



**National Water Initiative:**

*Presented by Samara Erlandson, NAILSMA Operations Manager*

Land and Sea Management Ranger Conference

Monday 1st-Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2009

Wilam Camp Ground,

Waminari Bay,

West Arnhem Land.

**Balkanu**  
Cape York Development Corporation Pty



Kimberley Land Council



Northern Land Council



Good morning everyone my name is Samara Erlandson and I work for NAILSMA as the Operations Manager.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Before I proceed I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners, whose land we are meeting on today.

I would also like to acknowledge Joe Morrison, the Chief Executive Officer of NAILSMA, who unfortunately was unable to attend today, but sends his apologies.

I would also like to thank the Northern Land Council, in particular Justine Yanner and Trish Rigby-Christopherson for inviting NAILSMA to come and talk to you.

## **INTRODUCTION**

I will firstly talk briefly on NAILSMA, to provide an organisational overview, and then provide some detail of NAILSMA work specifically relating to Indigenous engagement in water resource management.

## **THE ALLIANCE**

NAILSMA is an Alliance made up of a partnership between the Kimberley, Northern and Carpentaria Land Councils and Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation. Our partners have given us a mandate to facilitate and bring people together to work in partnership for better Indigenous outcomes relating to their land and seas, their management and development using Traditional Knowledge.

NAILSMA operates on the basis of a culture-based economy, one that is defined by Indigenous people, for Indigenous purposes. It aspires to new ways of engagement in existing industries, such as mining, pastoral and tourism, but also to lead the development of emerging new industries such as carbon offsets, water based economies and environmental service provisions.

The term '*Looking after our country our way*' is a theme NAILSMA embraces for all its activities which to me, best sums up the philosophical foundation of the Alliance. Indigenous

people **are** ‘Caring for Country’ using knowledge and skills that have been passed on to them from countless generations. But within this philosophy, partnerships with governments and the scientific community are seen as important to help deal with contemporary challenges and the many emerging new threats, but on Indigenous terms.

NAILSMA is advocating, sponsoring and supporting work that involves dealing with people and policy at the national level – but this is always carried out by being mindful of the need to respect and support Indigenous land and sea management programs operating in the region.

### **IWPG BACKGROUND**

NAILSMA has been engaged in water resource management issues since 2006 when the Indigenous Water Policy Group (IWPG) was formed to continue the work of the Lingiari Water Rights Discussion Booklets (Onshore and Offshore), which identified that Indigenous rights, responsibilities and interests in water need to be recognized in any water resource management plans, further to this, a scoping study of Indigenous interest in tropical rivers identified an extremely low awareness of the National Water Initiative (NWI) amongst Indigenous people in northern Australia.

The IWPG was initially funded for one year (2006-07) by Land and Water Australia to develop institutional arrangements for Indigenous participations in the NWI. The National Water Commission currently funds the IWPG until 2011 under its Raising National Water Standards Programme.

### **IWPG AIMS**

The broad aims of the IWPG are:

- To increase the awareness of Indigenous people living in northern Australia about the government’s current policies for water reform, and
- To engage in research relating to Indigenous rights, responsibilities and interests in water resources in northern Australia so that these aspects are articulated during the water reform process.

The most important aspect of NAILSMA’s IWPG activities has been the development of a policy position around the inclusion of Indigenous people into the commercialization of

water in northern Australia. It is hoped that this will be released soon as a means of guiding the states and territories regarding water planning, use and management into the future.

## **IWPG STRUCTURE**

The IWPG is made up of key Indigenous representatives from major regional organisations across the north that represents a large number of Indigenous communities and Traditional Owners.

An Advisory Group and a Policy Engagement Group support the IWPG. Advisors act independently in an advisory capacity to provide strategic advice to the IWPG on matters concerning research and policies as they affect Indigenous communities in the north. As required, the IWPG may commission researchers to engage in research programs and to provide briefing papers that review relevant literature and policy documents that will assist in developing informed Indigenous policy positions.

The Policy Engagement Group (PEG) is currently made up of key representatives from state (WA and QLD), territory (NT) and national (NWC) water agencies. PEG may act to support the IWPG to engage Indigenous positions on water resources in the north of Australia with development initiatives at the state, territory and federal levels. The approach for engagement between PEG and the IWPG is two-fold. Firstly, it provides for meaningful Indigenous integrated policy development. Secondly, it provides for a coordinated approach that crosses jurisdictions to the management and security of water resources unique to the north of Australia.

## **ICWFN ROLE**

Working in parallel and in support of the IWPG, the newly established Indigenous Community Water Facilitator Network (ICWFN) will act as a vehicle to ensure that Indigenous interests at the community level are articulated, encouraged and incorporated into water policy decisions, planning and water allocation processes.

The success of various projects currently being undertaken in northern Australia, such as those conducted under the Tropical River and Coastal Knowledge (TRaCK) research program, are greatly dependent upon a strong understanding and capacity for local communities to effectively engage in discussions about the future of north Australia's water

resources. However, facilitation at the community level to integrate Indigenous interests in water management among the various stakeholders remains deficient.

The broad aims of the Network are to:

- Establish a community based network to advance Indigenous engagement in research and management of tropical rivers, water use and conservation across northern Australia; and
- Act as a catalyst to ensure that Indigenous interests are articulated, encouraged and incorporated into water policy decisions, management plans and water allocations.

The overall outcomes of this level of engagement will include health, economic, cultural, environmental and social benefits among Indigenous participants.

The National Water Commission has provided funding for the Network until 2011 under the Raising National Water Standards programme.

The Network will advise the IWPG, TRaCK, the National Water Commission and State and Territory jurisdictions.

## **TRaCK**

In 2007, NAILSMA formed a partnership with the Tropical River and Coastal Knowledge (TRaCK) research program to ensure that Indigenous aspirations be considered with respect to the national water reform agenda of the National Water Initiative. This partnership, along with the IWPG, provides a strategic pathway for Indigenous participation in public policy formulation, and the debate about northern waters through the integration of Indigenous knowledge with scientific and technical data.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, I would like to say that a few things from my experience of working with NAILSMA. It makes sense to be connected to other land and sea organisations in the form of an Alliance. This means sharing the effort and pooling resources, building and maintaining partnerships, working together with a common vision to take on the challenges of today and ensuring the survival of our people's connections to land and sea country for future generations. There are still plenty of challenges, but I have faith in the strong leaders that occupy their traditional lands across the north to meet these challenges as our ancestors have

done for generations before.

As I referred to earlier, NAILSMA is committed to promoting Indigenous Water Resource Management. To achieve this, NAILSMA supports the Indigenous Water Policy Group and Indigenous Community Water Facilitator Network, and with the IWPG Policy Position Statement on Indigenous Rights in Commercial Water Allocations, NAILSMA also promotes international mechanisms such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the United Nations that was ratified by the Rudd government in March 2009.

I hope you have a better sense of what NAILSMA is doing in the area of Indigenous Water Resource Management. If not, I would be happy to put you in contact with the appropriate staff who may be able to assist with providing further information about any of the activities I referred to in this presentation.

Thank you all for listening and I wish you all well for the rest of the conference.

### **Further Acknowledgements**

#### **IWPG MEMBERS**

- Joe Ross (IWPG Chairman)
- Frank Davey (Deputy Chairman - Kimberley Land Council)
- Nolan Hunter (Deputy Director - Kimberley Land Council)
- Desmond Hill (OFA Project Implementation Officer – Miriuwung Gajerrong Corporation)
- Murrundoo Yanner (Representative - Gulf of Carpentaria)
- Thomas Wilson (Chairman - Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation)
- Richard Ah Mat (Chair of NAILSMA)
- Richard Aken (Chairman - Balkanu - Cape York Development Corporation)
- Richard Jenkins (Balkanu - Cape York Development Corporation)
- Toby Accoom (Cape York Land Council - Lockhardt River)
- William Busch (Cape York Land Council - Mapoon)
- Kim Hill (CEO NLC)
- Sammy Bush-Blanasi (Deputy Chair NLC)

## **IWPG ADVISORS**

- Patrick Dodson (Director - Lingiari Foundation)
- Paul Lane (Executive Officer - Kimberley Institute)
- Marcia Langton (Professor for Australian Indigenous Studies - The University of Melbourne)
- Ameyali Ramos (Consultant - Institute of Advanced Studies - United Nations University)
- Tom Hatton (Director, CSIRO Water for a Health Country Flagship)
- Sue Jackson (Senior Research Scientist, CSIRO Tropical Ecosystems Research Centre)
- Jon Altman (Director for Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University)
- Michael O'Donnell (Legal Research Associate - TRaCK Theme 6)
- Peter Whitehead (Theme 6 Leader - TRaCK)
- Poh Ling-Tan (Associate Professor - Griffith University)
- Lee Godden (Professor of Law - The University of Melbourne)

## **IWPG POLICY ENGAGEMENT GROUP**

- Western Australian Government Department of Water - shared by John Loney, Ed Hauk and Susie Williams
- Queensland Government Department of Natural Resources and Water - shared by Nigel Kelly and Tom Crothers
- Northern Territory Government Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sports - Ian Lancaster
- National Water Commission - Murray Radcliffe

## **ICWFN CATCHMENT AREAS**

- Fitzroy (WA)
- Ord (WA)
- Katherine –Daly (NT)
- Southern Gulf (QLD)
- Mitchell (QLD)
- Wenlock River (QLD)