



HEALTHY RIVERS TO
REEF PARTNERSHIP
MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY-ISAAC



INDIGENOUS CULTURAL HERITAGE ASSESSMENTS

— Executive Summary —

2021 MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY-ISAAC REPORT CARD

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Partnership acknowledges the continuing land and sea country management of the Traditional Owner groups within the Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac region and Great Barrier Reef whose rich cultures, heritage values, enduring connections, and shared efforts protect the land and Reef for future generations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This assessment was undertaken for the Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac (MWI) Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership (HR2RP), led by the MWI Traditional Owner Reference Group (TORG) and Converge Heritage Consulting with support provided by Reef Catchments Limited (RCL). The TORG members and the Traditional Owner groups they identify with are shown in Table 1. HR2RP would like to acknowledge Aunty Carol Prior's contribution to the cultural heritage assessments. HR2RP are incredibly privileged to have worked alongside Aunty Carol, sharing her traditional knowledge of her country. HR2RP express our deepest condolences to Aunty Carol's family on her passing.

In addition to completing the assessment, we would like to acknowledge the additional time and effort spent by the TORG and RCL staff in providing feedback and reviews of the assessments.



Table 1: MWI Traditional Owner Reference Group Members 2022.

TORG Member	Traditional Owner Groups
Cathy Illin	Ngaro
Aunty Sue West	Juru
Agnes Boyd	Gia
Uncle George Tonga	Yuwibara
Samarla Deshong	Koinmerburra
Marissa Deshong	Koinmerburra
Sam Dallachy	Barada Barna/Wiri

BACKGROUND

The MWI Report Card provides an annual snapshot of waterway health in the region by communicating indicators related to ecosystem condition and human dimensions. The geographical region covered by the report card includes the Don, O'Connell, Proserpine, Pioneer and Plane basins, their estuaries and the adjacent inshore and offshore marine waters to the eastern boundary of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The sites assessed for the report card fall within the country of the Juru, Ngaro, Gia, Koinmerburra, Barada, and Widi Peoples.

The Partnership acknowledges the Yuwi people's native title determination on 25 February 2020. As the Yuwi Aboriginal Corporation was newly formed at the time of the cultural heritage assessments, it was decided not to include Yuwi sites, out of respect for the Native Title Act and to allow for further consultation with the traditional owners of Yuwi Country. The Partnership looks forward to working with the Yuwi Aboriginal Corporation to create engagement opportunities and help support Yuwi people's aspirations on Country.

As part of the Report Card's human dimensions indicators, the MWI Indigenous Cultural Heritage Assessment was developed by the TORG and HR2RP, and first assessed in 2015. The assessment is updated every three years, with subsequent surveys completed for the 2018 and 2021 report cards. The assessment is unique in that it is Traditional Owner-led and has a diverse array of objectives. The objectives include assessing the archaeological importance of a site through time, identifying opportunities for cultural maintenance and management plans, and assessing the spiritual health of culturally important sites. The cultural heritage assessments for the 2021 Report Card took place in October 2020. For consistency, these assessments are referred to in this summary as the 2021 assessments.



WHAT WAS ASSESSED IN THE 2021 REPORT CARD?

The 2021 Report Card presents the third assessment of the MWI Indigenous Cultural Heritage index. The following indicators were evaluated during assessments on Country by Traditional Owner representatives and archaeologists:

INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION
Spiritual & Social Value	How healthy a site is in a spiritual and social sense, as determined by the relevant Traditional Owner(s) representatives for a given site. This metric is qualitative and holistic.
	This indicator was assessed retroactively at a zone level following the most recent assessment by members of the Traditional Owner Reference Group.
Archaeological Value	How well a site represents or supports the story of traditional land use.
	How unique, rare, or distinct a site is.
	The potential for a site or artefact to answer research questions for Traditional Owners and archaeologists.
Physical Condition	The visible impact to a site as a result of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental factors (storm surges, inundation, erosion, fading of motifs, insect nests, water flow across art, and mineral staining) • Animals (burrowing, trampling, and animal waste) • Humans (tracks, vehicles, paths, trampling, and boating activities).
	The impact of the above threats on the cultural value of the site.
Protection of Sites	Registration of sites with the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP).
	Management of threats to sites.
	Control of access to sites (boardwalks, information signage, and fencing).
	No obvious threats (no physical protection needed).
Cultural Maintenance	Documented ongoing management arrangements (management plans, agreements with local and state governments).
	Engaging and collaborating with stakeholders to meet joint cultural values.



ZONES ASSESSED IN THE 2021 REPORT

- Islands of the Whitsundays (4 sites)
- Airlie Beach & Proserpine (New; 4 sites)
- Lake Elphinstone & Mt Britton (New; 7 sites)
- St Lawrence (New, 2 sites)

WHAT WERE THE OVERALL SCORES AND GRADES IN THE 2021 REPORT CARD?

Data was recorded for 17 sites across four zones, using custom-designed recording forms. The Proserpine-Airlie Beach, Lake Elphinstone-Mt Britton, and St Lawrence zones were assessed for the first time, amounting to 13 new sites.

Report card grades for the 2021 Indigenous Cultural Heritage Assessment of the MWI region ranged from C (moderate) to D (poor). The only zone assessed in 2021 that was previously assessed in 2018 was the 'Islands of the Whitsundays' zone, which received similar indicator grades to the previous assessment (assessed as 'good' condition overall).

Assessing cultural heritage in the MWI region continues to be an iterative, evolving process for all parties involved. Most recently, there have been multiple method changes between the 2018 and 2021 assessments, including:

- The replacement of a 'spiritual and social value' indicator with the 'spiritual and social health' indicator, designed to improve the accuracy of the assessments by adding a holistic metric of site health by Traditional Owners.
- Multiple site and zone changes between years, including two new zones in the MWI region visited in 2021 ('Airlie Beach-Proserpine' and 'Lake Elphinstone-Mt Britton' zones) (Table 2).

As a result, grade changes in the 2021 assessment are likely due to method changes and site selection rather than changes to site condition.

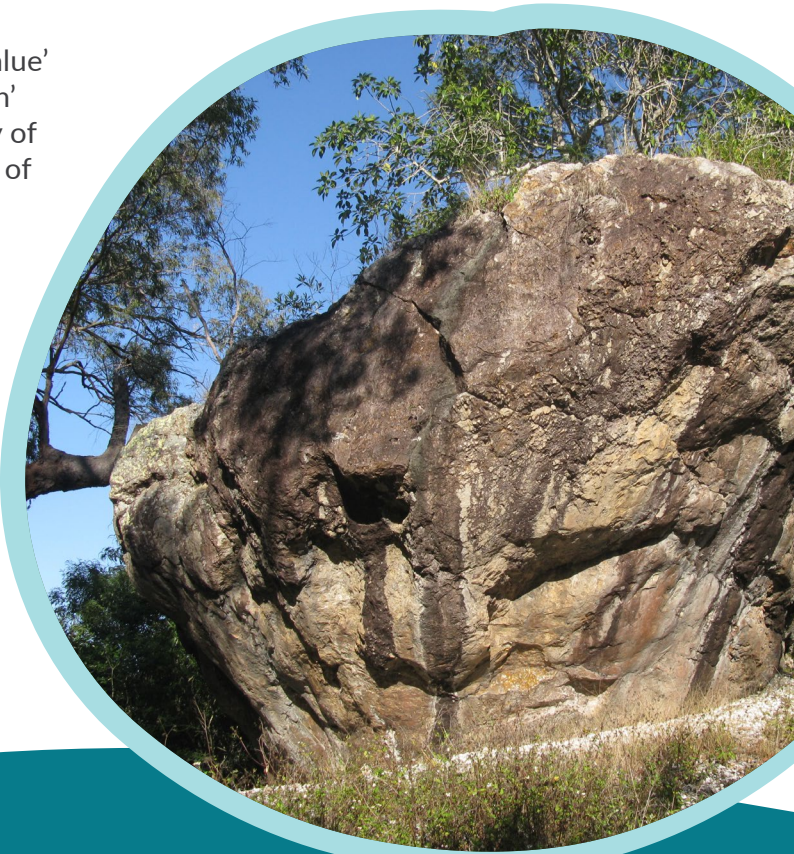


Table 2: Scores and Grades for the 2015, 2018, and 2021 Cultural Heritage Assessments. Sites not visited during an assessment are shaded in grey.*

ZONE		2021	2018	2015
St Helens	Average score		2.5	1.1
	Grade	-	D	E
Islands of Whitsundays	Average score	3.9	3.6	3.7
	Grade	B	B	B
Cape Hillsborough	Average score		2.7	2.6
	Grade	-	C	C
Cape Palmerston	Average score		2.5	-
	Grade	-	D	-
Proserpine-Airlie Beach Zone	Average score	2.15		
	Grade	D		
Lake Elphinstone-Mount Britton Zone	Average score	3.6		
	Grade	B		
St Lawrence Zone*	Average score	2.1		
	Grade	D		
Average score for Region		2.9	2.8	2.5
Overall grade for Region		C	C	D

A (4.6 to 5) Very Good
 B (3.6 to 4.5) Good
 C (2.6 to 3.5) Moderate
 D (1.6 to 2.5) Poor
 E (0 to 1.5) Very Poor

*The 'spiritual and social value' indicator was changed to the 'spiritual and social health' indicator retroactively following the 2021 assessments on Country, which affected overall grades in the Proserpine-Airlie Beach and St Lawrence Zones.

**St Lawrence Zone grades were retroactively modified after the 2021 assessment based on advice from Koinmerburra Traditional Owners.

Table 3. The 2021 Cultural Heritage Assessment scores per site.

ZONE	Spiritual & Social Health	Archaeological	Physical Condition	Protection	Cultural Maintenance
Lake Elphinstone-Mount Britton Zone	5	3.57	3.57	3.14	3.14
St Lawrence	1	1.5	2.5	2.5	3
Islands of Whitsundays	5	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.25
Airlie Beach & Proserpine	1	2.75	2.25	2.25	2.5
Indicator Average	3	2.89	3.02	2.91	2.97
Regional Indicator Grade	C	C	C	C	C

ISLANDS OF THE WHITSUNDAYS

- Sites in this zone fall in the boundary of Ngāro peoples.
- Four sites were visited in the 2021 assessment, including the Nara inlet art sites that were included in previous assessments.
- Risks identified during these assessments included the potential for fire damage and vandalism.

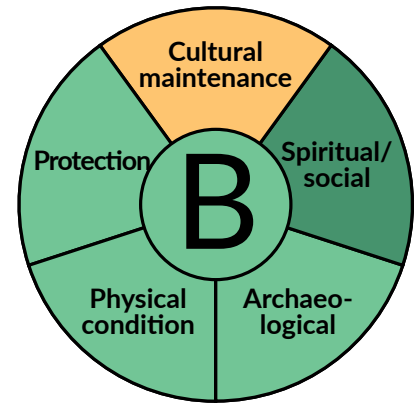


Figure 1. The survey boat and tender used during the assessment on Ngāro Country (Converge, 2020).



Figure 2. Shoreline from the water showing effects from a recent fire (Converge, 2020).



Figure 3. Art panel at Nara inlet site (Converge, 2020).



Figure 4. Red “net” motif art in the Whitsunday Islands (Converge, 2020).

AIRLIE BEACH & PROSERPINE ZONE

- Sites in this zone fall within the boundary of Gia and Ngaro peoples.
- Four sites were visited in the 2021 assessment, which included a shell scatter site (see below).
- Cyclone damage was a key risk identified with respect to sites in this zone.

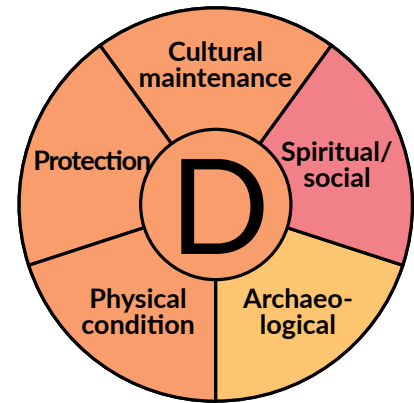


Figure 5. Survey photo while on Gia / Ngaro Country (Converge 2020).



Figure 6. Coral, cuttlefish bone and pumice stone (Converge 2020).



Figure 6. An example of a shell scatter site surveyed during the 2021 assessment (Converge, 2020)

LAKE ELPHINSTONE & MT BRITTON

- Sites in this zone fall within the boundary of the Barada and Widi peoples.
- Seven sites were visited in the 2021 assessment, including artefact scatters and glass tools (see below).
- Gully erosion and vandalism were identified as potential risks to some sites in this zone.
- In addition to site-level risks, it was noted that there have been concerns raised by Traditional Owners about the water use of Lake Elphinstone. The lake has high cultural significance and has been noted as being drier in recent years, with increasing reliance on wet-season rainfall to maintain its water levels.

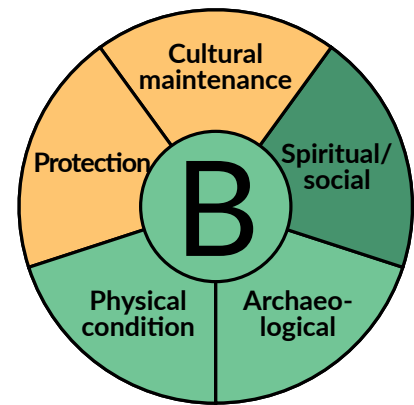


Figure 7. Barada and Widi representative Sam Dallachy, on Country during the assessment update (Converge, 2020).



Figure 8. The view of a dry Lake Elphinstone in October 2020.

ST LAWRENCE

- Sites in this zone fall within the boundary of the Koinmerburra peoples.
- Two sites were visited in the 2021 assessment including a scarred tree (image right).
- Identified threats to sites in this zone were feral animals and pest weeds.
- More cultural heritage assessments in this zone (particularly around the St Lawrence wetlands) are set to be undertaken by Koinmerburra Traditional Owners in the near future.

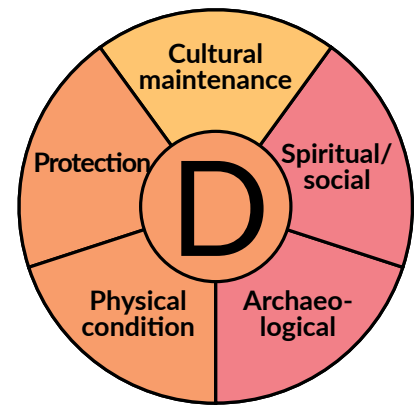


Figure 8. Swans in St Lawrence wetlands during the 2021 assessment (Converge 2020).



Figure 9. Example of a scarred tree on Koinmerburra Country, showing its scar with a hole and numerous burls (Converge, 2020).

SUMMARY AND WHAT'S NEXT

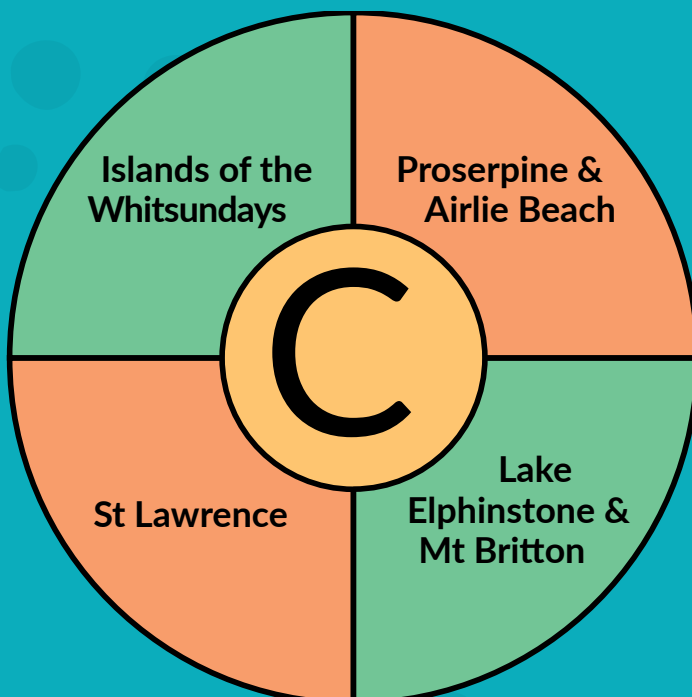
The 2021 Indigenous Cultural Heritage Assessment is the third time sites have been assessed as part of the MWI Report Card. While the overall regional grade was similar to the previous assessment (grading 'C' or 'moderate'), method changes prevent direct comparison with previous regional grades.

In addition to informing the Report Card, these assessments have also helped to highlight important, broad threats to cultural heritage in the MWI region. Two of the most prominent concerns identified during the 2021 assessment include:

- Traditional Owners having sufficient access to cultural sites to maintain cultural continuity.
- Development and exploitation of the natural environment. These were identified as the most pervasive and persistent ongoing threats to sites and cultural values of the landscape across the MWI region.

The next assessment is scheduled for the 2023-24 financial year, with the results to be released in the 2024 Report Card.

MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY-ISAAC REGIONAL CULTURAL HERITAGE GRADE





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MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY-ISAAC

This summary was based on:

Converge Heritage + Community (2020).
Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Indicators
Assessment, Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac
Region.

For enquiries regarding the full report
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PHOTO CREDITS

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