



INDIGENOUS LAND MANAGEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

A SUMMARY OF THE EXTENT,
BARRIERS AND SUCCESS FACTORS



CARING
FOR
OUR
COUNTRY

Indigenous land and sea management, also known as ‘caring for country’, is happening right around Australia. It is remarkable in its scope, diversity and cultural foundations—yet it is often not well-understood.

In order to build the Landcare community’s understanding of Indigenous peoples’ fundamental role in managing country around Australia, the Australian Landcare Council commissioned a review of the extent, scope and diversity of Indigenous land management (ILM) across Australia, and the associated success factors and barriers. This booklet provides a summary of the findings.

For the full report go to www.daff.gov.au/natural-resources/landcare/council/submissions, or contact the Australian Landcare Council Secretariat on +61 2 6272 5911 or alcsecretariat@daff.gov.au.

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WHAT IS INDIGENOUS LAND MANAGEMENT?

ILM includes a wide range of environmental, natural resource, commercial, economic and cultural resource management activities undertaken by individuals, groups and organisations across Australia. These activities have their origins in the holistic relationships between traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies and their customary land and sea estates that have evolved over at least 50 000 years.

ILM activities are highly diverse. They include customary or cultural resource management (e.g. hunting, gathering, burning, ceremony, knowledge sharing), actions to improve conditions in settlements (e.g. dust mitigation, firewood collection, management of water supplies), commercial economic activities (e.g. bush harvest for sale, pastoral, management, art) and threat abatement (e.g. weed and feral animal control, fire management, threatened species management, revegetation). Contemporary Indigenous management has different aims, goals and outcomes across the landscape according to the location of cultural sites, contemporary land tenure arrangements and the availability of funding to engage in particular activities.

Indigenous peoples have had an increasing level of formal involvement in natural resource management, which is something noted in the *Australia—state of the environment 2011* report as one of four major trends in environmental management over the last decade. By creating and responding to opportunities for funding, Indigenous peoples are undertaking significant and diverse projects across Australia (figure 1), and are the key providers of land management services in many remote and regional areas (as well as in some urban centres).

WHAT ARE THE DRIVERS BEHIND ILM?

The review identified six main drivers of ILM:

<p>Indigenous peoples’ customary obligations to younger generations and country</p>	<p>Indigenous leadership at multiple levels of decision making</p>	<p>Existence of markets for land management and associated goods and services</p>
<p>Recognition of Indigenous rights and interests in land through title and agreements (figure 2)</p>	<p>Movement towards Indigenous and co-managed conservation areas</p>	<p>Investments for improved environmental and cultural heritage outcomes</p>



Figure 1 Investment in Indigenous land management projects from 2002-13 (predominantly Australian Government funding, with some philanthropic and state government funding represented).

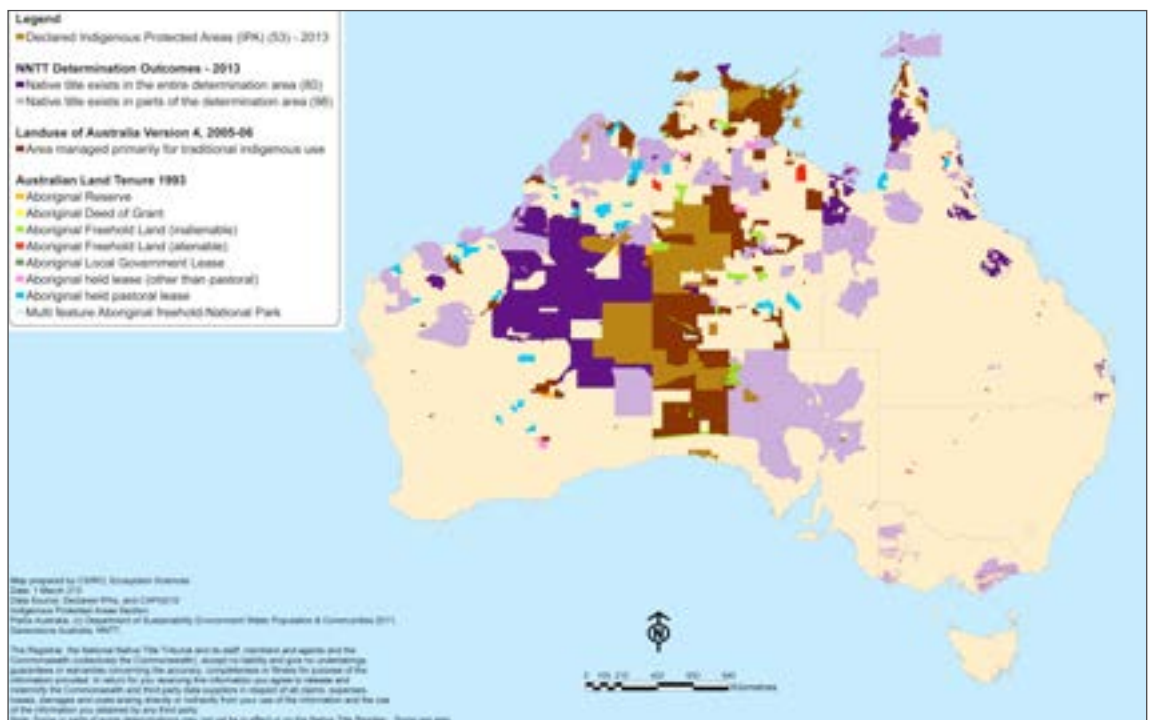


Figure 2 Indigenous interests in country have been recognised to varying extents over more than half of Australia. This includes over 16% held through tenure, 8.3% where native title is determined to be held over the whole area, and a further 12.9% where it is held over part of the area. Recognition of Indigenous rights and interests in land through title and agreements is a key driver of Indigenous land management.

WHAT MAKES ILM SUCCESSFUL AND WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS?

SUCCESS FACTORS

- ◆ Indigenous motivation—Indigenous peoples are highly motivated to do ILM as it has a strong cultural basis
- ◆ Indigenous governance and co-governance arrangements that respond to customary institutions—Indigenous governance is most successful for ILM where Indigenous peoples start it themselves
- ◆ Hybrid economies that generate multiple benefits—many successful ILM activities are the result of synergies between customary, government and market economies
- ◆ Indigenous-specific government programs that engage ILM through multiyear funding, real jobs and flexible case management— enables Indigenous people to access funds for management based on their own cultural knowledge and practices, provides certainty, stability and cost savings for organisations, and improves an individual's capacity, self-confidence and financial security
- ◆ Brokers and brokering organisations—link community-based Indigenous organisations to the resources and support required to undertake ILM (for example, land councils and regional NRM bodies)
- ◆ Relationships of trust, respect and mutuality—time spent together on country is important to relationship building and underpins success in all ILM
- ◆ Diverse multimedia approaches for Indigenous knowledge—are successfully supporting Indigenous knowledge while ensuring intergenerational transfer, through methods such as youth videorecording elders on country
- ◆ Collaborative two-way knowledge engagement—equitable engagement allows Indigenous people to be active partners in developing better understandings of the environment and helps in successfully implementing ILM that draws on Indigenous and scientific 'tool-boxes'
- ◆ Indigenous-driven planning—provides a way for Indigenous people to take control of their own future, shape it and give it meaning.



BARRIERS

- ♦ loss of traditional knowledge and language—power imbalances lead to western systems playing the dominant role in education and land management practices, which is a threat to traditional knowledge and languages and ILM.
- ♦ lack of access to traditional lands—many Indigenous people lack access to traditional lands held under other forms of tenure, or their lands may be difficult to access due to their remote location
- ♦ limited access to resources for ILM— the demand for resources with which to do ILM substantially outstrips supply
- ♦ challenging role and fragility of ILM organisations—difficulties are faced in working across cultures without adequate resources or access to long-term administration, governance and infrastructure funding
- ♦ socio-economic and educational disadvantage—the daily challenges of socioeconomic disadvantage (for example, endemic health issues and the life expectancy gap) affect Indigenous people’s ability to undertake ILM.

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ILM STORY Carbon farming in northern Australia—the Fish River Fire Project

The Fish River Fire Project, located in the Daly River region, is the first savanna burning project and the first Indigenous project approved under the Australian Government’s Carbon Farming Initiative. Indigenous rangers work on country to abate greenhouse gas emissions from savanna fires. By using methods that draw on Indigenous customary patterns and science, the area of land that had been historically burnt each year by late dry-season wildfires has been reduced from 69% to 3%. The project will deliver about 13 000 Kyoto-compliant Australian carbon credit units per year for sale, enabling more resources to be available to benefit the environment and strengthen Indigenous knowledge and practices.



Darren Sambono, Larbaganyan man and Traditional Owner of Fish River, undertaking an early dry season controlled burn. Photo: Indigenous Land Corporation

WHAT ARE THE ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT IN ILM?

The positive outcomes of Indigenous involvement in natural resource management are not only environmental. A variety of benefits come from these activities and investments, including improved health and wellbeing, cultural and social outcomes, and economic opportunities.

Examples of benefits:

Health & wellbeing

Engagement in ILM was a factor in decreases in blood pressure, body mass and heart disease risk in at least one remote community

Cultural

Support for intergenerational transfer of knowledge that is critical to the maintenance of cultural practices and institutions

Social

Reduction in anti-social behaviour of young people, and increased access to housing and employment

Economic

Fee-for-service contracts for ILM work were estimated to be worth \$4–6 million in the Northern Territory in 2009 biodiversity than adjacent lands

Despite these notable benefits, the demand for resources with which to do ILM still substantially outstrips supply. Even with the growth in Australian Government funding in this area, ILM expenditure is still less than 5% of the overall Australian Government Indigenous-specific spend. Finding new mechanisms that bring additional resources and reduce over-reliance on government funding remains a key challenge.

Sources

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WHAT IS THE OUTLOOK FOR ILM IN AUSTRALIA?

ILM has emerged as an important phenomenon in Australia and has led to positive environmental, social, economic and cultural outcomes. Nevertheless, successes are patchy and more time is needed for ILM to develop and overcome some of the barriers that have been identified. Future success in ILM is particularly dependent on closing the gap in health and socio-economic status between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, which investment in ILM has been shown to help achieve.

Although the outlook for ILM depends on Indigenous policy settings that are broader than land management, eight areas have been identified in which government land management policies can support future successes:

1. Support Indigenous leadership and governance
2. Increase visibility of ILM by developing effective measures and promoting the benefits generated by ILM, for both Indigenous peoples and the wider Australian society
3. Increase the share of government funding for Indigenous purposes that is allocated for ILM
4. Leverage new resources by supporting innovative financing mechanisms that bring in corporate and philanthropic funding
5. Generate new Indigenous knowledge and language initiatives and support two-way knowledge engagement with science
6. Recognise the role of brokers and brokering organisations in ILM, including both Indigenous organisations, such as the Central Land Council, and non-Indigenous organisations, such as the regional NRM bodies
7. Support Indigenous-driven planning
8. Support hybrid economy approaches, such as government-funded Indigenous rangers undertaking fee-for-service contracts.

ILM STORY Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation

Dhimurru celebrated its 20th year in operation as an Indigenous land and sea manager in 2012. The Yolngu people in north-east Arnhem Land established Dhimurru in response to concerns about unrestricted access of people to their country, the impacts of recreational activities and other problems, such as ghost nets entangling and drowning turtles. Dhimurru has a governance system based on customary institutions. The Dhimurru Vision explains, 'The decision makers are the landowners, the clans that are connected through Yothu-Yindi and Mari-Gutharra kinships'. Yolngu control and empowerment is the first guiding principle of all Dhimurru's work and Dhimurru's directors are members of the clans with relevant interests.

Yolngu launched Dhimurru using their own resources, with three rangers, an executive officer, a second-hand vehicle and a shared office. Today, they employ 13 Yolngu rangers and 6 non-Indigenous staff, and run a large number of projects, including an Indigenous Protected Area, and the longest running marine debris monitoring program in Australia. Building partnerships and leveraging funding from multiple sources has contributed to their success.



Dhimurru Rangers, Ngalkanbuy and Gathapurra, hunting termites in foreign timber as part of a marine debris survey. Dhimurru Rangers are supported by IPA and WoC. Photo: Lisa Roeger, Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation



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