

# Building better Indigenous Participation

New ways of involving indigenous people in planning for our water and land resources

## Putting all views on the table

Across northern Australia Indigenous people have strong ties to river and water resources – socially, culturally and economically. Using traditional knowledge, indigenous rangers and other groups actively manage large tracts of land containing some of the most ecologically intact river systems in Australia.

The way we currently plan and decide how to use our natural resources, are almost exclusively made under laws and processes that are unfamiliar to most indigenous people. Indigenous people can feel shut out and have requested activities and tools that will give them the insight and skills to participate more effectively in these decisions and in ways that enable their perspectives and knowledge to be heard.

Policy and decision making should include not exclude valuable perspectives – otherwise we will not get the best possible results for our valuable water and land resources.

## Learning by Doing

Through targeted training (learning by doing), this research aims to give local indigenous communities the skills required to:

- effectively participate and be heard in the mainstream water and land planning processes that are gearing up across northern Australia; and
- explore alternative ways and arrangements (scenarios) for developing water resources.

Researchers will be using a variety of methods such as maps and other media to explore indigenous people's changing perceptions of landscapes and their aspirations for the future. Most of this work will be undertaken in the language of choice by the community.

In each catchment the research will begin with a workshop where possible future scenarios will be discussed and documented. Further workshops with indigenous participants will develop a working model to enable assumptions to be tested and “what if” questions to be posed so that the different impacts of scenarios can be explored.



Photo: Ian Dixon

**TRaCK – Research to support river and estuary management in northern Australia**

TRaCK brings together leading tropical river researchers and managers from Charles Darwin University, Griffith University, University of Western Australia, CSIRO, James Cook University, Australian National University, Geoscience Australia, Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist, Australian Institute of Marine Science, North Australia Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance, and the Governments of Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia.

Scenario  
Evaluation



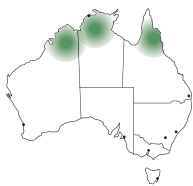
## More confidence – greater involvement

It is hoped that indigenous participants will build skills and confidence to the point where they will be able to discuss and negotiate about water issues in wider forums, often dominated by non-indigenous stakeholders.

The project builds on a body of research conducted in other parts of Australia and overseas that have opened up opportunities for local communities to use tools that were previously thought to be out of reach. The methodologies developed through this research will enable these approaches to be applied across many catchments in northern Australia.

## Who is on the team?

This project is conducted by a team of scientists from Charles Darwin University specialising in ecology, policy and economic development. Researchers will work directly with indigenous people in each catchment (for example the Aboriginal Reference Group in the Daly) who will be part of the research effort.



## Where is the research happening?

The research will initially be piloted in the Daly River catchment (NT) and then expanded into the Mitchell (Qld) and Fitzroy (WA) catchments. Work in the Daly catchment started in October 2007. The project finishes in 2010.

## How will this research help?

This research will enable governments to more clearly hear and understand indigenous aspirations within mainstream water planning processes, leading to more inclusive policy making and better decisions.

Indigenous landholders, ranger groups and organisations will build skills, capacity and confidence that they can actively shape decisions that affect the river values that are important to them. Through this research, indigenous landholders will be better positioned to understand and say what's important to them and how they want the future to unfold.



Photo: Michael Douglas

For catchment authorities, NRM boards and landcare groups, this research will mean that their work in identifying priority land management tasks is done with a more active and useful contribution from indigenous partners.

## Team Contacts

Further information on this project can be obtained from:

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## How can you get involved?

Participation is central to this project – TRaCK researchers will be involving indigenous people through a number of catchment based groups such as the Aboriginal Reference Group which advises the Daly River Management Advisory Committee (NT).



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**Australian Government Water Fund**  
Raising National Water Standards

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