



**Australian Government**

**Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts**

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# **The Indigenous Protected Area Program**

## **Background Information and**

## **Advice to Applicants**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have managed their lands for tens of thousands of years. Land is central to their lives and well-being. It provides an economic base, it underpins Indigenous history, innovation and culture, and is fundamental to spiritual beliefs. The Indigenous Protected Areas Program is one of the ways in which Indigenous Australians are being supported to meet their cultural responsibility to care for their country and to pass on their knowledge about the land and its resources to future generations.

The Indigenous Protected Areas Program forms part of the National Reserve System, which aims to establish a network of protected areas which includes a representative sample of all types of ecosystems across the country. Through this program, Indigenous landowners are being supported to manage their lands for the protection of natural and cultural features in accordance with internationally recognised standards and guidelines for the benefit of all Australians.



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**Indigenous Land Corporation**

## **Background**

### ***What is a Protected Area?***

In general Protected Areas are what most of us know as national parks, nature reserves and marine parks. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) defines a protected area as:

"An area of land or sea specially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biodiversity and associated cultural resources and management through legal and/or other effective means."

The IUCN definition is different to the traditional view of national parks in two important areas; the words '*associated cultural resources*' recognise there is a human component to the natural world we aim to protect; and the words '*other effective means*' imply that protected areas need not be seen as purely government business dependent on statutory definition and legal enforcement. For instance, Indigenous and other private land holders may have, or may develop, effective means to manage their protected areas in such a way that can contribute to the National Reserve System (NRS).

Through the IUCN definition there is international recognition that Indigenous resource use and customary land management can live in harmony with, and contribute to, biodiversity conservation objectives on protected areas.

### ***What is an Indigenous Protected Area?***

An Indigenous Protected Area is an area of land or sea over which the Traditional Indigenous Owners have entered into a voluntary agreement for the purposes of promoting biodiversity and cultural resource conservation.

The Indigenous Protected Areas Program is part of a broader national objective, the establishment of a comprehensive, adequate and representative National Reserve System. The Commonwealth and the State and Territory agencies concerned with biodiversity conservation are working to identify good samples of Australia's ecosystems which can be conserved and managed effectively in a National Reserve System.

A scientific approach is being used to identify priorities for the establishment and management of new protected areas across Australia. The scientific approach has identified major gaps in the existing system of protected areas across Australia. It has shown (that?) many types of landscapes and ecosystems across Australia are poorly represented in the existing National Reserve System and that some such areas occur only on Indigenous owned lands.

The declaration of an Indigenous Protected Area over Indigenous owned lands results in that land being considered as part of the National Reserve System. The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts believes that the IPA Program can accommodate the cultural priorities of Indigenous people with the biodiversity conservation objectives of the nature conservation agencies and so contribute to the National Reserve System as well as meeting the land management aspirations of Indigenous landowners.

## **Goals of the Indigenous Protected Areas Program**

The Indigenous Protected Areas Program provides incentives for Indigenous people to participate in the National Reserves System through voluntary declaration of Protected Areas on their lands, and support for greater involvement of Indigenous people in the management of existing statutory protected areas.

The Goals of the IPA Program are;

1. To establish partnerships between government and Indigenous land managers to support the development of a comprehensive, adequate and representative national system of protected areas by assisting Indigenous people to establish and manage protected areas on their estates for which they hold title,
2. To promote Indigenous involvement in protected area management by assisting Indigenous groups and Government agencies to develop partnerships and agreements for the cooperative management of existing protected areas; and
3. To promote national best practice approaches to cooperative partnerships in conservation and protected area management, including the integration of Indigenous ecological and cultural knowledge into contemporary protected area management practices in accordance with internationally endorsed protected areas guidelines.

## **Establishment of Indigenous Protected Areas**

Indigenous Protected Area projects across Australia are at different stages of development. A number of projects have resulted in an IPA declaration while others are in the process of developing management plans and consulting with the Indigenous community and relevant organisations which may provide assistance, such as relevant State/Territory Conservation agencies.

IPA Program funding is available to Indigenous organisations to enable them to carry out the following activities;

### **Considering a possible IPA declaration.**

Support can be provided for the Indigenous landowners to consider the implications of establishing an Indigenous Protected Area on their land. This may include seeking advice on the legal, cultural heritage or conservation aspects of the proposed IPA to inform the decision making by the landowners.

### **Developing a Management Plan for the land.**

Landowners prepare a Management Plan for the area they propose to declare as an Indigenous Protected Area. This may include holding discussions with the relevant State/Territory conservation agencies and other agencies that may be able to support the project and incorporating expert advice on the values of the IPA and how these should be managed and protected.

IPA projects usually combine these activities during an initial phase culminating in a draft Management Plan and decision as to whether an IPA declaration will proceed.

## **Declaring an IPA.**

Declaration takes the form of a formal and public announcement of the intention to manage land as an Indigenous Protected Area according to the prepared Management Plan. The Management Plan for an IPA will identify the on-ground management activities and the decision making structure which will govern management decisions. The Plan will also identify the relevant IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Categories for conservation management which apply to the IPA.

## **Implementing a Plan of Management.**

Implementing the on-ground works as specified in the Plan of Management such as weed and feral animal control, cultural heritage conservation activities or the establishment of infrastructure to control visitor access.

## **Monitoring the implementation of the Plan of Management.**

Monitoring activities identified in the Plan of Management and the effectiveness of the on-ground works in achieving the planned outcomes. The activities should be undertaken by the landowner in consultation with other agencies.

## **Co-management projects**

The Cooperative Management component of the Indigenous Protected Area Program provides funding support for Indigenous organisations and State or Territory Conservation Agencies to develop cooperative management arrangements over existing protected areas. Support is available for a limited time, usually one or two years, to assist the parties to identify the management issues and to negotiate a decision making and management structure which accommodates the needs of both.

Some cooperative management projects involve the development of a formal agreement between the Indigenous interests and the State or Territory agency and other authorities. Such an agreement might identify cultural heritage management issues in the protected area which require special attention, appropriate interpretation of the features of the area or employment or enterprise concessions for the Indigenous Community.

The emphasis in the co-management project component of the IPA Program is to be a catalyst for developing cooperative relationships which can benefit both parties.

## **Indigenous Protected Areas Funding**

Funding is available to establish Indigenous Protected Areas on Indigenous owned lands and for promoting Indigenous involvement in State and Territory government managed protected areas. Potential IPA projects should, where possible, be discussed with the relevant regional authority and State or Territory conservation agency to seek their support.

The Indigenous Land Management Section will accept IPA project applications at any time during the year. However, if you would like to ensure your application is assessed in time to be funded for the next financial year, please forward your application no later than the last Friday in March. The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts encourages potential applicants to contact the Indigenous Land Management Section of Parks Australia to discuss their application.

1. The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts will ensure that Native Title interests are properly addressed and accounted for in each application for funding. Applicants are required to identify their Native Title Representative Body (NTRB) and their contact details when they apply. IPA Program staff will contact these NTRBs during our assessment process to ensure any competing interests or potential divisions arising from the project are avoided.

Note that conditions differ for the two elements of the Indigenous Protected Areas Program.

### **Indigenous Protected Areas Component**

Indigenous groups seeking funding to develop an IPA should;

- Have legal ownership of the land where they wish to establish an IPA. Note that different forms of tenure such as freehold, deed of grant or leasehold can all potentially be considered for IPA establishment.
- Have land which has high natural and cultural heritage values.
- Have a clear intention to manage the land for the conservation of natural and cultural features for the long term.
- Not intend to use the proposed IPA for any land use that will have a detrimental effect on the cultural or natural heritage values.
- Have legal or other effective means available to manage and protect an IPA. For example, traditional management practices such as patch burning can be an effective means of management. Customary Law is recognised as a form of management which satisfies the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) guidelines. Legal mechanisms for protecting IPAs might include Commonwealth, State or Territory legislation, which may be implemented through an agreement with the appropriate government agency.

### **Cooperative Management Component**

Indigenous groups and may apply for IPA program funding to develop cooperative management arrangements over existing State/Territory managed and non Government managed protected areas if they;

- Have demonstrated support from the relevant Indigenous traditional owners and their Native Title representative body.
- Have demonstrated support from the relevant State/Territory government agency or non Government organisation who manage the protected area.
- There is demonstrated commitment from the relevant State/Territory government agency or non Government organisation to increase Indigenous involvement in the management of the protected area concerned.
- There is, or will be, a formal agreement developed as an outcome of the activities supported under the IPA initiative.
- The proposal will contribute to the development and achievement of best practice standards for the cooperative management of protected areas.

## **Indigenous Protected Area Project Assessment**

Applications for IPA funding are assessed against guidelines which are available at <http://www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/ipa/funding.html>, and the guidelines for the establishment of the National Reserve System, which can be located at <http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs>.

The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts encourages an open application process. Early applications are invited so that the Department can provide feedback at an early stage to guide the development of the application. Projects and evaluations against NRS guidelines are referred to the relevant State and Territory authorities for their comments.

When applications are finalised they are provided together with technical assessment information to the IPA Advisory Group (IPAAG) for their comment and recommendations. At the end of this process recommendations are referred to the Federal Minister for the Environment and Water Resources for consideration.

## **Indigenous Protected Areas Advisory Group**

An Indigenous Protected Areas Advisory Group provides advice on the development of the IPA Program. The membership of the group reflects a range of participants with both expertise and commitment to promoting the benefits of Indigenous involvement in the management and protection of Australia's biodiversity. The Advisory Group has representation from Indigenous people from across the country as well as other stakeholders such as the World Wide Fund for Nature and Government Nature Conservation Agencies.

The terms of reference for the IPA Advisory Group are;

The Indigenous Protected Areas Advisory Group will meet at least once per year to provide policy advice and direction to the Federal Minister for Environment Heritage and the Arts and the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts on the further development of the Indigenous Protected Areas Program. In carrying out this role the Advisory Group will:

1. Seek to reflect the views of all stakeholders, including the State and Territory conservation agencies, NGO's and Indigenous groups from across Australia, in the development of the IPA program.
2. Encourage the development of parallel processes in each State/Territory.
3. Advise on the implementation of the Indigenous Protected Areas Program, including broader Indigenous conservation issues.
4. Seek to identify and promote national best practice examples of;
  - cooperative management of protected areas between Indigenous groups, government and non- government agencies
  - management of Indigenous owned and managed Protected Areas
5. Contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the IPA Program.
6. Recommend options for the further development of IPAs.
7. Review the existing IPA guidelines and program administration.

## Criteria for Evaluation of Applications

These criteria are not necessarily applicable in all cases, but will assist The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts in the assessment of applications and allocation of resources. Projects which meet the following criteria would be highly regarded;

- The proposal is located in a high or moderate priority region which is lacking in protected areas; or
- The proposal includes land with significant natural and cultural heritage values.
- The proponent organisation has a strong interest in managing their land for conservation.
- The proponent organisation has the capacity to carry out the project and to administer funds according to Commonwealth funding requirements.
- The proposal can demonstrate support from the relevant State/Territory nature conservation agency.
- Contributions and support are available from other sources to assist the management of the proposed Indigenous Protected Areas.

### ***Who Can Apply for IPA Funding?***

- Incorporated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations including land management agencies;
- Community councils, land councils, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Trusts or representative bodies;
- Commonwealth, State, Territory and local government land management agencies; or
- nature conservation and cultural heritage agencies that wish to enter into cooperative management arrangements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

Applications for the IPA Program use the application form which is available at <http://www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/ipa/funding.html>. Applications should be submitted to:

Director,  
Indigenous Land Management Section,  
Parks Australia  
Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts  
GPO Box 787  
CANBERRA ACT 2601.

If you require advice or assistance in the preparation of submissions or have any general enquires please contact the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts Community Information Unit on 1800 065 823.