



Media Release



Australian Government

Director of National Parks

Supervising Scientist

17 June 2005

[Insert reference number]

Using two toolboxes to manage Kakadu's wetlands

"You look after country, and the country will look after you," says Violet Lawson, a traditional owner from Kakadu National Park.

Violet and her family are combining traditional ecological knowledge with western science to manage Boggy Plain, a Ramsar-listed wetland on the South Alligator River floodplain in Kakadu. This project is the first of its kind in Australia.

CSIRO researcher and Violet's son-in-law, Peter Christophersen, said by using fire and drawing on two toolboxes of knowledge, both traditional and scientific, his family had transformed Boggy Plain from a dense monoculture of grass to a mosaic of different habitats.

"Using fire to look after country is an integral part of traditional Aboriginal life in northern Australia and the results at Boggy Plain have been amazing. We've significantly enhanced biodiversity in this wetland and have improved its cultural values for Aboriginal people by increasing the availability of food resources," he said.

Another important aspect of the project is the transfer of traditional knowledge to younger generations.

"Our whole family is involved in burning the wetland. Our kids love to learn about looking after country, to learn how to burn, and to learn how to hunt and collect bush tucker," Mr Christophersen said.

Kakadu Park Manager, Glenn Meade, said the project had been an important two-way learning experience.

"With this project whitefellas have learnt about traditional fire management, and Aboriginal people have used science to document vegetation change and show the rest of the world that what they are doing is making a difference," he said.

Peter Bayliss from the Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist in Darwin has been helping Violet and her family with vegetation monitoring.

"Aboriginal people have an enormous wealth of ecological knowledge gained from 40,000 or more years of living in the northern Australian environment. Yet they are very much marginalised in terms of natural resource management. The Boggy Plain project could serve as a model for effective joint management in national parks", he said.

The Boggy Plain project is now entering a new phase in partnership with CSIRO and the national Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre.

"With support from CSIRO and the Bushfire CRC, we can now start documenting how our burning has improved the availability of food resources at Boggy Plain, and what this means for the traditional economy of Aboriginal people in Kakadu," said Mr Christophersen.

Further Information:

Peter Christophersen CSIRO

Peter Bayliss ERISS

Glenn Meade Kakadu National Park

Media Assistance:

Barbara McKaige CSIRO

Ph. 08 8944 8411

Ph 08 8920 1100 mobile

mobile 0438 381 101

ph. 08 8944 8411 mobile 0407 611 846

Barbara.McKaige@csiro.au

www.csiro.au

If you would like to be removed from this mailing list, please contact CSIROMedia@csiro.au, or telephone us on 02 6276 6479.