



COMMON
INTEREST

EDUCATION
CONSERVATION
RECREATION

REVITALISING THE TOWNSVILLE TOWN COMMON

“The community Vision is to revitalise the Townsville Town Common to improve the condition of wildlife habitat and to increase opportunities for nature based recreation, healthy lifestyle and outdoor learning experiences”

Acknowledgements

The Townsville community for providing the vision and enthusiasm to support the revitalisation of the Townsville Town Common.

Thanks go to Dave Hudson for convening the community Collective Social Learning (CSL) workshop and coordinating the Common Interest working group and to all the project

partners and other working group members including Marty McLaughlin from Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), Greg Bruce and Chris Manning from Townsville City Council (TCC), Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA), Townsville Enterprise Limited (TEL), Townsville Airport, Department of Defence, NQ Dry Tropics, Townsville Rockwheelers Mountain Bike Club Inc., Coastal Dry Tropics Landcare Inc., BirdLife Townsville and WetlandCare Australia.

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REVITALISING THE TOWNSVILLE TOWN COMMON

The Townsville Town Common (known to locals as the Common) has been both loved and mistreated since its gazettal in June 1869. People who know and love the Common want to revitalise it so Townsville locals and visitors alike can take advantage of nature-based recreational, educational and healthy lifestyle opportunities on the urban doorstep – the city’s very own backyard.

This desire to revitalise the Common was reconfirmed at a Collective Social Learning (CSL) workshop (9th of May 2011) convened by Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) and Townsville City Council (Creek to Coral program). The focus question of the workshop was “What could the Common be and how do we get there in terms of health, usage, profile and funding?” Some of the ‘What Should Be’ (visions) and ‘What Could Be’ (strategic direction, programs and projects) thoughts from the workshop included:

- A healthy, intact, biodiverse natural area with world class eco-tourism activities

- The jewel in the crown of Townsville’s wetland network
- Rowes Bay Sustainability Centre becomes a vibrant, shared natural resource management and environmental education hub
- Public green space that is cherished by the community for natural and cultural experiences and opportunities
- A natural system surrounded by an urban environment with abundant local and visiting wildlife, enjoyed by locals and visitors on a daily basis for a variety of recreation opportunities
- A place to be immersed in nature and where people can go to enjoy and be peaceful
- An area show casing the dry tropics environment, valued by the community and providing a range of well utilised recreational opportunities (I think showcasing is one word)
- Properly resourced Friends of Parks style program managed by CVA to engage and coordinate community volunteers in habitat restoration work
- New community engagement programs e.g. a Volunteer Interpreter Program and Green Gym

The overwhelming outcome of the workshop was that those local people who know it cherish the Common. It is however very much under utilised by the broader Townsville community and visitors to the region. As a result of this reflection on ‘What Is’ a whole range of strategies and actions were proposed at the workshop to improve facilities, make the Common more accessible and lift its profile as an enjoyable destination. (see workshop results at creektocoral.org)

A Common Interest Working Group (CIWG) was formed to design a way forward and progress actions to implement the great ideas that were expressed at the workshop. The CIWG has been taking ‘What Could Be’ ideas to tell the story of the Common and its values to potential supporters, politicians, government agencies, business, industry, philanthropic organisations and the wider community.

This concept plan is part of the communication package to showcase the range of recreational, educational, volunteering and healthy lifestyle opportunities available at the Common for the local and regional community

and interstate and international tourists through the provision of appropriate infrastructure and management systems.

The Common Interest working group would love to see the Townsville community enthusiastically involved in the restoration of wildlife habitat at the Common and enjoying the health and social benefits of getting outdoors and ‘cleaning up their big backyard’.

Another important objective is the re-connection of the Louisa Creek/Rowes Bay wetlands (part of the original Town Common) to the Townsville Town Common and Cape Pallarenda Conservation Parks. This will allow for the creation of a “Natureway”, linking the precincts at Pallarenda and Rowes Bay back to Kissing Point and the Strand - connecting the bush to the beach to the burbs.

For QPWS this concept plan presents the strategic direction for management and development of visitor opportunities for the proposed Pallarenda Recreation Hub. The principle is to manage the Townsville Town Common and Cape Pallarenda Conservation Parks as one

REVITALISING THE TOWNSVILLE TOWN COMMON

place to provide better public access to the opportunities within the parks all year round. The priority for QPWS is to encourage local participation in activities on the parks, with tourism being a complementary use, which has flow-on benefits for the regional economy.

The healthy lifestyle opportunities proposed provide a new (third) focus area for recreation on the parks, adding to wildlife viewing and heritage appreciation.

The Pallarenda Recreation Hub (and greater Town Common) requires an investment of time and resources to improve the sustainability and functionality of existing environmental infrastructure, install new and connecting infrastructure and add value to the extensive but under utilised recreational, educational, health and other social and economic benefits associated with the Townsville Town Common.



The greater Town Common and main catchment connections are shown in yellow

TOWNSVILLE'S BACKYARD



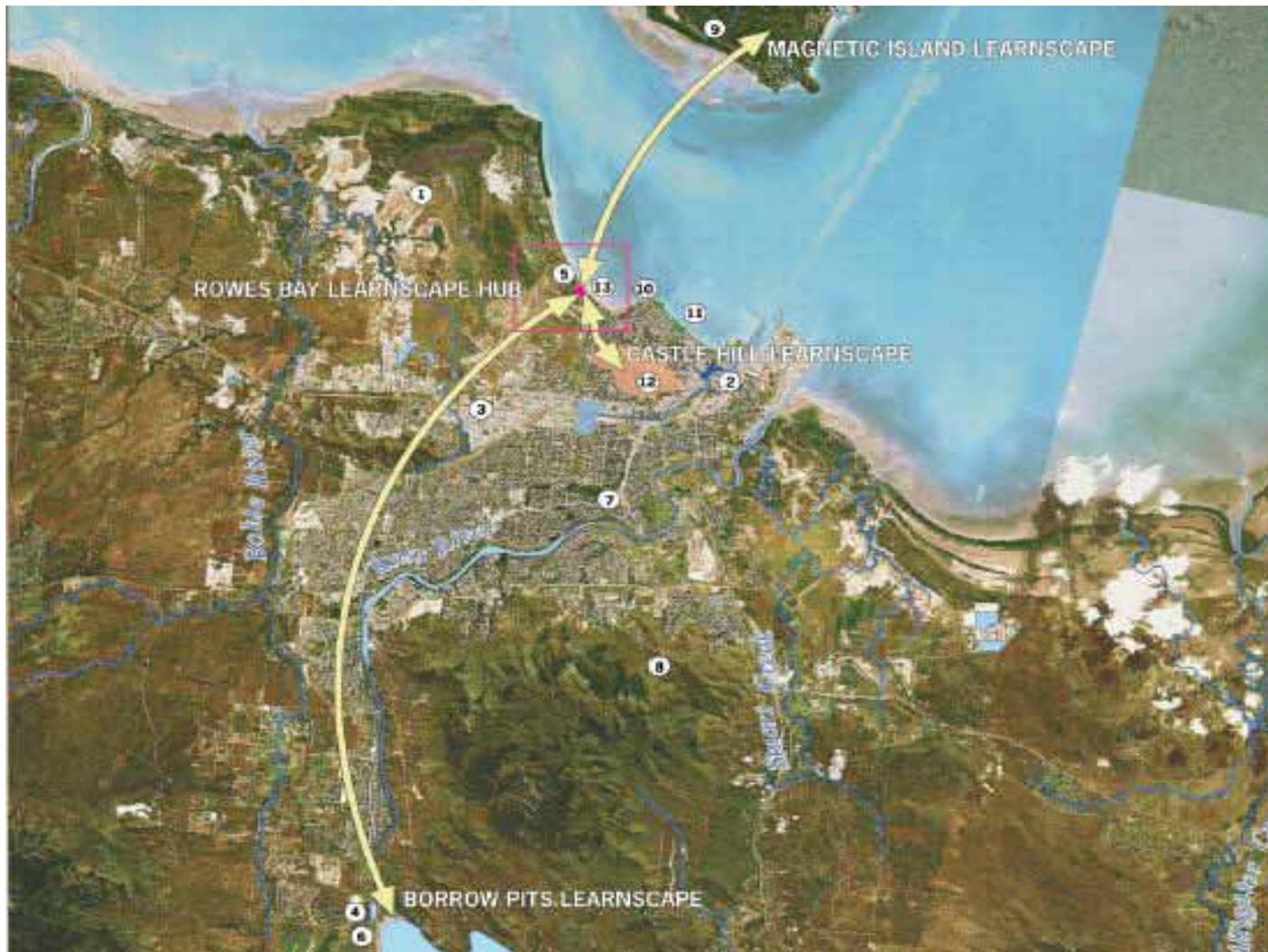
1 The greater Town Common is Townsville's backyard. 2 View to Castle Hill from the base of Many Peaks Range. 3 Many Peaks Range and wetlands. 4 Start of the track to Shelly Beach at Bald Rock carpark.

COASTAL CATCHMENT CONNECTIONS



1 The greater Town Common is well connected. 2 Castle Hill and Mt Stuart from Many Peaks Range. 3 Mt Louisa and Bohle River catchments from Many Peaks Range.

TOWNSVILLE LEARNSCAPES



Townsville Learnscapes

Townsville is a series of Learnscapes connecting catchments, water, nature/ biodiversity and energy with people.

The Rows Bay Sustainability Centre (13) is the Learnscapes hub and one end of the Borrow Pits (4) to Rows Bay Transect (4/13).

The Town Common (1) is a key Learnscapes in the Townsville City Council/Creek to Coral network of Community Based Education and Involvement (CBEI) opportunities.

Learnscapes elements include:

- 1 Town Common
- 2 CBD and Ross Creek
- 4 Borrow Pits
- 5 Rows Bay Wetlands
- 9 Magnetic Island
- 10 Kissing Point
- 11 The Strand
- 12 Castle Hill
- 13 Rows Bay Sustainability Centre

ELEMENTS OF THE GREATER TOWN COMMON

The greater Town Common describes the extent of the original Townsville Town Common, connected catchments and associated Learnscapes elements (see diagram).

- 1 Townsville Town Common Conservation Park
- 2 Defence radar installation
- 3 Cape Pallarenda Conservation Park
- 4 Rowes Bay / Pallarenda foreshore
- 5 Rowes Bay Coastal Learnscapes Centre Hub (with Rowes Bay wetlands)
- 6 Kissing Point/old Jezzine Barracks/tidal wetlands
- 7 Mundy Creek catchment
- 8 Townsville Airport
- 9 Townsville Water reserve
- 10 Defence land
- 11 Louisa Creek catchment (lower)
- 12 Lower Bohle River catchment
- 13 Castle Hill

The Rowes Bay Hub will act as the interpretive gateway for the Townsville Town Common and continue as Townsville City Council's Sustainability Centre and pivotal Creek to Coral Coastal Learnscapes.

Note: The yellow line is an approximation of the original Town Common boundary from the 1869 gazettal description. The red line shows the current boundaries of the conservation parks.



ROWES BAY SUSTAINABILITY CENTRE NRM HUB

The Rowes Bay Hub currently consists of the Rowes Bay Sustainability Centre incorporating Creek to Coral Coastal Scapes. The Rowes Bay Sustainability Centre is the home of Townsville City Council's Integrated Sustainability Services (ISS) department including the TCC ISS Landscape Ecology (NRM) Team. The Sustainability Centre includes:

- Main ISS office space;
- The Rowes Bay sustainable house/ office ('recycled' caretaker's cottage)
- Sustainable energy and water working demonstrations;
- Rowes Bay wetlands boardwalk (sponsored by Origin Energy);
- Facilities/depot and storage space (vehicles, trailers, tools, equipment and supplies) for ISS natural resources management and landscape ecology teams.

The concept is for the Rowes Bay Hub to become an integrated natural resource management (NRM) centre for Townsville incorporating;

- 1 The current ISS/Creek to Coral Coastal Scapes / Sustainability Centre facilities;
- 2 Community NRM groups centre

housing for example; Conservation Volunteers Australia, Coastal Dry Tropics Landcare Inc., WetlandCare Australia and ReefCheck;

- 3 The greater Town Common Interpretive Centre incorporating the Rowes Bay wetlands boardwalk and Coastal Scapes trails linking with the Cape Pallarenda Trails.

Co-locating community based NRM organisations and groups with Council will strengthen the relationships and better enable coordinated approaches to natural resource management from the local level to the landscape ecology level and all the way from Creek to Coral.

The considered expansion of the Rowes Bay Hub will see the final progression from a pasturage reserve to Sanitary Reserve and then to an operational Environmental Reserve as recommended to and accepted by Council in 2000.

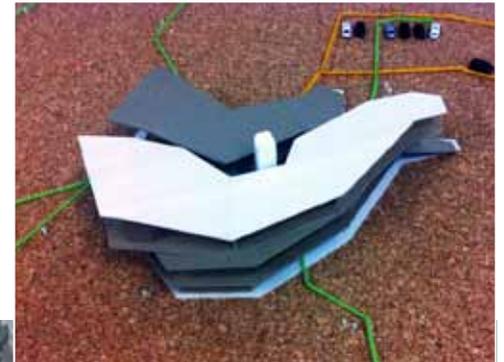
General aspirations and principles for the Community NRM building and greater Townsville Town Common Interpretive include:

- Minimising footprint and building size
- Utilising back to basics design

principles

- Integration with the environment
- Creating an autonomous system
- Healthy indoor environment
- Considering broader site and cultural issues

9point9 Architects initial concept design for the NRM interpretive centre



ROWES BAY WETLANDS AND SAND ISLAND TRACKS

The Rowes Bay wetland boardwalk was constructed in 2011 (Stage 1) and 2012 (Stage 2 and 3) with generous support from Origin Energy. With the construction of the public car park between the Coastal Learnscapes Centre and Cape Pallarenda Road the plan is to establish dual purpose walking tracks/management trails including from the car park to the Rowes Bay wetland boardwalk and from the Centre to the Town Common entrance.

-  Boardwalk
-  Woodland track and maintenance access
-  Boardwalk access tracks from new carpark
-  Carpark



ROWES BAY WETLANDS PART OF THE GREATER TOWN COMMON



PALLARENDA RECREATIONAL AND ECOTOURISM HUB

Pallarenda is located 10 kilometres from the Townsville city centre. It is linked by road and shared pathway to suburbs near the city centre and also the popular Strand foreshore.

The Pallarenda Recreational Hub consists of the Cape Pallarenda Conservation Park, the Townsville Town Common Conservation Park approximately 3,300 hectares) and remnants of the old Town Common Pasturage Reserve.

The Pallarenda Recreation Hub has the following key infrastructure and uses (2010):

- Freshwater Lagoon Road (5.3km) a two-lane gravel road accessible in all but wettest of conditions;
- Causeway Road (1.8km) a two-lane gravel road accessible during the dry season;
- Wildlife viewing (focussing on birds) at the Observation Tower, two wildlife viewing areas, Freshwater Lagoon birdhide; Jacana birdhide and Bald Rock birdhide;
- Walking opportunities at the Aboriginal Plant Trail (1.4km), Graves Circuit (1.9km), Forts Track (2km),

Forest Walk (1.9km), Shelley Beach Track (9km return) and Many Peak Trail (4.5km - incorporates the Mt Marlow and Tegoora Rock Walks);

- Fishing at Cape Pallarenda and Shelley Beach;
- Heritage viewing at the Quarantine Station (museum and graves); and WWII history (gun emplacements, bunkers, fox holes and searchlight station);
- Day-use picnic area at Cape Pallarenda;
- Small interpretation shelter located at the entrance to the Townsville Town Common (Freshwater Lagoon Road).

Ecotourism, recreational and educational opportunities are enhanced by the areas significant natural values and cultural history.

Note: The red line shows the boundaries of the Pallarenda Ecotourism/Recreation Hub while the orange lines indicate internal and cadastral boundaries including the Town Common Conservation Park, Defence radar installation (no go area) and Council land marked for amalgamation with the conservation parks.



PALLARENDA RECREATIONAL AND ECOTOURISM HUB

Opportunities under Development

Projects underway in 2012/13 through the capital works program and natural disaster funding include:

- Restoration of the Freshwater Lagoon Road and construction of two new causeways
- Maintenance of Causeway Road;
- Establishment of Under the Radar cross country mountain bike trail (10.1km);
- Upgrade of Lagoon and Freshwater management road to establish shared mountain bike and walking trails (4.7km);
- Redefining the Shelley Beach Track as a shared trail for mountain bikes and walkers (3.9km);
- Formerly naming, with new signage, the Melaleuca and Pandanus wildlife viewing areas
- Upgrade access to the Observation Tower and the Melaleuca viewing area;
- Re-establishing the Aboriginal Plant Trail as the Wetland Walk;
- Establish rock climbing and abseiling opportunities at Tegoora Rock;
- Install signs to ensure trailheads and nodes are clearly identified and directional information is clear and simple.

These works focus on more active uses as well as enhancing existing activities by providing greater access throughout the year and more clearly defining access and activity locations.

Actively growing recreational activities i.e. mountain biking (in particular) and trail running, will benefit from these works on the longer trails, which are separate to wildlife viewing nodes.

Walking for fitness is going to be encouraged as a result of the loop opportunities created providing a 'wilderness' alternative to the increasingly popular Castle Hill road walk and tracks.

Additionally the Pallarenda end of Rowes Bay is becoming a hub for watersports (outriggers and kite surfing) adding to the land based activities associated with the Pallarenda Recreational Hub.



PALLARENDA RECREATIONAL AND ECOTOURISM HUB

Forward Thinking Opportunities

A number of forward thinking opportunities exist to bring out the full potential of the Pallarenda Recreation Hub.

Some of the opportunities include:

- *A single lane (one way) road from Pallarenda to the current Town Common entrance (the Brolga Dreaming Trail);
- An upper viewing level added to the Freshwater Lagoon birdhide;
- An edge of wetland platform at the Pandanus viewing area;
- The Many Peaks Trail at a consistent Australian Walking Track Standard (AWTS) (Grade 4);
- A realigned Forest Walk and upgrade to AWTS Grade 2 providing year round access;
- A Many Peaks Link along the Freshwater Lagoon dam wall (1.8km);
- Realigned Freshwater link shared trail closer to the wetland;
- More parking spaces and a toilet block at the Freshwater Lagoon car park;

- Maintenance and interpretation of WWII built heritage;
- Cape Pallarenda day-use area primary function as a trailhead and orientation point;
- Adaptive re-use of the old quarantine station with an education tourism focus;
- A further 6km of single purpose mountain bike trail (Smedley's Hill Trail).

With these opportunities realised the Pallarenda Recreational Hub could become the region's most popular ecotourism destination and local 'playground' with flow on benefits for Townsville and the regional economy

** This road needs to be of a standard that enables all year round access to realise the full potential for the Pallarenda Recreation Hub.*



NORTH QUEENSLAND WETLAND NETWORK AND THE TOWNSVILLE TOWN COMMON



Townsville Enterprise, with the region's tourism industry, developed a Destination Tourism Strategy for Townsville, North Queensland in 2012. This document outlined the future direction of the North Queensland tourism industry.

The strategy highlighted an opportunity to present Townsville as a centre of excellence for educational, nature based and cultural tourism experiences. The close proximity of these world class environmental attractions to the city centre was highlighted as a major strength of the Townsville region.

Developing tourism products such as the Townsville Town Common that provide rich, educational and entertaining experiences, is crucial to improving local recreational visitation and visitors understanding of wetlands and their importance to the environment. The proposed improvements to accessibility will also offer opportunities for visitors to Townsville to experience a coastal wetland system.

The close proximity of the attraction to the city centre is significant with the construction of a designated cruise

ship terminal at the Port of Townsville. Environmental education experiences in close proximity to the port will be attractive to cruise ship guests who only have limited time when ashore.

The Town Common development will also provide local tourism operators with the impetus to create new products. The new product must be an enriching, educational, entertaining and engaging experience highlighting the important links between catchments, waterways, wetlands, plants and animals and the Great Barrier Reef.

With 'edutourism' in the region gaining momentum, links between schools and universities could be developed with the potential to use the Town Common as a key educational experience.

Enhancing the Town Common as a tourism product will complement the existing reef, island, rainforest, wetland and outback experiences available in North Queensland. Development and marketing of the Townsville Town Common's characteristics is crucial to forging its own identity within a North Queensland Wetlands Network ensuring it does not 'compete' with other sites.



NORTH QUEENSLAND WETLAND NETWORK AND THE TOWNSVILLE TOWN COMMON

The Townsville Town Common wetlands and surrounds have an extensive history and will complement other major wetlands such as Cromarty (Haughton River Basin) and Tyto (Ingham).

Being so close to the city the Town Common precinct could be the starting point for a regional wetlands tour.

The proposed improvements to the greater Townsville Town Common along with use of the natural facilities as an educational and recreational hub will assist in driving growth in the Townsville, North Queensland tourism industry and wider economy.

Smart Town Common

The market for environmental education experiences is growing with more people living in built up areas and less local green space for them to explore.

Townsville has a range of nature and heritage based recreational and educational opportunities with the Town Common being the closest and largest (land based) of these.

The Pallarenda Recreational and Ecotourism Hub combined with the Rowes Bay Sustainability Centre

NRM Hub has the potential to become a worldclass ecotourism and environmental education precinct through the enhancement and expansion of existing facilities and the development of new, innovative Learnscapes.

The opportunity exists to weave together Smarter City physical and digital Learnscapes through the development of additional low environmental impact experiences, new interpretive facilities and digitally enhanced experiential learning activities.

People living in or visiting regional centres such as Townsville can have 'close to nature' experiences and still have access to all the creature comforts urban dwellers are accustomed to.

This kind of experience may lead to a greater awareness of the pleasures that can be derived from natural environment without degrading them.

It is a tribute to the people of Townsville that the Town Common has been retained to date as a conservation and recreational area for all to enjoy. Even greater benefits can be realised with strategic investment.



NORTH QUEENSLAND WETLAND NETWORK AND THE TOWNSVILLE TOWN COMMON

NQ Wetlands Network Pre-feasibility Study

The North Queensland region boasts a large number and variety of wetlands with considerable conservation value.

“The management of ecologically sensitive areas to provide sustainable use for commercial and recreational users is becoming increasingly complex.

Mechanisms to manage these areas through the collaborative development of infrastructure and implementation of sustainable practices are critical in ensuring their long-term use.”

The North Queensland Wetlands Network Pre-feasibility Study supports the notion of improvements to the greater Townsville Town Common as a sound business investment in the regional and state economy.



LAST WORDS

Based on key recommendations identified in the Great Tropical Drive - Iconic Tourism Development Opportunities Study (GTD - ITDOS) - the development of a Wetlands Trail would be of significant interest and value to tourists in the region.

It would also provide highly beneficial recreational, educational and research facilities for the local residents of North Queensland and further attract additional special interest groups to the region (e.g. avitourists)." (<http://townsvilleenterprise.com.au/Visit/TourismDevelopment/Projects.aspx#Wetlands>)

It is within the context of the GTD-ITDOS and the prefeasibility study into the development and implementation of a North Queensland Wetlands Network that the greater Townsville Town Common is put forward as an ideal candidate for a key role in the network.

This is especially relevant for the local community of Townsville, regional visitors, environmental experience volunteer tourists, bird observers and specialist markets such as cruise ships.

For these ecotourism markets to be realised and for local residents and

visitors to enjoy the benefits of a world-class natural experience on their doorstep, the infrastructure associated with ecotourism and other nature-based recreational and education opportunities needs a significant upgrade.

In addition the Rowes Bay Sustainability Centre needs to be extended to facilitate the co-location of community based natural resource management organisations to enable more integrated landscape ecology management across the Townsville region.

This concept plan proposes the revitalisation of the greater Townsville Town Common to create an integrated ecotourism, recreational, educational and natural resource management precinct in Townsville's backyard.



