

WUNAMBAL GAAMBERA ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Representing the Wanjina Wunggurr Uunguu Traditional Owners of the North Kimberley

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Science and culture join forces in fight for dugong survival

North Kimberley Traditional Owner Rangers are now professionally trained to help monitor one of their most vulnerable and culturally important species – the dugong - following an intensive course hosted on Wunambal Gaambera Country.

Delivered by the CSIRO and Western Australian Marine Science Institution (WAMSI), the three-day accredited course was hosted by Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation's Uunguu Rangers at their Garmbemirri camp near Mungalalu Truscott Airbase. Garmbemirri is undergoing redevelopment as a fully serviced and managed camp and is fast becoming an important base for scientists and other visiting groups.

Representatives of the Uunguu, Dambimangari and Kimberley Land Council-facilitated Balanggarra and Bardi Jawi ranger groups joined CSIRO researchers, Kimberley TAFE training staff and specialist consultants to learn best-practice aerial survey techniques for monitoring wildlife populations on sea and land.

Aerial survey methodology focused on dugongs, which are listed internationally as "vulnerable to extinction". The North Kimberley is considered an important global stronghold for the species. Scientists aim to integrate their data with the deep traditional knowledge Coastal Kimberley Traditional Owner groups have regarding dugong, their seasonal movements and seagrass feeding grounds.

Coastal Kimberley Aboriginal groups have actively sought opportunities to build their skills in monitoring and managing dugong – an important part of traditional stories and diet, and a key target of Traditional Owners' Healthy Country Plans.

"We need to know more about where balguja (dugong) live, feed and travel so we can look after them," Uunguu Head Ranger Neil Waina said. "Learning these survey methods with other Traditional Owner groups will help us keep these animals healthy in our Country and keep our saltwater culture strong."

Rangers trialled an Australian-built 7-seater cargo plane – the Gippsland G8Airvan - to practice surveying dugongs and turtles from the air and 'get their eye in'. Course accreditation on two of the modules (aerial navigation & safety around aircraft) was co-funded by the Traditional Owner research partners.

The newly accredited Rangers will work closely with CSIRO researchers throughout September and October to survey their sea country and contribute to critical baseline population surveys of dugongs and other marine species identified as Healthy Country Plan targets, including sea turtles, dolphins, whales and threatened sawfish species. – **ENDS** -

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Traditional Owner Rangers prepare to board for aerial survey training at Mungallalu Truscott Airbase



"Getting their eye in": Rangers and scientists take to the air over Wunambal Gaambera Country.