



Indigenous Australians: Natural Resource Management

The Australian Government and Indigenous people are working together to advance the environmentally sustainable management and development of land.

Indigenous land ownership and control has increased as a result of various government initiatives since the 1970s, including the legislative return of land and the purchase of land with dedicated government funds. Indigenous people directly own and/or manage approximately 15 per cent of land in Australia.

Joint management

Under a system of joint management of national parks, title to Indigenous land is granted to its traditional owners, who in turn lease back that land to the Australian Government for management as a national park. The traditional owners are paid rent and a share of park revenue in recognition of the land's use for conservation purposes and public benefit.

The lease agreements require the Director of National Parks to take all practicable steps to promote Indigenous management and control of national parks. As such, traditional owners form the majority on the parks' boards of management. The leases also allow for the continuing traditional hunting practices by traditional owners and oblige the Australian Government to provide employment and other economic opportunities within the parks.

In 1979, Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory was the first park to be subject to this form of joint management. The government has since entered into agreements with the traditional owners of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park in the Northern Territory and Booderee National Park on the New South Wales south coast.

Joint management delivers social, cultural and economic benefits to the Indigenous communities involved. Combining the skills of joint management partners provides optimal environmental results in areas such as weed management, feral animal eradication and fire regimes. These arrangements continue to provide an enduring basis for working together on these issues.

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park

One of Australia's most recognised landscapes, Uluru-Kata Tjuta covers more than 132 000 hectares in the arid centre. It was declared as a national park in 1977. Title to the park was granted to the Uluru-Kata Tjuta Land Trust in October 1985 when the traditional Aboriginal owners leased the land back to the Australian Government. The park's listing as a World Heritage Cultural Landscape in 1994 - its second World Heritage listing - provided international recognition of the traditional owners' connection with the land.

In 1995, the park and its board of management won UNESCO's highest award, the Picasso Gold Medal, for outstanding efforts to preserve the landscape and Aboriginal culture of the park and for setting international standards for World Heritage management.

Kakadu National Park

Kakadu, Australia's largest national park at nearly two million hectares, is located in the northern wet-dry tropics. A World Heritage area listed against natural and cultural criteria, the park includes evidence Aboriginal people have lived continuously in the region for over 50,000 years.

Approximately half of Kakadu is owned by Indigenous people with the remaining area under Aboriginal land claim. There are several language groups and a diverse and complex Aboriginal society. The traditional owners are active partners in park management.

The park was first declared in 1979, and subsequent extensions were declared in 1984, 1987, 1989 and 1991.



Booderee National Park and Botanic Garden

Booderee occupies 6400 hectares of coastal landscape. Joint management began in October 1995 with the grant of title of land to the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council and the signing of a lease with the Australian Government.

The Booderee Botanic Garden, located within the park, is Australia's only Indigenous-owned botanic garden and is also jointly managed with the Wreck Bay people. The traditional owners continue to use the region's resources as a natural classroom for younger people and for collecting food and medicine. The park is very popular, with visitors and campers appreciating its natural cultural values.

Indigenous Protected Areas

Indigenous landholders are contributing their land and land management expertise to conserve Australia's biodiversity. Indigenous Protected Areas consist of Indigenous-owned land that is managed to protect its natural and associated cultural values. In the past three years, 15 Indigenous Protected Areas have been declared, adding 3.6 million hectares to the National Reserve System, a network of protected areas representing all types of ecosystems across the country.

The traditional owners of Australia's first Indigenous Protected Area, Nantawarrina in South Australia, won a United Nations Environment Program Global 500 Award on World Environment Day 2000.

Natural Heritage Trust

The Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust aims to achieve more productive land, cleaner beaches, healthier rivers and waterways, less air pollution and the protection of threatened species.

A network of Indigenous Land Management Facilitators assists Indigenous Australians to access trust funding. The facilitators link Indigenous land managers with organisations involved in promoting sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation.

More information

Environment Australia – www.ea.gov.au

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation – www.atsic.gov.au

Trust funding assists Indigenous Australians to address land management issues and contribute to national natural resource management objectives. For example, projects have established native plant nurseries, restored degraded habitats in rural and coastal regions, implemented dust suppression and environmental health programs, re-established native food and medicinal plants, and protected cultural sites.

In support of the government's agenda on Indigenous reconciliation, these activities have had important social, cultural and economic outcomes and, in some cases, have brought Indigenous and non-Indigenous community groups together on larger regional projects.

Biodiversity protection

The government's commitment to work closely with Indigenous people and consult them on matters of national environmental significance has been strengthened through the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The legislation recognises the role of Indigenous people in the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of biodiversity and promotes the use of Indigenous peoples' knowledge of biodiversity with their involvement and cooperation.

An Indigenous Advisory Committee reports to the government on issues affecting Indigenous people. The 12 Indigenous members, with expertise in land and environmental management, are drawn from each State, the Northern Territory and the Torres Strait.

Indigenous Land Corporation

The Indigenous Land Corporation is a statutory authority that assists Indigenous people to acquire land of cultural significance and to manage it in a sustainable way to provide economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits for future generations. The corporation cannot purchase land for individuals and must grant the title of land to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander corporation or corporate body controlled by Indigenous people.

