

THE CAIRNS INSTITUTE  
Research in tropical societies

# Newsletter

## Issue Three | 2025

Cairns  
Singapore  
Townsville







## Welcome!

The Cairns Institute supports JCU's strategic intent to create a brighter future for life in the tropics world-wide through graduates and discoveries that make a difference. [www.jcu.edu.au/about/strategic-intent](http://www.jcu.edu.au/about/strategic-intent).

The Cairns Institute's location in tropical north Queensland and proximity to neighbouring countries in the Pacific and South East Asia offers unique opportunities to enhance human life in the tropics and contribute to a brighter, more equitable and enriching future for its peoples. The Institute is committed to understanding and informing critical processes of social and environmental transformation in the tropics.

As the world's tropical zones face immense social, economic and environmental challenges, the Institute aims to provide innovative research with local, national and global applications. The Institute's core business of research, training and dialogue is embedded in commitments of excellence, social justice and engagement with the societies in which we work. Our unique profile is built on the following key concerns:

- Creativity and innovation
- Cultural and linguistical transformations
- Indigenous futures
- Social and environmental justice
- Sustainable development

## Contact details

The Cairns Institute, Building D3  
Nguma Bada campus, James Cook University  
Smithfield QLD 4878

PO Box 6811 Cairns QLD 4870 Australia

Phone: +61 7 4232 1888

Email: [cairnsinstitute@jcu.edu.au](mailto:cairnsinstitute@jcu.edu.au)  
[www.cairnsinstitute.jcu.edu.au](http://www.cairnsinstitute.jcu.edu.au)

Instagram: @thecairnsinstitute  
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-cairns-institute/>



## Contents

Welcome	02
Nalisa is our Spirit of JCU	03
Social Science Reference Group	04
Decarbonising regional Queensland report	05
FNQ Connect welcomes new director	06
Balik tipol sa Pilipinas: Sarus Cranes	07
Abner advocates for regional development	08
Indigenous Education in Australia: Beyond basic metrics	09
Rethinking the north	10
Social Sciences Week 2025	11
Celebrating women in Ag: Harvesting strength: stories of grit & growth	12
Supporting changemakers	14
Nurturing young minds through reading in Manus	15
TCI welcomes Australia Awards recipients	16
Strong northern Voices at DNAC2025	18
Sharing Climate Codesign Insights at AMOS2025	19
Building drought resilient grazing systems at Clarke Creek	20
Sustainability Education Workshop	21
SATSIE showcased at DNAC025	22
GrowHer- Advancing Young Female Founders through AgTech	23
Global Cooperation to Protect and Promote Rangeland Resilience	24
Ag and Food Futures at Tropical Innovation Festival	26
Restoring Land Health by Managing Invasive Weeds	27
What's On	28



Dr Nalisa Neuendorf



## Nalisa is our Spirit of JCU

On Friday 8 August, six inspiring alumni, working across law, government, conservation, and medicine, were awarded for their outstanding contributions to their fields in a ceremony held at the Bebegu Yumba campus in Townsville. Vice Chancellor Professor Simon Biggs said JCU is honoured to recognise the remarkable achievements of its alumni. *"The Outstanding Alumni Awards remind us of the important role JCU has played and continues to play in shaping our graduates,"* he said.

*"We are immensely proud of the impactful work our graduates go on to do in their respective fields and they should all be congratulated for continuing to inspire others along their journey."*

The Cairns Institute Adjunct Dr Nalisa Neuendorf has been named the recipient of the prestigious Spirit of JCU award, recognising her exceptional leadership, commitment to cross-cultural collaboration, and impactful contributions to research and community engagement. Nominated by Professor Allan Dale, Nalisa's career embodies the values and vision of James Cook University, demonstrating a deep dedication to creating positive change across the tropics. The Spirit of JCU award honours individuals whose personal and professional achievements reflect JCU's mission to create a brighter future for communities locally, nationally, and globally.

Nalisa's pioneering work in Indigenous and Pacific Studies is exemplified by her role in co-founding OneTalk, a collective of Papua New Guinean and Australian First Nations academics. This collaborative network fosters safe, inclusive spaces for dialogue, mentorship, and innovative research, leading to significant publications exploring themes of race, colonial history, and cultural identity.

Her academic portfolio reflects a deep engagement with issues central to social justice and community wellbeing. Her PhD research, *"Luksave em bikpela samting! Witnessing gender violence in Papua New Guinea"*, offers critical insights into community responses to gender violence in the remote Gulf Province. Beyond her doctoral work, she has contributed extensively to public health research, including the Sexual Health and Wellbeing Training with Women in Pacific Island Countries and Territories: A Scoping Review, advancing health outcomes and building sustainable international partnerships.

Based in Goroka, PNG, Nalisa serves as the Social Science Lead at the Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research, guiding a multi-disciplinary team focused on population health, social change, and evidence-based policy. A committed mentor, she is dedicated to empowering the next generation of scholars—particularly from PNG—while strengthening partnerships with Australian First Nations and Pasifika research communities. She champions culturally grounded research methodologies that reflect and respond to local contexts.

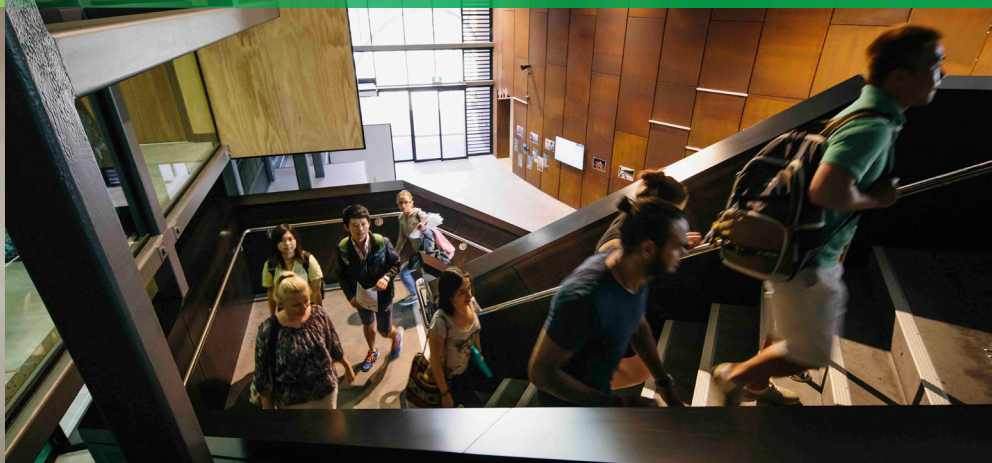
In her role as Adjunct Research Fellow with The Cairns Institute, Nalisa plays an active part in shaping its strategic future. Her recent keynote address at the 2024 launch of *The Chinese in Papua New Guinea* further underscores her influence as a thought leader in cross-cultural research and engagement.

We wish to congratulate Nalisa on this prestigious award and look forward to continuing to work with her in the future. You can view a short video of Nalisa's work and learn more about the award [here](#).





Prof Kerrie Wilson



## Social Science Reference Group

In June 2025, the Queensland Government's Chief Scientist Professor Kerrie Wilson created a Social Science Reference Group to help solidify Queensland's position as a source of social science expertise and a global leader in social sciences nationally and internationally.

The Cairns Institute Director, Distinguished Professor Stewart Lockie is a member along with University representatives from University of Queensland (UQ), Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Bond University (BU), Griffiths University (GU), University of the Sunshine Coast (USC), University of Southern Queensland (USQ) and Central Queensland University (CQU). Governmental representatives came from the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and

Innovation (DETSI), the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC), and Queensland Treasury (QT).

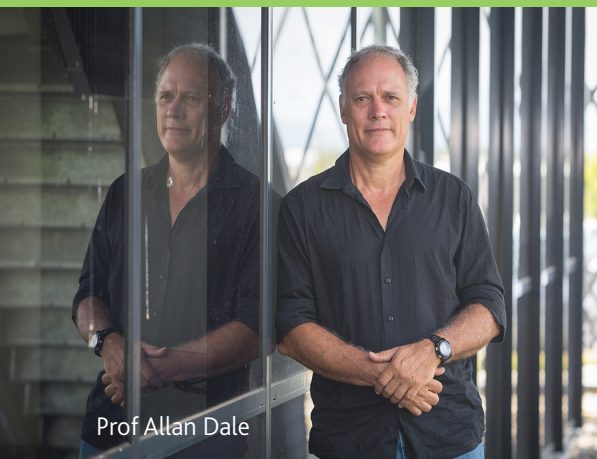
Members of the Social Science Reference group are featured below. Standing from left to right, is A/Prof Penny Williams (QUT), Prof Ahmed Moustafa (BU), Dr Jeanette Durante (DETSI), Prof Paul Salmon (USC), Prof Rebecca Wicks (GU), Prof Tim Carey (CQU), Prof Celmara Pocock (USQ), and Prof Mark Western (UQ).

Seated from left to right are, Kathy Benson (DPC), Prof Daniel Angus (QUT), Prof Kerrie Wilson (UQ), D/Prof Stewart Lockie (TCI at JCU), Prof Deanna Kemp (UQ), and Dr Andrea Walton (CSIRO). Absent Mitchell Day (QT).

*Image credit: Office of the Chief Scientist, Queensland Government.*





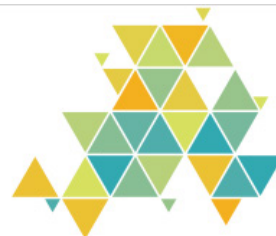


## Decarbonising regional Queensland report

This paper titled "Building an Investment Pipeline to Decarbonise Regional Queensland: Pathways For Positive Action", has been produced by the Queensland Decarbonisation Hub in collaboration with RECoE universities, examines the risks and opportunities for regional decarbonisation. It identifies the conditions needed to attract quality investment to achieve net-zero targets and support regional developments.

This report argues that Queensland's regional decarbonisation must be sustainable, inclusive, and resilient, align with national and state investment principles, and support multiple sectors and scales. It calls for coordinated investment that delivers better economic, social, and environmental outcomes while preparing communities, businesses, and households for a decarbonised future.

It reviews lessons from all stages of the investment pipeline needed to secure quality finance for decarbonisation projects across sectors and regions. It addresses nine focus areas, from sector-wide strategies and infrastructure planning to Indigenous institution strengthening, enterprise decarbonisation, workforce skills, resilience, R&D, and regional finance. It also considers global trade dynamics, Indo-Pacific relations, and governance, marking the Decarbonisation Hub's first step toward a comprehensive approach. [Read the report here.](#)



### Building an Investment Pipeline to Decarbonise Regional Queensland

Pathways For Positive Action





Eleanor Loudon

## FNQ Connect welcomes new director as initiative grows

FNQ Connect, located within The Cairns Institute, has welcomed a new director to guide the now fully-staffed backbone team ahead of its cross-sector leadership table in August.

The initiative, inspired by the fundamental belief that everyone deserves the opportunity to live a good life regardless of their age or postcode, is being led by Eleanor Loudon, who brings a wealth of experience in Locally Led collaborative approaches, international development, and organisational leadership, including as the former CEO of Engineers Without Borders, Australia.

*"Putting those with lived experience of disability in the centre of the changes that affect them, and joining up – across sectors – is the only way that the changes made are relevant, real and lasting. It takes time and trust, and I'm excited to join at this stage of the initiative, because the FNQ Connect movement has been building for years,"* said Eleanor Loudon.

*"There is urgency to address the problem of access and equity in Far North Queensland and a shared commitment to doing things differently,"* she continued.

Recently, FNQ Connect reconnected with various members of the community via several reference groups, including Service Providers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people with Lived Experience of Disability, as part of an ongoing journey towards a more connected and responsive disability and healthcare system.

Project Lead Professor Ruth Barker said the initiative was one of the first examples of a 'disability-focused collective impact project' in Australia.

*"What we needed next was a way of working that could turn our shared intent into real impact. The collective impact approach gave us that structure. It gave us a methodology that unites diverse players around a common agenda, supports aligned action, and tracks progress and learning together over time,"* said Professor Barker.

Having been part of the project since the very beginning, Principal Research Officer Katrina Bird said the focus was not about putting services in more places – it was about doing things differently based on how things 'really' work on the ground.

*"It brings local voices into the room, centres community leadership, and focuses on making support more coordinated, culturally responsive, and easier to navigate. If we get this right, it could mean less duplication, fewer people falling through the cracks, and a system that's more attuned to the way people live across this region,"* said Katrina Bird.

The FNQ Connect pilot initiative has received \$4.5 million in joint funding from the state and federal governments; hosted by James Cook University.

*Image credit: J.Bracegirdle*





## Balik Tipol sa Pilipinas: Sarus Crane

The Philippine Sarus Crane *Grus antigone luzonica*, known as Tipol in Filipino, went extinct in the 1970s. Twenty-five years before, it was a common bird in rural Luzon. What prompted its extinction, after several thousand years living alongside farming communities, is still a matter of speculation but following Philippine independence from the United States of America in 1946, its demise was rapid and absolute.

Community attitudes in Asia are changing though and similar Sarus extinctions in Thailand and Vietnam are being reversed by popular reintroduction projects. If this change in rural attitudes towards birds that live and forage alongside rural communities is paralleled in the Philippines, a similar reintroduction could now be on the cards. Against this backdrop, the annual symposium organised by the Association of Systematic Biologists of the Philippines (ASBP) in Manila brought together some key researchers, including Adjunct Professor Tim Nevard (the author), of The Cairns Institute (TCI) and Professor Juan Carlos Tecson Gonzalez of the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB).

Recent genetic work indicates a close affinity between Tipol and Australian Sarus (*G. a. gillae*). Although it currently looks like the best genetic 'fit' for reintroduction is from Queensland, there is still potential that the South-east Asian subspecies (*G. a. sharpii*) could be an alternative. Final confirmation will therefore require analysis of more Tipol specimens, so the author and Professor Gonzalez inspected specimens at the University of Santo Tomás (UST) museum and the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) in Manila.

To increase the certainty around the genetic relationships of Tipol, as many specimens as possible are to be tested for their genetic affinities with both Australian and South East Asian Sarus.

Alongside this genetic work is equally important community engagement. This will need to occur in the vicinity of each of three potential reintroduction sites, which are currently under investigation by Jimuel Piñafiel (a student of Professor Gonzalez), who also presented a poster at the symposium. The author was able to visit one of these sites at Lalaguna Marshland, near Lopez, Quezon, where he, Stella and Jürgen Freund met officers and members of the Municipal Council. All expressed early enthusiasm for the potential project at Lalaguna, where one of the last observations of Tipol was made.

Next steps are: (i) confirmation of the appropriate source of birds for reintroduction; (ii) community engagement around the potential reintroduction sites and nationally; (iii) preliminary discussions with Philippine and source authorities and NGOs; (iv) selection of a preferred reintroduction site; (v) preparation and lodgement of a comprehensive costed project plan; (vi) project approval; (vii) fundraising and ongoing engagement for the reintroduction; (viii) acquisition and translocation of eggs or birds to a specialised purpose-built rearing facility in the Philippines; (ix) rearing and preparation for release under strict biosecure conditions; (x) release and monitoring over a three to four year period - until a sustainable wild population can be established.

*Image: ASBP Symposium (top inset). Credit: J.C. Gonzalez*





Dr Abner Yalu



## Abner advocates for regional development

As a proud Bukawa man from Morobe Province in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Abner Yalu's journey in research began in 2004 when he joined the Papua New Guinea National Agriculture Research Institute as a cadet scientist after graduating from the University of Papua New Guinea. During this time, he received invaluable mentoring and supervision from Mr Robert Mayer of the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (QDPI&F), who has since retired from his role as Senior Principal Biometrician. Abner also greatly benefited from the Australian Contribution to National Agricultural Research System in PNG (ACNARS) that targeted research competency development from 2004 to 2008 with lots of placements and on the job training in both Australia and PNG.

Over the years, Abner gained experience working in both government, Non-government organisations, and commercial research programs, with several publications ranging from plant breeding studies to agronomic research as well social studies. His expertise also includes consulting on experimental and survey design, as well as data analysis across a wide range of research areas, from crop and animal studies to entomological studies and socio-economic baseline surveys, impact assessments, monitoring, and evaluation.

In 2008, he completed a Master of Science in Agricultural Studies at the University of Queensland, followed by his completion in 2023 for a PhD in Social Network Analysis from the University of Sydney. His doctoral research focused on community social network structures and their influence on the adoption of ecologically sustainable cocoa farming practices in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Abner has spent three enriching years in Maningrida, West Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, where he supported Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation with various community initiatives, from improving educational outcomes and managing human resources to coordinating bushfoods enterprises and assisting with administrative duties for the Djelk Rangers.

Recently, he joined The Cairns Institute as a Senior Research Officer in Regional and Community Development at James Cook University (JCU), working on the Water Project. Abner is based in Cairns with his son, Ozmond, who is also studying at JCU. Wife, Deborah, and their three daughters, Michal, Prudence, and Zierl, remain in PNG. Deborah manages their family-owned downstream processing company, which was invited to participate in the Tropical Innovations Festival in 2024 in Cairns. Their business focuses on creating innovative, eco-friendly products from coffee, cocoa, virgin coconut oil, spices, oil palm, and flowers, with the goal of reducing environmental impacts along the value chain.

Abner is thrilled to be working with Dr Jim Turnour at The Cairns Institute (TCI) at James Cook University. He is deeply passionate on advancing regional and community development in Northern Australia, particularly in supporting First Nations community development. He is looking forward to developing new partnerships and contributing to impactful research at TCI.

To contact: [abner.yalu@jcu.edu.au](mailto:abner.yalu@jcu.edu.au)





Carolyn Trott



## Indigenous Education in Australia: Beyond Basic Metrics

This research sought to better understand the impacts of current educational policy and its enactment on Indigenous school students in Australia. Drawing from experience as a teacher and researcher, the author identified frustrations with the crowded nature of work in schools and the relegation of learning behind other priorities. The investigation examined how Indigenous students are represented in Australian education policy and revealed important insights for educators. The study identified several key findings with direct implications for teaching practice and student outcomes.

The analysis uncovered seven distinct discourses shaping student experiences in Australian schools. While five of these affect all students, two additional discourses specifically impact Indigenous students: a cultural discourse and Indigenous strengths discourse. In addition, it identified two unique ways that Indigenous students are represented in policy – as a cultural student and as an empowered student – in addition to five ways that all students are represented.

A critical finding is that current policy approaches, which emphasize basic metrics like attendance, engagement, literacy, and numeracy standards, may actually be inadequate for addressing Indigenous students' learning needs. The research highlights a concerning "dislocation" where Indigenous students' learning opportunities can be limited by competing priorities and multiple discourses.

These findings also recommend prioritizing the measurement of actual learning indicators over engagement metrics, developing professional practices specifically focused on Indigenous students' learning growth, being mindful of how the term 'engagement' is used and understood in different contexts, and maintaining focus on learning outcomes when implementing cultural and strengths-based programs.

This research empowers educators to move beyond simplified metrics and engage with deeper understanding of Indigenous students' educational experiences. It provides a framework for teachers to critically examine their practice and make informed decisions about supporting Indigenous learners. By understanding the complex positioning of Indigenous students within the education system, educators can work more effectively to prioritize learning while respecting cultural and strengths-based approaches.

*Carolyn Trott (PhD candidate, IERC Bebegu Yumba campus)*







Dr John Coyne

## Rethinking the north

Long term colleague of the Development in the Tropics Team, Dr John Coyne is co-author of recent report that frames Northern Australia as a developing economy within a developed nation. The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) report outlines Northern Australia is central to the nation's future, it serves as a gateway to Indo-Pacific trade, a hub of world-class resources, has significant natural resources and untapped potential of a youthful population and space. Strategically, it forms the keystone of Australia's defence posture.

Yet the region continues to face entrenched challenges: limited private investment, low local benefit from major projects, workforce and service shortfalls, and rising public safety concerns. The Northern Australia Action Plan 2024–2029 sets out a refreshed agenda to drive economic development and align government priorities with the region's success. While it addresses many pressing needs, the plan remains framed largely within nationwide policy models rather than tailored to the north's unique circumstances.

The authors suggest that recognizing the characteristics of the

north's developing economy "isn't a call for pity or protection—it's a call for ambition. The opportunity is not just to close gaps but to build something better: a region defined not by disadvantage but by leadership in the most important national missions of our time." It demonstrates why one size fits all national policy models have failed and looks to regionally anchored solutions.

Ten years on from the Australian Government's 2015 Our north, our future: White Paper on developing northern Australia, and four years since the 2021 Australian Infrastructure Plan, the ASPI report reminds us

"The structural, demographic and economic distinctions that set the north apart from the southern states shouldn't be viewed as failures. They are, in fact, the very indicators of untapped national opportunity. Those differences highlight where targeted investment, policy innovation and new governance models can unlock long-term growth—for the region and the nation as a whole."

You can read the full report [HERE](#)







## Social Science Week 2025

Social Sciences Week, 7-14 September, is a national celebration showcasing the depth and diversity of social sciences in Australia. Bringing together researchers, academics, and practitioners, the week provides a platform to share ideas with the broader community and highlight the powerful ways social sciences shape our understanding of the world.

Events are held across the country, including seminars, public lectures, workshops, and panel discussions. Covering themes from politics and economics to sociology and psychology, these gatherings encourage dialogue, debate, and reflection on some of today's most pressing social issues.

At its core, Social Sciences Week underscores the value of social sciences research in addressing complex challenges and in contributing to a more informed, equitable, and resilient society—both in Australia and globally.

The Cairns Institute is hosting three events for this week.

**Emerging Research in Social Sciences** is the first event which is a showcase from Higher Degree Research students based in Cairns. The students will present a succinct version of their research in three slides within three minutes.



The second event is themed to tie in with **Papua New Guinea's 50th anniversary of independence**. There is an exhibition launch of PNG memorabilia, a film screening followed by discussions led by Papua New Guinea academics. This is an in-person event. [RSVP for catering and capacity purposes](#). The first two events held 10 September are supported by a Spark Grant from the Social Sciences Academy.



The third event is the **Energy Transitions and Climate Futures: Australia's regions at the forefront**, a collaboration with The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) and The Cairns Institute. This symposium brings diverse voices together - to discuss climate change, energy, economic, and social policy and advocacy and how the regions are playing a key role in change. This will be held 11 September and is a hybrid event. [RSVP for catering and capacity purposes](#).

*Images: (left) AI-generated classroom. Newcastle (above) Credit: J.Cooper. PNG 50th logo. Credit: The Government of PNG*





Mayor Liz Schmidt &amp; Kylie Stretton



## Celebrating Women in Ag at “Harvesting Strength: Stories of Grit and Growth”

On Thursday 26 June, over 50 community members gathered at the Charters Towers Golf Club to celebrate the strength, resilience, and innovation of women in agriculture at the Harvesting Strength: Stories of Grit and Growth lunch event. Delivered through the Charters Towers Agricultural Sector Development and Resilience Project (CTADRP) in partnership with The Cairns Institute, James Cook University (JCU) and the Charters Towers Regional Council, the event offered a relaxed and uplifting afternoon of storytelling, connection, and recognition for the critical contributions of rural women.

Opening the program, Mayor Liz Schmidt paid tribute to the pivotal role women play in the growth and resilience of the region’s agricultural sector. The program was emceed by Michelle Lyons and Tracy Moff, who guided guests through two panel discussions featuring six remarkable rural women:

- Kylie Stretton (Red Hill Station)
- Jenny Black (Pajingo Cattle Station)
- Fran Lyons (Basalt River Station)
- Mellissa Angus (Red Diamond Beef)
- Shona Larkin and Angie Nisbet (FarmHer Hands)

From grassroots advocacy and rural education to regenerative land practices, family businesses, and sun safety innovation, the speakers shared powerful personal stories that captured the complexity and courage of women working on and off the land.

*“This is more than a lunch,” said JCU’s project spokesperson Jen McHugh. “It’s a chance to pause and acknowledge the incredible grit and contributions of women who keep our rural communities strong, often while juggling multiple roles.”*

Fran Lyons a qualified Pilot and Vet reminded the audience that *‘Women can have everything, but not just all at once.’*

The event was part of a broader CTADRP workshop and training series focused on community resilience, including sessions on Psychological First Aid, Resilient Soils, Diversifying Farm Income and in partnership with NQ Dry Tropics NRM, Soil Health and Legumes for Grazing Properties. All workshops and events were supported through funding from the Queensland Resilience and Risk Reduction Fund (QRRRF).



Image credits: J. McHugh & Sumpton Gold Rush Gazette.





Psychological First Aid Workshop



## Continued.



As the region continues to face challenges and opportunities, events like Harvesting Strength highlight the value of coming together to share knowledge, celebrate success, and build stronger, more connected rural communities. There is a strong desire from attendees to see this lunch become an annual event. The CT Network a community-focused media and news platform based in Charters Towers covered the lunch and the story can be viewed [HERE](#).

*Image credits: J. McHugh & Sumpton Gold Rush Gazette.*



Resilient Soils session

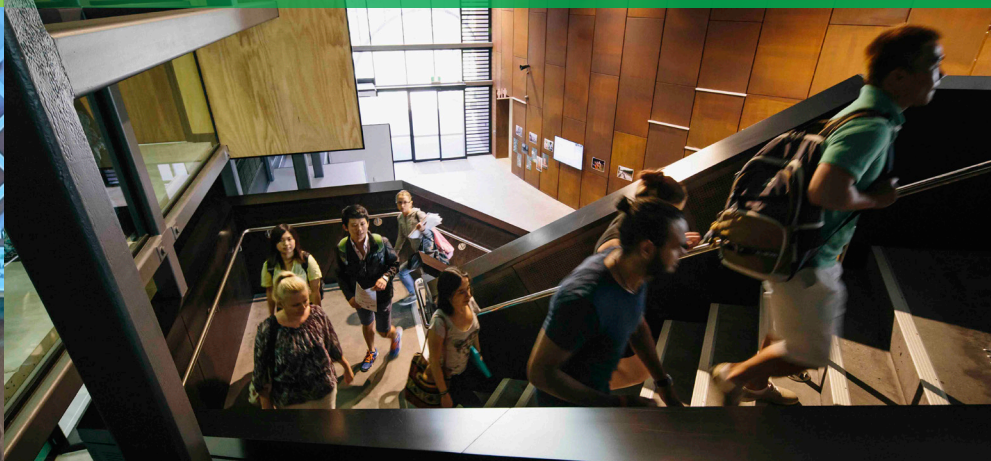


Soil Health and Legumes session





Opening of 2025 National Changemaker Forum



## Supporting changemakers

The Tropical North Queensland Drought Hub (TNQDH) was proud to join changemakers from across rural, regional, and remote Australia in Cairns for the 2025 National Changemaker Gathering last week from June 24–26. Hosted by the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation, the event brought together 50 emerging leaders from 35 communities to strengthen a national network of changemakers equipped to lead community resilience and innovation, particularly in the face of drought and climate challenges.

Knowledge Broker Karen George was invited to present to the leaders on Australia's Drought Resilient Adoption and Innovation Hubs and how the hubs can support and enable the changemakers to continue their journey towards drought preparedness and building resilience.

Karen said, *"It was an incredible gathering of inspiring leaders who are committed to making a change. We look forward to seeing the ideas and plans developed from the gathering making a difference to the regions and communities where action will take place."*

*"We especially look forward to hearing about the connections gained and how the leaders use the hubs to enable and directly influence community resilience. Attending events like this helps us ensure we are listening, learning, and connecting with those leading change on the ground so we can continue to support resilient, thriving communities."*

The 2025 National Changemaker Gathering built on the momentum of 100+ Changemaker Workshops held across the country and set the foundation for a growing and connected national network of drought-ready leadership.

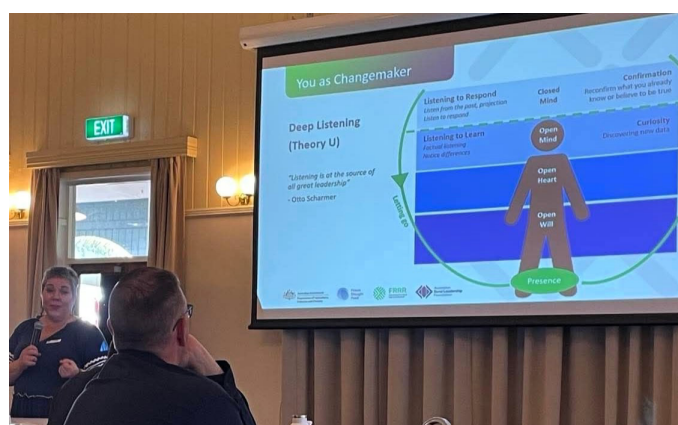


Image credits: E. Harrington.





Manus children enjoying the read



## Nurturing Young Minds Through Reading in Manus

In April 2025, a simple but powerful truth sparked a heartfelt initiative: just one book can open the door to a new way of thinking. In the remote village of Naringel in Manus Province, Papua New Guinea, children brim with curiosity and a love for reading—but their access to books has long been limited. That changed when a remarkable collaboration between the Queensland State Library, Cooktown Library, and the Royal Australian Navy brought a world of knowledge to their doorstep.

The initiative began when Cooktown Library upgraded its children's section, leaving behind a surplus of high-quality books - fiction and non-fiction - suitable for preschoolers to young teens. Covering topics from gardening and engineering to creative writing and even restaurant management, the books offered rich and diverse learning opportunities. Rather than letting these valuable resources go to waste, the idea was born: why not give them a second life in the hands of eager learners?

Former Queensland State Library Manager Louise Hunter arranged for the books to be transported from Cooktown to Cairns, where each was carefully cleaned, sorted, and packed into nine large plastic containers. These were then secured on a pallet, ready for their journey across the Coral Sea. The real challenge lay ahead - getting the books to Naringel. With minimal telecommunications infrastructure and complex logistics, the task required creative coordination.

Enter Commander Andrew Thorpe and his team from HMAS Cairns, who played a pivotal role in transporting the shipment.

Navigating communication barriers and tight naval schedules, they ensured the books were delivered safely and intact to the primary school in Naringel.

This donation wasn't just about logistics; it was a symbol of community spirit and a shared belief in the power of education. Families from Cairns to Manus helped bridge communication gaps and supported the delivery effort. For the children of Naringel, the arrival of nine large containers filled with books brought not only joy and excitement but also a renewed sense of hope - fueling dreams, sparking imagination, and nurturing lifelong learning.

In a world where literacy can change lives, this story serves as a reminder: every child deserves the chance to read, learn, and grow - and sometimes, it just takes one book to light the way.

This project was organised by The Cairns Institute Adjunct Research Associate Simon Towle, with logistics from Cairns to Naringel coordinated by his daughter, James Cook University undergraduate student Sian-Tia Towle.

*"I would like to thank the Naringel Community, Naringel Primary School, its students and teachers—Hikanau Christopher and Papu Rosen—for their help in organising photos and local logistics, as well as my cousins who assisted with communication in areas lacking coverage.*

*Mi hamamas tru long yupela. Thank you from the bottom of my heart." From Sian-tia Towle.*





Prof Hurriyet Babacan & Prof Stewart Lockie



## TCI welcomes Australia Awards recipients

### Strengthening Regional Cooperation through Learning and Dialogue

The Northern Australia Universities Alliance (NAUA) proudly hosted the DFAT Australia Awards – Northern Australia 2025 Thematic Event, “Northern Australia-Indo-Pacific Connectivity: Doing Regional Cooperation Differently.”

Led by Professors Hurriyet Babacan, Allan Dale and NAUA Director Brook Orr, the highlighted the importance of “relational engagement” in the Indo-Pacific, a model built on trust, mutual respect, and culturally responsive partnerships. The Australia Awards Scholarships, funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), are among Australia’s most prestigious long-term development opportunities. These scholarships invest in talented students and professionals from partner countries who demonstrate the potential to become future leaders.

Through study, research, and professional development in Australia, recipients are equipped with the skills and networks needed to drive positive change and deliver development outcomes in their home countries. The Cairns visit was supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and delivered in partnership with the Northern Australia Universities Alliance (NAUA), which includes JCU, CQU and CDU.

Around 40 Australian Award recipients attended the seminar and the pre seminar tours in Cairns. Four recipients also presented at the Developing Northern Australia Conference as part of the designed program.

Beyond individual achievement, the Australia Awards program plays a vital role in strengthening regional cooperation,



building people-to-people connections, and promoting growth, security, and sustainability across the Indo-Pacific. The seminar brought together Australia Awards recipients from across the Indo-Pacific, who contributed their diverse perspectives and expertise. These participants are emerging leaders across sectors such as public policy, community health, education, environmental governance and security.

The seminar aimed to foster a new approach to international cooperation—one that focuses on relational engagement built on trust, respect and cultural understanding, rather than purely transactional models.







Australia Awards recipients



## Continued.

Discussions explored:

- How Northern Australia can work more closely with Indo-Pacific nations
- Shared challenges such as climate change, health, education, and inequality
- Opportunities for building lasting collaborations through research, skills, and people-to-people partnerships

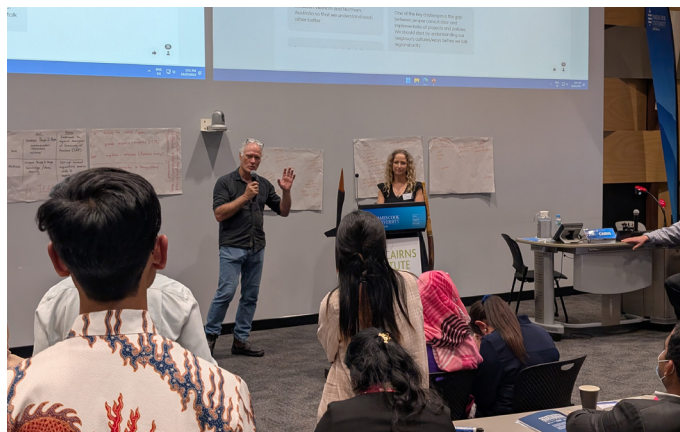
Speakers included a diverse range of experts and leaders such as Distinguished Professor Stewart Lockie, Gavin Singleton, Rhona McPhee (DFAT), Professor Allan Dale and Professor Hurriyet Babacan, Associate Professor Santoso Wibowo, Associate Professor Taha Chaiechi, Professor Delwar Akbar and Sonja Johnson (RDATN). Industry and education leaders including Adam Douglas (Jet Zero), Sam Doyle-Wiaaczek (Cairns Regional Council), Brook Orr (NAUA), Jodie Duignan-George (CQU), Dr Brian Fairman and Maria Camille Chen also contributed, bringing insights from across sectors and the Indo-Pacific region.

This partnership underscores the value of connecting Northern Australia's expertise and capabilities with the priorities of the

Indo-Pacific, fostering impactful cooperation and connectivity between Northern Australia and the Indo-Pacific. We look forward to continuing these valuable conversations and forging strong partnerships for regional prosperity.

The delegates also participated in a tour of the Ideas Lab and CAVE immersive learning environment, or the campus and Australian Tropical Herbarium guided by Gerry Turpin, Australia's only Indigenous ethnobotanist.

*Images: Courtesy of J. McHugh & DFAT/Palladium*







## Strong Northern Voices at the DNAC2025

The 2025 Developing Northern Australia Conference (DNAC) took place from the 22-24 July in Cairns, bringing together over 500 delegates from across the north, the rest of Australia and the wider Indo-Pacific. In its 11th year, DNAC continues to serve as a key platform for shaping the future of northern Australia through providing a forum for strategic dialogue, cross-sector collaboration and bold regional thinking.

This year's event was particularly momentous as it marked the final year that Professor Allan Dale of The Cairns Institute (TCI) served as Conference Chair. A respected leader in regional development and policy reform, Professor Dale has been instrumental in building DNAC into a nationally recognised event and brand since its launch in Townsville in 2015. His leadership has helped amplify northern voices and foster a culture of cooperation across jurisdictions, sectors, and communities. Since then, DNAC has been held in thrice in Darwin, twice in Karratha, Alice Springs, twice in Cairns, Mackay and Rockhampton.

The 2025 program featured a wide range of perspectives on themes as diverse of Indigenous self-determination, Indo-Pacific relations, geostrategic issues, renewable transitions and nature

positive economies, workforce development, place-based planning, supply chains and infrastructure. The TCI team actively contributed to discussions throughout the event. Professor Hurriyet Babacan AM, Chair of Regional Development Australia Tropical North, delivered a powerful keynote on Regional Cooperation between Australia and the Indo-Pacific. Dr Jim Turnour shared insights on Indigenous water rights and regional empowerment, highlighting the value of long-term, place-based investment.

The conference also featured a range of dynamic sessions; including one on workforce and opportunities through sport chaired by Jen McHugh. Dr Brian Fairman and Prof Babacan led a link between the conference and four Australian Awards participants from the Indo Pacific Region. Dr Anna Hayes from College of Arts, Society and Education at James Cook University (JCU) provided a significant keynote of geostrategic issues of importance to the region. Minister Madeleine King also announced James Cook University's Professor Martin Nakata as the new Chair of the Indigenous Reference Group for Northern Australia.

DNAC2026 will be held in Alice Springs.







## Sharing Climate Codesign Insights at AMOS 2025

Tropical North Queensland Drought Hub (TNQDH) Knowledge Broker Karen George representing the hub at the Australian Meteorological Oceanographic Society (AMOS) 2025 Conference in Cairns recently, sharing her codesign insights with weather, climate, and ocean science leaders from across the country.

Karen was invited to co-present by Research Scientist Dr Yuwan Malakar of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) to talk on the work she has been delivering within the horticulture industry over the past five years, highlighting how climate tools can support practical decision-making on the ground and the progression to the co-design of 'train the trainer' materials.

Karen said, *"Through my role as Knowledge Broker, it excites me to continue enabling industry and the community to use climate tools to aid decision-making."*

Yuwan, has spent the past few years researching 'train the trainer' design for the Climate Services for Agriculture (CSA) My Climate View tool, helping industry trainers bring the tool into practical action via Farm Business Resilience Planning.

Karen has co-designed and delivered Climate Tools workshops and resources to industry and trainers and piloted 'train the trainer' workshops across Far North Queensland whilst previously managing the Farm Business Resilience Program for Queensland's

horticulture industry. Yuwan's research has been aiding Farm Business Resilience facilitators in integrating climate tools into their programs to support growers with confident, climate-smart decisions.

*"It's also great to see other Future Drought Funded programs like the Farm Business Resilience Program embed climate tools into the Farm Business Resilience plans,"* Karen added.

The AMOS Conference was a fantastic opportunity to share how Future Drought Fund initiatives are helping industry embrace climate tools while connecting with the broader climate science community on how to support resilience across agriculture and regional communities.

Image: Dr Karen George and Dr Yuwan Malakar. Credit: E.Harrington







Climate Smart Day



## Building drought resilient grazing systems at Clarke Creek

More than 25 Central Queensland producers took to the paddock at Clarke Creek for Hub Node Fitzroy Basin Association's (FBA) recent Climate Smart Field Day, eager to learn how to build resilience in their grazing businesses through better decision making and proven land management practices.

The hands-on field day focused on equipping producers with practical tools available to help measure available feed using forage budgeting, assess land condition, and enhance soil health to boost productivity.

Participants worked through methods to improve soil structure and biological health, gaining valuable insights into how healthy soils underpin productive pastures and resilient grazing systems, particularly during dry times.

Regional Soils Coordinator Dhiraj Gajera said, *"Understanding soil characteristics and how to monitor your soil health through tests such as a soil core, filtration, using a penetrometer, and exploring bacteria/fungi ratios and pH is invaluable for helping graziers understand what's happening beneath the surface."*

*"For this group of producers, I have recommended and encouraged them to add mix species with legumes to fix atmospheric nitrogen as it's not economically viable to apply nitrogen fertiliser across huge acreage."*

The field day also covered making effective use of weather and climate forecasts and explored how graziers can access practical support to reach their land management goals.

The event highlighted how soil health is the foundation of productive, drought-resilient grazing businesses, supporting graziers to take proactive steps towards sustainable land management that benefits both their operations and the environment.

Dhiraj demonstrates soil testing techniques to producers.

*Images are from the Clarke Creek Climate Smart Field Day. Credit: E.Harrington*







Dr Hilary Whitehouse &amp; Dr Thomas Wanner



## Sustainability Education Workshop

The Cairns Institute Adjunct Associate Professor Hilary Whitehouse attended the University of Adelaide Sustainability Education Workshop 2025, held Monday 26 May, at Union House. It was hosted by the School of Social Science, Faculty of Arts, Business, Law & Economics and organised by Dr Thomas Wanner who is also the Director of the university's Educational for Sustainability Research Group.

The event was attended by over 50 academics and researchers from 4 South Australian Higher Education Institutions – the University of South Australia, University of Adelaide, Flinders University, and some teachers from TAFE South Australia. Many disciplines were represented.

Hilary is seated in between with educators, Julian from Millicent Farm and Tom Linnell from the Mount Gambier campus of the University of South Australia. Both had had flown up for the day.

After the workshop, Tom emailed Hilary the following:

*"I'm just sending a connecting email to say a quick thank you for your generous time and thoughtful conversation last week in Adelaide. The room was charged with energy of individuals, teams and faculties eager to see much of what you (and Thomas) have been working towards in education come to fruition. Fingers crossed we can position both universities in a positive place as they merge, however I'm specifically eager to the new university lead the way in an education program which provides a considered and nuanced focus on the theme of sustainability. I've put a proposal in for an additional elective however told to wait until the dust settles before actioning this further."*

The University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia are merging, and sustainability education is supposed to be a key feature of the new Adelaide University.

*Image credit: H. Whitehouse*







Dr Jim Turnour &amp; Mr Joe Clarke



## SATSIE showcased at DNAC2025

The Developing Northern Australia Conference in Cairns provided an opportunity to show case some of the Tropical North Queensland Drought Hub's (TNQDH) Sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Enterprise Program (SATSIE) work and network across northern Australia with partners. SATSIE Program Lead Dr Jim Turnour said that it was good to learn and connect with organisations and businesses also working to build First Nation climate resilience and food security.

The SATSIE program sponsored Joe Clarke Group General Manager of Centrefarm Aboriginal Horticulture Ltd and Christine Rhazi Director Community and Economic Development with Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council to attend. Centrefarm's core role is to identify at scale commercially viable opportunities on Aboriginal land and develop them as the foundations of new regional economies. Napranum Aboriginal Corporation is looking to develop sustainable enterprises including reestablishing their farm and both took the opportunity to share their experiences, learn and network through the conference. Jim presented on the opportunities and challenges of activating Indigenous water rights in Cape York Peninsula.

A key theme from many of the Indigenous conference presentations was the importance of good cultural and corporate governance to establishing and running a business on the First Nation estate. First Nation people needed to be engaged early and provide free, prior and informed consent to the business activity.

Country based planning that sorted through often complex tenures and identified the right people to be consulted through established protocols assisted in these processes.

The Anindilyakwa Land Council (ALC) presented on the development of a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) that addresses the difficulty in representing Indigenous priorities through GIS tools which were developed for western land management and planning. Complex land tenure and a lack of investment in country-based planning are key challenges in many parts of the TNQDH region. These new technologies and approaches could assist in the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) process and support self-determined development outcomes.

The need for partnerships and investment were also strong themes to support First Nation business development. Aboriginal Investment NT for example discussed new longer-term investments in First Nation building to facilitate development over a 3 to 5 year time frame. Their presentation (and others) including one by Tiwi Forestry emphasised that future success depends on strong Indigenous governance and meaningful partnerships with government and industry.

Dr Turnour said that the conference provided a real opportunity to hear and learn from diverse First Nations and their partners, and affirmed the approach the SATSIE Program is taking to support First Nation climate and drought resilience.





Kara Glenn-Worth with mentors &amp; students



## GrowHer – Advancing Young Female Founders through AgTech

Tropical North Queensland Drought Hub (TNQDH) Program Lead Kara-Glenn Worth was invited to attend GrowHer, a program designed to transform the future of agriculture by empowering Year 7 – 12 girls across regional Queensland to engage in the AgTech industry. The students learnt about the challenges facing agriculture, AgTech innovations and were partnered with a mentor to take them through learning how to pitch an idea to solve one of those challenges.

Kara spoke about her career journey and shared practical examples on how the tool AgValuate was helping to solve producer questions around innovation within their business. Kara said “It was such a pleasure to attend GrowHer. It is so inspiring and encouraging to see the calibre of young people interested in careers in agriculture.”

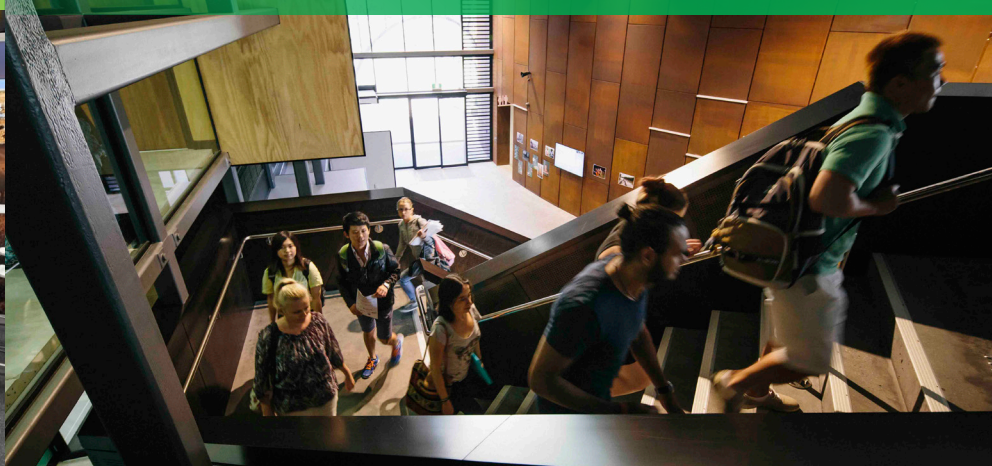
*“As a mentor I worked with 4 young girls from Ayr and Townsville on an idea around ‘reducing farm waste and optimising marketing for a fruit and veggie farming family’. The girls developed and presented opportunities such as delivering fruit and veggie boxes via drones and opening the farm to people to collect their own produce.”*



The winning team from Charters Towers will represent GrowHer at an innovation event later in the year.

The TNQDH was honoured to be involved with GrowHer – Advancing Young Female Founders through AgTech, proudly funded by Advance Queensland as part of the Regional Enablers Program, as part of our commitment to building the future, knowledge and skills of agriculture in Tropical North Queensland.





## Global Cooperation to protect and promote Rangeland Resilience

The XII International Rangeland Congress (IRC) was held in Australia from June 2-6, 2025, at the Adelaide Convention Centre. This significant event brought together over 750 delegates from more than 45 countries, including a diverse range of global experts, academics, pastoralists, indigenous representatives, and other stakeholders to address the evolving challenges and opportunities in global rangeland management.

The Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs were proud to be involved in the congress through delivering workshops, running tours, poster presentations, chairing panels and presenting on a wide range of topics on drought resilience and climate adaptation in rangeland systems.

Tropical North Queensland Drought Hub (TNQDH) Director and President of the International Rangeland Congress Professor David Phelps said he was thrilled with the turn out and the diversity of attendees and how the congress facilitated high-quality, impactful conversations.

*"As both a committee member and drought hub representative, the congress exceeded our expectations for bringing people together and providing an opportunity to exchange ideas."*

*"The calibre of presentations from experts from across the world has ensured we are walking away with a plan to contribute to addressing the environmental, social, and economic challenges faced by the vital rangelands ecosystems and the communities that depend on them."*

Highlights of the congress include:

- Emphasis on Indigenous Knowledge and codesign through the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems into rangeland management. Insights from the Traditional Indigenous Knowledge Forum, held prior to the main event, were incorporated into the congress discussions, emphasising codesign and partnerships for enduring rangeland outcomes. Day one's Keynote Address was "First Nations & Mainstream Economies Co-Existing on Rangelands" presented by Joe Morrison, Group CEO of the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation and set the tone of inclusivity throughout the congress.
- Panel discussions with Mongolian herders and Hungarian shepherds to explore herd management and highlight the diverse challenges and practices in rangeland stewardship across different cultures and regions.



Image: Representatives from the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovations Hubs across Australia. Credit: E Harrington.





Prof David Phelps



## Continued.



- Exploring multi-functional land use in rangelands, moving beyond traditional pastoral activities. This included discussions on integrating conservation, tourism, and other land uses to diversify income sources and promote sustainable development in rangeland areas.
- Highlighting and integrating the crucial perspectives and roles of women in rangeland management through keynote speakers and themes that addressed gender and social justice and understanding the diverse roles and challenges faced by women within rangeland communities. This included women herders from Mongolia, India, Kenya, Tanzania as well as Spain and Hungary.
- A variety of tours were offered, both before and during the Congress, providing delegates with firsthand experiences of diverse rangeland ecosystems (from semi-arid grazing lands to iconic natural landscapes like the Flinders Ranges), land management practices, community engagements as well as visits to research facilities.

- The United Nations led global initiative 'International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) 2026' was heavily integrated into the congress to raise awareness about the critical importance of healthy rangelands and sustainable pastoralism for the planet, people, and economies worldwide.

Prof Phelps said, *"The impact that drought can have on rangelands includes erosion, increased fire risk and weed infestations, so it was important to hear about other international drought experiences, policies and management strategies and the new research, technologies, and innovative practices such as soil health management that Australia could adopt."*

The congress emphasised the collaborative and interdisciplinary approach required to address the complex challenges and opportunities facing rangelands worldwide.

*"Key resolutions from the congress include the need for improved national awareness of the importance of our rangelands, the need for greater advocacy for investment in knowledge and understanding of management needs in the world's rangelands, and the need for greater integration of traditional knowledge with our scientific knowledge of rangelands management."*

For more detailed information, including session recordings and presentation materials, please visit the [official Congress website](#).

Find out more [about the IYRP](#)





Dr Karen George



## Ag and Food Futures at Tropical Innovation Festival

The Tropical North Queensland Drought Hub (TNQDH) was proud to sponsor a dedicated session on agriculture and food systems at the 2025 Tropical Innovation Festival (TIF), held in Cairns on the 25-26 June. The session reflected the vital role these sectors play in Tropical North Queensland and beyond. The half-day session delved into the integration of technology in farming practices, emphasising sustainable agriculture, building relationship, food security, the role of innovation in enhancing productivity and pushing the boundaries of agtech and sustainability. Discussions also encompassed the importance of traditional knowledge in modern agricultural practices. Program Lead Kara-Glenn Worth said, *"The importance of inspiring and supporting diversity in Agrifood Tech is a topic close to my heart and vital for driving innovation that truly reflects the communities we serve."*

A highlight for the festival included the Hub-sponsored First Nations Agribusiness Panel with the team from Local Indigenous Food Enterprise Services (LIFES) who support First Nations businesses and promote bush foods. The panel pointed out the importance of trust, investment and time in building relationships with indigenous communities and the need for local initiatives.

The TNQDH team played a large part throughout the festival with Kara delivering a Lighting Pitch on AgValuate at the Ecosystem Leaders Bootcamp, and Knowledge Adoption Officer Carrie-Ann Wilson joined the Research Commercialisation Bootcamp and Agriculture and Food Session panels which focused on the support and programs available to both farmers and startups. Carrie-Ann also pitched BeefVantage, an artificial intelligence chatbot providing beef producers with tailored, actionable advice. Knowledge Broker Karen George facilitated a panel with startups who are boosting drought and climate resilience through innovation.

Carrie-Ann reflected on the festival, *"I walked out energised and optimistic. There's something powerful about being in a place full of people building things that matter. Queensland's startup scene is full of energy."*

TIF served as a vibrant space for connecting innovators, researchers, and producers, showcasing cutting-edge solutions and fostering discussions critical to the future of Australian agriculture and food.

*Images from TIF: Credit: TIF & E.Harrington*







## Restoring Land Health by Managing Invasive Weeds

Hub Node Reef Catchments, in partnership with the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and supported by the Tropical North Queensland Drought Hub (TNQDH), recently delivered an Invasive Weeds Workshop in Mackay on 25–26 June, helping local landholders and industry professionals build practical skills to manage invasive grass species and improve land condition.

The two-day workshop brought together DPI experts, local landcare groups, council representatives, agronomists, and landholders to tackle the challenges of invasive grass weeds, including Giant Rats Tail Grass, Grader Grass, and Gamba Grass—species that can reduce pasture productivity and increase drought vulnerability.

DPI Senior Principal Scientist Wayne Vogler led sessions on identifying key invasive grasses and understanding their ecology and management, while DPI Scientist Katrina Hodgson-Kratky shared updates on biocontrol research currently being trialled to help reduce the impact of these species. DPI Beef Extension Officer Grayson Jones highlighted the importance of monitoring and maintaining land condition to support pasture resilience, even during dry times.

Day One saw around 40 industry professionals attend, gaining in-depth insights into species identification, fire risk, and integrated management approaches, including a field trip. Day Two welcomed 20 local landholders, who engaged in practical discussions on weed control using herbicides, biocontrol, and improved pasture management, sharing challenges and experiences across the room.

The event showcased years of DPI research; equipping attendees with the tools and knowledge to manage invasive grasses effectively within their farming systems, supporting healthier pastures and better drought preparedness across the region.

Reef Catchments Drought Resilience Coordinator, Louise Fitzgerald said, "With a successful two day event and identifying a need for more information for our local landholders around Invasive grasses identification and management, we look forward to being able to partner with the DPI in future to bring another event to the region."

*Images: Landholders at the workshop (top inset) Credit: E.Harrington. Mackay region (below) Credit Tourism Queensland.*







International Rangelands Congress, Adelaide



## What's happening in the Institute?

Details for these events can be found at: [www.cairnsinstitute.jcu.edu.au/upcoming-events/](http://www.cairnsinstitute.jcu.edu.au/upcoming-events/)

### Events in 2025

### Date & location

[The importance of Indigenous Astronomical Knowledge when studying Environmental Histories](#)  
CIEHF Seminar Series | A/Prof Duane Hamacher

4 September, Online

[Reeflections: Understanding the Great Barrier Reef Through Time](#)  
5th Annual Symposium of Social Science Community for the Great Barrier Reef |  
Social Science Week 2025

8-10 September, Townsville

[Emerging Research in Social Science Showcase](#)  
The Cairns Institute | Social Science Week 2025

10 September, Cairns

[50 Years of Independence: Reflections on Papua New Guinea](#)  
The Cairns Institute | Social Science Week 2025

10 September, Cairns

[Energy Transitions & Climate Futures: Australia's regions at the forefront](#)  
The Cairns Institute | Social Science Week 2025

11 September, Cairns



# APEN2025

BRISBANE 14-16 OCT TECH + EXTENSION

## 2025 AUSTRALASIA-PACIFIC EXTENSION NETWORK INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

TECH + EXTENSION: A POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP FOR CHANGE



Brisbane Showgrounds  
Brisbane, Queensland

Tuesday 14 to  
Thursday 16 October

[www.apen.org.au](http://www.apen.org.au)