



# Wuthathi Aboriginal Corporation News

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# Testing the waters

Pics by Kerly Trapnell



Water Monitoring Training, Freshwater Lake, Wuthathi Country,  
Gabrielle Davidson, Brian Macumboy, George Mooka and Phillip Repu



**Wuthathi Land & Sea Custodians - rangers - and Traditional Owners are gearing up for the second round of Wetlands and Water Quality Training thanks to funding from the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, Land & Sea Ranger Coordinator Clayton Enoch says.**

"We did our first serious round of water quality monitoring in October last year" he said.

"Four rangers went out with Wuthathi elder Brian Macumboy where they did training and sampling from some of the lagoons up there at Shelburne."

In October 2021, ecologists Kim Stephan and Gabrielle Davidson facilitated that first session

through the Great Barrier Reef Foundation (GBRF) to up-skill Wuthathi rangers.

The idea behind the training was to make it possible for traditional owners to track ongoing and long-term water quality and flora and fauna health in and around local water systems.

They assessed four wetlands including Bertie Creek, which was

the only location not on Wuthathi country, and a perched dune lake only accessible by helicopter.

The results have highlighted a need to monitor the effects of human activity on and around the water holes and to address the impacts of feral animals on water quality.

*Continued on pages 4-5...*

# From our General Manager...



It is exciting to see Wuthathi people return to live on and manage Country after the decades of work by Elders and the community to get their land and sea back General Manager Jim Turnour writes...

Welcome to our new Land & Sea Custodians – rangers – Cameron Wilson, Davis Wilson and Neil Butcher, and our new Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) Coordinator Sophie Holt.

The Board has decided that Wuthathi rangers will be known as *Land & Sea Custodians* to better reflect Wuthathi peoples connection and role in caring for Country.

It is a significant responsibility to be the first full-time Wuthathi Custodians of Country since Wuthathi people were removed during colonisation.

I look forward to working with the Elders, Directors and staff in supporting them as they return to Country.

I would like to acknowledge the Queensland Department of Environment and Science (DES), who are funding the Wuthathi Custodians, and the National Indigenous Australia Agency (NIAA), who are funding the IPA

Coordinator position.

The Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC) has also funded the construction of the ranger base at Shelburne Bay. In total the Wuthathi Aboriginal Corporation now has 10 different grants supporting the Land & Sea Custodians program on Wuthathi Country.

Most of my work therefore involves managing these contracts to ensure the agreed work plans are delivered, while continuing to secure more resources to grow our land and sea programs.

I am also looking at ways to further support community and economic development on Country.

The work of Aboriginal Corporations like Wuthathi, supporting people returning to Country, can therefore be administratively burdensome but could be made easier with structural reforms to government.



ABOVE: Ready to fly: Jim with new IPA Manager Sophie Holt, Facilitator Ellie Bock & Administration Officer Jessica Namai

The Queensland Government's 'Tracks to Treaty'\* processes and the new DES Gurra Gurra Framework\*\* provide an opportunity to reframe the Government's relationship with Indigenous First Nations through new place-based relational contracting and funding arrangements.

Wuthathi wrote to the Queensland Minister for Environment and Science last year identifying a range of issues and reforms needed to improve our relationship with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS).

We appreciate the commitment from the Director General Jamie Merrick for his Department to work with us in what we hope will be a more holistic and integrated way, to reflect the intent of the Gurra Gurra framework.

I look forward to continuing to work with all our partners to support Wuthathi people return to live on and manage Country passing on their traditional knowledge to future generations.



Wuthathi Land & Sea Custodians' Smoking Ceremony on Country with Aiden Deemal, Davis Wilson, Jim Turnour, Neil Butcher & Brian Macumboy

\*<https://www.dsdsatsip.qld.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-partnerships/reconciliation-tracks-treaty/tracks-treaty>

\*\* <https://www.des.qld.gov.au/our-department/corporate-docs/gurra-gurra-framework>

**jim Turnour**  
General Manager

# From our Chair...

We are sorry to have recently lost some of our key Elders, and I wanted to start by offering our condolences to families, Wuthathi Aboriginal Corporation Chair Keron Murray writes...

I also wanted to congratulate our new staff, Cameron, Davis, Neil and Sophie. They hold a lot of responsibility, especially our Land & Sea Custodians, who are working on Country for the first time as part of the Wuthathi Aboriginal Corporation.

It's a big moment for all our Wuthathi people.

I have every confidence in them.

On behalf of the Elders' Council and the Directors I would also like to personally thank all of our mob for their patience over the years and the respect they have shown for our land, our law and our custom.

Over the coming months our Land and Sea Custodians will start clearing tracks to make sure it's safe for our families to visit.

All our efforts, over all these years, will be rewarded at last.



ABOVE: Side by Side Training: Land & Sea Custodians Cameron Wilson, Neil Butcher (left) & Davis Wilson (right) with General Manager Jim Turnour and WAC Chair Keron Murray in Yungaburra last month

And we will keep moving forward.

Our Elders Council has been working on a document to bridge the gap between our cultural obligations as Wuthathi and Western restraints.

The end result will be a rule book which adapts and integrates what we need to do into strong code of cultural governance and compliance, especially to our funding bodies. We are almost at the point where we have the opportunity to shift our focus to creating our town plan and start building our community.

We want everyone to benefit collectively and we take this journey together as a tribe.

Our starting point will be a house for every family as we identify the social and economic groundwork we need to do to

make that a reality.

We'll be working on things like tourism feasibility

We are all on that one first foot together.

One of the most important thing all our members can do is keep in regular contact with our office, and make sure all your details are on our database so everyone is in touch with what we are doing.

Anyone can ring the office or myself any time, I'm always happy to chat and yarn.

If you're not sure what's going on and you want to know, just ask.

Our AGM is next month, we'll look forward to seeing you there in one way or another.

**Keron Murray**

WAC Chair

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**Wuthathi Aboriginal Corporation**

## Annual General Meeting Thursday 21 April 2022

The Wuthathi Aboriginal Corporation will be holding its 2022 Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Cairns on Thursday April 21. We are looking into how we can connect the meeting to communities via video conference. As a result of community consultations held over the past year, the meeting will include a special resolution for membership to endorse dedication of the Indigenous Protected Area Plan.

If you would like more information, or a copy of the plan, please contact the Office phone 07 4249 3360 or email [ipacoordinator@wuthathi.com](mailto:ipacoordinator@wuthathi.com)



# Testing our waters

**Wuthathi Land & Sea Custodians and Traditional Owners are gearing up for the second round of Wetlands and Water Quality Training, after an initial report determined water quality was 'good' to 'very good', with healthy aquatic systems.**

The findings also indicated two wetlands were rapidly drying.

Despite this, researchers suggested the health of those systems was good, thanks to significant groundwater in these areas, with a warning that protecting the groundwater was essential.

Land & Sea Ranger Coordinator Clayton Enoch said these analyses were paramount for Wuthathi country. "Knowing what the water's doing; the impact from runoff and feral animals ripping up the place is important to track," he said.

"So just before the wet rangers went out there taking samples, and the plan now is they'll go back out to see what the water systems are like after the wet, so it's going to be a progression.

"We need long term monitoring of our water, so they're getting trained up".

The hope was to up-skill Wuthathi rangers in wetland assessment and water quality monitoring to raise awareness of ecological and cultural values and establish a baseline for future data recording and retrieval.

Clayton said the format of the training was a mix of in-house and fieldwork at Heathlands Ranger Base over five days and included:

- How to assess the health of aquatic ecosystems;
- How to undertake water quality testing;
- Collect baseline data from the assessed wetlands for environmental considerations; and,
- Collect information on drinking water quality from ranger base water sources.

While all four wetlands surveyed indicated healthy aquatic systems, the initial survey occurred at the end of the dry, which often resulted in more stressed systems.



Nevertheless, according to their report, scores for wetland health were high thanks to low human disturbance due to the area's inaccessibility.

The data collected so far also indicated good biodiversity in plant and animal species.

Researchers also said recording two frog species and five bird species in naturally low nutrient perched dune lake system was pleasing.

However, the report also highlighted concerns about feral cat footprints around the edges of the lake, cane toad activity and the presence of feral pig diggings.

Clayton said it had probably been decades since any significant water quality testing has been undertaken in the area.

"This is a positive step," he said.

"There are over 150 water holes throughout the area, and we don't know much about them; we don't know what's there, as in wildlife or flora around them.

"So, getting out there and getting that data and recording these findings is important information for our entire community going forward.

"The truth is, we don't have much information about many of these systems; we just do not know what's there."

He said the next round of training and testing activities, to be facilitated by Howley Consulting, was expected to begin in May.



**WATER MONITORING TRAINING:** ABOVE LEFT: travelling via helicopter is the only way to access many of our waterways ; ABOVE TOP: Newly appointed Land & Sea Custodian Davis Wilson in training for water quality monitoring, Freshwater Lake, Wuthathi Country; ABOVE RIGHT: Wuthathi Land & Sea Custodians receiving Water Monitoring Training at Heathlands Ranger Base; BELOW: Water Monitoring Training: Brian Macumboy, Kim Stephan, Neil Butcher, Aiden Deemal, George Mooka & Gabrielle Davidson. INSETS: the bigger pictures. Pics by Kerry Trapnell.



# New base ready to go

With building complete and solar panels in place, it won't be long before the Wuthathi Ranger Base is operational Land and Sea Custodian Coordinator Clayton Enoch says.

"The actual base itself is finished," he said.

"We're just waiting on the wet season to end and then we will get our communications set up. "That's one of the major things that we need before we can put the Land & Sea Custodians on site and to be able to live there.

"The solar array is up and running now with the last lot of batteries due soon."

He said the independence

the batteries offered was an advantage.

"Most of the time, the base will just run off solar but we do have a big generator connected to it as well as a dish for communications like phone and email," he said.

"Our solar will be able to be hooked up through that communication so if something's wrong with it, I can check it all remotely by computer.

"The aim is for Land & Sea Custodians on Country to be able to look at the systems and decide what to actions to take."

He said the people that built the system would also be able to troubleshoot remotely fairly easily.

Clayton said he intended to be up there himself for a week or two every month.

He said three Land & Sea Custodians were employed =>

## New staff welcome

IPA Manager Sophie Holt (right) was born in Port Macquarie, on the mid-north coast of New South Wales, and grew up in a place inland from there, called Rollands Plains.

"Rollands Plains is on the border of Dungutti and Birpai Country," she said.

"For the first 18 years of my life I lived in the bush, and this is where I developed my passion and interest in land and environmental management.

"I have worked as a ranger and coordinator in government, non-government and Indigenous Protected Areas.

"Most recently I was employed by Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, looking after land and sea country in the Djelk IPA in west Arnhem Land, in the Northern Territory. She said her favourite part to that role was



going crocodile egg collecting.

"I am most looking forward to supporting Wuthathi People in managing their land and sea, and advocating for Wuthathi Country to be formally recognised as an IPA by the Australian government," she said.

"I don't yet know what the best or worst part of my job will be but I am sure I have lots to learn.

"I am looking forward to meeting you all and being as useful as I can be in the development and management of the upcoming IPA in line with Wuthathi values and aspirations."



Snr Land & Sea Custodian Cameron Wilson (right above) was born on Thursday Island and grew up in Umagico and Lockhart River.

"I have my own place at Umagico, with my wife and three kids," he said. "I was working for Transhipment Services Australia, operating a loader and dozer at the Metro Mining Bauxite Hills (Skardon River)."

He said he had always wanted to work for his own people and to take care of Country.

"I want to look after Country for my People and our kids and their kids," he said.

Land & Sea Custodian Davis Wilson (left above) was born on Thursday Island and grew up in Umagico

"My previous job was as a Apudthama Land & Sea ranger in Bamaga, in the NPA," he said.

"I'm a Traditional Owner and I wanted to go and work and look after my Country," he said.

"I'd like to see the ranger program grow, and also have junior rangers on board.

"The best thing will be just being present on Country, I'm happy to have the opportunity to be the first, because there hasn't been rangers here before, this is history."



=> so far: Senior Ranger Cameron Wilson, Ranger Davis Wilson and recently appointed Ranger Neil Butcher.

Inductions were due to start in mid-March in Cairns.

"When we start on inductions we will go out and visit some of our partners including AIMS (Australian Institute of Marine

Science)," Clayton said.

"They're doing coral research out in Wuthathi country and we need our People out there when they're doing that."

He said they also planned to look at other ranger bases to check out how they do things.

Clayton said he was also excited about the classification

of the new recruits.

"We're not putting 'Ranger' on their clothing," he said.

"They're going to be called 'Wuthathi Land and Sea Custodians'.

"We wanted to be something different to everyone else and something we can all be proud of."

*Pics by Kerry Trapnell*

**For more information contact Clayton on 4249 3360 or email [projectofficer@wuthathi.com](mailto:projectofficer@wuthathi.com)**

## **Wuthathi Land & Sea Custodians will soon be working on the front lines of pest and weed detection and eradication on our Country, thanks to an Australian Government grant of more than \$150,000 for a biosecurity program.**

Coordinator Clayton Enoch said it was great news.

"The grant will set Wuthathi Land & Sea Custodians up with the critical skills and equipment necessary to carry out biosecurity activities for the Australian Government in the future." He said

"Wuthathi Traditional Owners will work with the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment to develop a plan to be on the frontline of biosecurity, pest and disease

detection and control in Cape York Peninsula."

Wuthathi Aboriginal Corporation chair Keran Murray said northern Cape York was the frontline for many high-risk plant and animal pests and diseases.

"Wuthathi people know our country better than anyone," he said.

"Our Land & Sea Custodians are ideally placed to monitor for potential biosecurity threats.

"Using this grant we will be able to build our rangers' skills and capacity and plan for future biosecurity activities.

"The extra income that Wuthathi gets from undertaking these biosecurity activities enhances job security for our rangers.

"It will also increase our ability to carry out a broader range of services for other entities, which could also provide additional income opportunities in the future."



## IPA plan makes progress

Plans for a Wuthathi Shelburne Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) are expected to be finalised this year after a series of community consultations and Healthy Country Planning workshops are completed.

IPA coordinator Sophie Holt, who started in her role earlier this month, said reports from discussions with community members in Lockhart River, the Northern Peninsula Area, Thursday Island, Cairns and Weipa had so far been positive.

"It was great to get around and visit communities to discuss the plan," Sophie said. "I'm looking forward to working with Elders, members and the Board to finalise the plan this year."

She said the Wuthathi Elders Council would review the plan before taking it to the WAC Board for endorsement.

Sophie said their priority was ensuring elders and members were satisfied with whatever went ahead.

"It is important that elders and members are happy with the plan before it is sent to government stakeholders who may want to invest in and support Wuthathi management of country," she said.

"An IPA steering committee will then be established as a round table to coordinate government and NGO partners who support putting the plan in place and implementation."

"If agreement can be reached through negotiations with the Australian government and a plan finalised, we hope to dedicate the Wuthathi Shelburne IPA later this year."



Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) consultations from top on Thursday Island, and in Bamaga and Weipa, and below in Cairns (Health Country Planning and IPA)



If you are a Wuthathi person and would like more information, or a copy of the draft plan, please contact the Wuthathi Office phone 07 4249 3360 and ask to speak with Sophie or email [IPAcordinator@wuthathi.com](mailto:IPAcordinator@wuthathi.com)

For more information about any of the stories in this newsletter please contact our Wuthathi Office on 4249 3360.

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