

## 5 NATIONAL CENTRE FOR TROPICAL WETLAND RESEARCH

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### 5.1 Introduction

The National Centre for Tropical Wetland Research (*nctwr*) is a collaborative venture between the Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist (*eriss*) and three university partners: James Cook University, Northern Territory University and The University of Western Australia. The *nctwr* conducts research and training with the aim of providing information and expertise to assist managers and users of tropical wetlands to use these valuable habitats in a sustainable manner.

Information about *nctwr* is available on the internet at [www.nctwr.org.au](http://www.nctwr.org.au). The website has been extensively updated in 2002–03.

### 5.2 National Centre for Tropical Wetland Research activities

#### 5.2.1 Board of Management

The Board of Management is chaired by the Hon Bob Collins, former Senator for the Northern Territory and a former Commonwealth Minister. The Board guides the research and training directions of the *nctwr* and met on 31 October 2002, 4 February 2003 and 3 March 2003.

Membership of the Board remained the same throughout the year with two representatives from each partner institution:

- Professors Charles Webb and Greg Hill of the Northern Territory University;
- Professor Richard Pearson and Mr George Lukacs from James Cook University;
- Dr Ian Eliot and Professor John Dodson/Dr Neil Drew of the University of Western Australia;
- Dr Arthur Johnston and Dr Peter Bayliss representing *eriss*.

Dr Max Finlayson from *eriss* is the Director of the *nctwr*.

The Board of Management undertook a review of its operations and communications using Econnect, a private consulting company. Econnect undertook this task by: i) a survey to discover what people involved with *nctwr* expect of the Centre; ii) workshop with Board members to discuss the survey and its implications for the Centre; and iii) prepared a draft communication and marketing strategy. The review enabled critical discussion of the strategic development of the *nctwr* and the relative capacity of the partner organisations to contribute to the Centre in terms of financial commitment and staff involvement. In addition to providing a draft strategy the review identified the need for an Operational Committee

that would meet more regularly and determine project priorities and activities. The Operational Committee comprises two representatives from each partner organisation and as suggested by its name addresses operational matters in response to general guidance provided by the Board and the views and interest of the Advisory Committee.

The Board was keen to pursue large projects and was particularly keen to see the ‘tropical rivers’ project developed along with a more strategic approach to training projects. In doing this it confirmed again the basis for undertaking projects within the *nctwr* – projects undertaken across tropical areas or with implications for management of tropical wetlands. It also reiterated that projects involving multiple partners from the Centre were preferred.

### 5.2.2 Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee was chaired by Ms Alison Russell French who is responsible for the wetlands programme within the Department of the Environment and Heritage. The Committee advises the Board of Management on research and training priorities and identifies issues of concern to major stakeholders. The Committee met on 9 May 2003, and included for the first time a representative from the marine and coastal sector.

The Committee considered the outcomes of the review of the *nctwr modus operandi* undertaken on behalf of the Board of Management by Econnect. In response the Committee agreed to operate in the following manner in support of the Operational Committee:

- i) identify wetland research and training needs and priorities;
- ii) promote research projects and training initiatives that are applied and from which on-ground benefits result;
- iii) advise and assist with effective delivery of research to stakeholders;
- iv) play an active role in ensuring effective integration and collaboration between *nctwr* partners and stakeholders;
- and v) assist in the identification of and, where appropriate, help in securing funding sources for *nctwr* activities.

The Committee confirmed its interest in the *nctwr* being seen as an honest broker of science-based knowledge across a range of wetland issues. In doing this the Committee acknowledged that not all topics could be developed at the same time, but anticipated progressive development of the following areas: economic and social value of wetlands; integrated coastal and catchment management with a particular focus on coastal wetlands; management of weeds, feral pests and invasive species; national waterbird monitoring; human health and wetlands; and provide an information centre for tropical wetlands. There was also strong support to develop varied and applied training activities.

### 5.2.3 Research programme

The *nctwr* research programme included collaborative projects with a number of national and international agencies and organisations. These included:

- *Tropical rivers programme* – developed in collaboration with Land and Water Australia and the Department of the Environment and Heritage and building on previous initiatives in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria. The purpose of the project is to provide an information base to support the management of Australia’s tropical rivers in a

sustainable manner. The project will be based on the major catchments and include assessments and information collection for rivers, floodplains and wetlands;

- *National waterbird project* – concepts developed for discussion with other interested parties to undertake a national approach to waterbird assessment and monitoring. The initial approach was based on the concepts developed for the Ramsar Wetlands Convention which could be integrated into the inventory and data management concepts being proposed for wetland habitats;
- *Wetland inventory and meta-data formats* – on behalf of the Ramsar Wetlands Convention a protocol for planning a wetland inventory was developed and linked with a decision tree for using remote sensing for wetland inventory and a meta-data framework for recording information on wetland inventory. This project built on the Asian Wetland Inventory that was undertaken in collaboration with Wetlands International;
- *Climate change and wetlands* – a review of the vulnerability of wetlands to climate change and adaptation options was presented to the 8th Meeting of the Conference of Contracting Parties to Ramsar Wetlands Convention at Valencia (Spain) in November 2002.

#### 5.2.4 Training programme

The detail associated with a formal training course at Masters level was agreed and submitted for formal approval by the University partners that will collaborate to deliver the course.

A formal agreement was signed between Wetlands International, RIZA (Netherlands water management institution) and the *nctwr* to cooperate and develop training courses and materials. This will draw upon the joint experience with wetland training of the partners in Europe, Africa and Asia-Pacific and link to the Ramsar Training Service being developed by Wetlands International. Immediate collaboration has resulted in a new course concept being developed for south-east Asia and formal participation by experts from *nctwr* and Wetlands International in the 10th International Course on Wetland Management course run by RIZA.

#### 5.2.5 Extension activities

Extension activities built on the above research and training programmes and included specific activities in Townsville and Darwin as well as several opportunities provided by international meetings. These included:

- National waterbird assessment and monitoring – a talk on a rationale for developing a national approach to wetland assessment and monitoring was presented at the Congress of Birds Australia at Alice Springs in August 2002. This led to a further national workshop in Adelaide in April 2003.
- Asian Wetland Inventory – official launch of the technical manual at the 8th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Wetlands Convention at Valencia (Spain) in November 2002. The launch was arranged by Wetlands

International as an official side event to the Conference and included presentations from Asian countries who had participated in the project and/or were planning to implement an inventory along the lines outlined in the manual.

- Integrated model for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring – key note opening talk presented at a Conference on Environmental Monitoring of Tropical and Subtropical Wetlands at Maun (Botswana) in December 2002. This was based on the concepts outlined in previous *nctwr* projects on these topics and adopted by the Ramsar Convention. During the conference a proposal was agreed to develop the Global Wetland Consortium to promote greater interaction and exchange between wetland scientists.
- Tropical wetlands and the services they provide – two presentations were made at a workshop in Darwin in celebration of World Wetland Day during February 2003, on the management and future of wetlands in the vicinity of Darwin. The workshop was organised by local groups with support from NGOs and governmental agencies.
- Tropical wetlands – a talk on the uses and management of tropical wetlands was presented in Townsville as part of a north Queensland forum held in conjunction with World Wetland Day in February 2003.
- Water and wetlands – an official welcome was made to a special workshop on inland waters and their services organised in Darwin in June 2003, by the global programme, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.