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summary of findings

the role of local government in the preservation and recovery
of threatened species and ecological communities

project findings

1. TENURE

The identified ecological communities are found on freehold private tenure and reserves. The mapping review suggests significant in scope land holdings by Local and State Government (approximately 70%). This lends itself to opportunities for improved habitat protection through natural areas management initiatives. Land in private tenure is at the margins of the habitat and provides an opportunity to improve connectivity between habitat locations and an opportunity to prevent further encroachment of development or agricultural practices into the targeted habitats.

4. COMMUNITY SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS

The solution for each ecological community will be different based on the cause of loss of habitat/ fragmentation. As such, a detailed analysis of each species is provided in this report to assist in informing Local Government officers, particularly planning officers, as to how best address the risks and threats within their planning scheme and planning scheme policies.

2. MAPPING

Broad Scale Mapping is NOT the answer. There is a growing frustration with inaccurate mapping and Assessment Managers are placing less weight on the protection afforded by mapping. Fine scale mapping is an option that should be explored based on identified priority areas. Fine scale mapping should be limited to areas within regions where it is necessary and will have a demonstrated net positive effect on habitat protection.

5. NATURAL AREAS MANAGEMENT

Local Governments have a role in practical on the ground solutions. It does appear that Local Governments could do more to acknowledge the importance of the role they play in Habitat Protection in Corporate and operational plans to ensure adequate project planning and operational budgets.

3. NOT “ONE SIZE FITS ALL”

Each habitat has a different risk and threat profile, and each Local Government area has a different appetite and resource allocation for natural areas management initiatives. The most appropriate solution for each local government should be tailored based on the location and species of habitat and the policy direction of the current Council. There is an opportunity in all Local Government areas to acknowledge the importance of habitat protection and reduction in fragmentation in the Strategic and purpose statements of a Planning Scheme.

6. TRADITIONAL OWNER ENGAGEMENT

Traditional Owners have a deep relationship with the land and a culture that is symbiotic with protection of the identified habitats. Story telling has the opportunity to greatly improve education and community awareness and traditional land management practices have an important role in ongoing habitat protection and restoration. The Local Government areas that genuinely engage with Traditional Owner groups and actively partner with indigenous ranger programs appear to have a deeper understanding of the value of the habitat to the region.



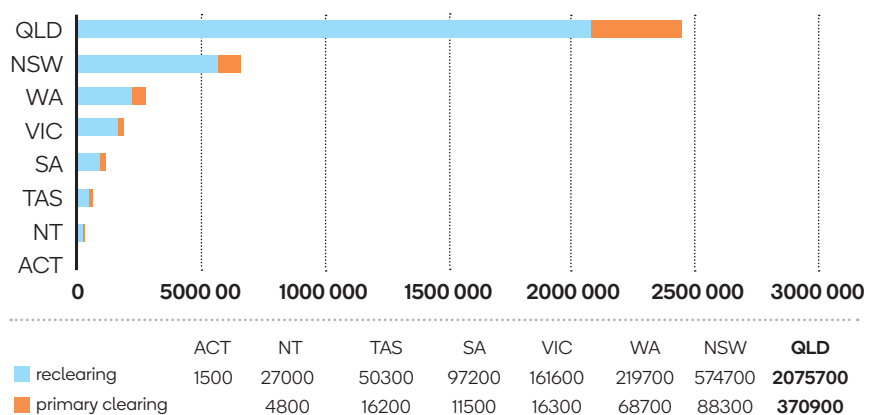
7. EDUCATING

Educating the community and Councillors is central to improved habitat protection outcomes and understanding the value of these ecosystems to Far North Queensland. This Review focused on specific vegetation types for identified threatened habitats. These habitats have both an ecological and economic benefit to the region. This link may be critical to aligning economic and environmental priorities and go a long way to reducing the historical conflict between economic and environmental outcomes.

8. TRUST

There is an inherent distrust in the vegetation protection framework from the general community, agricultural industry, and development industry. Equally, conservation groups often form the view that “lip-service” is paid to conservation provisions and that they are often overlooked for the economic benefits associated with farming and development. This is understandable given the rates of primary clearing and reclearing in Queensland compared to the balance of the States and Territories. There is a challenge in balancing the expectation of community and environmental groups with the expectations of industry sectors.

FIG 1: LANDCLEARING (HA) RATES BY STATE 2010 - 2018



Source: Land Use, Land Use Change & Forestry.
 Note: includes both native forestry and plantation forestry figures

recommendations

This report identifies a number of opportunities for FNQROC Councils to improve or increase their involvement in habitat protection and restoration of the targeted ecological habitats. It is acknowledged that Local Government delivers a vast suite of community services with finite resources and budgets. Accordingly, some of the initiatives proposed are designed to be a low cost, simple and efficient approach to improved habitat protection. Other initiatives may take some time to implement and require external funding applications to enable further development.

INITIATIVE	COMMENT	TIMEFRAME	STAKEHOLDERS	COST
<p>Planning Scheme</p>	<p>The Planning Scheme reflects the existing and aspirational values of the community, sets the strategic direction for Council and regulates development.</p> <p>The Scheme sets up the 'go' and 'no-go' areas for different land uses. In the case of vegetation it can set the policy direction for values such as biodiversity and connectivity and can identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. existing vegetation for protection b. appropriate development and appropriate assessment provisions for development c. provide mechanisms for enforcement in the event of clearing d. strategic (future) vegetation corridors, as a trigger for identifying areas for possible revegetation. <p>A guideline to implementation is provided at Appendix 2 of the full Report.</p>	<p>Next Major Amendment</p>	<p>Planning Officers</p>	<p>\$ \$\$\$</p> <p>LOW HIGH</p>

INITIATIVE	COMMENT	TIMEFRAME	STAKEHOLDERS	COST
<p>Localised Mapping</p>	<p>Where mapping gaps exist in current vegetation protection for the targeted ecological habitats it is recommended that LGA specific mapping be undertaken. This mapping can be incorporated into Planning Scheme Biodiversity and Vegetation Overlay mapping and also submitted to the State and Federal Government agencies to update MSES and MNES mapping.</p> <p>More detail is provided in Appendix 2.</p>	<p>Short Term Prior to next Major Amendment</p>	<p>Planning Officers FNQROC Terrain NRM Traditional Owners</p>	
<p>Corporate Plan</p>	<p>It is critical that Councils acknowledge the importance of the identified endangered habitats (as applicable to each LGA) in the Corporate Plan Framework. This provides an ongoing commitment to habitat protection and forms the basis for establishing operational plans and budgets to support the implementation of specific strategies.</p> <p>A guideline to implementation is provided at Appendix 3 of the full Report.</p>	<p>Immediate</p>	<p>ELT Councillors</p>	
<p>traditional owner engagement</p>	<p>A consistent theme has been identified following consultation with Traditional Owners (TO) in the FNQROC region, that an opportunity exists to improve engagement by Local Government with TOs in the development and implementation of Natural Areas Management Plans and Biodiversity Plans.</p> <p>This presents an opportunity to understand historical and cultural approaches to habitat protection and to partner in education and resourcing opportunities to undertake projects on behalf of Local Government Natural Areas teams. Importantly, TOs have a unique story attached to the natural environment that should be valued and understood and, where appropriate and in an appropriate manner, shared with the community to assist in education and understanding of the importance of these habitats.</p> <p>A framework for Engaging with Traditional Owner Groups is provided at Appendix 4 of the full Report.</p>	<p>Immediate</p>	<p>NAM Officers Traditional Owners Terrain NRM</p>	

INITIATIVE

COMMENT

TIMEFRAME

STAKEHOLDERS

COST

Ecosystem Services

Prescribing an economic value and ROI to habitat protection and restoration works is not a new concept, however, it is not widely practiced by Local Governments in the context of capital and operational budgets and projects.

Developing regional Ecosystem Services would create a regional economy based on habitat protection.

This would enable reporting on ecological integrity and habitat connectivity and prescribe an economic benefit to that asset.

It would also facilitate a clear per HA analysis of habitat protection and restoration.

Mabi forest likely to benefit substantially from this approach.

Further development required

FNQROC
Terrain NRM
Economic Development Officers
ELT
Councillors
Traditional Owners



Coastal Hazards Adaptation Strategy

It is recognised that most coastal Councils are well progressed with the development of their CHAS and that this opportunity may not present itself until the first review period following adoption.

There has been varying degrees of inclusion of “soft” infrastructure or natural habitat restoration solutions proposed from Council to Council.

The protection and restoration of Littoral Rainforest provides an opportunity for “green infrastructure” to play a role in the ongoing protection of Coastal areas.

Conversely, Littoral Rainforest is not recognised as an asset for the purpose of the CHAS. There is a pressing need to assess the existing and future threats to Littoral rainforest from extreme weather events and sea-level rise in order to prioritise areas for management intervention to maximize its capacity to continue providing the many services that benefit communities and biota in this region.

First CHAS Review

Planning Officers
Sustainability Officers
Infrastructure Officers
Traditional Owners



INITIATIVE	COMMENT	TIMEFRAME	STAKEHOLDERS	COST
<p>Incentive Programs (local government)</p>	<p>A number of FNQROC Councils have developed and trialled different landowner incentive programs over the years.</p> <p>Some Councils such as Tablelands Regional Council have Incentive Programs under development.</p> <p>A well-developed incentive programs can deliver significant and measurable habitat restoration and protection outcomes.</p> <p>Careful consideration needs to go into the development of these incentives to ensure they are specific and suitable for each LGA particularly those with a limited rates base.</p>		<p>FNQROC ELT Elected Representatives NAM Officers Finance Officers</p>	
<p>Incentive Programs (state government)</p>	<p>The QLD State Government has a well-developed QLD Heritage Strategy designed to incentivise and assist with the restoration and maintenance of sites on the QLD Heritage Register.</p> <p>MSES Mapping recognises that the subject habitats are of State Significance.</p> <p>There is an opportunity for the State Government to develop a similar strategy for the preservation and restoration of the State's most endangered habitats.</p>	<p>Further development required</p>	<p>FNQROC</p>	
<p>Representation on Action Groups</p>	<p>The existing Action Groups for Mabi, Littoral, and Cassowary Habitat are well established.</p> <p>They are a substantial resource and a wealth of knowledge.</p> <p>There is benefit in having increased representation from Local Government as part of each Action Group.</p>	<p>Immediate</p>	<p>NAM Officers Planning Officers Terrain NRM FNQROC</p>	

INITIATIVE

Education

COMMENT

The capacity and willingness of the community to support biodiversity and ecological connectivity continues to be acknowledged and supported in the use of a range of different conservation tools and approaches and activities to establish and maintain healthy relationships between diverse community groups.

Throughout consultation education was raised consistently as a simple yet effective opportunity to improve habitat protection.

Education is focus on:

- Increasing community awareness
- Increasing Councillor awareness
- Increasing visitor awareness

Education is not just about species identification and status but also about the value the habitat has to the region, the deep connection our first peoples have with the land and providing the tools to make a difference.

Local Government successfully run advertising awareness campaigns for Water, Waste and Animal Management. Natural Areas Management presents another opportunity to work with the community to increase awareness.

TIMEFRAME

Further development required

STAKEHOLDERS

FNQROC
Terrain NRM
NAM Officers
Marketing & Comms Officers
Councillors
Traditional Owners

COST



INITIATIVE

Advocacy

COMMENT

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TIMEFRAME

Immediate

STAKEHOLDERS

ELT
Councillors
Terrain NRM
FNQROC

COST

