

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Widespread rain means the time is right to burn grasswren habitat**

The nationally endangered Carpentarian Grasswren will benefit from upcoming habitat management burns following recent widespread rainfall in the region.

Southern Gulf NRM will implement controlled burns from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> February Calton Hills Station and Thornton Station, North West of Mount Isa. This project is supported by Southern Gulf NRM, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

The fire management project is a partnership between the participating stations' management, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services and BirdLife Australia that aims to protect the habitat of the nationally endangered Carpentarian Grasswren.

The region's iconic Carpentarian Grasswren inhabits long-unburnt clumps of spinifex. Frequent, low intensity fires managed over millennia by Aboriginal people was the fire regime Carpentarian Grasswrens became adapted to. The extensive, hot fires of 2011 and 2012 badly affected the population of the small bird leading to it being listed as nationally endangered.

There is a strong alignment between Grasswren conservation and cattle production. Large, hot wildfires are a risk to Carpentarian Grasswrens, but a risk to graziers as well. The fire that destroys Grasswren habitat also destroys fodder, fences and other assets. A mosaic of burnt and unburnt areas significantly reduces the risk of hot wildfires that could carry across large areas of the region's rugged landscape.

Preparations for the burn program have been made over several months. Operations could not commence until after enough rainfall to ensure moderate fire behaviour. This is particularly important when breaking up large extents of old-age spinifex which presents a high fire risk.

Recent widespread rains have created ideal conditions to burn and project partners have jumped at the opportunity.

Burning will be conducted using incendiary devices distributed from a helicopter under the guidance of Mick Blackman from Friendly Fire Ecological Consultants.

Satellite image analysis will be used to monitor the extent of the fires in this remote and rugged landscape.



The controlled burn program builds on previous project work undertaken as part of the National Landcare Program and will create a fire management corridor from Calton Hills Station up to Boodjamulla National Park, a globally recognised Key Biodiversity Area.

The general public are advised to stay clear of the properties while the burn program is being undertaken.

## ENDS

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### Carpentarian Grasswren – Fast Facts

- The Carpentarian Grasswren is largely confined to North West Queensland, in the region between Mount Isa and the NT border.
- It is classified as an endangered species under Australian and Queensland environmental laws.
- Long-unburnt spinifex clumps are a vital habitat component for the endangered Carpentarian Grasswren.
- Populations of the Carpentarian Grasswren were badly affected by extensive, hot, dry-season wildfires that burnt through the region in 2011 and 2012.
- Ironically, well-managed fire is the best tool to ensure that sufficient unburnt spinifex remains for the bird. A mosaic of burnt and unburnt areas significantly reduces the risk of hot wildfires that could destroy habitat over large areas.



Photo Credit: Anthony Woodbine



Photo Credit: Southern Gulf NRM