

Balanggarra

Kimberley, Western Australia

Declared an Indigenous Protected Area in May 2013



"Balanggarra means 'one mob together for country'. Our old people gave this name to our claim for our gra, our country... Today we live a different life to our Ancestors but we still remember where we come from and how we have to look after our gra."

Balanggarra Plan of Management

Located in the rugged, beautiful Kimberley region, near the Western Australian border is the Balanggarra Indigenous Protected Area, which will cover about 2.6 million hectares of land and sea country over several stages.

The northern part of Balanggarra is 'blue water' country and includes Cape Londonderry, several rivers such as the lower Drysdale and King George, saltwater, reefs, and offshore islands, like Sir Graham Moore and the Governor Islands. The southern part is 'brown water' country and includes land drained by the Forrest River system, the muddy waters of the Cambridge Gulf and Adolphus Island.

Traditional owners say, some of us are the 'blue water mob' and some of us are the 'brown water mob' but we come together as one mob, 'Balanggarra' for all our country because we all follow the same rules for country.

The actions of Creator beings of the Dreamings give Balanggarra people their law; rules and responsibilities for looking after culture, plants, animals and country. Two important Dreamings are *Wungkurr* rainbow serpent and *Wolara* the creator. A male and female Wungkurr travelled from Sir Graham Moore Island in the far west of their country to King George Falls to become the majestic twin waterfalls. *Wolara* made the saltwater as he 'poled his canoe' in the coastal regions. Some of the islands are where his pole touched the seabed.

Balanggarra rock art includes elegant human-like images of *Girri-girro* (Bradshaw figures), which their old people painted in rock shelters. *Girri-girro* show the old people with head-dresses and tassels hunting, dancing or living their lives and differ to the Wanjina spirit images of their western neighbours. Both rock art traditions were recently added to the National Heritage List, as part of the cultural landscape of the west Kimberley.

The Kimberley region is also biologically rich, with over 165 plants and animals found nowhere else on earth. Balanggarra provides a refuge to animals that have disappeared from other parts of Australia. Endangered animals include the elegantly spotted northern quoll and the Gouldian finch.



Vulnerable animals include the brush-tailed tree rat, ground-dwelling partridge pigeon, purple-crowned fairy wren and three types of sawfish.

Last century, Balanggarra people were forced off their homelands into missions. Today most people live in Kalumburu or in the nearby towns of Wyndham or Kununurra.

Balanggarra people live a different life to their old people but still remember their advice, 'Don't forget your culture and your country it makes you strong.' They have produced a healthy country plan to help guide them manage the Indigenous Protected Area and collaborate with conservation agencies. Things covered in the plan include law and culture, gra (homeland), native animals, bush tucker and medicine plants, right-way fire, and freshwater and saltwater resources.

The Balanggarra rangers have recently became part of the Australian Government's Working on Country program. The rangers look after country both ways, using traditional knowledge and western scientific methods: Walking in both worlds with their knowledge, it allows Balanggarra Rangers to do "right-way-fire management", look after cultural sites, undertake wildlife surveys or weed-management activities.

Right-way fire is an important land management tool; cool burns release less greenhouse gasses than hot burns. Balanggarra rangers burn the country early in the dry season to try and avoid hot fires.

They start burning in Kolorrirru after the rain eases, but most burning happens during Yirrama when the south-easterlies blow and the grasses dry. Right-way fire helps trees produce bush fruits and promotes grass shoots for native animals to eat. Wrong-way fire in the late dry season, can burn for several weeks, resulting in bigger emissions, less food and tree hollows for animals.

Fishing and sea hunting remains very important to Balanggarra people. Balanggarra Rangers do regular sea country patrols to remove ghost nets and other rubbish that may harm marine life and monitor iconic marine species.

Balanggarra Indigenous Protected Area is part of Australia's National Reserve System - a nation-wide network of reserves especially set up to protect Australia's unique landscapes, flora and fauna for current and future generations.

Formally declared in 2013, the Balanggarra IPA is managed under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Category VI, as a protected area with sustainable use of natural resources.

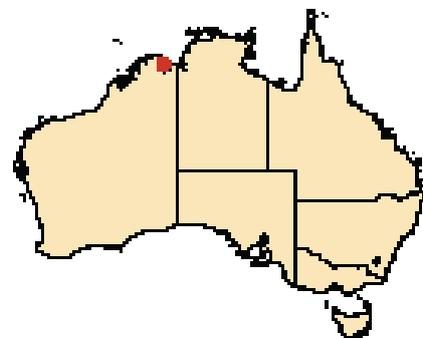


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CARING
FOR
OUR
COUNTRY

