



Australian Government
Indigenous Land Corporation

**Developing partnerships and capacity
to support tourism development**

Introduction

Thank you.

Firstly, I'd like to acknowledge and thank the Arrernte people, whose traditional country this is, for welcoming us to their land so this important conference can be held.

I would also like to thank the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Committee and conference organisers for giving me the opportunity to address delegates.

It is a great pleasure to be able to contribute the ILC's thoughts regarding the development of Indigenous tourism.

Clearly, the ILC is keen to support tourism at the local and national level and that is why we are proud to be a Gold Level sponsor of this conference.

Through its economic land acquisition program and land management enterprise development initiative, the ILC supports sustainable and viable land-based tourism businesses.

In order to give tourism a more specific focus, the ILC Board has now established a Tourism Advisory Committee to assist in the evaluation of proposals to undertake tourism activities on properties that the ILC has already acquired or is assessing for acquisition.

Proposals must be sustainable in the long-term, and have an opportunity to generate a reasonable return; must create employment and training opportunities for Indigenous people; and there must be commitment to the project from a potential beneficiary group.

The ILC Tourism Advisory Committee is chaired by ILC Director Mr David Baffsky who has extensive experience and involvement in the local, national and international tourism industry as the Chairman of Accor Asia Pacific – the largest hotel and tourism company in Australia and the Asia Pacific Region.

Industry experts who contribute to the work of the Committee, include Mr Aden Ridgeway, Chairman, Indigenous Tourism Australia; Mr Chris Fry from the National Bank of Australia; Ms Judy Freeman from Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park and Mr Glen Miller from Tourism Queensland.

The ILC believes tourism has many potential benefits for Indigenous people as it presents an opportunity to achieve benefits such as economic development, training and employment, protection and conservation of important environments, and an avenue to maintain Indigenous culture.

Tourism also has the ability to create benefits in many other industries. The demand in tourism extends beyond traditional tourism companies, into upstream industries such as transport and primary producers and downstream to service providers.

This makes tourism an attractive industry for many Indigenous people.

The potential in tourism must not be overstated, however.

The industry is also a highly fragmented and diverse industry, and so co-ordinated, industry-wide action can be difficult to achieve.

Tourism is not a ‘wonder industry’, but instead is perhaps best viewed as a diverse range of small- to medium-scale activities, each with a significant niche market.

The ILC receives many requests from groups who wish to pursue tourism on their land.

This indicates that there is a great willingness to supply tourism product to the high demand that certainly exists nationally and internationally.

The direction that people are working toward is one of economic self-sufficiency, of sustainability, of enterprise development and diversification.

And importantly, all of the benefits I have just mentioned are critical in developing a brighter future for our Indigenous youth and providing them with a greater number of choices and pathways to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

To capitalise on this potential, the ILC is increasingly looking at ways it can sustainably support Indigenous tourism business development and tourism training.

Home Valley Station – An ILC tourism case study

Home Valley Station in the East Kimberly is a good case study that highlights what the ILC is trying to achieve in this area.

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

Since acquisition, 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 ten 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 Tourism graduates of the Home Valley Tourism Traineeships program.

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.

This is just one example of the ILC's involvement in tourism development from the ILC's perspective

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 in specific locations.

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

The increasing demand for Indigenous tourism experiences, highlights the key role Indigenous people and products have to play in the development of tourism, particularly in rural and remote Australia.

The ILC believes that Indigenous tourism, compared to other tourism operations, is still very much a developing industry group and as such needs support so it can deliver the positive outcomes for Indigenous people that we all know it has the potential to do.

Partnerships with Federal and State Government agencies and the private sector will be vital in providing appropriate support to the Indigenous tourism industry.

And to achieve that, successful partnerships will require appropriate communication and consultation with Indigenous people and clear processes for engagement.

Consultation with Indigenous people involved in the tourism industry is necessary because it is a practical way of focussing attention on the on-ground issues Indigenous tourism operators face, their aspirations for the future, and subsequent opportunities for Indigenous people to link with supporting organisations and other tourism businesses.

In conjunction with this, Indigenous people require access to appropriate training and other capacity development initiatives to support their involvement in tourism.

It is important that Indigenous people have the capacity and skills to operate and manage tourism enterprises themselves so as to provide long-term and direct benefits.

Indigenous people must be meaningful stakeholders in tourism.

This is why the ILC has a policy of supporting and facilitating joint ventures and partnership arrangements.

Additionally, as I said in my introduction, the ILC supports the development of Indigenous tourism at a national level.

Often groups view tourism as an answer to sustainability without fully understanding or recognising the reality of operating such a business. The ILC has come to understand the immense amount of work that needs to be done to bridge the gap between groups who have the desire to run a tourism business and those that have the capacity to successfully run a tourism business.

An example of the challenges to be considered can be found in the area of tourism marketing.

Marketing is obviously crucial to the success of any tourism business, but unless capacity, training and employment issues are dealt with at the same time some businesses may not be able to cope with increased demand.

For example, a husband and wife business may need to expand their business and employ more people in order for the business to cope with demand.

This business will need to consider additional factors such as differences in taxation requirements, superannuation contributions and employment requirements, which the business may not have the capacity to undertake.

A number of strategies must be put in place to assist Aboriginal businesses to manage growth and increased demand.

It is important that Aboriginal people have the capacity and skills to undertake actions and tasks themselves so as to provide long term benefit and successful implementation.

Without a strong emphasis on training and skills development, Aboriginal people are effectively being set up for failure.

Training opportunities must accommodate areas such as finance and bookkeeping, business management and human resources etc.

The ILC believes that training programs should incorporate 'whole of business' considerations.

There needs to be a clearer and stronger focus on developing Aboriginal organisations' capacity to manage all aspects of promoting and providing the tourism product.

This will ensure that Aboriginal people really benefit from participation in the tourism arena.

The ILC currently funds Aboriginal Tourism Australia (ATA) and the Respecting Our Culture program, or ROC program as it is referred to, that has done significant work on promoting and supporting Indigenous tourism.

Through its coordinator and mentoring network, the ROC program provides assistance for operators to attain accreditation to national industry standards.

This network provides Indigenous tourism businesses with business development and management, mentoring and support.

ROC addresses business management, cultural protocols and sustainable environmental practices, including the establishment of standards for Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses marketing Indigenous product.

Furthermore ROC provides specific accreditation for Indigenous product and those operators who achieve the business management, cultural protocols and sustainable environmental practice standard under the ROC program are able to use the Respecting Our Culture (ROC) logo.

Using this approach Aboriginal Tourism Australia aims to build capacity within the industry to deliver a genuine and sustainable high standard Indigenous products to meet increasing market demand.

Concluding remarks

There is often the temptation to identify Indigenous tourism with promoting Indigenous people's artefacts.

But, if we see cultural awareness as being conscious of the needs of people, the focus shifts to investing in people.

There needs to be a clear understanding of Indigenous people's involvement in the industry and how their organisations can develop.

There needs to be a stronger emphasis on training and capacity development. In particular, this needs to encompass whole-of-business considerations, including; finance, bookkeeping, business, HR, wholesalers, media relations, management and promotion of products so that organisations are set up for success,

And success needs to mean viable and sustainable enterprises.

To best use partnerships in the wider tourism industry for the benefit of Indigenous people, they should be directed at capacity development: that is, the capacity of Indigenous people and their enterprises.

Thank you