



2024-2030

STRATEGIC PLAN

North Queensland Land Council NTRB AC
ICN: 1996

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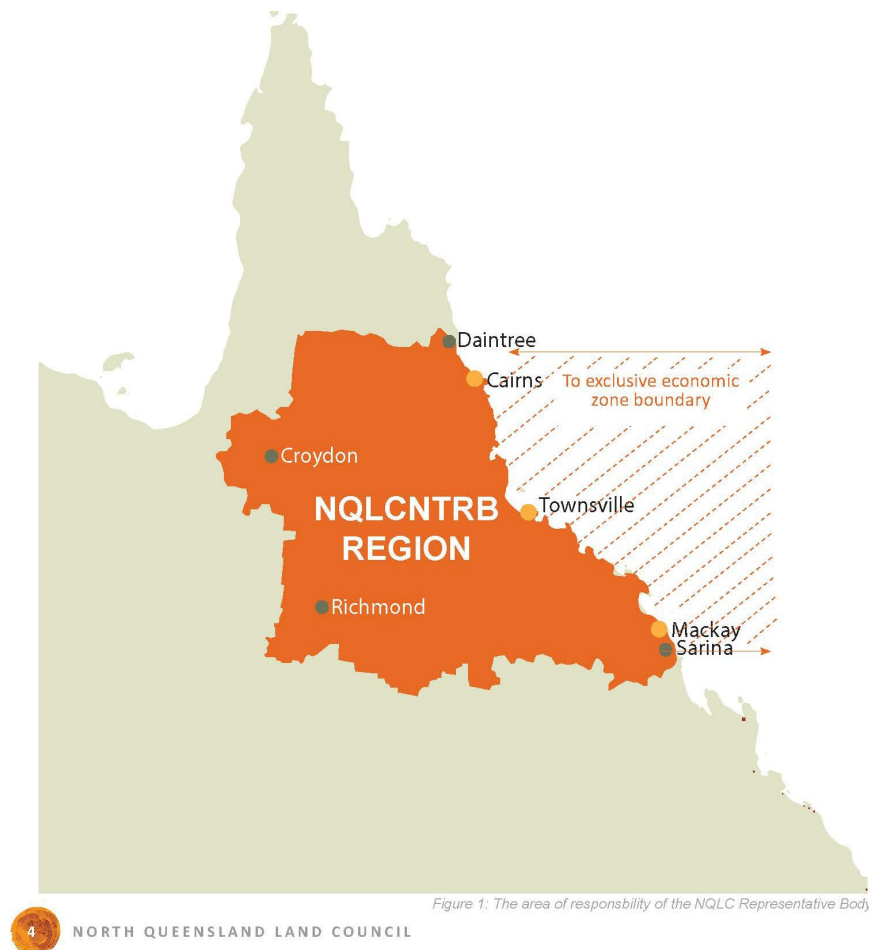
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Preamble

The North Queensland Land Council (NQLC), originally established in 1994, is a recognised (NTRB) under section 203AD of the *Native Title Act 1993*. The region it represents covers approximately 943,300 km² of lands and waters, with approximately 411,164 km² of this being land.

Our origins date back to the 1970s but we celebrate our 30th year of operations in March 2024. We acknowledge the founders of the NQLC.

NQLC's region is as diverse in its landscapes as it is in its culture, covering the marine environment of the Great Barrier Reef, to seven bioregions on land. These bioregions include the Central Queensland Coast, Brigalow Belt, Wet Tropics of the coastal and upland areas, Einasleigh Uplands and Desert Uplands, Mitchell Grass Downs and the Savannah Gulf Plains.



NQLC is an organisation funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), to assist Aboriginal people with all aspects of their native title claims. We represent traditional custodians and claimants in native title related proceedings including, native title claims, appearing in court on behalf of native title claimants, responding to 'future act' applications (for example, proposed mining on native title land or land subject to a registered native title claim), and negotiations for Indigenous Land Use Agreements.

Vision

Our business is advocacy and support of People, Culture and Country.

Mission

In our business we will empower native title common law holders to secure their cultural rights and interests in caring for and developing People, Culture and Country, including freshwaters and salt waters.

Through self-determination, promote economic development and social advocacy.

Values

- Cultural respect and sensitivity for the *lore and customs* of *traditional custodians* and *common law holders*.
- A quality assured professional service.
- To be fair, transparent, accountable, responsible and just.
- Demonstrate leadership and excellence in corporate governance.
- Honesty, professionalism and accountability to *traditional custodians* and *common law holders* in the delivery of our services.
- Effective distribution of resources to achieve native title and other outcomes.
- Maximum participation of, and collaboration with *traditional custodians* and *common law holders*, and other stakeholders in native title processes.
- Responsive to the changing operating environment of *NTRBs*.

Relationships

The North Queensland Land Council (NQLC) will advocate a rights agenda—People, Culture and Country. We aspire to deliver high-level professional services and develop relationships built on our capacity to manage and adapt to change.

We will develop and build positive and effective relationships with all stakeholders while advocating and supporting People, Culture and Country. Our key stakeholders include:

- common law holders (traditional custodians, language groups, clans and families);
- registered native title bodies corporate;
- our primary funding body—the National Indigenous Australians Agency;
- the Queensland Representative Body Alliance and National Native Title Council;
- the Federal Court of Australia;
- the National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT);
- the Queensland Government and agencies;
- all other major third-party stakeholders; and
- potential joint venture or partner commercial entities.

NQLC is committed to the negotiation process as the best means of achieving successful outcomes for People, Country and Culture.



Corporate Role

Objectives

- (a) To carry out the functions, powers, responsibilities, and rights of a corporation under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (CATSI Act) and as an NTRB under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth).
- (b) To advance the practices of, and respect for traditional lore/law and custom, Aboriginal knowledge systems including lore, cultural governance, and decision-making, including custodial responsibilities of Country.
- (c) To advance opportunities from native title rights and interests, including cultural, social and economic development.
- (d) To undertake charitable purposes for Aboriginal people.

We have a broad base membership of traditional custodians from throughout our recognised region (NQLC region) and operate in accordance with a rule book registered under the CATSI Act. Our members elect the member directors of the corporation.

We represent traditional custodians and support the registered native title bodies corporate that manage and hold the native title and cultural heritage rights and interests of traditional custodians on determined Country.

Philosophy

We are guided by cultural lore and traditional custodian laws and customs, and the principles of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*—free, prior and informed consent of Aboriginal people.

Directors

The directors oversee the running of the corporation on behalf of all members and make decisions about the affairs of the corporation. The directors manage, or set the direction for managing the business of the corporation. The directors exercise all the powers of the Corporation except any that the CATSI Act or the rule book requires the corporation to exercise in a general meeting.

Sub-committees

The directors establish sub-committees including an executive committee, audit and risk committee and nominations committee, which are empowered through delegation to deal with various matters in between directors' meetings.

Chief Executive Officer

The directors appoint the Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**).

The CEO is responsible for implementing the decisions of the directors and for the day-to-day management of the corporation and its staff and programs. The CEO is accountable to the directors for delivering its corporate objectives and strategic priorities.

The CEO's responsibilities include:

- Operational planning;
- Relationships with stakeholders;
- Staff employment matters;
- Ensuring compliance with legislation and funding conditions;
- Financial strategy and monitoring performance; and
- Ensuring organisational capacity.

Staff

We employ qualified and professional staff to carry out our statutory functions and corporate objectives. Our aim is to employ as many traditional custodians as possible in our corporation.

Registered Native Title Body Corporates

Registered Native Title Body Corporates (**RNTBCs**) hold and manage the native title and cultural heritage rights and interests of traditional custodians on determined Country. We acknowledge the importance of RNTBCs in maximising the opportunities and benefits arising from native title and ensuring that traditional custodians have self-determination.

We work closely with RNTBCs to improve their financial viability, capacity and good governance post-determination, and to identify and promote business and economic development opportunities available through native title and cultural heritage.

We advocate on behalf of RNTBCs in the NQLC region and source funding for the RNTBCs.

Accountability and Governance

Good corporate governance is a responsibility shared across the whole corporation, with the development of a skilled and diverse workforce, appropriate planning, resource allocation and management models. It includes providing appropriate leadership, policies, programs, processes and systems that enable and enhance corporate capability and improved business process and delivery, and transparency to our members, traditional custodians and the funding bodies.

The NQLC's corporate governance philosophy is based on the following principles:

- Accountability for decisions, actions and funding;
- Unity and respect;
- Openness, frankness, honesty and transparency;
- Consistency and regularity;
- Respect for roles and responsibilities (separation of powers);
- Setting and delivering on priorities;
- Performance;
- Planning;
- Leadership.

Key Functions

As a recognised native title representative body (NTRB), the NQLC has the following statutory functions under section 203B of the NTA and include assisting Aboriginal people within the NQLC region to make and progress native title claims, negotiate land-use agreements, and mediate disputes about native title:



Facilitation and Assistance

Our key facilitation and assistance objectives are:

- Prepare and lodge native title applications in the most effective, efficient and timely manner.
- Ensure that all groups that may have native title claim and can demonstrate sufficient connection will have a native title claim lodged.
- Maximise benefits to traditional custodians through the strategic negotiation of agreements with stakeholders.
- Set priorities and allocate resources to achieve just, equitable and agreed native title outcomes with maximum benefit for traditional custodians.
- Develop native title claims in accordance with the assessed priorities and needs throughout the region.
- Facilitate appropriate anthropological research that meet the State's current connections guidelines to ensure all claims can progress to consent determination.
- Where possible, progress claims in order of priority to consent determination.
- Utilise the most cost-effective and efficient professional services for the advancement of claims.
- Resolve claims through negotiation, agreement and consent rather than through litigation.

Certification

Our key certification objectives are:

- Ensure all native title application claims and ILUAs represented by NQLC are provided with certification or the alternate supply of information under s190C(5) of the NTA.
- Ensure proper records are kept of any authorisation meetings.
- Commission appropriate research to ensure prompt and timely identification of native title claimants so that claims and ILUAs are properly lodged and authorised.

Dispute Resolution

Our key dispute resolution objectives are:

- That all:
 - intra-Indigenous group disputes (i.e. between individuals belonging to the same native title holding group).
 - inter-Indigenous group disputes (between two or more native title holding groups).

are resolved in a timely fashion to ensure continued progression of claims towards determination.

- Where possible, we only lodge new claimant applications where all significant disputes between members of the group have been resolved using culturally appropriate dispute resolution protocols.
- Where appropriate, research matters which will aid in the resolution of the disputes.
- We resolve disputes in a timely fashion.
- Regularly review the grant of assistance to a claim and where after reasonable efforts to resolve disputes have not resulted in a settlement of those disputes to consider whether continued funding is appropriate.
- Train staff in alternative dispute resolution processes to manage and resolve disputes in house.
- Utilise where appropriate, external resources including but not limited to the NNTT, Federal Court and recognised community leaders to assist in resolving disputes.

Internal Review

Our key internal review objectives are:

- Consolidate effective working relationships and professional claim management practices with native title holding groups to maintain the current low levels of requests for internal reviews via inclusive and consultative claim management strategies based on natural justice principles.
- Ensure that internal review processes are known and accessible.
- Deal with all requests for internal reviews promptly and in accordance with publicised procedures.
- Maintain good working relationships with claimants.

Agreement Making

Our key agreement making objectives are:

- Support and assist negotiated agreements between traditional custodians and claimants and other parties for the maximum benefit of the traditional custodians.
- Where required, assist traditional custodians to protect their native title rights in agreement negotiations.
- Ensure traditional custodians have access to appropriate legal advice for the purpose of negotiation agreements.
- To fully consult with, and be directed by, native title claimants and holders where we are a party to an ILUA.
- Utilise the NNTT, facilitators and other agencies to assist in reaching agreements.

- Monitor the implementation of agreements.

Notification

Our key notification objectives are:

- Traditional custodians of our service region are informed and advised in an efficient and effective manner of different notification processes and timeframes, terms and conditions, processes for responding and other activities that may affect their native title rights and interests in a timely and informative manner.
- Continue to streamline procedures for processing future act notices.
- Strategically identify key future act notices requiring objection due to their potential for impact on native title rights and interests.
- Maintain an up-to-date register of traditional custodians and holders.

Other Functions

Our other key functions under the NTA are:

- Provide information to traditional custodians in the NQLC region to provide the best opportunity to understand the roles and functions of NTRBs, the NNTT and the Federal Court and native title processes.
- Ensure cooperative and productive relationships are established and maintained with neighbouring native title representative bodies.
- As much as possible coordinate NQLC responses to particular native title issues via a collective approach with other NTRBs in Queensland and, where appropriate, nationally.
- Make presentations to public, community and school groups and our constituents about the rights and interests of traditional custodians of our region.
- Produce accessible and informative annual reports.
- Utilise other educational materials and programs particularly those of the NNTT.
- Attend national and state forums with other NTRBs on native title issues.

Key Priorities for 2024—2030

Maximise stakeholder value and realise strategic ambitions

1. Maintain recognition as a Native Title Representative Body

Maintain NQLC's recognition as an NTRB under the Native Title Act

- Introduce continuous improvement in service delivery and address matters identified in external reviews.
- Maintain positive relationship with stakeholders and funding bodies.

2. Finalisation outstanding native title claims

Finalise outstanding claims and identify new claims

- Finalise existing native title claims.
- Identify and prioritise new native title claims on unclaimed Country.
- Identify fresh and salt water native title claims and develop united sea claim for NQLC region.
- Identify and prepare historical compensation test claim for traditional custodians.

3. Develop role for NQLC in post-determination environment

Maintain NQLC's relevance to stakeholders

- Empower traditional custodians in their cultural responsibilities for looking after Country and protecting cultural intellectual property rights and traditional knowledge.
- Diversify NQLC income and funding, including fee for service options.
- Identify growth opportunities for economic development and incorporate economic subsidiary.
- Strengthen advocacy, self-sufficiency and self-determination for traditional custodians and RNTBCs.

4. Improve communication with traditional custodians

Improve communication with stakeholders

- Explain prioritisation of claims and NQLC resource allocation.
- Continue to publish the quarterly NQLC native title newsletter Message Stick.
- Make presentations to public, community and school groups and our constituents about the rights and interests of native title holders of our region and positive stories.
- Produce accessible and informative annual reports.
- Utilise other educational materials and programs.
- Develop stakeholder engagement strategy and new partnerships.
- Undertake membership drive to increase membership base to strengthen representation of traditional custodians.

5. Manage risk and regulation

High quality risk management and effective compliance

- Update risk and compliance management and internal audit framework.
- Maintain compliance with CATSI Act, NTA and funding agreements.
- Implement new rule book.
- Undertake three-year review of strategic plan in 2026.

6. Engage leadership and talent

Engage and develop high quality leadership and talent

- Continue to improve governance skills and capacity of directors.
- Allocate portfolios for directors and improve participation and engagement of directors.
- Maintain separation of powers.
- Develop induction program for directors.
- Develop periodic evaluations of director and board performance.
- Establish nominations committee to identify new directors.
- Identify training and development framework for directors and senior staff.
- Develop succession plan for directors and senior staff.
- Recruit and retain traditional custodians.

