

Information on the Sustainable Cape Communities Initiative

On 9 March 2011, in response to feedback from Aboriginal leaders and communities during consultation on the Wild Rivers program, the Minister for Environment and Resource Management, the Honourable Kate Jones announced the *Sustainable Cape Communities Initiative* as the next plank of the Wild Rivers program.

A multifaceted program, this initiative seeks to:

- build the capacity of the Indigenous people of Cape York to capitalise on economic opportunities; and
- ensure that the views of Traditional Owners are considered before decisions are made that affect their lands and communities.

There are four elements to the program, key of which is the establishment of Indigenous Reference Groups.

Indigenous Reference Groups

Some Traditional Owners and Indigenous communities have said that existing Indigenous organisations are unable to accurately or impartially represent their views in decisions about their country in relation to wild river declarations.

To enhance consultation and representation during the process of declaring a wild river area, I am establishing Indigenous reference groups, or IRG's for areas proposed for declaration as a wild river area. To ensure legitimate and representative input to the process, the IRG is to be made up of representatives selected or nominated from within the area of the proposed declaration – people who can speak for country.

As Traditional Owner representation is the key focus of an IRG, this model will ensure independence from the government and provide representatives of the Traditional Owners and Indigenous communities of an area to express their views on wild river related matters directly to the Minister.

Legislative amendments will give legislative recognition to the traditional owners and the ability to present their views directly to the Minister. The IRG's will be comprised of those people who speak for country and will report direct to the Minister on existing wild river areas and proposals to declare wild rivers on Cape York Peninsula.

Amendments to the Legislation

The *Wild Rivers Act 2005* will be amended to provide for the establishment of IRGs in both an existing wild river area or a proposed wild river area. As set out in the legislation, an IRG will advise the Minister about matters relating to a wild river area or a declaration proposal including, for example, the boundaries of the wild river area and proposals for development in the wild river area. The Act would provide for an IRG to consist of members appointed by the Minister and that must include members the Minister is satisfied represent the interests of indigenous people of the wild river area or proposed wild river area.

The law will require that the Minister must consider the advice of the IRG in the making of any declaration, and, where that decision is inconsistent with advice provided by an IRG, a statement outlining how the Group's advice was considered, where the declaration may be an inconsistent with the advice by the IRG and the reasons for the decision.

Other elements of the Sustainable Cape Communities initiative include:

- **Economic Development Plan** – focussed on identifying real and sustainable options for Indigenous people and consolidating existing, planned and potential opportunities for economic develop. This will seek to capitalise on the Cape's outstanding natural values, building culturally appropriate, conservation-based economic opportunities, as well as building on existing and emerging industries in mining, tourism and government employment.
- **Capacity Building for Indigenous Local Governments** – This program will assist Indigenous local governments in the Cape to prepare planning schemes and community plans required under the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* and *Local Government Act 2009*, providing a blueprint for sustainable development in each local government area. Additionally, to improve the capacity for undertaking the assessment of, and making decisions on, development applications, dedicated case managers are being appointed to provide assistance to Indigenous local governments to build the development assessment skills.
- **Economic Development Mentors** – To foster economic development opportunities for Indigenous communities and Traditional Owners on Cape York Peninsula, this program will establish partnerships between corporate Australia, Indigenous communities and existing and aspiring Indigenous business people, providing an opportunity for experienced business people to contribute to the sustainable development of communities on Cape York Peninsula.

This program responds to and is aimed at addressing issues raised by Indigenous communities with the Queensland Government through ongoing consultation.

28 April 2011