

Indigenous Land Management in Action

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For thousands of years, Australia's Indigenous people incorporated land and sea management, popularly termed Caring for Country, into their way of life, customs and laws. Australia's land had been shaped and maintained by Aboriginal people before European settlement. Traditional methods of land care used by Indigenous communities included burning, sowing and storing plants, the creation of 'grasslands' and fishing traps. These activities were conducted with consideration of both land, plant and animal preferences and behaviours. The introduction of European farming practices, which were suited to the significantly different European environments, has changed traditional indigenous land management, resulting in some environmental issues today (for example, erosion, salinity, feral animals and weeds) [1].



Modern Burning in Kakadu National Park

Last year we released an insight on [Caring for Country in Practice](#), which explored the cultural significance and impact of Caring for Country. This insight will explore how indigenous land management techniques have been adopted and utilised across Western Australia.

Modern Land Management

Despite traditional indigenous land care methods differing greatly from modern techniques, Indigenous knowledge has been a valuable resource in many modern land management and conservation efforts. Two of the main modern indigenous land management applications can be seen through the Indigenous Ranger Program and Indigenous Protected Areas. Traditional knowledge is also being used in Indigenous communities across Australia in the development of Land Management Plans.

Indigenous Rangers - Indigenous Rangers protect and care for both land and sea across Australia using a combination of traditional Indigenous knowledge and modern techniques. They work in Indigenous Protected Areas and National Parks, on the sea and in private estates. As of April 2021, there are 129 funded Indigenous ranger groups across Australia [2].

Rangers use their skills on a variety of tasks, including:

- ⇒ The protection and monitoring of threatened species;
- ⇒ Control and eradication of feral animals and weeds;
- ⇒ Fire Management;
- ⇒ Establishing and maintaining tourism; and
- ⇒ Protecting and restoring cultural sites.

Often, an important part of the ranger program is not only looking after Country, but also incorporates the transfer of cultural knowledge, practices and engagement with the community [3].



Summary/Quote



For thousands of years, Australia's Indigenous people incorporated land and sea management, popularly termed Caring for Country, into their way of life, customs and laws.



Indigenous Protected Areas - Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) are areas of land and sea return to traditional owners. In these areas Aboriginal people work with the Australian Government to protect the biodiversity and cultural values [4]. You can view these areas on the [Map of Indigenous Protected Areas](#) - provided by the NIAA (as of September 2020). There are currently 78 dedicated Indigenous Protected Areas covering a total area of 74,693,991 hectares across Australia [4].

Land and Sea Management Projects

The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) has an interactive map of currently funded Indigenous land and sea management projects across Australia. To see what projects occur in WA take the time to view the [NIAA map](#) [5].

If you do not have time, below are three projects based in Western Australia that we hope sparks your interest.

Spinifex Land Management Rangers

The Spinifex Land Management Rangers are based in the remote Tjuntjuntjara community (650km northeast of Kalgoorlie) and protect environmental and cultural assets throughout 73,000km² of Spinifex and Pilki Native Title Determination areas [5].

The Spinifex people created the Spinifex Healthy Country Plan in 2015, which guides the work of the Land Management Program. Some of the key activities that the Spinifex Rangers undertake include:

- Managing and eradicating the invasive weed Buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) in the Great Victoria Desert. This weed is considered one of the greatest invasive species threats across Australia's Arid areas [6];
- Surveying Malleefowl (nganamara) in the region;
- Managing invasive camels and introduced predators;
- Looking after waterholes and soaks;
- Patrolling Parks and Reserves [7];
- Passing on traditional knowledge to younger generations.



Buffel grass seedhead. (©2011 DPIRD). Sourced: [agric.wa.gov](#)

The Spinifex Land Management and Cultural Knowledge Program is run by the [Pila Nguru Aboriginal Corporation](#) and receives funding from the Commonwealth.

Esperance Tjaltjraak Cultural Rangers - Cheetup

Tjaltjraak is the Aboriginal name for a culturally significant species of eucalypt (Blue Mallee *Eucalyptus pleurocarpa*) whose geographic distribution approximately aligns with Esperance Nyungar Country boundaries. This ancestral land spans 30,000 km² of Southern WA [8].

The Tjaltjraak Ranger program was launched in 2018, as part of a key strategy under the [Esperance Nyungar Healthy Country Plan](#). This plan identified key areas for protection including cultural places, the coastline, granite outcrops, wetlands and native flora & fauna [9]. The rangers provide integrated services including Phytophthora Dieback management, fire management, weed and feral animal control, tourism management, and threatened species monitoring.



Blue Mallee *Eucalyptus pleurocarpa*. Source: [ANSPA](#)

The Esperance Tjaltjraak is also currently developing an integrated cultural management plan for Cheetup Cave, which has been added as a National Heritage listed place based on its cultural and archaeological significance. Cheetup Cave is a large granite dome and cave system 55km east of Esperance.



Stage 1 of the Cheetup cultural management plan development comprised of activities such as cultural surveying and burning and provided an opportunity for Elders to work with youth and cultural rangers [10]. The complete cultural management plan will eventually be integrated into the existing Cape le Grand national park management plan and will address both environment and visitor management issues such as Dieback, trails and signage.



Cheetup Management Plan. Source ETNAC

Nyangumarta Warrarn IPA and Rangers

The Nyangumarta Warrarn Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) spans 28,420km² of North Western Australia, situated in the Canning Basin's southern areas. The land here is rich in ecological values and diverse habitats. The IPA encompasses parts of the Great Sandy Desert, and the Ramsar Wetlands of Eighty Mile Beach and Walyarta (Mandora Marsh) [11].

Currently based in Bidyadanga, the Nyangumarta Rangers primarily operate in the Nyangumarta Warrarn IPA protecting cultural and biodiversity values through activities including:



Canning Stock Route / Desert Rd (Kidson Track / Wapet Rd) crossroads - By: 17 South. Sourced: exploroz.com

- Monitoring threatened species such as marine turtles, greater bilby, marsupial moles and various bird and plant species;
- Weed Management;
- Water Monitoring (significant because rainfall is unreliable throughout the year);
- Fencing and Feral Animal control;
- Fire Control;
- Addressing tourism development (in particular implementing a permit system for Nyangumarta Highway (Kidson Track/Wapet Road).

Recording traditional knowledge for future generations has also been a paramount endeavour of both the Nyangumarta Rangers and the Nyangumarta Warrarn Aboriginal Corporation. They have published an extensive booklet on the [Traditional Ecological Knowledge of the Nyangumarta Warrarn IPA](#), which contains ethno-botanical knowledge passed down through generations and descriptions of 70 native species [2].

If your organisation's activities interact with the land or sea and need assistance connecting with your local community or aboriginal groups, don't hesitate to contact us via enquires@integratesustainability.com.au or phone 9468 0338.

References

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