

Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' Think Tank

RAPTT NEWS

Newsletter for the Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' Think Tank

The Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area Regional Agreement was signed in April 2005 on a good day in Innisfail. It was the largest, most comprehensive agreement undertaken in Australia. Traditional Custodians – Rainforest Aboriginal People (RAP) – and the Queensland and Australian Governments and their agencies, particularly the Wet Tropics Management Authority and the Queensland Department of Environment and Science, have agreed to undertake a refresh of the standing Agreement, the end result of which will be an Implementation Agreement.



The original Agreement was developed by staff from the Wet Tropics Management Authority, the Aboriginal Rainforest Council, North Queensland Land Council, Australian Department of Environment and Heritage, Queensland Environment Protection Agency and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

At the time it was trailblazing in its context and content, covering the oldest rainforest in the world, and it is still active 15 years later.

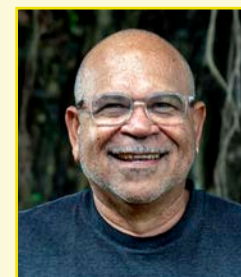
To bridge the period from 2020-2022 while the Implementation Agreement is developed, a draft Supplementary Agreement was drawn up last year (2020) by the RAPTT group (pictured right).

Our mandate to do this work was drawn from regional RAP forums.



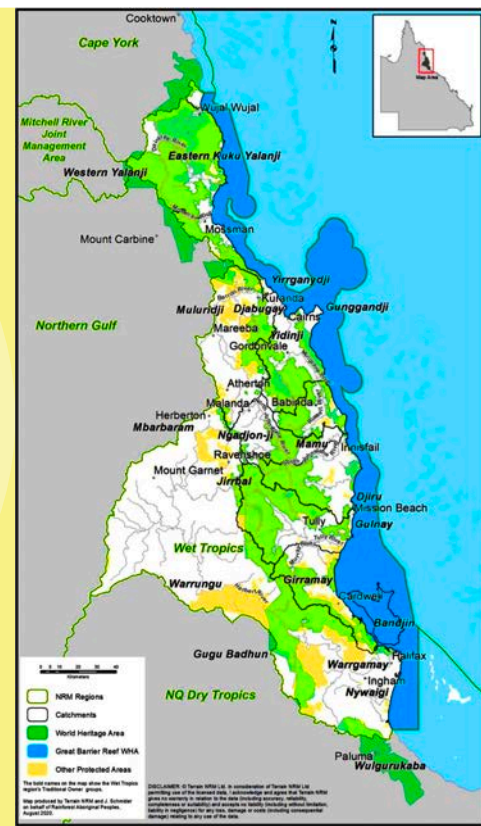
Left to Right: Top Row: Allison Halliday is of the Malanbarra Clan of the Yidinji Tribe of the Gordonvale & Goldsborough Valley Region; Barry Hunter is a descendant from the Djabugay speaking people of the Cairns hinterland; Gavin Singleton has family connections to Yirrganydjil Djabugay people (Cairns to Port Douglas region), Umpila people (Nesbit River, Cape York), & Kalkadoon (Central Queensland) and Dr Leah Talbot (apical ancestor George Mero) is a descendant of the Kuku Yalanji People from the Bloomfield River region.

Bottom Row: Phil Rist is a widely respected Nywaigi descendant; Chrissy Grant is a descendant of the apical family of Maggie Queen from Bailey's Creek in Kuku Yalanji Country on her mother's side & Torres Strait Islander (Mualgal from Kubin on Moa Island) on her father's side; John Locke (apical Locke family), a Malanbarra Yidinji man, is a recognised native titleholder of the Goldsborough Valley and Joann Schmitter identifies as traditional custodian through her apical family Brooks & Wari-barra locality group of the Mamu native title group of the Dyirbalic-speaking nation.



Some immediate concerns

1. Negotiate a collaborative framework to **refresh** the 2005 *Regional Agreement* with all partners, without losing the **integrity** of the original document (this is the *Supplementary Agreement*);
2. Develop a **preamble** to re-affirm the intent of the Regional Agreement and to scope new actors in the **changed** landscape and **clarify** roles with government agencies and partners;
3. Remove the **obstacles** currently prohibiting RAP from gaining **stability** through economic development;
4. Develop a collaborative regional **funding** submission to support Traditional Custodian-led **management**;
5. Progress **recognition** of RAP cultural **values** achieved with the 2012 national heritage listing;
6. Progress RAP **involvement** in permitting research and commercial activity with QPWS, and in community service **infrastructure** with WTMA; and,
7. Act as the reference **advocacy** body in the implementation of the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Plan (to 2030)* being undertaken by WTMA.



COVID-19 has impacted our proposed time lines

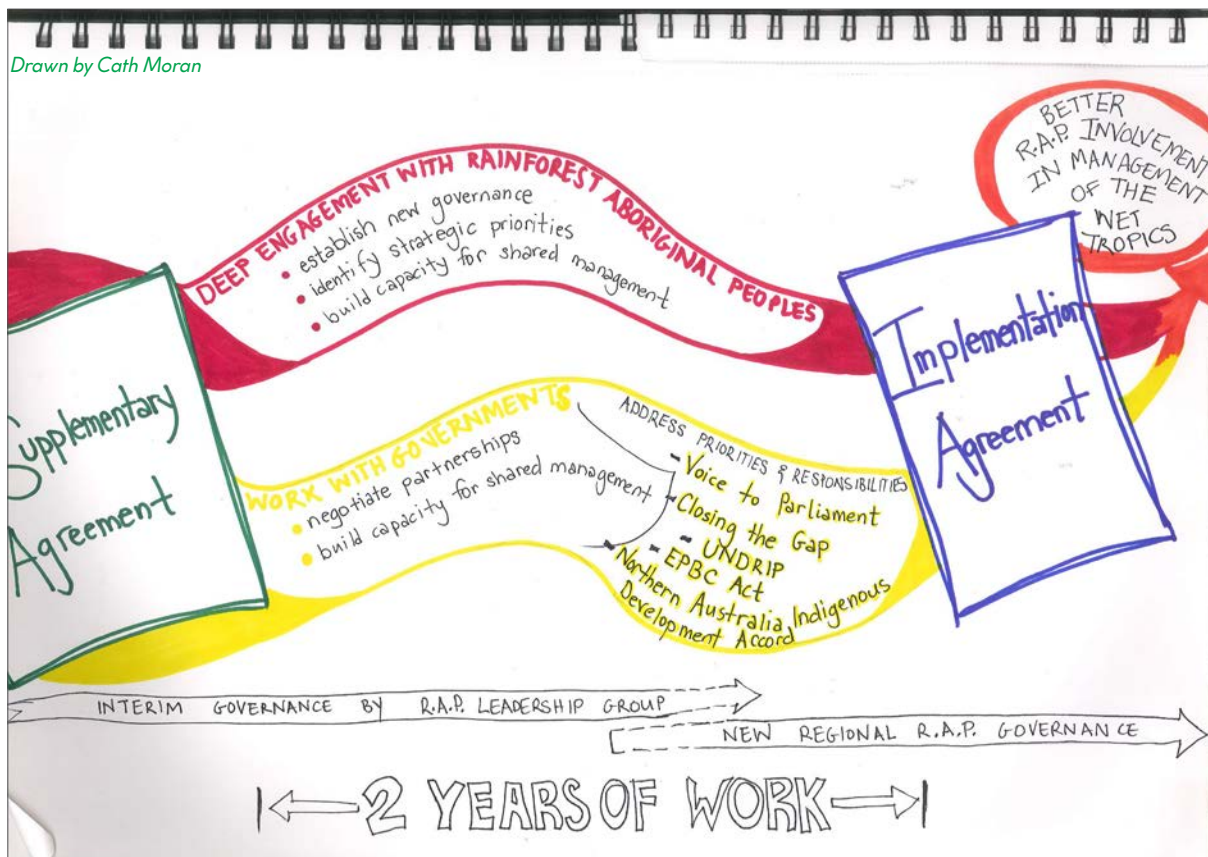
In developing the Implementation Plan, Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples (RAP) and our partners will work through a co-design approach to reflect a more contemporary, rights-based framework.

We need to also consider changes to native title, culture and cultural heritage, and natural resource management since the original Agreement was put into place.

Over the past 15 years those changes have included recognition of the bio-cultural region of the Wet Tropics and the identification of 25 Traditional Custodian groups and multiple entities.

A wide range of newly applicable Queensland, Australian and international legislation has also come into play.

In **April 2020** negotiating team members Joann Schmitter and John Locke met with National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) FNO acting-Regional



Manager Michael White as a first step towards gaining financial support for the 2005 Agreement refresh, including the draft Supplementary Agreement approach.

They said the meeting was able to successfully secure \$25,000 in NIAA Direct Source funding to assist our RAP leadership group in moving forward.

In **September 2020** RAPTT members Barry Hunter, Joann Schmitter and Leah Talbot met with Queensland Minister for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Partnerships Craig Crawford, followed by a 45-minute Zoom meeting between Federal Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt and RAPTT members Leah Talbot, Allison Halliday

& Phil Rist, with support from WTMA, in November.

In these and related meetings, RAP delegates sought resources guided by the draft Supplementary Agreement to progress the refresh on the basis that several of the original 2005 Agreement's commitments remain outstanding.

More than 30 years of RAP leadership

1988: Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area (WTQWHA) declared, with no Aboriginal involvement

1992-4: Rainforest Aboriginal Network (RAN)

1995-2001: Bama Wabu

1998: Publication: *'Which Way Our Cultural Survival'*

2001-5: Aboriginal Negotiating Team (ANT)

2005-8: Aboriginal Rainforest Council (ARC)

2005: Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area Regional Agreement between RAP and the State and Federal Governments which provides for the cooperative management of the WTQWHA by RAP and the Australian and Queensland Governments. Components of the Agreement included involvement of RAP in management of the WTQWHA according to a set of protocols around consultation, operational management, policy development, strategic planning, engagement, and cultural heritage management and mapping, environmental impact assessment, scientific, education and commercial activity permissions and monitoring and reporting.

2010-16: Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' Alliance (RAPA)

2010: RAP Summit

2012: RAP Summit

2012: National Heritage Listing for Cultural Values

2014: RAP Summit

Key publications: *5+3 Agenda Directions' Statements and Discussion Papers*

2017-2021: Traditional Owners' Leadership Group (TOLG) which has become the Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' (RAP) Strategic Custodial Think Tank (SCTT) or RAPTT

2017: RAP Regional Workshop: agreement to refresh the original 2005 Agreement

2018: RAP Regional Forum: agreement on how to structure the refresh

2019: RAP Regional Forum: affirmation of intent

2020: COVID-19 restrictions

What's Next...?

With commitment and resources over a two-year period, RAPTT will be able to:

- **Ensure** deep engagement about the refresh with RAP using Indigenous-led, culturally appropriate methods and time frames;
- **Support** RAP-led processes to identify contemporary strategic RAP priorities;
- **Implement** outstanding tasks from the 2005 Agreement;
- **Support** RAP to negotiate partnerships, including funding, programs and policies;
- **Build** the capacity of Governments and RAP for shared, successful management of the Wet Tropics;
- **Support** RAP-led processes to identify and establish suitable new RAP regional governance arrangements for implementing the refreshed Agreement; and
- **Resource** interim RAP regional governance arrangements of the RAPTT for progressing these requirements.

At the 2021 Regional Forum — deferred from 2020 because of COVID-19 — members will be asked to review our RAPTT terms of reference, as was most recently authorised by the 2019 (pre-COVID) forum, and the operational guidelines established in June 2020 to progress the refresh, as per the draft Supplementary Agreement.

We are thus far agreed the refresh will:

1. Deliver outstanding **commitments** of the 2005 Agreement;
2. **Deliver** on Environmental Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999) obligations for the involvement of Indigenous peoples in the management of this World Heritage Area;
3. Achieve other legislative **obligations** for activities impacting on Indigenous environmental interests and heritage such as the *Queensland Human Rights Act (2019)*;
4. **Address** Governments' commitments under the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*; and,
5. Provide a practical **application** of the *'Path to Treaty' (Old)*, *'Voice to Parliament'* and *'Closing the Gap'* targets, and the Northern Australia Indigenous Development Accord.

The refresh has:

- **unanimous** support from key partners; and,
- produced a **draft** Supplementary Agreement for the period 2020-22 while the refresh is developed.

TOLG meeting at Genazzano Retreat in 2019



As an egalitarian and non-hierarchical strategic regional think-tank, the RAPTT's values, code of conduct and guiding principles steer our actions as we work to support the on-ground work and progress of RAP families, groups and legal entities.

Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' Regional Forum 2021 - a call for participant nominations

The RAP Regional Forum will be held in Cairns on 23-25 July and will be convened again this year by the Wet Tropics Management Authority, in partnership with RAPTT.

The partnership has agreed to the principle of reaching out to the cultural authority held by the 300 Apical Extended Families across the 25 RAP identity groups.

There are several reasons why the forum numbers have to have a limit, and we are looking to about 80 participants.

The partnership is looking to the leadership of Recognised Native Title (and Prescribed) Bodies Corporate, Land Trusts, Cultural Heritage Bodies, Aboriginal Councils and Aboriginal Organisations along with the original signatories of the *Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area Regional Agreement 2005* to nominate participants across the 25 RAP identity groups to attend.

Regional forum participants will best be persons with:

- good capacity to work with the partnership on how to progress regional strategic work from a position of informed local knowledge and viewpoints; and,
- great capacity to feed back to within the RAP identity groups, especially those with cultural authority across their respective Apical families and to the group's legal entities.

Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples' networks will be sent more information as it comes to hand.



RAPTT respectfully acknowledges the over 20,000 persons, the 300 extended apical families recognised in the western native title system, the at least 120 locality groupings, the 25 self-identified assemblies, and the eight language nations with ongoing traditional connections to, and various level responsibilities for, Country in the Wet Tropics' bio-cultural region.

We pay our deep and abiding respects to the Old People, Elders and Leaders who, on behalf of Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples, negotiated and entered into the original Wet Tropics Regional Agreement in 2005; who developed and endorsed the 2005 Bama Plan (the Wet Tropics Aboriginal Cultural and Natural Resource Management Plan: Caring for Country and Culture) and who fought so hard over many decades for our collective rights

and interests to be recognised, respected and incorporated into the on-going governance and management of our Country.

We further pay our respects to the diverse holders of Rainforest Aboriginal cultural authority today, and to those representative bodies and Traditional Custodian groups empowering and enabling RAP to assert and practise our statutory rights and interests across the greater Wet Tropics.

If you have any questions about anything in this newsletter, or you have feedback to offer, please get in touch with us at: RAPThinkTank@gmail.com or via any of our members.