



NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

Impact Report 2019



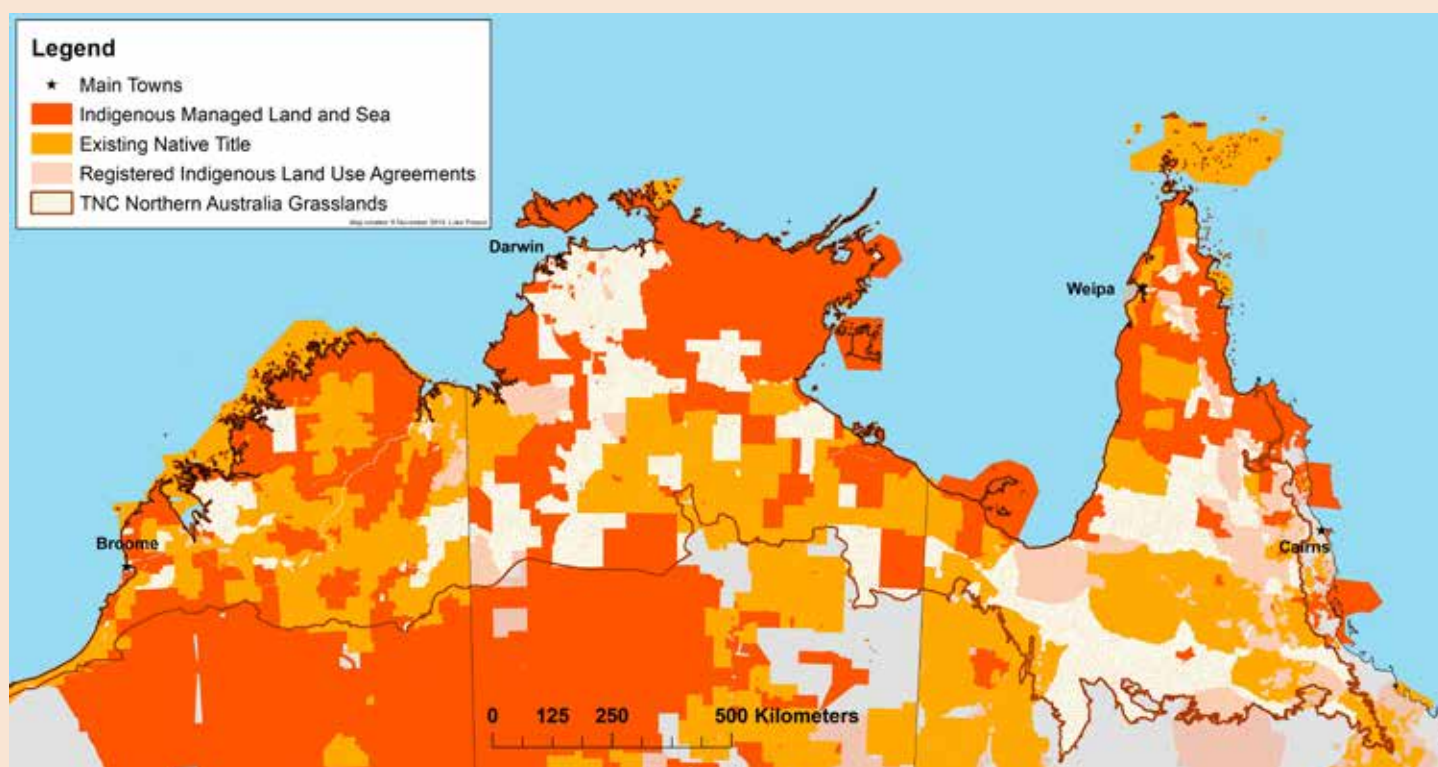
Contents

Introduction	1
The story so far	2
Indigenous fire-carbon	5
2019 projects	7
Annual report card for 2018-19	8
Australia Program: working with Indigenous communities	12
TNC values	13

Photo © Warddeken

Introduction

The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) northern Australia program is helping establish a resilient and inclusive Indigenous-led conservation economy that supports sustainable land management and the communities that rely on them. This report presents impact to date and the outcomes that TNC and our partners have achieved over the 2018-2019 financial year.



NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

Our northern Australia program works across the largest remaining intact tropical savanna in the world. From north West Australia, to Northern Territory and Queensland, our work covers more than 130 million hectares. The diverse habitats within this vast area are home to hundreds of unique and threatened plant and animal species, including more than half of Australia's bird species and around one third of its mammal species.

We recognise that Indigenous Australians shaped the landscape for more than 65,000 years, harnessing the ecological process responsible for maintaining biodiversity and keeping their Country healthy.

We also recognise that Indigenous people have some form of management rights to more than 75% of the land in northern Australia. They are effectively managing these landscapes for social, environmental and cultural outcomes if provided the right opportunities and support. Indigenous ranger groups are now leading in the management of their Country, combining the latest science and technology advances with intricate traditional knowledge and cultural practices.

However, Indigenous communities continue to face significant challenges even once their rights to land ownership and control are re-established. Our work aims to support these communities to manage Country for the benefit of people and nature.

The story so far

The northern Australia program supports Indigenous communities by helping plan for future management of their Country and assisting to continually increase capacity to manage for long-term success. We prioritise innovation and finding ways to support the expansion of successful initiatives to achieve the scale necessary for enhanced planning and management of Indigenous lands across much of the northern savannas.



21

**HEALTHY
COUNTRY
PLANS (HCP)
COMPLETED**



35+

**GROUPS
ENGAGED
IN HCP
SINCE 2010**



21

**INDIGENOUS
GROUPS
ENGAGED BY
TNC FOR HCP**



43M

**HECTARES OF
LAND AND
SEA COUNTRY
ENGAGED IN HCP**



18-22%

**PROTECTED
AREA
COVERAGE**

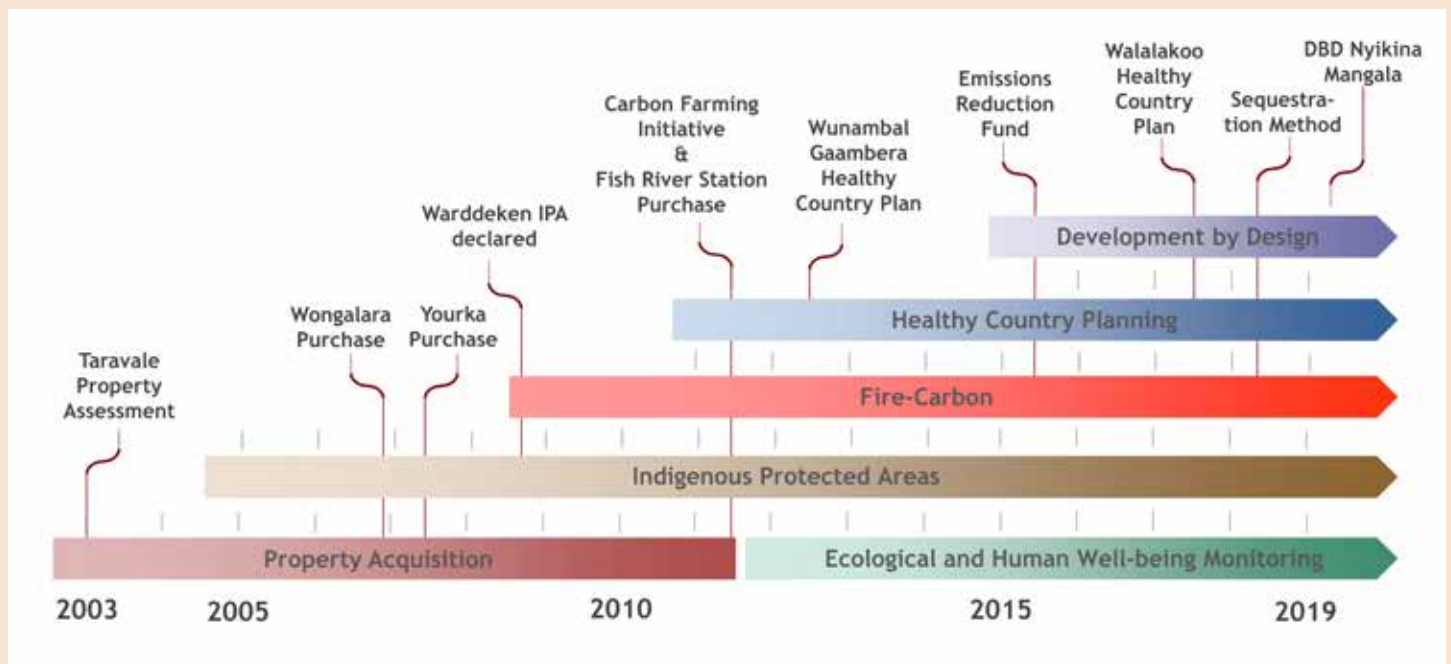




Photo © Luke Preece



Photo © Emilie Ens



Photo © Luke Preece

Indigenous fire-carbon

When European settlers arrived in northern Australia a long history of careful fire management by Indigenous people was interrupted and fire regimes changed from smaller controlled fires throughout the year to destructive late dry season wildfires. Shifting fire regimes back to a pattern of smaller cooler burns improves conservation outcomes and reduces carbon emissions.

TNC supports the development of savanna burning methodologies and assists Indigenous groups plan and manage burning regimes. The combined efforts of Indigenous organisations across northern Australia has a huge impact. The carbon economy is being taken to scale and achieving results – reducing the amount of late season burns and earning valuable income for indigenous land managers and communities.

Over the past year, the area of carbon projects has remained relatively static and we are seeing natural fluctuations in fire seasons influencing the balance between early and late season burns. New carbon accounting methods have come into operation to enable fire projects to account for storage of carbon in logs in addition to the existing carbon emissions reduction method. Indigenous groups are now considering future use of these new methodologies and decisions to enter the carbon market.

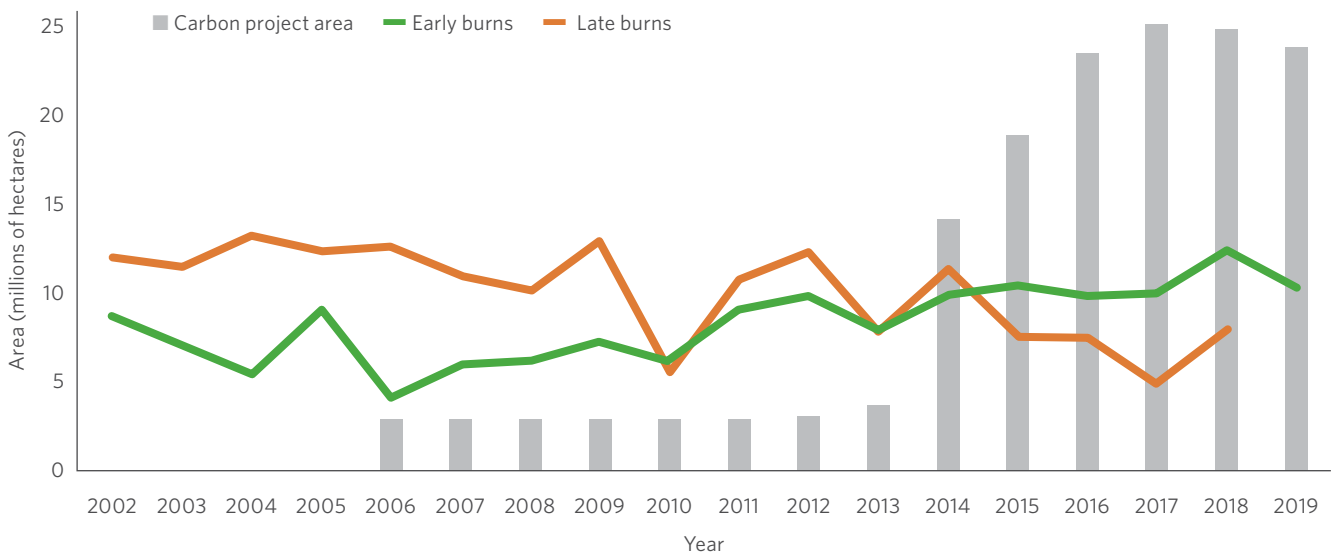
5M
TONNES OF CARBON OFFICIALLY ABATED

19M
HECTARES UNDER A CARBON PROJECT

\$80M
WORTH OF CARBON CREDITS ISSUED

28 INDIGENOUS GROUPS REGISTERED WITH THE EMISSIONS REDUCTION FUND

\$100M WORTH OF CARBON CONTRACTS IN PLACE



Carbon projects and fire scars in the early and late dry seasons in the High Rainfall Zone (HRZ – above 1000 mm annual rainfall) of northern Australia from 2002 to 2019. The HRZ is where the most carbon project activity has occurred and has the greatest potential for emissions reduction from savanna burning methods.



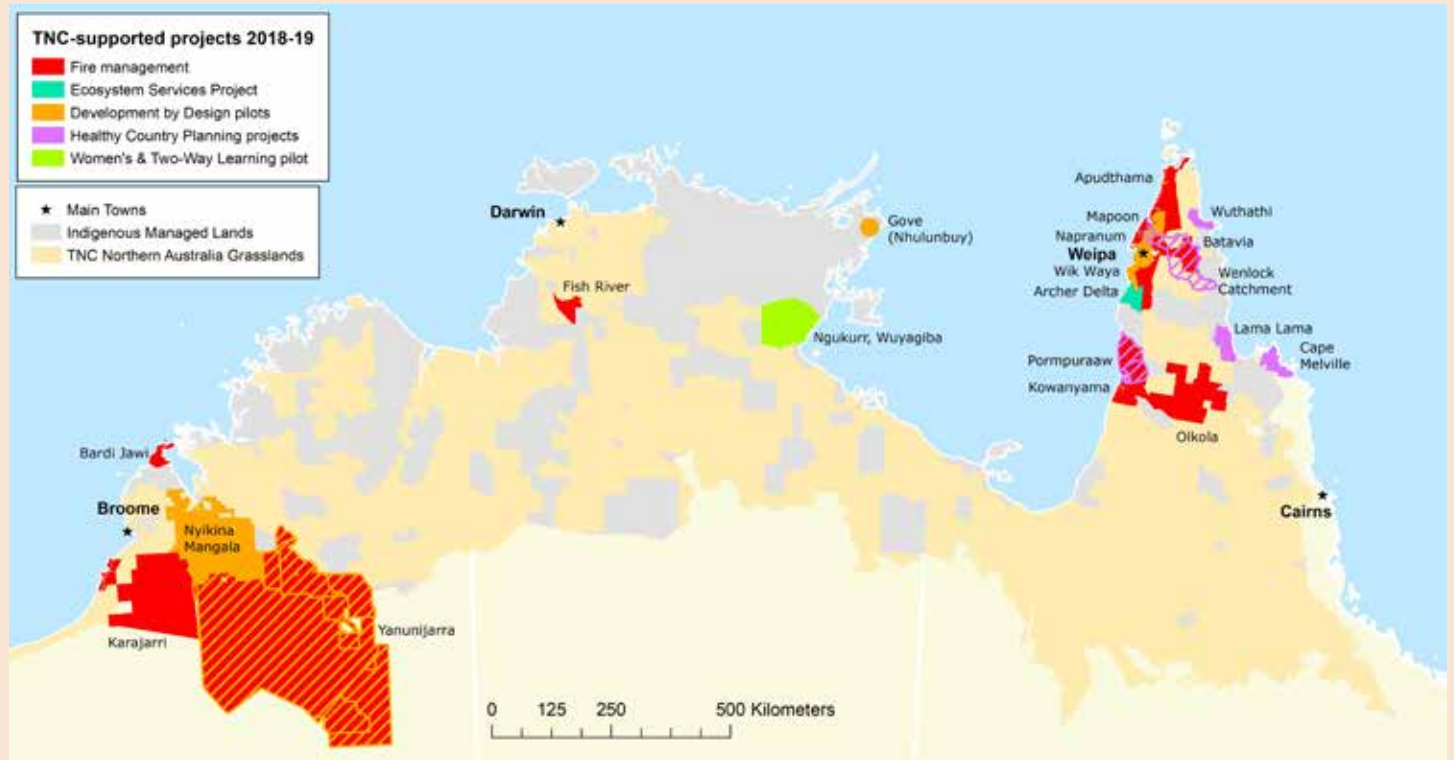
2019 projects



20 GROUPS SUPPORTED TO
MANAGE THEIR COUNTRY



\$520K IN NEW CONTRACTS
TO PARTNERS



Annual report card 2018-19

FIRE PATTERNS

The plants and animals of northern Australia have evolved with fire. They have a range of responses to fire and need a diversity of fire patterns. Firescape Science and TNC have developed a method to investigate fire patterns resulting from carbon projects.

The analysis produces 'report cards' based on publicly available information with scores for:

- Emission abatement objectives
- Proportion of area burnt in the late dry season versus early dry season
- Long unburnt Country
- Habitat condition
- Threatened species

Initial report cards were prepared for Fish River Station, Pormpuraaw, Mapoon, Olkola, Karajarri and Ngurrara. The report's focus is on 'right way burning', making suggestions on how fire management effort can be directed to improve landscape health.

The real benefits of these reports will be seen as they are repeated each year and progress in achieving burning objectives is reviewed through before and after comparisons.

BIODIVERSITY AND MONITORING REVIEW

North Australian savannas are largely intact and hold globally significant biodiversity values. Despite this, indicators suggest that fauna, particularly small mammals, are declining at an alarming rate and some species are heading for extinction. Threats include changed fire regimes, feral animals, grazing, disease and climate change. Importantly, patchiness of fire is vital to the survival of many species.

In the last year TNC contracted a scientist from Biome5 to review the status of current evidence on biodiversity across the savannas, with a focus on small mammal decline.

One of the key findings from the study was that as Indigenous organisations have regained more management rights over their lands and waters their knowledge is increasingly recognised and used for the active conservation of species and ecosystems, complemented by new research. Monitoring by Indigenous people on their lands improves coverage and understanding of biodiversity status and trends, and high-tech monitoring solutions are increasingly being used by Indigenous rangers.

TNC will continue to address this through workshops, investigations and supporting Indigenous capacity to undertake research and management.



Photo © Emilie Ens



Photo © Luke Preece

HUMAN WELL-BEING FRAMEWORK

Indigenous peoples' well-being is inextricably linked to their Country. This is particularly the case for Australian Indigenous people, who have been here for over 65,000 years.

TNC is running a project to improve our understanding of human well-being in Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities programs. The framework has been developed from a review of literature and a diverse global team of practitioners.

The northern Australia program is running a pilot to further develop this framework.

We are using this as an opportunity to exchange with other Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities programs. The framework will help us to work with partners to support community-based management of country and show the benefits that this provides. The pilot will be completed by 2020.

FOCAL AREA	OUTCOME	COMPONENT
Opportunity	Sustainable, place-based economic opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic livelihoods Material assets Diversified income
Security	Secure rights to territory or resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenure and resource security
Empowerment	Ability to meaningfully participate in decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder participation in decision-making Governance capacity Management capacity
Culture	Strong cultural connection to place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrity of connection to place
Environment	Healthy and sustainably managed territories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health of culturally important places or species Territory protected or under improved management Health of conservation targets



Dr James Fitzsimons is presented with a painting from Traditional Owner Linda Nardea at the launch of the Nykina Mangala Healthy Country Plan. Photo © Michael Douglas/University of Western Australia.

COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING

TNC continues to support Healthy Country Planning (HCP), as an Indigenous, community-driven planning method used to develop management plans for looking after natural and cultural values.

This enables Indigenous people to manage their land in a way that respects their community aspirations and that can work in partnership with Government, NGOs and businesses.

In the last year we have supported four groups on Cape York to undertake HCP. One of these groups is using HCP to engage with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to develop better co-management arrangements for parts of their traditional lands.

Community-based Development by Design (DBD) spatially assesses future development options with reference to the vision and values articulated by the community in its Healthy Country Plan. This is done using maps and other tools to overlay where developments are proposed, or where development opportunities exist, with detailed layers of natural and cultural values. This enables groups to clearly see where developments might co-exist or impact on their natural and cultural values, then decide what the community wants.

In the last year we have completed two pilot DBD projects in the Kimberley Region and initiated one on Cape York and are working to expand this work in response to interest from many Indigenous groups wanting to increase their ability to achieve development that benefits their communities and look after the health of their Country.

GENDER PROJECTS

Successful completion of a three-year pilot gender project at Ngukurr in the Northern Territory resulted in significantly increased involvement of young Indigenous women in land management and education activities. This helped stimulate the creation of a new 'bush university' campus - the Wuyagiba Study Hub - that attracted funding from the Australian Government and Macquarie University. The Hub is now preparing for its third cohort of students. The programs involve both Indigenous Elders and non-Indigenous lecturers to teach the bridging course to university. So far there are 10 students studying at Macquarie University for the first time in 30 years! A new cohort will start university in early 2020.

At Fish River Station in the Northern Territory we supported the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation to establish a women's camp with increased women's involvement, and provide a foundation for future economic activity for long-term management and ultimate hand-back to its Traditional Owners.

SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOLS

As part of our approach to supporting Indigenous groups undertake activities such as fire management, Healthy Country Planning and ranger programs we have developed a set of self-assessment tools that land managers can use to review and improve their core capacities.

We have developed this toolbox in a modular format so that it can be tailored to any stage of development for individual organisations, and address the governance, organisation and operation of each organisation for fire management, Indigenous ranger programs and Healthy Country Planning.



FORMALISING OUR APPROACH

TNC is a founding member of the Conservation Initiative on Human Rights (CIHR), a consortium of international conservation organisations that seeks to improve conservation by promoting integration of human rights in conservation policy and practice. As such, TNC is committed to respecting human rights and promoting them within conservation programs, protecting the vulnerable, and encouraging good governance.

The northern Australia program is now a leading example of TNC's work in partnership with Indigenous peoples, communities and organisations, where we strive to strengthen voices and support choices and actions of Indigenous peoples and local communities, to shape and manage natural territory in ways that improve lives and drive conservation.

We have developed a strong strategy and a history of success based on these principles and are now seeking to increase our funding and ability to support Indigenous land management at the scale needed to make a lasting difference to the lives of people and the health of the environment across northern Australia.

TNC is a global conservation organisation working to protect and manage lands and waters for nature and people. TNC has a network of community-based conservation initiatives, backed by a strong team of social and biophysical scientists. Our Australian Indigenous work adheres to a Charter for working with Indigenous Peoples. This Charter guides our approach in northern Australia.



Photo © Sam Bayley at Ngukurr

Australia Program: working with Indigenous communities

TNC is a global conservation organisation working to protect and manage lands and waters for nature and people. TNC has a network of community-based conservation initiatives, backed by a strong team of social and biophysical scientists. Our Australian Indigenous work adheres to a Charter for working with Indigenous Peoples. This Charter guides our approach in northern Australia.

OUR PROGRAM APPROACH

We support new ideas, then help grow these ideas to give social, economic, cultural and environmental benefits for the long-term.

We aim to support Indigenous-community-led conservation and development initiatives based on their aspirations for health of people and Country. We will:

Support community-led planning, decision-making and ensure Free, Prior and Informed Consent:

- Base our support on the values, aspirations and strategies expressed through community-based planning.
- Help build the adaptive management and informed decision-making capacity of Indigenous groups responsible for managing their Country.

Focus on enduring outcomes:

- Bring science, funding and policy support to help develop new ideas, methods, tools and policies that support Indigenous land management.
- Provide catalytic funding to help Indigenous organisations develop diversified funding streams through management of Country.

Develop and maintain respectful partnerships:

- Build partnerships that are underpinned by respect for intellectual property and traditional knowledge.
- Establish clear understanding of roles, relationships and responsibilities and be clear on what TNC can offer based on overlapping values and objectives, and the amount and limits of funding and other resources.
- Respect and acknowledge achievements of partners.
- Be clear on TNC's objectives regarding use of communication and promotional materials to raise funds and share learning with other groups and organisations.

TNC values

Integrity beyond reproach

Respect for people, community and culture

One conservancy (global connections)

Commitment to deliver

Tangible, lasting results

Photo © Luke Preece



**We thank you for your
continued support
of our northern
Australia program.**

Photo © Luke Preece

CONTACTS

David Hinchley, Program Manager | dhinchley@tnc.org | 0488 006 064

Luke Preece, Outback Conservation Officer | luke.preece@tnc.org | 0474 010 696

Marla Edwards, Director of Development | marla.edwards@tnc.org | 0449 690 332

James Fitzsimons, Director of Conservation | jfitzsimons@tnc.org | 0410 567 695

Suite 2-01, 60 Leicester Street, Carlton, VIC 3053

www.natureaustralia.org.au

The Nature
Conservancy 
Australia