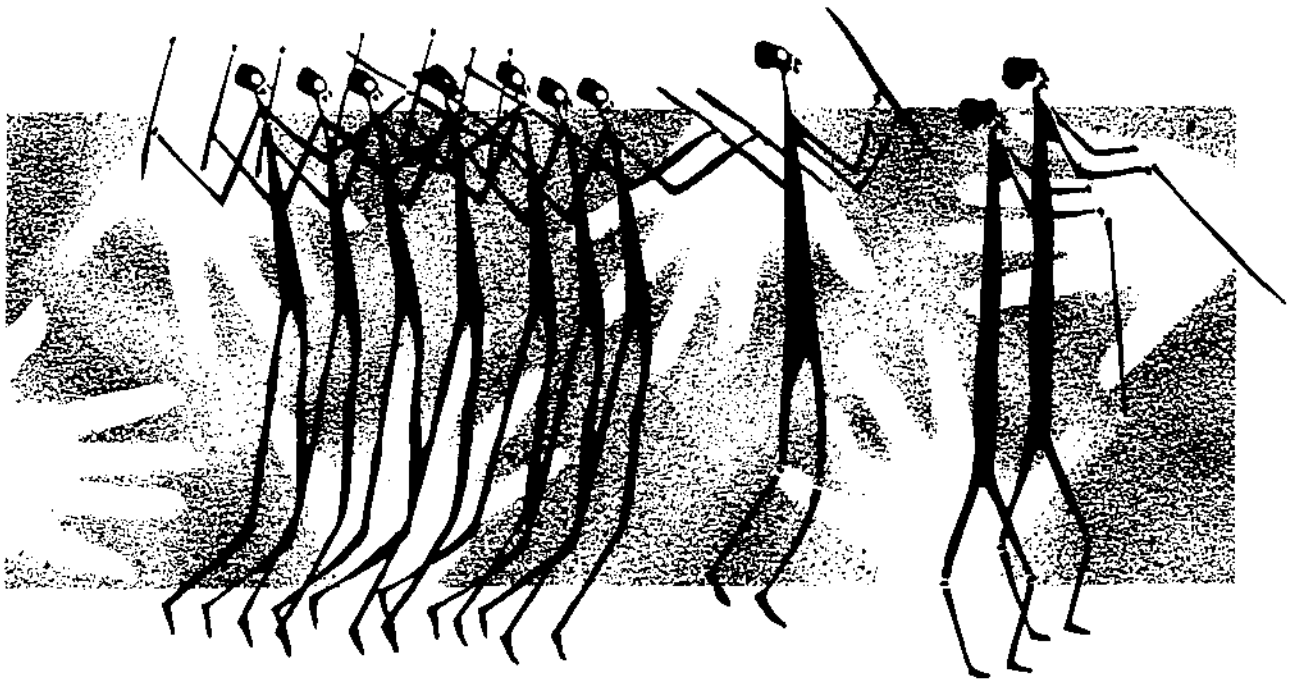


## **Kakadu Region**

### **Social Impact Study**



#### **Report of the Aboriginal Project Committee**

June 1997

A study jointly funded by the  
Commonwealth and Territory  
Governments, the Northern  
Land Council, and Energy  
Resources of Australia

This report is one of two reports that describe the Kakadu Region Social Impact Study. It describes the aspirations and expectations of Aboriginal people in the Region. A separate report responds with a proposed Community Action Plan.

This report should be cited as follows:

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16th July 1997

Mr Pat Dodson  
Chairman  
Study Advisory Group  
Locked Bag 2  
Jabiru  
NT 0886

Dear Pat,

On behalf of the members of the Aboriginal Project Committee, I present herewith the Final Report of the Committee for the consideration of the Study Advisory Group.

Yours sincerely,



Victor Cooper  
CHAIRMAN

I reckon it's good. It's the first time we've done this, never happened before. It's been good from the start. This is the beginning of what we know, and we've done it as a group. We've got more to go, all of us. See what reaction we get from the Study Advisory Group. Then next time, we'll do better. This one is good already. Things change every year, and I think we've gotten this off the ground. It should have happened a long time ago, back in the 70s. But it's been picked up before things get worse. (Aboriginal Project Committee member)

## **Acknowledgements**

The Senior Project Officer, Mel Sheppard, worked hard and maintained commitment throughout this difficult and exhausting process. The Project Officer, Rebecca Bennett, and Administrative Assistant, Claire Willsher, arrived later on the scene, and contributed greatly through the latter phases. From the Study Advisory Group, Michelle Andrews, the Executive Officer, was ever helpful. Kathleen Oien helped out repeatedly with secretarial work, Kate Boyd contributed her plain-English talents, and Alison Draper, Lynnette Miller and Ronald Dirdi assisted with research.

The substance of this project came from those many Aboriginal people of the Kakadu region, Committee members and others, who took the time to listen and the trouble to respond. Energy Resources of Australia, the Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist, and the Northern Land Council, contributed extra money and resources as needed above their negotiated shares, Gundjehmi Corporation contributed the services of Darryl Cronin, Gagudju Association donated accommodation for our consultants, Parks Australia gave us meeting space and Jabiru Town Council allowed us use of their photocopier.

Finally, thanks to those, notably Greg Ryan, who gave encouragement and support at difficult moments, and especially Kathleen who endured it all with good humour and insight.

## **Prefatory Note**

This report has been written and compiled for the Aboriginal Project Committee. While some parts, especially Sections 1 and 3.1.1, are substantially based on my own previous research in the area, the bulk of what appears here is an account of issues identified or endorsed, or views expressed, mostly by Aboriginal respondents. I have tried to render their various positions faithfully and effectively, and have organised them into what seemed a coherent order. It is, however, not my own analysis of social impact, nor do I necessarily hold the views expressed herein. Some further direct Aboriginal commentary can be found on an accompanying video also prepared for the Committee.

Robert Levitus  
Project Co-ordinator

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the Final Report of an eight-month project directed by the Aboriginal Project Committee for the Kakadu Region Social Impact Study. It has been a project oriented less towards analysis of past impact causation than to identification of problems and issues that need to be addressed in an action plan for community development.

Section 1 looks at the social history of the Kakadu region, noting the radical depopulation, the extinction of some land-owning groups, the external attractions of mining camps and towns, and the experience of employment with white bush entrepreneurs. The Aboriginal population living in the Kakadu region from the end of the 1970s was composed of traditional owners and residents with varied degrees of life-history attachment to the area, and who had external cultural connections in four major directions. The land claims of that era documented a pattern of traditional land ownership by patrilineal *gunmogurr-gurr* and language groups, but had to deal with problems of lost knowledge and extinct estates that in some cases defeated the claim. Relations between clans, residence of varying duration, and criteria for determining membership of descent groups, all complicate any attempt to mark off a bounded Aboriginal region as the subject of this Study. The new Kakadu regime established in the late 1970s was a complex mix, allowing large-scale Aboriginal re-occupation of the region and some land ownership, but subject to a set of non-Aboriginal jurisdictions and purposes over the land.

Section 2 begins with Taylor's finding that statistical indicators show the social problems of the region to be unimproved since the 1980s, and similar to those of neighbouring Aboriginal communities. The servicing regime is a long-standing object of complaint. An Outstation Resource Centre and a major upgrading of housing and associated outstation infrastructure is needed, and planning has begun to service the needs of the aged and disabled. A range of measures are recommended to improve Aboriginal life-chances from birth to young adulthood. Ante-natal and infant nutrition requires attention, a planned Women's Resource Centre promises a range of productive pursuits, Aboriginal input into alcohol control strategies needs to be enhanced, and the Committee has endorsed a series of recommendations to open education to Aboriginal children. Senior men seek support for ceremonies to socialise the young, organised sport and recreation needs to include the outstations, and a substantially improved effort is required from employers to recruit and train Aboriginal workers. CDEP

needs to be continued. It is the programs and priorities identified in this Section that involve the major budgetary and infrastructural demands emanating from the Study.

Section 3 discusses the problems that have arisen as a consequence of the need for Aboriginal people to organise themselves to manage the material benefits of mining. Membership of the Gagudju Association has been a constant source of tension and dispute. The definition of the "area affected" by the Ranger mine is the first of a series of questions that need to be addressed in order to determine the proper membership of a royalty-receiving association. That definition remains unsettled. Still more prominent as a result of dissatisfaction and dispute in recent years, is the question of the special entitlements accruing to the traditional owners of a mine site itself, over those accruing to other affected peoples. Claims of entitlement to money are a manifestation also of a claim to respect.

As the major manager of Aboriginal resources since the inception of mining, the Gagudju Association's investment and financial record have been subject to critical scrutiny. Members have expressed dissatisfaction over spending priorities and the quality of service and communication. Gagudju's political and financial decline, and the political sectoring of the last decade, have raised the question of where Aboriginal authority lies in the Kakadu region, and by what means, and at what level, it can be expressed.

Section 4 begins with a series of Aboriginal critiques of the performance of a number of organisations exercising jurisdiction in the region: the Northern Land Council, the Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist, Parks Australia North, Jabiru Town Council and Energy Resources of Australia. The consultants responsible for these consultations suggest that a revision of funding arrangements might allow local people to use their wealth to purchase adequate servicing. The future of Jabiru is an issue of particular complexity for which a program of information and communication is recommended to allow Aborigines to understand issues of town administration, learn of the implications for them of stakeholder positions, and articulate their own interests. That Jabiru should be legally recognised as Aboriginal land is seen as a necessary step. There is also opposition to any growth in the size of Jabiru and wariness of proposals for greater openness or "normalisation". Finally, a recommended model for the future monitoring of social impact that placed the monitoring research team within ERISS, was treated sceptically by the Committee. Partly as a

result of distrust over ERISS' past failure to communicate its research results or involve Aboriginal people in its work, the Committee preferred the idea of a new and separate entity, along the lines of the existing Project Team, being given responsibility for, and the legal authority to pursue, action-oriented social impact monitoring. Insofar as it is possible to articulate an Aboriginal vision for the region, it combines a demand for a stronger legal position based on land ownership of the whole Park, with an expectation of a more open and participatory ethos of dealing on the part of those agencies exercising jurisdiction over some part, or aspect, of the affairs of the country.



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