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## Appendix 4

### Land management pressures, responses and Indigenous institutions

Anthropological studies provide evidence of complex systems of rights to access and utilise wetland and riparian resources under Indigenous law:

*there could be highly exclusive rights over important waterholes or rivers which were regarded as sacred sites, and non-exclusive rights where other water resources were concerned (Tan 1997: 172).*

Smith and Claudie (2003) elaborate on the resource access, use and distribution rules practiced by the Kaanju people of central Cape York, which include

- prohibitions on waste, particularly regarding meat foods;
- need to gain assent of Traditional Owners to access country and use its resources, and
- policing presence of others on country (2003: 3).

Kaanju people refer to this body of rules as ‘caring for country’ (Claudie 2003: 3). Further,

*... such practices are not just materially productive, but also speak to the ‘ideology of looking after and having a reciprocal relationship with a sentient landscape’ (citing Altman).*

West Kimberley land management practice is described by Yu (2005) in her case study for this project:

*The Indigenous groups of the river believe that it is their responsibility to ‘look after’ the river country so as to maintain the replenishment of seasonal resources upon which they are dependent. This is primarily achieved through ritual and song and ‘talking to the country’, but also through conservationist practices, such as never wasting fish, leaving excess bait for crocodiles, and only taking enough to satisfy immediate sustenance needs (2005:20).*

### Management issues

Environmental degradation of water bodies and riparian landscapes from pastoralism, tourism and other European land uses is a source of consternation to Indigenous people in north Australia, as are the impacts of water resource developments (Jackson *et al.* 2005; Storrs 1999). Recent Kimberley research identified the regulation of rivers,

especially impoundment for dams, as a threat to a valued cultural principle: the unimpeded flow of a river body (Toussaint *et al.* 2001: 65).

Indigenous people encounter and seek to address the pervasive threats to riparian health within areas under their control and beyond: sedimentation from erosion, weed infestations (usually pasture grasses), deteriorating water quality, feral animal impacts, saltwater intrusion and other degrading processes (Caring for Country Unit 2004; Cooke 1999; Storrs *et al.* 2001; Strang 1997; Langton 2002; Barber and Rumley 2003; Johnston 1994). A number of studies have documented these problems, for example, the Indigenous component of the National Rangelands Strategy (Johnston 1994; see also Whitehead *et al.* 1999).

An appraisal of the environmental status of the numerous river basins within the jurisdiction of the Northern Land Council paints an alarming picture of the impact of feral animals on water bodies in Arnhem Land, for example:

*In the Top End it has been recently reported that 'there is no floodplain along the Arnhem Land coast that is not trashed by pigs and buffalo'. This is of great concern particularly as this makes these areas prone to invasion by weeds such as mimosa. Further to this, it is reported that buffalo are having a huge impact on the most fragile elements of the Arnhem Land Plateau ecosystems causing erosion and consequent siltation and plugging of springs, wetlands and waterways (Caring for Country Unit, 2004: 26).*

In the Ord River area, Traditional Owners have witnessed major environmental changes and associated social impacts. Land and sites were flooded by dams and altered as irrigated agriculture was introduced. Where the environment was generally predictable and ordered the post-dam environments are disordered and vegetation types are out-of-place as new environments are created. Barber and Rumley (2003) report on the altered vegetation dynamics as described by Traditional Owners:

*The vegetation is, however, a composite of species previously found in other environmental niches... In this post-Argyle Dam environment, species which were once found in riparian zones and around springs and in jungle pockets, are now established together in large complex communities along the banks of the river. In this new environment, these indigenous species are also interspersed with introduced species such as caltrophe (2003: 22).*

Baker's study of Yanyuwa ecological knowledge cites Dinah Marrngawi's observation of the effect of cattle, or 'bullocky', on water bodies:

*Eat him (water lilies) he go down long water and grab him, eat him up and we looking for that lily seed, for roots, he gone, he eat him that bullocky, that's no good ... no matter where you go you look bullocky foot here, no turtle, some turtle run away hide long river side now, big river, because too many bullocky (1993: 134).*

Other changes to the Yanyuwa aquatic resource base are recounted by Annie Karrakayn who had noticed that a wide area around Borroloola was affected by increased human pressure:

*We used to get plenty of fish, not now all the whitefella take him away now ... greedy one (1993: 136).*

In the dry tropics of north Australia freshwater sources such as lagoons, billabongs, creeks, rivers and other wetlands are very often highly valued and productive places by other groups as well as Indigenous people. Recreational fishers, tourists, and conservationists are placing increasing emphasis on the new amenity and lifestyle values associated with these locations and resources (Holmes 1996). Many coexisting values are complementary and do not necessarily require exclusive occupancy rights to satisfy or protect, although conflict has occurred, usually over access to fishing locations or development impacts on water quality and flow.

Conflict erupted following the 1996 High Court *Wik* decision which found that elements of native title can coexist with pastoral lease title. Current property regimes, such as the pastoral lease system, do not adequately cater for these varied multiple uses and management of popular water holes and fishing spots has been the source of tension between pastoralists and other user groups, as well as Traditional Owners. For example, the NT's Pastoral Land Board is currently dissatisfied with legislative provisions for access to waterways and features of public interest through pastoral land (Northern Territory Government 2004). The Board has reported that the provisions do not address responsibility for construction and maintenance of roads, boat ramps, public facilities, garbage collection etc (ibid: 6).

Less attention has been given in the published literature to the social impacts arising from these environmental changes, particularly pressure from tourism and other human uses. Bradley (1992) refers to 'deep impacts' on Yanyuwa people from Borroloola in the NT resulting from unauthorised access to places, damage to sites, wastage of fish and fear of aggressive behaviour. He cites Dinah Norman:

*Those tourists have spoilt the country of my mother, they have spoilt the song cycle path in the north, they are shutting up the country (1992: 30)*

These concerns were expressed more than ten years ago and yet tourism pressure has increased in many regions since. In the northern Gulf region of Queensland 'excessive tourism' is nominated as a threat to parts of the region through uncontrolled camping along roadsides, lack of infrastructure to dispose of human waste and the introduction of pests (NRM Plan 2004: 147). The region receives 80,000-100,000 visitors annually, more than ten times the resident population, and visitor numbers are projected to increase significantly in coming years (ibid).

A study of tourism in the Carpentaria Shire of north Queensland found that tourism in that state has grown by 25% in the five years prior to 2005 (Stoeckl, Greiner and Mayocchi 2006). Given the small population base in many savanna regions the impact of tourism can be significant (Stoeckl, Greiner and Mayocchi 2006). The authors state that similar rates of growth have been experienced in the Gulf region where there has been a 'rapid and unplanned increase' in visitor numbers since the 1970s. Fishing was the single most important draw card to the region for all tourism groups except singles (ibid). There is evidence of negative impacts on fish stocks in the Carpentaria Shire from tourist fishing activity. This study concluded that 'tourism has a negative impact upon the availability of fresh water and generates congestion of some of the 'favourite spots' of Karumba's permanent local residents. The Indigenous population comprises more than 60% of the estimated resident population (see Greiner *et al.* 2004)<sup>15</sup>.

One of the most critical land management issues facing Indigenous communities is the rapid loss of ecological knowledge as older people pass away and younger people are diverted from the social processes that ensure the customary transfer of knowledge. Glenn Wightman, a locally experienced ethnobotanist, makes the connection between land management and traditional ecological knowledge explicit:

*Kija and Jaru people (from the East Kimberley) consider the loss of traditional biological knowledge as a natural resource or indeed a land management issue. Many Indigenous people throughout the Kimberley and the Top End of the Northern Territory hold this view of traditional knowledge in fact being a management issue. In simple terms the loss of biological knowledge equates to poor natural resource or land management (cited in Pursche 2004: 51).*

This phenomenon alarms and motivates all Indigenous land management groups across the north. Groups are particularly committed to conserving their environmental knowledge so as to ensure the continuity of their culture. The application of both Indigenous and scientific knowledge is seen as the means to solve new problems beyond the experience of Indigenous communities (e.g. weeds) while also respecting and

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<sup>15</sup> The pressure on water bodies and water resources arising from multiple uses is a key issue under consideration in the CSIRO/James Cook University socio-economic profile currently in preparation.

benefiting from local and detailed ecological knowledge. These approaches are referred to as ‘two-ways’ or ‘both-ways’ knowledge application (Cooke 1999; Storrs *et al.* 2001).

Christie’s (1991) analysis of western and Indigenous modes of knowledge production highlights the need for negotiation between scientists and Indigenous people to reach a balance between different perspectives and interpretations. Given the tendency for the dominant Western worldview to overwhelm and devalue Indigenous views and knowledge, effort should be devoted to building relationships across cultures which value difference whilst encouraging consensus on ultimate research and management goals (Duff *et al.*, 2004). It is likely that the priorities of Indigenous groups, such as the inter-generational transfer of cultural knowledge, may challenge biophysical scientists to develop a broader understanding of the socio-cultural context in which their work is located.



*Figure 13* Wetland scientists making a transect at Wiriyalka spring on the Fitzroy River floodplain, Kimberley.  
Photo: Sarah Yu.

### **Natural resource-based enterprises**

As noted in the section describing the goals and activities of the Caring for Country Unit, heightened attention is being given to the economic dimensions of customary use and opportunities arising from Indigenous stewardship and resource management. In the Northern Territory in particular, the cessation of new land claims brought about by the sunset clause in the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (1976)*, has focused attention on the strategic management of the Indigenous land base (Armstrong 2004). There is

considerable interest in exploring opportunities for livelihood development based on the sustainable use of natural and cultural resources and emerging 'sunrise' industries such as carbon abatement and stewardship payments or incentives. Indigenous organisations, communities, government agencies and researchers are interested in developing the institutions and capacity to support sustainable livelihoods whilst meeting the cultural and social aspirations of Indigenous people to maintain and in places, restore, customary resource use relations. Wildlife utilisation is one such incentive:

*Enterprise based on wildlife may supplement incentives to maintain customary practice and provide the means for more people to be active more often on their country to deal with threats to biodiversity values like wildfire, feral animals and weeds (Whitehead 2003: 11).*

A number of Indigenous communities are engaged in trade in wildlife. Perhaps the most well known is the collection of crocodile eggs for supply to farms. Other enterprises include the harvest of freshwater turtles, lizards and snakes for the pet trade, and there is interest in harvesting magpie geese (Altman and Whitehead 2003; Thurtell *et al.* 1999). Altman and Whitehead (2003) maintain that in most cases there is sufficient biological knowledge of the species being utilised to permit the design of sustainable systems of use. In the other cases, the proposed use is of such a low impact that populations will not be adversely affected.

Research can have a role to play in determining the limits to sustainable use, strategies for adaptive management, including monitoring, and in marketing. It can also contribute to 'better recognition of the subsistence economy and Indigenous people as primary producers' (Altman and Whitehead 2003), particularly in areas where there are competing pressures on the resource base from agricultural proposals.

### **Indigenous land and sea management organisations in north Australia**

Indigenous awareness of environmental threats is increasing fast, according to Cooke (1999). During the last five years the enthusiasm for establishing Indigenous Ranger groups is further evidence of the heightened interest in land management issues on Indigenous lands.

Responses to natural resource management issues on Indigenous land, or in areas where Indigenous people maintain customary connections, have been varied. They range across a spectrum where varying levels of Indigenous control is asserted - from an advisory role in the management of national parks and other resources such as water, joint management of national parks under statutory arrangements (Smyth 2001), Indigenous protected areas (Smyth and Sutherland 1996), and participation in natural

resource management regional bodies or ranger programs such as those sponsored by the Northern Land Council's Caring for Country (Storrs 2003).

As noted by Altman and Cochrane (2003), the institutional framework for wildlife management in the tropical savanna is 'enormously complex' and this complexity applies to natural resource management generally:

*Institutions operate at three distinguishable tiers. State agencies characterised by formal institutions are at the least local level, and the form and informal institutions of Indigenous social groups and community-based Indigenous organisations are at the most local level. Intermediate between these are regional institutions such as the Caring for Country Unit (CFCU) of the Northern Land Council (NLC) and the network that has resulted in the North Australian Land and Sea Managers Alliance (NAILSMA).*

According to Armstrong (2004; see also Altman and Whitehead 2003; Lane and Corbett 2005), the current suite of programs supporting Indigenous land and sea management is inadequate:

*These programs do not currently represent a long term, comprehensive and sustainable approach to supporting Indigenous land and sea management. Short timeframes stifle long term planning and development of Indigenous institutional structures and the agendas of different agencies involved do not necessarily correspond with Indigenous priorities and caring for country practices (2004: 3).*

An inadequate resource base is currently limiting the ability of Indigenous groups to pursue their land management goals. This issue should also be a cause for concern for research organisations for whom a representative Indigenous organisation is a prerequisite to negotiating a research agreement or relationship with an Indigenous community. This issue is further discussed in section 5.

The following section will describe briefly the activities and where, possible, the objectives of each of the member organisations of NAILSMA (from west to east), as well as the Northern Gulf Savanna Indigenous NRM Group. The status of NRM planning and key NRM issues are described, where appropriate.

### **The Kimberley Land Council's Land and Sea Management Unit**

In addition to providing legal avenues for recognition of native title, the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) supports a range of projects involved with Indigenous land and sea management in the Kimberley through the Land and Sea Management Unit.

The Unit was established in 1998. It's vision statement is:

*The Kimberley Land Council's Land + Sea Unit assists Kimberley Aboriginal people to be empowered to keep country and culture healthy, generate positive social, economic, environmental, and cultural outcomes, and maintain strong connection to country for future generations.*

LSMU currently employs 11 staff, an indigenous trainee and numerous contractors to support 28 land and sea projects that it administers across the Kimberley region. Many of these projects are conducted through partnerships with government agencies, research institutions, Indigenous representative bodies, nationally and in other states and Territories, and local Kimberley Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations.

The focus of Land and Sea Management Unit projects finds its natural divide across 4 country types identified by the Kimberley Aboriginal Reference Group established through recent NRM planning. Some of these projects include:

- River
  - Threatened Species Freshwater Sawfish
  - Ribbons of Blue
  - Rivercare Projects
  - Cane Toad Education
  - Fish passage research
  - Freshwater fish research
- Saltwater
  - Saltwater Country project
  - Dugong and Marine Turtle project
  - Coastal management
  - Ranger programs
- Rangelands
  - Integrated natural and Cultural Resource Management on 2 east Kimberley pastoral projects
- Desert
  - Paruku IPA management areas
  - Warlujilajaa jumu proposed IPA

Wider regional projects include:

- Aboriginal engagement in natural resource management processes.
- Appropriate economies for the Fitzroy basin
- Indigenous Land management Facilitation

The goal for future development is to coordinate the Unit's efforts on country more strategically and to establish programs that lead to sustainable employment for Kimberley Aboriginal people in the natural and cultural resource management industry<sup>16</sup>.

For NRM planning purposes the Kimberley forms a sub-region of the Rangelands region (Draft Kimberley NRM Plan). The purpose of the Kimberley Plan is: *to provide the overarching coordination direction for natural resource management specific to the Kimberley region in the Rangelands of Western Australia* (2004: 9)

The Plan lists the major challenges for NRM in the region as being:

- Tourism – one of the fastest growing industries, but with insufficient co-ordinated management;
- Fire management;
- Cane toads;
- Weeds, and
- Climate change.

The Plan notes that waterway condition is not well understood in the Kimberley.

Interim Kimberley NRM Group and Technical Working Groups were established to guide the development of the Plan. The Interim Kimberley NRM Group met in October 2004 and agreed to a proposed long-term structure for the NRM group (Prouse 2004). It was recommended that the group consist of 10 community members with five of those members being Indigenous. Four of those five are to be chosen according to the general environmental categories: saltwater, river, desert and rangelands/cattle (ibid). Existing Indigenous community organisations are to nominate the four Traditional Owners, while the fifth will be reserved for an Indigenous person appointed by all members of the Kimberley NRM group.

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<sup>16</sup> For an account of environmental planning activity amongst Indigenous communities in the west Kimberley during the 1990s, before the formation of the Land + Sea Unit, see Davies and Young (1996).

## The Northern Land Council's Caring for Country and Caring for Sea Country Programs

The Northern Land Council is a statutory authority representing Indigenous people in the northern half of the Northern Territory. It was established under the ALRA to represent Indigenous owners to claim and manage their land. It is a representative body under the *Native Title Act 1993 (Cwth)* (Caring for Country Unit 2004). In 1995 the Land Council established the Caring for Country Unit to assist Indigenous landowners with land management and sustainable development projects. Threats to wetlands arising from weeds, particularly *Mimosa pigra* (mimosa) served as a significant impetus to the establishment of this Unit within the Land Council (Storrs *et al.* 2001). Its aim was to:

assist Traditional Owners in conserving healthy landscapes for future generations through strategic planning and by increasing the capacity needed to deal with existing and emerging environmental problems (Caring for Country Unit 2004: 8)

Currently there are approximately 30 Indigenous ranger programs operating within the Northern Land Council's region, providing activity for about 350 people from funds provide by the Community Development Employment Project scheme and the National Heritage Trust. This coverage brings approximately 50% of the Indigenous-owned land area under a 'formalised regime' (Caring for Country Unit 2004: 9). The ranger programs aim to sustainably manage Indigenous-owned land and sea resources over an area of about 170,000 sq kms and close to 90% of the NT's coastal zone (Altman 2003a). Altman describes some of their activities:

*Ranger programs focus on the eradication of noxious weeds, especially mimosa, and the management of feral animals and pests, including cane toads, crazy ants, cats, pigs, horses, donkeys and buffalo (ibid; see also Caring for Country Unit 2004).*

In 1996 the NLC's Caring for Country Unit established the Top End Indigenous People's Wetland Program with funds from the Australian Federal Government (Jackson *et al.* 2005; Thurtell *et al.* 1999). The initial focus of the Program was the wetlands within the catchment of the Blyth and Liverpool Rivers in central Arnhem Land. In a planning report prepared by Thurtell *et al.* (1999), the original choice of this site was attributed to the enthusiasm of the local community rangers, the Djelk Community Rangers, and the ability of the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation to provide administrative support to the program and planning activities. The program adopted a strategy of total catchment management, and where necessary coordination across catchments, as described by Thurtell *et al.* (1999):

*This recognises that not only are the coastal wetlands inter-connected but also that Indigenous land ownership and kinship can extend across catchments. Indigenous landowners have control of the catchment planning processes and implementation*

*of the management prescriptions for the wetlands. The planning processes involve continuous consultation and liaison by the NLC and others to identify and articulate the aspirations of the landowners for the management of their wetlands, and to develop priorities for future research and management (1999: 2).*

The Caring for Country Unit has developed a considerable capacity for resource assessment and planning. In 2004 the Unit prepared a set of environmental management status reports for each of the 31 river basins found within the Northern Land Council's jurisdiction (Caring for Country Unit 2004). The development of the report drew on the combined experience of the extensive network of Indigenous land management programs and an array of previous planning activities and consultations carried out by the Caring for Country Unit over the previous ten year period (Mahney pers. comm.) It was used as a basis for the NLC 's input into the Northern Territory's regional plan and was also designed to complement the Unit's internal strategy (ibid). Each of the status reports summarise existing social, economic and environmental information and outlines approaches to Natural Resource Management by local communities and external agencies.

The overview of the Northern Land Council region details the environmental management issues facing Traditional Owners (Caring for Country 2004: 17). These include weeds, fire, feral animals, threatened species, land clearing, infrastructure development, mining, water quality, and coastal and marine issues. Under the water quality section the following issues are raised – adequacy of drinking water supplies, rubbish disposal in remote communities, water extraction in rapidly developing river basins and management of riparian vegetation. Limited capacity of Indigenous people to respond to water allocation processes is noted (2004: 21).

The same report describes a number of priority issues, including:

- Effective institutional arrangements;
- Recognising two sets of knowledge;
- Increasing participation of Indigenous people in land and sea management;
- Cultural preservation/conservation;
- Effective communication;
- Creating a sustainable economic base for cultural and natural resource management;
- Gun ownership;
- Threatened species, and
- Effective management of environmental threats (2004: 24).

Collaborations between scientists and Indigenous rangers have been facilitated by the Caring For Country Unit, which sees itself as a broker creating and supporting partnerships between Indigenous community-based initiatives and government agencies, researchers, non-government organisations and others. The brokerage aspect is very important in the context of this report. With such capability there are experienced staff who can act as a conduit for researchers, and as collaborators in research project development, and sometimes research activity. There are many examples of this kind of research collaboration, for instance the Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist was engaged in a project to undertake an inventory of wetlands (plants, aquatic invertebrates and freshwater fish). Other investigations (groundwater hydrology and paleo-geomorphology) were brokered to provide information for management planning and assessment of the usefulness of the Ramsar convention (see Thurtell *et al.* 1999), to enhance the skills of Indigenous rangers and to address the needs of government research agencies (Storrs *et al.* 2001).



**Figure 14** Charles Darwin University science students working with traditional land owners at Acacia Gap, NT.  
Photo: Michael Douglas.

Storrs *et al.* (2001) describe the lessons learnt from the experience of collaborating with scientists:

*Using a concrete issue such as weed (mimosa) control to introduce wetland management enabled community members to be involved in on-site control that helped strengthen their feelings of responsibility for country. Success at on-ground action built community confidence as well as the technical and institutional capacity*

*to deal with other land management and science-based issues... Science projects were initiated or chosen based on their relevance to the community and the researcher's ability to conduct research in a culturally appropriate way (2001: 9).*

Scientists have also worked with Traditional Owners to survey macro-invertebrates and fish in central Arnhem Land river systems (Thurtell *et al.* 1999). These surveys are to serve as a baseline for future water quality and ecological monitoring and could assist in an assessment of the ecological health of the habitats sampled. Scientific staff provided training to the Djelk Rangers in sampling techniques. Thurtell *et al.* (1999) comment further on the research processes:

*The surveys have been done jointly and knowledge from the Traditional Owners and survey staff combined. In this manner the documentation and recording of ecological knowledge has been enhanced and information shared on an equal basis. Interaction and exchanging information is treated as an important part of the documentation process (1999: 19).*

Over many years devoted to land management activities, the Caring for Country Unit is now giving increased emphasis to enterprise development on Indigenous lands:

*The CFCU has both a conservation and development focus, based as it is on the philosophy that the people need to look after country so the country can continue to look after the people... The CFCU also supports the development of small-scale resource-based Indigenous enterprises, such as wildlife use, which have the potential to provide jobs, partially support communities and contribute some funding and resources to Indigenous land and sea management programs (Caring for Country Unit 2004: 9).*

### **Carpentaria Land Council**

The following description of the Carpentaria Land Council was provided to the authors by a staff member of the Land Council:

The Carpentaria Land Council Indigenous Corporation is a native title representative body under the *Native Title Act 1993* for the Queensland west region. It was established in 1984 as a community organisation to represent, protect, and secure the rights and interests of Indigenous people in northwest Queensland. Since 1984, we have been dedicated to providing this service.

On 30 June 1994 the CLCAC was recognised under the NTA as the native title representative body for the Gulf Region. This region included land and waters from the Northern Territory border to north-east of Normanton, and the islands and seas of the lower Gulf of Carpentaria. On 1 July 2001, the Federal Minister for Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Affairs enlarged CLCAC's area of recognition to include the new Queensland West region, with its NTRB boundaries extended to include an area south to the South Australian border and east to Julia Creek. This region had been without an NTRB until that time.

This region now forms the CLCAC's Greater Mount Isa Region. The organisation has offices in Mt Isa, Burketown and Normanton and Cairns.

The Carpentaria Land Council has not yet developed the capacity to assist in land and resource management to the extent shown by the Land Councils in the Northern Territory or the Kimberley.

The Land Council is located in the Southern Gulf NRM region which covers an area of 230,000 square kilometres with a population of 35,000 living in the municipalities of Mount Isa City Council, Cloncurry Shire, McKinlay Shire, Richmond Shire, Flinders Shire, Burke Shire, Doomadgee and Shire of Mornington.

Southern Gulf Catchments Ltd, the regional NRM group, has been responsible for developing the draft Southern Gulf regional plan, currently available for comment. Key problem areas identified by the group include:

- Weeds (prickly acacia, mesquite, rubber vine, etc)
- Livestock overgrazing
- Feral animals displacing native species
- Insufficient water storage facilities
- Unregulated camping and 4WD use ([www.nrm.gov.au/state/qld/southern-gulf/publications/report-card/](http://www.nrm.gov.au/state/qld/southern-gulf/publications/report-card/)).

Unlike the Northern Gulf region there is no formalised Indigenous sub-group or consultative structure. Arrangements for involvement of Indigenous people in the region are currently being negotiated with the Carpentaria Land Council and other relevant bodies.

## Northern Gulf Savanna Indigenous Group<sup>17</sup>

The Northern Gulf Resource Management Group was formed in 1999 to embody representative members of a diversity of interests and expertise associated with Gulf land and sea management ([www.northerngulf.com.au](http://www.northerngulf.com.au)). An Indigenous sub-group of the Northern Savannas NRM group was formed by Indigenous communities of the Northern Gulf in 2002. It was designed to take account of traditional 'governance structures' and to improve communications between various groups and communities (2004: 135). It consists of nominated members from the traditional tribe and or language groups of Tagalaka, Kurtijar, Euwamiam, Wakamin, Mbarbarrum, and Djungan. According to the Plan 'two nominated representatives of each Traditional Owner group work together for an integrated cooperative approach to Indigenous resource management for the region' (2004: 136). Since 2002 it has been involved in developing targets and implementing priorities for NRM in the region. An accredited plan for NRM exists for the Northern Gulf region with a biophysical theme dealing with water. The Plan discusses environmental conditions, issues and current management responses.

A meeting of all Traditional Owners was held at Undara to 'tackle the question of how do we engage with this NRM business' (Ron Archer pers. comm.). Ron Archer, the current Chair of the group, describes how it was formed:

*We decided we couldn't elect people because Indigenous management didn't really work that way. Most of the relevant language groups were at that meeting so it was suggested that each go away and come back with two names of people for their language group who could represent them – we formed our group then and work mainly to that Northern Gulf region.*

*We feel that this is our own model and is culturally appropriate. If I am to speak somewhere I will get appropriate authorisation from the group. People still remain the primary spokespeople of their traditional country, however, and we make sure the right people are speaking for the right country (pers. comm.)*

The Northern Gulf Regional NRM Plan provides a focus on 'on-ground works' on land and sea considered achievable by Indigenous communities in the region, acknowledging that such works need to achieve multiple outcomes for communities including collection of Indigenous knowledge and the protection or restoration of Indigenous cultural sites (2004: 134). It identifies three Indigenous resource management themes:

- Indigenous and cultural natural resource knowledge
- Cultural heritage
- Access to country

<sup>17</sup> This group differs from the others profiled here in that it is not either a representative body under the Native Title Act nor a Land Council established under statute or independently of Government. Therefore this group does not seek to lodge claims to land or to manage land held under Aboriginal title.

The Plan firmly establishes the link between caring for country and maintaining cultural pursuits in land management activities. It notes that many Indigenous communities consider their efforts across a range of areas to ‘exemplify best practice environmental management’ (date: 135). It also raises land use agreements as a popular mechanism by which Indigenous communities, governments and other parties are developing partnerships.

The Northern Gulf Indigenous Savanna Group have articulated their aspirations, and these are referred to in the NRM Plan:

*As well as access to country, they sought the recognition and respect for their cultural values, opportunities for undertaking economic development, and employment and training to participate in tourism, and business enterprises, the protection and management of environmental and cultural sites, and the maintenance of a way of life (2004: 137).*

They have identified ‘lack of resources, materials and access to country as a contributing factor in achieving recognised outcomes’ (2004: 136). Further, it offers specialised and dedicated resource centres as a solution:

*Land and Sea Management Centres are seen by Indigenous communities as a successful means of coordinating resource management. The centres also plan a large role in community development and training. Traditional Owners in the Northern Gulf NRM region wish to continue the operation of the Land and Sea Management Centre at Kowanyama and establish a new centre in the Karumba area. These existing centre and opportunities for future centres are at risk with respect to on-going government funding. As the centres play such a large role in community development, employment and training, full resourcing of the operation and establishment of the centres does not suitable fit (sic) current regional Natural Heritage Trust funding parameters. However, the Natural Heritage Trust is a suitable source of funding for implementation works (date: 136).*

According to the Northern Gulf Regional NRM Plan, some members of the Indigenous communities of the region hold a strong interest in aquaculture production, principally for economic development (date). A recent report examined the potential to develop aquaculture industries in Kowanyama and the communities surrounding the town of Normanton<sup>18</sup>. The species under consideration include: Redclaw (*Cherax quadricarinatus*), Barramundi (*Lates calcifer*), crocodiles, mud crabs, freshwater mussels and Cherubin (*Macrocrachium rosenbergii*).

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<sup>18</sup> By Minniecon & Burke Pty Ltd.

The Plan lists a number of management actions endorsed by the Northern Gulf Indigenous Savanna Group and recognised by the wider Northern Gulf community as important. The following are those that relate to tropical rivers research and management:

- Support Traditional Owners to identify, map, record and prioritise significant and important Country for protection, preservation and appropriate management to maintain Indigenous cultural values
- Address the impacts of humans, fire, feral animals, water and weeds on country and sites of cultural importance, and to preserve and protect the cultural heritage and the biodiversity of that area
- Encourage and support Traditional Owner communities to become involved in addressing resource management issues through activities such as sustainable fishing practices, tourism and catchment management by using information forums and capacity building workshops/sessions.

### **Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation**

Balkanu is a corporation rather than a representative body under the Native Title Act. In the Cape York region it is the Cape York Land Council that performs the functions of a representative body.

The following description is provided by the Balkanu website:

Balkanu was established in 1996 and is owned by the Cape York Indigenous Charitable Trust, on behalf of the Indigenous people of Cape York. Balkanu is committed to supporting Indigenous people of Cape York through initiatives which deliver positive outcomes for the economy, society and culture of Cape York people. This is achieved through a number of programs/business units including:

- Caring for Country Unit: land and sea management through traditional knowledge recording;
- Homelands Housing Project: low cost housing on homelands, and
- Property Planning and Land Tenure.

Balkanu is one of a number of key regional organisations in Cape York which are working together to bring about sustainable long term outcomes to improve the lives of the Indigenous People of Cape York Communities. These organisations include, Cape York Partnerships, Cape York Institute of Policy and Leadership, Cape York Land Council and Cape York Health Council.

To maximise the opportunities and potentials available to the Indigenous people of Cape York, Balkanu will work with governments, industry and non-government organisations ([www.balkanu.com.au](http://www.balkanu.com.au); accessed November 2005).

The Caring for Country Unit of Balkanu currently employs ten staff who undertake the following activities:

- Property management planning;
- Ethno-ecological recording;
- Investigating commercial resource use opportunities;
- Natural resource management planning;
- Development of GIS technologies, and
- Marine and coastal planning.

This Unit has established partnerships with State and Commonwealth agencies as well as a number of university research institutions and CRCs. According to the Balkanu website:

this research helps influence institutional changes within those established structures that deliver better services supporting Traditional Owner management of resources on country ([www.balkanu.com](http://www.balkanu.com)).