

# Why collaborative governance is critical for managing the natural and cultural values of wet tropics country

November 2014 Research towards Policy Brief

Rainforest Aboriginal peoples work with partners to manage their traditional estates across multiple tenures in wet tropics country according to their own law and culture. A three and a half year co-research project involving Traditional Owners, social scientists, spatial analysts, government and non-government organisations investigated the health of collaborative governance through these partnerships.

“Energy needs to be put into the governance up front.”

*Traditional Owner*

## Key findings

- **getting the governance right** is critical for effective partnerships in managing country.
- in the past, most attention was to management, what partners do together.
- more attention to governance—who decides and how—leads to better results (Table 1).
- effective collaborative governance:
  - is “a **flexible solution-building** process, not a fixed state, involving extensive talking, negotiations and jointly learning, so it gets better over time”.
  - generates **multiple benefits** for business, employment, and community as well as biodiversity and ecosystems.
  - provides a pathway to **sustainable livelihoods** and Aboriginal **self-determination**.
  - is **increasing in extent** through native title determinations, Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs), Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs), Rangers and on-ground projects, working across many different tenures.
  - is based on the **strategic vision** of **Rainforest Aboriginal people** for keeping their Indigenous governance, culture, kin, country, and capacity strong.
  - keeps **engagement strong** between Rainforest Aboriginal people and partners through effective principles, relationships, protocols, and supports mechanisms for joint management, power-shifting, and issues resolution.
  - provides a **more stable foundation** that allows people to ride out the constant policy changes on the partners’ side and fracturing on the Traditional Owners’ side.
  - is **adaptive** and responds to the impacts of climate change, habitat loss and invasive species in the wet tropics.
  - requires **co-investment between Australian and Queensland governments**, with corporate and philanthropic partners.

“Governance is the number one issue.”

*Partner*



Collaborative governance of country protects natural and cultural values. Reproduced with permission of Giringun Aboriginal Corporation.

## Key opportunities

While both Rainforest Aboriginal peoples and their partners have some effective collaborative governance across the wet tropics, overall it is patchy.

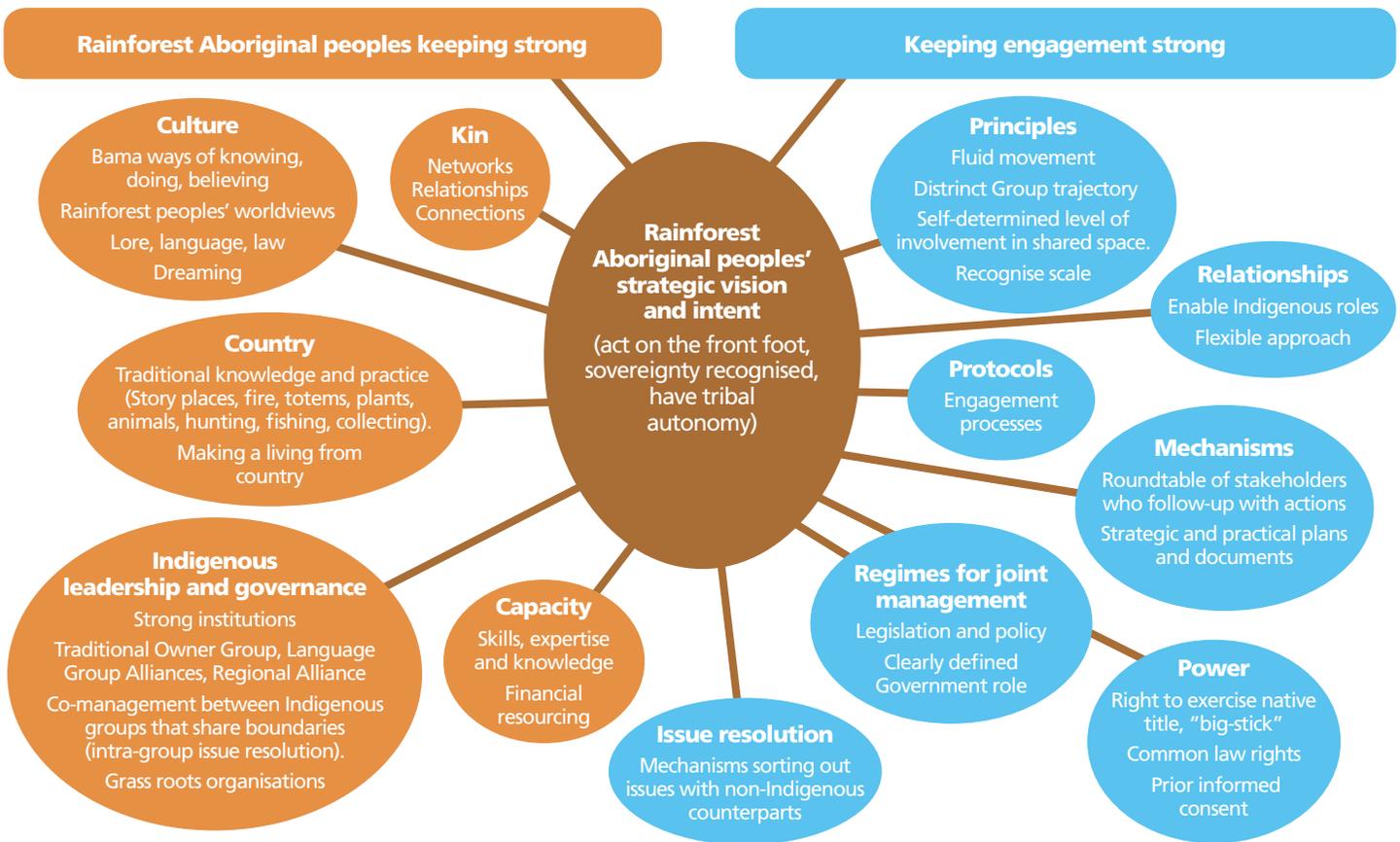
Opportunities to improve collaborative governance:

- support knowledge networks among Rainforest Aboriginal people and their partners for mutual learning about leadership, cultural differences, collective decision making and other governance topics.
- improve understanding of how and why multiple benefits are delivered to maximize positive impacts.
- extend IPAs and Rangers to better protect natural and cultural values across wet tropics country.
- focus ILUAS on collaboration for mutual benefit instead of regulation.
- support strategic planning between Native Title Corporations and Local Governments to clarify their roles and responsibilities.

**Table 1** The difference between governance and management

<b>Management</b>	is about...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>what is done</b> in pursuit of given objectives</li> <li>• <b>the means and actions</b> to achieve such objectives</li> </ul>
<b>Governance</b>	is about...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>who decides</b> what the objectives are, <b>what to do</b> to pursue them, and with <b>what means</b></li> <li>• <b>how</b> those decisions are taken</li> <li>• who holds <b>power, authority and responsibility</b> - who is (or should be) held <b>accountable</b></li> <li>• relationships, communications and engagement</li> </ul>

Figure 1 Framework for participatory evaluation of partnerships for managing wet tropics country



## Evaluation of management partnerships

The co-research team worked with Traditional Owners and their partners through discussions, interviews and workshops to produce a framework to evaluate their management partnerships (Figure 1):

- The left side shows six parts identified as needed for **Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples Keeping Strong**, to manage their country according to their own law and culture.
- The middle shows "Rainforest Aboriginal peoples' strategic vision and intent" as the key link between the two sides.
- The right side shows seven parts needed for **Keeping Engagement Strong** so partners and Aboriginal people can effectively manage country together.

Participants gave each part a health rating, ranging from very sick to excellent (Table 2). They explained why they gave the rating, identified issues and gaps, and policy opportunities to address these.

The health of each part was rated according to:

- structures (how things are set up).
- processes (how things are getting done).
- results (what the outcomes are).

Table 2 Health indicators and their definitions

Health rating	Definition of indicator
5 Excellent	This indicator is excellent and continuing as is will keep it in excellent health.
4 Very good	This indicator is very healthy and does not need too much different to be done to keep it healthy.
3 Good	This indicator is healthy and may need something more or different to be done to keep it healthy.
2 Little bit sick	This indicator is a little bit sick and needs work to be done to make to healthy. If no work is done it will get worse.
5 Very sick	This indicator is very sick and if no work is done to make it better it may never be healthy again.

## Mapping the findings

The health of structures, processes and results for each part are mapped from Traditional Owners' ratings at three scales:

- regional—wet tropics bioregion plus a 50km buffer
- sub-regional—the traditional lands of the nine tribal groups that make up Girringun Aboriginal Corporation
- one tribal—the traditional lands of the Mandingalbay Yidinji people

The health ratings from partners are mapped similarly but only at the regional scale. The partners' ratings are of the *support provided to*, rather than the actual health of, Rainforest Aboriginal People Keeping Strong.

## What do the health ratings shown on the maps mean for collaborative governance of wet tropics country?

Traditional Owners rated the health of *Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples Keeping Strong* as better overall than *Keeping Engagement Strong*. Their ratings reflect the cultural priorities of Traditional Owners and their success in keeping Indigenous knowledge and values strong despite challenging circumstances.

Partners similarly rated the health of **support** for *Rainforest Aboriginal People Keeping Strong*, as better than *Keeping Engagement Strong*, although they rated support for Indigenous governance as very poor. Partners expressed frustration, and a view that their agencies could respond better to opportunities. They recognised the need for change.

**“On the government side, cultural change is progressing, but may not be adequate to support the move to collaboration.”**

Partner

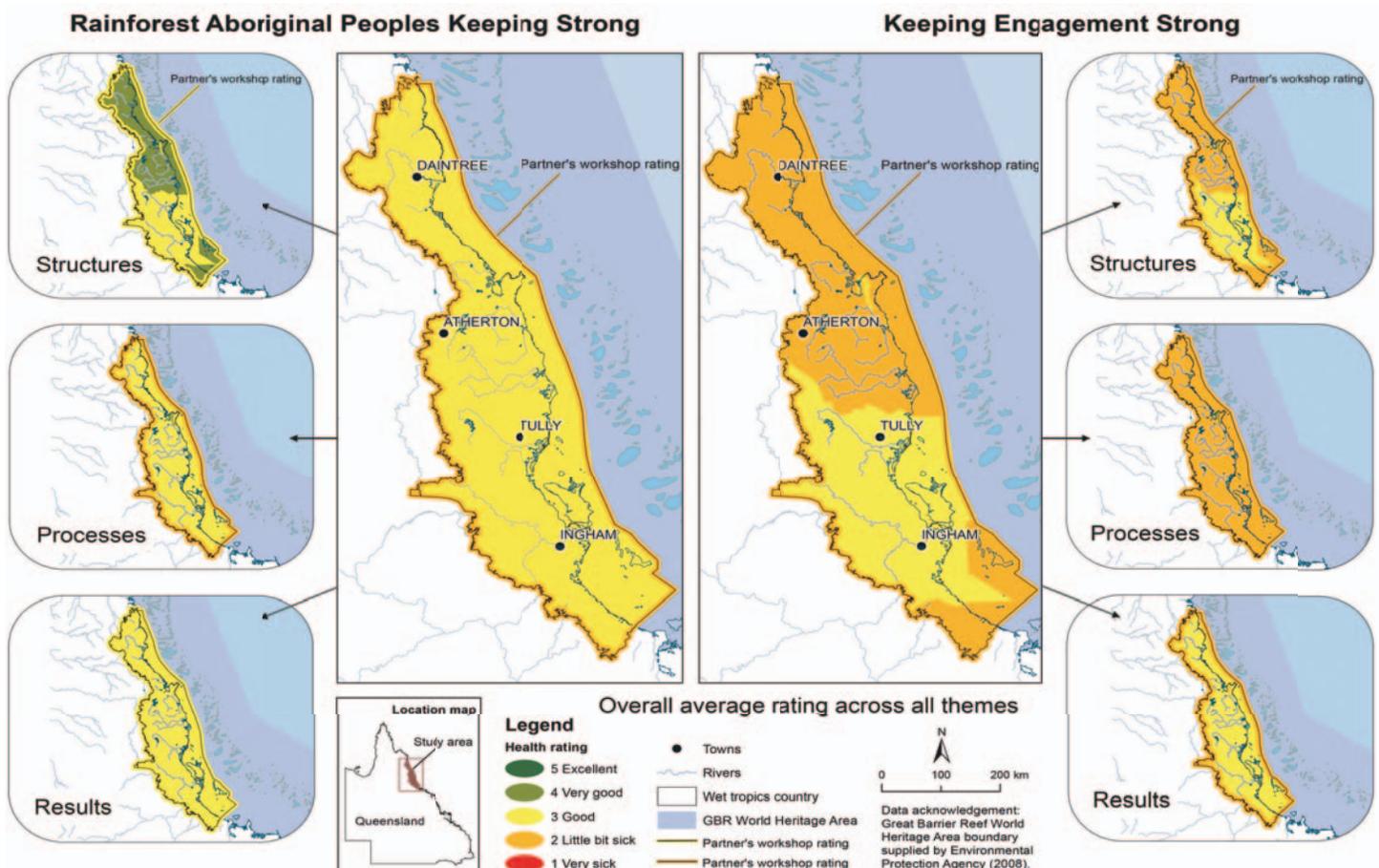
**“Culturally assured engagement, that directs the partner agency, is critical...the best results come when Traditional Owners drive the process, take government on a journey.”**

Partner

Rainforest Aboriginal peoples' roles have changed through native title, ILUAs, IPAs, Rangers and other initiatives. Government and other partners struggle to keep up with all these changes.

The situation is complex because of the number of different Traditional Owner groups and partners all at different stages, the patchy effectiveness of governance and ongoing rapid change. This means that:

- actions to improve governance effectiveness are vital
- a flexible adaptive approach to improving governance is needed.



**Figure 2** Average health ratings for structures, processes and results, and overall average. Maps on the left hand side refer to ratings for the 7 parts of “Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples Keeping Strong”, and on the right hand side to the 6 parts of “Keeping Engagement Strong” as shown in Figure 1. The maps break the ratings by Traditional Owners into Giringgun (Tully to Ingham and surrounds), Mandingalbay Yidinji (small area on the coast east of Atherton) with the remainder being the ratings from the Rainforest Aboriginal regional scale. The partners ratings are shown as a buffer around the whole region. Sometimes the ratings are the same between different areas so that no boundary appears between them.

## Who is involved in collaborative governance of wet tropics country?

### Rainforest Aboriginal peoples

- 20 tribal groups
  - e.g. Djiru, Kuk-Yalanji etc.
- ~ 120 RAP clans
- ~ 70 RAP legal entities including Prescribed Body Corporates and Cultural Heritage Bodies
  - e.g. Jabalbina Yalanji Land Trust
- Sub-regional and regional RAP bodies
  - e.g. Girringun Aboriginal Corporation, RAPA
- 2 Land Councils,
  - North Queensland and Cape York.
- ~ 20,000 Rainforest Aboriginal persons
- Source Schmider (2014)

### Mainstream bodies

- Wet Tropics Management Authority (joint Australian/Qld)
- Several Australian govt agencies
  - e.g. Department of Environment, Prime Minister and Cabinet
- 9 Qld government agencies
  - e.g. Department of Environment & Heritage, Department of National Parks & Recreation Sport and Racing
- 11 Local Government Authorities
  - e.g. Tablelands Regional Council, Yarrabah Council, Douglas Shire
- 3 Regional NRM bodies
  - e.g. Terrain NRM, Cape York NRM
- Multiple Non-government environment organisations
  - e.g. CAFNEC, Australian Conservation Foundation
- Industry
  - e.g. Tourism, agriculture
- Private landholders

The information in this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government or any of the project partners. To the maximum extent permitted by law, the Commonwealth and each project partner excludes all liability to any person arising directly or indirectly from use of or reliance on the content of this publication.

## Co-research team



### Further reading

All NERP Reports and available at <http://www.nerptropical.edu.au/project/indigenous-peoples-and-protected-areas>.

- ▶ Borrini-Feyerabend G, and Hill R (2014 (in press)) Governance of the conservation of nature. In: Worboys GL, Lockwood M, and Kothari A (eds). Protected Area Governance and Management, ANU Press, Canberra.
- ▶ Stankovitch M, editor. (2008) Indicators Relevant for Indigenous Peoples: A Resource Book. Baguio City, Philippines, Tebtebba Foundation
- ▶ Hill R (2013) Bringing the community into world heritage through biocultural diversity: issues and policy implications. In: Figgis P, Leverington A, Mackay R, Maclean A, and Valentine PS (eds). Keeping the Outstanding Exceptional: The Future of World Heritage in Australia, Australian Committee for IUCN, Sydney
- ▶ Hill, R., P. L. Pert, K. Maclean, T. Bauman, E. Bock, A. P. Dale, M. Flynn, A. Joyce, S. McDermott, V. Mundraby, P. Rist, B. Rampton, J. Schmider, L. D. Talbot, and L. Tawake. 2014. Indigenous peoples and biodiversity protection in the wet tropics. Reef and Rainforest Research Centre on behalf of the Australian Government's National Environmental Research Program (NERP) Tropical Ecosystems (TE) Hub. Online: <http://www.nerptropical.edu.au/publication/project-121-technical-report-indigenous-peoples-and-biodiversity-protection-wet-tropics>.
- ▶ Maclean, K., R. Hill, P. L. Pert, E. Bock, P. Barrett, R. Bellafquih, M. Friday, V. Mundraby, L. Sarago, J. Schmider, and L. Talbot. 2012. Framework and institutional analysis: Indigenous co-management and biodiversity protection in the wet tropics. Reef and Rainforest Research Centre on behalf of the Australian Government's National Environmental Research Program (NERP) Tropical Ecosystems (TE) Hub. Online: <http://www.nerptropical.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/files/Project%202012.1%20Technical%20Report%20Maclean%20et%20al%202012%20Final.pdf>, Cairns.
- ▶ Pert PL, Hill R, Maclean K, Dale A, Rist P, Talbot LD, Tawake L, and Schmider J (2014 in review) Mapping cultural ecosystem services with Rainforest Aboriginal peoples: integrating biocultural diversity, governance and social variation. Ecosystem Services.
- ▶ Schmider J (2014) Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples Project 2020. Looking after Australia's world heritage - our wet tropics rainforest country, culture and kin Cairns: Presentation to the Co-management Workshop at Cairns Colonial Club, 29 April