



Phil Schouteten

Aurukun kids learning from elders at the Returning Generations Camp.

IMPACT STORY 2018

Reconnecting with Country through collaborative research

Wik homelands south of the Archer River are difficult to access and this has prevented many Traditional Owners from spending time on Country. A collaborative effort from Aak Puul Ngantam and the Northern Hub project *Defining metrics of success for feral animal management in northern Australia* has provided an opportunity for cultural reconnection to remote homelands, and for sharing traditional and science knowledge with children. This is leading to better land management and improved environmental outcomes.

► Find out more about this project



**Northern Australia
Environmental
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National Environmental Science Programme



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Celia O'Rourke (APN)

Checking camera traps.

Many children in the Cape York Peninsula community of Aurukun have never visited their traditional lands, the Wik estate.

The Archer River separates Aurukun from most of these lands, so they can only be accessed by boat and then 4WD or by a 15-hour drive, and most families lack the resources to visit on a regular basis.

Aak Puul Ngantam (APN) has acknowledged this disconnection as a significant long-term issue for cultural obligations and land management, and is working to support re-connection with traditional lands and to ensure this Country is cared for. The Northern Hub is working with APN to support this goal through co-developed research in the *Defining metrics of success for feral animal management in northern Australia* project.

As part of the project, researchers Justin Perry and Pethie Lyons visited the difficult-to-access southern section of the Wik Native Title area with Traditional Owners from Aurukun. During the trip, a senior Walngal Traditional Owner shared vital information about cultural obligations and expressed a clear desire to reinvigorate connections with this Country. Other important cultural and land management issues were also discussed, including the impacts of feral animals on waterhole values such as bush tucker. Information was recorded and reported back to APN, with much of this informing the Hub project.



Justin Perry

The community taught the CSIRO scientists about the local bushtucker while setting traps.

This collaborative research has become an essential element of forward planning for APN. The work was a primary focus of a recent APN planning meeting and helped facilitate important discussions about long-term access to remote Country, reconnection activities and caring for Country. A hardcover book of photos taken during the trip, produced rapidly in collaboration with APN on request from the Walngal families, is also helping people connect to the area and its stories.

Setting up fauna traps on Wik homelands.



Justin Perry



Celia O'Rourke (APN)

APN Ranger Vernon Marbendinar teaching carving to the kids.

Research outputs

Journal article

- [Thermal and asphyxia exposure risk to freshwater fish in feral-pig-damaged tropical wetlands](#) (Jul 2018)

Factsheets

- [Defining metrics of success for feral animal management across northern Australia](#) (start-up factsheet, Jan 2017)
- [Defining metrics of success for feral animal management across northern Australia](#) (project update, Oct 2018)

Presentation

- [Defining metrics of success for feral animal management across northern Australia](#) (Apr 2018)

Project webpage

- [Defining metrics of success for feral animal management across northern Australia](#)

Facebook posts from APN

- [Sharing knowledge with Aurukun Year Six students](#) (Feb 2019)
- [Scientists and rangers ready to meet community](#) (Feb 2019)
- [Returning Generations Camp](#) (Jul 2018)



Another initiative that is promoting connections with Country is the APN Returning Generations Camp, and Justin and Pethie were invited to run scientific activities on Country alongside cultural activities run by senior Traditional Owners. Here school students, APN Rangers and other Traditional Owners conducted fauna surveys and an iPad tracking exercise. These activities show future generations how science and traditional knowledge can be combined to manage land, and Justin continues to promote them (e.g. see [this recent post](#)).

This work of assisting cultural re-connection to difficult-to-access traditional lands will likely be one of the most important legacies of the project. It's hoped that future investments will help consolidate this re-connection so Aurukun kids will always know their Country and be able to manage it well.



Celia O'Rourke (APN)

APN Rangers setting traps.

Attributions

- Project leader: Justin Perry (CSIRO)
- Eric Vanderduys, Anders Zimny, Pethie Lyons, Cathy Robinson, Dan Metcalfe (CSIRO)
- Nathan Waltham, Jason Schaffer (James Cook University)
- Sandy Whyte, Dawn Komeeta, Celia O'Rourke, Robbie Weedon, Dion Komeeta, Aaron Woola, Horrace Wikmunea (APN).
- Dion Creek, Tim Jaffer, Jenny Creek, Naomi Hobson, Gabriel Creek, Steven Peter (Kalan)