

5 Making a difference: The action framework

5.1 It is essential that the SAG do not lose sight of the need for a Kakadu regional approach to the implementation of the Community Action Plan; all traditional owners, residents, employees, governments and visitors are important players in the social contract.

Implementation

5.2 Once this Community Action Plan is presented to governments and agencies in the Region, it is imperative that the recommendations do not fail for lack of effective implementation, monitoring and action. The SAG believes a small implementation team should be appointed immediately, responsible for working with all the agencies and industries in the Region to ensure the Community Action Plan is implemented, and adjustments are made to address any problems that arise, and that any new circumstances are accommodated.

5.3 It is essential that the commitments and undertakings given during the study, and the recommendations contained in this report, are more than mere rhetoric and empty words. An Implementation Team will ensure that there is commitment, motivation and incentives for action to ensure that outcomes are regionally beneficial and move all parties towards simultaneously meeting their specific goals and regional Aboriginal agendas, as outlined in Chapter 3.

5.4 The SAG notes that the APC has prioritised the major initiatives it considers important for the Region. The Aboriginal education centre at Jabiru Area School and the Outstation Resource Centre are considered equal first priority, followed by housing, Women's Resource Centre, pre-school/transition school, aged and disabled care hostel, and vehicles for various purposes.

5.5 The pace of change can be beneficially forced at this moment; it is now timely to extract commercial and political (decision-making) concessions from all parties, but this needs to be done (from the Aboriginal perspective) to a clearly articulated and progressive agenda. It is imperative, for example, that regional agendas are not confused.

5.6 The SAG recommends that:

- **the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments, Energy Resources of Australia and the Northern Land Council immediately establish a team to oversee the implementation in a holistic manner of all Government-endorsed recommendations in this Community Action Plan;**
- **the Implementation Team consists of senior personnel with decision-making authority appointed by the Commonwealth Government, Northern Territory Government, Northern Land Council, Energy Resources of Australia, Jabiru Town Council, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, and the Aboriginal Project Committee;**
- **the Implementation Team is independently chaired;**
- **the implementation process is jointly funded by the key participants: the Commonwealth Government, Northern Territory Government, Energy Resources of Australia and the Northern Land Council. Major resource commitments will be needed for a full-time regionally-based secretariat, with program commitments and team participation to be the responsibility of individual agencies;**

- the Implementation Team meets quarterly and is constituted for a period of three years in the first instance; and
- the Implementation Team is fully accountable via quarterly reporting to governments, the Region's Aboriginal population and all participants. The independent chair should report directly to relevant ministers.

Monitoring

5.7 The APC Report (1997: 67) states that, when uranium mining was approved in the late 1970s, monitoring was part of the social contract – monitoring of the physical and social environments. Responsibility for bio-physical monitoring was allocated to ERISS. A project to monitor the social impact of uranium mining was established within the AIAS. The social impact monitoring project ran for five years until 1984 and was not extended. Since 1984, there has been no one agency with responsibility for social impact monitoring in the region, and it is generally recognised that there has been a complete lack of coordinated activity in this area.

5.8 A consultant engaged by the APC to examine this issue recommended a tripartite monitoring regime: an independent committee with comprehensive Aboriginal representation; a research unit housed in an appropriate host organisation; and a set of agencies that provide services or oversee Aboriginal affairs in the Region (Kesteven 1997). The consultant considered ERISS to be the preferred organisation for housing such a social impact research and monitoring unit.

5.9 The APC, however, expressed reservations about Kesteven's recommendations (APC 1997: 70), in particular possible limitations of ERISS's legislation, failure of ERISS to communicate with Aboriginal people in the past, the legal standing of a recommended Memorandum of Understanding, and 'yet another committee'. The APC believes that a new and separate entity, such as the existing Aboriginal Project Committee arrangement, is the most desirable option, and the Aboriginal committee should be vested with legal rights. Also, the geographical scope of the monitoring work should be limited to the Kakadu Region, and should not include Gunbalanya (Oenpelli) in western Arnhem Land.

5.10 The SAG recognises the APC's preference for a separate new organisation directly accountable to the Aboriginal community in all its diversity. The SAG's view is that the original social contract provides for a balance of power and responsibility between the major parties - the balance has clearly not been appropriate in the past. However there are other options to the response of creating yet another organisation. The fundamental issue is ensuring that the committee overseeing monitoring and research is independently serviced and has appropriate representation from the Aboriginal community. The current absence of an effective regional Aboriginal organisation is unfortunate as such an organisation would have been ideal as the monitoring committee.

5.11 The monitoring program should include

- overseeing implementation of the KRSIS recommendations;
- education, employment and training issues;
- housing, infrastructure and servicing needs assessment and provision;
- the impact of mining development;
- the impact of tourism development; and

- the health status of the regional Aboriginal population.

5.12 The SAG recommends that:

- as soon as the implementation process begins, a Social Impact Research and Monitoring Program is initiated in the Kakadu Region;
- the charter for this Program is to ensure independent assessment and oversighting of implementation of recommendations, action research and ongoing analysis of social change in the Region;
- the Research and Monitoring Program is overseen by an independently serviced Aboriginal Committee with appropriate representation from all regional interests;
- the Research and Monitoring Program is ongoing, and co-funded by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments, with a review every three years;
- the Research and Monitoring Program is undertaken by a small team of professionals working closely with the Implementation Team (Recommendation 5.6);
- the Research and Monitoring team is either a newly-created independent body, or is housed in an existing government organisation, and the funding implications of both options should be considered by the funding agencies; and
- whichever option is taken, the independence of the Research and Monitoring Program and its accountability to the Region, via the Aboriginal Committee and to the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments is legally assured.

A final comment: Ensuring action

5.13 There needs to be a strategic governmental approach to implementation of the Community Action Plan at all levels, Commonwealth, Territory, and local. There also needs to be a strategic Aboriginal approach which recognises the potential benefits and costs associated with discretionary dollars, and a strategic private sector (ERA, tourism) approach which considers options for joint venturing, effective cross-cultural communications, and the commercial good sense of positive relations with Aboriginal land owners and long-term residents.

5.14 It is important to find the right and comfortable balance between 'tradition' and 'modernity' in this context, recognising, for example, that social and economic betterment can occur while maintaining cultural integrity. To some extent, Kakadu is uniquely placed to deliver economic betterment with cultural maintenance because of tourism, a benign national parks authority, and continual public scrutiny of this important World Heritage region. Considerable goodwill has been demonstrated by all the parties involved in the KRSIS. But it is still imperative to hear the Aboriginal voice. Aboriginal socio-economic enhancement will only occur via incorporation, appropriate education, active participation and ultimately greater political and economic engagement.