



Natural Heritage Trust

*Helping Communities Helping Australia*

An Australian Government Initiative

Working with Indigenous Knowledge  
in Natural Resource Management

# Ways to improve Community Engagement

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Indigenous Knowledge

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## Introduction

This short report is drawn from the Workshop Outcomes Report of an Indigenous Knowledge Forum, held at Alice Springs on 28–29 May 2003.

The purpose of this report is to suggest ways to improve community engagement so that Indigenous knowledge works effectively with regional natural resource management.

The report outlines:

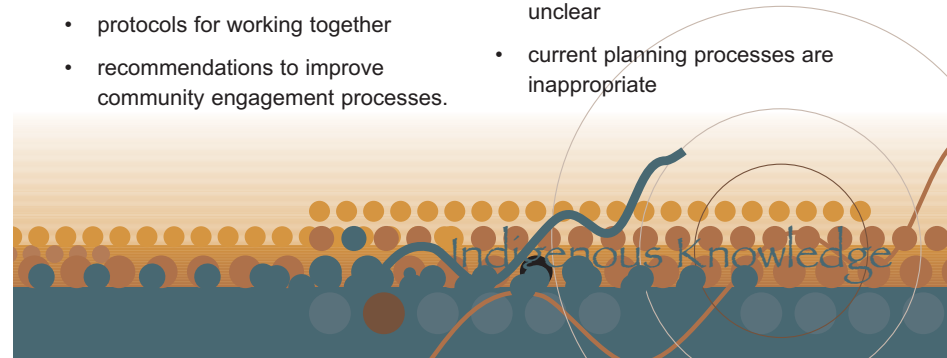
- the issues involved in supporting Indigenous knowledge
- a framework of principles for engagement with Indigenous knowledge
- a partnership approach
- an Indigenous Knowledge Support (IKS) Plan
- an Indigenous Natural Resource Management (INRM) planning process
- protocols for working together
- recommendations to improve community engagement processes.

## Indigenous knowledge

Indigenous knowledge is integral to Natural Resource Management (NRM) in the rangelands.

At the regional level, Aboriginal communities face the following issues in regard to Indigenous knowledge:

- poor understanding of Indigenous knowledge
- devaluation of Indigenous knowledge by Western science
- low cultural awareness
- not consulting the right people
- lack of mechanisms to protect Indigenous knowledge
- Aboriginal organisations not working together
- lack of resources and frameworks for Indigenous knowledge
- community needs not being met
- accountability processes are unclear
- current planning processes are inappropriate



- poor information access and flow
- problems of distance and dispersal, in desert regions.

## A framework of principles

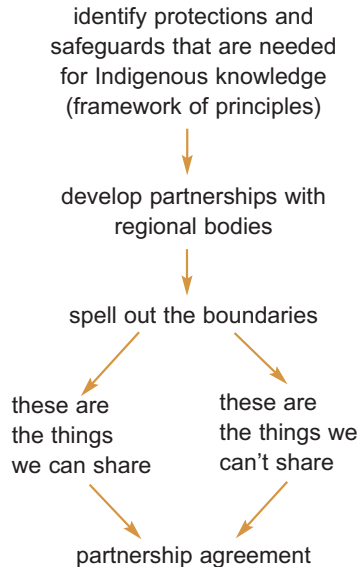
To address these issues, communities need to agree on a framework of principles, relevant to their situation, with the regional NRM body, for example:

- Indigenous people enjoy a fundamental and continuing relationship to all landscapes and seascapes
- support for the maintenance, protection and continuity of Indigenous knowledge is an NRM regional priority
- regional bodies recognise Indigenous rights and interests in planning and implementing their regional plans
- natural and cultural resource management involves a partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous interests
- active involvement of Indigenous people at all levels of decision-making on NRM regional groups

- Indigenous people are adequately resourced to effectively participate in the development and implementation of regional NRM plans.

## The partnership approach

The following process for working together was developed:



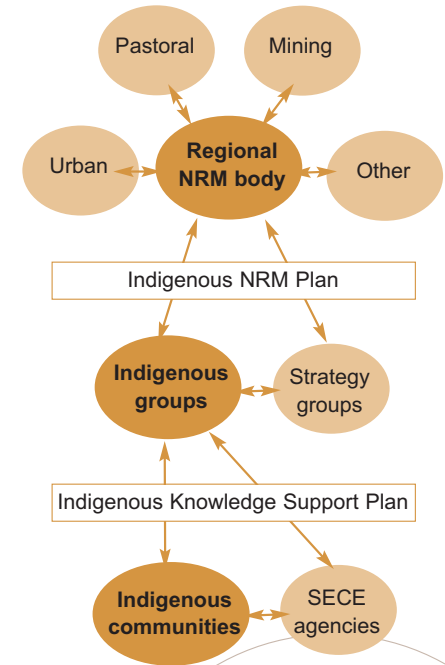
## Indigenous Knowledge Support Plan

Within the community, an Indigenous Knowledge Support (IKS) Plan needs to be developed as follows:

- offered as an incentive to participate in the regional process
- funded by a broad range of agencies
- used by Indigenous people as appropriate to their situation
- helping to keep Indigenous groups strong
- employing people to work with Indigenous communities to define issues, priorities and linkages to existing structures and specific Indigenous knowledge projects.

## An Indigenous NRM planning process

The IKS Plan at the local level is linked to an INRM Plan at the sub-regional or regional level.



- **Indigenous Natural Resource Management (INRM) Plan**

- written like an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) Plan
- strategy group reflects the IPA approach
- INRM is an overview of the issues
- INRM in turn informs local plans

- **Existing regional initiatives are the vehicles to push into regional strategies, that is:**

- NAILSMA
- KLC *Healthy Country*
- NLC *Caring for Country*
- SAMLISA in South Australia
- SAMLIV in Victoria

- **Need to add cross-cultural and participatory support to the planning process within the Regional NRM Body**

## Protocols for working together

The following draft points represent good practice in meeting the requirement for INRM Plans to demonstrate proper consultation with Indigenous groups in their region. These draft protocols have been prepared by the Indigenous Policy and Coordination Section of the Department of the Environment and Heritage to assist Australian Government officers in the assessment of regional plans submitted for comment.

Good practice in Indigenous consultation and involvement in integrated regional NRM planning will be reflected by:

- the inclusion of at least two Indigenous people on each regional body
- a list of local Indigenous people and organisations with interests in land management issues in the region

- a list of the Indigenous organisations and individuals who were consulted in the process of developing the INRM plans (these last two dot points address the requirement to demonstrate consultation has occurred)
- the identification of Aboriginal-owned properties in the region or the percentage of Aboriginal-owned land in the region; identification of areas of public land where Native Title rights and interests may continue
- the plan explicitly seeking to build partnerships with local Indigenous organisations
- each plan having a statement on the region's Indigenous history, heritage and interests
- the plan including recognition that there are Indigenous interests in most, if not all, natural resources, i.e. there will be spiritual, totemic and economic relationships with many plants and animals (biodiversity) and Indigenous people have rights and responsibilities for these
- the plan including recognition of Indigenous cultural interests in water management, e.g. lakes, rivers and coastal areas, special places, fishing and environmental flows
- each plan recognising the need for protection of Indigenous cultural heritage places as part of Indigenous Natural Resource Management
- capacity building programs recognising and including Indigenous peoples' traditional ecological knowledge and land management practices
- plans identifying the need for ongoing Indigenous participation in Natural Resource Management, e.g. the development of Indigenous Land Management Facilitator-type positions
- consultation with Indigenous communities commencing in the early stages of the plans — not after everyone else has had their say.

## Recommendations to improve community engagement processes

The recommendations are as follows:

- projects to be driven by Elders, which provides the opportunity for Elders to restore and maintain their traditional ecological knowledge, and play their traditional roles as leaders of cultural and land management practices
- use of the IKS Plan process to mobilise the articulation of Indigenous priorities for natural and cultural resource management
- support mechanisms and resources for cultural camps for men and for women
- allow for the maintenance of cultural landscapes and sites (although information cannot be shared)
- allow for use of traditional land management practices, e.g. firestick farming

- walking through country or walking someone through country
- networking to get people together
- use of Indigenous resource kits and educational material
- development of plant-based industries based on traditional ecological knowledge.

## Glossary of terms

ATSIS	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services
ARAP	Aboriginal Regional Advisory Panel
BBIFMAC	Burdekin Bowen Integrated Floodplain Management Advisory Committee
BRIG	Burdekin Rangelands Implementation Group
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
GIS	Geographic Information System
DAFF	Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
DEH	Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage
IAC	Indigenous Advisory Committee
IKS	Indigenous Knowledge Support
ILC	Indigenous Land Corporation
ILMF	Indigenous Land Management Facilitator
INRM	Indigenous Natural Resource Management Plan
IPA	Indigenous Protected Area
KLC	Kimberley Land Council
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAILSMA	Northern Aboriginal and Islander Land and Sea Management Alliance
NAPSWQ (also NAP)	National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality
NAREF	Townsville Thuringowa Natural Resource and Environment Forum

NHT	Natural Heritage Trust
NRM	Natural Resource Management
On country	In situ; in the actual place
RIS	Regional Investment Strategy
SAMLIV	Strategy for Aboriginal Lands in Victoria
SAMLISA	Strategy for Aboriginal Lands in South Australia
SECE	Social, Economic, Cultural and Environmental
TOR	Terms of Reference



Indigenous Knowledge