

# ARAFURA SWAMP RANGERS

Healthy Country Plan 2017–2027



## DEDICATION

We dedicate this plan to our fathers and mothers, our grandfathers and grandmothers, from our father's side and our mothers side. They did whatever they could to protect the animals and look after the country. Our rangers carry on this work.

We are always looking backwards to get a full story. Old people give us everything. We are always thinking who is behind us.

Our old people — our mothers and our fathers — brought us to where we are now. Through that connection we know many things. We now look forwards, and must give a strong story to our grandchildren. To tell a good story now, we are listening to everyone's story and putting two toolboxes together, two knowledges, ours and Balanda science.

**The Arafura Swamp Healthy Country Plan** was prepared for Arafura Swamp Rangers Aboriginal Corporation (ASRAC) by Yolngu and Bi clans and families, the traditional owners and djungkayi of the land and sea that is connected to Gurruwiling (the Arafura Swamp).

It is our story.

Warning: This plan may contain images, names of, or references to, deceased Aboriginal people.

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Front cover: Design represents the clan totems *malargatji* surrounding the Arafura Swamp. Design by Therese Ritchie.



We would like to acknowledge the special contributions of Mangay Guyula, Matthew Dhulumburrk and Otto Campion in the making of this plan.

## GLOSSARY

- Balanda:** from the word “Hollander” and refers to white people and their culture
- Bi:** (pronounced bee) people who speak Rembarrnga, which is not a Yolngu Matha language
- Djungkayi:** people with special responsibilities for land, distinct from traditional owners
- Malargatji:** totems
- Ngala Dakku:** kinship relationship/ moiety system for Bi people
- Ngarra:** Yolngu sacred ceremony business
- Right-way fire:** customary fire management
- Rom:** Yolngu law
- Targets:** things we value on our land and in our culture, our assets
- Threats:** things that damage our targets
- Traditional owners:** those who have inherited land through their fathers
- Wongarr:** refers to both ancestral beings and time of creation
- Yolngu:** a cultural and linguistic bloc in eastern and central Arnhem Land
- Yolngu matha:** languages shared by the Yolngu
- Yothu Yindi:** kinship relationship/moiety system within the Yolngu domain
- Yuyung nyanung:** kinship relationship/moiety system for the Gurruwiling area





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# Our story for Country

We know that the land needs its people to care for it and to keep it healthy

We know that caring for the country keeps us healthy — physically, mentally and spiritually.

The circle of connection and caring that exists between people and Country is the key to how we approach what is called “land and sea management” in English.

In the languages of Yolngu Matha we call the foundation of this relationship between country and its people Rom. Rom is a very complex word that has no direct translation equivalent in English.

Rom has deep roots that start from the time of creation, extending to the present and into the future.

Rom is like a tree, standing firm, not like grass that comes and goes with every season.

Rom links our clans, it tells us who we are and how we should relate to one another, it tells us how to perform our ceremonies, how to raise our children to respect people and country and, importantly, how to respect themselves.

Other cultures speak of the law, of religion, of kinship, of intellectual knowledge, of art and science — many separate things. But in our way all these things and more exist together as Rom.

We are born to a heritage of Rom but we learn it as we grow, layer by layer, listening to our mothers, our uncles, our fathers, acting in the right way until we have the knowledge and experience to finally take our place as the leaders of culture and Rom.

Many people from many places connected to Gurruwiling have been part of making this plan. We all speak for our own Country and have many different languages including the Yolngu languages of Ganabingu, Dhuwal, Djadiwitji and Wagilak as well as Rembarrnga spoken by Bi people located in the west and with strong connections to our neighbours further west. In some ways we are two different peoples, Yolngu and Bi, but we are also connected. Everything in our world is connected and divided by two halves (also called moieties)

known as Dhuwa and Yirritja. This includes our people, our country, all the plants, animals, seasons and languages.

Our responsibility for looking after country is given to us through our kinship relationships. Balanda might call this land ownership, but it is different for Yolngu and Bi. Children have rights and responsibilities to their mother's people and country and to our father's people and country. In Yolngu we call this Yothu Yindi. In Rembarrnga it is Ngala Dakku and for the Arafura Swamp it is Yuyung Nyanung. In English it could be something like a mother-child relationship.

Relationships to the country of our maternal grandparents and maternal great-grandparents are also important and we have names for those connections and the responsibilities that go with them.

# Only with Rom in our hearts and minds can we manage country properly



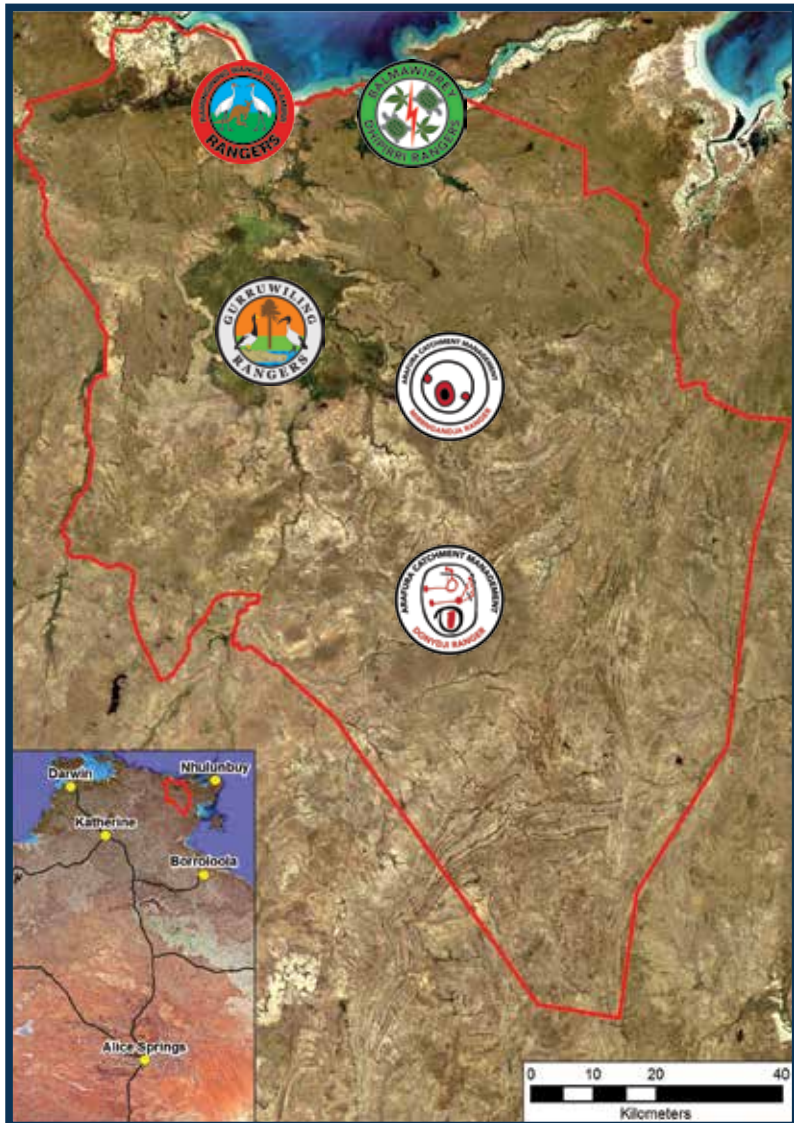
Above: Millingimbi Collection.

Left: Charlie Djurrjini — Malibirr family from Mulgurram. “We draw our country — and we draw strength from it.”



# Ranger story and ASRAC

Our people have been managing this country since our ancestral beings gave us the land, our languages, and the cultural system we call Rom.



Above: Ranger groups for Arafura Swamp and catchment of East Arnhem Land (1.2million hectares).



But the world we live in has changed. Our way of life has changed and we have new threats to our lands.

We have created ranger groups to help traditional owners keep our indigenous knowledge strong and to make sure it is being used to look after country.

Our rangers are also looking to western scientific knowledge as we deal with new problems in country, many of which have only come to us since Balanda arrived here. To tell a good story now, we are listening to everyone's story and putting two toolboxes together, two knowledges, ours and Balanda science.

Our indigenous toolbox holds the knowledge that has come to us from our ancestors — how to manage country through right way fire, how to live off the land without taking too much, how to read signs that tell us whether country is healthy or sick and, importantly, how to



maintain the ceremonies and kinship laws that keep culture and country strong.

We can draw on science when we need to help us deal with the new problems like weeds and feral animals. We look to new technology to help us like using satellite mapping to see how fire is affecting country. We use helicopters to put in place our early dry season burning.

We started ranger groups in the catchment area in the 1970s and now we have South-East Arafura Catchment Ranger groups associated with Donydji, Mirrngatja and Dhupawamirri homelands. We have the Gurruwiling rangers for the swamp area and the Wanga Djakamirri and Dhipirri Rangers look after our saltwater country. We have been supported by the Northern Land Council's Caring for Country Unit but now we have started operating independently under our own corporation, Arafura Swamp Rangers Aboriginal Corporation.



We have rangers looking after the far inland, where our waters start to flow towards the sea, we have rangers working in the freshwater mid reaches that is the Arafura Swamp and we have rangers looking after our saltwater country. Each ranger group has special responsibilities in its own area but we all come together under the Arafura Swamp Rangers Aboriginal Corporation (ASRAC) to help us plan together, gather resources together and act together.

We have grown strong and with our plan in front of us, we are ready to make our own futures, on our own country, and following in the footsteps of our Old People.

We are not alone. As we go forward we are building strong relationships with other ranger groups. In some cases we share management responsibilities over country with these neighbouring groups, united in Rom and linked by the vast web of kinship.

We will seek partnerships with governments, with private enterprise and with NGOs who are willing to share our vision.

*Page 8 centre: The goose hunters of the Arafura Swamp, central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, 1937. Photographer — D.F. Thomson. The Donald Thomson Ethnohistory Collection. Reproduced courtesy of the Thomson family and Museums Victoria (TPH1093).*



“We are connected to country. We keep culture and language strong wherever our homelands are. By keeping culture and stories then we can pass it on to children. Not only our story, but healthy country too.”

*Bobby Bunungurr*



# How this plan was made

In May 2015 we started working towards this plan. We had already formed the Arafura Swamp Rangers Corporation as a vehicle to take us forward. We recognised the need for a road map to show how to get from where we are today, to where we want to be in the future.

We wanted our plan to show how we can build a strong body to manage our own income and build skills, jobs and business to pass on to the younger generations.

We brought our friends from Bush Heritage, Charles Darwin University and the Northern Land Council to introduce us to the Healthy Country Planning process and the language that goes with it.

Our planning work started in Ramingining to bring people from many clans and their ideas into the circle of planning with an understanding of the key words of targets, goals, threats, strategies and monitoring.

From our big meetings we started travelling out to satellite ranger bases and homelands where many of our rangers and traditional owners are living and working.

The bush trips were very important for us, giving us the opportunity to express ourselves, supporting the rangers and the local families to look after our land and sea. Doing many trips to country was very important to show the problems on-ground instead of sitting in a room.

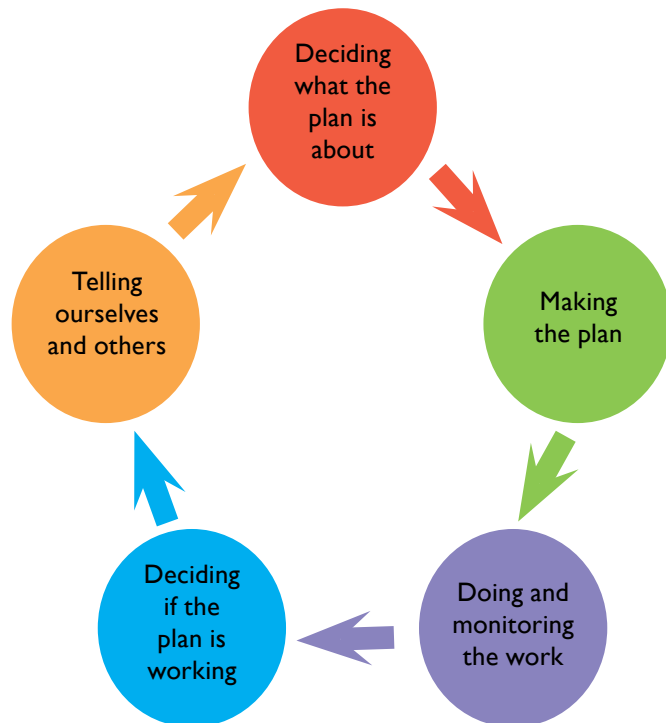
People talked up with their ideas. One old lady said that our plan has to be made up by each group putting the story together — little bit by little bit.

We identified cultural mapping as a key tool for planning and the connections between places and culture as “the backbone of everything”.

We travelled to Mirrngatja in the east, Donydji in the south-east, to Malnyangarnak in the west and to Dhipirri at the edge of our saltwater country.

We shared our understanding of what is important in country, what are the threats, what we can do to deal with these threats and how we can check to see if our strategies and plan is working.

In 2017 we have made this book to share the results of our work. We now have our road map. To succeed in getting to where we want to be, we understand that we have to continue to come together, listen together, stick together and work together as we follow that road map.



“Healthy country planning is like weaving a dilly bag. You start in the centre and bring all the strings together... then you keep taking it around in the circle. Like a dilly bag, the plan is something you put tools in and carry with you to go forwards.”

*Otto Campion*



Above: Two Toolboxes by Otto Campion.





# Our vision



## ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Healthy Country, healthy tucker,  
healthy families, living on our homelands.  
The right people are speaking for country,  
Passing knowledge from the old to the young.  
We have strong ceremony, family and language for Country.

## GANALBINGU LANGUAGE

Latju ngirri  
Latju wali  
Latju Yolngni  
Ngani ngirri watangu mala ban djan  
Wangi ga ban djan  
Margiyum romwu ga ngirri-wu ga gurrngul wu

## REMBARRNGA LANGUAGE

Dawal Wula  
Meh wula  
Bi yarranurah dawal yarriga  
Dawal walang yarrnurah  
Djungurr-na wirridji-gan, bi madjih yang dawal-gan

## DHUWAL LANGUAGE

Manymak wänga  
Manymak ñatha  
Manymak yolngu  
Nhina ga nhanukal wängangur  
Watanu mala ga wänga djäga walalan wängaw  
Marngikum ñäthiliñu rom yutany yolñuny

## DJADIWITJI LANGUAGE

Manymak gorrbah  
Manymak wali  
Manymak yulpili  
Djinini ngirrangi, gorربي ngarri gorربي watangu  
Bamanpe ngurru nangalpi  
Yulpili lem niyini gurrbuw

## WAGILAK LANGUAGE

Ngamakguli dhala  
Ngamakguli ngatha nga limalangu  
Ngamakguli yolnguwadj  
Ngarr wanga dhala wardangu  
Maringigoma dhamawadj-na  
Romngalimala-ngu dalmiridjirri  
Yolnguwadj-gu mathayunguna-gu



# Our targets

In Ramingining, in the homelands and on trips to look at country we talked a lot about the things that are really important to us... and how these are all connected. These are the things that we call targets in our plan. They are our targets because that's where our management actions are aimed.

In our planning workshops we talked about many things that are important for people and for country. We finally focused on 12 of the really important things.

1. Cultural places
2. Stories, language and Rom
3. People on country
4. Both way education and knowledge
5. Bush tucker and native wildlife
6. Right way fire
7. Gurruwiling (The Arafura Swamp)
8. Our saltwater country
9. Our freshwater country
10. Our woodland country
11. Jungles
12. Our rock country


We asked ourselves — how healthy are these things? We talked until we agreed whether these things were manymak (good), ganga manymak (fair) or yatjkurr (poor).

We wrote our answers on the diagram on the next page and put arrows to show whether our targets were getting better, staying the same, or getting worse.

Then we asked “how do we want these things to be in the future?”. Our answers showed us the goals we have listed for each target in our diagram.

On the following pages we have a story for each of our TARGETS — those targets we called our “priority targets” and then on pages 34 to 41 we show our STRATEGIES — the work we are going to do to make our targets healthier.



TARGET	RANKING	TREND	GOALS
Our really important things	How healthy are they?	Getting better or worse?	How we would like to see our Targets in 10 years time
Cultural places	<b>POOR</b> yatjkurr		Ceremonies are being held by the right people on the right country and our cultural places are clean, protected and respected by all.
Stories, language and Rom	<b>FAIR</b> ganga manymak		Our knowledge is recorded and accessible to us and kept alive by young people and old people walking and talking on country.
People on country	<b>FAIR</b> ganga manymak		Country is full up with the right people and elders are happy for family who enjoy good lives.
Both way education and knowledge	<b>POOR</b> yatjkurr		Everyone respects Rom and we have the skills and knowledge to have professional jobs and our culture.
Bush tucker and native wildlife	<b>GOOD</b> manymak		People are protecting their malargatji (totems), preparing and sharing food which is plentiful, fat and tastes good.
Right way fire	<b>FAIR</b> ganga manymak		The right people are burning country at the right time with a strong carbon business, and there are plenty of healthy sugarbag, emu and kangaroo.
Gurruwiling (The Arafura Swamp)	<b>POOR</b> yatjkurr		Families are sharing Gurruwiling, enjoying plenty of water lilies, longneck turtle, fish and magpie geese to eat and we can always dig a hole in the right place to drink clean water.
Our saltwater country	<b>GOOD</b> manymak		We are working with neighbouring clans and ranger groups to look after our saltwater country and there are plenty of healthy stingray and oysters.
Our freshwater country	<b>POOR</b> yatjkurr		Our freshwater places have clear water that smells clean and we can find plenty of water lilies, water chestnut, fish and turtle.
Our woodland country	<b>FAIR</b> ganga manymak		All the right plants are growing and flowering together in our woodlands so native bees are making plenty of sugar bag, with sugar glider, possum, echidna, night owl and bats nesting in hollow logs.
Jungles	<b>FAIR</b> ganga manymak		Our jungle has lots of tucker, shade and clean water and are the same size as they are today with healthier plants and animals.
Our rock country	<b>GOOD</b> manymak		All the right animals and plants are healthy, and we have good access to look after our escarpment country and there is no mining.

# TARGET I: CULTURAL PLACES



## **Our sacred places connect us, and bring us together.**

Every place has meaning because all the land came from the Wongarr, or ancestral beings, who created it.

The power of the Wongarr is still strong in the landscape. Sometimes it might be something we can see — a rock or tree or billabong — but not always, sometimes that power is invisible.

We learn as we grow, so we know how to behave properly on country because the power in the land is dangerous if not treated properly.

When the wrong people go into our sacred and cultural places they might get sick or the landowners and djungkayi might get sick. When we see our cultural places damaged it is like our body has been wounded.

Our ceremony places are filled with strong power and only the right people can go there to look after the power. Whether the ceremony is happening at the time or not, strict rules apply under our law that defines the roles played by people.

As rangers we are often in the middle between our people and Balanda. Some Balanda look to us rangers to give permission to go places. As rangers we don't have the right to talk for other people's country but we do have a responsibility to know who are the right people and to make sure they are the ones who are consulted.

The health of our cultural places target is not good. In the section further on we talk more about why and what we will do to make it better.

Our cultural places are filled with knowledge and stories. If we know country, we can read the knowledge and stories like Balanda read from a book.

**“Cultural mapping is the backbone of everything. Site protection, registration, sharing connections, mapping, support everyone talking ... cultural mapping is underneath everything ASRAC does.”**

*Otto Champion*

**POOR**  
yatjkurr



**GOAL:** Ceremonies are being held by the right people on the right country and our cultural places are clean, protected and respected by all.



## TARGET 2: STORIES, LANGUAGE AND ROM

Our stories, languages, ceremonies and law direct us in how to carry out our responsibilities, our stories give us meaning and are how we transfer our knowledge and wisdom. As children we begin to learn about our responsibilities and our country from the stories we hear from families. As adults we are the guardians and teachers of those stories.

Our languages are the code that unlocks everything we need to know about who we are and how to behave. Like husband and wife our Yolngu Matha languages are married — one is Dhuwa and the other is Yirritja. For example, Djinba language from the Goyder is Dhuwa and married to the Yirritja language Ganhalpuyngu from Gurruwiling. The Goyder River feeds the swamp — they need each other and belong together.

Stories belong to our languages and our languages belong to our stories. Both are kept alive by young and old walking and talking on country. This is the proper way for knowledge to be learned and shared.

But we need to find ways to “back-up” our knowledge as well. Recording our stories and making them accessible to the right people is something we must do in these times when our people are being distracted by television, by movies, by Facebook. We can use some of the technology and knowledge from Balanda to help us keep hold of culture and our own knowledge. Our ceremonies make us strong and we must use that strength to stand by the system of Rom and Ngarrra that will always govern our lives as Yolngu

and Bi. To manage for healthy country we must stay within the circle of Rom and the Ngarrra.

We see the health of our target of Rom, and all within it, as being ganga manymak, just fair and not good. As rangers we have to work with elders and families to put more strength back into our culture.

**“It’s like proper digging for yam, you’ve got to get the whole yam — don’t break it. If you break it, some is left down deep. Same with stories. Must have all of story.”**

*Marley Djangirr*



**FAIR**  
ganga manymak



**GOAL:** Our knowledge is recorded and accessible to us and kept alive by young people and old people walking and talking on country.

# TARGET 3: PEOPLE ON COUNTRY

When you walk on country, you can feel something special inside.

You can feel stories from old people, our fathers, and grandfathers leading us in the right way.



Over the past 25 years Governments have been cutting back on support for people living on country.

Some people want to live in bigger places like Ramingining but many of us want to be living back on our homelands all the time.

Before, we used to get health services, bush schools, shopping services, road maintenance in our homelands. But that support has gone down. It's getting harder.

We need support to be on country where we can enjoy healthy bush tucker. Many of us don't feel safe when we leave the bush. Town foods are giving us high blood pressure.

Bush life is important to take young people away from the influence of drugs and give them a positive outlook on life. We have been losing too many young people in the big communities. Some run away from the homelands to town and drugs — if there were jobs on the homelands many more would stay and live a clean life.

When our young people are in the bush they get to see how what they do makes a difference to country, and to them. They go burning for yam and other bush foods and see new life coming up. They learn to care for country and themselves.

If we are in the bush we can teach our young people to hunt and share all the stories for country.



**FAIR**  
ganga manymak



**GOAL:** Country is full up with the right people and elders are happy for family who enjoy good lives.

## TARGET 4: BOTH WAY EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE

We cannot wait for Balanda. We have to make our own way to build a future of both-way education and knowledge for the coming generations.

We will take the opportunity to draw on our strong culture and unique knowledge, and not be afraid to find new ways of doing things that help us follow our own path as the people of Central Arnhem Land.

We are standing firm on the ancient ground of our culture and law. We are also modern people living in a modern world.

We want to have the same rights and opportunities as everybody else. We want our children to be able to pursue their dreams the same as other children in Australia.

We also have new challenges and want to work with others to find new solutions. As land managers we have to deal with problems that have come from outside and which need tools from the “Balanda toolbox” to deal with those things.



To have the power to live our lives as we want to, and to keep ourselves and our country healthy, we need our younger and middle aged people to feel strong and confident when they go into “the mainstream” to get the tools we need for the future.

The education system has failed many of our people. In particular it has put Balanda learning high above our

knowledge and who we are. It has tried to teach basic numeracy and literacy but it has failed to link that learning to things we care about.

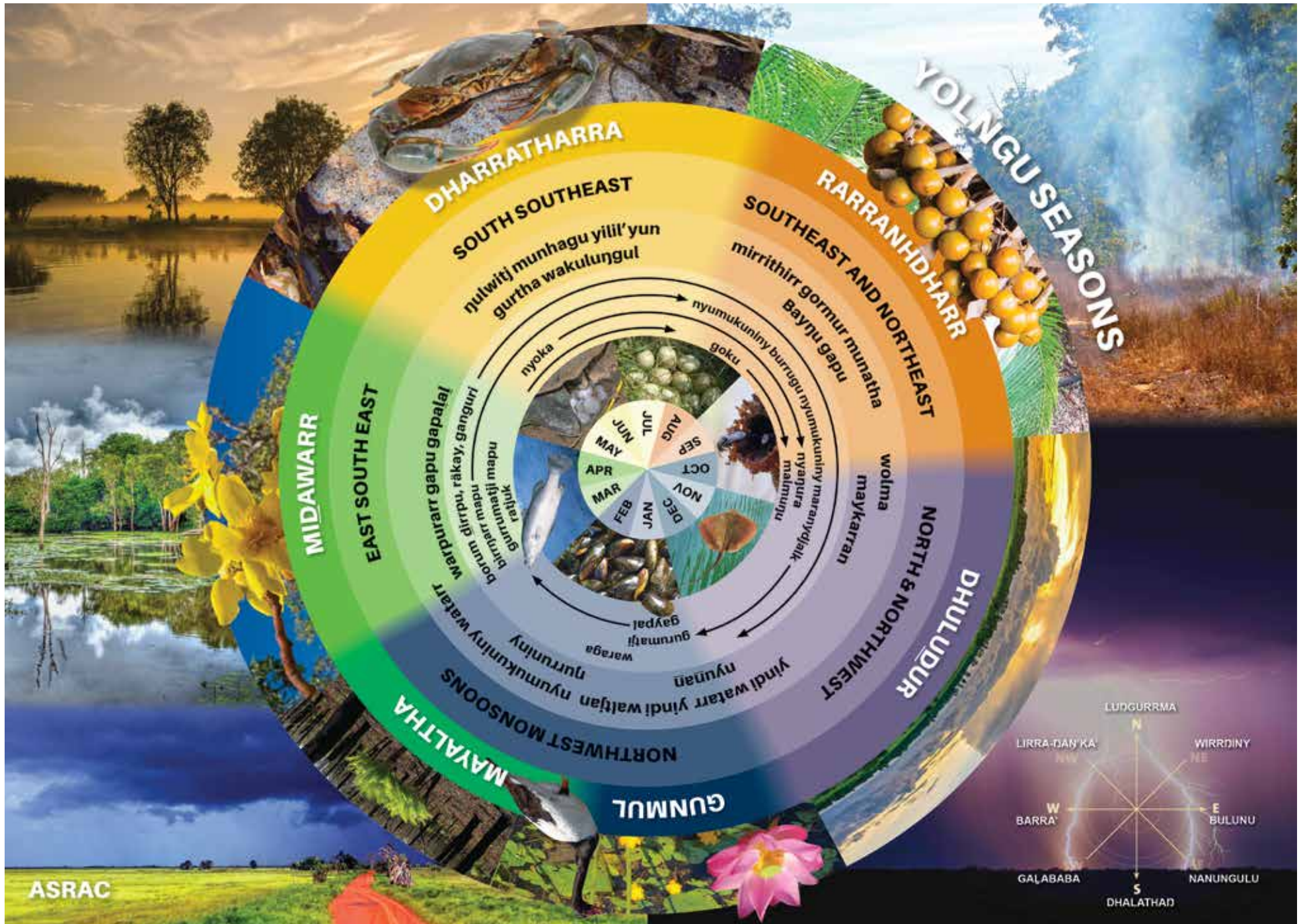
As land managers we are interested in science and the maths and English that go with it. But the education system has ignored the fact that we are born to look after country and that education should take that into account.

POOR  
yatjcurr



**GOAL:** Everyone respects Rom and we have the skills and knowledge to have professional jobs and our culture.





ASRAC

## TARGET 5: BUSH TUCKER AND NATIVE WILDLIFE



The seasons tell us when is the right time for all our bush food. We don't need a paper calendar to follow our seasons — the country sends us signals.

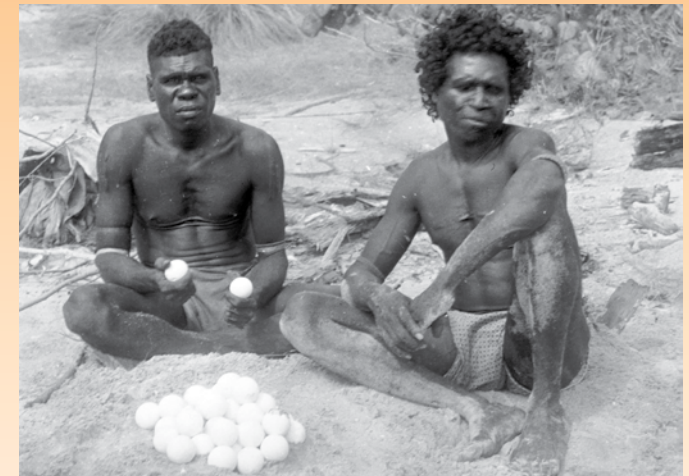
The red flowers of Balgurr tell us when sharks and stingray are fat. When the spear grass is tall and green and starts to flower we know that the yams and magpie geese eggs are ready to harvest.

We have six different seasons. Animals tell us when the seasons are changing. The dragonfly and the little yellow butterfly tells us the dry season is just around the corner and food is ready for harvest. In the right seasons animals have plenty of fat, they are abundant and of good size.

This knowledge came to us from the old people and they gave us rules to follow. We must prepare, cook and share our food in the right way and make sure we pass this knowledge to our children. Every part of the meat has a different meaning for different people.

Ngattu or warraga, the strong smelling damper made from the fruit of the cycad, feeds big gatherings of people for ceremony in central Arnhem Land. It has been estimated that cycad country can produce more food per hectare than many cultivated crops. But that food must be prepared properly to take out the poisons before it goes in the ashes. It's the same for cheeky yams — we cook them to soften them, slice them with the shoulder blade of a kangaroo and soak the yam chips in running water to take out the poisons. Only then can we eat them.

In our culture we must respect the animals and plants that feed us. Our law says "don't take more than you need". We



Above: Millingimbi Collection.

don't go hunting to kill things for fun and we don't do catch-and-release fishing. Many fish die after catch-and-release.

Our country is rich country. In the right season the swamp gives us magpie geese and their eggs. There are flying fox in the jungles and wallabies around the edges. In the tall forest and even in the mangroves there is sugarbag honey. We find kangaroos in the open forest and in rocky country.

It's all there for us, but we must protect our bush tucker through managing country properly. Old people told us how to burn for healthy country, how to leave a little piece of yam to grow back.

This time we are mixing tools and knowledge from Balanda with Yolngu and Bi knowledge and tools for land management. As long as we keep the foundation of our knowledge in the front of our minds, we can bring in these new tools to help us manage country in our own way.

GOOD  
manymak



**GOAL:** People are protecting their malargatji (totems) and preparing and sharing food the right way, which is plentiful, fat and tastes good.

# Our law says “don’t take more than you need”.

People and animals have sacred connections.

We feel upset when we see bycatch from commercial fishing left to rot, or recreational fishers throwing away the meaty skeletons of barramundi after taking off fillets. This insults our totems, makes us ashamed and unhappy.

Through our clans and in our kinship groups we each have the animals that Balanda call “totems” and we call malargatji.

We represent and become our special animals when we dance for young-man business, for funerals and other ceremonies. We paint their special designs on our bodies and today also on bark and paper to share that special connection between the people and the animals of the land and sea.

When we are hunting we watch birds and animals for signs. Sometimes these are ancestors sending us a message — if we know how to listen.

Animals communicate with us sometimes to warn or alert us. Cockatoos let us know if outsiders are coming. Plants flowering at the wrong time might let us know there is something different with the seasons or if fire is not happening right.

As rangers we are learning new things about our plants and animals from working with botanists and biologists. We are learning that some things in our country are only found here.

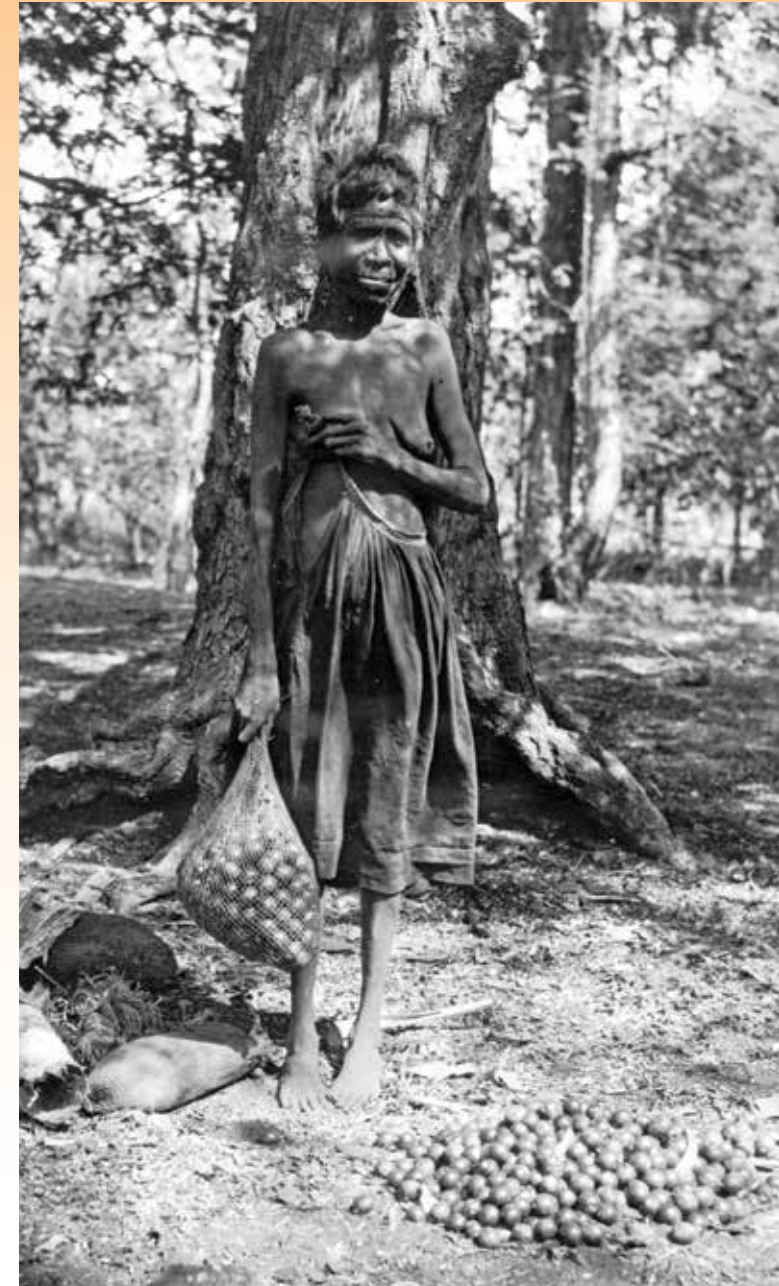
There are other plants and animals in our country that are being lost from the landscape in other places. We have special responsibilities to look after endangered and vulnerable species where they are living on our country, both for our people and everyone on Earth.



**“We all begin as animals and we all return to our animal spirit when we die.”**

*Neville Gulaygulay*

*Right: Millingimbi Collection.*



# TARGET 6: RIGHT WAY FIRE



## DOW

### A Rembarrnga and Dalabon ritual of fire

When the time for early burning was finished and it was time to take special care with fire in the late dry season, old people from the Rembarrnga and Dalabon people used to make a public ritual called Dow around a special big bonfire.

That ritual was nearly lost but we brought it back in 2016.

Dow was one way our old people taught young people how to follow right way burning and look after the forest, sugarbag and all the other animals.



**FAIR**  
ganga manymak



**GOAL:** The right people burning country at the right time with a strong carbon business, and there are plenty of healthy sugarbag, emu and kangaroo.





# “Fire is our most powerful tool for land management.”

When we use fire properly it makes the land come alive again. When the right people burn in the right places, at the right time and in the right way, it protects the country from late dry season wildfires that can cover huge areas.

Our good early dry season fires are patchy fires — small fires that don't scorch the canopy and link up to make a pattern of burned fire breaks. There is still plenty of food for animals. Sugarbag bees are finding the flowers they need to fill their nests with honey. The green grass that grows after early fires make kangaroos and wallabies fat. After bad fires food for animals is gone, nesting hollows for birds, bandicoots and possums are destroyed and trees may take several seasons to recover.

But bad fires also harm the whole planet. They produce far more greenhouse gases than our good early dry season fires.

So we are bringing back our traditional fire management but in a new way to look after our country and the world. We use helicopters and vehicles but we are working to the same outcomes as our ancestors.

We have joined with other groups to earn money from reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This is making jobs for our people and helping to fund other parts of our healthy country work.

Burning brings people together — rangers must talk to the right people to make our annual fire plans. ASRAC supports fire management by people who are living on country.

**RIGHT WAY BURNING IS STRONG MEDICINE FOR OUR COUNTRY**

## TARGET 7: GURRUWILING (THE ARAFURA SWAMP)



Gurruwiling, also known as the Arafura Swamp, is rich in resources and stories. It is an area shared by many clans. These clans each speak for their particular areas and all of us rely on the swamp for our living. The major totem for Gurruwiling is the crocodile. Our clans have many different totems, mostly associated with animal and plants of the swamp but also connecting to other natural phenomena, like rainbows, the sun and stars as well as spirit beings.

Gurruwiling is the largest freshwater ecosystem in Arnhem Land and the largest paperbark swamp in Australia. The swamp and catchment is listed as an Australian wetland of national importance and much of it is listed on The Register of the National Estate. The swamp is classified as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA).

Gurruwiling is a major breeding area for magpie geese and large numbers of water birds, which occur in internationally significant numbers.

Gurruwiling includes many grassy plains and networks of lagoons full of important food plants like the water lily and water chestnut and important food animals like fish, long-necked turtle and magpie geese.

Habitat that sustains magpie geese is declining all across North Australia. This means that Gurruwiling is an increasingly important stronghold for this species. The story of the movie *Ten Canoes* is built around the importance of magpie geese in our history and our future.

We also have the Little Banded Rainbow fish, a species that is only found in the swamp. Our waterways are lined with the giant palm *Corypha elata*, which we will call *Gulwirri* or *Balangulo*. This spectacular plant has sacred symbolism.

We have many different paperbarks covering huge areas. We have chosen the leaves and flowers of the paperbark known as *Melaleuca viridiflora* as our Arafura Swamp Rangers symbol. Everyone uses it for many things — like cooking, tools, shelter and washing.

The paperbark is not a totem that belongs to any particular ceremonies or clans and it grows on everyone's country. In that way it is a public symbol of us coming together, working towards healthy country.

# The pulsing heart of our homelands

The swamp holds our history and our future.

We gather our traditional foods there and we look to the swamp for opportunities to create employment for our people into the future.

For many years we have been involved in harvesting crocodile eggs for others to incubate and grow for the meat and skin trade. But now we are stepping up into the industry, building our own facility in Ramingining to grow out hatchlings. Image (right) Crocodile eggs were always one of our seasonal food sources. But today we gather eggs mostly to build our local economy. The hatchlings from these eggs will be grown on until they are the right size for the skin and meat trade. The oar seen in this picture is not for paddling — it's there to protect the rangers from the mother crocodile.

The spectacular beauty of the swamp and its wildlife offers opportunities for tourism development for landowners.

Our future and that of the swamp are locked together. We must keep the swamp healthy if we are to enjoy spiritual health, physical health and develop a healthy economy.

In the long term a small rise in global sea levels could drive saltwater into the swamp and destroy it. Freshwater and the quality and abundance of that water is the key to the nature of the Arafura Swamp.

The swamp is under pressure.



Traditional owners and rangers have struggled to deal with the potentially catastrophic invasion by the weeds mimosa and olive hymenachne.

Feral pigs and buffalo are causing huge damage to the swamp. Pigs are rooting up the waterways and destroying our important foods.

There are many, many buffalo on the swamp and their paths are making channels, causing saltwater to intrude into our freshwater swamp. The Arafura Swamp Rangers are the frontline in helping landowners defend the swamp from natural and man-made threats.

**POOR**  
yatjkurr



**GOAL:** Families are sharing Gurruwiling, enjoying plenty of water lilies, longneck turtle, fish and magpie geese to eat and we can always dig a hole in the right place to drink clean water.

## TARGET 8: OUR SALTWATER COUNTRY

Since the beginning our old people have looked after saltwater country through ceremony, protecting sacred sites and following our Rom. The sea gives us fish, crabs, oysters, stingray and dugong in the right seasons.

Our Rom tells us to take only what we need — not too much. But now we no longer control what is taken from our saltwater country and this has affected the health of that country. Commercial fishermen who use nets are taking too much. We know because fish populations are going down. Commercial fishermen come for barramundi (and threadfin salmon) but their nets also kill many tonnes of other sea animals which are left to rot and which change the behaviour of crocodiles and make them more dangerous.

Balanda laws say where and how fishermen can fish — the fishermen sometimes do the right things and sometimes the wrong things and can take too much. We can't stop the Government giving out licences to commercial fishers but we can build a strong saltwater ranger program that watches out for all kinds of illegal behaviour.

If fishermen anchor their boats on sacred sites in the sea it's like we are being speared — people can become sick or die. The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority registered our sites and put out marker buoys. Many of these get dragged around by wind and tide.

Fishermen are now obliged to have the positions of our sites marked on their GPS and charts. Our sea rangers are being trained with enforcement skills by the Fisheries Branch so they use cameras and GPS to provide the evidence needed to take fishermen to court and force them to at least stay within the Balanda law.



Our sea rangers now have the skills to produce professional saltwater patrol reports. They are ready for stronger powers to manage what happens in the sea and on the areas where saltwater and freshwater mix.

From the deep water beyond the tidal zone, saltwater influence extends past the beach and well inland, south to the narrow entrance of the freshwater basin of the swamp.

In the mangrove areas we see small areas of dead mangroves. We know that in the Gulf of Carpentaria huge areas of mangroves are being lost to what is called “die back”. We must increase monitoring of our mangrove areas because they are the heart and lungs of our waterways.

We need to make it easier to get our ranger vessel out on patrol and have the resources to maintain our equipment in a harsh working environment. We need better equipment.

As well as monitoring the behaviour of fishermen and what is happening with mangroves, our sea rangers want to run a strong monitoring program to watch what is happening with sea turtles and especially see what impact pigs may be having on turtle nests. On Western Cape York this is a huge problem.

Our beaches once were clean but now all kind of rubbish drifts onto our shores from passing vessels and even from overseas — not just bottles and other rubbish but ghost nets as well. We want to keep our saltwater country clean and healthy, our sites protected and to get our people out onto country.

**GOOD**  
manymak



**GOAL:** We are working with neighbouring clans and ranger groups to look after our saltwater country and there are plenty of healthy stingray and oysters.

# Yolngu law is one law ... for land and for sea

In Yolngu Rom there is no difference in the law of the land and the law of the sea.

On the land our rights are protected by the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and we have strong control of what can happen there, who can visit and what they can do.

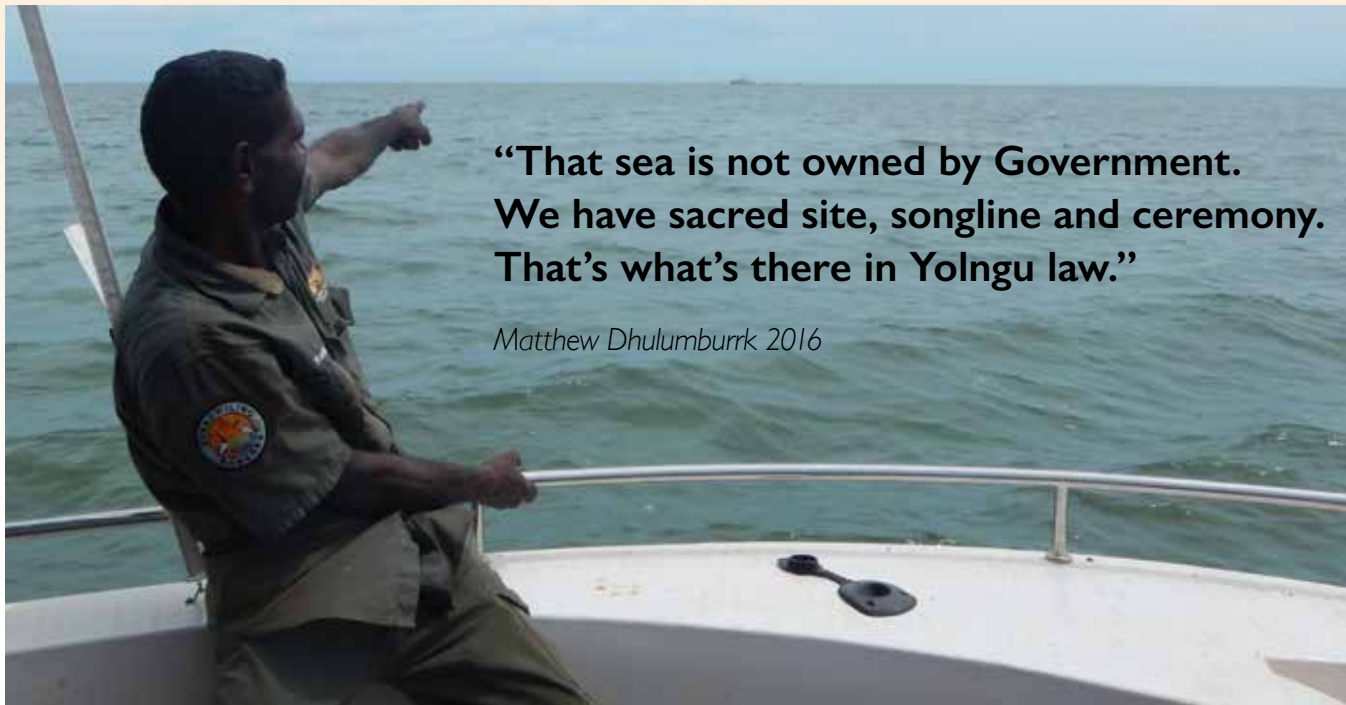
But Balanda have made one law for land and another for sea country and a muddy, unclear mix of law for the inter-tidal zone and inshore waters.

We were the first people to take their claims for control of saltwater country to the Aboriginal Land Commissioner when we presented a claim for sea-closure in the Milingimbi and Glyde River area. This historic claim book was written

38 years ago by Matthew Dhulumburrk and Mark Dreyfus, each an expert in the law of their own cultures.

Mr Justice Toohey recommended that the closure be granted, recognising that our law extends into the sea. His judgment pointed to our concerns for the desecration of sacred sites. He said:

*It may be that the need to obtain permission was for the protection of the visitor as well as the maintenance of rights of the residents. It was to ensure not only that sacred places were not desecrated but also that visitors were warned of those places so that they might avoid the dangers inherent in them (Toohey 1981).*



**“That sea is not owned by Government.  
We have sacred site, songline and ceremony.  
That’s what’s there in Yolngu law.”**

*Matthew Dhulumburrk 2016*

Justice Toohey also accepted that Aboriginal people were concerned that the activities of commercial fishermen, especially around the Glyde River, were a danger to the food supply for Aboriginal people and a threat to places and things of totemic importance, including totemic fish and crocodiles of particular importance to some clans. Also, Aboriginal people, he said, were concerned about the possible pollution of the shoreline and potential damage to sacred sites on land because of the activities of commercial fishermen.

But the judgment did not give us control over the entry of fisherman onto our waters and the taking of our fish without our permission. As Justice Toohey wrote:

*Current holders of commercial fishing licences will not be disadvantaged by the sea closure because they can continue fishing, and can continue to have their licences renewed, although they are required to notify the Northern Land Council each time they enter and engage in fishing within the closed sea area.*

# TARGET 9: OUR FRESHWATER COUNTRY

A long time ago our freshwater places were much healthier than they are today.

By the end of the nineteenth century buffalo had spread everywhere in Arnhem Land. In the 1890s Balanda arrived with cattle and guns to establish Florida Station in the swamp.

The Balanda eventually left, but buffalo and some scrub cattle stayed. Together with feral pigs (which did not arrive until late in the twentieth century) they are largely responsible for the poor quality of our freshwater places today.

Water is a cultural thing, it is a ceremonial and spiritual thing. Each clan has its own special water places, home of the spirits of the long dead and of the yet unborn.

Healthy freshwater places give us important bush tucker — water lilies, the water chestnuts *Eleocharis* and many species of fish, turtles and crayfish are there for us.



When our rivers and creeks are healthy the banks are stable and the right trees and bushes are growing there. Strong-flowing healthy springs feed the rivers and creeks and maintain the waters of the swamp through the late dry season. The Goyder River feeds the swamp with freshwater from the catchment and is very important culturally and spiritually.

Bringing our freshwater places back to health is a big job but we must work towards it because water is life.



**POOR**  
yatjkurr



**GOAL:** Our freshwater places have clear water that smells clean and we can find plenty of water lilies, water chestnut, fish and turtle.

# TARGET 10: OUR WOODLAND COUNTRY

Our woodland plant communities are diverse — from the dense paperbarks within the swamp, to open levee Melaleuca viridiflora woodland at the margins of the swamp and into the uplands.

Further away from the coast we have some woodlands dominated by Corymbia latifolia and far inland we find isolated, dense patches of lancewood in dry savannah country. The cypress pine is very important to us as it shows us where there is underground water. The cypress doesn't like fire and if it dies we worry because it means the water is gone or that there is bad fire.

But most of our area is made up of the taller woodlands of Darwin stringybark and woollybutt. These are very important trees for us. The stringybark is Dhuwa moiety and we call it Gardayka. The woollybutt is Yirritja moiety and we call it Badarr. Badarr bark changes color inside with the seasons and the bark is waterproof so we can always make a fire even in the wet.

But it is the flowering of the forests of Badarr and Gardayka that are most important for many species of sugarbag bees that are celebrated in song and ceremony. When we go hunting with our children they always ask for sugarbag.

To keep the woodlands healthy and feeding the sugarbag we must burn country in the right way, at the right time, keeping the flames away from high in the trees. Very hot fires in the late dry season can badly affect the flowering of the woodland species.

We have rated the health of our woodlands as ganga manymak or fair — but in fact it is going through a slow recovery from one of the strongest cyclones in recent decades.

**When we go hunting with our children they always ask for sugarbag. We must keep burning in the right way so we will always be able to make them happy with lots of sugarbag.**

Animals like glider possums, ringtail possums, many birds, bats and lizards have lost important nesting habitat.

Fallen timber everywhere makes it very difficult to get into country to manage fire — both for early burning and controlling late dry season wildfire.

The money we earn from greenhouse gas emissions abatement work enables us to use helicopters to take fire where it needs to be in the early dry season.

Right way fire also protects our woodland fruit trees so we get good harvests of green plum, billy goat plum and other bush fruits. Right way fire also protects the native cypress pine which began to suffer from late dry season fires as people were drawn off country during the 20th century into the missions and away from responsibilities controlling fire.

It will be a slow road to recovery but we have the tools and the techniques to lift the woodlands back to being a target that is manymak — in good health.



**FAIR**  
ganga manymak



**GOAL:** All the right plants are growing and flowering together in our woodlands so native bees are making plenty of sugar bag, with sugar glider, possum, echidna, night owl and bats nesting in hollow logs.

## TARGET II: OUR JUNGLES

Most of the jungle in our area is dry jungle found on the escarpment around Gurruwiling that we call bukul-nah, but we also have wet jungle patches around our springs, wetlands and rivers.

Jungles provide plenty of shade and plenty of tucker. Inside we can find cool springs, tall banyan trees and plenty of foods. There are many different plants in the jungle that we don't find anywhere else.



Our jungle is especially important for women and they have strong knowledge for these areas, including bush foods, materials and medicines and sacred knowledge. Women visit the jungle to collect yams and fruits, including many different yams, red and orange berries, bush peanut and arenga palm. The jungle gives us fire sticks, spears (wada wada, makarunga, bodi), Bombax wood for carvings and string from the banyans. We hunt for echidna, python, flying fox, rock wallaby and birds such as pigeon.

The biggest problems for jungle are wildfires, buffalo and pigs, and weeds. Hot fires make our jungles smaller and thinner.

Traditional owners and djungkayi need to do small early season protection burns in the woodlands around our jungles to stop late season wild fires. We also need to manage weeds like mission grass around the edges because they can add fuel for fires.

Pigs and buffalo also like jungle and the yams that grow there. They cause a lot of damage to jungle around springs where a lot of our important plants grow. We are also worried about impacts of cane toads and invasive ants. Cane toads are dangerous for our native animals that eat them. We are also worried about them fouling the spring water and making us sick when we drink it.

We also know that our jungle is important for its conservation significance. In our area, nine different animals and four plants are listed as either vulnerable or endangered and another three animals and 41 plants are considered rare. All of the vulnerable plants are found in our jungle.



**FAIR**  
ganga manymak



**GOAL:** Our jungle has lots of tucker, shade and clean water and are the same size as they are today with healthier plants and animals.



## TARGET 12: OUR ROCK COUNTRY

We call the rocky high ground all around Gurruwiling (Arafura Swamp) bukul-nah and larr. It is an important home for rock wallaby, echidna, possum, flying fox, python and blue tongue. There are also plenty of important plants like the spear tree, bush potato and berries and plums. Most of our escarpment country is found in the catchment area for Gurruwiling and includes the Parsons and Mitchell Ranges.

From this high ground our old people were able to look out over the swamp to watch for smoke as signals of people approaching and also showing where people were hunting on country. From the high ground we are still able to see what is happening in the swamp as it changes with the seasons.

Here we find spinifex, some jungle springs and waterfalls. This includes the famous stone quarry of Ngilipidji where for thousands of years Wagilak and Rittharngu craftsmen have made stone tools to be traded over a huge region in this part of north Australia.

Much of the water that feeds our rivers and Gurruwiling comes down from the ranges. But big fires can also start in rough and rugged country where it is very hard to control.

Many of the plants in the rock country do not tolerate repeated late hot fire. Old people knew this and controlled burning in the rock country very carefully, regularly reducing fuels by burning small areas as they walked around in the early dry season.

We want to revive the tradition of walking and burning across this upland area from Ngilipidji to Donydji and maybe even as far as Ngukurr to the east and Barrapunta to the west.

Bukul-nah and larr are big areas and hard to get into because much is rough and rugged. We need better access for management so we can visit our country and carry out our cultural responsibilities. We need some roads and tracks so we can burn in the right way and keep an eye on weeds and feral animals. Donkeys and brumbies come in across this country. But we know that roads will open this area up to other threats like the wrong visitors — so while making access easier for our people we must strengthen our control over access by wrong people.

Our biggest worry is the threat of mining. More than 30 years ago Rittharngu and Wagilak people made a short film called “Still You Keep Asking, Asking”, saying we were sick from being asked to let mining into our homelands.

We still keep saying no to mining but still they keep coming back and asking, asking. If mining ever happens there is a big concern about the impact it will also have on all our country.



Above: Ngilipidji stone spear quarry by Jardi Ashley (decd).

**GOOD**  
manymak



**GOAL:** All the right animals and plants are healthy, and we have good access to look after our escarpment country and there is no mining.

# Our target strategies



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## TARGET 1: CULTURAL PLACES

**POOR**  
yatjkurr



**GOAL:** Ceremonies are being held by the right people on the right country and our cultural places are clean, protected and respected by all.

- STRATEGIES**
- Work with clans and partners to collect information and map culturally significant sites and produce a cultural map with clan estates, sites and connections.
  - By 2020 we will have developed a database for all our cultural and natural knowledge and information, and by 2022 it will accessible and safe in a cultural centre.
  - Support a cultural program with activities such as on-country cultural camps at least annually and work with our education partners to provide high quality both-way education at community and homeland schools.
  - ASRAC will develop a Visitor Management Plan that addresses a permit system, protocols, patrolling, signage, surveillance, enforcement and tourism.

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## TARGET 2: STORIES, LANGUAGE AND ROM

**FAIR**  
ganga manymak



**GOAL:** Our knowledge is recorded and accessible to us and kept alive by young people and old people walking and talking on country.

- STRATEGIES**
- Support a cultural program with activities such as on-country cultural camps at least annually and work with our education partners to provide high quality both-way education at community and homeland schools.
  - By 2020 we will have developed a database for all our cultural and natural knowledge and information, and by 2022 it will accessible and safe in a cultural centre.
  - By 2018 at least a third of our rangers will be women who are well-supported and trained.

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## TARGET 3: PEOPLE ON COUNTRY

**FAIR**  
ganga manymak



**GOAL:** Country is full up with the right people and elders are happy for family who enjoy good lives.

- STRATEGIES**
- Continue through ASRAC, to grow our crocodile and carbon business and investigate new sustainable businesses such as tourism, arts and crafts, wildlife enterprise, commercial fishing, mustering and an abattoir.
  - Provide support, infrastructure and year-round access for new and existing satellite ranger bases, so rangers and their families can operate from them effectively.
  - Support a cultural program with activities such as on-country cultural camps at least annually and work with our education partners to provide high quality both-way education at community and homeland schools.
  - ASRAC will work with landowners to explore the option of dedicating country as an Indigenous Protected Area, and within 5 years ASRAC will raise sufficient funds through seeking grants, gifts, bequests and undertaking fee-for-service work to implement the Healthy Country Plan strategies.

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## TARGET 4: BOTH-WAY EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE

**POOR**  
yatjkurr



**GOAL:** Everyone respects Rom and we have the skills and knowledge to have professional jobs and our culture.

- STRATEGIES**
- Support a cultural program with activities such as on-country cultural camps at least annually and work with our education partners to provide high quality both-way education at community and homeland schools.
  - Plan and implement a career pathway program for, and beyond, rangers.
  - By 2020 we will have developed a database for all our cultural and natural knowledge and information, and by 2022 it will accessible and safe in a cultural centre.
  - Develop a monitoring program using both-way science with relevant partners.

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## TARGET 5: BUSH TUCKER AND NATIVE WILDLIFE

GOOD  
manymak



**GOAL:** People are protecting their malargatji (totems) and preparing and sharing food the right way, which is plentiful, fat and tastes good.

### STRATEGIES

- Make an ASRAC plants and animals book and produce a Seasonal Calendar.
- Continue to work with scientists to better understand environmental impacts, their causes and potential solutions.
- Support a cultural program with activities such as on-country cultural camps at least annually and work with our education partners to provide high quality both-way education at community and homeland schools.
- The rangers will engage the community and develop an awareness program and materials about key threats to country and management issues.
- Work with partners to develop a strategy to increase populations of important plants and animals where there are not as many as their used to be (for example, captive rearing and reintroduction of Emus, seed collection and revegetation).

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## TARGET 6: RIGHT WAY FIRE

FAIR  
ganga manymak



**GOAL:** The right people burning country at the right time with a strong carbon business, and there are plenty of healthy sugarbag, emu and kangaroo.

### STRATEGIES

- Continue and expand the fire management program and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Fire Management Plan and Procedures consistent with carbon abatement opportunities and cultural priorities.
- Provide support, infrastructure and year round access for new and existing satellite ranger bases, so rangers and their families can operate from them effectively.
- Continue through ASRAC, to grow our crocodile and carbon business and investigate new sustainable businesses such as tourism, arts and crafts, wildlife enterprise, commercial fishing, mustering and an abattoir.
- Develop a monitoring program using both-way science with relevant partners.

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## TARGET 7: GURRUWILING (THE ARAFURA SWAMP)

POOR  
yatjokurr



**GOAL:** Families are sharing Gurruwiling, enjoying plenty of water lilies, longneck turtle, fish and magpie geese to eat and we can always dig a hole in the right place to drink clean water.

- STRATEGIES**
- Continue and expand the feral animal and weed control programs and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Weed and Feral Animal Management Plan and Procedures.
  - Continue and expand the fire management program and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Fire Management Plan and Procedures consistent with carbon abatement opportunities and cultural priorities.
  - ASRAC will develop a Visitor Management Plan that addresses a permit system, protocols, patrolling, signage, surveillance, enforcement and tourism. Provide support, infrastructure and year-round access for new and existing satellite ranger bases, so rangers and their families can operate from them effectively.
  - Continue to work with scientists to better understand environmental impacts, their causes and potential solutions.
  - Develop a monitoring program using both-way science with relevant partners.

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## TARGET 8: OUR SALTWATER COUNTRY

GOOD  
manymak



**GOAL:** We are working with neighbouring clans and ranger groups to look after our saltwater country and there are plenty of healthy stingray and oysters.

- STRATEGIES**
- ASRAC will work with stakeholders to develop a fisheries management plan addressing enforcement powers for Yolngu sea rangers.
  - Continue and expand the feral animal and weed control programs and by 2018 complete the 5 year ASRAC Weed and Feral Animal Management Plan and Procedures.
  - Continue and expand the fire management program and by 2018 complete the 5 year ASRAC Fire Management Plan and Procedures consistent with carbon abatement opportunities and cultural priorities.
  - ASRAC will develop a Visitor Management Plan that addresses a permit system, protocols, patrolling, signage, surveillance, enforcement and tourism.
  - Provide support, infrastructure and year round access for new and existing satellite ranger bases, so rangers and their families can operate from them effectively.
  - Continue to work with scientists to better understand environmental impacts, their causes and potential solutions.
  - Develop a monitoring program using both-way science with relevant partners.
  - Continue through ASRAC, to grow our crocodile and carbon business and investigate new sustainable businesses such as tourism, arts and crafts, wildlife enterprise, commercial fishing, mustering and an abattoir.

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## TARGET 9: OUR FRESHWATER COUNTRY

POOR  
yatjkurr



**GOAL:** Our freshwater places have clear water that smells clean and we can find plenty of water lilies, water chestnut, fish and turtle.

- STRATEGIES**
- Continue and expand the feral animal and weed control programs and by 2018 complete the 5 year ASRAC Weed and Feral Animal Management Plan and Procedures.
  - Continue and expand the fire management program and by 2018 complete the 5 year ASRAC Fire Management Plan and Procedures consistent with carbon abatement opportunities and cultural priorities.
  - ASRAC will develop a Visitor Management Plan that addresses a permit system, protocols, patrolling, signage, surveillance, enforcement and tourism.
  - Provide support, infrastructure and year round access for new and existing satellite ranger bases, so rangers and their families can operate from them effectively.
  - Continue to work with scientists to better understand environmental impacts, their causes and potential solutions.
  - Develop a monitoring program using both-way science with relevant partners.

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## TARGET 10: OUR WOODLAND COUNTRY

FAIR  
ganga manymak



**GOAL:** All the right plants are growing and flowering together in our woodlands so native bees are making plenty of sugar bag, with sugar glider, possum, echidna, night owl and bats nesting in hollow logs.

- STRATEGIES**
- Continue and expand the feral animal and weed control programs and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Weed and Feral Animal Management Plan and Procedures.
  - Continue and expand the fire management program and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Fire Management Plan and Procedures consistent with carbon abatement opportunities and cultural priorities.
  - ASRAC will develop a Visitor Management Plan that addresses a permit system, protocols, patrolling, signage, surveillance, enforcement and tourism.
  - Provide support, infrastructure and year-round access for new and existing satellite ranger bases, so rangers and their families can operate from them effectively.
  - Continue to work with scientists to better understand environmental impacts, their causes and potential solutions.
  - Develop a monitoring program using both-way science with relevant partners.





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## TARGET 11: OUR JUNGLES

FAIR  
ganga manymak



**GOAL:** Our jungle has lots of tucker, shade and clean water and are the same size as they are today with healthier plants and animals.

- STRATEGIES**
- Continue and expand the feral animal and weed control programs and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Weed and Feral Animal Management Plan and Procedures.
  - Continue and expand the fire management program and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Fire Management Plan and Procedures consistent with carbon abatement opportunities and cultural priorities.
  - ASRAC will develop a Visitor Management Plan that addresses a permit system, protocols, patrolling, signage, surveillance, enforcement and tourism.
  - Provide support, infrastructure and year-round access for new and existing satellite ranger bases, so rangers and their families can operate from them effectively.
  - Continue to work with scientists to better understand environmental impacts, their causes and potential solutions.
  - Develop a monitoring program using both-way science with relevant partners.

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## TARGET 12: OUR ROCK COUNTRY

GOOD  
manymak



**GOAL:** All the right animals and plants are healthy, and we have good access to look after our escarpment country and there is no mining.

- STRATEGIES**
- Continue and expand the feral animal and weed control programs and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Weed and Feral Animal Management Plan and Procedures.
  - Continue and expand the fire management program and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Fire Management Plan and Procedures consistent with carbon abatement opportunities and cultural priorities.
  - ASRAC will develop a Visitor Management Plan that addresses a permit system, protocols, patrolling, signage, surveillance, enforcement and tourism.
  - Provide support, infrastructure and year-round access for new and existing satellite ranger bases, so rangers and their families can operate from them effectively.
  - Continue to work with scientists to better understand environmental impacts, their causes and potential solutions.
  - Develop a monitoring program using both-way science with relevant partners.

# Threats to country and our vision

**Rubbish**  
**Erosion**  
**Climate change**  
**Overharvest**  
**Not having schools on outstations**  
**Gambling**  
**Drugs and alcohol**  
**Young people not listening to elders**  
**Lack of infrastructure and services**  
**Ghost nets and sea debris**  
**Foreign fishing vessels**  
**Disease from overseas**  
**Losing stories and culture**  
**Buffalo**  
**Pigs**  
**Feral cats**  
**Cane toads**  
**Donkeys and horses**  
**Big-headed ants**  
**Problem animals**  
**Balanda running their own business on country without Yolngu contractors**  
**Not eating bush tucker**  
**Lack of communication and community awareness**  
**Road conditions and lack of access to country**  
**Not enough training resources**  
**Not enough jobs for Yolngu**  
**Pollution**  
**Wrong people overfishing**  
**Lack of money**  
**Spending money the wrong way**  
**Mimosa**  
**Olive Hymenachne**  
**Gamba grass**

We have identified the things that we really care about on country in the first part of this plan.

We have decided how healthy they are at present — whether they are manymak, ganga manymak or yatjkurr.

Against each target we have set our goals — how we want to change the condition of the targets in the next 10 years.

If we succeed in reaching our goals we should have achieved our vision for healthy country and people, for knowledge, ceremony and language.

But there are threats standing in the way as we follow our road map towards our vision. To achieve our targets we must reduce the many threats we face. To make our targets healthier we have to fix these problems.

The table on the next page shows the top 12 threats we identified in our planning process and what we decided are the highest threats. We ranked each threat against each of our targets and decided how big the problem was; mirrithirri yatjkurr is very high, yatjkurr is high, ganga yatjkurr is medium and ganga manymak is low. When we ranked these threats we talked about how much of the target is affected by the threat (scope) how bad the damage is (severity) and if we could fix the threat (reversibility). This helps us prioritise our work and how the implementation of our strategies will reduce the most critical threats. There are some threats that are beyond our control. For example, when we started this planning process the huge category four Cyclone Lam hit the Arafura Swamp region. It caused terrible damage to our country even a long way into the inland.

In some areas we suffered a huge loss of the trees in our woodlands and forests. This has caused more problems such as fire and weed invasions. The tangle of big logs lying on the ground has made it hard to travel through the bush.

We believe that increasing numbers of cyclones and stronger cyclones are part of what is happening with climate change.

Climate change is another huge problem for the future. We worry about how this is changing the rhythm of our seasons. Rising sea levels will push saltwater towards the swamp and we already see this happening. It happened in the past. Four thousand years ago when sea levels were higher the swamp was not freshwater but brackish in parts and salty in others.

Close to the coast buffalo are adding the problem by making channels that saltwater can follow.

We cannot stop climate change by ourselves but we are doing our part by managing fire better and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We can't stop natural disasters like cyclones but we can have a plan to help country become healthy again.

We did a lot of work to decide what are the major threats. This helps us decide where to apply our resources to get the best healthy country outcomes.

In the following section the 11 main threats are ranked from highest threats to lowest and we show the strategies that we think can best reduce the threats.

On this page we have listed all the threats we have identified, including ones we have not written about at length in this plan.

# TOP 12 THREATS

TARGETS	Cultural places	Stories, language and Rom	Wrong people on country	Both-way education and knowledge	Bush tucker and native wildlife	Right way fire	Gurruwil-ing (The Arafura Swamp)	Our saltwater country	Our fresh-water country	Our woodland country	Jungles	Our rock country	SUMMARY THREAT RATING
Loss of respect for Rom and elders	VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr		LOW Ganga Manymuk							VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr
Feral animals	HIGH Yatjkurr				VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr		VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr
Wrong people on country	HIGH Yatjkurr				LOW Ganga Manymuk	LOW Ganga Manymuk	LOW Ganga Manymuk	HIGH Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr		MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr
Balanda rules always changing	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr									HIGH Yatjkurr
Bad fire					HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	LOW Ganga Manymuk		MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	LOW Ganga Manymuk	HIGH Yatjkurr
Empty country	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr		MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr
Mining and other development	HIGH Yatjkurr				LOW Ganga Manymuk		MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	LOW Ganga Manymuk			HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr
Lack of jobs on country			HIGH Yatjkurr										MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr
Commercial fishing								HIGH Yatjkurr					MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr
Saltwater intrusion							HIGH Yatjkurr		MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr				MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr
Weeds					MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr		MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	LOW Ganga Manymuk	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	LOW Ganga Manymuk	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr
Erosion									HIGH Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr		MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr
SUMMARY TARGET RATING	VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr



## THREAT I: LOSS OF RESPECT FOR ROM AND ELDERS

Indigenous people all over the world are struggling to keep their culture alive and we are no different.

Television, Facebook and many other things in our communities are coming from outside and leading our children and many adults away from our culture — leading them into the middle of nowhere.

Drugs are coming into the community. People are heading to Darwin chasing alcohol and not listening to and respecting elders.

We want our children to learn all the skills they need to participate in the mainstream but they shouldn't have to give up their culture to do that. That's what the government was trying to do to us back when they had policies called "assimilation" in the 1960s.

Our elders should be invited in to bring culture into the school and be paid as experts of knowledge and law. We want our languages to have a place in school. And we want stronger support for two-way learning schools on outstations. Being on the right country connects young people to country in a way that makes respecting elders meaningful.

As rangers we have to think of ways to support culture and Rom outside of school. Our programs can support culture camps, language camps for family groups or right across the community. We can support ceremony in many ways.

But perhaps most importantly as rangers we need to be role models to show how to live with two-way knowledge, to value the things from Balanda knowledge systems that can support our vision of having healthy culture on healthy country.

When we are doing our jobs we have to make sure we always act with respect for culture and for law. As role models we can support the struggle to keep law and culture strong.



VERY HIGH  
Mirrithirri  
Yatjkurr



THREAT GOAL:

Children respect their country and elders; they are independent, looking after their culture and building strong futures.

## THREAT 2: FERAL ANIMALS

Our biggest feral animal problem is the buffalo. We can see a lot of damage to country, especially our freshwater places. Buffalo make dirty wallows and their hard hoofs and “buffalo roads” cause erosion and wash-aways by their impact on topsoil and grasses.

Their tracks are also creating channels in the swamp that increase saltwater intrusion into freshwater areas. Buffalo are impacting on the health of our important plants and animals. Crocodiles, barramundi, freshwater turtles and other wildlife are suffering, and many waterbirds, including magpie geese, have had their habitat damaged.

We are also very worried about how buffalo are damaging our sacred springs. They have fouled the waters with their trampling and dung. Their rubbing is killing the trees. Buffalo also eat a lot of grasses and other plants, that other native wildlife need to be healthy. Their trampling and disturbance causes weeds to spread through our country.

But buffalo are also an important source of food for our communities so we don't want to get rid of them completely. We need to come up with smart ways to manage the population and their impact on country.

Buffalo are a big problem everywhere but we think pigs are an even bigger threat than buffalo for the swamplands. Not only do they cause damage to our freshwater places, they also root up and eat our important bush food plants such as lilies, water chestnut and yams. The pugging of wet ground damages the plants. Pigs make it hard for us to

access our rivers and billabongs for swimming, fishing and fresh drinking water.

Cane toads are a huge worry for us as there are so many and they have spread so quickly though all our waterways and in many places we can no longer find clean fresh water to drink. We need scientists to come up with some kind of biological control — there is nothing we can do to control cane toad by ourselves.

There are other feral animals that we need to find out more about. We know that feral cats are a big problem for our native wildlife and we need to find out more about big headed ants, yellow crazy ants and the big impacts they can have on our country. .



**VERY HIGH**  
Mirrithirri  
Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:**

In ten years time — through musters, culls and safari businesses — we will have reduced the buffalo population by half. A local butcher will provide cheap, fresh meat for the community. Also, our special places (culturally and ecologically) will be protected from pigs.

## FERAL ANIMALS THREAT RATINGS

<b>THREATS</b>	<b>TARGETS</b>	Cultural places	Stories, language and Rom	Wrong people on country	Both-way education and knowledge	Bush tucker and native wildlife	Right way fire	Gurruwil-ing (The Arafura Swamp)	Our saltwater country	Our fresh-water country	Our woodland country	Jungles	Our rock country	<b>SUMMARY THREAT RATING</b>
Buffalo		HIGH Yatjkurr				HIGH Yatjkurr		VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr
Cane toads						VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr		HIGH Yatjkurr		VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr		HIGH Yatjkurr		VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr
Pigs		HIGH Yatjkurr				HIGH Yatjkurr		VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	LOW Ganga Manymuk	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr
Feral cats						HIGH Yatjkurr		MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr			MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr		MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr
Horses and donkeys								MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr		LOW Ganga Manymuk			LOW Ganga Manymuk	LOW Ganga Manymuk
<b>SUMMARY TARGET RATING</b>		HIGH Yatjkurr				HIGH Yatjkurr		VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	MEDIUM Ganga Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	HIGH Yatjkurr	VERY HIGH Mirrithirri Yatjkurr

## THREAT 3: WRONG PEOPLE ON COUNTRY

Wrong people on country is a problem that affects both land and sea country.

It's a problem that is getting much worse in the south of our management area where every year more and more tourists and other strangers are coming in from Katherine along the Central Arnhem Road. They often travel in convoy.

It's 800km from Katherine to Gove and there are no designated camping areas negotiated with landowners so many tourists just pull up and camp anywhere. We also worry about the ones who try to drive through in one day. That can be dangerous and we don't want strangers being hurt or killed on our country.

Some visitors show no respect. Last year a convoy of 50 little French cars went through to Gove and about a dozen were found off the road at Barrapunta outstation when no-one was there. They were found walking through empty houses and poking around in the private possessions of the people from Barrapunta. Some visitors think they can go anywhere.

Other strangers come through on the Top Road and down from Ramingining. We find pig shooters and other hunters on our lands with guns and quad bikes. We have illegal safari hunters. Some strangers come because of illegal trade in wildlife. Bird smugglers come stealing eggs of valuable birds and others are looking for fish like rainbow fish and reptiles.

Some balanda who come to work in our country and live at Ramingining don't show respect for landowners and go places without asking, or they ask the wrong people.



In the saltwater we still have problems with commercial fishers — a problem we have been complaining about for more than 40 years.

Strangers on country don't know the country and they don't know where our sacred sites are. When they damage our sites they can make us sick or get sick themselves.

We want people to be safe on country and country to be safe from wrong people in the wrong places.

Some balanda complain about the permit system and needing to get permission to be on Aboriginal land. But we are just like any landowners who are managing their country. You'll find plenty of locked gates on pastoral properties, and for good reason too.



We rangers and landowners need the power to control strangers on our country. The image above shows the wreckage from a convoy of 50 Citroen 2CV vehicles who, in August 2016 (with NLC permits), drove through to Gove on the Central Arnhem Road in an event called "2CV RAID ARNHEM 2016". But they ignored the rules and went into the outstation at Barrapunta.

HIGH  
Yatjkurr



THREAT GOAL: Visitors respect Traditional Owners and Rom and comply with our rules and protocols.



## THREAT 4: BALANDA RULES ALWAYS CHANGING

When governments change, policies and programs change. Nobody asks us what we value in policies and programs, what we think is working or not working, or how government can help us get a better future. Not just us, but Aboriginal people all over Australia are saying the same thing.

We are caught in the middle between governments as they turn one way and another.

Sometimes governments get it right. John Howard did a good thing when his government listened to our people and created the Working On Country Program — this was something that brought together our connection to country and our desperate wish to create employment for our people.

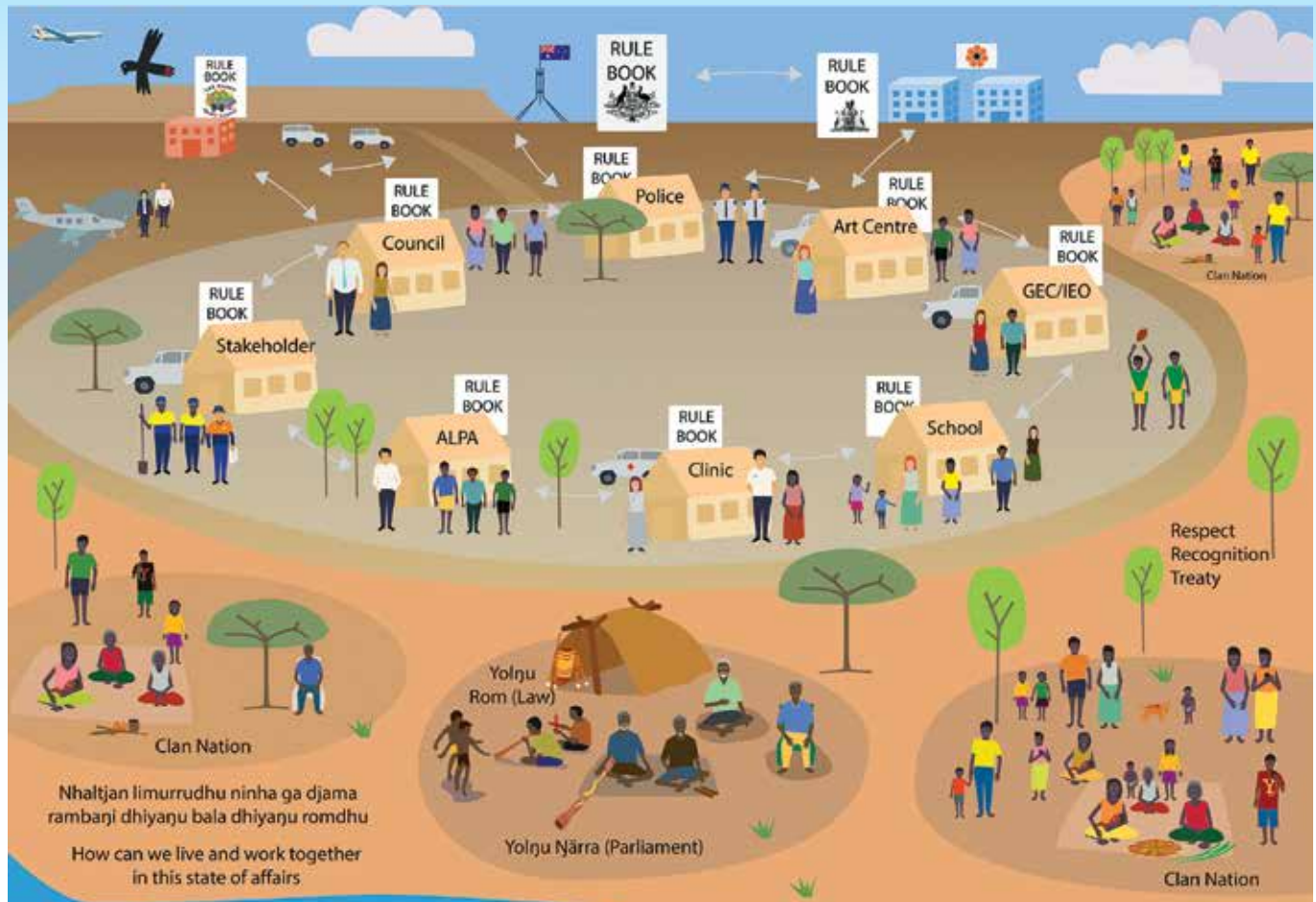
Working on Country survived a change in government, but we cannot be sure it is going to stay around. Still we keep asking, asking for government to make a commitment to this very successful program and still we are left wondering what will happen next year when contracts run out.

You can't grow a garden by turning a tap on for a few weeks and then turning it off again for weeks. In a little while everything in that garden will be dead and you'll have to start again. Our struggle to make jobs for country and for culture is like that.

We need to know what's coming so we can build on what we have done so far. This is perhaps our biggest problem — a lack of stability supporting the programs that we know are best and that we are most committed to making work.

While we need government support, we should be looking for other ways to get ahead.

So for the future perhaps we look to getting support in three ways — from government, from innovative eco-



friendly business development and from non-government organisations like we have done so far with Bush Heritage.

We hear a lot about capacity building but it's hard to build capacity when things keep changing. We need to know that

if we succeed through our commitments to our goals that success will be recognised and supported by government and non government partnerships into the future.

**HIGH**  
Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:**

**ASRAC is strong with good governance, business and funding so we can achieve our long-term dreams for country and create good jobs.**

## THREAT 5: BAD FIRE

When we stop burning in the right way country is going to become sick. Right-way burning, following in the footsteps of our ancestors is the only way to keep country healthy.

When we don't do proper early burning every year, grassy fuels build up in a way that when we get late dry season fires — from people or from lightning — it's just about impossible to stop those fires. They burn huge areas and may not stop until the rains come.

The fires are so much hotter than early dry season fires and go right up into the tops of the forest. In very hot fires the small branches are so badly affected trees have to start putting leaves out just from the trunk. It may take years for the trees to recover.

Trees may stop flowering properly for a few years and sugarbag will have no food. The birds which depend on flowering plants will suffer too. Fruit trees stop giving us plenty of fruit at the right time.

Nesting hollows for birds and goannas are destroyed by the late, hot fires. Hollow logs for bandicoots and goannas, snakes and lizards are burned up too.

When all the cover is burned it is easy for feral cats to find small mammals and lizards.

And when the country is burned too hard and too late there is very little grass to hold the soil in place when the big rains come. Soil is washed away and creates sheet and

gully erosion in some places and the soil starts to fill up our billabongs and creeks. Freshwater habitat for fish and other animals becomes unhealthy. .

Bad fire is also bad for greenhouse gas emissions and that's bad for our carbon business. In the swamp, bad fire can destroy grasses that are needed for crocodiles to build their nests. This is bad for our crocodile business.

Good fire makes country come alive again and bad fire kills it. Today we can use two toolboxes for right way burning. We can be out on country walking and burning like old people did. We can also use helicopters to cover long distances quickly to put in our burned breaks and to create the kind of patchy burns that leave tree tops unburned and with plenty of food and safe places for our animals to live.

Right way burning means following culture. It means always making sure that right people are making the decisions for burning, whether the burning is done by rangers in a helicopter or on the ground.

We need to make sure young people learn about right-way burning and that everyone understands that we shouldn't burn unless we have a good reason to burn. Old people did burn in the late dry season to hunt for kangaroo and to thin out scrubby country. But they did it carefully and so must we.

**HIGH  
Yatjkurr**



**THREAT GOAL:**

**There is no bad fire because we have a strong fire program and people are on country burning the right way.**

## THREAT 6: EMPTY COUNTRY

Empty country is lonely and sick without its people. Our old people talked to country. They weren't talking to themselves, they were talking to our ancestors and to the first beings, the Wongarr. All these ancestors are still there in the land and the water, in the sacred waterholes and dreaming places. The country is alive.

In our belief, the wongarr send us what we need from the country and keep the country in balance. When we are not there following our customary management, country is getting out of balance — and so are we.

But many new things are putting country out of balance. Things like weeds and feral animals are new and can only be fixed by our hard work and commitment.

Without our commitment to the right people being on country at the right time our fire goes out of balance and country gets sick.

Country needs our eyes and ears to watch out for trespassers and activities that are illegal in both Balanda and Yolngu law.

Many things have changed since Balanda came to this country. We are in the modern world and being on country needs things that are part of that modern world. We need to maintain our roads and airstrips to keep access open. We need to create better access to places with no roads as we recover from Cyclone Lam closing off country.

We need to find resources to help people who can't access their country find ways to be there — at least some of the time. Our right-way burning program can help with this.

We have to push governments to restore and expand support for people living on country. Helping outstations, including new outstations, operate as satellite ranger bases with paid employment for people caring for country is one important strategic direction for us to take.

There are many things that make it hard for people to live on country and be there to care for it. One of the big ones for us is not having schools on our outstations. We will never give up the struggle to have two-way education for children on their country.

HIGH  
Yatjkurr



THREAT GOAL: Country is full up with the right people and elders are happy for family who enjoy good lives.

## THREAT 7: MINING

We've been watching mining development for a long time and it worries us.

What we see is not good. We have seen what happened to the country at the Gove Peninsula and in Kakadu National Park. At Borroloola we see a mountain of waste rock that is burning at the MacArthur River Mine and we know that people are afraid to eat fish from the river because poison is going into the waters.

We cannot trust governments and mining companies to make sure mine areas are "rehabilitated". A new report from the Australia Institute says that there are more than 60,000 mines that have been abandoned across Australia. The report says only a handful of mines have ever been fully rehabilitated.

So we have good reason to be afraid, afraid for the health of our country and our people, and for the effects on

culture that come with mining and royalties and clans fighting over money.

Royalties don't last long but healthy country is forever. Healthy country is our greatest resource. So much of the world's natural environment is going down and what we have here is precious.

Yet mining companies keep asking, asking.

HIGH  
Yatjkurr



THREAT GOAL: There is no bad mining or development in the Arafura Swamp area because people want healthy country and have good jobs.

## THREAT 8: LACK OF JOBS ON COUNTRY

Our old people lived off the country — they made everything they needed from it or traded things from their country for things from other places. Of course we can't go back to a lifestyle and economy like that. We have to find ways to support ourselves in a modern lifestyle

How can we use our country to make jobs on country for our people?

We don't want mining jobs destroying country, we don't want to chop the timber down for woodchip, we don't want to put so many buffalo and cattle on country that it becomes sick. This is a big problem for all the people in Arnhem Land and other remote communities and there is no easy and quick solution to this big problem.

Firstly we have to protect our country because that will be the foundation for our future development of jobs on healthy country.

We have to look to all the ways we can use country for jobs without destroying it. We have started earning an income in the crocodile industry. We can take this a lot further.

We can continue to develop jobs from fire. At the moment we make money and jobs from reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In future these carbon opportunities may expand with sequestration — locking up carbon in forests through right-way fire.

At the moment Balanda are running the tourism on our lands. We need our younger people to get the skills to be able to run tourism businesses and we need support to set up those businesses.

There are opportunities in the seas if we could take back the rights to our saltwater resources. Pursuing careers in arts and crafts including music are other possibilities.

But we have to go forward and not back and that is why it is critically important that the Working on Country program is continued and expanded, not cut back. With those foundation jobs we can protect the country while we develop new ways to live on country and from country.

**MEDIUM**  
Ganga Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:** Our people are educated, skilled and employed in meaningful jobs and we have our own businesses on country supported by ASRAC.

## THREAT 9: COMMERCIAL FISHING

The commercial fishers that use nets are taking too much fish and people in the community are not benefiting. We just don't get as many fish when we go fishing for our families.

Big boats come and take too much at one time — tonnes and tonnes of fish. Then there is no good fishing for us. We go out fishing and come back empty.

But it's not just the barramundi, jewfish, mackerel and salmon that they take, other animals get wasted. We see catfish, turtle, crocodile and sharks caught in their nets and killed. They just throw them away and waste them.

Over the years we have seen the results of fishers not complying with the NT Fisheries Act. Some have strung nets right across and blocked rivers and creeks with nets killing everything, barramundi, crocodiles, shark, turtle and

dugong. This is bad and it is illegal — but it happens and we don't see the fishers going to court. Fishermen fillet the fish and throw away the bones and carcass. This is against Yolngu Rom and upsets our ancestors. We have strict rules about how to cut up an animal including fish.

When they throw out the carcasses, this waste causes problems with crocodiles. They get cheeky and can be dangerous for our families.

**MEDIUM**  
Ganga Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:** In ten years we want to see Yolgnu skippers and our own community commercial fishery licenses, supported by strong sea rangers with enforcement powers.

## THREAT 10: SALTWATER INTRUSION (AND CLIMATE CHANGE)

Climate change is happening but the results of climate change are hard to see because they happen slowly.

Our commitment to our country is forever and so we need to think hard about the things that will impact on future generations.

We are really worried about saltwater intruding into our freshwater swamp. Gurruwiling is a huge freshwater food bowl for us and we need to protect it.

Using the science toolbox helps us to understand and we have been working with scientists since the 1990s to see how we can stop salt intrusion. This work has included extensive monitoring and reporting along with Charles Darwin University and Territory Natural Resources Management.

In the 1990s scientists Rhys Jones and John Chapell came and drilled out mud cores from around the swamp. They came back and at a big community meeting we discussed the story embedded in the mud.

From 8000 to 4000 years ago, when sea levels were from 1–2m higher than today, our freshwater swamp was a saline wetland and a mangrove swamp.

Science also tells us that we may not need such big rises in sea levels for the swamp to be damaged again by saltwater.

We can't do anything to stop sea levels rising but we can manage some of the impacts and other causes. We can control buffalo and reduce the channelling that lets salt water further into freshwater places. We can control late



hot fires that damage the grasses that hold the soil together and prevent erosion.

At some point, as sea level rise becomes a very big threat to Gurruwiling we may need to consider a big, Balanda engineering solution to protect the swamp. The gap where freshwater leaves the enormous rock bound basin that is the swamp is only 2km wide and it is suggested that some time in the future it would be possible to engineer a rock embankment between swamp and saltwater.

All across North Australia coastal plains face a slow general threat from rising sea levels. But the Arafura swamp is perhaps the only wetland where it might be possible to control the impact of saltwater on a freshwater system.

In our lifetime the swamp is safe from serious saltwater damage but the movement of tidal creeks and mangroves towards the swamp is something we must monitor and see if there is anything we can do to stabilise those areas.

The possibility that elsewhere sea level rise may destroy Top End wetlands makes the health of the swamp more important. The long-term future of many wetland species may depend on our country. This is another reason why we should be supported in making sure the swamp is protected from all those kind of threats that our management can control.

**MEDIUM**  
Ganga Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:**

**We have slowed the rate of saltwater intrusion and erosion and have a better understanding of how to manage the impacts.**

## THREAT II: WEEDS



Weeds do not belong to our country and they are a problem for the plants and animals that do belong to this country. We have weeds in the Northern Territory that can kill country. We already have some very invasive weeds like mimosa, olive hymenachne, mission grass and grader grass. We are working hard to stop them spreading.

Olive hymenachne is one of the worst weeds because it is a water grass that is thick and spreads quickly, taking over whole areas. It was first bought to Murwangi Station as cattle feed and since then it has spread in huge thick patches through our swamp. It is taking over our wetlands and out-competing our native plants like the water chestnut and the wild rice that the magpie geese need for tucker and which is also one of our favourite bush tuckers.

Mimosa is also a Weed of National significance that has Invaded Gurruwiling. Traditional owners, rangers and government weeds people have been struggling to control and eradicate it. We work hard and look everywhere to find plants before they make thousands of seeds that can stay alive in the soil for up to 20 years.

On the Adelaide River flood plain mimosa has turned beautiful plains country into a wasteland that millions of dollars of government money hasn't been able to save.

We haven't got millions of dollars but if we use our eyes carefully and our hands quickly we can stop weeds before they spread.

Other weeds are a problem around disturbed areas but don't spread too much so these are easier to treat and keep an eye on. However, there are a number of weeds that occur in other places nearby that could cause very serious problems if they got into our area.

Gamba grass is a big danger for our country. Our rangers have found a few gamba grass plants on the road into Ramingining and have quickly eradicated them. But we need to keep a close watch because gamba can destroy country. We can see other places where gamba has spread right through the forest — big stringybark and woollybutt trees are standing dead in a sea of grass. Fruit trees have long gone.

Gamba means terrible fires because it makes so much more fuel than our native grasses. It can burn twice in the same year.

We are earning money for land management by our success in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. If gamba spreads through our country we will be producing more greenhouse gas emissions, not less.

Gamba grass could cost us millions of dollars a year and take away money for employing Yolngu and Bi land managers.

There are many dangerous plants coming towards us. There are water weeds that can destroy the wetlands that our geese and crocodiles and fish and turtles depend on.

We have roads coming through our country that more and more tourists are using. When they go through creek crossings who knows what weed seeds might wash off from under their vehicles? We must watch and act.

We can only watch and work quickly if we are to keep this country from being destroyed by weeds.

Weed management is now and forever. Never forget this.

**HIGH**  
Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:**

**Mimosa and Olive Hymenachne are no longer taking over Gurruwiling, there are no new problem weeds like gamba on our country and our rangers are keeping on top of other weeds.**



# Our strategies for our threats





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## THREAT 1: LOSS OF RESPECT FOR ROM AND ELDERS

VERY HIGH  
Mirrithirri  
Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:** Children respect their country and elders; they are independent, looking after their culture and building strong futures.

- STRATEGIES**
- Support a cultural program with activities such as on-country cultural camps at least annually and work with our education partners to provide high quality both-way education at community and homeland schools;
  - By 2020 we will have developed a database for all our cultural and natural knowledge and information, and by 2022 it will be accessible and safe in a cultural centre;
  - By 2018 at least a third of our rangers will be women who are well supported and trained;
  - Plan and implement a career pathway program for, and beyond, rangers.

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## THREAT 2: FERAL ANIMALS

VERY HIGH  
Mirrithirri  
Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:** In ten years time — through musters, culls and safari businesses — we will have reduced the buffalo population by half. A local butcher will provide cheap, fresh meat for the community. Also, our special places (culturally and ecologically) will be protected from pigs.

- STRATEGIES**
- Continue and expand the feral animal and weed control programs and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Weed and Feral Animal Management Plan and Procedures;
  - Continue to work with scientists to better understand environmental impacts, their causes and potential solutions.

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## THREAT 3: WRONG PEOPLE ON COUNTRY

HIGH  
Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:** Visitors respect Traditional Owners and Rom and comply with our rules and protocols.

- STRATEGIES**
- ASRAC will develop a Visitor Management Plan that addresses a permit system, protocols, patrolling, signage, surveillance, enforcement and tourism.

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## THREAT 4: BALANDA RULES ALWAYS CHANGING

HIGH  
Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:** ASRAC is strong with good governance, business and funding so we can achieve our long-term dreams for country and create good jobs.

- STRATEGIES**
- ASRAC will work with landowners to explore the option of dedicating country as an Indigenous Protected Area, and within 5 years ASRAC will raise sufficient funds through seeking grants, gifts, bequests and undertaking fee-for-service work to implement the Healthy Country Plan strategies.
  - Continue through ASRAC, to grow our crocodile and carbon business and investigate new sustainable businesses such as tourism, arts and crafts, wildlife enterprise, commercial fishing, mustering and an abattoir.
  - In the next two years ASRAC will build our landowner support through membership and strengthen our governance, operational and financial systems.

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## THREAT 5: BAD FIRE

HIGH  
Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:** There is no bad fire because we have a strong fire program and people are on country burning the right way.

- STRATEGIES**
- Continue and expand the fire management program and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Fire Management Plan and Procedures consistent with carbon abatement opportunities and cultural priorities.
  - ASRAC will develop a Visitor Management Plan that addresses a permit system, protocols, patrolling, signage, surveillance, enforcement and tourism.
  - The rangers will engage the community and develop an awareness program and materials about key threats to country and management issues.

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## THREAT 6: EMPTY COUNTRY

HIGH  
Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:** Country is full up with the right people and elders are happy for family who enjoy good lives.

- STRATEGIES**
- Continue through ASRAC, to grow our crocodile and carbon business and investigate new sustainable businesses such as tourism, arts and crafts, wildlife enterprise, commercial fishing, mustering and an abattoir.
  - Provide support, infrastructure and year round access for new and existing satellite ranger bases, so rangers and their families can operate from them effectively.
  - Support a cultural program with activities such as on-country cultural camps at least annually and work with our education partners to provide high quality both way education at community and homeland schools.
  - ASRAC will work with landowners to explore the option of dedicating country as an Indigenous Protected Area, and within 5 years ASRAC will raise sufficient funds through seeking grants, gifts, bequests and undertaking fee-for-service work to implement the Healthy Country Plan strategies.

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## THREAT 7: MINING

HIGH  
Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:** There is no bad mining or development in the Arafura Swamp area because people want healthy country and have good jobs.

- STRATEGIES**
- Continue through ASRAC, to grow our crocodile and carbon business and investigate new sustainable businesses such as tourism, arts and crafts, wildlife enterprise, commercial fishing, mustering and an abattoir.
  - ASRAC will work with landowners to explore the option of dedicating country as an Indigenous Protected Area, and within 5 years ASRAC will raise sufficient funds through seeking grants, gifts, bequests and undertaking fee-for-service work to implement the Healthy Country Plan strategies.
  - Plan and implement a career pathway program for and beyond rangers.

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## THREAT 8: LACK OF JOBS ON COUNTRY

MEDIUM  
Ganga Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:** Our people are educated, skilled and employed in meaningful jobs and we have our own businesses on country supported by ASRAC.

- STRATEGIES**
- Continue through ASRAC, to grow our crocodile and carbon business and investigate new sustainable businesses such as tourism, arts and crafts, wildlife enterprise, commercial fishing, mustering and an abattoir.
  - Plan and implement a career pathway program for and beyond rangers.
  - Continue and expand the fire management program and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Fire Management Plan and Procedures consistent with carbon abatement opportunities and cultural priorities.
  - In the next two years ASRAC will build our landowner support through membership and strengthen our governance, operational and financial systems.
  - Look at ways to transfer existing jobs and business to Yolngu through training and mentorship and joint-venture arrangements.

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## THREAT 9: COMMERCIAL FISHING

MEDIUM  
Ganga Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:** In ten years we want to see Yolgnu skippers and our own community commercial fishery licenses, supported by strong sea rangers with enforcement powers.

- STRATEGIES**
- ASRAC will work with stakeholders to develop a fisheries management plan addressing enforcement powers for Yolngu sea rangers.
  - Continue through ASRAC, to grow our crocodile and carbon business and investigate new sustainable businesses such as tourism, arts and crafts, wildlife enterprise, commercial fishing, mustering and an abattoir.
  - Plan and implement a career pathway program for and beyond rangers.
  - Provide support, infrastructure and year round access for new and existing satellite ranger bases, so rangers and their families can operate from them effectively.

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## THREAT 10: SALTWATER INTRUSION (AND CLIMATE CHANGE)

MEDIUM  
Ganga Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:** We have slowed the rate of saltwater intrusion and erosion and have a better understanding of how to manage the impacts.

- STRATEGIES**
- Continue to work with scientists to better understand environmental impacts, their causes and potential solutions.
  - Continue and expand the feral animal and weed control programs and by 2018 complete the 5 year ASRAC Weed and Feral Animal Management Plan and Procedures.
  - Continue and expand the fire management program and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Fire Management Plan and Procedures consistent with carbon abatement opportunities and cultural priorities.

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## THREAT 11: WEEDS

HIGH  
Yatjkurr



**THREAT GOAL:** Mimosa and Olive Hymenachne are no longer taking over Gurruwilling, there are no new problem weeds like gamba on our country and our rangers are keeping on top of other weeds.

- STRATEGIES**
- Continue and expand the feral animal and weed control programs and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Weed and Feral Animal Management Plan and Procedures.
  - Continue to work with scientists to better understand environmental impacts, their causes and potential solutions.
  - The rangers will engage the community and develop an awareness program and materials about key threats to country and management issues.



# Strategy summary

## A summary of what we are going to do

Following is a list of all the things we have talked about that we are going to do to look after our Country. To strengthen the things we value on our land and in our culture, our targets, and to protect them against the things that harm them, our threats.

- By 2020 we will have developed a database for all our cultural and natural knowledge and information, and by 2022 it will be accessible and safe in a cultural centre.
- Work with clans and partners to collect information and map culturally significant sites and produce a cultural map with clan estates, sites and connections.
- Support a cultural program with activities such as on-country cultural camps at least annually and work with our education partners to provide high quality both-way education at community and homeland schools.
- ASRAC will develop a Visitor Management Plan that addresses a permit system, protocols, patrolling, signage, surveillance, enforcement and tourism.
- By 2018 at least a third of our rangers will be women who are well-supported and trained.
- Provide support, infrastructure and year-round access for new and existing satellite ranger bases, so rangers and their families can operate from them effectively.
- Plan and implement a career pathway program for, and beyond, rangers.
- Develop a monitoring program using both-way science with relevant partners.
- Make an ASRAC plants and animals book and produce a Seasonal Calendar.
- Continue to work with scientists to better understand environmental impacts, their causes and potential solutions.
- The rangers will engage the community and develop an awareness program and materials about key threats to country and management issues.
- Work with partners to develop a strategy to increase populations of important plants and animals where there are not as many as there used to be (for example, captive rearing and reintroduction of Emus, seed collection and revegetation).
- Continue and expand the fire management program and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Fire Management Plan and Procedures consistent with carbon abatement opportunities and cultural priorities.
- Continue through ASRAC, to grow our crocodile and carbon business and investigate new sustainable businesses such as tourism, arts and crafts, wildlife enterprise, commercial fishing, mustering and an abattoir.
- Continue and expand the feral animal and weed control programs and by 2018 complete the 5-year ASRAC Weed and Feral Animal Management Plan and Procedures.
- ASRAC will work with stakeholders to develop a fisheries management plan addressing enforcement powers for Yolngu sea rangers.
- ASRAC will work with landowners to explore the option of dedicating country as an Indigenous Protected Area, and within 5 years ASRAC will raise sufficient funds through seeking grants, gifts, bequests and undertaking fee-for-service work to implement the Healthy Country Plan strategies.
- In the next two years ASRAC will build our landowner support through membership and strengthen our governance, operational and financial systems.
- Look at ways to transfer existing jobs and business to Yolngu through training and mentorship and joint-venture arrangements.





# Monitoring and adapting

As we put our plan into action, we need to monitor what happens. We need to measure whether our actions and strategies are producing the right kind of results that will take us to the goals we have identified in this plan.

To do this we need another kind of plan — a monitoring plan. As we make this monitoring plan we will focus on the indicators that we believe will tell us whether our target is healthy or not. Looking at the results of our actions will tell us what changes we might need to make in strategies to achieve our goals as we implement the healthy country plan.

Here are some of the indicators we are thinking of using, there will be many more, ours and Balanda ones, from both our knowledges, from both our toolboxes.

## INDICATORS

### SEA COUNTRY

**Oysters:**

are they fat? Do they taste good and are there little crabs living inside the oyster shell?

**Rubbish:**

how much rubbish, and what kinds of rubbish do we find in the sea and on the beach?

**Plants:**

are plants telling us the right time for saltwater foods?

**Stingray:**

how many can you spear when you go hunting and how fat is the liver and what colour is the mouth?

### JUNGLES

**Yams and plant foods:**

how much are they being damaged by pigs and are we finding the right amount of yams at the right times?

**Size:**

is the jungle getting bigger or smaller or staying the same and are there plenty of spear shafts?

**Animals**

**and plants:**

are we finding the right jungle animals and plants (Arenga palm, flying foxes).

### GURRUWILING (THE SWAMP)

**Water:**

can we find plenty of clean water in the right places?

**Plants and animals:**

how healthy are populations of waterlilies, longnecked turtles and when we go fishing do we catch plenty of the right species of fish for that place?



## PEOPLE ON COUNTRY

- Happiness:** how happy are elders that families are living on country, learning their stories, songs, dances and how to live healthy lives and enjoy bush tucker?
- Ngarra:** is ngarra strong?
- Jobs:** are more people finding jobs in the homelands?
- Ranger bases:** how many active remote ranger bases?

## CULTURAL PLACES

- Ceremonies:** how many ceremonies and what kinds of ceremonies are being held and are the numbers of people involved in ceremony increasing?
- Special places being cared for:** how clean are places and are they being damaged?
- Respect:** are people from other places (including Balanda) recognising and respecting our cultural places and law?

## BUSH TUCKER

- Health and abundance:** do bush foods taste good; are animals fat and is there plenty of bush food in the right places and in the right seasons?

## FRESHWATER PLACES

- Water:** does the water look and smell clean and can we see small fish (or yabbies)?
- Vegetation:** in the water, how much water lily, and water chestnut, and beside our water places, are all the right plants there and are they healthy?
- Bush tucker:** are there plenty of the right freshwater foods there and are the plants and animals healthy?

## STORIES, LANGUAGE AND ROM

- Learning stories:** are stories being kept alive by walking and talking on country and how many young people are learning this way?
- “Backing up” stories:** are we recording stories, can people access these stories and how many people have learned the stories?



## ROCK COUNTRY

- Healthy animals:** how many emu, kangaroo, wallaby, rock wallaby, echidna, possum, flying fox, blue tongue do we find in rock country?
- Healthy plant foods:** are there plenty of berries, plums, bush potatoes and water lilies?

## BOTH WAY EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE

- School:** how much is two-way education happening at the school?
- Ceremony:** how many young and old people are participating in ceremony?
- Being on country:** how many people are living on country and how many others are visiting regularly?
- Dancing:** how many children know the right way for Dhuwa and Yirridja dancing?

## NATIVE ANIMALS AND WILDLIFE

- Following our rules:** how many people are protecting their totem animals, following Yolngu and Bi rules and law, (including preparing animals in the right way) and not taking too much or wasting bush tucker?

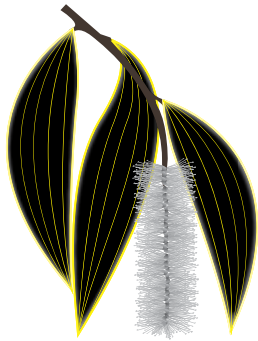
## FORESTS AND WOODLANDS

- Sugarbag:** are the right plants flowering at the right time and filling the nests of sugar bag?
- Nests:** do animals and birds have the right places to live and to nest?
- Underground water:** is cypress healthy with young trees coming along?

## RIGHT WAY BURNING

- Right people:** are the right people out burning at the right time and how often?
- Sugarbag:** how much sugarbag will tell us if burning is right?
- Right animals:** are there plenty of emu, showing their foods that need good fire management are healthy?

# Arafura Swamp Rangers Aboriginal Corporation



We know who we are under Yolngu law but to carry out our strategies and achieve our vision we need to be a properly incorporated company under Balanda law.

We started ranger groups in the catchment area in the 1970s and now we have South-East Arafura Catchment Ranger groups associated with Donydji, Mirngatja and Dhupawamirri homelands. We also have the Gurruwiling rangers for the swamp area and the Wangra Djakamirr and Dhipirri rangers that look after our saltwater country. We have been supported by the Northern Land Council's Caring for Country Unit but now we have started operating independently under our own corporation, Arafura Swamp Rangers Aboriginal Corporation.

ASRAC is incorporated through the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations (ORIC), which has approved the rules under which we operate. We have to report to ORIC annually.

ASRAC is a charitable organisation, also called a not-for-profit organisation and does not have to pay tax on the income it gets. It enjoys status as a Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) and has a public fund or gift fund set up to receive and manage donations. It can accept gifts from individuals or corporations, but this money has to be spent on the charitable objectives defined in the rule book. These objectives are:

*To relieve poverty in the Arafura Swamp Region of Arnhem Land by creation of indigenous employment opportunities through not-for-profit enterprise focused on sustainably using natural and cultural resources of land and sea;*

*Advance indigenous education (including bursaries, scholarships for vocational training, secondary and tertiary studies) in particular to assist people with customary management responsibilities to increase their capacity to participate in management of the land and gain employment;*

*Operate an indigenous ranger program to work with landowners protecting and enhancing natural and cultural assets and remediating threats to land and culture, recognising that degradation of those assets threatens indigenous futures with increasing poverty and intransigent development obstacles;*

*To provide a range of assistance, other than financial assistance, to landowners seeking to establish family-based businesses utilising land and cultural assets;*

*To collaborate and partner with indigenous and non-indigenous organisations in pursuing the principal objective;*

*Raise funds to support the Corporation's objects through seeking grants, gifts and bequests, undertaking fee-for-service work and participation in land-based commercial projects where those projects support, and do not conflict with, the Corporation's commitment to sustainable land use;*

*Operate and maintain a gift fund to be known as The Arafura Swamp Rangers Aboriginal Corporation Public Fund in accordance with the requirements of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997.*

ASRAC can pay out money as wages to rangers doing the healthy country work and spend money on operational costs and capital for things like work vehicles. But it cannot give money to private individuals. It can develop businesses which support healthy country management, but any profits have to go back into looking after the Arafura area through ASRAC.

ASRAC is governed by eight Yolngu and Bi directors. No more than three directors are allowed to be employees of the Corporation. This is a strict Commonwealth law from ORIC.

Adult Aboriginal people associated with these clans and countries can be members, elect directors, and stand for election as directors at the elections every two years.

These are the groups that belong to ASRAC:

**Western clans:** Mapi, Morrgapina & Bulkbulk from Jalawarrwarr, Bukgubukgu from Ganbiganbi, Wurrigandjarr, Daltungu and Nirrgining from Rirritji, Daltungu from Marminy, Balngarra and Bunungu from Yarrbal, Dalparri from Djambarr, Kalkalbi from Milmurr, Ngergenenge from Galadjapin, Malmurrungu & Labimba from Mulkumurr, Dhaburruku from Bundatharri, Mildjingi from Garandjirr and Malwanadarra, Dhoupu from Yathalamarra.

**Eastern clans:** Balmawuy from Gulnurra, Guralpa from Gamanman, Marrangu from Mangu, Malibirr from Ngaliyindi, Wanapuyngu from Ngilipiji, Gaykamangu from Djiliwirri, Durrurrnga from Guruwana, Lilipiyana from Mirrmina, Wanybarrnga from Djarraya, Daymirringu from Dhamala, Djimalka from Gupulul, Garrawurra from Gariyak, Gadawarr from Balinga, Wubulkarra from Balangjuwa, Yanangu from Gulkubirri.

Four directors must come from eastern clans and four from western clans.

# More information

## Publications

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## Film

**Charlie's Country** is a 2013 Australian drama film directed by Rolf de Heer. It was selected to compete in the Un Certain Regard section at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival where David Gulpilil won the award for Best Actor.

**Ten Canoes**, 2006 Australian period drama film directed by Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr and starring Crusoe Kurddal. The first ever movie entirely filmed in Australian Aboriginal languages.

Yunupingu, Galarrwuy, 1948- & Northern Land Council (Australia) & Northern Territory. Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authority (1985). **"Still you keep asking, asking..."**. Northern Land Council, Darwin, N.T

# Acknowledgements

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