



Your way forward for Native Title

MESSAGE STICK

2025

Vol 3



*Message Stick is published by the North Queensland Land Council Native Title Representative Body Aboriginal Corporation.
The cover image was captured by Reilly Wilson-Neil at Yorkeys Knob, Cairns.*



NQLC acknowledges the
Traditional Owners of our
representative region.

We recognise their
continuous relationships
to the lands and waters,
and pay our respects to
Elders past, present and
emerging.

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NQLC's FAME Unit is monitoring critical minerals development in Queensland and national strategies, ensuring Traditional Owners' rights and benefits are protected amid growing investment and international partnerships in mining and downstream processing.

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50 Year Celebration Project

As NQLC approaches its 50-year milestone, a dedicated working group has been formed to honour the organisation's legacy and preserve its history, beginning with insights from Barbara Miller on the formative years of the land rights movement in North Queensland.

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50 Year Celebration Project

NQLC is expanding its PBC Support services and welcoming new team members, including Michelle Lutwyche, Liyadari Alahakoon, Stephanie Capper, and Shanika Murga, whose diverse skills strengthen our commitment to supporting Traditional Owners and communities.

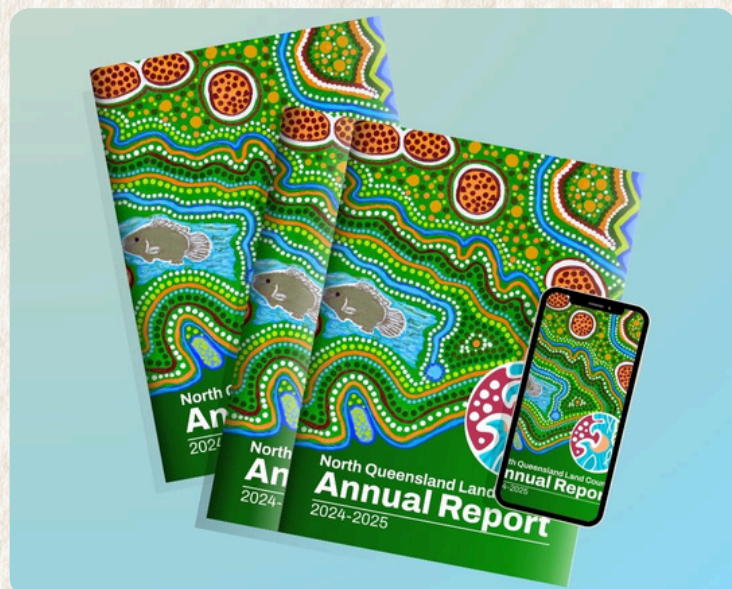
2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT

The North Queensland Land Council is proud to announce that our 2024–2025 Annual Report is now available for our members, communities, and partners.

This year's report reflects the strength of our organisation and the dedication of the many people who continue to shape native title outcomes across North Queensland. Inside, you'll find key updates on our achievements, financial performance, governance, strategic engagement, claim progress, and the growing work we are undertaking to support Traditional Owners in the post-determination environment.

We invite all members and stakeholders to read the report and stay informed about the work being done on your behalf. The achievements captured in this year's report reflect your guidance, your resilience, and your ongoing commitment to protecting Country, culture, and rights for future generations.

The Annual Report is now available on our website!



**SCAN QR CODE TO READ
OUR ANNUAL REPORT**



Meet Marita - Our Annual Report Artist!

We are excited to feature amazing work of Marita Budden is a proud Aboriginal woman from the Atherton Tablelands, with cultural ties to the Jirrbalngan (Jirrbal) and Ngadjan-jii (Ngadjan) rainforest peoples. Raised by Kevin and Elsie Go Sam, respected Aboriginal pioneers in the Silver Valley tin mining industry, Marita grew up surrounded by strong cultural values and creativity. Her artistic journey began in the 1970s, when she won first prize for best abstract art at her local show, sparking a lifelong passion for expressing culture and Country through art.

Over the years, Marita's practice has grown to include painting, jewellery, textiles, badge making, greeting cards, and souvenirs, often incorporating designs inspired by or contributed by her family. Her contemporary style carries traditional influences, drawing on the landscapes, flora, fauna, and stories of the rainforest. Through her work, Marita aims to inspire and uplift others, celebrating identity, cultural diversity, and the enduring beauty of Aboriginal culture.



EXECUTIVE UPDATE

Ward Elections

NQLC congratulates the returning Directors and warmly welcomes our newly elected Director. The results are summarised below:

Ward	Director	Status
Cairns Ward	Sarah Addo	Returning
Cairns Ward	Warren Martens	Returning
Innisfail Ward	Rona Hart	Returning
Tablelands Ward	Joann Schmider	Returning
Tablelands Ward	Carol Chong	New Director
Mt Garnet Ward	Patrick Wheeler	Returning
Yarrabah Ward	Errol (Mala) Neal	Returning
Mackay/Proserpine Ward	Gary Mooney	Returning

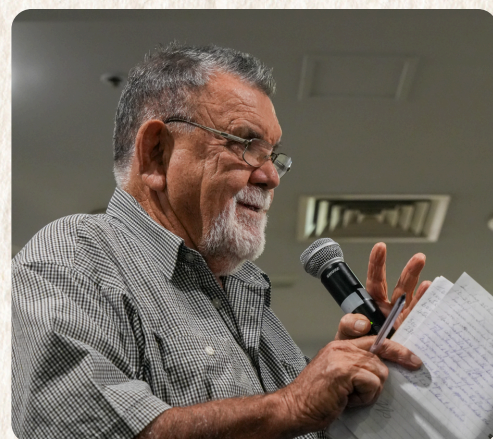
NQLC also notes several casual vacancies that remain in the Charters Towers, Palm Island, Tully, and Townsville Wards. These vacancies will now be referred to the Board, who will undertake the process to identify and appoint suitable candidates to fill the remaining positions.

NQLC Annual General Meeting 2025

NQLC held its Annual General Meeting on Saturday, 29 November 2025, bringing together members, directors, and staff to reflect on the past year's achievements and look ahead to the next chapter. The 2024–2025 Annual Report was officially presented, highlighting key milestones in native title, community engagement, governance, and organisational progress.

The meeting also marked an important moment for leadership renewal, as the board welcomed newly appointed directors for the upcoming term. Their contributions, alongside the experience of returning directors, will guide NQLC's continued work in supporting Traditional Owners and strengthening outcomes across North Queensland.

NQLC extends its appreciation to all members who participated in the AGM and looks forward to working together in the year ahead.



EXECUTIVE UPDATE

Wanjirra,

The progress activities at NQLC continued. NQLC was bolstered by new team member additions and thanks to NT applicants and PBC boards, we continue to make progress toward claims outcomes and supporting governance arrangements.

End-of-Year Operations

The business has been humming and going through its paces with the end of the financial year and associated audit process between 1/7 – 30/10 (reports, audits and meeting preparations etc.).

This then quickly transitioned to elections and the preparation for the Annual General Meeting. With this year being a board changeover, ward meetings held decide the new board composition, and after the AGM, a new board commences. Vacancies again in several seats will have the directors busy with appointments. The only criteria (apart from consent to act and Director ID) for board consideration is to select from the members list from the ward, but the board has relied on an EOI process to help their appointment decision.

NNTC 20th Anniversary

NQLC attended the NNTC's 20th Anniversary in Adelaide with Chairperson Angie Akee, Deputy Chairperson Sarah Addo and CEO. This was a special occasion to support the major milestone for NNTC.



Leon Yeatman
Chief Executive Officer

Cybersecurity & Scam Prevention

NQLC has been targeted by scammers, our IT security identified the risk and responded quickly. Internal policies and procedures are currently being reviewed to ensure our IT systems are secured, and measures are in place to keep NQLC data and documents secure. Members are encouraged to also be aware of cyber criminals to protect their personal information.



National Gathering Follow-Up

Actions stemming from the National Gathering the held in Port Douglas in September 2025 continues. As a member of the interim First Nations Council board, I have requested the slides and information discussed at the gathering to be made available on the First Nations Council website.

NQLC at National Forums

NQLC executive management team members have continued to lead teams and manage process. The NIAA national CEO forum involved the CFO, PLO and EDST Manager. This meeting involved staff from the 14 NT Rep Bodies and Service Providers, to discuss sectoral issues and updates on the Prime Minister's announcement about PBC funding made at the Garma Festival and that 2026 funding round – new 3 years contracts on offer for NTRB's – Invitations to submit due in early November.



FAME UPDATE

John Cecchi is the Senior Legal Officer – Coordinator who leads our Future Acts Mining and Exploration (**FAME**) Unit providing services to Prescribed Bodies Corporate (**PBCs**) and Claim Groups for future acts and cultural heritage matters.

Mamu Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC Strategic Litigation

Jules Taylor (Senior Legal Officer - EDST Manager), Karen Douglas (FAME Unit Senior Legal Officer) and members for the Mamu Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (MAC) travelled to Brisbane in October to attend the hearing of a matter that is currently before the Federal Court.

MAC's board of representatives is working hard to protect the native title rights and interests that were recognised over their Country nearly 12 years ago to the day. MAC is asking the Court to consider important questions about whether certain actions by the State of Queensland are in fact 'future acts' under the Native Title Act 1993 (Cth). It may be some months until we have an outcome, but in the meantime there is still further work to be done.



Native Title Act Future Act Review

NQLC has made formal submissions to the Australian Law Reform Commission (**ALRC**) in relation to the proposed amendments to the Native Title Act 1993 (Cth) (**Native Title Act**) that can be viewed with other submissions at:

www.alrc.gov.au/inquiry/review-of-the-future-acts-regime/submissions/



NQLC is also continuing to engage with the ALRC as they move toward settling their report to government in relation to the proposed amendments.

Attorney General's Department review of the 2021 Native Title Act amendments

NQLC has prepared a submission in response to the 5 year review of the 2021 Native Title Act amendments. All though some of the amendments from both the Native Title Act and Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2003 were well received, some of the amendments that have not realised benefits for Common Law Holders and PBCs.

An example of this is the reluctance of the State to engage with groups for the new Section 47C which allows for prior extinguishment for park areas to be disregarded. Many Claim Groups and PBCs were looking forward to the opportunity to enter into agreements with the State to recognise exclusive possession native title over national parks for example but to date no agreements have been reached.

www.ag.gov.au/legal-system/native-title/key-changes-native-title-act

CRITICAL MINERALS IN NORTH QLD

The Queensland government is pushing for the development of critical minerals projects in far North Queensland. Information can be seen on their website including interactive maps and proposed projects.

Some of the projects are repurposed mines for example Mt Carbine for Tungsten and Copper at the historic Diane Mining site. New projects are also on the horizon for Graphite at Esmeralda near Croydon and Silica is already being extracted from both Quartz near Mt Surprise and sand near Kurramine Beach.

The Queensland government is also proposing to increase downstream processing with infrastructure areas to capture this market in Townsville with a push to stop the 'dig and ship' mentality of mining in Australia.

The Queensland government is also putting significant resources into financial packages for critical mineral mine and infrastructure development through tailored government assistance packages for large-scale projects and targeted policies and funded programs that complement national incentives.

National Perspective

The Commonwealth released their Critical Minerals Strategy in 2023 for 2023 to 2030. The strategy's objectives are to:



Create diverse, resilient and sustainable supply chains through strong and secure international partnerships



Build sovereign capability in critical minerals processing



Use our critical minerals to help become a renewable energy superpower



Extract more value onshore from our resources, creating jobs and economic opportunity, including for regional and First Nations communities.

This is similar to the Queensland government with a focus on downstream processing however with an additional focus on international partnerships largely to shift mineral reliance away from China.

The US/Australia Partnership

The United States and Australia have entered into a partnership for mining and processing critical minerals. A framework is now available on the Commonwealth Industry page.

<https://www.industry.gov.au/publications/united-states-australia-framework-securing-supply-mining-and-processing-critical-minerals-and-rare-earths>

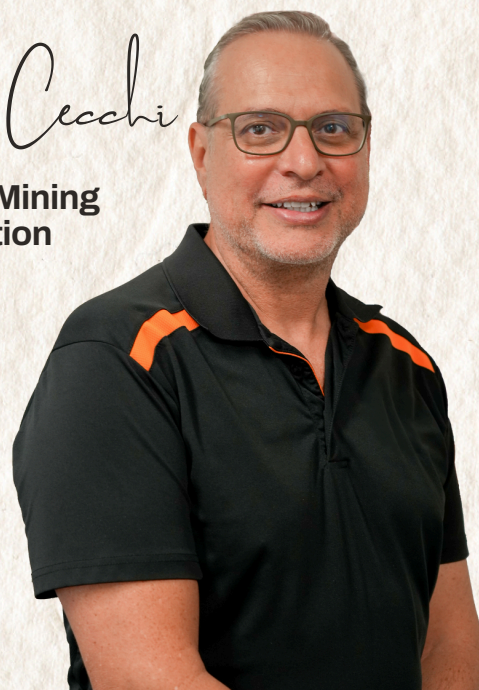
Since the announcement there have been three US investments in Australian projects in Western Australia, Northern Territory and also in FNQ for the Esmeralda Project near Croydon estimated at \$1.3b.

FAME Unit is closely watching this space as there are some discrepancies between the Australian/Queensland joint government approach for downstream processing and the US agenda for securing raw minerals. This has included economic advice to assess benefits for traditional owners to ensure that their rights including any royalties and land disturbance payments are flexible enough to allow for either 'dig and ship' or downstream processing.



John Cecchi

Future Acts Mining and Exploration Coordinator



PBCSU UPDATE

Julia (Jules) Taylor is the Senior Legal Officer – Manager of NQLC's Engagement and Development Support Team (**EDST**) that encompasses the PBC Support Unit and the Future Acts Mining and Exploration (**FAME**) Unit.



We're heading toward the end of the year and this year has been very busy for the team. For a bit of a mix up EDST has been proceeding with strategic litigation to protect native title rights and interests, negotiating large critical minerals projects with international finance, new carbon methodology projects for the first time in NQLC's statutory region and have been busy assisting PBCs where required especially during the busy AGM period.

Below are updates for the PBC Support Unit and Future Act Mining and Exploration (**FAME**) Unit that make up the Engagement and Development Support Team.

Jules Taylor

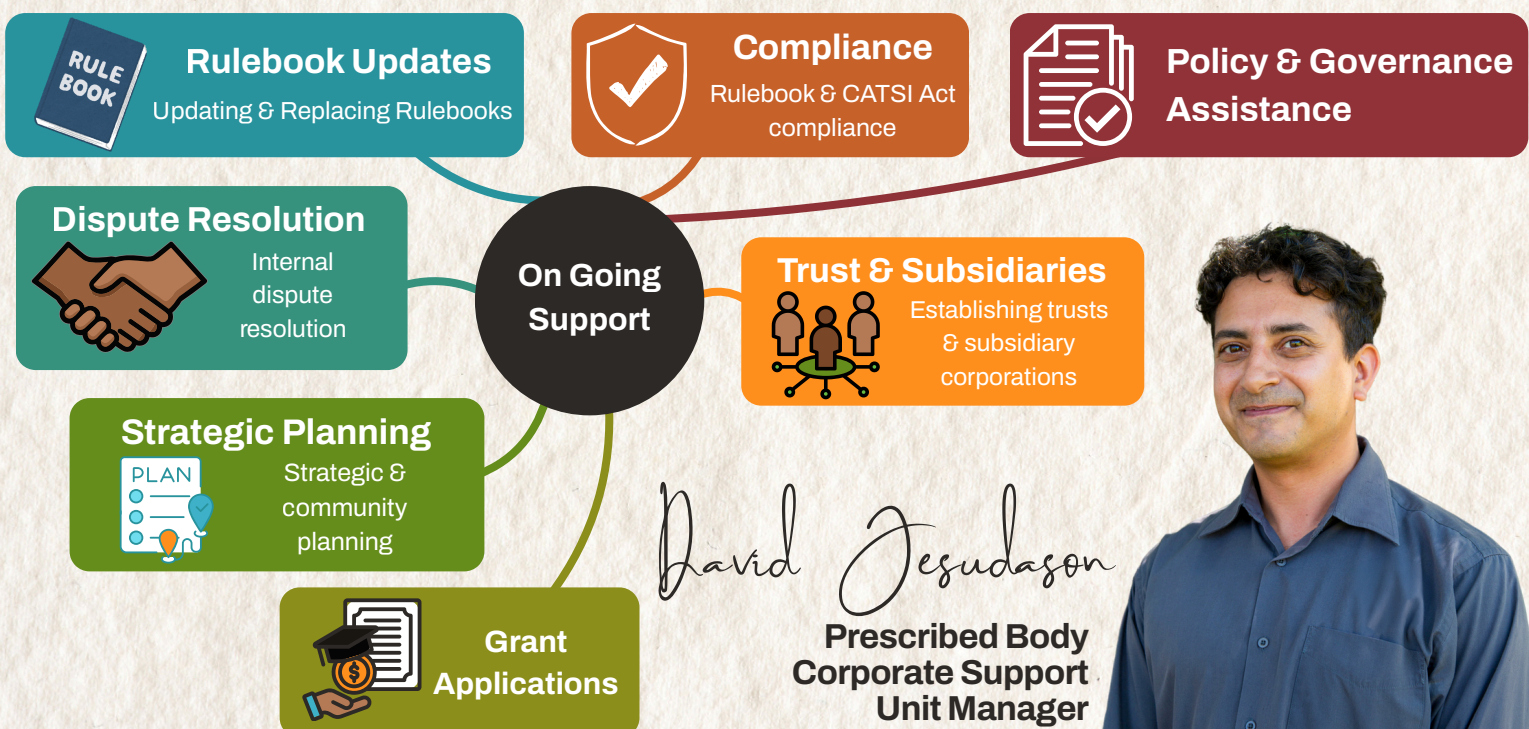
**Engagement and
Development Support
Team Manager**

PBCSU UPDATE

David Jesudason is the PBC Support Unit Senior Legal Officer – Coordinator and leads our PBC Support Unit team in providing services to Prescribed Bodies Corporate (**PBCs**)

The PBC Support Unit offers corporate support to the 33 Registered Native Title Body Corporates (**RNTBCs**) within the NQLC RNTB area. PBCSU is also assisting 3 native title claim groups to develop policies and establish their corporations to be the RNTBC upon a successful determination of their claim.

We congratulate all new and returning Directors flowing from the AGMs that have been held to date in late 2025 and look forward to working with you as requested in 2026. PBCSU continues to provide ongoing support to PBCs and Applicants with regards to:



David Jesudason

**Prescribed Body
Corporate Support
Unit Manager**



If your PBC needs any assistance from the PBC Support Unit please contact them directly at pbcsupport@nqlc.com.au

50-YEAR CELEBRATION PROJECT

As NQLC moves toward its 50-year milestone, the Board has set in motion a special project to honour the legacy, leadership, and determination that shaped our organisation. To begin this journey, staff recently sat down with respected author and long-time advocate Barbara Miller and her husband Norman Miller, whose memories and lived experience are woven deeply into the early days of the land rights movement in North Queensland.

Barbara welcomed us with the same warmth and clarity that has carried through her work for decades. She shared how she witnessed—and recorded in her book *Secrets and Lies*—the foundational moments of the North Queensland Land Council. One of the stories that struck us most was her recollection of the Formation Conference of the NQLC, an event opened by none other than former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, whose presence underscored the significance of the moment.

Listening to Barbara describe that gathering felt like stepping back in time. She painted a picture of a room filled with determination—Traditional Owners, leaders, activists, and community members who came together with a common purpose: to create a voice strong enough to stand for Country, rights, and justice. Her memories brought to life the energy of that era, reminding us that NQLC was born not just from legal necessity but from a powerful community movement.

To ensure this history is honoured respectfully and preserved for future generations, a dedicated 50-Year Celebration Working Group has now been formed. Guided by the CEO and supported by staff and Directors, this group will lead the internal project management, coordinate research, and shape how we tell the story of NQLC's first half-century.

This project is more than a milestone—it's an opportunity to reconnect with our roots, celebrate our Elders and leaders, and ensure the stories that built NQLC are shared with the generations who will carry it forward.



Left to Right: Halejah Wacando, Reilly Wilson-Neil, Cherona Walker, Rachel Coulthard, Barbara Miller, Norman Miller & Leon Yeatman



Gough Whitlam opens at the Formation Conference of the North Queensland Land Council.
Left to Right: Barbara Miller, Gough Whitlam, Peter Noble & Mick Miller



Land Right's Conference in Cairns
Left to Right: Gough Whitlam, Mick Miller & Peter Noble

MEET THE TEAM



MICHELLE LUTWYCHE Legal Officer - PBC Support Unit

We're excited to welcome Michelle to the NQLC team! Michelle joins us as a second-career lawyer, bringing a wealth of experience from her previous career in investment banking, where she specialised in derivatives legal documentation and Equity Capital Markets. Her unique background adds valuable expertise to our legal team as she embarks on this new chapter in law.



LIYADARI ALAHAKOON Legal Administration Officer

We're delighted to welcome Liyadari to the claims team! Born and raised in Nhulunbuy, NT before moving to Queensland, where she gained experience as a legal clerk in Townsville, working with a law firm and at the courthouse in QCAT and civil matters. A recent JCU law graduate with a strong interest in human rights and Indigenous rights, Liyadari is now focused on completing her practical legal training to become a practicing lawyer in the near future.



STEPHANIE CAPPER Finance Officer

We're pleased to welcome Stephanie to the NQLC team! After many years in New Zealand, she moved back to Cairns 20 years ago, drawn by the sunshine and tropical lifestyle. Stephanie brings extensive finance experience from both local government and private sectors and is excited to join our friendly and dynamic finance team, contributing her skills to support the important work we do.



SHANIKA MURGHA Receptionist

We're thrilled to welcome Shanika to the NQLC team! A proud Yarrabah woman with strong cultural ties across the region and Cape York, Shanika brings valuable experience from five years in the Australian Army, where she specialised in logistics and transport and mentored Indigenous youth through the Proud Warrior Program. Now based in Cairns, she's excited to support our staff and clients while contributing her skills to the important work we do for our communities.

PBC Support is Growing Join Our Team!

PBC Support is expanding its services and looking for passionate individuals to join our team.

We are currently recruiting for an exciting roles:

- **Support Administration Officer**



Scan the QR Code

To view our current
vacancies and apply
today!



North Queensland Land Council

NTRB Aboriginal Corporation | ICN 1996

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Townsville Office

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