



One of the last great wild places on Earth

An outline of the Wilderness Society's work with Indigenous people for land justice and the protection of Cape York Peninsula

May 2007

Since the early 1990s the Wilderness Society has worked with Indigenous traditional owners to achieve protection and management of Cape York Peninsula and the return of homelands to the control and management of its traditional owners. Here is a brief description of our work.

We have:

- Worked with Guugu-Yimidhirr traditional owners to successfully secure the protection of their homelands at [Starke](#) just north of Cooktown, including State Government purchase and return of land to Aboriginal freehold and a national park.
- Worked with Wuthathi traditional owners to [protect their homelands](#) at Shelburne Bay – the outstanding landform of the 'white sand country'– from sand mining, and to support the development of a community conservation plan.
- Entered into a [Cooperation Agreement](#) with Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation, a northern Kaanju traditional owner organisation. The Wilderness Society and Chuulangun are currently working together on a number of environment objectives, including an Indigenous Protected Area and protection of the wild rivers on homelands, and a [joint approach](#) to promoting conservation of Cape York Peninsula.
- Worked with traditional owners, the Cape York Land Council and Balkanu to secure the purchase and eventual return of 2 million hectares of land across 19 properties. This includes the [Kalpowar agreement](#), which in December 2005 returned 200,000h of land just east of Lakefield National Park to traditional owners and protected areas under conservation agreements and created a 200,000h national park.

The Wilderness Society has also been involved in many broad Cape York conservation issues with Government and Cape York indigenous representatives:

- 1992 – 1997: [CYPLUS](#) (Cape York Peninsula Land Use Study / Strategy) – a broad State and Commonwealth sponsored project to address the future options for land use given the region's identified natural and cultural values and the various interests in the Cape.
- 1996 – onwards: [CYPHoA](#) (Cape York Peninsula Land Use Heads of Agreement) – a voluntary agreement recognising the interlocking interests around Indigenous land rights, conservation and pastoral enterprise. Groups involved are the Cape York Land Council, Balkanu Aboriginal Development Corporation, the ATSIC regional council, The Wilderness Society, Australian Conservation Foundation, the Peninsula Cattlemen's Union, and the Queensland Government (which became a signatory in 2001).
- 2001 – 2003: TRG (Tenure Resolution Group) – a group set up to resolve outstanding conservation, economic development and native title issues. Groups involved were Cape York Land Council, Balkanu Aboriginal Development Corporation, The Wilderness Society, Australian Conservation Foundation, the Peninsula Cattlemen's Union, and the Queensland Government.
- 2004 – onwards: CYTRIG (Cape York Tenure Resolution Implementation Group) a group set up to resolve the return and protection of 2 million hectares of 'east coast' land (the 'state land dealings'). Groups involved are Cape York Land Council, Balkanu Aboriginal Development Corporation, The Wilderness Society, Australian Conservation Foundation, and the Queensland Government.
- 2006 – current: The Department of Premier and Cabinet process to resolve issues of World Heritage, wild rivers, land ownership and management. Negotiating groups include Cape York Indigenous organisations, The Wilderness Society, Australian Conservation Foundation, and Agforce.





The Wilderness Society also has a comprehensive approach to engaging indigenous interests in relation to the Wild Rivers Act 2005.

TWS:

- Met representatives of the Cape York Land Council and Balkanu Aboriginal Development Corporation immediately after the 2004 state election when Labor issued a policy to protect the wild rivers of Queensland and discussed this in the meeting. The Wilderness Society continued to meet with officers and representatives of the Cape York Land Council and some traditional owners over the wild rivers issue.
- Wrote directly to all native title representative bodies in Queensland in early 2005, as well as another 150 Indigenous organisations in Far North and Western Queensland, including information on the protection of free-flowing rivers and The Wilderness Society's [position on indigenous rights and interests](#) in rivers. We followed this with a series of calls to offer meetings and further information.
- Developed dialogue with Carpentaria Land Council, which led to the ongoing exchange of information and submissions, and [joint actions](#) during the period of nomination for the four Gulf wild rivers.
- Met with the Mapoon Council in late 2005 to discuss the Wild Rivers Act and related issues.
- Ongoing dialogue and development of a case study of wild rivers with Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation, focused on the Wenlock and Pascoe Rivers.
- In mid 2006 participated in a meeting and process convened by Premier Beattie to find agreement between key stakeholders on the Wild Rivers Act, Wild Rivers Code, and the initial six nominated rivers (in the Gulf of Carpentaria and Hinchinbrook and Fraser Islands). The meeting, chaired by the Premier, included the NRM Minister and Government officials, representatives of The Wilderness Society, the Queensland Resources Council, the Carpentaria Land Council, and Noel Pearson representing Cape York indigenous interests. The Government also consulted Agforce and shire councils in this process. The negotiations resulted in agreed amendments to the Wild Rivers Act and the declaration of the first six wild rivers in Queensland.

The Wilderness Society has also been directly involved in a number of land justice and native title processes.

We:

- Worked with others to set up the Land Justice Alliance Queensland – an alliance of indigenous, environment and social justice groups. This was in [response to the backlash against the Wik decision](#), and moves from the Borbidge Government to upgrade the tenure of Queensland rural leases and extinguish native title. This campaign group successfully blocked the Borbidge initiative and gave rise to the first Queensland ANTaR (Australian's for Native Title and Recognition) branch.
- Worked with the Australian Heritage Commission and other stakeholders and interests to develop the Malimup Communiqué. The communiqué is a national guide to understanding indigenous rights in relation to areas defined as 'wilderness', while recognising the role of wilderness in nature conservation. The Wilderness Society adopted this communiqué into our [policy on indigenous land rights](#).
- Have been [a lead agency](#) in the Queensland environment groups' [Native Title and Protected Areas project](#) (1998 – 2005), which included policy developed in consultation with the Queensland Indigenous Working Group.

