



## OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

# THE SALTWATER PEOPLE

*Our region has been home to 'Saltwater People' for many thousands of years.*

The **Ngaro, Gia, Juru, Yuwibara** and **Koinmerburra** tribes were marine hunters, gatherers and skilled navigators. They used canoes built from tree bark, joined with fibres, stiffened with saplings and waterproofed with paper-bark caulking. From these canoes, the men would hunt turtles and dugong for food.

Hunting is an extremely spiritual activity, and elders have a deep understanding of what is and is not appropriate to hunt.

For example, female dugongs with young calves were not hunted. It is very important to protect the young, because it takes a long time (approximately thirty years) until dugong are ready to breed, and they only have a small number of calves.

**NGARO ELDERS TELL STORIES OF A TIME WHEN THEIR ANCESTORS LIT FIRES IN CAVES THROUGHOUT THE WHITSUNDAY ISLANDS TO GUIDE THE HUNTERS HOME AT NIGHT.**



Original artwork: Nickey Bidju Pryor



Above: Fish trap



**ISLANDS WERE ACTIVELY MANAGED WITH FIRE, AND STONE TRAPS WERE SPECIALLY DESIGNED FOR CATCHING AND STORING FISH.**

These fish traps required carrying large rocks into a river or creek and arranging them into a kind of wall. At high tide, fish and other marine species can swim over the top of the wall, but at low tide they are trapped making them easier to catch. Remnants of these fish traps are still present throughout the Mackay, Whitsunday and Broadsound area.



Above: Some of the TORG members on country



**MANY ISLANDS STILL BEAR TANGIBLE EVIDENCE OF ABORIGINAL OCCUPATION, INCLUDING CAVE ART, ENGRAVINGS, STONE TOOLS AND ITEMS THAT WERE TRADED WITH NEARBY LAND-BASED TRIBES, SUCH AS OCHRE FOR PAINTING.**

If you are lucky enough to experience these places, please do your utmost to respect the Aboriginal culture. Do not touch or remove anything from its place without permission from elders.



Above: Shell midden



**THE SALTWATER PEOPLE HAVE LIVED OFF OF THESE WATERS FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. THEIR ANCESTORS, CULTURE AND CONNECTION TO COUNTRY REMAINS, AS ALWAYS.**

For more information about Aboriginal culture, please contact Reef Catchments' Traditional Owner Reference Group – visit [www.reefcatchments.com.au/community/traditional-owners/](http://www.reefcatchments.com.au/community/traditional-owners/)

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