

Desert Knowledge Symposium

Desert partnerships and sustainable land outcomes

Presentation by

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Thank you Fred (Fred Chaney) for your kind introduction.

It is a great pleasure to be here today and I would like to thank Desert Knowledge Australia for the opportunity to address International and Australian delegates.

I am a Yamatji woman, from Western Australia and I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the Arrente people - the traditional owners of the country on whose land we are meeting today.

We must never forget that the traditional owners have had responsibility for looking after this country for thousands of years and I pay my respects to current day descendants of the Arrente people.

As the Chairperson of the Indigenous Land Corporation, I am proud that the ILC, as an organisation with a national focus, is the major sponsor of this conference in Alice Springs.

The ILC has been happy to provide significant funding for an event which focuses attention on creating economic opportunities and sustainable livelihoods for desert people.

The major themes of this symposium – Doing Business, Building Sustainability, Natural Resource Management, Land and Culture, Education and the Knowledge Economy and Water and Energy Solutions – are critical considerations for the ILC in its day-to-day operations.

Today I want to focus on the increasingly important role partnerships are playing from an ILC perspective in achieving sustainable land outcomes in desert and remote Australia.

The ILC is a Commonwealth Government independent statutory authority established to provide social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits to Indigenous people by assisting them to acquire land and manage Indigenous-held land.

As we are gathered here to share knowledge and experiences about working together in desert environments, I will by necessity be focusing on activities by the ILC in the desert and remote areas of Australia and the work we are doing to foster partnerships and bring direct benefits to the Indigenous community and indirectly to the wider community.

The ILC operates on a self-funding budget of about \$25 to \$30 million a year to do everything it needs to do – including creating badly-needed economic opportunities for Indigenous people in remote Australia.

That figure may sound like a lot of money but, let's not forget that Indigenous-held land now amounts to about 16% of the Australian land mass.

Many areas of land that were added to the Indigenous estate were in remote areas, were significantly degraded and suffered from a range of land management problems.

As a result, identifying economic and sustainable land uses for much Indigenous-held land presents a considerable and on-going challenge.

Under its land management function the ILC supports activities such as:

- carrying on a business that involves the use, care or improvement of land;
- providing environmental management services; and
- providing training related to the carrying on of a business or in the managed use, care and improvement of land;

The National Indigenous Land Strategy – or NILS as it is called – gives the ILC the flexibility to address a broad range of Indigenous people’s needs by establishing four land acquisition programs—cultural, social, environmental and economic.

Strategic Land Acquisition & Land Management Projects

It is against this legislative, policy and financial background that, in the last 12 months, the ILC Board has adopted a more interventionist or strategic approach to improve its ability to promote economic opportunities on Indigenous land.

The ILC Board identified that there were strategic land acquisition and land management opportunities, capable of delivering significant benefits to Indigenous people, which were not emerging through the ILC’s existing application-driven process.

To address this, the ILC Board has made provision in the National Indigenous Land Strategy (NILS) that, in addition to considering land acquisition and land management applications submitted to it, the ILC may initiate strategic land acquisitions and undertake strategic land management activities provided appropriate criteria are met.

The NILS sets out a range of criteria to guide strategic projects, including:

- Projects will focus on employment, training and the delivery of social and cultural benefits in particular regions and specific industries.
- Joint arrangements and coordinated service delivery will be a priority.
- Land management projects must focus on developing the capacity for land management over regional areas and the creation of employment and training opportunities in specific industries.

As an extension to this strategic approach, in 2005 the ILC Board directed that the pastoral and tourism industries will be a priority in terms of economic activity over the next three to five years and this has set the direction for the ILC in its work.

To date projects that have been approved under this strategic approach include:

- Tourism development at Home Valley Station in Kununurra WA;
- Cattle enterprise development at Durack River and Karunjie Stations in WA;
- Tourism and cattle enterprise development at Crocodile and Welcome Stations in QLD;
- Cattle enterprise development at Bulimba Station in QLD;
- Cattle enterprise development on Merapah Station in QLD
- Cattle enterprise development on Mimosa Station in QLD
- Cattle enterprise development on Hodgson Downs Station in the NT and;
- Cattle enterprise development on Elsey Station in the NT.

Indigenous Pastoral Industry

The ILC has underpinned this strategic approach by significantly increasing its efforts to boost pastoral activity on Indigenous-held land.

This includes support to both ILC-purchased and other Indigenous-held properties.

The ILC has pursued whole-of-government initiatives to generate improvements in the productive use of Indigenous-held land and improved training and employment outcomes.

Two major undertakings – the Kimberly Indigenous Management Support Service (KIMMS) in WA and the Indigenous Pastoral Program (IPP) in the NT – are good examples of the ILC approach to boost pastoral activity.

In the Kimberley, the ILC and the Western Australian Department of Agriculture have jointly funded the Kimberley Indigenous Management Support Service (KIMSS) over the last three years.

This project has seen increased commercial pastoral activity on ten Indigenous-owned cattle stations.

It has a strong focus on developing the technical and management skills of the Indigenous directors, managers and workers on the stations.

On the screen behind me you can see images of Indigenous people undertaking training and working at places like Lamboo Station and Noonkanbah – this is the kind of good work which is underway through the KIMSS program.

In May 2005, the ILC Board extended KIMSS for a further five years, taking total joint funding to \$6.5 million with an ILC contribution of \$2.5 million.

In the Northern Territory, the ILC, the Northern Territory Government and the Northern and Central Land Councils have jointly funded the Indigenous Pastoral Program (IPP).

Stewart Blythe, manager of the Indigenous Pastoral Program will be talking about the IPP in greater detail this afternoon during the Natural Resource Management in the Desert sessions.

However, I would like to give a quick overview of this program because it links to my central theme about partnerships and clearly shows what can be achieved in desert and remote areas through a partnership approach.

The IPP was originally established between the ILC, the NT Government and Northern and Central Land Councils to:

- Sustainably increase the level of pastoral production on Indigenous land and;
- Increase the level of Indigenous involvement in the pastoral industry through training and employment.

From its inception in 2003, the program has seen an increase of 14,000 head of cattle on Indigenous land and more than 11,000 square kilometres of land under improved management in terms of fire, feral animal and weeds control.

Specific training programs have also delivered significant outcomes for Indigenous people.

For example, a pre-employment training program which was run on Elliot Station during 2004/05 for 18 young Indigenous people resulted in 13 people graduating and 11 people being placed in full-time employment.

In addition, over 80 Indigenous company directors have completed or are undertaking corporate governance training.

Total funding under the IPP from 2003 to 2006 was \$4.42 million with an ILC contribution of \$1.45 million.

In February this year the ILC Board approved a further \$2.685 million in funding to extend the successful Indigenous Pastoral Program (IPP) for a further five years to 2011.

The original IPP has been such a success that the new 5-year MOU has now been signed to include the formal involvement of the NT Cattleman's Association (NTCA) and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR).

The signing ceremony for this agreement was recently held at Kalkarinji as part of the 40th anniversary celebrations for the Wave Hill Walk-Off.

It is important that we all understand the significance of that event.

Forty years ago Indigenous pastoral workers, cattle station owners and the Government were in dispute.

Now, 40 years later, we have Indigenous people, land councils, Territory and Commonwealth Government agencies and peak bodies like the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association all sitting down together at the negotiation table, signing multi-million agreements to boost pastoral production on Indigenous land and deliver economic, employment and training benefits to both the Indigenous and wider community.

As you can see, the concept of partnerships has helped us come a long way.

Future Direction

Over the past 3 to 5 years the ILC has supported a number of smaller scale cattle projects which have aimed at building land owner capacity and skills through the staged construction of infrastructure, such as water points and fences prior to the introduction of stock.

These have included a project west of Alice Springs and a number in the Tennant Creek area.

These projects have demonstrated the importance of good, upfront planning and ongoing governance, the need for skills not only in the practical aspects of running cattle but also in operating within a community environment.

They have also demonstrated greater success where people are better connected with local and regional networks and industry.

Cattlemen's workshops have been a major boost to some of these projects and an Indigenous Cattlemen's Workshop was held at the Arid Zone Research Institute in Alice Springs only two weeks ago.

The annual workshop assists Indigenous people who are decision makers and are responsible for the management of a pastoral enterprise.

The participants were from a wide range of diverse backgrounds, some being primarily from pastoral enterprises while others are involved in a pastoral enterprise on a part time basis.

Eight individual pastoral projects were represented, and five government and five non-government organisations were also involved in various capacities.

The ILC will continue to foster the growth of a sustainable Indigenous pastoral industry by developing further pastoral businesses and encouraging partnerships.

It is envisaged that in the next five years the ILC will run approximately 80,000 head of cattle on Indigenous-held land and create significant economic, employment and training opportunities for Indigenous people.

Indigenous Tourism Industry

As I mentioned earlier in my presentation, the other part of this strategic focus for the ILC, is in the area of tourism.

To give this tourism focus practical drive, the ILC Board has established a Tourism Advisory Committee, chaired by ILC Director David Baffsky, who is chairperson of

Accor Asia Pacific, the largest hotel and tourism company in Australia and the Asia Pacific region.

The Committee has been charged with identifying, scoping and developing opportunities for tourism enterprises on Indigenous-held land that will deliver training, employment and income for Indigenous people.

The Committee's work in redeveloping a tourism facility on Home Valley Station in WA provides an excellent case study of what the ILC is trying to achieve in this area.

This development has immediately generated four full-time Indigenous jobs, 11 traineeships and part-time employment for 6 to 7 other Indigenous people.

Home Valley Station – An ILC tourism case study

Home Valley station is owned by the ILC and was purchased under our Economic program as a tourism and cattle production enterprise on behalf of the Ballangarra people of the East Kimberly.

Since acquiring the pastoral lease, the ILC has endeavoured to involve local people in all aspects of the station's operations.

In both its tourism and pastoral enterprises, local indigenous communities and workers have played a critical role in rejuvenating what was, at the time of purchase, a badly-neglected cattle station.

Today, Home Valley is a hub of activity that caters not only for tourists on the Gibb River Road, but is also becoming an important tourism training centre for Indigenous youth, students and trainees from many communities across the Kimberly.

Skills-based training courses run continuously during the Dry season from April to November, delivering tuition in a variety of tourism services as well as practical skills to support the cattle station operations.

East Kimberly TAFE utilises Home Valley for various Rural Operations Courses for young men and women.

In 2006 TAFE has become part of the Home Valley fabric as students are incorporated into the tourist operation through Indigenous Tourism Traineeships.

These traineeships allow young Indigenous people to gain practical tourism skills on-the-job.

Every customer query that is made, every room which is prepared, every drink and meal that is served, every camp site that is sold and every tour that is conducted provides hands-on tuition for eleven full-time, live-in Tourism Trainees, who work alongside the permanent Home Valley staff.

Through the ILC's alliance with Kimberley Group Training and East Kimberley TAFE, Home Valley Station will be in a position to maximise employment pathways

and offer full-time employment to Certificate III graduates of Home Valley Tourism Traineeships.

The first graduates, of course, will get the opportunity to become a permanent staff member at the station and it is hoped that they will go on to develop their skills further and play increasingly important roles in developing and running the Home Valley tourist business.

Earlier this year the ILC provided a quarter of a million dollars in funding to the Titjikala Community so it could expand its Gunya tourism enterprise.

ILC funding has helped expand tourist accommodation and dining facilities and has increased community equity in this tourist joint venture to 50%.

Only local labour is used to service tourists and to date more than 80 Titjikala people have been engaged in some capacity across the operations.

This has increased pride, engagement and has created employment opportunities.

Local people have received award rates, full entitlements and have received on-site nationally-accredited training programs in management, food and beverage administration and hotel operations.

These are just two examples of tourism development from the ILC's perspective, but we are acutely aware of how this is but one small spoke in a much bigger wheel.

Perhaps to a greater degree than most activities, travel and tourism depends on a wide range of infrastructure services such as airports and roads, as well as basic infrastructure services required by hotels, restaurants, shops, and recreation facilities such as telecommunications and utilities.

This has been confirmed by a number of scoping studies conducted by the ILC on the potential for Indigenous tourism.

Infrastructure and capacity issues have been found to be among the most important needs, particularly in desert and remote localities.

ILC Operated Businesses

Another important economic initiative by the ILC involves the direct management of 10 businesses on ILC-purchased land.

These are predominantly pastoral industry businesses, operating approximately 42,500 head of cattle and 16,000 sheep but also include a tourism venture and two orchards.

To enhance the ILC's capacity to directly manage these and other businesses on ILC-purchased land, the ILC Board has established a Business Enterprise Committee to oversee these businesses.

All businesses are run on a commercial basis and seek to generate profits which are reinvested in improved infrastructure and skills development and training for Indigenous employees.

Indigenous employees are engaged wherever possible and the ILC looks to all opportunities to provide training and development support to them.

In the last financial year ILC businesses have provided a mix of full time and part-time employment, training and contract work for over 200 Indigenous people and this figure will grow.

Collaborative Approach

While I have set out an overview of a range of ILC policy and business approaches to fostering sustainable development in Australia's desert and remote areas, it would be wrong to give you the impression that we have all the answers or are trying to do this on our own.

The simple fact is that we do not and cannot.

No one agency has the total financial, human resource or appropriate skills base needed in this area and there is growing recognition that whole-of-government approaches in conjunction with non-government agencies, communities and the private sector is required if we are to achieve real and lasting outcomes.

That may all sound wonderful, but let me illustrate this point with two practical examples of how the ILC is developing its collaborative approach particularly in relation to land management.

The ILC has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage.

Under this MoU we are examining a number of programs and projects that will help people to care for country and provide employment and training opportunities in natural resource management.

The ILC is currently negotiating a major Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) Partnership with Environment and Heritage.

It is expected that this strategic partnership will deliver considerable social, cultural, and environmental benefits to Aboriginal land-owners in priority bio-regions.

IPAs are parcels of land that Indigenous landholders have voluntarily incorporated into the National Reserve System.

The program aims to mesh Indigenous cultural values with mainstream biodiversity conservation objectives by establishing partnerships between Indigenous landholders and governments in the management of protected areas.

IPAs provide opportunity for landholders to pursue cultural and natural resource management and utilise their land as a viable environmental resource.

This is especially important where the land provides limited conventional business opportunities.

IPAs provide primary support for the protection and maintenance of land as well as exploring complementary avenues for economic development through ecotourism, traditional economies and general public visitation.

Another example of the partnership approach to land management adopted by the ILC is The Top End Aboriginal Land Management Employment Strategy.

This is a joint initiative between key Northern Territory and Australian Government agencies, the Northern Land Council and the ILC to address invasive weed, fire and feral animal issues while building local Indigenous landholders' capacity.

The strategy involves nine Indigenous communities and total funding of the strategy for the calendar years 2005 and 2006 is \$5.06 million including an ILC contribution of \$748,000.

Under the strategy, more than 85 Indigenous people have been trained in natural resource management.

Utilising the skills acquired through this training, Indigenous land management groups established under the strategy have developed enterprises and won contracts for environmental management work.

Thirty Indigenous people have derived full or part-time contract employment from these enterprise activities.

Closing remarks:

In delivering this presentation, I have tried to focus my remarks on what the ILC is trying to achieve in desert and remote Australia and the crucial role that partnerships are increasingly playing in our day-to-day work.

Obviously, as a national organisation, we are delivering programs right across the nation in remote, rural, regional and urban environments.

For the ILC this presents us with huge challenges as it does for other organisations.

Well-constructed partnerships that enable people to collaborate, plan and bring an equal share of expertise, resources and knowledge to the table are the only way we can all move forward and achieve results.

Anything less is, quite simply, a recipe for failure.

I would like to close by saying that the ILC remains committed to actively seeking out land-based opportunities which will provide long-term and sustainable benefits to Indigenous people.

To do that we will continue to encourage the development of strategic partnerships so there can be true equality in life and opportunity for the Indigenous peoples of Australia.

Thank you.