

Inquiry into the impact of climate change on Queensland agricultural production

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Submitter Comments:

Committee Secretary
State Development and Regional Industries Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
Email: sdric@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Members,

Introduction and About Cape York Institute

Cape York Institute welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the work of the State Development and Regional Industries Committee and the present *Inquiry into the Impact of Climate Change on Queensland Agricultural Production*.

In making this submission we recognise the significant challenges that confront the agricultural industry and every Queenslanders in addressing the impacts of climate change. We also acknowledge the contributions and submissions made by First Nations people to this inquiry and as stewards of this continent since time immemorial.

Over the last three decades, the Cape York Institute has worked diligently under the guidance of Cape York's Indigenous leadership to develop policy and initiatives that focus on the reinstatement and realisation of personal and collective responsibility. We know that when responsibility is combined with opportunity and necessary services, capability will result, and the lives of Cape York will change for the better.

Our reality is that climate change is the greatest threat to humanity and that it will disproportionately and most acutely affect vulnerable people in remote areas.¹ The communities of Cape York are no exception. We recognise that it is our responsibility to contribute to the adaption, resilience and mitigation of climate change and the responsibility of others to consider and listen to those that are at risk of harm.

The Reality for Cape York and Its People

Queensland's Traditional Owners, particularly those located in the state's north, in Cape York and the Islands of the Torres Strait, will be amongst those most adversely impacted by the climate crisis.² Rising temperatures, rising sea levels, changes to land and seascapes, energy and

¹ S Quilty, N Frank Jupurrurla, R.S Bailie, R.S. and R.L. Gruen, 'Climate, housing, energy and Indigenous health: a call to action' (2022) 271 *Medical Journal Australia*, 9-12.

² Donna green, *Climate Change and Health: Impacts on Remote Indigenous Communities in Northern Australia* (CSIRO, November 2006), available: <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=9ba31fcbb3cf3897f50f7aacea80fd7879b64f67>.

food insecurity alongside inadequate housing are among the many existing challenges that will be amplified by climate change.³

As the 2014 IPCC report into the Australasian region contends, there is high agreement that:

*Natural resource dependence increases Indigenous exposure and sensitivity to climate change; climate change-induced dislocation, attenuation of cultural attachment to place, and loss of agency will disadvantage Indigenous mental health and community identity and, housing, infrastructure, services, and transport, often already inadequate for Indigenous needs especially in remote Australia, will be further stressed.*⁴

The most recent guidelines for policy makers released by the IPCC in 2022 emphasised that, 'unsustainable land-use and land cover change, unsustainable use of natural resources, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, pollution, and their interactions, adversely affect the capacities of ecosystems, societies, communities and individuals to adapt to climate change,'⁵ 'especially Indigenous communities.'⁶

The IPCC denote that loss of ecosystems and their services has cascading and long-term impacts on people globally, especially for Indigenous Peoples and local communities who are directly dependent on ecosystems, to meet basic needs.⁷ Available research to date indicates that Cape York will be impacted in a way that is consistent with IPCC warnings.

Direct Impacts on Cape York

The consequences of climate change will be far reaching, varied and unprecedented. Research seeking to elicit local understandings of climate change has demonstrated that while observations and concerns amongst Traditional Owners have emerged, forthcoming information and education have been lacking. It can be suggested there exists a deficit in the collective understanding of climate change on the future of Cape York.⁸ However, the research and stories emerging from Cape York indicate Traditional Owner concern is warranted.

The impact on Cape environments is expected to be most noticeably felt in coastal areas. The following are examples of changes already noticed and reported by Traditional Owners:

- Coral Bleaching episodes
- Changes in the physical biology of fish caught
- Storm surges and larger electrical storms
- Changes in surface water temperature and fish behaviour
- Difficulty in sea based hunting

³ T Lea et al, 'Sustainable Indigenous housing in regional and remote Australia' (November 2021) *AHURI Final Report No. 368, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited*, Melbourne, available: <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/368>, 1.

⁴ A.R.L. Kitching et al, *Australasia*, in: Barros et al, *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part B: Regional Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (2014, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA), pp. 1371-1438, p. 1405.

⁵ H.O. Pörtner et al *Summary For Policy Makers*, in: H.O. Pörtner *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, 2022), pp. 3-33, 6.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Susan McIntyre-Tamwoy, Maureen Fuary and Alice Buhrich, 'Understanding climate, adapting to change: indigenous cultural values and climate change impacts in North Queensland' (2013) 18(1) *Local Environment* 91-109. ⁹ Ibid.

- Changes to sea grass distribution
- Loss of heritage on coastal areas and increased salination of wetlands⁹

A recent JCU study investigating the human connections to land, water and the Great Barrier Reef on the eastern coast of Cape York provides insight into the future of community vitality, cultural heritage, aspirations and development. The study concludes that ‘the most vulnerable sector in terms of disaster response may be people living in remote Indigenous communities. There is seasonal flooding and coastal hazards and it is costly to deliver a wide range of human services.’¹⁰

Compounding this is the fact that Cape York communities are already restrained by limited opportunities and that industry viability or development in the region will be further challenged by climate change. For example, in eastern Cape York, the tourism industry is ‘under-developed’, stewardship activities across the Indigenous estate which covers 60% of the land and sea in the region have been limited in uptake, and the viability of the grazing and pastoral industry which covers 40% of the land mass is threatened by climate change.¹¹ The latter of these will need to retract toward the south east to continue.¹²

These findings are corroborated by a 2017 report published by the University of Queensland that focused on the human and economic impact of climate change on Cape York more broadly.¹³ In terms of health, it is predicted that a changing climate will increase instances of injury and contagious disease due to more natural disasters and altered rainfall. This would compound the ‘chronic difficulties and inequalities that already face many communities.’¹⁴ A recent 2021 study confirmed instances of infectious diseases linked to climate change such as Ross River and Tuberculosis have been recorded in greater numbers in the Torres Strait, with some patients receiving assistance from Cape York based health services.¹⁵

Increased temperature, higher carbon dioxide concentration and changed rainfall will have an impact on the major industries in Cape York.¹⁶ The combined effect of elevated carbon, higher temperatures and lower rainfall will cause lower forage production and a reduction of overall pasture quality.¹⁷ Cattle may become heat stressed under current climate predictions and the industry forced to retract geographically toward the south east.¹⁸ An increase in carbon levels, ocean temperature and acidification is predicted to impact the fisheries which surround Cape York.¹⁹ Specifically, species abundance and breeding behaviour of fish and prawns will shift and the profitability of the industry in the region will be threatened.²⁰

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Gooch et al, *Assessing the human dimensions of the Great Barrier Reef: An Eastern Cape York Region focus: Report to the National Environmental Science Programme*. Reef and Rainforest Research Centre Limited (JCU, Cairns Institute, Cairns, 2018), 1.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Cobon DH, Terwijn MJ, and Williams AAJ, *Impacts and adaptation strategies for a variable and changing climate in the wide bay burnett region* (International Centre for Applied Climate Sciences, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia, 2017).

¹⁴ Ibid, 4.

¹⁵ Nina L. Hall, Samuel Barnes, Condy Canuto, Francis Nona, Andrew M. Redmond, *Climate change and infectious diseases in Australia’s Torres Strait Islands* (2021) 45(2) *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 122-128.

¹⁶ Cobon et al (n 13).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

It is in this context and with valid concern that we provide the following recommendations. They list some of the means by which Cape York seeks recognition in Queensland's future and some strategies that will allow not only the survival of Cape York's people and cultures but also facilitate contributions to resilience and adaptation to climate change.

Recommendations:

1. Support Constitutional recognition and an enshrined Voice to Parliament. We have identified that the best means for First Nations to contribute to the future of Australia, be that in making representation to government on policy or collaborating with industry, is by a guaranteed Voice.
2. Free Prior and Informed Consent – Traditional Owners of Cape York have consistently fought for the fundamental principle that recognises the rights and autonomy of Aboriginal peoples, in decisions that affect their lands and waterways, resources, cultures and wellbeing. FPIC is cemented in International Human Rights standards, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and emphasises the importance of involving Indigenous communities in any decisions or actions that may impact them. This is the long-held view of the Cape York Institute, and underpinned the fight against Wild Rivers legislation, implemented without FPIC.
3. Cape York people must be allowed to fulfill their responsibility in adapting to and mitigating against the climate crisis by contributing to land management strategies. This can be immediately achieved through caring for country programs, ranger jobs and feral species abatement.
4. In Queensland's transition to a renewable and sustainable future the necessary involvement of Cape York will begin with:
 - a. Finalise and complete the tenure resolution program by transferring all unallocated state land and transferable land to Traditional Owners.
 - b. Recognise the significant potential of renewable energy production and resources in Cape York, including labour and the need to begin planning now.
 - c. Provide sustainable energy solutions and housing in Cape York Communities.

We Have a Responsibility in Cape York that we Must be Empowered to Fulfill

1. **Recommendation: Support recognition. We have identified that the best means for First Nations to contribute to the future of Australia, is by a voice.**

Recognition of Indigenous Australians does not end at the full stop which follows an acknowledgment of country or its people. It must be expansive and inclusive. It must be cognisant of survival and continued knowledge. It must be empathetic towards suffering and how culture and heritage are continuously threatened. True equity will come from empowering and including Indigenous peoples in the future development of Australia, including in strategizing against the reality of collective dangers such as climate change.

The available briefings published by this committee, and which relate to this inquiry begin with extensive acknowledgements of Queensland's Traditional Owners, of Elders, and future generations. And yet, the contributions made by those attending these briefings, industry

representatives; members of parliament; and academic experts, are devoid of any mention of the stake held by Traditional Owners. Much less, the direct inclusion of First Nations voices.

First Nations people keep and care for the oldest continuous cultures on earth, and it is through a person-land-ancestral relationship and living connection to landscapes, waters, and seas that an intangible heritage of custodianship exists.²¹ From time immemorial people have cared for, and sustained country in Cape York. This has continued despite historical challenges and occurs through the survival of a culture that is commensurate to development, nurture, care and sustainability. These knowledges have been applied to land management and in partnerships with industry since the region was colonised.

Importantly, the IPCC amongst other commentators recommend including First Nations in responses to climate change, not simply paternalistic policy. The 2014 regional report commented that plans and policies that are imposed on Indigenous communities can constrain their adaptive capacity.²² It is recommended that Indigenous re-engagement with environmental management can promote health and may increase adaptive capacity.²³ The report also finds that there is emerging interest in integrating Indigenous observations of climate and developing intercultural communication tools.²⁴ Extensive land ownership in northern and inland Australia and land management traditions mean that Indigenous people are well situated to provide advice alongside greenhouse gas abatement and carbon sequestration services that may also support livelihood aspirations.²⁵

International research investigating the utility of First Nations knowledge in the Agricultural sector encourages strong partnerships between Indigenous knowledge holders, government, representative bodies and farmers.²⁶ It is suggested that observing and predicting weather patterns, behaviour of some fauna and long standing indigenous agricultural practices are all examples of useful tools and strategies for mitigating and building the resilience of communities to climate change.²⁷

There is significant opportunity to integrate Indigenous knowledges into future government policy and within the practices of the agricultural industry broadly. After all, there is a long running history of mutually beneficial relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and Australian agriculturalists. The people of Cape York are willing to uptake the responsibility bestowed by connection to country and contribute to adaptation via these relationships. Partnerships between graziers and Indigenous Fire Practitioners are already

²¹ Heritage Chairs of Australia and New Zealand, *Dhawura Ngilan* (March 2021), available, [dhawura-ngilan-vision-atsi-heritage.pdf](https://www.dcceew.gov.au/heritage/pdf) (dcceew.gov.au).

²² A.R.L. Kitching et al (n 4).

²³ H Ellemo, 'Reconsidering emergency management and indigenous communities in Australia', (2005) 6(1) *Global Environmental Change Part B: Environmental Hazards*, 1-7.

²⁴ S Leonard, J. Mackenzie, F. Kofod, M. Parsons, M. Langton, P. Russ, L. Ormond-Parker, K. Smith, and M. Smith, 'Indigenous Climate Change Adaptation in the Kimberley Region of North-Western Australia: Learning from the Past, Adapting in the Future: Identifying Pathways to Successful Adaptation in Indigenous Communities' (2010, National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF), Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus, Southport, QLD, Australia), 131.

²⁵ A.R.L. Kitching et al (n 4).

²⁶ Billie Dewalt, 'Using Indigenous Knowledge to Improve Agriculture and Natural Resource Management' (1994) 53(2) *Human Organization* 123-13; AZ Imoro AZ, AB Duwiejua and A Abukari 'Harnessing Indigenous Technologies for Sustainable Management of Land, Water, and Food Resources Amidst Climate Change' (2021) 5 *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* 1; Kaja Weaver, 'Bridging Indigenous and Western knowledge-systems in knowledge co-production with Amazonian Indigenous communities: a systematic realist review' (2023) 10(1) *Development Studies Research*.

²⁷ AZ Imoro (n 13).

increasing the viability of pastoralist's practice and helping some farms regain areas of lost country. A partnership between Gudjuda Traditional Owners and Jervoise Station is a recently reported example of this.²⁸

Structural empowerment is the first step to achieve this future. This begins with a co-design and negotiating structure that ensures regional voices and people have the strength to fulfill their potential and assist those who seek an Indigenous perspective including farmers and government.

Free Prior and Informed Consent – Decisions affecting our land and waterways cannot be made without Traditional Owner consent and agreement across the region

2. **Recommendation: That all matters directly or with potential of affecting the rights and interests of Traditional Owners including land, waters, resources, and cultural activities are discussed at both local and regional levels.**

Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is particularly important when policies and legislative changes can affect the protection of land and waters today and the rights and interests of Aboriginal people in the future.²⁹ Indigenous communities need to be consulted at early stages of decision-making processes, and consent can only be given with access to accurate, clear and culturally appropriate information about the proposed activity or decisions. In 2005, Traditional Owners recognised that the Wild Rivers legislation imposed by the Queensland Government would affect future opportunities including land and water, jobs and economic development.³⁰ Without FPIC, how could government make such decisions affecting future generations of Aboriginal people? After a lengthy Court process, the decision was overturned and there is an expectation that this would not be repeated, and government would engage in an appropriate manner.³¹

Disregarding FPIC is a violation of rights, and an indication of a move to sever internationally recognised, inherent rights of Indigenous peoples to lands and resources.

Many Aboriginal communities rely on their land and seas for sustenance, livelihoods, and traditional knowledge. Without FPIC, decisions made without the input of these communities may lead to unsustainable resource extraction, environmental degradation, and disruption of traditional ways of life.

Throughout history, Aboriginal peoples have faced displacement and marginalisation, often resulting from decisions made without their voices and consent. FPIC ensures Traditional Owners have a say in decisions that directly affect and impact their well-being and futures. As the State develops, new resources and practices are required, the importance of FPIC cannot be discounted nor ignored. Despite wide commitment and supportive rhetoric this has not been the case on Cape York in recent history.

²⁸ No author, How Indigenous fire knowledge has helped this family farm again (24 August 2023) *SBS News*, available: <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/how-indigenous-fire-knowledge-has-helped-this-family-farm-again/bmu8eyc75>

²⁹ *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*, Signed 12 September 2007, A/RES/61/295 (entered into force 2 October 2007) ("UNDRIP"), articles 18, 19, 26, 32.

³⁰ *Wild Rivers Act 2005* (Qld).

³¹ *Koowarta v State of Queensland* [2014] FCA 627.

Threats to FPIC on Cape York and Climate Change Adaptation

The extraction of resources, required to develop renewable energy infrastructure and engagement in savannah burning by pastoralists are two examples where activities related to climate change mitigation have intersected with Traditional Owners rights.

Extraction

In June of this year Diatreme reportedly completed its scoping study of a silica mine on the lands of Traditional Owners, many of whom have since expressed concern about consultation and consent.³² The proponents of The Northern Silica Project espouse to have engaged in adequate consultation and approvals, however it has since been revealed this has not occurred. A December article in *the Australian* quoted Binthi Traditional owner Aaway Mclvor who stated “Diatreme has no social licence to operate,” and that “they’re not legitimate, transparent, credible or trustworthy, and their social licence to operate should be withdrawn and withheld.”³³

These statements followed revelations that many Traditional Owners were frozen out of consultation and agreements regarding the mine which has been identified as threatening significant cultural sites and critical resources such as water. The scope of this discussion does not allow for a dissection of the complexities which have hindered adequate consultation in this case. However, the Northern Silica project provides an apt example of how advancements in Queensland and Australia’s development toward a more renewable future might be done in a way that threatened Indigenous Cultural heritage.

The silica to be extracted from the region was destined for overseas manufacturing plants producing solar panels. While it is clear that this technology will be required in the establishment of wide scale renewable grids, and that Australia should seek to economically benefit from this now emerged and thriving industry, this must only occur through the consent of Traditional Owners. Adequate consultation and compensation must form the basis of any declaration that Traditional Owner approval has been given, as Diatreme wrongly attempted in this case.

Burning Practices on Cape York

Pastoralists benefiting from climate abatement programs that contravene both their pastoral leases and the rights of Traditional Owners is of growing concern on Cape York.³⁴

The permitted use of a term lease for pastoral purposes under the *Land Act 1994* (Qld), previously granted as a pastoral lease under the *Land Act 1962* (Qld), is confined to agricultural or grazing purposes or both. Pastoral leases are subject to a reservation of forest products in favour of the Crown. Furthermore, taking or damaging forest products on pastoral leases is regulated by the provisions of the *Forestry Act 1959* (Qld). Without more, a pastoral lease does

³² Peter Curruthers, ‘Diatreme Resources completes scoping study of Northern Silica Project’ (June 20 2023) *Cairns Post*, available: <https://www.cairnspost.com.au/news/cairns/diatreme-resources-completes-scoping-study-of-northern-silica-project/news-story/02c210b351d9979a29119d739fb673c2>

³³ Michael McKenna and Sarah Elks, ‘Mass Destruction in the Name of Green Energy’ (9 December 2022) *The Australian*, available: <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/inquirer/silica-mine-plan-draws-a-line-on-pure-white-cape-york-sands/news-story/c281797d351992584ae192dd9d541413>

³⁴ Mardi J. Reardon-Smith, ‘Forging Preferred Landscapes: Burning Regimes, Carbon Sequestration and ‘Natural’ Fire in Cape York’ (2023) *Ethno* 1.

not authorise the lessee to undertake the activities necessary for a savanna burning project under the *Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Act 2011* (Cth) (**CFI Act**). Similarly, a pastoral lease does not authorise a sequestration project. In both cases, this is because the pastoral lease does not confer the rights to undertake the necessary activities – an offsets project under the CFI Act is a new enterprise and not within the scope of agricultural or grazing purposes.

The creation of a carbon abatement interest under the *Land Act 1994* (Qld) over a pastoral lease which confers sufficient rights to enable a savanna burning project will typically be a future act under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) (**NTA**) (and an Indigenous land use agreement (**ILUA**) required to ensure the future act is valid under the NTA).

Intentional burning has held significance in land management practices long before the commencement of colonial Australia and remains a cornerstone of Indigenous stewardship of country. Importantly, it must be recognised that fire management has distinct cultural elements, for example that a senior person must be present when burning is conducted.³⁵ Indigenous Savannah Burning is a method deeply rooted in traditional ecological knowledge. It involves strategic, controlled burns that mirror natural fire patterns.

This prevents excessive fuel buildup, curbs wildfire risks, and nurtures diverse plant life. The practice supports native vegetation regeneration, cultural plant growth, and wildlife habitat. It is a testament to the symbiotic relationship between First Nations traditions, sustainable land management and ecological harmony. As has been demonstrated, there is an argument that this knowledge should be reserved for use by Traditional Owners and adoption of techniques by pastoralists is not only in contravention of lease agreements but being done so in disregard of these cultural values and FPIC.

At this time in our nations story, FPIC and Indigenous Land Use Agreements are vital to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities to have a voice in decisions that affect them. It respects autonomy and self-determination, allowing them to define their own development paths and determine what is in their best interest. We raise this principle for consideration as it must be a foundation of any future developments in agriculture or renewables in the Cape York region or wider Queensland.

Cape York Custodianship and Stewardship Must be Empowered and Supported

- 3. Recommendation: Cape York people must be allowed to fulfill their responsibility in adapting to and mitigating against the climate crisis by contributing to land management strategies. This can be immediately achieved through investing further into caring for country programs, ranger jobs and feral species abatement.**

Custodians of Cape York should be supported and able to choose a job that aligns with a duty to ancestral homelands. In planning for mitigation, resilience and adaptation to climate change, the Queensland Government must support initiatives that tend to the diverse bioregions of Queensland and concurrently create Indigenous jobs.

³⁵ Ibid.

Ensuring that the interconnected environments remain healthy is of key interest to agriculturalists and Traditional Owners alike. It is for this reason that caring for country initiatives and ranger jobs in Cape York must be a key cornerstone to any future climate change policy.

Cape York Ranger Programs

At present 11 organisations in Cape York have employed rangers working toward caring for country. Generally, these are Prescribed Body Corporates (PBCs) who have successfully claimed native title. Rangers engage in a suite of work that concurrently protects the bioregions of Queensland and, according to the state government itself, positively contributes to positive social, cultural and economic outcomes.³⁶ It is estimated that Ranger programs deliver a return of two to three times on each public dollar invested.³⁷

The Federal Government invested \$636 million in Indigenous Ranger programs in March of 2022.³⁸ This is in addition to Queensland committing to 100 new Indigenous Land and Sea ranger jobs in 2021 and a promise to have at least 200 rangers working across Queensland by 2024.³⁹ However, when the size of the areas Rangers are tasked with caring for is taken into account these numbers can be considered inadequate. In Queensland these 200 Rangers will be spread across 37 regions accounting for approximately 6 Rangers each. Given the vast size of Indigenous estates in Cape York, for example, it is clear further funding and job availability must be provided.

The evidence which supports the environmental and social benefits of funding Ranger programs is clear. Traditional Owner rangers engage in the following critical practices:

- Fire and emissions prevention through burning practices;
- Feral animal and weed control;
- Carbon sequestration and abatement;
- Bioregion sustainability and health;
- Contribution to the health of water tables and resources;
- Creating generations of land stewards that have transferable skills and capabilities to be offered to other sectors and industries in the future; and
- Providing services in partnerships with other land users such as agriculturalists.

It has also been demonstrated that investment in Ranger programs reduces State expenditure on health, education, the criminal justice system and welfare services beyond just environmental protection.⁴⁰ By investing in more Ranger jobs the Queensland government is investing in a future workforce of land stewards with expert knowledge of country and water management, Rangers can then contribute to partnerships and programs focussed on climate change resilience and mitigation long into the state's future, including in fruitful partnerships with Queensland's farmers.

³⁶ QLD Cabinet and Minister Directory, 'Recruit on for additional Indigenous Land and Sea Rangers' (12 March 2023), available: <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/97356>.

³⁷ Synergies Economic Consulting, *Working for Our Country A review of the economic and social benefits of Indigenous land and sea management* (1 November 2015, Report), available: <https://www.synergies.com.au/reports/a-review-of-the-economic-and-social-benefits-of-indigenous-land-and-sea-management/>.

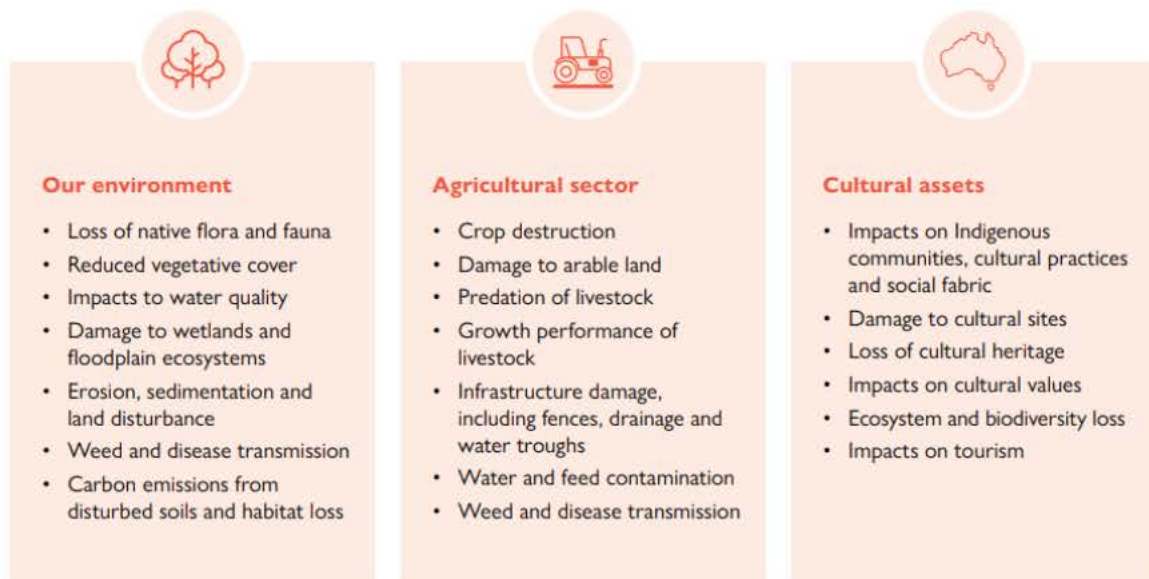
³⁸ Mike Foley, Indigenous rangers program doubles with \$636 million boost' (29 march 2022) *Sydney Morning Herald*, available: <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/indigenous-rangers-program-doubles-with-636-million-boost-20220323-p5a79w.html>.

³⁹QLD Cabinet (n 35).

⁴⁰ Synergies Economic Consulting (n 16).

Feral Pig Abatement

To protect the state's agricultural industry, prevent the destruction of invaluable eco systems and ensure economic development in Cape York, a significant opportunity exists in the creation of a more integrated pig abatement program. In 2021 the *National Feral Pig Action Plan* was commissioned and endorsed by the federal government.⁴¹ The strategy included statistics regarding the economic and environmental harm caused by feral pigs nationally and regionally. It is clear from findings that Cape York has the worst feral pig problem in Australia and at present the region is restrained by sparsely separated, area specific responses that could be improved, creating more jobs in the process.⁴²



At present feral pigs pose an extreme risk to Australia's landscapes and the \$65 million agricultural industry.⁴³ It is estimated feral pigs cost the Australian agricultural market over \$100 million dollars annually and that private land holders spend in excess of \$47 million dollars on feral pig management per year.⁴⁴ Regarding their environmental impact, feral pigs account for 4.9 million metric tonnes of CO₂ emissions per year and in the Australian context cause a threat to 146 threatened flora and fauna species and 8 ecological communities.⁴⁵ In addition to this, a potential incursion of the diseases harboured by feral pigs into the Australian environment and economy, such as foot and mouth or African swine, would cost over \$50 billion dollars.⁴⁶ Traditional Owners and agriculturalists alike know the specific damage caused by feral pigs intimately. These are summarised by the infographic above sourced from the national strategy.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Australian Pork Ltd, *Feral Pig Action Plan: 2021-2031* (February 2023), available: <https://feralpigs.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/National-Feral-Pig-Action-Plan-February-2023.pdf>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

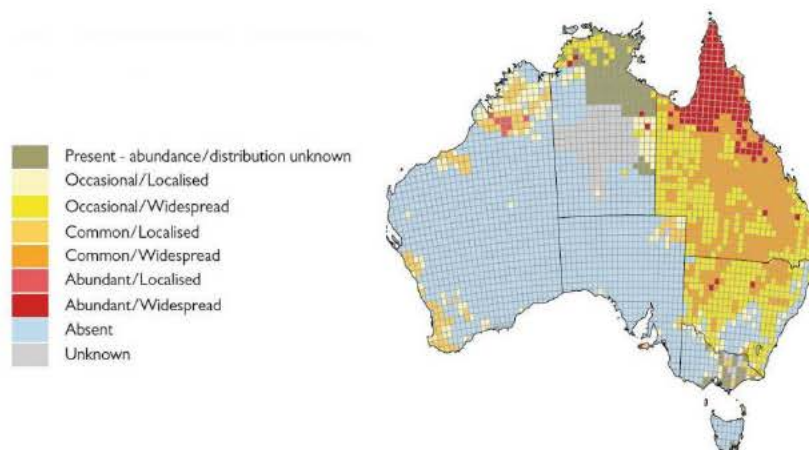
⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Australian Pork Ltd, *National Coordination, Local Action Prospectus* (3 March 2023), available: <https://feralpigs.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/National-Feral-Pigs-Prospectus-3-March-2023.pdf>.

Cape York currently has the worst feral pig infestation of any region in Australia. It is the largest region by area where pigs are considered abundant or widespread. Estimates vary but numbers of 2-3 million pigs in the region are often quoted. There have been innovative and concerted efforts to abate the existence and spread of these animals in Cape York, but in the context of the national strategy it is clear further opportunities exist.



Feral Pig Occurrence, Distribution and Abundance in Australia

Source: Australian Pork Ltd, *Feral Pig Action Plan: 2021-2031* (February 2023).

At present, the *Western Cape Turtle Threat Abatement Alliance* and *The Catchments to Coral—Great Barrier Reef Coastal Ecosystems and Species Protection Project* on eastern Cape York are the two primary regional initiatives. These programs operate on opposite sides of the Cape and focus on the impact of feral pigs on turtle populations in the west and damage to the eastern coastal regions which feed into the reef. These Traditional Owner led initiatives have had success and mainly employ aerial shooting, trapping, ground shooting, nest protection, nest monitoring and fencing as strategies.⁴⁸ In any year up to 3000 pigs are destroyed on Cape York and there has been significant advances in the health of turtle populations and rookeries.⁴⁹ As recently as December 2022 the Queensland Department of Environment and Science collaborated with Traditional Owners to aerially hunt a large group of animals.⁵⁰

However, research indicates that upwards of 70% of a feral pig population must be eliminated in order to curb their impact.⁵¹ It is evident that the current approach on Cape York is not ambitious enough and will not significantly reduce the immense harm caused by these animals. As pigs also provide a significant food source and protein for many Cape communities, an integrated and innovative strategy will require the employment and involvement of many Traditional Owners and Indigenous Land Holding Bodies.

It is recommended consultation toward investigating a regionally integrated feral pig strategy begins. This would significantly alleviate the impact they have on the bioregions of Cape York

⁴⁸ Mary O'callaghan, *Managing Feral Pigs on Cape York: It's Not A Numbers Game* (9 July 2015) *CSIRO News*, available: <https://www.csiro.au/en/news/all/articles/2015/july/managing-feral-pigs-on-cape-york-its-not-a-numbers-game>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ QLD Department of Environment and Science, 'Feral pig program reduces population' (13 December 2022), available: <https://www.des.qld.gov.au/our-department/news-media/mediareleases/2022/feral-pig-program-reduces-population>.

⁵¹ Aus Pork Ltd (n 46).

and beyond, alongside their negative influence on the region's natural carbon sequestration. These effects which would flow into the Queensland economy, dually providing much needed employment opportunities for local people and acting as a lighthouse project for best practice feral species management for the State's land managers.

A Development Agenda Must Honour and Respect the Rights of First Nations

4. Recommendations:

- a. Finalise and complete the tenure resolution program by transferring all unallocated state land and transferable land to Traditional Owners.
- b. Recognition of the significant potential of renewable energy production and resources in Cape York, including labour and the need to begin planning now.
- c. Provision of sustainable energy solutions and housing in Cape York Communities.

In developing the agricultural sector, within the context of the quickly evolving Queensland economy, new sources of energy, labour and resources will be required. In adapting to climate change, it is imperative that transformation occurs in recognition of the legal and human rights of Indigenous people and lands.

There is concern that the scale and pace of economic and renewable energy transitions in Australia might allow for rapid changes to occur without the proper consent and involvement of its first people.⁵² The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People has expressly defined the conditions under which development should occur and how to ensure self-determination of Indigenous people and participants.⁵³ In an era where this is now so clearly defined, and where the finance sector is so cognisant of ESG metrics, government and industry need to ensure policy and regulation is done in the correct way.

This is what the IPCC and other commentators refer to when calling for the inclusion of First Nations in responses to climate change, not simply the imposition of changes and policy. The 2014 regional report commented that plans and policies that are imposed on Indigenous communities can constrain their adaptive capacity.⁵⁴ Moreover and despite being criticised themselves for not including Indigenous voices in the report,⁵⁵ the authors add that adaptation planning would benefit from a robust typology across the diversity of Indigenous life experience.⁵⁶ This is consistent with UNDRIP and both levels of government's commitment to this instrument of international law. In the context of Cape York, we envisage this as including the following principles and initiatives.

Firstly, that the Queensland government finalise its tenure resolution program so that available and unallocated state land is transferred to its rightful Traditional Owners under the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991* (QLD). This will complete the transfer of property rights already achieved by many

⁵² Cathy Eatock et al, *Indigenous Peoples' Organisation-Australia: Heal Country Heal Climate* (November 2021), available: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/indigenous-peoples-organization2.pdf>

⁵³ *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*, Signed 12 September 2007, A/RES/61/295 (entered into force 2 October 2007) ("UNDRIP").

⁵⁴ ARL Kitching (n 4).

⁵⁵ Bradely Moggridge et al, 'IPCC reports still exclude Indigenous voices. Come join us at our sacred fires to find answers to climate change' (March 4 2022) *The Conversation*, available: <https://theconversation.com/ipcc-reports-still-exclude-indigenous-voices-come-join-us-at-our-sacred-fires-to-find-answers-to-climate-change-178045>

⁵⁶ ARL Kitching (n 4).

of Cape York's Traditional Owners and facilitate engagement in the renewable transition and climate change abatement programs from a position of surety.

Secondly, that Cape York, which is soon to be almost entirely claimed by Native Title and which comprises a patchwork of Indigenous Land Holding Bodies, will contribute to Queensland's future economy through its resources and labour. There will likely be thousands of kilometres of renewable energy infrastructure which runs through far north Queensland, transporting and drawing power from lands and seas over which First Nations have property rights. It is integral to create partnerships and consultation with these bodies as soon as possible to ensure the mutual benefits of these transitions are realised. This will also provide the best access to labour from Cape York and in turn jobs for community members.

Thirdly, the future of Cape York, its people, culture, knowledge systems and their contribution to a climate adapted economy, depends on the ability to happily live in communities on homelands. This submission began with comment on concern among the far communities of Cape York that already difficult living standards and livelihood will be worsened by climate change.

In discussing energy justice and the disproportionate risks of climate change harm, Longden et al focus on the temperature extremes likely to be experienced by Northern Australia.⁵⁷

It is a fact that weather events will increase the risk of mortality and ill health in Northern Australia.⁵⁸ This eventuates as at-risk people are exposed to dangerous conditions and do not have the services or resources to safely mitigate these risks.⁵⁹ Specifically, temperature related harm will impact those households with poor quality housing, low incomes, poor health and who also experience high energy insecurity created by a system of prepaid energy provision.⁶⁰ These threats will be compounded by an ever increasing risk of natural disasters in Northern Australia and specifically sea level rise and coastal erosion on Cape York

If the people of Cape York are to have a future, and indeed are to contribute work and knowledge to future land management, urgent support in the form of energy solutions and sustainable housing is required. Across Australia diesel generation and social housing are now recognised as completely inappropriate for the environment in which they are situated. As a result they will be and are being replaced and reimagined. While this might seem distant from the terms of reference of this inquiry, Cape York people have and will continue to contribute climate adaptation and mitigation in the region and beyond, either directly caring for country or on one of the many agricultural properties of the area. Traditional Owners and Indigenous communities must be provided the basic dignity of appropriate and sustainable housing alongside the assurances that necessary amenities are connected and are aligned with contemporary renewable technology.

Conclusion, On Lands and Seas Cape York will Contribute as Stewards of Country and the New Era of Development

The opportunities presented here are ones that facilitate the custodianship of Cape York by its own people. For this to endure the committee and various stakeholders must recognise the key realities also discussed. These are that Indigenous people of Northern Queensland and Australia are going to be the most adversely affected by climate change. The existence of extensive

⁵⁷ Longden et al, Energy insecurity during temperature extremes in remote Australia (2022) 7 *Nature Energy* 43-54, p. 43.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.



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knowledge systems in Cape York can be harnessed to assist the innovation of land management and agricultural practices in the region and beyond. This, however, requires support for the People of Cape York to fulfill a known responsibility in adapting to climate change by recognising voice, capability, rights over knowledge and resources, and an ability to contribute across all industries, including agriculture.