

Giving Green Briefing Note – Indigenous land and sea management

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Giving Green

Giving Green has been written for different people involved in the craft of giving and wealth management. Whether you are an individual just starting out on your journey in philanthropy, a staff member of a philanthropic trust or community foundation, a wealth manager working for a bank, an estate planner or manager in a trustee company, the AEGN's *Giving Green* can help you.

It is made up of four different resources which can be found on AEGN's website:

- *Giving Green: An Introduction for Grantmakers*, which gives you the importance and value of environmental funding and an overview of the environmental themes and issues we face in Australia.
- *Giving Green: A Guide to Environmental Grantmaking* which is a step-by-step guide that takes you through a comprehensive process of decision-making for environmental grantmaking.
- Briefing notes like this one on nine environmental themes:
 - the land and its biodiversity
 - inland waters: rivers, estuaries and wetlands
 - the marine environment and its biodiversity
 - Indigenous land and sea management
 - sustainable agriculture and food systems
 - sustainable cities and communities
 - climate change and energy
 - sustainable economy
 - toxics.

Except for Indigenous land and sea management, sustainable economy and toxics, these papers have been largely based on the Federal Government's *State of the Environment Report 2011* (SOE). Each paper outlines the theme, the issues it faces and the overarching solutions that experts have proposed. Each paper is accompanied by a funding table that gives ideas on what could be funded within the theme.

- Case studies that illustrate the successful funding of environmental issues.

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Introduction

The Indigenous estate, held under a variety of land rights and native title regimes, covers an estimated 1.7 million square kilometres or 23% of Australia. It contains priority conservation areas. Any attempt to address the multiple environmental threats and challenges facing Australia is doomed unless it can adequately and appropriately engage with the needs and aspirations of Indigenous people.

There are more than 1,000 communities on Indigenous lands with a population of about 120,000 people, or 20% of Australia's Indigenous population. Indigenous Australians living in these remote and very remote areas often experience extreme poverty.

Settlement and development have been constrained by climate, soil quality, topography and water availability. Indeed, most Indigenous lands are in areas that historically have had low commercial value and therefore have not felt the same development pressure as elsewhere in Australia.

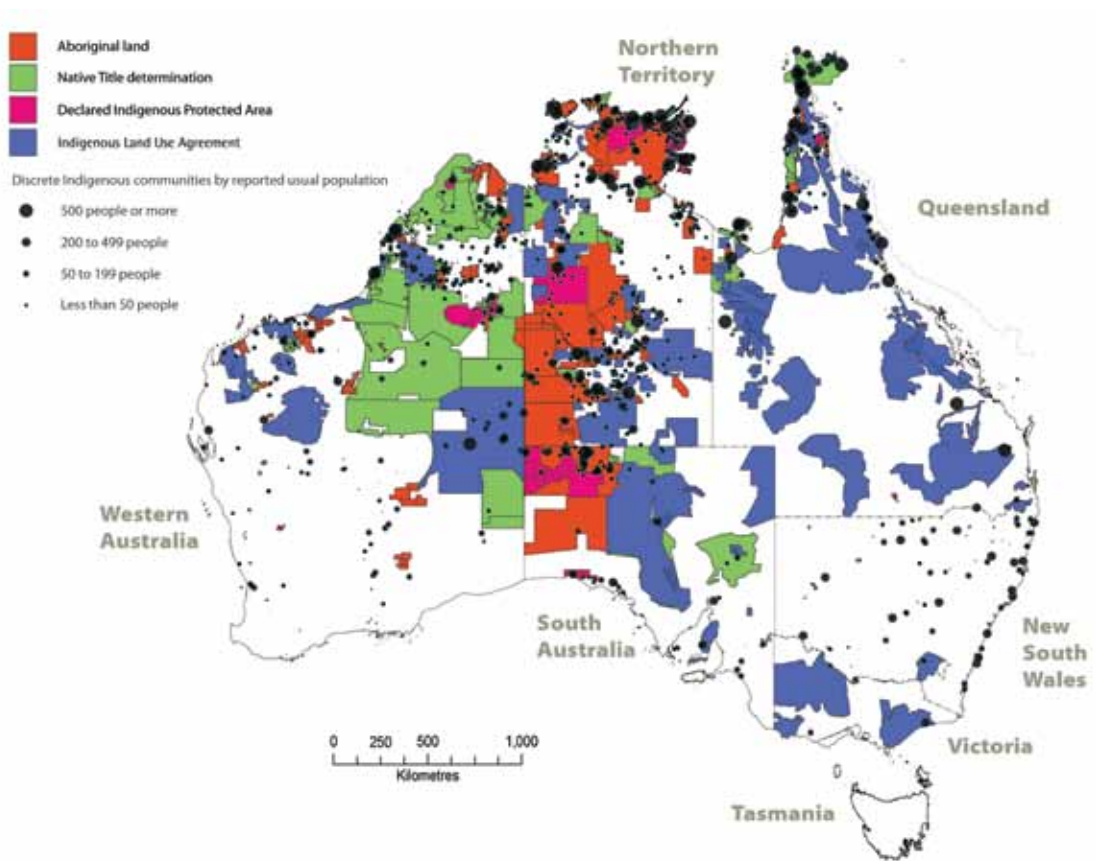


Figure 1 Indigenous land and communities in Australia, 2012

The environmental value of the Indigenous estate

The Indigenous estate has very high environmental and cultural heritage values. They include an enormously rich diversity of ecosystems – from some of the wettest areas in the northern tropics to some of the driest areas of the desert centre. Large parts of Indigenous lands remain relatively intact ecologically, with vast tracts of undisturbed, connected and healthy environments. They include wetlands, riparian zones, forests, reefs, rivers and waterways which have been identified as nationally important.¹

The Indigenous estate is important to Australia's National Reserve System (NRS) which protects areas of high environmental value. Fifty Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) make up almost a quarter of the NRS.

Despite remaining relatively intact, the Indigenous estate lands are threatened by feral animals and invasive weeds, land clearing, changed climatic and fire regimes, overgrazing and the pollution of waterways and marine environments.

In areas that have formerly been used for cattle grazing, degraded land has been returned to Indigenous people. The environmental significance of the Indigenous estate is likely to increase in future as a result of continuing development pressure across Australia, water scarcity and the impacts of climate change.

Principles to consider when supporting work in this area

Social justice needs to apply when it comes to Indigenous people and resource management. Ownership of land should benefit Indigenous people and aspirations can be diverse: not all Indigenous people want to be land managers and not all want to work in mines or tourism, or move to mainstream employment. The needs and desires of Indigenous landowners should be clearly established, heard and respected.

Indigenous people do not generally separate natural resource management from cultural heritage protection. They talk about 'looking after country', where country has a holistic meaning encompassing land, resources, plants, animals and cultural heritage sites.² When Indigenous people talk about looking after country they expect that country will, in turn, look after them.³ This reciprocal relationship is a vastly different way of thinking about the environment to the Western management paradigm.

Indigenous ways of interacting with the environment and responding to threats and challenges are shaped by systems of knowledge, historical association, practical experience and social institutions. Indigenous knowledge must be recognised for its unique potential to improve understanding of critical ecological processes and to offer insights into an alternative, sustainable future.

Indigenous people must be paid fairly for land and resource management work. There is growing evidence of an unacceptable public funding deficit on Indigenous lands.⁴ For example in the Northern Territory, other NRS properties receive three times as much per square kilometre as IPAs.⁵

The Australian Government's Working on Country program supports over 80 ranger groups employing more than 600 rangers. There is great potential for many more Indigenous Australians to be employed in natural resource management. Expansion of environmental work would provide much-needed opportunities to address Indigenous disadvantage.

Where ancestral land has been returned in a degraded or damaged state, compensation is justified, along with greater resources to allow Indigenous owners to look after degraded land and increase its biodiversity.

Indigenous communities are, through sea claims and the work of Indigenous agencies, seeking a primary role in the use and management of marine and coastal environments. Australian waters and coast should be co-managed and resources urgently directed to Indigenous environmental protection including threatened species management, marine debris clean-ups and coastal surveillance.

Caring for the unique environment of Indigenous lands is in the national interest and benefits all Australians. For instance, many of Australia's pristine rivers are on Indigenous lands; they need to be protected from threats including weeds, wildfire and feral animals.

The way that Indigenous property rights have been structured makes it difficult for Indigenous people to participate in emerging natural resource markets.

Examples of current programs and initiatives

Indigenous people, independently and in cooperation with government and the private sector, have developed a number of responses to environmental threats. Key among these is the Indigenous Protected Areas program, Indigenous community-based ranger groups and carbon abatement schemes. The IPA program was started in 1997 and has allowed Indigenous landholders to voluntarily incorporate areas of high biodiversity into the NRS. As well as helping the environment, IPAs have brought social, economic and educational benefits.⁶

Indigenous community ranger groups are involved in many activities including control of feral animals and invasive weeds, fire management, marine debris clean-up and water quality monitoring. Some of these groups have developed into organisations with expertise in environmental management and formed partnerships with research bodies, government and non-government agencies, the private sector and philanthropic organisations.

The West Arnhem Land Fire Abatement (WALFA) project is an example of how private investment is generating jobs for Indigenous people and helping the environment. WALFA is based on payment for environmental service, with 30 Indigenous people paid for fire management in a remote area of the Arnhem Plateau. This, in turn, acts to partially offset greenhouse gas emissions for Darwin Liquefied Natural Gas. WALFA has a target of 100,000 tonnes of abatement each year. The target has been well exceeded in recent years, showing the project to be a successful carbon abatement scheme that also creates jobs.

Importantly, increased Indigenous involvement in natural resource management reduces social inequality. Studies show a connection between employment in the field and improved Indigenous health and wellbeing.⁷



Environmental, social and economic priorities

A broad range of responses to the complex environmental threats facing Australia is needed. Conservation efforts must draw on both Western and Indigenous knowledge and techniques. Indigenous people, given the environmental importance of their substantial landholdings, traditions of sustainable management and experience in bridging Western and customary knowledge, will play a crucial role in the challenges of ecological sustainability. With fair and appropriate funding, Indigenous people can make an enormous contribution to Australia's conservation future.

Recommendations

- Recognise the extraordinary environmental significance of Indigenous lands and support the development of appropriate responses to the threats they face.
- Recognise and support Indigenous customary marine tenure and aspirations to manage sea country.
- Appreciate that Indigenous customary land management, in combination with Western science, is a sound and legitimate basis for joint care of protected areas.
- Recognise that economic disadvantage means many Indigenous land owners need help to look after their lands.
- Acknowledge and respect the substantial contribution that Indigenous knowledge is making in tackling Australia's environmental problems.
- Support Indigenous knowledge to ensure the strengthening of blended customary and Western environmental management.
- Make sure funding for work on Indigenous lands is fair.
- Advocate for clear policies on property rights and allow Indigenous people control over their lands.
- Support Indigenous aspirations to live on country as an effective way of looking after the environment.
- Fund further research on Indigenous environmental care from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives.

Key principles for grantmakers engaging with Indigenous communities

The following points are taken from *A Worthwhile Exchange: A guide to Indigenous philanthropy*⁸

To successfully engage with Indigenous communities, grantmakers need to be aware of the following key principles:

- Take the opportunity to fund innovation, recognising that most traditional funding sources work to low-risk margins.
- Listen to what the community identifies as the point of impact. Communities and grant seekers are a great source of expertise on what is needed to create positive change.
- Recognise that funding is only part of the exchange; there is also non-financial support through relationships and access to people as well as the mutual transfer of knowledge.
- Be open to long-term investments. Larger, longer-term grants have led to breakthroughs in key areas.
- Take responsibility for your own cultural learning.
- Be alert to the diversity of the Indigenous community (remote, rural, regional, urban, different levels of education and employment experience, different aspirations etc).
- Look for long-term results and measure beyond the life of the funding agreement.
- Celebrate the success of funded activities.
- Listen, listen and listen!

The following practical steps are drawn from the recommendations made by grantseekers and grantmakers who took part in the research for *A Worthwhile Exchange: A guide to Indigenous philanthropy* and are a roadmap for getting started in Indigenous grantmaking.

1. Communicate widely about what grantmaking is, what your organisational values are, what you are trying to achieve and how you think you will achieve it in simple, direct English and in Indigenous languages where appropriate.
2. Make funding processes more accessible by being flexible about when grantseekers can apply and how they can apply – consider verbal or videoed applications.
3. Provide easy and timely access to a ‘real’ person to help potential applicants decide if their project fits your guidelines. For example, you could provide a service – online or by telephone – where people could outline their proposed project and get an immediate and straightforward answer.
4. Consider being involved with auspicing arrangements or having a special pool for non-deductible gift recipient projects. Many worthy organisations do not have deductible gift recipient status, which stops them being funded.
5. Take a ‘big picture’ view, understand the system as a whole, see where you fit and work towards co-funding, partnering and collaboration. For instance, consider common reporting in a collaborative model that would apply across a number of funders, possibly including government.
6. Nurture supportive and long-term relationships with grantseekers.
7. Identify and work towards cultural competency.

How to approach working with Indigenous organisations: Recommendations from funders at the AEGN 2011 Conference

Small groups at the AEGN's 2011 conference on Indigenous and environmental philanthropy came up with some guiding principles for successful philanthropy to support Indigenous land and sea management.

- strong relationships are critical
- support individuals – leaders, visionaries and their institutions
- fund people and capacity building (including local groups)
- build governance structures and vision in early stages
- build strong accountability in institutions and people
- consider long-term commitment and funding
- work in a collaborative / co-investment style
- consider how to build scale and impact
- remember to be flexible and entrepreneurial
- invite Indigenous input in decision making, particularly in the early phases
- united funds –philanthropic and government– are important
- asking each community what works best for them is important
- don't wait for applications – be proactive.

Endnotes

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