

# OUR KNOWLEDGE OUR WAY in caring for Country

## Indigenous-led approaches to strengthening and sharing our knowledge for land and sea management

Best Practice Guidelines from Australian experiences



### OUR VISION AND PURPOSE FOR OUR KNOWLEDGE OUR WAY

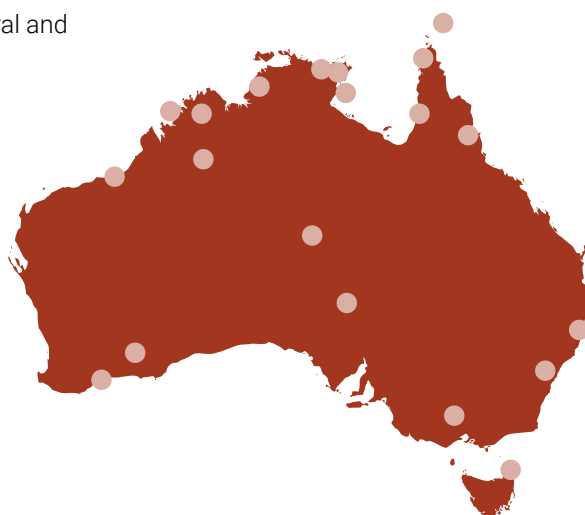
Our **purpose** in producing these Best Practice Guidelines from Australian experiences is to **support learning, by both ourselves and our partners, about good ways of using our Indigenous knowledge to look after our land and sea Country.**

Our Indigenous knowledge connects us to our Country and our cultures. Our knowledge is owned by us as Traditional Owners and is diverse across Australia. The vision for *Our Knowledge Our Way* in caring for Country, established by the Indigenous-majority Project Steering Group, is:

- Indigenous people are empowered to look after Country *our way*
- Improved environmental conditions and multiple social, cultural and economic benefits come from effective Indigenous adaptive management of Country.

The Guidelines are based on 23 Australian case studies that show that *Our Knowledge Our Way* in caring for Country can be supported through:

- Strengthening Indigenous knowledge
- Strong partnerships
- Sharing and weaving knowledge
- Indigenous networks.



## STRENGTHENING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Holding and strengthening Indigenous knowledge for Country involves having the rights to access Country, listening to Country, interpreting that knowledge, and communicating it to others.

Indigenous knowledge is different between groups. It comes from Country, from our ancestors and ancestral beings present in Country today. Our kinship relationships connect us as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples within a network of other people, plants, animals and features in the landscape. Connection is maintained through our knowledge and through our actions to care for our Country. Culture and Country are spoken about together.

*When I talk about culture, I talk about the Country. The Country is alive. The river, the land they're all an energy system... It's also a healing mechanism – this relationship between land and people – we need to have this connectivity to Country.*

Anne Poelina

Keeping our Indigenous knowledge strong and vibrant requires:

- Access to our Country
- Strong cultural governance of our knowledge.

### Keeping knowledge strong through access to Country

Access to our land and sea Country is the foundation of keeping our Indigenous knowledge strong. We need to be on our Country to sing, dance, tell stories, collect bush tucker, practise art, and to speak our language to the plants, animals and ancestral beings in our landscapes and seascapes. While colonisation has severely impacted our access to Country, we use different legal and agreement-making approaches to keep our connections as much as possible.

### Important ways we are able to access Country

- Aboriginal Land Rights legislation in some states and territories
- Recognition of Native Title
- Purchasing of land
- Agreements to establish Indigenous Protected Areas
- Co-management of parks and protected areas
- Indigenous Land Use Agreements
- Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements
- Partnerships with local governments and natural resource management agencies
- Partnerships with state and territory natural resource agencies
- Partnerships with private sector and philanthropic organisations

### Strong cultural governance of our knowledge

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and other international laws and policies, recognise our rights to self-governance and autonomy. This means:

- Decision-making about knowledge needs to respect and follow each group's customary governance, and cultural protocols. This usually requires collective decision-making by key people, including Elders
- New organisations resulting from government policies need to be resourced and supported to strengthen, not weaken, cultural norms of knowledge governance
- New laws are needed to provide protection for Indigenous cultural and intellectual property (ICIP)
- Agreements can provide for both customary law and Australian nation-state legal protection when sharing knowledge.



## Keep and revitalise knowledge, language and culture

Our knowledge is kept alive and is passed on through language, song, dance, art, story, through being on Country, hunting and harvesting and through many other cultural practices.

Opportunities to continue these practices are essential to the survival of our culture.

We are educating our youth through Indigenous-led bi-lingual education, learning on Country and two-way science programs. New and emerging digital technologies can engage youth and record and revitalise knowledge, provided knowledge protocols are followed.

Together, Indigenous people and partners can:

Promote new laws, agreements and treaties to give us greater access to our Country to keep our knowledge strong

Promote a new story of environmental management and enterprise development that recognises our caring for our Country over millenia

Support and promote strong cultural governance, to strengthen *Our Knowledge Our Way*.

## Case studies in strengthening Indigenous knowledge

**Language and land: Arabana on-Country language camps (SA)** highlights the Mobile Language Team, which has supported 20+ Aboriginal language groups through activities such as on-Country language camps, co-curricular language programs, videography and training for medical students.

**Wirlomin Noongar language and stories (WA)** showcases how digital solutions and face to face gathering has contributed to re-embedding language, story and song in the landscape, and revitalising language and culture.

**Torres Strait traditional ecological knowledge project** involved the development of a secure database for communities to record, store, protect and, where applicable, share traditional knowledge within their own community whilst adhering to their respective community's cultural protocols.



*Top: Arabana camp leader showing young Arabana boy how to decorate clapsticks. Photo: Mobile Language Team.*

*Middle: Clint Bracknell, Roma Winmar and Iris Woods recording a Noongar story at Point Ann, WA. Photo: Amy Budrikis, Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories.*

*Bottom: Masigalgal Elder Mr Moses Mene informs Taigai College Primary Students how Masigalgal used to work together to harvest from the land and seas for survival in generations past. Photo: Chris de La Rosa.*

## BUILDING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships that enable the building of respect and appreciation for Indigenous knowledge are desired – particularly where they support an Indigenous voice in decision-making processes that affect us. Respect for Indigenous knowledge, culture and Country are critical for the development of trust and relationship-building, which underpin strong partnerships.

### Trust and relationships in knowledge work

Custodians of knowledge feel an obligation and responsibility to the ancestors to treat knowledge the right way. It takes time for trust to build between knowledge holders and outsiders before knowledge might be shared.

We seek engagements and partnerships where we think our knowledge will be treated the right way. This can mean taking a very slow approach to building a partnership, and testing partners to see if they are respectful and trustworthy, before knowledge is shared.

Taking the time and interest to build relationships between people will underpin positive experiences in knowledge-sharing. Relationship-building demands that all partners recognise and respect multiple cultural backgrounds and knowledges in creating a safe space for sharing.

## Protocols

Our knowledge protocols are vital to positive experiences in sharing knowledge. It is our business to know and follow our own cultural protocols when sharing knowledge outside of our different Traditional Owner groups.

Other protocols can be negotiated between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners to facilitate sharing of knowledge the right way, and these can operate at many scales. Protocols can include agreement on the activities, responsibilities and contributions of each partner; acknowledgement and consideration of background intellectual property (IP) and how the research IP will be shared. Formalised research agreements between institutions offer a higher level of protection to IP because they are binding.

### Consent for sharing knowledge

Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) is critical to the sharing of knowledge. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and many other international and national laws and policies, recognise FPIC as the best-practice approach to engaging with Indigenous knowledge.

FPIC requires that individuals and groups are provided with sufficient accessible information to enable full consideration of the risks and benefits of a proposed project, prior to them making a decision about whether or not to consent to that proposal. Partners should ensure that their project budgets accommodate payment of interpreters where appropriate, to ensure Indigenous partners are adequately informed before giving consent. The requirement for consent entitles Indigenous Peoples to determine the outcome of decision-making that affects them.

### Principles for strong partnerships

- Partners should commit to ethical research protocols and agreements to create transparency, ensure mutual benefit, and protect ICIP
- Strong corporate and cultural governance arrangements are a foundation for protocols and agreements that enable transparency, ensure mutual benefit and protect ICIP
- Good partners understand the importance of time in enabling proper decision-making and building trust, foundations for respectful working relationships
- Indigenous-led partnerships hold mutual benefits for knowledge-sharing

### Together Indigenous people and partners can:

Ensure that cultural protocols are followed, and that enough time and resources are allocated to ensure that FPIC processes have local legitimacy

Promote correct processes for FPIC and require that all research, conservation and development proposals on Country adhere to FPIC.



## Case studies in developing strong partnerships

**Dhelkunya Wi (healing fire): Healing massacre site, Djaara (people) and Djandak (Country) (Vic)** shows how Dja Dja Wurrung have been bringing back Djandak Wi onto Country through partnerships with government agencies, particularly Forest Fire Management Victoria Loddon Mallee and Parks Victoria.



**Tebrakunna and Melythina Tiakana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation (Tas)** showcases a successful partnership between the Tebrakunna and Melythina Tiakana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation and the Woolnorth Windfarm Group in establishing the Tebrakunna Visitor Centre, illustrating several principles critical in establishing a successful partnership.



**Walking with good spirit at Yarramundi, Western Sydney (NSW).** Darug custodians and university researchers talk of the importance of walking with good spirit in creating an opportunity to learn from each other and from Country at Yarramundi, western Sydney.



Top: Dja Dja Wurrung fireworkers. From left: Trent Nichols, Andrew Murray, Mick Bourke, Amos Atkinson. Photo: DELWP.

Middle: Tasmanian Aboriginal dancer Jarrod Hughes, Mannalargenna Day 2019. Photo: MJ Anders

Bottom: Yarning together at Yarramundi. Photo: Yanama budyari gumada

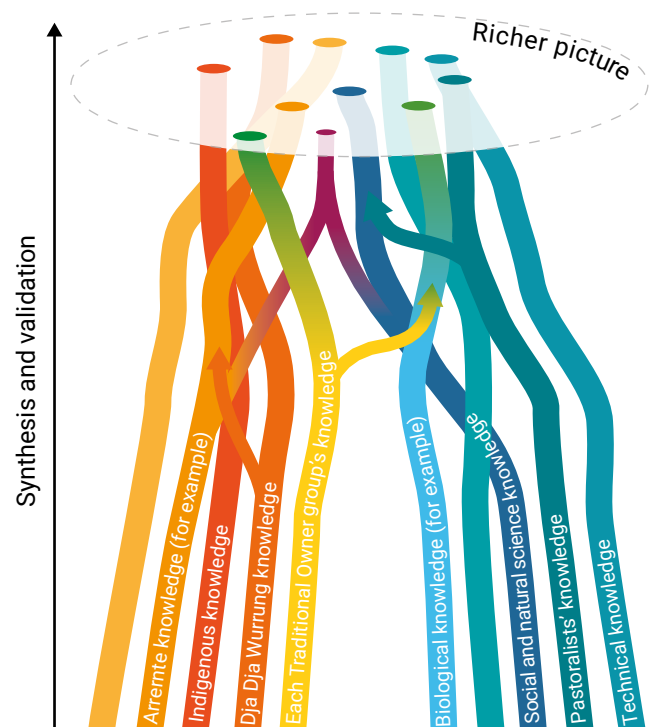
## SHARING AND WEAVING KNOWLEDGE

Indigenous managers often weave knowledge to manage new and complex land and sea management issues. Externally funded Indigenous land and sea management ranger programs sometimes draw on western science to build ecological monitoring and evaluation programs into their work plans. Sometimes scientific rigour lends support to the development of land and sea management-based enterprises – for example, in developing a methodology for traditional burning regimes to offset carbon emissions.

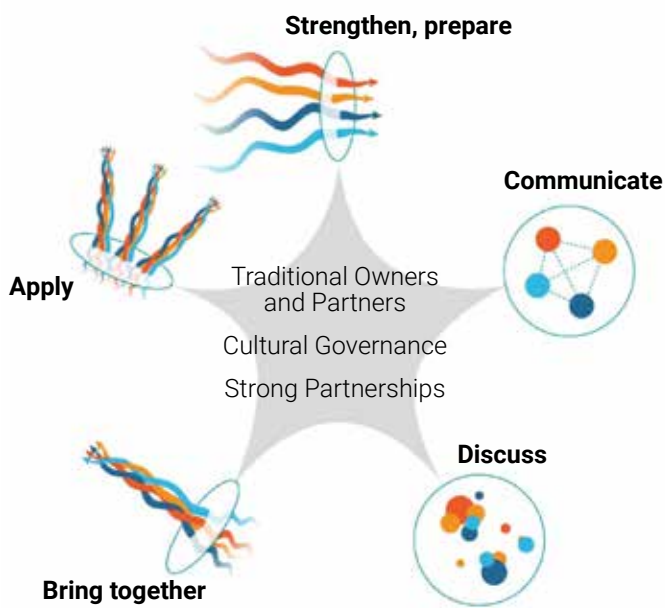
All knowledge sharing is based on first strengthening and preparing the knowledge systems that will be shared. Four subsequent steps can help: *Communicate, Discuss, Bring together* and *Apply*.

**Communicate** involves presenting knowledge in a format that can be understood by a different knowledge system e.g. a seasonal calendar.

**Discuss** requires us to talk together and interact around our different knowledges. ‘Boundary objects’ that people from different knowledge systems can connect to, like the 3D catchment model, can help discussions.



Many different Indigenous, scientific and other knowledge systems exist in Australia.



Key steps that can help Traditional Owners and partners in sharing and weaving knowledge.

**Bring together** After discussions and negotiations, we can bring together our different knowledge systems, for example in Indigenous Protected Area management plans.

**Apply** The final step in weaving knowledge is application of the new, (partly) woven knowledge, which has been shown to deliver many co-benefits.

### Communication tools for sharing and weaving knowledge

- Indigenous-led and co-developed tools are most appropriate for sharing and weaving knowledge
- Tools that promote the inter-generational transfer of knowledge are highly valued

The case studies demonstrate that co-created tools can facilitate the communication of specific messages, and can be used amongst Indigenous participants, government and scientists to facilitate relationship building and promote discussion. Co-produced communication tools can promote learning about culture and language, as well as assist understanding across knowledge systems.

### Data management tools for sharing and weaving knowledge

- Indigenous Peoples seek control over data which is collected about us, our knowledge or our land and sea Country
- Data needs to be returned to us in a useable and accessible form – we need access to data management platforms
- Agreements are essential to ensure data is collected, analysed, stored and shared in accordance with cultural protocols and our wishes – funding must allow for this
- Indigenous data sovereignty must be respected
- Project budgets and timelines must account for appropriate data sharing and dissemination, including trips to report back, share data, and provide training

Together Indigenous people and partners can:

Create opportunities for co-creation of tools that promote and support inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in environmental decision-making

Continue to realise opportunities for building understanding and respect for Indigenous knowledge systems – through sharing of knowledge in diverse forms and styles

Push the boundaries of co-learning through co-creation of innovative tools that draw on multiple knowledges and understandings and create new avenues for inter-generational learning.

## Case studies in weaving knowledge systems

### Showing and sharing knowledge in the Fitzroy River catchment (WA).

Traditional Owners and scientists have been working together to help Indigenous land managers find better ways to use both scientific and Indigenous knowledge for making decisions for Country. They created a 3D catchment model to explore water flow, water rights, flood, fire, and development.

**The Ngan'gi Seasons Indigenous seasonal calendar (NT)** was created to communicate to government water planners the importance of Ngan'gi people's connection to the Daly River.

**As the seasons change we think of the old people, the ancestors, we think of gathering maypal (NT)**, Doris Yethun Burarrwanja talks about the importance of weaving knowledge systems, bringing together western scientists with all relevant Yolngu knowledge holders, to describe and document ecological and cultural knowledge of shellfish.



*Top: Participants use the 3D map to discuss water flows in the Fitzroy River Catchment. Photo: Pia Harkness*

*Middle: A section of the Ngan'gi Seasons Calendar.*

*Bottom: Gonyia-nukaliya-Clibanaris taeniatus. Photo: D. Hancock and T. Ritchie*

## INDIGENOUS LAND AND SEA NETWORKS FOR SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Global networks that promote Indigenous-led knowledge practices and their application to international environmental challenges include the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services and the Indigenous and Local Knowledge Centres of Distinction. These networks are important as they offer peer-to-peer learning opportunities for Indigenous land and sea management practitioners. They support:

- Learning about good partners, projects and approaches to keeping knowledge strong, our way
- Learning from others about best-practice protocols and processes for managing partnerships
- Building strength and inspiration through solidarity.

In recent years there have been great opportunities at the national level for us to build strength in knowledge through peer-to-peer learning. Over three years (2017-2019) Indigenous Ranger Forums were held to promote knowledge sharing amongst rangers and land and sea management-related partners across northern Australia. At the 2019 Forum, held on Kenbi Country in the Northern Territory, rangers discussed the importance of the Guidelines in the context of building knowledge between ranger groups. The idea of a national Indigenous land and sea network has been discussed and needs exploring further.

Together, Indigenous people and partners can:

Support pan-regional, pan-national and international sharing of land and sea knowledge for enhanced environmental management

Strengthen existing networks for knowledge-sharing, to identify best-practice methods and tools for bringing Indigenous knowledge into land and sea management and enterprise development. This might take the form of a national Indigenous land and sea management network

Raise the profile of Indigenous land and sea management knowledge through national and international forums



# BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FROM AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCES

These Guidelines are a key output from a project of the Australian Government's National Environmental Science Program, Northern Australia Environmental Resources Hub, titled *Knowledge Brokering for Indigenous Land Management*.

The project co-leaders, the North Australia Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) and CSIRO, established an Indigenous-majority Project Steering Group to ensure Indigenous leadership of the project. The Project Steering Group asked "who decides what is best practice and how?" and provided the critical direction that:

**Indigenous people must decide what is best practice in working with our knowledge.**

The Best Practice Guidelines are therefore Indigenous-led, based on an open, transparent process established by the Project Steering Group of calling for Indigenous Peoples to submit case studies that demonstrate best practice in working with Indigenous knowledge.

## Indigenous leadership of the Guidelines is through:

- Indigenous-led Project Steering Group
- Indigenous-led case studies
- Indigenous lead co-authors for each chapter
- Indigenous review, consultation and input
- Face-to-face discussions about the Guidelines at meetings and workshops.



Land and sea rangers discussing the OKOW Guidelines at the NT Ranger Forum. Photo: Patch Clapp

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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The full report is available for download from the CSIRO website:

[www.csiro.au/ourknowledgeourway](http://www.csiro.au/ourknowledgeourway)

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