



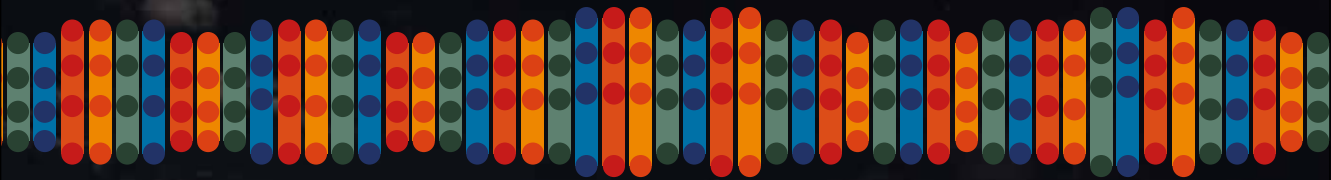
**Australian Government**  
**Indigenous Land Corporation**



**The ILC GROUP**

**REGIONAL INDIGENOUS  
LAND STRATEGY (RILS)**  
**AUSTRALIAN  
DESERT**





## THE INDIGENOUS ESTATE

The Indigenous Estate holds the key to successful economic development for all Indigenous Australians. Its significant tangible and intangible assets—not just land and waters, but people and the knowledge and intellectual property flowing from the heritage of Indigenous Australians—must be used for the benefit of all Indigenous Australians. The Indigenous Estate is the focus of the ILC’s efforts.



“Field of Light” art installation, Uluru  
Front cover image: Uluru sunrise



# The ILC GROUP

### Message from the ILC Chairperson

Welcome to the Regional Indigenous Land Strategy (RILS) for the Australian Desert region—the first time the ILC has, through the RILS, recognised the particular environmental, social and economic features of this vast region.

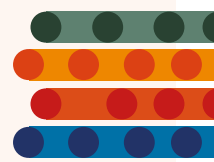
This RILS represents an additional, more focused layer to the ILC Group’s strategic direction as laid out in the National Indigenous Land Strategy (NILS) for the period 2018 to 2022. These are the first NILS and RILS that I and the current ILC Board have had the honour of presenting to you, our stakeholders and partners in growing the Indigenous Estate.

As you will see throughout the NILS and RILS, the ILC is focused on becoming a trusted partner in developing the Indigenous Estate to achieve economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The ILC Board, staff and subsidiary companies are determined to apply the resources available to us to help transform Indigenous-held land and waters and our unique cultural assets into a source of prosperity for this and future generations.

Central to our strategies has been identifying the best ways to invest and partner with you, to make our collective resources go further. On behalf of the ILC Board, I thank those who participated in consultation sessions on these important documents. Your views have informed our way forward.

Please take the time to read through this RILS and the NILS it accompanies. Also check the ILC website and follow us on social media. Most importantly, contact your local ILC office with any ideas you have for projects that fit with this strategy or would benefit from ILC partnership.

Mr Eddie Fry, Chairperson



# INTRODUCTION

## About the ILC

The ILC is an Australian Government agency established under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005* (the ATSI Act) to assist Indigenous Australians to achieve economic, environmental, social or cultural benefits through land-related projects.

**The ILC has two functions, as set out in the ATSI Act:**

- to assist Indigenous Australians to acquire land
- to assist in the management of Indigenous-held land, however that land was acquired.

**This makes the ILC an important institution in helping to define, enhance, and grow the Indigenous Estate.**



Bush Tucker Journeys at Ayers Rock Resort

## WHAT WE DO

- **ILC Functions**  
Land Acquisition and Land Management

## HOW WE DO IT

- **Subsidiary Operations**
  - National Centre of Indigenous Excellence
  - Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia
  - Australian Indigenous Agribusiness
- **ILC Program Mechanism**  
**Our Land Our Future**
  - Dedicated Industry Strategies
  - Investment Principles
  - Priority Areas

## WHAT WE ACHIEVE

- **Benefits**  
Assist Indigenous People to Achieve Economic, Environmental, Social and Cultural Benefits

# 2018–2022 RILS

## About the National Indigenous Land Strategy and Regional Indigenous Land Strategies

The **National Indigenous Land Strategy** (NILS), a requirement under the ATSI Act, is the ILC's key policy document. The directions laid out in the NILS inform other key documents, including our annual Corporate Plan. The latest NILS was tabled in Parliament in February 2018 and is available at [www.ilc.gov.au/NILS](http://www.ilc.gov.au/NILS)

Also required by the ATSI Act are **Regional Indigenous Land Strategies** (RILS), which provide regions within Australia with an additional, layered framework for the interpretation and implementation of the NILS.

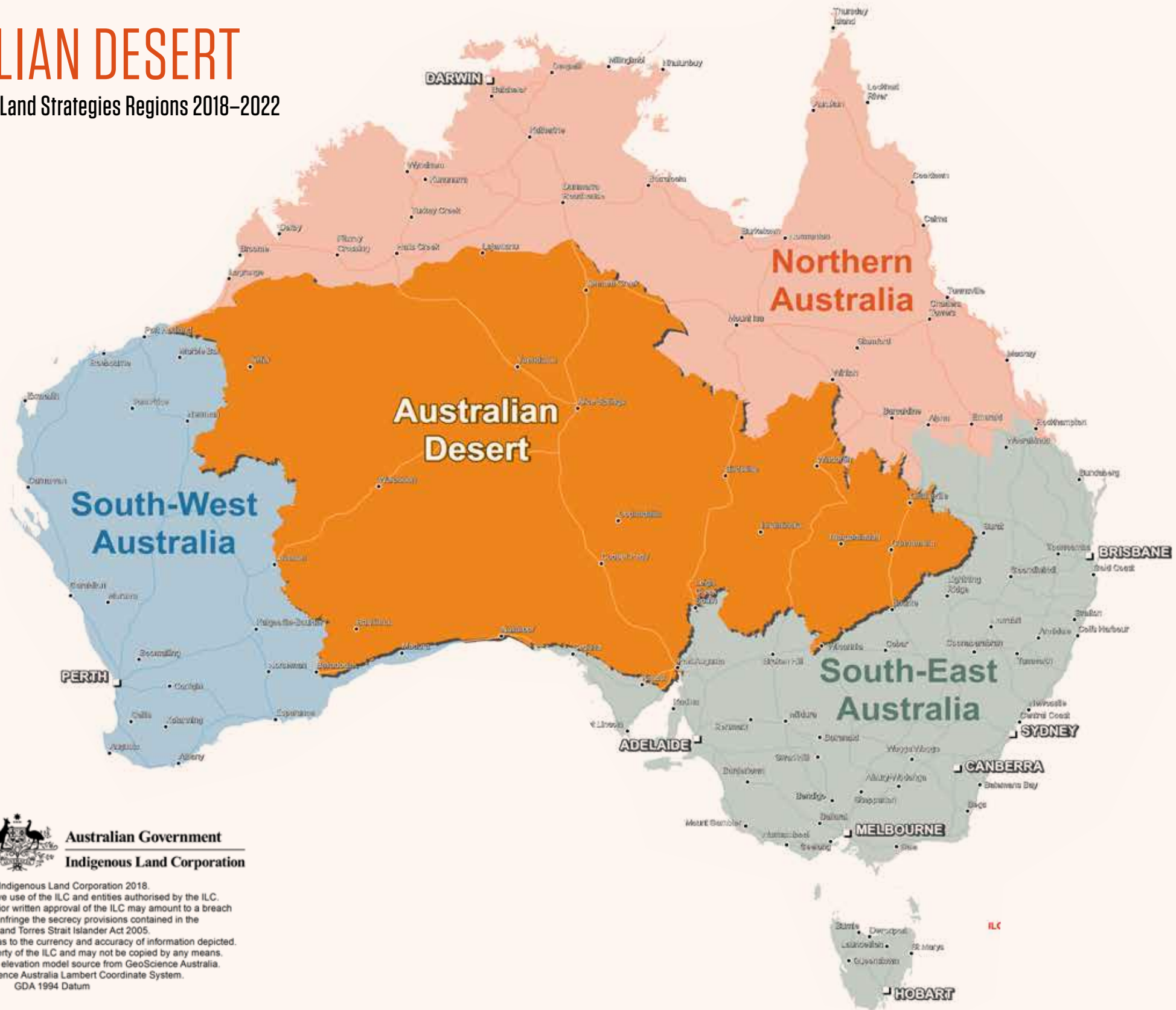
The RILS regions have been restructured for the current NILS period, 2018 to 2022. Previously ILC regions were the six states and the Northern Territory. Now they reflect eco-regions—highlighting important environmental, demographic and economic differences across the continent and the ways these are reflected in the different situations of Indigenous people. In making this change, the ILC Board recognises the opportunities presented through bringing together discrete, but aligned, land parcels within the Indigenous Estate to allow the development of joined-up projects and economies of scale.

The following regions underpin the RILS from 2018:

- **Northern Australia** - includes northern Western Australia, the northern areas of the Northern Territory and North Queensland. The climate, environment and general economic-development opportunities in northern Australia differ significantly from the rest of Australia. For example, savanna burning for emissions reduction is viable in this broad region and not in others.
- **Desert Australia** - includes the desert regions of Western Australia, northern South Australia, the Northern Territory, south-west Queensland and north-west New South Wales. As with the Northern Australia region, Australia's arid regions are unique and projects benefit from economies of scale. There is value in considering the opportunities arising in these areas in their own right.
- **South-West Australia** - includes the southern coastal areas of Western Australia west from the South Australian border across to Perth and north to Port Hedland. This region has diverse opportunities in agriculture, land rehabilitation associated with mining, and urban-based industries.
- **South-East Australia** - includes southern South Australia, all of Victoria and Tasmania, most of New South Wales and south-east Queensland. The mostly temperate regions of south-eastern Australia are more heavily populated and urbanised than the other eco-regions, with more intensive and diverse agricultural operations and greater employment and training opportunities in professional and service industries.

# AUSTRALIAN DESERT

Regional Indigenous Land Strategies Regions 2018–2022



15-May-2018  
ILC Map No. 2822-ad



**Australian Government**  
**Indigenous Land Corporation**

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GDA 1994 Datum

# THE DESERT REGION

## Landscape

The Australian Desert region covers approximately 1.9 million square kilometres and is the largest desert biome in the world. It crosses over five states and territories. As the desert region covers such a vast area, its landscapes vary quite considerably.

Topographically the region is low and flat, with isolated low mountain ranges such as the Flinders Ranges and the iconic Uluru and Kata Tjuta in the 'Red Centre'. It also encompasses the Simpson and Sandy Deserts.

The actual 'desert' areas of this region are made up of two types: sandy deserts with significant dune systems; and stony deserts, found more towards the eastern areas of the region.

The non-desert landscapes also vary quite significantly—from vast treeless grassy plains (or downs country); to hummock grasslands (spinifex), mulga woodlands and shrub lands; to saltbush and bluebush shrub lands towards the region's southern extent.

## Climate

The climate is arid to semi-arid, with mean annual rainfall varying greatly from 150mm to more than 250mm, but generally less than 300mm. Evaporation exceeds rainfall across much of the region. Regions with less than 300mm annual rainfall are considered unsuitable for non-pastoral agriculture. The rainfall varies significantly from summer-dominated rainfall in the north, to winter-dominated rainfall in the south.

The north-western areas of the region are considered sub-tropical and can be impacted by heavy rains driving down from the north, especially after cyclones cross the coast and penetrate inland. Rainfall patterns can also vary quite significantly from year to year and area to area, with major droughts and wet periods being quite common in the region.

Temperature extremes are a characteristic of most deserts. The summers in the desert region are very hot, with mean maximums during summer between 32°C and 35°C. Overnight it commonly falls below 0°C during winter. Searing daytime heat gives way to colder nights because no insulation is provided by humidity and cloud cover.

Not surprisingly, the diversity of climatic conditions—though quite harsh—supports a

rich array of habitats. Many of these habitats are ephemeral in nature, reflecting the paucity and seasonality of available water. The Great Sandy-Tanami Deserts are the richest deserts in Australia and exhibit high levels of local endemism (species unique to the area) including the most abundant lizard communities in the world.

## Indigenous population

This region is one of the least populated areas of Australia, though as with Northern Australia the proportion of Indigenous residents is relatively high. Approximately 58,000 Indigenous people are estimated to live in the region, with the largest population clusters around Alice Springs.



Uluru



Windmill on Kokatha Country, SA



Banka Banka landscape, NT



Rain on Uluru



Sharing Indigenous knowledge



Because the RILS regions for the 2018–2022 period are new, during the period the ILC will undertake a project to map the Indigenous Estate for each region. This project will include demographic data.

### Issues

Rainfall variability is one of the major drivers of change in the Desert region. In different areas and at different times, other pressures contribute to change, including declining biodiversity, dry/drought years, uncontrolled fires, invasive species (weeds and feral animals) and water extraction and diversion. Notwithstanding these pressures, the region, with its characteristically varied landscapes, still contains relatively intact ecosystems and much of Australia’s biodiversity.

Dealing with environmental challenges is complicated by the number of jurisdictions across the region, with their differing policies and legislative/regulatory regimes.

Climate-change scenarios for Australia’s deserts have predicted that climate variability and unpredictability will increase. Individual rainfall events may be larger and more frequent with longer drought periods between the rain events. There is potential for dryland salinity to increase due to the erosion caused by run-off during extreme rainfall events. Both of these issues will contribute to an increase in woody vegetation and this, coupled with changes in rainfall, will affect the frequency and intensity of fire.

### Indigenous-held land

This region is dominated by three types of tenure: land subject to pastoral lease, National Reserve land where activity is restricted, and Aboriginal land subject to various legislative regimes.

#### Aboriginal land includes:

- large areas in Central Australia granted under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*
- the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) and Maralinga Tjarutja lands in northern and western South Australia
- large areas of Western Australia managed by the Aboriginal Lands Trust (ALT), under the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act 1972*
- extensive determinations of exclusive possession native title (not subject to other interests) particularly in Western Australia and non-exclusive native title on pastoral-lease land across South Australia, the Northern Territory and western Queensland.

### Infrastructure

The Desert region is generally lacking in transport and other infrastructure compared to other regions, reflecting the sparse population and relatively low economic capacity of the land. The major road and rail route from Adelaide to Darwin does, however, bisect this region.



Sunset over Mount Willoughby Station, SA

## OPPORTUNITIES

Australia’s deserts have extensive areas of Indigenous-held land and present industry opportunities.

### Agribusiness

In this region Indigenous Australians hold large areas of pastoral or potential pastoral land that may be suitable for broad-scale, low-intensity grazing of sheep and cattle. Goats, donkeys and camels run wild in many arid areas and could be put to productive uses through management.

There are opportunities for irrigated agriculture in locations with suitable conditions and supplies of groundwater.

‘Carbon farming’ is any change in agricultural or land management practices that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions or store additional carbon in vegetation or soils. Carbon farming is under-developed in arid areas of Australia but could be pursued, if cost-effective, through herd management and land set aside for revegetation.

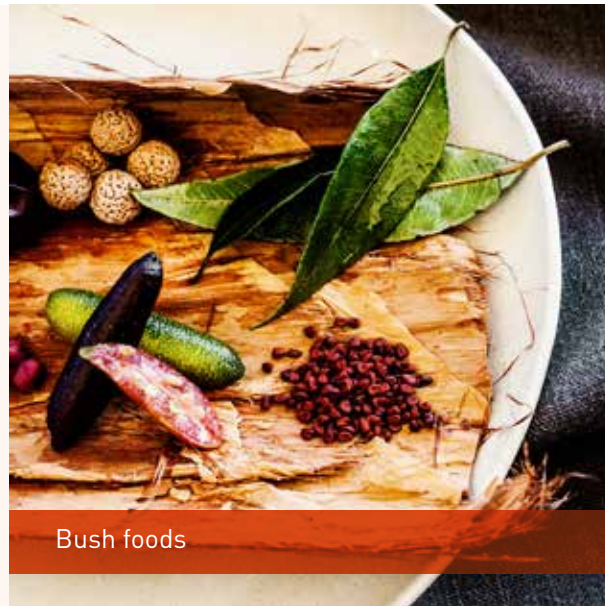
### Case study: land acquisition

The ILC has purchased pastoral-lease land on behalf of Indigenous groups in the Desert region—for example, Mount Willoughby (479,600 ha) and Mount Clarence (179,390 ha) Stations SA, Murra Murra Station (86,800 ha) Qld, and Ooratippra Station (432,000 ha) NT. These purchases have largely been to enable Indigenous access to traditional country.





Ngaanyatjarra Camel Company, WA/NT/SA



Bush foods



Construction work on country

### Niche Indigenous products

Australia's Indigenous people are the custodians of traditional cultural and environmental knowledge. Indigenous land holders could develop enterprises based on growing or wild-harvesting native plants for food, pharmaceutical or cosmetic uses,

or the harvesting of protein from native (e.g. kangaroo) or feral animals (e.g. goats, camels). Investment is needed to research potential products, build markets for them, and establish Indigenous people's participation in niche-product supply chains.

### Case study: land management

More than a million feral camels are roaming inland Australia. They damage the environment, but at the same time have a long association with the country. The camel population on the remote Ngaanyatjarra Lands is around 200,000, and they are regarded as a resource to be managed.

Since the formation of the company in 2012, the Ngaanyatjarra Camel Company has sold for meat export more than 25,000 captured feral camels. Capacity to manage feral camels is being rapidly developed, including through infrastructure assistance provided by the ILC. Permanent and mobile yards are used across the lands with access to the best available roads as the main muster points for the feral herd. Good-quality permanent watering points have been developed at these muster points both to attract camels and to ensure they are in the best possible condition for sale or domestication. Feral camels have proven easy to work with in the yards and young camels are easy to domesticate.

The company has received many requests for live animals. Holding paddocks have been built in order to develop that market and add value to the feral herd. Young camels can be grown out to a saleable size. Currently the company's main focus is to source, develop and select premium animals for domestication as milk or meat producers.

The continent has vast areas of land suited to camel husbandry. With Australia's relatively disease-free status and wide access to export markets, these areas have potential for large-scale camel-product production for export.

### Tourism

Australian Desert region has many spectacular landscapes and rich Indigenous cultural connections, both a potential basis for tourism businesses—either larger scale resorts or smaller, locally-based ecotourism or cultural tourism ventures. With agribusiness, tourism is a recognised high-growth area in the Australian economy.



Sharing local knowledge

### Renewable energies

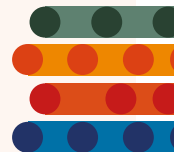
Australia needs to transform its energy sources to meet internationally agreed emissions-reduction targets (the UN Paris Agreement).

If suitable, Indigenous-held land could be used to generate solar, wind or geothermal energy for sale to energy retailers. The roll out of renewable-energy technologies could also assist Indigenous communities in this region, including communities off the electricity grid, to ensure reliable and affordable energy supply.

The area around Alice Springs, NT, has a national and international reputation for solar energy adoption and integration. Solar energy has obvious applications in hot, arid areas.

### Ranger work: the conservation economy

Indigenous people live on desert country that may otherwise be unoccupied. Indigenous land-holders are already involved in 'caring for country', with groups receiving income from government and others for ecosystem services. Many national parks in the Desert region are co-managed between government and Indigenous owners—for example, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park in the Northern Territory. Ranger-type work presents opportunities for expansion, as increasing value is placed on rehabilitating environments through combatting weeds and feral animals and preserving biodiversity.





# RELATIONSHIPS & LINKS

The ILC always seeks to consult and partner with local and regional organisations in taking advantage of opportunities on Indigenous-held land. Collaboration is a core principle underpinning ILC projects. Over the period of this RILS, the ILC will focus on three levels of alliance building: networks linking Indigenous land holders through their engagement with the Indigenous Estate; partnerships with the ILC on key projects and activities; and strategic alliances, formal arrangements involving the ILC, Indigenous land holders and industry and charitable groups. The ILC will work with stakeholders to leverage knowledge of what works from previous and existing projects, tailored to local aspirations and expertise. Where possible, projects will be strengthened by input across multiple sectors—government, community, private and charitable.

## The native title representative bodies and service providers across this region are:

**Central Desert Native Title Services, WA**  
[www.centraldesert.org.au](http://www.centraldesert.org.au)

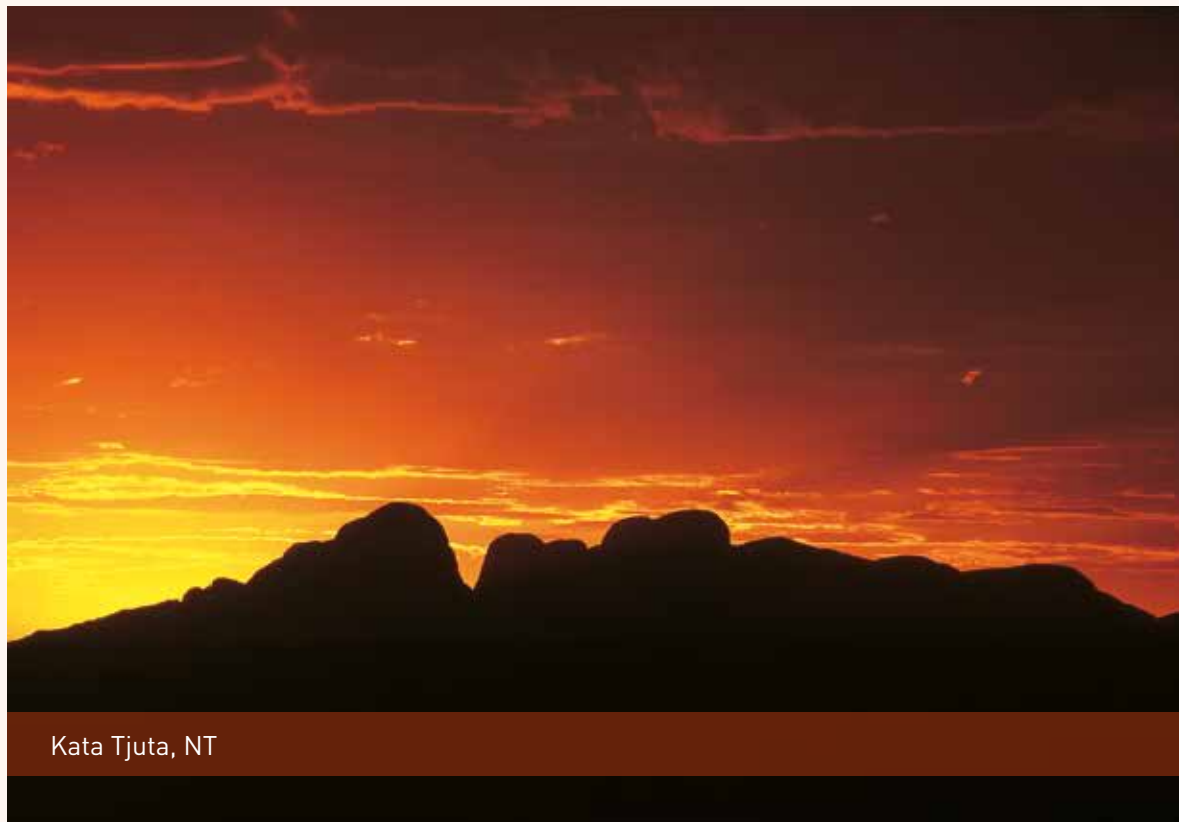
**Central Land Council, NT**  
[www.clc.org.au](http://www.clc.org.au)

**Goldfields Land and Sea Council, WA**  
[www.glsc.com.au](http://www.glsc.com.au)

**NTSCORP Ltd, NSW**  
[www.ntscorp.com.au](http://www.ntscorp.com.au)

**Queensland South Native Title Services, Qld**  
[www.qsnts.com.au](http://www.qsnts.com.au)

**South Australia Native Title Services, SA**  
[www.nativetitlesa.org](http://www.nativetitlesa.org)



Kata Tjuta, NT

## Other significant organisations:

**Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (Aboriginal Corporation)**  
[www.anangu.com.au](http://www.anangu.com.au)

Representing communities across the APY Lands in northern South Australia.

**Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (KJ)**  
[www.kj.org.au](http://www.kj.org.au)

A Martu organisation established to look after Martu culture and help build sustainable Martu communities—the Martu are the traditional owners of the Martu native title determination, including Karlamilyi National Park, spanning three desert bioregions and 15 million hectares in remote Western Australia.

**Ninti One: Innovation for Remote Australia**  
[www.nintione.com.au](http://www.nintione.com.au)

The Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation, provides services across the region in the areas of research, participatory evaluation, communications, business planning and governance.

## Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku

[www.ngaanyatjarraku.wa.gov.au/index.php/our-region/community-information/warburton](http://www.ngaanyatjarraku.wa.gov.au/index.php/our-region/community-information/warburton)

Based at Warburton, WA, responsible for the provision of local government services to ten communities.

## Ngaanyatjarra Council (Aboriginal Corporation)

[www.ngaanyatjarraku.wa.gov.au](http://www.ngaanyatjarraku.wa.gov.au)

Representing around 2000 Ngaanyatjarra, Pintupi and Pitjantjatjara Traditional Owners (Yarnangu) who reside in 12 member communities in remote Western Australia.

## Maralinga Tjarutja

[www.maralingatjarutja.com](http://www.maralingatjarutja.com)

Representing the Oak Valley community in far western South Australia.

## NPY Women's Council

[www.npywc.org.au](http://www.npywc.org.au)

Providing services across the remote tri-state region.

## The Indigenous Desert Alliance (IDA)

[www.indigenousdesertalliance.com](http://www.indigenousdesertalliance.com)

Connects desert-based land managers working on Indigenous lands throughout Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory to improve cultural, environmental, economic and social outcomes.

## Desert Knowledge Australia (DKA)

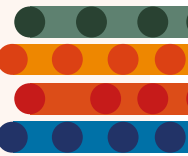
[www.desertknowledge.com.au](http://www.desertknowledge.com.au)

A statutory corporation of the Northern Territory, DKA manages the Desert Knowledge Precinct in Alice Springs, and has a mandate to create alliances across sectors and state/territory borders that will strengthen the people, communities, businesses and governments of remote Australia. The centre's core functions include knowledge sharing, community education and engagement, industry partnerships, and commercialisation.

## The Centre for Appropriate Technology Limited (CfAT Ltd)

[www.cfat.org.au](http://www.cfat.org.au)

Based in Alice Springs, facilitates tailored approaches to delivering technical reliability and building local capacity to unlock economic opportunity for remote Indigenous people and communities.





“Bush Tucker Journeys”

# APPENDIX: RELEVANT LEGISLATION

## Commonwealth

- Native Title Act 1993
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984
- Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999
- Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976

## New South Wales

- Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983
- Heritage Act 1977
- Heritage Act 2004
- National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974
- Native Title Act 1994
- Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995

## Western Australia

- Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act 1972
- Aboriginal Communities Act 1979
- Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972
- Aboriginal Heritage (Marandoo) Act 1992
- Land Administration Act 1997
- Titles (Validation) and Native Title (Effect of Past Acts) Act 1995

## Queensland

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Holding Act 2013
- Aboriginal Land Act 1991 and Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991
- Land Act 1994 (Queensland)
- Native Title (Queensland) Act 1993
- Nature Conservation Act 1992

## Northern Territory

- Aboriginal Land Act 1978
- Heritage Act 2011
- Mineral Titles Act 2010
- Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989
- Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act 2004 and Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2005
- Pastoral Land Act 1992
- Petroleum Act and Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Act
- Validation (Native Title) Act 1994 and Validation of Titles and Actions Amendment Act 1998

## South Australia

- Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988
- Aboriginal Lands Parliamentary Standing Committee Act 2003
- Aboriginal Lands Trust Act 1966
- Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Rights Act 1981
- Maralinga Tjarutja Land Rights Act 1984
- Native Title (South Australia) Act 1994 and Native Title (South Australia) (Validation and Confirmation) Amendment Act 2000
- Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act 1989



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