Wilinggin Healthy Country Plan

Keeping Ngarinyin People and Wilinggin Country Healthy 2023-2032

Warning

This plan contains images, names and references to deceased Indigenous Australians.

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Graphic design by Skeleton Gamblers Creative.

Photography Acknowledgement: Annette Ruzicka, Nick Weigner (WWF), Kimberley Land Council and Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation

Citation

Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation (2022). Keeping Ngarinyin People and Wilinggin Country Healthy 2023-2032.

"We seek to build a sustainable Ngarinyin society where our ancient values and knowledge systems are used to preserve, protect and restore our cultural domains. We dream of a time when Ngarinyin people are restored to our lands, rivers, and places of significance, so that we continue to be the people of the Wanjina."

Ngarinyin Elders, 2021

Dedication to Elders past and present

Ngarinyin Law and culture have been passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years.

The strength and courage of Ngarinyin Elders to continue practising culture in severe adversity, and their fight for land rights, has made it possible for young Ngarinyin today to practise their traditional culture and visit their ancestral lands – a legal right through the Wanjina-Wunggurr Wilinggin Native Title Determination 2005.

"Standing alone is like a single stick – easily broken; but standing together is like a bundle of sticks, very hard to break."

Elder Paddy Neowarra, Native Title Consultation, 2002.

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Who is this plan for?

Ngarinyin people

This Wilinggin Healthy Country Plan (WHCP) was developed with Ngarinyin people, the Traditional Owners of Wilinggin Country.

It provides guidance and strategic direction for Ngarinyin activities within the Wanjina-Wunggurr Wilinggin Native Title Determination Area. It is adapted from the previous Wilinggin Healthy Country Plan 2012-2022.

The WHCP pulls together information on Traditional Owners' aspirations to look after Country, and the cultural, social, and environmental values that underpin this. Together with the Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation (WAC) Rule Book, it guides the work of WAC and is the corporation's strategic plan.

The goals and strategies in this plan act as a road map for the future, helping to create both a healthier Wilinggin Country and new livelihood for Ngarinyin.

Partners

The WHCP supports partners of WAC by providing information on Wilinggin Country and Ngarinyin, setting the scene for discussions around land management partnerships.

Visitors

For visitors to Wilinggin Country, the plan provides an understanding of Wanjina-Wunggurr culture, Wilinggin Country and Ngarinyin people.

Our Vision

Ngarinyin communities working together in their homelands, keeping language, culture and Country healthy, supported by traditional and western education and technologies.

"Wanjina came from the wind and travelled the land
and made this earth, and sea, and the mountains,
the rivers, the waterholes, the trees, the plants,
the animals, the language, and then the people.
Wanjina made everything. Wanjina then gave us
the Law to follow and gave us the land."

Elder David Mowaljarlai 1992.

Wanjina people and culture

The traditional connection to Wilinggin Country is through the Law of the Wanjina-Wunggurr.

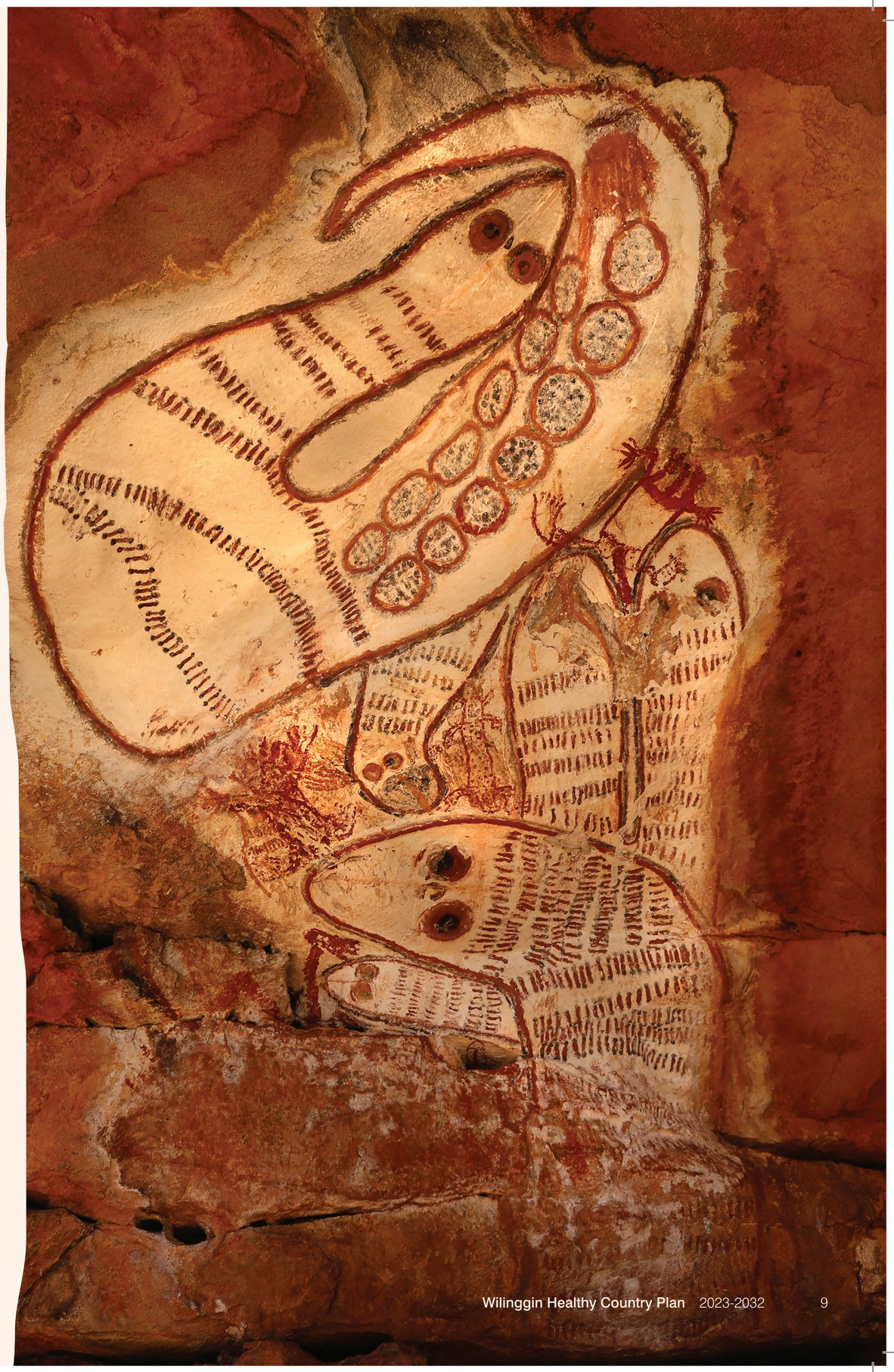
Ngarinyin people believe that the Wanjina are their ancestors, who came and 'put themselves' in the rock when the world was soft. Wunggurr is the Rock Python / Rainbow Serpent, who usually lives in deep water pools and is close to the Wanjina.

The Wilinggin Country that makes up the Wilinggin Determination Area is divided into dambun (clan estates). The names of the clan estate are based on the gi (totem of a particular part of Wilinggin Country). The gi may be an animal *e.g.* garnjalngarri (hawk), a plant such as warrgalingongo (a wattle species), a geographical feature *e.g.* brredorron (rocky country, gorge), a mythological being *e.g.* Galarungarri (Rainbow Serpent, rainbow) or another feature *e.g.* man.guraarrigona (fog) (Mowaljarlai 1992). Each dambun carries one of the two skin-names (moieties): Wodoy or Jun.gurn (refer to Wilinggin Healthy Country Plan 2012-2022 at www.wilinggin.com.au/hcp). A person belonging to one skin can only marry someone of the opposite skin. People know their connection to their Country and their connections to each other through the Law that comes down through the generations from Wanjina and Wunggurr.

Wanjina and Wunggurr help to define the geographic area occupied by their custodians, the Ngarinyin, Worrorra and Wunambal peoples. The Wanjina are made visible in the multi-coloured paintings in the sandstone caves of the region but are also identified with certain features of the landscape, as animal and plant species, as pools of freshwater and sometimes saltwater, and as rain clouds. Aboriginal people of the north Kimberley say these creator beings are central to their sense of group identity. The Wanjina are regarded by neighbouring peoples as distinctive of the people of the northern Kimberley, even where individual Wanjina may have wandered into neighbouring domains *e.g.* into Kija Country.

Today some 800 people identify themselves as Ngarinyin, most of whom live in Kimberley towns, within and outside Wilinggin Country. The majority of these people live between Mowanjum and Derby, while others reside in the towns of Broome, Kununurra and Wyndham. Many still live on their traditional country in the communities of Imintji, Kupungarri, Dodnun and Ngallanggunda, and commute regularly into the major towns of the region. Many of the Traditional Owners who live in the regional townships also spend time on Country, visiting relatives or checking on Country around the outstations at Majidan, Munja, Winyuduwa, Pantijan and Karunjie during the dry season.

Whilst only a small number of fluent Ngarinyin language speakers remain, there is much interest in the revitalisation of the Ngarinyin language. WAC has initiated strategies around this – **see Project section.**



Plan Area – Wilinggin Country

Wilinggin Country covers approximately 63,000 km2 of land in the central north Kimberley region of northern Australia, an area roughly the same as the Wanjina-Wunggurr Wilinggin Native Title Determination Area (*Figure 1*).

In some places Wilinggin Country flows beyond this boundary. The area has been home to Ngarinyin for many thousands of years.

Wilinggin Country is mostly land-locked, apart from two small saltwater areas: on Walcott Inlet and Prince Frederick Harbour. It extends from the limestone Devonian reef of the Napier Range and the King Leopold Ranges in the west across to the Durack, Saw and Cockburn ranges in the east. Mitchell Plateau and Drysdale River national parks and Carson River Station form the northern border, while to the south Wilinggin Country extends as far as the southern section of the King Leopold Ranges, Marion Downs and Glenroy Stations, and the northern edges of the Kija Tablelands **(see *Figure 1*)**.

The landscape is dominated by rugged sandstone and basalt ranges broken up by the major waterways of the Drysdale, Hann, King Edward, Durack, Moran, Roe, Mitchell, Calder, Isdell, Charnley and Chamberlain rivers. Deep rocky gorges and waterways with sandy banks lined with wulun (melaleuca paperbarks) and orrawa / gurnjad (spring pandanus) are typical of the central plateau areas of Wilinggin Country. Pockets of rainforest can also be found and are home to many significant plants and animals.

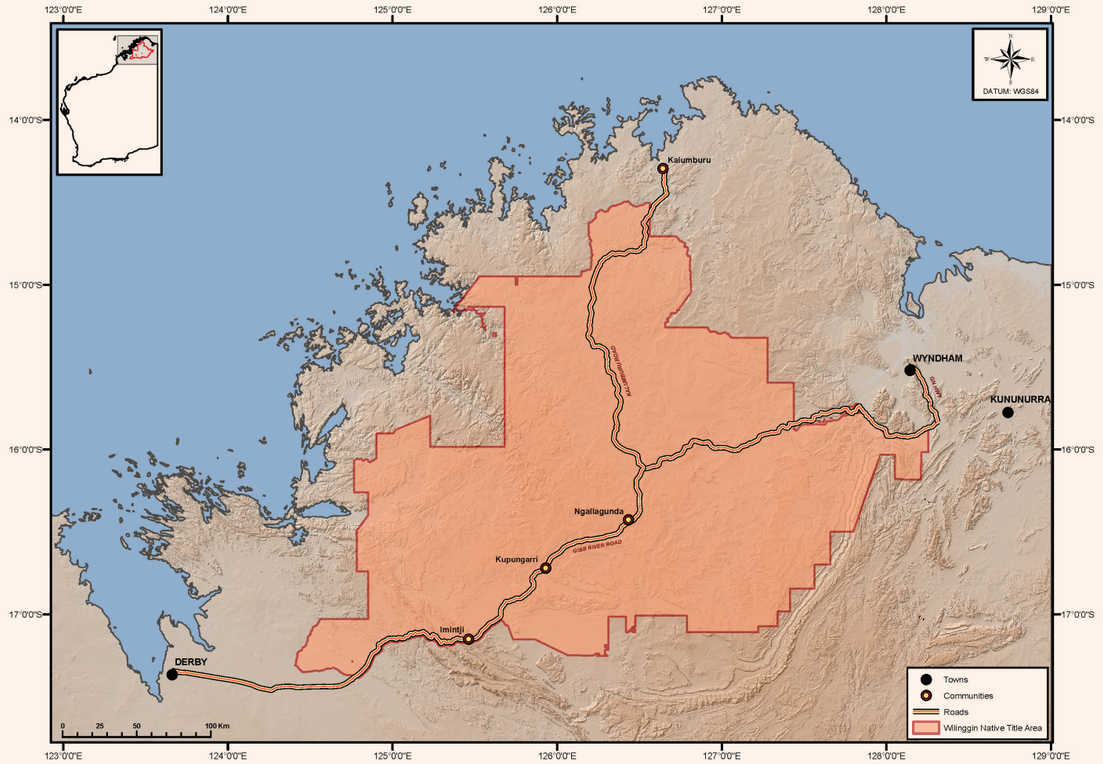
The central Kimberley plateau, the heartland of Wilinggin Country , consists largely of low wooded savanna grasslands growing in shallow valleys between rugged sandstone tablelands. The tablelands extend westwards through Worrorra Country to the high sandstone cliffs, which rise as high as 250 metres along the deeply indented coastline, before dropping away into estuarine tidal mudflats with extensive mangrove systems. High tides along the north-western Kimberley coast run up to 11 metres, so these estuarine inlets, rich in food resources for local Aboriginal people, can extend a considerable distance inland. Wilinggin Country includes part of Walcott Inlet, which is lalanggarra mindi (‘saltwater’) but doesn’t extend to wondu mindi (‘sea, ocean’) properly. This contrasts with Worrorra and Wunambal countries, which have coastline, sea country and islands.

Plant communities are subject to a dry tropics regime in which the north-west monsoon brings jawad (annual wet season) generally extending from January through to April. Cyclones may form during this season. Up to 1 metre of rain falls on the north-west. During this period extensive flooding of the tablelands occurs and rivers may rise to 10 metres. The jawad is followed by mawinggi (cool dry season) generally between May and September, when virtually no rain falls. Many of the smaller rivers dry up and the larger rivers retract to a series of deep rock pools, often fringed by wulun, orrawa / gurnjad (a species of fig), and balmangan (orange-flowering grevillea species). These rock pools may be linked by underground flows and often occur in the deep gorges that cut through the tablelands. The gorges support very constricted areas of monsoon rainforest-type vegetation. The rocky outcrops nearby support populations of bonjoyi (red-flowered kurrajong) and alwa (yellow-flowering kapok), which bloom at the height of the mawinggi.

Wilinggin Country holds important values for Ngarinyin. Many of these values are also recognised nationally and internationally in a range of declarations and conventions applying to the preservation of such rich cultural

Figure 1 Map of our Plan area

Wilinggin Country



The road to Native Title

The Wanjina-Wunggurr Wilinggin Native Title claim, and eventual determination, were only a part of the Ngarinyin struggle for recognition as the Traditional Owners of their Country and to have some control over their lives.

Pastoralism forced many of the old people onto stations, where they were often treated like slaves, working for no pay for most of their lives and not having the freedom to travel through their country. People were taken to Munja, a government ration station, but later it was closed down and people were moved away. Many Ngarinyin ended up on Mount House Station following the closure of Munja, and later at Old Mowanjum and then New Mowanjum, the community just outside Derby.

In another phase of this struggle, the old people set up communities within Wilinggin Country, including Imintji, Kupungarri, Dodnun, Ngallagunda, Wingingare and Prap Prap. This process began in the 1980s, when excisions were granted through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and other government bodies. Initially people lived under canvas at many of these places, with no infrastructure such as houses, offices, stores, schools or anything else. By applying for funding, the communities eventually gained the services they have today.

Throughout the Native Title process many Ngarinyin people contributed, whether by giving evidence, singing songs for Country or performing junba (dance and song) to show people's connection to and knowledge of country to the judge. The evidence was challenged at every opportunity as the other parties attempted to make their case.

In June 2004, then again in August 2004 the Ngarinyin together with the Wunambal Gaambera and Dambi Mangari communities won their Native Title Rights. The Native Title Determination was a time to remember the work of many of the old people who had passed away during the fight for Native Title rights.

Since Native Title was determined for Ngarinyin, WAC has grown in strength and resourcing and continues to fight on behalf of Ngarinyin for stronger land use and access rights. Some of these achievements can be seen on page 19.

Further work is needed to align Native Title with the mainstream land tenure system to create more appropriate tenure which supports the aspirations, responsibilities, and cultural governance of Traditional Owners.

The journey continues.

"If anyone wants to do business with us, they all have to come through the one gate."

Paddy Neowarra 2002, Derby

Land tenure

Wilinggin Country contains over 20 different land parcels (**see *Tables 1-4***), with various land managers (**see *Figure 4***). The different land tenure within Wilinggin Country includes national parks, Indigenous pastoral leases, non-Indigenous pastoral leases, Unallocated Crown Land (UCL) and other small leases. Ngarinyin have different levels of Native Title rights within these areas which requires effective communication and relationships with all these land managers. Through this plan, WAC can start to develop formal partnerships and other opportunities (*e.g.* acquisition) to support Ngarinyin's vision to manage Wilinggin Country.

Table 1 Determination area

Wanjina-Wunggurr Wilinggin Determination Area	Area (ha)	Area (km²)
	6,291,210	62,912

Table 2 Wilinggin Conservation Area

Wilinggin Conservation Area (WCA)	Area (ha)	Area (km²)
	3,155,100	31,551
Including Wilinggin IPA	2,417,400	24,174

Table 3 Conservation estate managed by the Western Australian Department of Environment and Conservation

Estate	Area (ha)	Area (km²)
Drysdale River National Park	79,852	799
Wunaamin Miliwundi Ranges Conservation Park	205,049	2,050
Laterite Conservation Park	8,717	87
Mitchell River National Park	61,121	611

Table 4 Pastoral leases

Estate	Area (ha)	Area (km²)
Charnley River	298,729	2,987
Doongan	332,516	3,325
Drysdale River	423,523	4,235
Durack River	377,975	3780
El Questro	166,168	1,662
Ellenbrae	395,867	3,959
Gibb River	397,180	3,972
Glenroy	60,672	607
Home Valley	29,542	295
Kachana	56,140	561
Karunjie	292,112	2,912
Kimberley Downs	12,252	122
Marion Downs	250,807	2,508
Mount Barnett	127,137	1,271
Mount Elizabeth	196,857	1,969
Mount House	282,464	2,825
Napier Downs	166,856	1,669
Theda	318,746	3,187

Wilinggin land management

Ngarinyin have traditional and legal responsibilities for managing Country. Today the challenge is to develop a land management model based on traditional practices that will enable Ngarinyin to look after Country in the modern world.

Dambun

The dambun is the basic unit that makes up a traditional land management system. All Ngarinyin belong to a dambun and has responsibilities to look after culture and Country for that area. Wilinggin Country is made up of 68 dambun. Most dambun have people who speak for that Country, but in places where members of the original clan are all deceased, neighbouring clan groups speak for and manage Country for that area. Not many Ngarinyin are able to live and work on their dambun; some visit regularly on holidays, while others struggle to get back, because of the remoteness and costs.

Wilinggin nations

Dambun are grouped into four Wilinggin Nations (**see *Figure 2***):

- Arawarri
- Walinjaro Burri
- Werangarri
- Wurlajaru

Today the nations provide for a culturally appropriate governance system for land management and delivery of services. WAC Directors are drawn from each of the four Wilinggin Nations.

Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation (WAC)

The WAC helps Ngarinyin Traditional Owners manage their dambun and look after their rights and interests. It does this through legal mechanisms such as the Native Title Act 1994 (Cwlth), *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* (WA) and the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950* (WA), and through customary Law. Rights differ with different land tenure, and include the right to possess, occupy, use, and enjoy the land and waters, engage in cultural activities, hunt and fish, control access to rock art including Wanjina or Gwion Gwion images, and negotiations with third parties.

Wilinggin Healthy Country Advisory Committee

The Wilinggin Healthy Country Advisory Committee provides guidance and feedback on the delivery of the WHCP and management of Wilinggin Country. Each nation is represented on the Committee. WAC staff, experts and partners are asked to attend meeting to support the monitoring of the plan, including specialists in biodiversity, community development and land management.

Figure 2 Map of the four Wilinggin Nations

Wilinggin Nations

Young Ngarinyin growing up on Gibb River or Mount Barnett Station can now aspire to live on their Country and work as a ranger, looking after Country...

Ngarinyin Ranger Programs

The rise of Indigenous land management across northern Australia, particularly through the employment of rangers via the federally funded Indigenous Ranger Program, provides career options for Ngarinyin men and women. Young Ngarinyin growing up on Gibb River or Mount Barnett Station can now aspire to live on their Country and work as a ranger, looking after Country. Ngarinyin men and women are employed and equipped with skills and training in natural and cultural resource management.

WAC oversees three ranger programs, funded from different sources, as follows:

- Wunggurr Rangers – based in Ngallagunda Community, Gibb River Station (funded by the Australian Government).
- Nyaliga Rangers – based in Wyndham and Karunjie Station (funded by the Government of Western Australia).
- Ngaringin Darran.gu Wulagura (Strong Women's Program) – based in Derby (funded by WAC from generated revenue).

Staff of the three Ranger Programs are predominately full-time employees, although the activities often rely on casual rangers and senior cultural advisors to assist. ***Figure 4*** shows where the ranger programs fit within the overall governance structure.

Figure 3 Land tenure and Conservation areas on Wilinggin Country

Wilinggin Conservation Areas

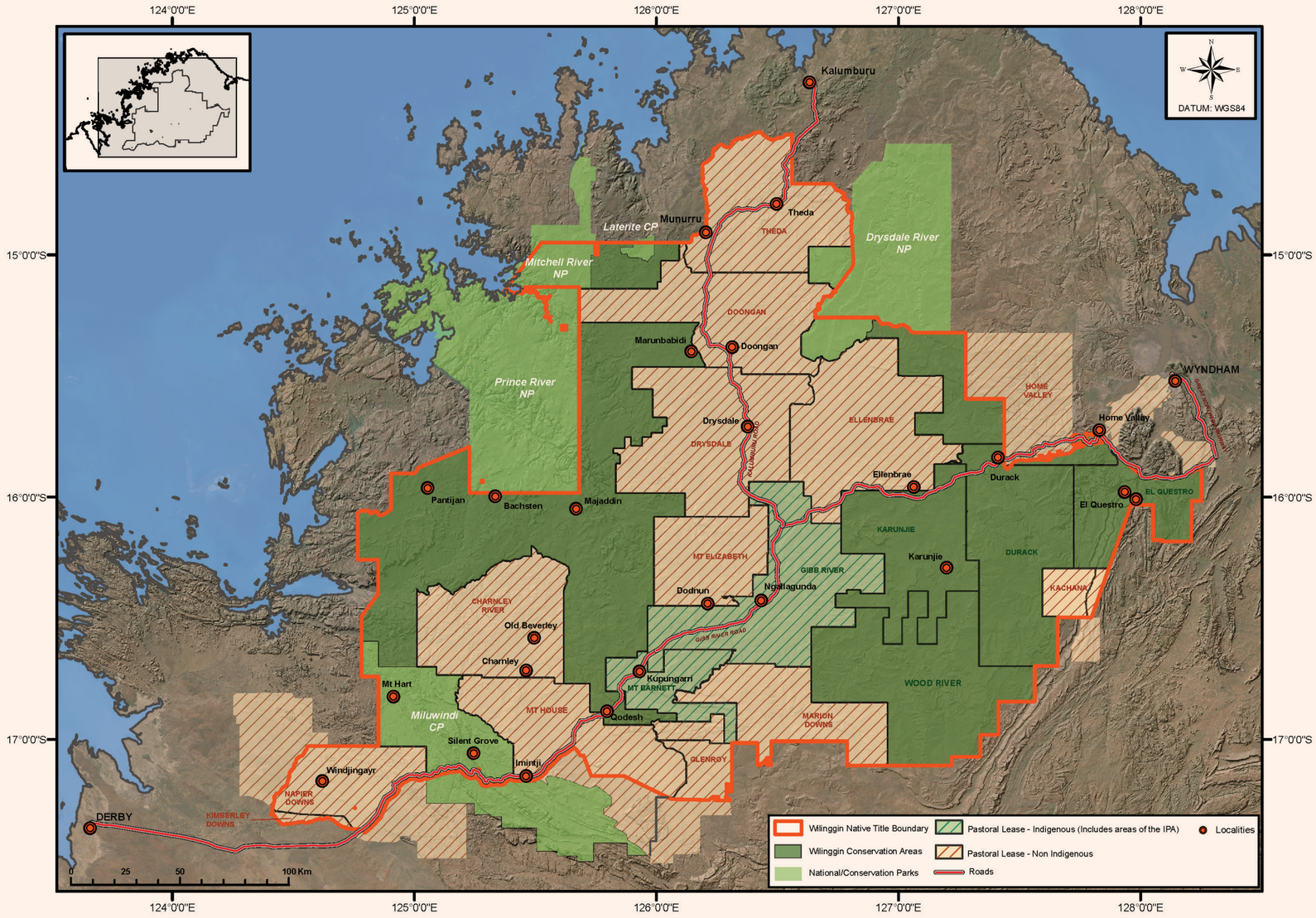
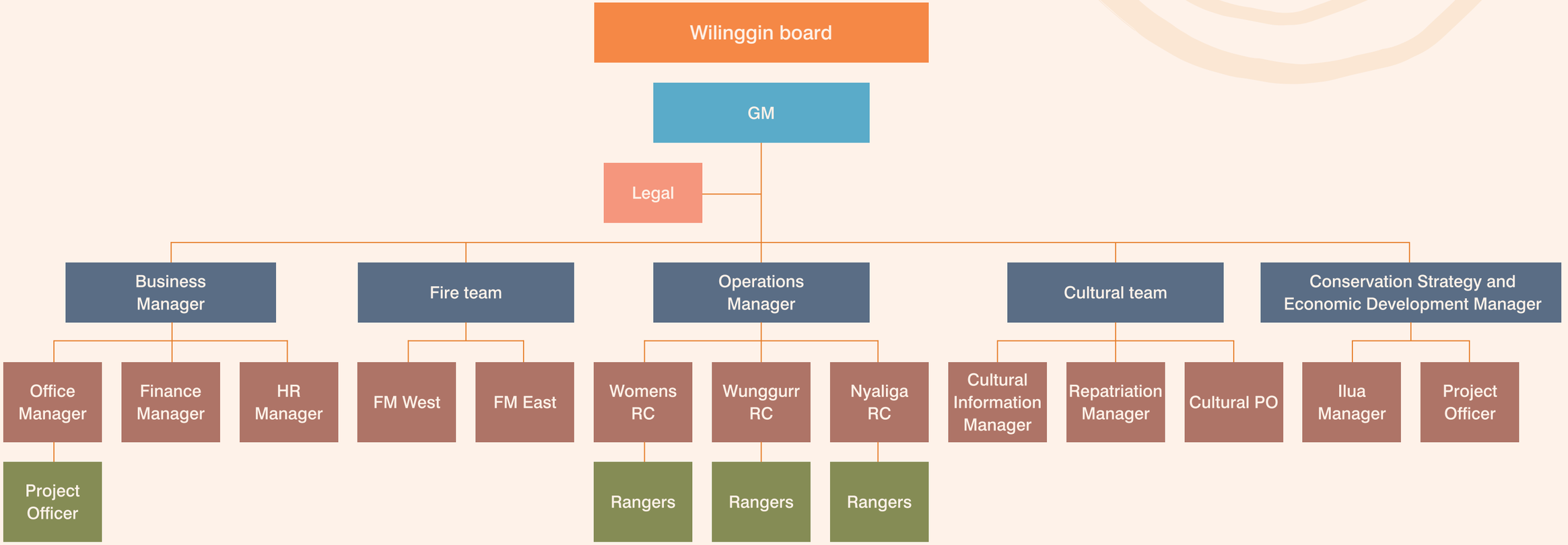
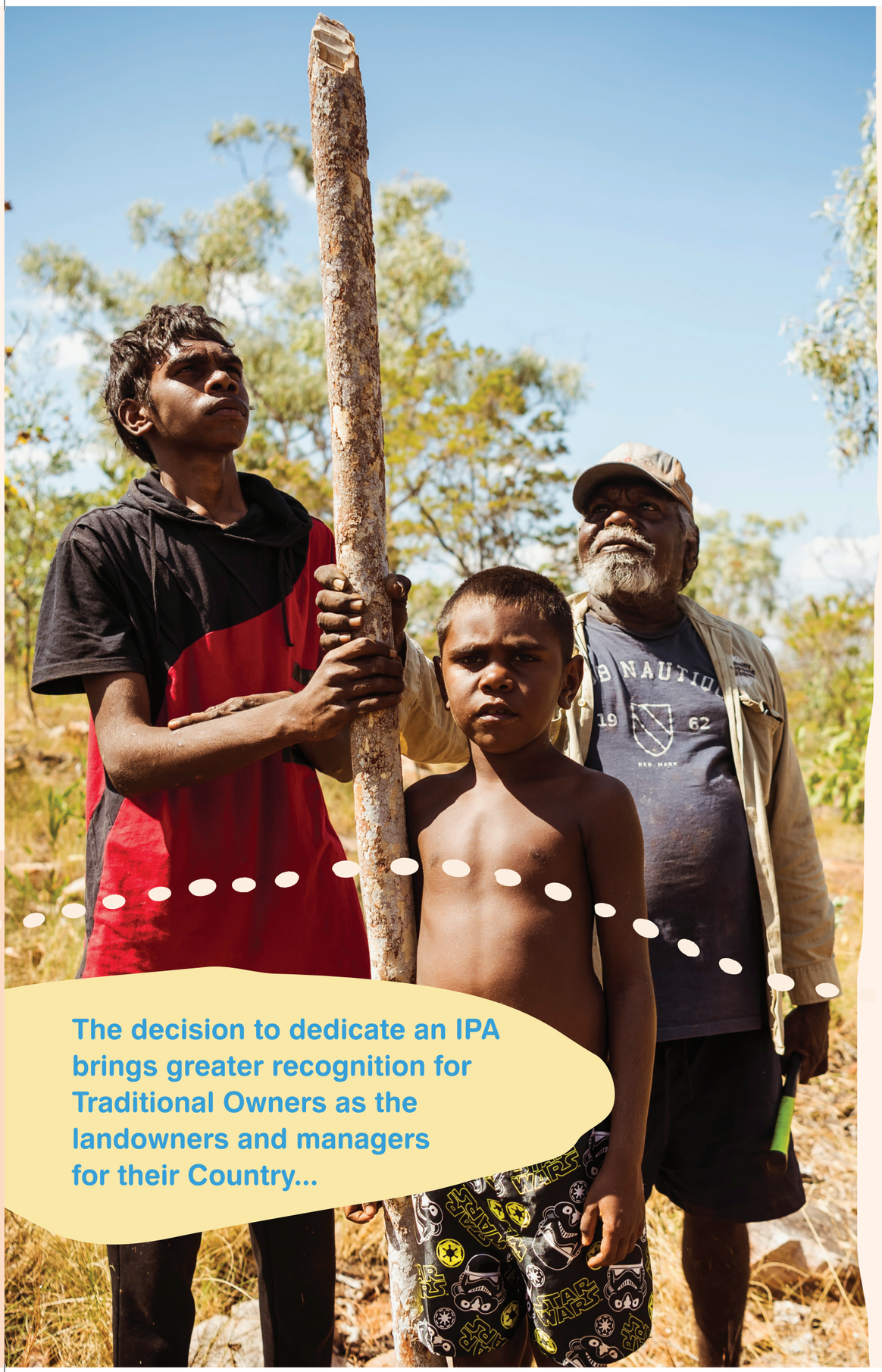


Figure 4 Governance structure

Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation structure 2022-23





Wilinggin Indigenous Protected Area (IPA)

In 2013 Ngarinyin unanimously agreed to establish an IPA on exclusive possession Native Title land within the Wanjina-Wunggurr Wilinggin Native Title Determination Area. Exclusive Possession Native Title, although not freehold, provides Traditional Owners with their strongest level of native title rights. The decision to dedicate an IPA brings greater recognition for Traditional Owners as the landowners and managers for their Country. It also brings much-needed resources and support through funding and partnerships to help Traditional Owners assert their rights.

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Protected Area Management Categories

The Wilinggin IPA will be managed according to two IUCN Categories. The IUCN categories give detail on the required management approaches for each:

Category V Protected Landscape / Seascape: A protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value, and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.

Category VI Protected area with sustainable use of natural resources: Protected areas that conserve ecosystems and habitats, together with associated cultural values and traditional natural resource management systems. They are generally large, with most of the area in a natural condition, where a proportion is under sustainable natural resource management and where low-level non-industrial use of natural resources compatible with nature conservation is seen as one of the main aims of the area.

National Reserve System

The Wilinggin IPA contributes to the Australian Government's National Reserve System (NRS). The NRS formally recognises IPAs as contributing to the biodiversity conservation of Australia for all its citizens and future generations.

Wilinggin Conservation Area (WCA)

The Wilinggin Conservation Area (WCA) is predominately made up of the Wilinggin Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) over Unallocated Crown Land (UCL). The WCA is expanding due to land tenure reform and will include additional areas such as Aboriginal Land Trusts (ALT) parcels, UCL parcels (planned 2023 / 2024)., and the evolution of non-viable pastoral stations to reserves, such as El Questro Station (2022) and Karunjie and Durack stations (planned for 2023).

How was this plan made?

This plan was adapted from the previous *Wilinggin Healthy Country Plan 2012-2022.* In 2022 a review of the previous plan was undertaken by WAC staff and community members to assess its implementation and progress towards the original goals and objectives.

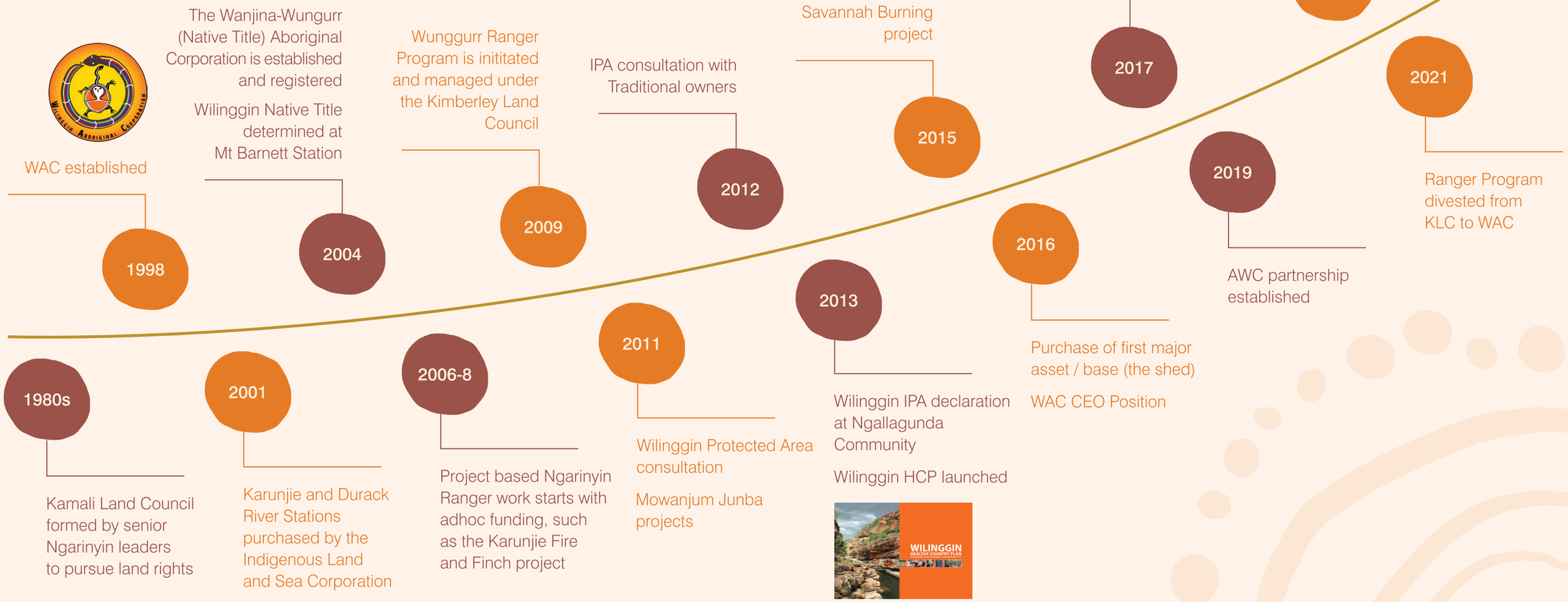
The review recognised achievements, challenges, new and redundant strategies, and projects. This, in combination with two community consultation meetings held at Derby and Wyndham, provided the information for the WHCP 2023-2032, this plan.

The consultation and review process to produce the WHCP 2023-2032 was undertaken using the Healthy Country Management Framework (HCMF). The HCMF provides a process for the planning, implementation, and monitoring of healthy country projects. It is an adaptation of the Conservation Standards (Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation) and is used by an extensive network of Indigenous communities in Australia and internationally.

Achievements and timeline

Ngarinyin are proud of their achievements in regaining control and management of Wilinggin Country. Below is a timeline of some of the milestones of these achievements since the 1980s.

Figure 6 Ngarinyin journey from the 1980s for control and management of their Country



Targets

In 2012 and again in 2022, Ngarinyin Elders and community identified what's important for a healthy Country and community. Ngarinyin call these important things targets.

Health of the targets

During the consultation processes Ngarinyin talked about what makes each target healthy. These things are called key attributes. By looking at the key attributes Ngarinyin were able to give each target a health rating based on traditional knowledge and western science **(see *Table 5*)**. Working to improve target health is the priority of this plan.

Trend

As the WHCP has been developed at a moment in time, showing a health rating alone only tells part of the story. Including an indication of health trend shows if targets are getting better, worse, or are staying the same. Trend is an assessment made by using either quantitative data e.g. (ecological survey), qualitative data (*e.g.* talking to Elders) or a mixture of both **(see *Table 5*)**.

Confidence

Confidence level indicates how the health and health trend of the targets were determined. Confidence is being open about whether the assessment has been made by an expert or it is a rough guess, or somewhere in between **(see *Tables 6* and *7*)**.

Evidence

Evidence on why the health, trend and confidence have been rated as they have in 2023 are included in the target descriptions in this plan. Further detail on these will be shown in annual reviews of this plan.

Target	Health status in 2012	Health status in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
1. Darran.gu ngadi – becoming strong on country			↑	◔
2. Maynda – food and medicine plants			↑	○
3. Malgarra – bushfire			↑	◔
4. Law and Culture sites			↓	◔
5. Ngaringin Law and Culture			→	◔
6. Ngabun – freshwater places			→	○
7. Ngaala – wildlife and bush meats			↑	○

Table 5 Targets and their health

Table 6 Targets health descriptions

Health status	Description
Very good	The target is very healthy. Current work associated with the target should be maintained.
Good	The target health is within an acceptable range. Minor changes to current work associated with the target are required to maintain or improve health.
Fair	The health of the target is not acceptable. Significant aspects of the target are unhealthy and current work associated with the target is not addressing the issues. Failing to act will result in further deterioration. A modest increase or change to current work is required.
Poor	The target is threatened with local extinction. Current work associated with the target is not addressing the issues. Restoring the health of the target is increasingly difficult and will require significant changes to current works, which is expensive and resource intensive.

Table 7 Confidence and trend descriptions

Confidence: What was the source of information	
Intensive assessment We did a detailed assessment / survey.	●
Expert knowledge We have good experience and knowledge with this.	◕
Sampling based We took some samples, or surveyed some sites out of many.	◑
Rapid assessment We have done a formal assessment but not a detailed one.	◔
Rough guess We think we know but we are just guessing.	○

What is the trend	
Unknown	?
Stong increase (better)	↑
Mild increase	↗
Flat	→
Mild decrease	↘
Strong decrease (worse)	↓

The goals and strategies in this plan act as a road map for the future, helping to create both a healthier Wilinggin Country and new livelihood for Ngarinyin...

Target 1 Darran.gu ngadi becoming strong on Country

For Ngarinyin becoming strong on Country means revitalising ties with Country through family groups spending time on country, travelling over it, hunting, harvesting, and using the resources.

It means reviving cultural practices that may have gone into decline, restoring Ngarinyin control over the management of the land and being able to pass on language, skills and knowledge between generations in normal social life and during interactions on Country.

Being strong on country also means having effective leadership and governance within the community. This requires the establishment of engaging programs for the training and mentoring of Ngarinyin in small business, governance, administration, and other skills to enable independence and self-sufficiency. In addition Ngarinyin want to see their children have access to education programs that integrate western education with Ngarinyin knowledge systems, so future leaders can be developed.

Ngarinyin also desire infrastructure to support cultural land management, such as: graded roads, airstrips, remote office space, outstation buildings and vehicles. By improving access to Country, greater opportunities for employment and training on Wilinggin Country will arise.

"Liyn muno maniyangarri munda dambun wa malwa mingge"

Look at this country, it's good. There are no bad places.

"Maniyangarri munda molngana ganda arrungu warn"

It's good [Country], these rivers and the ranges up high.

"Vmangarri munda manunggu oden wanjina barnjara"

With Wanjina paintings in the caves, stretching across the land.

Elder Pansy Nulgit, Barnett River, 2011

Goals

WAC is a strong, well governed, well-resourced, and stable organisation where Ngarinyin occupy leadership roles.

By 2032 economic opportunities based around ecological knowledge (*e.g.* Myanda) are created to provide increased livelihood options for Ngarinyin.

Key attributes

- Diverse mix of resources to enable WAC to work independently.
- Low turnover of staff.
- Increased opportunities for Ngarinyin employment on Country.
- Delivery and monitoring of the WHCP.

Health status in 2012	Health status in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		↑	

Evidence for 2023 rating

- Expansion of ranger program and ranger infrastructure on Country.
- WAC offices and infrastructure established in Derby.
- WAC have employed 23 staff, predominantly Indigenous, and including a CEO and Business Development Manager, Ngarinyin in leadership roles.
- Successful negotiations for land tenure reform including increasing Wilinggin Conservation Areas leading to increased employment.

Health status key	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor

Target 2 Maynda food and medicine plants

Maynda (food and medicine plants from the bush) has always been important to Ngarinyin. Wilinggin Country provides a wide variety of food in the different seasons.

Each year, children and adults look forward to the fruiting of the guloy (green plum) for its sweet-tasting flesh and enjoy collecting mangarnda (a type of bush potato) at the end of the jawad (wet season). They cook and eat the cabbage-like inside of the dangana (livistona palm). Ngarinyin healers rely on the bush for medicines such as garra leaves to cure sickness such as gundurrg (coughs and colds) and for warding off evil spirits. Guru (Cypress pine) is used to smoke babies and people in ceremonies, and as a mosquito repellent. Ngarinyin know a great deal about food and medicine plants, but as older people pass away and town life becomes more attractive to the young, more work is needed to ensure that this target is looked after, and knowledge is passed on.

"Garnmanggu liynba gula marru monod munda."
With the garnmanggu (bush potato), first we look around for the vine.
"Garnmanggu yarra mumangarri ganda buluba biyangarri munda ngayali"
When they find the one that entangles (trees) – that's the one!
[A] garnmanggu plant.

Elder Pansy Nulgit, Kupungarri Community, 2013

Goals

Myanda – (food and medicine plants) are abundant, and cultural knowledge of, and use are strong.

Key attributes

- Burning the right areas at the right time, with the right frequency and intensity.
- The use and transfer of bush knowledge.
- Presence of indicator species such as guru (Cypress pine).

Health status in 2012	Health status in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		↑	○

Evidence for 2023 rating

- Wilinggin and Nyaliga carbon projects up and running decreasing the frequency of wildfires protecting maynda.
- Fire and Biodiversity roles established with Ngarinyin person employed. Building significant capacity within WAC.
- Ngarinyin cultural knowledge trips initiated including publication of Bunda Ngaala-Gu di Wurnan [We are talking about animals and plants].

Health status key: Very good | Good | Fair | Poor

Target 3 Malgarra bushfire

Ngarinyin distinguish between winjangun (campfires – concentrated in one spot) and malgarra (bushfires – spread over an area). Burning at the right time of year, right-way, is one of the most important tools Ngarinyin use to look after Country.

Fire helps bush fruits, such as gulangi and guloy (black and green plums), to flower and fruit, and other food plants such as mangarnda (bush potato), which can be recognised by its wandud (string / creeper), to grow and spread. It also helps to ensure that jolulu (new grass and seeds) are produced for animals, particularly birds, to eat. Burning right way also supports species who rely on access to old growth vegetation (e.g. old spinifex) such as the Critically Endangered Gouldian finch. Malgarra protects culturally important medicine plants such as guru (Cypress pine), by reducing the fuel load so that if a late season fire comes, it will burn out.

Each year Traditional Owners and rangers undertake fire planning and operations. This helps Ngarinyin to build skills in planning and looking after their country. Traditional Owners are encouraged to participate in both aerial and ground burning operations, while agencies are directed by the Traditional Owners on when to burn, where to burn and who should participate. The Ngarinyin Ranger Programs are building the capacity of Ngarinyin communities to undertake fire management work independently and, through partnerships.

A goal in the first WHCP was for carbon projects to be established to generate income for fire operations and other land management initiatives. With this goal realised, WAC and Ngarinyin aim to increase the area managed for fire through strategic partnerships and other mechanisms.

Goals

By 2032 WAC fire operations and carbon programs are expanded (i.e. to include pastoral stations and conservation parks) and looking after natural and cultural values.

By 2032 Ngarinyin people and communities are increasingly managing fire on their own clan estates.

Key attributes

- Burning the right area at the right time, with the right frequency and intensity.
- Having the right people involved.
- Protecting and watching indicator species such as guru.
- Having sufficient resources (including rangers) to carry out fire management.

Health status in 2012	Health status in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		↑	

Evidence for 2023 rating

- The Wilinggin and Nyaliga carbon projects up and running and decreasing the frequency of wildfires – increasing right way fire.
- Carbon credits are being sold and revenue is supported increased fire work.
- Two Fire and Biodiversity roles established and recruited, including a Ngarinyin person employed. This is building significant capacity within WAC to enable more right way fire.
- Lots of opportunities for Traditional Owners to get involved in training and fire work.

Health status key: Very good | Good | Fair | Poor

Target 4
Law and culture sites

Within Wilinggin Country are thousands of important places for Ngarinyin. Ngarinyin call these places Law and culture sites. Looking after these sites helps to make country healthy; not caring for them can cause Country to become unhealthy.

They may be burial sites, ceremonial grounds, rock art sites (including Gwion Gwion and Wanjina paintings) and other places that are important to look after (such as shared heritage sites after European settlement).

Many sites are well-known to visitors as well as Ngarinyin; these are found along tourist routes such as the Gibb River Road. Equally important are all the sites in remote, hard-to-reach places. Many of these sites are only accessible on foot and have been almost forgotten. Although a huge challenge, there is still opportunity, through the knowledge of living Manambarra (Elders) and documentation from archives, to protect these sites and ensure the right custodians are managing them.

In recent years WAC has developed an inventory of cultural information held by organisations and institutions around the world. Using this inventory WAC staff and directors have been establishing partnerships and bringing home cultural information that previously was inaccessible.

"Marlmarl liyn ongo budmangarri wanjina barnjara"
When white people want to look at Wanjinas in a cave,
"ari banyumindan barnjara marlmarl"
we smoke them at the cave

Elder Pansy Nulgit, Barnett River, 2011

Goals

By 2032 knowledge of priority Law and culture sites is mapped, documented and managed in a safe keeping place.

Traditional Owners are regularly visiting sites and passing on stories and knowledge to younger generations.

Key attributes

- Significant sites mapped and recorded for Ngarinyin use.
- Sites maintained by the right Traditional Owners.
- Traditional knowledge is being passed on from elders.

Health status in 2012	Health status in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		↓	

Evidence for 2023 rating

- Many Manambarra (Elders) with knowledge of Country have passed away, resulting in a reduced health status of this target.
- WAC has good access to country through its own resources and partnerships.
- Cultural information has started to be incorporated into the Ngarinyin Cultural Information Framework database (Ngarinyin Cultural Database), starting with large datasets from the Frobenius Institute (Germany), the Department of Planning, Land and Heritage (Government of Western Australia), and other published authors and researchers.
- Employment of a fulltime WAC Cultural Information Manager.

Health status key	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor

"Wurlan layburru bijingi yilala "

Let the children know language.

"Burrolman doba bidi ngudma wudmarndan "

They, the women, clap their upper thighs / laps.

"Junba dunba burrwanngarri "

while they, the men, dance for corroboree.

"Layburru bijingi yilala junba jirri jodba bijingi ngadaga dambira"

Let the children know junba, let them dance our Country.

Elder Pansy Nulgit, Walarra (New Mt Hart Station), 2012

Target 5
Ngarinyin Law and culture

Today Ngarinyin Law and culture is still practised. Although no longer as entwined into everyday life as it once was, it remains an important and valued aspect of the life of every Ngarinyin person.

Junba (dance and song), wurlan (language), Larlan (Dreamtime) stories and Law ceremony are key elements that are practised through both formal and informal arrangements. Every year Ngarinyin continue to hold Law ceremony for the younger generation to go through their rites of passage.

Ngarinyin Manambarra (Elders) hold the customary Law for future generations. They help guide behaviour on country using cultural protocols that have been handed down for generations. It is this customary Law that protects and maintains healthy relationships to country. From entering a cultural site, to collecting guloy (green plum) and hunting for yaali (kangaroos and wallabies), strict rules apply. For example, if country is entered or treated the wrong way there can be consequences, such as floods, drought, fires, and sickness. Visitors must be guided by Traditional Owners of the right skin group – either Wodoy or Jun.gurn – and from the right dambun (clan). Visitors must enter the country in a respectful manner and tell the ancestors of their presence. Preparation includes bijagun (smoke) from burning unggarrun (ironwood tree) to disperse the land's spirits to ensure they do you no harm, such as making you sick or giving you bad dreams.

As more and more people move away from country into town, modern-day distractions threaten the knowledge and practice of customary Law and culture. Many Manambarra have passed away; however, knowledge of customary Law still exists. Work is needed to ensure that Ngarinyin Law and culture is passed on to each generation and that new teachers emerge to pass it on again.

Goals

By 2032 Ngarinyin are actively teaching culture to the younger generation resulting in increased participation and skill in key cultural practices such as Law, junba, wurlan and larlan.

By 2026 a curriculum / program is in place to train new speakers in wurlan.

Key attributes

- Increase in programs/projects teaching culture.
- Increased opportunities for junba resulting in more dancers.
- Wurlan being maintained with increased proficiency.
- Knowledge being used and integrated for cultural land management.

Health status in 2012	Health status in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		→	

Evidence for 2023 rating

- Many Manambarra (Elders) with knowledge of country have passed away, resulting in a reduced health status of this target.
- Ngarinyin junba activities (the Junba Project) have grown during the last plan with more singers and dancers involved.
- Back to country trips for teaching kids traditional bush craft, bush medicines, tool making have been occurring – more is needed.
- Support for ceremony.
- WAC continue to document and promote the use of the Ngarinyin language through publication of books, signage and recordings, however more is needed.
- Ngarinyin knowledge is incorporated into formal and informal education systems.
- Establishment of annual work programs focused on cultural knowledge transfer projects such as language books and Apps and bushcraft projects.

Health status key: Very good | Good | Fair | Poor

Target 6 Ngabun freshwater places

Ngabungnanga are freshwater places such as rivers, creeks, springs, billabongs, floodplains, swamps, waterfalls and underground water.

Ngabun give drinking water and bush foods like ungguwiya (water lily), freshwater fish such as emana (black bream), wulumara (long-necked turtle) and dijigudi (short-necked turtle), goya (freshwater crocodile) and narli (cherabin).

Ngabun sustain useful plants like the paperbark species (*Melaleuca argentea* and *M. leucadendra*), which are used for cooking, collecting water, medicines, tools, and shelters. Orrawa jirri (spring pandanus) is another plant that can be eaten and provides habitat for birds such as Gouldian finches and purple-crowned fairy-wrens, and other birds that the Ngarinyin value. Yaali (kangaroos and wallabies) and other game animals hang around ngabun at certain times of the day. The Ngarinyin Rangers have done lots of work to protect ngabun places.

Each year the rangers study wulumara and dijigudi. They also monitor the waterways and wetlands for feral pigs and weeds and look at water quality and the insects and animals that live there. The rangers visit schools to educate children on the importance of looking after the waterways and wetlands.

Wilinggin Country boasts many beautiful and important water places such as the Drysdale, Hann, King Edward, Durack, Moran, Roe, Mitchell, Calder, Isdell, Charnley and Chamberlain rivers. These must be protected.

"Ngabun Wudjilan wuran ganda orrawa jinda ngabun.gurdeyali alyin "

This tree, pandanus (*Pandanus spiralis*) holds freshwater inside it.

Elder Pansy Nulgit

Goals

By 2032 priority ngabungnanga are identified and are healthy, supporting culturally and ecologically significant species populations.

Key attributes

- Riverbanks in good condition.
- Respectful and appropriate visits to Wunggurr places.
- Water quality.
- Healthy populations of culturally significant species such as wulumara and dijigudi.

Health status in 2012	Health status in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		→	○

Evidence for 2023 rating

- WAC Partnerships with Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) has enabled further progress in feral animal and weed control. This work is ongoing and needs to increase.
- Wilinggin and Nyaliga fire and carbon projects up and running decreasing the frequency of wildfires and reducing impact on riparian vegetation.
- The ongoing expansion and establishment of protected areas continue to protect water catchments from threatening processes.
- Better monitoring and evaluation programs need to be established to check waterway health.

Health status key	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor

"Your father yarri (dream) you from that water, it can be big turtle, fish, goanna, you can go and visit that place then, your dreaming place, where your spirit came into the world. You can ngayag the Traditional Owners from that place, the Manambarra from that place, this comes first before any action, they will help you understand your own place of belonging. This is our customary law."

Elder Pansy Nulgit, Kupungarri Community, 2013

"Warndij woni wurlan nyadaga amalarr wijingarri"

The jun.gurn man, wijingarri, the native cat, made our language

Elder Pansy Nulgit, Munja, 2008

"Wurnan di warndij
wanyidnirrni-ngarri ...

When we made the wurnan...

Dududu amindani

she stomped away with it

gulangi jirri

the bush plum

nyindi-yali jebarra"

that emu was the one

Elder David Mowaljarlai, 1992

Target 7 Ngaala wildlife and bush meats

Ngaala means animals, insects, fish and meat. From gaanggi (march flies), warrmuna (brushtail possum), dirrinjinji (dragonflies) to dilalanggi (bull ants), everything has its place in Ngarinyin culture.

The Kimberley is a hot spot for endemic species (animals that occur nowhere else in the world), for example the black grasswren (*Amytornis housei*), monjon (*Petrogale burbidgei*), and miyol / yilangal (scaly-tailed possum, *Wyulda squamicaudata*) are just a few. The size of Wilinggin Country and diversity of habitats makes it one of the last strongholds for many conservation listed species in Australia. For example, the balyawarra (golden-backed tree-rat) has virtually disappeared in the Northern Territory but is still quite common in places in Wilinggin Country, such as at Yanduma near the Calder River. Other species such as the purple-crowned fairy-wren, red goshawk and western partridge pigeon are recognised nationally as animals that need to be looked after. See **Appendix 2** for a list of national listed threatened species.

Many animals are significant not just ecologically but also culturally. For example, the bird jun.gurn, the owlet-nightjar *(Aegotheles cristata*), and wodoy, the spotted nightjar (*Eurotoposus guttatus*), play important roles in Larlan (Dreamtime) stories that teach people customary law around skin and kin relationships. Other animals of cultural importance are jebarra (emu) related to the wurnan (traditional exchange and trade network of objects and art forms), wijingarri (quoll) and domalagngarri (black-headed python) important to baran (widow) Law.

> "Aw, wurnan wandij widnirri, wodoy-ya jun.gurn"
>
> O.K., they started making the wurnan, spotted nightjar and owlet nightjar
>
> *Elder David Mowaljarlai, 1992*

Bush meats come from game animals that have always played an important part in the diets of Ngarinyin. Naginyin are talking about looking after yaali (kangaroos and wallabies), garayali (goanna), jebarra and barnarr (bush turkey). Hunting and tracking game, and preparing and cooking bush meats, follow customary Law. When you protect game animals you are also protecting cultural knowledge and practices.

Ngaala in Wilinggin Country is increasingly coming under threat from pest animals such as feral herbivores, cane toads and feral cats as well as unmanaged fire.

To date, biodiversity work done on Wilinggin Country has primarily focused on inventory, finding out what species are present and where, across mostly little surveyed areas of the IPA. The inventory data is necessary for prioritising and designing any ongoing monitoring programs for assessing the health of country, species and impact of management work.

Goals

By 2032 ecological and culturally important species are being monitored and healthy populations are supported by land and cultural management activities.

By 2032 Ngarinyin are accessing and enjoying ngaala (bush meats) and following protocols for hunting, cutting up, cooking and distribution.

Key attributes

- Burning the right area at the right time, with the right frequency and intensity.
- Ngarinyin following customary Law for hunting.
- Ngarinyin using and passing on bush knowledge.
- Healthy populations of priority cultural and ecological species.
- Abundance of game (*e.g.* yaali, jebarra, barnarr).

Health status in 2012	Health status in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		↑	○

Evidence for 2023 rating

- Increased operational work and partnerships has led to an enhanced understanding of this target and a improved target health assessment. Further monitoring required to build confidence.
- The early mawinggi (cool dry season) burning program is occurring each year with constant improvements (complemented by wildfire suppression activity when feasible).
- Wilinggin fire and carbon projects up and running supporting operations and
- Increased resourcing for WAC and Ngarinyin Ranger Programs enabling more work to be done.
- Biodiversity work with partners (AWC, World Wildlife Fund, Bush Blitz) has established some good inventory data that will inform strategic monitoring programs.

Health status key	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor

Threats

In 2014 and 2022 Ngarinyin Elders and community identified a range of threats that were affecting the health of the targets.

The threats were rated and ranked by assessing how bad they are, the extent of the damage they cause and whether the damage caused can be fixed. This helps prioritise work with the focus on the most serious threats.

By implementing this plan, it is anticipated that the ratings of the threats reduce. For example, with good cultural land management threats rated ***High*** in 2023, are expected to be rated ***Medium*** in 2028. To help guide the work for reducing the threats goals have been developed.

Table 9 shows the threat ratings of the main threats on Wilinggin Country in 2023, as well as the threat trend and the rating confidence.

Evidence on why the threat rating, trend and confidence have been rated as they have in 2023 are included in the threat descriptions in this plan. Further detail on these will be shown in annual reviews of this plan.

Main threat	Rating in 2012	Rating in 2023	Trend	Confidence
1. People not on Country			→	◔
2. Loss of, and respect for, Ngarinyin knowledge transfer			↓	◔
3. Lack of emerging leaders (human capital)			↓	◔
4. Uncontrolled visitor access			↓	◔
5. Climate change			↓	◔
6. Unmanaged fire			↑	◔
7. Lack of resources for good land management			↑	◔
8. Weeds			→	○
9. Feral animals			→	○
10. Lack of good governance and administration			↑	◔
11. Pastoral and other leases			↑	◔

Table 9 Threats and their rankings

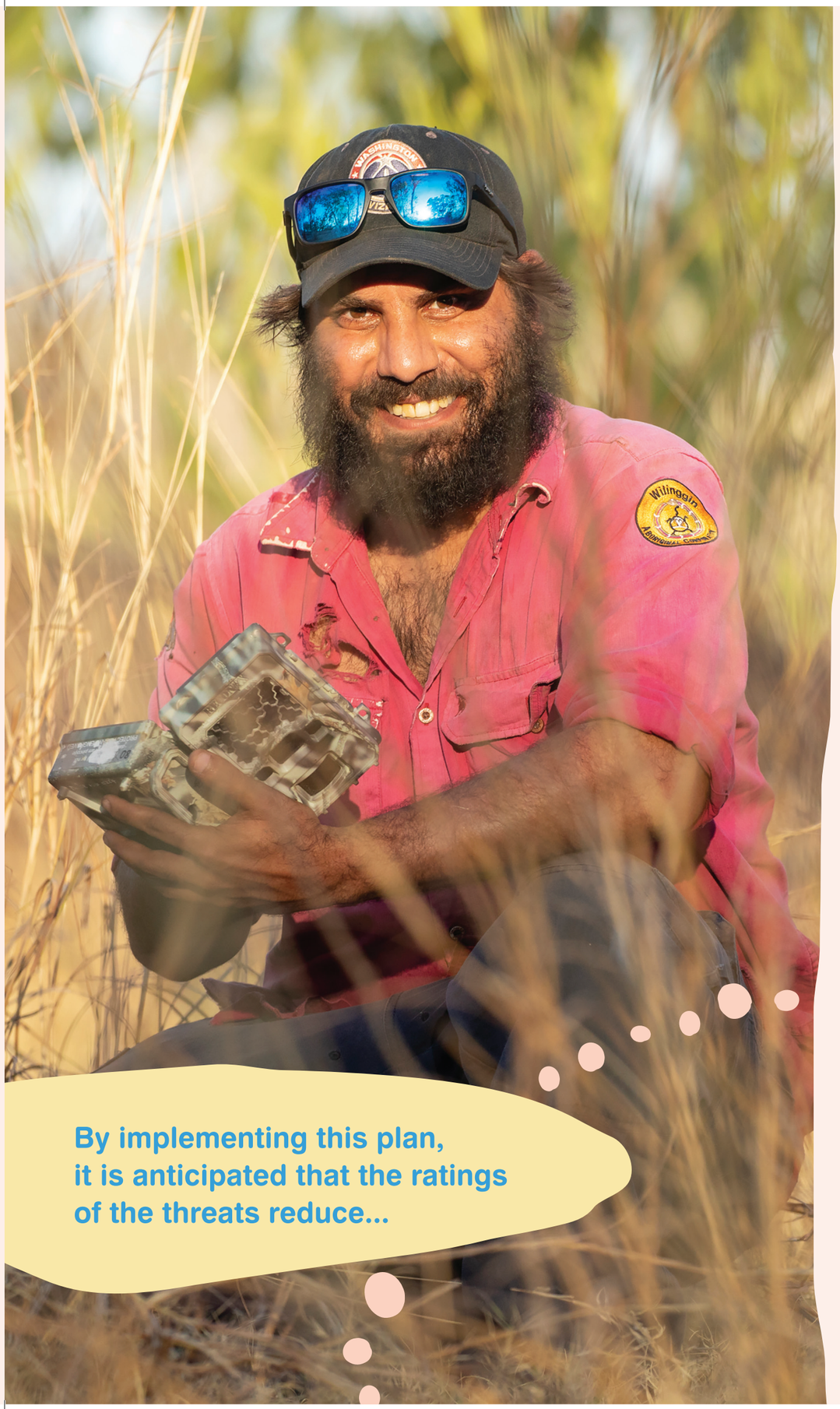


Table 10 Threat rating descriptions

Threat rating	Description
Very high	The threat has the potential, or is likely, to destroy or remove all or part of the target, if the current situation or rate of damage continues. If this happens then it may not be possible to make the target healthy again.
High	The threat is likely to cause serious damage to all or part of the target if the current situation or rate of damage continues. If this happens then it would be very expensive and difficult to make the target healthy.
Medium	The threat is likely to cause moderate damage to all or part of the target if the current situation or rate of damage continues. If this happens then it would take a reasonable effort and amount of money to make the target healthy.
Low	The threat is likely to cause a small amount of damage to all or part of the target if the current situation or rate of damage continues. If this happens it would not cost much money, and would be relatively easy, to make the target healthy.

Table 11 Confidence and trend descriptions

Confidence: What was the source of information		What is the trend	
Intensive assessment We did a detailed assessment / survey	●	Unknown	?
Expert knowledge We have good experience and knowledge with this	◕	Stong increase (better)	↑
Sampling based We took some samples, or surveyed some sites out of many	◑	Mild increase	↗
Rapid assessment We have done a formal assessment but not a detailed one	◔	Flat	→
Rough guess We think we know but we are just guessing	○	Mild decrease	↘
		Strong decrease (worse)	↓

Threat 1
People not on Country

For thousands of years, Ngarinyin lived on their land and undertook traditional land management, which kept Country healthy and people prosperous.

This connection to Country enabled Ngarinyin to understand the land and protect its values against threats. As the seasons changed and people travelled throughout the landscape on foot everyone could see, smell, hear and taste the country and know whether it was healthy or unhealthy.

These days, many Ngarinyin do not live on or visit Country. Many children have never been to their ancestral lands, and do not gain the experience to know whether Country is healthy or unhealthy. For some families, living on country is not an option because their land is on pastoral leases or lacks infrastructure, such as roads. Work commitments or aspirations and the necessity to send their children to school also keep them in regional centres. To keep country healthy, Traditional Owners must be on country and actively managing the land.

Threat goals

By 2032 an increased number of Traditional Owners are regularly accessing their homelands compared to 2023.

By 2032 Traditional and non-Traditional Owners are following protocols when visiting country, ensuring a safe and respectful experience for everyone

Threat rating in 2012	Threat rating in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		→	

Evidence for 2023 rating

- Increase in WAC staffing and opportunities for Ngarinyin to access country.
- Challenges remain in developing significant support, infrastructure and the will to visit, live or work on country.

Threat rating key	Very high	High	Medium	Low

Threat 2
Loss of, and respect for, Ngarinyin knowledge transfer

Opportunities for young people to learn from their Elders on Country are becoming less.

Few organisations have the capacity to plan and run knowledge transfer trips. To ensure that knowledge is passed on to the future generations of land managers, on-Country traditional education needs to occur. Hunting and gathering, fire management, cultural site management, language and knowledge transfer and other important activities all have to be undertaken on Country. These opportunities should complement western education to ensure that the younger generations are trained to use both toolboxes, western and traditional.

Threat goals

By 2032 WAC have Ngarinyin educational programs and technologies in place resulting in increased retention and respect of Law, culture and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).

Threat rating in 2012	Threat rating in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		↓	

Evidence for 2023 rating

- Challenges remain in weaving Ngarinyin traditional knowledge into formal education systems.
- Less knowledge holders available to assist in teaching and mentoring.

Threat rating key: Very high | High | Medium | Low

Threat goals

By 2025, programs are in place fostering and mentoring the development of new Ngarinyin leaders.

By 2032 programs and partnerships are in place leading to increased Ngarinyin wellbeing (*e.g.* physical, mental, and spiritual health).

Threat rating in 2012	Threat rating in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
No rating		↓	

Evidence for 2023 rating

- Challenges remain in the engagement, recruitment and retention of young and middle-aged people which is coupled with social and health issues.

Threat rating key: Very high | High | Medium | Low

Threat 3
Lack of emerging leaders

The poor personal health and wellbeing of Ngarinyin is becoming an increasing concern for the health of Wilinggin Country.

Without healthy and active people, they are unable to fill jobs, undertake training and look after Country as the old people did. Today many people are unwell, both in body and spirit. There are many reasons why this is happening, including poor money-management, depression, relationship problems, welfare dependency, substance abuse, broken families, modern distractions and many more. Although health is not normally associated with land management, Ngarinyin see direct links between the health of people and the health of Country.

Important sites are not just caves where Wanjina rock art is found, but waterholes, rivers, the rocky ranges and remnant rainforest patches. There are many traditional stories attached to these places...

Threat 4
Uncontrolled visitor access

Wilinggin Country has some of the most beautiful and rugged landscapes in the world and as such attracts thousands of local and international tourists each year.

Increasing amounts of tourists travel along the Gibb River Road, stopping and camping at gorges, rivers, cultural sites and other points of interest. While most visitors have good intentions many are unaware of what a culture site is, and the cultural sensitivities of going onto country without permission or education. Important sites are not just caves where Wanjina rock art is found, but waterholes, rivers, the rocky ranges and remnant rainforest patches. There are many traditional stories attached to these places and all are important to Ngarinyin.

While WAC has increased its management capacity to deal with visitors to country and initiated the development of projects and programs (*e.g.* tourism apps) for education, the sheer number of visitors over a vast area makes it an ongoing challenge.

Threat goals

By 2032 visitors on Wilinggin Country are following cultural and management protocols as directed by WAC, communities, and Traditional Owners.

Threat rating in 2012	Threat rating in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		↓	

Evidence for 2023 rating

- Significant uncontrolled and increased visitation along the Gibb River Road
- Ngarinyin cultural awareness programs yet to be initiated.
- WAC has started to build a profile, workforce and business and has greater respect and authority as a land manager.
- *Wilinggin Visitor Management Strategy 2021-2026* developed but yet to be actioned.

Threat rating key: Very high | High | Medium | Low

Threat goals

By 2025 WAC is implementing its monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) framework mitigating compounding effects from the changing climate.

Threat rating in 2012	Threat rating in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		↓	

Evidence for 2023 rating

- Lack of MERI work means WAC cannot be responsive to landscape changes.
- Climate change research suggests an increase in temperature including more hot days and fewer colder nights, increased extreme cyclonic events affecting WAC operations.
- WAC has increased capacity, resources and partnerships leading to the establishment of strategic land management programs around fire, ferals and weeds.

Threat rating key: Very high | High | Medium | Low

Threat 5
Climate Change

Climate Change is an overarching threat for Wilinggin Country.

Climate Change is contributing to increasingly complex issues in the management of weeds, feral animals, restoration of native plants and animals and adaptive fire management.

Threat 6
Unmanaged fire

A fire not properly managed or controlled can become a wildfire under certain conditions. A wildfire is any fire that causes damage to Country.

Wildfires generally occur from early August until December. Under dry, windy conditions, and when not enough Mawinggi (cool dry season) burning has occurred, late season wildfires can burn for many weeks, destroying vast areas of country. Wildfires destroy animal habitats and food resources, interrupt plant flowering and fruiting, reduce organic matter causing erosion and water pollution, and damage cultural sites and infrastructure. Wildfires also contribute to the spread of weeds and feral animals.

Since Europeans arrived in the Kimberley, wildfires have increased in extent, intensity, and frequency on average, creating a significant threat to biodiversity values. Climate change is contributing to increasing late season fire frequency across the northern savanna and burning will have to adapt year-on-year in response to the rapidly changing conditions during the 'traditional' early-season burning period.

Threat goals
By 2028 the frequency and intensity of wildfires are reduced on all Ngarinyin Country.

Threat rating in 2012	Threat rating in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		→	

Evidence for 2023 rating

- Wilinggin and Nyaliga fire and carbon projects up and running, decreasing the frequency of wildfires.
- Challenges remain around increasing the workforce and skills to do fire work (*e.g.* succession planning).

Threat rating key: Very high | High | Medium | Low

"Majal jongarri mingarri melbarra wari mumindan munda guloy"

When the grass is high, [the fire] burns the green plums completely

"Wari mumindan muna jongarri malgarra"

Big fires burn up all the bush tucker

"Wari budmangarri malgarra mindiyu rulug biyingga manjanda barnjara"

When they [the people] set a bushfire, [the animals] shift themselves out to the rocks and caves.

"Gajin.ga mara borrgoya"

We can't find them [the animals]

"Malgarra gi andumani"

The bushfire pushed out all the animals

Elder Pansy Nulgit, Kupungarri Community, 2013.

Threat 7
Lack of resources for good land management

Under the last WHCP significant work was carried out to secure resources to undertake and increase cultural land management activities.

In 2023 three Ngarinyin Ranger Programs were running Wunggurr Rangers, Ngaliga Rangers and Ngarinyin Darran.gu Wulagura – Strong Women's Program.

While much progress has been made in this area, a lack of resources remains a constant threat due to the reliance on grants for funding. In addition, with land tenure reform occurring and an increasing area for WAC to manage, more rangers and resources are needed to mitigate threats and improve the health of targets. Increased resources is also important for developing programs for junior rangers and other staff members.

Threat goals

By 2032 the Nyaliga, Wunggurr and Women ranger programs are well staffed, resourced, and skilled to look after Country.

Threat rating in 2012	Threat rating in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		↑	

Evidence for 2023 rating

- WAC has significantly harnessed increased resources through partnerships, projects and grants supporting the expansion of cultural land management activities.
- The establishment of the Nyaliga Rangers and Ngarinyin Darran.gu Wulagura – Strong Women's Program.

Threat rating key	Very high	High	Medium	Low

Threat 8 Weeds

Weeds are plants that do not belong to Country and cause damage, and they are becoming an increasing problem on Wilinggin Country.

They come in the form of grasses and herbs, vines, trees, and shrubs, and some occur in waterways. Many weeds come from overseas, having been brought in on purpose (*e.g.* for pasture or horticulture) or by accident. Weeds cause damage by:

- altering habitats, making it hard for animals to find food and shelter
- competing with or taking the place of native plants, including those that people rely on
- creating increased fuel loads for wildfires, which then burn hotter and cause more damage
- changing the flow and health of water places
- restricting the movement of people and animals through the landscape.

Land managers have legal responsibilities to manage some weeds (Weeds of National Significance or Western Australian Declared Weeds).

It is important for Traditional Owners to spend time on their country and notice if any new plants have arrived; it is at this point that weeds are easiest to eradicate. It is important to know what weeds look like and how to eradicate them.

Threat goals

By 2032, priority weeds within Wilinggin Conservation Areas are managed and not degrading cultural and natural values.

Threat rating in 2012	Threat rating in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		→	○

Evidence for 2023 rating

- Establishment of partnership has enabled greater progress in weed surveillance and control.
- Wilinggin Weed Management Plan established; however challenges remain around implementation (*e.g.* timing, workforce availability, technical support, resources available).

Threat rating key	Very high	High	Medium	Low

Threat 9
Feral animals

Feral animals are non-native animals that cause significant damage to Country.

Animals that do not belong here include cats, pigs, donkeys and the cane toad. Other invasive animals include types of fish, birds and reptiles. Cattle outside stations are also feral but are a source of meat for Traditional Owners. Feral animals cause damage by:

- preying on native animals
- trampling sensitive vegetation (*e.g.* rainforests) and causing erosion
- trampling and fouling waterholes
- spreading diseases and parasites
- disturbing and damaging cultural sites
- spreading weeds.

Feral animal control can be extremely difficult and costly. Working with neighbouring land managers is essential for any long-term control efforts.

Threat goals
By 2032, priority feral animals within Wilinggin Conservation Areas are managed and not degrading cultural and natural values.

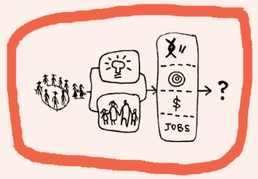
Threat rating in 2012	Threat rating in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		→	○

Evidence for 2023 rating

- Partnership with AWC and DBCA has enabled greater progress in feral animal surveillance and control.
- Wilinggin Feral Animal Management Plan established; however challenges remain around implementation (*e.g.* timing, workforce availability, technical support, resources available).

Threat rating key	Very high	High	Medium	Low

Threat 10
Lack of good governance and administration



To effectively carry out their legal and cultural responsibilities to manage country, Ngarinyin require effective governance and administration arrangements.

Whether it be a PBC or community corporation, Ngarinyin want their affairs to be managed in a professional and productive way. Ngarinyin must work in two worlds; western and traditional. This means that effective rules, policies and procedures have to be developed and followed to ensure that both ways are respected. To enable this training and capacity building must be undertaken to help assist directors and members of these corporations to understand and fulfill their roles. Good governance and administration also offers protection for when staff move on, allowing for a spread of skills and succession planning.

Threat goals

By 2032 through targeted programs and initiatives, new Ngarinyin leaders are emerging and working to look after country.

Threat rating in 2012	Threat rating in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		↑	

Evidence for 2023 rating

- WAC have employed 23 staff, predominantly Indigenous, including a CEO and Business Development Manager.
- Challenges remain in supporting succession planning and other Ngarinyin smaller corporations.

Threat rating key: Very high | High | Medium | Low

Threat goals

By 2032 there is an improvement to land rights and access for Ngarinyin from 2023.

Threat rating in 2012	Threat rating in 2023	Trend in 2023	Confidence
		↑	

Evidence for 2023 rating

- WAC have continued to improve land rights and access for Ngarinyin through partnerships, acquisitions, and increased authority as a land manager.
- Some challenges and risks remain to maintain and improve into the future with different land tenure / managers.

Threat rating key: Very high | High | Medium | Low

Threat 11
Pastoral and other leases

Wilinggin Country has a strong history of pastoralism. Many Ngarinyin look back with fondness to their station days, when they lived and worked on the land.

Today, pastoralism is still strong, but Indigenous participation has been declining. Pastoral activity has been listed as a threat because of the impact of hard-hoofed animals on the targets, and the perceived and real restrictions of access to Wilinggin Country.

The problem of access across pastoral and other leases is raised by Traditional Owners during community consultations. Gates and fences impede Traditional Owners from using areas for their own customary purposes. Fences and signage prohibiting people from entering leasehold or private land to reach resources on Country are discouraging for Traditional Owners, and people risk losing their attachment to such areas, which they see as now belonging to someone else.

Today the challenge is to develop a land management model based on traditional practices that will enable Ngarinyin to look after Country in the modern world...

Projects

Projects help to organise work. Under each project a series of strategies have been identified to restore the targets, reduce the threats and develop capacity of staff.

Strategies help Ngarinyin to achieve their goals. By implementing the strategies, Ngarinyin should see improvement in the overall health of their country.

Each strategy involves one or more activities. The activities for each strategy are developed in an Action plan which gets updated progressively over 1-5 years. An Action plan also includes:

- Agreed timeframes and prioritisation of strategies and activities
- Theories of Change (*i.e.* Road Maps) for key strategies
- A monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) framework (Check-up process)

The annual work plans are made from the Action Plan.

The project areas for this plan are:

1. Fire management
2. Weed management
3. Law and cultural site management
4. Feral animal management
5. Cultural knowledge transfer
6. Governing Country

To keep Country healthy, Traditional Owners must be on Country and actively managing the land...

Project 1 Fire management

Strategies	Threats reduced	Targets improved
Manage and expand Wilinggin Fire Carbon projects onto all Ngarinyin Country including undertaking traditional burning practices through increased ground burning and on country fire walks. Increase Traditional Owner capacity to manage fire through accredited training, mentoring and access to resources. Continue strategic fire management as directed by Traditional Owners through annual planning and review workshops. Work with partners to develop a biodiversity monitoring framework to assess changes in target health.	• Unmanaged fire. • Not enough resources to look after Country. • Loss of, and respect for, Ngarinyin knowledge transfer.	• Darran.gu ngadi – becoming strong on Country. • Maynda – food and medicine plants. • Malgarra – bushfire. • Ngaala – wildlife and bush meats. • Ngabun – freshwater places.

Project 2 Weed management

Strategies	Threats reduced	Targets improved
Continue to monitor for and eradicate highly invasive species in priority areas to prevent new infestations. Identify high priority weed species for surveillance, containment, control, or eradication (*e.g.* grader grass, gamba grass, Parkinsonia).	• Weeds.	• Maynda – food and medicine plants. • Ngaala – wildlife and bush meats. • Ngabun – freshwater places.

Project 3 Law and cultural site management

Strategies	Threats reduced	Targets improved
Repatriate Ngarinyin cultural information for safe storage and use on the Ngarinyin Cultural Database.	• Loss of, and respect for, Ngarinyin knowledge transfer. • Uncontrolled visitor access.	• Law and culture sites. • Ngarinyin Law and culture. • Darran.gu ngadi – becoming strong on Country.
Develop and implement cultural awareness program / products for visitors to Wilinggin Country including tourists, business, and services providers.		
Facilitate the ongoing maintenance of Law and cultural sites by old and young people within each zone of Wilinggin Country.		
Develop a cloud-based cultural database interface so Ngarinyin can access their cultural heritage information.		
Source funding and partnerships to implement the priorities within the *Wilinggin Visitor Management Strategy 2021-2026*.		

Project 4 Feral animal management

Strategies	Threats reduced	Targets improved
Using the *Wilinggin Feral Management and Action Plan (WFMAC)* identify high priority species and location (*e.g.* Ngabungnanga – Water places) for surveillance, containment, control, or eradication (*e.g.* cattle, pigs).	• Feral animals. • Unmanaged fire. • Weeds.	• Law and culture sites. • Maynda – food and medicine plants. • Ngaala – wildlife and bush meats. • Ngabun – freshwater places.

Ngarinyin Manambarra (Elders) hold the customary Law for future generations. They help guide behaviour on Country using cultural protocols that have been handed down for generations..

Project 5 Cultural knowledge transfer

Strategies	Threats reduced	Targets improved
Source funding and work with language experts to develop a Ngarinyin language speaking program to promote the use of Ngarinyin language.	• Loss of, and respect for, Ngarinyin knowledge transfer. • People not on Country. • Lack of emerging leaders.	• All targets.
Continue to build up the Ngarinyin Junba Project for developing young singers, artists, dancers, and language speakers.		
Support and undertake themed back to country trips to strengthen cultural activities such as bush craft, hunting right way, bush medicine uses *etc*.		
Work with partners and families to support small back to country trips.		
Continue to support Ngarinyin Law activities.		
Continue to collect Traditional Ecological Knowledge and develop products (*e.g.* Books, seasonal calendars) to educate and build respect for Ngarinyin Law and culture.		
Work with elders and leaders to develop cultural protocol information for right way hunting.		

Project 6 Governing Country

Strategies	Threats reduced	Targets improved
Weave health and wellbeing programs into the ranger work plans (*e.g.* Mental Health – Mad Bastards Training).	• Lack of emerging leaders. • Lack of resources for good land management. • People not on Country. • Climate Change.	• Darran.gu ngadi – becoming strong on Country. • Ngarinyin Law and culture.
Develop capital works program to assist Traditional Owners and rangers in accessing and looking after country (*e.g.* roads, airstrips, grader training, housing, infrastructure upgrades and procurement, water crossings *etc.*).		
Develop and implement a Ngarinyin emerging leaders' program that creates career and training pathways to cater to people's interests, skills, workplace gaps (*e.g.* succession plans, specialised roles, governance and administration, Internships *etc*).		
Work with partners to establish a land management academy which provides skills and experiences, nurturing Ngarinyin youth for future ranger work.		
Continue to actively support Ngarinyin women to be involved in the Ngarinyin Darran.gu Wulagura (Strong women on Country) Program.		
Plan for and undertake twice yearly formal monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement work with the Wilinggin Healthy Country Planning Advisory Committee.		

"More trips on country involving multiple generations would make us feel a lot better - exchange between young and old."

Barbara Bear, Derby, 2022

Learning and adapting

It is important that WAC has regular "check ups'' to review how well the healthy country work is going and make changes to ensure the projects remain on track to achieve the goals and objectives in this plan.

Since the first *Wilinggin Healthy Country Plan* (2013) WAC has developed a Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Plan (MERI) to guide these regular ''check-ups''. The MERI Plan includes:

- the types of monitoring needed to check progress.
- the indicators needed to measure progress.
- how WAC will record progress.
- how WAC will report and communicate the progress.
- what WAC will do to improve management.

There are three levels of Monitoring in the MERI plan

- Strategy monitoring: checking the implementation of the plan.
- Threat monitoring: checking the strategies are reducing the threats.
- Target monitoring: checking if the health of the targets is improving, and goals are being reached.

WAC will work with key staff, elders, community members and partners to carry out the monitoring and evaluations.

Implementation monitoring

Checking the progress with implementing the strategies and activities

Every 6 months

Threat monitoring

Measuring the threat indicators to see if the threats are reducing = checking if the threat goals are being achieved

Every 1–2 years

Target monitoring

Measuring the target indicators to see if the targets are getting healthier = checking if the target goals are being achieved

Every 5 years

"When walking on country you feel the spirit from your people. It is important that everyone is on Country. Feels like your life is much better and feels good."

Heather Wungundin, Derby, 2022

Moving forward

Since 2013 there has been tremendous progress and success for the Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation in becoming a professional organisation providing benefit and services to Ngarinyin.

Through the hard work of many Ngarinyin, support staff and partners, the future looks bright. This plan sets the strategic direction to build off this recent success and honour the Elders who fought for so long and passionately for Wilinggin Country and for Ngarinyin.

Appendix

Appendix 1: The members of the Wanjina-Wunggurr Community

The descendants of Manumordja, Bulun, Muduu, Banganjaa, Djanghara, Yamara, Baangngayi, Miyaawuyu, Juugaariitor, Djurog-gal, Gilingii, Buunduunguu, Awololaa, Baarrbarrnguu, Angaarambuu, Liinyang, Maanduu-Nuunda, Yuulbal, Freddie Yauubidi, Djalalarmarra, Biljimbirii, Didjingul and Jimmy Manguubangguu.

The descendants of Bandilu, Jarara, Garnag, Momolindij, Galadna, Wanbalug, Burrimbalu, Niyalgarl, Janggara, Ngambijmoro Birramang-nguray, Marala, Gayroog, Buunbuun, Bunngn-guuluu, Djanban, Ngaul-gnarli, Wuungulaa, Maamaandil, Djalanoo, Djilawalaa, Gunagang-ngarii, Mirgngala,, Wabilu, Babirri, Morndignali, Wulagudan, Balangurr, Nyolgodi, Bagumaya, Banggulmoro, Bundungumen, Bagurrngumen, Jilbidij, Bulyuriyali, Brarnggun, Moundi Nirrin,. Molabayng, King O'Malley, Ulinji, Nyaminjenman, Nyalangun, Nalawaru, Bumangul Jarngulay, Bandibej, Munbara, Didburr, Gungala, Wundij, Larburr, Mandi Bandumar, Omboni, Wama, Jalimburr, Bundanali, Umbawinali, Dinamoro, Yalwamurrngarri, Milarbiyar, Mudarwin, Larungumen, Gunduran, Warrwarr, Dandangumen, Didburrngomen, Naranyalgan, Jimmy Bird, Monarriyali, Ngarburrngu, Yanbongu, Dudungungga, Jimmy Wawawawarri, together with the descendants of Dalbi, who was adopted into the Native Title claimant group; and

The descendants of Bulun / Mauckie, Luwirr, Binjirrngu / Kadi, Djamai, Marnpiny, Munguwadawoi, Kanaway, Arai Djinbari, Maudie Kaiimbinya, Nyanggawana, Ernie Nyimandum and Ruby, Manumortja, Peter Malanaby, Old Jacob, Miyardu, Jerry Jangoot, Jabadayim, Nalawaru, Junggara and Murunguny together with Kenny Oobagooma, Jacob Sesar and Evelyn Bandora, who were adopted into the Native Title claimant group, and their descendants.

Appendix 2: Species listed under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Scientific name	Common English name	Likelihood	EPBC status
Chloebia gouldiae	Gouldian finch	Confirmed	Endangered
Malurus coronatus coronatus	Western purple-crowned fairy-wren	Very likely	Endangered
Dasyurus hallucatus	Northern quoll	Confirmed	Endangered
Mesembriomys gouldii gouldii	Black-footed tree-rat (Kimberley and mainland N.T.)	Confirmed	Endangered
Petrogale concinna monastria	Nabarlek (Kimberley)	Very likely	Endangered
Erythrotriorchis radiatus	Red goshawk	Confirmed	Vulnerable
Falco hypoleucos	Grey falcon	Very likely	Vulnerable
Geophaps smithii blaauwi	Western partridge pigeon	Confirmed	Vulnerable
Conilurus penicillatus penicillatus	Brush-tailed rabbit-rat (Kimberley, Top End)	Very likely	Vulnerable
Isoodon auratus	Golden bandicoot	Very likely	Vulnerable
Phascogale tapoatafa kimberleyensis	Kimberley brush-tailed phascogale	Confirmed	Vulnerable
Trichosurus vulpecula arnhemensis	Common brushtail possum (north-western)	Confirmed	Vulnerable

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Acknowledgements

WAC thank the following valued partners for their financial assistance, expertise, and other support in helping to prepare this Wilinggin Healthy Country Plan.

- The Nature Conservancy
- Conservation Management
- Australian Wildlife Conservancy
- Indigenous Protected Areas Program of the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)

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