



6 March 2019

The Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia.  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email [jscna@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscna@aph.gov.au)

**Re: Opportunities and Challenges of the Engagement of Traditional Owners in the Economic Development of Northern Australia**

Key Recommendations:

1. Carbon farming is recognised as an industry and supported by the Australian Government similar to that of AgriFutures Australia.
2. The Australian Government vehicle fleet is offset by Australian Carbon Credit Units with environmental, social and cultural values directly benefiting Traditional Owners
3. A carbon farming training budget is a standing item for Aboriginal ranger professional development.

I would like to make the following submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia.

Carbon farming is an emerging industry in Northern Australia that generates a sustainable multimillion-dollar income for Traditional Owners. The support of the Australian Government is essential to the further development of the industry as well as meeting national climate change policy targets. Investment by corporate Australia in Aboriginal carbon farming through the voluntary market is increasingly significant as they buy Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCU) with environmental, social and cultural values.

The Aboriginal Carbon Foundation was established in 2010 to catalyse life-changing, community building opportunities for people living in regional and rural Australia. Our Not for Profit company has been instrumental in enabling millions of dollars for communities in Far North Queensland to date, through trading Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCU) with environmental, social and cultural values in the voluntary market to Corporate Australia and the Queensland Government. We refer to this commodity as 'ethical carbon credits'.

Our trading arm the Reducing Carbon Building Communities (RCBC) Fund Pty Ltd was established in April 2018 generating over \$1.3m in its first several months going to Kowanyama, Mapoon, Pormpuraaw and Aurukun communities in Cape York from the voluntary market. The trade of ethical carbon credits in the voluntary market for a premium price are an important source of income for Aboriginal groups and communities. Ethical carbon credits can address Corporate Australia's aspirations to meet UN Sustainable

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Development Goals (SDG), Reconciliation Action Plans as well as carbon neutrality requirements.

The AbCF developed the Aboriginal Carbon Farming and Core Benefits Management training course (nationally accredited) for rangers and Traditional Owners. The training package should be a standard Australian Government budget item for Aboriginal groups engaged in carbon farming across northern Australia. This is part of the professional development of rangers and enables Traditional Owners greater decision making over their carbon projects.

A major issue facing Aboriginal groups is not implementing the carbon farming (savanna burning) projects per se, but rather engaging with the carbon industry and markets as independent entities.

The model of external organisations negotiating carbon farming projects (normally staffed by non-Aboriginal people) does not build the capacity of Aboriginal groups to conduct their own carbon business, but instead builds the capacity of the organisations and their staff as they take up opportunities at the expense of local people.

It has been our experience that Aboriginal groups who own their land and manage Aboriginal ranger teams aspire to secure independent incomes without interference from third parties who 'dabble' in carbon. The focus of capacity development should be directly on Aboriginal groups to support their growth and economic sustainability.

The income achieved through the RCBC Fund goes directly to Aboriginal project owners. There is no external agenda dictating how the funds are spent. This supports project owners' aspirations to be financially independent and chart their own course.

The verification of environmental, social and cultural values is undertaken by Aboriginal rangers providing jobs and professional skills development in northern Australia. We do not engage non-Aboriginal people to do this work, which has been the standard practise of regional organisations and conservation groups, rather we invest in the Aboriginal rangers.

The Hon. Leeanne Enoch Queensland Minister for the Environment and Science raised our work at the 2018 Governors Climate and Forest Task Force meeting in California placing Queensland in a leadership position internationally.

The Queensland Government (QG) are buying ethical carbon credits to offset their vehicle fleet (QFleet) through a standard tender process. Similarly, to the QG, the Australian Government can offset its vehicle fleet using ethical carbon credits through a tender process. There is no necessity to acquire ACCUs with environmental, social

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and cultural values outside of a normal tender process or any requirement to implement special legislation.

AbCF work will be featured as a case study in the DFAT *Soft Power Review* focussed on the Asia Pacific region, and the AbCF is a member of the Advisory Committee for the International Savanna Fire Management Initiative undertaking work in Botswana and Southern Africa. Furthermore, the Maori Carbon Foundation in New Zealand was inspired by the AbCF, and we are in discussions with First Nations in Canada helping think through similar carbon schemes that benefit Indigenous people.

The AbCF works in partnership with Melbourne University on an Indigenous blue carbon initiative and Griffith University on the development of tertiary courses in carbon farming.

The AbCF has signed an MoU with Agforce Queensland to promote carbon farming and trade through the RCBC Fund for Aboriginal (and non-Aboriginal) pastoralists as a diversification strategy in times of drought and uncertain climate impacts. We share concerns in that we want families on the land contributing to their local communities and economies. Locking the gate to grow trees to produce ACCU does not normally employ many local people or keep families in the district. This adverse outcome is not in the best interests of the local communities, regional economies or the carbon industry.

If you require any further information please be in contact.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R Foley".

Rowan Foley  
Chief Executive Officer

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