MEDIA RELEASE

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Gulf of Carpentaria rangers reduce wildfires through early burning work

Since becoming active in fire management in 2007, the Garawa and Waanyi Garawa Rangers have reduced late season wildfires by 87% across the land they manage in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Late season wildfires account for around 3% of Australia’s annual greenhouse gas emissions, and can cause greater environmental and economic damage than early season fires.

Using a combination of onground and aerial burning, the rangers have implemented an early season mosaic burning regime across their 20,000km² land trusts, reducing emissions and protecting vital feeding and breeding habitat for the region’s native fauna.

A short video has been produced to highlight the essential role the rangers and Traditional Owners play, which is now available online.

Senior Garawa man Jack Green was instrumental in setting up the ranger groups, which manage two separate land trusts in the western section of the Gulf.

“Before 2007 there were late season wildfires which burnt in excess of 16,000km². Damage from those fires still scars the landscape today,” Mr Green said.

“You've got to have the right people out there managing the land, and we’ve got to teach that to our kids too so that when they grow up, they carry that knowledge forward.”

There are seven full time rangers funded by the Australian Government’s Working on Country program, and 37 Traditional Owners employed part time on a seasonal basis.

Northern Australia hub researchers have been working with the rangers and several other groups across Arnhem Land and in the Gulf to improve Indigenous governance, and government policies and programs supporting Indigenous rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas.

This research is funded by the Australian Government as part of the National Environmental Research Program. Read more about the research project, which aims to help local communities adaptively manage their natural and cultural resources and improve governance structures and institutions.

The project team is also working with the rangers to identify new opportunities for funding and support, and develop long-term sustainable livelihoods.

Dr Sean Kerins, from the Australian National University said that when Indigenous peoples’ aspirations, knowledge, cultures and skills are given priority in project development, they often succeed.

“The Garawa and Waanyi/Garawa Rangers’ fire management project is a great example of this,” Dr Kerins said.

For interviews, please contact Amy Kimber on (08) 8946 7619 or 0428 853 425.