



Natural Heritage Trust

Helping Communities Help Australia

An Australian Government Initiative

Working with Indigenous Knowledge
in Natural Resource Management

Guidelines for Regional Bodies

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Indigenous Knowledge

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ISBN 064 255 0344

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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 provide guidelines, processes and protocols for regional bodies to work effectively with Indigenous knowledge in regional natural resource management.

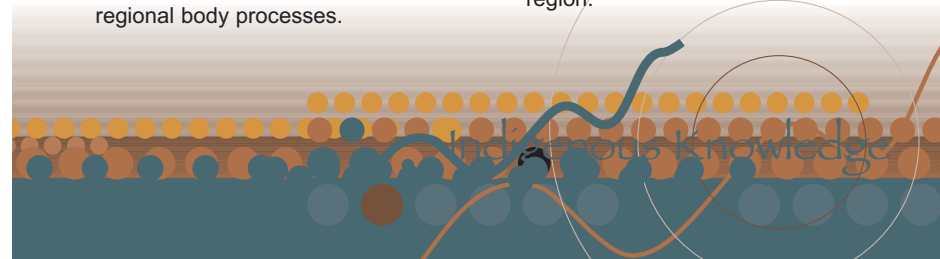
The report outlines:

- the regional delivery context
- 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 regional body processes.

Regional delivery of Natural Resource Management

The institutional context for regional delivery includes the following:

- The arrangements for delivery of the second phase of the Natural Heritage Trust and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality take account of lessons learnt from the first phase of the Trust.
- The extension of the Trust focuses on investing in large strategic projects at the regional level.
- Integrated Natural Resource Management (NRM) Plans and investment strategies that identify investment priorities to implement the plan are the foundation of regional delivery.
- Regional plans ensure that investment is targeted at achieving outcomes in the sustainable use of resources, conservation of biodiversity, capacity building at an appropriate scale and addressing the most important issues in each region.



- Guiding the development of integrated regional natural resource management plans is the 'accreditation criteria for integrated catchment/regional natural resource management plans'.
- The accreditation criteria identify the key elements needed in a plan to provide a sound basis for investment in integrated outcomes.
- Regional bodies, in consultation with a range of community interests, are responsible for developing and implementing plans.
- The accreditation criteria identify the need to effectively engage all key stakeholders, including Indigenous communities.

Issues

Participants identified the issues involved in supporting Indigenous knowledge in the regional delivery of natural resource management in the rangelands, as follows:

- 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.

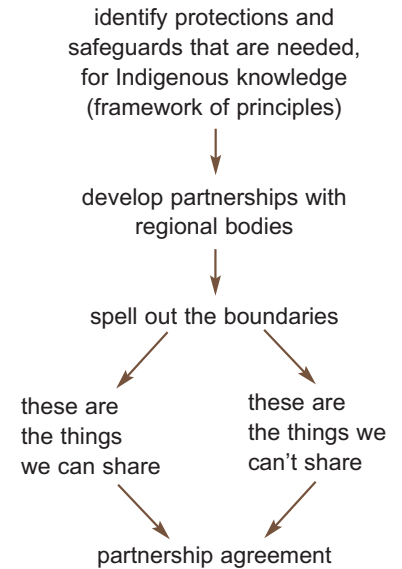
A framework of principles

Participants agreed on the following guiding principles for a framework agreement on Indigenous knowledge, with government agencies, regional planning bodies and industry:

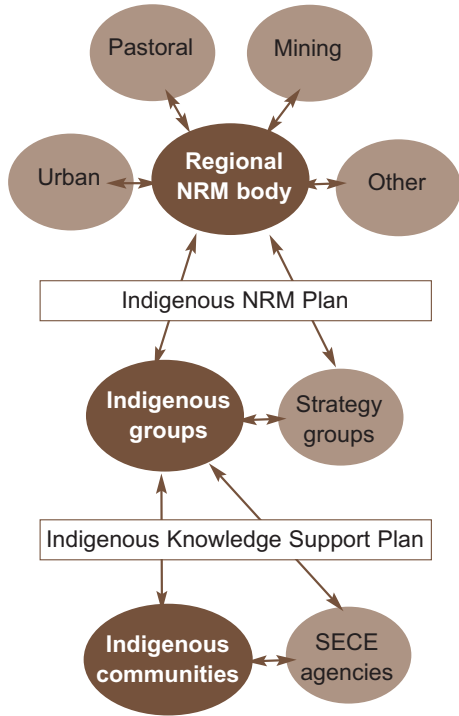
- Indigenous people enjoy a fundamental and continuing relationship to all landscapes and seascapes.
- Support for the maintenance, protection and continuity of Indigenous knowledge is an NRM regional priority.
- Regional bodies recognise Indigenous rights and interests in planning and implementing their 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:



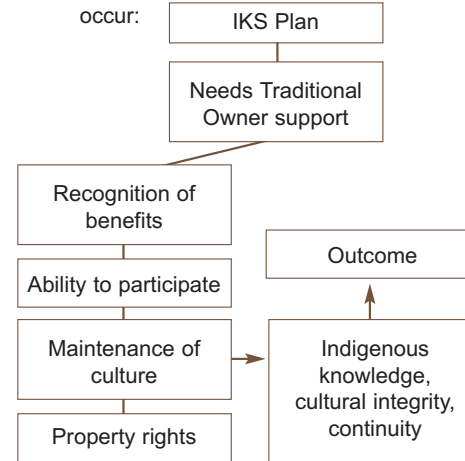
An Indigenous NRM planning process



- **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*

An Indigenous Knowledge Support Plan

To address issues involving Indigenous knowledge, the following needs to occur:



- **IKS Plan:**
 - offered as an incentive to participate in the regional process
 - funded by a broad range of agencies
 - Indigenous people use as appropriate to their situation

- keeps Indigenous groups strong
- develop the IKS Plan by employing people to work with Indigenous communities to define issues, priorities and linkages to existing structures and specific Indigenous knowledge projects

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 the 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
- the 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 should commence in the early stages of the plans — not after everyone else has had their say

Recommendations to improve regional body processes

- agreement that recognition of Indigenous peoples' profile and credibility is valid and valued and should not be negotiated or questioned
- agreement that the IKS Plan should remain within the community but its outcomes should be incorporated into an INRM Plan for the region
- NRM groups to lobby corporations, organisations and Aboriginal corporations for support, recognition and acknowledgement that traditional knowledge belongs to the Traditional Owner groups
- recognition that Indigenous knowledge is culturally appropriate to specific Indigenous groups and communities, e.g. ethnological surveys:
 - ownership is confused between the NRM group, the Australian Government and the community
 - regional bodies try to appropriate the knowledge from the surveys and refuse funding unless information is provided
- regional bodies need to support ethnobotanical surveys under the conditions that the knowledge remains in the community, reports are provided and benefits are shared
- these safeguards need to be built into agreements
- regional bodies should include jurisdictions in their terms of reference as all jurisdictions are already committed but not meeting their commitments
- funding of projects that research best practice ways to protect and enhance Indigenous knowledge
- undertake capacity building now, as time is critical to protecting Indigenous knowledge
- cross-cultural training for everyone, prior to any business being conducted.

Glossary of terms

ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services	On country	In situ; in the actual place
ARAP	Aboriginal Regional Advisory Panel	RIS	Regional Investment Strategy
BBIFMAC	Burdekin Bowen Integrated Floodplain Management Advisory Committee	SAMLIV	Strategy for Aboriginal Lands in Victoria
BRIG	Burdekin Rangelands Implementation Group	SAMLISA	Strategy for Aboriginal Lands in South Australia
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity	SECE	Social, Economic, Cultural and Environmental
COAG	Council of Australian Governments	TOR	Terms of Reference
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		