



**OLKOLA**  
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

**News**



**MARCH 2022**

We, the Olkola people, all stand together as one, upholding our traditions and culture with great respect for our old ways.

We lead and govern our traditional lands, business and future.

Others will listen to what we are saying and support our Ways.

Our ancestors have entrusted us to carry on the traditions and to care for the country and all the animals, plants and food within.

We do not take more than the land can give, so it will provide for generations to come.

Our elders teach the young people language and knowledge of how to protect our sacred sites, artifacts, water places and stories of our land, so they continue to live on for generations to come.

We support each other to live life to the fullest, living a healthy lifestyle, ensure we have happy homes, good healthcare and a safe community free of violence and crime.

# Moving our vision forward





# A word from our Chair...



## Everything's exciting Olkola Aboriginal Corporation chair Mike Ross writes...

Everything's a new pathway for us.

This is our land, this is our culture, and this is our law and custom on our country.

I'm very excited with how things are going to roll out, especially our new Cultural Knowledge Centre.

I think a lot of traffic be coming up, people will be using it.

What's another 30 kilometres to go to find the knowledge of the Central Cape York Traditional Owners?

We'll be putting in areas for people to camp out there in the area and, of course, they will learn about us.

How did the Olkola people end up in the central area?

How did they survive?

What foods do we have, what medicines?

We're all freshwater people, we hadn't seen saltwater, so we are completely different to the seaside people.

There's a lot of little things that we can do on our Country.

There's old mine sites in there that go back to the 18th century. There's Alice Queen and the Seventy Mile gold field that are still there.

So much opportunity.

We've got wetlands down on the Crosbie country.

Big lagoons and beautiful wetlands country, and an opportunity to look at different areas.

We want people to see how Olkola people survived in all those years and how we are still surviving now.

We are working to try to capture all that and one of the best things about it is our new generation will be able to capture that knowledge, to pass on again.

Our progress is amazing.

We've got the bores in.

We've got the solar panels.

The plan is to use all the water, rain water and everything, to keep the lagoon full all the time, so we can then start to grow lilies and native trees around there.

There will be places where people can sit and talk to the rangers and elders who are left, and get to know Olkola as the Central Cape York Traditional Owners.

We've got members scattered across Australia, and it's hard to keep up with you all but we hope this newsletter will help Olkola people to know better what's going on.

We're so excited to tell you what it's all about, how it came about and how we are progressing.

This is just one of the projects I've really dreamed about from a long time ago.

It's something that we will see Olkola people recognised on their Country, and I hope you are excited now too.



ABOVE COVER PIC: Olkola Aboriginal Corporation work planning for 2022 (Pic Kat Samuel); TOP OF PAGE: Olkola Country Waterhole (Pic Olkola Rangers); NEXT PAGE TOP RIGHT: Mike Ross - helping to move our vision forward (Pic Annette Ruzicka); BELOW: Walking on Olkola Country (Pic Shania Ross)





# Moving our vision forward

**Olkola Aboriginal Corporation Chair Mike Ross invites all our Olkola People, Cape York People and the wider community to come and learn with us.**

“Olkola are working to bridge a gap between Cape York people and tribes, different people, and the wider community,” he said.

“That means we have to start learning the ways of the Olkola people, we have to start the woman business and men business.

“Then in our law and custom, in the Olkola country, we can teach the young ones that come up.

“That’s my dream.

“We’ve been on it since 2010, when we got our land handed back.

“That was our first handover, our national parks,

“And that’s when we started the process of saving our little parrots, our Alwal.

“This is their home, and they are endangered.

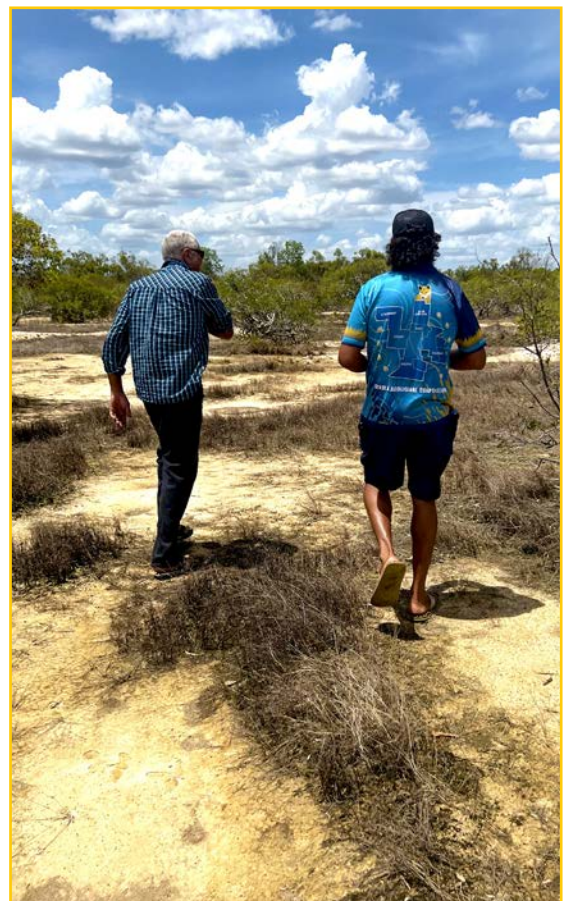
“In the heart of our golden-shouldered parrot habitat area we’ve got a spring fenced in.

“It bubbles and there is clean water coming out of it.

“The spring is where the parrot was created.

“The spring is where we were created.

“We invite you all to come to our Country and come and learn with us.”







**In early February the Olkola Ranger and admin team came together to flesh out what 2022 has in store for us, CEO Deb Symonds writes...**

It was a great opportunity to collaboratively review our 2021 work plan.

We were able to look at how we managed our work in areas including fire, pest, weed, aerodrome and infrastructure upgrades, cultural surveying, and data recording.

We continue to grow as a corporation with an increasing number of Olkola people on staff as projects get underway.

Our carbon abatement program has worked well as a revenue raiser for us, which means we've been able to reinvest into infrastructure and other projects.

It meant we were able to

buy the Laura Roadhouse, for example, where we now employ our own staff and have several smaller projects in development there, even including a vegetable garden.

In 2016 we had just four part-time rangers and a part-time CEO, now we have over 17 full-time staff, which goes up to as many as 25 when we run tours.

We expect 2022 will be a steep climb but we will tread steady towards the end of the year.

Something we are all looking forward to is the opening of our Nakurra Walking Track (*pictured below by Kat Samuel*).

Olkola Corporation

administrative staff have also been meeting with website designers and developers to look at ways of adding more functions to the website for our members and visitors.

In the coming days or weeks our current website may down time to time as we carry out maintenance and upgrades.

We look forward to the end product, and for our users to provide any feedback on the new look and features when the time comes.

We are so excited about this opportunity to report on our progress to our members, we hope you all enjoying reading our March newsletter.



## Tourism headed for 2023 return

**COVID-19 triggered an extension of the Queensland Government's Year of Indigenous Tourism and offered an opportunity for Olkola to review their operations and do some training.**

"The government is investing \$10 million over the next two years in Indigenous tourism development and growth," CEO Deb Symonds said.

"Out of that staff were able to attend an 'Emerging Indigenous Experiences' Field School with Savannah Guides.

"The week-long workshop was an opportunity to review our business and marketing plans for our 'Journey to Olkola Country' tours.

"It was a timely reminder of our target markets, especially for our domestic tourism, as well as a chance to review the progress we've made with our

Healthy Country Plan."

She said once they had finished their reviews they hoped to make an announcement for re-opening.

"Once we are set we hope to announce to our guests and returning friends on the waiting list the return of our tours for 2023," she said.



# Our biggest project so far



**“We’ve got a fair bit to go with the Cultural Centre at Sandy Creek,” Olkola Aboriginal Corporation Chair Mike Ross says.**



“We’re still working on it, and that’s exciting.

“We’re going to go a long way with that centre.

“The first stage is leveling the area where the Cultural and Knowledge Centre has to go in, then there’s the bottom section where the ranger base sits.

“The Olkola Corporation and the workers are working hard to use our own material from our own country, like the timbers and some clay, so they can make some parts of the buildings from our own country.

“It means a more natural fit into the natural environment around it.

“When the first section’s finished, then we’ll start on the process of moving in.

“It’s a major milestone for the Olkola Corporation and the Olkola People to have something like that on their country.

“A lot of our old people are gone now, but there are still memories and the stories they told.

“We will all be working to bring in information and artifacts and stories going back a long time.



*TOP: Working on the Cultural Centre site in November 2021 (Pic Olkola Rangers), INSET an artist’s impression of the new venture; LEFT: Measuring up (Pic Shania Ross); ABOVE: Olkola Rangers finding local timber (Pic Olkola Rangers)*

“It will be a keeping place for the Olkola people, and for the wider communities and the public too – if they’re coming past, they can come in and read about it.

“That’s partly why I put it on Sandy Creek area there, that and because it’s in the golden-shouldered parrot habitat area.

“That makes it easy access and it’s right on the road, so it’s the perfect place.”





# Indigenous Protected Area ready for dedication

**“We are on track, with potential pathways of multiple ranger positions under the project,” CEO Deb Symonds said.**

“We thank all our members for continuously being involved in this project, as it follows through our vision for the Olkola People.

“We will, finally, have a fully operational IPA

plan that fits into our Health Country Plan – a vision born out of our first land handover in 2014.

“This dedication helps us secure and protect our Country, it means we can employ more

rangers and access resources such as equipment and training, which will support us for years to come.”

Attached is the map that identifies the country that is an essential added layer of

protection and for many areas of cultural site recording ahead.

The Corporation will be looking at advertising several positions later in the year, Olkola men, women and youths will be encouraged to apply.



## Fire and wind study means better, more efficient burns

**Olkola Rangers, including our juniors, jumped at the chance to learn about software used to plan more efficient burns according to local conditions earlier this year.**

The Projected Augmented Land Management (PALM) workshop was taught via Zoom by Charles Darwin University’s Rohan Fisher.

A second mini-workshop on the use and coordination of the Kestrel Wind Reader and tripod holder, taught by Environmental Scientist John Tomerini and Firescape’s Leasia Felderhof, was the perfect compliment to the PALM course.

CEO Deb Symonds said the work they did was part of an ongoing partnership they have with Charles Darwin University and the CSIRO.

“We are trialling the new

SPARK modeling,” she said.

“We have a 3D model of our country we use to chart previous history, combined with current data, it helps us to predict what might happen in the future.”

Rangers were able to experiment with 3D fire simulation by creating fire breaks on the model to see how much would burn according to wind direction and intensity.

Deb said it was early stages, but the junior rangers were especially impressed.

“The number of functions this software has is incredible,” one of



our junior rangers said.

Deb said it was valuable work.

“Knowing things like the different wind speeds in different landscapes, such as melaleuca or lancewood country, and being able to factor that into a burn allows us to predict and trial what we are doing before we even light a match,” she said.

“We can actually feed data between programs

“What we have learned will go a long way towards protecting and nurturing our Country.”



6





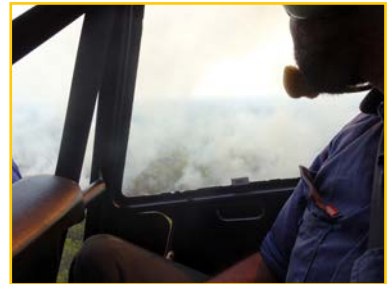
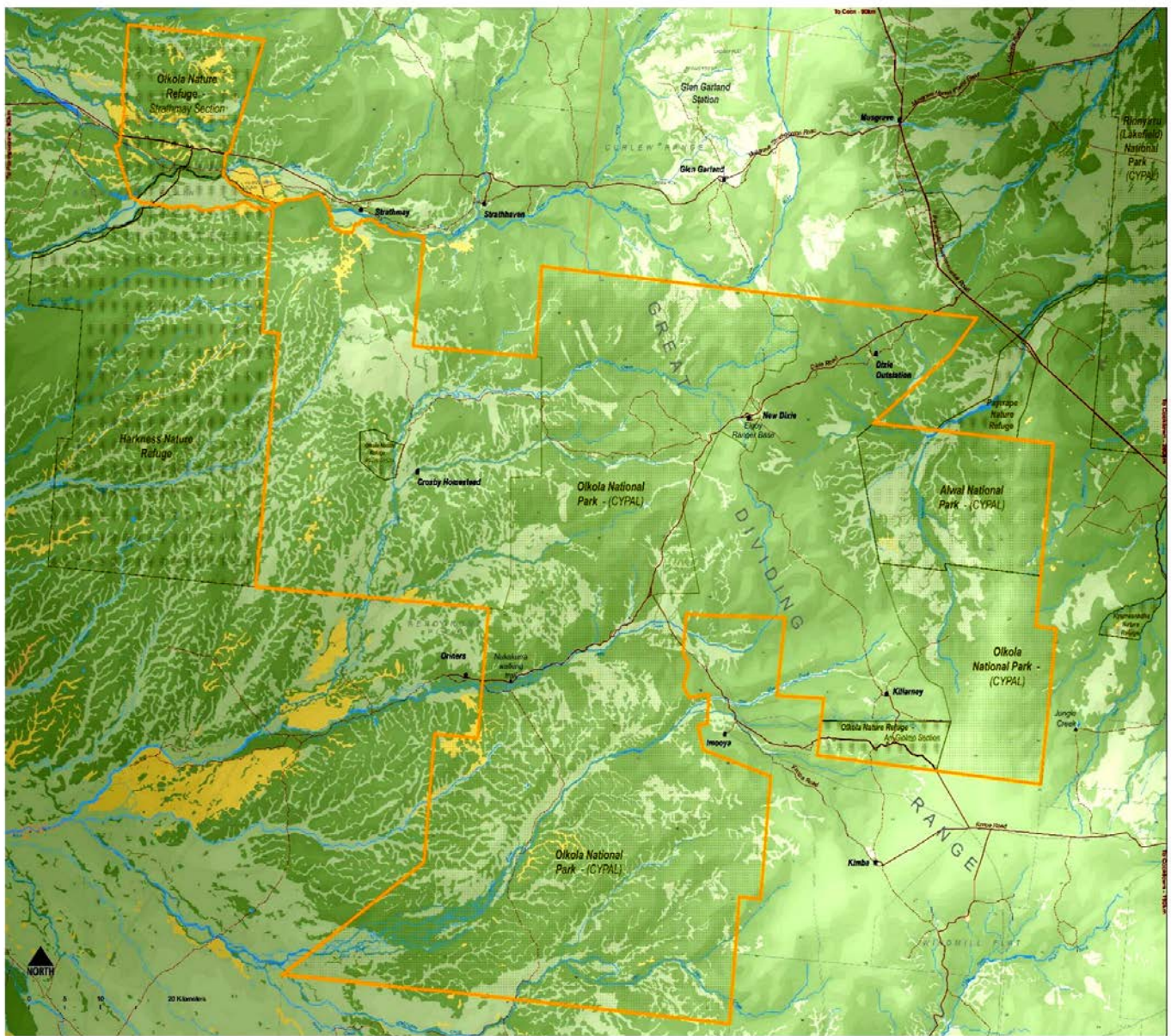
Wall map of  
**OLKOLA**  
INDIGENOUS  
PROTECTED AREA



OLKOLA  
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Legend

- Olkola IPA boundary
- Homesites
- Main towns
- Rivers and streams
- Roads
- Tracks
- National Parks and Nature Refuges
- Pastoral property boundaries
- Glen Garland pastoral holding
- Forests and Woodlands
- Open woodlands
- Grasslands
- Elevation (metres)



# Leading the way in controlled fires

Every year the Olkola Rangers do an outstanding job with early season wildfire burns and late season responses, CEO Deb Symonds says.

“We have the largest carbon abatement program across Cape York,” she said.

“Last year we only lost 8.8 per cent of country to wild fire, which was the lowest across Cape York.

“Every year we’ve gotten better and better at our controlled burns.”

Operations Manager Ashaley Ross said the rangers had worked hard to nourish and protect their Country.

“Reading country right, the moment the Rangers can burn, it lights up,” Ashaley said.

“The Rangers work in carrying out a lot of early season burns and

fire breaks from August to December last year ensured Olkola country and our Corporation was not at risk of uncontrolled wildfires.

“Our new junior rangers will be undertaking fire training with our great long-term partner, Fire Consultant Mick Blackman, from

Friendly Fire Ecological Consultants in the coming months.”

Deb said the carbon abatement money had supported their investment in infrastructure and other projects, making it a win-win for everyone.





# Rangers secure for three more years

**In 2018 Olkola was able to secure four full-time ranger positions, which have been renewed and extended for another three years, CEO Deb Symonds says.**

Through the Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger Program, the Queensland Government partners with First Nations communities to care for land and sea country, provide jobs and training and engage future generations.

“Our amazing partnership with the Department of Environment & Sciences (DES) continues,” Deb said.

“It means our rangers are fully-funded with full job security,” she said.

“We wouldn’t be able to

cover such a wide area of our Country without that funding.

“All our work is within the guidelines of our Healthy Country Plan, so this partnership is amazing, we’re so grateful for this continued support.”



**800,000 hectares is a ‘lot of Country’ for our Olkola rangers to look after - Chair**

**One of my dreams is to have a women’s ranger team, Olkola Aboriginal Corporation chair Mike Ross says.**

“It’s up to the Olkola people but I’d like to have most women rangers too,” he said.

“Our Olkola Rangers, based at Killarney, are doing their part of the work, but they are mostly men.

“There are young people to train, and we’ve got some more younger ones coming in and learning how to be rangers and doing training with the older ones.

“They’re training a lot and they’re doing things with it, it’s been a busy season, and it’s going to get busier.

“We’ve been working with them on our fire plans and carbon banking.

“We also have weed control, and working with

QPWS rangers out of the Olkola National Park.

“We have our own rangers working on the freehold area.

“They’ve said they’ve got the parrot out there

too, so we know by the end of April and into early May they’ll start to dig their nests.

“There’s a lot of country to look after, they’ve got close to 800,000 hectares of land.”



TOP PICS: thanks to Richard Ross and the Olkola Rangers  
ABOVE: Olkola Aboriginal Corporation Chair speaking at the Kuku Yalanji CYPAL/Joint Management ILUA/IMA signing in Ayton, September 2021 (Pic Christine Howes).





# Progressing joint management

Earlier this year our six Olkola Rangers, including Senior Ranger Richard Ross, met with Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service rangers for this year's Joint Management meeting.



Existing national parks, Aboriginal land and unallocated State land in the Cape York Peninsula region are managed under 'CYPAL' where joint management arrangements may be established under Indigenous Management Agreements (IMAs).

Management responsibilities are negotiated between the department and Traditional Owners over a period of



time, often years.

Last year's meeting was held in Cairns Operations Manager Ashaley Ross said.

"It was a bit different meeting on Zoom this year," he said. "Discussions were collaborative, as they have been when we have met in person.

"We covered items such as annual burns, pest and weed on the Olkola National Parks, compliance and other



types of training available for Olkola Rangers."

CEO Deb Symonds said they were also looking to establish a full-time residence for a staff member to work alongside the Alwal and Elgoye National Parks' rangers as a cultural advisor.

Pics on this page thanks to Richard Ross, Shania Ross, Kat Samuel and the Olkola Rangers.







## First aid up to date

Olkola and Junior Rangers and staff are all up to date and fully refreshed in their first aid qualifications after enjoying a full day course held in Cairns in mid-February, CEO Deb Symonds says.

“Completing this training ensures all staff are aware of what first aid they need to carry out during any emergency,” she said.

“Working in remote areas mean an emergency is an emergency and each situation will be different.

“The work we did included staff practicing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) on manikins, trying for a response from an unconscious person, and/or calling 000.

“We strive to adhere to Workplace Health & Safety policies and have acted out several and various possible scenarios under controlled conditions.”



## Locating connections through GIS training

Every year the Olkola Corporation staff try to take on as much training as they can, and already this year our Olkola Junior Rangers and Admin staff have undertaken a course in Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

“We are now well-versed in how to explore complex uses of Google Earth, GIS Software and transferring data from our handheld Global Positioning System (GPS) equipment,” Operations Manager Ashaley Ross said.

“That means on-field data such as fire ignition points, cultural site recordings, sited nests of Alwal and so much more can be kept and used for future reference and/or projects.”

Firescape is an important partner in the ongoing training of our Rangers and staff.



*Pics on this page thanks to  
Kat Samuels*



# Taking flight from Olkola Country

In 2019 Olkola Aboriginal Corporation secured funding from the Federal Government to build two new airstrips on Olkola nation, and to upgrade the existing airstrip on Strathmay.

“We are all about keeping our rangers, workers and visitors safe,” CEO Deb Symonds says.

“So the access we have from what will be our three airstrips on our County is critical.

“This is our second year working on these projects, Glen Garland is a much bigger job because we are building it from scratch.

“But that’s not a bad thing at all, it means our rangers and workers are learning new skills which

include working to CASA approval guidelines for construction.

“We hope to see finalisation soon.

Operations Manager Ashaley Ross said earthworks on Glen Garland Aerodrome would go ahead in April.

“We will then move on to Strathmay’s Aerodrome,” he said.

“We hope to see finalisation of all three of our aerodrome projects, including Killarney, which is done, within the year.”



## Fuel on tap seven days a week

The Laura Roadhouse can now offer travellers fuel – diesel and unleaded – 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, CEO Deb Symonds says.



The new automated fuel bowser will benefit those who are traveling outside of normal hours and will assist with building revenue.

“Olkola Aboriginal Corporation purchased the roadhouse back in 2020 as part of Olkola’s Healthy Country Plan and out of our carbon abatement money,” Deb said.

“It was part of our strategic direction to improve the health of Olkola people.

“A lot of our Olkola people live in Laura, and we all travel through there quite a bit, so by having the Roadhouse there as a retail space for ourselves, we are able to buy things like fresh fruit and vegetables, and even meat.

“And it also means we are maintaining diversified income streams, as good business practice, for all of us into the future.”

Make sure you pull in to the Roadhouse on your way up to the Cape to check out our new fuel system!



"I have been dreaming of the golden-shouldered parrot, which we call Alwal," Olkola chair Mike Ross says. "We'll be working with the property owners at Artemis, who have been looking after the golden-shouldered parrots for over 20 years. They've got a lot of experience on that, and we've formed a recovery team. Different tribes and clan groups are directors on the recovery team and we can do different projects in and around that. We are bringing our birds, and our People, home."

## Bringing Alwal home



*Pics thanks to Annette Ruzicka & Kat Samuel*

## Contact us!



**OLKOLA**  
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Follow Olkola's social media to keep up to date on our latest news.

Instagram: [olkolaaboriginalcorporation](#)

Facebook: Olkola Aboriginal Corporation Cape York

Website (in progress): <http://www.olkola.com.au/>

CEO Debbie Symonds: 0409 155 207 or [ceo@olkola.com.au](mailto:ceo@olkola.com.au)

Administration & Finance Officer: Shania Ross: [admin@olkola.com.au](mailto:admin@olkola.com.au)

Administration Officer: Katherine Samuel: [ksamuel@olkola.com.au](mailto:ksamuel@olkola.com.au)

Office Address: 184 Mulgrave Road, Westcourt Cairns, Q 4870

Snail Mail: PO Box 523, Westcourt Cairns, Q 4870

Phone: 4051 2184

