



THE NATIONAL INDIGENOUS FORESTRY STRATEGY

May 2005



FOREWORD

Forests hold many values. They supply the resource base for one of Australia's largest manufacturing industries, they are important for biodiversity conservation, water quality and carbon storage, and they provide a landscape for a host of recreational activities. Our forests provide housing, furniture, paper and food, as well as employment for tens of thousands of Australians.

Forests also play an important social and cultural role for many Indigenous communities across Australia and with an estimated 13% of Australia's forest area under Indigenous ownership there is scope for communities to develop a strong economic association with Australia's forests and their products.

There are many areas within the forestry sector which have not been fully explored such as value added wood products, utilisation of new commercial species, further development of non-wood products like bush foods, traditional Indigenous medicines and essential oils, native cut flowers and, of course, capitalising on tourism and conservation.

The National Indigenous Forestry Strategy proposes that Indigenous communities participate in building competitive and ecologically sustainable forest industries. Participation in these industries can help communities in many parts of Australia become more economically independent, and interact with the wider community, while staying connected to their cultural values.

The Strategy provides a framework for industry to work with Indigenous communities to achieve multiple rural and regional economic benefits, indeed there are already some projects underway that will deliver such outcomes. It will promote the involvement of Indigenous peoples in forest and wood processing industries through projects that will deliver job opportunities and lead to improved social and economic outcomes. From my discussions with Indigenous communities and industry leaders, I know there is a strong interest in activities that the Strategy promotes, including developing joint forestry-based initiatives.

The success will depend on the cooperation of a range of parties including governments and their agencies, industry, Indigenous communities, as well as the broader community and I encourage all to make a positive contribution toward achieving the Strategy's goals.

The Australian Government recognises the importance of the land to the traditional owners, who should have the opportunity to derive economic and social benefits from their land ownership. I believe that by working together Indigenous communities and industry will benefit from an improved and sustainable management of Australia's forests, which will have benefits for all Australians.

I therefore commend the Strategy to its facilitators and potential beneficiary's and look forward to seeing its goals realised.

Senator Ian Macdonald

Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation.



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THE VISION

The National Indigenous Forestry Strategy is built around the vision of an expanding, competitive and ecologically sustainable forest and forest products industry (wood and non-wood) where participation by Australian Indigenous communities and peoples has grown to levels at which they enjoy demonstrably greater economic and social independence and standing in the wider community, while staying connected to their cultural values.

INTRODUCTION

As a major contributor to nation's economy, particularly in rural and regional Australia, the forest and wood products industry has the potential to provide significant economic and social opportunities for Indigenous Australians. Indigenous communities are keen to contribute to, and benefit from, the long-term growth forecast for the industry while maintaining connection to their traditional and cultural values.

The high expectations for the National Indigenous Forestry Strategy (NIFS) include:

- improved economic and social outcomes for Indigenous communities and peoples through more active involvement in the forest and timber products industry
- more Indigenous Australians involved in developing and managing regional, state and national forest policy and industry activities
- better forest and plantation management and use to achieve greater economic, social, environmentally sustainable and cultural benefits for all Australians, especially Indigenous Australians.

It is important that the NIFS contributes to the overall sustainable development of Indigenous land and communities. To do this, it will work in conjunction with other Australian Government and state/territory strategies and programmes. These include areas such as natural resource management, business development, cultural heritage, education, employment and training. Working closely with the recently established network of Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) throughout Australia will assist coordination.

Funding will come from identifying and providing resources and programmes in agencies responsible for Indigenous development and advancement as well as from the mainstream forest industry. This will be a key role for those implementing the NIFS.



BACKGROUND

In 2003, the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) commissioned a study into the opportunities for Indigenous Australians to be more involved in forestry. The study involved two rounds of consultations during 2003 and 2004 with Indigenous communities and the forestry sector at eight locations around Australia.

The report, *Opportunities and barriers for greater Indigenous involvement in Australia's forest industries: A scoping report addressing Indigenous involvement in the forestry and associated sectors for the National Indigenous Forestry Strategy Steering Committee*, identified where Indigenous communities operate in the industry, including areas of greatest potential for their contribution. It also identified issues most likely to discourage their involvement.

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The same principles that guided development of the NIFS will steer its implementation. These are:

1. NIFS should complement the overall and sustainable development of Indigenous landscapes and communities.
2. Resource sustainability is of top importance.
3. Indigenous peoples have continuing rights and responsibilities for traditional lands and waters.
4. The role Indigenous peoples play in managing and conserving forested lands and related natural resources must be recognised.
5. Cultural heritage and values must be respected.
6. Activities must be consistent and accountable within an overall, integrated approach to forest and plantation management.
7. Activities must be practical and take into account legal and regulatory processes, and political and social structures.



THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT – THE AUSTRALIAN FOREST INDUSTRY AND INDIGENOUS INVOLVEMENT

Australia's forest and wood products industry is expanding, vibrant and competitive. It comprises natural and plantation forests, and the harvesting, processing and marketing sectors.

THE AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY

The industry has a turnover of about \$18 billion a year and contributes 1 per cent to Australia's Gross Domestic Product. Imports were valued at \$A3.9 billion in 2003-04 and exports at \$A2.1 billion. The \$1.8 billion trade deficit is mostly in pulp and paper products. The industry estimates the forest and wood products sector provides employment for about 130,000 people – mostly in regional and rural Australia.

Australia has about 162 million hectares of natural forest and 1.6 million hectares of plantation forest. However, only 13 million hectares of the natural forest area is set aside for commercial timber harvesting with less than 1% harvested annually.

Over the past 130 years, State and Territory forest services, and more recently the private sector, have established large areas of planted forests, which are providing a growing proportion of the total wood fibre harvest. The timber industry is mainly located in higher rainfall regions. These include the 'forest fringe' along the eastern seaboard (including Tasmania), in southern Victoria and southern South Australia, and south west Western Australia. The increasing volume of wood fibre becoming available from plantations provides significant new development opportunities.

Australia has about 1100 sawmills. Seventy five per cent produce mainly high-value small-volume products, and the rest produce high volumes of structural building materials. State and territory government agencies may manage native and plantation forests under their jurisdiction, while the private commercial sector manages private native forests, private plantations and all timber processing and merchandising.

The volume of logs from natural forests delivered to sawmills has fallen over the past 15 years. This relates to the decision by commonwealth and state governments to expand natural forest conservation areas, including through Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs).

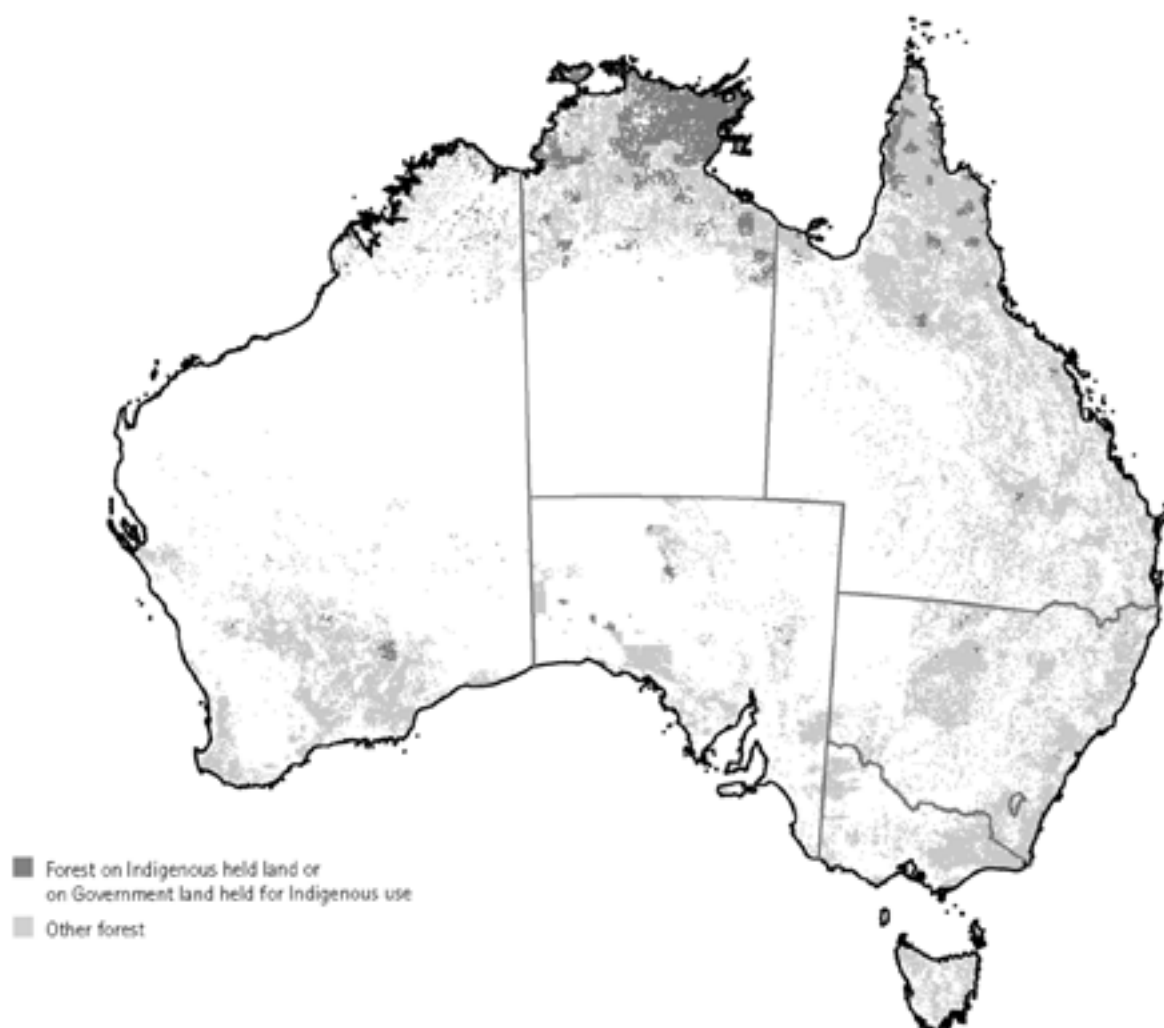
INDIGENOUS INVOLVEMENT AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE WIDER INDUSTRY

The consultations with Indigenous communities indicated low participation rates by Indigenous people in all parts of the forest and wood products industry. Nevertheless, over the past few years Indigenous communities have resumed ownership and management of some areas of land, including some natural forest cover, following the RFA process and through Native Title. RFAs recognise Indigenous Australians are the rightful holders of Indigenous cultural heritage information, including traditional knowledge, and social and spiritual values associated with items and places within forests, and should be involved in managing them. However, the extent to which this happens varies between States.

Annex 1 contains a summary of the site consultations with Indigenous communities.

In the context of the NIFS, it is significant that some Indigenous communities have access to land. Importantly, these Indigenous communities can use the land to develop forestry-based businesses. Similarly the forest industry is seeking to improve indigenous participation in forest-based businesses. An estimated 13 per cent of Australia's forest area is under Indigenous ownership, mainly in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia. There are also opportunities for individuals or groups to secure access to land through land acquisition programmes such as the Indigenous land corporations.

Figure 1 shows the extent and location of Indigenous forest land in Australia as at 2002.



Source: National Forest Inventory 2003. Australia's State of the Forests Report 2003

It was evident during the consultations that there are opportunities to develop wood and non-wood forest-based activities. Some initiatives being undertaken have strong potential for replication. They include several major plantation management companies engaging with Indigenous communities in business arrangements involving management of tree crops to produce timber for pulp and paper production. Business partnerships that combine Indigenous land ownership and employment with mainstream industry capital and business planning are potentially important in the NIFS context. In the wood products industry, partnerships can underpin development in forest development and management, nursery operations, seed collection and extraction, and speciality areas such as bush furniture. At the same time, wage-based employment opportunities exist in natural forest management, timber transport, timber milling, and value adding and manufacturing.

In recent years, state forestry departments have recognised the need to involve Indigenous Australians in the management of forestry resources. As a result, some are considering providing cross cultural training courses for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians including on the cultural significance of sites within forest settings, and how to protect them.



Taken together, opportunities in the ‘alternate’ and ‘non-wood’ aspects of the forest industry are thought to be significant. Alternate activities include bark collection for paintings, bush flowers, seed collection for tree planting and nursery supplies, and making didgeridoos, bush furniture and artefacts. Non-wood activities include eco-tourism, land management, park management, bush tucker and bush medicines, bee keeping, and cultural heritage and site management. These activities have the potential to include a wide cross-section of Australia’s Indigenous communities. The NIFS will need to provide a framework to accommodate the cultural, occupational, commercial and geographical gaps between these activities and the mainstream commercial forest and wood products industry.

The consultations with Indigenous communities identified many barriers to engaging Indigenous Australians in employment and business opportunities in the forest industry. They include:

- low industry participation by Indigenous peoples
- a lack of peer group role models and low self esteem among prospective employees
- cultural differences about full-time employment
- employer biases
- low literacy/numeracy/technical/business skills
- the difficulty of raising capital for business development
- a loss of ‘non-wood’ industry traditional knowledge
- cultural and attitudinal differences between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians, and Indigenous Australians and industry employers.

Overcoming the barriers, which have been built on and perpetuated by all stakeholders’ beliefs and biases, is a major challenge for the NIFS and will require focused action by all stakeholders. However, the barriers are not considered insurmountable provided there is goodwill, trust and a high-level commitment to action by all stakeholders.

Annex 2 contains case studies of Indigenous forest-related wood and non-wood projects.

THE OBJECTIVES

The NIFS will provide the national framework and direction for greater Indigenous participation in the forest and wood products sector. The three-tiered objectives for the NIFS are to create:

for Indigenous communities – improved economic and social outcomes, greater business participation and employment in industry operations, greater participation in resource management and policy development, and development of non-wood forest related activities

for the forest and wood products industry – opportunities to develop business partnerships with Indigenous Australians and negotiate business agreements to access Indigenous lands, greater labour force diversity, greater cultural awareness and improved perceptions through social partnerships

for the wider community – better forest and plantation management leading to improved social, economic, environmental and cultural outcomes, and active participation of Indigenous communities in new economic and social partnerships.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As the principal stakeholders in the NIFS, governments, Indigenous communities and the forest and wood products industry will need to share responsibility for its implementation and results. Cultural sensitivities and differences must be recognised and understood but should not be allowed to block development opportunities for Indigenous Australians.

GOVERNMENTS

The success of depends on participation and responsibility at all levels of government. The Australian Government, through DAFF, must provide leadership and maintain the momentum to implement the NIFS efficiently and effectively. From the outset, the NIFS must work with state and territory Indigenous forestry strategies and programmes. State and territory governments are often in the best position to support ‘on-ground’ management. Local governments and planning authorities may need to take part in projects where their input is required. All levels of government should be prepared to provide resources to implement projects.

The Australian Government should ensure an appropriate governance arrangement is put in place to oversee and advise on the NIFS implementation. Governance arrangements must foster Indigenous interest and participation in the NIFS.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The most important contribution Indigenous Australians can make is for them to bring to the table the willpower and commitment to participate in the NIFS and succeed. For many, this will require a commitment to undertake training and acquire new work skills. This should lead to opportunities for full-time employment. It may also require a commitment to new work cultures. Indigenous leaders should promote awareness of opportunities and stimulate community interest. Indigenous leaders will also need to be prepared to negotiate with forest industry businesses and investors.

Some Indigenous communities have forest lands under their jurisdiction. These are important capital assets in which the communities can now invest, including in partnership with industry, and generate income flows and long-term employment opportunities for their people. It is in the long-term interests of all Indigenous Australians to ensure the NIFS works for them. Indigenous interests will also need to take part in the NIFS governance arrangements.

INDUSTRY

It is also important for the forest and wood products industry to bring to the table the will and commitment to make the NIFS work for Indigenous peoples in a commercial environment. It can enter into partnerships with Indigenous owners of forest assets and help develop new wood and non-wood industries and employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians. Industry will need to actively explore how to increase participation by Indigenous people in already established businesses, especially those close to Indigenous communities in regional and rural Australia. Industry may need to improve its understanding of how to approach and do business with Indigenous communities. While a number of initiatives are already underway, new policies and protocols for Indigenous engagement will likely be necessary.

Industry must also take an active part in the NIFS governance arrangements.

KEY PATHWAYS

To balance development opportunities for Indigenous Australians in the forest and wood products industry, the Strategy has six key interrelated pathways with actions recommended under each. The pathways must be managed and implemented in a way that ensures coordinated, balanced and measured development. The pathways are:

1. Leadership, coordination and communications
2. Regional communities – awareness, involvement, planning and ownership
3. Capacity building – improving the knowledge and skills base
4. Consistent government and forest industry direction
5. Project development
6. Recognition of social and cultural issues.

1. LEADERSHIP, COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

In practice, day-to-day responsibility for many of the processes and activities under the NIFS will be at the regional or local level. Nevertheless, and as discussed earlier under ‘roles and responsibilities’, overall responsibility lies with the Australian Government to ensure the NIFS is efficiently and effectively implemented, and its momentum maintained. The focus of the government’s leadership role will be to facilitate, coordinate and encourage the processes and mechanisms at the regional and local levels to ensure activities happen. For example, project development will mostly be a ‘bottom-up’ process, but the top layer of administration will need to ensure processes and mechanisms are in place to assist the development of opportunities as they arise.

Communication about the NIFS with prospective interest groups needs to be consistent with community protocols. When people can explore and choose from the options before them, this will help create ownership in decision-making and implementing the NIFS and its measures. The NIFS and its possibilities must be communicated to Indigenous communities.

To provide leadership and develop/coordinate communication strategies and material will require a dedicated unit to encourage and energise parties to become involved in the NIFS. The Indigenous Forestry Unit (IFU) will provide a link between the forestry industry, Indigenous communities and individuals, governments and the wider community. It will promote and market the NIFS to interested parties. The IFU could be established within DAFF or a peak industry association and should include Indigenous employees.

Regional and local consultation should provide the means to identify potential opportunities for business development within the industries and the Indigenous communities.

Action 1

Establish an NIFS Steering Committee of key stakeholders, who would be responsible for overall NIFS implementation. The Steering Committee should:

- oversee the work of the IFU; and
- work towards an alignment of federal and state/territory policies on forest management issues and access to forested lands as they affect Indigenous people.

Action 2

Establish and adequately resource a specialist IFU to coordinate the implementation of the NIFS for an initial period of three years. Develop a service charter for the Unit that identifies its objectives, primary functions, procedures and responsibilities.

2. REGIONAL COMMUNITIES – AWARENESS, INVOLVEMENT, PLANNING AND OWNERSHIP

The long-term success of any NIFS project depends on Indigenous support and commitment. The NIFS must engender awareness, foster inclusion and help thorough planning to achieve commitment and ownership at the regional and project level. Flexibility will be necessary. ‘Regional’ must also reflect Indigenous culture and understanding of “country”, as well as administrative boundaries defined by state or local governments. Working with regional ICCs should greatly assist regional involvement and planning.

Education and awareness is a first step in raising the awareness of likely participants of the possibilities under the NIFS. The aim is to make potential applicants aware of, and inform them about, what will be involved, and spark their interest in taking up the opportunities. This function will be channelled through the IFU.

Increasing involvement by Indigenous Australians in forest and wood product ventures will also require support and commitment from the wider community. Successfully implementing the NIFS will require regional communities that are informed about the NIFS and the opportunities it promotes. The NIFS implementation should allow Indigenous peoples, the industry and the wider community to jointly participate and benefit. Comprehensive planning at the regional level – where projects are identified and plans developed – will bring together all stakeholders.

Widespread and diverse opportunities will continue to arise and they are likely to include direct involvement in forestry development, harvesting and processing, production of ‘non-wood’ products and participation in ‘alternate’ forest industries. Regional communities must become involved in, and take ownership of, the opportunities. Realising the potential for Indigenous communities and the commercial industry depends on engaging local communities. Consultations clearly identified planning, to engender ownership, was best done at the regional level.

Regional forums, with involvement of the ICCs, can be a conduit for Indigenous communities, the forestry industry and governments to discuss key issues and identify and move forward projects to increase involvement of Indigenous Australians in the forestry industry. For maximum benefit, regional forums should include representation from:

- wood and non-wood product industry groups (e.g. relevant industry and community associations, regional businesses)
- Indigenous communities, businesses and individuals (e.g. traditional owners, elders, Indigenous councils, Indigenous land trusts, community groups)
- governments and institutions (e.g. Australian, state and territory governments, including the ICCs, local councils and shires, land councils, research institutions).

Indigenous communities might also consider becoming members of forestry industry associations.

Action 3

Establish a framework to encourage/establish regional planning forums and networks to bring together Indigenous communities, the forestry industry and all levels of governments, including the ICCs, with a role in achieving the NIFS outcomes.

Action 4

The IFU to coordinate regional mapping to define areas of interest where potential exists to increase Indigenous involvement in the forestry industry. The mapping should principally identify broad forest areas that could provide opportunities for Indigenous communities in wood and non-wood projects and activities.

3. CAPACITY BUILDING – IMPROVING THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS BASE

A key factor in achieving higher levels of involvement by Indigenous Australians in the forest and wood products industry is how effectively Indigenous Australians can participate in industry production and management. Successful entry and participation by Indigenous peoples in industry operations and management throughout the supply chain will be assisted by an appropriate knowledge and skills base.

Research and clear identification of the skills required, targeted training and skill development packages provided through regional vocational training programmes will improve the basic knowledge and skill base. Mentoring could also help integrate Indigenous Australians into the supply chain. The aim is to provide potential staff and managers with skill levels that meet the expectations of industry and Indigenous people, and provide career paths for the Indigenous participants.

A first step is to identify existing relevant training programmes and processes. The National Forest and Forest Products Industry Training Package sets out competency levels and training requirements at various levels in forest growing, management, silviculture and harvesting, timber processing, and pulp, paper and board manufacture. Training programmes, designed to meet the standard, are developed in consultation with industry and made available through registered training organisations.

Other initiatives that should help guide forest-related employment and training for Indigenous peoples include the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) 2002 Indigenous Initiative, the Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) and the Structured Training Employment Programme (STEP). National programmes for Indigenous peoples should also connect with similar state and territory programmes.

A second step is to assess existing training programmes. This could include assessing skills levels in Indigenous communities against the skills required to perform tasks and realise opportunities. It could identify the gap between the two and suggest how to close it.

Skills development leads to job-readiness. Job-readiness revolves around aspects such as workplace literacy and work cultures such as managing daily and weekly routines. Employers will need to have flexible recruitment policies to help strike a balance between the needs of Indigenous peoples and mainstream industry.

The training programmes will build on existing initiatives and ensure a consistent approach to make the best use of funding. This could lead to other initiatives such as establishing forest industry training units for Indigenous communities, and specific management and business skills courses for Indigenous peoples, e.g. applying for tenders and/or assistance to develop business ideas. Training programmes will often require concurrent work experience to be effective.

The ever-changing work environment and the impediments noted during consultations show that a strong commitment and support to improve the knowledge and skill base. The commitment also needs to be coordinated across government departments, industry and communities to broker solutions so that the best use is made of state and federal training resources.

General research and development will open up opportunities for capacity building in its broader context. Progressive implementation of the NIFS will reveal obstacles and opportunities for Indigenous peoples and industry. A well-developed and implemented investigation and research will help in dealing with them. Issues that could be addressed include:

- identifying and advising relevant research and development organisations about the NIFS and establishing links for information exchange and project support;

- establishing a way to focus research and development efforts on the special requirements of Indigenous communities in their dealings with the forestry industry;
- helping Indigenous Australians adopt research and development results; and
- identifying and harnessing sources of research funding.

Action 5

The IFU to coordinate an assessment of existing industry training programmes and packages for their capacity, delivery and effectiveness in preparing Indigenous Australians for entry into, and ongoing skills development within, the forest industry (wood and non-wood) workforce and related businesses.

- Where it identifies specific gaps or shortcomings, develop options and implement remedial action, which could include developing new nationally accredited courses, where appropriate.

Action 6

The IFU, with existing federal, state and regional research institutions, identify key research issues and develop an Indigenous forestry research programme on forest-based opportunities relevant to the NIFS.

- Target research and development organisations to include NIFS research priorities in their programmes. Harness research and development funding and activities to help achieve NIFS goals.

4. CONSISTENT GOVERNMENT AND FOREST INDUSTRY DIRECTION

Implementing the NIFS will be complex. The Strategy's 'areas of interest' include a diverse range of forest industry businesses and associations, Indigenous Australian communities, and wider community cultures. Potential NIFS business opportunities will also be spread over many geographical regions and federal/state/territory/local government jurisdictions.

Implementing the NIFS will require consistent and appropriate bipartisan government policy and support at all government levels, and a coordinated approach that includes forest industries.

While consultations revealed some good examples of work in progress, it was also apparent from the consultations that Indigenous Australians are often wary of government programmes and promises of a better future, and similar claims by the industry. A long-term adequately resourced commitment by the parties will provide the means to achieve the NIFS objectives and help overcome the wariness of some stakeholders.

Consultations also indicated that there is a need for an industry policy on Indigenous peoples' involvement in the forest and timber industry. Indigenous peoples would see such an industry policy as a strong commitment by mainstream industry to building closer working relationships with Indigenous communities. A series of protocols could sit under a forest industries Indigenous policy which could address the need for greater flexibility in job recruitment for Indigenous peoples and promote greater recognition of cultural and heritage values in forests and plantations. This will also help Indigenous communities understand what is required of them under the NIFS.

The NIFS should also encourage a whole-of-government approach to matters such as links with other agro-forestry initiatives, funding and policy.

Action 7

The forest and wood products industry develop an industry policy on Indigenous peoples' access to and involvement in the forest and timber industry with a strong commitment to building closer and practical working relationships with Indigenous communities.

5. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Facilitating project development with Indigenous communities will be a NIFS core function and a primary responsibility for the IFU. It will be important to identify and draw on existing government programmes and resources tailored for project development. Projects are likely to be diverse, geographically widespread and to need building from the ‘bottom up’. Project support will require a mix of proactive and reactive approaches, depending on the stage of development and available resources.

Project development will be considered and assessed across the wood and non-wood sectors by government, industry and Indigenous communities. Projects will range from those with predominantly timber production and economic objectives to others that could include identifying and managing Indigenous cultural sites within forests. While some might provide business opportunities, training and career development, others could offer ways to conserve greater cultural identity and connectivity with the forest and land. Other project areas – such as craft-related industries, non-wood forest products, e.g. bush tucker and bush medicines, and eco-tourism – provide potential and opportunity.

Business partnerships between Indigenous communities and industry can provide economic returns to Indigenous landowners, employment and wages for Indigenous peoples and benefits for industry through access to skilled workers. With about 13 per cent of Australia’s forested area under Indigenous ownership, project development on Indigenous land is expected to be a major platform for the NIFS. Business partnerships with mainstream industry could underpin activities such as plantation forest development, and native forest timber and nursery operations. Wage-based employment opportunities are available and are currently working in forest management, timber transport, timber milling and downstream value-adding.

Resource development projects, such as the Tiwi Forestry Project in the Northern Territory (see Case studies at annex 2), are excellent examples of what Indigenous peoples can achieve by collaborating with a company specialising in plantation management. Projects such as this lend themselves readily to communities with land and forest resources (e.g. northern Australia). Others, which are more likely to be in southern areas and without these resources, may have to identify other opportunities through regional mapping exercises. All project developments should consider impact assessments. In this sense it is important that case studies be made available showing both the positive and negative aspects of activities undertaken.

Another aspect of Indigenous participation in the wood and non-wood forestry industry is the traditional knowledge that Indigenous peoples have in relation to forest resources and their products. In the community consultations, the capacity for Indigenous people to use and have this knowledge legally protected in the wood and non-wood forestry industry was identified as a barrier to their participation. It is not within the scope of this Strategy to examine the broader legal and policy aspects of traditional knowledge and intellectual property rights. However, the Strategy’s guiding principles do provide a framework for implementation as these legal and policy issues are advanced over time. The Strategy provides some scope to enhance the capacity of Indigenous peoples to identify and promote wider understanding and application of Traditional Forest-Related Knowledge (TFRK). There is also scope for industry to identify opportunities for including such knowledge in resource management practices.

Action 8

The IFU to assist identify existing government, industry and Indigenous programmes that can undertake, or further assist, the development of projects of benefit to Indigenous peoples in the wood and non-wood forest industry.

Action 9

Indigenous communities, especially those with title over land and forest resources, explore potential project development opportunities to create business development and employment opportunities for their peoples. Projects could include:

- small-scale timber production and processing;

- joint timber production and processing from native and/or plantation timber, in collaboration with mainstream industry; and
- non-wood forest projects, either with or without mainstream industry, which could include bush furniture and artifacts, eco-tourism, bush tucker and bush medicines.

Action 10

Clarify/define the scope of TFRK and its relationship with the wood and non-wood forestry industry, and work with appropriate government, legal, Indigenous community, industry and business organisations to promote activities to advance TFRK in the wood and non-wood forestry industry.

6. RECOGNITION OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ISSUES

During community consultations, it became evident there was often insufficient understanding by non-Indigenous stakeholders about the cultural significance to Indigenous peoples of forests generally, and the importance of specific cultural sites in them. Every attempt should be made to identify and catalogue cultural sites in forest and plantation areas. Identification could be assisted through the regional mapping recommended in pathway 2 (see Action 4).

Many mainstream forestry industry players have had limited interaction or experience with Indigenous Australians. For the NIFS to achieve its potential, stakeholders will need to understand social and cultural sensitivities and differences, and integrate this into developing business opportunities. This provides a challenge for the NIFS. In practice, the best way to meet it may be to draw on, for example, the outcomes of regional forums, the positive and negative aspects of case studies, and the experience gained in developing projects. Improved cross-cultural training for non-Indigenous forestry stakeholders would also help. An improved understanding of social and cultural issues can only enhance development of long-term business relationships.

Action 11

Ensure that culturally sensitive areas are identified, protected and managed within forested areas.

Action 12

Develop a cultural awareness training package for non-Indigenous business partners and other key stakeholders.

NIFS MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Administering any programme requires continuous monitoring and evaluation to assess the efficiency of implementation and the effectiveness of projects against programme objectives. Clear goals and milestones should be set in advance and projects monitored regularly to measure progress and identify how to improve implementation and results. To benefit most from monitoring and evaluation, it will be necessary to establish qualitative and quantitative benchmarks to measure progress. Measurement should focus on outputs and outcomes, not inputs.

Action 13

Develop an NIFS monitoring and evaluation programme to include:

- a database of key quantitative and qualitative variables to measure the progress of the NIFS;
- ongoing monitoring and periodic evaluation of individual projects and the overall programme to measure and assess qualitative and quantitative changes in Indigenous involvement in the wood and non-wood product forestry industry; and
- an ongoing review of the Strategy, including the ability to deliver the intended outcomes.



ANNEX 1 SITE VISIT SUMMARIES

Two rounds of site visits were made to eight locations around Australia – the first round during 2003 to research the scoping study, and the second in 2004 on the content of the Strategy.

KEY THEMES FROM THE CONSULTATIONS

Common themes emerged throughout the consultations in 2003 and 2004. They included:

- A broad integrated approach is needed – the focus of any strategy must take in economic, social, cultural, environmental and heritage factors.
- Strong leadership (nationally, regionally and locally) is needed to draw stakeholders together, identify activities, draw up regional plans and drive programmes.
- Consultation is the key to engender enthusiasm and ‘push’ from Indigenous peoples.
- There is a need to make full use of other agencies, programmes and funding that can be linked to the NIFS.
- Industry and governments must focus on working with Indigenous communities at a local/regional level.
- Indigenous communities want to be empowered with decision-making responsibilities on the development/running of potential ventures.
- Indigenous values and wants need to be fully considered – communities may seek economic development opportunities for social benefits as much as for profit.
- An industry employment policy is needed to assist hiring Indigenous peoples. It should include a commitment to employment traineeships linked to genuine employment opportunities.
- There is a need for capacity building. A clear need exists for business skills training (tendering for contracts, running tree nurseries), employment skills training and development, and acquisition of requisite base skills to enter training schemes.
- Where Indigenous communities own land suitable for timber production, partnerships with industry can offer substantial business and employment/training opportunities at the local level.
- Secondary benefits from forestry projects can be as important as the original project because of improved infrastructure.
- Greater Indigenous access to public native forest and increased input into management should be encouraged.
- There is a need to protect Indigenous heritage and intellectual property. Is our legal framework up to the task?

The site visits identified a low level of involvement by Indigenous peoples in forest-based industries generally – e.g.

- low Indigenous employment and experience
- low Indigenous ownership of forests or forest-related businesses.

Nevertheless, some positive initiatives are underway around Australia including:

- some major plantation management companies are engaging with Indigenous communities;
- some local employment strategies and programmes are under development;
- employment opportunities are emerging in forest-based environmental projects;
- Indigenous communities and forest stakeholders have met in some regional areas to explore potential forest activities; and
- various state/territory government agencies have established programmes and demonstration projects.



SITE-SPECIFIC THEMES FROM THE CONSULTATIONS

As expected, all of the sites have things in common. However some distinct issues also came out of different consultations. Because of this, it is important that the NIFS recognises the diversity of Indigenous association with forestry, for example plantations are appropriate in some places but not in others.

The issues below highlight some of the key issues and comments raised at the specific site visits.

During consultations, participants made it clear that, while they could speak for their communities, they could not speak for others.

MANJIMUP, WA

- Holistic approach
 - It is important not to focus solely on economic benefits, but include social, cultural and environmental benefits.
 - Involvement in forestry may lead to empowerment of Indigenous communities with downstream benefits.
 - There is concern about the lack of access to forests.
- Environmental focus
 - There is a strong interest in biodiversity and environmental outcomes.
 - Issue of sustainability of forest and the environment - “saving our country”.
 - Potential to use wood, which is being wasted.
- Employment and business
 - There is potential for Indigenous communities to network with industry for mutual gain.
 - There is an opportunity to change negative perceptions of Indigenous people through involvement in the industry – increased cross-cultural awareness.
 - Some Indigenous people find it difficult to gain financial support and/or government funding.
 - A large number of displaced timber workers in the area may reduce the opportunities for new employees, including Indigenous people.

MOORA, WA

- Environmental focus
 - There is a strong concern about the negative environmental impacts in the area, especially water resources, Swan River degradation and salinity.
 - Potential to look at naturally occurring trees species for the area - Potential for endemic species use, to produce, e.g. honey and fence posts.
- Forestry industry limitations
 - Concern that the changes to the allocation of industry contracts have restricted Aboriginal involvement.
 - Some Aboriginal people find it difficult to get financial backing.
 - Concern that with industry downsizing, Indigenous involvement will be even more limited.
 - Would like to see Memorandum of Understanding with Land Council and WA Government’s Forest Products Commission so there is agreement on what can be done on the land.

- Greater consultations and recognition
 - Aboriginal people are not being consulted - they want to have a say - they may not have the answers, but want to be involved 'walking together side by side'.
 - Not just about "white science" but about cultural issues and understanding the country (don't have academic background, but have knowledge and connections to land and community).
 - Need people on the ground at the local level to talk to elders and traditional owners.

BARMAH, VIC

- Environmental focus
 - Need to look at the big picture – environmental impact, sustainability, significance of water management, "putting back what we take".
 - Aboriginal people in the Barmah area use forests for food and wood in a sustainable way – not necessarily interested in logging forest, but managing and looking after the resources
 - A holistic framework – a "working forest/working river" approach.
- Consultation and planning
 - Important for Indigenous people to be involved in planning and managing forests, not just employed.
 - Participants are interested in establishing a regional committee with local representatives to look at forest management issues.
 - Resources should be put into communities and not agencies.
 - Participants clearly acknowledged they cannot speak for other Indigenous communities.
 - There needs to be more consultation on the ground with true protocol process, showing respect, sitting with people and respecting the traditional owners individually.
 - Would like to see state legislation changed to recognise the true custodians of the land.
 - 'gifted in that we can turn nothing into something'.
- Training and support
 - Need for more training – specifically to obtain business development, planning and employment skills.
 - Lack of economic support.
 - Participants were interested in being able to undertake an inventory of their own resources, relate the inventory outcomes to timber and non-timber opportunities, and use the information to decide what to do.
 - Opportunities for contracts in forest thinning, plantation development, sawmilling, etc.

MT GAMBIER, SA

- Employment
 - Training of Indigenous peoples and industry recruitment procedures do not mesh – need for an industry employment strategy to address Indigenous-specific issues.
 - Increased employment in the industry may lead to more role models and possible increase in home ownership.
 - Preconceptions about Indigenous people negatively affects them being employed.
 - Need to be more proactive in seeking out other government programmes and funding.
 - Need better communication between industry and Indigenous communities.

- Difficulty with identified positions because there is a negative attitude towards the Indigenous person who is instantly employed.
- Not enough training, the benchmark for employment has moved, need more skills and training.
- It would be good if more Indigenous people were employed together – increased support.
- Would like to see career path and inclusion in high-level decision-making.
- Forest industry should highlight for Indigenous people the skills required for the industry.
- Interest in employment in particular national parks and conservation.
- Holistic approach
 - There is a strong sense that what landholders do can affect the entire region.
 - Issue of water use – precious resource water conservation.
 - Projects should not focus solely on monetary gain – also need to consider environment and sustainability issues.
 - Would like to see long-term resources and commitment to maintain cultural sites/heritage.
 - Benefits of involvement and Indigenous ownership can include feeling good and good health in the community.
- Community ownership essential
 - There needs to Indigenous community desire to successfully undertake any activity.
 - Regional planning is needed to identify the range of wood and non-wood opportunities.

TIWI ISLANDS, NT

- Employment
 - Employment is available. However, there are issues on training, career pathways and work ethic.
 - Community gains pride from participation.
- Working with industry
 - Partnerships with industry offer substantial business, employment and training opportunities. Partnerships can help overcome problems where banks, etc, are reluctant to provide loans when the collateral is land under Native Title.
 - Secondary benefits from forestry projects can be as important as the original project – e.g. through improved infrastructure.
 - Access to and use of forested lands – Native Title should not be viewed as *de facto* national parks.
- Flexibility of programmes and funding
 - Employment funding has restrictions that do not accommodate the Tiwi environment/situation – difficult to coordinate specific approach for Tiwi (current funding does not meet the Tiwi needs – need flexibility).
 - Need for whole-of-government approach, which allows flexibility of funding.
 - Getting government approval for projects under the Australian Government’s EPBC Act is time consuming and takes up large amount of resources.

HOBART, TAS

- Hesitancy to be involved in industry
 - There is a concern that Aboriginal involvement in industry at any level endorses an industry, which they see as destroying Aboriginal culture.

- The forestry industry is not seen as embracing Indigenous culture and values. Therefore, there is a lack of interest from Indigenous communities about being involved.
- Concern over the lack of access to forest.
- Is the legal and policy framework adequate? – perceived as weak in protecting native forests and Indigenous cultural heritage.
- Regional communication and consultation
 - Need an open forum for everyone to discuss the issues.
 - Need consultation protocols – to include heritage responsibilities.
 - Need to have a local focus, from the ground up.
 - Need for forest education and vocational information packages for schools.
 - Possible synergies working with the Aboriginal Tourism Strategy for Tasmania.

CAIRNS, QLD

- Regional focus
 - Concern over national strategy, there must be a focus on the regional level and consultation with appropriate people – traditional owners, elders.
 - There needs to be a capacity to bring training to people (and not people to the training).
- Holistic approach
 - Need to link into current programmes and not double up or create new funding (this causes confusion).
 - Need to recognise some projects may not have an economic focus.
 - Need to consider projects/activities – how might they be affected by world heritage legislation and native title issues.
 - Need to make full use of other programmes and funding that can be linked to the NIFS – e.g. Department and Employment and Workplace Relations and Natural Heritage Trust programmes.
- Importance of traditional knowledge
 - There is an imbalance between traditional knowledge and land/equity.
 - Would like to see greater access to forests for uses, such as collecting bush foods.

GRAFTON, NSW

- Regional approach
 - Regional strategies are essential before even considering a national strategy – need a ground-up approach, local Indigenous communities and traditional owners involvement and support is key for any project to work.
 - Participants discussed the idea of having an NIFS committee with regional representatives to look at consulting more with local mobs – or a community forum to provide advice to government.
 - Need to use Indigenous models of consultation.
 - Project development and implementation requires a dedicated officer.
- Training, employment and finance
 - Indigenous people need to learn business skills.
 - Problems obtaining funding from government and banks.



- Some Indigenous people have limited knowledge of the timber industry.
- The future for many Indigenous youths is linked to employment opportunity.
- Community interests fundamental
 - Community enterprises have goals other than economic focus.
 - Social benefits from involvement in the industry are immediate and economic benefits are long term.
 - Cultural heritage issues often overlooked.
 - Important that the NIFS recognises diversity of Indigenous association with forest and forestry.
 - Potential for joint management between state forest agencies and communities.
 - Concern over lack of access to forests because of national parks.
 - Aboriginal forest management committees need resources to function properly.



ANNEX 2 CASE STUDIES

THE KEEPA-KEEPA – NSW

View from the Keepa-Keepa site



In Heaton State Forest, just outside Newcastle in the Hunter Valley, NSW, elders are sharing their vision for the management of Indigenous sites for future generations. In the local Awabakal language, *keepa-keepa* means ‘place of many grass trees’. The site was traditionally a meeting place for five Indigenous groups, including the Awabakal, Darkinjung and Awaba peoples. Forests NSW has a co-management agreement with the elders, in which it will continue to be the land manager while the elders provide input into land management practices.

‘As a group, we respect the land on which we live and the culture practised by our forebears in living in harmony with the land. We want to pass on their traditional skills and knowledge to young Aboriginal people at an appropriate time in their life and in an appropriate learning environment.’

— Uncle Bob Sampson, elder

A first-class teaching facility is being built at Keepa-Keepa through the collaboration of Forests NSW and the local community, which has attended many of the planning meetings and strongly supports the project. The site represents the eagle hawk, totem of the Awabakal country, Lake Macquarie and the Myall Lakes. The education centre will be built at the heart of the eagle, with gender-specific teaching sites stretching out across the wings.

Some prominent architects who live in the area have given their time to design a unique building for the facility. There are plans to develop teaching programmes covering Indigenous culture, which will be taught on site. The programmes will also be incorporated into the curriculum of local schools. The project brings together the local Indigenous people and the non-Indigenous communities, improving cross-cultural understanding and breaking down traditional barriers. One proposal is for prison inmates to help in the construction, so they too may gain from the cultural exchange.

Keepa-Keepa has many traces of past Indigenous people’s activity, including ancient waterholes, grave sites, tool making areas, grinding grooves made by sharpening spears and axes, stone arrangements and hunting tracks. These will all make learning easier. It is hoped that, eventually, the Keepa-Keepa will be able to recreate traditional ways of life, and people will be able to learn more of Indigenous people’s culture.

‘Entering into this co-management agreement is a big breakthrough in the spirit of reconciliation ... A new beginning for our culture is going to start here, the way it used to be ... We can get back to our past ... we can add the present, but not lose our culture and traditions.’

— ‘Uncle’ Ken McBride, elder

THE MIRRORING WOMEN'S GROUP – NSW

The Mirring women elders, concerned that negotiations over Indigenous women's sites in NSW public forests were proceeding with the largely male-dominated Aboriginal Land Council, decided to be proactive. They approached Forests NSW and the land council about managing an Indigenous women's site in the Strickland State Forest. Inspecting the site, the Mirring elders discovered several plants important as bush tucker (forest-derived food) and bush medicines growing in the surrounding area. The Forests NSW managers and the Mirring women elders are meeting on site to jointly develop an appropriate management plan for the area.

Work is going ahead while the details of a management agreement are being negotiated. Forests NSW is providing an ecologist to work with the Mirring women on an ecological survey of the area. The study will help the women restore a more natural balance in the local vegetation communities and ensure important medicinal and bush tucker plants survive and propagate naturally. This has led to a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge between the ecologist and the Mirring women. The women have become skilled in seed collection and plant propagation, and are considering using their skills commercially, as well as in restoring the site. The ecologist has gained knowledge of bush tucker, bush medicines and Indigenous people's heritage.

Conscious the Strickland Forest is public land, the Mirring women's group and Forests NSW have started formal discussions with the local community, particularly the Friends of the Strickland Forest nature group. Discussions are mainly held in the forest, as this greatly improves communication and helps the elders demonstrate the cultural significance of the site to Forests NSW staff and local people. Because men and boys are rarely permitted close to the female sacred site, meetings are held at a nearby teaching site, where many Indigenous rock carvings and tools, and medicinal and bush tucker plants, can be found. The Mirring elders use the artefacts and plants to show the significance of the site and explain their heritage.

A co-management agreement is being negotiated to formalise arrangements in a Memorandum Of Understanding in the next few years. As part of their responsibility to restore a balance between the vegetative communities in the local area, the Mirring elders want to re-establish ecological fire regimes. Shorter-term goals include restoring the women's sacred site. Vandalism of the site has declined markedly after a fence was constructed and signs posted about the importance of the site to the local Indigenous people.

By using the teaching site to educate local people, especially children, the Mirring elders are improving cross-cultural understanding, and ensuring traditional knowledge and culture are passed on to future generations.

THE TIWI FORESTRY PROJECT – NT

The Tiwi Forestry Project is a partnership between Sylvatech Limited, an unlisted Australian public company, and the Tiwi Land Council. The Tiwi Land Council was established in 1978 under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Cth), and represents the Tiwi people who hold inalienable freehold title to their land under the Act. The overall objective of the Tiwi Forestry Project is the continual development of an integrated forest products industry on the Tiwi Islands.

The project has been running for about six years and has a potentially unlimited lifespan as it is based on rotational cropping. The Tiwi people were introduced to plantation forestry in the 1960s, when the Australian Government established significant pine plantations on Melville Island. The maturing plantations were gifted to the Tiwi people in 1985 and now form part of the Tiwi Forestry Project.

In 1986, the Tiwi elders decided on strategies for health, education and economic development to build a secure future for their people. They had been exposed to plantation forestry through the pine plantation establishment programme. Because it had provided employment opportunities and demonstrated the potential for plantation forestry on their land, they supported forestry development and keen to participate.

As tropical forestry specialists, Sylvatech saw the potential for a large-scale industry based on the fast-growing tropical hardwood, *Acacia mangium*, native to northern Queensland and Papua New Guinea.

Sylvatech manages more than 8,000 hectares of established pine and *A. mangium* plantations for the Tiwi Forestry Project. The area will be increased to 30,000 hectares over the next few years. This will create a world-scale forest products industry with a goal of exporting 1 million tonnes annually of high-grade *A. mangium* woodchips by 2013.

Sylvatech and the Tiwi Land Council have made substantial investments in the Tiwi Forestry Project. Additional investment has come from private investors, and through the Sylvatech Tropical Timbers managed investment schemes. The schemes have proved popular with investors because of the Tiwi Forestry Project's emphasis on achieving "triple bottom line" returns – delivering financial, social and environmental benefits. Sylvatech, the Tiwi people, private and institutional investors, and further managed investment schemes will fund the project's continuing expansion.

A eucalypt harvesting programme began in 2003. The project had stockpiled over 25,000 tonnes of logs for export to secured customers in Vietnam and China. The first 7,000 tonnes was exported to Indonesia and China in December 2004. It began a five-year, 1 million tonne, exporting programme at the end of the initial stage of the Port Melville development in mid-2004. Export sales over the five years will generate significant cash flow for the Tiwi Forestry Project. The eucalypt harvesting programme will continue until 2009. Harvesting the maturing pine plantations will start in 2004, concurrent with continuing *A. mangium* establishment.

In 2008-09, the project is scheduled to harvest 200,000 tonnes from the first *A. mangium* plantations and convert the logs into woodchips for export.

The Tiwi Forestry Project has created a sustainable and profitable business partnership model, and is already a "real" industry generating substantial revenue. Land lease fees paid to the Tiwi Land Council and, shortly, its share of profits from timber product marketing are being reinvested in the project's development. Along with royalties paid to the Tiwi, the income is also used to fund significant education, health and social infrastructure and services programmes for the 2,500 Tiwi people.

The ultimate benefit of the Tiwi Forestry Project for Sylvatech and the Tiwi people is equal participation in a viable export industry, which will earn substantial income for both parties.

Many other positive outcomes have flowed from the project. During 2003, it led to a major upgrade of roads on Melville Island through the provision of \$1.5 million in joint Australian and Northern Territory government funding.

A deep-water port, capable of docking 24,000 tonne vessels, was constructed at Port Melville, just south of Pirlangimpi, to allow timber products to be shipped to overseas customers. Sylvatech will lease and operate the port, which was constructed with Tiwi funds. The Tiwi Land Council owns Port Melville, which is a valuable asset that will provide ongoing income to the community from its operations.

More than 10 years, the Tiwi Land Council identified the development of meaningful work opportunities as the single most important factor in creating a better future for the Tiwi people.

A Community Services Deed, which began in April 1998, formally outlines the Tiwi Forestry Project's social objectives. Through the deed, Sylvatech agrees to provide training and employment opportunities for the Tiwi people. The deed also requires the Tiwi to encourage their people to take them up.

This is happening through the Tiwi and Sylvatech Management Advisory Committee and the Tiwi Forestry Employment Pilot. The latter programme breaks new ground by pooling and targeting the resources of several Northern Territory and Australian government agencies to deliver tangible employment results. There are 11 Tiwi apprentices and four full-time Tiwis working with contractors.

The objective is for as many Tiwi as possible to fill the 100 full-time jobs available and, through a structured, four-year training programme, prepare more to accept highly skilled positions as they become available. It is a model for developing full time employment opportunities, without the need for ongoing government subsidies.



MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE SOUTHERN ANAIWAN ELDERS AND FORESTS NSW

In 2002, the Southern Anaiwan Aboriginal elders group approached Forests NSW to discuss access for cultural teaching and learn about forest management aims. Their interests included places of cultural significance, maintenance of traditions, awareness of forest management and opportunities to enhance the social and economic situation for the Anaiwan Aboriginal community.

Over several meetings, the elders and State Forests forged a firm common understanding leading to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU is a commitment to cooperatively manage Aboriginal cultural heritage and Aboriginal interests in State forests, and acknowledge the legitimacy of various forest management aims and practices.

The stated commitments are:

- A close working relationship, based on mutual respect, understanding and trust.
- Conservation of Aboriginal cultural heritage and promotion of Aboriginal social and economic opportunities.
- Recognition and endorsement of Forests NSW management practices in plantations and native forests.

The MOU's objectives include:

- Creation of harmonious relations and processes for open dialogue.
- Consultation for forest management that respects Aboriginal rights and interests.
- Participation in the management of Aboriginal cultural heritage.
- Review of options for Aboriginal access, cultural and economic activity.

The MOU applies to areas within the identified Anaiwan Nation boundary on the Northern Tablelands of NSW, generally around Walcha and Armidale. State Forests' Mid-North Coast and Northern Regions administer the areas.

The Anaiwan and Forests NSW will manage a range of potential uses and issues, such as:

- Consultation on plans for harvesting, burning, plantation establishment, weed control and feral animal control.
- Anaiwan involvement in surveys for places and sites in advance of operations.
- An Occupation Permit over the Riamukka Forestry Camp, and for camping and teaching Aboriginal cultural heritage.
- Access to a range of forests for products and materials to sustain traditional Aboriginal lifestyle, such as medicines, bush tucker and tool making materials.
- Seeking training and experience for Aboriginal people to enhance their employment prospects.
- Involvement in Cultural Heritage Awareness training for State Forests staff.
- Opportunities for hunting, fishing and traditional food gathering.
- Seeking common ground with other Aboriginal groups and local Aboriginal Land Councils (noting that the MOU is not meant to affect the rights and entitlements of others).
- Opportunities for commercial use of forests by Aboriginal-run businesses, such as tourism, grazing, plant collection, use of waste timber or firewood.

At a recent ceremony to celebrate the new Occupation Permit, the elders said,

“Let’s walk together on the land to make a better future for us all.”

THE PILLIGA FORESTS – NSW

The Pilliga forests of inland NSW, north of the Warrumbungle Ranges, are primarily White Cypress Pine (*Callitris glaucophylla*), with some Black Cypress Pine (*Callitris endlicheri*) and *Eucalyptus* species, such as Narrow-Leaf Iron Bark (*Eucalyptus crebra*). According to early settlers' and explorers' records, they were once open forests on sandy alluvial soils, which also supported extensive native grasslands harbouring many now extinct or endangered marsupial species.

Aboriginal burning regimes and grazing by native animals are believed to have maintained the open nature of the forests. Over the past 200 years, hard-hoofed animals, rabbits and the farming practices of white settlers have exacerbated the effects of unusually dry and wet periods, leading to permanent changes to forest structure and flora composition.

Massive proliferation in the regeneration of pine seedlings has been the most marked result of land use changes, with estimated seedling densities of up to 2.5 million a hectare. Since the 1920s, forestry departments have been thinning the Pilliga forests to encourage straight growth in the remaining trees. Although labour intensive and difficult, the silviculture has brought no economic return and the felled trees have remained on the forest floor.

Recognising the economic potential of the pine thinnings, the Red Chief Local Aboriginal Land Council applied for a grant to prepare a feasibility study for value adding to the Cypress Pine industry. The Gunnedah-based land council worked with Paul Craigie, the Indigenous Development officer in the New England and Northwest Area Consultative Committee to prepare a funding submission to the Indigenous Small Business Fund.

The bid was successful and the feasibility study completed in early 2004. The study identified several niche markets that could provide employment opportunities for local Indigenous people, using saw mill residues and thinnings to manufacture a range of products, including Cypress oil, particle board, briquettes and cultural items.

The Land Council intends to establish a company in partnership with other Indigenous organisations to manage the activities. It has received support from Forests NSW, which manages the forests, and conservation groups that see environmental benefits in ongoing silviculture in the Pilliga forests.

NAPRANUM – FORESTRY ON THE WESTERN CAPE YORK PENINSULA, QLD

Aboriginals have practised forestry in the Cape York Peninsula for countless generations and have shaped the nature of these forests through sustainable forest management practices. Forests and other areas of Aboriginal country provided all the resources required for Aboriginal people including their social, material and cultural needs.

With the establishment of the bauxite mining town of Weipa in the 1960s, the mining company, Comalco, set up a sawmill to meet local construction needs, using some Indigenous labour. In the early 1990s, Comalco gave the remains of the sawmill to the Napranum Aboriginal Corporation, which set it up at Napranum to produce timber for local construction needs, including sales to Weipa. This mill operated for about 10 years but was recently replaced, temporarily, with a mobile sawmill.

The Napranum Aboriginal community wants to pursue social, cultural, environmental and economic sustainable land use on relinquished land (land handed back to traditional owners after mining and regeneration) to generate employment and industry development. Comalco supports the proposal and is addressing changing community expectations on handing back land to traditional owners. Land relinquishment criteria are being developed. The objectives of mine site rehabilitation at Weipa include: “Rehabilitate land to type and quality, or End Point Criteria, acceptable to government and traditional Aboriginal owners”.



The Indigenous community has identified an opportunity to salvage and use millable timber, which is being cleared as part of Comalco's programme of mining bauxite deposits around the Weipa region. Rather than clearing and burning the timber, the community considers it can be commercially harvested and milled in Weipa. At present, no one benefits from the timber. Opportunities exist to obtain several benefits from this timber through investment and training, which will provide employment and income. The objective is to train new local Indigenous staff and establish a larger scale sawmilling operation. The new Indigenous-owned business is to be called Nanum Tawap ('tawap' combines the first letter of each of the five main clan groups in the Napranum area).

Over the past few years, the Indigenous community of Napranum has established agro-forestry plantation systems, with support from Comalco, and the QLD state departments of Primary Industries and Fisheries, and State Development and Innovation. Recent plantations have included high-value species such as Sandalwood and African Mahogany. The community has also tested several bush tucker species. An integrated Indigenous training programme has begun which will support those communities, who will be the eventual owners of the resource by encouraging the drive to develop sustainable business and positive local employment outcomes.

Plantation development on mined land, complemented by native forest material rescued from land cleared for farming, has the potential to develop a significant and viable forestry industry, and create other value-adding businesses. This can only enhance the long-term employment opportunities for Indigenous communities of the western Cape York Peninsula.

The existing plantations on previously mined lands indicate productive forestry plantations can be established on regenerated land at Weipa. Species selection, site selection and silvicultural management have to be carefully considered to obtain a commercially viable plantation at the end of the rotation period.

THE ARTWORK

THE ARTISTS' STORY BEHIND THE NINE PANELS

Traditionally Indigenous Australians' relationships to land were, and are, deeply spiritual, as well as physical, psychological and communal. There is no concept for 'wilderness' as understood by non-Indigenous people (being pristine and untouched), because there is no part of this continent that has not provided physical, emotional and spiritual sustenance for its people. The land is conceived of as Mother and/or Father in Aboriginal cultures, and it is believed that one's spirit comes from the land, and will return to it. Land and country are intimately connected to Ancestors and forebears, such that individuals will refer to various tracts of traditional country to as their Grandmother's or Grandfather's country, or their Mother's or Father's country, as if that country and the person are each other. In the reciprocal kinship relationship that arises from this, one takes care of the land as one takes care of one's grandmothers/mothers, grandfathers/fathers. In this way, traditional land management has been, and remains, intimately associated with spiritual and genealogical genesis and obligation. The reciprocal, nurturing relationship with land, sky, water, flora and fauna is one of deep respect in which human beings are an equal and inseparable element of one vast interconnected network, referred to in some Aboriginal cultures as being the 'skin of the land my mother.'

OVERALL STORY CONCEPT

The nine panels together represent Indigenous relationships to land/country, including traditional and contemporary land management concepts and practices. Specific symbolic elements include:

The unifying grey areas which evoke forest and fire tracks, mountain range, common ground, links, paths, old growth forest, bark and water. That they extend beyond the frame represents the continuity of joint land management between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, future growth and generations, and the unlimited potential for shared obligation and care-taking our natural environment.

The poetry waterhole graphic, "Women's Country", in the central panel represents the intimate, core role of mother/nurturer/land, and the simultaneous presence of Ancestors, present and future generations.

The snakeskin patterns symbolize renewal, seasonal change and regeneration as in the snake's shedding of its old skin. There is also an embedded reference here to the Rainbow Serpent, traditionally Creator Spirit of the land and its natural features. It also represents bark and the diversity of patterning on the trunks of different species of native trees, and as in scribbly gum, the unseen presence of forest micro-life.

THE BACKGROUND COLOURS ARE

3 panels in traditional yellow ochre colours symbolizing earth, clay (bones) and fertility.

3 panels in blues symbolising water, sky and spirit.

3 panels in reds symbolizing fire, blood and life.

The dots belong to Jennifer's traditional Arrernte country and are traditional Central Desert art elements. They are topographical representations of country and flora. The colours of the dots are variations of the 9 main theme colours, evoke the colours of native flora, and represent diversity and connection. Single colour rows of dots represent paths, walking to collect bush foods, and boundaries between countries, bush/plantation, etc.



THE PANELS

Panel 1: Bush Flower Dreaming 1

The turtle-flower, other blossoms and seed pods represent the rich diversity of native flora, and the harvesting of native flowers and seeds for traditional medicines and ceremony. It affirms the intimate connection between human beings and the natural world.

Panel 2: Seed Dreaming

This panel represents the collection of a wide variety of seeds from plantations and the bush for preservation, planting, traditional jewellery and foods.

Panel 3: Honey Dreaming

Bees nest in gum trees, and collect pollen and nectar from the natural environment for honey, which sustains traditional lifestyles, and helps to maintain the diversity of plant species within the environment. Bees also represent fertility and adaptability. This panel also refers to how traditional fire-stick farming to maintain healthy bush growth is now complemented by contemporary plantation methods.

Panel 4: Us-Fella Tree Dreaming

Traditional and contemporary land management techniques take care of old growth forests, as well as other timber forests grown for harvest. In taking care of these forests we are contributing to the maintenance of waterways, fauna and other flora.

Panel 5: Walking Together – Two-Ways Dreaming

This panel symbolizes the coming together of community and forestry, sharing knowledge, respecting both traditional (Indigenous) and contemporary (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) understandings and ways of knowing the natural environment, and each other's obligations and ways of taking care of country. The poetry graphic refers to the simultaneous presence and custodianship of all generations, past, present and future.

There is a story told by an Elder from the Roper River area which says that while we belong to the land and come from it, and while some Elders are the Law Keepers for the land, and others (custodians) are entrusted with the sacred duty of taking care of the land, it is the women who own the land. But not in the way non-Indigenous people understand 'own'. The women own the land as they own their bodies that they live from inside. In other words, it is the woman's spirit, the mother and nurturer, that is the land. The poem inscribing the waterhole and women's country in this panel is as follows:



WOMEN'S COUNTRY

i am the flow of women's dreams
i am the river of birth and death and story
my grandmothers' grandmothers' story
i am their incarnation upon the scripted hours
between

cycles between countries i am
the river's ripple upon the green verge
that never ceases
i am the stone in the bed of its desire
from which the ripple is born

i am its echo
from the great Larapinta
that shivers upon the sand
where my grandmothers' mothers
spoke the generations of the journey

i am each footprint
upon red gibber desert each breath
my grandmothers' grandmothers
breathed in the sacred spaces of the dance
i am their country their

women's body
the course of life between cycles
i am the felt invisible
track of days i am
survival i am Dream

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Panel 6: Eco-Dreaming

This panel represents native plant nurseries, the regeneration and rescue of endangered plant and tree species, and the sustainable enterprise that grows from that. Such enterprise contributes to the preservation of eco-systems, cultural maintenance and continuity, and contemporary economic pathways that respectfully build upon traditional knowledge of, and obligations to, country. A way of building on the inheritance from the Ancestors for future generations.

Panel 7: Bark Dreaming

The Bark represents ceremony, cultural and artistic activities, and the cyclic processes of growth and regeneration. Plantations also represent heritage and preservation. Each tree represents the presence of all generations of its species, past, present and future. Collectively, they represent the presence and well-being of heritage, community and sustainable futures. The circle also symbolizes the ever present cycles of completion, birth, death and rebirth.

Panel 8: Bush Flower Dreaming 2

The flowers, leaves and grasses in this panel evoke the continuing unique botanical heritage of this continent, their environmental adaptation over millions of years, and the use of Australian flora in traditional and contemporary industries, such as basket weaving, ceremonial dress, floristry, naturopathy, art and craft.

Panel 9: Bush Tucker Dreaming

Traditionally, and in contemporary contexts, life and life styles are sustained through the harvesting of seeds, tree fruits, roots, bark, flowers and the micro-fauna of traditional and cultivated eco-systems. This is extended by the export of native tree and plant products ranging from essential oils and medicines, to bush foods.