



Frequently Asked Questions

● **Q. How did the Wet Tropics Plan for People and Country come about?**

A. In 2013, Terrain NRM was funded under the Australian Government's Regional NRM Planning for Climate Change Program, to review the Natural Resource Management (NRM) Plan for the Wet Tropics region to include climate change impacts, adaptation pathways and opportunities for the region. The previous regional NRM Plan had 'expired' in 2008, and it was clear that reviewing and updating this plan to incorporate climate science would not be enough. A new plan was required, and work began on the Wet Tropics Plan for People and Country. This is a grass roots NRM Plan for all communities and industries in the Wet Tropics.

● **Q. Were there specific conditions required through this funding?**

A. Yes. The primary purpose of this funding program was to include climate change considerations into regional NRM plans. A lot of work was put into synthesising the current science about climate change and the implications for our region, through a research partnership between the CSIRO and JCU. The Plan provides considerable information on past and projected climate change for the Wet Tropics. Sharing an understanding of the climate change implications, adaptation pathways and opportunities for our region formed an important part of the prioritisation process used in Plan development.

There was also a requirement to identify regional priorities for investment into carbon sequestration and potential co-benefits for biodiversity conservation. Some comprehensive science was undertaken to find out where in the Wet Tropics region carbon-related investment would also maximise the benefits for biodiversity, and results of this have been synthesised and incorporated into the Plan. More detailed spatial data from this work will be included in the interactive mapping portal as it becomes available.

● **Q. How is the Wet Tropics Plan for People and Country different to other plans for the region?**

A. While there are other plans for natural resource management in the Wet Tropics region, the Wet Tropics Plan is different because it:

- Is a community plan and it is not statutory or binding; involvement is voluntary.
- Covers the whole Wet Tropics NRM region, from Daintree in the north, to the Lower Herbert in the south, and west past Mt Garnet. It includes all terrestrial areas, not just the World Heritage Areas or the Wet Tropics rainforests.
- Considers a range of topics which influence NRM, including climate change, cultural connections, biodiversity, biosecurity, water, sustainable industries and coastal systems.
- Is not static – it will be updated over time, and will hopefully continue to remain relevant – it does not have an 'expiry' date. This is possible as it is a 'living' online plan.

● **Q. What is the purpose of the Wet Tropics Plan for People and Country?**

A. During the initial planning stages, it was agreed that a successful plan should:

“Influence Natural Resource Management decision making at all levels for the long-term.”

It was important to approach this from the perspective of farmers, community groups, local councils, Traditional Owners, industry, the research sector, government and investors. To reach – and influence – ALL of these decision makers, the Plan needs to be:

- **meaningful** to a wide range of stakeholders – to address their needs and provide solutions to their issues;
- **useful** to these stakeholders – they need to be able to access it easily and use the information that it contains in their decision-making processes; and
- **current** – we need to ensure this plan can be updated as new data, information and priorities emerge. This is why it has been built online.

● **Q. How does the Plan go about trying to influence decision makers?**

A. Supporting the many decisions of such a variety of audiences is no easy task. The plan endeavours to do this through a number of ways:

- **Prioritisation:** Identifying regional goals, outcomes and priority actions – at both the regional and local scales. These actions are based on community values and the best available knowledge, to address our region’s challenges – current and emerging. Importantly, the implications of climate change projections have been a key informer of these actions. While there are quite a number of priorities and some of them are very broad, articulating what the community thinks is important in our region was considered the best approach in developing a regional plan that is meaningful to people.
- **Connections:** Facilitating partnerships, helping people make connections, learn from one another and stimulating collaborative action.
- **Knowledge:** Providing community members, land managers and strategic partners with information to help them make decisions about how to manage what is valued in the region. A key feature is an interactive mapping portal providing access to a very wide range of spatial information. Another really important part is the information on climate change that has been tailored specifically for the themes and local landscapes of this region.
- **Monitoring:** Providing the basis for tracking progress towards the goals and outcomes, and keeping tabs on how we are progressing with our priority actions.

● **Q. How were the Priority Actions in the Plan developed?**

A. Priority Actions in the Plan have been identified and prioritised by the community – through a series of both local landscape and technical workshops. There is always a tension between local priorities that reflect what people care about, and strategic priorities that are based on latest science and objective decision making processes. The plan attempts to find the connection between local and regional priorities, and reconcile these different scales.

At the regional scale, technical workshops focusing on the five regional themes built on existing plans and scientific information to identify the challenges, opportunities and priority strategies. Importantly, the latest climate science was distilled and interpreted for each theme, and was integrated into the prioritisation process. Many of the priorities focus on working more effectively with the resources we have and building a stronger commitment to action by policy makers and community.

Ten Local Landscape workshops were held, involving many skilful and knowledgeable individuals and grass roots organisations involved in managing the natural resources in their ‘backyard’. Regional

and technical expertise – including in relation to climate science – was incorporated into community workshops to inform community priorities.

A transparent process was designed to prioritise project ideas at these community workshops. In some of the smaller community workshops (3 out of the 10 workshops), the prioritisation process was not used.

After all the regional (thematic) and local priorities had been identified, a process of bringing the two together resulted in a list of Priority Actions that have strong community ownership as well as a strong level of technical and scientific input. Importantly, no action has been lost, and if you select a local landscape through the interactive Priority Actions section of the plan, you will find all of the projects from the local landscape workshops listed.

A really important aspect of the plan is that it is not set in stone. Priorities change. Over time, local landscape workshops will be repeated, progress reviewed and a fresh look at whether or not the priorities are still valid will be facilitated.

● ***Q. How has scientific information been incorporated into the Plan?***

A. As well as providing scientific information – in particular on climate change – as the basis for the technical workshops, significant and relevant scientific data for the Wet Tropics region have been collated and made accessible to everyone in the Plan. These include explanatory text about particular topics on the website pages, as well as links to more detailed information and interactive maps. The web-based format of the plan means that it is possible to keep this information up to date.

The Resource Library in the plan contains an enormous amount of information that can be sorted and filtered according to interest. The flexible nature of the Plan means that anyone can delve into their area of interest, accessing detailed information through the Resource Library and links to other websites, according to their need.

● ***Q. Why doesn't the Plan prioritise exactly where we should be focusing our effort in things like tree planting for biodiversity?***

A. It was recognised early on in the planning process that it would not be possible – or even helpful – to come up with the definitive list of the top priorities, or the definitive map/s of where investment should be made. NRM is far too broad and there are many different perspectives on what is a priority. Is it a priority to work with species that are extremely vulnerable or with ones that have a little more resilience and may have a greater chance of survival? Is it a priority to work in an area where there is strong community interest for a particular species, or disregard the community interest and prioritise areas purely based on the scientific evidence? Should we focus all of our effort in one location in the region or spread it more broadly? There are so many variables at play.

If you did manage to agree on a definitive list or map, these top priorities are likely to change with new science and information. In addition, when investment opportunities arise, they usually come with their own quite specific criteria, and predicting these criteria for all areas of NRM for the whole region in order to produce the right list or maps for example, would be impossible.

There are also a lot of other planning processes which delve into the detail of specific NRM issues, and arrive at more detailed priorities. Examples of these include local council pest management plans and threatened species recovery plans.

● **Q. So how can the Plan be useful for prioritising NRM investment?**

Instead of developing the definitive list of very specific priorities, the opportunity was taken to build a GIS platform and some smart mapping tools which are designed to help in the decision-making process. These tools enable us to bring together a wide range of GIS layers and analyse these based on different sets of criteria. As the tools are interactive and can be adjusted in real time, they provide the opportunity for a group of stakeholders to come together and plan based on the best available spatial information, but also in response to the planning objectives.

Being able to rapidly compile the latest spatial information to undertake prioritisation for any investment opportunity that arises ensures the Wet Tropics community can remain nimble and responsive. It means that the Plan is flexible to respond to different investment opportunities for the long term. Most importantly, these tools have incorporated some new spatial information on biodiversity and climate change, supporting stakeholders to come together and make decisions that are well informed.

It is very important to emphasise that it was not the job of the Plan to *tell* people what to do and where to do it. This would just result in arguments and discontent. It is the role of the Plan to provide the strongest possible support for groups and individuals to come together and make collective decisions which are as evidence based as possible. With the development of the spatial tools in combination with the information provided through the website, this can happen in response to opportunities over time.

A few examples of how this tool has already been used include:

- The development of a Strategic Offsets Investment Corridors layer to provide information on the most practical and appropriate areas to direct offsets investment for biodiversity (climate change was not taken into consideration as the spatial information was not yet available);
- Building on that layer, (and incorporating additional information on implications of climate change on biodiversity), a spatial prioritisation layer was prepared as the basis for an application to the international organisation Rainforest Trust for buy-back investment in priority mahogany glider (and cassowary) habitat which is currently at threat of development;
- Development of a Water Quality Decision Support Tool to guide investment to support practice change, incorporating water quality hotspot mapping and other key spatial layers; and
- Development of a region-wide biodiversity connectivity layer (in production, with the first area of consideration being the Southern Atherton Tablelands).

● **Q. How can I use the Plan and its Priority Actions to develop or implement projects?**

A. If you would like to know what the community has said is a priority – either within a local area or across the region with regard to a specific theme – you can view this through the Priority Actions look-up page in the plan. You can filter your search to hone in on your area of interest. Each Priority Action in this list also links to more detailed information which may be used to further develop project proposals.

However, given there is such a wide variety of priorities, the information for each one is limited. Further exploratory work will need to be undertaken in developing a fully-blown project.

To assist with this, there is a wide range of information within the Plan, as well as interactive mapping tools that can be accessed by anyone. Reference to the Plan and its Priorities can be made when sourcing funding, to help strengthen the case for funds to implement the project.

● ***Q. Is there support available to develop more detail on Priority Actions so I can develop a more comprehensive project proposal?***

A. As mentioned above, a strong commitment has been made to the development of spatial decision support tools to allow further refinement of the priorities identified in the Plan, using the latest spatial information available. These tools use an interactive, computer-based system (Community Viz) which enables a broad range of factors to be considered together, providing the flexibility to respond to different funding criteria. The decision support tools can be applied quickly in response to new funding opportunities and criteria, allowing the development of tailored and detailed projects and locations specific to the opportunities available at the time. These tools also facilitate collective and informed decision making processes. Accessing these tools, and ensuring they are tailored to your needs, requires the assistance of our technical GIS expert, who can come and talk to you about your needs, and discuss in more detail how we can help.

● ***Q. How are the Priority Actions identified in the Wet Tropics Plan for People and Country different to priorities or prioritisation frameworks used by other groups and processes?***

A. There are other well-established prioritisation frameworks used by various groups in the region which help guide their work in their field (e.g., the Invasive Species Prioritisation Framework delivered through FNQROC; threatened species Recovery Plans). They may provide more detailed information for that particular theme, location or species. This information is recognised by the Wet Tropics Plan for People and Country, with links and references wherever possible. The spatial mapping portal is a good place to find existing data, displayed geographically (e.g., identified corridors for wildlife).

● ***Q. Don't we already know where the important areas are to be doing our project work?***

A. While there are many sources of information for the region which identify on ground priorities (including for biodiversity, biosecurity, water, coastal systems, sustainable industries), many do not fully take into account potential impacts of climate change. As the funding criteria for the development of this Plan was to incorporate climate change impacts into planning, many priorities developed through this planning process identified a need to review current priorities and prioritisation processes to better reflect potential impacts of climate change. An important focus now is on collating the climate data, referencing the priorities identified in the Plan, along with other environmental, social and financial considerations, and providing the tools to refine and use the data for a range of purposes. The outcome of this stage of the process may be a range of more detailed priority locations and actions identified using these tools, which can be adapted to suit a range of purposes, groups and funding criteria.

● ***Q. I don't agree with the Priority Actions identified in the Plan for my area. How did they get included in the Plan?***

A. There was a broad cross section of groups representing many different interests involved in community engagement activities during Plan development. The process of reflecting the diversity of community perspectives, while incorporating the latest scientific data, within the constraints of the funding criteria, was not a simple task. While not all priorities will be relevant to all locations or all groups, if they are included in the Plan, it is because they have been identified by a particular group and prioritised for that location.

● **Q. *How can I provide feedback on the Plan?***

A. Constructive feedback from Plan users is welcome and ensures we continue to critically evaluate the Plan's effectiveness and usefulness. The easiest way to provide feedback is by using the online links to the Feedback Form, easily found in several locations on the Plan website.

● **Q. *Will there be opportunities to review the Plan and its priorities?***

A. Yes. Because the Plan is online, it can be easily updated to ensure it remains current and relevant. Opportunities for reviews of the Plan and its priorities will be undertaken as part of monitoring and evaluation of the Plan. Any review processes will be widely promoted, to ensure everyone gets a chance to be involved.