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MEDIA RELEASE

Protecting Habitat Through Strategic Burning

A three-year conservation project has delivered significant benefits for the endangered Carpentarian Grasswren, with more than 17,000 hectares of strategic prescribed burning completed across the Mount Isa region to reduce the threat of destructive wildfires and improve habitat for one of Australia's rarest birds.

The Carpentarian Grasswren Conservation Project, delivered by Southern Gulf NRM with funding from Glencore Queensland Metals' Community Assistance Program, brought together pastoralists, BirdLife North Queensland, fire specialists and conservationists to improve the resilience of important spinifex habitats across 1,070,302 hectares of pastoral properties.

Despite facing widespread wildfires and one of the wettest seasons in recent years, the project exceeded its original target of 14,000 hectares, successfully establishing a patchwork of low intensity burns that will help reduce the spread of future large wildfires.

Southern Gulf NRM Project Manager, Lyndy Skea said the project showed how working with nature, rather than against it, delivers long-term benefits for both biodiversity and pastoral production.

"Fire is a natural part of these landscapes, but when large, high-intensity wildfires burn across vast areas, they remove the diverse spinifex habitat that the Carpentarian Grasswren depends on."

"By creating a mosaic of different-aged vegetation through carefully planned, low-intensity burns, we're making the landscape more resilient while protecting important habitat for this endangered species."

Annual BirdLife North Queensland surveys undertaken in 2024 and 2025 demonstrated that Carpentarian Grasswrens remained widespread across the project area despite the extensive 2023 and 2024 wildfires. Surveys confirmed there was no measurable contraction in the species' distribution or occupancy, with populations persisting in burnt landscapes where rocky refuges and regenerating spinifex remained. The 2025 surveys also expanded monitoring to neighbouring properties, identifying additional populations

on Barr Creek and Bortala and improving understanding of the species' regional distribution. While adult birds continued to persist 18 months after the wildfires, survey results indicated reduced breeding success compared with previous years, highlighting the importance of continued long-term monitoring as habitat recovery progresses.

The project also invested in local people. Participating landholders increased their skills and confidence in fire management through practical fire training and collaborative burn planning, building local capacity to continue controlled burns into the future.

Importantly, monitoring throughout the project demonstrated that prescribed burns established in previous years had helped slow the spread of later wildfires by breaking up continuous fuel loads. These findings are now helping shape future fire management through the Queensland Government's Carpentarian Grasswren Offset Management Program.

Southern Gulf NRM Chief Executive Officer, Damian Miley said the project highlighted the value of strong partnerships.

"This project demonstrates what can be achieved when industry, land managers, community organisations and government work together."

"We're grateful to Glencore Queensland Metals for investing in a project that will continue delivering benefits for biodiversity, landholders and the wider community long after the funding has finished."

The project has laid the groundwork for ongoing conservation through continued monitoring and future strategic fire management across the Carpentarian Grasswren corridor.

This project is delivered by Southern Gulf NRM through funding from Glencore's Community Assistance Program.

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