

# Why it's called the Croaker



Photo courtesy Australian Museum FrogID project

When we began the process of making a new look Gulf Croaker, some of us asked “why is it called the Croaker?” We were all pretty certain it was a frog reference, but which one, and why?

We’ve been able to track down the story.

Our newsletter was started by the late Val Speedy, of Innot Hot Springs, who chose one of our burrowing frogs for its name and logo. We think it’s the Green Striped Burrowing Frog, *Cyclorana alboguttata*.

We found this explanation in an old newsletter.

“I was chosen as the logo for this newsletter, as my cousins and I can relate to, and speak for, all different people who live in the Gulf. Our chorus hails the coming rains for the local Indigenous people.

“These same rains replenish our land for our graziers and our sea for our fishing industry. We burrow underground for survival like the miners. The tourists love us. Well, most do, and take our photo to show people back home. Our children have played together since time

immemorial .

“If we are here the land is healthy, the water is clean, and the fish thrive. We are strong and can endure droughts and floods, like all true Aussies. We look different but we live in and love the same piece of Australia.”

The Green Striped Burrowing Frog is a large species, reaching eight centimetres in length, with brown or olive-green back with brown patches or a pale green or brown stripe. They lay egg clusters near dams and flooded ditches. Tadpoles swim in schools, taking up to eight weeks to become frogs.

Burrowing, also known as aestivation, is a common survival method among frogs and turtles, who can stay underground for long periods to avoid heat or predators.

We’re proud to have our frog continue in its inspirational role with our new look Gulf Croaker magazine. We hope you enjoy it. We welcome your feedback and suggestions for future editions.

*Richard Dinnen*



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# the Gulf Croaker



Issue 13 December 2021

## Living with fire in Mareeba Shire

Climate change adaptation in action

## Turtles in trouble

Feral pigs a threat on Gulf plains

## Let's get digital

Gulf needs connectivity boost

## Gulf events calendar

What's happening in your area



# Message from the CEO



Welcome to our new look Gulf Croaker magazine. It's one of many changes during the past year.

We launched our new trading name and our new logo back in August. Now, we launch our new look community magazine. At heart, though, we are the same organisation, with the same mission and the same terrific team of local professionals.

Our new name, Gulf Savannah NRM, says more about the work we do and the communities we work with. The design of our new logo reflects the sweeping savannah plains, dirt roads, and brilliant sunsets, and retains a key element of the old logo, the lotus flower. The lotus is a powerful symbol of our place, which we see in the beautiful wetlands right across the region. To us, they represent the connection between soil, water, and air.

With a modern new look, we are setting our organisation up for the future. We are excited to embrace the challenges and opportunities of a new era in NRM and forge new partnerships. We will continue to grow the business so we can do more work in the region, improving the environment and supporting industry and community to create a brighter future.

This will be our last magazine for the year, so I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all our partners, our fantastic staff and our community for all your support in 2021. I wish you and your families a Merry Christmas and a safe and prosperous 2022.

**Zoe Williams**



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## In This Issue



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Our project brings people together to promote fire safety



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Getting you out of strife is one of Steve Clarke's many talents



### **P13. TURTLES IN TROUBLE**

Gulf freshwater turtles need your help to stop feral pig predation

### **REGULAR FEATURES**

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# THE GULF SAVANNAH ROUND UP

## Karumba live export yards sold

The Port of Karumba live export loading yards have been sold. *ABC News* reports the facility had long been inactive. Built in 1990 with hopes of moving 50,000 cattle a year but not used after the 2019 floods.

## Ootan Road upgrade funding

*Queensland Country Life* says Federal and local governments will put \$7.5 million into an upgrade of the Ootan Rd between Chillagoe and Mount Surprise. The 95-kilometre road is a key link between the Burke and Peninsula developmental roads and the Kennedy Highway and is the only triple road train access into the upper Gulf region.

## Rex gets Gulf air route

Rex Airlines takes over regulated Queensland regional routes from January 1st. *Australian Aviation* says a five-year contract includes the Cairns, Normanton, Mornington Island, Burketown, Doomadgee Mount Isa route.

## Award for Dimbulah grower

Dimbulah producer Raymond Courtice is the 2021 Charlie Nastasi Horticultural Farmer of the Year. The *Mareeba Express* says the award recognises the leading work growers do on their properties and in industries and communities.

## Gulf Indigenous portraits win

Portraits of Indigenous stock women taken in Normanton have won one of the world's most prestigious photography prizes. Four women sat for portraits and shared stories of their working lives. The pictures, now on display at the Normanton visitor centre, won David Prichard the Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize.

# Let's get digital

## Gulf needs major connectivity boost



We need major strategic investment in digital connectivity to increase safety, strengthen communities and boost local businesses. That's the key message in the just-released landmark report *Solutions for Improved Digital Connectivity in FNQ: Building community and disaster resilience in the Gulf Savannah*. We are the lead agency on this project. CEO Zoe Williams said communities, property owners, local govern-

ments, businesses and telecommunications providers worked together to review the event. "Communications challenges affect everyday life in our region. We've identified viable solutions to increase digital connectivity, improve social cohesion and support development.

"We've talked with local people across the region about what they need the

technology to do, we've audited what's currently available, and we have advice from local telcos to create tailored solutions to community-identified needs and priorities," Ms Williams said.

The report also calls for building digital capability, so people can make best use of services.

## Welcome our new directors

Gulf Savannah NRM is proud to announce our two new directors, Bood Hickson and Nick Hardy. The appointments were recommended by our Independent Selection Committee and confirmed at our annual general meeting in late November.

Bood grew up in the Gulf Country and has a long history of involvement with landcare groups and natural resource management initiatives, including vegetation management planning, water allocation plans, carbon farming and regenerative agriculture.

Nick is a town planning consultant, born and raised in the far north. He's worked across the Gulf region for more than 20 years, developing a deep understanding of local natural resource management issues. Nick has a strong background in



*The Board at our recent AGM. Left to right: Kate Eden, Ellen Weber, Bood Hickson, Anne Clarke, Nick Hardy*

assessing potential impacts of developments on natural resources, and an impressive record of community engagement and public consultation across the Gulf Savannah region.

Our new directors take over from Brian

Muirhead, who had completed his term, and Kelly Bethel, who became an interim director to replace Jess Fealy.

We thank Brian, Jess and Kelly for their service, and welcome Nick and Bood to our team.

# Gulf echidna love train

*It's not widely known echidnas live in our region. Why do they follow each other around? That's how these iconic creatures go looking for love*

We all know the short-beaked echidna, one of only two surviving monotremes, egg-laying mammals. They're on our five cent piece, but there's more to know about this iconic Australian creature. It's one of our most widespread animals, found across the continent. Echidnas live above the mountain snowline, in tropical rainforests, arid grasslands, and on coasts and beaches. Surprisingly, they're pretty good swimmers.

Echidnas have been around for more than 60 million years, evolving from platypuses. They have electroreceptors in their beak, more often seen in aquatic animals which use this super-sense to detect the tiny electrical currents generated by their prey. Echidnas have developed some neat survival tricks. Their rear legs face backwards, on the side of their body, instead of below, allowing them to dig straight down into the soil when they feel threatened, and then lock their feet into rocks and roots, making them very difficult for predators to overturn. They can also move their spines, which are modified hairs, individually, wedging themselves between rock or in logs. Their top speed is just two kilometres per hour, so running away from predators is not an option. Digging also helps boost their chance of surviving bushfires.

## Good for your soil

Echidnas may play an important role in our Gulf Savannah ecosystems because they turn over a huge amount of soil. A study from Western Australia found each echidna can shift some 200 cubic metres of soil per year. This bioturbation reduces soil compaction, improves mixing and water penetration, incorporates leaf litter and other organic matter into the soil, and reduces run-off and erosion.

It's not easy to see an echidna. These often secretive animals are more active at night, particularly in the warmer time of year. They also have excellent hearing and will actively hide when they hear you approaching, either by digging into the ground or hiding among rocks or logs. They're incredibly easy to miss.

But they are easier to see in late winter and spring, when one of their more unusual behaviours attracts human attention and comment. Males will travel vast distances, two kilometres or more, to find females. When they find a receptive female, they begin to follow her. When multiple males turn up, they create a "love train", waddling along in file behind the female for days. Trains have been seen with up to 10 males, but it's usually two or three.

Unfortunately, these extra breeding season male miles bring echidnas onto our roads, where they do not do well. Watch out for echidna love trains when you're travelling in our area to prevent them becoming roadkill. We found a three-echidna love train during some recent fauna survey work by Gulf Savannah



*Echidna love train caught on our camera trap*

NRM and the Tagalaka Rangers on Esmeralda Nature Refuge. Our camera trap captured the train passing through at night.

It may surprise some locals to hear echidnas occur right across the Gulf Savannah region. But they're poorly known, and there are currently no recorded sightings. We will soon add the Tagalaka Rangers record from Esmeralda Nature Refuge to the Atlas of Living Australia. You can help by working with EchidnaCSI, a research group that has developed a database to record sightings, echidna activity and submit scats (poo) for detailed analysis. Given the difficulty of researching echidnas and recording their behaviour, your citizen science records from our Gulf Savannah region will make a real difference.

*Wayne Young*



# Living with fire in Mareeaba Shire



Bulawai Ranger Astro Brim at a controlled burn at Koah

*Australian landscapes have been shaped by fire. Wildfire destroys some ecosystems. Others thrive on it. With predictions of climate change giving us more hot, dry days, how do we prepare and keep safe? Mareeaba Shire fire managers, landholders, and Traditional Owners share their ideas with our Fire Project Officer Jackie McLeod*

**F**or *Astro Brim*, hazard reduction burns help protect and heal Country from wildfires that spread to the tree canopy. Astro is one of five Buluwai Rangers. He says a hot canopy fire has major negative impacts. “It destroys the country, kills the wildlife, and it puts people at risk.

“Our aim is to grow that ranger group. We encourage younger

generations to learn this knowledge about fire, about Country and preservation. It’s important to have training. It gives us the chance to work with fires and stakeholders, and also they can work with us to create this relationship that Country really needs to stay healthy and to protect it. Fire is for the people. We’ve got a saying – Healthy Country. Healthy people.”

*Ryan and Rachel Gunderson* moved to their Dimbulah property four years ago, where they commercially grow limes and passionfruit as WRG Produce. Their 105-acre property has a creek on one side, neighbours all around, a channel from Tinaroo Dam, and a main road right through the middle, which increases the risk of arson and accidental fires. In 2019, Ryan was in the paddock, picking fruit,

when he saw smoke. Within 15 minutes, fire was on their property. “Inside an hour, the whole place was pretty much alight,” Ryan said. It took out a new irrigation system and 20 per cent of their orchard. “Luckily, we had help from all our neighbours turning up, the fire brigade, and there was a helicopter here at the time that was bombing it.”

Ryan fought the fire while

Rachel protected the house and kept the firefighters fed and watered. “We had four or five other ladies from around town come into the house to help make sandwiches, cutting up fruit, sending them out to the blokes.” Rachel could see smoke everywhere. She prepared food, moved sprinklers, checked on animals, watched for sparks. “I was around seven or eight months pregnant. Running around checking everything, the fear of losing my house sent me into early contractions.” With fire still nearby, an ambulance took Rachel to hospital to ensure the safety of baby Laine.

Ryan stayed to fight the fire, a difficult decision, but later joined Rachel at hospital while people stood watch on their property all night, making sure all was well. Rachel and Ryan protect their property from future fires by slashing fire breaks, mowing and watering. They use a loader and grader, keep the place tidy, and always have two firefighting setups ready to go. But the biggest lesson of 2019, says Ryan, is the power of relationships. “It’s really important to have good communication with your neighbours. We would have probably lost our whole farm if it wasn’t for everyone in the community that came and helped us that day.”

## *“Inside an hour, the whole place was pretty much alright”*

**Brooklyn Wildlife Sanctuary** is as diverse as it is vast. Covering just over 59,000 hectares, Brooklyn contains a range of different ecosystems. Mountains blanketed in world heritage Daintree rainforest, sprawling eucalypt woodlands, Mitchell River floodplains, and more. Over 50 threatened plants and animals are found here, including the Southern Cassowary, Torrent Tree Frog, and Yellow-Bellied Glider. And it contains the townships of Maryfarms and Mount Carbine.

All this combines to make for complex fire management. The various ecosystems require different responses, and the townships must be kept safe. The Mulligan Highway cuts right through Brooklyn, making an easy ignition point for fires caused by discarded cigarettes or arson.

Andrew Francis, Brooklyn property manager of ten years, was in charge of fire management. Along with technology like the Northern Australian Fire Information website, and fine-scale mapping produced by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, Andrew shares a few things that help.

**Grader** “It means we can burn later in the year a lot easier. That’s helped tremendously, to be able to burn off a graded break.”

**Good neighbours** “Where we’re burning against someone’s paddocks and houses, extra people on board really helps. We support the local fire brigade and they in turn assist us. Without their help, we wouldn’t be able to do it so successfully. We’ve been doing roadside burning with Main Roads. That has reduced our roadside arson or incidental ignitions nearly totally.”

**Being adaptable** “Every year is different, and you’ve just got to roll with it.”

**Barry “Baz” Child** is First Fire Officer for the Kuranda/Myola Rural Fire Brigade and Fire Warden for Flaggy Creek. He works hard to keep landholders informed about fire management in their area. He’s passionate about working with, and giving back to, community.

“Volunteerism is about the pure joy and pleasure from giving and caring for people. I’ve rocked up to blocks where fire is coming, and I’ve got panicked owners. What a wonderful feeling to be able to say, ‘It’s okay. We’re here now.’”



**Barry “Baz” Child**  
Kuranda/Myola Rural Fire Brigade



**QPWS ranger Brittany Butler recording conditions at a controlled burn**



*Janette Hodgkinson* has been in the Irvinebank Rural Fire Brigade for more than 20 years. She's Secretary/Treasurer and Second Officer. And Janette is the Volunteer Community Educator, a role that has her working directly with people doing education and outreach. She keeps people informed about fires in the area, and helps ensure families and their properties are prepared for fire season. Simple measures are so effective, like checking gutters are clear of leaves, and vegetation near the house is not overgrown.

"The reason I wear so many hats, I suppose, is because I love doing what I'm doing and love helping the community in any way."

Janette's dedication, knowledge, and community spirit is an asset in Irvinebank, an old tin-mining town at the end of 14 kilometres of corrugated dirt road. "The red fire trucks cannot access us very much. We're sort of self-sufficient. When we've got a fire in the hills, we've got to look after ourselves before we can get resources in, and that can be up to two hours. Our truck is always ready to go. Normally we try and manage fire ourselves. We might get the neighbouring brigades, Watsonville and Walsh River. But sometimes it gets a bit bigger and we need to call in reinforcements."

In a remote community, banding together to deal with crisis is a necessity. The Irvinebank Rural Fire Brigade leads by example.



**Ryan and Rachel Gunderson at their Dimbulah property**

**Brittany Butler** is a Yirrganydji woman and a ranger with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Brittany uses a Kestrel fire weather metre to monitor air humidity, temperature, and wind speed every two hours during controlled burns.

“It’s good to see the weather change all throughout the day. That helps explain the fire’s behaviour.”

Go to the Gulf Savannah NRM YouTube channel to find more stories from our Living With Fire in Mareeba Shire project. Read more about our Fire Project Officer in our staff profile on page 19. We’re holding a continuing series of public events until April 2022 as part of this project. Contact us to register your interest.

The Living With Fire in Mareeba Shire project is funded under the Community Development Program, which is jointly funded under the Commonwealth Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

*Chelsea Reventos Smith*



**Andrew Francis (centre) from Brooklyn Wildlife Sanctuary preparing for a planned burn with Lloyd (L) and Ricky (R) from the Mt. Carbine and Maryfarms Rural Fire Brigade**



**Janette Hodgkinson  
Irvinebank Rural Fire Brigade**

# Dogs for land care



*Working dogs can make cattle handling so much easier. But using dogs to manage herds can also be a powerful landcare tool, keeping ground cover in good shape and reducing erosion.*

**C**attle dogs are the stuff of legend. Stories of heroics, antics, achievement. Graziers know a good dog saves time and money, helping to control and move herds. It's less well known that using dogs to manage cattle can also help take better care of your land.

Gulf Savannah NRM brought one of Australia's leading livestock handling experts, Neil McDonald, to the region earlier this year to show how it works. Neil led a three-day workshop at Perryvale Station near Einasleigh.

Neil talked about different approaches to managing livestock.

"You could use more fences and waterpoints to have bigger mobs of cattle, shifted more often.

"They eat out an area and then give it sufficient rest, so that you're looking after your ground cover, your plant species, eliminating as much erosion as you can.

"High quality working dogs have an influence over the cattle, making them easier, more cooperative to work with. That leads on to better production."

Neil McDonald believes using dogs on cattle properties is central to getting better landcare outcomes.

"We're showing people how to approach cattle where we have them more peaceful. It's about working cattle in a more enlightened way. In terms of landcare, when you understand how to have bigger mobs in smaller areas, shifted more

often, then that's going to put you in the driver's seat in terms of your plant species, your soil erosion, your ground cover."

Neil says there's productivity and landcare benefits to be had, and working cattle becomes more enjoyable.

"Less scowl factor. A lot more wow factor. And it helps integrate new staff into grazing operations in the face of what I believe is a looming labour shortage."

*This project was funded by the Queensland Government Natural Resources Investment Program.*

Funded by  
Natural Resources  
Investment Program



# ANGEL IN THE DUST

On a hot Normanton morning, I meet Steve Clarke at the Gulflander Motel. It's our second meeting. The first time, he helped me out of trouble, saved me from myself, on a road trip deep into the Gulf country. I'd changed a flat tyre, then drove on. The ute lurched onto the gravel, lopsided. My tyre rolled past and hit a tree. Always double-check you've tightened the wheel nuts.

Steve has helped many people as he gets around the country driving road trains. His nickname is "GPS" – because he never gets lost. In his free time, he paints, does leatherwork, flies helicopters. "I've been doing this since before I was 16. I do all different directions at all different times. I left home one time and didn't come back for three weeks. It was supposed to be straight up to Kowanyama to drop off a forklift off and come back. But then I got sent over to Mareeba, to Cairns to pick up culverts, then down to Mount Isa.

"You've got to learn to load trucks in the bush, to dig a hole to put the trailer in to get a caravan on. You need to know what to do, how to improvise with low tyres or what to do if a tyre falls off." Yes. Thank you Steve.

That first meeting, on a dusty Gulf road, was memorable. Steve assessed the situation, unloaded the crane from his truck, lifted the ute, bent metal into place and got us sorted. "It's not about payment, mate. It's about the friends you make along the way. It's alright. These things happen."

Steve tells me stories about a crocodile crossing a highway after a big wet, a large black bull on the road, red eyes shining in the night. It takes practice to know how to react with a full load behind you. Steve is ever watchful.

I'll leave you with one last pearl of Steve Clarke wisdom.

"Why do they say to date a truck driver? Because he always delivers."

If you see Steve on the road, or at the Gulflander, give him a wave.

*Chelsea Reventos Smith*

*Steve and Chelsea's memorable first meeting*



# Change for the better



Joseph Rainbow  
Containers for Change  
Normanton

**W**e know options diminish with distance from big cities. Telecommunications, retail, services. Deep in rural Australia, we have fewer choices than our city-dwelling friends. Same goes for recycling. Out here, where we most need to pick up bottles and cans, it can be hard to get involved in Queensland's landmark container recycling refund scheme.

So it's encouraging to hear that a Containers for Change scheme recycling depot at Normanton has attracted strong community support across the region. Two years in, a million containers recycled, Annie Cork and the team have done a remarkable thing. "We cover four shires, Carpentaria, Burke, Croydon and Etheridge. It's a massive area, about 170,000 square kilometres. In Burke and Carpentaria, we go out and collect from people.

Elderly people in Karumba, we do door-to-door pickup. We do the big run, about 900 kilometres to Burke Shire, Normanton to Burketown. We go to Tirrana Springs roadhouse, Gregory, some of the cattle stations. We either do it Burketown way or we'll go Burke & Wills way the next time, depending on who's got what. We can bring back up to 40,000 containers a trip."

Annie says that's a lot of containers not ending up on roadsides, in the bush, or the beautiful Gulf waterways. "In the early days when people started getting very keen, they were going down to the waterways, rivers, and popular spots and picking containers up and bringing them in. There was one woman who works at the hospital who cleaned up a really big area of the Norman River while she was fishing.

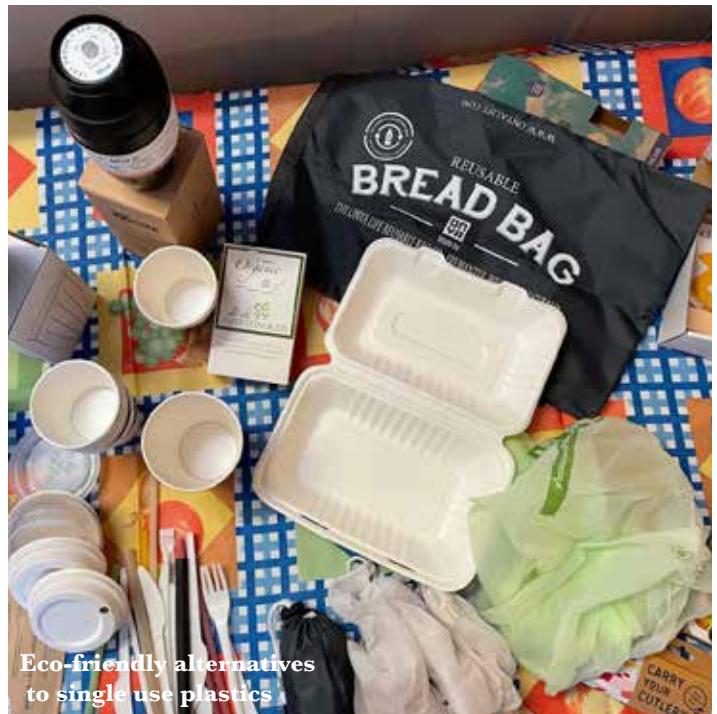
“As soon as people come in and get paid, they’re hooked. We always try to emphasise to the kids that it’s not just about money, it’s about cleaning up Country as well. It’s probably not anything we’ll ever make a huge amount of money on, but the rewards are more than the financial gain of doing this. It’s a very fulfilling thing, just to see the towns cleaned up and money being brought back in.”

Also making a difference is the Gulf Savannah NRM Litter Quitter program, helping local businesses adapt

to Queensland’s ban on single use plastics. We took eco-products expert Diane Creasey, from Enviromart Australia, to Georgetown, Norman-ton, Karumba and Mareeba, where she helped local businesses identify viable alternatives to now outlawed products like drinking straws, stirrers, plates, bowls and stirrers.

“We’ve helped people understand the ban and identify really good options to replace single use plastics,” Diane said.

*Chelsea Reventos Smith*



Eco-friendly alternatives to single use plastics



Joseph Rainbow and Annie Cork

# Gulf turtles are in trouble



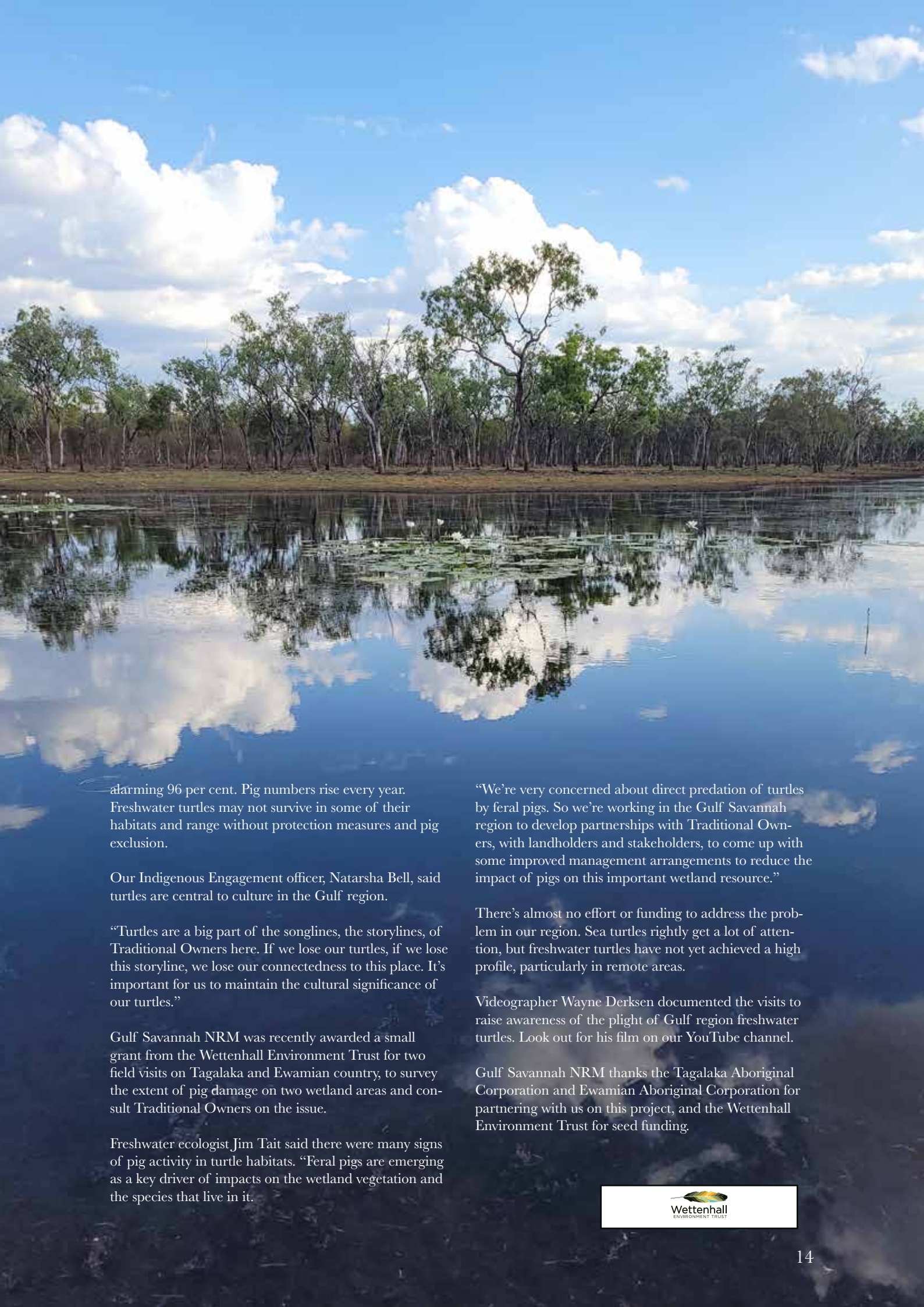
**O**ur freshwater turtles are in trouble. Across the Gulf plains, feral pig numbers are rising. They're eating turtles in our floodplains and wetlands. Sadly, turtles are easy prey, most vulnerable when they burrow into the sand and lay dormant to escape long hot and dry spells.

Tagalaka Traditional Owners alerted us to this serious problem. Freshwater turtles are an important part of their culture and traditional diet. Eight freshwater turtle species live in the Gulf plains, but there's very little data on their numbers and distribution. Studies elsewhere suggest pig predation is a major problem. Reports from local Indigenous communities support those findings.

One northern Australia study found feral pig predation of radio-tracked turtles during burrowing, known as aestivation, was an



*Pig damage in a Gulf wetland - churned up soil and limited sedge.*



alarming 96 per cent. Pig numbers rise every year. Freshwater turtles may not survive in some of their habitats and range without protection measures and pig exclusion.

Our Indigenous Engagement officer, Natarsha Bell, said turtles are central to culture in the Gulf region.

“Turtles are a big part of the songlines, the storylines, of Traditional Owners here. If we lose our turtles, if we lose this storyline, we lose our connectedness to this place. It’s important for us to maintain the cultural significance of our turtles.”

Gulf Savannah NRM was recently awarded a small grant from the Wettenhall Environment Trust for two field visits on Tagalaka and Ewamian country, to survey the extent of pig damage on two wetland areas and consult Traditional Owners on the issue.

Freshwater ecologist Jim Tait said there were many signs of pig activity in turtle habitats. “Feral pigs are emerging as a key driver of impacts on the wetland vegetation and the species that live in it.

“We’re very concerned about direct predation of turtles by feral pigs. So we’re working in the Gulf Savannah region to develop partnerships with Traditional Owners, with landholders and stakeholders, to come up with some improved management arrangements to reduce the impact of pigs on this important wetland resource.”

There’s almost no effort or funding to address the problem in our region. Sea turtles rightly get a lot of attention, but freshwater turtles have not yet achieved a high profile, particularly in remote areas.

Videographer Wayne Derksen documented the visits to raise awareness of the plight of Gulf region freshwater turtles. Look out for his film on our YouTube channel.

Gulf Savannah NRM thanks the Tagalaka Aboriginal Corporation and Ewamian Aboriginal Corporation for partnering with us on this project, and the Wettenhall Environment Trust for seed funding.





# Best reader photo



*Send us your photos of our beautiful region and we'll share them in each edition of the Gulf Croaker. Email photos to [publicity@gulfsavannahrm.org](mailto:publicity@gulfsavannahrm.org). Thanks to Kevin Priestly for this in-flight photo of the meandering rivers of the Gulf country.*

# NRM WORLD

## **NESP calls it a day**

The Northern Environmental Science Program hub wraps up after more than 15 years of research focused on northern Australia in three major Commonwealth funding programs, the National Environmental Science Program, the National Environmental Research Program, and the Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities. Research will continue under the National Environmental Science Program, a long-term Australian Government commitment funding environment and climate research. Wrap up reports from the NESP Northern Hub are now available at [www.nespnorthern.edu.au](http://www.nespnorthern.edu.au)

## **Building tropical north drought resilience**

The Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub has been established at James Cook University in Cairns, one of eight drought hubs nationwide. Gulf Savannah NRM is proud to be one of many partners, working with farmers, Indigenous landholders, communities, researchers and industry to improve drought resilience in the region. Drought affects local industries like sugar, beef, dairy, vegetables and fruits. Support comes from the Australian Government, with \$8 million over four years through the Future Drought Fund, while hub partners will contribute \$18.5 million.

## **Cape York Fire Forum**

The 2021 Cape York Fire Forum brought the region's fire practitioners together in early December. Land managers from all industries, including indigenous rangers, pastoralists, and conservation estates, shared their stories and discussed fire management.

## **Soilborne Diseases Symposium 2022**

Save the date. The Australian Soilborne Diseases Symposium 2022 will take place from August 2 - 5 at the Hilton in Cairns. The theme is "Soil Health, Plant Health & Global Health", which is right at the core of natural resource management principles. Organisers have called for abstracts. More details at <http://asds2022.wyrd.currinda.com/>

## **Getting the good dirt**

Our friends at Terrain NRM have launched a new guide to soil health in the tropics, covering everything from microbes to soil management. The Tropical Soils handbook was put together by soil specialists, farmers and natural resource management organisations, and written by agro-ecologist David Hardwick. It includes practical stories from farmers in the wet and dry tropics. The book is free. You can download it from [https:// terrain.org.au/tropical-soils/](https://terrain.org.au/tropical-soils/)

## **Endangered species**

The Queensland Government has moved some northern creatures to endangered or critically endangered status. The changes include the Palm Cockatoo, the Jardine River turtle, the McIlwraith leaf-tailed gecko and the Cape Melville leaf-tailed gecko. The changes were made as amendments to the Nature Conservation (Animals) Regulation 2020.

Cape York NRM CEO John Gavin said the news was worrying, and organisations and government should work together to introduce targeted approaches to protecting threatened and endangered species.

## **Gulf Savannah NRM Citizen Science Project**

We're proud to launch our Drop in the Bucket water monitoring project. We're encouraging kids and families across the Gulf to get involved in this important citizen science initiative.

Contact our Mareeba office on (07) 4092 1088 to get your free water testing kit. Use it to test water samples from rivers, creeks and waterways. You'll be testing several key indicators of water health and uploading data to our brand new website. You'll be able to see results from other places, and you'll be helping to make sure our waterways are healthy.



# Project UPDATES

## Powerful pollinators



Gulf Savannah NRM has been running a Smart Farms Small Grants project called Powerful Pollinators. Pollinators are an undervalued vital part of native ecosystems and commercial crop production. Pollinator numbers are down, due to habitat loss, insecticide use and increasing incidence of very hot days. Our project includes native pollinators, integrated pest management and honey beekeeping. At a series of public workshops, our project shows people how to attract the right bees and insects, supporting them to set up and maintain healthy pollinator habitats. The project aims to boost farming and ecosystem resilience.

## Healthy Farming Soils



Sarah Stevens is providing financial and technical assistance to eight farmers to plant multispecies cover crops to improve soil health and prevent wet season erosion.

This project found local farmers are very interested in biological fertilisers but are confused by the growing range of so-called biological products that may not be beneficial.

We're planning more workshops next year about on-farm brewing with easily sourced inputs. The project helped a farm-scale worm farm at Emerald Creek get started, with its first vermicast product ready to go in a few months.

## Natural Resource Improvement Project



In the past six months, this project has delivered one aerial pig shoot on the Gilbert River, environmental works on five properties, including rubber vine control, and measures to allow for more sustainable stock management like fencing to split paddocks and waterpoint installation. The project aims to boost farming and ecosystem resilience.

## Remote school gardens



This project began four years ago with four schools. We now fund 11 schools across the region, with 334 students taking part.

We're proud to work with these schools: Mt Molloy, Bibbohra, Chillagoe, Dimbulah, Mutchilba, Irvinebank, Forsayth, Georgetown, Croydon, Karumba, and Gulf Christian College Normanton.

We recently introduced a school holiday program with an enviro themed day in Dimbulah. Sessions on Indigenous foods and plants for better health have also recently been introduced, with local Traditional Owners sharing their bushfood knowledge with local children.

This project has been made possible through funding from Northern Queensland Primary Health Network.

## Gulf Coast women's event



Gulf Savannah NRM ran two events for women in Carpentaria Shire in November, with 30 women joining in at Normanton and Karumba. There was art, crafts and conversations about big issues for women and families in remote areas.

Thanks to our great team: artist Helena Loncaric, Lynnette McGuffie from Rural Financial Counselling, Kerry Major from Save the Children Mount Isa, horticulturalist Madi Worsfold, and our Natarsha Bell and Sarah Rizvi, who coordinated the events.

This project was made possible through funding from the Queensland Government Investing in Queensland Women program.

## E-Beef



The E-Beef Project continues to pave the way for new and emerging technologies in our remote rangelands. There are 12 technology trials underway from Longreach to Almaden.

The technologies are enabling graziers to address some of their main business

challenges, improving profits and productivity.

We've recently added new trials. At Whitewater Station in Mount Surprise, owners Tom and Christine have installed a DIT AgTech Water Supplementation unit. Two more

## Litter Quitters



Chelsea Smith has been working with Di Creasey of Cairns Enviromart to provide information to Gulf businesses and communities about the Queensland Government phase out of single-use plastics.

Food retailers and takeaway businesses can no longer supply single-use plastic straws, stirrers, plates, bowls, cutlery, and expanded polystyrene takeaway food containers and cups.

We held business forums in Mareeba, Georgetown, Karumba and Normanton, helping people understand the ban and identify affordable replacements. We also took part in a Scouts night with around 20 young people and six adults. This project was made possible by funding through the Queensland Government.

# Staff Profile

**JACKIE MCLEOD**



Jackie has, more than once, been described as a “pocket rocket”. She brings an inspiring vivacity to the Gulf Savannah NRM team. Jackie has a background in environmental science and more than a decade of experience writing burn plans, fighting fires, and conducting controlled burns.

Jackie is the perfect fit for our Living With Fire in Mareeba Shire project. She has been meeting with community and local fire managers to hear about their experiences with fire, what they’ve gotten right, and where there is room for improvement.

“Having the time to go around and gather people’s stories is amazing. I was driving back from Irvinebank, looking out through the hills and thinking I’ve met so many amazing people and I’ve only been in this role for four months. How lucky am I that I love what I do and I get paid for it?”

## **Fun fact**

Jackie grew up in Papua New Guinea, before moving to Cairns during high school. “The wet tropics and the tropics, anything north of the Tropic of Capricorn, run through my veins.”

## **If I had a superpower**

“I have been called a pocket rocket more than once in my life. Vertically challenged is another label. So, I would really love to be able to reach the pump on the back of my fire unit without having to get my turtle step out. I’m not sure it’s a superpower, but I would love to be able to reach that top shelf when I need to.”

## **If I were a tree**

“It’s too difficult to pick one species of tree. So I would have to say I’d like to be a habitat tree”

*Chelsea Reventos Smith*



# COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTORY

## Normanton State School

Address: 6 -12 Little Brown Street Normanton  
 Web <https://normantonss.eq.edu.au/>  
 Phone: (07) 4769 7222

## North and West Remote Health

Address: 38 Dutton Street Normanton  
 Web <https://www.nwrh.com.au/>  
 Phone: (07) 4747 8800

## QGAP Croydon

Address: 63 Samwell Street Croydon  
 Web <https://www.qld.gov.au>  
 Phone: (07) 4748 7100

## QGAP Normanton

Address: 24 Haig Street Normanton  
 Web <https://www.qld.gov.au>  
 Phone: 07 5541 3762

## QGAP Georgetown

Address: 12 High Street Georgetown  
 Web <https://www.qld.gov.au>  
 Phone: (07) 4062 1260

## TAFE North

Address: 20 Green Street Normanton  
 Web <https://tafeqld.edu.au/>  
 Phone: (07) 4745 2000

## Mount Garnet Primary Health Centre

Address: Galena Street Mount Garnet  
 Web [www.cairns-hinterland.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.cairns-hinterland.health.qld.gov.au)  
 Phone: (07) 4097 9101

## Royal Flying Doctor Service

Web <https://www.flyingdoctor.org.au/qld/>  
 Phone: 24 hour emergency help 1300 697 337  
 Cairns base: (07) 4040 0444

## Forsyth Primary Health Centre

Address: 21 Fourth Street Forsyth  
 Email: [forsyth.chc@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:forsyth.chc@health.qld.gov.au)  
 Phone: (07) 4062 5372

## Croydon Primary Health Centre

Address: Sircom Street Croydon  
 Web [www.cairns-hinterland.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.cairns-hinterland.health.qld.gov.au)  
 Phone: (07) 4748 7000

## Dimbulah Primary Health Centre

Address: 1-5 Stephens Street Dimbulah  
 Web [www.cairns-hinterland.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.cairns-hinterland.health.qld.gov.au)  
 Phone: (07) 4094 5000

## Georgetown Primary Health Centre

Address: High Street Georgetown  
 Web [www.cairns-hinterland.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.cairns-hinterland.health.qld.gov.au)  
 Phone: 07 4062 1266

## Normanton Hospital

Address: 199 Brown Street Normanton  
 Web [www.northwest.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.northwest.health.qld.gov.au)  
 Phone: (07) 4745 2100

## Karumba Primary Health Care Clinic

Address: 140 -160 Walker Street, Karumba  
 Web [www.northwest.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.northwest.health.qld.gov.au)  
 Phone: (07) 4745 9137

*resourceful  
women of  
the north*

**SAT, 11TH DECEMBER**  
 9.30AM - 5PM  
 At the Railway Hotel, Almaden

Guest presenters  
 Soap making  
 Lunch & High Tea provided

Bookings essential  
 RSVP on 0439443906  
[vickie.mylrea@gulfsavannahnrm.org](mailto:vickie.mylrea@gulfsavannahnrm.org)








**LIVING WITH FIRE  
IN MAREEBA SHIRE**

SHARING KNOWLEDGE, BUILDING  
COMMUNITY CONFIDENCE



**BUSHFIRE INFORMATION FORUMS**

We are supporting locals in fire awareness and preparedness and providing a place for knowledge sharing and experience building.

Join us for a series of bushfire information forums from August 2021 to April 2022.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER INTEREST, PLEASE CONTACT JACKIE MCLEOD:  
[Jackie.Mcleod@gulfsavannahnrm.org](mailto:Jackie.Mcleod@gulfsavannahnrm.org) 0449 255 344





This project is funded under the Community Development Program, which is jointly funded under the Commonwealth/Queensland Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.



# LOCAL HISTORY

**T**he 19th of September 2021 marked the 100 year anniversary of the Mt Mulligan mine disaster in Djungan country, in which a series of explosions in the coal mine were audible from as far as 30km away from the mine site.

The disaster claimed the lives of 75 mine workers and rocked the small close-knit township of Mt Mulligan to the core. The death toll makes it the third worst coal mining accident in Australia in terms of lives.

These were hard times, with many people desperate for work. People with no experience in coal mining went to remote and severe places like Mt Mulligan with their wives

and children looking for the chance to make money. Cairns was a poor region at the time. Miners were paid on how much coal they mined, so every man was out for themselves.

Although the coal from this site was of poor quality, the demand for it was high. It was one of the only local sources of fuel for steam trains, pumps, mining crushes and stampers in places like Chillagoe, and the sugar mills closer to the coast. There was enormous pressure on the mine's managers to up the production.

“One of the saddest aspects of event, was all those women and children living in the adjacent

Mt Mulligan township, who lost their husband/ father and main breadwinner in a millisecond” says mining historian Ken Harley, who has visited the site on the anniversary for many years.

“These were poor people, and most of them had nowhere to go except to live with other families.”

Mt Mulligan's original name is Ngarrabullgan, a place of immense cultural significance for Djungan people and others. On the tabletop itself are found the two oldest-known Aboriginal sites in Queensland: Nonda Rock and Ngarrabullgan Cave.

*Sarah Rizvi*

# COMMUNITY EVENTS CALENDAR

## DEC

8

**Georgetown Xmas BBQ**  
Gregg Bethel Memorial Oval

10

**Carpentaria Youth Xmas Party**  
Normanton Sports Centre

11

**Georgetown Horse Sports**  
Georgetown rodeo ground

11

**Resourceful Women of the North**  
Railway Hotel Almaden

11

**Mareeba markets**  
Centeneray Park

31

**New Year's Eve Rodeo**  
Croydon rodeo grounds

## JAN

7

**Community dinner**  
Mutchilba Community Centre

26

**Carpentaria Shire Australia Day Awards**  
Karumba Library

26

**Family Fun Day**  
Dimbulah Memorial Hall Park

Get your community events listed here

[publicity@gulfsavannahnrm.org](mailto:publicity@gulfsavannahnrm.org)

or call (07) 4092 1088



*We were delighted to join the Georgetown 150+1 celebrations in August. Congratulations to everyone for such a wonderful community celebration.*