

*MEDIA RELEASE*

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*Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC), Cairns*

*For immediate release*



## **Community Rangers ready to help develop PNG Villages with Australian-funded training**

A hugely-attended graduation ceremony for an Australian-funded development program in Papua New Guinea's Treaty Village area has shown the demand for the program to be expanded beyond pilot phase, organisers say.

The first generation of community rangers trained under the Treaty Village Resilience Program, funded by Australian Aid and managed by the Cairns-based Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC) graduated in a ceremony in Mabuadan Village, on August 6.

The Treaty Villages are a group of 13 settlements on Papua New Guinea's southern coast, directly adjacent to the Torres Strait Islands of Saibai and Boigu, Australia's northernmost land territories.

Under the Treaty, free travel for traditional purposes is allowed across the border, making the region a key focus area for Australian border policy.

40 male and 12 female community rangers received their official qualifications at the ceremony, and are now equipped to build freshwater wells, perform first aid, engineer sanitation infrastructure, educate and lead their communities, in addition to a host of other skills developed over the course of the program, which was launched in November 2014.

The graduation ceremony saw a huge turnout of over 1500 local Treaty Village residents, in addition to political representatives from Australia and Papua New Guinea.

PNG figures included Member for South Fly Aide Ganasi, district administrator Moses Ase, Treaty Village Association chairman Kebi Sallee, in addition to the past and present Treaty Village councillors.

Australian representatives - who brave high winds and slogged through muddy tracks to reach the ceremony - included Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion, Member for Leichhardt Warren Entsch, in addition to RRRC managing director Sheriden Morris and chair Dr Ian Poiner.

A strong contingent from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)'s High Commission in Port Moresby also attended the graduation ceremony.

PNG representatives thanked Australian foreign minister Julie Bishop for her tremendous support for Papua New Guinea's development, Mr Scullion for his interest and attendance and Mr Entsch for his ongoing support for the region.

RRRC chair Sheriden Morris said the massive turnout at the graduation ceremony in Mabudan showed clear support for the Treaty Village Resilience Program from both the PNG and Australian sides of the partnership.

"People came from all over to this ceremony, they were dancing all night and into the morning - everyone is very proud of the graduates, parents and community leaders included, and things got very emotional at times," Sheriden said.

"The enthusiastic response shows that this is a very popular program with clear support from the people of the Treaty Villages, in addition to Australian representatives.

“This program is focused on building local capacity in the Treaty villages to develop their own vital infrastructure - by doing so we strengthen both sides of the partnership between Australian and Papua New Guinean.

Sheriden said unique knowledge developed in Northern Australia helped develop the program.

“We’ve used what was learned for the Indigenous community ranger programs to guide the development of the Treaty Village Program,” she said.

Sheriden added that the graduation of the rangers marks a shift in the program’s timeline from its ‘training’ phase to the expanded ‘implementation’ stage across all the remaining Treaty Villages with the financial support of the PNG government.

“Definitely the next step here is to see the program extended to the rest of the Treaty Villages so we can get this training and these outcomes happening for everyone in the area,” she said.

The Australian Government has provided \$1.85 million in funding for the Resilience Program, with RRRC investing \$400,000.

Below: READY TO HELP: The 52 Community Rangers graduating under the Treaty Village Resilience Program





South Fly MP Aide Ganasi, RRRRC managing director Sheriden Morris, Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion and Member for Leichhardt Warren Entsch at the Treaty Village Community Ranger graduation ceremony"



Rangers learn a wide variety of vital community-building skills including construction

All images courtesy of the office of Warren Entsch.

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