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INQUIRY SECRETARY

HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENT AND THE ARTS

**Inquiry into biodiversity in a changing climate –
supplementary answers to questions on notice.**

Dear Inquiry Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence before the Committee in relation to this inquiry and to share some of the research findings and partnerships AIATSIS has developed. I hope that the evidence will be of use to the committee in its deliberations.

On 27 September you requested supplementary information in answer to questions on notice. Obviously there are many instances I could point to of where Indigenous people are adopting innovative practices to further their aspirations for working on and caring for their country. I have tried to elicit some case examples, below, to illustrate the matters of interest to the Committee, but these are by no means isolated instances.

Please let me know if you require any further clarification.

1. At the end of your opening statement (p. 2) you undertook to provide the draft weeds management report to the Committee

The Executive Summary of the report is enclosed.

2. In response to questions from Ms Marino (pp. 2-3) you undertook to provide some information on:

- **Examples of sources of income to fund land and weed management – other than government grants**
- **Where native title groups do not have to manage the weeds, who is doing it?**
- **Examples of Indigenous communities piecing together funding from a number of different programs and sources**
- **Examples of resources from local commercial activities feeding into land management**

In answer to this question we have provided a case study from one of our research partnerships with the Abm Elgoring Ambung (RNTBC), the Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council and the Kowanyama Aboriginal Land & Natural Resource Management Office (the Lands Office).

Where native title groups do not have to manage the weeds, who is doing it?

- The councillors of Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council and Traditional Owners operate the Lands Office and are also native title holders recognised in *People v State of Queensland* [2009] FCA 1192, over 2 518 square kilometres of exclusive possession Deed of Grant in Trust land and non exclusive 213 square kilometres of sea, beach and tidal areas. The Lands Office has a long history of land management– including pests and weeds management – that predates the 2009 native title determination.
- Lands Office program includes pests and weeds management recognised in the Prospectus produced in 2008:
 - “Kowanyama Aboriginal Land and Natural Resources Management Office (Lands Office) has been operated by the Council and Traditional Owners since 1990. Establishment of the Lands Office was a direct result of the self-governance movement and Kowanyama’s concerns over mining, and both recreational and commercial fisheries issues.”
 - Although the lands around Kowanyama remain relatively untouched , “the more subtle changes which have become evident are related to the effects of grazing, changes in land use patterns, modern roads and introduced pest species”

Examples of Indigenous communities piecing together funding from a number of different programs and sources

The Lands Office adopts a piecemeal approach to funding and has been successful in maintaining a level of independence through diversifying its funding sources including both government and non government:

- Government sponsors
 - Australian Government Envirofund
 - Australian Quarantine and Inspection Services
 - Cape York Community Engagement Group
 - Department of Education & The Arts
 - Environment, Water Heritage & the Arts
 - National Heritage Trust
 - National Parks & Wildlife Service
 - Natural Resources & Water
 - Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries
 - Queensland Government Environmental Protection Agency
 - Queensland Health – Animal Management & Welfare
 - Queensland Museum
 - Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service
 - Tourism Queensland
- Non-Government sponsors
 - Annan and Endeavour Catchment Group
 - Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation
 - Cape York Land Council
 - Mitchell River Watershed Management Group
 - Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, State of

- Washington, USA
- Royal Flying Doctor Service
- The Christensen Fund
- Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge (TRACK)
- Wetlands International

One of the most important contributing elements to the success of the Lands Office is the support of the Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council in providing administrative support in order to attract and manage grants. This basic infrastructure has been central to the maintenance of the grants that have enabled the Lands Office to build and sustain its capacity.

The lack of long term funding assistance to maintain and operate land management functions has lead AIATSIS has compiled toolkits for Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate (RNTBCs). These toolkits document both national and state based funding and have been created to assist native title holders to access information and resources regarding funding and training opportunities that may be relevant to their RNTBCs, enabling RNTBCs to seek multiple sources of funding for their operations. The need for funding information was highlighted in the 2007 Australian Government report ‘[Structures and Processes of Prescribed Bodies Corporate](#)’ (Recommendation 2). These toolkits can be accessed online: <http://nativetitle.org.au/toolkits.html>

Examples of sources of income to fund land and weed management – other than government grants

- o The Land Office attracts some funding from:
 - Fees for service
 - Camp revenue
 - Low impact sustainable tourism, such as recreational fishing, Aboriginal cultural awareness, bird watching
 - Research teams from national and international bodies and universities
 - Selling carbon credits from fire abatement
 - Philanthropy
 - Non-governmental organisations (as above)
- o There has also been some discussion around culling wild boar and selling meat commercially (although resistance in community as is staple in local diets and hunting is popular recreational activity)
- o The Indigenous Management Agreement (IMA) for the Errk Oygangand National Park:
 - The IMA provides for the delegation of a wide range of park service responsibilities, which KALNRM has been progressively undertaking under contract as part of its overall work program
 - This arrangement has allowed for the provision of funding for the employment of one traditional owner ranger, as well as the provision of operational equipment, including a vehicle
- o AIATSIS’ research into weeds management has also highlighted opportunities for collaborations between native title holders and surrounding land holders such as pastoralists for weeds eradication through appropriate fire burning and water management. However these practices are often undocumented or unrecognised as they are performed by native title holders as a part of their traditional land management. Although there are examples provided below of how traditional practices have been aligned with government programs.

2. In response to questions from Ms Hall (p. 4) you undertook to provide examples of innovative programs

During evidence I identified that the national Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF) has funded research on Indigenous communities' engagement in climate change adaptation. Projects under the Indigenous communities stream of the NCCARF program can be found at: <http://www.nccarf.edu.au/research/thematic/648>.

In particular, I drew the committee's attention to the Yorta Yorta cultural mapping project in partnerships with Monash University: *'Indigenous voices in climate change adaptation: Addressing the challenges of diverse knowledge systems in the Barmah-Millewa'*. This project is designed to assist the Yorta Yorta people of the Barmah-Millewa floodplain to adapt to the challenges of climate change by drawing on traditional knowledge known only to them. A unique database will be used to combine traditional knowledge with more conventional forms of information (climate, vegetation etc) to improve the way natural resources are managed. Trained volunteers from the local community will accompany elders to local places of cultural significance in the Barmah-Millewa National Forest and record knowledge associated with these places with voice recordings, photography and GPS. The data will be entered into a custom designed GIS database which will securely protect the indigenous knowledge while combining it with scientific data to produce products such as interactive 3D visualisation. These products will help Indigenous people, managers and policymakers to make better management decisions utilising the best of Indigenous and conventional knowledge.

I also highlighted a case study from one of our research colleagues at University of Melbourne. As part of this project, Sonia Leonard has been working with the Ngurrara people on a Climate change monitoring and evaluation project. Sonia provided the following summary of some innovative outcomes from the project:

'The impacts of climate change on desert ecosystems in Northwestern Australia are poorly understood. Indigenous communities have long observed and recorded the phenology of these systems through traditional knowledge systems. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) paradigms have high levels of complexity that help explain the changing relationships between cycles of inter-annual weather patterns, water availability and the subsequent response of flora and fauna in the landscape. TEK used by Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) and ranger programs can identify bio-temporal indicators and cultural keystone species that provide a basis for developing detailed phenological monitoring and evaluation programs. Ngurrara people of the Great Sandy Desert have initiated a research program that uses Indigenous seasonal calendars to develop methodologies that allow the application of TEK in contemporary conservation management as well as informing climate change adaption plans at both macro and micro scales.

'The Ngurrara seasonal calendar is being developed in partnership with the Warlu Jilajaa Jimu Indigenous Protected Area and the Ngurrara ranger program from the northern Great Sandy Desert region of the North western Australia. A seasonal calendar database provides a mechanism to capture and store TEK to describe the interactions between changing weather patterns and flora and fauna behavior within Ngurrara's 75,000km² native title estate. The database design provides an organized structure for the quantification of TEK to inform conservation activities by rangers and IPA managers. The database is enabling traditional owners to identify cultural keystone species and bi-temporal indicators of change to significant cultural sites of high biodiversity. This in turn allows rangers to evaluate both

positive and negative feedbacks within the environment to design targeted action based work plans that respond to ecosystem needs for better conservation outcomes.

'The project combines western science with TEK through the installation of a remote research station on Lake Pirnirni near Kulku community approximately 300km east of Fitzroy Crossing. The weather station and water monitoring equipment is operated by the Ngurrara Working on Country ranger program in conjunction with the Warlu Jillija Jumu IPA. Indigenous rangers are starting to document responses of bio-temporal indicators and how historically Ngurrara people adapted to these changes. TEK derived from the Ngurrara seasonal calendar has been used to tailor itracker sequences for the Ngurrara rangers. These sequences are displayed in language and documents TEK of seasonal cycles and socio-ecological systems. This information is uploaded into the database and cross referenced with data collected from the Ngurrara research station. Results are compared and used to not only validate TEK but also record impacts of climate change and landuse practices. The results of this project will be important in identifying culturally appropriate land management strategies in response to climate change.'

3. In response to a question from Mr Zappia (p. 6) you undertook to provide examples of Indigenous communities that may be managing their land better than other communities

In response to this question I indicated that I do not think I could make such a distinction, as many Indigenous communities take advantage of the opportunities available and do their best with the available resources and capacities. However, there are many communities that provide useful examples of how engagement in land management can be maximised, including through comprehensive agreements and settlements with the State. Some useful examples, not already highlighted, and worth further consideration by the committee include:

- **Gunditj Mirring RNTBC:** The Gunditjmara people have a strong history of utilising available programs to maximise their involvement in managing their own land, though land rights legislation, native title settlement, joint management agreement, IPAs, Indigenous Land Corporation, National heritage trust, among other initiatives. The Gunditjmara are also keen to develop partnerships with government researchers and industry. Major partnerships identified on their website include:
 - Lake Condah Sustainable Development Project
 - Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation
 - Budj Bim Rangers and Land Management Program
 - Indigenous Protected Areas Management
 - Budj Bim Tours
 - Budj Bim Council for the co-operative management of Mt Eccles National Park
 - Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape
 - Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Partnership Project with the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority & PDF Brochure
 - Holding Knowledge Research Project with Monash University
 - NMNM Southwest Planning with Parks Victoria
 - Victorian Traditional Owners Land Justice Group
 - Glenelg Shire Council – Indigenous Agreement
 - Moyne Shire Council 's Statement of Commitment to the local Indigenous Communities

- **Jabalbina Yalanji** Aboriginal Corporation (RNTBC) for the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people's native title determination is also the Aboriginal Land Trust with responsibility for the administration and management of Aboriginal Freehold Land that is granted to Eastern Kuku Yalanji people by the Queensland Government. From their website, Jabalbina note that:
'The greater part of the Eastern Kuku Yalanji Native Title determination is National Park within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and Jabalbina is negotiating Activity guidelines with the Queensland government on how Eastern Kuku Yalanji people can exercise their Native Title rights in the Parks. Similar activity agreements and land use and business development guidelines are also being negotiated for Aboriginal Freehold Land. A significant part of this estate is also being transferred as Nature Refuge under the Queensland Nature Conservation Act (1992). The challenge facing Jabalbina at present is to work through 15 Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUA) that cover all of the interests that State and local government, and business enterprises have within the Native Title determination area so that Eastern Kuku Yalanji people can enjoy their Native Title rights and obtain livelihoods from them and plan for the well-being of their families in the future.'
- The **Nyamba Buru Yawuru** (RNTBC) for the Yawuru people, whose agreement with the State government concerns the recognition of native title (and extinguishment in some areas) in around Broome. The set of agreements supporting the native title determination includes agreement that a Conservation Estate will be established. The Agreement stipulates that Marine Park areas, Townsite areas and Out of Town areas will be incorporated into the Conservation Estate. There is an Assistance Agreement and a Joint Management agreement in place which outline the responsibilities for the care, management and control of the above areas. The Yawuru Rangers are responsible for management of the lands on behalf of the native title holders and do so in partnership with State and Commonwealth agencies and the Shire of Broome.

There are many more examples around the country. Often the differences between Indigenous communities is the opportunities that are available to engage effectively in land management activities as opposed whether or not communities are managing their land better than others. Opportunities to meet and learn from best practice are also rare.

4. After the hearing you also undertook to respond to a query of Dr Washer's (unfortunately I do not have a note of this query).

Dr Washer requested information on how ranger programs may be better funded to carryout climate change and biodiversity monitoring work.

As noted in my evidence, in the absence of funding programs for RNTBCs to undertake management of native tile lands, the Working on Country programs have provided an important source of funds for activities that are closely aligned to the aspirations of native tile holders.

While the Nyamba Buru Yawuru have the capacity to manage their own ranger program, other RNTBCs are still building toward a functioning independent entity that could administer such a program. Others may always need to rely on support from a regional organisation such as a land council. For example, the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) facilitates ten full-time ranger groups through the Working On Country program as well as four emerging rangers groups from across the Kimberley region. The program employs more

than 60 permanent, and up to 150 part time, rangers currently and includes partnerships with TAFE and Kimberley Group Training to facilitate the important training elements of the program. Ranger groups now exist for Bardi Jawi, Wunggurr, Unguu, Paruku, Nyikina Mangala, Karajarri, Ngurrara, Balangarra, Gooniyandi and Nyul Nyul. Emerging groups include the Kija, and Jilajin and a number of women's ranger teams.

There will also, always be benefits in regional coordination of information, particularly in managing climate change and biodiversity through such organisations as the KLC and other land councils and North Australia Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA). Programs that support the divestment of these programs to RNTBCs where possible, while facilitating regional networks and coordination of activities (including business support) would add a missing element to the effectiveness of this program. Investment into regionally appropriate social and environmental monitoring and evaluation systems would enable groups to identify how effective their activities are in delivering biodiversity outcomes and monitoring climate changes. As a result, development of climate change adaptation strategies based on aggregated monitoring and evaluation information.

The current emphasis of working on country programs toward the traditional weeds, ferals and fire management is moving toward a more whole of country whole of ecosystem approach to priority setting. This could allow a stronger focus on climate change and/or biodiversity management and adaptation where appropriate. Integration with Indigenous Protected Areas program (IPA) is important in this regard to facilitate the delivery of strategic outcomes identified by Traditional Owner groups as priority management targets.

Additional benefits, both socially and scientifically would result from involvement of cultural leaders and elders to ensure intergenerational transfer of traditional ecological knowledge which underpins whole of ecosystem approach to management of country.

There is also significant potential for ranger groups to diversify their funding base through contracts on a fee for service basis with State and Commonwealth agencies to provide a range of environmental services. However, the provision of more consistent long-term funding with appropriate administrative, community engagement and management support is required to ensure delivery of high quality outcomes.

Funding for equipment and training in environmental monitoring, supported by strong Information management frameworks is also an ongoing necessity. Ensuring ranger programs have the capacity and to engage with the research and innovation sector is also important to ongoing improvement in practice and knowledge transfer. This requires strong research agreements based on ethical research practices and benefit sharing that build the capacity of and transfer knowledge to ranger groups to ensure best practise management of country.

I hope this information is of assistance to the Committee

Yours sincerely

Dr Lisa Strelein