

Indigenous Protected Areas

Indigenous Australians Caring for Country



What is an IPA?

An Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) is an area over which the traditional Indigenous owners have entered into a voluntary agreement to promote biodiversity and conserve cultural resources in line with international standards. An IPA brings together traditional Indigenous knowledge and modern science for effective land management.

Australia currently has 42 Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) and other Indigenous communities are undertaking consultations to decide whether to declare an IPA over their land. The 42 declared IPAs cover nearly 24 million hectares, including some of Australia's rarest and most fragile environments. They range in size from one square kilometre to almost 100,000 square kilometres. Most IPAs are born out of the desire of the Traditional Owners to protect the values of their land and to control its management.

Each declared IPA is actively managed by its Indigenous owners, administered through an Indigenous organisation or land council.

Every IPA makes an important contribution to Australia's nation-wide network of parks and reserves, the National Reserve System, by protecting biodiversity for the benefit of all Australians.

The Australian Government supports IPAs through the Indigenous Protected Areas element of the Caring for our Country initiative. In 2008 the Australian Government tripled its funding for IPAs, boosting it to \$50 million over the next five years.

The initiative received a major boost in August 2007, when the Indigenous Land Corporation contributed \$7 million over three years to expand the work of Australia's existing IPAs and help create at least 10 new ones.

Indigenous relationship to the land

For non-Indigenous Australians, the words 'caring for country' may suggest traditional land management and age-old conservation practices. But for Indigenous Australians, the phrase means much more: a deep spiritual attachment to land, to creation beings, the plants and animals, to the source of rules for living and stories, dance, songs and art.

For Indigenous communities, caring for country is closely linked to community wellbeing. Projects that support Indigenous land management provide real benefits in health, education, employment and social cohesion, and are a potential model for engagement with remote Indigenous communities around the country.

What does an IPA manager do?

IPA managers look after the natural and cultural heritage of their land. Day to day management activities include weed and feral animal control; revegetation programs; interpretive activities for visitors; management and maintenance of visitor facilities; protection of rock art; cultural history and language projects; and wildlife protection and research such as crocodile management and monitoring the impact of marine debris on threatened turtle populations.

Some IPAs run tourism businesses or establish bush tucker nurseries for the manufacture and sale of Indigenous foods. The vast bulk of an IPA's budget is spent locally, helping ensure ongoing employment and the viability of local businesses.

Social, education and health benefits

An IPA creates jobs for Indigenous men and women doing what they want to do – working and looking after their land in a healthy environment. Many IPAs are in regions of high unemployment, so the rangers and managers become role models for their communities. Indigenous rangers working on IPAs are



engaging with on-the-job training programs in literacy and numeracy, law enforcement, coxswain's licence, business administration and Indigenous leadership.

Participants are improving their capacity to manage natural and cultural resources. The spin-off is a greater capacity to look after their own affairs coupled with recognition and respect from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

IPAs work in a range of ways to create greater cross-cultural understanding. For example, Indigenous rangers work with non-Indigenous and Indigenous school classes on environmental and cultural issues, and help organise and run school camps.

Indigenous rangers also work directly with Indigenous children, facilitating the transfer of traditional knowledge. The rangers are role models and mentors for young Indigenous children.

The transfer of traditional knowledge not only helps to raise awareness of specific environmental issues and provide opportunities for young people to gain a better understanding of their relationship to country - it also contributes to social outcomes such as better school attendance and cross-community engagement.

For more information about Indigenous Protected Areas, visit www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/ipa

Photo Credits: Front - Collecting ghostnets at Laynhapuy IPA. Back - (Left) Prescribed burning at Watru and Walalkara IPAs. (Right) Bush tucker. Art Credit: Taken from original artwork ©Eunice Nungarayi Woods.



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