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## **NORTHERN WATERS**

22 July 2025 – 6 December 2025



Special Collections, Eddie Koiki Mabo Library, James Cook University on Bindal and Wulgurukaba country, Townsville. Image courtesy of Rachel O'Reilly.

Artist: Rachel O'Reilly

*NORTHERN WATERS* is a new feature-length experimental video installation exploring complex aftermaths of the successful 1960s Save the Reef Campaign. Focused on key sites of dialogue at the 'littoral zone' (the space at the edge of a water body) where agriculture and tourism meet at-risk 'reef and rainforest' ecologies, the film mobilises imagination and future generations' care for these vital and highly contested sites.

Featuring contemporary interviews with First Nations artists, activists, and scientists and revisiting the video archives of past campaigns, the installation is the culmination of a multi-year regional research residency undertaken by O'Reilly through UQ Art Museum's partnership with the JCU Blue Humanities Lab. A major outcome of the residency was an intensive

workshop called *Northern Conditions, Planetary Practices* (2023) which brought together regional arts workers and environmentalists on Djiru Country (Bingil Bay), some of whom are in the film. The workshop enabled information sharing on plural histories, current energy and ecology issues in the context of local and global warming futures. The workshop was located at Ninney Rise Historic House, the original location of the 1960s Save the Reef movement that brought together artist-activists (i.e. Judith Wright and John Busst), politicians (Harold Holt), and scientists (Len Webb, the Queensland Littoral Society, Charlie Veron), and now houses part of the campaign archive.

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body.

### **Images and captions for media**

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Rachel O'Reilly. Photo: Sean Gilligan

### **Artist Biography**

Rachel O'Reilly is a queer settler Australian artist/writer/researcher. She was film, video, new media curator at GoMA/Australian Cinematheque, has an MA (Cum Laude) in Media and Culture from the University of Amsterdam (2012) and is a Phd student in Research Architecture at Goldsmiths University London. From 2014-21 Rachel taught 'How to Do Things with Theory' at the Dutch Art Institute, NL and was an editor of Theory on Demand for the Institute for Network Cultures. Their artistic work has been presented at HKW, Berlin, E-Flux New York, Tate Liverpool; Museum of Yugoslav History, Belgrade; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Jakarta Biennale; Qalandiya International, Jerusalem; and Museu de Arte de São Paulo, Brazil. Curatorial collaborations include The Leisure Class (GoMA), Moving Images of Speculation (NL), 'Planetary Records', Contour Biennale (BE), and EX-EMBASSY.com (DE). She writes with Jelena Vesic on Non-Aligned Movement legacies, with Danny Butt on artistic autonomy in settler colonial conditions and edits with Richard Bell. From 2013-21 her artistic research project, The Gas Imaginary, used poetry, drawing, installation and moving image media to explore the difference of unconventional gas (fracking) from colonial modern

mining regimes, culminating in the feature installation INFRACTIONS  
[www.infractionsdocumentary.net](http://www.infractionsdocumentary.net).



Leonard Andy on Djiru Country, Mission Beach. Image courtesy Rachel O'Reilly



'Rainforest meets reef, next 800m', sign at Mission Beach, Djiru Country. Image courtesy Rachel O'Reilly.



Margaret Thosborne, Townsville Marina, Wulgurukaba Country. Image courtesy Rachel O'Reilly.



Sonya Takau (Jirrbal), at Alligator's Nest, Gulngay and Jirrbal Country near Tully. Image courtesy Rachel O'Reilly.



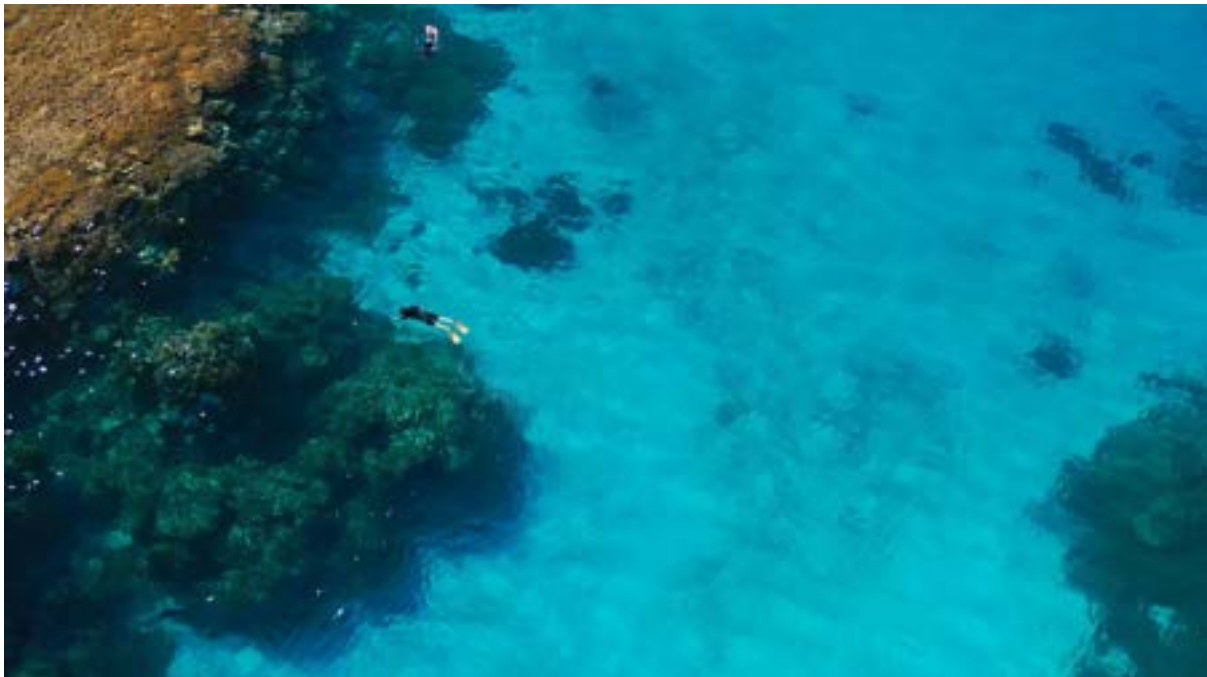
Jacob Cassidy at Mungalla Station, Nywaigi Country. Image courtesy Rachel O'Reilly.



Hilary Smith (marine biologist) and Rohan Lloyd (reef historian) at home in Pallarenda, Gurambilbarra Wulgurukaba Country. Image courtesy Rachel O'Reilly.



Close-up of coral breeding experiments at Australian Institute for Marine Science on Bindal Country, near Townsville. Image courtesy Rachel O'Reilly.



Filming offshore of Wallaginji ("beautiful reef")/ Lady Musgrave Island, Southern end of Great Barrier Reef, Sea Country of Taribelang Bunda, Gooreng Gooreng, Gurang, Bailai, and the Wakka Wakka and Auburn Hawkwood (Wulli Wulli) People. Image courtesy Rachel O'Reilly.



Filming Northern Waters, offshore of Lady Musgrave Island, Southern Great Barrier Reef, Sea Country of Taribelang Bunda, Gooreng Gooreng, Gurang, Bailai, and the Wakka Wakka and Auburn Hawkwood (Wulli Wulli) People. Image courtesy Rachel O'Reilly.



Image from 'Northern Conditions, Planetary Practices' workshop for regional art workers and environmentalists on Djiru Country at Ninney Rise, supported by UQ Art Museum and the Blue Humanities Lab. Image courtesy UQ Art Museum.