



# Tablelands Regional Council



## Beating About The Bush: An Overview of Tablelands Regional Council's role in Natural Asset Management in the TRC Region





## Contents

1.	<b>Report Purpose</b> .....	1
2.	<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
3.	<b>An Overview of Natural Asset Management in the TRC Region</b> .....	3
3.1	The Land Protection Unit .....	3
3.1.1	Fire management .....	3
3.1.2	Plant pests and animals .....	3
3.1.3	Data collection and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) .....	4
3.1.4	Loan weed spray units .....	4
3.1.5	Wash-down facilities .....	4
3.2	TRC Community Revegetation Nursery .....	4
3.2.1	Wildlife passages .....	5
3.3	Mabi Forest .....	7
3.4	Tepon-Wondecla Nature Refuge and other TRC conservation parks and reserves .....	7
4.	<b>Development Proposal Assessments</b> .....	8
5.	<b>Community Engagement</b> .....	8
6.	<b>External Grants</b> .....	8

## Version Control

Version	Outline of Revisions	Date	Updated By
1.0	Initial development	March 2018	NRM and Biosecurity Coordinator
1.1	Comments from Planning and Regulatory Services-Planning, Land Protection Unit and TRC Community Revegetation Nursery	April-May 2018	NRM and Biosecurity Coordinator
1.2	Draft for adoption	May 2018	NRM and Biosecurity Coordinator
2.0	Adopted by Council	28 June 2018	NRM and Biosecurity Coordinator

## Photo credits

Front cover (left to right): The Golden Bowerbird (scienceimage.csiro.au ©) lives 600m above sea level in the Atherton Tableland region; Crocodile Trophy, Chris McLellan © TEQ; Tolga, Karl Seelig © TEQ; Creek Bed, Millaa Millaa Falls, Darren Jew © TEQ; *Homoranthus porteri* (Don Franklin ©) is found on a few rock outcrops in far north Queensland and is listed as vulnerable under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*; Windy Hill, Karl Seelig ©, TEQ.

Back cover (left to right): Dynamic duo, Scott Morrison ©; *Stockwellia quadrifida* (Don Franklin ©) is restricted to the Atherton tableland and is vulnerable under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*; Motorbike men, Scott Morrison ©.



## Acknowledgement of Country

Tablelands Regional Council would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Tablelands region and recognise their continuing connection to country. We pay respect to Elders past, present and future.

### 1. Report Purpose

Tablelands Regional Council (TRC) is obligated, as are other local government councils, to manage biosecurity risks and ensure high value natural assets are maintained, protected and improved<sup>1 2 3 4</sup>.

This report aims to broadly demonstrate that country within the TRC local government area is highly-valued as a natural asset on the Australian continent and to detail how TRC currently contributes to safe guarding its significant agricultural and natural values.

For the purpose of this document, natural assets are defined as healthy plants, animals, water and land, which are vital for our economic security, health, wellbeing and way of life.

### 2. Introduction

The Tablelands and surrounding environs have some of the best agricultural land in Queensland, coupled with the most intact savannah woodlands<sup>5</sup> and oldest tropical rainforests on Earth<sup>6</sup>.

TRC is committed to protecting the natural environment by adopting sound management principles and practices as detailed in the TRC Strategic Framework Planning Scheme 2016<sup>7</sup>.

The TRC local government area spans 1,138,217ha and covers ten catchments (Figure 1) including a significant portion of the Barron, Herbert and Johnstone rivers. It is a region recognised as a crucial network of natural corridors linking the Eucalyptus dominant Einasleigh Uplands of the west, to the Wet Tropics rainforests of the Great Dividing Range in the east<sup>8</sup>. The region is home to 24,827 people<sup>9</sup>, with 67% of the landscape under broad-acre and agricultural production, 23% under conservation<sup>10</sup> and 10% residential. Agricultural industries are the highest employer (16.4%)<sup>11</sup>.

Both the environment and rural communities in the region are highly significant, as reflected in the Tablelands Community Plan 2021<sup>12</sup> and TRC 2017–2021 Corporate Plan<sup>13</sup>. Their importance is

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.fngroc.qld.gov.au/files/media/original/004/1aa/5f4/90c/FNQROC-Strategic\\_Operational\\_Plan\\_2018.pdf](http://www.fngroc.qld.gov.au/files/media/original/004/1aa/5f4/90c/FNQROC-Strategic_Operational_Plan_2018.pdf) Pg.12

<sup>2</sup> [https://douglas.qld.gov.au/download/publications\\_reports/Corporate-Sustainability-Strategy-2017-2020.pdf](https://douglas.qld.gov.au/download/publications_reports/Corporate-Sustainability-Strategy-2017-2020.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/52995/BioStrat2012\\_22.pdf](http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/52995/BioStrat2012_22.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/20170522\\_-\\_brisbane\\_clean\\_green\\_sustainable\\_2017\\_2031\\_summary.pdf](https://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/20170522_-_brisbane_clean_green_sustainable_2017_2031_summary.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.northernaustralia.gov.au/sites/prod.office-northern-australia.gov.au/files/files/Chapter\\_04-Terrestrial\\_ecosystems.pdf](http://www.northernaustralia.gov.au/sites/prod.office-northern-australia.gov.au/files/files/Chapter_04-Terrestrial_ecosystems.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.wettropicsplan.org.au/content/download/788/6563/version/3/file/Terrain-WQIP-combined.pdf> Pg. 11.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.trc.qld.gov.au/download/volume-1-strategic-framework-codes/> Part 3.7.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.wettropics.gov.au/site/user-assets/docs/WT\\_planning\\_boundaries.pdf](http://www.wettropics.gov.au/site/user-assets/docs/WT_planning_boundaries.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA36820](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA36820)

<sup>10</sup> Including National Parks and Conservation areas plus State Forests and private Nature Refuges.

<sup>11</sup> <https://economy.id.com.au/tablelands/Employment-census>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.trc.qld.gov.au/download/tablelands-community-plan/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.trc.qld.gov.au/download/corporate-plan-2017-2021/>

also evident in the countless outdoor pursuits enjoyed in the area including walking, horse riding<sup>14</sup>, water and motor sports, vehicle touring, mountain biking, camping and wildlife observation and appreciation.



**Figure 1:** River catchments in the Tablelands Regional Council local government area. Note that these catchments<sup>16</sup> contribute up to 22% of the annual flow to the Great Barrier Reef<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4177.0>

<sup>15</sup> Tablelands Sport and Recreation Plan, final report, 2010. TRC.

<sup>16</sup> Not including the Einasleigh and Mitchell catchments

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.wettropicsplan.org.au/content/download/788/6563/version/3/file/Terrain-WQIP-combined.pdf>

Pg.13.



## 3. An Overview of Natural Asset Management in the TRC Region

### 3.1 The Land Protection Unit

#### 3.1.1 Fire management

Proactive fire management is critical for the protection of life, property and the integrity of natural ecosystems.

TRC is a member of the Tablelands Fire and Land Management Group, comprising of the Department of Natural Resources and Energy (DNRME), Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) / Department of Environment and Science (DES).

The Land Protection Unit contributes to the Tablelands Local Disaster Management Plan<sup>18</sup> and has a five year strategy for operational burning and wildfire mitigation in the region.

Land Protection Officers often work with multiple agencies to achieve their burning objectives for the calendar year.

#### 3.1.2 Plant pests and animals

Pest plant and animal work is carried out by the Land Protection Unit with the assistance of community groups, Biosecurity Queensland (BQ)/Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF), DNRME, Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC), QPWS/DES, private landholders and Terrain Natural Resource Management.

The TRC Local Area Pest Management Plan 2014–2018 is a requirement under the *Biosecurity Act 2014* and reflects community expectations with agreed control actions for sixteen plant and four animal pest species<sup>19</sup>. This plan also enables TRC to meet planning scheme guidelines to ensure operational works associated with development, avoid, limit or minimise the spread of weed species<sup>20</sup>.

In the event of the discovery of significant new pest outbreaks in neighbouring local council areas, Land Protection Officers are required, through a Memorandum Of Understanding with FNQROC<sup>21</sup>, to participate in joint task force operations to: assess the extent of the infestation; investigate control/mitigation options; coordinate implementation of control and map and report the issue to DAF and other stakeholders. New discoveries of pest species can result in a change of work priorities in the Land Protection Unit.

The control of pest plants and animals also fall under the duties of the Land Protection Unit through obligations under Local Laws<sup>22</sup> and the Tablelands Local Disaster Management Plan.

---

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.trc.qld.gov.au/download/local-dissater-management-plan-ldmp-v5-2-november-2017/> Pg.19

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.trc.qld.gov.au/download/2014-2018-local-area-pest-management-plan/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.trc.qld.gov.au/download/volume-1-strategic-framework-codes/> Part 3.7.3

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.fnqroc.qld.gov.au/files/media/original/003/cd9/79d/904/Regional\\_Resource\\_Sharing\\_MOU\\_amendment\\_2014.pdf](http://www.fnqroc.qld.gov.au/files/media/original/003/cd9/79d/904/Regional_Resource_Sharing_MOU_amendment_2014.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.trc.qld.gov.au/download/local-law-no-3-community-environmental-management-2011/>



### 3.1.3 Data collection and Geographical Information Systems (GIS)

Land Protection Officers record information about pest control work using Global Positioning System (GPS) units. This data is used for the efficient control and mapping of infestations and is often supplied to third parties through contractual arrangements.

Data, in the form of waypoints, is also plotted on the TRC GIS system to provide a regional perspective of key pest species and to determine control priorities.

### 3.1.4 Loan weed spray units

In order to assist the community to control priority weed species, two vehicle-mounted spray units are available for loan to the community from the Malanda and Ravenshoe depots. Bookings are managed by the Senior Land Protection Officer.

### 3.1.5 Wash-down facilities

Public wash-down bays are being constructed at Millaa Millaa and Malanda in an effort to decrease weed spread into and throughout the region. It is anticipated the bays will be operational during the 2018/19 financial year.

Dedicated wash-down water tanks have also been established at priority sites along roadside slashing routes for TRC operators to wash down their equipment before moving on-to other areas. Slashing operators from the Malanda and Ravenshoe depots also work with Land Protection Officers to schedule weed treatment in conjunction with slashing schedules.

## 3.2 TRC Community Revegetation Nursery

Since 1989, the TRC Community Revegetation Nursery has produced and supplied native trees to numerous townships and local landholders. More than 900,000 trees<sup>23</sup> have been planted, resulting in the creation of environmentally significant wildlife corridors that link isolated remnants of vegetation<sup>24</sup>.

This work aligns with the TRC Planning Scheme 2016<sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> and FNQROC Development manual DP1<sup>27</sup> and has been supported by strong community partnerships<sup>28</sup> <sup>29</sup>.

TRC Community Revegetation Nursery work is guided by the following objectives:

- Create and promote priority vegetation corridors<sup>30</sup> between fragmented natural habitat including State and privately-owned protected areas, such as national parks and nature refuges. This includes the creation and enhancement of habitat for threatened animals

---

<sup>23</sup> Personal communication, K. Freebody, 2018

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.treat.net.au/projects/habitatlinkage\\_sat\\_grn.html](http://www.treat.net.au/projects/habitatlinkage_sat_grn.html)

<sup>25</sup> PSP6 landscaping and preferred plant species and PSP8 natural area revegetation and rehabilitation

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.trc.qld.gov.au/download/volume-2-schedules-version-2-trc-planning-scheme/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/79235f07-9c32-45fa-b868-eb248691e945/files/sth-cassowary.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.wettropics.gov.au/site/user-assets/docs/mc\\_brochure\\_web.pdf](https://www.wettropics.gov.au/site/user-assets/docs/mc_brochure_web.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> These groups include: Barron Catchment Care, Eacham Landcare, Johnston River Catchment Management Association, Malanda Landcare, Southern Atherton Tablelands Revegetation Alliance (SATRA), The School for Field Studies (SFS), South Endeavour Trust, Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group (TKMG), Trees for the Evelyn and Atherton Tablelands (TREAT) and Yungaburra Land Care.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.wettropics.gov.au/site/user-assets/docs/wtmaConservationStrategy.pdf> pg. 44-49



such as the Southern Cassowary<sup>31 32</sup>, Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo<sup>33</sup> and Green Ringtail Possum<sup>34</sup>.

- Improve soil stabilisation and water quality in Great Barrier Reef Catchments (targeting the Barron and Johnstone systems).
- Enhance shade shelter belts on agricultural land, incorporating stock exclusion fencing.
- Improve scenic amenity of TRC reserves and recreational areas.
- Provide community support to revegetation projects by individual landholders.

### 3.2.1 Wildlife passages

The establishment of significant corridors of natural habitat through tree planting has created important wildlife passages in the region (Figure 2). Some examples of this are:

- 'Making Connections Corridor' project restoring 40ha of upland rainforest for climate refugia<sup>35 36</sup>.
- Peterson Creek Wildlife Corridor linking Curtain Fig National Park (NP) to the Lake Eacham section of Crater Lakes NP.
- Toohey Creek Wildlife Corridor linking the Lake Barrine section of Crater Lakes NP to Gadgarra NP.
- Upper Johnstone River revegetation between Bromfield Swamp and Malanda Falls Conservation Park

This work has been achieved by collaborative projects with TRC, community groups, private landowners, Department of Transport and Main Roads, DES, universities, and Wet Tropics Management Authority.

Other achievements include:

- Under-road wildlife passages for the East Evelyn Road upgrade connecting Millaa Millaa and Ravenshoe. This work forms a nationally significant link of high natural value between the Herberton Range and Malaan national parks.
- Overhead rope bridge for arboreal wildlife at the headwaters of Dirran Creek/Kenny Road (Upper Johnstone River), linking a large privately owned<sup>37</sup> and endangered rainforest complex to Herberton Range NP.
- Overhead rope passages across the Palmerston Highway in Wooroonooran NP.
- Installation of Tree-kangaroo crossing road signage at known hot-spots.

These projects have been successful in encouraging wildlife movement<sup>38</sup> and also satisfy the TRC Planning Scheme 2016 (Vol. 2, V3)<sup>39</sup> as measures for minimising impacts on wildlife movement.

---

31

<http://www.fngroc.qld.gov.au/files/media/original/003/e26/83a/281/DP1%20Development%20Principles%20-03%2014%20Finalised.pdf>

32 <http://www.wettropics.gov.au/cassowaries>

33 [http://www.tree-kangaroo.net/download\\_file/view\\_inline/186](http://www.tree-kangaroo.net/download_file/view_inline/186)

34 <http://155.187.2.69/biodiversity/threatened/publications/action/marsupials/28.html>

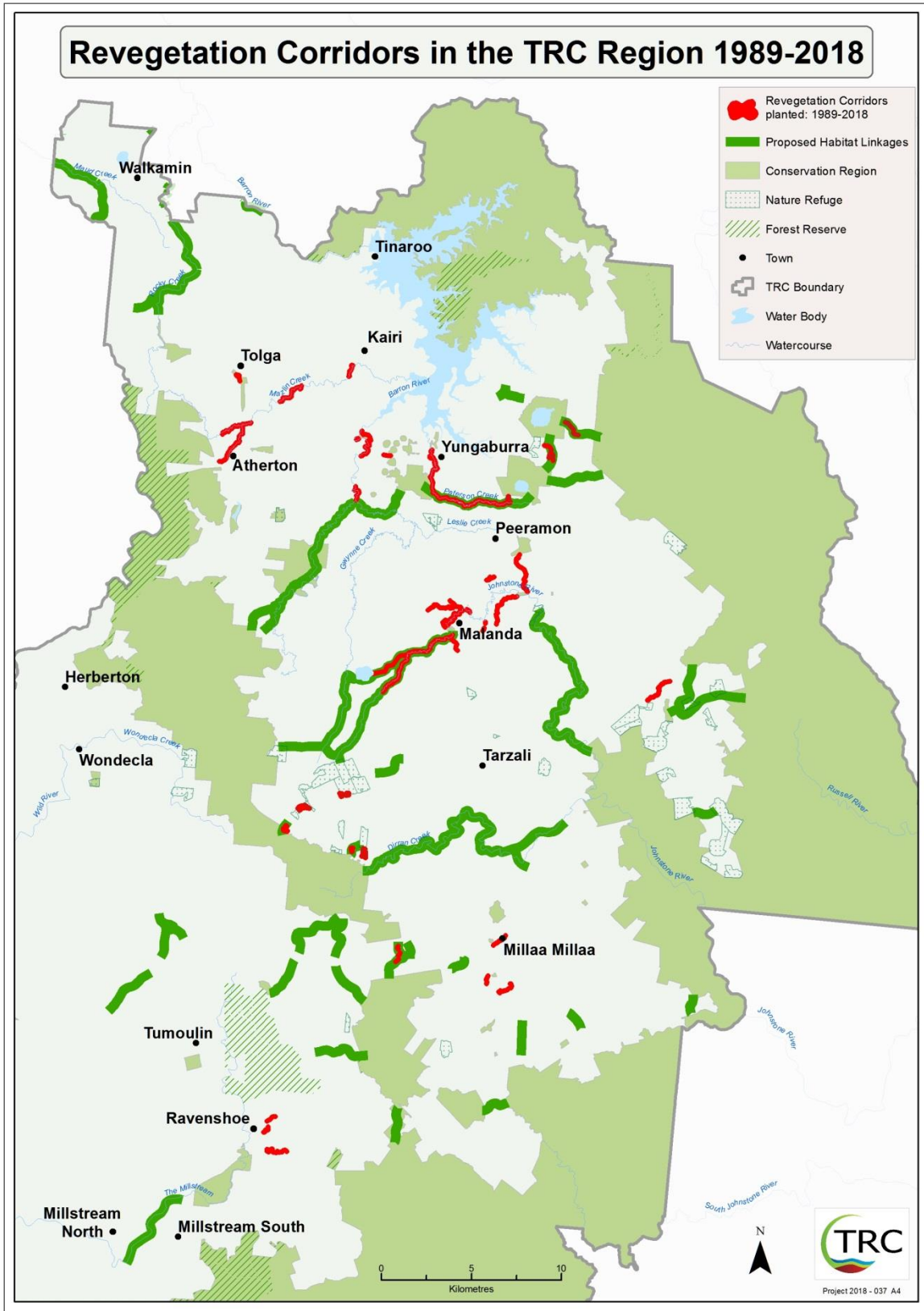
35 <http://www.wettropics.gov.au/building-landscape-resilience>

36 <http://www.publish.csiro.au/ZO/ZO08027>

37 [http://www.southendeavour.com.au/lemuroid\\_leap.html](http://www.southendeavour.com.au/lemuroid_leap.html)

38 <https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=685627052621737;res=IELENG>

39 <https://www.trc.qld.gov.au/download/volume-2-schedules-version-2-trc-planning-scheme/>Sch. PSP2. Appendix 1.



**Figure 2:** Revegetation corridors planted through collaboration between TRC Community Revegetation Nursery, individual landholders, numerous community groups and State agencies; 1989-2018.





### 3.3 Mabi Forest

Prior to European settlement, Mabi Forest in the TRC region was a continuous forest of approximately 19,800ha bordered by Yungaburra in the east, Kairi–Cullamungie Pocket to the north, Tolga in the west and past Wongabel State Forest in the south<sup>40</sup>.

Mabi Forest now covers less than 1,000ha and is largely held in National Park, State Forest and freehold land<sup>41</sup>. Due to its limited distribution, vulnerability to ongoing threats, loss and decline in species and reduction in community integrity, it is listed as critically endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*<sup>42</sup> and endangered under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*. Two nationally vulnerable flora species<sup>43 44</sup> plus the nationally vulnerable Spectacled Flying-fox<sup>45</sup> occur in forest type.

TRC is responsible for around 40ha of Mabi Forest at Tolga Scrub and Picnic Crossing<sup>46</sup> Reserve. Substantial plantings (approximately 34,000 trees<sup>47</sup>) have been established at these sites and at other remnants in collaboration with the TRC Community Revegetation Nursery, Barron Catchment Care<sup>48</sup>, Trees for the Evelyn and Atherton Tablelands (TREAT), Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group (TKMG) and Yungaburra Land Care and Terrain NRM.

### 3.4 Tepon-Wondecla Nature Refuge and other TRC conservation parks and reserves

TRC holds a conservation agreement with the State<sup>49</sup> (represented by DES) to manage Tepon-Wondecla Nature Refuge near Herberton<sup>50</sup>.

The priorities at this site are to protect and enhance recognised significant natural values under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, including endangered and of concern regional ecosystems<sup>51 52</sup>. An adjacent wetland on unassigned State Land is also of significance.

Other TRC reserves have received grant funded works via land protection and revegetation projects.

---

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/e2d1ece8-21cd-4b56-91db-32b8f69f6065/files/mabi-forest.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/recovery-plans/recovery-plan-mabi-forest>

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=30&status=Critically+Endangered>

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicspecies.pl?taxon\\_id=56400](http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicspecies.pl?taxon_id=56400)

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/species/pubs/13189-conservation-advice.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/99449a95-4a42-4a68-8735-303408b8470f/files/pteropus-conspicillatus-recovery-plan.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.trc.qld.gov.au/download/picnic-crossing-reserve-land-management-plan/>

<sup>47</sup> Personal communication, K. Freebody, 2018

<sup>48</sup> <http://barronrivercatchment.org.au/~barronri/projects/content/leslie-creek-mabi-corridor>

<sup>49</sup> <https://test.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/asmade/sl-2009-0189/lh>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.protectedplanet.net/tepon-wondecla-nature-refuge>

<sup>51</sup> <https://environment.ehp.qld.gov.au/regional-ecosystems/details/?re=7.8.19>

<sup>52</sup> <https://environment.ehp.qld.gov.au/regional-ecosystems/details/?re=7.8.8>

## 4. Development Proposal Assessments

Commitments under the TRC Planning Scheme's Strategic Framework<sup>53</sup> ensure that the TRC Natural Asset Officer and TRC NRM/Biosecurity Coordinator work closely with TRC Planning Officers to achieve positive environmental outcomes in relation to:

- Habitat and biodiversity—recognition and optimal management of regional, State and national values including habitat linkages and remnant vegetation.
- Watercourses and wetlands—physical condition, ecological health and environmental values of surface and ground water are protected and improved.
- Water resources—Barron Basin, Lake Tinaroo and Atherton Basalt aquifer are not compromised by land use or development.

This arrangement includes providing advice on Environmental Impact Statements and revegetation requirements for development proposals.

## 5. Community Engagement

The TRC Land Protection Unit and Community Revegetation Nursery supplies environmental education material to schools and community groups, has environmental education stalls at regional show days and hosts volunteers including secondary and tertiary students.

Information is also provided to the community via printed, broadcast and social media, and e-newsletters.

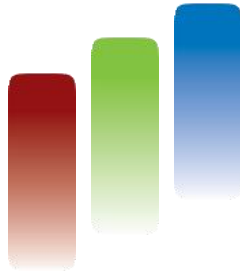
## 6. External Grants

As the opportunity arises, State and federal grants are hosted by the TRC Land Protection Unit and Community Revegetation Nursery in collaboration with local NRM and community groups.



---

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.trc.qld.gov.au/download/volume-1-strategic-framework-codes/> Part 3.7



*Live, discover and invest in a Tablelands community*



Tablelands Regional Council

45 Mabel Street, Atherton Qld 4883  
PO Box 573, Atherton Qld 4883

1300 362 242

[info@trc.qld.gov.au](mailto:info@trc.qld.gov.au)

[trc.qld.gov.au](http://trc.qld.gov.au)



#athertontablelands