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BLACK PASTORALISM

Contemporary Aboriginal Land Use

The experience of Aboriginal owned pastoral enterprises in the Northern Territory 1972 – 1996

Stuart George Phillpot

May 2000

A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University
I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own independent research and that all authorities that have been used are duly acknowledged.

Stuart George Phillpot

28 May 2000
Acknowledgments

Many people have influenced this study and I would like to acknowledge their contributions. To the many Aboriginal elders, leaders and workers who have, around many campfires, discussed the issues considered in the study – I hope I have captured some of your views. I would particularly like to acknowledge those Warlpiri, Pijjantjatjara and Anmatyerre cattlemen who are no longer with us and who were gracious and kind enough to share with me the cattle game.

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Abstract

Aboriginal peoples' involvement in the pastoral industry of the Northern Territory has been a feature of that industry almost since first contact between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people. However, whilst Aboriginal involvement in the pastoral industry has been celebrated in terms of their bush skills and their qualities as stockmen, their association with the industry has always been ambivalent. For it was the pastoral industry that occupied and exploited their traditional land. Aboriginal peoples' involvement in the pastoral industry was both exploitative and oppressive as they were always restricted to fulfilling a labour provision role.

The development of Aboriginal people as owners and managers of pastoral cattle enterprises is relatively new, dating from the mid 1970s. This involvement has arisen in part through the policies directed at meeting Aboriginal peoples' land needs through various pastoral property acquisition policies, and in part through the privatisation of government and mission cattle projects. The policies that have supported Aboriginal involvement as owners and managers of pastoral properties have varied over time ranging from support for employment, meat self-sufficiency and commercial success, to an increasing focus on commercial success only.

The increased emphasis of policy and program upon commercial success has had a number of outcomes. The number of properties receiving economic development support has been reduced, as has the actual number of operating
beef cattle enterprises. In addition, herds on Aboriginal properties have been substantially reduced and there has been no real independent Aboriginal-owned and operated pastoral sector established. This has occurred because, to a large extent, policy has ignored the biogeographical, social and industry factors that constrained the development of an Aboriginal-owned and operated cattle industry. The primary factor for the failure of the policies to develop a commercially successful Aboriginal owned, operated and managed cattle industry in the Northern Territory is that the policies and the programs that supported them did not support Aboriginal people in their multiple land use aspirations, which in many cases included cattle production.
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<td>AACM</td>
<td>Australian Agricultural Consulting Management Company</td>
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<td>ABARE</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Agricultural Resource Economics</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABTA</td>
<td>Aboriginal Benefits Trust Account</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABTF</td>
<td>Aboriginal Benefits Trust Fund</td>
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<td>ACT</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
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IBRA  Interim Biogeographical Regional Area
ILC  Indigenous Land Corporation
NAB  Native Affairs Branch
NAC  National Aboriginal Council
NACC  National Aboriginal Consultative Committee
NLC  Northern Land Council
NPC  Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company
NSW  New South Wales
NT  Northern Territory
NTA  Northern Territory Administration
NTDC  Northern Territory Development Corporation
NTGPS  Northern Territory Government Publishing Service
OAL  Office of Aboriginal Liaison
RCIADC  Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
RSSS  Research School of Social Sciences
SA  South Australia
SWP  Special Work Projects
TAP  Training for Aboriginals Program
USA  United States of America
VRD  Victoria River District
WA  Western Australia
Chapter 1: Introduction – Northern Territory Aboriginal properties in the literature – A statement of the problem, methodology and focus

This thesis will examine the range of policies that have enabled Aboriginal people to acquire and operate pastoral leases and pastoral operations. The performance of the different Aboriginal pastoral leases and pastoral activities has been quite variable. Many Aboriginal pastoral operations have substantially lower numbers, employ more people and have poorer infrastructure than non-Aboriginal owned properties. Overall, the majority of Aboriginal pastoral enterprises’ commercial performance has been less successful than those owned and operated by non-Aboriginal people.

The Aboriginal owned sector of the Northern Territory (NT) pastoral industry has developed as the result of a number of historical factors. Cattle activities on missions were a major supplement to limited incomes and to food stocks. Later, government settlements also developed cattle activities. The purpose of these activities included the provision of employment and training, as well as meat for communal kitchens (Phillpot, 1985). The introduction of self-determination and the establishment of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) resulted in the original holding of Aboriginal pastoral activities being increased. This was accomplished through a range of policies that supported the purchase of pastoral leases on behalf of resident Aboriginal communities. The practice of pastoral lease purchase has continued, although the policy and program support has varied significantly in the period between 1972 and 1996. As a consequence, there are in excess of fifty different Aboriginal groups (Hanlon & Phillpot,
1993a:9) which have, have had, or wished to have a pastoral operation. In addition to these groups, the activities of the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) indicate that there may be a number of additional Aboriginal groups who wish to have some involvement in a cattle enterprise.

A number of Authors – Young (1981, 1984, 1988a, 1992, 1995, 1998), Thiele (1982), Hanlon (1985a), Cane and Stanley (1985), and Stanley (1985) – have raised questions about the policy objectives of property purchase. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, there has been little policy response to these concerns. Rather there appears to have been a constant contradiction, and indeed confusion, between the approach of Aboriginal people to cattle enterprises at the local level and the policies of government applied to those pastoral enterprises. The problem of dissonance between government objectives and Aboriginal peoples’ aspirations for their pastoral enterprises remains. Indeed, it has worsened. Therefore, there is a need for further critical examination of the policy relating to the Aboriginal pastoral industry.

Previous analysis of NT Aboriginal pastoral properties

Aboriginal pastoral properties were subject to a detailed analysis by Thiele (1982) in his analysis of Yugal, an Aboriginal property in Arnhem Land, Originally Yugal had been a Church Mission Society (CMS) project at Roper River. Following the withdrawal of the CMS from Roper River in 1969, the project was taken over by the NT Administration Social Welfare Branch. It was
privatised as an Aboriginal owned and operated pastoral company when the Commonwealth DAA was established in 1972.

Thiele argued that Yugal failed as a commercial operation and he offered a number of explanations for its commercial failure. These included the cultural inappropriateness of the corporate structure and the lack of management expertise, lack of capital and a lack of skill and knowledge among the Aboriginal stockmen.

The Author (1985a) raised similar concerns in his study of labour usage on Aboriginal cattle stations and he identified substantial differences between Aboriginal cattle stations and non-Aboriginal cattle stations. In his analysis, Aboriginal cattle stations were smaller, had smaller herds, less infrastructure and employed more people than non-Aboriginal pastoral enterprises. He later extended his argument to suggest that a major factor for the differences between Aboriginal owned and operated cattle stations was that Aboriginal cattle stations are located within a different institutional framework to that of non-Aboriginal pastoral enterprises, and that the policies being applied to the Aboriginal owned properties needed to acknowledge this (Phillpot, 1988).

However, it is Young (1981, 1984, 1988a, 1992, 1995, 1998), in numerous articles and monographs, who has consistently raised concerns about the policies that have been applied to Aboriginal cattle stations. In her work on Willowra, Young (1981) identified that the Aboriginal people had different priorities for their cattle station than non-Aboriginal people. She later pointed out, in relation
to Yuendumu, that the cattle enterprise provided a range of benefits to communities and that, in the community’s eyes, those benefits were of equal or greater value than profit making.

More recently Young, in conjunction with Ross, has expanded her early analysis and, in a study of Aboriginal owned cattle enterprises in the Kimberley (Young & Ross, 1994), identified two different perspectives as applied to Aboriginal owned cattle stations, that is, an insider view and an outsider view. The insiders are those Aboriginal groups and their employees who operate cattle enterprises, and the outsiders are an array of bureaucrats and service providers who work with, or in support of, the Aboriginal owned cattle stations. Cowlishaw (1998) also identified a dualistic perspective of Aboriginal owned and operated cattle stations, between insiders and outsiders. Cowlishaw has argued that the use of large-scale, extensive pastoral property models, as applied by government in supporting Aboriginal owned and operated pastoral properties, is ethnocentric, ignores Aboriginal peoples’ values, and provides significant benefits to the bureaucracy at the expense of the Aboriginal group wishing to pursue a pastoral activity.

Other Authors have raised these concerns in a slightly different context. Hanlon (1985a) has argued that the policy objectives are confused and that, as a consequence, most program support is misdirected. Stanley (1985) argues this, and in a joint paper with Cane (Cane & Stanley, 1985) suggests that the Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign (BTEC) and other
Hanlon and Phillpot (1993b) have extended this argument by suggesting that the Aboriginal owned pastoral industry lacks a cadre of people who have the management, technical and operational expertise to manage these enterprises. They further argue that large-scale pastoralism constitutes less than 5% of the industry and they imply that other models should be explored.

Stafford-Smith, McNee, Rose, Snowden and Carter (1994) have further developed this theme in their analysis of goals and strategies for Aboriginal cattle stations. They argue that new technology enables support agencies to design cattle production systems that are environmentally sustainable and in accord with the aspirations and capacity of the Aboriginal community that wishes to pursue cattle production. This, they suggest, is a more appropriate policy framework than the pursuit of commercially successful, Aboriginal owned, managed and operated, large-scale pastoral enterprises. Dunlop and McGlashon (1985) also questioned the appropriateness of large-scale pastoralism on Aboriginal land. Among their concerns are doubts about the commercial viability of Aboriginal pastoral enterprises which were located in rangelands and whose pastoral value was marginal. Young (1991) and Rose (1992) have made similar arguments. Yet the dominance of the large-scale pastoral enterprise, in terms of goals for Aboriginal cattle stations, has continued and in recent years has been subject to criticisms from the popular press for its apparent lack of success (Sykes, 1995:39).
The literature's representations are generally accurate, though it gives insufficient attention to two aspects that were to have an influence on the administrative policy and practice that applied to the purchase of pastoral properties and their associated enterprises after the policy of self determination was established in 1972. Firstly, on many Aboriginal settlements and missions, there were cattle projects operated by Aboriginal people, albeit under unqualified white supervisors, who were highly dependent upon senior Aboriginal cattlemen. Secondly, there were a number of individuals of Aboriginal descent and their families who owned and operated cattle stations more or less successfully, and who had acquired these properties either through their own talent or through a mixture of descent and skill. Examples of this latter group included such people as the Liddles at Angas Downs, the Kunoths at Mt Ebenezer, the Bathems and Bostocks at Beetaloo, and the Andersons and Shadforths in the Gulf near Borroloola. The existence of these two slightly different models of Aboriginal peoples' involvement in pastoral enterprise gave the early policy makers some grounds for hope that a successful Aboriginal owned, managed and operated pastoral sector could be established (Gibb, 1971, Recommendations).

Nonetheless, the dissonance between Aboriginal peoples' capacities and aspirations on the one hand, and public policy on the other, has been clearly demonstrated. However, neither side in this unsatisfactory relationship was static in its aims or capacity. What needs fuller application is the changing dynamics of the relationship between a shifting government policy and developing Aboriginal communities.
Understanding the dynamics of the elements

In dealing with Aboriginal cattle stations, this thesis will focus on the communities and the pastoral industry. However, in dealing with these varied elements and their interrelationship, it is necessary to have some appreciation of the evolving nature of the encapsulation of Aboriginal society, initially within the pastoral industry, and, as the evolutionary process continued, within Australian society.

Hanlon and Phillpot (1993a) have argued that, from an Aboriginal peoples’ perspective, the state represented a marble cake made up of layers of government policy and administration agencies that Aborigines must wend their way through if they are to obtain resources for their various needs. However, while many minority groups and others have to deal with layered systems of bureaucracy and policy, they do not do so from the perspective of an encapsulated hunting and gathering society (Peterson, 1991:2). Peterson’s view is that ‘foraging peoples encapsulated within first world liberal democratic states are in a category all of their own’ (Peterson, 1991:14). This encapsulation involves different cultural perspectives about roles, functions and obligations, but also involves an unequal power relationship (Wolfe, 1993a & b).

In exploring this situation, the Author has accepted Peterson’s argument that foraging cultures that have been encapsulated by industrially developed, liberal
democratic society, have by nature of the encapsulation entered into a range of relations with the encapsulating society.

Therefore, any analysis of that relationship has to adopt a pluralistic framework and this requires adoption of a multi-disciplinary approach.

One aspect of the encapsulation is that Aboriginal people are not only unequal in power, but are also unequal in size, a fact acknowledged by Peterson (1991) but not always appreciated in terms of its impact on communities. As Peterson points out, Aboriginal communities are small. Therefore, their capacity to manage all of the relationship layers in an encapsulated situation is limited. As a consequence, the leadership concentration on single areas such as cattle enterprises is often distracted by competing and conflicting demands, others which pertain to the non-Aboriginal domain and some of which pertain to the Aboriginal domain.

The cultural dualism that Aboriginal groups have to deal with was first brought to the Author's attention when he undertook a study into the training needs of Aboriginal Local Government Councils (Phillpot, 1990). During the course of this research, Aboriginal informants spoke of living 'in-between' and the tensions inherent with that position. As they described it, this in-between world was inherent with conflict, tension and contradiction that they represented in the figure below:
In the context of encapsulation of Aboriginal society by non-Aboriginal society, the analysis of one aspect of the encapsulation, that is, Aboriginal ownership and operation of pastoral properties and their associated enterprises, poses some theoretical difficulties.

In analysing culturally dualistic and encapsulated situations there are a number of political theories whose common elements will provide some insight, particularly in a situation where small groups of politically less powerful groups are encapsulated within a multi-layered bureaucratic pluralism. Certainly Dunlevy and O'Leary (1988:323) suggest such a possibility in their analysis of state power relationships and the plurality of liberal democratic systems. In this context then, it is little wonder that Rowse finds some political models applied to Aboriginal community politics insufficient in themselves or useful as a general model (Rowse, 1992). In fact, Rowse suggests that the current state of political theory is incapable of dealing with the situation of an encapsulated hunting and gathering society (Rowse, 1992:28). For example, Palmer, in his analysis of
Aboriginal land purchase policies of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, essentially applies a Marxist model to analysing the state's response to the demand for land rights (Palmer, 1988:2-7). However, he does not capture the dynamics of the experience of those communities that had acquired land under those policies, nor does he capture the dynamic of the enterprises that Aboriginal people had to manage on that land.

However, it is not the purpose of this thesis to analyse the relevance of various political theories of the state to the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society.

Rather, it is to explore the confusion, contradiction and policy options available to Aboriginal people who wish to pursue the operation of cattle activities in the NT.

In order to briefly outline the process of encapsulation, the Author adopted the framework developed by the Berndts (1987). The Berndt's model of encapsulation draws on their observations of the encapsulation of Aboriginal people by the pastoral industry prior to, during and immediately after the second world war. It also draws on their observations of Aboriginal people employed by the Army during World War II, and the encapsulation of Aboriginal people along the Daly River, which included engagement with the Sacred Heart Mission, small Daly River farmers and increasing contact with Darwin. In demonstrating an encapsulation that was, at first, single industry, and which over time moved to an increasing pluralistic relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal
society, the Berndt's model is useful in capturing some of the dynamics of Peterson's (1991) notion of encapsulation. It is useful in capturing the continuities and discontinuities in policy identified by Rowse (1998), particularly in relation to the continuities associated with the relatively small size of the groups involved and the role of the same personalities in local situations (see chapters 4 and 5) over different policy periods. It is also useful in analysing the discontinuities associated with changing policy periods and the growth of non-Aboriginal society in the NT. The Author has marginally extended the Berndt's framework in order to analyse the experience of Aboriginal people who acquired pastoral leases and continued to operate some form of beef cattle pastoralism in the post assimilation period.

Aboriginal communities associated with pastoral activities have not arisen as a result of communal interest, a common need or activity as the word 'community' normally implies. They have arisen as a result of contact with non-Aboriginal settlement – a settlement characterised by conflict, oppression, exploitation and encapsulation of Aboriginal people. In this sense, the use of the term 'community' is less than appropriate in that it usually implies joint ownership, unity of character, or a structured organic nature that has a shared identity. As Smith (1989) indicates in his analysis of remote Aboriginal communities, "To jump straight from 'community' as locality (geographic community) to socially organised community is possible but often artificial". Smith goes on to describe the impact of non-Aboriginal settlement generally in the formation of Aboriginal communities that derive from fringe camps, government settlements and missions. In this approach Smith acknowledges that government only
sporadically influenced the pastoral areas, at least up until the post assimilation period, in terms of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships. As a consequence, in the pastoral areas the relationship was most often determined by the powerful, invading group, the pastoralists. This dominance was to have a major effect on the future capacity of Aboriginal people to operate pastoral activities.

The process of encapsulation of Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal people in the NT, beginning with the pastoral industry, according to the Berndts (1987:202-213) involved a number of stages. These stages varied according to the evolving nature of contact between the two groups in different districts of the NT, and are represented as four general stages to which the Author has added a fifth to cover the contemporary period. The five are described in the following sections.

1. Initial contact

This occurred within a regional context most often with either a company or a series of individual non-Aboriginal settlers taking up “runs” in a region or district whose traditional owners shared a common language and cultural homogeneity. The initial contact was often characterised by conflict either over cattle spearing or over women. Inducting local people into the pastoral workforce followed this immediately or soon afterwards. In many cases there was a degree of continuity between traditional land occupants and those who now make up the pastoral property labour force and pastoral property Aboriginal community, as the various
Aboriginal land claims on pastoral leases have confirmed. (Ti Tree, 1984; Willowra, 1983; etc). This process is shown graphically in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Evolutionary model of contact between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people in the pastoral zone (adapted from Berndt, 1987)**

| Stage 1: Impact of non-Aboriginal contact on cultural homogeneity of Aboriginals |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| **Traditional Aboriginal**      | **Europeans**                   |
| BUSH                            | Impact of Socio-economic        |
| PASTORAL PROPERTY               | interests                       |
| Relative Homogeneity            |                                 |


There was very little choice for Aboriginal people but to move into the environs of pastoral properties, insofar as the destruction of local flora and fauna meant that work on the pastoral property was the only real alternative to starving. Consequently, the general pattern of settlement became one where the now dispossessed traditional owners lived in a pastoral community. It was inevitable that others would congregate around homestead nearest to their traditional areas if they were on their traditional lands, but with no access to facilities such as a station homestead or outstation.

In discussing the relationship between pastoralism and the Aboriginal domain, several Authors (McGrath, 1987; Rose D B, 1992) have noted that Aboriginal people who they interviewed say the relationship was symbiotic and as a period
in which Aboriginal society was not entrenched upon, while at the same time, Aboriginal people were acknowledged as superior bushmen and stockmen. This may be so, but as the Berndts (1987:217-221) quite rightly point out, the cost was high in infant and adult mortality, infertility, malnutrition and poor health.

The result of this, insofar as Aboriginal cultural maintenance was concerned, was that as long as cultural activities did not interfere with the operation of the pastoral enterprise, it was possible for Aboriginal people in the pastoral zone to maintain a degree of cultural homogeneity and continuity. This was possible largely because of the narrow nature of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships. That is, the relationship between the Aboriginal people and the non-Aboriginal pastoralist was economic in the sense that Aboriginal people were perceived as useful only as a source of labour and as a source of sexual relief. Relationships between the bulk of the Aboriginal people and the non-Aboriginal people were limited, and it was only stockmen and a few women who experienced any intense relationship with the non-Aboriginal pastoralist, and who thereby gained some appreciation of how non-Aboriginal society functioned. To the bulk of the Aboriginal population, the non-Aboriginal people were powerful, but mysterious.

These conditions approximated the period of policy of protection – 1890s to the 1930s (Broome, 1994:48-50; Griffiths, 1995:25; Markus, 1994:30-54) – although many of the elements continue to this day.
In this situation, the relationship between Aboriginal groups and non-Aboriginal people, particularly in relation to the pastoral industry, can be described as ambivalent and transitory. That is, people in contact with the pastoral industry may find themselves in conflict with it. Once involved in the industry they collaborated and exchanged labour, and often sex, for non-Aboriginal goods and services. They then could retreat from the non-Aboriginal domain to their own culture. This relationship is shown in Figure 3, which demonstrates that in this stage of contact, Aboriginal people could enter and retreat from non-Aboriginal society. While sojourning in non-Aboriginal society they collaborated with non-Aboriginal people, albeit that they were less autonomous and more dependent. However, if they retreated, they could and did reclaim autonomy and independence.

Figure 3: Relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domain

2. A growing heterogeneity

As settlement increased, Aboriginal people were exposed to a wider experience of non-Aboriginal society. This occurred through contact with missions, government settlements, patrol officers, and during the war, civil and army support camps. This process introduced a growing heterogeneity into Aboriginal pastoral communities.

Firstly, there was an increasing demographic mix, which meant that communities would contain a mixture of traditional landowner groups and non-landowners. In some situations this meant that other groups outnumbered the traditional land owning groups. For example, at the Hatches Creek mines between the wars, the Kaytej were outnumbered by the Warlpiri, Warumungu and Arrernte groups working for the various miners (Tommy Driver, 1990, pers. com.).

It also meant that more people had wide experience of non-Aboriginal society and that non-Aboriginal society had become the primary source of economic sustenance. This is shown graphically in Figure 4.
The experience was not totally negative. On the mission at least, there was access to primary school education, and in the army and government camps, some men and women gained experience as supervisors and acquired such skills as mechanical maintenance. However, on the stations, leadership roles were primarily for non-Aboriginal people. This relationship can be characterised as hierarchical and dependent, and is shown in Figure 5.
Figure 5: Hierarchical relationship in an increasing heterogenous cross-cultural situation

Mission or Government Settlement
Superintendent
Manager
Overseer
Tradesperson/Sister/Teacher
Ganger

Hierarchical dependence

Pastoral Property / Town
Manager
Welfare Officer
Overseer
Policeman
Head Stockman

Hierarchical dependence

ABORIGINAL DOMAIN

Bush
Autonomy/independence


This process approximated the policy period of assimilation – the 1930s to 1963 (Broome, 1994:121-159; Griffith, 1994:63-64; Markus, 1994:153-154; Rowse, 1998:107) – although some aspects of it preceded the policy period.
3. Superimposition

In this stage Aboriginal people experienced an encapsulation of life by non-Aboriginal society. This process was characterised by two effects: First, the intrusion of non-Aboriginal society into all aspects of Aboriginal society; second, the assumption of authority by non-Aboriginal people over all aspects of Aboriginal life. This assumption was based on the almost total economic, legal and physical control that non-Aboriginal people could exert over Aboriginal people, as is shown in Figure 6:

**Figure 6: Evolutionary model of contact between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people in the pastoral zones**

Stage 2: Model of settlements, missions and pastoral properties

Homogeneity → Traditional Aboriginal → European


This meant that cultural activities could not coincide with the seasonal cycles of ceremony and nature. Further, the availability of people critical to ceremony or
other activities was circumscribed by their involvement in non-Aboriginal activities.

However, it was still possible to maintain a degree of cultural autonomy, although economic independence and self-sufficiency was reduced substantially. While total authority had now been assumed, it was only within a certain set of specifically defined social roles, for example, teacher, missionary, patrol officer, head stockman, manager and overseer. As a consequence, there was very limited social or non-specific social interaction and the exposure of Aboriginal people to the complexities involved in non-Aboriginal activities, particularly those involving economic activity, was limited to one or two dimensions. This was primarily as a source of labour, often quite skilled. For example, neither the pastoral industry, missions or government settlements could have operated without Aboriginal stockmen, carpenters and maintenance technicians (Stanley, 1985). No Aboriginal managers, superintendents or higher level technical managers developed during this period. However, the first Aboriginal teachers and health workers were trained and began to take some responsibility for the delivery of educational and health services to their people. In this stage, Aboriginal people achieved some measure of political autonomy. However, there was still no Aboriginal managerial class or technical class, and as a consequence, there remained a dependence upon non-Aboriginal people for these roles.

The fact that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships were still carefully defined by specifically defined roles allowed for a degree of maintenance of Aboriginal culture, ritual and authority. However, at the end of the assimilation
and integration policy periods (Broome, 1994:121-159; Griffiths; 1994:63,64,79-87); Markus, 1994: 175-177), Aboriginal people were effectively landless, they had no access to capital, and their labour had only recently been acknowledged as having value as a result of the award wages case in 1968 (Stevens, 1968). The granting of award wages meant that many stations had begun to shed labour (Rowse, 1998:129). So in a sense, their labour, whilst officially of value, had less value in terms of the industry’s mix of land, labour and capital.

The process coincides approximately with the period of the policy of integration and award wages on cattle stations. This latter event caused thousands of people to move to missions and government settlements, thereby increasing the number of people exposed to a broader experience of non-Aboriginal society, albeit within the limited dimensions of an institutional setting.

4. Dominance and the subjugation of Aboriginal culture

The additional demographic changes in which people moved off the pastoral properties were to have a number of consequences. Not all Aboriginal people left the pastoral areas for government settlements or church missions. Many moved to town settlements such as Bagot and Amoonguna, or fringe camps such as Charles River in Alice Springs or Top Camp at Elliott. In these cases, Aboriginal culture and its observance were totally circumscribed by the surrounding European culture, and there was increasing reliance on welfare rather than work for sustenance, as is shown in Figure 7:
Figure 7: Evolutionary model of contact between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people in the pastoral zones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 4: Model of urbanisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superimposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Aboriginal Memory Culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In these situations cultural life for many Aboriginal people was to become just a memory, although there is evidence to demonstrate that it was stronger in the town camps than many non-Aboriginal people believed. For example, in 1985 ceremonies involving a number of language groups took place in Alice Springs at Il Parpa Swamp (Phillpot, 1988, *pers. obs*.). It was also possible for town based Aboriginal people to renew their culture by a return to their country for short or long periods of time. These comments notwithstanding, the combined effects of increasing welfare dependence and excessive alcohol consumption detracted from the maintenance and practice of Aboriginal culture. Paradoxically, it was from these camps that a renewed Aboriginal political leadership management group was to emerge. For example, the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress was the first pan-Aboriginal organisation in Alice Springs and was to take up, politically, a range of social justice issues including those of land acquisition and
land rights. In addition, it was to spawn a number of Aboriginal owned and operated service delivery organisations, such as Tangentyere in Alice Springs. However, even in these cases, the availability of Aboriginal managerial and technical workers was limited. While Aboriginal political leadership grew in experience and capacity, there was not a commensurate growth in the technical and managerial class.

This process generally coincides with the end of the policy of assimilation and the beginning of the policy of self-determination (1972).

5. Non-Aboriginal incorporation and Aboriginal renewal

The introduction of the policy of self-determination coincided with increased non-Aboriginal settlement and improvements in transport and telecommunications.

Figure 8: European encapsulation of Aboriginal society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 5: Model of modernisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

European Incorporation

Urban

Aboriginal Diminution/Renewal

In this stage, Aboriginal communities, while increasingly interlocked with the wider non-Aboriginal society, were also in the process of renewing their culture and fostering something of a renaissance, while at the same time the intrusion of non-Aboriginal society was increasing. The renaissance was characterised by increasing ceremony cycles for some groups. For example, ceremony cycles in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands commence sometime in October and continue to March or April. Individual ceremonies can be quite large, involving one or more language groups for lengthy periods. For example, in March 1997, some 3,000 Pitjantjatjara and Warlpiri people gathered at Mitibi for an initiation. They resided at Mitibi for some three weeks while the ceremonies were completed. There were no non-Aboriginal people involved in this gathering (Phillpot, 1997, pers. obs.). The renaissance was also characterised by a flourishing of Aboriginal art, and the increased control, and number, of Aboriginal organisations providing their own services, albeit that they were often dependent upon public funding.

The extent of the intrusion of non-Aboriginal society is illustrated by the fact that an increasing bureaucratic diversity means that Aboriginal leadership is often distracted by the agendas of external non-Aboriginal agencies (Phillpot, 1980a). That is, in the post assimilation period, one dominant aspect of Aboriginal community encapsulation within non-Aboriginal society was the role and number of government and other publicly funded bureaucracies. The extent of the intrusion of non-Aboriginal society is illustrated by the fact that some 36 mainstream agencies service or visit communities. This does not include the individual divisions or sections of departments responsible for specific programs,
and therefore, in some communities it understates the degree of non-Aboriginal interaction with Aboriginal communities. The development of a form of bureaucratic pluralism in which Aboriginal communities and groups had to deal with multiple agencies and multiple layers can be represented diagrammatically as a drum with revolving layers, and is shown in Figure 10.

In this figure the superimposition of non-Aboriginal society by non-Aboriginal people is represented by a series of interlocking spheres of level of influence, power and activity. In each sphere of influence there have been changes at different rates with linkage between the aspirations, needs and capacity of the Aboriginal people never completely aligned with that of the levels of non-Aboriginal society. As described above, much of Aboriginal encapsulation within non-Aboriginal society is through various agencies of a pluralistic state or its auxiliaries, that is, quasi-autonomous, subcontracted organisations that undertake specific functions under contract to the state.

From the Berndt’s model (1987), Walsh’s (1995) analysis and the Author’s own research (see chapter 3, pages 170-179), it is possible to view the situation of remote Aboriginal communities as one of encapsulation by bureaucracy. That is, the major interrelationship that Aboriginal communities have with the non-Aboriginal world is through government and its various bureaux. The interrelationship includes all aspects of the community, which is interlinked to government at the policy, program and service delivery levels. This bureaucratic encapsulation is shown in Figures 9 & 10, and can be described as follows.
The land forms the base on which all activities of local people take place. It is upon this base that contemporary Aboriginal society drives its traditional structures and functions. Because of historical contact (as chapters 3, 4 and 5 will show) the Aboriginal community is now encapsulated within and dependent upon government, the structure of which is shown in the upper levels of the diagram as policy formulation, functional departments, departmental policy, and departmental programs and projects.

An example of this bureaucratic pluralism was used by Walsh (1995:155-173) in his analysis of the relationship between Aboriginal communities and the agencies involved in land conservation. Hence, in order to examine such a multi-divisional situation, a multi-disciplinary approach is necessary (Dunlevy & O’Leary, 1988:322-323).

**Figure 9: An example of the relationships that Aboriginal groups must deal with on land conservation issues**

![Diagram of relationships between Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal organisations, and programs, departments, and external agencies.](image)

Figure 10: Bureau encapsulation: the interrelationship of encapsulated Aboriginal communities with government policy and program
Aboriginal owned and operated pastoral properties

While criticisms of the large-scale Aboriginal owned pastoral enterprises and their lack of success abound, there has been little detailed analysis of the policy framework, the relationship between the policy framework and associated programs on the one hand, and communities that operated these enterprises on the other. This interface between government policy and Aboriginal activity also embodies interface with market capitalism in the form of the cattle industry. The interrelationship between government policy, structural change in the cattle industry, and the reaction of the Aboriginal communities operating cattle enterprises in response to both industry change and government policy has not been studied in any detail. In part, this is because the intersection of government policy, community enterprise and industry change creates an in-between world, a multi-dimensional situation that is difficult to model and even harder to reflect in all its prismatic perspectives.

In this sense, this thesis seeks to go beyond previous analysis by capturing the contractions and dynamic change that is the hallmark of Aboriginal peoples' involvement in, and their ownership and operation of, cattle enterprises in the NT. It is these areas that this study focuses on, with the aim of laying a basis for more effective government policy.

This thesis also addresses the following questions:
i. Was the land acquired capable of supporting a commercially independent cattle enterprise?

ii. Was there sufficient capital available to enable Aboriginal people to achieve commercially independent cattle enterprises?

iii. Were Aboriginal people able to acquire appropriate skills to manage commercially independent cattle enterprises?

iv. Did the relevant agencies have in place a development process that enabled Aboriginal people to acquire pastoral enterprises, define their aspirations for those enterprises, and then, through judicious management of the land, labour, skill acquisition and capital, achieve some measure of commercial independence? That is, did the pluralistic state have in place a process that enabled communities to weave together strategies that enabled them, where they so aspired, to achieve commercially independent pastoral enterprises?

In analysing the development of Aboriginal owned cattle enterprises in the NT, the following definitions will be used:

1. **Commercial independent enterprise** is taken to mean that the cattle enterprise is organised as a commercial entity and is capable of generating sufficient income so as to cover all labour, land and capital costs and to provide a return (profit) on these costs.

2. **Subsidised commercial enterprise** is defined as an enterprise that is organised as a commercial entity but is incapable of covering all of its land, labour and capital costs, but in the assessment of the funding agencies, has the capacity to do so, and therefore is worthy of receiving subsidy.
3. *Subsidised, non-commercial cattle activity* is defined as a situation where the activity generates some income from cattle sales, is incapable of covering all of its costs, but its social benefits in the form of such things as meat and employment, justify, in the eyes of the state funding agencies, some form of funding.

4. *Non-subsidised, non-commercial cattle operation* is defined as where an Aboriginal group generates income from intermittent cattle activities. The income is distributed according to Aboriginal traditions and the activity occurs totally within the Aboriginal domain except for the act of selling. That is, the activity is usually low-scale, opportunistic, and in response to the immediate needs of the group and receives no form of subsidy.

**An interdisciplinary approach**

In addressing these questions, the analysis will draw on the disciplines of agricultural science, agricultural economics, agricultural extension, education and training, and development theory. The details of the relevance of each of these disciplines to the nature of the problem with reference to the work of particular research in each of these fields is set out below.

As the focus of the thesis is contemporary Aboriginal pastoralism, the thesis draws on research into the rangelands, and in particular, pastoral use of the rangelands. Of particular relevance to this element of the thesis is the work of Foran, Friedel, McLeod, Stafford-Smith and Wilson (1990). In addition, in
relation to animal husbandry in the rangelands and the BTEC, the work of Williams (Williams & McPherson, 1985) has been particularly useful.

In addressing economic issues, particularly structured change in the industry, the 1997 study on Structural Adjustment in Agriculture (ABARE, 1997) provides a broad national framework as well as data to benchmark the Aboriginal industry. In addition, the Author has been able to draw upon his own work and that undertaken in collaboration with David Hanlon (Phillpot & Hanlon, 1993a & b). The Department of Primary Industry (DPP) study of the NT Pastoral Industry (GRM, 1987) has also provided insight into the adjustment problems of the industry.

In dealing with extension, education and training issues, the Author’s collaboration with Hanlon is again a major source. In addition, the Author has drawn on that work with Downing (Downing & Phillpot, 1994) in developing and delivering Aboriginal pastoral company directors’ training, and on his work with McEntee in developing an Aboriginal station managers’ training program (McEntee & Phillpot, forthcoming).

In terms of community development theory and planning, the major influence has been that of Friere (1989). In the Australian context, the work of Ellana et al (1988), Young (1981, 1984, 1988a, 1992, 1995, 1998), Wolfe (1993a & b) and Davies (1995) has supplied an Australian Aboriginal context. In terms of Australian cattle station planning and development, the work of Dodd (1993), Downing and Phillpot (1994) and Mitchell (1996) has been influential. Young
has challenged the conventional thinking and suggests alternative models to that of large-scale, capital intensive pastoralism, and in some of her more recent work (1995) has suggested that Aboriginal groups in the industry need to apply community based planning methods similar to those used by Walsh (1995), Mitchell (1997) and Dale (1997) in Central Australia. However, in the main, the application of such methods to Aboriginal cattle enterprises has been ignored by the policy makers. Some reasons for this will be explored in this thesis.

Methodology

In essence, this thesis is a piece of action research and the Author has derived this approach from the work of Paulo Friere (1989). In Friere’s words, this thesis is about the Author’s “searching for the beauty of knowledge recognising that knowledge is full of politics and dreams and actually arises from rebellious struggles to change ourselves” (Smith, Williams & Johnson, 1997:i).

Smith, Williams and Johnson (1997:7) argue that for community development practitioners and educators research commences as a consequence of being in a community context. In this sense the thesis is about the Author’s research and reflection upon his working life, in particular the social cultural dualism involved in being in the interface between the encapsulating and the encapsulated.

The Author has been, and continues to be, a practitioner in this field. The Author directly participated in or observed many of the events and experiences described and analysed in this thesis. Specifically, the Author’s interest in pastoralism, and
Aboriginal pastoralism in particular, commenced whilst employed as a young stationhand in the late 1960s. Subsequent employment with the then Social Welfare Branch of the NT Administration as a Patrol Officer in Training, Patrol Officer and Superintendent of Reserves intensified this interest.

The Author’s experience of Aboriginal cattle enterprises was expanded in the late 1970s when, as a agricultural economist working with the Iwaidja people on Croker Island, the Author was responsible for the management of the community’s cattle herd. This experience was enhanced between 1980 and 1985 when the Author coordinated the Institute for Aboriginal Development’s (IAD) rural extension program, the focus of which was to support Aboriginal owned and operated cattle stations in northern South Australia (SA) and Central Australia.

This Aboriginal peoples’ experience was extended to cover the non-Aboriginal pastoral industry during the period the Author was employed as a senior executive with the NT DPP (1985 to 1990). These positions entailed a specific brief to administer the pastoral industry, with a particular emphasis on brucellosis and tuberculosis eradication. Throughout the 1990s, the Author has acted as a consultant to many Aboriginal groups and has been involved as either sole author, co-author, or team member in a range of reports, some of which are referenced in this thesis.

The Author continues to be involved in the Aboriginal owned pastoral industry through his current employment with the ILC. Therefore, this thesis is in many
ways a piece of action research and is derived as much from three decades of observation and participation as it does from the specific methodology used in the thesis and described above. As a piece of action research, it shares many of the advantages and disadvantages of such approaches. The Author has been able to draw upon a wide range of perspectives and experiences. However, attaining an objective perspective about some specific events described in this thesis has not always been easy. At the same time, in adopting an underlying action research approach, the Author has not ignored either empirical analysis or descriptive interpretative approaches to examination of the problem. That notwithstanding, the Author’s role throughout the three decades that this study describes and analyses has nearly always been as a go-between (Long, 1992), and as such, the Author has attempted to capture the culturally dualistic nature of the Aboriginal owned pastoral industry in the NT.

The core elements of this thesis are chapters 4 and 5, for as much as this thesis is a piece of action research, it is also a reflection of three decades of field work in the area of Aboriginal community development and of Aboriginal pastoralism in the NT in particular. It was at Ti Tree in 1968 as a young, inexperienced stationhand, that the Author first observed Aboriginal people involved in the pastoral industry. Later, as a Patrol Officer in Training at Yuendumu in 1969, he had occasion to observe the Social Welfare Branch’s cattle project. Thus chapters 1 to 3 are attempts to work backwards from what the Author experienced. The purpose of this is to centralise the theoretical, physical and political implications of the Author’s observations, while in chapters 6 to 10 the Author has sought to identify the theoretical, physical and political implications of alternative policy
options. Part of the Author’s purpose in adopting this approach is to evoke for the reader the Aboriginal community experience.

**Thesis structure**

One of the difficulties in research methodology for a practitioner who adopts an action research approach is to set the context in which the problem to be analysed sits. In conventional research the researcher addresses the problem from a background in the literature, the theoretical frameworks, his or her own research, and the research of others. For a practitioner who comes to research an area in which he or she has been intimately involved (that is, they have been both participant and observer), there are a number of additional issues. Firstly, too often the broader context in which the practitioner is working and in which he or she is focused was not understood at the time of his or her involvement in events, or was not explicit at the time either to the practitioner or to those involved in the particular issue. For example, in 1969, the Author, in the company of Gavin O’Brien (another Patrol Officer) was instructed to consult with the Warlpiri people on the possible purchase of Willowra. The instruction was verbal from the then District Welfare Officer, Mr J Cooke, and the Author’s and O’Brien’s memory of the instruction was simply, “Do the census, check social welfare payments and see if the Aboriginal people really want the station”. There was no explanation as to the policy changes, the establishment of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs (OAA), the establishment of the Capital Fund (Palmer, 1988:11), or the administrative mechanisms that would allow such a purchase to take place.
Similarly, in the early years of policy acquisitions, very rarely was there any consideration of the limitations of the land resource in terms of the Author’s memory of the process. Given this, chapter 2 sets out the geographical, anthropological and historical context of the area of study in this thesis. A study of Aboriginal Affairs policy between 1972 and 1996 and its relevance to Aboriginal pastoral enterprises is made, and is described in chapter 3. A particular focus of this chapter is the rate and extent of change that local Aboriginal leadership had to cope with in addition to dealing with pastoral enterprise focus.

A preliminary analysis of the data indicated that there was significant variance between Aboriginal owned pastoral enterprises and non-Aboriginal pastoral enterprises, and between different Aboriginal owned pastoral enterprises. However, substantial differences between individual properties indicated a need for and examination of particular instances. Because, in essence, this thesis is a piece of action research, the Author has begun with insights derived from experiences of two individual pastoral properties, that is, to see if the specific that is the case studies (chapters 4 and 5) is replicated generally (chapters 6, 7 and 8). The purpose of this is to demonstrate clearly that the impact of policy and administrative practice in the case studies was indeed general, and therefore there were some general policy and administrative reforms that could be applied to all pastoral properties. Thus, the similarities and differences in the case studies provided a useful framework to analyse the input of different policies. This framework also enabled the analysis to be used to ascertain if other Aboriginal
owned pastoral properties demonstrated similar patterns to those of the case studies.

Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company (NPC) at Yuendumu and Puraiya Cattle Company (PCC) at Ti Tree were selected as two case studies. The reasons for this selection are as follows. Both companies are located in Central Australia and, while they are located in two different language group areas, the two groups are affiliated and have similar cultural structures. The two cattle enterprises had similar herd sizes and both are incorporated under the Corporations Act as private enterprise companies. These similarities provided a base for comparison. There are also differences that would provide a contrast in determining the impacts of policy. NPC at Yuendumu, like Yugal (Thiele, 1982), had been privatised, while PCC at Ti Tree had been purchased as an operating pastoral enterprise. NPC had successfully managed its BTEC program, while PCC had been required to destock its herd and then restock. NPC is no longer in receipt of any government support, while PCC was continuing to receive ATSIC enterprise support until 1996. Data for the two case studies was gathered from the literature and from visits to the two groups over a 25-year period of working with the two particular communities. This included substantial periods of residence in both communities and consultation with a range of individuals in both communities. Additional material was gathered during regular field visits on other research projects in Central Australia between 1993 and 1996. These include an examination and evaluation of a request for a small abattoir at Yuendumu and the examination of the potential of Ti Tree and other Anmatyerre speaking communities to form a local government community council.
In order to compare and contrast the experiences and structures of the case studies with other Aboriginal properties in the NT, during a joint project with Mr David Hanlon, and with his permission, a further 26 Aboriginal owned and operated cattle stations were surveyed to examine whether they exhibited similar experiences and structures. This data was subsequently reviewed and updated through the use of telephone interviews in 1996. This information was then checked against the records of the Central Land Council (CLC) and the Northern Land Council (NLC) pastoral units. The locations of these properties are shown in Figure 11. The study also draws upon a range of interviews with key Aboriginal leaders, the NT Minister for Primary Production, the directors of the CLC and NLC, the Chairman of the ILC, and the General Manager of ATSIC, as well as the technical and professional staff of the NT Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPIF).

In addition, there were a number of projects that the Author undertook between 1990 and 1996 that are drawn on throughout this thesis. These projects included the training needs analysis of community government councils in the NT (1990), the collaboration with the Rev Jim Downing of the design, development and delivery of the Aboriginal pastoral company directors’ programs (1994-1996), and an assessment of the commercial support needs of Aboriginal properties for the Indigenous Land Corporation (1996-1998).
Figure 11: Location of surveyed properties

Source: ILC and Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993
Chapter 2: An examination of the regions and the biogeography and history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal settlement

In this chapter three factors fundamental to understanding the encapsulation of Aboriginal society by non-Aboriginal society, and the development of the Aboriginal pastoral industry in particular, are examined. These are the original land resource existing before European settlement, Aboriginal traditional life, and the incursion of the non-Aboriginal pastoral industry in the six geobiographical regions of the NT. The purpose of this examination is to set the context for examining and analysing the case studies, the comparative analysis of other Aboriginal properties, and for exploring such concepts as industry structural adjustment, social change and social mystification, all of which are dealt with in later chapters.

In examining these, this chapter examines the lower level of elements of the community policy paradigm outlined in Figure 9 on page 26 of chapter 1, and shown in the highlighted areas in this chapter in Figure 12.

The land resource

The Australian land mass has existed as a continental island for some millions of years. It has been affected by the glacial periods and the rising and lowering of the seas that occurred at the onset and cessation of each Ice Age. In that time it has developed flora and fauna that are unique. Yet it is also, in terms of soil and plant nutrients, the poorest endowed land mass in the world. For example,
Australian soils contain less than half the phosphate and nitrates of equivalent soil types elsewhere (Flannery, 1994). Any examination of pastoral land use in the NT has to start with this factor.

Figure 12: Bureaucratic encapsulation: land, tradition, industry contact and its relationship to policy and programs
Geologically, the NT has some degree of homogeneity in that it is part of the western shield of Australia with its eastern boundary constituting part of the western extremities of the central plains of Australia. The geography of the NT is much more heterogeneous than other parts of Australia, although it contains a number of definable geographic regions and quite distinct biological areas.

The question of geographic regions in the NT has been the subject of some debate. Holmes (1963:263-290) argued that the NT consisted of four regions, only one of which was totally within the political borders of the NT. These were:

(i) the Darwin/Katherine region, including Arnhem Land;
(ii) the north-north-west, consisting of the Victoria/Ord basin;
(iii) the south-east and east consisting of the Barkly Tableland; and
(iv) from Tennant Creek south, the Central Australia inland region of Australia.

The geography of the NT was therefore, Holmes (1963:262) suggested, a merging of four distinct Australian geographic regions with little to connect them physically in terms of non-Aboriginal settlement and with no relationship to the political boundaries of the NT.

Kirk, in his study of Aboriginal ecological adaptation (Kirk, 1983:11-16), also considered the nature of the geography of Australia and the NT. He argued that, in the pre-contact period, geological continuity provided a base from which Aboriginal people developed a common conceptual framework for land use
while allowing for a diversity of local adaptation to regional or local geographies. In making this argument, Kirk drew heavily on the work of Peterson (1976) who classified Aboriginal settlements on the basis of their locations spread along major drainage basis. In this regard Peterson identifies eight regions in the NT – Arnhem Land, Darwin, Douglas-Daly, the Roper, the Victoria River District, the Gulf, the Barkly Tableland and Central Australia. In his analysis, Peterson also suggests that Aboriginal society developed a common conceptual framework to land use, but one which was characterised by diverse local adaptations and variations that reflected regional geography.

More recently, McConvell (1990) and Huchet (1993) have extended Peterson’s analysis arguing that while watershed areas were a factor, other factors also played a part, including shared family and skin group structures, styles of body decoration, weapons, art styles and ceremonial practices, including initiation and mortuary rites. In the NT these regions are akin to the biogeographic regions, but are not synonymous. The key regions, and the non-Aboriginal equivalent, are set out in Figure 13:

**Figure 13: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal regions in the NT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The North</td>
<td>Douglas-Daly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnhem Land</td>
<td>Arnhem Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzmaurice</td>
<td>Victoria River District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gulf</td>
<td>The Gulf and the Barkly Tableland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Desert</td>
<td>Central Australia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from Peterson (1976), Powell (1982), McConvell (1990), Reid (1990) and Huchet (1993)*
The Kirk, Peterson, McConvell and Huchet analysis is consistent with more recent environmental research work that has classified the Australian landscape into a mosaic of biogeographic regions. This classification, developed by the Commonwealth and all States and Territories, classifies areas on the basis of common biological and geographic criteria. This has enabled the Australian landscape to be classified into common biogeographic regions (Thackway & Cresswell, 1995). This latter classification is also useful in analysing activity that utilises the environmental resource such as Aboriginal traditional land use or pastoral use. The distribution of these biogeographic regions across Australia is shown in Figure 14.
Figure 14: Interim biogeographical regions of Australia

Source: Australian Nature Conservation Agency, 1994
The Interim Biogeographical Regional Areas (IBRAs), as Thackway and Cresswell’s classifications are taken, are important classifications because the performance of the pastoral industry is determined by the availability of water and fodder. Therefore, it is possible to analyse the pastoral industry’s capacity using the biogeographical regions. However, because of the nature, type and timing of non-Aboriginal settlement and the subsequent land use, the biogeographical regions are too narrow for analysing the development of the pastoral industry generally, and the development of the Aboriginal pastoral industry specifically.

This view was adopted by both Powell (1982) and Reid (1990) whose historical treatment of the NT classified it into the following six geo-political regions:

(i) Darwin/Douglas-Daly Basin, including Katherine;
(ii) Arnhem Land;
(iii) Victoria River Basin, including the upper levels of the Tanami;
(iv) The Gulf, including the Roper and Macarthur River regions;
(v) The Barkly Tableland; and
(vi) Central Australia.

Given this, it is proposed to use both the above regions and the biogeographical regional areas within them for analysing the development and the capacity of Aboriginal owned pastoral enterprises. These broader regions are shown in Figure 15:
Figure 15: The six geo-political regions of the NT and their associated biogeographies

Adapted from ANPWS, 1994; Powell, 1982:1-20; Reid, 1990 – prepared by the ILC – only the primary biogeographic regions are shown here – each of these has a number of subsets which are dealt with in detail in the text.
The primary reason for adopting Powell and Reid's geo-political regions to the biogeographic regions is to capture some of the array of elements whose dynamic interrelationship effected the development of the Aboriginal pastoral industry. The adoption of this approach is derived from the inter-disciplinary model outlined in chapter 1.

The biogeographical areas of NT regions

In this section each of the biogeographical areas contained in the six regions of the NT are described. The borders of each of these biogeographic regions are not clearly delineated as at the boundaries of each region there is a general merging of the surrounding biogeography until one biogeographic pattern becomes dominant.

Darwin/Douglas-Daly Basin, including Katherine

The Darwin/Douglas-Daly Basin, as shown in Figure 15, includes four biogeographical areas described below:

1. Darwin/Coastal

The Darwin/Coastal biogeographical area commences on the north-eastern coast of the Bonaparte Gulf and extends at an average width of 70 km along the NT coast until it reaches the Murgenalla region. The land is gently undulating with the soils consisting of laterised cretaceous sand and siltstone siliceous sands, and loamy red and yellow earths. The vegetation consists of open forest made up of Darwin stringybark and woollybutt with an
understorey of sorghum. On the flood plains, where there is recent alluvium, the vegetation is made up of grassland, sedge land and vertosols. As pastoral land for domestic cattle the area is marginal with low growth rates and low fertility, although it is ideal for buffalo.

2. Daly Basin

The Daly Basin consists of a low plateau of Paleozoic sandstones, siltstone and limestone. The soils tend to be neutral loamy and sandy red earths. The vegetation is similar to that of the Darwin/Coastal area containing Darwin woollybutt and stringybark forests with annual and perennial grass understorey. The whole basin is cut by the Douglas and Daly Rivers, whose mouth cuts across the Darwin/Coastal region some 200 km south-west of Darwin. The Daly Basin supports cattle, and pockets of land within it are suitable for high levels of cattle production. These pockets are often associated with the more fertile river plains. In addition to cattle, a number of attempts have been made at large-scale cropping on the pockets of high fertility.

3. Pine Creek

This area consists of rugged hills of Proterozoic sandstones and slipstones. The soils are shallow and skeletal with silty profiles. The vegetation includes Darwin boxwood and round leaf bloodwood, with an understorey of sorghum. The area is very poor grazing country and is unsuitable for pastoral production, although historically it has been used for both cattle and buffalo production.
4. Tiwi/Coburg

This area includes the Tiwi Islands, the Coburg Peninsula and Croker Island. Its topography is represented by gently sloping plains made up on red and yellow earths and siliceous sands. On Croker Island and the Coburg Peninsula low grade manganese deposits can be found. The Tiwi Islands have not been used for beef cattle production, although there is a self-sustaining herd of buffalo. Croker Island has sustained cattle production, as has the Coburg Peninsula, although the latter is considered marginal as a whole. The area experiences a tropical climate with a substantial monsoon, which occurs between November and March each year. Annual rainfalls are quite variable but are usually in excess of 700 mm. The dry, in which little or no rain falls, covers the period April to October. The early dry is usually used for mustering, branding and culling for sale.

Arnhem Land

Arnhem Land extends east of the Darwin/Douglas-Daly Region to the Gulf of Carpentaria and south to the Roper River. It contains three biogeographical areas. The details of these areas are described below:

1. Arnhem/Coastal

The Arnhem Land coastal biogeographical area consists of low plateaux and gently undulating plains that are made up of laterised cretaceous sandstones and siltstone. The soils are yellow and red earths with pockets and belts of siliceous sands, particularly on the riverbanks and beaches. The vegetation is
characterised by open forest comprising stands of variable barked bloodwood and Darwin woollybutt. The grasses are sorghum types of the tropical tall grasslands. The area is totally unsuitable for cattle production. However, buffalo herds were ubiquitous until the BTEC of the 1980s.

2. Arnhem/Plateau

This area contains an uplifted plateau on protozoic sandstones. It is ruggedly dissected with rock outcrops and skeletal soils. The vegetation is a continuation of the open forest on the Arnhem coast, although the grass understorey is spinifex. The area is unsuitable for beef cattle production, but is suitable for buffalo.

3. Central Arnhem

In the Central Arnhem area the rugged hills of the plateau have been reduced to low hills and gently sloping plains that rest on the laterised cretaceous sandstones, siltstones and tertiary material similar to that found elsewhere in Arnhem Land. The soils range from shallow stony sands to earthy yellows, and include significant areas of black soils. The vegetation is a continuation of the open woodland forest with a grass understorey. The area is suitable for buffalo production, but is unsuited to beef cattle production. From a biogeographical perspective, Arnhem Land represents one of the richest areas for Aboriginal land use. However, the poor quality grasses make it unsuitable for cattle. The climate is similar to that of the Darwin coastal area.
Victoria River Basin, including the upper levels of the Tanami Desert

This area is located some 300 km south-west of Darwin. There are five biogeographical areas of the Victoria River region and these are described below:

1. Victoria/Bonaparte

The Victoria/Bonaparte biogeographical area contains two sub-areas – one covering the north and north-west and one stretching from the east to the south. The north-western areas consist of phanerozoic strata of the Bonaparte basin mantled by quaternary marine sediments. The area contains earth and black soil plains and supports a range of vegetation generally consisting of open savanna high grasslands. In the south and east is the Victoria Plateau, which is made up of abrupt ranges and plateaux of proterozoic sandstone. These are mantled in part by skeletal sandy soils. The vegetation is made up of hummock grasslands and low tree savanna.

2. Ord/Victoria

The Order/Victoria area is dominated by a variety of rock and stone formations of three basic types. These are as follows:

(i) Abrupt ranges of proterozoic and phanerozoic formations that are covered by shallow sand soils that support triode hummock grasslands and sparse low trees;

(ii) Extensive plains that are made up of Cambrian volcanic and limestone materials. The soils are either dry calcareous or cracking clays. These respectively support short grass or medium height grasses. Along the drainage line there are riparian forests of river gums.
(iii) In the south-west the country consists of laterised upland sand plains with sparse trees, mostly lance wood, and a medium height grass understorey. Elsewhere the area consists of Cambrian volcanic and proterozoic sedimentary rocks that support level to gently undulating plains that contain vertosols on the plains and skeletal soils on the hills. Vegetation consists of grassland on the plains, spinifex on the hills, and scattered stands of bloodwood and snappy gum trees.

3. Great Sandy Desert

This area, which extends down into Central Australia and Western Australia, is made up of Jurassic and cretaceous sandstones that are covered by quaternary red longitudinal sand dunes. Outside the dune areas in the north the laterised uplands are gently undulating and support shrub and tree plains.

The Ord/Victoria area and the northern boundaries of the Great Sandy Desert have supported extensive cattle operations since the 1890s. The climate experiences significant monsoonal influence with a wet season and a dry season, although rainfalls are somewhat lower than Darwin/Coastal or Arnhem Land and reduces substantially as one moves further inland from the coast.

The Gulf

This area covers the drainage basins of the Roper and Macarthur River regions and includes three biogeographical areas.
1. Gulf Coastal

This area is made up of scattered, rugged proterozoic sandstones and tertiary sediments. In between the rock outcrops there are gently undulating plains made up of sandy red earths and shallow gravel sandy soil. These areas support vegetation of Darwin stringybark woodland with a spinifex understorey.

2. Gulf Falls

This area is made up of low steep hills comprised of proterozoic and palaeozoic sedimentary rock. This is covered by laterised, tertiary, skeletal soils and shallow sands. The vegetation consists of open woodland containing Darwin boxwood and variable barked bloodwood with a spinifex understorey.

3. Gulf Plains

This area includes the Carpentaria and Karumba Basins, which have significant marine and terrestrial deposits. The area is a mosaic of plains, plateaux and outwash plains supporting grasslands and woodlands.

The Gulf region is generally considered marginal, although all three areas have been used for beef cattle production. The Gulf also experiences a tropical monsoonal climate.
The Barkly Tableland

The Barkly Tableland contains two biogeographical regions – the Mitchell grass plains and the channel country complex. These are described below.

1. Mitchell Grass Plains

This is undulating downs country on a shale and limestone base with grey and brown cracking soils and clays that support grasslands and low woodlands.

2. Channel Country Complex

This area is made up of cretaceous sediments in the form of low hills dissected by braided river systems and small areas of sand plains. The vegetation includes coolabah woodlands, lignum and saltbush, and shrublands.

Both biogeographical regions of the Barkly Tableland support large numbers of beef cattle. The climate is considered to be sub-tropical with a significant monsoonal influence.

Central Australia

There are six biogeographical areas within the Central Australia region and these are described in the following ways.
1. Simpson and Strzelecki Deserts
These are made up of longitudinal arid dune fields and sand plains supporting cane grass along the crests of dunes and in between sparse scrubland, together with spinifex hummock grassland.

2. Central Ranges
These ranges contain proterozoic formations between which lie derived soil plains and red quaternary sand plains. The ranges support wattle scrub of various types and the plains consist of open woodland, which is mostly mulga and desert oak. The understorey grasses consist of hummock grasslands.

3. Finke Plains
This area is mostly Precambrian volcanic and contains dissected uplands and valleys which are made up of arid sand plains of red earths and shallow sand. These plains support spinifex hummock and acacia shrubs.

4. MacDonnell Ranges
These dominant high relief ranges and foothills support woodlands along the drainage systems, and are covered in spinifex and acacia shrubs on the higher areas.

5. Burt Plain
This area consists of low rocky ranges and plains of Precambrian granites with red earths supporting mulga and acacia woodlands.
6. Tanami

This is made up of permian and proterozoic strata, which form hills and ranges in exposed areas. These strata are mantled mainly with red quaternary sand plains. These plains support mixed shrub steppes and include desert bloodwoods, acacia wattles and grevillea over hummock grasslands and gibber plains.

All of these areas have supported a measure of beef cattle production, although often at very low stocking rates. The climate is an arid continental type with annual average rainfall under 100 mm, usually falling in the summer. There is a high variability of rainfall in this area, as with the rest of the NT. Droughts are common and are considered to be normal by many commentators.

Overall, the regions and their associated biogeographies are not the best suited for cattle production. Only two of the regions – the Barkly Tableland and the Victoria River District – have substantial areas of above moderate carrying capacity.

Climate

In the 1980s the apparent increasing uncertainty of the Australian climate was being attributed to the El Nino Oscillation (ENSO) which was regarded as a relatively new phenomenon. The ENSO, or El Nino, phenomenon is the result of a warming of the east Pacific Ocean by up to four degrees Celsius. This occurs
when the winds in the west Pacific reverse and no longer prevent the warmer western waters from moving east. When this happens a new current is created which is some 120 metres deep and up to 8,000 kilometres long. In Australia, the effect of this is dramatic – coastal waters become colder, evaporation is reduced, cloud formation decreases, and almost all the continent becomes gripped by drought which can continue for up to eight years. When the current changes, it often brings torrential rain and flood.

When discovered, the El Nino was first thought to be a new phenomenon, although historical records would indicate that it was prevalent in the 19th century, and new research and geological explorations suggest that it may be as old as 350 to 400 years old. Flannery (1994:81) argues that it could be as old as a million years. The debate about the commencement of ENSO notwithstanding, what is certain is that it contributes to Australia’s seasonal climatic variability and thus the unpredictability of animal and plant production.

Given such seasonal unpredictability, it is possible to argue that the transference of the classic European definition of four seasons, on which much of Australian agricultural and pastoral development is based, has been inappropriate. More appropriate climatic seasonal definitions need to be identified, and production cycles, agricultural policy and agricultural support programs matched to these.

In this regard, examination of Aboriginal climatic classifications may have important clues. Yet, apart from anthropological interest, Aboriginal knowledge of seasonal cycles has not been examined in any detail and certainly not from the
perspective of agricultural or animal production in the NT. What is clear is that the effect of the El Nino makes annual animal production levels both uncertain and unpredictable.

**Animal resources**

The NT contains a variety of indigenous animals which, prior to non-Aboriginal settlement, had an extensive range within the different biogeographic regions of Australia and were a major food source for Aboriginal people. These animals included a wide range of kangaroo and wallaby species, as well as smaller marsupials, including the bilby and the echidna. Bird life was also extensive with emus and magpie geese, different species of pigeon, duck and other water fowl contributing significantly to the diet of Aboriginal groups. Other animal food resources for Aboriginal people included a number of reptiles, species of pythons, all lizards and goannas, as well as tortoises. In the coastal areas, crocodiles were both a source of food and of danger, whilst the amply stocked rivers and seas enabled coastal groups to live well (Berndt, 1968).

The Australian landscape contains one of the widest diversities of life in the world and many of the species, such as kangaroos, were widely dispersed across the NT. This dispersion was a response to the variability of the seasons which encourages species to be both nomadic and widely dispersed in order to ensure the greatest access to the available resources. The variable seasonal environment means that the indigenous fauna of Australia share some common characteristics. These include rates of reproduction that are capable of exploiting the erratic
occurrence of good seasons. For example, in good seasons a female kangaroo can be pregnant, have a joey in the pouch and one at foot. In a bad season, the same female kangaroo can cease breeding altogether (Flannery, 1994). Other species breed quickly in the good seasons and their offspring achieve independence prior to the onset of adverse seasons. Consequently, in such an uncertain environment, Aboriginal people required an encyclopaedic knowledge of local resources under all seasonal conditions, together with the skill to apply this knowledge to harvest the same available resources.

Aboriginal land use and the composition of species were disrupted by non-Aboriginal people and the addition of a number of new species to the NT. The eight major introduced species, all of which have some relevance to the pastoral industry and Aboriginal land use, are cattle, buffalo, rabbits, donkeys, camels, horses, foxes and cats. All of these species have higher reproduction levels and are much greater users of the available flora and fauna resource than the indigenous species. Their higher reproduction rates also mean that they can out-compete native species for resources. Consequently, native species numbers have been reduced and so too has the capacity of Aboriginal people to maintain a hunting and gathering economy.

**Summary comments on the biogeography of the NT**

The NT is a complex biological and topographical environment. It has a climate that is highly variable and difficult to predict. Overwhelmingly, the land resource is poor by world standards. Because of the biogeography’s poverty, it requires a
sophisticated knowledge and a high level of skill to utilise it in a sustainable manner.

The ENSO effect, that is, the pattern of long periods of drought followed by intense periods of flood, requires a longer-term approach to productive land use than the annual cycles adopted by non-Aboriginal pastoralists. Aboriginal people were able, through their extensive environmental knowledge, to adopt such an approach over the period of their residence of Australia.

**Human settlement: Aboriginal occupation**

Archaeological evidence has pushed back the arrival of Aboriginal people to at least 40,000 BP and are there now suggestions that Aboriginal occupation may have occurred as early as 100,000 BP (Flannery, 1994). How Aboriginal people crossed to the mainland is of continued intellectual conjecture and inquiry. Their spread across the Australian continent by utilising its drainage systems (Peterson, 1976) enabled them to effectively occupy the Australian continent for at least twelve hundred generations.

On initial settlement Aborigines occupied an environment substantially different from the one that existed even in 1788 and certainly one that is different to the contemporary Australian environment. For example, along the Great Divide volcanoes were still active when Aborigines first arrived (Blainey, 1975). At least some of the giant marsupials existed. Over the generations of their settlement of the Australian continent Aboriginal people were able to develop a
sustainable exploitation of the environment. It also needs to be said that this adaptation was not without its environmental impact. Increasingly it is believed that Aboriginal hunting pressure, combined with the impact of fire utilised by Aboriginal people, played a substantial part in the demise of the giant marsupials and a number of other species such as the marsupial lion (Flannery, 1994). It is also thought that the use of fire resulted in the dominance of eucalypt forests at the expense of the casuarina rainforests.

Flannery's view of Aboriginal impact upon the environment in terms of hunting pressure and the use of fire has been criticised as narrow. Mulvaney and Kamminga (1999:125-6) cite the work of Garlings (1994) and Mains (1978:169-173) as offering an alternative explanation for both the disappearance of the megafauna and the expansion of eucalypt forests. That is, there were a series of environmental changes, including climate, sea level and the presence of man, which contributed to those events and no one factor was dominant. These speculations notwithstanding, Aboriginal people also developed a unique social and economic structure which has fascinated anthropologists for two hundred years. The Berndts (1968), Elkin (1964) and Spencer and Gillen (1968) and many others have analysed and described both the Aboriginal adaptation to the Australian landscape and the social and economic structure that supported this adaptation. As the majority of Aboriginal owned cattle stations are owned by groups rather than individuals, some understanding of Aboriginal society is necessary before any assessment of Aboriginal owned cattle stations can be made. A summary of the anthropological descriptions of Aboriginal society is contained in the following sections of this chapter.
Aboriginal social and economic structures prior to non-Aboriginal contact

Aboriginal society and land use was based around a multi-use of the land that included mystical, cultural, social, economic and recreational uses of the land. This multiple use of the land requires some understanding in order to appreciate the impact of non-Aboriginal pastoral settlement and the subsequent development of an Aboriginal owned, managed and operated pastoral sector.

The smallest unit of Aboriginal society was the horde and the largest was the language group. Between these units there was a range of structures which had various functions. Anthropological studies of Aboriginal society prior to and immediately following contact saw them as both simple in terms of political structures and complex in terms of their social organisation (Stanner, 1965). Those structures of direct relevance to Aboriginal land ownership and pastoral use are described in this section.

In examining these structures the four key social groups identified by Stanner (1965:5-16) are used, that is, family, horde, descent group and language group.

The family

The family, or hearth group, generally consists of a man, his wife or wives, and their children. In some cases older relatives and nephews undergoing instruction from the man might also be attached to the group. The family unit was the principal economic unit with all the people in it having the required knowledge
of that particular piece of country and its surrounds to live off it and to produce the necessities of life. Generally within the family unit, descent is bilateral, that is, descent is both through the mother and the father, although the dominance of either patrilineal or matrilineal descent varied from language group to language group.

Hordes or bands

The formation of hordes or bands, that is, the grouping of several hearth or family groups into an economic unit for food gathering, was very much determined by seasonal conditions and the resources available. In Arnhem Land, hordes or bands could consist of up to fifty people. In less hospitable environments or in poor seasons, bands might only be loose associations of hearth groups independently foraging in the one area.

Local descent groups

Local descent groups are those people who have ownership or management of a particular piece of land or country and who trace their descent from a common ancestor or ancestress, either physical or mystical. The country within the bounds of the areas occupied by the language groups is usually defined by a number of natural features. The descent group not only owns these features, but it also has responsibility for the ceremonies associated with them, including those ceremonies that are part of wider stories and rituals (song line) that may be shared by a number of language groups. For example, the Dingo Ceremonies at Ali Curung near Tennant Creek are part of a song line that travels from the Gulf area down to the Devil’s Marbles and Ali Curung and then proceed from there to
the MacDonnell Ranges and on to the Flinders Ranges (Johnson, 1988, pers. com.). Where local descent groups are affiliated with natural features associated with a particular song line, ownership of the particular story is usually vested in the local descent group.

Language groups

Historically, the word ‘tribe’ has been used to describe people utilising the same language and sharing common ceremonies, social structure, marriage rules and occupying a designated area claimed by themselves and acknowledged by their neighbours. However, the word ‘tribe’ as applied in other areas of the world includes a range of connotations involving governance, authority and political structure. As these connotations do not apply to Australian Aborigines, the word ‘tribe’ will not be used, and instead the words ‘language group’ are applied.

In applying this label, Elkin’s (1964:57) definition of the qualities of a tribe is retained.

A language group is a group of people whom:

(i) own and inhabit an area of country,

(ii) have a language or dialect in common,

(iii) have a distinct name with which they identify themselves and by which they are identified by others,

(iv) have customs and laws unique to themselves, and

(v) have rites and rituals that are different from other groups.
In terms of the two case studies, the relevant language groups are Warlpiri in relation to Ngarliyikirlangu, and Anmatyerre in relation to Puraiya.

**Kinship**

The question of descent and land ownership is governed by the kinship systems which are all embracing and complex since they are capable of classifying all people with whom one comes in contact into a family relationship of either father, mother, brother, sister, grandfather or grandmother. Elkin (1964:91) identified five of these systems operating across the Australian continent, namely, the Kariera, the Kadjeri, the Aranda, the Alridja and the Ungarinyin. However, he makes the point that while there are substantial differences between the various systems, it is possible to identify one’s kinship location through reference to another classification.

The classificatory system of kinship was particularly important from the point of view of managing exogamy which, depending upon the classificatory system in any one locality, ensured that people never married closer than first cousin in the four section systems, and second cousin in eight section systems. However, within the broad framework of Aboriginal kinship systems, kinship behaviour was often localised in its application. That is, in any one area, different emphasis might be given to a particular aspect of the system. For example, in one system father’s sister or mother’s brother may be emphasised – in another system moiety relationships may be more heavily emphasised.
Demography

Radcliffe-Brown (1931) estimated that 50,000 Aboriginal people inhabited the NT prior to non-Aboriginal settlement. More recent authors (Lawrence, 1969; Kirk, 1983) have estimated that this gives a population density by the different language groups of one person to every eighteen square kilometres. While this estimation is interesting, its usefulness is limited from the perspective of Aboriginal land use and the subsequent involvement in the pastoral industry because, given the range of biogeographical areas, population densities of Aboriginal hunters and gatherers would have varied enormously. Kirk (1983) notes that the range across the Australian continent was anywhere between 2.5 people to every square kilometre in the Sydney area to one person for every 98 square kilometres in northern SA. These figures are also supported by the work of Meggitt (1968) in Central Australia and the work of The Berndts (1968) on Arnhem Land.

However, the variations of that density from season to season and from generation to generation are also important. Given the climatic variability in Australia generally, and between regions, it is inevitable that population densities in any one area would vary significantly over time. Blainey (1975) supports this view and extends it by arguing that the Aboriginal population was limited to safe, sustainable levels due to high infant mortality, infanticide, deaths through endemic warfare and a limited ability to care for the aged. The Berndts (1992:187) doubt Blainey’s estimates of infanticide. However, they do support the other factors. Again, the extent of each of these factors would have been affected by the seasonal availability of food.
What is clear from these studies (the Berndts, 1968; Kirk, 1983) is that Aboriginal settlement was regional and that the intensity of land use was driven by local environmental conditions. It also meant that an Aboriginal person’s geographic and social community covered a huge area and was not restricted to a specific point in an area.

**Economy**

The Aboriginal economy was dependent on the hunting and gathering activities of hearth groups. This involved the harvesting of all available, useable natural resources through hunting and gathering. It was an economy that could provide a quality of life (in terms of leisure and interest) unequalled prior to the industrial revolution. It was based upon the application of simple, multi-purpose technology combined with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the environment within which Aboriginal people lived.

The application of their environmental knowledge enabled Aborigines to utilise a wide range of resources in the different biogeographies. This utilisation was characterised by exploiting the seasonal variation in the species available. This was in turn dependent on the seasonal availability of different species and the needs of the hearth group. The capacity of the horde or hearth group to exploit the environment was very much dependent upon the knowledge and skill of the individual males and females in the group. Males were, by and large, the hunters whose output, while dramatic, was not as secure as the gathering activities of the women.
As the basic social and economic unit, the hearth group itself had a number of economic advantages. These included independence of decision-making, ease of movement and travel and a capacity to adapt quickly to any unforeseen environmental change. The capacity of the hearth group to totally exploit all natural resources was not complete, for in any economic production system the equation is never linear or simple. Seasonal cycles, climatic and other ecological factors will determine the foods that are available. The quality of the seasons and longer environmental cycles will determine the levels of production and the technology, the application of the technology, as well as human preference, will determine the level of exploitation (Blainey, 1975:27; Flannery, 1994:173).

Despite their knowledge of the environment and their capacity to adapt and exploit it, it should not be assumed that Aboriginal use of the environment was benign or neutral. The evidence is that any such perception is incorrect for, on their settlement of Australia, the Aborigines brought fire with them.

**Use of fire**

From the archaeological evidence, fire has always been a factor in the Australian landscape. The aridity of the environment and naturally occurring fires from lightning strikes and other causes has meant that Australia has often been affected by fire. However, Jones (1990) argues that it was the Aboriginal people's organised widespread use of fire that resulted in dramatic changes to the prehistoric landscape. Aborigines utilised fire for a variety of purposes – to signal, to drive game, to regenerate grasses, and to clear country either for
hunting or travel. The consequence of this practice over thousands of years has been a reduction in the savanna rainforests and an increase in the eucalypt forests and grasslands (Flannery, 1994). These changes, of course, occurred over the thousands of years of Aboriginal settlement and, as they occurred, they required further adjustment by Aboriginal groups. As species composition changed Aboriginal people were required to adapt and extend their knowledge of the environment. This requirement to adapt to changed ecological circumstances was not only related to the use of fire. The changing sea levels during the interglacial periods, as well as other climatic factors, also required a high degree of adjustment (Flannery, 1994:265). The role of Aboriginal use of fire has been challenged (Mulvaney, 1999:257). Nonetheless, human habitation, land use and climate variability did change the Australian landscape.

Religion, spiritual life and ceremony

The knowledge of environment developed by Aborigines was codified, transferred and reinforced through the development of an elaborate ceremonial life. The ceremonial cycles themselves were then linked directly to an individual affiliation with particular areas of land as well as to its flora and fauna. This linkage of the humans with the landscape and its non-human inhabitants created in the minds of Aboriginal people a mystical perspective of both their existence and their relationship with the land (Elkin, 1964; Levi-Strauss, 1966; the Bermdts, 1968). This mystical perception of life also provided an explanation of the cause and effect relationships in the natural world. It is a perspective that would cope with difficulty with the arrival of the non-Aboriginal people.
Governance and the decision-making process

It is not surprising, given that the social structure of Aboriginal society was one of widely dispersed hearth groups that gathered from time to time when seasons permitted to fulfil ceremonial responsibilities, that there was a great deal of autonomy in Aboriginal decision-making. Evans-Pritchard (1954) describes it as a society based upon small, autonomous groups that reserved the right to ignore the decisions of others. Liberman (1985), in work on western desert groups, supports this view and remarks extensively upon the individuality of each person and the right of each not to be bound by the decisions of others. Whilst language groups and descent groups were discrete and autonomous, they were linked to wider cultural and geographic regions referred to earlier. Although there were no political or governmental functions in these cultural regions, there were the big ceremonies that involved groups from within the same cultural region and between cultural regions, particularly at the boundaries.

Human settlement: non-Aboriginal occupation

The expansion of the pastoral industry occurred in the last quarter of the 19th century. Whilst there had been a number of earlier explorations (Leichhardt, 1844-45; AC Gregory, 1855-56; Stuart, 1860-62), it was Stuart’s opening up of the overland telegraph line and its subsequent construction in 1872 that really provided the impetus to the full-scale pastoral expansion into the suitable areas of the NT. However, the expansion of the industry was not uniform and each region had its own unique experience. A summary of this experience and its contemporary outcomes is set out in the next section.
Darwin/Douglas-Daly Region

The settlement of the Port of Darwin in 1872 was followed by various attempts to establish local cattle stations. However, for the most part the country was so unsuitable that the majority of the properties were purely speculative – the exception being the Douglas-Daly region where, from the outset, pioneer farming and subsistence pastoralism were established. Darwin’s major function to the pastoral industry became one of an export port and as a manufacturing area. In 1885 Messrs Fisher and Lyons shipped a small trial load of cattle to Hong Kong and this trade developed, reaching its peak in 1897 with 2,000 head of cattle being exported a year. Following this early success the Darwin region’s involvement in the cattle industry became a series of stop-starts. The short-lived meat works (1917-20) was followed by the development in the 1920s of the live cattle export to Singapore and the Philippines (1922-30). The Depression reduced Darwin’s importance with the majority of NT cattle being exported south rather than north until the late 1980s when live boat exports to Indonesia, the Philippines, other parts of Asia and the Middle East developed. Currently, Darwin’s role as an export port is once more in abeyance as the Asian recession of the 1990s has substantially reduced demand for live cattle.

Pastoral settlement was characterised by a large number of semi-subsistence blocks on which the owners made their living from cattle, buffalo shooting and later catching, mining and contract work. Interspersed between these blocks were a few highly developed properties and some properties that barely functioned and were owned for speculative reasons.
Arnhem Land

Cattle and buffalo were first introduced into Arnhem Land following the early military settlements at Melville Island (Fort Dundas, 1824), Raffles Bay (Fort Wellington, 1827) and Port Essington (Fort Victoria, 1838). In each case, when these settlements were abandoned, the stock, including cattle, buffalo and horses, were let loose. The buffalo appear to have thrived and quickly spread over western and central Arnhem Land. However, cattle appear to have been restricted to the Coburg Peninsula, as were the Timor ponies. Subsequent attempts to establish pastoralism in Arnhem Land were defeated by the climate, the inappropriate terrain and the fierceness of Aboriginal resistance. However, in the 1930s small cattle herds were established by the various missions at Oenpelli, Croker Island, Milingimbi and Roper River. The establishment of such subsistence level beef cattle production continued during the post-war period, and as late as 1968, the then Social Welfare Branch of the NT Administration attempted to establish pastoralism at Maningrida by overlanding cattle from the Bulman. This project failed, although the mission herds have persisted, albeit on a very small scale.

Victoria River District

The VRD was initially taken up following the positive reports on the grazing capacity of the area by the explorer Grey. The Duracks passed through on their way to the Kimberley in the late 1880s, but it was left to the big SA pastoralists such as Fisher, Lyons and Sir Thomas Elder to commence pastoral expansion. However, the VRD’s distance from markets meant that it was always going to be
an area dominated by the big companies. A deep pocket was required for this region, and as a consequence, Vesteys, Bovrills and LJ Hooker were to dominate the region for the next one hundred years. There were no missions, nor were there any government reserves of any substance established in the VRD.

The Gulf

The Gulf was first identified as having some pastoral potential by the explorer Leichhardt. However, its potential was short-lived and the Gulf essentially became an area dominated by poor, small landowners or "battlers", although in the early 1970s it attracted a substantial number of speculators who used a mixture of property subdivision and attempts at pasture improvement using Townsville Stylo to improve both the productive capacity of the area and the value of individual properties. These attempts were short-lived and the area is generally regarded as suitable for producing store cattle, that is, cattle under two years of age that are sent elsewhere for fattening. There were no missions established in the NT side of the Gulf area, although an NT Social Welfare Branch patrol officer was stationed at Borroloola after World War II.

Properties in the Gulf, like Darwin, were characterised by smaller subsistence-type operations where the owners made their livelihood from cattle, fishing, hunting and contracting. Interspersed between these types of properties were properties owned for speculative reasons, and those held by mining companies to protect their mining interests. For example, Macarthur River is owned by Mount Isa Mines.
The Barkly

The extensive Mitchell grass plains of the Barkly Tableland were an immediate attraction for pastoralists. However, the lack of permanent water proved a major obstacle until the development of deep drilling technology that enabled the pastoral industry to establish bores that could access the depths of the subartesian basin. The costs of such technology meant that it was only large pastoral companies with substantial capital that had the resources to develop the Barkly Tableland. To this day it remains dominated by such companies as the Australian Agricultural Company, Prudential Pastoral Holdings and Consolidated Pastoral Holdings. No missions or government reserves were established on the Barkly Tableland. However, Aboriginal people constitute up to 50% of the stockmen employed by Barkly Tableland properties.

Central Australia

The pastoral settlement began in the NT in Central Australia with early leases taken up by the Hayes and Bloomfield families in the vicinity of the telegraph station at Alice Springs. The hardness of the country, the fierceness of Aboriginal resistance, which continued from the 1870s through to the late 1920s, and the variability of the seasons meant that the Central Australia district was to remain, in Powell's view (1982:102), occupied by smaller family owned properties. Hermannsburg, the Lutheran mission, was established in 1877 prior to pastoral settlement and operated its own pastoral enterprise that was equivalent in size to the non-Aboriginal family owned properties. Subsequently, the Catholic mission at Santa Teresa (established in the early 1950s) and the
government reserves at Yuendumu, Areyonga and Haasts Bluff all operated cattle enterprises.

In Central Australia pastoral settlement was made up of larger intergenerational family holdings such as those owned by the Weirs, Chalmers, Webbs and Hayes, and more recently, families seeking to emulate them. Among this latter group there were, until very recently, properties that could only be described as subsistence.

In such cases, conditions were rough, there was no palatial homestead surrounded by white-washed outbuildings – rather there was a corrugated iron shed come sleeping quarters with associated bow shelters and lean-to's to protect gear. This was the case in the Author's observation while carrying out patrols in both districts between 1969 and 1971 at Coniston, in Central Australia, and at Wallogorang, Seven Emus and Spring Creek in the Gulf.

Overview of contemporary NT pastoral industry

Since 1945 the total NT herd has grown from 960,000 head in 1945 to 1.8 million head in 1980. Following the BTEC (1980-1994) and the drought in Central Australia (1990-1996), it is currently 1.3 million head.
The contemporary NT pastoral industry occupies 50% of the land area of the NT and extends from Central Australia to the Top End, and from Queensland to the Western Australian (WA) border. The patterns of settlement described above demonstrate an industry that has been subjected to structural change since it first expanded into the NT. The extent and variation of these changes was identified by Martin (1980) during the course of the enquiry into pastoral land tenure in the NT. This enquiry clearly demonstrated that from the late 19th century to contemporary times, as a result of speculation, market forces and seasons, lease boundaries and leasehold areas were subject to continual change. This is shown in Figure 17.
Figure 17: Changing pastoral property boundaries in the NT – 1876 to 1979

Source: Martin B, 1980, Inquiry into Pastoral Land Tenure in the Northern Territory, Department of Lands and Housing, Darwin
The pastoral industry contributes approximately $145 million to the gross NT product and is 42% of total rural industry and fisheries production. Total herd size is 1,502,000, with an average turnoff of 27.6% or 415,089 head a year. The industry is characterised by the extensive management of low carrying capacity land areas with the majority of cattle produced being store cattle. In national terms, the NT is one of the smallest producing areas with a total herd of 1.5 million compared to Queensland with 10.07 million, NSW with 6.038 million, Victoria with 2.5 million, WA with 1.8 million, and SA with 1.05 million. It is also unique in that the majority of cattle producers in Australia own 100 head or less, whereas all of the NT producers own 1,000 head or more. That is, NT producers constitute only 5% of the producers nationally (Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993b:27).

Despite these differences in pastoral settlement in each of the regions of the NT, there are a number of factors and features of the pastoral industry that are common across the NT. All commercial pastoral properties in the NT were originally structured along similar lines. Holmes (1963:217) describes a centralised, hierarchical structure based upon one’s role, class and race. Thus, the manager and/or owner lived in the “big house”, usually centrally located and prominent. Married quarters and single men’s quarters for non-Aboriginal people were in closest proximity to the “big house”. Next were the workshops, saddle and tack sheds, followed by the facilities for the Aboriginal people. This spread of people according to class and race also reflected decision-making. The manager/owner made all critical decisions and his instructions were relayed by the head stockman or overseer to the Aboriginal people, who usually formed the
backbone of the labour force, to carry them out. Even where properties were essentially subsistence operations and the difference between the “big” house and workers’ quarters only marginal, there was still, in the Author’s observation, a maintenance of the hierarchical values of the bigger properties.

Infrastructure and management methods were similar across the NT. Cattle were mustered, usually once a year, sometimes twice, branded and the three-year old fat cattle culled for sale. In the periods when mustering was not in progress, yards, water points and fences were repaired and maintained. Mustering usually took place in the dry or cooler months (May to October). Repairs and maintenance work was undertaken in the hotter periods (November to April). Production relied upon native grasses and the whole operation could be characterised as extensive beef cattle production using cheap labour and cheap land to minimise costs. It was, in essence, a colonial plantation system similar to those employed in similar environments elsewhere in the world.

Although the tendency of these features and the experience of particular factors varied from season to season, year to year, and from region to region, the overriding factor was climate. Its variability in terms of quantity and reliability of rainfall was characterised by its very unpredictability. That is, the one predictable thing about rainfall in the NT is its unpredictability, both when it would arrive and how much would arrive. This variability made pasture growth unpredictable and thus limited the number of strategies available to pastoralists.
This unpredictability effectively means that producers have three options – they can manage their herd structure, they can manage their grazing capacity, or ideally, they can manage both. Historically, the dominant strategy of the industry in the NT has been to manage animal production. Until the last two decades, this has generally meant adjusting total herd numbers to reflect the season, the pasture availability, and of course, the markets. In recent times it has meant adjusting mating, weaning and breed selection. This has required much greater investment in capital, more sophisticated and better skilled management, and has reduced labour. These changes were, as we will see in subsequent chapters, also affected by the BTEC, award wages and the structural adjustment pressures that were being experienced by agriculture generally. This is the industry environment with which Aboriginal people, in moving from being workers to owner/operators, have had to cope.

Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry

Aboriginal involvement in the pastoral industry has always had a degree of ambivalence. Pastoral settlement was always accompanied by violence, occupation of Aboriginal land, competition for resources and destruction of Aboriginal society (Reynolds, 1972; Gerritsen, 1981; Dunlop & McGlashon, 1985; Rose DB, 1992). On the other hand, pastoralists could not have taken up the country and located waters and good pasture without Aboriginal guides, trackers and workers. This assistance has been viewed as crucial to the establishment of the NT cattle industry. For example, Kelly (1971) has argued that without this support the NT cattle industry would never have been
established. All the evidence is that after the initial trauma of non-Aboriginal occupation, a variety of accommodations were made by Aboriginal society to the new intruders, albeit that these accommodations were loaded in favour of the non-Aboriginal people. However, this accommodation was full of contradictions. There was cash, food and self-esteem for the stockmen and women, but for the non-working dependant there was drudgery, exploitation (including sexual exploitation), and total reliance on the good will of the individual pastoral manager.

Aboriginal people could remain in their country, but they were constrained by the demands of the cattle enterprise and they could only exercise their cultural activities when those activities did not conflict with the enterprise. The contradictions have been demonstrated clearly by a range of Authors, but have been perhaps best summarised by Gerritsen in his 1981 paper on activists opposing pastoralists and collaborators who worked with pastoralists. In his paper he describes the types of contradictions and the tensions that accompanied those contradictions in relation to non-Aboriginal pastoral settlement of Aboriginal land in the NT. These tensions erupted in the battle for award wages in the 1960s and have continued to this day. For while the award wage dispute resulted in better conditions for Aboriginal workers, it had a number of unfortunate results. Specifically, it resulted in people being further dispossessed of their land. This dispossession was only partially related to the granting of award wages. Certainly, pastoralists reduced the number of black employees and increased their capital investment following the granting of award wages to Aboriginal people, but the government also played a part in the movement of
Aboriginal people away from stations because it withdrew the ration subsidy paid to pastoralists for supporting non-working dependants. The award wage dispute also occurred at a time when Aboriginal people themselves were gaining a greater appreciation of the opportunities that were denied to them by their continued dependence on white pastoral employers, particularly opportunities for better health and education for their children.

The dominance and the exclusive nature of the pastoral industry with its feudal, plantation-type social structure (Holmes, 1963) also precluded Aboriginal people from acquiring non-indigenous pastoral management skills and attempted to restrict them to a very narrow range of roles. This restriction meant that when the opportunity came for Aboriginal people to become owners and managers of pastoral properties, they had substantial catching up to do.

However, the award wage battle signalled a return to the open conflict between pastoralists and Aboriginal people (Stevens, 1968) that was a feature of early settlement, although this time the conflict was fought with political and legal weapons rather than with spears, boomerangs and rifles. The granting of land rights in 1976 was a demonstration of the increasing political and legal skill of Aboriginal people. The conflict between pastoralists and Aboriginal people was exacerbated and characterised by conflicts over land claims on stock routes, excisions for resident communities on pastoral leases, and the transfer of Aboriginal owned pastoral leases to Aboriginal freehold under the Land Rights Act. These conflicts commenced in 1976 and have continued to the present. Thus, it was in an atmosphere of social and political conflict that Aboriginal
people became managers and owners of the pastoral leases in their own right, and it was in this context that they have had to deal with the changing dynamics and economics of the pastoral industry that has occurred over the last 28 years.

Conclusion

Aboriginal occupation of the NT is at least 40,000 years old, and was characterised by a socially complex hunting and gathering society that utilised all of the available resources of the landscape through the application of a taxonomic knowledge of the environment and the use of a range of simple, multi-purpose implements. The expansion of non-Aboriginal pastoralism was more than a land use competitor. It subsumed Aboriginal culture and society in a way that was both exploitative and oppressive. However, the capacity of the pastoral industry to expand was limited by the land capacity and the almost constant change to markets, land, labour and capital mix. This required pastoralists to develop a better understanding of the land resource, to improve their financial management and to develop new management regimes. The experience and outcomes of Aboriginal attempts to meet the requirements of owning, managing and operating large-scale pastoral enterprises are considered in the later chapters of this thesis.
Chapter 3: Aboriginal Affairs policy and its implications for Aboriginal pastoral enterprises under the Whitlam, Fraser and Hawke-Keating Governments

This chapter explains the evolving nature of policies and programs that initiated and supported the development of an Aboriginal owned pastoral industry in the NT during the period of the Whitlam Labor Government, the Fraser Coalition Government, and the Hawke-Keating Labor Governments, that is, the period 1972 to 1996. In explaining this theme, the chapter will focus on four aspects of the development of the NT Aboriginal owned pastoral industry. These four aspects are the development of relevant Commonwealth Aboriginal Affairs policy, particularly those directly relevant to Aboriginal owned pastoral enterprises, relevant changes to NT governance, the practice of relevant individual departments and agencies, and industry change. That is, this chapter explores the upper three levels of the layered framework articulated in chapter 1 and shown in this chapter as the shaded areas in Figure 18. However, as Rowse (1992, 1998) has shown in other areas of Aboriginal Affairs policy, and as this chapter will show in relation to Aboriginal pastoral industry policy, there are substantial linkages, overlaps and continuities between the policy layers and the dynamics of the policy development process.
Figure 18: Bureaucratic encapsulation: government policy and program change – 1972 to 1996
The relevant policy periods covered in this chapter are:

1972 - 1975: the Whitlam Labor Government,

1973 - 1983: the Fraser Coalition Government,


However, an understanding of these periods is not possible without some understanding of the period prior to the commencement of the Whitlam Labor Government in 1972.

Policy issues relevant to Aboriginal pastoral properties in the NT prior to 1972

The almost feudal world that characterised Aboriginal peoples' relationship with the pastoral industry was progressively ameliorated post World War II. In the main, this amelioration was characterised by various government and court actions and not by any proactive action on the part of industry. In point of fact, the industry opposed many of the changes or sought to maximise any advantage. Of late several authors have argued (McGrath, 1987; Rose D B, 1992; Rowse, 1992, 1998) that the relationship between Aboriginal people and pastoralists was symbiotic and mutually beneficial. Their arguments are based on the memories of the survivors of pastoral industry encapsulation of Aboriginal society, that is, on the memories of those who survived the conditions described so accurately and vividly by the Berndts (1987) and subsequently reported on throughout the fifties and sixties by Social Welfare Branch Patrol Officers. Conditions at the
time, though improving, were still characterised by poor nutrition, high levels of infant and adult mortality and general ill health, and by general industry neglect. Those who survived such conditions were most likely to have had the better relationships with the pastoralists and thus greater access to resources. That is, the survivors were more likely to be active collaborators with the non-Aboriginal pastoralists (Gerritsen, 1981). Hence the benign view of pastoralists contains a certain revisionist romanticism that is contradicted by objective reports of the time.

The amelioration of conditions on pastoral properties was to pave the way for what was ultimately to become the pastoral property purchase policies of the Whitlam, Fraser and Hawke-Keating Governments. Some of these critical events are shown in Figure 19 as a timeline and are briefly described in this section.

**Figure 19: Timeline of critical events for Aboriginal people on pastoral leases prior to 1972**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Aged pensions and child endowment available following amendment of the Social Security Act, except for those who were nomadic and primitive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Referendum empowering the Commonwealth to legislate on behalf of Aboriginal people. OAA founded within the Prime Minister’s Department. Central Australian drought breaks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1968 Aboriginal Enterprise Act passed. OAA assumes responsibility for administering it and the Council of Aboriginal Affairs chaired by H C (Nugget) Coombs.

Award wages granted to the pastoral industry.

1971 Gibb Report into conditions of Aboriginal people on NT pastoral leases complete.

Expansion of Social Security pensions

Under Act No 57 of 1959, Social Security benefits were made accessible to all Aboriginal people except those who were “nomadic and primitive”. In 1966, under Act No 41, those excluding provisions were removed. This effectively made Social Security benefits available to all eligible Aboriginal people in the NT. In practice, this meant benefits were accessible by those who could provide the necessary administrative support to demonstrate eligibility. That is, in a largely illiterate and innumerate Aboriginal population that moved often but irregularly, assistance was needed with applications, maintenance of eligibility and dealing with overpayments and underpayments, if access was to be maintained. On missions and government settlements the administration generally assumed this role. On pastoral properties it was somewhat more problematic.

On some stations the owner or manager established general stores and created lucrative enterprises, albeit that the store managers often became Social Security
administrators. On other stations, as a consequence of the owners’ and/or managers’ refusal to carry out such functions, including the provision of stores, many elderly people and mothers relocated to town, government settlements, missions or to a station where such a service was available – stations like Napperby, Willowra and Amaroo. In such situations the stations were often accused of farming “blacks” (Chisholm, 1985, pers. com.). However, the net effect of these changes was to reduce the dependence of Aboriginal people upon individual pastoralists in particular, and the industry in general.

**Wattie Creek walkout**

In 1966 a group of Gurindji men and their dependants walked off Wave Hill and sat down at Wattie Creek, the ancestral country of some of the leaders, a number of whom had been involved in a walkout at Newcastle Waters some years earlier. The Wattie Creek walkout, as the incident has come to be called, has been discussed at length elsewhere (Hardy, 1968). Suffice to say that the Wattie Creek walkout has come to be regarded as the first step in the long struggle for land rights. That it commenced among NT pastoral workers is both fitting and ironic, for their claim was not only about industrial conditions but a claim in the economic use of the land, as well as a statement about their traditional ownership of it. It was, if you like, a claim for increased social, cultural and economic autonomy and independence – a claim that would be ultimately recognised by the Whitlam Government.
The experience of administering the Aboriginal Enterprises Act and its associated Capital Fund caused the Council of Aboriginal Affairs to reflect upon the Act's limitations. That is, the Aboriginal Enterprises Act was directed towards encouraging individual Aboriginal people to develop businesses, including farms and pastoral enterprises, but it did not deal with the needs of groups. The claims being made by the Gurindji demonstrated this clearly, and as Coombs (1977) described in his work “Kulinma”, caused the Council of Aboriginal Affairs to advocate some form of Land Fund.

This advocacy was ultimately recognised by the then McMahon Government when on Australia Day in January 1972, Prime Minister McMahon indicated support for the establishment of some form of fund with an initial allocation of $5 million and $2 million the next year. However, it would be left to the Whitlam Government to implement such arrangements.

The referendum and the OAA, the Council of Aboriginal Affairs and the Aboriginal Enterprises Act

The referendum of 1967 in which 89% of all Australians eligible to vote agreed that the Commonwealth should have the power to legislate for Aboriginal people and that they should be included in the census, was a major landmark in Aboriginal Affairs policy. In response, the federal government established the OAA within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Whilst initially an interim office, it was established on a permanent basis in early 1968 with the following functions: to act as a Commonwealth working agency on Aboriginal
Affairs matters; to administer the Aboriginal Enterprises Act 1968; and to provide secretariat support to the newly established Council of Aboriginal Affairs. The purpose of these multiple functions was to lay a foundation for new policy initiatives, and because of the cross fertilisation between the players, it is difficult to discern now which function contributed to which initiative.

The OAA, through its administration of the Capital Fund established under the Aboriginal Enterprises Act 1968, attempted to purchase two pastoral properties, namely, Everard Park (Mimili) and Willowra. As described, Palmer (1988:13-16), the intent was to provide some mechanism for land rights for the Aboriginal people living on those properties despite the fact that the Capital Fund and the Act itself only provided funding for business purposes.

However, the OAA was reliant on the Department of the Interior, and in the NT this meant the Social Welfare Branch officers of the NT Administration. Coombs records (Coombs, 1977:171) that this relationship was characterised by conflict, with the Department of the Interior grudgingly acceding to assessment of Willowra in 1970, some two years after the initial suggestion that Willowra might be purchased. It would be a further two years and require the establishment of the Aboriginal Land Fund (ALF) before the property was purchased. Coombs' explanation of the Department of the Interior's opposition is that the influence of National Party pastoral interests over the Department of the Interior, and the NT Administration in particular, ensured that any Aboriginal Affairs initiative that might challenge the interests of the pastoral industry would be opposed. Miller (1985:318) is even more condemnatory of the difficulties of the OAA and later
the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission (ALFC) that in acquiring pastoral
properties, suggesting that “obstruction and bureaucratic incompetence” was the
main cause.

Whilst these perspectives are undoubtedly accurate, there is another that has long
been ignored or treated with disdain by some academic authors (Palmer, 1986)
and that was dealing with the practical land management issues after land
acquisition, problems that field staff of the NT Administration were well aware
of. For this was a time when community support in terms of staff and resources
were stretched to their limits and the difficulties of administering the existing
indigenous estate on Aboriginal reserves were proving to be beyond the then
allocation of resources (Social Welfare Branch Annual Reports 1969, 1970,
1971). In such a situation it is little wonder that, at field level, concerns about
future management was a legitimate concern – a concern that does not appear to
have been addressed by either OAA or the ALFC. It was only later as the DAA
and then the Aboriginal Development Corporation (ADC) came to grips with the
management consequences of purchases that these issues began to be dealt with.

Award wages

In December 1968 the full bench of the Commonwealth Conciliation and
Arbitration Commission ruled that all indigenous employees employed under the
Cattle Stations Industry Award (NT) were entitled to full award wages. The
granting of award wages produced or contributed to a number of outcomes.
These outcomes included a reduction in labour and a substitution of capital, a
general trend in Australian agriculture and one that intensified in the NT cattle industry after award wages as the graphs in Figures 26 to 28 show. The relocation of Aboriginal people also increased as some stations ceased to support dependants, whilst on others stores were further expanded to deal with the increased incomes of workers. Overall, from an industry perspective, award wages were another factor in the structural adjustment. From an Aboriginal perspective, it was a further experience of government policy having both positive and negative results. On the one hand, wage justice had been achieved. On the other hand, for many Aboriginal people on stations, the outcome of wage justice involved relocation.

The Gibb Review

The Gibb Review arose out of the McMahon Government’s concern (Gibb, 1971:2) that Aboriginal people on pastoral properties were experiencing serious social disadvantage in part as a consequence of the granting of award wages. The purpose of the review was to ascertain the situation, identify options for addressing any socioeconomic disadvantage, including short, medium and long-term policy and program options, as well as identifying any new areas. At the time, the industry problems identified elsewhere in this chapter of reducing labour, stable total herd size and turnover, and a diversifying market, were already self evident. As Figure 20 shows, at the time, the pastoral industry was a major employer of Aboriginal people with over 60% of the workers being Aboriginal. However, the report noted (Gibb, 1971:10) that the combination of award wages and access to alcohol as a consequence of citizenship had caused
some stations to replace Aboriginal labour with non-Aboriginal labour, and in one case Aboriginal people had "been encouraged to leave" the station.

Figure 20: Estimated workforce on pastoral properties in the NT (1963 to 1965)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Alice Springs</th>
<th>Barkly Tableland</th>
<th>Victoria River</th>
<th>Darwin/Gulf</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of properties</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of male employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Aboriginal</td>
<td>524 (22)*</td>
<td>372 (30)</td>
<td>513 (26)</td>
<td>346 (31)</td>
<td>1,755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- other</td>
<td>262 (26)</td>
<td>403 (25)</td>
<td>420 (19)</td>
<td>142 (29)</td>
<td>1,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total male</td>
<td>786 (23)</td>
<td>775 (27)</td>
<td>933 (23)</td>
<td>488 (30)</td>
<td>2,982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of female employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Aboriginal</td>
<td>104 (25)</td>
<td>146 (36)</td>
<td>242 (34)</td>
<td>101 (37)</td>
<td>593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total all employees</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>921</td>
<td>1,175</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>3,575</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Brackets show estimated average duration of employment in weeks per year per person.

The report made a number of recommendations in relation to employment, education, training, industrial conditions and land. Among those recommendations was the recommendation that:

"whenever a coherent group of Aborigines indicates a coherent interest in establishing a group-owned enterprise it should be encouraged if the enterprise had reasonable prospects of success."

Source: The Committee of Review of the Situation of Aborigines on Pastoral Properties in the NT – Chaired by Professor C A Gibb, 1971, p.77
The NT pastoral industry pre 1972

By 1971 cattle numbers in the NT had risen to 1.13 million (GRM, 1987 – see Figure 21) with a turn-off of 220,000 per year or 19.1% of production. This represented an all time high in terms of production. It also represented a peak in market access. In the 1960s the industry had effectively eradicated pleuropneumonia, export abattoirs had been established in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Darwin, and beef roads had been expanded.

The beef road expansion and the large-scale of road transport via road trains meant that the NT cattle industry could reduce the tyranny of distance and be much more responsive to markets in a way that was not possible using horse-based droving. Access to NT abattoirs and the huge demand for hamburger beef in the US, partially fuelled by the Vietnam War, meant that profitability was high. The improvements in market and transport were also accompanied by other changes. Capital was now somewhat cheaper than labour (Musgrave, 1980) and therefore new technology was cheaper. For example, the early 1970s saw the increased use of aircraft for mustering. Initially this was fixed wing, but later helicopters became more common. The amount of infrastructure was also increasing. The pleuropneumonia campaign had demonstrated the superiority of yards and crushes over horse and rope methods of animal husbandry, and consequently drafting yard crushes and trap yards began to be introduced.

These changes inevitably put pressure on the smaller subsistence operators, and as a consequence, in some parts of the NT smaller leases were aggregated. In
other parts, such as the Gulf and Darwin, there were both aggregation and subdivision, the latter occurring where speculators sought to realise a benefit from the optimism about the industry.

Figure 21: NT cattle population, slaughterings and live exports (‘000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Year ended 30 June</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darwin &amp; Gulf</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria River</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barkly Tableland</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Springs</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>1,049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slaughterings*</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Exports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fats</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stores</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Exports &amp; Slaughterings</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Slaughterings include 16,000 estimated slaughterings for station use (16 November 1971)

Source: Gibb Review

Summary

The development of policies to enable Aboriginal people to purchase and operate cattle stations evolved as a consequence of a range of factors. As indicated in chapter 1, there was already a small group of Aboriginal people who had acquired properties and it was perhaps this group who served as the model for the objectives of the 1968 Aboriginal Enterprises Act. There were also group activities on Aboriginal settlements and missions. However, the evolution of policies to enable Aboriginal people to acquire pastoral land and to use that land for social, cultural and economic purposes was very much a result of Aboriginal action such as the Wattie Creek walkout, the struggle for constitutional recognition, industrial equality, and government reform as a consequence of this
activism (Palmer, 1988). This amalgam of Aboriginal struggle and government reformist response was to continue throughout the subsequent policy periods.

THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT: 1972-1975

The election of the Whitlam Government in 1972 burst upon Aboriginal communities in the NT with a shattering effect. The incremental adjustments to Aboriginal Affairs policy and administration that had characterised policy and administrative practice in the NT prior to 1972 were swept away in the policy and administrative reforms that the Whitlam Government introduced. A timeline showing the critical reforms implemented by the Whitlam Government is shown at Figure 22.

Figure 22: Timeline of critical events for Aboriginal people on pastoral leases during the period of the Whitlam Labor Government: 1972-1975

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>December – election of the Whitlam Government. Establishment of the DAA.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The basis of the Whitlam Government’s Aboriginal Affairs policy was that Aboriginal people should be free to decide their own future and that government had a responsibility to support Aboriginal peoples’ choices. This policy, like so many that the Whitlam Government adopted, was in stark contrast to the policies of the previous conservative McMahon Coalition Government. The Coalition policy had been one of “integration”, that is, Aboriginal people could choose the pace and the method by which they entered Australian society (ultimately they would enter Australian society). Self-determination, as the Whitlam Government’s Aboriginal Affairs policy came to be called, allowed for a much more pluralistic approach. Self-determination acknowledged the fact that some Aboriginal people might not wish to enter or engage in the wider non-Aboriginal society and that government should support such a choice by individuals, families or Aboriginal communities. In Whitlam’s words, the aims and objectives of the policy were:

To enable Aboriginal groups and communities to incorporate for the conduct of their own affairs, determining their own decision making processes, choosing their own leaders and executives in ways they themselves decide as the primary instruments of Aboriginal authority at the local and community level.

*Source: Prime Minister’s Address to the Aboriginal Affairs Council, February 1973*

To administer this policy a new Commonwealth DAA was established. The new department was developed by re-organising a number of existing Commonwealth agencies (DAA, 1972-1974), the principal ones being:
1. The OAA of the Department of Environment, Aborigines and the Arts;
2. The Social Welfare Division of the NT Administration, Department of the Interior;
3. The Finance Branch of the Department of Environment, Aborigines and the Arts; and

In order to achieve its new policy objectives, the Aboriginal Affairs budget allocation was increased. Under Whitlam, the level of funding provided for Aboriginal Affairs rose from $61.44 million in 1972/73 to $189.7 million in 1975/76 (Whitlam, 1985:472).

The Whitlam Government also established an Aboriginal policy advisory body, the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC). This body was elected by eligible, adult Aborigines and the first elections were conducted in 1975. The speed with which this body was established left the role of the elected representatives quite unclear. As a result, there was some tension between the staff of the DAA and the various elected representatives, particularly in regions where NACC representatives were of the impression that they had authority to direct DAA staff (DAA, 1974:10).

In addition to these changes, moves were made to resolve the issue of land rights in the NT with the appointment of a Royal Commission headed by Justice
Woodward. The purpose of the Royal Commission was to examine and make recommendations on the nature and form of Aboriginal land ownership. The Commission involved traditional Aboriginal leaders in an issue of vital importance to them culturally and individually. Recognition of the importance of traditional Aboriginal land ownership represented a fundamental change in Aboriginal Affairs policy and administration. That is, for the first time since non-Aboriginal settlement, Aboriginal law and land tenure would be given some legitimate consideration by the Australian legal system. In support of these initiatives, the ALFC was established to acquire land for Aboriginal people who had been dispossessed.

Responsible Commonwealth agencies

At a Commonwealth level, the major agency responsible for implementing the policy of self-determination was the newly established DAA. The new department assumed responsibility for the overall policy of self-determination. However, it was not given major service delivery responsibilities. These remained the responsibility of the relevant functional Commonwealth, State or NT departments. For example, the Mobile Works Forces that maintained infrastructure on government settlements in the NT now became part of the Commonwealth Department of Works.
NT agencies

The changes in Aboriginal Affairs administration at the Commonwealth level were accompanied by similar changes to the NT Aboriginal Affairs administrative structure. The Social Welfare Division of the NT Administration (NTA), which had previously been responsible for Aboriginal affairs and administration, was subsumed into the DAA, and the service delivery functions of the Social Welfare division, such as education, health and essential services, became the responsibility of the relevant Commonwealth department or NTA division. In addition to these changes, Aboriginal people became eligible to receive all social security entitlements and to access employment support through the then Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (DEIR).

The changes to NT Aboriginal community administrative arrangements under the policy of self-determination

The sixteen church missions operated by the Catholic, Uniting, Anglican and Lutheran Churches in the NT were to be phased out. They would only receive government funding if they made a commitment to adopt the policy of self-determination.

The large government settlements and mission communities, which had previously been administered by a superintendent, often (but not universally) with the advice of a village council, were now to be administered by an incorporated community organisation. Initially, most settlements and missions
were incorporated under the NT Associations Ordinance. Later, some would choose to incorporate under the Commonwealth Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act of 1978. The use of the NT Associations Ordinance as a means of incorporation occurred largely because it was the only available legislation. There had been some attempt to develop a form of local government for Aboriginal communities by the McMahon Government, but this had been abandoned on Whitlam’s election. As a consequence, there was no other legislation by which Aboriginal communities could incorporate. It should be noted that the NT legislation was designed for incorporating sporting clubs and community service organisations – it was not designed to provide for the ‘government of good order and welfare of people’\(^1\) at the local level.

As part of the de-institutionalisation of government settlements and missions, the Training Allowance Scheme was phased out (Sanders, 1991). This scheme, which had been available on all government settlements and missions, provided payment for work undertaken on behalf of the settlement or mission administration. The scheme was, to some extent, an alternative to both award wages, which had been introduced to the private sector in the NT in 1967, and unemployment benefits, which had also been available outside government settlements and missions since 1967.

The use of the training allowances as a wage alternative was possible because Aboriginal people residing on government settlements and missions were deemed to be wards of the state under the NT Social Welfare Ordinance.

\(^1\) Standard type of preamble to state and territory local government legislation.
Therefore, settlements and missions were exempt from the normal industrial relations obligations of an employer and Aboriginal residents were only entitled to limited social welfare payments, that is, child endowment and aged and invalid pensions.

Under the Whitlam Government policy of self-determination, the Training Allowance Scheme could no longer be used to subsidise labour costs as the NT Social Welfare Ordinance was repealed and the settlements and missions became self-determining (self-governing) communities. As self-governing and self-determining bodies, the new community councils would receive funding support for undertaking town and municipal services and other functions that had previously been carried out by the settlement and mission administrations that were either wound up or privatised. Those people who did not obtain employment with either the community council or one of the newly established, privatised activities were entitled to receive unemployment benefits.

The impact of these policy and administrative changes at a community level was dramatic. Functions that had been undertaken for twenty years, and in which Aboriginal people had developed high skills, were progressively abandoned. This included kitchens, bakeries, gardens, orchards, chicken runs, piggeries and dairies. Between 1972 and 1978 a whole generation went on unemployment benefits. For example, at Alekerenge, of the 150 people previously employed under the Training Allowance Scheme, only forty people obtained employment under the new arrangements. The remaining 110 became welfare recipients (NTA Social Welfare Branch, Warrabri, 1973/74; Phillpot, 1974, pers. obs.). In
addition, the DAA staff were withdrawn from active community administration and replaced by community employed staff at much reduced numbers and generally at a lower level of skill.²

The speed with which the DAA withdrew staff was rapid. In 1973 nearly all staff employed in communities were DAA employees – by the end of 1975, there were very few DAA staff resident in communities (DAA Annual Report, 1975/76). DAA staff who were still resident in communities were usually employed as advisers to the newly established community councils and were called Community Advisers. On the missions church staff were also withdrawn, but at a much slower rate. For example, there were still substantial numbers of Uniting Church staff on Minjilang as late as 1980 (Phillpot, 1980a). Given the high degree of administrative control and institutionalisation that had prevailed in communities prior to this period, such haste was bound to create difficulties for the emerging political leadership of the communities. Concurrent with these changes was a loss of field staff who had fulfilled the previous roles and there were difficulties in recruiting new, appropriately qualified, staff (DAA Annual Report, 1973/74). The changes introduced by the policy of self-determination also affected Aboriginal people living on pastoral leases.

² Until 1975 all staff at superintendent rank were sent to the Australian School of Pacific Administration for training in social change management and community administration – teachers and nurses received specialist induction training. Other staff received very little training to work in an Aboriginal community.
The changes to Aboriginal administration on pastoral leases

The conditions of Aboriginal people on many pastoral leases were characterised by poor or non-existent housing, inadequate water supplies, low quality food and little or no education services. On many pastoral properties conditions had not improved since the 1940s (the Berndts, 1987; NT Social Welfare Branch, 1960-1972). The battle for award wages for Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry had revealed to the wider Australia society the extent of the feudal exploitation of Aboriginal people by the pastoral industry. The Wave Hill walkout and Wattie Creek “sit down” had further focused attention on the plight of Aboriginal people living on pastoral leases (Hardy, 1968).

The romantic view of Aboriginal people living on pastoral leases, as described in novels such as We of the Never Never (Gunn, 1908), was largely extinguished and was replaced by a concern for an exploited, long-suffering people. As a consequence of this concern, the Whitlam Government adopted a policy of land purchase. The Aboriginal Land Fund Commission (ALFC) was established by the Whitlam Government in 1973 to assist Aboriginal people to purchase land, including pastoral leases. The purchase of properties was seen by many in government as a means of securing a living space for resident Aborigines and providing an economic resource.

The role of the ALFC was to purchase property for Aboriginal people throughout Australia. The DAA was to provide resources for the social and economic development of Aboriginal people. In terms of NT pastoral property acquisition,
these different roles created a tension between the two bodies. The ALFC saw its role as addressing dispossession. The DAA, on the other hand, was critical of acquiring land, which incurred further liabilities in terms of increased recurrent demand for further social and economic funding support (Palmer, 1988:32).

Under this land purchase policy the national annual budget allocation was $5 million and by 1975/76 a sum of $834,359 had been spent on the purchase of pastoral leases (DAA, 1975-1977:59). This fund immediately commenced negotiations to purchase a number of pastoral properties or parts of pastoral properties. One of these was Wattie Creek, or Daguragu, which was then part of Wave Hill Station. By the middle of 1975 the ALFC, in association with the DAA, had purchased three properties and was negotiating to purchase two more.

**Aboriginal Land Rights Commission**

In December 1972, following his election as Prime Minister, Whitlam appointed Mr Justice A E Woodward as a sole Commissioner for the purpose of examining ways by which the Labor Government could implement the government’s land rights commitments. Following Justice Woodward’s appointment, an Aboriginal Land Rights Commission (ALRC) was established. The first (interim) report was tabled in August 1973 and among its many recommendations was the recommendation that two land councils be established – the NLC and CLC – and these two were subsequently convened in September 1976.
In May 1974 the second and final report was tabled, and among its recommendations were a number pertaining to land purchases (Woodward, 1974, recommendations 240-257). These recommendations included identifying properties that were of immediate priority (Woodward, 1974:43-45) and the means by which the purchase and operation of the enterprise attached to the property should be funded. An important factor in acquiring such properties was to slow or limit the rural-urban drift from pastoral areas (Woodward, 1974:42).

**Industry background**

The purchase of pastoral leases for Aboriginal people and the privatisation of the herds on the larger Aboriginal communities occurred at a time when the beef industry in the NT was undergoing major structural adjustments. The introduction of award wages for Aboriginal labour in 1968 had coincided with a shift in production mix in the NT pastoral industry – from one of a low investment, harvest operation to one of high investment and managed production. That is, the historical practice of letting cattle run uncontrolled on the open rangeland, to be mustered by horseback once a year and then culled for sale and sex (male/female), was being replaced by new management practices. These management regimes included a greater use of fences and yards, increased mustering and the culling for age, type, sex (male/female) and market demand. The increased use of live weight selling, and selling on the basis of dressed weight at the abattoir, meant that management had to be more precise in breeding and selecting for market. These changes in NT beef cattle production required a
more sophisticated approach to operational management (Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1974).

Aboriginal people were therefore acquiring ownership of pastoral operations at a time when the industry was demanding less labour and higher levels of investment and management for relatively low returns.

The impact of the policy of self-determination on the development of an Aboriginal pastoral sector in the NT

There were two ways in which the policy of self-determination enabled Aborigines to develop an Aboriginal communal or group-owned pastoral sector in the NT. The first was based on the government settlement and mission beef herds, and the second was through the property purchase scheme.

Government settlements and missions – pastoral activities

Prior to the period of self-determination, many government settlements and missions had operated beef herds. These herds had generally been smaller than most commercial operations and had several functions, which Thiele (1982) defines as follows:

1. Meat producing;
2. Employment maximising; and
3. Training.
The operations of these herds were not commercial and their capital and labour requirements were both heavily subsidised.

The capital subsidies were usually in the form of an annual budget allocation to the particular community or mission by the mission authorities, or in the case of government settlements, by the NT Social Welfare Division. The annual allocations to pastoral activities were generally small and often unrelated to need.

The pastoral activities on the settlements were not immune to the changes introduced by self-determination. Generally, the pastoral activities previously carried out by government on Aboriginal communities were now privatised. This was done in a similar fashion to that adopted when a property was purchased. That is, a limited liability company was established, community residents were nominated as shareholders and directors were appointed. The directors were generally made up of people who had a major interest in beef and cattle production. They were not necessarily traditional owners. The new company took over the assets, that is, the beef herd, the yards and water points, previously managed by the government or mission administration.

Land ownership was not considered an issue, although the herds owned by the new companies were running on Aboriginal reserve land. The administrative practice of the day was to act as though the Aboriginal pastoral companies could run the cattle on the land by right of practice. This arrangement and the fact that not all pastoral company directors were traditional owners, would be a major source of community conflict (Hanlon, 1985b).
On the ex-missions the arrangements for maintaining a pastoral activity were less clear. Some adopted the privatisation approach, as in the case of the Yugal Mangi Cattle Company at Ngukurr (Thiele, 1982). Others, such as Santa Teresa, retained control by establishing progress associations, which were largely dominated by the community council and were reliant on the council administration for accounting and other services. In Santa Teresa’s case this meant that there was a heavy reliance upon the Catholic Church’s administrative support. In other communities, the pastoral operation became the rationale for disaffected groups within the existing community to physically relocate and establish new, smaller communities. For example, Peppimenarti was established in this manner in 1975 (Stanley, 1985). In other communities, such as Minjilang on Croker Island and Murwangi near Milingimbi (Hanlon, 1985a), the herds were simply left to run wild or were run by the community council as a special project.

The property purchase scheme

There were similarities between the privatisation of beef herds on the ex-government settlements and ex-missions and the arrangements when a property was purchased. The initial granting of 3,000 square kilometres to the Kalkarindji Daguragu communities in 1974/75 as a means of settling the strikers’ claims for land rights and as a means of providing an economic base to the community, was to set the pattern for other purchases. That is, when a pastoral property was purchased on behalf of an Aboriginal community, it became standard practice to ensure that:
1. A pastoral company was established;

2. A board of directors was appointed or elected from among the community shareholders; and

3. An agricultural consultant was appointed to provide business management advice.

A mixture of grant and loan funding was provided to establish infrastructure such as fences and yards and to purchase such operational items as vehicles and saddles. Wage subsidies were not available as the pastoral operations were expected to generate sufficient income to cover operational costs. Similar arrangements were made at Mt Allan (purchased in 1975), Willowra (purchased in 1974) and Ti-Tree (purchased in 1975) (DAA, 1975:59).

Among the Aborigines living on the pastoral leases purchased by the Aboriginal Land Fund there were mixed expectations. People expected that they would now get free meat, there would be plenty of work, and the money that the non-Aborigines used to obtain from the pastoral lease, which enabled them to own cars and houses, would now come to the Aboriginal resident-owners (Hanlon, 1985b).

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3 It should be noted that, although the purchase might be finalised in any given year, actual transfer might take longer. For example, Ti-Tree was not transferred until 1976.
Summary

The implementation of the policy of self-determination had a mixed impact on Aboriginal communities and people in the NT. It liberalised and de-institutionalised Aboriginal settlements and missions. It legitimised the land rights debate and provided, through the Aboriginal Land Fund, a means by which Aboriginal people could acquire land.

One result of self-determination was that it established a new role for Aborigines, that of pastoral enterprise managers and owners. There were two means of Aboriginal groups achieving ownership of a pastoral enterprise – a property could be purchased, or an existing pastoral activity on an Aboriginal reserve could be privatised. In each case, the operation of the pastoral enterprise was vested in a limited liability company, with shareholders and directors drawn from the resident community. The nature of the policy of self-determination, that is, that people could determine their own future, meant that many communities that acquired pastoral operations, either by purchase or privatisation, had a number of objectives for their pastoral operations. The objectives of Aboriginal people for pastoral activities retained both the old objectives of the “integration era”, that is, employment, training and meat supply, and included two new ones, profit maximisation and the provision of living areas (at least on purchased properties). However, the government support programs for pastoral activities were limited to capital and management advisory support.
The development of an Aboriginal owned sector of the pastoral industry was also occurring within a larger context of the policy debate on land rights, mining royalties and the right of Aborigines to manage and determine their own future. Furthermore, the involvement in the pastoral industry of Aboriginal communities as owners and operators was occurring at the same time as significant structural adjustments in the industry. The adjustments taking place in the pastoral industry included greater capital investment, higher levels of management, and less, but better skilled, labour. These changes notwithstanding, there was also an expectation by the funding agencies that some pastoral enterprises would be profitable, particularly those that were purchased.

The two case studies, Puraiya (chapter 4) and Ngarliyikirlangu (chapter 5) represent respectively examples of a purchased and a privatised enterprise.

THE FRASER GOVERNMENT: 1975-1983

This section of chapter 3 describes the Aboriginal Affairs policies of the Fraser Coalition Government and the impact of these policies on the development of an Aboriginal owned pastoral sector in the NT. The section includes in its examination a description of the impact of land rights and NT self-government on the Aboriginal owned pastoral sector.

Aboriginal Affairs policy was not isolated from the political changes that accompanied the downfall of the Whitlam Labor Government and the election of the Fraser Liberal-National Party Government. The Fraser Government
introduced a new Aboriginal Affairs policy called self-management. The new policy was defined in the following manner:

[t]he Liberal and National Country Parties are committed to the principle that all Aborigines and Islanders should be free as other Australians to determine their own varied futures.


The difference between this statement and the Whitlam Government’s self-determination policy were the words “free as other Australians”, which implied that there were limits to how far Aborigines might be allowed to determine their future. Many commentators and Aboriginal leaders feared that the words meant a return to some type of assimilationist approach (Downing, 1980). These concerns proved, in many ways, to be unfounded as the self-management policy retained many of the elements of the Whitlam Government’s self-determination policy.

The achievement of the self-management objective was predicated upon two approaches. The first was the establishment of a representative national peak body to advise on Aboriginal Affairs policy. As a first step to achieving this, the Fraser Government initiated a review of the NACC. The second approach to achieving the self-management policy objective was to establish programs that would support Aboriginal community and corporate development.

A timeline indicating the critical events for the Fraser Coalition Government is shown in Figure 23:
The land rights objectives of the Fraser Government were much more problematic. In reality the only constitutional areas that the Fraser Government had the authority to address the land rights issue were the NT and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). In the NT the Commonwealth Government proceeded to act with the passing of the *NT Land Rights Act 1976*. In addition, the Fraser Government also sought to protect sacred sites through national legislation, as well as recompensing Aboriginal owners for mining on their land. These approaches were consistent with a further objective of using Aboriginal land ownership to improve the health, welfare and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. The third overarching objective of self-sufficiency was defined as Aboriginalising government field staff, expanding Aboriginal service delivery organisations, improving educational services, reviewing employment programs, and addressing alcohol problems. This represented a significant shift in Liberal-National Party attitudes, particularly when one considers the assimilationist and integrationist policies of previous Liberal-National Party
Governments. The radical nature of the Fraser Government’s Aboriginal Affairs policy becomes more obvious when some of the specific policy objectives are considered.

In order to achieve these policy objectives, the Fraser Government believed that Aborigines had to be involved nationally in three fundamental areas. These were:

1. Setting the policy goals and objectives;
2. Setting the policy funding priorities; and
3. Conducting policy program evaluations.

The Fraser Government’s commitment to implementing the Aboriginalisation of the policy formulation process, the service delivery mechanisms and land rights required adjustments to the existing administrative structures and the development of new ones.

**Responsible Commonwealth agencies**

The Commonwealth administrative arrangements under the Fraser Government were structured, to a large extent, by the policy objectives. That is, each of the elements of the policy of self-management – land rights and self-sufficiency – was supported by a specific set of administrative arrangements. A description of these arrangements is as follows.
Self-Management

The Fraser Government, like the Whitlam Government, sought to establish some arrangements through which Aborigines could provide policy advice direct to government. The Whitlam Government had established the NACC as the principal source of policy advice on Aboriginal Affairs. However, the increasingly confrontationist approach taken by delegates during and immediately-post the 1975 election (Gibbins, 1988) saw the Fraser Government reviewing (DAA, 1977), and then restructuring, the NACC as the National Aboriginal Council (NAC).

There were several important aspects of the NACC and the NAC that were to have implications for future national Aboriginal councils. Firstly, both organisations were elected bodies and delegates were paid. Secondly, they exposed an elected Aboriginal leadership to national politics in a way that had not been done before. That is, prior to both the NACC and the NAC, Aboriginal leadership had very few mechanisms for providing independent advice or maintaining a national profile. In addition to the NAC, the Fraser Government established the Council for Aboriginal Development (CAD) as the principal source of policy advice by Aborigines to government. This Council was made up of representatives nominated by the NAC and appointed by the Minister. The CAD operated for approximately three years, then in 1978, with ministerial consent, the role of the CAD was taken over by the executive of the NAC.

Complementing the establishment of an independent policy body at the national level, the Fraser Government passed the *Aboriginal and Councils Associations*
Act 1976. The Act provided for the incorporation of Aboriginal organisations at the community level. The Act was in two parts – one provided for the incorporation of community organisations, the other for the incorporation of local governments. The Act provided for its own Registrar of Corporations and had a number of corporate enforcement provisions similar to the Companies Act. A number of pastoral companies were to use this Act to incorporate and operate their pastoral operations. A major aim of the Act was to provide a legislative framework that would enable groups to incorporate as legal entities and be capable of incorporating Aboriginal social and cultural structures.

Land rights

The Fraser Government accepted the recommendations of the Woodward Royal Commission into Aboriginal Land Rights in the NT, and in 1976 passed the NT Land Rights Act 1976. The Land Rights Act transferred all existing Aboriginal reserve land to Aboriginal title and opened up all unalienated areas of the NT to land claim, a process that was taken up almost immediately by the land councils. The process included lodging claims, on behalf of the traditional owners, on pastoral leases owned by Aboriginal people.

The capacity of the Land Rights Act to enable Aboriginal people to lodge claims on pastoral leases they owned aroused concerns among non-Aboriginal pastoralists. These concerns were particularly focused on the security of their own tenure, given that all pastoral land was held under Crown leasehold, and as the non-Aboriginal pastoralists viewed the situation, it was possible that the courts might find that the pastoral leasehold land was unalienated, and therefore,
claimable. These fears created a climate for conflict that was to become institutionalised when the NT was granted self-government.

One important feature of the land councils is that a substantial part of their funding is derived from mining royalties (Altman & Dillon, 1988). That is, the NT Land Rights Act provided for a proportion of mining royalties to go to the traditional landowners, a proportion went to the land councils for administration purposes, and a proportion to the Aboriginal Benefits Trust Fund (ABTF). The funding of the land councils through royalties rather than through government sources, provided the land councils with a measure of financial independence from government pressure, although as Altman and Dillon (1988) have pointed out, it meant that it was often in the land councils’ interests to achieve agreement over mining issues.

The ABTF administered a grant system that was available to all Aboriginal people in the NT based on the submission of applications by Aboriginal individuals, groups or communities (Altman, 1983a:27-37). The ABTF had originally been established in 1952. Following the signing of the Ranger Agreement, the Fund was expanded and its name changed to the Aboriginal Benefits Trust Account (ABTA). As mining royalties grew, the ABTA was to become an important source of funds for pastoral property purchases. Mining royalty payments to traditional owners had a number of effects. They provided individuals and communities with substantial windfall gains, they provided significant investment resource opportunities, and they reduced the pressure on individuals and communities to pursue such land use activities as pastoralism.
For example, when the first mining royalties were paid on Croker Island in 1979 both stock camps ceased operation and the leadership of the community lost interest in the cattle operations (Phillpot, 1980a).

The land councils and land management

Although this section is located in the Fraser Government period (1975-1983), it covers the whole period of land council land management activity between 1975-1996. This has been done in order to show the evolving nature of the land councils’ land management activities.

The two land councils were involved in pastoral support from their inception. However, as Figures 24 and 25 show, the land management functions they carry out demonstrate their experience was very different. The NLC has been very much concerned with the administration of the Act, and as a consequence, has been much more focused on applications for licences, land use agreements and the administration of agreements between the traditional owners and various groups (NLC Annual Reports, 1977-1996). The CLC appears to have a much more developmental approach and its experience is one of a gradual expansion of functions to meet the needs of the respective agencies (CLC Annual Reports, 1977-1996).
Figure 24: CLC land management support 1987/88 to 1995/96

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<td>1995/96</td>
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Source: CLC Annual Reports 1987-1996

Figure 25: NLC land management support 1987/88 to 1995/96

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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Source: CLC Annual Reports 1987-1996
Interviews with NLC staff 1990-1996
These comments notwithstanding, they have both been involved in supporting Aboriginal pastoral enterprises for most of their existence, and they have had some form of pastoral support unit established for ten years. In that time they have both struggled to evolve a support system. The NLC has adopted a central control model, supporting only those properties that they had a direct involvement in acquiring, that is, Balabrini, Hodgson Downs, Fitzroy, Bohemia and Elsey. In each case, while the community enterprise employ their own manager, the NLC Pastoral Unit provides accounting, marketing and general management, including brokering financial arrangements.

The CLC historically has always acted as an advisory service, although for two of the properties it was involved in acquiring, Mistake Creek and Loves Creek, it also provides accounting services. In general, however, the CLC provides advisory support across the board, that is, to both the subsistence type pastoral operations and to the commercial type operations. The CLC has also been more involved in extension, education and training than the NLC. Indeed, rather than use management intervention, the CLC has relied upon extension programs to resolve issues (Downing & Phillpot, 1994).

However, as the Pastoral Support Units both rely on grant funds to exist, the ability of both Units to provide support has waxed and waned with their ability to access funding. As a consequence, the capacity to provide support has been limited in some years and expanded in others. Although, it was probably never enough to meet all the needs of the different Aboriginal pastoral activities within their jurisdiction. As a further consequence of the variation in pastoral enterprise
support, neither agency has developed a long-term strategy to address comprehensively the need of Aboriginal groups wishing to pursue pastoral activities.

Self-sufficiency

The DAA was initially responsible, under the self-management policy, for the administration and implementation of social and economic development. This included supporting the operations of economic projects, such as stores and pastoral leases, as well as such social programs as the outstation housing and research programs. This inevitably introduced some tension into the DAA administration, for who was to decide when a project was primarily social and when it was economic? For example, was a pastoral operation purely economic when, clearly, many Aboriginal operations wished to maximise labour and to use the operation as a source of meat (Thiele, 1982)? This tension was manifest in constant conflict between the DAA and the ALFC (Palmer, 1988:125-148). In part, the establishment of the ADC was an attempt to resolve the tension between property acquisition and the need for ongoing economic development funding support.

The Aboriginal Development Commission

The Commission was established in 1980 as the principal body responsible for Aboriginal economic development. It had an Aboriginal board of commissioners appointed by government and its purpose was to support the economic development of Aborigines. It could loan money at less than commercial interest
rates, and there was provision for the ADC to provide grant monies where an Aborigine or an Aboriginal group lacked start-up funds. Management support for Aboriginal enterprises was also provided by the ADC, and in the case of pastoral operations, this took the form of grants for agricultural advice and at least part payment of a manager's and/or a bookkeeper's wage. It also included some capital infrastructure grants.

These grant funds were provided on careful economic analysis and were supposed to be paid only until the pastoral operations had reached commercial viability. The economic assessment usually adopted a forecasted cash flow approach. This was usually undertaken by agricultural consultants, either working for the Aboriginal pastoral operation or appointed by the ADC. This period has been called the rule of the internal rate of return. That is, all assistance provided by the ADC would be based upon the internal rates of return calculated on the basis of a forecasted cash flow assessment (Hanlon, 1985a).

That is, there was an increasing focus by the ADC upon the commercial viability of a pastoral enterprise that was defined on the basis of a positive internal rate of return. The application of this definition, Hanlon argued, excluded any other objectives the community might have and was inappropriate for many communities. Hanlon also argued that much of the commercial viability debate was about potential commercial viability. That is, ADC assessment of commercial viability was based on questionable assumptions about the capacity of the land, the acquisition of skills by Aboriginal people, and the aspirations of Aboriginal people (Hanlon, 1985). Nonetheless, the ADC continued to apply it
with increasing rigour. From the ADC’s perspective, this enabled them to manage funding applications more effectively. It had advantages – firstly, in a period of financial restriction, it enabled funding to be rationed. Secondly, it provided a sound policy base that could be easily justified to the Department of the Treasury, and finally, it enabled the ADC to answer, at least in part, NT and pastoral industry critics who were sceptical of the success of Aboriginal owned pastoral properties.

In addition to enterprise support through the ADC, funds for training could be accessed through the DEIR. Training provision was primarily the responsibility of the NT Administration, or in the absence of appropriate NT government providers, Aboriginal or private educational organisations. The responsiveness to the educational needs of Aboriginal enterprises, and in particular, pastoral operations, by the NT Administration was problematic, firstly, because there was a limited capacity to respond to such needs (McRobert, 1982), and secondly, because of the tension that developed between the Aboriginal land councils and the NT Government following the passing of the NT Self-Government Act in 1977.

**NT agencies**

The re-organisation of functional divisions of the NT Administration continued after the Social Welfare Division was subsumed into the DAA, with the Commonwealth Department of Health, the NT Education Service and the Department of Works becoming increasingly important providers of services to
communities. However, these changes were minor compared to the changes that were introduced following the passing of the NT Self-Government Act in 1977.

The granting of self-government in 1977 ushered in a new era in the political and social development of the NT (Phillpot, 1990). Funding of the newly self-governing Territory was by way of a Memorandum of Understanding. The Memorandum of Understanding is generally considered to have been in the NT Government's favour (Heatly, 1990:88-98). The increased funding under the Memorandum of Understanding had an almost immediate impact. There was an increase in expenditure on economic development, community services and capital infrastructure (NT Government, 1978) and a dramatic increase in the NT public service.

The new NT Government found itself in a unique position as a substantial part of the land area of the NT's political territory was held under a different system of land ownership and the administrative bodies for that land, that is, the land councils, were not accountable to the government. The land councils operated under the Commonwealth's Land Rights Act of 1976. Faced with this situation, the NT Government had two choices. It could either accept the situation as a fait accompli, accept the legitimacy of the land rights policy and seek accommodation with Aboriginal leaders, or it could adopt what could be called a post-land reform reaction (Turnbull, 1981). The new government chose the latter option. In choosing to oppose land claims, the NT Government engaged in a conflict with the land councils that was to colour every aspect of race relations, including the management of pastoral leases. The general philosophy underlining
the NT Government’s approach between 1977 and 1983 was one of mainstreaming, which was defined as providing the same standard programs to all NT residents regardless of racial or cultural origin (Everingham, 1980). Many authors (eg, Mowbray, 1986; Dodson, 1988) interpreted mainstreaming as a euphemism for assimilation. Certainly the NT saw no need to establish a specific Aboriginal Affairs department. Instead, there was an Aboriginal liaison unit within the Office of the Chief Minister. The coordination of service delivery to Aboriginal communities was the responsibility of the Department of Community Development. Functional departments, such as the Department of Primary Production (DPP), were responsible for specific services, for example, stock inspection. The capacity of the functional departments, and in particular the DPP, to deliver services, particularly extension services, was questionable (Mollah, 1984). Yet the assumption that the DPP could provide an appropriate level of service to Aboriginal owned pastoral operations was generally held by both NT and Commonwealth agencies (ADC, 1980/81).

### The changes to NT Aboriginal community administrative arrangements under self-management

At community level the policy of self-management did not have the dramatic changes on community administration that the introduction of self-determination did. Rather, there was a change of emphasis. This involved the DAA becoming more focused upon program design and outcomes, and less focused on direct service delivery. For example, 1977 DAA community advisers had been
withdrawn from communities, and instead communities were provided grant funds to employ their own advisers.

Community administrative structures began to take on standard forms. In most communities there was a community council, a council clerk, who was the equivalent of a town clerk in a municipality, and a community adviser. There was also a small operational workforce to undertake town maintenance and public utility functions. The respective roles of the council clerk and the community adviser were often unclear, although it was generally accepted that the community adviser's role was focused on the social and economic development of the community, and the role of the council clerk was one of community administration. One consequence of the role of the community adviser was that advisers were often drawn into providing advice in areas where they had little expertise, including providing advice on the pastoral operations of communities. By 1977 the privatisation of other activities on communities was almost complete. In communities like Yuendumu, activities that had previously come under the control or administrative responsibility of the Social Welfare division were now incorporated as private companies and were free to explore a range of opportunities. For example, the Yuendumu Mining Company was not only involved in mining development, the company also undertook road construction, airstrip maintenance, mechanical repairs and also opened a store. In the same period, the abandonment of other activities that had been administered by the Social Welfare Branch was completed – for example, the bakery, the garden, the poultry farm and the kitchen had all ceased operation by 1977.
The other major change in communities during the Fraser period was the beginning of the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP). This program arose as the social consequences of large-scale unemployment in communities began to manifest themselves in terms of increased social deviance. For example, alcoholism and domestic and community violence all increased during this period (Plant, Conden & Durby, 1995). In response to these social issues, communities began to complain about “sit down money” and its impact.

The DAA cast around for a solution that would enable communities to maximise the surplus labour that existed to create social and community infrastructure. Any scheme that sought to maximise labour could not be an alternative wage system as this would contravene a number of the international treaties Australia had signed that committed Australia to non-discriminatory wage practices. The solution was to develop a system where a community voluntarily gave up its entitlement to unemployment benefits. In return the community received the equivalent of the total unemployment benefit paid to all community members, plus an allowance for operational costs. In order to access the scheme there first had to be a unanimous vote of all unemployment recipients that this would be acceptable. The scheme was piloted in 1977 and by 1980 there were five communities accessing the scheme in the NT (DAA, 1980/81).

The scheme was in some ways reminiscent of the Training Allowance Scheme operated by the Social Welfare Branch in that it enabled communities to provide work for all available community residents. The essential difference between the CDEP and the Training Allowance Scheme was that people could not work a full day, that is, they could only work for the time that the money available allowed
under the basic wage. This essentially meant that most people involved in the scheme could only work four hours. The development of the CDEP in communities did provide an opportunity to pay people to undertake community work. However, it was generally only available to people employed by community councils. It did not apply, at least at its beginning, to people working for Aboriginal owned enterprises such as Aboriginal owned pastoral companies.

The changes to Aboriginal administration on pastoral leases

The most significant impact of self-management was the granting of land rights. The creation of an Aboriginal land owning class with rights and responsibilities in relation to land management was a new phenomenon in the NT. It not only established a new land owning class, it changed forever the nature of race relations and racial politics in the NT (Mowbray, 1986).

The drift of Aboriginal people from cattle stations either to communities or to townships continued during the period between 1975 and 1983, with the size and number of town camps in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs growing substantially (Collman, 1988). The DAA response to this movement was to assist Aboriginal groups to acquire land in or near the towns. This was usually provided through an Aboriginal community organisation, such as Tangentyere in Alice Springs, or Kalano in Katherine. The granting of land rights and the transfer of Aboriginal reserve land to Aboriginal owned land meant that many Aborigines living on pastoral leases could now move back to their traditional country by developing outstations or homelands on what had been former Aboriginal reserve or unalienated Crown land.
The movement of people to towns and to traditional country encouraged Aborigines resident on pastoral leases (particularly where they were the traditional owners of pastoral lease country) to lobby, through the land councils, for some form of security of tenure over their living areas. Initially this involved excising by purchase a living space for the resident community, and between 1975 and 1983, some five excisions were purchased. Given that there were some thirty groups living on pastoral leases, the slow speed with which excisions were granted was frustrating to the Aboriginal people concerned. Much of the slowness of the process was due to the fear of many pastoralists that any excision would open the way to a land claim on their lease. Whilst the land councils argued that this would not happen, and could not happen as properties were not subject to claim under the NT Land Rights Act 1976 and that the reluctance of pastoralists to agree to excisions was racist, it is possible to appreciate some of the reasons for the reluctance of pastoralists to the granting of excisions.

The pastoralist’s title to pastoral land was not secure. That is, most pastoralists held title under a Crown lease that had a finite period, usually 99 years. Given the unproven nature of the Land Rights Act, many pastoralists believed that the granting of an excision could then open the way for further claims. There was also concern that excisions would mean a loss of control over what happened on the pastoral lease. For example, many pastoralists believed that while the pastoralist had leasehold title over the land, the pastoral lessee had some power of control over a community if fences were cut or bores misused (Heaslip, 1984).
This fear by pastoralists was intensified following the Utopia Land Claim (Toohey, 1980) where it was found that pastoral leasehold could be converted to Aboriginal freehold.

**Industry background**

The structural change that had commenced in the NT beef industry in the 1970s continued during the years 1975 to 1983. In 1974/75 beef prices slumped to a post-war record low and did not recover until September 1977. The response of producers was to withhold cattle from sale and reduce costs. This was accompanied by a series of exceptionally good seasons, particularly in Central Australia. As a consequence, between 1975 and 1977, the average number of cattle per property grew from just under 7,000 head per property to over 9,000 head per property. In 1977 prices recovered rapidly and turn-off increased accordingly. This effectively reduced the size of the average herds to a little over 7,000 head.

In 1977/78 an additional factor began to impact on herd sizes. This was the Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign, or BTEC as it was commonly called. The BTEC was a national program aimed at eradicating both diseases. The BTEC had commenced in the eastern and southern states in the late 1960s and had progressively moved north. The standard approach was to test for both diseases and then either cull or slaughter infected animals. Each property was assessed by the DPP for disease levels and then a disease eradication program was developed between the producer and the DPP. The program was
actually a legal contract that required the producer to undertake certain work and
the department to provide a range of assistance, including freight assistance, and
compensation for animals that were sold at less than market value. One of the
results of the intensification of the BTEC was that higher levels of management
were required. This included more complete musters, the use of aerial mustering,
increased herd management through age and sex segregation, and an increased
use of capital infrastructure, such as yards and paddocks. This resulted in more
accurate counting of stock numbers.

The change produced by the combined impact of price changes, the seasons and
the BTEC was not confined to herd sizes. There were also significant changes to
labour capital investment levels and branding efficiencies. As Figures 26 to 28
show, during the period 1968 to 1980 labour inputs were reduced from an
average of 550 to 430 person-weeks per property per year. Capital investment
changed from an average $175,000 per property to $450,000, and branding
percentages changed from an average of 38% to 54% of breeders per property. A
major impact of these structural changes on the beef industry was the
requirement for higher and more intensive management of properties than had
been required in the history of the NT beef industry. One trend that contradicted
trends in other parts of the Australian beef industry was that property size was
reduced during this period. The reduction in property size was a reflection of
more intensive use of land, greater management input and land speculation. For
example, the old Victoria River Downs property was broken up into several
properties, as were a number of other larger blocks in the Gulf, the Barkly
Tableland and Central Australia.
Figure 26: Change in NT beef properties capital improvements 1962-1980

Source: Data derived from BAE Beef Surveys 1962-1980 by Phillpot S, in Aspects of Adjustment

Problems in the NT Cattle Industry, 1980, NT University Planning Authority

Figure 27: Labour input person-weeks on NT beef properties 1962-1980

Source: Data derived from BAE Beef Surveys 1962-1980 by Phillpot S, in Aspects of Adjustment

Problems in the NT Cattle Industry, 1980, NT University Planning Authority
The impact of the Fraser Government policy of self-management on the development of an Aboriginal pastoral sector in the NT

Initially, the implementation of the self-management policy had little impact upon the Aboriginal owned pastoral operations. The administrative practices of self-determination were continued with grant and loan funds being provided to support pastoral operations.

The good seasons and poor prices between 1975 and 1977 enabled most Aboriginal owned pastoral properties to turn off cattle using harvesting style mustering operations. However, because of the low returns, like their non-Aboriginal counterparts, most Aboriginal properties adopted a minimalist
management approach, that is, only the best cattle were sold and then only to meet immediate cash flow requirements. Brandings were reduced, and because of the good seasons, particularly in Central Australia, cattle numbers increased. In Central Australia the build up of uncontrolled cattle numbers so alarmed the DAA, because of the threat posed to the environment, that in 1977, with the agreement of the Haasts Bluff community, a Crown muster was organised. This resulted in non-Aboriginal contract musterers obtaining huge windfall gains when prices recovered in September 1977.

The recovery of cattle prices and the build up of numbers in 1977 enabled Aboriginal owned properties to generate cash flows that were well above average. This was a unique experience for many Aboriginal pastoral operations. They now found that on the basis of their herd numbers and their cash flows, Aboriginal directors could negotiate stock mortgages that could be used to finance plant and equipment purchases, and in some cases, personal benefits. The speed with which such funds could be negotiated was different from the often long and protracted process of negotiating government finance, and for many Aboriginal owners an unrealistic expectation developed around the capacity of the cattle operations to generate cash flow. For example, one Aboriginal director with power of attorney was able to draw down in excess of $100,000 for his personal benefit (IAD, 1982). The high cash flows generated between 1977 and the early 1980s created an illusion of success in both the eyes of the Aborigines who operated them and of funding agencies (DAA, 1979).
The policy of self-management also coincided with increased structural adjustment pressures on the beef cattle pastoral industry. These pressures, that is, the cost price squeeze that most Australian agricultural producers were experiencing, were intensified by the BTEC. Initially, the response of the agencies responsible for Aboriginal development was to be unconcerned about the impact of BTEC on the Aboriginal properties. There were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, because of the role differentiation between departments with a specific function and those with a general Aboriginal development function, the DAA had little or no internal expertise in beef cattle production. As a consequence, the Aboriginal pastoral operations were reliant on the advice of the NT DPP, which was also responsible for the BTEC. Secondly, the DAA, and later the ADC, policy and program focus was one of ensuring financial accountability for funds expended. However, local Aboriginal leaders were concerned about the impact of the BTEC, and in 1980, Yami Lester, the Director of the Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD), responded to requests from Aborigines who were conducting cattle operations by establishing a Rural Extension Program within the IAD. This program had an extension and advisory role, including providing whole property pastoral advice (Lester, 1993). The program expanded rapidly, and by 1982 had some 23 cattle stations on its books. Lester’s lobbying was also successful in raising ADC concern and in 1982 the ADC sponsored a series of workshops in central and northern Australia and in the Kimberley on the BTEC. As a consequence of these workshops, the demand for advisory services increased, and as a result, the ADC acknowledged the value of the IAD program and provided annual funding. The ADC also established an equivalent program in the north. This program was provided by a wholly owned
subsidiary of the ADC called the Financial and Consulting Training Service, or FACTS.

The two organisations had very different philosophical approaches. The IAD approach was one based on community development. FACTS was based on an accounting approach. Both of the organisations saw themselves as having a different client. FACTS’ view was that its primary client was the ADC – the IAD view was that its primary clients were the Aboriginal pastoralists. This difference was to involve both organisations in a series of conflicts with both the ADC and Aboriginal pastoralists, and was directly related to the increased confusion about the role of Aboriginal owned pastoral operations.

The impact of the Fraser Government’s land rights policy on Aboriginal owned pastoral leases

One aspect of the Fraser Government’s self-management policy that had a number of impacts on the development of an Aboriginal owned pastoral sector was the Land Rights Act. Firstly, the Act granted ownership of all land-based resources, including cattle, to the traditional owners. This meant that it could no longer be assumed that the pastoral companies had the right to run cattle on Aboriginal land just because they were Aboriginal owned incorporated bodies. The pastoral company either had to be representative of the traditional owners, that is, owned by them, or there had to be a formal agreement with the traditional owners to conduct cattle operations. This created a number of problems for the pastoral company. These problems ranged from those of a minor nuisance value
to ones of a fundamental nature in terms of the cattle company's viability. For example, many of the brands used by Aboriginal cattle companies were inherited from the mission and settlement days and had not been transferred to the new cattle company. Furthermore, the new cattle company could not hold a brand without the permission of the traditional owners. The granting of brands often became problematic in situations where the traditional owners were not satisfied with the returns they or the community were receiving from the cattle operations (Phillpot, 1982). Furthermore, because of the experiences of being paid mining royalties and the obvious cash flows being generated from cattle operations, there was some expectation among traditional owners who were not involved in the pastoral company that, if the cattle continued, the traditional owners would get a return by way of royalty payments.

There were also tensions in situations where boards of directors of Aboriginal owned cattle operations either did not represent traditional owners or did so only in part. This created real tensions with the traditional owners believing they were being denied the benefits of the cattle operations and the non-traditional owner-direc tors resenting that people who they regarded as non-cattlemen were now interfering in their company business (Thiele, 1982; Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993a). The confusion over the role of pastoral operations on Aboriginal land and the rights of traditional owners and their relationship to past operations was to be a continuing feature of cattle operations on Aboriginal land (Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993a).
The other impact of land rights was that the possibility of transfer of pastoral lease to Aboriginal title meant that the land ceased to have a commercial value, and therefore, could not be used as collateral for development funding from commercial sources. This effectively meant the Aborigines running cattle could obtain funds from only two sources. The first source was by taking out stock mortgages through the various stock and station agencies, for example, Dalgety, Elders or Bennet-Fisher. The second source was government, the DAA and/or the ADC.

Following the establishment of the ADC in 1980 the DAA withdrew any direct support of pastoral operations as they were regarded as economic enterprises and were, therefore, the responsibility of the ADC. Initially, the ADC adopted the DAA programs. However, there was a gradual adjustment, and by 1983, for all intents and purposes, the mission and settlement beef cattle operations and those on purchased pastoral leases were treated as the same in terms of both assessment and access to ADC support.

The rate of property purchases had slowed prior to the establishment of the ADC and the consequence of treating Aboriginal pastoral operations in purely economic terms was a significant reduction in capital and operational support. The slow down in property purchases was due to a number of factors. Firstly, there was a view that Aborigines in the NT had already obtained sufficient land under the Land Rights Act to meet their needs, and secondly, the Fraser Government was conscious of the concern of the NT Pastoralists’ Association and the NT Government that further purchases would result in more pastoral land
being transferred to Aboriginal title and would increase the risk of a further reduction of the NT pastoral industry.

As Figure 29 indicates, there were eleven property purchases during the Fraser period. Of these, only two were pastoral properties – the rest were either pastoral excisions or town camp purchases. Overall, less than $2 million was spent on land purchases in the NT.

**Figure 29: NT land purchases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Property name</th>
<th>Purchase cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975/76</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976/77</td>
<td>Bassos Farm*</td>
<td>$7,838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977/78</td>
<td>Chilla Well</td>
<td>$26,073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978/79</td>
<td>Kyebrook Farm*</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narwietoooma**</td>
<td>$13,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979/80</td>
<td>Mt Ebenezer/Impapa*</td>
<td>$24,302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980/81</td>
<td>Robinson River</td>
<td>$670,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981/82</td>
<td>Tangentyere*</td>
<td>$322,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982/83</td>
<td>Mt Skinner Excision**</td>
<td>$32,969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amburla Excision**</td>
<td>$22,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>11 properties</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,133,926</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These were small farms or allotments near towns
** These are excisions.

*Source: Adapted from DAA and ADC Annual Reports for each year*

DAA reports do not identify the specific level of funding available to Aboriginal pastoral properties. What DAA reports do indicate is that there was a general reduction in enterprise support by the DAA from a high of over $13 million, or 7.5% of the DAA's total budget in 1975, to under $6 million, or 5%, in 1980.
Figure 30: DAA enterprise support 1975-1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total enterprise expenditure</th>
<th>Percentage of DAA total budget</th>
<th>Total DAA budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975/76</td>
<td>$13,882,000</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>$185,798,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976/77</td>
<td>$4,223,000</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>$161,537,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977/78</td>
<td>$6,024,000</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>$124,645,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978/79</td>
<td>$5,324,000</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>$132,518,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979/80</td>
<td>$5,927,000</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>$140,796,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980/81</td>
<td>$678,000</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>$159,418,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981/82</td>
<td>$628,000</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>$145,789,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982/83</td>
<td>$810,000</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>$162,079,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$37,496,000</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>$1,212,580,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 31: ADC Pastoral Enterprise Support 1980-1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Loan support</th>
<th>Percentage of enterprise loans</th>
<th>Grant support</th>
<th>Percentage of pastoral enterprise grants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980/81</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>$299,917</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981/82</td>
<td>$75,700</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>$1,712,849</td>
<td>54.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982/83</td>
<td>$681,884</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>$1,667,327</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$757,584</td>
<td></td>
<td>$3,680,093</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ADC Annual Reports 1980-1983

However, because of the activities of the DAA and the ALFC, the ADC found itself with a significant recurrent commitment in its first three years. For example, it spent in excess of 40% or over $1.5 million of its enterprise budget on 77 pastoral properties across the country. Nationally, this approximates an annual allocation of less than $25,000 per property, which was significantly less than industry requirements for capital in the NT. Even when loan funds are accounted for, the available funds per property were never more than $30,000.

This limitation on ADC support to Aboriginal cattle stations was on some properties offset by access to special works programs and some training support, and to a limited extent in one or two communities, by CDEP. However, prior to 1980, there were only ten communities using CDEP and only one of those,
Barunga, involved a cattle enterprise. These subsidies could not and did not substitute for the capital requirements demanded by the BTEC. Secondly, the training offered was nearly always at operational level. This latter practice caused one critic, B L Tilmouth, to explain, “There are more trained Aboriginal fencers in the NT than Germany needed to build concentration camps in World War II.” (Tilmouth, 1980, *pers. com.*)

**Summary**

The introduction of the Fraser Government policy of self-management had three primary impacts on the development of an Aboriginal owned pastoral sector in the NT. The first was the granting of land rights which created a new land owning class and opened up the possibility of using land for purposes other than pastoralism. The second was that Aboriginal communities underwent substantial organisational change that absorbed all the energy of the Aboriginal leadership. The third was that the policy was introduced at the same time that pastoralists (Aborigines and non-Aborigines) were having to manage severe structural adjustment pressures. Under the objectives of self-management and self-sufficiency the responsibility for dealing with these pressures was solely the responsibility of the Aboriginal cattlemen.

The introduction of a traditional land owning class created a great deal of confusion over the operations of pastoral activities, particularly in terms of ownership of cattle and use of Aboriginal owned land. In many cases this created tension between the traditional owners and those operating the pastoral company.
The division of responsibilities between functional departments (both Commonwealth and the NT) and those with the responsibility for Aboriginal development (DAA, ADC and the respective land councils) increased the number of agencies with whom Aborigines who were involved in pastoral activities had to deal. The development of national and regional structures, such as the NACC and the land councils, enabled Aborigines to have a say in policy formulation and provided an institutional base for negotiations. The demand for representational leadership by the new national, regional and local bodies also placed a strain on the available leadership.

The passing of the Land Rights Act preceded the granting of self-government to the NT. The NT Government opposition to land rights institutionalised a state of conflict between the Aboriginal traditional owners and the NT Government. Land rights enabled Aboriginal people to consider a range of alternative land uses other than pastoralism, including traditional land uses, occupying the land and using it as living space. In response to the requests from community, the self-management period saw the development of CDEP labour market programs. This scheme rapidly expanded and whilst initially it was used only for town maintenance, it had the potential to become an important resource for supporting labour intensive operations such as pastoralism.

Self-management also coincided with increased structural adjustment pressures in the beef cattle industry. The most important structural adjustment pressure in the years between 1975 and 1983 was the BTEC. As this campaign intensified the requirement to reduce herd numbers, expand investment, reduce labour and
improve production efficiencies increased. The major response to this pressure by the Aboriginal development agencies was to establish two advisory services. At the same time, the ADC reduced support grants and loans. The combination of the tension over land rights and the structural adjustment pressures in the pastoral industry also combined to reduce the rate of property purchases and to reduce the level of support provided to cattle stations. Given the pressure of structural adjustment, including the BTEC, and the unavailability of funds from commercial sources other than stock mortgages, the capacity of Aboriginal properties to adjust to change was clearly limited.


This section examines the Aboriginal Affairs policies of the Hawke-Keating Labor Governments and their impact on the development of an Aboriginal owned pastoral sector in the NT. The impact of Mabo, and the role of ATSIC and the NLC and CLC on the Aboriginal owned pastoral sector will also be discussed. A timeline showing critical events relevant to the Aboriginal owned pastoral industry in the NT is shown in Figure 32.
The Hawke-Keating Aboriginal Affairs Ministers were Clyde Holding (1983-1988), Gerry Hand (1988-1990) and Robert Tickner (1990-1996). The institutional changes included the winding up of the NAC and the incorporation of both DAA and ADC functions into a new body – ATSIC. In addition to these changes, the recommendations of a number of inquiries, in particular, the Miller Report into Aboriginal education and employment and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, were accepted by the Hawke-Keating Governments and new programs were developed to implement the recommendations. The CDEP program expanded until it became the largest single program administered by ATSIC. The role of the land councils expanded into land management and pastoral support. The changes in Australian land laws included the Mabo decision and the subsequent passing of the Native Title Act.
A major effect of these changes was the way in which they absorbed the energies of the national Aboriginal leadership elite in consultations with the Aboriginal communities and in negotiation with government. The concentration on larger policy issues meant that Aboriginal leaders were limited in how much they could concentrate on policy implementation.

The Hawke Labor Government came to power with a number of commitments relevant to Aboriginal Affairs policy. In particular, the Hawke Government had as its stated policy aims the redistribution of political and economic power, the abolition of poverty, improved social justice outcomes, and improved access to education, employment, information and other community services. It also wished to eliminate discrimination. Directly related to these goals was the objective of recognising the prior ownership of Australia by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Australian Labor Party, 1983:1-8).

These policy commitments were underpinned by two essential principles of consultation and self-determination. The application of these principles also committed the Hawke, and then the Keating, Government to examine how funds were distributed and to what extent Aborigines made funding and resource allocation decisions. These principles, together with the above broad policy commitments, also committed the Hawke Labor Government to address a number of specific areas. These areas included the development of a legislative strategy that would provide Aborigines protection against discrimination, provide for national land rights, protect Aboriginal culture, and examine the desirability of a treaty of commitment.
In order to address the specific commitments and to maintain the integrity and consistency of the principles of their approach, the Hawke Labor Government had four program strategies. These were:

1. Enhancing the ADC;
2. Restructuring both the NAC and the DAA;
3. Empowering Aboriginal organisations through improved resourcing; and
4. A national Aboriginal employment strategy.

Throughout both the Hawke and Keating periods the above principles were pursued with varying degrees of intensity and success. The appointment of Clyde Holding as the first Hawke Government Minister of Aboriginal Affairs initiated a number of reviews of national Aboriginal organisations. The purpose of these reviews was to examine the state of Aboriginal Affairs organisations and administration and to make recommendations that would enable Aboriginal Affairs administration to carry out the Hawke Labor Government's platform. These reviews had a range of impacts on a number of Commonwealth agencies and laid the basis for the development of new Aboriginal Affairs structures.

**Responsible Commonwealth agencies**

The major areas reviewed were the roles and functions of the DAA, the ADC, Aboriginal Hotels Ltd, Aboriginal Legal Aid and the NAC. In addition, the NT Land Rights Act, uniform national land rights and Aboriginal education and
training were subject to examination by the review teams (Griffiths, 1995:207). Although not all the results of all of these reviews have been published, a number were, for example, the Miller Report on Aboriginal Education and Training. Others were used to inform the Hawke Government's approach on restructuring Aboriginal Affairs. The NAC Council was restructured following a review by Coombs in 1984, and effectively the Hawke Government operated without a formal Aboriginal Affairs policy advisory forum until the establishment of ATSIC in 1990.

No official consultative Aboriginal Affairs forum existed until the establishment of ATSIC in 1990, although, as Jennett (1990:250) points out, a number of organisations did provide some avenues for national consultation. In particular, the Federated Land Councils (FLC) became very influential during the period that Gerry Hand was Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Jennett, 1990:252).

Department of Aboriginal Affairs

As a department, the DAA was responsible to Parliament through the Minister and was not directly accountable to Aboriginal people. This was perceived by the Hawke Labor Government as being inconsistent with the principle of self-determination and there was a very strong belief by all three Labor Ministers (Holding, Hand and Tickner) that the administrative arm of Aboriginal Affairs should be accountable to and managed by Aboriginal people (Jennett, 1990:209).

There was also concern that the proliferation of various Aboriginal development agencies – for example, the ADC, the ALF, and Aboriginal Hostels Ltd – was
inefficient and that some restructuring would improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Aboriginal Affairs service delivery (Griffiths, 1995:207). This view was in keeping with the Hawke Government’s overall approach to the reform of the Public Service. As an initial step in increasing the accountability of the DAA to the Aboriginal community, the first Aboriginal appointment as Secretary of the DAA was made in 1984. The appointment of an Aborigine as the permanent head was the forerunner of the much more comprehensive reforms of Aboriginal Affairs administration that were to be announced in 1988.

Aboriginal Development Commission

Because the ADC was the major financier of Aboriginal enterprises, it was bound to attract a lot of interest in its performance, particularly from those parliamentarians who either had a genuine interest in Aboriginal Affairs or who had electorates with large Aboriginal populations. As early as 1984 the House of Representatives Expenditure Committee had become concerned over ADC lending and general financial administration, and had been critical of a number of ADC transactions (Griffiths, 1995:210). This Committee tabled a detailed report (McLeay, 1984), the thrust of which was to recommend that (a) commercial criteria be given priority when assessing proposals, and (b) that social considerations be given a lesser consideration (McLeay, 1984, recommendation 28).

It also recommended that feasibility studies be rigorous and independent, that external directors should be appointed to community enterprises, and that wherever possible, joint ventures should be explored. In relation to pastoral
properties the report recommended that outstanding liabilities should be assessed before any further acquisitions take place. In addition, the Committee was highly critical of the ADC’s lack of involvement or commitment to this.

These concerns increased when it came to light that the Secretary of the DAA, Mr Charles Perkins, had, while Chairman of the ADC, approved loans and grants to a social club of which he was both a member and a member of the club’s executive. Although subsequent investigations cleared him of any wrong doing, it left a strong perception that things were less than perfect in the ADC. In addition to these factors, there were substantial tensions between the DAA and the ADC. These tensions were in part personal, part political and part administrative (Jennett, 1990:250). The impact of the tensions was to increase the perception that there was a less than effective system of service delivery in Aboriginal administration (Sanders, 1991:274).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

As a consequence of the concerns raised by the various reviews initiated by Minister Holding, several well publicised incidents, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, and the Hawke Government’s desire to restructure Aboriginal Affairs in a manner consistent with the policy objective of self-determination, a new Aboriginal Affairs policy was announced by a new Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Gerry Hand (appointed mid-1987). The new policy was released in a statement of Parliament called “Foundations for the Future”. The key elements of the Hawke-Keating Aboriginal Affairs policy between 1985 and 1996 were:
1. The formation of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission that would replace the DAA, the ADC, Aboriginal Hostels Ltd and the Institute for Aboriginal Studies;

2. The development of a Makaratta agreement or compact between the government and the Aboriginal people;

3. The formation of an Aboriginal Economic Development Commission to develop commercial activities for Aboriginal people;

4. The development of a land base for Aboriginal people;

5. A Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody;

6. Better employment opportunities for Aboriginal people;

7. An Aboriginal health strategy; and

8. Better intergovernmental relations on Aboriginal issues.

*Source: The Labor Government's Achievements: the first four years, Australian Labor Party, Canberra 1987*

The establishment of ATSIC was not without challenge and some forty amendments were proposed, of which the government agreed to 38. The legislation establishing the new organisation was passed in October 1989 and the new organisation commenced operations in March 1990. Initially, the organisation consisted of sixty regional councils and had 19 national commissioners, three of whom, including the chair, were ministerial appointments. In 1993 the number of councils was reduced to 35, the chair and the regional council chairpersons became full-time positions, and the number of ministerial-appointed commissioners was reduced to two. This reduction was strongly opposed by the land councils on the grounds that it would reduce the
representation of many groups, particularly the smaller language groups (CLC, 1992). The major functions of ATSIC were detailed in the first annual report (ATSIC, 1990/91) and are as follows:

1. Formulate programs for Aboriginal people;
2. Monitor programs, including those provided by State and Territory agencies;
3. Develop national Aboriginal policy;
4. Assist, advise and cooperate with Aboriginal communities;
5. Advise the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs;
6. Provide information to the Minister on request;
7. Take appropriate actions to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture;
8. Take other action or undertake functions as required under sections 8 and 9 of the ATSIC Act; and
9. Undertake research relevant to Aboriginal development.

Source: ATSIC Annual Report 1990/91:10

The restructure of ATSIC regional councils in 1993 reduced the number of regional councils in the NT from eleven to seven. One consequence of the reduction in the number of regional councils was a commensurate increase in the number of communities that regional councils represented, and as the land councils had foreseen, a reduction in the representation of the smaller communities and language groups.
The formation of ATSIC addressed many of the problems that had beset both the NACC and the NAC. That is, it was a statutory body with regional and national, elected representation, it had administrative responsibility for the financial administration of the Commonwealth’s Aboriginal Affairs budget, and it rationalised some of the functions of both the DAA and the ADC. However, it was not the sole provider of Commonwealth services to Aboriginal communities, although many state, NT and other agencies acted as though it was (Aboriginal Reconciliation Council, 1996).

The other major Commonwealth agency involved in Aboriginal development was the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET).

**Department of Employment, Education and Training**

DEET was formed from the Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations in July 1987. The merger of the employment and the education functions was part of the Hawke Government’s rationalisation of the Public Service (Wiltshire, 1990:37).

A major initiative of DEET was the establishment of the AEDP. This program was established as a result of the work of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs, chaired by Aboriginal educator, Mick Miller. The Committee’s report (the Miller Report) was submitted in 1985, and based upon its recommendations, the AEDP was adopted in mid-1987. The portfolios of Aboriginal Affairs, Employment Education and Training, and Youth Affairs shared the responsibility for implementing the AEDP, although the
Minister for Employment, Education and Training had overall responsibility for the program. The three major programs administered under this program were the CDEP, the Training for Aboriginals Program (TAP), and DEET's general labour market programs. All of these programs were available to Aboriginal owned pastoral properties.

In addition, there was growing concern about the lack of management skills within Aboriginal community owned enterprises. These surfaced in a number of reports, including the final report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADC) in 1991. The recommendations of the RCIADC had a major effect on funds available for enterprise development and education and training, some of which were accessed by the NT land councils to support activities on pastoral properties. For example, the CLC was able to fund a number of training programs based upon the recommendations of the RCIADC (Downing & Phillpot, 1995:12).

The Miller Report and the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy

In 1984 Ralph Willis, the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, appointed a Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs. The Committee was chaired by Aboriginal educator, Mr Mick Miller, and submitted its report in 1985. The task of the Committee was to assess the relevance of existing Aboriginal employment and training programs, and to make recommendations to improve the effectiveness of such programs.
In relation to the pastoral industry, the report acknowledged that the pastoral industry was now a limited employer of Aboriginal people (Miller, 1985:317). However, it still showed the industry as important. Essentially Miller argued (Miller, 1985:355-358) that the economic activity in largely welfare dependent Aboriginal communities should be subsidised in the same way that northern Australian was subsidised by transfer payments from south-eastern Australia. In relation to pastoral properties in particular, it recommended an expansion of the pastoral purchase scheme to meet land needs, the provision of operational capital, the expansion of CDEP on pastoral properties, that land no longer viable for cattle production should be taken out of production, and that there should be some considerations to creating an internal cattle economy through local kill abattoirs and combined marketing operations through Aboriginal pastoralists' associations. In making recommendations, the Miller Report was essentially arguing for the pastoral enterprise to be used as part of an overall development approach to isolated communities with limited opportunities and resources. In this area, the Miller Report was clearly advocating a rural development approach to the situation of remote Aboriginal pastoral communities.

The recommendations of the Miller Report formed the basis of the AEDP, which was adopted in 1987. However, not all the recommendations were implemented. In fact, some were almost completely rejected. For example, in relation to pastoral properties, a strategy was recommended that was "geared towards ... increased emphasis on agricultural industries that are more labour intensive and have more stable market prospects and lower emphasis on highly capital intensive industries yielding low or negative returns to capital because of poor
market prospects (such as the pastoral industry)." (AEDP, 1987). This caveat is perhaps why Hanlon and Phillpot (1993b) found that while there were nine agencies whose training programs were of some relevance to the Aboriginal pastoral industry, there was no one agency that could cover all the training and technology transfer envisaged in the Miller Report’s rural development recommendations.

Hanlon and Phillpot’s (1993b) concerns were echoed in the 1994 review of the AEDP, which found that the AEDP had not effectively met the needs of community based enterprises and that there was a need for increased training in these areas, including management, and a much more flexible approach if remote communities, particularly pastoral communities, were to access such training. Similar concerns were raised by Spicer in his 1997 review of CDEP programs (Spicer, 1997:79-81).

The Miller Report was critical of ADC’s lack of attention to training and in some ways the Miller Report advocated a much broader approach than that of the McLeay Report (1984) referred to above. However, what both the Miller and McLeay Reports were attempting to deal with was the tensions inherent in the land acquisition/land use debate that was at the base of some of the early DAA-ALFC struggles. That is, on the one hand, land was acquired because of its social or cultural importance, and on the other, it had potential for economic land use. McLeay (1984) advocated a developmental approach. What was ultimately adopted by the ADC was a rigorous economic assessment, and by the then DEET, a fairly flexible program approach under AEDP. However, while there
was some contradiction between the ADC approach and that adopted under AEDP, the practical outcome for Aboriginal properties was that they could access neither capital nor the type of extension education necessary to cope with structural adjustment pressures in the pastoral industry (Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993).

**Mabo and native title**

In 1992 the High Court of Australia overturned the legal doctrine of *terra nullius*, that is, that Australia was an empty continent prior to non-Aboriginal settlement, and acknowledged the existence of “native title”. The decision to acknowledge the existence of “native title” raised a whole series of anomalies in relation to Australian land ownership, particularly in areas where land was held under Crown lease, as much of the land in the pastoral zones was. The Keating Government’s (1991-1996) response to this was to develop national legislation to deal with the anomalies and to incorporate the findings of the High Court on Mabo into statutory law. The legislation was enshrined in the *Native Title Act 1994*. The intention was to acknowledge that:

> The common law of Australia recognises a form of native title that reflects the entitlement of the indigenous inhabitants of Australia, in accordance with their laws and customs, to their traditional lands.

(*Preamble to the Native Title Act 1994*)

Subsequently, in the Wik Decision in December 1995, the High Court found that it was possible for native title rights to co-exist on a pastoral lease. That is, that the rights to the same area of land by both a pastoral lessee and an indigenous
traditional owner could co-exist (Wensing & Sheehan, 1997). The implication of this for Aboriginal pastoral leaseholders was that by holding both the lease and having their native title rights confirmed, Aboriginal traditional owners who had a pastoral lease had the opportunity to establish through the courts some form of inalienable title.

**Indigenous Land Corporation**

In addition to recognising native title, the Keating Government established the ILC, the purpose of which was to acquire land for Aboriginal people who had been dispossessed, and to provide support for the management of that land.

The ILC was established on 1 June 1995. Its primary purpose was to acquire land for those Aboriginal people who were unlikely to have their rights recognised under the *Native Title Act 1994*. Under section 191 of the *Indigenous Land Corporation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Fund (ATSIC Amendment) Act 1995* (the ILC Act), the ILC’s major purpose is to acquire land and manage and deal with environmental issues on behalf of indigenous people. In May 1996 the ILC released its National Indigenous Land Strategy 1996-2001 (the National Strategy). In June 1996 the ILC released its NT Regional Area Indigenous Land Strategy (ILC, 1996). The focus of this strategy was on acquisition and land management, particularly environmental management. The strategy, while acknowledging the need for support to pastoral activities (ILC, 1996:60), was not specific about what form that support would take.
NT agencies

There were a number of NT agencies involved in the development of the Aboriginal owned pastoral sector in the NT during the Hawke and Keating Labor Governments. The major agencies were the NT Government, particularly the DPP, the land councils, and initially, the DAA and the ADC, and subsequently, ATSIC. There were also a number of smaller agencies, including the IAD (until 1984), the FACTS (until 1984), and the Central Australian Aboriginal Pastoralists’ Association (CAAPA) (CAAPA, 1984-1998). Some aspects of the involvement of these agencies are described in the following sections.

NT Government

Throughout the period of the Hawke-Keating Governments the NT Government opposed all land claims, including those on pastoral leases owned by Aboriginal people. In addition, and in support of the NT Cattlemen’s Association, the NT Government did not process any applications for excision of land for living spaces for Aboriginal people living on non-Aboriginal owned pastoral leases where excision was opposed by the non-Aboriginal lessee (CLC, 1992:26). The opposition to the claim for excisions by the NT Government created and maintained an atmosphere of conflict between the land councils and the NT Government. This conflict also permeated relations with NT Government departments, including the DPP.
Department of Primary Production

The DPP had the primary responsibility for the implementation of the BTEC. The major strategy adopted by the DPP to achieve the eradication of brucellosis and tuberculosis was an epidemiological one based upon sound veterinary principles. It was not until 1985 that the economics of eradication became an issue and the department employed economists to provide advice to pastoralists.

In regard to Aboriginal properties, the department was aware of the difficulties that Aboriginal properties were facing, and in Central Australia between 1983 and 1987, the DPP cooperated and fully supported the activities of the IAD, FACTS and CAAPA. This cooperation included assistance with extension activities and technical support, and in the production of culturally appropriate material. In the northern part of the Territory, there was less extension cooperation and a greater emphasis on a regulatory approach to disease eradication.

The use of regulation became a more general approach in Central Australia after 1986, particularly when it became apparent that, as a consequence of a lack of capital, limited management and inappropriate skills, a large number of Aboriginal owned properties could not maintain a test and slaughter program. For example, Willowra and Mt Barkly were compulsorily destocked in 1986 after the successive failures of a series of test and slaughter programs. In cases where this occurred, properties were destocked and the cattle unable to be mustered were shot. The quantity of the stock that was shot, in many Aboriginal eyes, was unjustified (Packsaddle, 1993). For example, at Anambidgee 9,000
head were alleged to have been shot with an estimated value of $1.3 million. It should be noted that the BTEC on several non-Aboriginal properties were conducted in the same manner. One result of this approach was that there were a number of legal cases involving non-Aboriginal properties in which the Department was found liable. For example, the non-Aboriginal owners of Banka Banka and Limbunya Stations have since sued the NT Government for negligence in their BTEC administration. However, no legal action has been taken on behalf of Aboriginal owned properties.

Land councils
The role of the NLC and the CLC in the management of pastoral properties during the Hawke-Keating Governments was an evolving one. A review of the CLC was conducted in 1982/83 by Nugget Coombs (Coombs, 1983). One of his recommendations was that the CLC establish a land management unit. In 1985 both the land councils established land management units. Initially the land management units primarily focused on land assessment and conservation rather than production. However, in 1992 both land councils established sections to support pastoral production and management. The establishment of these units coincided with the increased land council involvement in pastoral property purchases. For example, between 1989 and 1996 the land councils were involved in the purchase of eight properties.

The purchase of the properties was criticised by both the Cattlemen’s Association and the NT Government on the basis that the purchase of pastoral leases by Aborigines inevitably led to the leases becoming uneconomic. Because
of these criticisms, the CLC and the NLC insisted that the Aboriginal pastoral companies (in whose names the properties had been purchased) sign management agreements. The aim of the management agreements was to limit the capacity of Aboriginal residents to influence the management of the pastoral lease. As will be seen later, the management agreements were to cause a number of tensions between community leaders and the land councils.

**Department of Aboriginal Affairs**

By 1983 the DAA had withdrawn from any direct support for pastoral operations. However, some DAA programs continued to provide support to pastoral activities. For example, the CDEP schemes at Beswick, Santa Teresa and Hermannsburg actively supported cattle enterprises (Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993b:37). In addition, a number of individual outstations throughout Central Australia are using CDEP to subsidise feral animal harvesting as a first step to re-establishing pastoral operations. For example, at Utopia, which had been destocked as part of the BTEC, a group of men have been mustering brumbies. The sale of these horses has been used to purchase yards, saddles and other equipment. Access to advisory and management support services for these groups was extremely limited – the DAA provided no such support. The land council pastoral units’ activities are primarily focused upon those properties with which they have signed management agreements, and ATSIC only provided funds for management consultants to those properties that it had been involved in purchasing.
Aboriginal Development Commission

The ADC had funded both the IAD and FACTS to provide advisory services. This support was withdrawn in 1985, and initially, an attempt was made to develop an advisory unit internal to the ADC. Following a number of representations by a leading Aboriginal activist, who was also an employee of the ADC, the ADC sponsored the establishment of the CAAPA. Those who supported the establishment of the CAAPA had a number of aims, including:

1. Acting as an advocate for Central Australian pastoralists;
2. Providing management advice; and
3. Providing alternative abattoir facilities, wholesale and retail meat outlets.

Following the failure of its meat processing and sales operations, CAAPA was wound up in 1989.

The IAD/FACTS experiment

In 1980 the then Director of the IAD, Mr Yami Lester AM, established a rural extension unit (Lester, 1993:130-131). Lester’s vision for this unit was to support Aboriginal commercial land use, in particular pastoral development. Lester’s vision for the unit was strongly influenced by his own experience as the manager of Mimili for three years, and his awareness that Aboriginal people interested or committed to pastoralism were not prepared for the changes that were occurring in industry. In Lester’s words, “We didn’t have the management skills to run a business like that.” (Lester, 1993:130).
As a consequence of his experiences, Lester saw the need for a multi-purpose unit that would provide information, undertake training and provide marketing and management support. This unit should provide its services free because, from his own knowledge, Lester believed that the Aboriginal properties could not generate sufficient profit to cover the costs of such services (Lester, 1993:127). As he saw it, such a service would generate its own demand, providing it provided the type of information, training and management support that the people needed. In order to provide such a service, Lester believed that IAD should adopt a developmental approach and that Aboriginal pastoralists should be informed and assisted in working through each set of problems as they came up to them. Hence, if there were no horses available for mustering then a horse breaking course should be provided. If the yards were in disrepair, then a welding course should be conducted. If the directors of a pastoral company were being manipulated by either internal community members or external individuals or agencies, then a pastoral company director’s course should be provided by IAD and the whole group work through the ‘whitefella’ and ‘blackfella’ perspectives involved in each issue.

Initially the unit was funded from DAA and DEIR training programs, and consisted of two staff. These two staff undertook training needs analysis of all Aboriginal properties in Central Australia. One of the major issues to arise from this analysis was the fact that many Aboriginal pastoralists were confused by BTEC. Many believed that, because of the SA department’s emphasis on destocking, and the constant threat to destock by the NT DPP, the whole program
was an attempt by ‘whitefellas’ to take back the cattle. As Andy Taiga put it, “You blokes bin give the land back, but you want to keep us poor so you bin take the cattle now!” (Andy Taiga, 1985, pers. com.).

In 1981 the IAD rural extension program attracted the attention of the ADC, which was just beginning to realise that it had assumed responsibility for funding pastoral properties, and that they might have a substantial liability in terms of assisting Aboriginal pastoral properties to cope with BTEC. Consequently, ADC offered to fund the program if the IAD would undertake a series of feasibility studies. IAD undertook this work in 1983, and as a consequence, in 1983/84 submitted some twenty pastoral property assessments. These studies were subsequently heavily criticised by the ADC central office because they only offered one strategy, that of test slaughter, and partially destocking only if necessary. The reasons for this singular focus was that the IAD analysis indicated that any total destock would take up to fifteen years to recover from, and that partial destocks would inevitably lead to complete destocking.

However, the implications of this analysis were that the ADC would need to invest up to $15 million in Central Australian Aboriginal pastoral properties (IAD, 1983/84), funds that the ADC was not prepared to commit. Accordingly, the ADC requested the IAD provide copies of all its pastoral property files. The purpose of this request was to enable the ADC central office to undertake a review of the IAD analysis in order to determine if there were alternative strategies. Lester refused this request on the grounds that the files were the property of IAD’s clients and could not be provided to the ADC without the
communities' express approval. He further maintained that as IAD staff had worked closely with the pastoral property communities to develop the solutions offered in the reports, it was not possible in terms of IAD's relationship with those communities to make recommendations contrary to the community's wishes. In particular, Lester had no doubt that preservation of their herds was the main objective of all groups, and that this would require substantial ADC investment. In response to Lester's position, the ADC at first threatened and then cut funding to the program, and in 1984 the rural extension program ceased.

While the debate between IAD and ADC was emerging, the ADC was establishing its own advisory service in the northern half of the NT. This service was established as a private company called FACTS. Its primary purpose was to provide financial advisory services to Aboriginal enterprises generally and to pastoral properties in particular. Like IAD it was asked to undertake BTEC feasibility studies of Aboriginal properties in the top end, but unlike IAD it did not provide these services for free. Rather, pastoral properties were provided with grant funds to employ FACTS to undertake the work. Whilst FACTS was an auxiliary of the ADC, that is, its initial capitalisation had been provided by the ADC, once established it had the appearance of a self-sustaining operation because its fees were paid by the communities, even if ultimately the funds were ADC grant funds. FACTS was to continue until 1989/90 when it was fully privatised through a form of staff buyout.

The IAD/FACTS experiment at community level mirrored the debate at policy level. That is, on the one hand, Lester, like Miller, believed a developmental
approach was necessary. On the other hand, FACTS and the ADC believed that only a commercial approach was acceptable, or at least in the case of FACTS one that could be made to appear commercial. In the end the commercial agenda, or what passed for a commercial agenda, dominated.

The changes to NT Aboriginal community administrative arrangements during the Hawke-Keating Governments

The major focus of the NT Government during the Hawke-Keating Governments was the introduction of a form of local government called community government. The introduction of community government was opposed by the land councils (Mowbray, 1986), and the debate over its introduction was to absorb the energy of a number of communities. One outcome of this debate was that the energy of community leadership was focused more on the structure of community organisations and less on service delivery issues (Jennett, 1990:252). The impact of this on community operated pastoral operations was that support became variable depending upon how well the families involved in the cattle station operations were represented on the community council. For example, at Ngarliyikirlangu at Yuendumu, when allies of the cattle company were elected to the council, the cattle company received significant in-kind support, such as access to bulldozers and graders for dam building. When the council was made up of people who were not interested or affiliated with the cattle ‘mob’, in-kind support was limited.
One major impact on communities during the Hawke-Keating period of government was the proliferation of both Commonwealth and NT agencies serving communities. Several attempts have been made to analyse the level of interaction and Figure 33 shows one model of the extent of community government agency interaction. There has been a range of criticisms about the lack of coordination between these agencies and the pressure that the lack of coordination placed upon community leaders (ATSIC, 1994:37). What this meant for Aborigines and Aboriginal communities pursuing pastoral activities was that any attempt to conduct a whole property development program would involve consultation and negotiation with at least four, and possibly five, of the six Commonwealth and NT agencies.
EURO-AUSTRALIAN ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

Community (average population <500) Leadership group approx. 20

Northern Territory
- Trans. & Works
- Prim. Ind & Fish.
- Mines & Energy
- Law & Courts
- Office of Local Govt
- Grants Comm.
- Health & Com. Serv.
- Lands & Housing
- Power & Water
- Education
- Primary & Secondary
- TAFE
- Tertiary

Federal
- ATSIC
- Health & Com. Serv.
- DEETYA
- Aboriginal Dev. Com.
- Social Security
- Housing & Construc.
- ILC
- Aboriginal Legal Aid
- Commercial Companies
- Outstation Centres
- INDEPENDENT ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS
- Land Councils
- Aboriginal Com. Serv.
- Catholic
- Baptist
- Lutheran
- Anglican
- Other

TRADITIONAL SOCIAL FACTORS
- Kinship obligations
- Language
- Ceremonies
- Land

Source: Phillpot, NTLGITC, 1990
It has been suggested (Gerritsen, 1982; Sanders, 1991) that the number of agencies enable Aboriginal communities some room for negotiation and autonomy. That is, what the communities cannot get from one agency, it will get from another. The evidence in chapters 4 and 5 supports this. For example, both Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu were able at times to substitute DEET funding for ADC funding. However, such negotiation and manoeuvring has some limitations when an Aboriginal group is attempting to implement a property development plan, for it assumes that a community or group has the capacity to develop a holistic property plan; that any substitution of one agency’s funding will be timely and at levels to meet the needs of the plan; and funding will be provided under conditions that enable the property plan to be implemented consistently. The reality is quite different. It is true that agencies can be manipulated, but too often the resources provided do not arrive when needed or are less than sufficient to meet the needs of the group.

The changes to Aboriginal administration on pastoral leases

In 1989 a memorandum of understanding was finalised between the NT Government and the Commonwealth Government on a policy for dealing with the excision of living areas on pastoral properties. This memorandum of understanding provided for the granting of special freehold title, to be provided under NT legislation, for those people resident on pastoral leases or who had recently resided there. Although the land councils had not been party to the negotiations on the memorandum of understanding (CLC, 1992:2) the signing of the agreement had the potential to reduce the conflict between the land councils
and the NT Government over the granting of excisions. However, despite the existence of the memorandum of understanding, there was little progress towards finalising excision negotiations. For example, in 1992/93 only two excisions out of 28 applications were agreed to, and as a consequence, the tensions between the NT Government and the land councils over excisions continued.

**Industry background**

The structural adjustment pressures in the NT beef industry that had commenced in the late 1960s intensified during the Hawke-Keating period of government. The NT beef industry was particularly vulnerable to these pressures as it was almost totally reliant on the export market, specifically the US market (Murti, 1998). Towards the end of the 1980s the reliance on the US market was somewhat reduced with the opening up of live trade to Indonesia, a market that has continued to grow and which represents a major new opportunity for the NT beef industry. However, the requirements for “boat” cattle, as they are called, are quite specific and necessitate efficient animal husbandry to meet the Indonesian live trade demands.

As ‘price takers’, NT beef producers neither influence the cost of inputs nor the price paid for product, and the structural adjustment strategies available to NT beef producers are therefore limited. In general, the strategies adopted by the producers during the Hawke-Keating period of government were to reduce operational costs, that is, labour, and to increase the level of capital investment in yards and fences and to adopt new technology, for example, aerial mustering.
The impact of these strategies was significant. For example, by using a combination of aerial mustering, well sited holding paddocks and drafting yards, the number of person-weeks per property could be reduced from 550 to 430 using semi-harvest labour intensive management (Phillpot, 1985). The increase in the level of capital investment was quite marked with an average annual capital investment of $100,000 (GRM, 1987:12). The move away from labour intensive semi-harvest operations to capital intensive managed herds brought with it a number of problems, not the least the question of ecologically sustainable range management.

The issue of ecologically sustainable range management emerged in the 1980s as the evidence of vegetation species change, the loss of grass species, and an overall reduction in the productive capacity of the land grew (McCosker et al, 1986:193). The work of CSIRO (Foran, Friedel, McLeod, Stafford-Smith & Wilson, 1990), the NT Conservation Commission and the Range Management Section of the DPP, began to indicate that many grazing regimes on the rangelands could not be sustained, particularly in the more arid regions of the NT. There was also increasing evidence that very few producers had sufficient understanding of the impact of stocking regimes on rangeland sustainability (Purvis, 1986).

The debate over the sustainability of beef production on the NT rangelands was also linked to an older debate over the viability of the NT beef industry. Historically, very few properties had ever made a regular annual profit. Instead most producers had relied on the capacity of the property to generate significant
capital gains to cover annual operating losses and to generate a large lump sum when the property was sold (Makin, 1972). Between 1983 and 1996 the question of viability arose again, as increasing numbers of properties became unprofitable. For example, in 1987 the GRM study of the NT beef industry found that 32.8% of the properties in Central Australia had negative returns. On the Barkly Tableland the percentage of properties with negative returns was 18.9%, in the Darwin and Gulf regions it was 46.3%, and in the Victoria River District it was 10.7% (GRM, 1987). At this time there were no Aboriginal properties on the Barkly Tableland, the majority being located in Central Australia, the Gulf and Darwin, and those that did exist in the Victoria River District were smaller in area and herd size than their non-Aboriginal neighbours. That is, the majority of Aboriginal owned properties were located in regions containing areas with the most negative returns. The same study also found that the net cash surplus per beast was quite low, with the NT net cash surplus per beast carried averaging less than $19 per head. Given this, the margins for management error in operating a property are not great. In addition to these pressures, the period of the Hawke-Keating Governments coincided with the completion of the BTEC and post-BTEC reconstruction.

The BTEC

By 1983 the BTEC in the NT had begun to intensify as producers and the NT Government realised that southern abattoirs would be closed off to them if disease eradication was not achieved by 1992. The DPP responded to this pressure by increasing staff numbers and expanding the number of properties
with approved programs. The focus of the BTEC was initially in Central Australia and progressively moved north as each district achieved disease freedom. As the intensity of BTEC increased, so too did the level of destocking, with a turnoff in the year before the campaign was completed (1990/91) amounting to 24% of the total herd. These figures may not be accurate, because until the BTEC, very few properties maintained accurate animal husbandry records (Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993b). The BTEC also required greater stock control and this required a greater investment in yards and fences. The location of this infrastructure was largely driven by the animal management requirements of the BTEC, and as a consequence, some country was under-utilised and other country was subject to grazing regimes not previously experienced (Williams & McPherson, 1985).

The BTEC resulted in an increase in yards, water points and fencing. The need to control stock within fenced paddocks resulted in the exclusion of land that had limited carrying capacity because it was not economic to fence it. The BTEC also required significant destocking of cows five or more years old. This initially increased stations’ cash flow, but then reduced cash flow substantially. This strategy effectively put the commercial viability of properties at risk by increasing their susceptibility to drought and market decline. Hanlon, McCosker and Eggington (1993), using Rangepac Herd Econ simulation systems, estimated that when drought and market declines are factored in, it could take up to 31 years for some stations to re-establish commercially viable herds.
The conventional view of the BTEC, particularly within government (Williams & McPherson, 1985), is that the campaign effectively enabled the NT pastoral industry to adopt 20th century management techniques, and that the failure of Aboriginal properties to successfully achieve modern management methods is a reflection of the cultural difficulties Aboriginal people face when adopting non-Aboriginal customs and practices. However, a number of other commentators disagree. Cane and Stanley (1985:15) argue that it was irrational to implement the BTEC in remote areas by applying methods developed in more settled areas. That is, in a situation where land was cheap, farming large herds with a low investment in capital is a more efficient way to use resources than relying on high capital investment and lower herd numbers. Such comments notwithstanding, it is clear that, as a result of the BTEC, the maintenance of commercially viable herds requires substantial investment, effective management systems, but very little labour. For example, the BTEC almost tripled the average level of infrastructure investment required per property. This increase required a greater return on capital than had ever been required historically. Yet the productive capacity of the land in terms of its ability to produce a greater number of cattle per square kilometre did not change (GRM, 1987). The economics of these changes in the NT pastoral industry is still an open question. The number of post-BTEC court cases brought by non-Aboriginal pastoralists against the NT Government (alleging that it was the BTEC that bankrupted them) suggests that the Cane and Stanley argument has some degree of validity.
Post-BTEC

The BTEC was completed by 1992, and for most properties in Central Australia, the Barkly Tableland and the Victoria River District, their BTEC programs were completed by 1990. It was only in the Darwin and Gulf regions that the BTEC continued well into 1992/93. The positive consequences of the BTEC were substantial – all herds had been fully tested and the average level of investment in infrastructure was a little less than $1 million per property. The negative impacts of BTEC were also significant. The level of destocking had reduced herd numbers and many properties found that their future capacity to generate income was significantly reduced (Hanlon & McCosker, 1993). For example, forecasts undertaken by the IAD rural extension program in 1983/84 indicated that many properties would not be able to recover their herd numbers through natural increase in less than sixteen years. More detailed herd studies undertaken by Hanlon and McCosker (1993) indicate that it can take up to thirty years or more to re-establish a commercially viable herd. The need to control herds in paddocks meant a concentration of use on the better quality land and an exclusion of lower carrying capacity land. As a result of the increased selected grazing pressure, the risk of rangeland degradation has increased.

The development of an Aboriginal pastoral sector during the Hawke-Keating period

The number of pastoral properties owned and operated by Aboriginal people in the NT expanded during the Hawke-Keating period of government. However, the
increased application of commercial criteria for assessing funding applications from Aboriginal pastoral enterprises intensified. The application of these criteria occurred at a time when many Aboriginal properties had been either partially or completely destocked and could not meet the commercial criteria. This resulted in their having their enterprise funding withdrawn, although as this study will demonstrate, several persisted by using CDEP.

Property purchases 1983-1996

There were eleven properties purchased in the NT between 1983 and 1996.

Figure 34: Property purchases 1983-1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Property name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1983/84</td>
<td>Eva Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984/85</td>
<td>McLaren Ck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985/86</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1986/87</td>
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<td>1987/88</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988/89</td>
<td>Atula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989/90</td>
<td>Tanami Downs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990/91</td>
<td>Elsey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hodgson Downs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muckaty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fitzroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991/92</td>
<td>Loves Creek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992/93</td>
<td>Mistake Ck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alcoota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993/94</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994/95</td>
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<td>1995/96</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ATSIC Annual Reports 1983 to 1996
During the periods of administration of the DAA and the ADC, funding for both land acquisition and management reflects some of the policy variation of each period. However, the funding does not reflect the level of funding required by the
properties. The difficulty of enterprises’ ongoing funding support was acknowledged by the McLeay Inquiry (HRSCE, 1984) which advocated better project definition between social and economic, social long term planning with an enterprise’s commercial viability, and sound feasibility assessment (HRSCE, 1984, recommendations 28 and 29). However, the adoption of this approach further exacerbated the difficulties at community level as many pastoral properties could not demonstrate long term commercial viability, and as a consequence, could not be assessed as eligible for funding. The McLeay recommendations were in a sense totally contradictory to those of the Miller Report, and the ultimate outcome was to deny or limit Aboriginal properties access to capital and training. During the ATSIC period, acquisition and management funding increased overall, but again did not reflect what the properties may have needed, as the funding included all land management support provided by ATSIC. That is, it included support to land councils, land management and national parks programs, as well as support to pastoral properties. For example, in 1995/96, if all of the NT’s share of national allocations had been spent on each of the pastoral enterprises or activities, there would have been only $76,436 available per enterprise or activity, which is 25% below the average annual capital requirements of pastoral activities in the NT (GRM, 1987). If the equivalent allocation was made in 1993/94, then there would have been no effective funds available. In fact, the relatively small amounts available between 1990 and 1995 meant that only those properties with the greatest chance of commercial success would be considered eligible for funding.
This suggests that the developmental needs of Aboriginal pastoral properties were not accounted for in making budget allocations.

That is, at community level there is a multiplicity of stakeholders and the benefits from one program do not necessarily flow to all the stakeholders. Hence, use of one program, say CDEP, in the development of a business enterprise such as pastoralism, does not necessarily benefit in an equitable way all of those who have contributed to the development of the enterprise.

**CDEP**

The evolution of CDEP following the demise of the Training Allowance Scheme in the 1970s was slow. The DAA 1972-1974 Annual Report identified that DAA allocated $6.5 million for Aboriginal employment, mostly through special works programs, training and minor immediate assistance. From this, by 1979/80, 850 people in eleven communities were employed in CDEP. These had first been reported in 1976/77 (DAA, 1977). At this point one pastoral enterprise was being supported (DAA, 1980:20). By the 1980 Annual Report, this had grown to eighteen communities employing 1,300 people. This situation remained static (DAA, 1983:28) until 1983/84 when CDEP was expanded to include 31 communities employing 2,200 people at a cost of $14.2 million (DAA, 1984:14). This included one Aboriginal community, Barunga, that operated a pastoral enterprise. By 1987/88 the communities with pastoral enterprises in the NT were Barunga, Beswick, Willowra, Ntaira, Santa Teresa, Daguragu and Yuelamu (Mt Allan). However, at Yuelamu and Daguragu, the community, for reasons
described below, refused to use CDEP in the pastoral enterprise (Phillpot, 1993, *pers. obs.*). Robinson River and Lajamanu adopted CDEP in 1990/91. However, by this stage their cattle enterprises were, as a consequence of BTEC, reduced to subsistence operations. The communities accessing CDEP essentially remained the same with less than 150 people employed in CDEP (ATSIC, 1990/91) pastoral activities nationally, and less than 100 in the NT (ATSIC, 1995:68). The lack of application of CDEP to pastoral enterprises raises a number of questions. From an outsider’s perspective, would it not make sense to use “sweat equity” to build up the community’s assets? Particularly when most communities have so few. From an insider’s perspective, given that the pastoral industry was changing and the struggle for pastoral award wages so long, why should workers accept anything less than their non-Aboriginal counterparts? The reason for this reluctance was perhaps best articulated by two Anmatyerre elders, Jack Cook and Cassidy, at Yuelamu, who stated to the Author in 1995, “We bin fight for full wages so our own place got to pay ’im.” (Phillpot, 1995, *pers. com.*). That is, in their eyes accepting CDEP for cattle work, which as they explained was real work, debased the award wages struggle. The outsider’s response to this might be, “but you own the assets”, to which the workers might reply, “do we?” or does the community or the traditional owners? – a conundrum never fully addressed at the policy or program level (see chapter 8, for a fuller discussion). These questions are similar to those raised by Sanders (1993:45).
Outstations movement

Outstations, or homelands, are the terms applied to small Aboriginal communities. The words can cover a variety of contexts and arrangements. They often are made up of "family" or extended family, and in the NT involved people moving from the large, centralised communities (ex-government settlements and missions) to which they had moved a few decades earlier, back to descent group estates.

The movement was not new. Ernabella and Hermannsburg Missions in Central Australia had maintained local descent groups in out-camps. Yai Yai and Alumbra Bore had been established for the Pintubi at Papunya in the late 1960s. There had also been decentralised family camps at Maningrida and Yirrkala. However, the outstation or homeland movement expanded in the 1970s, particularly following the NT Land Act and the increasing transfer of land to Aboriginal freehold. Gerritsen and Phillpot (1996) have described three waves of outstation settlement. These are traditional, neo-traditional and non-traditional. The two waves of importance in this study are the traditional and neo-traditional. In Gerritsen and Phillpot's analysis these waves involved traditional leaders relocating their families on to traditional lands as it was acquired as Aboriginal freehold on pastoral leases or on Aboriginal land where pastoral enterprises were operating. This movement raised two problems – one legal and one practical. The legal one involved the problem of what right did the cattle enterprise have to conduct its business on land now settled by the rightful traditional owners? If they did have the right, what was the return to the land owners? As far as the
Author is aware, no serious attempt has been made to resolve this issue. In the main, from the Author’s observations, the problem has been reduced by allowing the outstations to take “killer” beasts for meat, as required. The second problem is that of water. In the main, outstations have not unnaturally been located at the best water points for both man and beast. Clearly such competition has an array of practical problems, ranging from human health to mustering arrangements. Again, these issues appear, from the Author’s observation, to have been resolved by the time honoured tradition of improvisation. Yet as this study will show in the two case studies, sometimes improvisation is not enough.

Summary

The Hawke-Keating period of government was a period of intense change in Aboriginal Affairs and in the pastoral industry. The changes in Aboriginal Affairs included three changes in Minister and major organisational change, as well as a fundamental change to Australia’s land laws as a result of the Mabo decision.

The Aboriginal owned pastoral sector expanded in terms of land ownership, although it contracted by a third in terms of herd size during the Hawke-Keating period. The reduction in herd size was largely due to the BTEC and the limited capacity of the Aboriginal owned pastoral sector to manage BTEC. This was directly related to the general reduction in support for Aboriginal pastoral enterprises, although there were two periods of intense support for Aboriginal owned and operated pastoral properties. The first was 1983 to 1989, and the
second was 1992 to 1996. In each period the support primarily consisted of establishing management and extension support units. In the latter period these units were located within the land councils, although the land council pastoral units do not provide support to all pastoral activities in their regions.

Conclusion

The period 1972 to 1996 encompassed substantial change to the NT beef industry. As chapter 2 (page 77) indicates, overall the herd grew, as did turnoff. Labour was reduced from over 2,000 in 1971 to just over 1,000 in 1993 (Figures 26 to 28). During the same period the Aboriginal owned pastoral industry expanded in land size, if not in overall herd size. During this period, the industry experienced three different phases – the beef slump of 1974-1980, the BTEC program in 1980-1994, and the post-BTEC era, 1994 onwards. These periods are reflected to some extent in herd numbers and turnoff levels.

During the beef slump the total turnoff was low, although there were substantial differences between regions. In the Victoria River and Barkly Districts, where herd control was poorer, turnoffs were lower than on the Barkly Tableland, and in Central Australia where the impact of BTEC was beginning to be felt and where properties were much more likely to be stocked to capacity. Some 41% of properties, or 57 properties of 139, were totally destocked (Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993b:36). In the post-BTEC era, there has been a critical increase in stock and turnoff levels as numbers and demand increase. In regard to demand, the live
boat trade has been a major factor in increasing the turnoff of younger, lighter animals.

Between 1972 and 1996 Aboriginal people in the NT acquired both pastoral leases and pastoral enterprises. This occurred during a period of intense change in Aboriginal affairs policy and in the NT political structures. The change has been characterised by substantial political, institutional, organisational and industry structural realignment and adjustment, which has consumed every level of Aboriginal society in the NT, including those Aboriginal people who wish to operate pastoral enterprises.

The intensity of change, particularly in regard to the change in both Commonwealth and NT agencies that dealt directly with Aboriginal pastoral properties, had a number of impacts. Firstly, in terms of obtaining support, it made for confusion about policy and programs and the eligibility of different groups. Secondly, it meant a constant change of government and community personnel, which in turn meant that there was a variation in how policy was implemented at the local level. Finally, it meant that at no time did any agency build up sufficient corporate knowledge and experience to be able to challenge the policy orthodoxy.

The policy and programs supporting the acquisition and funding of pastoral leases and enterprises have varied. There appears to have been a constant duality in policy direction, though the emphasis has shifted over time. On the one hand, pastoral lease acquisition has been undertaken and justified on the basis of
meeting peoples’ land needs and to address the impact of land dispossession, a
goal that was pursued more vigorously during periods of Labor Governments
than during periods of Conservative Governments. On the other hand, land
enterprise funding for pastoral enterprises has become increasingly dependent on
the capacity of an enterprise to demonstrate commercial viability or potential
commercial viability, a trend that ignored the changes taking place in industry
and did not take into account the aspirations of Aboriginal people who may have
wished to be involved in beef cattle production.

Policy and program support for the Aboriginal owned pastoral sector has not yet
addressed three fundamental questions: What is the purpose of the Aboriginal
owned cattle operations – is it economic or is it social? The second and third
questions relate to the first: Insofar as the purpose of the Aboriginal owned
pastoral sector is economic, then how is viability and sustainability to be
achieved? Insofar as the purpose of the Aboriginal owned pastoral sector is
social, how is it to be sustained?

The experiences of individual Aboriginal owned pastoral enterprises, and the
outcomes of these policies on a number of Aboriginal owned pastoral enterprises,
are explored in subsequent chapters.

In answering these questions it is necessary to analyse the issues raised in
chapter 1 at page 28.
Chapter 4: The Puraiya Cattle Company – A case study of an Aboriginal owned pastoral enterprise

This chapter will describe and analyse the experience of Puraiya Cattle Company at Ti-Tree during the policy periods described in the earlier chapters. The chapter will include an examination of the geography, history and sociology of human settlement as well as a description of property management and operations during the three policy periods, namely, 1972 to 1975, 1975 to 1983 and 1983 to 1996.

The focus of this chapter in examining these periods is on the dynamics at community level, in particular the role, function and experience of the cattle enterprise. In focusing on these areas at community level the chapter examines the community level of the layered encapsulated relationship that Aboriginal communities have with government, which is described in chapter 1 and is shown in this chapter as Figure 38. The emphasis in this chapter is on the land, community enterprise government agency interaction shown in Figure 38 in the shaded areas.

This chapter’s purpose in focusing upon these periods at community level is to explore the community’s pastoral enterprise response to the policy changes described in chapter 3. That is, it seeks to examine the community dynamics related to the changes in the other levels of the framework within which policy is developed and implemented, described in chapter 1 and shown in this chapter as Figure 38.
Data used in this chapter draws heavily on the Author’s own experience of the Ti-Tree communities. This includes personal contact between 1967 and 1968, contact as a patrol officer in training between 1969 and 1974, personal contact between 1974 and 1978, professional contact as advisor and then a DPP administrator between 1980 and 1988, and as a consultant between 1989 and 1998. Specifically, diary notes of interviews with key Aboriginal people and Mr and Mrs Heffernan recorded during property inspections for the period 1969-1974 are used for this period. In 1983 the Author completed a Feasibility of Puraiya Cattle Station, which was published by the IAD. Between 1984 and 1990 the Author visited Puraiya and the Ti-Tree area on a bi-monthly basis and again using notes of meetings with Aboriginal leaders. In 1993 the Author co-authored with Mr David Hanlon a training needs analysis of Aboriginal pastoral properties in the NT and Puraiya was one of the cases studied and throughout the last three decades the Author has visited the communities at Ti-Tree annually. Where other data has been used it is referenced.
Figure 38: Bureaucratic encapsulation: critical factors directly involved in the management of Puraiya Cattle Company
However, before beginning this analysis some clarification of nomenclature is necessary. Over the years different spellings have been used to describe communities in the Ti-Tree area. The original declaration of the Telegraph Reserve called the area Tea Tree or Teatree (SA Gazette, 1888). The Pastoral Lease No. 626 describes the property as Ti-Tree Station. Subsequent official files often failed to adopt a consistent nomenclature. In order to avoid confusion this study has adopted the approach recommended by the Land Commissioner in the Ti-Tree Station Land Claim (Maurice, 1987:3). That is, the name “Ti-Tree” is used to refer to the cattle station and the words “Tea Tree” to the township. The words “Tea Tree District” refer to the Police District which runs 110 km north and 150 km south of the Tea Tree township, and includes the stations of Aileron, Napperby, Pine Hill, Mt Skinner, Anningie, Willowra, Mt Barkly, Stirling and Ti-Tree. The location of Ti-Tree is shown on Figure 39.
Source: ILC – Language groups adapted from Horton 1981
Topography and geography

Travelling north in Central Australia from the MacDonnell Ranges you cross a series of mulga plains dissected here and there by low ranges, which generally run east-west. In the centre of Australia, overshadowed by the brooding presence of Mt Ester and Central Mount Stuart, some 240 km north of Alice Springs and 280 km south of Tennant Creek, lies the Township of Tea Tree and the pastoral property of Ti-Tree. The pastoral property is surrounded by a number of other cattle stations, Pine Hill and Atartinga in the south, Stirling and Anningie in the north, Coniston in the west and Mt Skinner in the east. Running east-west, either side of the Stuart highway, Ti-Tree Station covers an area of 3,500 sq km. It is located within the Burt Plain biogeographical region, an area dominated by the plains and rocky ranges of Pre-Cambrian granites with acacia and mulga woodlands. The soils on the property are largely lateritic sands, while the northern and southern boundaries are marked by small quartzite and granite hills.

The total area occupied by Ti-Tree pastoral lease is 3,545 sq km. Beef cattle production on Ti-Tree is sustained by three north-south water courses, Ti-Tree Creek and the Hansen and the Woodroffe Rivers, all of which are truncated non-perennial streams. These water courses are generally dry, flowing perhaps once a year, although they are capable of flooding. For example, during the 1970s, as a result of above average rainfall, they regularly flooded the Stuart Highway cutting road access to Alice Springs and Darwin for up to a week. On the eastern side of the property, Mt Solitary and Mt Harper dominate more lateritic sandy plains. These contain poorly defined and uncoordinated drainage channels and
depressions, which hold significant amounts of surface water following rains. Along the water courses there are substantial stands of corkwood and eucalypts.

Away from the water courses the property is dominated by large stands of mulga which cover approximately 56% of the property. Spinifex grasses and hill country cover 35% of the property and the remaining 8% is made up of rich sandy open woodland. In the open woodland and along the water courses buffel grass abounds. Buffel grass was first introduced by the Afghan cameleers (Heffernan, 1969) at the turn of the century and was later spread by the NT Government primary production agencies in the 1960s and 1970s. Although buffel grass is generally acknowledged to be an exceptional drought resistant stock feed, it is regarded by many rangeland scientists as a threat to native pasture species. It also increases the risk of wildfire because of the amount of combustible foliage it produces (Dunlop & McGlashon, 1985:77).

Ti-Tree Station experiences a typical arid zone climate (Perry, 1980). That is, a climate where there is insufficient rainfall to support crop production. The area experiences a slight monsoonal effect, with what rain there is generally falling in the late summer months of February and March. During the ten years between 1973 and 1983 this monsoonal effect was exaggerated with average annual rainfall during that period exceeding 10 inches. Since 1984, rainfall has been less regular with extensive dry periods between 1984/85 and again between 1990-1993. Underground water supplies are extensive with the property being located on top of the Ti-Tree sub-artesian basin. This basin, which is connected to the Wiso basin, has been assessed as one of the major underground water supplies
capable of supporting horticultural production. The potential for horticultural production is also assisted by the fact that the Station lies outside the frost zone, experiencing fewer than 50 days of frost a year.

Aboriginal Occupation

Ti-Tree Station lies at the centre of land that was the territory of the Anmatyerre people. Prior to non-Aboriginal occupation, Anmatyerre territory included all lands bounded by Mt Stirling Station in the north, Aileron Station in the south, Mt Skinner and Atartinga in the east and Mt Allan Station in the west (see Figure 39), and these stations continue to be the main residence of the majority of Anmatyerre speakers. The populations of Anmatyerre speaking communities are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anningie</td>
<td>50 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ti-Tree Station</td>
<td>110 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pmarra Jutunja</td>
<td>120 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide Bore</td>
<td>90 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atartinga</td>
<td>75 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuelamu</td>
<td>100-120 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napperby</td>
<td>150 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine Hill</td>
<td>5 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>700 people (± 50)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is generally thought that the Anmatyerre population has recently increased from a population that was much depleted (Strehlow, 1947; Meggitt, 1968) by conflict, disease and drought that followed contact with non-Aboriginal people, although Avery (1987:70) suggests that the level of depletion may have been overestimated as people dispersed rather than died. However, what is clear is that the current population of 300 people at the three Ti-Tree communities (the station, Adelaide Bore and Pmara Jutunta) is the highest it has been since the first contact with non-Aboriginal people.

In 1987 Ti-Tree Station was declared to be Aboriginal land belonging to the Anmatyerre people under the NT Land Rights Act (Maurice, 1987:2). How long the Anmatyerre have occupied the land is a matter of archaeological debate. However, the evidence indicates that they have been living in the area for at least several thousand years (Elkin, 1964; Flannery, 1994). For the Anmatyerre people the land is divided into a number of more or less discrete countries, each of which is associated with one or more Altyerrenge beings (dreamings) which are mystical beings who created and maintained the land. These mystical beings are associated with certain sites within the country and with tracks linking those sites. The sites represent special activities of the Altyerrenge beings and the tracks represent their travels through the country. Some of the Altyerrenge beings are localised to a particular country; others travelled widely and are associated with several countries.
The boundaries between countries are not clear, with the end of one country and the beginning of another tending to run together in the same way that different biogeographic boundaries often merge at their margins. Thus Anmatyerre people who have a primary allegiance to one piece of country can also have overlapping responsibilities, rights and interests in several other countries. However, it is clear that particular descent groups are linked to specific countries and the core descent group is a member of the same pair of subsections (see chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of the subsection relationship system). Descent groups that own a country refer to the country as *Arrenge* (Father’s father). Other groups refer to the same country by the appropriate kin name. According to the Land Commissioner and the evidence offered during the land claim (Avery, 1986; Maurice, 1987), the major associated dreamings/Altyerrenge ancestors and the relevant subsection groups located on Ti-Tree are the following.

(i) **Angintye** is located on the western part of the lease and extends onto the neighbouring stations of Coniston and Anningie (Maurice, 1987:12). The major Altyerrenge being associated with the country is *Artetye* (mulga seed). The subsection associated with the Angintye country is the Pengarte-Penangke subsection.

(ii) **Alpanapentye** is located in the north-east section of the station and covers parts of Anningie and Stirling Stations. The major Altyerrenge being is *Yerrampe* (honey ant) and the affiliated pair of subsections are the same as those of Angintye (Pengarte-Penangke), although it is of a different lineage. *Malpwenke* (native cats) are another important Altyerrenge being in this
country as these creatures travelled from the Port Augusta area through Alpanapentye country to the “seawater” country in the north.

(iii) Ilkawerne is located in the eastern area of the station and extends into Mt Swan and Stirling. The major Altyerrenge being for the area is the *Ahakeye* (bush plum) some of which travelled within Ilkawerne while others travelled outside to other countries. The other major Altyerrenge being is the *Atwenenge* (flying ant) which followed the *Ahakeye* (bush plum) in their journeys. Ilkawerne country also contains a number of kangaroo dreaming sites and an important baby dreaming site. The pair of subsections affiliated with the area is Ngale-Meptyane.

(iv) Ngwenywenpe is located in the south-west of the station and also includes parts of Pine Hill Station. The major Altyerrenge ancestor for this area is the *Arenge* (euro) and the subsection pair affiliated with the area is the Peltharre-Kngwarreye. The other Altyerrenge beings associated with the area are the corkwood tree, red ochre and mulga seed.

(v) Ntureye is located in the central part of the station and includes the township of Tea Tree. The major Altyerrenge being for the country is *Ahakeye* (bush plum) and the principal subsection pair is Ngale-Meptyane.

(vi) Puraye is described as an area within Ntureye. Consequently Maurice (1983:13) treats the area as synonymous with Ntureye. Although Maurice acknowledges that Anmatyerre people do distinguish between the two, the
The Anmatyerre people use the eight subsection relationship system common in Central Australia and shared by the neighbouring language groups of the Warlpiri and the Alyawarra. The subsection system can be defined as a classificatory system of kin relationships encompassing both Anmatyerre people and Altyerrenge beings. Thus for the Anmatyerre people the relationship system is a clear manifestation of the links between the physical and mystical dimensions of life and is an important aspect of Anmatyerre cosmology. Although Ti-Tree Station encompasses six areas of country, the land claimants presented evidence to the Land Commissioner that this did not indicate ownership by six distinct groups. Rather, they argued that they were all one group. The land claim found that the owners comprised a single descent group with six sub-groups linked to particular areas of land. This finding reflects the extensive interrelationships among the sub-groups, a process intensified by colonisation. That is, in the past the sub-groups may have been distinct descent groups, but as a result of the conflict, disease and common occupation that occurred on Ti-Tree following contact with non-Aborigines, these distinct descent groups became extensively interrelated. The Land Commissioner did not make any comment on this, although he noted that by locating themselves within one descent group, the Ti-Tree claimants had distinguished themselves from other Anmatyerre claimants on other properties, such as Mt Allan, or from claims associated with the nearby Warlpiri people on Mt Barkly and Willowra. This distinction has important implications for the management of the cattle station. The implications will be
explored latter in this study. A comparison between the Anmatyerre, Warlpiri and Alyawarra subsections is shown in Figure 40.

Figure 40: Anmatyerre, Warlpiri and Alyawarra Subsections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anmatyerre</th>
<th>Warlpiri</th>
<th>Alyawarra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kngwarreye</td>
<td>Junagarrayi(m)</td>
<td>Kngwarreye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nungarrayi(f)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penangke</td>
<td>Japanankga(m)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Napanangka(f)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peltharre</td>
<td>Japaljarri(m)</td>
<td>Petyarre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Napajarri(f)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pengarte</td>
<td>Janangardi(m)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Napangardi(f)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngale</td>
<td>Jangala(m)</td>
<td>Purle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nangala(f)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perrwerle</td>
<td>Jupurrurla</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nupurrula</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kemarre</td>
<td>Jakamarra (m)</td>
<td>Kemarre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nakamarra (f)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpetyane</td>
<td>Jampijimpa (m)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nampijimba (f)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kesteven S L, 1978; Peterson et al, 1978; Peterson N & Young E, 1981; Avery D, 1986

Aboriginal owners and managers

Like other desert Aboriginal groups the Anmatyerre distinguish between those who own the land, the *(Pmereke Artweye)* and those who have a responsibility for managing activities on the land *(Kwertengwerle)*. The *Pmereke Artweye* ownership rights are understood by all members of the descent group and their
obligations are generally implicit. The role of the Kwertengwerle is more explicit, although it can vary across a range of land management activities. In general the Kwertengwerle have a responsibility for managing ceremonies, making sure people know that they are in the right place, preparing the ceremony area, painting the participants, as well as opening the ceremonies with dance. These Kwertengwerle duties will be carried out by various individuals within the groups of people eligible to be Kwertengwerle depending on the nature of the ceremony, the knowledge, the kinship relationship and the experiences of the particular individual.

Brief overview of the non-Aboriginal history of Ti-Tree Station

During the construction of the Overland Telegraph between Adelaide and Darwin a construction camp was established at Ti-Tree Well. In 1888, 64 sq km was reserved as a Telegraph Reserve and a linesman’s camp. A post office with telegraph and later a telephone exchange was also established. The post office is still in operation although the telegraph line and the manually operated telephone switchboard ceased operation in 1984 following the introduction of the microwave link (Phillpot, 1984, pers obs).

In 1919 Bill Heffernan applied for a pastoral lease either side of the Stuart Highway (as a returned serviceman). By late 1921, after a number of successful droving trips, Heffernan was in a position to stock the property. He located his initial camp within the Telegraph Reserve as this was the only permanent water source. He also established a store, a post office and a telegraph station (Scherer,
1993:17-18) while working as a linesman for the Overland Telegraph. In between these duties Heffernan continued to develop the station.¹

Between 1922 and 1928 Heffernan used surface water to maintain his growing herd. However, with the onset of the 1928-1931 drought, Heffernan was forced to develop a number of wells on the eastern and western side of the property. The same year Heffernan leased the operations of his store, post office and telegraph station and moved out to the Hansen River, locating the homestead where the Nturiya community is now. Heffernan’s relationship with the Aborigines living at Ti-Tree appears to have been one of paternal respect with the Aborigines looking to Heffernan for protection. For example, while on a droving trip Heffernan picked up two young Arrente stockmen in the Kimberley who had been coerced into a droving camp and were now terrified because they were living out of their own country. Heffernan was more than happy to bring them home to Central Australia and deliver them to their relations at Yambah (Heffernan, 1968). During the Coniston massacre in 1928 Ti-Tree became something of a haven for people fleeing the killing grounds. Heffernan’s own comment on this period is revealing:

> [t]he whole sad episode then finished up in a punitive expedition under Mounted Constable Murray, who became responsible for the loss of many innocent lives (Scherer, 1996:24).

¹ Bill Heffernan was an experienced bushman having traversed the NT, the Kimberley, Queensland and New South Wales as a drover prior to joining the AIF as a trooper in the 3rd Light Horse in 1914.
Thus Heffernan and his wife\(^2\) had a good rapport with the Aboriginal community in spite of their often paternalistic and ethnocentric attitudes. For example, Heffernan’s Aboriginal head stockman was a non-initiated Arrente man from Yambah who was married to a local woman. Heffernan’s choice of a man with no traditional standing in the community to act as his link with the Ti-Tree Aboriginal community displays a lack of cultural knowledge and understanding that was typical of the time.

The cattle station was progressively developed after the second world war with its best years coming between 1949 and 1962 when the seasons were benign and cattle prices comparatively high. During this period Heffernan sank numerous wells, constructed a number of wood yards and developed some holding paddocks. Heffernan also purchased the neighbouring property of Woola Downs, which was incorporated into the station in 1950. The property now supported three full-time non-Aboriginal employees and their families as well as three full-time Aboriginal employees and up to ten Aboriginal ringers during mustering. Cattle numbers grew until by 1962 the property was carrying in excess of 5,000 head (AIAB, 1969).

However, with the onset of the 1962-1967 drought, the herd size was not sustainable and numbers were substantially reduced. By 1968 the property was only running approximately 1,500 breeding cattle (Heffernan, 1969). The costs of the drought and Heffernan’s age meant that, at the end of the drought, much of the infrastructure was run down. Heffernan died in 1969. Three years after his

\(^2\) Heffernan married Miss Frieda Lehman in 1938.
death, Mrs Heffernan decided to retire and sell the property to the Aboriginal people. Negotiations to complete the sale of the property were completed in 1976. During the three-year intervening period little investment was made in either the infrastructure or the beef herd, although the collapse of the beef market in 1974 meant that any opportunity to do so was extremely limited.

The animal management strategy adopted by Heffernan was typical of most cattle stations of that period. Cattle were mustered off water points, and breeding stock and calves were drafted off, as were those cattle selected for sale. The calves were then branded. The cattle selected for sale were then driven to market or the railhead by drovers. After World War II the cattle were generally trucked to the railhead at Alice Springs by road train. However, even as late as the 1970s, mobs of cattle were occasionally still being driven to Alice Springs.

Other changes in the Tea Tree District prior to 1972

The population of Anmatyerre living at Tea Tree and at Ti-Tree Station had been relatively small (some forty people) until the 1970s. NT Administration reports (NT Social Welfare Branch Reports, 1971) indicate twenty people living at the township and forty living at Ti-Tree Station. In 1971 the Anmatyerre living at Aileron Station some seventy miles south of Tea Tree Township moved to a living area six kilometres south of the township. The new community, called Pmara Jutunta, consisted of 120 people located in an area of approximately 2.9 sq km. Initially it was proposed to excise the area from the pastoral lease and negotiations were under way with Mrs Heffernan to effect the excision when the
sale of the pastoral property to the ALFC made the excision unnecessary as the property was now Aboriginal owned and there was, therefore, no threat to the continued residence of the people living at Pmara Jutunta, as there may have been if the station had been sold to non-Aboriginal people. Those Anmatyerre living in the Tea Tree Township also relocated to Pmara Jutunta.

Management of Ti-Tree Station 1972-1975

Following completion of the negotiations to sell the property, Mrs Heffernan left and the property was managed by her manager until a commercial company representing the Ti-Tree Aboriginal community could be established. The company established to do this was a shelf company (renamed the Puraiya Cattle Company) the majority of shareholders of which were from the Ti-Tree community. In purchasing the property the ALFC resolved that it approved a “grant of interest” to Purai Pty Ltd [sic] to be held in “trust for the Aranda and Anmidjarra people”.

Negotiations for the sale of Ti-Tree were complicated by the organisational and administrative changes that accompanied the Whitlam Government’s change in Aboriginal Affairs policy from one of assimilation to one of self-determination. As has been described in chapter 3, these changes included the establishment of the DAA and the ALFC which were accompanied by significant changes in the personnel and in the organisational structure of the two agencies. For example, the NT Social Welfare Division was absorbed into the DAA and an Assistant Secretary from the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet became the NT Director
of the DAA. At district level other staff changes occurred, including the withdrawal of field staff from communities and a reduction in the overall number of field staff. Many of the more experienced field staff left and there were difficulties in recruiting new DAA field staff (DAA, 1975/76). In addition, the DAA and the ALFC took time to put in place new administrative procedures.

All these changes impacted on the process of purchasing Ti-Tree in three ways. Firstly, the purchase of Ti-Tree involved decisions at the district, regional (NT) and central office (Canberra). Secondly, the change to field staff meant that the purchase became a stop/go process as one officer left and a new officer took up responsibility for the purchase (a review of files indicates that up to ten different officers were involved in district negotiations between 1972 and 1976). Thirdly, there was tension between DAA operational management of the purchase process and the ALFC funding of the purchase (Palmer, 1988:51).

Nevertheless at the end of 1975 the purchase of Ti-Tree Station by the ALFC was approved and the property was officially handed over in 1976.

One significant aspect of the sale of Ti-Tree is that, just prior to the sale, Mrs Heffernan excised one square mile from the lease at six-mile bore. This site was thirteen kilometres south of the Tea Tree Township. The area had previously been used by the Agricultural Branch of the NT Administration for horticultural research. The primary purpose of the research had been to identify commercially viable horticultural varieties of grapes, tomatoes, olives and curcubits. In 1974 the technical officer who had previously conducted the research on the block (with
Mrs Heffernan’s agreement and support from the Primary Industries Board) applied for an agricultural excision, for the purpose of establishing a commercial horticultural block. The excision was approved in 1974 (Phillpot, 1977:24).

Management of Ti-Tree Station 1975-1983

The completion of the purchase of the Ti-Tree pastoral lease created a new role for the Anmatyerre people living on Ti-Tree – that of owners and managers of a commercial beef cattle enterprise. Prior to this they had been a resident labour-force dependent upon the goodwill of the non-Aboriginal owner. Ti-Tree was sold during the Fraser Government’s policy period of self-management. The purchase was justified by the ALFC on the basis that it would achieve three objectives of the Fraser Government’s Aboriginal Affairs policy. That is, it would:

1. Provide a measure of land tenure for the resident communities;
2. Enable the resident communities to manage themselves; and
3. Increase the resident communities’ economic self-sufficiency.

(New Government Policies, 1975, Liberal Party)

The extent to which these policy objectives were achieved will be assessed in the following sections of this chapter.
Management

Puraiya Cattle Company took over the management of the Ti-Tree pastoral lease in mid-1976. The cattle company's objectives, as stated in the Articles of Incorporation, state that it would manage the pastoral lease on behalf of any Anamidjara or Aranda (Arrente) people living at Ti-Tree. This clause is consistent with the Deed of Trust approved by the ALFC (Maurice, 1987). The Puraiya Cattle Company is a public company with six shareholders resident at Ti-Tree Station and two shares held by the ALFC. The shareholders are able to elect local residents as directors. The fact that the Deed of Trust and the Puraiya Cattle Company Articles refer to Anmatyerre and Arrente people indicates a lack of social and anthropological field work by either the ALFC or DAA field staff involved in the purchase of the property. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the principal language of the people living at Ti-Tree station is the Anmatyerre not Arrente, and although the two language groups have some common cultural affiliation, the Arrente have no land ownership association with Ti-Tree Station. The way the management of the Puraiya Cattle Company was structured also indicates a lack of appreciation of Anmatyerre traditional structures. There were in fact two major gaps in the representation of the shareholders/directors. Firstly, the six individual shareholders who also became the directors of the Puraiya Cattle Company only represented two of the resident communities living on the Ti-Tree pastoral lease, that is, Ntureye and Woola Downs. No-one living at Pmara Jutunta was represented either as a shareholder or director. Secondly, the shareholder/director representation was not representative of the descent groups (see Figure 41), including those living elsewhere. For example, Figure 41
indicates that only three of the descent groups were represented as either shareholders or directors.

**Figure 41: Puraiya Cattle Company Directors Descent Residential Location and Group Affiliation 1976-1996**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shareholder</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Residential Location</th>
<th>Descent Group</th>
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<td>Ntureye</td>
</tr>
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<td>Angitye</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Woola Downs</td>
<td>Ilkawerne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy Nelson</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>Ilkawerne</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Puraiya Cattle Company Articles of Association, and Hanlon & Phillpot, unpublished data.*

Concurrent with the establishment of the cattle company, the community at Ti-Tree was incorporated as the Nturiya (Ntureye) Community under the NT Associations Ordinance. The purpose of incorporating the community was to establish a legal entity that could receive and acquit funding for town maintenance, housing and public utilities. Pmara Jutunta had been incorporated for similar purposes when they had been relocated from Aileron.

Immediately following the purchase of Ti-Tree Station, the ALFC insisted that the Manager be appointed by the Australian Agricultural Consulting Management Company (AACM). AACM is an agribusiness consulting company which was retained by the ALFC to advise on pre-property purchase and pastoral property management. There were almost constant clashes between the manager and the directors of Ti-Tree over directors’ access to vehicles and other resources owned by the station (Reid, 1977). At the end of 1977 the services of the manager and of AACM services were terminated. Confusion among directors over the respective
roles of shareholders, directors and the manager appears to have been significant (Dunlop & McGlashon, 1986). There are no records of any training or development programs offered to directors, although there were a series of meetings to explain how the Puraiya Cattle Company was supposed to work (Murray Pierce, 1981).

Following AACM’s departure, the DAA sought to put in place other management and development arrangements to support the three groups located on Ti-Tree Station. Following some consultation with each group, the DAA, with the agreement of all three communities, appointed the Finke River Mission (FRM) as the community development and management advice agency. FRM had a long association with the Anmatyerre people and with the non-Aboriginal people in the Ti-Tree area. As early as the 1930s, Pastor Fred Albrecht had regularly conducted mission patrols in the area from Hermannsburg and work had commenced on an Anmatyerre Bible (Henson, 1992). As a result of these contacts, one Anmatyerre man at Pmara Jutunta was undergoing theological training leading to ordination, and a number of others were undertaking theological studies. Included in these studies was a literacy and numeracy component. Mr and Mrs Heffernan had also had close contact with the Lutherans at Hermannsburg, perhaps not surprisingly given Mrs Heffernan’s German heritage and her own Lutheran affiliations (Scherer, 1996:22). The appointment of FRM, therefore, ensured some continuity of professional advice as most FRM staff had been in the area for at least two decades and nearly all FRM staff were able to speak the Arrente language which was understood by the Anmatyerre. Given this long term association with the Anmatyerre people, it should not be surprising that in appointing a new manager
for the Puraiya Cattle Company, the directors appointed a man who had been overseer of the cattle operations at Hermannsburg for twenty years. The new manager elected not to live permanently at the station and instead commuted weekly from Alice Springs. The homestead became an office and visitors' quarters.

In 1979, following tension over FRM's authoritative approach, FRM withdrew from any involvement in either the Puraiya Cattle Company or Nturiya Community because of significant differences of opinion about their management. Following the withdrawal of FRM, the manager, previously appointed by FRM, became the sole source of advice and management support to the cattle company and the community. Concern about this situation was raised by both FRM and DAA field officers. However, these officers adopted the view that under the policy of self-management the directors and the elected community elected leaders could take whatever management decisions they wished. Therefore, no departmental action was taken to deal with the situation, despite the fact that the DAA had a legitimate and direct relationship in the management of the company through the two shares in the Puraiya Cattle Company still held by the ALFC. Concerns about the fact that the directors and community-elected leaderships were dependent on one person for advice (IAD, 1983:140) continued to be expressed, particularly when it became apparent that between 1980 and 1983 there had been no directors' meetings, annual general meetings or community elections in accordance with the community constitution. In other words, both the Puraiya Cattle Company and the Nturiya Community operated
illegally, that is, they operated outside their Articles of Incorporation or constitution for at least three years.

The tension between the Ntureye descent group at the Ti-Tree Station and the Ilkawerne descent group at Woola Downs intensified in 1982. This tension had been noted during the property purchase assessment in 1976 (Browning & Cook, 1975) but had been ignored by the DAA and the ALFC when the Puraiya Cattle Company was established. The Ilkawerne descent group resided at Adelaide Bore on the old Woola Downs side of the station. This group had close associations with the Pmara Jutunta group and FRM. When FRM withdrew, the Nelson, Purvis and Price families petitioned the shareholders (of whom they represented three) and the directors to divide the lease into two even areas and for the assets to be shared equally. This was agreed to in July 1982. However, the division could hardly be said to be equitable. The Ilkawerne mob on the Woola Downs side received a set of portable yards and $100,000 in cash from reserves of $200,000. The Ti-Tree side retained $100,000 plus the store, the workshops and all the vehicles with the exception of those vehicles already purchased for the directors who resided at Woola Downs. The shareholders and directors representing the Ilkawerne descent group resigned their positions on the Puraiya Cattle Company, although they did not proceed to incorporate as a legal entity.

In August 1983, a further meeting of the Ilkawerne group and the Nturiya group was convened by the ADC (who now retained the original ALFC shares in the company in place of the DAA). This meeting discussed the situation. During the meeting, the Ilkawerne groups expressed concern that the station was not being
run properly and that their group’s needs were being ignored (IAD, 1983). The ADC responded by suggesting that if the Ilkawerne group were to agree to a reunification of the pastoral operations, the ADC would support the provision of community infrastructure and other development support for their group. On the basis of this commitment the two groups agreed to reunify the pastoral operations, although the groups would operate as two separate groups in respect to ADC or DAA community development funding. That is, the community would remain separate. Because of the failure to conduct regular meetings of either the community or the cattle company, neither organisation could meet DAA or ADC grant conditions. As a consequence, the Puraiya Cattle Company had to assume responsibility for funding community infrastructure, which included the purchase and operation of the power plant, the water supply, store and community vehicles.

**Employment**

Between 1976 and 1983 the Puraiya Cattle Company did not employ many local Anmatyerre people. IAD reports (1983) indicate that in addition to the manager there was only one permanent employee and ten casual stockmen during mustering time. This is less than the staff employed during the Heffernan’s time, although it is consistent with the changing labour patterns in the industry. DAA reports (IAD, 1983) indicate that the manager adopted a policy of minimising labour through the use of helicopter mustering and trap yards. There was little training offered to any of the younger residents and those stockmen who were offered training came from the families of the six company directors. It should
also be noted that the one permanent Anmatyerre employee was the son of the Anmatyerre head stockman employed during the Heffernan's time.

**Herd management**

In 1976 the Ti-Tree herd was in excess of 4,000 poor quality short horn drought master cattle. Initially, turn off levels were low as the market was low. The manager’s salary was subsidised by a DAA grant and, because there were some grant funds for fencing and maintenance, there was not a great pressure to sell cattle. However, because of Ti-Tree’s proximity to the Stuart Highway, a lucrative market did develop with the local Alice Springs butchers.

Because the purchase of the station coincided with almost a decade of above average seasons, Ti-Tree experienced vigorous pasture growth. As a consequence, herd fertility rates were high and, together with the low turn off levels, this enabled the herd to build up to well above the recommended stocking rate of 4,500 head (NT Department of Lands, 1983). There are no accurate records of the number of cattle on the station because all of the station records were destroyed in 1982. DPP BTEC records (DPP, 1977-1983) indicate that numbers of cattle in the early 1980s could have been as high as 8,500. The recovery of prices in 1977 enabled the Puraiya Cattle Company to increase its turn off and this offset a gradual reduction in DAA grant support. In 1978 the Puraiya Cattle Company commenced its first BTEC approved program. This program was based upon a partial destocking of the herd and a test and slaughter program. The income from the partial destocking was then to be used to improve
both the herd and the infrastructure. However, by 1980 the test and slaughter program had failed and a full destock of the property commenced. By 1983 the property was 90% destocked with the remaining 10% un-musterable and, therefore, classified by the DPP to be shot out. In addition to the remaining cattle there were also approximately 200 brumbies and feral donkeys on the property. The presence of feral animals meant that fences were continually damaged and, until paddocks could be secured, the DPP would not approve restocking.

Thus, while it would be at least two to three years before the property could restock, it would have to have the financial resources to maintain all of the bores, yards and fences and additional capital to purchase a new herd, as the $100,000 held in reserve (originally $200,000 but reduced to $100,000 because of the station split) was insufficient to restock the property (IAD, 1983).

**Property development**

The property was extensively improved during the years 1972-1983. Some 92 km of internal fencing and 100 km of boundary fencing were constructed. Of the twelve bores on the station, three were equipped with engines only and nine with engines and windmills. Six new steel trap and drafting yards were constructed to replace the older wooden ones. The remaining wooden yards suffered further deterioration, although management was able to compensate with a set of portable yards. The station infrastructure was in fair to poor condition with the homestead being wrecked during late 1982. Other sheds and workshops were in fair condition, but lacked the basic equipment such as welding, vehicle maintenance
tools and a proper tack for horse work. Towards the end of 1982 and the beginning of 1983 fences began to deteriorate as the station’s cash flow dried up.

Vehicles were also a problem during this period. The cattle company had purchased a number of vehicles for station work, the directors and the community. These purchases included four vehicles for directors, two community trucks and two store vehicles. At the end of 1983, with the exception of one community truck and the two store vehicles, none of these vehicles were operating and the reduced cash flow from cattle sales meant that the station could not afford to repair them.

The store

In 1979 the Puraiya Cattle Company established a store at the Nturiya Community. This involved the construction of a retail building with drygoods storage, freezer and coolrooms, plus the purchase of stock. The cattle manager’s son and daughter-in-law were then employed as managers and the store quickly developed an annual turnover of $300,000. In 1982 the store managers resigned. The new store manager gained the support of the Puraiya Cattle Company directors by funding the repair of all their vehicles and providing money for directors’ personal trips (Phillpot, 1983, *pers. obs.*). There was also a substantial reduction in stock-on-hand and an increase in the number of creditors. In response to this situation the IAD, which was providing financial advice to the Puraiya Cattle Company, requested an audit and also asked the ADC to call a shareholders’ meeting. The Regional Director of the ADC declined on the
grounds that, under the self-management policy guidelines, the issue was one for
the community to resolve.

However, an ADC Commissioner who lived on a nearby community disagreed.
Because this person was traditionally an Aboriginal Man of High Degree (Elkin,
1977) he was able to call a community meeting at which there were no non-
Aboriginal people present. Following that meeting the IAD was instructed to call
in the auditors. Two days before the auditors arrived, all Puraiya Cattle Company
records on the station were destroyed. The store manager then left, leaving the
store $100,000 in debt and with minimal stock-on-hand (IAD, 1983). A new store
manager was appointed. The store manager's husband was appointed as a part-
time stock overseer because there were insufficient funds to employ a full-time
cattle manager.

Other developments in the Tea Tree Township and District

Between 1975 and 1983, a number of developments associated with the Tea Tree
township and district also affected the Anmatyerre pastoral operations at Ti-Tree
Station. In 1977 the caravan school that had previously existed at Tea Tree was
replaced with a permanent structure built to cater for 500 students. The new
school was so big that a new power house had to be constructed to meet its power
requirements. Because the new school was obviously too big for the available
students, a decision was taken to bus children from the station communities at
Anningie, Mt Skinner, Pmara Jutunta, Stirling, Pine Hill and Aileron. The non-
Aboriginal population in Tea Tree also increased because of the school. In
addition to the teachers, there was a requirement for bus drivers, school cleaners, yardmen and additional powerhouse maintenance support. One consequence of the increase in the non-Aboriginal population was that the Tea Tree Progress Association became increasingly active and began to assume some functions of a local government, for example, town beautification and rubbish collection.

During this period the Stuart Highway was re-aligned and became a two lane highway rather than the single lane of bitumen that had been constructed during World War II. This, together with the establishment of the microwave link communication towers, which allowed for fax, direct-dial telephone and improved access to national radio, increased the communities’ access to the outside world. In 1982 the Central Land Council commenced the preparation of the Ti-Tree land claim.

Management of Ti-Tree Station 1983-1996

At the beginning of 1983, the IAD submitted an overall development plan for the property. The plan outlined three options and the directors decided to implement the option that enabled a slow build-up of the herd over six years with grant funds and the re-establishment of yards, water supplies and fences using labour paid for under various labour market programs.

This decision was subject to funding but was pursued with some success. In addition to developing a whole property management plan, a number of other
developments would influence the dynamics of all the communities (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) in the Tea Tree District. These developments included:

1. the completion of the land claim and the granting of Aboriginal Title to the claimants;
2. the expansion of horticultural production in the Tea Tree district; and
3. the incorporation of the Tea Tree township, Nturiya community, Pmara Jutunta and Adelaide Bore (Woola Downs) as a community government under the NT Local Government Act.

The following section looks at these developments in more detail.

Management

The management structure established in 1983, that is, the operation of the cattle enterprise over the whole of the property, continued throughout the 1983-1996 period. In late 1983 funding was obtained from the ADC for a manager’s wage and the store no longer had to sustain the cost of the manager. The manager’s position now became a full-time position. In 1983/84 restocking commenced and funding was obtained for a Community Employment Project (CEP) to repair yards and fences. These activities were consistent with the IAD plan (Dunlop & McGlashon, 1985:22).
The reunification of the cattle operation occurred in 1983 with the result that the original directors were returned to the Puraiya Cattle Company Board of Directors. Regular cattle company meetings were established and the Puraiya Cattle Company became an active participant in the CAAPA.

In 1992 the store manager and the cattle manager resigned and a new store manager was appointed. A part-time cattle adviser/manager was also appointed. This person had substantial experience in the pastoral industry and had previously worked as the manager at Willowra, an Aboriginal owned cattle station 180 km north-west of Ti-Tree. Consequently, he was used to working with Aboriginal people and had a good grasp of the management of the newly purchased herd.

Funding

The ADC acted on the recommendations of the 1983 IAD property planning study and $300,000 was provided for restocking over three years. In 1984/85, $300,596 was provided under a CEP for fencing and yard improvements and $78,000 was provided for a manager’s salary and for administration. In 1986/87, the ABTA provided an additional $150,000 for livestock, $47,200 for improvements to waters and, in 1987/88, yards were provided with funds from the ABTA. The financial pressure on the Puraiya Cattle Company was further reduced in 1984/85 when the NT Department of Community Development and the ADC took over the funding of power and water to the Nturiya, Pmara Jutunta and Adelaide Bore communities. The level of funding received by the Puraiya Cattle Company is shown in the Figure 42.
Figure 42: Funding for the Puraiya Cattle Company 1983-1987

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Source: CAAPA property records held by Flattum, J, 1983-1987

Employment

Between 1983 and 1985, 15 to 18 people were employed by the station under the CEP, mainly on fencing and yard repairs. In addition, a number of contractors were employed to build new fences and yards. After 1986 employment was reduced to the manager and one permanent employee with occasional casual labour or contractors being used to repair windmills and fences. Several times between 1983 and 1996 the communities on Ti-Tree Station were asked by the DAA, the ADC and ATSIC to consider the introduction of a CDEP, and each time the request was rejected. The basis for the rejection of CDEP was the belief prevalent among the Anmatyerre people that they should receive real wages for real work or they should receive full unemployment benefits. When asked why they held this view Patch Price from Adelaide Bore replied: "We cattlemen, we bin fight for 'ward wages, we not gunna go back to little bit money" (Price P, 1993, pers. com.). However, as the herd increased there was an increased demand for stock workers, which the station could not fund. To solve this problem, the combined communities on Ti-Tree Station adopted a novel approach – some twenty young men underwent a twelve-week stock and station course. Following the course, the manager allowed the young men to use station horses for rodeo,
gymkhana and other recreation activities provided they assisted him with mustering and station maintenance. Although participation by any one individual on any one day was purely voluntary, with the mustering camp or work gang always being made up of different individuals there were always enough workers to complete the necessary tasks. This practice has continued to this day. In addition, the community council requested the local magistrate to issue community service orders for work on the station instead of fines or jail sentences for drinking offences. The community council then went a step further and decided that if anyone missed one day of a service order then they were required to start their community service all over again. In 1993 this proved so effective that one young man had been in the stock camp for nine months fulfilling an original 200 hour community service order (Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993, pers. obs.). Thus the Puraiya Cattle Company has continued to use local labour at minimum cost while the herd rebuilt.

**Herd management**

In 1985 the property was restocked with 1,500 head of Braford cattle. As these cattle were the nucleus of a commercial herd, turn-off levels were kept to a minimum.
Property development

Overall property development stabilised during the period of the Hawke and Keating Governments and the major focus was on herd management, particularly after the completion of the 1986 CEP project. One major change to the structure of the Puraiya Cattle Company was that the store was separately incorporated. It could, therefore, be said that by 1996 nearly all of the major recommendations of the IAD study had been implemented.

Other developments in the Tea Tree Township and District

In 1983 the CLC commenced working with the Tea Tree Anmatyerre communities to prepare a land claim under the NT Land Rights Act 1977. A recommendation was made to the Minister to grant the claim in 1986. The claim was granted in 1987. The process of preparing the claim was a particularly important one for the Anmatyerre living on Ti-Tree Station. Firstly, it helped them redefine their identity. As articulated by a number of claimants during the claim process “We are all one mob”. Secondly, it established Ti-Tree Station not just as a cattle station, but as Anmatyerre heartland. Thirdly, it expanded the local leadership’s awareness of the larger political picture.

The granting of the land claim was not without its effect on the non-Aboriginal population of Tea Tree Township. Although the township was outside the claim, there was a degree of insecurity among the non-Aboriginal residents. This manifested itself in an increased level of political activity. Following the granting
of the land claim, the Tea Tree Progress Association increased the number of
government functions it carried out. By the late 1980s it developed a sporting
complex, established an all-weather airstrip, a cemetery and a garbage collection
process, and had commenced discussions with the NT Office of Local
Government on the possibility of establishing a community government council
under the NT Local Government Act. The Progress Association was not entirely
made up of non-Aboriginal people – Pastor Eric Pananka from Pmara Jutunta
served on the Executive. However, his role appears to have been mainly one as a
conduit for communicating with the Anmatyerre. Certainly, during this period the
Tea Tree Progress Association did not provide any services to Pmara Jutunta or
any of the other communities. Alcohol abuse within the Tea Tree Township
became an increasing problem during the period and internal conflicts within the
communities and with the police intensified. This culminated in two incidents in
1988. The first was when two elderly women, very much under the influence of
alcohol, attacked two police officers with frozen kangaroo tails. Not long after
this incident, the police shot and killed two young men while attempting to arrest
them after a disturbance at the hotel. While these incidents created a great deal of
tension they also created an opportunity for the Anmatyerre leaders to argue for
policy and administrative changes which would reduce the impact of alcohol on
their people. Subsequently, the leadership of all three communities (lead by
Pastor Eric Pananka) successfully negotiated with the Liquor Commission to
declare their communities “dry”, restrict take-away sales and limit hotel opening
hours.
The success of the land claim and the struggle to combat the effects of alcohol abuse increased both the sense of Anmatyerre identity and the skills of the local political leadership. The Anmatyerre leadership then began to seek ways of expanding their influence in the wider political field. At first they tried to do this within the CLC and, for a time, they were successful when a Kaytetye man (whose mother was Anmatyerre) became Chair of the CLC. However, after his death, the Warlpiri and Arrente resumed their dominance of the CLC Executive. The Anmatyerre leadership responded to their loss of influence within the CLC by pushing for their own land council. This struggle is continuing.

Following the shootings and the changes to the liquor regulations there was a growing awareness that the interests of the Aboriginal residents and the non-Aboriginal residents were intertwined and that both groups could benefit if they worked together. As a consequence, negotiations commenced to establish a multi-racial community government based on the Anmatyerre living on Ti-Tree Station and the non-Aboriginal people living in the Tea Tree Township. These negotiations were successful and in 1995 the Anmatyerre Community Government Council was established.

During this period the non-Aboriginal population in the Tea Tree District expanded as a result of the expansion of the horticultural industry. The original horticultural block on Ti-Tree Station was subdivided into six blocks and two table grape farms were established on Pine Hill Station (one of 100 hectares and one of 50 hectares), 50 km south of Tea Tree Township. The expansion of the horticultural industry did not increase the employment of Aboriginal people, nor
did it provide any other benefits. In fact most of the benefits of the horticultural expansion were felt in other regions of Australia (Phillpot, 1989a). That is, labour and capital were imported from elsewhere and the profits were exported out of the NT. Furthermore, from the evidence presented during the land claim, the expansion of the horticultural industry may be to the detriment of the Aboriginal communities because it may be reducing the supplies of underground water.


Determining the extent to which the purchase of Ti-Tree pastoral lease and the establishment of the Puraiya Cattle Company achieved the Commonwealth Government’s policy objectives is problematic at best. The following section comments on the policy success of the Puraiya Cattle Company and identifies a number of additional policy issues that have not been addressed within the existing policy framework.

While the purchase of Ti-Tree Station was initiated under the Whitlam Government’s policy of self-determination, it was finalised under the Fraser Government’s policy of self-management, which aimed to increase the capacity of communities to manage their own affairs, increase economic self-sufficiency and increase Aboriginal land ownership. In terms of land ownership, the purchase of Ti-Tree certainly provided a land base for the Anmatyerre people living in the area. The operation of the station also increased the services available to the Nturiya community in that the cattle operations supported the establishment of the
store and the provision of power and water supplies, as well as vehicles to the
directors of the cattle company. However, the provision of these services came at
the expense of the long-term viability of the cattle enterprise as the funds were
not then available for its development.

The question as to whether the purchase of Ti-Tree Station increased the self-
management capacity of the Anmatyerre people is more problematic. It would
appear that, given the absence of meetings between 1979 and 1983, most of the
management decisions were made by either the station manager or the store
manager with the informal support of the directors. The directors only represented
three of the traditional land owning descent groups and the shareholders and
directors were one and the same. Therefore, the directors and shareholders were
only partially representative of the Anmatyerre community.

The limited representation of the community among the directors and
shareholders had a number of important consequences. Firstly, the shareholders
and directors increased their political power through the acquisition of station
provided vehicles. Secondly, there was an almost permanent struggle for power
between the Nturiya group and the Ilkawerne group, which manifested itself in
the division of the station in 1982. Thirdly, the Pmara Jutunta group was denied
any access to resources and any decision-making involved in the cattle company.
The assumption that a few people could represent all of the groups living at Ti-
Tree Station was patently false. The shareholder/director company structure was
typical of many holding company arrangements and, in a non-Aboriginal context,
would have been appropriate. However, it did not reflect the traditional structure
of the Anmatyerre community. Furthermore, there appears to have been no attempt to educate all of the groups living on Ti-Tree Station in the operations and legal requirements of a commercial company and, as a consequence, there was confusion over the rights of the manager, the role of directors and the way resources from the cattle company should be distributed. This confusion was long-standing and it manifest itself in a number of ways, most notably in the termination of the ACC manager and the termination of the ex-FRM manager whose role was replaced by a store manager. In each case the services of both managers were terminated when resources provided to the directors were no longer provided by the cattle company.

The general standard of pastoral management was poor. Although there was substantial investment in water supplies, yards and fences, no attempt was made at herd improvement as shown in the failure to maintain a test and slaughter BTEC program. In addition, there was no whole property management plan and management decisions appear to have been made on an ad hoc basis or in response to immediate herd management needs. Despite these factors, the herd build up during the late 1970s generated large cash flows which, in turn, enabled the station to provide a substantial level of self-sufficiency for the community at Nturiya. That this support was funded on the basis of effectively asset stripping the herd also indicates the poor level of management. So while the cattle company did increase the number of services available to the Ntuyira community for a time, it did so at the expense of the long-term viability of the cattle company.
Another aspect of this period is the role of the external agencies. The DAA and the ADC were effectively excluded after 1977 from any direct input to the developments taking place on Ti-Tree Station, as was FRM. There is no doubt that the DAA and the ADC could have intervened as shareholders, particularly when the cattle company was in breach of its constitution. For example, the lack of meetings and the destruction of station records should have been sufficient to justify some intervention. However, despite these events, the Registrar of Incorporations and the Registrar of Associations took no action. The failure of the ADC to take action as a shareholder is significant, given that the failure was justified on the basis of the local interpretation of the Commonwealth Government’s policy of self-management. The lack of action by the DAA and the ADC, despite the breaches of the Companies Act and the NT Associations Incorporation Ordinance, created the impression at the community level that the actions of the managers and directors were legitimate.

The period 1983-1996 was one in which the cattle herd on Ti-Tree Station was re-established and built up to near commercial size. To what extent this process was managed by the local Anmatyerre leadership, and to what extent they were driven by organisations like CAAPA or individuals like the respective managers that managed the property during this time, is difficult to assess. Certainly, the reconstruction of the herd could not have occurred if the Anmatyerre leadership had been against the process. For example, Utopia Station, which was destocked at approximately the same time, never restocked because the Alyawarra leadership was not at all supportive of re-establishing cattle on Utopia. Interviews with the directors of Puraiya Cattle Company in 1993 (Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993b)
indicated strong support for the cattle operations, although all of the directors recognised that the benefits to be derived from cattle were limited. In the same interviews it was clear that the directors’ understanding of their management responsibilities was still fuzzy, although they were conscious of the fact that the manager and other staff had to obtain the approval of the directors before they could do anything. They were also aware of their power to terminate staff. This awareness of the power of directors was certainly a change from the confusion over the role and powers of directors that characterised the 1970s. In this sense, the lessons learned from managing the cattle operations over a twenty-year period had led to some increased understanding of the respective roles in a company structure.

However, the extent to which their management skills had developed commensurate with their political skills is more problematic. Throughout the 1983-1996 period there was always a non-Aboriginal cattle manager and there were two critical periods when the managers were supported by outside advisory bodies (ie, the IAD and CAAPA). In each of these periods the work of the outside agencies made a significant contribution to the future of the station. The IAD played a significant part in developing a ten-year plan and CAAPA in lobbying for funds to implement the plan. The Anmatyerre leadership had minimal involvement in the activities of the IAD. Their involvement in CAAPA was more substantial, with two Anmatyerre leaders sitting on the CAAPA Executive. However, the operations of the cattle company were also a source of significant conflict and the directors had difficulty in resolving the conflict, as is exemplified by the division of the property in 1982. In terms of maintaining the long-term
commercial viability, had the directors been more aware of their options they may have avoided dividing the property and the cash reserves. For example, they could have expanded the shareholding and the size of the board to make it more representative and then sought to develop a property management plan that involved all of the descent groups. Instead they sought to preserve the benefits of the station for themselves and continued to rely on non-Aboriginal people for management support. This suggests that the major advantage of the cattle property to the respective leaders was the benefit derived from having the enterprise, rather than the benefits that could be derived from operating the enterprise as a viable entity.

The organisations responsible for Aboriginal Affairs policy relevant to the Puraiya Cattle Company changed over time. Those organisations responsible for policy implementation were not strictly aligned to the specific policy periods. That is, each of the major agencies' existence overlapped at least one other period of government. For example:

- **DAA** 1972-1990
- **Aboriginal Development Commission** 1980-1990
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission** 1990-current
- **Department of Employment and Industrial Relations** 1978-1988
- **Department of Employment, Education & Training** 1988-1996
- **Department of Employment, Education, Training & Youth Affairs** 1996-current
- **Central Land Council** 1976-current
The administrative practice of each of these organisations varied considerably and this had some impact upon the development of the Puraiya Cattle Company. For example, from 1978 until 1983, the DAA’s and then the ADC’s refusal to become directly involved in either the Puraiya Cattle Company or the Ntureye Community following breaches of grant conditions enabled the non-Aboriginal manager to develop a dominance in both organisations that was not conducive either to Aboriginal participation or to self-determination. It was not until 1983, when an ADC Commissioner took unilateral action, without Alice Springs Regional Office involvement, in supporting community members’ action to dismiss the manager, that the community was able to re-exert its authority (Phillpot, 1983b, *pers. obs.*).

The failure of the DAA and the ADC to take proactive action in a situation where not only grant conditions had been breached, but the two were still shareholders, can be explained by a number of factors. Firstly, there was a reluctance by both DAA officers and ADC officers to interfere in a situation in a manner that would compromise the policy of self-determination or where they could be accused of doing so. There was also confusion over the social and economic objectives of the policy, that is, if a community was enhancing its social autonomy by certain decisions, should a departmental officer then interfere when these same decisions were economically disadvantaging the community? Secondly, there was a shortage of field officers with training in either community development or in the pastoral industry. Thirdly, Ti-Tree had had little contact with government agencies prior to the purchase of the property. This made it difficult for field officers to establish relationships with the Aboriginal community or to provide
advice that would be seen by the Aboriginal community as being more credible than that of the Puraiya Cattle Company manager.

The establishment of the ADC with a clear economic development policy objective resolved some of the confusion over the social and policy objectives of self-determination, but it did not resolve the other administrative factors affecting the Puraiya Cattle Company. That is, under the ADC support for the Puraiya Cattle Company could only be justified on economic viability grounds, hence the IAD feasibility study only addressed the commercial development of the Puraiya Cattle Company and ignored or assumed away all other issues. However, like the DAA, the ADC lacked appropriately trained field staff and, as a consequence, relied first on the IAD and then on CAAPA for advice. The ADC did not establish its own rural extension unit until 1988.

DEIR, or its bureaucratic descendent DEET (now DEETYA), provided funding to the Puraiya Cattle Company from time to time. This support took the form of funding for special work programs or training programs and was irregular and ad hoc.

The other agency that had a close relationship with Ti-Tree was the CLC, particularly during the land claim process. It is interesting to note that, despite the CLC being aware of the dissonance between traditional land ownership as detailed in the land claim and the structure of the Puraiya Cattle Company, the CLC made no attempt to resolve the following issues.
1. How could the complex Anmatyerre land ownership and management relationship be represented in the organisational structure of the company that operates the cattle station?

2. Given the roles of traditional land owners and land managers, who were the most appropriate people to be responsible for managing the cattle property?

3. Given the complexity of traditional land ownership with the existence of six sub-groups coming from one common descent group, how should any benefits from the cattle enterprise be distributed?

Instead, the CLC declined to be involved in any of the cattle station's operations and the ownership status quo was maintained.

Ultimately the negotiation of the land claim had a greater impact on the management skills of the Anmatyerre leadership, although again, it is doubtful if the management skills developed to the same level as their political skills. It was the process of the land claim that enabled the Anmatyerre groups living on Ti-Tree Station to identify as one mob and to reject the notion that the three groups were separate communities. Having articulated that they were one mob, the Anmatyerre leadership then appears to have begun to determine a new future for Anmatyerre. This new future included a reduction of alcohol abuse, increased access to government funding for community facilities, an involvement in local government, and lastly, but certainly not least, the establishment of their own land council. All of these activities had little to do with the operation of the cattle station.

**Conclusion**
Conclusion

Ti-Tree Station has had two sets of owners in the course of its seventy-year history. The first owners (a non-Aboriginal pioneer and his wife) established the station by shrewd dealings and having a capacity to earn non-station income. During their ownership the station was developed to the stage where, at its peak in the 1950s, it supported six permanent families, three Aboriginal and three non-Aboriginal. The station’s commercial viability then declined due to drought and the age of the original settler. When it was sold to the Anmatyerre people it was barely viable.

The sale of the station to the Anmatyerre people was not particularly well managed. The traditional owners and language affiliations were inappropriately identified and the transfer of title unclear and possibly illegal. The structure of the company set up to manage the station was neither representative of all groups living on the station nor reflective of Anmatyerre traditional structures. In this sense the transfer of the property could hardly be said to support the self-management capacity of all the groups living on the property. However, what the sale of the property did do was to provide an immediate benefit to the six families who became shareholders and directors of the cattle company. The purchase of the lease and the establishment of the Puraiya Cattle Company did not make a significant contribution to either the self-determination or self-management capacity of the Anmatyerre communities living on Ti-Tree, although it did expand the services at Ntuyira. However, the six families involved as shareholders and directors developed their management capacity to the point of obtaining benefits
and preserving those benefits, thus ensuring that the cattle company continued to
operate, although it did not achieve any measure of commercial viability until
1996.

The achievement of some commercial viability following the BTEC has only
been possible on the basis of substantial subsidies from the Federal Government.
During the re-establishment phase (1983-1996) the only permanent benefit has
gone to the two managers, with occasional benefits to individual directors and,
perhaps, in terms of self-esteem to the young men who have worked on the
station.

In terms of the land rights objectives of the Whitlam and Fraser Governments, the
purchase of Ti-Tree Station was an intermediate step which was finally achieved
in 1987. In this sense the purchase of Ti-Tree Station eventually led to a situation
in which the land rights objectives of successive Federal Governments were
achieved. The extent to which the purchase of Ti-Tree Station increased the
Anmatyerre communities’ self-sufficiency and/or economic independence is more
problematic. As has been identified, it was a small group of Aboriginal people
and an even smaller group of non-Aboriginal people who benefited from the
operations of the cattle station. However, the continued enjoyment of those
benefits was always dependent upon government support. The role of the cattle
company directors in maintaining their control of the Puraiya Cattle Company
over twenty years demonstrates a significant level of political skill, but this does
not appear to have been translated into cattle management skills, given the
permanent employment of a non-Aboriginal manager for the station. What is clear
is that the purchase of the station provided a foundation for the Anmatyerre
people to develop a new contemporary lifestyle (albeit one that is substantially dependent upon public funds) which retains significant elements of tradition and something of the pastoral experience.
Chapter 5: The Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company – A case study of an Aboriginal owned pastoral enterprise

This chapter examines and analyses the experience of the Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company during the periods described in chapter 3. The framework of the analysis is similar to that used in chapter 4 and will include an analysis of the geography, history and sociology of human settlement, as well as a description of property management and operations during the three policy periods, namely, 1972 to 1975, 1975 to 1983 and 1983 to 1996.

The substantial difference between the Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company and the Puraiya Cattle Company is that, unlike the Puraiya Cattle Company which operated on a conventional pastoral lease, Ngarliyikirlangu was developed from a government training project at Yuendumu Settlement. Part of the purpose of selecting this case study is to provide a basis to compare and contrast the impact of policies on the two different sources of Aboriginal owned cattle enterprises. That is, those that were purchased and those that were developed from either church missions or government settlements.

That is, in terms of the analytical model developed in chapter 1, this chapter examines the experience of a privatised Aboriginal property in the same manner as chapter 4. The focus of this chapter is on the land, community, enterprise, government agency interaction as shown in the shaded area of Figure 43.
From 1969 until 1971 the Author worked in the north-eastern Central Australian Pastoral District as a Patrol Officer in Training (Long, 1992). During that time he was stationed at Yuendumu for monthly periods. Between 1971 and 1974 the Author visited there regularly and was adviser to the cattle company from 1980 to 1985. In 1983/84 the author completed a Feasibility Study of the Cattle Enterprise, which was revisited in 1993 by Hanlon and Phillpot and again in 1996 (CLC, 1996). During these periods the Author had regular and intimate contact with the directors and members of Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company, as well as community residents. It is the Author’s recounts of these contacts that form the basis of this chapter. Where other sources are used, they are referenced.
Figure 43: Bureaucratic encapsulation: critical factors directly involved in the management of Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company
Topography and Geography

Yuendumu lies to the immediate south-east of the Tanami Desert and 360 km north-west of Alice Springs. The area is Aboriginal land held under title granted under the *NT Land Rights Act 1976*. The area lies within the 300 mm isohyet, although rainfall is highly variable. Between 1970 and 1984 the area had an average rainfall of 600 mm per year, but since 1984 average rainfall has been less than 200 mm per year. What rainfall there is generally arrives in the summer months - October to March. When cyclones occur in the north-west during the summer, Yuendumu can experience large falls of rain - up to 150 mm in a day - blown in by the tail end of the cyclone. These large falls of rain fill the rivers, claypans and waterholes, and cause rapid plant growth. However, the deluges can also cut roads, wash out fences and isolate communities for up to a week at a time.

Yuendumu is approximately 280 km from Alice Springs, as shown on Figure 44. Generally the country consists of undulating sandy plains dissected by truncated non-perennial watercourses and claypans. Interspersed across these sandy plains are groups of fragmented sandstone hills such as the Reynolds Ranges, which extend for a little over 150 km and are located some 70 km north-east of Yuendumu, and the Truer/Warlpiri Range which begins immediately south of Yuendumu and runs west-south-west to Vaughan Springs. Between these two ranges there are a number of isolated rocky outcrops such as the Ngarliyikirlangu Hills just north of Yuendumu. These ranges vary between 30 to 50 metres in height above the surrounding countryside and consist mainly of sandstone.
Figure 44: Location of Yuendumu and language boundaries

Source: Indigenous Land Corporation – Language groups adapted from Horton, 1981
Although Yuendumu contains a range of desert flora, the most visually dominant species are the long stretches of spinifex broken up by small, treeless, light brown loam plains. Blue bush and desert plums grow in the sandy loams, as well as a variety of sweet herbage grasses that provide edible seeds and fodder for cattle and game. In the hills are wild oranges, figs and cypress pines. Along the creek beds there are bean trees, coolabah trees and river gums. Ghost gums, blood wood and blue mallee trees are found in drier sites, particularly near the ranges. In addition, acacias, conkerberries, ermorphillias, hakeas, grevilleas and cassias are scattered across the landscape.

Despite the desert nature of Yuendumu the fauna inhabiting the area is extensive. Meggitt (1962:12-13) listed some 164 species identified by the Warlpiri, 108 of which were eaten, although 44 were only rarely eaten. Meggitt also believed that, with the exception of species regarded as taboo for magic/religious reasons, in hard times all of the available species were regarded by the Warlpiri as a potential food source, although the larger and more palatable species are preferred. This view is supported by Young (1981:77) who suggests that, as a consequence of modernisation and access to non-Aboriginal foods, the range of local foods eaten by the Warlpiri is now much less than it used to be, with only 27 species regularly eaten.
Aboriginal occupation

Yuendumu is situated in Ngalia Warlpiri country. The Warlpiri are an Aboriginal linguistic group, commonly called the Warlpiri tribe, which occupies the Tanami region of the Northern Territory. The Ngalia Warlpiri are a subset of the Warlpiri speaking peoples. Other subsets identified by Meggitt (1962:47-48) are the Yalpari, Wanayaka and Warlmala. These groups do not own land. Rather they reflect a common association with natural physical divisions and topography of specific areas within the region occupied by the Warlpiri. Association with these areas influences communication, patterns of travel and minor dialect variations. The area occupied by the Warlpiri and each of the subsets of the Warlpiri people is shown on Figure 44.

The Warlpiri believe that they have always occupied this area and the archaeological evidence supports a continuous occupation for at least 10,000 years (Mulvaney 1975:289). It is therefore reasonable to suppose that for practical purposes the Warlpiri view, that they have always been there, is correct.

The Warlpiri are one of the larger language groups of Central Australia, numbering in excess of three thousand people. They are known for their assertiveness and cultural ethnocentrism. The Warlpiri kinship system is one based upon eight sections or subsections of classification. All Warlpiri males and females fall into one of the sections. Kinship group, or skin grouping, affects all social relationships as it determines who you are, whom you may marry, as well as who your children and grandchildren will be. For example, a Junagari’s
marriage partner should be someone from the Nungala skin group and their children will be Jabaldjari if they are boys and Nabaldjari if they are girls.

Aboriginal owners and managers

The major land owning group among the Warlpiri is the patrilineal clan or descent group, which consists of approximately 25 people and is called a *Kirda*. This group has a strong association with, and ownership of, specific areas of land including significant sites and the tracks between the sites. In poor seasons the descent group congregates around their permanent waterholes. In the good seasons they spread out over their entire area of land. The most important sacred sites are nearly always associated with permanent waterholes (Peterson, 1976:50). Of equal importance are the tracks between sites, as these are the routes by which social and religious co-operation is maintained. As with the Anmatyerre, the land owning descent group, or *Kirda*, does not have overall management responsibility for the ceremonies and rituals associated with a particular piece of country. This is the responsibility of the managers known as the *Kurdunglu*. The *Kurdunglu* is usually made up of a patrilineal clan that is in the opposite patrimoity that is also in a cross cousin relationship. The *Kirda/Kurdunglu* relationships between different subsections at Yuendumu is set out in Figure 45.
Figure 45: Kirda/ Kurdunglu Relationships at Yuendumu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Kirda</strong> (owners)</th>
<th><strong>Kurdunglu</strong> (guardians)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jampijinpa-Jangala</td>
<td>Japaljarri-Japanangka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nampijinpa-Nangala</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jupurrula-Jakamarra</td>
<td>Japangardi-Jungarrayi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napurrula-Nakamarra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jungarrayi-Japaljarri</td>
<td>Jampijinpa-Jupurrula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nungarraya-Napaljarri</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanangka-Japangardi</td>
<td>Jakamarra-Jangala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napanangka-Napangardi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Kesteven S, A Sketch of Yuendumu and its Outstations, ANU, 1978*

While the relationship between the patrilineal descent group (the *Kirda*) and its opposite patrimoiet (the *Kurdunglu*) is a close one, it is not a fixed, unmoving relationship. Sutton (1998:34,36) argues that the relationship between the patrilineal Kirda and the matrilineal Kurdunglu is a complimentary relationship in which the rights of both group are defined by mutual dependence.

The patrilineal Kirda have definite privileges in self-identification with the estate, and in the long term transmissions of intent and right related to land use. Sutton also makes the point that matrilineal rights are limited to one or two generations.

The relatively small size of the clans (less than 30) and the harsh and highly variable environment means that any change in fertility or the sex ratio could dramatically affect clan survival and growth. In bad times clans could die out and their place taken by another. Alternatively, some clans could absorb another, or split to form a new patrilineal clan.
The relationship between land ownership and land use is also complex. People moved extensively for hunting and gathering, ritual purposes and for social contact. As a consequence, it was not unusual for groups or individuals to be living well outside their clan area. However, the 1977 land claim documentation does verify that senior patrilineal clan members tended to live on, use the resources, and care for the area of country which they “owned”. As noted previously, the pattern of land used by each of the patrilineal clan groups oscillated between the outlying areas in good times and the better areas in poor times. The clan and/or descent groups would move to the less favourable areas in good times and, as water and other resources declined, the group would withdraw to core areas where a permanent water supply ensured a continuing supply of food. Because of the variability of the seasons - the long droughts and the sudden monsoonal deluges - the use of the country was highly variable and, to the extent that the seasons were unpredictable, so too was the movement of people.

**Brief overview of the non-Aboriginal history of Yuendumu and other changes in the Yuendumu area prior to 1972**

The Warlpiri maintained close relationships with the Kurinji people (Meggitt 1962:43) in the north and the Anmatyerre in the east, who they regarded as half Warlpiri. They also maintained close relationships with the Pitjantjatjara as well as the Pintubi, who the Warlpiri regarded as country cousins. On the other hand, the Warlpiri tended to have minimal contact with the Kaytetye and the Alyawarra, and they actively discriminated against the Arrernte.
The Warlpiri and Kartangurruru Land Claim (Peterson et al., 1978:10)

Non-Aboriginal incursion into the area occurred late in the history of the NT. A C Gregory did not record any contact when, as part of his 1854 expedition, he travelled as far south as Winnecke Creek. John McDouall Stuart crossed the Hanson River and travelled through the Reynolds Ranges in 1865, but it was not until 1873 that the Warburton Expedition crossed the Tanami and came into contact with the Warlpiri. However, substantial contact with non-Aboriginal people dates from the opening up of the Victoria River District (VRD) and the commencement of pastoral settlement in the 1890s.

The early pastoral contact in the VRD area was quickly followed by the opening up of the Granites Goldfields in the early 1900s. A series of wells was established between the Granites and Hooker Creek and, as the goldfields expanded, a number of Warlpiri began to work for the miners in exchange for rations and oddments. However, relationships were not always cordial and in 1910 some miners were killed and a number of retaliatory raids followed. The gold petered out and non-Aboriginal settlement declined. For example, by 1914 there were only ten miners in the area (Peterson, 1976:14).

After the First World War active pastoral leases were increasingly taken up and by the 1920s pastoralists had occupied country as far north and west as Mt Doreen and Mt Theo. The occupation of pastoral leases brought the Warlpiri into much more frequent contact than previously and, as a result, conflicts between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people increased, culminating in the Coniston massacre of 1928. Official records indicate approximately 28 Warlpiri were killed
in this massacre by police and pastoralists keen to avenge the death of a non-
Aboriginal dingo hunter.

In 1932 more gold was discovered at the Granites and miners again rushed to the
area. As before, a number of Warlpiri worked for the miners. In addition, several
pastoralists operated mining ventures, mostly for wolfram and gemstones. In the
years just prior to World War II, wolfram mining became quite lucrative and
Mr W Braitling operated a large wolfram mine at Mt Doreen Station. During the
1940s, following a series of reports on the state of Aboriginal people in the
Tanami region, pressure began to build for the establishment of an Aboriginal
reserve in the area. The reports of the Reverend Laurie Reece of the Baptist
Union of Australia and that of Patrol Officer Sweeney of the NT Administration
were particularly influential. Sweeney's report went so far as to recommend the
resumption of Mr Braitling's lease (Peterson, 1976:16) and the conversion of the
lease into an Aboriginal reserve. However, after lengthy negotiations (which were
delayed by World War II) between the Native Affairs Branch of the NT
Administration, the Commonwealth and local pastoralists, an Aboriginal reserve
of 2,200 square miles was established at Yuendumu in 1946, although it was not
declared as such until 1956. The area was selected because permanent water had
been established with the drilling of a bore in the Warlpiri Hills on the north west
stock routes and because the land in the immediate vicinity of the bore was
unoccupied Crown land. The country was not particularly suited to cattle, hence
the lack of early pastoral settlement. Yuendumu's suitability for pastoralism
decayed further when the pastoralist at Mt Allan (who was also the NT
Government engineer for the southern region of the NT) asked that 137 square
miles of the proposed Yuendumu Reserve be transferred to the Mt Allan pastoral lease. The application by the pastoralist was opposed by the NT Native Affairs Branch (NAB) on the grounds that the area was some of best pasture in the area and it would be required, if a cattle activity was established, to feed the Warlpiri population at Yuendumu. However, NAB concerns were ignored and the transfer went ahead.

**Yuendumu: A brief overview**

Yuendumu Welfare Settlement had initially been established as part of a program of settling nomadic Aboriginal groups in permanent settlements within Aboriginal reserves established under the Aboriginal Affairs policy of assimilation. The purpose of Yuendumu was to provide for the social welfare of Aboriginal people and to train them in non-Aboriginal skills so that they might one day be assimilated into non-Aboriginal society. One of the policy objectives of institutions like Yuendumu, under both the assimilation policy and later the policy of integration, was the training and employment of Aboriginal people for work within and outside the settlement. As well as employment objectives, Yuendumu was also expected to provide the administrative, health, education and general development functions for the Warlpiri residents. A cattle project was included along with a garden, piggery and poultry project in order to increase the food self-sufficiency of the settlement.

Yuendumu settlement grew quite quickly with an initial population of 400 drawn from the Warlpiri at the Granites and from Mt Doreen station. By the late 1960s
the population was a little over a thousand (Young, 1981; Kesteven, 1978). By 1970 (NT Social Welfare Branch Annual Report, 1970/71) there was a well-established garden, a bakery, a store, a mining company, a housing association and a school council and, until 1972, all of these organisations or services came under the administrative control of the NT Social Welfare Branch. The settlement was administered by a superintendent on the advice of the village council, a representative body of all skin groups living at Yuendumu. The superintendent also served as an ex-officio member of the social club (which ran the store), the housing association and the mining company. The announcement of the Aboriginal Affairs policy of self-determination by the newly elected 1972 Labor Government was the beginning of major structural changes in the administration and development of Yuendumu. These changes included the establishment of a community council as the local governing body, the abolition of the superintendent’s position and the appointment of a community adviser to work with the council. The Training Allowance Scheme was gradually replaced with a system of award wages for a few community council employees, some special work programs for particular activities and the eventual introduction of unemployment benefits. The various enterprises were either privatised or closed. For example, the mining company became an independent body, as did the store and the housing association. The garden, bakery and the communal kitchen all closed and moves commenced to incorporate the cattle project as a pastoral company.
The commencement of cattle operations at Yuendumu

The establishment of the Yuendumu Welfare Settlement in 1946 was the base of the Ngarliyikirrlangu Pastoral Company (NPC). The cattle project was small, initially starting with a herd of 200 head (Evans, 1990). It continued to develop over the years and by 1972 had reached a size of 3,500 head. Further growth was limited by the lack of reliable water sources. For example, in 1972 there were only two reliable bores and one dam available to the entire herd.

Management of the cattle enterprise varied considerably during the years the cattle activity was controlled by the Social Welfare Branch of the NT Administration. As Yuendumu was a government institution, all employees were public servants and appointment to the position of cattle manager had more to do with public service criteria, such as length of service, educational qualifications and whether a candidate was a permanent employee, than actual cattle husbandry skills. Consequently, there were a number of managers who held the position over a number of years with varying degrees of pastoral industry expertise. For example, between 1948 and 1972, ex-cooks, mechanics and poultry farmers were all employed as Yuendumu cattle manager. Income from cattle sales was not returned to the community but instead was paid directly into Commonwealth consolidated revenue.

On the other hand, the cattle project was not reliant on income for either wages or capital development. Wages were initially paid in the form of rations and small amounts of cash allowances under the Settlements Administration. In 1967
rations and cash allowances were replaced with the Training Allowance Scheme. This scheme paid a wage which, at its lowest level, was a little less than the dole and, at its highest level (that is, for gangers and head stockmen) paid a little less than award wages. In addition, settlement residents received a free basic health service, education and subsidised meals at communal kitchens. Some residents also received assistance with free rudimentary housing. By 1978 the annual cost of training allowance support for the cattle enterprise was $80,000 (Young 1981:83).

The capital development necessary to operate the cattle project and other food producing projects was also part of the Social Welfare Branch program and was reliant on annual budget priorities. Enterprise requirements did not guarantee capital development funds. That is, yards, fences and bores could be funded, although actual funding depended on policy objectives, budget allocations and funding priorities established in Canberra and/or Darwin. In short, the major purpose of the cattle enterprise at Yuendumu was to maximise employment, to train Warlpiri men in pastoral skills and to provide fresh meat to the community.

In 1972 the Yuendumu herd had grown to 3,500 (McKell, 1980). This growth was due in part to the particularly good seasons between 1967 and 1972 and the generally low level of turn-off. The low turn-off was directly related to the lack of commercial incentive to sell cattle. Thus, apart from a weekly supply of killers and the odd sale, Yuendumu tended to retain cattle rather than maximise turn-off and profit. There was one set of timber bronco yards. The cattle enterprise had the
use of a settlement administration truck and a four wheel drive vehicle and owned a range of saddles, tools and general spare parts.

Over the years the cattle activity had attracted a more or less permanent group of Jampijinpa, Jangala and Jungarrayi stockmen. Although individual members of this group varied at any one time, there was a core group of four or five men who were permanent. All of these men were associated with the country around Ngarliyikirlangu, an area just north of Yuendumu, and had all worked on surrounding properties and, in some cases, had worked in the Victoria River District and the Kimberley.

Management of Yuendumu 1972-1975

In 1972 the NT Social Welfare Branch appointed Mr William McKell as cattle manager at Yuendumu. Having grown up in the industry, McKell was probably the first real cattleman appointed to the job. While at high school McKell had run away from an exclusive Catholic boarding school in Perth and entered the cattle industry as a station hand. He had then progressively worked on a range of stations throughout the north. Because the majority of his employment involved working alongside or with Aboriginal stockman, he had absorbed an enormous amount of knowledge about Aboriginal culture and behaviour. He was also something of a legend, hard drinking with a penchant for outrageous practical jokes, and with little or no respect for officialdom. He once described himself as “pretending to be a character so long he had become one” (McKell, 1997, pers com).
His appointment was unique and was made largely in response to a staffing review by the NT Social Welfare Branch which recommended improvements to staff appointments (Department of the Interior, 1973). Prior to his appointment at Yuendumu, McKell had been head stockman on the neighbouring property, Mt Doreen, and both he and his wife were well known to the Warlpiri at Yuendumu. McKell took up his appointment just as the changes that had been foreshadowed with the announcement of the Aboriginal Affairs policy of “self-determination” began to have an effect.

Throughout 1972-1975 rumours abounded that the cattle enterprise at Yuendumu was to be privatised. However, progress was slow and no formal action was taken. The lack of progress towards privatisation had little effect upon the day-to-day operations, as cattle still had to be mustered, killers butchered and tallies kept. There were no fenced paddocks, and branding, castration and other animal husbandry requirements were undertaken using bronco methods. Broncoeing was essentially a 19th century management technique relying on skilled stockmen, capable horses and a supply of cheap labour. This low cost method of animal husbandry assumed that the land was either free or had little value and that men and horses could substitute for investment in yards and fences. It was attractive to the early pastoralists and to the Social Welfare Branch officials at Yuendumu because it involved minimal capital investment.

The crash of beef prices in 1974 meant that no stock were turned-off during the 1972-1975 period other than those killed for the kitchen, which averaged two
beasts a week or one hundred a year. The downturn in prices coincided with exceptionally good seasons with over 750 mm of rain falling in 1972/73. As a consequence of both the good seasons and low turn-off levels, herd numbers built up rapidly.

**Other changes in Yuendumu 1972-1975**

The introduction of the Aboriginal Affairs policy of self-determination effectively de-institutionalised the settlement of Yuendumu. This was perhaps best symbolised by the change of name from Yuendumu Settlement to Yuendumu Community. Initially the changes did not come too quickly. The superintendent continued to administer the community throughout 1973, although steps were taken to incorporate the community council (the successor of the old village council) and the superintendent was sent to Canberra to undertake a three-month training program in community development.

The superintendent also stepped down from a number of ex-officio positions on the housing association, the social club (which ran the store) and the mining company. These organisations now began to operate independently of the administration with their own boards made up of Warlpiri people from the Yuendumu community. In each of these organisations there was a group of Warlpiri, supported by a non-Aboriginal champion, who usually held a management position. Nearly all of these non-Aboriginal champions were to stay in their positions for over twenty years. Over this period each of the champions formed a close bond with the Aboriginal owners of their particular organisations,
that is, managers of the housing association, the mining company and (to a lesser extent) the social club, and the Warlpiri members of each organisation had the same sort of relationship as McKell and the Jampijinpa, Jangala, Jakamarra and Jungarrayi men associated with the cattle enterprise.

Management of Yuendumu 1975-1983

From 1975 the Aboriginal men associated with the cattle enterprise, the manager (McKell) and the bookkeeper (McKell’s wife) commenced negotiations to privatise the cattle enterprise by forming their own cattle company. While this approach was consistent with the policy of self-determination, there were a number of administrative difficulties, including taking over the former DAA assets. Because the cattle were branded with a DAA registered brand, the audit requirements of the Commonwealth Department of Finance had to be met, which resulted in substantial negotiations between the bureaucracy and the Yuendumu people. During these negotiations beef prices remained low and McKell was retained as a DAA employee while the workers were maintained on the training allowance.

However, during the period 1972-1975, the DAA and the NT Animal Industry Branch became concerned at the build up of cattle numbers on Haasts Bluff, the reserve neighbouring Yuendumu, and on Yuendumu itself. Therefore, a pastoral officer from the DAA was sent out to inspect both properties and to arrange a muster that was not finalised until 1977 when 850 prime bullocks were selected for sale. Because of the lack of facilities, these cattle had to be walked to Mt
Allan where they were trucked to Adelaide. They were sold on the Adelaide markets with a gross return to the Department of the Interior of $720,000 (McKell, 1996 & 1997). None of these funds were returned to the Yuendumu cattle enterprise.

Negotiations over the formation of a cattle company continued throughout 1977/78, but it was not until Professor Colin Tatz and the Reverend Jim Downing (Downing, 1998, *pers com*) had questions asked in the Federal Parliament over the DAA’s reluctance to form a cattle company that the process was completed. In July 1979 the Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company was established with six directors elected by sixty shareholders. The shareholders were mostly made up of either people associated with the workers or those associated with the area of Ngarliyikirlangu. During the formation of the pastoral company, little or no attention was paid to traditional ownership structures or to community interest (Young, 1981). However, this did not provoke any reaction from those Yuendumu Warlpiri who were not involved in the cattle company but who had a traditional interest either in the land ownership or land management of Yuendumu.

The negotiations over the formation of the cattle company had taken so long that McKell had the dubious honour of being the last DAA resident employee on Yuendumu. Following the formation of the Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company (NPC) all government owned assets other than the cattle (valued at $149,574) and the permanent bores were withdrawn to be disposed of at public auction. This included saddles, a truck and four wheel drive utility as well as a variety of tools.
Ngariyikirlangu Pastoral Company commenced operations with a small tractor and a trailer, that had previously been written off, and approximately 3,500 head of cattle. There were no drafting and trucking yards and only three bores, two of which also provided water to the community. There were no dams and, with the cessation of the training allowance for the workers and DAA employment for the manager, there were no funds to pay wages. An enterprise grant was applied for (which included an amount to cover the wages of the manager and a part-time bookkeeper), but this was not approved until 1979. Because of the delays involved in accessing government support, McKell and the Warlpiri men borrowed vehicles from the community council and the mining company and commenced to muster, brand and cull cattle for sale. In addition, a stock mortgage of $20,000 was taken out with Dalgety's in order to provide working capital (NPC, 1979). These measures raised approximately $200,000 in 1978/79. The DAA did eventually make a grant of $55,000 in 1979/80 to cover recurrent expenditure that included wages for the manager and his wife, who was also the bookkeeper. However, stockmen's wages still had to be paid for from cattle sales (Dunlop & McGlashon, 1985).

In 1979 the BTEC in the NT began in earnest. Despite the fact that the abattoir trace backs of infected animals was lower at Yuendumu than that of surrounding properties (NT DPP files 1979/80), the NT Government veterinary officers insisted that Yuendumu be destocked. In response to this pressure, the Ngariyikirlangu Pastoral Company directors and McKell approached the Chief Minister's Office of Aboriginal Liaison (OAL) for support. The OAL advised
them to seek assistance from the IAD's rural extension program. This was done and the IAD rural extension program advised them to develop the infrastructure necessary to maintain a testing program. In addition, it was decided to seek long-term development funding from the newly established ADC, the NT Development Corporation (NTDC) and the Commonwealth Development Bank (CDB). Because Yuendumu had recently become Aboriginal land under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1977*, the NPC was not eligible for funds under the NTDC or the CDB. This effectively meant that the NPC could not access mainstream rural finance. The NPC was therefore dependent upon public funding from the DAA, the ADC or the DEIR. DEIR had only recently emerged as a potential source of funding support due to the closure of the training allowance system which left a large number of Aboriginal people unemployed and in need of assistance from some type of labour market program. The earliest of these labour market programs were Special Work Projects (SWP). These were later subsumed into Community Employment Projects (CEP), which later were subsumed into CDEP, where communities adopted them.

Initially the NPC sought funds from DEIR under SWP and CEP to build yards and construct paddocks. This was done with some help from the local adult educator and by salvaging steel from around Yuendumu.

Conflict over the use and control of company vehicles arose early in the life of the NPC as company directors did not appreciate that, although they were the "bosses", they were not entitled to use company vehicles for personal use. Tensions over company vehicles came to a head in 1979 when the head stockman,
who was both a company director and a traditional owner, was sacked as head stockman for the misuse of a company vehicle. The director’s humiliation at his sacking was to surface again and again in future directors’ meetings and was to be used later by funding bodies to deny the NPC funds.

The termination of the head stockman/director/traditional owner highlighted critical tensions, that is, the rights of a land owner over an enterprise taking place upon his and other descent group lands.

The person concerned, George Jungala’s, view was that while the manager was responsible for making the cattle decisions, the question of where and when the cattle should be worked should be referred to him and other Kirda to ensure that there was no conflict with other activities taking place. For, as he pointed out to the Author (Jungala, 1993, pers. com.), the water points were close to some sacred sites and “there might be other things, Aboriginal things, going on”.

In addition, he was concerned about money business and where all the money was going. In discussions with the Author, George indicated a degree of mystification about the link between sales and costs. In his view, all the cattle sale money should be split up between directors and shareholders and the link between income and costs was not clearly understood. Because of this, and the consistent inability of NPC to distribute any profit, George formed the view that there was “funny business going on” (Jungala, 1993, pers. com.).
George was not alone in his view and there was a small group of mainly older shareholders and directors who held a similar view. However, McKell had the support of a number of younger, better educated directors and shareholders who, until the 1990s, supported his approach. That support notwithstanding, the tension between the McKell supporters and the landowners' supporters was a permanent feature of NPC board meetings from 1978 to 1998.

Another source of tension for the company was the control of community dogs and the tendency of Yuendumu community residents to kill cattle without recompense to the company. While the taking of a ‘killer’ is something of a time-honoured tradition in the north, for the fledgling the NPC the loss of cattle was a serious problem. In 1982/83 the NPC strategy of using a variety of public funding sources for property development came unstuck when the ADC grant was withdrawn because the NPC had assumed that the grant was recurrent and did not make an annual application. However, the ADC assumed that because they had not received an application the NPC did not need their support. Loss of the ADC grant forced the NPC to sell 200 additional cattle.

Employment

Because of Yuendumu’s history of employment maximisation, company directors continually pushed the manager to maintain high levels of employment. For example, when McKell introduced helicopter mustering some of the directors complained that “he was saving all the jobs for the whitefellas and giving away blackfella jobs” (George Jungala, 1982). However, between 1975 and 1983 it was
possible to maintain high levels of employment. This was achieved through a combination of cattle sales, labour market programs and ADC funding. For example, the continuation of the training allowance allowed DAA employment levels to be maintained until 1978. High turn-off levels and good prices, followed by the successful application for Special Work Projects, enabled DAA employment levels to be maintained and, for a short time, exceeded. For example, in 1978 the NPC employed twelve stockmen (Kesteven, 1978:39). By 1980 this had risen to twenty, making the NPC the third largest non-government employer at Yuendumu after the community council and the housing association (Young, 1981:104).

**Herd management**

During the eight years between 1975 and 1983 the herd was heavily culled, partly as a result of the need for cash, partly as a result of pressure from the BTEC and partly due to the need to cull poor cattle types. The uneven nature of the quality of the Yuendumu herd was largely a reflection of the inadequacy of cattle management during the first forty years of Yuendumu's existence under the policy of assimilation. In order to improve the herd, funds from cattle sales were also used to purchase several new bulls.

In 1981 the NPC entered into an approved brucellosis and tuberculosis eradication program. This involved entering into a contract with the NT DPP for the purpose of eradicating both diseases. The agreed program required:
1. bangtail musters;
2. culling of all old stock;
3. testing and ear tagging of all young stock;
4. development of a series of internal paddocks;
5. improved monitoring of all waters; and
6. regular testing of stock until disease free status was achieved.

The NPC was able to maintain this program and, consequently, it was one of the few Aboriginal owned properties in Central Australia not to be issued with a compulsory destocking order (Dunlop & McGlashon, 1985: 85).

Property development

In the years between 1978 and 1983 trucking and drafting yards four miles outside of Yuendumu were gradually built using scrap steel salvaged from government dumps at Yuendumu. These yards were ideally situated 2 km from the all-weather stock route beef road. Following this a number of holding paddocks were constructed along the Warlpiri Hills. These paddocks were designed to be used as funnels when mustering cattle out of the hills with helicopters, thus easing the pressure on men and horses. The paddocks were also in keeping with the requirements of the disease eradication program.

In 1981/82 the IAD began to advise on property development and undertook a feasibility study of the NPC in 1983. The study concluded that the property had insufficient water supplies to enable it to develop 5,000-6,000 head, the herd size
which was considered economically sustainable (GRM, 1987). The IAD study suggested a number of alternative development options. The NCP decided to adopt option three (IAD, 1983) which involved developing the herd to 5,600 by establishing more bores, paddocks and yards, as well as a community abattoir and butcher shop. The IAD study estimated this would require an investment of $639,500 (IAD, 1983); $283,000 for fences and yards, $21,500 for the abattoir and butcher shop and $355,000 for restocking and operational costs. Attempts to establish new bores had been frustrated by lack of drilling success and, as a substitute, the NPC began to establish a number of dams in strategic locations. The purpose of these dams was to ease the grazing pressure on the permanent water points and to promote maximum use of the available pasture.

**Other developments at Yuendumu**

The years 1975-1983 were marked by the continued devolution of the old Social Welfare Branch functions that were subsumed by the DAA to a number of private and public organisations. That is, in 1972 the primary employer of all people at Yuendumu was the DAA. By 1983 there were eleven organisations employing 73 Aboriginal people. These organisations were made up of four Aboriginal organisations, three government departments and two non-government and non-Aboriginal organisations, the latter two being the YMCA and the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Kesteven, 1978; Young, 1981; Raynal, 1990).

The devolution of DAA functions to the different organisations created some confusion over the role of the community council. The DAA and the NT
Government saw its role very much in terms of a local government one. Some residents, particularly those who had been closely involved with the DAA administration, saw it as filling the vacuum left by the DAA and assuming all the authority once held by the DAA. Other residents saw the council as something created by non-Aboriginal people and believed that the Warlpiri people should develop an alternative governing structure that was in keeping with Aboriginal tradition. The confusion over the role of the council and the activity of the other organisations created a number of political tensions. These tensions were reflected in intense political rivalry and conflict between the Yuendumu organisations, including the council and government departments (Raynal, 1990).

In terms of employment, the community council continued to be the major employer, followed by the housing association and then the cattle company. New activities at Yuendumu also began to develop during this time – a school of artists was established and a number of outstations were occupied. In addition, the land was handed over and negotiations commenced over royalties relating to the goldfields in the Tanami.

**Management of Yuendumu 1983-1996**

At the end of 1983, the NPC believed it was in a position to achieve a number of goals (NPC AGM:1983) including:

1. disease freedom;
2. the development of a commercially sustainable herd;
3. an economically viable local kill slaughterhouse; and
4. the maintenance of employment levels.

As the NPC began to implement its development strategy, concerns about the viability of the NPC development strategy began to surface. These concerns were first raised in 1986 by the CLC following its review of pastoral properties (Dunlop & McGlashan, 1985). Essentially, McGlashon queried the capacity of the Yuendumu land resources to support a herd of 5,600 head, as forecast in the IAD feasibility study. The IAD study had assumed that the major limitation in the NPC herd development was the lack of water and that all that was required was to establish more water points for the herd to expand. The CLC questioned this view (Dunlop & McGlashon, 1985) and argued that the land systems (Perry, 1962) could not support the pasture required to maintain a level of 5,600 head. Instead, the CLC argued that a safe stocking rate, that is, a drought safe stocking rate, was more likely to be 1,000 to 1,500 head. This view, together with other factors that will become apparent, was to seriously affect NPC access to funding.

The emergence of concerns about the capacity of the land resources coincided with changes in the training and advisory support to the NPC, and was to seriously delay access to funding to implement the development plan. That is, at the end of 1983 the body responsible for financial and pastoral advice, as well as training, was the IAD. Following a dispute between the IAD and the ADC over the confidentiality of client files, the ADC withdrew funding and, as a consequence, Yuendumu lost its advisory service. The submission for development funds based on the original IAD feasibility study was then held in
abeyance by the ADC pending the establishment of alternative advisory and financial monitoring arrangements.

In 1985 the CAAP A was established. It was funded by the ADC to undertake some of the functions previously offered by the IAD, as well as some additional functions. The three primary functions of CAAPA were:

1. to act as a lobbyist for the Central Australian pastoralists;
2. to provide a means by which Aboriginal owned animal production and meat processing facilities could be integrated; and
3. to act as a fund monitor and reporter for the ADC.

CAAPA did not provide accounting or training services and it only provided limited property development advice. CAAPA accepted the recommendations of the IAD feasibility study and, in fact, increased the original IAD estimates. It then, on the NPC’s advice, applied for $706,000 worth of development funds over five years. The purpose of these funds is set out in Figure 46:

**Figure 46: 1985 NPC development funding applied for by CAAPA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yards, waters and fencing</td>
<td>ABTA</td>
<td>$323,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADC Restocking &amp; operational</td>
<td>ADC</td>
<td>$283,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>DEIR</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>$706,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Ngarliyikirnlangu ADC Application, copy held by J. Flattum*
These applications were largely unsuccessful and the ABTA provided no funds at all while the ADC provided a small capital grant of $37,608 in 1985/86. A factor that influenced the rejection of the funding applications was the doubt about the land capacity to support a commercially viable herd.

On the other hand, DEIR continued to support the NPC through a Community Employment Program. This enabled the NPC to continue employing 19 full-time employees and 24 casual employees. However, in terms of public funding support there was, between 1986/87 and 1990, a general withdrawal both by the ADC and DEIR (later to become DEET). In 1990 DEET ceased to fund labour market programs operated by the NPC and ATSIC withdrew operating subsidies for the manager and bookkeeper. The primary reason for this withdrawal by both agencies was that, under the Aboriginal employment policy (DEET, 1989), programs were supposed to be directed at economically viable projects. ATSIC had come to the conclusion, following a consultant’s evaluation of the NPC, that the NPC was uneconomic and unviable and, therefore, did not warrant continued support. The Minister’s letter advising of this justified the decision on the basis that ATSIC and its predecessors had invested $1.2m over ten years without the NPC achieving financial viability and, therefore, the government could no longer continue to support the NPC (Tickner, 1991).

The NPC disputed ATSIC’s calculation of $1.2m. The NPC’s accounts indicated an investment of only $670,000, or $55,000 annually (NPC, 1991). Even if the government figure was correct, at $1.29m, then this equals an approximate annual subsidy of $100,000, which is little greater than the $80,000 a year training
The withdrawal of funds on the grounds that the NPC could never achieve viability was only part of the reason for the withdrawal of support by ATSIC. The other reasons are related to the confusion that arose when the ADC withdrew funding from the IAD’s rural extension program and then replaced some of its services with CAAPA. These changes not only delayed NPC funding applications, they created a deep sense of frustration and resentment in McKell and the NPC directors that resulted in a number of physical confrontations with ADC and ATSIC officers. This frustration did not only relate to the fact that funding was delayed. The organisational changes had other effects. For example, CAAPA did not fully replicate the pastoral or training services offered by the IAD and, as a consequence, the NPC was then required to access, design and seek funds for its own training activities. This clearly had a number of indirect and direct costs, including the burden of assessing training needs, designing a training program, seeking funding, obtaining trainers and implementing appropriate programs. Given that the operational duties of management were already significant, it was not possible for McKell and his wife to sustain a committed or long-term interest in training. For example, when the abattoir was developed, the NPC employed four different trainers over the first fourteen months of the abattoir’s operations. These trainers were of varying skills and abilities and, as a consequence of the constant change, none of the Aboriginal trainees were able to successfully complete the training program in meat processing. From 1993 to 1996 no training took place.
In addition to these factors, seasonal conditions began to change. Following the exceptionally good seasons between 1972-1979, seasonal conditions in Central Australia generally deteriorated, culminating with the onset of the 1984/85 drought. This was broken in 1987/88, but drought conditions reoccurred in 1988/89 and continued to 1996. As a consequence, Yuendumu was forced to further destock. Between 1978 and 1994 market prices generally remained buoyant and, because of this, the drought-forced destocking initially increased the NPC cash flow and disguised the effect of the withdrawal of government support. It also caused the reduction of the herd to below commercially sustainable levels. However, the high cash flow from cattle sales, together with the DEIR subsidies, enabled the NPC to carry out parts of its development plan. Then, in 1994/95, beef prices collapsed. This meant that the NPC could not turn-off enough cattle to meet the interest on the existing debts.

Management of the Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company

The withdrawal of support by the development agencies coincided with other developments in the Yuendumu area, in particular the growth of outstations, the expansion of art and crafts, and the payment of mining royalties. These developments meant that the directors began to take less and less interest in the cattle company. The reduction of employment after 1990 also meant that there was little community benefit from the NPC and so, bit by bit, interest in the NPC was reduced until the major champions were the manager, his wife, the head stockman and a number of Warlpiri leaders who had a long association with the
NPC. There were also a number of directors who were critical of the manager and who blamed him for the loss of government support.

During this period McKell and his wife experienced a number of tragedies, including the loss of a son from drowning in a water filled freezer and their daughter being seriously injured in a school ground accident. While not directly related to the operations of the cattle enterprise, the incidents were major personal stresses for the management of the NPC.

The reduction in support also coincided with the winding up of CAAPA, which had lost significant funds in its meat operation, and serious questions had been raised about the management of the ADC grants to individual cattle stations. For example, it is alleged (McKell, 1996) that funds allocated to the NPC were used by a CAAPA employee to purchase paintings for personal profit. Further, the 1988/89 audit could not account for $70,000 (Hanson, 1989). As a consequence of these and other allegations, ADC launched an internal investigation and then wound up the organisation. No further action was taken.

CAAPA had had a difficult set of roles. On the one hand, it was supposed to provide management advice, although its technical and professional capacity to do so was limited. On the other hand, it had a vested interest in obtaining cattle for its meat works at the lowest possible price. In its role as a manager of ADC grants and loans, CAAPA was in an enormously powerful position in terms of coercing properties to sell to them at CAAPA’s price. This was inevitably resented. One of CAAPA’s most vocal critics was, of course, the NPC and
McKell in particular. His criticism and his vocal allegations were both feared and resented by some of the CAAPA staff who subsequently became important figures in both ATSIC and the CLC.

**Employment**

Until 1990 the NPC was able to employ up to twenty-four people each year. After 1990 employment was reduced to one employee and the manager and by 1993 even he was unemployed, although he continued to run the station while drawing unemployment benefits.

**Herd management**

In December 1988 the NPC achieved disease free status. It was one of only two Aboriginal owned properties to do so and it achieved this status well before any of its non-Aboriginal neighbours (NT DPP, 1996). The dry years in 1984/85 and then the onset of the 1988-1996 drought put enormous pressure on herd management. The herd was reduced in part to meet cash flow demands and in part because there was no grass to feed it. As a consequence, herd numbers were reduced to under three thousand (NPC Audit, 1992/93).

**Property development**

In general the NPC attempted to carry out the strategy recommended in the IAD feasibility study, albeit at a much slower rate because of the lower actual funding
levels, and it had a number of successes in doing so. Paddocks were constructed and water points, mainly dams, were expanded or established. In addition, by 1990 the NPC had established a licensed slaughterhouse for the butchering of meat for local consumption. The slaughterhouse was constructed with a small grant from ATSIC and some training subsidies from DEET. It became a major source of cash flow, although there were difficulties in employing qualified butchers to train Warlpiri butchers and, as a consequence, the slaughterhouse was not well maintained. In 1996 it was advised by the DPP that it did not meet the new Australian Quarantine Inspection Service Standards and that it would therefore lose its licence in January 1997. The reduction of funds in 1990, and the drought, effectively meant that the NPC was at a standstill and was effectively a holding operation that was sustained only by the benevolence of its major creditor, the Yuendumu Mining Company.

**Other developments**

Yuendumu was racked with conflict during the 1983-1996 period. There were major disputes between various factions over the role of the council and the adoption of local government under the NT Local Government Act. ATSIC encouraged the community to consider the adoption of the CDEP. This was strongly rejected on a number of occasions because the people (a) did not wish to surrender an individual entitlement, and (b) did not wish to go back to the training allowance days (Jagamarra Nelson, 1996, *pers com*). The program was finally accepted in 1996 and was implemented in 1997.
The outstation movement expanded, with twelve outstations being established with a total population of approximately 500. The outstations, with their inherent autonomy, involved a number of key players from the NPC, including the head stockman and three directors who had always been involved in working for the NPC. The loss of their commitment to the NPC was a serious blow to the NPC political influence within Yuendumu, and with organisations like the CLC.

In addition, there were large payments of mining royalties to both individuals and to descent groups. This represented a substantial short-term benefit to the community in that it raised per capita income substantially. However, most of the money was spent on personal consumer items, including vehicles. The benefits from mining royalties far outweighed any of the benefits derived from involvement with the NPC, either as a worker or as a director/shareholder. This effectively reduced the liability of the NPC.

Commentary

The de-institutionalisation of Yuendumu initially had little effect upon the operations of the cattle enterprise. However, the possibility of privatisation raised expectations among the Aboriginal men associated with the cattle enterprise that they would be able to develop a pastoral enterprise comparable to those surrounding Yuendumu, and that they would be able to obtain the level of benefits obtained by non-Aboriginal pastoralists.
Local people and political activists had to exert significant political pressure in order to establish the NPC. One result of this activism was that the NPC’s structure reflected the needs of those who had the greatest interest in the activity, namely, the workers, their relations and the manager. After the granting of Aboriginal title to the traditional owners in 1978, no attempt was made to rationalise the shareholders with the traditional owners or any of the identified descent groups responsible for the area on which the NPC was running cattle.

When the NPC was established, the cattle company was left with little operational equipment or infrastructure, even though the government had obtained a windfall gain of over $700,000 from cattle sales just prior to the transition in 1978. Despite this, this early period was one of great hope. The NPC was able to attract funds from a number of public sources and, as a consequence, was able to maximise labour and develop its operations. However, delays in receiving grants meant that the company was forced to sell cattle for cash flow reasons rather than good herd management or in response to good market prices. These difficulties notwithstanding, the NPC was able to maximise employment at levels equal to, or greater than, those during the DAA period, and it was able to successfully commence a BTEC program.

However, not all the signs for the future were positive. A number of funding agencies (or at least the representatives of the funding agencies) were not happy. McKell, either by his behaviour on sprees in town or by a number of practical jokes on ADC officers, had caused offence. His cavalier attitude to the requirements of officiadalom had also raised concerns about his management style,
and these were fuelled by complaints by one or two directors who felt that they were not obtaining the level of benefits from the NPC they had expected prior to privatisation. The seasons, which until 1983 had been benign with rainfall well above average, now appeared to be returning to the drier average, and attempts to find underground water had not been particularly successful.

The NPC commenced the first year of the Hawke Labor Government with great hope. It had embarked upon a BTEC program, had a development plan, had support from within Yuendumu and a linkage into the bureaucracy through the IAD. This linkage was renewed with the establishment of CAAPA and, until 1988, the NPC was able, through various means, to maintain the momentum of the development plan and the BTEC.

However, the NPC suffered continually from changes to administrative practice and personnel, that is, during this period the NPC was included in seven different funding or advisory bodies, among them:

1. Department of Aboriginal Affairs;
2. Aboriginal Development Commission;
3. Central Australian Aboriginal Pastoralists Association;
4. Department of Employment and Industrial Relations;
5. Department of Employment, Education and Training;
6. Institute for Aboriginal Development; and
7. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.
This resulted in regular and constant delays in the release of grants. In addition, as described earlier, the five assumptions upon which the development plan adopted by the NPC had been based, all crashed. That is, the NPC had assumed that:

(a) the Yuendumu land systems would support a commercially viable herd;
(b) public funding would be available to fund its development plan;
(c) training and education would be easily accessible;
(d) the seasons would be benign; and
(e) the markets would remain buoyant.

The gradual crash of these assumptions resulted in the NPC being forced to sell cattle at inappropriate times to the detriment of the long-term herd development. The failure of CAAPA to secure the long-term funding required to achieve full development, according to the objectives set out in the IAD feasibility study, meant that the NPC would never achieve economic viability. The withdrawal of ATSIC and DEET support doomed the NPC, and its continued existence is due to the commitment of McKell and the support of the Yuendumu Mining Company. It should also be noted that, with the exception of some meat processing training, there was very little, if any, training provided to the NPC directors, the manager or workers.

The poor seasons that occurred after 1988 were a major contributing factor, although these could probably have been managed if the NPC had been able to establish sufficient permanent waters. This did not occur because of the NPC failure to obtain sufficient development funding.
Conclusion

The NPC is currently unviable (Author, 1996, *pers obs*.), owing its major creditor, Yuendumu Mining Company, over $150,000 secured by approximately 1,500 head of cattle. This situation indicates that the NPC failed to achieve two of its key 1983 goals – a commercially sustainable herd and an economically viable local kill slaughterhouse.

On the other hand, it had achieved disease freedom and, within the financial constraints, it had implemented a number of parts of its initial development program, one of which was the maintenance of employment levels that, until 1990, enabled the NPC to be the third largest employer at Yuendumu (Ellana et al, 1988).

Yuendumu’s capacity to sustain an economically viable cattle enterprise has never been properly assessed. The CLC estimated that IAD/DPP stocking rates were overoptimistic and that the NPC could never achieve the levels inherent in the IAD feasibility study. This, and the fact that some of the best country had been transferred on the establishment of Yuendumu, suggests that the CLC may be right. Certainly current stocking levels are at the safe drought levels recommended by the CLC. However, the policies of the various Aboriginal funding agencies, that is, the DAA, the ADC and/or ATSIC, never required such an assessment.
Throughout its existence the NPC never made a profit nor did it achieve economic viability and, in this sense, it failed to achieve the policy objectives of the various enterprise support programs that were applied during 1972 to 1996.

It is possible that the enterprise may have been able to achieve a profit if it had been able to successfully operate its slaughter house, a view supported by Ellana et al (1988). However, lack of capital and expertise meant that it could neither maintain production nor meet Australian Quarantine Inspection Standards, and as a consequence this option has never been fully exploited.

For all of its operational existence, that is, up until 1990, the NPC was able to maximise employment, and this was both an objective of its directors as well as a major benefit to the community. During a period when unemployment was rife at Yuendumu such a benefit was considerable.

The NPC was clearly not a community-based operation. The shareholders, directors and workers always represented a particular group of people at Yuendumu who were affiliated with the land on which the cattle were running, and who were also seen by other residents as being cattlemen or owning a cattle business.

The numbers and the commitment of those involved in the NPC waned as:

1. the benefits from the NPC declined; and
2. other opportunities appeared, in particular the outstation movement.
The adoption of, and the enthusiasm for the outstation movement among those traditional owners involved in the NPC indicates that the development of the NPC was less important than caring for the traditional owners’ particular country, a view supported by a number of other commentators on Aboriginal pastoral properties (Young, 1981:146; Thiele, 1982; Hanlon, 1985; Phillpot, 1985).

From 1972 the Yuendumu community experienced constant structural change. The Aboriginal leadership had to contend with numerous new responsibilities in the management of boards and the running of new organisations. In addition, the previously stable workforce was totally disrupted with the introduction of unemployment benefits and the creation of limited full-time work in the organisations. The organisations also facilitated intense internal factionalism and competition. These internal politics often distracted the leadership and, as a consequence, the needs of the NPC were often left to the directors.
Chapter 6: The Puraiya Cattle Company and the Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company compared and contrasted

The purpose of this chapter is to begin an analysis of the Aboriginal owned and operated pastoral industry in the NT. It will do this by analysing the similarities and differences in the experience of the two Aboriginal owned and operated pastoral companies – the Puraiya Cattle Company and the Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company, discussed in chapters 4 and 5. The chapter will conclude by identifying the assumptions that underlie the Aboriginal development policies of the last twenty-five years as applied to the two case studies.

In each of the two case studies the four critical elements that have emerged were the social structure of the community, the company structure of the enterprise and its relationship with the community, the capacity of the land to support cattle, and the infrastructure on each property. In addition there was the impact of government policy, specifically Aboriginal development policy and the BTEC strategy. Other factors that affected the development of the pastoral enterprise in each of the case studies were the management capacity of the community to manage the enterprise, and the role of agency field officers.

In this sense, the chapter links the community elements to the issues identified in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 and shown here in the shaded areas in Figure 47.
Figure 47: Bureaucratic encapsulation: context of both case studies
The following descriptions compare and contrast the experiences of both Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu from four perspectives. These perspectives include comparing and contrasting the general backgrounds of the two case studies, an examination of the impact of policy, the role of management, and an assessment of the outcomes.

**General background**

In analysing the general background of the two case studies three aspects of each of the properties will be considered. These are the social structure, the company structures and the land capacity and infrastructure of each property.

**Social structure**

The social structure of the Anmatyerre (who operate Puraiya) and the Warlpiri (who operate Ngarliyikirlangu) are similar. Each of the two language groups is closely linked by marriage kinship and ceremony (Meggitt, 1962). Both use section kinship systems and share some of the same song cycles. However, the two communities in which the cattle companies are located are quite different. The Ntareye community at Ti-Tree is the primary community for Puraiya, although the communities at Six Mile and at Woola Downs also have an interest in the cattle company. Ntareye has a small population of less than eighty and, as a consequence, its resources are limited. As well as the cattle it has a store, a
community council and a football team. The limited number of organisations at Ntureye means that the cattle company is important to the community leadership as a resource and in terms of political power. It also means that there is less competition for government funds, thereby making it easier for the Anmatyerre leadership to garner community support for activities such as lobbying funding agencies. As described in chapter 4, because Puraiya was originally a cattle station, the cattle culture is strong. For example, during interviews with directors in 1993, the directors made clear that they were “cattlemen” or as Big Bill Mbtijana put it “we bin grow up longa the cattle.” – Puraiya Cattle Company Directors Meeting, 1993 (Mbtijana, 1993, pers. com.).

The Ngarliyikirlangu community at Yuendumu has a population of over one thousand with more than twelve Aboriginal managed or owned organisations, including a mining company, a media centre, two stores, a workshop and a fully operational local government council. The cattle company is, therefore, only one of many organisations competing for resources and political support, which makes it difficult for the Warlpiri leadership of the Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company to gather sufficient political support to effectively lobby funding agencies. For example, during periods of community turmoil when the political competition was particularly fierce, as occurred in 1989 (chapter 5, page 277), it was almost impossible to gain community support for funding of the cattle company operations.
Company structures

In both the Puraiya Cattle Company and the Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company the pastoral operations were incorporated as private companies under the Australian Companies Act. The organisational structures of the two cattle operations are quite different. The Puraiya Cattle Company is controlled by a small group of six shareholders who are also directors. The Articles of Association specify that the directors and the shareholders are to manage the company on behalf of the community (Puraiya Cattle Company 1978 Articles of Association).

The Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company 1978 Articles of Association require the directors and shareholders to manage the company on behalf of the community. However, unlike Puraiya, Ngarliyikirlangu has sixty shareholders and twelve directors. While the organisational structure of Ngarliyikirlangu is clearly larger, neither company structure is fully representative of the respective communities. Certainly in Puraiya’s case, the cattle company has been managed for the benefit of a small Aboriginal elite and the non-Aboriginal management. However, the wider representation of Ngarliyikirlangu has meant that management is always under pressure to provide benefits to directors and shareholders and, in that sense, has been more accountable to the wider community but less likely to maintain the viability of the enterprise.

Land capacity and infrastructure

The land capacity of both properties differed in the following respects. The Puraiya Cattle Company is located on the old Ti-Tree pastoral lease and is almost
a third larger in size (3,345 sq km) than the area occupied by the Ngarliyikirrangu Pastoral Company (2,120 sq km). In addition, only a third of the old Yuendumu Reserve area, which makes up the Ngarliyikirrangu Pastoral Company, is useable for cattle because of limited water resources, whereas two-thirds of Ti-Tree can be used for cattle. Ti-Tree is generally regarded as sound arid rangeland capable of sustaining pastoral production, while Yuendumu falls into Perry’s classification of marginal country (Perry, 1980) and, as a consequence, Ngarliyikirrangu is more marginal in physical terms.

The greater carrying capacity of the Puraiya Cattle Company is due in part to the fact that the original settler (Bill Heffernan) developed substantial water resources on Ti-Tree and, while these water resources have required re-equipment over the last twenty years, they have always protected Puraiya from the type of problems faced by the Ngarliyikirrangu Pastoral Company. For example, Ti-Tree had already survived two droughts during the period it was owned by the Heffernans and has survived the current drought. While the infrastructure on Ti-Tree was run down at the time of purchase, the property’s established water points and confirmed reserves of underground water meant that it always had the capacity (subject to appropriate levels of investment) to support a commercial size herd. Yuendumu lacked these resources. When it became apparent that the land and water capacity of Yuendumu could not support a commercially viable herd, policy support was withdrawn. This withdrawal ignored the fact that, even before privatisation, Ngarliyikirrangu’s cattle operation had not been commercial (see Chapter 5, pages 253-257).
Puraiya was always a commercial entity. It had been selected by the original settler, Heffeman, because of its pasture and potential for surface and underground water and, although at the time of its purchase for the Aboriginal community it was run down, it had been commercially viable. Ngarliyikirlangu, on the other hand, had never intended to be commercial. On its establishment, the best pasture and water had been excised out and transferred to a neighbouring non-Aboriginal pastoralist. During the years it was operated as a DAA project (Social Welfare Branch), its purpose was to provide meat and training, not provide a profit. Certainly the government’s objectives, prior to 1972, of meat provision and training for Ngarliyikirlangu, or the Yuendumu Cattle Project as it was then, were similar to the objectives of all cattle projects on missions and government settlements; meat; work and training (Thiele, 1982). Consequently the level of infrastructure investment in the Yuendumu Cattle Project was minimal, amounting to one bore, a set of run-down wooden yards and three holding paddocks (McKell, 1997). Therefore, when both properties were established as commercial entities, it was on a different and unequal basis, which the subsequent application of commercial funding criteria never acknowledged. That is, Ngarliyikirlangu was never provided with catch up funds to expand its infrastructure. In fact, the opposite occurred. The year prior to privatisation, $700,000 worth of cattle were sold, a windfall gain to government which effectively reduced Ngarliyikirlangu's asset base even further.
Impact of changing government policy

As chapter 3 indicates, there were three major policy areas that impacted on all Aboriginal owned cattle operations. The first was Aboriginal development funding, the second was the BTEC, and the third was the transfer of land to Aboriginal freehold and the subsequent development of outstations on land that was once used for pastoralism.

The objectives of the general thrust of Aboriginal development policy and the land rights policy were to secure a social and economic base for Aboriginal groups.

Aboriginal development policy

The policy experience of the two properties has been quite similar but the outcomes are different. Between 1972 and 1975 a great deal of confusion arose over the objectives of cattle production under the policy of self-determination. This confusion continued after 1975. Consequently, the purchase of Ti-Tree Station and the establishment of The Puraiya Cattle Company in 1978 had a dual purpose, that is, to acquire land and develop a commercially viable cattle station, while at the same time it was also expected that the cattle company would provide both employment and meat (chapter 4). Similarly, the objectives for privatising the cattle training and meat-producing project at Yuendumu by establishing Ngarliyikirlangu were also confused. The rationale was that a private non-government pastoral company would enable the community to determine its own outcomes for the cattle project. However, this rationale ignored the practical
reality that even after privatisation, at the time, the project was entirely reliant on
government grant funds. Again, the policy objectives in regard to the
establishment of a cattle company were not clearly defined.

The degree of confusion and the evolution of the policy objectives is exemplified
in a number of ways in both case studies. In Puraiya's case, it is perhaps best
demonstrated by the fact that the Puraiya Cattle Company financed the water
supply for the community, the establishment of a store and the construction of
two community houses. In the case of Yuendumu, the Training Allowance
Scheme was maintained and the manager continued to be employed by the DAA
for five years after the adoption of the policy of self-determination in 1972. After
privatisation Ngarliyikirlangu was able to maintain pre-privatisation structures by
accessing various labour market subsidies and management support grants.
Ngarliyikirlangu was, therefore, able to maintain its historical role of training and
meat provision, while at the same time generating income from sales as a private
company.

The resolution of the policy confusion between social and economic objectives
became clearer as the economic objectives began to be understood as commercial
viability (ADC, 1980). The establishment of the ADC in 1980 increased the
emphasis on commercial criteria for assessment. By 1983, long-term development
plans had been prepared for both cattle companies, and these plans formed the
basis of funding submissions which, in Puraiya's case, have been largely granted.
Hence, commercial criteria were offset by increased access to training programs
provided by the DEIR. For example, both properties were able to obtain wage
subsidies for fencing and yard building under the AEDP. However, even labour market programs were increasingly tied to the objectives of supporting properties in their attempts to achieve commercial viability (ADC, 1986:4,7,11,12). The motivation for this increased support was derived from the political need of Aboriginal properties to achieve the same level of success with BTEC as non-Aboriginal owned properties. After 1988, when both properties had either been destocked or tested free of brucellosis and tuberculosis, there was a gradual withdrawal of support in line with the general policy assumption that, in the future, pastoral properties would provide little employment at a high cost. For example, in 1981 through to 1984, the ADC maintained support for the rural extension programs of the IAD and FACTS but by 1987 the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy had adopted the position that pastoral enterprises’ priority for training funds should be lower than for other enterprises (AEP, 1987).

The brucellosis and tuberculosis eradication program
The experience at Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu of the BTEC conducted between 1977 and 1992 was different. Puraiya commenced the BTEC with a herd of 8,000 head. Puraiya initially attempted to test and slaughter infected cattle but, after a series of failures, totally destocked. Puraiya then invested some funds in pastoral and community infrastructure. The cash flow gained from destocking this herd enabled the station's infrastructure to be substantially improved.
Consequently, when Puraiya did restock, it had sufficient infrastructure to control the herd. Puraiya then restocked with grant funds provided by the ABTA. This grant was provided through the CAAPA.

The Puraiya Cattle Company is now in the twelfth year of herd reconstruction, having just emerged from a six-year drought during the lowest period of cattle prices for over twenty years. The slow herd build up after the BTEC meant that, at the beginning of the 1990-1996 Central Australian drought, Puraiya was better placed to survive the drought than it would have been had it been fully stocked. However, Puraiya could not have sustained the herd, nor been able to increase herd numbers, without ATSIC management subsidies and the preparedness of the young men in the community to work on the station whilst receiving unemployment benefits. Without such support, Puraiya would have been forced to sell cattle and thus reduce the probability of establishing a commercial herd.

At the commencement of the BTEC, Ngarliyikirlangu barely had a commercial herd and it had very little infrastructure. Despite this, it was able to achieve disease-free status and increase its infrastructure. It was able to do this through a judicious mix of ATSIC or ADC funding to subsidise management costs, astute cattle sales and regular access to a variety of labour market programs. The use of labour market subsidies to develop infrastructure had the added benefit that it enabled the cattle company to maximise employment between 1978 and 1990. This made the cattle company the third largest employer at Yuendumu. However, despite the improvements to yards and the creation of additional paddocks, Ngarliyikirlangu was never able to develop its water sources to an extent that
would enable a larger, commercially viable herd to be carried and, therefore, it failed to maintain its support from ATSIC.

The granting of land rights and the homeland movement

The granting of Aboriginal freehold title to Yuendumu (1977) and Ti-Tree (1988) changed the political, social and economic structure of each of the cattle companies. In Ti-Tree's case, the transfer from a pastoral lease to Aboriginal freehold also reinforced traditional values and widened the accountability of directors. That is, by arguing during the land claim process that all of the descent groups belonged to "one mob", the directors could no longer make decisions about the cattle without consulting the traditional land owners. Although the number of directors did not change, there was now a greater degree of accountability between the directors and the rest of the Anmatyerre community associated with Ti-Tree. At Yuendumu, the transfer of the reserve land to Aboriginal freehold fostered the development of an outstation movement as people moved to areas associated with their particular descent group. This created a new focus for the traditional leadership including those leaders who were involved in the Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company. It also had the effect of reinforcing important traditional authority as well as traditional social and cultural structures. The renewed emphasis on Warlpiri cultural practices reduced the importance of non-Aboriginal activities, including the operations of the cattle company. Consequently, cattle became a subsidiary activity (Young, 1981:164-165).
The granting of land rights marked a substantial shift in policy that subsumed and dominated all previous land use policy, including the management and operation of pastoral enterprises. In a sense, the Land Rights Act represented a legislative expression of self-management/self-determination, while pastoral property operations retained an odour of assimilation and integration policy.

The granting of freehold title also introduced a new agency to both communities – the CLC. Although the relationship between the two communities and the CLC has not been without its tensions, the CLC has provided an alternative source of land management and enterprise support in the form of professional advice and lobbying capacity that has been outside the Commonwealth and Territory Government agencies' policy framework. However, the CLC is not a funding agency and has no capacity to provide financial support.

Management

The key players in the management of the two pastoral properties were the directors, the managers and the field officers of the relevant departments. An assessment of the roles that each of these groups played in the two case studies is described in the next sections.

The role of the directors
At both Puraiya and Ngariyikirlangu, the company director is an important figure within the community and often holds representative positions in organisations such as the CLC. Yet, at no time throughout the existence of the two companies
were any of the directors formally instructed as to their duties and responsibilities. Consequently, the directors saw themselves less as managers, managing on behalf of the shareholders, and more as "bosses" entitled to any benefits that the company might provide. The question of benefits to shareholders did not arise. The reasons for this relate to the structure of both companies. For example, at Puraiya the directors were also shareholders, and at Yuendumu the shareholders were directly related to the directors who provided benefits (usually employment) on the basis of the Aboriginal tradition of reciprocity rather than as prescribed by company law. The awareness of the directors about the limitations of the cattle companies' capacity to provide benefits, either in employment or in-kind, and the net effect upon the companies' cash flow was not great.

In addition to the lack of knowledge about financial management, strong personalities also affected decision-making. For example, George Jungala at Yuendumu and Big Billy Mbtijana at Ti-Tree dominated the other directors and continually pressured the managers for resources. While managers resisted such pressures where they could, at the end of the day the managers were responsible to the directors who could make things difficult for any manager who did not ensure that the most powerful directors received some benefits. For example, if managers did not comply, directors could complain to the funding agencies that the manager was not doing his job, or they could authorise community members to take killers without advising the manager, or, in cases where there was a new storekeeper, they could book up fuel and other goods at the cattle company's expense. Each of these tactics would remind the manager that he needed the directors and that there was a finite limit to the manager's power. As a last resort,
the directors could terminate the services of the manager, as happened on three occasions at Puraiya.

In terms of developing a capacity for self-management among the Aboriginal owners of both cattle companies, little investment was made in either training or development. No training was provided to the directors. However, because of their association with the cattle company, directors became involved in a wide range of land-related issues, particularly where a change of land activity, such as mining, might affect the cattle operations. So in that sense, a role as a cattle company director gave directors the opportunity to acquire more experience of the non-Aboriginal world.

In addition, no training in modern pastoral management was offered to either the head stockmen or managers of either company. The Aboriginal head stockmen effectively learnt on-the-job and very little thought was given to developing their managerial skills.

The managers

Puraiya terminated its first manager when he failed to acknowledge the role of directors as "bosses". The second manager was terminated following the destocking of all the cattle, the loss of cash reserves and the intervention of an ADC Commissioner. The third manager resigned of his own volition. However, the current cattle adviser, who is also undertaking the manager's role, is supported by both ATSIC and the community.
The situation at Ngarliyikirlangu was very different. The manager (McKell) had grown up with cattle in the NT, had developed a deep knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture and, in many ways, adopted the behaviour of an Aboriginal male. McKell socialised with the Warlpiri, as did his wife and children. Consequently, there was always a core of support for him within the Warlpiri community and among the directors.

Field officers

The personality, training and experience of field officers also affected the development of the two cattle companies. For example, the field officers responsible for Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu constantly changed and had very little knowledge of the cattle industry. However, at Puraiya the changeover of managers enabled the field officers to argue that previous mistakes or performance failures were a management problem that would be resolved by the new manager and, in view of Puraiya's land capacity, commercial viability could be achieved. However, at Ngarliyikirlangu with the ongoing presence of McKell as manager, field officers were unable to blame previous incumbents for poor performance. Field officers therefore came into conflict with McKell and this coloured their view of McKell's management capacity and the performance of Ngarliyikirlangu. For example, a file notation on a Ngarliyikirlangu funding application states: "McKell is a good cattle manager but hopeless with money." (Tilmouth, 1990). It was therefore easy to justify denying funding support for Ngarliyikirlangu because the field officer could report that Ngarliyikirlangu had neither the land capacity nor the management capacity to achieve commercial
viability. Thus, paradoxically, the management continuity at Ngarliyikirlangu weakened rather than enhanced its capacity to obtain access to financial support.

Outcomes

In terms of government policy objectives for the pastoral enterprises as distinct from land acquisition, there were three key areas. The first was commercial success, the second was employment and training, and the third was the wider general social benefits to be derived from operating a pastoral enterprise. These aspects are analysed in the next sections.

Commercial success

In 1996 the Puraiya Cattle Company had almost re-established a herd of a little over 3,000 head. A herd of this size is two thousand head less than that considered necessary to generate a commercial profit. Puraiya was receiving an enterprise management grant from ATSIC (Mitchell, 1997) to pay the manager and accounting costs. Operational activities were undertaken by local young men who worked for nothing on a casual basis in exchange for access to horses and tack for rodeo and gymkhana events. Although the Puraiya Cattle Company is currently not profitable because of its herd size and the low level of current market prices, it has continued to receive ATSIC support because assessments of water, land and infrastructure capacity indicate that, with sound management and a recovery in market prices, it can sustain commercial viability. The official view is that it has the land capacity, infrastructure and herd size which gives it the potential to become an independent commercial enterprise within the next three to
four years (ATSIC, 1996), assuming that drought conditions do not occur and that there is at least a modest recovery in beef prices. Ngarliyikirnlangu, on the other hand, had financial support from ATSIC withdrawn in 1991 when assessments undertaken by ATSIC indicated that Ngarliyikirnlangu had neither sufficient water nor land to support a commercial size herd. The withdrawal of government support forced Ngarliyikirnlangu to sell off cattle to cover its costs and, as a consequence, by 1996 the Ngarliyikirnlangu Pastoral Company had less than 1,500 head of cattle, outstanding debts of over $300,000, non-animal assets in the order of $200,000, and was financially unsustainable. The manager and some casual workers were effectively working for the dole. An assessment of the Ngarliyikirnlangu Pastoral Company undertaken by the CLC in 1996 indicates that Ngarliyikirnlangu is unlikely to ever achieve commercial viability.

Thus neither Puraiya nor Ngarliyikirnlangu are at present capable of operating as a commercially independent unit. Puraiya, given its water and pasture resources may be able to achieve commercial independence, but only if it continues to receive a subsidy until it has achieved a herd size equal to, or greater than, the average commercial herd for Central Australian pastoral properties (that is, a herd size of between 5,700 and 10,000). However, the probability of Puraiya's achieving a herd size in this range within the next three years will depend upon better than average markets and better than average seasons. If these conditions do not occur then Puraiya will continue to require subsidies. The continuing low demand for beef in the world market (ABARE, 1997) and the below average seasons experienced in Central Australia suggest that the conditions necessary for
Puraiya to achieve commercial independence will not be met and, therefore, Puraiya will continue as a subsidised commercial operation.

Ngarliyikirlangu's future is even more uncertain. Ngarliyikirlangu lacks the water and the pasture resource to achieve a commercial size herd. It might achieve some measure of commercial independence if it were able to establish an Australian Quarantine Service accredited, local kill abattoir. However, this would require further grant funding as Ngarliyikirlangu could not support a loan. In view of ATSIC's past assessments of Ngarliyikirlangu, such funding is unlikely. Therefore, the probability is that Ngarliyikirlangu will continue to operate as a non-subsidised operation until its creditors require the company's winding up and the sale of its assets to meet outstanding debts.

**Employment and training**

Both enterprises provided employment although, with the exception of 1988/89, Puraiya never employed more than six full-time employees. Ngarliyikirlangu regularly employed eight full-time employees and up to twenty part-time employees every year between 1978 and 1990. The capacity to offer employment was due to two factors – the cash flow from cattle sales, and access to labour market programs. In this regard, Puraiya was disadvantaged in comparison to Ngarliyikirlangu. Firstly, because Puraiya had totally destocked in 1985/86 and then restocked in 1988/89, there was a period when the only employment was caretaking. When it restocked there was a period of five to six years before there were sufficient cattle numbers to justify additional employment other than that of the manager. Even when numbers did increase to near commercial size, there was
insufficient cash to support the additional labour and, as a consequence, Puraiya developed the unique set of arrangements described in chapter 4. Employment practices on Puraiya never maximised employment, although the company was able to support at least twenty employees as fencers during 1988/89, made possible by a DEET grant.

Ngarliyikirlangu, on the other hand, maintained its herd under BTEC and successfully achieved disease-free status. The BTEC, with its constant demand for mustering, needling and blood tests, demanded labour. Ngarliyikirlangu was able, through cattle sales and access to a variety of labour market programs, to undertake the level of stock handling required by BTEC. Until 1990, Ngarliyikirlangu was the third largest non-government employer at Yuendumu because, from 1978 until 1990/91, it was able to access a variety of government labour market programs.

Since 1990, the two operations have not provided any significant employment. This is consistent with the pattern of general labour reduction and the changes to labour usage in the NT pastoral industry post-BTEC. That is, contemporary pastoral properties tend to use less, but more highly skilled, labour (GRM, 1987). In the post-BTEC era a modern cattle enterprise demands constant attention, and a higher standard of mustering, stock handling and general animal husbandry is required in order to successfully operate a cattle company that requires constant involvement and commitment by those operating the enterprise. Water points require daily checking in summer and fences and yards require regular checking and maintenance.
If this commitment is not forthcoming, then the enterprise is more likely to fail. In the case of both Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu, the requisite level of involvement and commitment was not forthcoming. If there was a choice between watering stock and fulfilling an individual's ceremonial responsibilities, then the ceremonial responsibilities usually received a higher priority. As a consequence, much of the routine operations of both enterprises fell to the managers supported by a small group of men who maintained a strong interest in the cattle.

Although Puraiya's herd size is approaching that of commercial viability, it is unlikely to generate sufficient income to increase community employment beyond the one or two permanent employees it has historically employed. However, Puraiya has been able to develop internal arrangements that enable men to assist with the cattle work while on the dole. While this does not provide additional income, it does provide those prepared to assist with cattle work some esteem and status in terms of fulfilling a role as stockman or ringer, a role that is held in high regard in the NT (McGrath, 1987). Ngarliyikirlangu, on the other hand, is near bankrupt because its current land is inadequate for generating sufficient cash flow to cover the cost of wages.

**Wider general social benefits**

Whilst neither cattle enterprise is profitable (Puraiya is dependent upon an ATSIC subsidy to maintain its operations, and Ngarliyikirlangu is near bankrupt), both enterprises have provided substantial, valued outcomes to their respective communities.
Puraiya provided the finances to construct and operate the community store until the store achieved commercial viability and could operate as a separate independent unit. In 1982/83 Puraiya also provided the funds to improve the water supply at a time when government agencies lacked the resources to do so. Puraiya also financed the construction of two community houses. Ngarliyikirrangu was never able to provide such substantial benefits. However, it did provide trucks and vehicle support to various outstations. In addition, it assisted with establishing outstation water bores and was active in providing vehicles and men to support community activities such as the annual Yuendumu Sports Carnival.

The employment opportunities provided by Puraiya and Ngarliyikirrangu were important, not only in terms of monetary benefits, but also in terms of improving individual status and self-esteem (McGrath, 1987; Sing, 1992). For many Aboriginal people in the NT, station and cattle work is seen as man's work, and considered to be superior to community work because of its mystique and tradition. Station and cattle work involves working with horses, cattle and helicopters, and the risk and excitement of the cattle yards is seen as far more interesting than, for example, waste disposal work in the community. In communities where low self-esteem is connected to high levels of substance abuse, community members value employment that provides for high levels of self-esteem. The value placed on stock work is clearly demonstrated in the willingness of the young men at Puraiya to undertake such work while still on unemployment benefits.
Both enterprises provided a number of benefits to directors. These benefits included cash payments, easy credit, or the underwriting of directors' purchases of vehicles. In addition, particular directors (that is, the most powerful) often had access to cattle company vehicles for personal use, although this latter practice usually ended in conflict when the personal needs of the director and the company needs collided. Directors also obtained a political benefit from their position. As a director of the cattle company, they had an institutional base that could be used to obtain resources and benefits that were then used to enhance their political power. For example, Gerritsen (1985) refers to an example at Lajamanu where a powerful director used his position to insist that the cattle company host a rodeo rather than muster cattle for sale, despite the fact that a condition of ADC funding was that the company only focus on income-generating operations and not give priority to social or recreational activities.

Another, non-monetary benefit of the cattle operations was the exposure of company directors in particular to a wider cross-section of non-Aboriginal society. Apart from stores and art sales, cattle enterprises are one of the few points at which Aboriginal people in the remote areas of the NT can engage with the non-Aboriginal commercial markets. Nearly all other community activities involve the public sector. Involvement with cattle operations necessitates involvement with primary production officers, veterinarians, stock inspectors, lands inspectors, scientists, meat buyers, stock agents, butchers and abattoir operators. Dealing with this diverse range of people expanded directors' knowledge of the non-Aboriginal world and increased their capacity to deal with
other non-Aboriginal agencies. For example, many of the Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu directors have taken on wider leadership responsibilities and have used their cattle enterprise experience to negotiate with governments and others on a range of issues including railway easements, gas pipe-line corridors, mining agreements and outstation developments.

A final non-profit outcome to Ti-Tree Station and Yuendumu from the operations of the two cattle enterprises was the provision of cheap (sometimes free) meat. Access to cheap or free meat in communities with poor levels of nutrition and correlated high levels of chronic illness is an extremely valuable outcome. For example, communities with access to killers can purchase such meat for $150, whereas the same amount of meat purchased through the local store would cost $600 (Phillpot, 1997).

Thus, while neither enterprise has achieved the policy objectives of the funding agencies, they have provided a range of outcomes that, from the communities' point of view, may be more valuable than profit maximisation.

An important fundamental aspect, of course, in all of this was, in both cases, the re-acquisition of the properties, reinforcing the culture and the authority of the traditional owners, as they were in a non-Aboriginal sense, the land owners. This legal recognition was, and is, undoubtedly the overwhelming benefit. In the words of Billy Mbtijana “we bosses for land, water, grass, tree, hill, cattle – everything” (Mbtijana, 1993, *pers. com.*).
Conclusion

In short, the differences and similarities between the two case studies is summarised in Figure 48.

Figure 48: A summary of the similarities and differences between the two case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Name</th>
<th>Puraiya</th>
<th>Ngarliyikirlangu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>3,345 sq km</td>
<td>2,120 sq km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate structure</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of establishment</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>Privatised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
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<td>1,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of directors</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of shareholders</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grazing capacity</td>
<td>5,600</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current herd</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government assistance</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDEP</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The different future situations faced by the Puraiya Cattle Company and the Ngarliyikirlangu Pastoral Company are a direct result of the capacity of both companies to access the resources provided by various Aboriginal enterprise and employment development programs over the last twenty years. Initially, both properties were able to access support for the purpose of achieving social and economic goals. However, from 1980 onwards, economic goals (defined as
commercial viability) became increasingly dominant, although up until 1990, both properties continued to access some labour market programs. By 1990, the only basis of government funding was the commercial viability of the enterprise. This resulted in Ngarliyikirliangu's funding being withdrawn and Puraiya being restricted to management support only. Currently, Ngarliyikirliangu is non-viable while Puraiya has a herd size that is approaching that of an independent commercial operation in Central Australia.

Although Puraiya and Ngarliyikirliangu face different futures, both cattle companies have been affected by the narrowing policy focus for Aboriginal pastoral companies over the last twenty years. After 1990 the principal basis for continuing to fund cattle companies by the respective Commonwealth Aboriginal development agencies was that of commercial viability on the same basis as non-Aboriginal cattle properties. However, no education or training was provided to support this objective. Furthermore, cultural factors which might have indicated that this policy focus was inappropriate were ignored. In small communities personalities are also often important. Certainly in the case of both Ti-Tree and Yuendumu the personality of the directors, the managers and the field officers had an effect on the development of the individual cattle companies. However, the overriding factor determining each company's future development was the land capacity of each and, based upon this, the provision of government funding.

The experience of Puraiya and Ngarliyikirliangu suggests that if a property or enterprise can convince the funding agencies that it has the land capacity, herd size and infrastructure to establish itself as an independent commercial enterprise
within a set time period, then it will receive ATSIC support and become a subsidised commercial operation. If a property or enterprise cannot convince funding agencies of its future commercial viability, then it will become a non-subsidised non-commercial operation, although it may still be able to obtain some CDEP support (CDEP or Work for the Dole). The experiences of Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu indicate that, even when enterprises can access government funding, policy objectives (commercial independence) are not necessarily fulfilled. However, what appears to be important is the funding agency’s perception of an enterprise’s likely future.

It is questionable whether the enterprises themselves ever shared the profit maximisation objectives of the funding agencies. In the case of Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu, there is no evidence to suggest such agreement – in fact, quite the contrary. The non-profit benefits in terms of personal benefits for directors, employment, and cheap or free meat, appear to have been far more important in terms of valued outcomes to community members than that of achieving commercial viability. Ngarliyikirlangu does not have the land capacity to achieve commercial viability and neither the directors of Puraiya nor Ngarliyikirlangu appear to have been committed to achieving commercial viability. Therefore, it would seem that there are fundamental flaws in the policy assumptions that have informed the provision of program support since 1974. If the objective of commercial viability is not valued by the Aboriginal owners and if the land capacity is limited, then the probability of establishing a commercial Aboriginal owned pastoral property must be relatively low. Thus, if the experience of Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu is replicated on other Aboriginal owned and
operated properties, then the probability of establishing a commercially viable Aboriginal owned pastoral sector is also low. The experience of other Aboriginal owned pastoral properties is assessed in chapter 7.
Chapter 7: The experience of other Northern Territory Aboriginal owned pastoral enterprises

This chapter will assess the extent to which the experiences of Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu are typical of other Aboriginal owned properties in the NT. That is, was the experience replicated?

In order to assess this, in addition to Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu, this chapter examines another twenty-six Aboriginal groups or communities that are involved in some form of pastoral activity in the NT. That is, this chapter will describe the current economic situation of these additional twenty-six properties and summarise their experience in relation to those factors discussed in detail in chapter 6. In other words, in chapters 3, 4 and 5, the policy framework and the impact of policy were explored, and four critical community components were identified – social structure, enterprise structure, land capacity and infrastructure. In addition, the impact of Aboriginal development policy and industry policy, the management quality of enterprises and the role of agency field officers were also identified as factors that contributed to the development experience of Aboriginal properties. As in chapters 4, 5 and 6 the emphasis in this chapter is on the land, community, enterprise, agency interaction experience of a larger sample of Aboriginal properties, shown in the shaded areas of Figure 49.

In order to achieve this, the chapter will first give an overview of the additional twenty-six groups involved in pastoral activities. It will then examine the policy, social enterprise structure, land, infrastructure, management and the role of
agency staff to ascertain if the same factors underlying the distinctions in the case studies are repeated in other properties. A diagrammatic representation of this approach is shown in Figure 49.

**Figure 49: Bureaucratic encapsulation: the context of all Aboriginal pastoral companies**
The data for this chapter was primarily gathered during the 1993 training needs analysis of Aboriginal cattle stations undertaken with Mr David Hanlon (Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993a & b). It was then revised for this thesis through telephone interviews in 1995/96. In addition, it draws on the Author's irregular contact with all of them over two and a half decades.

At the end of the chapter those properties that can be classified as commercial operations or as non-commercial operations will be defined.

A brief description of twenty-eight Aboriginal owned or operated NT pastoral properties

As in chapter 6, the examination of the background of the additional properties includes an examination of the current situation, social structures, the company structures and the land/infrastructure capacity.

Darwin/Douglas-Daly Basin, including Katherine

Minjilang

The cattle project at Minjilang has always been run as part of the Minjilang Community Council, which is situated on Croker Island, some 150 km north-east of Darwin and 70 sea km south-east of the Tiwi Islands. The beef herd was originally established as part of the Aboriginal children's home that existed on Croker Island between 1939 and 1967. It continued as a meat source for the community and a training project when Minjilang became a Methodist mission in
The herd was largely made up of Santa Gertrudis cattle with an odd infusion of Australian Illawarra Shorthorn. The Illawarra Shorthorn were introduced to the Island as part of a dairy herd to support the children’s home and, when the children's home was closed down, the dairy herd was mixed in with the beef herd. The main purpose of the herd at Minjilang was to provide meat to the community and to provide training. For example, in the 1970s the operation employed five men under the Council and shipped live cattle to Singapore (Phillpot, 1980a). Since 1980, the herd has been culled on a contract basis for pet meat and is currently non-operational because of a drop in population from 290 (in 1979) to 70 people, as community members dispersed to outstations. The resource capacity of Minjilang, although limited by size, does contain fertile wet flood plains that have supported up to 2,000 head of cattle in the wet season. However, this herd size put severe pressure on the whole ecology of Croker Island in the dry season.

Minjilang has never received any Aboriginal development enterprise support as the cattle project was always funded from community funds. Its herd size of approximately 1,400 head is well below that of a commercial herd and the cattle enterprise is not considered to be commercially viable. The operation of the cattle enterprise is one of six services or activities operated by the community council.

Murwangi

The Murwangi Pastoral Company is located inland from Milingimbi and its herd is based on the old Arafura Pastoral Company herd that was established in the 1890s. The operations of the Murwangi Pastoral Company revolve around a non-
Aboriginal manager who has had a long association with the community, and a small group of older Aboriginal men who had a close involvement with the pastoral industry in the Katherine region in the 1950s and 1960s. The primary purpose of Murwangi is to provide meat to the Milingimbi communities and outstations. In order to fulfil this function, Murwangi is currently in the process of establishing a local kill abattoir. Although the capacity of the area to support cattle is limited, the large area available could support a commercial operation. The project is largely funded by CDEP. The herd size, while below the average considered to be commercial, is sufficient to support the commercial processing of meat for nearby communities.

**Palumpa**

Palumpa was originally established as an offshoot of Port Keats Mission and has operated more or less successfully for over twenty years. The major reason for the success of Palumpa has been a domestic abattoir that provides meat to Port Keats and surrounding communities in the Port Keats/Daly River region. The herd size is sufficient to support the abattoir. The property successfully employs a total of twelve people – five in the stock camp and seven in the butcher shop.

The area represents some of the better pastoral land of the Port Keats/Daly River area. Until 1990 Palumpa had been able to access loan and grant funding from the ADC and ATSIC. It has continued to receive some support from ATSIC, although its major source of support is from the community of Port Keats.
Eva Valley

Eva Valley is a small property located south-east of Katherine and approximately 70 km north-east of Barunga. It was substantially destocked under the BTEC and currently operates its cattle activities under CDEP. Its primary activity is eco-tourism. It also receives substantial support from the administrative staff at the Barunga Community Council. While Eva Valley is too small to ever achieve commercial viability, it does provide some training in the cattle industry for CDEP participants. Eva Valley is considered commercially viable as an eco-tourism enterprise.

Arnhem Land

Bulman/Gulin Gulin

Bulman was initially established as an outstation halfway between Katherine and Maningrida. Currently, feral cattle and buffalo are harvested by non-Aboriginal contractors under a license agreement with the traditional owners. The community has little effective involvement in the operation apart from odd casual work. However, the licence fees paid to the traditional owners sometimes amount to as much as $40,000 per year. The contractors also employ local men as ringers and bull catchers. Bulman has the capacity to support a large buffalo population and could support an increased cattle herd, but only on the basis of extensive land use with little capital investment. Because of its capacity to contract the operations out and receive a return by way of royalty payments, the property can be considered commercially viable.
The Gulf

Barunga
The cattle operation at Barunga was originally derived from the old NT Social Welfare Branch training project at Beswick, some 120 km south of Katherine. It currently operates under CDEP and, as in the old Social Welfare Branch days, its primary function is as a training project. However, there is substantial conflict over ownership of the cattle among traditional owners at Barunga and, as a consequence, the intensity with which the community supports the cattle company waxes and wanes with the intensity of the conflict over cattle ownership. The size of Barunga has always limited its capacity to develop a commercial herd.

Elsey Station
Elsey Station is located on the banks of the Roper River and is the site of E. Gunn's *We of the Never Never* and *Little Black Princess*. It was purchased in 1992 and has approximately 8,000 head of cattle. It currently receives ATSIC management support grants to employ a bookkeeper and a manager. It also receives employment support grants that enable it to employ Aboriginal workers. There is a large community nearby at Djikminggan. The land at Elsey has the capacity to sustain a commercial beef operation and the station has commenced to develop a capacity to export live beef to South-East Asia. Elsey is considered a commercially viable property.
**Hodgson Downs**

Hodgson Downs, which is located 300 km south-east of Katherine and 100 km south-east of Elsey, was substantially destocked during the BTEC. There has been a number of feasibility studies undertaken to re-establish Hodgson Downs, including an abattoir study, but to date nothing has been done. Hodgson Downs has the land capacity to develop a commercial herd. However, it may have difficulty attracting Aboriginal development funds because of the high level of investment required to achieve commercial viability.

**Robinson River**

Robinson River is located 180 km east of Borroloola in country that Holmes (1988) defined as uneconomic and environmentally unsustainable for cattle. The area was substantially destocked and shot out during the BTEC and has not yet recovered. Some stock work has taken place under CDEP, primarily to provide meat for the community. The capacity of the Gulf Country to support viable properties has been questioned by a number of authors, including Holmes (1988), and it is doubtful whether Robinson River could ever support a viable herd.

**Victoria River District**

**Lajamanu**

Lajamanu is located some 400 km south west of Katherine. The cattle enterprise was established as a meat producing and employment project during the period the community was a welfare settlement administered by the NT Government. The herd was between 2,000 and 3,000 head and, as a consequence of lack of
infrastructure, it was destocked during the BTEC. In recent years some locals have attempted to resurrect its project by mustering unbranded cattle that have drifted south from more northern properties. This activity can be considered non-commercial.

**Anambidgee**

Anambidgee is part of the old Kildurk Research Station and has never been a commercial property, operating as a research activity for improving animal production in the Victoria River District. While 9,000 head of cattle were shot out during the BTEC, the community received little compensation. The residue herd is now used as a meat source for the community. Anambidgee is probably too small in size to ever achieve commercial viability and it has not been able to attract development funding support.

**Daguragu**

Daguragu is the contemporary name for the old Wattie Creek walk-off community. It is located some 400 km south-west of Katherine on the banks of the Victoria River. Half of Daguragu is leased back to the owners of Wave Hill Station and the other half to the local stock inspector. This provides some income to the community. While Daguragu has the capacity to support a level of commercial production, the level of investment required and the degree of commitment required from the local people make it unlikely that it will be commercially viable.
Fitzroy

Fitzroy Station is located some 350 km west of Katherine near Timber Creek. The area of Fitzroy Station was substantially reduced following the development of the Gregory National Park, and the owners were left with relatively marginal country already substantially degraded after 90 years of overstocking. Fitzroy Station employs four people and the community owners reside at Top Springs, not at the station. There is a non-Aboriginal manager on the property. The property receives enterprise support grants from ATSIC and is provided with pastoral advice by the NLC. Because of its small size, the limitations of the country and its reliance on subsidies, Fitzroy is unlikely to achieve commercial viability.

Mistake Creek

Mistake Creek is located on the NT side of the Western Australian/NT border approximately 600 km south-west of Katherine. Mistake Creek currently operates as a fully commercial operation and sells over $250,000 of cattle per year, mostly to the Indonesian boat trade, although initially it received some enterprise support grants and employed some CDEP labour. In this sense it is a subsidised commercial operation. However, it could operate as a commercial unit with less labour. It has an Aboriginal manager, an active board of directors (all of whom have substantial experience in the cattle industry), and employs several members of the local community in direct stock work, as well as a number under CDEP for fencing and yard building. The herd is commercial and the land has the potential to support a sizeable commercial herd, although to realise this potential key areas of the property will require rehabilitation.
Barkly Tableland

Muckaty
Muckaty is located some 105 km from Tennant Creek on the eastern side of the Stuart Highway. It is 2,241 sq km in size and has a carrying capacity of 3,500 head. It was purchased bare, and has several outstations on it. While it is within the boundaries of the Barkly Tableland, its land system is dominated by the Tanami biogeography, which has an extremely low carrying capacity. During the drought of 1988 to 1996, Muckaty made some money from agistment that it has used to establish a small herd. However, it must be considered a non-commercial operation.

Central Australia

Alcoota
Alcoota is located 180 km north-east of Alice Springs. It is a fully developed property, purchased in 1992, and operates a commercial level herd. There is substantial conflict among the traditional owners over who owns the pastoral company. However, the property has continued to operate successfully and has managed to survive the 1988-1996 drought with the herd largely intact. This is due in large part to the capacity of the country and the property's infrastructure. Alcoota receives management advice from the CLC and receives management support and employment support from ATSIC.
Atula

Atula is located on the Queensland/NT border and currently operates a sustainable commercial herd. Atula lies at the northern end of the Simpson Desert and is prone to drought. Consequently, its commercial sustainability is variable. The 1988 to 1996 drought hurt it substantially and there is significant conflict in the community between traditional owners of the property and those working in the enterprise. This conflict revolves around tension between the needs of the workers and the enterprise impinging on the authority of the traditional owners’ right to dictate what may happen, and when, on the land. It currently receives ATSIC support. However, its herd size would suggest that it is not commercially viable without subsidy.

Tanami

Tanami is located 500 km north-west of Alice Springs on the Western Australian border. It was purchased in 1988 and has always been considered a marginal property. It was originally established as a stopover point for cattle being moved from the Kimberleys to Central Australia, and has survived on the basis of substantial support from ATSIC. The resident community consists mainly of a small group (not more than ten) of very aged pensioners. Although the Tanami has a limited capacity to support cattle, it does experience some monsoonal effects and, as a consequence, can, in a good season, carry more cattle than one would normally expect for that country. Although there are concerns about its land capacity, it currently receives support from ATSIC, which currently considers Tanami to be commercially viable.
Haasts Bluff

Haasts Bluff is located approximately 100 km south of Papunya and 280 km north-west of Alice Springs. It was originally established as a ration depot by the Social Welfare Branch and a cattle project was developed for the purpose of training and meat provision. In the 1970s, in response to above average seasonal conditions, herd numbers built up to over ten thousand head. Because of fears of overstocking, and just prior to the passing of the Land Rights Act in 1977, the government destocked an estimated eight million dollars worth of cattle and reduced the herd to a little under two thousand head. The BTEC period saw the area almost totally destocked. However, following the passing of the Land Rights Act, individual members of Haasts Bluff community and its ten associated outstations have all attempted various pastoral activities using the residual cattle herd left over following the DPIE destock in 1977. Lack of support, resources and training has meant that most of these activities have been more subsistence than commercial. The outstations only receive CDEP support and the Haasts Bluff land systems can only support large numbers of cattle in very good seasons. Haasts Bluff is currently considered non-viable.

Hermannsburg

Hermannsburg is located 100 km from Alice Springs at the western end of the MacDonnell Ranges. Hermannsburg is the site of the oldest mission in the NT. The herd at Hermannsburg was largely destocked during the BTEC and the area suffers from over 100 years of overgrazing, cattle being the main commercial activity of the Hermannsburg Mission during its 100 years of existence. Following the passing of the *NT Land Rights Act 1976*, the old mission
community was reduced as families moved back to their traditional areas and established outstations. Today, Wallace Rockhole and Impolera undertake some pastoral activities, but these tend to be secondary to social and community development activities. For all intents and purposes, pastoral activities at Hermannsburg and its associated outstations can only be considered recreational. In the past, Hermannsburg has supported a commercial size herd (Henson, 1992). However, the effect of continual overstocking has reduced the land capacity and this, combined with the development of outstations, has meant that the establishment of a commercially viable herd under a cattle company structure is unlikely, although it may be possible if some type of outstation co-operative is developed.

**Loves Creek**

Loves Creek was purchased in 1992 as an on-going pastoral lease and is currently the subject of a land claim. It is located 150 km east of Alice Springs on the flood plains out of the Todd River. When it was purchased, Loves Creek was carrying 6,000 head of cattle, although 3,000 had to be agisted in northern South Australia as a result of continuing drought. Consultations with the traditional owners indicate that only a few of the traditional owners wish to pursue pastoral activities with the remainder preferring to establish outstations once the land has reverted to Aboriginal ownership. Loves Creek has supported a commercially viable herd in the past and currently receives ATSIC support. To what extent this support will continue after the land claim has been processed remains to be seen.
Mt Allan/Yuelamu
Mt Allan/Yuelamu was originally purchased in 1976 and, as late as 1988, had 10,000 head of cattle. It is located 230 km north-west of Alice Springs. It was fully developed in terms of yards, bores and fences and was commercially sustainable. Since 1988 its herd has been substantially reduced and the infrastructure is badly in need of maintenance. The property can be considered to be only marginally commercial. The community has recently decided to use CDEP workers to refurbish the property. However, it is unlikely that the property will be redeveloped without substantial funds for restocking. Yuelamu can support a herd of 10,000 head in good seasons and 5,000 head in the poorer seasons. It is currently unviable as a commercial operation, although with a greater involvement of the community and with some ATSIC support, it could probably rebuild its operations.

McLaren Creek
McLaren Creek was purchased in 1983 as a destocked property and has not been restocked. It is located 150 km south of Tennant Creek. Some horse mustering has been undertaken, but essentially the property is operated as a home for the traditional owners. The property has carried commercial size herds in the past. However, it receives no Aboriginal development funding support and is therefore unlikely to re-establish a commercial herd.

Santa Teresa
The herd at Santa Teresa was originally established by the Catholic missionaries for the purpose of providing meat and training. Santa Teresa is located 60 km
south-east of Alice Springs. The area occupied by Santa Teresa is too small to maintain a commercially viable property and, as a consequence of the 1988 to 1996 drought, all of the cattle have been sold.

**Utopia**

Utopia was purchased in 1976 and is located 180 km north-east of Alice Springs. It was destocked during the BTEC. It currently has ten outstations, three of which have made several attempts to re-establish pastoral activities on the basis of mustering brumbies for sale, the proceeds of which are then used to buy cattle. These activities have had marginal support from the CLC and no support from ATSIC. Utopia was always one of the smaller pastoral leases in Central Australia and, from the end of World War II, it was operated as part of a larger family enterprise. It is doubtful whether the land capacity is sufficient to support a commercially viable herd. It receives no Aboriginal enterprise development support.

**Willowra/Mt Barkly**

Willowra is located 93 km west-north-west of Ti-Tree. It was expanded in the 1980s to include Mt Barkly, which had previously been operating as a single unit. In 1987 Willowra/Mt Barkly was destocked under the BTEC following successive failures on a number of approved BTEC test and slaughter programs. Some residual feral cattle remain and large numbers of feral horses. While a number of community residents have attempted to muster this stock and rebuild some sort of cattle industry, they have had little support from ATSIC and it is unlikely that these efforts will be successful. Willowra/Mt Barkly is dominated by
the Lander River system and is capable (with development) of supporting a commercially viable herd. However, because of the social structure of the community, it is unlikely to do so.

A comparison of the experiences of Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu with that of the other Aboriginal owned cattle stations in the NT

The following section summarises the experiences of the other Aboriginal owned cattle stations and compares them to the experiences of Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu. This will be undertaken by examining the same aspects of the larger group of properties examined in the two case studies. In order to simplify this examination, a profile of 28 properties is shown in Figure 50. The characteristics identified include herd size, carrying capacity, title type, the history of establishment and a number of employment and community service details.
Figure 50: Some Selected Characteristics of Aboriginal Owned Cattle Properties in the Northern Territory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Name</th>
<th>Property Size (sq km)</th>
<th>Carrying Capacity</th>
<th>Herd Size 1993</th>
<th>Land Title 1993</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>ATSIC or other Enterprise Support</th>
<th>CDEP</th>
<th>No of Community Services</th>
<th>Local Manager</th>
<th>Non-Local Manager</th>
<th>External Advice</th>
<th>Total Employ.</th>
<th>Access to Pastoral Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darwin/Douglas Daly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minjilang</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murwangi</td>
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<td>3,100</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palumpa</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,611</strong></td>
<td><strong>20,300</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,200</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>690</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>Nil</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnhem Land</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulman/Gulin Gulin</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>20,300</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,500</strong></td>
<td><strong>20,300</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,000</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>148</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Nil</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gulf</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barunga</td>
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<td>Not known</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsey</td>
<td>5,346</td>
<td>14,450</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>Pastoral Lease</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva Valley</td>
<td>2,926</td>
<td>4,700</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NLC</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Nil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hodgson Downs</td>
<td>3,232</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Pastoral Lease</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinson River</td>
<td>5,196</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>Pastoral Lease</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<th>No of Community Services</th>
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<td><strong>Total (ALL Regions)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>162,277</strong></td>
<td><strong>56,850</strong></td>
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<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>104</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Average (ALL Regions)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>6,892</strong></td>
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<td><strong>217</strong></td>
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</table>

Haasts Bluff includes the outstations of Ikuti, Kungkayunti, Tarrawarra, Unurarrnya, Undandita, Yeatman's Bore and Kulpitjarra
Hermannsburg includes the outstations of Wallace Rockhole and Impolera
Social structures

All the cattle properties are owned and operated by Aboriginal people who actively maintain Aboriginal culture. In other words, Aboriginal kinship, religion, ceremonial activities and social structures are the dominant social aspect of all of the 28 cattle operations (Rose D B, 1992). This includes Aboriginal land ownership and management structures. However, as with Puraiya and Ngarliykirlangu, there does not appear to have been any attempt to align the cattle operations with Aboriginal land ownership and management structures. That is, the corporate model applied to Aboriginal pastoral properties was non-Aboriginal.

In fact, the opposite has occurred. For example, at Alcoota, which was purchased in 1992, a major conflict occurred between the resident community, traditional owners and the CLC. At the heart of the conflict was the desire of the leaders of the resident community to maintain a single enterprise, while some of the traditional owners wished to exercise their land and resource management rights by establishing outstations and reducing cattle activities. Hanlon and Phillpot (1993) noted similar tensions at Atula, Elsey and Mistake Creek, all of which were purchased after 1992.

In terms of the other activities taking place in the communities associated with the properties, Figure 50 indicates that seventeen have stores; eight have horticultural projects; thirteen have clinics; eleven have tourist activities; twelve have access to a school; eleven have arts and craft activities; and eighteen have a workshop.
After further analysis, it is clear that the older community based settlement or mission properties have far more activities and community resources than those communities located on a purchased pastoral property. For example, in the Darwin/Douglas-Daly Region, all of the properties are ex-government settlement or mission enterprises and have access to a full range of community support in terms of maintenance, a store, clinic, school, arts and craft, and a workshop. In the Central Region, of the five communities that have access to all types of community support, four are ex-government settlements or mission. The development of these services appears to have been a higher priority than developing the cattle enterprise. The only non-mission or ex-government settlement that is a cattle station and has a similar range of services to the ex-settlements and missions is Willowra. However, Willowra's population is in excess of three hundred and, as a consequence, has been able to attract government support for a full range of community services. Thus, the ex-government mission and settlement communities, as well as communities with large populations, tend to have a range of community support and activities similar to those found at Ngarliyikirlangu. Those communities located on purchased properties have, on average, only three community services. This is similar to the situation at Puraiya and, again like Puraiya, it would appear that one of the major advantages of having a cattle enterprise is the multiple purpose cattle enterprise resources that can be used. For example, trucks can transport stores and people as well as stock, and water points can be used to establish outstations.
Company structures

Aboriginal pastoral activities were established either by privatising what was previously a government or mission project or by purchasing an existing pastoral operation. The properties purchased were incorporated as companies. However, not all of the ex-mission and settlement cattle operations were established as private companies. Those that were established as private companies included Daguragu, Palumpa, Murwangi and Ngarliyikirlangu. On the other hand, Minjilang, Hermannsburg and Haasts Bluff operate their cattle activities through individuals with a commitment to, or interest in, pastoralism, usually with support from the community council or the outstation resource centre. These resource centres were often incorporated as associations under the *Commonwealth Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* or the *NT Associations Act 1990*.

Land and infrastructure capacity

There is no evidence that any land capacity assessments have been undertaken on any of the ex-government or mission settlements. On the other hand, properties that were purchased continued to have regular Department of Lands inspections until such time as they were converted to Aboriginal freehold. At that point Department of Lands inspections ceased. The lack of land capacity assessments, by either the Aboriginal companies themselves or the funding agencies, seems to indicate that it was assumed that all the Aboriginal owned land could sustain commercially viable herds. The corollary of this assumption is that if an Aboriginal pastoral company failed to sustain a commercial operation, it was
either due to poor management or the failure to honour grant or loan conditions. In other words, failure to achieve commercially viable herds is the result of inadequate skills on the part of managers and directors rather than limited land resources. However, it should be noted that the CLC land management unit has recently (1994) commenced such assessments using a bicultural land resources assessment methodology focused on multiple land use rather than pastoralism. This approach involves facilitating Aboriginal people to prepare maps based upon their taxonomic definitions of country type and then asking them to identify the best use of each area. One of the preliminary results of this work indicates the extent to which contemporary Aboriginal people perceive land in terms of multiple land use rather than mono-land use, such as large-scale cattle production.

The purchased properties are slightly larger in total size than the privatised group. Carrying capacity is lower, although average herd size is greater. This suggests that the purchased properties have sufficient infrastructure to maximise their carrying capacity while the privatised properties lack the infrastructure to maximise their carrying capacity.

At all of the 28 properties land resources were always limited. The evidence is that, where pastoralism has occurred, there has been a significant reduction in the land capacity. The National Rangeland Strategy (National Rangelands Management Working Group, 1996) estimated that 56 per cent of the NT rangelands have experienced a loss of capacity through land degradation. Furthermore, the same study indicated that the impact of global warming was likely to increase the uncertainty of pastoral production in the rangelands and to
place a number of pastoral environments at increased risk of further degradation. This would indicate that Aboriginal cattle producers, as well as non-Aboriginal cattle producers, face an increasingly uncertain environmental future. What this suggests is that if some Aboriginal people wish to continue to be involved in pastoralism, then new approaches are required. It also suggests that, from an environmental perspective, the reduction of herd numbers on Aboriginal land may be a positive outcome. The level of infrastructure on properties varies considerably. For example, Haasts Bluff and Santa Teresa have very little in the way of yards, fences and bores. Yuelamu, on the other hand, has well-developed yards, bores and fences. However, in general, most Aboriginal properties had less infrastructure than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Thiele, 1980; Hanlon, 1985; Phillpot, 1985). The issue of the capacity of the local resource is dealt with in detail in chapter 9.

**Impact of government policy**

As in the case studies, there were three key policy areas that impacted on the Aboriginal owned pastoral properties. These were the Aboriginal development policies, the BTEC and the granting of land rights. The impact of these policies is examined in this section. The impact of land rights is treated as a subset of Aboriginal development policy. However, the BTEC is examined separately.
Impact of Aboriginal Development Policy

As in the case studies, the policy objective of establishing commercially viable, Aboriginal owned pastoral properties, as the dominant policy objective for funding properties, only emerged over time.

Initially, on the establishment of the self-determination policy under the Whitlam Government (1972-1975) and under the self-management policy of the Fraser Government (1975-1983), Aboriginal development funds were provided on the basis of both social and economic benefit. This included meat production, employment, training, self-esteem, community activity and profit. As a consequence, at the beginning of 1980 there were 28 subsidised commercial cattle enterprises owned and operated by Aboriginal people in the NT.

However, with the establishment of the ADC in 1980, the funding criteria narrowed considerably. That is, funding was provided by the ADC solely on the basis of commercial viability. While, it was still possible to justify some funding through DEET, and its predecessor DEIR, for employment purposes, the restricted nature of funding criteria meant that by the end of 1988 only twelve Aboriginal owned cattle operations were operating as subsidised commercial enterprises. A contributing factor in this reduction was the BTEC.

The ADC policies were continued under ATSIC and the commercial viability criteria were applied even more strictly. Under ATSIC, funding was provided to Aboriginal properties solely on the basis of their capacity to achieve commercial viability. The assessment of commercial viability was based upon the capacity of
the property to carry sufficient cattle to provide a positive cash flow within a
given time period (ATSIC, 1990). During this period, the industry experienced
severe drought as well as a downturn in commodity prices between 1992 and
1996. As a result of these factors, by the end of 1996 the number of properties
operating as subsidised commercial enterprises had fallen to six.

This brief review of successive Aboriginal policies indicates that Aboriginal
people operating pastoral properties had to manage a dynamic policy context
which contained a variable mix of social, industry development and land
redistribution policy objectives. Inevitably, this meant that it was often difficult to
assess the likely impact of the policies on the management and development of
the properties.

The granting of land rights and the homeland movement

Only those properties purchased after 1992 are still held under pastoral leases,
and each of those is currently the subject of a land claim. All of the other areas
where cattle are run either have outstations or plan to develop outstations. The
locations of the outstations are, or will be, largely determined by each group's
descent group status in terms of being owners or managers of land. The expansion
of the outstation movement means that, on a number of properties, conventional
pastoralism (that is, extensive rangeland grazing) is not possible. For example, at
Utopia, Willowra, Hermannsburg and Haasts Bluff the water requirements of the
extended families moving to outstations is not compatible with the watering of
stock. In each case the operation and development of outstations posed similar
problems to those experienced at Ngarliyikirlangu and Puraiya. That is, once
descent groups had reoccupied land, what rights did they have to use and benefit from cattle remaining on this land. For example, the high tally of killers at Ngarliyikirlangu, and in the Author's experience, is directly related to the fact that this issue has never been properly addressed either at the policy level or at the community level.

The homeland movement demonstrates both the heterogeneity of Aboriginal society and the increased interest by different Aboriginal groups in multiple land use, rather than maintaining pastoralism as a single dominant activity. Rose B (1995), in his examination of Aboriginal land management issues in Central Australia, clearly identifies the heterogeneous nature of Aboriginal homeland interests in land use. Although some groups were interested in carrying out pastoral activities, the overwhelming majority saw their first priority as looking after the country (Rose B, 1995:11-24); that is, looking after sacred sites and maintaining areas used for hunting and gathering.

The Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign

The BTEC, conducted between 1977 and 1992, left the majority of Aboriginal owned properties with reduced stock. The reason for this destocking was that most Aboriginal owned enterprises lacked sufficient infrastructure to maintain a testing program. As a consequence, over fifty per cent of Aboriginal owned herds in the NT are run on the six properties purchased after 1992, after the completion of the BTEC. Those properties purchased after 1992 that had commercial sized herds had successfully eradicated the disease using a test and slaughter strategy that enabled them to maintain a commercial operation. On the other hand, those
purchased or established before 1992, with the exception of Ngarliyikirlangu, Palumpa and Murwangi, were all destocked.

Management

An examination of the role of directors, managers and field officers shows similar patterns to those experienced by the two case studies.

The role of directors

All of the above properties, including those that have been newly purchased, exhibit high staff turnovers and a dominant core group of directors. As at Ngarliyikirlangu and Puraiya, there appears to have been no attempt to align the management of the cattle companies (that is, the directors) with the traditional ownership structure. Management training has only been provided to the directors of four properties; that is, to the directors of Mistake Creek, Yuelamu, Loves Creek and Alcoota. This training was provided between 1993 and 1996.

Fingleton (1996a & b) explores the role of directors in his review of Aboriginal organisation. Fingleton found that the form of the incorporated organisation rarely reflected the decision-making structure of the Aboriginal group. In the words of H Wootten QC:

[a] constant tension exists in many Aboriginal communities between the natural forms of association in the community and the legal structures which are seen by officialdom in white society as natural, reasonable and democratic.
(cited in Fingleton, 1996a:51)
This view was echoed during the 1993 training needs analysis of the NT Aboriginal owned pastoral industry (Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993a). Directors and workers constantly complained that traditional owners often interfered with the operation of the property and that their demands were constant and unreasonable (Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993a). At the same time, many community members complained that the directors of pastoral companies were able to obtain store credit and access to vehicles and other resources, when the directors were not traditional owners and had no traditional rights to the land or benefits from land use.

Hanlon (1985) has argued that poor communication between the funding agencies and the cattle company, and the lack of a clear relationship between traditional owners, the resident community and the directors and operators of a cattle operation, often creates a significant level of confusion over the objectives of the cattle operation. This is certainly the case in both Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu and the twenty-six cattle operations reviewed in this chapter.

The confusion over policy objectives was not helped by the lack of property management training for Aboriginal directors of pastoral companies.

Four of the purchased properties had accessed formal training in pastoral property management, while no privatised properties had accessed property management training. These differences suggest that the difference between Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu in terms of their history of establishment is repeated across the other privatised and purchased commercial properties.
Training programs that had been accessed in the three years between 1990 and 1993 included two directors' training courses, seven mechanical courses, ten water maintenance courses, four welding courses, seven stock and station skill courses and four bookkeeping courses. Until 1993 no training was offered to directors or managers and, in the main, it was assumed that Aboriginal pastoral company directors agreed with the government objectives of achieving commercial viability. This is consistent with the experience of both Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu, which received little or no training. It is interesting to note that even when training opportunities increased post-1992, they were generally not made available to the older cattle operations.

The managers

Management arrangements on the properties vary. Fourteen of the properties have a resident manager, nine of whom are Aboriginal people. Only ten properties have access to external management or pastoral industry advice. Information on the performance of managers is limited. However, twenty of the properties have changed their manager at least once in the last three years. This experience is similar to that of Puraiya and demonstrates the unique position of Ngarliyikirlangu in having only one manager for the whole of its twenty year operation.

Field officers

The constant change in policy and agencies meant that very few Commonwealth Aboriginal development agencies worked for any length of time with one station.
Consequently, most Aboriginal leaders and non-Aboriginal managers of Aboriginal owned enterprises were obliged to continually educate field staff about the history of their enterprise, their community's aspirations and the difficulties faced by the enterprise in meeting those aspirations (Thiele, 1982). Because of their lack of detailed knowledge, field officers tended to rigidly enforce funding conditions in the early part of their association with a pastoral property. Recent increases in ATSIC accountability have increased the onus on field officers to maintain such standards and, as a consequence, it is unlikely that a cattle enterprise would obtain funding without evidence that it could achieve the objectives of the funding agencies. Access to the field services of the different agencies is also limited. For example, ATSIC only provides field services to properties in receipt of ATSIC funds. Similarly, the land councils tend to focus on those properties that they have purchased. This approach to field operations is consistent with the experience of Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu.

**Outcomes**

It is clear that the commercial experience of Ngarliyikirlangu and Puraiya is repeated in other Aboriginal owned or operated pastoral operations across the NT. An examination of privatised cattle projects is shown in Figure 51. Nearly all of the Aboriginal owned cattle enterprises which are ex-government settlements or mission training and meat producing projects have similar herd and carrying capacity concerns to that of Ngarliyikirlangu and are not operating as commercial operations.
In the Darwin/Douglas-Daly Region, Minjilang, Murwangi and Palumpa are carrying less than half their estimated capacity. All of these properties were established from ex-mission projects. Murwangi and Palumpa are both operating as commercial operations. This has been possible because of their local kill abattoir operations which are subsidised through CDEP and capital investment by the NT Government.
Figure 51: Some Selected Characteristics of Privatised Aboriginal Owned Cattle Properties in the Northern Territory


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Name</th>
<th>Property Size (sq km)</th>
<th>Carrying Capacity</th>
<th>Herd Size 1993</th>
<th>Land Title 1993</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>ATSIC or other Enterprise Support</th>
<th>No of Community Services</th>
<th>Total Employ.</th>
<th>Access to Pastoral Mgt Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Santa Teresa (C)</td>
<td>1,286</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Mission/Govt</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lajamanu (VRD)</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Mission/Govt</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haasts Bluff (C)</td>
<td>14,800</td>
<td>8,200</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Mission/Govt</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anambidgee (VRD)</td>
<td>2,831</td>
<td>12,400</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Ex Research</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barunga (G)</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Mission/Govt</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daguragu (VRD)</td>
<td>3,280</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermannsburg (C)</td>
<td>3,087</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Mission/Govt</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngarliyikirlangu (C)</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Mission/Govt</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minjilang (D)</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murwangi (D)</td>
<td>7,161</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>3,100</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palumpa (D)</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulman/Gulin Gulin (A)</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>20,300</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Mission/Govt</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>44,095</strong></td>
<td><strong>87,200</strong></td>
<td><strong>16,200</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,163</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>62</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>62</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **AVERAGE** | **4,009** | **7,927** | **1,350** | **430** | 2 | **6** | **6** | **9** | **9** |

*Haasts Bluff includes the outstations of Ikujji, Kungkayunti, Tarrawarra, Untarranya, Undandita, Yeatman's Bore and Kulpitjarra*

*Hermannsburg includes the outstations of Wallace Rockhole and Impolera*

(A) = Arnhem Land  
(C) = Central Region  
(D) = Darwin/Douglas-Daly Region  
(G) = The Gulf Region  
(VRD) = Victoria River District
On the other hand, purchased properties (as shown in Figure 52) do show some differences to the privatised projects. For example, in the Gulf Region, Bulman, Elsey, Eva Valley, Hodgson Downs and Robinson River are carrying two-thirds of their capacity. All of the properties in the Gulf Region, with the exception of Barunga, were purchased with commercial operational cattle businesses. The only one still operating as a commercial operation is Elsey, which has a commercial herd.

In the Victoria River Downs District, of the five properties in the area only Mistake Creek, purchased after 1992, has a commercial size herd.

In the Central Australian Region, those cattle enterprises that were ex-government settlements or mission enterprises (that is, Haasts Bluff, Hermannsburg, Ngarliyikirlangu and Santa Teresa) have only residual herds. This is, in part, a result of destocking from the BTEC and, in part, a reflection of low levels of infrastructure investment and poor management. It also indicates just how successful and exceptional Ngarliyikirlangu was in being able to achieve a disease-free herd without destocking. On the other hand, only properties purchased after 1992 (that is, post-BTEC) such as Alcoota and Loves Creek, have either commercial size or near commercial size herds.
Figure 52: Some Selected Characteristics of Purchased Aboriginal Owned Cattle Properties in the Northern Territory

*Source: Hanlon & Philpot, Rural Development Skills on Aboriginal Land Report 1993*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Name</th>
<th>Property Size (sq km)</th>
<th>Carrying Capacity</th>
<th>Herd Size 1993</th>
<th>Land Title 1993</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>ATSIC or other Enterprise Support</th>
<th>No of Community Services</th>
<th>CDEP</th>
<th>Total Employ.</th>
<th>Access to Pastoral Mgt Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willowra/Mt Barkly (C)</td>
<td>7,475</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hodgson Downs (G)</td>
<td>3,232</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Pastoral Lease</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muckaty (B)</td>
<td>3,050</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Pastoral Lease</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva Valley (D)</td>
<td>2,926</td>
<td>4,700</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLaren Creek (C)</td>
<td>3,551</td>
<td>3,420</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utopia (C)</td>
<td>2,050</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinson River (G)</td>
<td>5,196</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>Pastoral Lease</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt Allan/Yuelamu (C)</td>
<td>2,360</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzroy (VRD)</td>
<td>1,442</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>Pastoral Lease</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atula (C)</td>
<td>4,027</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>Pastoral Lease</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanami (C)</td>
<td>4,206</td>
<td>5,200</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>Pastoral Lease</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puraiya/Ti-Tree (C)</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>5,600</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loves Creek (C)</td>
<td>3,670</td>
<td>6,150</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>Pastoral Lease</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoota (C)</td>
<td>2,868</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>6,750</td>
<td>Pastoral Lease</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsey (G)</td>
<td>5,346</td>
<td>14,450</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>Pastoral Lease</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistake Creek (VRD)</td>
<td>2,557</td>
<td>11,352</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>Pastoral Lease</td>
<td>Purchased</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL AVERAGE</strong></td>
<td><strong>54,406</strong></td>
<td><strong>98,877</strong></td>
<td><strong>44,650</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2,319</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>87</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(B) = Barkly Tableland  
(C) = Central Region  
(D) = Darwin/Douglas-Daly Region  
(G) = The Gulf Region  
(VRD) = Victoria River District
There are also other differences between those properties that were purchased, as in Puraiya's case, and those that were privatised, as in Ngarliyikirlangu's case. Populations are higher in the privatised operations and there are more community services. Total employment is higher on the purchased properties, but this was distorted by the fact that a number of properties were accessing CDEP and one was accessing both ATSIC support and CDEP. Thus, a significant determinant of a property's capacity to maintain a larger herd size is whether or not it is in receipt of ATSIC enterprise support.

The basis on which a property was established also appears to be a significant factor in determining the commercial viability of a property. Puraiya was purchased as a going pastoral concern, whereas Ngarliyikirlangu was established by privatising what had been a government training and meat-producing project. Figures 51 and 52 classify the 28 properties according to whether they were purchased or privatised. As indicated in Figures 51 and 52 there are substantial differences between the two types of properties. However, on average the purchased properties have larger levels of support or contribute to the income of smaller communities and provide a greater proportion of employment than do those that were privatised.

On the basis of these attributes, they provide a greater benefit to the community than the privatised enterprises.

However, all of the figures indicate that in 1993 there were no commercially independent Aboriginal properties, although there were a number that were
operating as subsidised commercial properties, while the majority were operating as non-commercial operations.

Employment

Total employment within the industry mirrors the experience of Ngarliyikirlangu, with total employment amounting to 149 people and employment under CDEP occurring on eleven of the twenty-eight properties. Average employment in all regions is nine people, with sixteen of the properties having a resident manager, twelve a bookkeeper, and five a head stockman. Only three enterprises have a mechanic, none have a cook and the remaining Aboriginal people are employed as either station hands or fencers. The total number employed on all stations is well in excess of the non-Aboriginal average per equivalent herd size for non-Aboriginal cattle stations (GRM, 1987).

Employment assistance also varies, with nine properties receiving management support. All of these properties were purchased post 1992 and four are receiving enterprise employment assistance as well as CDEP. Nine non-commercial properties receive CDEP support and two have training projects. That is, twenty of the properties are accessing some form of employment support. This would indicate that all properties are still attempting to maximise employment, which suggests that this is still a major objective of the cattle activity.

Wider non-profit benefits

There have been few studies undertaken on who benefits from cattle operations in Aboriginal communities, and no detailed work has been undertaken in relation to
the distribution of enterprise benefits from Aboriginal activities. What evidence there is, is mixed. Some communities, such as Yuelamu and Daguragu, use windfall gain from cattle sales to establish stores and other community assets, in the same manner as Puraiya. Others maximise employment, and all appear to provide some benefits to directors in the form of cash, cars and credit facilities (Thiele, 1982; Gerritsen, 1985; Stanley, 1985). In addition, directors derive some political influence from involvement in the cattle enterprise (Gerritsen, 1985). It is noticeable that all of the ex-mission and government settlement cattle activities are non-commercial operations and that their herd sizes are such that they are effectively killer herds. That is, their primary function is meat provision because, as was the case at Ngarliyikirlangu, they either lack the infrastructure or the land capacity to build up a commercial size herd. Low herd size has meant that the enterprises could not generate sufficient capital to meet the infrastructure requirements of the BTEC and, as a consequence, they were either fully or partially destocked.

There may also be other benefits. Brady (1992) has noted that Aboriginal communities operating cattle enterprises have a lower level of petrol sniffing than other communities. Although she offers no explanation for this correlation, it is possible that lower levels of petrol sniffing may be related to the smaller size of cattle station communities, the esteem gained from being seen to "work the cattle", closer-knit family life and the maintenance of traditional Aboriginal culture values and authority.
Given these non-commercial benefits and the limited commercial successes, the policy of funding properties only on the basis of their potential to achieve commercial independence appears bankrupt. Therefore, the options appear to be to reduce or do away with the cattle enterprises on the basis that they are a fruitless expenditure of limited public funds. Alternatively, to see them as part of a community asset base, in a context in which communities have limited assets and therefore see them as Miller did (1985:355) as part of a basis for overall development.

Summary

Figure 50 indicates that in 1993, of the twenty-eight Aboriginal communities that had or have cattle producing activities only ten were operating as commercial entities, and one of these, Bulman (Gulin Gulin), was contracted out to non-Aboriginal operators who paid royalties to the traditional owners. All of the remaining nine properties operating as commercial entities received either ATSIC or other public enterprise support. It should be noted that of these, Fitzroy, Tanami and Atula do not have herd sizes that are equivalent to the average herd size for commercial non-Aboriginal cattle properties. Two of the properties operating as commercial entities, Mistake Creek and Murwangi, also have access to CDEP.

In regard to the other eighteen Aboriginal communities which had or have cattle operations, five no longer have any cattle, eleven have access to CDEP, and two which still have cattle were in the same situation as Ngarliyikir langu. That is,
they were heavily in debt and would shortly be required to dispense of a substantial part of their herd to discharge their debts.

Therefore, in considering the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter, it is clear that no Aboriginal owned cattle property has achieved commercial independence, because all of the existing operating cattle enterprises are in receipt of some form of subsidy. However, it is equally clear that non-commercial benefits, such as monetary or non-monetary employment benefits and provision of meat, are highly valued by the communities operating subsidised, non-commercial properties.

The question of whether there is any real distinction between commercial enterprises and non-commercial enterprises is addressed in the conclusion.

**Conclusion**

Of the twenty-eight cattle activities examined in this chapter, only twenty six are operating some form of cattle activity. That is, there are nine subsidised, commercial enterprises, fourteen subsidised, non-commercial cattle enterprises and there are three properties with minimal cattle that could be classified as non-subsidised, non-commercial (chapter 1, pages 29-30). The experiences of the nine subsidised commercial properties are similar to that of Puraiya, while the non-commercial properties resemble Ngarliyikirlangu in their experiences.
In other words, where properties have been deemed to be commercially viable, ATSIC support continued. Where properties have either been deemed unviable or unlikely to become viable, support has been reduced and, as a consequence, the Aboriginal owner-operators have been forced to operate a residual cattle activity in a similar manner to Ngarliyikirlangu, or have been unable to operate any sort of cattle activity.

Therefore, to answer the original questions raised by the case studies, one can draw the following conclusions. No Aboriginal properties have yet achieved commercial independence, although three – Mistake Creek, Alcoota and Elsey – could, if they reduced labour and hence the need for CDEP subsidy. However, there are substantial differences in land capacity, infrastructure and herd size between those properties that are subsidised commercial operations and those that are not. Finally, the continuing involvement of twenty-three Aboriginal groups in cattle operations is directly related to the non-profit benefits that they obtain from cattle activities and access to subsidised labour through CDEP.

The fact that an independent commercially viable Aboriginal owned pastoral sector has not emerged in the NT indicates that there are serious flaws in the assumptions underlying Aboriginal development policies as applied to Aboriginal owned pastoral operations. In particular, questions surround two key assumptions: first, that the policy objectives implied in the ATSIC funding criteria of commercial viability are shared by the Aboriginal corporate owners of the Aboriginal pastoral operations; and, second, that the land capacity of the
Aboriginal owned operations was capable of sustaining a commercially viable herd.

What is clear from this chapter is that there is an array of cattle enterprise types. Further, in each case, the cattle enterprise or cattle activity that has developed in each locality is a result of a mixture of community aspiration, community capacity, land capacity and government policy. This result suggests that government policy in relation to Aboriginal land use needs to recognise the diversity of Aboriginal cattle enterprises and activities, and develop appropriate policy responses in accordance with the reality.
Chapter 8: An examination of the social assumptions of policy

This chapter further examines the first of the two assumptions underlying the Aboriginal Affairs policies that supported Aboriginal owned and operated cattle stations between 1972-1996. This was that the government policy objective of achieving commercial viability for Aboriginal owned and operated cattle enterprises in the NT was understood and agreed to by the Aboriginal owners and managers of those same cattle enterprises.

That is, in terms of the model elucidated in chapter 1, this chapter examines the implicit policy assumptions behind the existing policies applied to Aboriginal cattle enterprises as shown in chapter 1 and reflected here in the shaded areas in Figure 53.

As indicated in earlier chapters, initial policy objectives justifying support for Aboriginal owned and operated cattle enterprises were based on the belief that each cattle enterprise would provide an economic base for the community in which it was located. Between 1972 and 1979, this was generally interpreted as meaning the cattle enterprise would provide employment, meat and income. However, by 1980, following the establishment of the ADC (ADC, 1980) the words "economic base" increasingly came to mean commercial viability. The ADC and its successor, ATSIC, defined commercial viability as cash flows generating a positive internal rate of return following a defined period of support and investment (ADC, 1986: Economic Independence Section 2:4).
Figure 53: Bureaucratic encapsulation: policy social assumptions and their relationship to the context of Aboriginal pastoral properties
The application of this criterion to decisions on the funding of Aboriginal owned and operated cattle enterprises assumed Aboriginal owners and managers were also aiming for commercial viability. The assumption that Aboriginal owners, managers and operators of cattle enterprises shared and agreed with these objectives was based upon a further set of more specific assumptions. These are as follows:

(a) That Aboriginal culture gave the same value to commercial success, and perceived it in the same way as non-Aboriginal culture;
(b) That the geographic community where the cattle enterprise was located, the cattle company itself and the Aboriginal traditional ownership were internally integrated and cohesive;
(c) That Aboriginal management of the cattle enterprise was representative of the Aboriginal group who owned the land on which the pastoral operations was located;
(d) That Aboriginal owners, managers and operators had modern management skills to achieve commercial success.

This chapter will show that the validity of these assumptions was highly questionable. The chapter will further show that the flaws in the assumptions on which the commercial policy objectives for Aboriginal owned, managed and operated cattle stations were based were well known and documented in the academic literature, but not taken into account by the policy makers.

**Aboriginal perceptions and values and non-Aboriginal perceptions and values**

Aboriginal society has been described by some anthropologists (for example, Piddington, 1963; Berndt, 1967; Elkin, 1967) as totemic in structure, utilising classificatory systems to define objects and the relationships between objects that
have cultural significance. Totems are defined as the “association between human
groups on the one hand and species of animal plants or natural phenomena on the
other” (Piddington, 1963:200-1). In other words, members of such societies view
their world in terms of time, space, matter and a mystical dimension.

Hunter-gatherer societies perceive these four dimensions as co-existing in a
perpetual state of interaction, where the emphasis on any one of the dimensions is
dependant on the situation (Levi-Strauss, 1966). An event can be both sacred and
profane. For example, the killing of a kangaroo among the Pitjantjatjara people of
Central Australia may satisfy the profane need of hunger. However, if the
kangaroo is gutted or the skin broken other than by a small incision in the chest, a
powerful taboo is broken and dire spiritual consequences such as sickness, death
or accident will result. Some characteristics of hunter-gatherer societies can be
described as follows (Piddington, 1963:200):

(a) It is common for the human group to be called by the name of the
totem.

(b) The totemic association usually has a legendary background,
consisting of one or more myths which link the human group with its
totemic species. Very commonly, this takes the form of a belief in
descent from a totemic ancestor, from some being who was partly
human and partly animal (such as bird, fish and so on).

(c) There is often some form of religious ritual connected with the totem.
This ritual frequently re-enacts dramatically the mythological events
which are believed to account for the origin of the totemic
relationship. A specialised type of totemic religious ritual is found on
the increase in ceremonies of the Australian Aborigines.

(d) The religious observances connected with totemism commonly
include prohibitions against members of the totemic group killing or
eating the totemic species.
(e) Since totemic groups are usually clans or moieties, totemism is usually found to be associated with the rule of exogamy, where marriage occurs between members of different groups.

(f) It is common for the totemic species to be represented by some kind of carving or symbolic design, which forms an emblem or crest with which the totemic group feels itself to be associated. The most striking example of this is found in the famous 'totem poles' on the north-west coast of America.

This system, which is better described as a cosmology (as it is a complete and closed-world view), is then defined using a complex set of classificatory systems. The use of such systems is not surprising as hunting and gathering societies rely on a complete and thorough knowledge of the environment, its processes and relationships. The need to order such knowledge through the use of taxonomies is logical, as is the use of myths to preserve such knowledge by the application of ritualised mnemonic oral methods. For example, singing, chanting and dance ensure a transfer of this knowledge, thus ensuring the continuation of the culture.

The use of classificatory systems to define the world, and the use of myths to preserve that knowledge, can be regarded as a science to the concrete (Levi-Strauss, 1966). The application of this system to the mystical dimension ensures a totality in the society’s perceptual field and provides for the individual a set of powerful integrative mechanisms. Levi-Strauss (1966) has described the pattern of thinking associated with this cosmology as magical or mythical thought. That is, in analysing any event the causal relationship will be analysed in terms of its implications for each of the relevant dimensions.
For example, in 1978 at Minjilang on Croker Island, a very senior man passed away after having consumed ethanol alcohol at a drinking session with a group of men on the island. As observed by the author, the results of the drinking session were quite catastrophic for the community. In addition to the senior man’s death, two men went blind and several more suffered severe physiological trauma that substantially incapacitated them.

At a community meeting to discuss the incident, the town clerk, a non-Aboriginal, took the occasion to point out the dangers and consequences of alcohol consumption. The meeting reacted quite negatively to the town clerk’s strictures. In fact, several people at the meeting chastised the town clerk, who was generally well regarded as he was known for his knowledge of and respect for Aboriginal culture. The reprimands took the following form:

“You [the town clerk] were at that meeting [another meeting some twelve months earlier] when that dead man showed those sacred objects when there were women present. For doing that in our culture he will die. He has died. The punishment for doing what he did [showing the sacred objects] is death, he has died.” (Phillpot, 1977. pers.obs.)

This story demonstrates a very different cultural perspective about causal relationships. From one cultural perspective, the death was a result of the consumption of a poisonous substance. From the other, the cause of the death was spiritual. What this demonstrates is that causal relationships in Aboriginal culture are not perceived in the same way as non-Aboriginal people perceive them. That is, the causal explanations that one puts forward to explain relationships between events depend upon the cultural paradigm within which one operates. The cultural
paradigm of Aboriginal communities operating a cattle enterprise is substantially
different from that of public servants administering government policy.
Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the management of an Aboriginal cattle
station will be perceived in the same way both by its Aboriginal owners and by
the representatives of public funding bodies, such as ATSIC.

Differences of perception and social structures create major problems when
working in a cross-cultural context. In other words, because of differing
perceptions and social structures, the purpose, motivation and priorities of one
culture will not be clear or transparent to the other. When one takes into account
the limited English language skills of many of the Aboriginal people, particularly
those involved in the cattle stations then it is clear that the Aboriginal people’s
understanding of the policy framework will be limited.

Related to the issue of understanding is the issue of social mystification. This can
be defined as a state in which a person of one cultural background, working in
another more dominant cultural framework, is confused or mystified by the
structure and functions of the dominant culture. Friere (1968) developed this
concept when describing the education process of landless rural poor in South
America. More recently, Trudgeon (1994) and Downing (1996) have used it in
describing cross-cultural education processes in Arnhem Land.

Aboriginal people, as noted, have a complex society that requires its members to
acquire a comprehensive taxonomic knowledge of the environment. This is
acquired through experience and ceremonial instruction. However, Aboriginal
knowledge of non-Aboriginal society, at least for a significant proportion of those involved as directors of cattle enterprises, was almost totally experiential. That is, Aboriginal knowledge of non-Aboriginal society was based upon their experience of the non-Aboriginal people living in their region and did not include any formal instruction in non-Aboriginal culture. Until very recent times, this experience was limited to cattle station managers, missionaries, teachers, policemen and welfare officers (chapter 1, pages 9-25). It was not until the 1980s and the introduction of remote area television, radio, telephones and facsimile machines, that Aboriginal people had access to additional information on non-Aboriginal society. However, by and large, this additional access to information had limited benefit because the non-Aboriginal people in contact with Aboriginal communities operating cattle enterprises were nearly always in a superior, powerful position. In Trudgeon’s words (1994):

The balanda [white people] were superior and powerful in all things – they always had food, their medicine brought about magic cures, their technology was miraculous and their authority supreme.

Trudgeon goes on to argue that Aboriginal people are often confused about the causal relationships in non-Aboriginal society and therefore interpret non-Aboriginal society in terms of their own social mores (Trudgeon, 1994). Thus the capacity of Aboriginal people to perceive the meanings and purposes of corporate meetings is limited, particularly in the absence of comprehensive explanation or education by non-Aboriginal people. Trudgeon (1994) argues that the level of mystification among Aboriginal people is extensive and applies to such things as the value of money, the source of money, taxation, profit, and the source of goods.
Key considerations in understanding social mystification

At the heart of the issue of social mystification for Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people who work at the interface of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds is the cultural duality of the situation and the political social economic encapsulation of Aboriginal society. The cultural duality can be represented by the diagram used in chapter 1 (page 9) and shown here as Figure 54. If an individual is then located between the two worlds by virtue of role, location or function, then while the non-Aboriginal may have the ability to perceive clearly the causal relationships and critical factors in the non-Aboriginal world, the understanding of the causal relationships and critical factors to be considered will not have the same clarity in the Aboriginal world.

Figure 54: Cultural dualism in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds
Conversely, for the Aboriginal person dealing at the interface the clarity with which the Aboriginal person perceives and understands the Aboriginal world will not necessarily be replicated in his or her perception of the non-Aboriginal world. Hence in any process there is a significant potential for the motives, intentions, overt and covert agendas of either party to be quite mystifying to the other.

The key elements contributing to social mystification are the ability of Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people to perceive the meaning in the actions of the other, and it also involves understanding the likely impacts of the actions of either world on the other.

Contributing factors to social mystification are the factors of cross-cultural understanding, language and the quality of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. In relation to the issue of cultural understanding, clearly an appreciation of the values, the motivations and the critical factors each culture considers important is a primary factor in reducing or avoiding social mystification. In situations where English is not the first language of the Aboriginal people, or in situations where peoples' English is not sophisticated, then, in the first instance, the non-Aboriginal people will need either language or interpreters who have a social cross-cultural appreciation of the key cultural considerations in each culture. In the second instance, supporting material or the process by which any issue will be addressed, will need to be clearly understood. Lastly, there will need to be established some degree of integrity between the Aboriginal group and the non-Aboriginal agency.
Dealing with social mystification is a fundamental prerequisite for successful community planning, enterprise planning and developing management competence. In the Author's views, for an individual to have such an understanding it is necessary for the individual to have (a) some cultural knowledge of both cultures, (b) some language or access to interpreters in situations where for the Aboriginal community English is not a first language, and (c) a set of relationships between representatives of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal that is regarded by all as having integrity, honesty and minimum self-interest, or at least transparent self-interest.

In dealing with social mystification, it is fundamental that whatever process, be it one of planning, consultation or managing, the whole context of the situation be mutually explored by all parties. Too often non-Aboriginal people assume that the context is transparent, while too often Aboriginal people assume that the latest round of policy or program initiatives are a replication of past interfaces, and too often, because of the failure of the parties to recognise the impact of social mystification, particularly in relation to each other's understanding of the nature of pastoral businesses and profit maximisation.

The level of profit generated by a business is a measure of successful commercial management. The success of a business in generating profit also forms a basis for assessing a company's or individual's social value. That is, modern society esteems those who perform well commercially and places less value on those who are not successful as commercial operators. Where public or private enterprises are successful, the value of the enterprise increases either in its share value or
other assets and the directors and managers of such successful enterprises are accorded respect and esteem. Equally, the converse is true. Unsuccessful companies are not well regarded or valued. Aboriginal society, on the other hand, is structured on a very different basis. Respect, value and esteem are granted to those who provide goods and other items to their kin. In a society that is based upon reciprocal obligations, a person's ability to access goods and services and then to be able to distribute them according to those obligations is a much more powerful determinant than profit (Sahlins, 1972). That is, the capacity to produce valuable commodities is respected. So a person (or an activity) in the community who can increase employment, provide cheap or free meat or increase access to other benefits, is a respected and clever person. How the person does it is less important for clearly they do it by using their knowledge, which in traditional society is regarded as private and often secret (Elkin, 1968). In the Aboriginal way of thinking a knowledgeable person can generate benefits by the correct application of knowledge of people, the environment and the spiritual. The concept that such benefits are derived from the income and the capacity to go on generating an income is reliant on the activity to make a profit is a foreign concept for many traditional Aboriginal people.

Downing (1996) extends Trudgeon's argument and suggests that while the differing world views create difficulties for Aboriginal people in understanding non-Aboriginal concerns, it also leads to very different priorities. For example at Mimili in northern South Australia, a number of younger Aboriginal men, who had undergone a number of years of primary and post-primary non-Aboriginal formal education, wished to re-establish a cattle enterprise in order to create
employment and income. The older men, on reflecting on how the country and indigenous game species had improved since the removal of cattle, rejected the proposal on the grounds that the cattle would have an adverse impact upon the land and affect the *Tjurpa* (the law). Downing’s (1996) example demonstrates two things. The first is that Aboriginal values are not all sacred. The young men clearly valued the cattle enterprises for the contemporary benefits that could be derived from it, although it should be noted that they did not see profit per se as having a value. The older men undoubtedly also saw employment and income as valuable, but they saw the recovery of indigenous species and their role in Aboriginal traditional beliefs as more important.

The fact that the older men at Mimili saw the land as having values other than as a source of employment and income is a reflection of different world views about reality. Young (1994) also argues this, although she describes it as insider realities versus outsider realities. That is, the insiders (those living on the land) have a different reality to those who live elsewhere, the outsiders. In most cases, the outsiders are government agencies.

The difference between the world views of Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people is reflected in attitudes to land ownership. In the Aboriginal world view, people own the land in the sense that they belong to the land, which their totemic ancestor created. That is, the descent groups are the owners. In addition, the people who are responsible for managing the ceremonial activities in relation to that land are in a direct personal relationship to the owners (usually cross cousins) (Sutton, 1998:25-54). In the non-Aboriginal world view, land is a commodity
which can be allocated by government, initially by way of granting a title or right
to use that land as in the case of a lease. The title or right to use the land may be
traded for profit but it has no intrinsic spiritual values and nor does the original
owner retain any right over the land once he or she has sold it or passed it on to
another generation.

These differences between Aboriginal culture and non-Aboriginal culture have
been dealt with at length by Malinowski (1926), Radcliffe-Brown (1931), Levi­
Strauss (1966), Berndt (1967) and Elkin (1967). The different values of
Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society were thus well known and documented.

Ellana, Loveday, Stanley, Young and White (1988), in their study of Aboriginal
enterprises in the NT, acknowledged these differences and argued that they had to
be incorporated into the policy framework. Yet there is little evidence to indicate
that the policy makers and administrators acknowledged the differences when
dealing with issues arising out of the development and management of Aboriginal
owned pastoral properties in the NT.

Herein lies an essential issue in terms of government policy. If the objectives of
the various policy and programs in terms of achieving commercial independence
were not understood and indeed mystified many of the Aboriginal people, then
equally the field officers and representatives were mystified as to what Aboriginal
people wished to achieve.

This mutual mystification required a level of communication that, except perhaps
for the IAD extension program and lately the CLC's directors' course, does not
appear to have occurred for a large number of the Aboriginal people involved in cattle stations. From an Aboriginal perspective, if you do not understand or are mystified by the legal, management and operational mechanics of achieving commercial independence, then your capacity to make a considered judgement as to whether this is a worthwhile objective is limited. Further, if the full conceptual and practical meaning of the words ‘commercial independence’ is not understood, your capacity to make a considered judgement is even more limited.

From an agency field officer’s perspective, if you do not have the training in cross-cultural communication skills, nor the time to discuss with Aboriginal clients the policy objectives, their implications and the options within the programs, then the probability of developing a program that meets the Aboriginal people’s objectives, and one that fits within the policy and program framework, inevitably means that in the interests of accountability and bureaucratic self-interest, a narrow application of both the policy and the programs will be adhered to.

Aboriginal social structures, the community and the cattle enterprise

As discussed in chapters 4 and 5 Aboriginal traditional owners and managers derive their roles and positions from descent, not location, and it is not uncommon for senior Aboriginal people to reside off their traditional country for long periods. However, this lack of residence does not mean that they no longer have a say over what happens on their land. Quite the contrary - they have, according to Aboriginal traditional law, the power to say ‘no’ to anything taking
place on their land and to any benefits arising from those activities. In this sense they are still ‘owners’ of the land. Young and Doohan (1989:16) have argued that Aboriginal people occupy a social community that is represented by a number of principal locations to which the individual is linked by kinship and cultural associations. Therefore, to assume that groups of people drawn from one physical location are truly representative of all of the people associated with that location is incorrect. For most traditional Aboriginal people their social community is broader than their geographic community.

However, the cattle enterprises were organised on a commercial enterprise basis based upon a geographic area. That is, they were either incorporated as companies, as in the case of Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu, or in other cases as Aboriginal organisations with the directors drawn from the residents of that geographic location. In either case the shareholder and directors were largely drawn from the geographic community in which the enterprise was located. When people talk about Aboriginal communities in the remote and northern parts of Australia they often assume that such communities are characterised by joint ownership, identity of character, organised political, municipal or social activities. They make these assumptions because it is these features which underlie the meaning of the word ‘community’ as applied to a geographic location in English.

Smith (1989) indicates that such assumptions are not correct. It is true that there are communities of people living in the one locality, but as Smith points out “to jump straight from community as locality (geographic community) to socially
organised community is possible but often artificial” (Smith, 1989:8). Smith argues that if this assumption is made it will deny the geographic community the opportunity to develop internal social structures because the starting point of any program will make certain assumptions about the social cohesiveness of the community and the effectiveness of existing internal social structures. This type of preconception is often a major factor in the failure of many community programs in the NT (Smith, 1989).

Commercial cattle stations generally fit this model. That is, they usually operate as an incorporated body with the right to run cattle over a pastoral lease. This has been the case with Aboriginal cattle stations where the Aboriginal cattle station was purchased from a non-Aboriginal pastoralist, and similarly where the Aboriginal cattle station was established by privatising a government or mission cattle project. For example, in Ngarliyikirlangu’s case it was just assumed that the traditional owners would permit the continuation of the cattle enterprise, regardless of who the traditional owners of the land were and who was responsible for managing the ceremonial activities associated with the land. As we have seen in the case studies, the traditional owners and the directors of the cattle company were not the same. Consequently, there was often tension between the directors of the cattle company and the traditional owners over such things as free meat, employment and the distribution of benefits from the sale of cattle.

Clearly, in the case of the cattle stations the Aboriginal social community and the geographic community were not identical. In addition, the assumptions about the internal cohesiveness of any geographic community, in terms of its capacity to
represent all of the people with an interest in the land on which the cattle station was operated, were not valid (Smith, 1989). Therefore any assumption that the members of the geographic community could act for or represent all of the interests of the Aboriginal people, who had an interest in the land on which the cattle enterprise operated, was false.

Aboriginal representation and the management of the cattle enterprise

The policy of supporting Aboriginal cattle enterprises to provide an economic base for the resident Aboriginal community, via commercial viability, assumed that any group of men could represent the community interest and that the number of shareholders was therefore irrelevant.

For example, at Puraiya (Ti-Tree) the shareholders and the directors were limited to six and were drawn from only two of the descent groups living in the Ti-Tree area. In Ngarliyikirlangu's case, the number of directors was larger, as was the number of shareholders. However, the directors were a select group and could not be considered to be representative of the Yuendumu community, nor could they be considered to be representative of the traditional ownership of the Yuendumu Reserve. In spite of this, government officers clearly assumed that any group of residents nominated as shareholders could represent the community and that directors nominated or elected by the shareholders would also act in the best interests of all people residing in the community.
The assumption about the relationship between the directors and shareholders of the cattle enterprise and the residents was critical in terms of ongoing funding assistance to both cattle properties. That is, it was assumed when both the Puraiya Cattle Company and the Ngarliyikirrangu Pastoral Company were established that whoever was nominated as the shareholders and directors would represent all of the community members. This then enabled the DAA, the ADC and later ATSIC to continue to fund the respective companies on the basis that their operations would benefit all of the community. However, this assumption is questionable given that, in the case of Puraiya, only members of two resident communities, and of the descent groups, were represented on the board of directors of the cattle company – all communities on the Yuendumu Reserve were represented in Ngarliyikirrangu’s case. However, once Puraiya and Ngarliyikirrangu became Aboriginal land under the *NT Land Rights Act 1976*, the relationship between the cattle company operations and the rights of the traditional owners became even more confused. At no stage does there appear to have been an attempt to clarify the situation. Even when an agency was aware of the problem no effort was made to clarify the position of the cattle enterprise in relation to traditional land ownership. For example, following the granting of title under the *NT Land Rights Act 1976* there does not appear to have been any action taken by the CLC or other agency to facilitate re-arrangement of the corporate structure of any cattle enterprise that was located on Aboriginal freehold land to reflect the new land ownership. Rather, the status quo was maintained and with it the existing representative structure. One result of this confusion was that traditional owners at both Ti-Tree and, more particularly at Yuendumu, felt they had the right to take “killers”, that is, beasts for their own consumption, without regard to the
commercial aspects of the enterprise. There is no evidence that the situation was any different on any other Aboriginal owned cattle stations – quite the contrary. In their training needs analysis of rural development skill on Aboriginal land, Hanlon and Phillpot (1993b:51) recorded tension between traditional owners and the managers and operators on all of the properties.

Even when an attempt is made to have a wider shareholding, represented by a wider group of directors as in Ngarliyikirlangu's case, if those directors move out of the community their involvement in the cattle enterprise will become problematic. For example, if you are living at community 'A', which has a cattle enterprise of which you are a director, and you move to community 'B', your capacity to be involved in what is happening in the cattle enterprise becomes limited. Those individuals who reside permanently at community ‘A’ will have a greater involvement in the cattle enterprise. The capacity of non-resident directors to be involved in cattle enterprise is further constrained by the low levels of literacy and numeracy skills of many directors. Therefore unless they attend meetings, they are not informed of cattle company decisions, even if written minutes are forwarded to them. Given the low level of literacy and numeracy skills, written minutes are often incomprehensible. In such a situation, resident directors inevitably begin to dominate. This can be clearly seen in the case of both Ti-Tree and Yuendumu where resident directors had a greater involvement in the cattle company than those living on outstations. When the majority of Yuendumu directors moved to outstations, interest in the cattle company waned altogether.
Historically, the selection of directors appears to have been very ad hoc, and the pattern that Thiele (1982) identified in the case of Yugal Mangi appears to have been repeated in the majority of cases. That is, one or two Aboriginal leaders who spoke English, and who managed or who acted as spokesman or interpreter for the community in negotiation with government, would be consulted by the relevant funding agency. If the spokesman had a background in cattle enterprises then the structure of the company would be developed on the basis of his advice. If there were someone in the community who was generally regarded as being the "boss" of the cattle business than this person, too, would be consulted. If, in addition, either of these people were traditional owners for some part of the area on which the cattle enterprise was operated, then the funding agency would assume that he, and occasionally she, could speak for all traditional owners about the cattle enterprise (Thiele 1982). Others (Cane and Stanley, 1985; Hanlon, 1985b; Phillpot, 1985) support Thiele's analysis. That is, government policy and field administration often enabled a few individuals to have greater control of the cattle enterprise than was warranted by their traditional authority or their capacity to represent the interests of all of the relevant traditional owners.

The lack of alignment of directors and shareholders, and traditional land owners made it very difficult, if not impossible, to resolve the underlying issue. That is, what rights did the land owning groups have over the cattle enterprise, in particular to the ownership of the cattle, and to a say as to when activities might take place, although this latter point was probably of lesser concern given the common locality. However, in numerous interviews with traditional owners on all
of the properties, the question of cattle ownership and the rights of traditional owners was a point of concern.

The consequence of creating a few dominant men was to reduce the constraints of the communal leadership. That is, because the external agency preferred to deal through a dominant man it de facto invested him, and in some cases her, in the role of a controller of information and of owning the business. This made it difficult for other community leaders to know if the management of the dominant man was legitimate, both in terms of accountability to the funding agency and of community interest. This was exacerbated by the lack of preparation given to the traditional owners of the property at the time of purchase. Generally the funding and purchase of a property was undertaken by an outside agency in an atmosphere of secrecy, and the community members only became involved when the property was purchased. Even then, the corporate structures to manage the property were developed by the outsiders and local people were then informed as to what their role would be - either as a director, shareholder or trustee.

Thus, at all times the power was with the outsider. Even when the property was transferred to a local Aboriginal corporate body the situation did not change (Downing & Phillpot, 1994): firstly, because the corporate structures were complex and difficult for non lawyers to follow; and secondly, because for the most part Aboriginal directors were ignorant of the laws which applied to companies, and of their rights, duties and obligations as directors.
The implications of community representation for government agencies is that, in assessing the eligibility of an enterprise, agencies need to communicate and consult with a far wider range of people than the directors of the cattle company. Yet as Shimpo (1985) has demonstrated, and as the case studies exemplify, field officers continued to operate on a very narrow set of assumptions and with a narrow representation of the community body. This inevitably meant that their analysis about the general support within a community for achieving a commercially successful cattle enterprise was dependent upon whom their informants were.

In recent property purchases, the CLC (Tilmouth & Mitchell, 1998) has attempted to address this issue by:

1. Ensuring that all of the descent groups and relevant traditional owners are represented on the boards of pastoral properties;
2. Ensuring that training in non-aboriginal corporate law is provided to directors;
3. Assisting boards to select managers; and
4. Restricting managers' authority to operating within a budget authorised by the board.

However, the CLC has only been able to establish this on two properties – Mistake Creek and Loves Creek. On other properties the boards have generally been unrepresentative and have been controlled by a few individuals.
The advocacy by the CLC of participatory planning models for dealing with Aboriginal land use, including land based enterprises, reflects over a decade of experience by the CLC (see chapter 3, pages 121-124) with land use and land management issues. This experience has included dealing with land use and land management struggles within community groups, between community groups and with a variety of NT Government agencies. If participatory land use planning approaches are to become a standard approach to land use and management on Aboriginal land, then there are two perspectives that the facilitating agency and individual facilitators will need to take cognisance of. The first is the danger that the plan will become more important than the planning process. The second is the danger that the planning process will take place outside of the political context within which the group is operating.

Community enterprise planning and management competence

Community based planning processes have been in administrative vogue a number of times since 1972. The most recent period has been the ATSIC requirement for community and regional development plans. Initially these plans were to be part of an overall development process. However, in practice (Wolfe, 1991) points out the plan became the overall objective rather than the process of planning. There is a similar danger in the adoption of participatory land use planning. For example, the requirement by the ILC for land councils to have in place by 1999 land acquisition and land management sub-regional plans may be a deadline that will not enable all participatory groups to contribute, hence the plans may (a) be not accurate and (b) exclude people. The issue of the community
political context within which the participatory planning process must take place is even more problematic. As we have seen in chapters 4, 5 and 6 Aboriginal groups exist within a mosaic of traditional, historical and contemporary domains which will colour peoples' perspectives and will, to some extent, define their roles in any participatory land use exercise. The traditional Aboriginal domains, as described in chapter 3, contain sacred and profane elements which are interlinked and for non-Aboriginal eyes are difficult to distinguish. The Aboriginal domains are also small in terms of the number of people involved. They range from local groups of 10 or 20, to over 1,000 in the larger communities or, in the case of large ceremonies, up to 2,000 people for short periods. By non-Aboriginal standards these groups are still small, and as we have seen in chapters 4, 5 and 6, because the groups are not static it creates a difficult environment in which to engage in participatory land use planning. It requires the agency to address the questions of who participates, and how the results of the planning process is to be communicated to other groups who may have some interest in the land. Tilmouth and Mitchell's participatory land use planning process (1998) seeks to be inclusive, but this will not always be practicable or possible because of peoples' movements (Young & Doohan, 1989).

A further issue in relation to the political context is that many participants will have multiple roles. That is, they may be community councillors, serve on an ATSIC regional council, or be involved in one or more Aboriginal organisations, and in some cases, government departments. Again, these more secular non-Aboriginal roles will colour the participants' perspective and their contribution to land use planning. As Rowse (1992) indicates in an extremely useful analysis of
Aboriginal group polity, the various models postulated so far all have limitations when applied generally. For example, Gerritsen’s elitist models (1985), Hiatt’s ethnographic work (1986), and Taylor’s market model (1989) do not fully explain the Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlandu experiences. This would indicate support for Rowse’s general conclusion that there is “no general model of Aboriginal domain” (Rowse, 1992:100). This is not to say that facilitators should ignore the polity when engaging in participatory planning processes. Rather they need to include consideration of both stakeholders and the politics of the stakeholders’ involvement in the planning exercise. If this approach is not adopted it is likely that the historical difficulties in community consultation and planning will be repeated. It also means that any facilitators in land use planning will require specialist training.

For example, in the situation experienced by the case studies, had the policy administrative framework acknowledged the need for a much more effective consultation with a wider group of people than the resident directors and the non-Aboriginal manager, it is doubtful if the field officers would have had the skills or the relationships to achieve the required communication. As has been noted in chapter 3 (page 93) the DAA, the ADC and ATSIC experienced a continual shortage of field staff, very few of whom had Aboriginal language skills. The evidence from the case studies is that the turnover of field officers was so high and their visits so intermittent that, even had they attempted such consultations, it is unlikely that the consultations would have been successful.
The critical elements in successful community based planning have been identified by a range of authors. In the context of the NT experience, Dale (1991), Lea and Wolfe (1993), Wolfe (1993a), Davies (1995) and Young (1998) have identified four types of community planning, shown here in Figure 55.

Figure 55: Types of community planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CENTRALISED</th>
<th>RITUALISTIC</th>
<th>AUTOCRATIC</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involves individual</td>
<td>(going through the</td>
<td>(decisions made by a few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or small group only</td>
<td>motions)</td>
<td>people)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPATORY</td>
<td>PLACATORY</td>
<td>DEVELOPMENTAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves the whole</td>
<td>(develops 'wish list';</td>
<td>(non-manipulative participatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community (council,</td>
<td>pacifies the community)</td>
<td>process, linked to action by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elders, women,</td>
<td></td>
<td>community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>youths ...)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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In Davies' analysis, it is only developmental planning that will enable Aboriginal groups to increase their independence and thus their capacity to determine their own future. However, Davies goes beyond a consideration of appropriate community planning approaches and the issues of the relationship between community planning and management competencies. This Davies shows as interlocked, and this is shown here in Figure 56. The key elements of the relationship between successful community planning and Aboriginal group competence in Davies' view, which she adapted from Lea and Wolfe (1993:12-16), are community initiative, community direction, community resources and the determination, tolerance and patience of community members. Dodd (1993)
identified similar factors in relation to successful pastoral enterprise planning. However, his analysis of management competence was limited and social mystification was not a consideration, nor is it considered by Davies (1995), at least in the terms used in this thesis.

Figure 56: Relationship between planning and management

Source: Adapted from Davies J S, 1995:50

Davies (1995:50) does in part address the issue of management, or at least acknowledge it, as does Dale (1992), as a major issue that can limit the effectiveness of participatory planning. Dale goes further and argues that most Aboriginal land management projects fail because of a lack of technical and management competencies. It was in part the lack of suitable programs to address the issue of management competence, social mystification and planning for pastoral enterprises that the CLC initiated its directors’ training programs.
Aboriginal management capacity and commercially successful cattle stations

Modern management is a reflection and a product of non-Aboriginal culture. That is, it is derived from the complex interaction of government, business, economics and technology of non-Aboriginal society. It is a system of values based upon the accumulation and transfer of wealth (Braudel, 1979:623). However, Aboriginal people’s perception of the means by which they are able to generate such wealth is different to non-Aboriginal means of managing the land, labour, capital and production functions aimed at increasing value and producing a profit. Rather, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, wealth is seen as being the product of a clever person in Aboriginal society. A clever person is one who is wise in the ways of the land, knowledgeable and skilled in the Tjkurpa (meaning law, dreaming), and smart in the management of people (Elkin, 1968). A clever person, therefore, is someone who, because of their knowledge, can generate goods and services, which he or she is then able to distribute according to the laws of reciprocity.

Similarly, in the non-Aboriginal world, successful commercial operations manipulate land, labour and capital to generate a surplus, which are then distributed according to corporate law. While the two systems are comparable, it cannot be assumed that they are self-evident to the non-initiated. Just as a successful Aboriginal person of high degree is required to acquire knowledge through ritual and pain, so too the non-Aboriginal successful commercial operator must also acquire a great deal of knowledge and skill. Such competence is not necessarily acquired simply by just partaking in the process, because operating a private or public corporation involves a knowledge of law, economics, finance,
human relations, markets and, in the case of a cattle enterprise, animal husbandry and land management.

The application of a criterion of commercial viability meant that, in order to receive government funds, an Aboriginal group operating a cattle enterprise had to be incorporated. This requirement brought with it a whole body of management practice and law, which it was assumed that Aboriginal people would pick up through experience. In other words, funding agencies not only assumed that Aboriginal people understood the economics of non-Aboriginal society and that they agreed with the value of profit maximization, they also assumed that it was not necessary to provide training and education in the skill and knowledge required to run a commercial enterprise.

Trudgeon (1994) argues that a similar assumption about the incorporation of community councils was equally incorrect. It did not necessarily follow that being involved in a process of operating a council would allow people to become knowledgeable and skilled at running a council. The assumption that Aboriginal members of community councils could manage the council effectively and efficiently was false and set people up to fail. Similar conclusions can be made about the cattle enterprises.

As the profiles in chapter 7 indicate (Figures 50 to 52) very few Aboriginal owned or operated pastoral enterprises had access to any relevant training, and attempts to develop pastoral industry training programs were generally frustrated.
by the fact that the type of training required did not meet the training program funding criteria (Hanlon & Phillipot, 1993a & b).

The need for management skills for Aboriginal operators of pastoral operations was not clearly identified until 1983 (Sri-Pathmanathan, 1983). Prior to that date, the funding agencies had attempted to deal with the issue by employing consultants and funding extension programs such as the IAD, FACTS or CAAPA. However, Sri-Pathmanathan’s recommendations about establishing training programs were largely ignored. While they were reiterated in 1987 (GRM, 1987) and again in 1993 (Hanlon & Phillipot, 1993a & b), the industry and the NT Government rejected these recommendations, despite the fact that they were consistent with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and in particular recommendation 203 which states:

The highest priority be accorded to the facilitation of social, economic and cultural development plans by Aboriginal communities.
(Source: Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, National Report, Overview and Recommendations, 1991, page 76)

The CLC recognised that, in order to implement this recommendation on Aboriginal pastoral properties in Central Australia, Aboriginal pastoral company directors must be provided with the skills and knowledge to fulfil their legal responsibilities. The CLC also recognised that pastoral company directors also needed to have sufficient skill and knowledge to be able to develop property plans that accord with the aspirations of their community. This premise was also consistent with Recommendations 8 to 10 of the Review into the Aboriginal
Employment Development Program (1994) which recommended that programs be focused on improving the managerial skills of local leadership groups.

The findings of the RCIADC and other studies meant that by 1993 the various Aboriginal development agencies could no longer ignore the lack of modern management skills of Aboriginal owners. There was also a growing awareness among Aboriginal directors of cattle companies that if they were to avoid the mistakes of their neighbours then they needed to acquire additional non-Aboriginal skills and knowledge. In October 1993 the directors of Blue Bush Pty Ltd, an Aboriginal owned cattle company operating the Mistake Creek cattle station, requested management training. The directors requested the training because they believed that “they were misinformed as to the structure of their company and their responsibilities as directors and they were confused over the relationship between their company and the Central Land Council” (Downing & Phillpot, 1994:1).

The CLC responded to the request positively and obtained funding to run a pilot pastoral company directors’ course. Following this course, the Aboriginal owned stations at Yuelamu, Alcoota and Loves Creek made similar requests. In response, the CLC initiated a major education program. The aim of the program was to equip Aboriginal pastoral company directors with the skills and knowledge to operate their property within the law and to achieve the objectives of the community owners.
The experience of this program is dealt with in detail on pages 387 to 392. However, before some of the issues raised by the programs are considered, it is necessary to have some appreciation of the policy contradictions.

**Contradictions in some of the policy assumptions**

While commentators (Young, 1981) have suggested that for the communities at large in either the purchased or privatised enterprises, cattle were of a lesser priority and the commercial success of the cattle enterprise even less compared with other priorities such as care for country, this is not true of those directly involved in the cattle enterprise. In numerous interviews with directors and workers over three decades, and more recently between 1993 and 1996, the common refrain was "we want a proper cattle station" (Jessie Roberts, Elsey Station, 1993, pers com). When questioned as to what a proper cattle station might look light, inevitably the answer was a description of an apparently successful non-Aboriginal cattle station nearby or in the same district. Inherent in Ms Roberts' statement is a conundrum that has bedeviled policy makers and development practitioners throughout the period of this study. That is, for the Aboriginal community members involved in and committed to the cattle, the successful pastoral model they have been exposed to is that of the non-Aboriginal cattle industry, and it is that to which they aspire. Yet for many, while the cattle may be an important community asset, it is only one aspect of community life, and should be given priority only insofar as it does not detract from other community priorities. Hence, there would appear to be an inherent tension between advising commercial viability, and managing the cattle enterprise in a
way that is culturally sustainable. How, given that one group has a higher priority for the cattle than the community at large, do you deal, as a policy issue, with these different priorities when often the community at large has a major interest in all land use on what is effectively, in many cases, their traditional land? Clearly, one step is to ensure that the shareholders and directors are representative of the land owning group and those people committed to the cattle, although in most cases this will be a sub-group of the traditional land owning group.

Another step is that of ensuring that what is involved in obtaining funding support in terms of the policy objectives, the contracted obligations of any funding provided, the expected operational performance from such funding contracts, the feasibility of commercial success, and the mutual responsibility of the funding agency, the community at large and the cattle enterprise, are fully understood and accepted. This is so that the implications of obtaining funding agency support are demystified.

It is only when these two steps are completed that people can make a considered decision as to whether they really wish the ideal of a “proper cattle station”. Further, in the Author’s experience, when these steps have been undertaken, some groups do decide to pursue the ideal of a “proper cattle station”. For example, following directors’ courses for traditional owners and directors of Mistake Creek and Alcoota, such a decision was reaffirmed. As a consequence of other courses – at Yuelamu and Loves Creek – directors articulated a very different vision, one of multiple land use including a CDEP subsidised cattle activity. Although opposition from the Aboriginal manager to the Loves Creek vision has limited the
implementation of this vision (Phillpot, 1995, pers obs), Yuelamu has effectively implemented theirs, and in doing so has reduced their debt and built up their herd.

**The impact of directors’ training**

In 1993/94, following requests from the communities of Mistake Creek, Mt Allan, Alcoota and Loves Creek, the CLC began to consider establishing a pastoral company directors’ training program. The request from the four communities arose from two issues:

1. Misinformation or poor information as to the structure of non-Aboriginal companies, company law and the rights and responsibilities of pastoral company directors and owners; and
2. Confusion over the non-Aboriginal economic system and the generation of wealth.

With funding from DEET, Reverend Jim Downing AM and the Author were requested to design and deliver an appropriate program.

**Aims and objectives**

The aim of the program is to equip Aboriginal pastoral company directors with the skills and knowledge to operate their property within the law and to achieve the objectives of the community owners. The training program does this by:
(a) Exploring Aboriginal concepts of corporate activity and finding parallels in non-Aboriginal society;
(b) Informing directors of their rights and responsibilities under company law;
(c) Role-playing directors’ meetings in order to demonstrate a range of managerial issues, including conflict of interest;
(d) Using experiential techniques to assist Aboriginal directors to plan their properties and plan for contingencies; and
(e) Exploring in cross-cultural dialogue the equivalents for contracts in Aboriginal society, the equivalents in non-Aboriginal society, and the obligations to both.

It was hoped that, after taking part in this program, Aboriginal company directors would have sufficient knowledge of the role, functions and duties of company directors to enable them to direct their property operations effectively.

Project purpose

The purpose of the program was to:

(a) Identify the extent of Aboriginal understanding of pastoral activities in terms of the outputs required in an efficient operation;
(b) Assess the extent of Aboriginal directors’ understanding of the directors’ roles involved in the operation of a pastoral company;
(c) In the first phase, identify any perceived training needs that participants could identify and which they believe would improve the pastoral operations;
(d) In the latter phases of the program, address the directors’ skills and knowledge gaps of fiduciary, legal and ethical responsibilities of directors; and

(e) Through the use of experiential techniques, expose directors to the cause and effect relationships of management decisions.

Training programs in property planning and contracts aimed to assist directors to identify:

(a) Their aims for the property and to develop a property plan through the use of simulation techniques; and

(b) The common elements between contracts in the non-Aboriginal world and equivalent binding arrangements in the Aboriginal world.

Program methodology

The program used four approaches, intermixed depending upon the needs of the directors in each situation. The details of these methods are shown in Figure 57 below:
Figure 57: Program methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiential learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This technique utilizes simulation to demonstrate financial and herd planning. It is also used to reinforce the concepts discussed in other methodologies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demystifying cross-cultural dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This approach, derived from Richard Trudgeon’s work in Arnhem Land, utilizes dialogue and sharing of cultures to identify where common arrangements exist in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Derived from Friere’s work in South America, this approach utilizes the conscientisation process of reflection, planning, action, reflection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation question and answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This follows the classic classroom instruction technique.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Course description

Each course adopted a three phase approach, with each of the phases lasting one week.

The first phase of the program concentrated on the legal responsibilities of directors, and introduced directors to financial management and the legalities involved in meeting procedures.

The second phase of the program focused on the following aspects of company operations – meetings; the structure and function of meetings; the role of shareholders, directors, staff and consultants; conflict of interest; legitimate and illegitimate company decisions; and remedies under the law for directors.
The third phase concentrated on financial management, making extensive use of the Cattle Boss simulation game. The phase was also used to identify any future training needs of directors.

The three week program was spread over three months, thus allowing time to provide literacy support and take account of directors' other time commitments. Not only did most directors have to content with the difficulties of a second or 'foreign' language, but many were barely or non-literate and numerate. It is also difficult to get people together for three week slabs of time and concentrating for that length of time. The time between phases allowed participants to reflect on what they had learned and experienced. Again, this was in keeping with the application of action learning. All told, 62 people from the four participating communities attended the courses in 1994 and 1995.

The program found that there were some parallels between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies that could be used to assist Aboriginal people to gain greater clarity about non-Aboriginal systems. However, there was still a tendency by both the community members and outside agencies to treat the chairperson as a “boss” and thus invest him with significant power and authority, in other words, to create a “big man” or dominant man. It also found that the directors and other community leaders were confused about the corporate structure of their cattle operations.

The program was subject to a comprehensive evaluation, which confirmed much of the earlier research about the inadequacy of Aboriginal management skills. For
example, participants in the courses indicated high levels of confusion or mystification about non-Aboriginal economics and authority. The lack of clarity in their perceptions about non-Aboriginal society inevitably led to suspicion and hostility towards non-Aboriginal society in general, and ‘outsider’ organisations such as the CLC in particular.

However, the evaluation of the program also found that, following the training, there was a greater appreciation of how “whitefella” company law could be used in some cases to protect the interests of the community, and in other cases, to reduce conflict between those committed to the cattle business and those whose land interests were wider.

Conclusions

The assumption that the government policy objective of achieving commercial viability for Aboriginal owned and operated cattle enterprises in the NT was understood and agreed to by the Aboriginal owners and managers of those same cattle enterprises was flawed. This is because the specific underlying assumptions were flawed.

Aboriginal people have a very different world view about land ownership and land use. It is a world view that has little in common with that of a modern commercial enterprise. Traditional Aboriginal culture does not give the same values to profit maximisation as non-Aboriginal culture and the concept itself is difficult for Aboriginal people to appreciate, given that their system of exchange
is based upon kinship and reciprocity. The differences in Aboriginal values and world view were well known. However, these differences were not accounted for in the formulation and implementation of policy.

The failure to take cognisance of the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture included the failure to ensure that the traditional land owning structure was aligned with the community organisations and/or the cattle company. This failure meant that the structure of the cattle companies was neither representative of the community nor necessarily related to any traditional social structure. Thus the operation of the cattle stations tended to be the province of a small group of people who may not have had the traditional rights to use all the land necessary for the cattle enterprise. Consequently, those holding responsibilities in the cattle company, such as directorships, did not always have the power to make decisions over land use. Nor did the directors always represent all of the people who had a legitimate interest in land use in the area.

The policy of funding cattle enterprises on the basis that they achieve commercial viability was never communicated in any effective manner. There was a shortage of field officers, they changed often and they were poorly trained in cross-cultural communication. Finally, only limited formal training about the financial, administrative and legal responsibilities of operating a cattle station were offered to community leaders and, as a consequence, their capacity to make informed choices about whether they wished to operate a commercially viable enterprise was limited.
Thus, from a social perspective, it is doubtful that, under community ownership, a policy aiming at commercial viability would ever have been successful. When the physical capacity of the properties to achieve viability is examined, the flaws in the policy become even more apparent. This issue is examined in the next chapter.
Chapter 9: An examination of the biogeographic and economic assumptions of policy

In chapter 8 it was demonstrated that the assumption that Aboriginal leaders and owners of Aboriginal cattle activities shared and were committed to the government policy initiative of achieving commercial viability was false. In this chapter the capacity of Aboriginal owned or operated activities to achieve commercial viability will be examined. A commercially viable cattle enterprise requires an adequate supply of three categories of resource, namely land, labour and capital, to produce a profit. To determine whether Aboriginal cattle enterprises were adequately resourced, three questions need to be addressed.

1. To what extent were the land resources on which Aboriginal cattle enterprises were located capable of achieving commercial viability?
2. To what extent did Aboriginal labour have sufficient skills and knowledge to utilise the animals and land in such a way as to achieve commercial success?
3. Did Aboriginal cattle enterprises have sufficient access to capital?

That is, in terms of the model in chapter 1, this chapter relates to the assumptions about community capacity and land use. In addressing these assumptions, the chapter revisits the regional biogeographical analysis detailed in chapter 2 and applies it to the assumptions. Again the encapsulation model is applied, as shown in the shaded areas of Figure 58.
Figure 58: Bureaucratic encapsulation: land, labour and capital policy assumptions and their relationship to the context of Aboriginal pastoral properties
The land capacity

In this section the capacity of the land resources to support commercially viable properties will be examined. In undertaking this examination, each district of the NT will be reviewed. The review will utilise the Interim Biogeographic Regional Classification as a means of classifying Aboriginal properties within each district of the NT against the grazing capacity of each region. The regions to be covered are as follows:

1. Douglas-Daly;
2. Arnhem Land;
3. The Gulf;
4. Victoria River District;
5. The Barkly Tableland; and
6. Central Australia.

The Douglas-Daly Region

As Figure 59 indicates, the Douglas-Daly Region is one of the lesser productive areas for cattle production. The exception is the Daly basin and some of the flood plain areas of the Darwin coastal region where mixed non-Aboriginal farms predominate and are used for cattle, grain production and horticulture. The limited productive capacity of the region is denoted by the total size of the cattle herd in the region, which is less than 190,000 head with an approximate turn-off of 76,000 head or 40%. The average district commercial herd size is 10,000 head. The high turn-off figure is in part a reflection of the fact that the farming areas are
often used as depots for live exports, and in part a reflection that the region is only capable of producing young store stock for fattening elsewhere.

In 1993 there were two Aboriginal cattle enterprises operating in the area. These were Palumpa and Minjilang. Palumpa lies halfway between Port Keats and the Daly River. It has had a history of intermittent commercial profitability and, because of the existence of a local kill abattoir, has always been able to rely on a regular income from providing meat to local Aboriginal communities. Minjilang, on the other hand, has always been more problematic. As described in chapter 7, the herd has suffered from ad hoc management over a long period of time.

That notwithstanding, both operations run relatively small herds compared to the district commercial average on land that has a low grazing capacity and where the wet season limits production to seven months of the year. In addition, Minjilang and Palumpa's productive areas are quite restricted. For example, the most productive area on Croker Island is a 750 hectare floodplain on the south-western corner of the island. The remaining area of the island is tall savanna grasslands. Palumpa, on the other hand, covers a far wider area and has a much wider variety of country. The average grazing capacity of each area is 50 hectares to support one beast, and the time required to produce a 500 kg beast is between five to seven years. In addition to the low grazing capacity, the area suffers from substantial climatic risk brought about by a high degree of variability in both the quality and the quantity of the wet season and the length of the dry season, as well as the accompanying risks of bushfires and floods. A summary of the region and the location of the two properties are shown in Figure 59.
Figure 59: The Biogeographical Regions of the Darwin/Douglas-Daly Region (including Katherine)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biogeographical Regions</th>
<th>Darwin Coastal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Commences in the north east corner of the Bonaparte Gulf covering a 70 km coastal strip as far as Murnagella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>160 km south west of Darwin following the Daly, Douglas &amp; Katherine Rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>250 km south of Darwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>150 km north north east of Darwin including the Tiwi Islands, Coburg Peninsula and Croker Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topography &amp; Geology</td>
<td>Undulating coastal flats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intersected river basins of low palaeozoic sandstone &amp; siltstone &amp; limestone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rugged dissected hills of proterozoic sandstone and siltstone hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gently sloping plains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soils</td>
<td>Lateral cretaceous sandstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral loam and sandy red earths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shallow skeletal silts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Red and siliceous earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetation</td>
<td>Open forest, stringy bark, woollybutt with sorghum grassland understorey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open savanna forest of woollybutt stringy bark with a sorghum understorey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Savanna forest with stands of boxwood and found leaf bloodwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open savanna dominated by stands of stringy bark interspersed with stands of casuarinas and occasional stands of Cyprus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainfall</td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 401 mm July - 0 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 209 mm July - 0 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 209 mm July - 0 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 209 mm July - 0 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humidity</td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 79% July - 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 76% July - 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 76% July - 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 76% July - 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climatic Phenomena</td>
<td>Droughts Bushfires Floods Cyclones Bushfires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Droughts Floods Cyclones Bushfires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Droughts Floods Cyclones Bushfires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Droughts Floods Cyclones Bushfires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grazing Capacity</td>
<td>Cattle - low, pockets of good grazing Buffalo - high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cattle - pockets of good grazing Buffalo - high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cattle - low Buffalo - low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cattle - pockets of good grazing Buffalo – high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Properties</td>
<td>Minjilang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Palumpa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Gulf Region

The Gulf Region includes the town of Borroloola and the new mining town of Macarthur River. As demonstrated in Figure 60, from a pastoral perspective the biogeography is characterised by a low grazing capacity of 25-50 hectares per head, low calving rates of 50% and a lengthy production time in terms of producing a 500 kg beast (7-8 years) (Perry & Mott, 1985). This is reflected in the total number of cattle in the region of 100,000 head which are carried on 19 properties, 17 of which are owned by non-Aboriginal people. Herd sizes vary in the region ranging from under 1,000 head up to 10,000. The relatively low stocking levels are a reflection of the impact of the BTEC when large areas of the Gulf were shot out. The average turn-off for the region is 40,000 head, the majority of which are young cattle under two years old and are trucked off to feedlots elsewhere in Australia or overseas.

At times in the last thirty years a number of pastoralists have attempted to invest in improved pasture, primarily using Townsville stylo and paragrass. However, returns from these investments did not justify their continuance and, as a consequence, the majority of the properties in the area utilised native grasses. The Macarthur River Station, which is currently owned by Macarthur River Mines, conducted a long-term trial using supplementary feeding in an attempt to increase the weight gain of animals. These trials proved unsuccessful (Phillpot, 1988).

In the early 1970s an abattoir located in the Macarthur River was successful for a short period. However, it suffered from a number of constraints, including unskilled labour and its inability to meet the increasing health standards required.
Overall, the region produces store cattle for fattening and finishing off elsewhere.

There are a number of Aboriginal owned properties in the area, the majority of which were inherited by the children of non-Aboriginal pastoralists. The properties surveyed in the area were Elsey, Hodgson Downs and Robinson River. Elsey is operating as a subsidised commercial operation, while Hodgson Downs and Robinson River were destocked during BTEC. All of the properties are constrained by the environmental conditions of the Gulf as described above and summarised in Figure 60. However, Elsey’s proximity to the Roper River gives it access to pockets of superior grazing, at least in Gulf terms.

**Figure 60: The Biogeographical Regions of the Gulf**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biogeographical Regions</th>
<th>Gulf Coastal</th>
<th>Gulf Falls &amp; Uplands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>1200 km south east of Darwin in the Gulf of Carpentaria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topography &amp; Geology</td>
<td>Rugged proterozoic sandstones and tertiary sediments</td>
<td>Low steep hills of proterozoic and palaeozoic sedimentary rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soils</td>
<td>Sandy red earths - shallow gravelly silt</td>
<td>Skeletal lateral tertiary soils and shallow sands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetation</td>
<td>Darwin stringybark woodland with a spinifex understorey</td>
<td>Open savanna with Darwin stringybark and variable barked bloodwood with a spinifex understorey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainfall</td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 401 mm July - 0 mm</td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 401 mm July - 0 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humidity</td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 79% July - 60%</td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 79% July - 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climatic Phenomena</td>
<td>Droughts, Bushfires, Floods, Cyclones, Storms</td>
<td>Droughts, Bushfires, Floods, Cyclones, Storms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grazing Capacity</td>
<td>Cattle - low</td>
<td>Cattle - medium &amp; low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Properties</td>
<td>Robinson River</td>
<td>Elsey Hodgson Downs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Arnhem Land**

Arnhem Land was never effectively taken up as pastoral land and there are no non-Aboriginal pastoral properties in this region. The few attempts made by pastoralists were all abandoned because of the unsuitability of the region and the hostility of the Aboriginal people. Those cattle activities operated by missions were for the sole purpose of expanding the mission’s food self-sufficiency (Social Welfare Branch reports, 1960-1972). The Aboriginal owned activities at Murwangi, Bulman and Barunga are all products of this policy for, in this case, neither the land nor the history has an established basis for commercial success.

Overall, Arnhem Land has extremely low grazing capacity, although beef grazing is very high. There are effectively four properties operating that are equivalent to the case studies in chapters 4 and 5. These are Murwangi, Bulman, Barunga and Eva Valley. Barunga, Bulman and Eva Valley are all privatised ex-government operations and Murwangi is a privatised ex-mission operation. Bulman can be considered commercial in terms of buffalo, but not cattle. However, as mentioned in chapter 7, all of its activities are contracted out to non-Aboriginal people in exchange for royalties and some guarantee of employment. All of these properties are constrained by the size of their operations and the quality of the land.
### The Victoria River District

The Victoria River District (VRD) is one of the most productive areas of the NT, carrying a total herd of 410,000 with an annual average turn-off of 91,590. The cattle are run on 45 properties with a district average herd size of 9,000 head. In non-Aboriginal terms, the Victoria River District has been the location of the “Big Runs”. Victoria River Station, as distinct from the district, was owned
successively by Bovrils and Hookers until the early 1980s. The other big run, Wave Hill Station, was owned by Vesteys. Both runs epitomised the stereotype of the corporate-owned cattle stations. That is, they ran large numbers on cheap land, with low cost labour managed through a hierarchical, organisational structure. In more recent times the big runs have been subdivided and their ownership is more diverse. However, VRD property ownership is still the province of large corporations such as Heytesbury, Consolidated Pastoral Holdings and the Australian Agricultural Company.

As Figure 62 indicates, the Victoria River District is a mixture of open savanna grasslands with large areas of abrupt ranges. In some areas the land is capable of running 15 hectares to a beast and producing a 500 kg beast in 2-3 years. In 1993 there were four Aboriginal owned properties in the region, made up of Fitzroy, Anambidgee, Mistake Creek and Daguragu. Only one of the properties in the region was capable of maintaining a herd equivalent to the district average commercial herd and that was Mistake Creek, which has been deemed a commercial entity (see chapter 7). Daguragu was operated as a commercial property but experienced similar difficulties to Ngarliyikirlangu (Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993). Fitzroy is constrained in terms of its size and Anambidgee was totally destocked during the BTEC.
Figure 62: The Biogeographical Regions of the Victoria River

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biogeographical Regions</th>
<th>Victoria Bonaparte Gulf</th>
<th>Ord Victoria River</th>
<th>Sturt Plains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Some 600 km south west of Darwin</td>
<td>100-700 km south west of Darwin</td>
<td>700 km south of Darwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topography &amp; Geology</td>
<td>The NW consists of proterozoic strata mantled by quaternary marine sediment. In the SE, abrupt ranges of proterozoic sandstones</td>
<td>1. Abrupt ranges of proterozoic and phareozoic formations 2. Extensive plains of cambrian, volcanic and limestone materials 3. Tanami - laterised sand plains</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetation</td>
<td>Open savanna grasslands on plains of hummock grasses with low tree savanna on the hills</td>
<td>1. Triode hummock grasses 2. Short to medium high grasses with forests of river gums along water courses 3. Medium high grasses with stands of lancewoods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainfall</td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 132 mm July - 0 mm</td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 132 mm July - 0 mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humidity</td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 49% July - 33%</td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 49% July - 33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climatic Phenomena</td>
<td>Droughts Bushfires Floods Cyclones Storms</td>
<td>Droughts Bushfires Floods Cyclones Storms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grazing Capacity</td>
<td>Cattle – medium</td>
<td>Cattle – medium</td>
<td>Cattle - medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Properties</td>
<td>Fitzroy</td>
<td>Anambidgee Mistake Creek Daguragu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Barkly Tableland

As with the Victoria River District, the Barkly Tableland is the location of the large corporate owned properties. The Australian Agricultural Company (Elders), Stanbroke (AMP), and Consolidated Pastoral Holdings (Packer) all dominate the area. The Barkly Tableland is the most productive area of the NT, largely consisting of Mitchell grasslands which will carry one beast to 15 hectares and produce a 500 kg beast within three years. The region carries a total of 497,000 head with average annual turn-off of 127,925. There are 27 properties in the region with the average, regional, commercial herd size being 18,407. While the area experiences all the climatic risks of other areas further north, it is less drought prone and the monsoonal effects generally guarantee an annual rainfall. Large, corporate owned conglomerations of properties dominate the area. There is only one Aboriginal owned property located in the region – Muckaty – and this is located on the edge of the Mitchell grasslands plains with 70% of Muckaty consisting of either rocky ridges or Tanami spinifex. It too is too small in both carrying capacity and size to be able to carry a herd equal to the district commercial average.
Figure 63: The Biogeographical Regions of the Barkly Tableland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biogeographical Regions</th>
<th>Mitchell Grass Downs</th>
<th>Channel Country Complex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>900 km south south west of Darwin</td>
<td>1500 km south south west of Darwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topography &amp; Geology</strong></td>
<td>Undulating downs on slate and limestone</td>
<td>Uplifted plateaux of proterozoic sandstones dissected by water courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Soils</strong></td>
<td>Grey and brown cracking soils</td>
<td>Shallow stony sands to earthy yellows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vegetation</strong></td>
<td>Grassland and low woodlands or gums and acacias</td>
<td>Coolabah woodlands with lignum saltbush and shrublands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rainfall</strong></td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 108 mm July - 0 mm</td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 108 mm July - 0 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humidity</strong></td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 57% July - 41%</td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 57% July - 41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Climatic Phenomena</strong></td>
<td>Droughts Bushfires Floods Storms</td>
<td>Droughts Bushfires Floods Storms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grazing Capacity</strong></td>
<td>Cattle - medium/high</td>
<td>Cattle - medium/high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Properties</strong></td>
<td>Muckaty*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Muckaty lies on the edge of the Barkly with a substantial proportion of it in the Tanami biogeographic region.

Central Australia

The Central Australia Region carries a total of 302,000 head with an annual average turn-off of nearly 80,000. The cattle are run on a total of 82 properties with an average district herd size of 3,682, although GRM (1987) estimated that a successful commercial herd in Central Australia needed to be 5,600 head. The grazing capacity of the area is characterised as low with a carrying capacity of one beast to 50 to 70 hectares. The area is drought prone with drought expected once in every four years, and it also suffers from extreme bushfire risk. Increasingly it requires sophisticated management to match the grazing capacity.
to the pasture resource. Historically, Central Australian properties have survived by having low cost operations utilising the few good seasons to generate windfall gains. However, in good seasons Central Australia can produce 500 kg beasts within three years. Even in poor seasons, with careful attention to grazing capacity and by matching stocking levels to the grazing capacity, it is possible to maintain a predictable commercial turn-off (Purvis, 1986). This notwithstanding, the Alice Springs region is one of the lowest producing beef cattle areas of the NT.

The majority of Aboriginal owned properties in the NT are located in Central Australia and are made up of a mixture of privatised and purchased properties or enterprises. As with Ngarliyikirlangu, the privatised properties lack either sufficient grazing capacity or water points, or both, to achieve commercial herds. The purchased properties, with the exception of recent purchases such as Alcoota, have at least one major constraint such as a lack of infrastructure, grazing capacity, stock and management. That is, they are similar to the situation at Puraiya.
Figure 64: The Biogeographical Regions of Central Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biogeographical Regions</th>
<th>Simpson &amp; Strzelecki</th>
<th>Central Ranges</th>
<th>Finke Plains</th>
<th>Macdonnell Ranges</th>
<th>Burt Plain</th>
<th>Tanami</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>180 km south and east of Alice Springs</td>
<td>100 km north of Alice Springs</td>
<td>West &amp; south west of Alice Springs</td>
<td>Alice Springs</td>
<td>60 km north of Alice Springs</td>
<td>50 km north west of Alice Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topography &amp; Geology</strong></td>
<td>Longitudinal sand dunes plains</td>
<td>Proterozoic ranges in between sand plains</td>
<td>Precambrian &amp; volcanic dissected upland and sand plains</td>
<td>High relief ranges and foothills</td>
<td>Low rock ranges</td>
<td>Low hills, sand ranges and gibber plains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Soils</strong></td>
<td>Sand</td>
<td>Red quaternary sand plains</td>
<td>Red sands and skeletal sands</td>
<td>Stony skeletal</td>
<td>Red earth</td>
<td>Red sand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vegetation</strong></td>
<td>Spinifex hummocks</td>
<td>Wattle scrub and hummock grasses open wood of mulga</td>
<td>Spinifex hummock grasses and acacia shrubs</td>
<td>Spinifex acacia shrubs</td>
<td>Mulgas and acacia woodland</td>
<td>Mixed shrub steppes including desert bloodwood acacia hummocks grasslands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rainfall</strong></td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 18 mm July - 1 mm</td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 18 mm July - 1 mm</td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 18 mm July - 1 mm</td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 18 mm July - 1 mm</td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 18 mm July - 1 mm</td>
<td>Median Rainfall: January - 18 mm July - 1 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humidity</strong></td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 31% July - 60%</td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 31% July - 60%</td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 31% July - 60%</td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 31% July - 60%</td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 31% July - 60%</td>
<td>Mean 9 am relative humidity: January - 31% July - 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Climatic Phenomena</strong></td>
<td>Droughts</td>
<td>Droughts</td>
<td>Droughts</td>
<td>Droughts Bushfires Storms</td>
<td>Droughts Bushfires</td>
<td>Droughts Bushfires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grazing Capacity</strong></td>
<td>Cattle - low</td>
<td>Cattle - low</td>
<td>Cattle - low with paddocks of fattening country</td>
<td>Cattle - generally low with paddocks of fattening country</td>
<td>Cattle - generally low with paddocks of fattening country</td>
<td>Cattle - generally low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Properties</strong></td>
<td>Atula</td>
<td>Ti-Tree</td>
<td>Hermannsburg Santa Teresa</td>
<td>Ti-Tree</td>
<td>Yuendumu Yuelamu Haasts Bluff Willowra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of the land capacity of Aboriginal cattle stations

If we examine the location of the Aboriginal owned and operated properties against the biogeographic regions, climate and grazing capacity as detailed in Figures 59 to 64, the limitations upon the Aboriginal operations become clear. Of the enterprises surveyed, only five are located in areas rated as medium and there are none at all on the best grazing areas, that is, the Barkly Tableland.

All of the properties are located in areas that are subject to severe negative climate phenomena (Lea & Neal, 1984:43). One third are located in the arid rangelands that experience constraints. These include drought, the probability of which in the southern half of the Territory is calculated to be at least one year in every four. The high probability of drought limits pasture growth and thus grazing capacity. Perry and Mott (1984) indicate that, for successful commercial grazing to be maintained, the following strategies need to be adopted:

1. In the arid areas, rangeland conditions must be maintained by matching stock rates to land capacity;
2. Use of adapted stock;
3. Control of animal pests and diseases; and
4. In the wetter areas, pasture improvement and supplementary feeding.

Perry and Mott’s assessment has been supported by others (Stafford-Smith et al., 1994) who have agreed that the adoption of these strategies requires management that is capable of applying multi-disciplined knowledge, in particular, knowledge
drawn from both animal husbandry and range management, to sustained commercially viable beef production in the rangelands.

The Aboriginal Affairs policy of supporting commercially viable cattle stations therefore assumed that Aboriginal labour, in terms of operational management, and physical operations, either had these skills or could acquire them. The next section examines the capacity of the Aboriginal labour and the validity of the above assumptions.

The capacity of Aboriginal labour

There has been very little analysis of the capacity of labour on Aboriginal cattle enterprises. The first critical analyses were undertaken in 1980/81 (IAD) and 1985 (Phillpot). As part of a wider study, Sri-Pathmanathan (1983) examined the role and training needs of all labour in the pastoral industry, including those Aboriginal people employed in the industry. More recently, as part of the 1993 training needs analysis of overall demand in the Aboriginal owned pastoral industry, Hanlon and Phillpot (1993b:51) concluded that “the Aboriginal pastoral industry cannot be expected to be a significant employer of people”. Each of these studies indicated a changing pastoral industry labour market that demanded a different set of skills.

This conclusion was based upon an overall industry demand of 1,322 people and a full-time equivalent demand of 60 persons in the Aboriginal owned industry. These figures were calculated on the basis of the GRM study (1987) and adjusted
against the 1991 ABS census data which indicated a reduction of ten per cent in employment levels overall from 1988 to 1991.

However, in 1993, Aboriginal properties employed 149 people or two and a half times more than that estimated as necessary for the size of the Aboriginal cattle herd. This indicates that Aboriginal properties are employment maximising which inevitably constrains their profit earning capacity and thus their commercial viability.

Hanlon and Phillpot (1993b) argue further that the figure of 149 employees on Aboriginal pastoral properties underestimates the actual involvement. They suggest that, because of seasonal mobility and the involvement of unpaid labour and Aboriginal directors, the actual number of persons involved in Aboriginal owned properties is between 600-700, although this involvement may be limited to specific events such as mustering or trucking. That notwithstanding, if their figure is correct then it could be argued that 15-17% of the total Aboriginal population resident on these pastoral properties is involved in the cattle industry at one time or another.

This is not surprising given that 47% of Aboriginal people in the NT live in areas where employment opportunities are extremely limited or non-existent. Therefore, where an activity that utilises labour exists, the community pressure to maximise employment becomes overwhelming. However, to suppose that maximising labour on Aboriginal owned and operated cattle enterprises leads to
Employment in the pastoral industry generally tends to be seasonal, with the majority of labour required during the cold (Central Australia) or dry season (in the northern top end) for mustering and related activities. The seasonal nature of this demand militates against skill acquisition except for a very few. In the non-Aboriginal pastoral industry, for example, the manager of Brunette Downs estimated that he would turnover 60 stockmen in a season (Wagstaff, 1988), five of which he would select for future training and advancement.

Similar high turnover figures are also experienced by Aboriginal owned and operated enterprises. Hanlon and Phillpot (1993b:53) analysed the labour practices of six Aboriginal properties that, at the time, represented half of the twelve properties operating as commercial entities. The results of this analysis are reproduced in Figure 65. What the table shows is that each of the properties was maximising employment and, in the case of Mistake Creek, Elsey and Atula, with some wage subsidy from ATSIC. What the table also shows is that individual employees varied considerably with the average continuous employment period for any one person averaging 14 weeks – hardly sufficient time to acquire any skills.

Thiele (1982), in his analysis of the Yugal Cattle Company, an Aboriginal owned enterprise at Yugal Mangi on the Roper River, cited two reasons for poor labour productivity:
1. Lack of training skills and experience; and
2. Tradition incompatible with non-aboriginal work styles.

Figure 65: Employment Patterns on Selected Aboriginal Owned Cattle Stations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property (Year)</th>
<th>Stock Nos</th>
<th>No of Employees</th>
<th>Person Years</th>
<th>Ave No of Weeks/Employee</th>
<th>Longest Continuous Employment (ex. Manager)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Each Year</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atula (1989)</td>
<td>1,596</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atula (1990)</td>
<td>1,892</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atula (1991)</td>
<td>2,409</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulman (1990)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulman (1991)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulman (1992)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzroy (1992)</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistake Ck (1992)</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanami Downs (89/90)</td>
<td>2,847</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanami Downs (90/91)</td>
<td>4,633</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1,077</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanami Downs (91/92)</td>
<td>4,981</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1,423</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsey (1990)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsey (1991)</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1,053</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsey (1992)</td>
<td>4,800</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>40,258</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>70.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Averages</td>
<td>3,660</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>741.5</td>
<td>19.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Young (1981:165), in her analysis of Willowra, another Aboriginal owned enterprise, extends Thiele's point about traditions which are incompatible with non-Aboriginal work styles to argue that cattle was a subsidiary activity and that traditional values are dominant over those of the commercial cattle activity. The question of differing values was discussed more fully in chapter 8. Clearly the differences in values have a direct effect on the aspirations of the Aboriginal people who own and operate cattle stations.
Hanlon and Phillpot (1993a:54) support Young and add that, among young men, there were two particular competitors with the cattle industry for their labour. These competitors are ceremonies (in the summer period) and football (in the winter). The esteem and status achieved from these activities are probably greater than the esteem and status from being a good stockman. In fact, if one considers the work of a stockman, the high risk of injury that accompanies such work, the low pay relative to the dole, and the poor conditions (mustering camps generally camp out, sometimes with a cook, sometimes not), cattle work is probably a poor competitor. Phillpot and Hanlon also point out that a number of other factors contribute to poor labour productivity. Included in these are chronic ill health, low levels of literacy and numeracy skills, and education levels generally, as well as high rates of incarceration (Hanlon and Phillpot, 1993a:12).

Hanlon and Phillpot (1993b:55) argued that all of the above factors indicate that the labour capacity of Aboriginal owned and operated enterprises was insufficient to achieve commercial viability. More recent studies confirm this view. In 1995 an audit of the stock and station skills of Mabunji (Australian Centre for Local Government and Regional Studies, 1996), a resource centre supporting a number of outstations which have ambitions of developing cattle enterprises, found that very few Aboriginal CDEP participants had any degree of stock and station skills beyond riding a horse. The Hanlon and Phillpot study also indicated that there was a lack of skill and knowledge at the management, technical and operational level.
These results support Hanlon and Phillpot’s view that:

Aboriginal employees have limited stock and station skills which is exacerbated by the absence of a European work ethic. There is the commonly held perception that if you can ride a horse you are a stockman. Hanlon and Phillpot, 1993, Rural Development Skills on Aboriginal Land: Can We Meet the Challenge? Vol.1 p.12, DEET, Canberra

What Hanlon and Phillpot also identified was that the opportunities of Aboriginal cattlemen to acquire such skills were extremely limited. There is only one publicly funded rural college in the NT (located in Katherine) and that was seen by most Aboriginal people to be culturally and physically oriented to non-Aboriginal people. It was also perceived as excluding Aboriginal people. Among the 48 private and public providers registered with the NT Education and Training Authority, only twelve had programs that were applicable to Aboriginal cattle enterprises and none of these considered animal husbandry issues, even though such training was not difficult to provide.

There were examples of successful training empowering or strengthening the capacity of Aboriginal cattle enterprises. For example, the stock and station training provided to the youth at Ti-Tree enabled Puraiya to successfully maintain herd growth and infrastructure such as bores, yards and fences. This example of success does not detract from the main argument of Hanlon and Phillpot that Aboriginal employees of Aboriginal owned and operated cattle enterprises exist in an unconventional labour market. This labour market is characterised by extremely limited or non-existent employment opportunities, little training and, where employment opportunities exist, they are likely to be subsidised by
government. Because of this, it lacks the capacity to achieve a level of productivity necessary to achieve commercial viability.

**Access to capital for Aboriginal owned pastoral properties**

Aboriginal owned and operated pastoral properties, as with other agricultural producers, have largely financed their increased capital needs from borrowings. In 1987 Benson estimated the farm debt of Australian beef/sheep producers was $8 billion of which major trading banks held 55% (Benson, 1987). Since then there has been a wide range in performance. The larger, better located properties, in terms of soil and water resources, have been able to generate sufficient income to reinvest in production. The smaller, poorer located properties have been unable to produce sufficient income to provide a living (DPIE, 1997:24). This can be contrasted with the situation in the 1960s where the rural sector borrowed only seventy five cents for every dollar on deposit. In contrast, for every dollar earned, the rural sector today is likely to have borrowed three. The means by which the sector raises funds include all of the usual means of raising capital such as overdrafts, bills of exchange, term loans and, in the case of public companies, share issues. Generally, these mechanisms are used to finance longer-term developments. Short-term finance needs are often met by stock mortgages, albeit at high interest rates. These are generally regarded as high risk loans as the probability of drought and/or the risk of market failure is high.

Because they are generally located on Aboriginal land, Aboriginal properties are excluded from the commercial finance market (other than the high interest stock
mortality market). Therefore Aboriginal properties do not have access to any other private sector finances other than stock mortgages. They are on the periphery of the commercial cattle economy, a situation akin to the position of North American Indian cattle ranches, a description of which provides some useful insight into the constraints on capital that apply to Aboriginal owned and operated cattle activities.

Trosper (1978), in his comparison of Indian and White American ranching efficiencies, analysed production factor data (gathered from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the United States Department of Agriculture) and then conducted an input-output analysis to test the technical efficiency of both White and Indian ranches. His conclusion was that the primary factor differentiating the two properties was that Indian properties existed within a completely different institutional framework from that of White properties. For example, Indian land could not be used to raise capital, and although capital was available from public sources at a lower direct cost (through the various Indian development programs) than private capital, it was expensive in terms of the time taken to access it and to account for it.

A similar conclusion could equally be made about Aboriginal properties. The institutional framework effectively locates Aboriginal communities within a welfare-based economy, which distances them from the normal free enterprise economy. The fact that their land is a non-marketable commodity restricts them severely in their ability to raise additional capital. As a consequence, they are denied access to the free capital market, except at very high interest rates. This
means that they often have to finance long-term development with what is regarded normally as short-term funds. Such strategies have often been forced on Aboriginal communities because the time taken, and the amount available through institutional sources such as ATSIC, would preclude initiating the development and therefore not permit the property to optimise its production. Amata (SA) (between 1980 and 1984) was required to finance all of its capital development from cattle sales and from short-term loans from Elder Smiths. To further illustrate the issue of access to capital, the experience of three Aboriginal stations in Central Australia (Amata and Fregon in SA and Mt Allan in the NT) provides some useful insights. All of them were able to access sufficient capital to successfully complete a BTEC test and slaughter program and achieve provisional or confirmed disease-free status. These properties all exhibit two common characteristics in relation to accessing capital, they are:

1. They used partial destocking to generate the capital to develop the infrastructure for a test and slaughter program; and
2. All had access to long-term economic advice.

However, once they could no longer use their own sources of capital, or no longer had access to long-term economic advice, the situation became much more problematic. Mt Allan’s herd size of 1,500 head is marginal. However, following advice and planning assistance from the CLC’s rural advisory service, they have been able to rebuild their operations. On the other hand, Fregon ceased to operate after CDEP labour support was withdrawn and they lost their pastoral adviser. Amata continues to operate only because the community council subsidises
labour in terms of paying an Aboriginal manager and employing labour through CDEP. That is, three of the stations that successfully completed a test and slaughter program during the BTEC could not achieve commercial viability once access to public funds or advice was withdrawn.

Whether this capital investment is available is a moot point. It has been estimated that between 1980 and 1985 the average capitalisation of pastoral properties in the NT pastoral industry increased from under $200,000 to over $500,000 (chapter 3, pages 135-136) (Phillpot, 1985). As we have seen in chapter 3, there was never sufficient capital in the DAA/ADC budget to provide this level of investment to all Aboriginal properties. Given the limited access to capital and the geographic constraints most Aboriginal properties experience, it is inevitable that there will be a reduction in the number of properties accessing public investment funds on the basis of their commercial viability.

Summary of the Aboriginal cattle station access issue

Aboriginal owned properties, in achieving commercial viability, are not just constrained by land and labour limitations. Access to capital is also an issue. In general, Aboriginal people are limited to accessing low interest public funding or high interest short-term loans for capital development. In both situations, Aboriginal people either have to demonstrate an efficient operation or have the herd numbers, where accessing private funds, to secure the loan. Both situations limit Aboriginal people's access to capital. In the case of public funding, there is a limited availability and this availability is even further restricted by stringent
funding requirements. In the situation of private funding, cattle numbers will determine availability and, in the main, most properties carry less than district commercial average. As a consequence, their ability to raise private finance without risk to the overall operation is extremely limited.

**Conclusions**

The biogeography of the NT is not highly productive for the purposes of cattle production. In the two best areas, the Victoria River District and the Barkly Tableland, there are only five Aboriginal owned and operated pastoral properties and, of these, only one has the capacity to carry a herd equivalent to the district average commercial size herd. The remaining Aboriginal properties are located elsewhere in the Territory on land that has low grazing capacity and high risk land, which in order to produce a profitable return, requires effective skill and knowledge management, highly skilled operators and clever pasture management strategies.

These skills are generally not available in the Aboriginal community and there has been little training provided, on any scale, for Aboriginal people to acquire these skills. However, the evidence is that, where suitable training is provided, there is substantial improvement in the efficiency of Aboriginal labour usage and the operations of pastoral properties generally.

In conclusion, given the land, labour and capital constraints on Aboriginal owned properties, the potential for all Aboriginal owned properties to achieve
commercial viability is extremely limited. In addition, those that have the land capacity to carry a commercial herd are constrained by the lack of training and the appropriateness of the funding arrangements. Therefore, the probability that all properties could achieve commercial viability is not high. The policy implication of this is that the successful development of an Aboriginal owned, managed and operated, commercially viable cattle industry requires a specific set of policies that contain within them mechanisms for dealing with the constraints on land, labour and capital.
Chapter 10: Conclusion

Introduction

From the evidence in the preceding chapters, it is possible to conclude, in terms of answering the questions in chapter 1 (pages 28-29) that only some of the pastoral land acquired by Aboriginal people in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s was capable of supporting commercially independent enterprises, although much of the land was capable of supporting subsistence cattle activity. There was never sufficient capital available to support all of the properties, and given the land constraints, never enough to ensure that they all achieved commercial independence. Only a selected few Aboriginal communities with the land capacity, access to capital and advice, were able to access, and therefore acquire, appropriate skills and knowledge that enabled them to manage commercial cattle enterprises, albeit that they subsidised them through CDEP in order to maximise labour.

In general, and with the exception of the CLC, the relevant agencies did not have in place development processes that enabled Aboriginal people to acquire pastoral enterprises, define their aspirations for land use, including cattle activity, and then implement a plan that would enable them to realise their aspirations. However, some communities and groups were able to weave together strategies that enabled them to operate commercially, while maximising labour through the use of CDEP subsidies. Others have been able to weave together strategies that have enabled them to maintain subsistence cattle activities.
Where communities have been able to weave successful strategies together, either to enable them to operate commercial, albeit subsidised, operations or subsistence operations, they have done so because of their capacity to access outside support and manage competing internal factors.

In this final chapter the policy implications of the experience are considered by:

1. providing a background summary to the overall pastoral experience of Aboriginal people in the NT;
2. summarising the policy formulation process;
3. summarising the policy implementation process;
4. summarising the impact of the experience on the community and land use; and
5. examining the implications for the future.

Situation summary

Aboriginal involvement in the pastoral industry dates from the first occupation of the land of the NT by non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal involvement has always been fraught with a degree of ambivalence characterised by the fact that it was pastoralists in the main who dispossessed Aboriginal land, thus disrupting a way of life thousands of years old. But once the initial dispossession occurred, it was possible for Aboriginal people to continue to exercise their traditional practices, and at the same time, derive sustenance as workers in the pastoral industry.
Despite the involvement of Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry, their role and function was quite discrete and did not involve ownership of an enterprise or its management. That is, in Reynolds' view (1972), the exercise of Aboriginal rights and those of the pastoralists were not incompatible. If they had been, then the history of pastoralism would have been very different.

Commercially oriented pastoralism was not the only pastoral activity in which Aboriginal people were involved. Again, as demonstrated in earlier chapters, many of the missions and government settlements had cattle projects, the primary purpose of which was to provide meat, employment and training. However, as in the case of private enterprise pastoralism, Aboriginal peoples' involvement in the mission and government settlement cattle projects was limited to that of workers, although occasionally Aboriginal people might act as head stockmen or overseers of a project. Thus, in the 1970s, the development of policies that enabled Aboriginal people to acquire both pastoral leases and the enterprises associated with them established a new role for Aboriginal people – that of owners, managers and operators of pastoral enterprises.

**The changing policy framework process and the impact of policy implementation**

From the late 1960s and early 1970s the primary purpose of the Aboriginal Affairs policy directed to pastoral land and enterprise acquisition was to acquire land. A set of secondary objectives also applied. These included economic development, meat production and employment and training. These secondary
objectives were directly related to the historical objectives of the mission and government settlement cattle projects. The policies associated with the primary and secondary set of objectives were administered by a number of different agencies over the last 28 years. The principal agencies were initially the DAA and the ALFC, the functions of which were later subsumed into the ADC, and then in 1990, the functions of both the DAA and the ADC were subsumed into ATSIC. In addition to these agencies, the DEIR and later DEET (now DEETYA) administered access to a variety of labour market programs.

Over time, while land acquisition remained a prime policy objective, two of the secondary policy objectives, that is, food self-sufficiency and employment and training, became less important than economic development, which increasingly came to be understood in terms of commercial viability. The test of commercial viability essentially came to mean the capacity to return a profit. The aim of profit maximisation was derived from the standard commercial model based on the non-Aboriginal, large-scale, extensive pastoral operations of the industry.

This reduction in the policy objectives resolved some of the historical tension at an agency level, but not at the community level. At an agency policy level, the way to resolve the tension between land acquisition objectives and other objectives was to reduce the number of objectives and to apply rigorous criteria to any secondary objectives. At the community level the tensions between the varying objectives remain unresolved, and in many cases were resolved by the community accessing additional resources in order to achieve both the primary objective of land acquisition and the secondary set of objectives of economic
development, food self-sufficiency and employment and training. The duality between the agencies attempting to reduce the policy objectives and the communities attempting to maintain them is evidenced in the two case studies. For example, the evidence is that, in both case studies and in terms of the other Aboriginal owned pastoral enterprises examined in this study, Aboriginal cattle enterprises have continued to maximise employment and have often been able to do so by accessing labour market programs or CDEP, or a combination of both.

From 1977 on, the role of the land councils, particularly the NLC and the CLC, also became important. Many of the pastoral leases acquired by purchase then became subject to an Aboriginal land claim, the majority of which have been successful, and as a consequence, the majority of purchased Aboriginal pastoral properties are now Aboriginal freehold land. The transfer of pastoral leases owned by Aboriginal people to Aboriginal freehold land inevitably meant that the land councils had to address the traditional owners' multiple interest in land use, and as a consequence, both the CLC and the NLC developed land management and pastoral management units to deal with the issues. The CLC in particular has developed a capacity to map the resource capacity of Aboriginal land and to utilise this mapping in a participatory planning process that assists Aboriginal people to plan their resource use, including those who wish to run cattle activities. However, in the main, these initiatives of the CLC have been constrained by access to resources and a reliance on annual project funding. The capacity of the CLC to address the problems of specific cases has therefore been limited, as is also demonstrated in the two case studies.
The two case studies, Puraiya (Ti-Tree) and Ngarliyikirlangu (Yuendumu), started from very different bases. Puraiya was purchased from a private operator, and while it was run down with a herd much reduced by the 1960s drought, it was large enough and had sufficient water resources to be regarded as commercial. The other case study, Ngarliyikirlangu, had been a government project whose primary objectives had been employment and meat production, and in terms of commerciality, had always been small-scale compared to its non-Aboriginal neighbours. Puraiya has continued to receive ATSIC enterprise support (up until 1996), and until 1996, has generally been regarded as potentially commercial. Ngarliyikirlangu, on the other hand, lost all its funding support in 1990 and is currently considered bankrupt, and were it not for the support of the Yuendumu Mining Company, would have had to have been wound up.

Yet the differences in the two herd sizes of the properties is not very great. The two substantial differences between the enterprises are that Puraiya has a larger area with more proven water supplies. In terms of the outcomes of the two case studies, ‘commercial viability’ was not so much actual commercial viability but rather the potential commercial viability. That is, Puraiya was considered to have the potential to be commercial in terms of its water and land resources, and therefore, justified continued funding. Ngarliyikirlangu, on the other hand, was considered not to have either the water or pasture resources to support a commercial sized herd, and therefore, it was rated as non-commercial and no longer entitled to funding.
As summarised in chapters 7 and 8, the experiences of Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu appear to have been replicated in the other Aboriginal pastoral properties. That is, the application of increasingly rigorous commercial evaluation criteria reduced the number of properties that were rated as commercial and entitled to subsidies. For example, in 1985 there were some 24 properties receiving enterprise development support. In 1988 there were eighteen, and by 1993 only nine were being treated as commercial, and of these six had been purchased since 1992. In addition, of those that were still treated as commercial between 1993 and 1996, and as a consequence, were receiving commercial subsidies, only four had herds equal to or greater than the district average for non-Aboriginal pastoral properties. That is, the majority of Aboriginal cattle enterprises now fall into the category of non-commercial, albeit that a significant number continue to operate by utilising CDEP to fund labour or by accessing other forms of subsidy and generating their own income. If we include the outstations associated with these enterprises, then between 31 and 50 groups (Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993) have persisted in some association with pastoral activity, although this activity is on a much smaller scale than the large-scale, non-Aboriginal pastoral enterprises.

The evidence is that, in fact, Aboriginal cattle activities are quite diverse, ranging from low intensive, subsistence killer herds, to large-scale, extensive, near-commercially viable operations. In the view of Ellana, Loveday, Stanley, Young and White (1988:12), they are located in both a subsistence and a market economy. There are indeed both subsistence and free-market elements in all of those activities that are large enough to sell either meat or livestock. The ratio of
subsistence to market activity varies and is directly related to when the enterprise was either purchased or privatised, although there are some exceptions to this. For example, Puraiya was purchased in 1978 but has continued to attract commercial support because of its assumed commercial potential. That notwithstanding, the evidence is that those properties that were purchased or privatised in the 1970s have fewer cattle and are less commercial than those purchased in the 1990s.

Community impact

It is clear from both the case studies and the review of other properties that cattle enterprises cannot be separated from the community within which they are located. Further, the community within which they are interlinked is not just the geographic community but pertains to the Aboriginal social community which includes all of those people who have a stakeholding in the land on which the cattle enterprise is being operated. This community is often very much larger than the geographic community, which has a variety of implications for the management of the cattle enterprise. Among these implications is that decisions about land use may require much longer and more extensive consultation than would normally be the case in a non-Aboriginal situation. In the majority of negotiations between funding agencies and Aboriginal cattle enterprises, it was apparently assumed that the geographic community and the Aboriginal community were synonymous.
It also needs to be recognised that there has always been ambivalence about cattle in the Aboriginal community. While stereotypes of the successful Aboriginal stockman abound, a heroic figure celebrated in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal myth and song, the plantation nature of NT non-Aboriginal pastoralism, meant that many Aborigines were excluded. Women were often exploited both sexually, and in terms of labour, the old were ignored, while generally Aboriginal people had few services. In addition, non-Aboriginal society intruded into and assumed authority and leadership roles and created a dependence of Aborigines upon non-Aboriginal society for sustenance. Excluded from involvement in management and given limited non-Aboriginal educational opportunities, many Aboriginal people involved in the pastoral industry continued to be mystified about such non-Aboriginal concepts as money, financial management generally, marketing and the causal relationships in non-Aboriginal society. As a consequence, while the benefits of a cattle enterprise were often valued, their priority was not universally high in terms of the overall community context. In fact, once the land on which the enterprise operated became Aboriginal freehold land, cultural and traditional priorities took far more importance.

The fact that other priorities may have been more important than the cattle enterprise should not detract from the importance of the enterprise. The evidence is that, with the exception of those cattle enterprises located in larger communities, the cattle enterprise was important given that the range of subsistence, market and service activities in these smaller communities was quite limited, ranging from three to five services. As a consequence, as we have seen
in Puraiya and Ngarliyikirlangu’s case, the cattle enterprise had importance from a number of perspectives, including employment generation, leadership development, generation of non-government income, provision of meat, and attraction of resources that could have multiple purposes. For example, the improvement of the water supply at Puraiya improved water for the community at the same time as for the cattle enterprise. The purchase of an 8-ton truck at Ngarliyikirlangu for carting cattle also enabled a variety of groups at Yuendumu to travel to sporting fixtures, ceremonial events and to transport freight from Alice Springs to Yuendumu. These benefits, while not commercial in terms of the cattle enterprise, cannot be easily dismissed. In fact, they have added substantially to the quality of life in communities where, over the last thirty years, such things as food self-sufficiency and employment opportunity have been substantially reduced. In short, the increased application of commercial viability criteria based on the non-Aboriginal pastoral industry meant that the community context was almost totally ignored and that these wider benefits were treated almost as though they were illegitimate.

Further, policy appears to have ignored the fact that the Aboriginal owned and operated pastoral sector in the NT was not homogenous, and that different groups had different aspirations for their enterprise. Yet policy consistently sought to locate the Aboriginal industry within the context of the non-Aboriginal industry.

By Australian standards the NT cattle industry is the smallest in total size and the least productive of the mainland areas involved in beef cattle production. It is characterised by large extensive operations requiring substantial capital, efficient
labour usage and rigorous management to maintain profit. Its extensive nature is reflected in the fact that 70% of costs are accounted for in labour, repairs of water points, fences and yards, mustering and fuel (GRM, 1987). The poor quality of the grazing resource and the seasonal nature of the areas indicate quite low stock to land ratios. Moreover, market demand is highly elastic and Territory producers can have no effect on the prices received. There is a small local market and a developing live export market, which is significant in terms of the Barkly Tableland, the Victoria River District and the Darwin/Douglas-Daly regions. However, overall Territory producers are disadvantaged by isolation, which imposes an impost on the cost of inputs, marketing and production. The major strategy available to producers is to produce animals as efficiently and as cheaply as possible using vast areas of land that have little or no cost. To be successful in this environment, producers must adopt low-input, low-production cost strategies that in periods of low cattle prices enable them to withhold turn-off until market conditions improve. These requirements indicate a very different context to those of an Aboriginal group wishing to operate a cattle enterprise. In addition, the industry itself has been undergoing substantial change.

In the main, this has been reflected in the high level of property turnovers (including the sale of properties to Aboriginal interests), the change in markets and increased use of off-farm income, and a reduction in the reliance on capital gain to offset production losses. A major indicator of the change is the reduction in the total NT beef cattle herd which, in 1984/85, was estimated at 1.75 million and in 1996/97 at 1.2 million. In 1996/97 cattle industry production was
estimated to be worth $145 million or 42% of the total NT rural industries and fisheries production.

It is argued (Murti, 1998) that the relatively small contribution by the pastoral industry to the NT economy understates its value when the indirect benefits are taken into account. These include multiplier effects of cattle transport, stock feed demand, port charges, quarantine inspection, veterinary requirements and abattoir sector benefits. It is interesting to note that policy support for the continuation of the NT pastoral industry relies on valuing both the direct and the indirect benefits. It should surprise no one that the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal industry share a number of constraints. In addition, the Aboriginal pastoral sector has a number of peculiar constraints of its own. Some of the shared and some of the non-shared constraints are discussed in the next section.

Shared constraints

Biogeography

The single most common shared constraint is the biogeography. The Aboriginal pastoral sector and the non-Aboriginal pastoral sector are co-located within all regions of the NT and there are only two regions with medium to high carrying capacity. All of the other regions are rated as having low carrying capacities. However, Aboriginal owned properties are disproportionately represented in the low carrying capacity areas. So, it can be said that, while all pastoral enterprises in the NT are constrained by the biogeography, Aboriginal owned properties experience much more intensive biogeographic constraints than those of the non-
Aboriginal sector. Consequently, the Aboriginal owned pastoral sector is much more sensitive to structural adjustment pressures.

**Structural adjustment**

The NT pastoral industry has experienced substantial structural adjustment and all the evidence indicates that structural adjustment – that is, the need to reduce costs, maximise production efficiencies, increase farm size, improve productivity gains, develop on-farm and off-farm strategies and develop flexible financial management strategies – will continue. Further evidence is indicated in the failure of the NT pastoral industry to rebuild its herd size following BTEC from the 1984/85 levels. In addition, in 1995/96, 46% of NT pastoral properties received skill-enhancing assistance under the Rural Adjustment Scheme.

Overall, it is expected that the NT pastoral industry will be subject to the same sorts of pressures as for agriculture as a whole. That is, pastoralism will undergo continuing substantial change. While producers may benefit from increased world demand for agricultural products, the demand is likely to be highly variable and will require much more sophisticated structures, as well as a shift from production agriculture to market demand agriculture. This will be in the context of an expanding world agricultural output in which supply is expected to continue to exceed demand, and which will make for a highly competitive market. It is also expected that there will be substantial changes to the way in which land ownership is treated for farming, and it is expected that alternative means of accessing farming land will evolve that will separate the ownership of
land from land management and land use (ABARE, 1997:4). All of these factors will impact on both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal pastoral sectors.

One of the single most important events that intensified the structural adjustment pressures on the whole NT pastoral industry was the BTEC.

**BTEC constraints**

The BTEC imposed on the NT cattle industry created a requirement for capital investment in the form of additional water points, yards and fences and improved herd management from a disease control perspective. It has been argued that this has resulted in an increase in the efficiency of the industry (Williams & McPherson, 1985). However, others argue that the model applied was totally inappropriate for extensive rangeland conditions, and was unnecessary (Cane & Stanley, 1988). In addition to these pressures, both the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal pastoral sectors have lacked the skilled labour necessary to cope with the changes in the industry.

As early as 1982, Waterhouse (1982) and Small (1982) indicated that there was a shortage of trained cattle labour in the pastoral industry and that this shortage of labour existed at all levels of production, that is, from tradesman to rouseabout. They further argued that the shortage of labour was exacerbated by a high turnover of staff, and Sri-Pathmanathan (1983) argued that this was directly related to low wages. Sri-Pathmanathan further noted that one out of three employees on cattle stations in the NT was Aboriginal and that the Aboriginal employees were mainly employed as station hands and stockmen with 7% being
employed as tradespeople and none as managers. He also noted that Aboriginal employees had a lower rate of turnover than white employees. In short, he described labour usage in NT cattle enterprises as young, highly mobile, poorly skilled, poorly paid and 30% of it black. Hanlon and Phillpot (1993), in their study of Aboriginal labour on Aboriginal properties some ten years later, noted a similar pattern, although as they pointed out, Aboriginal workers experienced all the same deficiencies as non-Aboriginal workers, only far more intensely. Hanlon and Phillpot also dealt with the lack of management and technical skills in far more detail than Sri-Pathmanathan’s study and concluded that the quality of labour at all levels was insufficient to achieve commercially successful, Aboriginal owned, operated and managed industry.

In addition to the different context, that is, Aboriginal cattle enterprises operate from communities, while non-Aboriginal properties are operated as businesses, the major institutional constraint experienced by Aboriginal properties was the different institutional framework within which they were required to operate. This institutional framework effectively located them within the community service dominated economy (ATSIC, 1994). Furthermore, this economy was characterised by a multiplicity of agencies with different policy emphases. While this multiplicity of agencies often had advantages for an Aboriginal group (Gerritsen, 1982; Sanders, 1997) it also meant that funding and support arrangements were often uncoordinated, poorly timed and inappropriately structured for the needs of the pastoral enterprise. These difficulties were exacerbated by a lack of variety of technical and cross-cultural skills among the field officers representing the enterprises. This lack of skills was compounded by
a high turnover that prevented the development of a comprehensive historical corporate knowledge of individual communities and the pastoral enterprises associated with them. These factors, over the 25 years that this study covers, were exacerbated by the regular organisational and policy changes that occur on average every three to five years. For example, there were five major organisational and policy changes to the Commonwealth bodies responsible for Aboriginal pastoral properties, and this was in addition to a range of changes made to NT agencies. Cowlishaw (1998) has argued that in addition to the above factors, the ethnocentrism of field staff meant that they were always fixated on the non-Aboriginal pastoral mode and at no stage could conceive of some form of alternative model that was of a scale, design and operation compatible with Aboriginal objectives.

The Aboriginal pastoral sector has been constrained by all of the factors experienced by the non-Aboriginal sector. However, because of their biogeographical location, their size and the different institutional framework within which they operate, they have experienced all the constraints of the non-Aboriginal sector far more intensively and negatively than the non-Aboriginal pastoral sector.

The failure of policy and the associated administrative programs to recognise this is difficult to explain. A number of studies (Young, 1981, 1994; Thiele, 1982; Stanley, 1985, Hanlon & Phillpot, 1993) identified various aspects of the situation of the Aboriginal owned properties. More recent studies (Rose B, 1995; Young, 1998; Cowlishaw, 1998) have confirmed the early criticisms. These
studies have further identified the fact that Aboriginal groups wish to utilise the land for multiple purposes and that some groups, but not all, wish to include cattle production in their multi-use of the land. Yet there appears to have been no real policy response to this identification other than to increase the emphasis on commercial viability as the major justification for enterprise funding. Clearly, the use of commercial viability as a test for enterprise funding had an agency purpose. That is, it would mean that individual allocations could be effectively rationed.

The application of commercial viability as a means of rationing allocations could then be perfectly justified in terms of public accountability and administrative efficiency. That the consequence of these policies has been to reduce the number of income-earning activities in communities and to increase the dependence on the public purse does not appear to have been considered. It remains to be seen whether the historical tensions and policy approaches will be continued in the future.

The implications for the future – or why the lessons were not learnt

The dominance of the commercial pastoral model as the only model of cattle production has been criticised in the literature consistently. There are a number of explanations as to why constraints identified earlier in this chapter appear to be consistently ignored by policy makers and administrators. The literature suggests some of the following reasons for the apparent failure of policy to
develop Aboriginal owned and operated pastoral properties that were commercially successful.

The model was flawed because it assumed that the type of cattle production that Aboriginal people wished to adopt was the large-scale, capital intensive, pastoral type developed by non-Aboriginal people. This model has persisted because constant organisational change at the Commonwealth, NT and local level has meant that the inadequacies of the model have never been fully learnt by the individuals responsible for the policy and associated programs. At the field level, the model was difficult to implement because of the lack of availability of appropriately qualified field staff and limited access to funding.

The degree to which the model was flawed has been the subject of intense debate. Large-scale, capital intensive, extensive animal production on the rangelands was an outcome of non-Aboriginal settlement. The farm organisational model that arose out of this type of non-Aboriginal settlement did not reflect Aboriginal social, cultural or geographic settlement and itself has been subject to ongoing and continuing change since it first evolved. It is currently in retreat from all but the most marginal of the rangelands.

It also ignored the fact that historically there were a range of pastoral enterprise types operated by non-Aboriginal people (Rowse, 1998:120). This range included highly computerised operations, commercial family operations, and subsistence operations. Yet it would appear that there was no positive recognition at a policy level that an equivalent pattern might legitimately emerge.
in the Aboriginal pastoral industry. That is, that the Aboriginal pastoral industry might contain a range of enterprise types that would include these commercially independent, subsidised commercial operations, subsidised subsistence operations, and non-subsidised subsistence operations, a pattern as shown in chapter 7 that has indeed emerged, and one in terms of individual Aboriginal enterprises the Aboriginal people appear comfortable with.

Young (1984, 1988, 1994), Hanlon (1985), Phillpot (1985, 1988), Thiele (1985) and more recently Stafford-Smith et al (1994) and Cowlishaw (1998:159) have argued that the persistence of the commercial model was a reflection of the inability of the state to deal with history, race and different cultural perspectives. There are echoes of Cowlishaw’s analysis in Young’s analysis of insider and outsider realities and her argument about the inability of outsiders, that is, policy makers and administrators, to appreciate the issues, concerns and aspirations of insiders, that is, Aboriginal people. Both Cowlishaw and Young argue that the application of the non-Aboriginal commercial pastoral model as a mechanism for assessing Aboriginal cattle enterprises had more to do with the direct benefits to bureaucrats and their associates than with the needs and wishes of the Aboriginal people. However, Cowlishaw and Young’s analysis notwithstanding, there were other factors that played a part.

The pursuit of commercial success for Aboriginal owned pastoral properties as a policy was pursued with increasing rigour over the 25 years of this study, and there appears to have been no iterative process through which the lessons learnt from the early acquisitions were reflected upon and policy adjusted accordingly.
The ethnocentrism of the policy makers, while undoubtedly important, is insufficient in itself to explain the dominance of the commercial model. Rather, the lack of policy response can be explained by several additional factors, including the level of organisational change and the advantages of the commercial model to the funding agency. These factors do not contradict Cowlishaw and Young's argument but add to it. The level of organisational change was quite substantial. In the 25 years covered by this study there were three major changes of policy and administration. These were centred around, as chapter 3 describes, the establishment of the DAA, the subsequent establishment of the ADC, and latterly, the establishment of ATSIC and the ILC.

In addition to these major changes, there was increasing reliance on the contracting out of the service delivery issues either through community-based organisations or other providers. The two examples of this in this study were the establishment of the IAD's rural extension program and the FACTS established by the ADC in Darwin in 1980. In both cases, as the problems of policy implementation began to arise and the service delivery agency began to challenge the public orthodoxy, funding was withdrawn and the program wound up.

Only recently have the land councils, and particularly the CLC, begun to challenge the validity of the commercial model. This challenge has arisen because the land councils' statutory role in representing the interests of traditional owners has required them to listen to and explore the aspirations of
the traditional owners for their land ownership, use and management, and it is in this context that the CLC has begun to examine the role of cattle enterprises.

In adopting this approach the CLC has had to grapple with a number of issues, including multiple land use, resource capacity, resource requirements and outcomes arising from traditional owners’ multiple land use. In order to address these issues, the CLC has developed a number of techniques and programs, including participatory land use planning, culturally appropriate education of traditional owners in non-Aboriginal corporate management, cultural land mapping and the development of a geographic information system that enables all of these activities to be recorded and assessed as progress takes place.

The approach adopted by the NLC and the CLC (particularly the CLC) has been substantiated by a number of studies in the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal literature. In particular, Holmes (1994a:147-153) argues that the management of the rangelands can no longer be considered the province of the sheep and cattle industry, and that as the returns from these industries decline, the market and non-market value of the rangelands will increase (Holmes, 1994b:160-170). Thus, in order to manage the industry adjustment process and the different values now being applied to the rangelands, new approaches to land ownership, use and management will be necessary. Similar views have been expressed by others (Gibbs, 1986; Heathcote, 1991). This approach will require a much more participatory planning process than has been utilised in the past. The use of participatory planning approaches in dealing with Aboriginal development has also been advocated by Wolfe (1991, 1993a & b), Dale (1995) and Davies (1995)
who have argued that unless the inhabitants participate in, and own, regional plans, the planning process is of little value to them.

However, these initiatives and perspectives are only recent and the general ATSIC response has been to ignore them and to tighten the commercial assessment criteria. One of the reasons for ATSIC adopting such a strategy has been the application of rigorous commercial criteria which effectively enables ATSIC to ration funding. Certainly the progressive adoption of commercial criteria, as we have seen in chapter 3, correlates to the progressive reduction of funds available for economic development. It also made it possible for ATSIC to be able to demonstrate to those departments that it was accountable to such as Treasury and the Department of Finance in that it was adopting a rational basis in allocating resources to Aboriginal pastoral enterprises. This became increasingly valuable as ATSIC came under increasing official scrutiny and public criticism. This strategy of reducing funding commitments by the application of commercial criteria became increasingly valuable to ATSIC and its predecessors as the field capacity became reduced. The lack of appropriately trained staff in sufficient numbers to deal with traditional Aboriginal aspirations for land use and management meant that the capacity of the organisation to report on and evaluate policy implementation and its effectiveness was also reduced. This also contributed to the failure of ATSIC and others to develop alternative models for cattle activities other than the commercial model.

The change in organisational structures in Aboriginal Affairs was also accompanied by changes in service delivery structures. At its outset the DAA
provided a holistic range of services based on the policy of self-determination. However, fairly quickly in its life many of these services were hived off to the relevant NT department – health and education became the responsibility of the NT Administration, and later, of the NT Government. Community development became the responsibility largely of the communities or community organisations and this effectively separated the policy function from the service delivery function, particularly in relation to cattle enterprises where the service delivery function was often reliant on agribusiness consultants and the local non-Aboriginal cattle manager, and the program and funding support was reliant on the field officers of the DAA, the ADC and ATSIC respectively who, while perhaps well trained in program administration, had variable knowledge of the cattle enterprise, were changed often and visited the communities intermittently.

As we have seen in the two case studies, this relationship clearly had advantages to the bureaucrats, as all they were required to do was to assess, report, monitor and evaluate performance. They were now divested from the actual act of delivery, and therefore, had limited capacity to understand the policy implications of the difficulties of implementation or the nuances of cross-cultural issues involved in Aboriginal owned cattle enterprises. As a consequence, it was possible to maintain the policy objective of commercial success for Aboriginal owned cattle stations long after the evidence indicated that there was little or no success to be obtained.
Lessons learnt – a policy framework for the future

Over the last 25 years it would appear clear that the primary purpose for pastoral property acquisition on behalf of Aboriginal people in the NT was to recover traditional land. In the process, Aboriginal people also acquired pastoral enterprises that, in the main, were supported by various funding agencies on the basis of their commercial viability, although in the early period of the 1970s, other objectives such as education and training, meat provision and employment, were also given some emphasis.

Over time there was an increased application of commercial criteria, and in order to maintain some semblance of commercial operation, the funding agencies were required to put in place a variety of high cost support mechanisms. These mechanisms usually required a non-Aboriginal manager and an agricultural consultant. In addition, the funding agencies’ field officers were regularly involved in decision making pertaining to the enterprises. The application of commercial criteria by the various funding agencies ignored the constraints faced by the enterprises. Further, there were only ad hoc attempts to establish support mechanisms to enable communities to develop a capacity to manage and operate their pastoral activities within the range of biogeographic, social and industry constraints. That is, at no stage was a developmental approach adopted. Aboriginal communities were effectively gifted an enterprise, and then with the support of non-Aboriginal people in various management and advisory roles, were expected to learn by doing. There was no real thought given to Aboriginal peoples’ aspirations for their land, their capacity to realise those aspirations, and
the development support required to increase their capacity to achieve those aspirations. The policies can therefore be defined as either social justice based policies in terms of land acquisition, or economic development based policies in terms of the commercial objectives of the policies.

Yet in a sense pastoral property acquisition, particularly when it was transferred to Aboriginal land under the NT Land Rights Act, should have been considered in the light of the international experience of land reform, particularly in view of the growing evidence that the model of large-scale extensive grazing is no longer an appropriate use for significant amounts of the NT rangelands. The granting of Aboriginal freehold and the multiple aspirations for land use that have been noted among Aboriginal people in this study should have been an opportunity for both Commonwealth, State and local government agencies to revisit the whole question of rangeland use and management. In recent years, this process has been commenced by the land councils, and yet Aboriginal Affairs policy directed at supporting pastoral properties has demonstrated little reaction to such an opportunity. Instead, there has been a more rigorous application of the commercial eligibility criteria with the net result that the number of Aboriginal cattle enterprises eligible for financial support has been substantially reduced. Yet many Aboriginal people have persisted with maintaining cattle activities, as is demonstrated by the number of CDEP supported cattle activities in this study.

Why is this so? The capacity of policy to be dynamic and responsive to changing conditions becomes limited where the policy makers and administrators contract out the implementation of the service delivery aspects of the policy. This is
compounded where the capacity of the organisation implementing the policy is limited and where the client group has limited ability to advocate its own aspirations. Whilst, in theory, the separation of policy formulation and administration from program delivery should enable a clearer focus for each and thus enable each to perform better, the experience of developing commercially successful Aboriginal owned, operated and managed cattle stations in the NT is that the policy makers have never come to grips with the contextual constraints within which the policy is operating, and as a consequence, both the policy and its associated programs fail. This is best demonstrated by Aboriginal attitudes to the non-commercial benefits derived from the cattle enterprises. Clearly, the non-commercial benefits described in earlier chapters have significant value for the Aboriginal communities that choose to persist with cattle. And yet these benefits, within the policy framework, have been given very little legitimacy.

It is clear from this study that Aboriginal people who have been able to re-acquire pastoral rangeland wish to utilise the land for multiple purposes, and this includes, in some cases, cattle activities. Therefore, policy needs to recognise both the multiple land use and the role of cattle enterprises in this multiple land use within the biogeographic, social and industry context in which Aboriginal communities are located. In terms of pastoral land use, policy also needs to accommodate the reality that there will be a range of pastoral enterprise types operated by Aboriginal people just as there is in the non-Aboriginal industry. Aboriginal support agencies, therefore, have to be provided with a policy framework that recognises this situation. The development by the CLC of a participatory planning model along the lines of that recommended by Dodd
(1995) has occurred because of the contingencies of community situations, rather than as a direct result of a policy framework that facilitates a positive consideration of multiple land use issues (chapter 9).

Yet the participatory planning model developed by the CLC is part of the key to a new policy framework. This framework should be aimed at assisting people to define the range of land uses they wish to undertake, and where they wish to undertake cattle activities, assist them to define the scale and aim of the operation. In defining the scale of the operation people should be assisted to identify for themselves their own social, economic, biogeographic and economic constraints. Where a group of people identify a scale of pastoral enterprise whose size can demonstrate a commercial return, the policy framework needs to acknowledge the additional support that will be required to assist the group to achieve a commercial success, in particular, the requirement for education and training which has an underlying principle of recognising the need to demystify the non-Aboriginal commercial world.

In adopting this approach development agencies will have to take care that the support arrangements and funding conditions do not take power from the decision makers in Aboriginal communities. Rather, the support arrangements should inform, empower and educate the Aboriginal landowners and managers. In order to do this, support agencies will need to recognise that their field staff will require specific skills in cross-cultural communication, land use management and planning, animal production and financial management, for
without these skills their capacity to facilitate a community’s pastoral land use planning will be limited.

All of the evidence of this study indicates that many Aboriginal people wish to continue to engage in some form of beef cattle production on land they own. All of the evidence of this study is that the narrow commercial focus of contemporary policy has not produced the outcomes it has set out to achieve, and in spite of these failures, the Aboriginal people have persisted with a range, in terms of scale and type, of cattle activity. This suggests that the policy, rather than being focused on commercial cattle production, needs to be focused upon land use and the place of cattle production within that land use. It further follows that policy then should be directed at assisting people to plan their land use and to equip them with the skills, knowledge and technology to sustain their chosen use of that land as part of their continuing social and economic development.

In order to achieve this recognition, policy makers will need to recognise that Aboriginal rangeland use, as with non-Aboriginal rangeland use, has to be analysed in terms of overall national rangeland policy, and not just Aboriginal Affairs policy. It also needs to recognise that Aboriginal pastoralists, as with non-Aboriginal pastoralists, will operate a range of cattle enterprise types, from subsistence (either non-subsidised or subsidised) through to commercially independent.

However, given the encapsulation of Aboriginal society within the dynamic layers described in the theoretical model applied in this thesis, the constraints
imposed by the resource, culture and history, the impossibility of getting some form of synchronicity between the layers in order to deliver effective policy and programs, it would appear that for Aboriginal people to be able to make feasible and sustainable choices about pastoral land use in an encapsulated environment, the most effective policy instruments are those related to increasing their planning and operational capacity through some community development planning, enterprise planning, enterprise management, and technical skill acquisition, both strategic and operational.

If this is recognised at the policy level, then it follows that an array of programs involving community planning, enterprise planning, employment, extension, education and training will be necessary if the enterprises are to continue to be part of the community asset base under community control, and if they are to be managed in an environmentally and culturally sustainable manner.
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