSULA ENSURING ITS LONG TERM PROTECTION

A contribution to a conservation agenda for the region

Cape York Peninsula is an extraordinary environment, with a seamless transition between dense mangroves, tropical rainforests, rolling savannas, endless woodlands, teeming wetlands and plentiful coasts and seas. The abundance and diversity of life on the Cape is sustained because these vast, interlocking ecosystems remain connected and healthy from coast to coast.

These landscapes are the homelands of the region's Indigenous traditional owners and have been since time immemorial. We recognise the unique connection to country and depth of ecological knowledge that Indigenous people possess. Accordingly, their rights and interests, and their ecological knowledge and management expertise are vital to the future of the Cape.

Cape York Peninsula is subject to the same kinds of destructive activities that have caused so much damage in southern and eastern Australia. These activities and new proposals continue to pose serious threats to the natural and cultural integrity of the Cape. We are also just starting to understand the effects of climate change on the Australian landscape, which may visit adverse consequences on many parts of northern Australia.

A long term conservation strategy is needed to protect Cape York Peninsula from harmful and unsustainable land use and the effects of climate change, and to ensure that this place of global environmental significance is properly valued and looked after. The following initiatives aim to protect this heritage and contribute to securing a sustainable and prosperous living for the Cape's communities.

PROTECTED AREAS

Cape York Peninsula has many areas vital to the protection of rare and endangered species, to the evolution of life, and to the maintenance of ecological processes essential to survival. It is also a place of great Indigenous cultural heritage and spectacular natural beauty.

We support the creation of a network of protected areas as an important part of a strategy to maintain the outstanding natural and cultural values of Cape York Peninsula. The establishment of these areas needs to be achieved with the agreement of the native title holders of Cape York Peninsula. There should be a range of reserve options including co-managed National Parks, Indigenous Protected Areas and other conservation areas. It is imperative that this protected area network be well resourced to ensure its proper management.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Cape York Peninsula is remarkable for the large extent of its intact plant communities. Land clearing around the country and in other parts of the world has decimated the environment and is one of the major reasons for the catastrophic decline in species, reduced water availability and quality, rising salt, soil erosion, long-term loss of biological productivity and rapid climate change.

We support the environmental laws in Queensland that protect the forests and woodlands on the Cape from broad-scale clearing. We maintain that economic enterprises should be developed in accord with this important benchmark of protection and sustainability.



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WILD RIVERS PROTECTION

Cape York Peninsula is a land of free-flowing rivers - or 'wild' rivers. Protection of these is essential to the health of the environment, river corridors and wetlands, and to maintaining associated cultural and economic values. These rivers are free of major dams and weirs and the pollution caused by large-scale irrigated agriculture, and increasingly rare in an era of unprecedented pressure on water resources.

We support the protection of wild rivers through the Wild Rivers Act and the model of river management this provides, including the creation of a river ranger program providing traditional owners with significant additional resources and capacity to manage Cape York's rivers. We support the exercise of native title rights in respect to these rivers. The Wild Rivers Act does not change the established economies and land uses on Cape York however it can protect these important river systems from new and increasing pressures.



LAND MANAGEMENT AND ENTERPRISE

Due to the encompassing natural and cultural values of Cape York Peninsula it is essential to have a whole-of-landscape approach to the management of the environment and not simply a focus on protected areas. A range of traditional land management practices and contemporary natural resource management initiatives are being developed by local people and are essential for the environmental health and productivity of the entire region.

Appropriate fire regimes, weed and feral animal eradication and prevention, river management, control of illegal fishing and a host of other activities are critical to avoid degradation and species loss and to maintain the natural and cultural assets of the Cape. These measures will create employment and infrastructure on which Cape communities can rely and generate new economic opportunities, such as in the emerging carbon economy, the protection of cultural and biological heritage, and tourism. We support investment by Governments and the private sector in land management conducted by traditional owners and other land holders. This should include support and finance for stewardship and ranger programmes, land and sea management agencies, and environmental and cultural enterprises.



WORLD HERITAGE

The natural and cultural values of Cape York Peninsula are of global significance. Australia's leading experts have confirmed that Cape York Peninsula can qualify for World Heritage listing. World Heritage listing is the highest form of recognition available, but it cannot happen unless it has the support of the Indigenous traditional owners, the Australian public, the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. For a nomination to succeed there must be tenure and management that will secure protection, and resolution in respect of native title rights.



We support the recognition of Cape York Peninsula for its World Heritage values. We confirm that we will only support a World Heritage nomination that has the prior informed consent of the Traditional Owners and other landholders. The social and economic benefits that World Heritage protection brings are substantial and must be carefully developed and equitably shared.



**The Wilderness Society, Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation, WWF
Queensland Conservation, Cairns and Far North Environment Centre
Australian Rainforest Conservation Society
Wildlife Preservation Society Queensland**

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