

Appendix 2

Engaging the state

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A core objective of the People on Country, Healthy Landscapes and Indigenous Economic Futures project, as outlined in Appendix 1, is to assist Indigenous land and sea managers to strengthen what we term the Caring for Country social movement by seeking the development of government policy and programs that recognise and support traditional owners to care for land and sea country. This objective reflected our aspiration in undertaking this research as well as those of our major sponsor the Sidney Myer Fund. The Sidney Myer Fund envisaged that more effective Indigenous natural and cultural resource management policies might generate significant national benefits including – economic benefits (addressing the costs of Indigenous disadvantage for both governments and Indigenous citizens); environmental benefits (facilitating better conservation and biodiversity outcomes in the face of serious and pressing threats); and social benefits (enhancing Indigenous cultural contributions, strengthening the reconciliation process and counteracting risks to the nation's social fabric arising from disengaged and dysfunctional communities). Our sponsors were keen for the People on Country project to influence the Australian as well as State and Territory governments to enhance support for Indigenous land and sea management groups.

To achieve this objective is a challenging task, especially in an Indigenous policy environment where the ideas, aspirations and success of Indigenous initiatives are all too often based more on ideology and political considerations and less on evidence. To overcome such hurdles, the People on Country research staff engaged in an active publications program, in part for public education and in part to provide material for strategic use by our Indigenous research partners, but perhaps most importantly, as input to government policy-making processes. The goal of influencing policy formation with evidence from our research with community-based ranger groups was given high priority, because it facilitated the presentation of Indigenous views, primarily from remote and regional parts of Australia that are often absent as stakeholder input to government policy-making processes.

Over 70 research publications were produced throughout the course of the People on Country project, all of which are available on the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research website (see <<http://caepr.anu.edu.au>>). These publications highlight the contributions that Indigenous caring for country activities make in both delivering socio-economic benefits to remote communities and environmental benefits to Australia through the protection and rehabilitation of relatively intact ecosystems.

People on Country research staff have consistently highlighted the connections between Indigenous caring for country activities and national priorities in the areas of carbon pollution reduction, climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation. A number of publications have called for alternate participatory development approaches that recognise Indigenous aspirations for involvement in natural and cultural resource management and support the livelihood opportunities that arise from living and working on country.

To facilitate the caring for country activities that might contribute to address these critical and complex issues a significant change will be required in the way caring for country activities are perceived. There is a need to implement useful education and training in school and post-school contexts for long-term employment in cultural and natural resource management. Preliminary evidence suggests that curriculum development and a change of teaching emphasis might have a beneficial impact on school attendance and that educational attainments might positively impact on the effectiveness of the Australian Government's Caring for Our Country funded Indigenous-specific programs. Furthermore, flexible employment programs for rangers must be developed. The Working on Country program, which currently delivers most of the funding to ranger groups, focuses on full-time work (although part-time options have more recently been made available) superseding the part-time, community-managed and flexible opportunities previously available under the Community Development Employment Projects scheme. The crucially important role that the Community Development Employment Projects scheme has historically served as an incubator for Working on Country and enterprise development has been myopically overlooked.

Community-based ranger initiatives, including those that now encompass declared Indigenous Protected Areas, require appropriate community-controlled host organisations. It is no coincidence that the most robust ranger groups today are stand-alone organisations or linked as business units to large and successful Aboriginal regional resource agencies. The importance of strong governance arrangements for ranger groups, including both financial management systems and diverse forms of customary decision making over land and resource management matters, needs to be recognised and supported. This is imperative if organisations are to demonstrate external accountability and internal legitimacy.

The People on Country project has championed the need to enhance the role of Indigenous people in land and sea management in regional and remote

Australia and has advocated for greater support for outstations/homelands as a vital element of Australia's conservation future; a managed landscape has to be a peopled landscape. At the same time, there is a need to consider how Caring for Country might take shape beyond the formal Indigenous estate, particularly in more settled regions where Indigenous land holdings are limited owing to the almost complete alienation of land associated with settler colonisation.

Any effective conservation planning and action will be highly dependent on accurate ecological information. It has been, and will continue to be, essential to rapidly establish base line biodiversity and ecological data, in partnership with Indigenous land owners, to allow an assessment of the environmental condition of the Indigenous estate at appropriate scales; and for the monitoring of caring for country performance against agreed community environmental targets.

Finally, it will be necessary to expand policy further so that Indigenous Protected Areas can be declared over sea country, especially where Indigenous groups own the coastal zone or have been granted sea country native title determinations. Options for declarations over public lands, possibly after the signing of Indigenous Land Use Agreements also need to be vigorously explored.

Some key People on Country publications which expand on these issues and make policy recommendations include the following.

On links between Indigenous cultural and natural resource management and carbon pollution reduction, climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation, see:

JC Altman and K Jordan (2008) Impact of climate change on Indigenous Australians: Submission to the Garnaut Climate Change Review, *CAEPR Topical Issue 3/2008*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, <<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/Publications/topical/2008TI3.php>>.

JC Altman, N Biddle and K Jordan (2009) Climate change impacts on livelihoods, in D Green, S Jackson and J Morrison (eds) *Risks from Climate Change to Indigenous Communities in the Tropical North of Australia*, Department of Climate Change, Canberra, 66–75, <www.climatechange.gov.au/en/publications/adaptation/risks-from-climate-change-to-indigenous-communities.aspx>.

J Altman, S Kerins, J Hunt, E Ens, K May, S Russell, B Fogarty (2011) Indigenous cultural and natural resource management futures, *CAEPR Topical Issue 9/2011*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, <<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/Publications/topical/2011TI9.php>>.

On alternate development approaches, see:

JC Altman (2007) Alleviating poverty in remote Indigenous Australia: The role of the hybrid economy, *CAEPR Topical Issue 10/2007*, Centre for Aboriginal

Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, <<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/Publications/topical/2007TI10.php>>.

JC Altman (2007) 'Working on Country' program: Merging indigenous knowledge and science *Crikey*, 4 June, <www.crikey.com.au/2007/06/04/working-on-country-program-merging-indigenous-knowledge-and-science>.

JC Altman and S Jackson (2008) Indigenous land and sea management, in P Lindenmayer, S Dovers, M Harris-Olsen and S Morton (eds) *Ten Commitments: Reshaping the Lucky Country's Environment*, CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne, 207–214.

On education and training, see:

B Fogarty and I Kral (2011) Indigenous language education in remote communities, *CAEPR Topical Issue 11/2011*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, <http://caepr.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/Publications/topical/TI2011_11_Fogarty_Kral_language.pdf>.

B Fogarty and J Schwab (2012) Indigenous education: Experiential learning and Learning through Country, *CAEPR Working Paper 80*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, <<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/Publications/WP/2012WP80.php>>.

On issues relating to employment, see:

JC Altman (2007) 'Working on Country' program: Merging indigenous knowledge and science *Crikey*, 4 June, <www.crikey.com.au/2007/06/04/working-on-country-program-merging-indigenous-knowledge-and-science>.

JC Altman (2008) Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, with a focus on CDEP, <www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/indig_ctte/submissions/sub23.pdf>.

On governance, see:

K May (2010) Government support for Indigenous cultural and natural resource management in Australia: The role of the Working on Country program, *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 45 (3): 395–416, <<http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=414919985591618;res=IELHEA>>.

On homelands/outstations, see:

JC Altman, S Kerins, B Fogarty and K Webb (2008) Why the Northern Territory Government needs to support Outstations/Homelands in the Aboriginal, Northern Territory and national interest, *CAEPR Topical Issue 17/2008*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, <<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/Publications/topical/2008TI17.php>>.

JC Altman (2009) No movement on outstations, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 May, <www.smh.com.au/opinion/no-movement-on-the-outstations-20090525-bkq5.html>.

S Kerins (2009) The first ever Northern Territory Homelands/Outstations policy, *Indigenous Law Bulletin*, 7: 14, also available as *CAEPR Topical Issue 9/2009*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, <<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/Publications/topical/2009TI9.php-0>>.

S Kerins (2010) The future of homelands/outstations, *Dialogue: The Journal of the Academy of the Social Sciences of Australia*, 29: 1, <www.assa.edu.au>.

On caring for country in settled regions, see:

J Hunt, JC Altman and K May (2009) Social benefits of Aboriginal engagement in natural resource management, *CAEPR Working Paper 60*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, <<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/Publications/WP/2009WP60.php>>.

J Hunt (2010) Looking after country in New South Wales: Two case-studies of socio-economic benefits for Aboriginal people, *CAEPR Working Paper 75*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, <<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/Publications/WP/2010WP75.php>>.

On base line biodiversity and ecological data, see:

E Ens (2009) Yirralka Rangers *CyberTracker User Guide*, Report to Yirralka Rangers and the Laynhapuy Homelands Association, <<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/others/Field-report-1296448909.php>>.

E Ens and the Manwurrk Rangers (2010) *How to make and use a women's land use CyberTracker sequence*, Workshop manual for the Northern Territory Women's Land and Sea Management Forum, Ross River, Northern Territory, <<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/others/Field-report-1296449273.php>>.

E Ens and G Towler (2011) People and Plants in Arnhem Land: Maintaining ecological and cultural assets using Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal techniques, *Australasian Plant Conservation*, 19: 14–15.

On sea country, see:

JC Altman and S Kerins (2008) Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts inquiry into the operation of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, *CAEPR Topical Issue 13/2008*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, <<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/Publications/topical/2008TI13.php>>.

These People on Country policy advocacy papers can be consolidated into seven broad recommendations:

1. Align the whole-of-governments response to Indigenous policy development so that it reflects Indigenous aspirations, recognises its crucial role in ameliorating climate change impacts on populations, ecosystems and natural resources, and supports Indigenous cultural and natural resource management.
2. Address any inequities in funding natural resource management activities and increase funding and governance support to Indigenous organisations that effectively undertake natural and cultural resource management activities so that they can further develop to meet local and regional challenges and continue to play an important role as incubators of innovation and partnership in caring for country.
3. Include cultural and natural resource management within school curricula, as learning through country, especially, but not exclusively, in remote area Indigenous schools and develop more two-way post-school training opportunities for Indigenous rangers in cultural and natural resource management.
4. Collect two-way biological and ecological base-line data, with Indigenous peoples, to allow for effective and locally meaningful monitoring of performance against environmental targets especially when in conservation action plans and Indigenous Protected Area plans of management.
5. Grow Indigenous land holdings through various means so as to facilitate Indigenous aspirations for participation in natural resource management in more settled regions of Australia.
6. Formally extend the Indigenous Protected Areas program over sea country to link management of terrestrial and marine estates in accord with Indigenous custom and close a significant management gap.
7. Develop long-term investment timeframes on a rolling basis, contingent on annual performance reporting and triennial review for community-based ranger groups to ensure realistic planning horizons and development of long-term environmental management actions to address deeply-entrenched environmental threats.

These recommendations, which are primarily directed to the Australian and State and Territory governments, can be regarded as the first essentials for maintaining vital landscapes through direct action by people on country as one important means to ensure sustainable Indigenous futures. At the time of publication all these recommendations are in urgent need of policy attention by the Australian state.