



WET TROPICS MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

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The Secretary of the Committee
The Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
PO Box 6021
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Secretary

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO DEVELOPING INDIGENOUS ENTERPRISES

Please find attached a submission from the Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) to the Inquiry into Developing Indigenous Enterprises.

WTMA has 20 years experience working with Indigenous people on land and cultural heritage management issues and feel this enquiry has the potential to provide substantial benefits towards *Closing the Gap* for Indigenous people. I am happy to provide further comment should the committee felt it is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Maclean
Executive Director

Wet Tropics Management Authority's Submission to the Inquiry into developing Indigenous enterprises

The Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) recognises and supports the important role Indigenous people, particularly Rainforest Aboriginal people have in maintaining the values of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area (WTWHA). Whether this contribution is made in a voluntary or paid capacity, the authority has benefited greatly from the unique contribution Indigenous people make to the conservation of our natural and cultural heritage.

Rainforest Aboriginal people's area of expertise

Indigenous people continue to demonstrate great appreciation and care in a variety of areas they are engaged within the natural and cultural resource management sector. This success is based in the strong cultural ties between people and country, and an ongoing requirement to protect the country under traditional lore. These fundamental principles guarantee a quality of engagement that can not be assured in other cultures.

To formalise the unique role Indigenous people play in natural and cultural resource management WTMA, the Australian Government and the Queensland Government signed a Regional Agreement¹ with the 18 Traditional Owner groups of area for their appropriate involvement in the areas management. Key outcomes of this Regional Agreement include:

- Structural arrangements that strengthen involvement in policy, planning and decision making through joined-up engagement; and
- A series of specific engagement protocols to ensure that Indigenous people have effective and meaningful involvement in the hands-on management of the WTWHA.

WTMA has developed strong partnerships with key Indigenous entities including:

- ◆ Giringun Aboriginal Cooperation (sub-regional entity representing 9 Tribal Groups);
- ◆ Aboriginal Rainforest Council (the regional representative entity currently under review);
- ◆ Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) including:
 - Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation;
 - Mandingalbay Yindinji Aboriginal Corporation;
 - Ngadjo-Jii Aboriginal Corporation; and
 - Djabaguy Tribal Aboriginal Corporation.
- ◆ Aboriginal Corporations including:
 - Bama Ngappi-Ngappi Aboriginal Corporation;
 - Jirrbal Aboriginal Corporation; and
 - MaMu Cultural Heritage Office.

It should be noted that although these entities are community organisations that may not originally have been formed to undertake commercial style activities, they have develop into such or have aspirations to do so.

¹ http://www.wetropics.gov.au/rah/rah_pdf/regional_agreement.pdf

Fee-for-Service Initiatives

Government and private industry are often required by legislation to consult with Indigenous people as Traditional Owners on a range of issues to ascertain the traditional knowledge and to manage Indigenous cultural heritage appropriately. Governments have acknowledged and recognised this unique and oldest living culture in the world needs to be preserved, both through legislation and funding support. It is natural that the people with the best ability for its protection would be the people who own the heritage. A unique commercial advantage for Indigenous people lies in providing consultancies. Cultural heritage management contracting could incorporate undertaking the consultations themselves as well as contributing their knowledge, skills and experiences for the appropriate management of their heritage.

Commercial style activities can result from fee-for-service initiatives or project contracts and tenders. For example, WTMA issues permits to regulate certain activities within the WTWHA. This permitting process requires Traditional Owners to be informed regarding the activity to be undertaken and the parties to properly consider any input or involvement of Indigenous people.

The opportunity exists to contract out this collaborative consultation process to community organisations to undertake on behalf of WTMA. The Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Natural Resources and Water and Local Governments are key on-ground land managers within the WTWHA.

The *United States minority business/development council model* has the potential to formalise the approaches the State already adopts in supporting and strengthening Indigenous businesses in land management roles. Consequently, supported Indigenous enterprises in land and sea management for conservation purposes have the potential to contribute substantially to economic development for Indigenous communities as well as individuals through commercially successful business arrangements.

Contracting Indigenous run businesses for on-ground management of protected area estates such as national parks, and conservation on Indigenous owned lands provide excellent opportunities for improving socio-economic well being whilst also improving the conservation of Australia's unique bio-cultural assets. In turn these improvements value add to the broader community through healthy ecosystem services and reducing government expenditure in social dysfunction programs.

Support can be provided in the area of business management to ensure service delivery meets the corporate expectations of clients such as the government land management agencies. This is becoming more recognised as a key area for success as new PBCs receive start-up support through Native Title Representative Bodies, to establish themselves in their role as land managers equipped with fee-for-service arrangements.

Alignment of Government Policies

Current and future government policies can be doing more to support opportunities for Indigenous enterprises, as unfortunately in some situations, they have inadvertently developed barriers or inequitable criteria. The current *Wild Rivers Program* allows for Traditional Owners to be employed to manage their traditional country, but only if they own the land. If the land is managed by the State, Traditional Owners are excluded from accessing this program (this is similar to the Federal Government's criteria for its Working on Country

Program). Given the government is funding both processes, mainstreaming the criteria to be more inclusive would expand the opportunities for success in this program to other areas, including the Traditional Owners of the WTWHA, where over 80% of the land is State managed.

Commercial Uses of Traditional Knowledge

Indigenous people demonstrate a key advantage of working within the WTWHA in providing advice to others (academics, land managers etc) on Indigenous traditional knowledge. It is becoming increasingly recognised that the traditional knowledge of Indigenous Australians contain a magnitude of undiscovered medicinal possibilities derived from thousands of years experience in managing the land.

The current scientific and academic debate around fire management demonstrates that western sciences can learn much from the successful fire regime that was being implemented pre-settlement. The intellectual property of Indigenous people, as well as containing important knowledge, could be a huge commercial asset that is not available to others.

Competitive Advantages in the Tourism Sector

A large proportion of the visitors to Australia want to experience Indigenous cultures. Previously, tourism operations have been hesitant to rely on Indigenous people to provide these experiences as the consistency of these services has been questionable. Indigenous driven business from a culturally appropriate position would have a competitive advantage providing a genuine product that mainstream operations cannot.

Successful opportunities will also be those that are based in continuing cultural practices, allowing people the opportunity to merge the two worlds of traditional activities with modern profitable activities and not make a choice between one and the other.

Most business opportunities are not found by looking at the existing products and services but by looking for the niches that do not yet exist or are just emerging. The healing tourism initiative, Dilthan Yolngunha: respite and healing, Yolngu way², is a key example of this. Health retreats have been a lucrative business for centuries. By merging this concept with traditional knowledge, a new market has emerged that has the potential to be a unique commercial advantage. Appropriate support in elements of business development, for example marketing would ensure this advantage is capitalised upon.

Location

Finally, these are products or services that do not need to be based within an urban environment and more often than not, require a rural or remote environment to undertake. Indigenous people are often the majority of the populations already located in these places and the existing opportunities in traditional western forms of employment are limited or do not exist. Opportunities that can be developed outside existing employment arrangements should be investigated and supported to provide more opportunities in environments that currently lack mainstream employment or that are culturally inappropriate.

² <http://www.healingplace.com.au/healingtourism.html>

Incentive Programs

Incentives should be provided to encourage successful businesses to sub-contract, do business with or mentor new Indigenous enterprises, but being cautious to ensure the approaches taken by participants are culturally appropriate. There have been cases where mentors have been dominating and patronising, and unfortunately brought about the downfall of Indigenous businesses and the opportunities. Any initiatives developed will need to ensure businesses supporting the Indigenous enterprises are given appropriate support and training to develop the capacity of Indigenous businesses rather than assuming a person with a successful commercial enterprise would have the ability to work and train cross-culturally.

WTMA fully acknowledges the importance of mentoring Indigenous entities and has, and will continue to do so on a regular basis.

Summary

WTMA's experience working with Rainforest Aboriginal people has demonstrated unique and tangible advantages for establishing successful Indigenous enterprises. To date the most successful competitive advantage has been demonstrated in the area of caring for country activities and capitalising on traditional knowledge. Key areas that would be beneficial to focus support on to ensure the development of Indigenous enterprises are:

- Training in business skills particularly around corporate governance and accountability, and providing a quality of the services or products during implementation;
- Culturally appropriate mentoring including establishing realistic business expectations and personal confidences; and
- Developing insensitive to encourage greater participation in the sector from government agencies and non-government organisations to private industry.