

Inquiry into Natural Resource Management and Conservation Challenges

Terms of Reference

On 26 June 2008, the Senate referred the following matters to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport for inquiry and report by 27 November 2008:

Nyoongar Nation 's Response

- **The lessons learned from the successes and failures of three decades of Commonwealth investment in resource management including Landcare, the National Heritage Trust, The National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality, and other national programs,**

Failures:

- ✓ Disproportionate funding allocation to the regions
- ✓ NRM is all about productivity
- ✓ The Bilateral process does not work, its exclusive to Governments
- ✓ Control of Aboriginal element in the delivery of NRM
- ✓ There is no career path structure for Indigenous people in NRM

Successes:

- ✓ The inclusion of the Aboriginal network in delivering NRM
 - ✓ The documentation of Aboriginal Stories
 - ✓ Recognition that the Aboriginal knowledge is vital to the proper care of this country
- **How we can best build on the knowledge and experience gained from these programs to capitalise on existing networks and projects, and maintain commitment and momentum among land-holders,**
- ✓ By enhancing what is working presently
 - ✓ Recognition to individuals for their achievements

- ✓ Incentives built into Indigenous NRM Program
 - ✓ 5 year fund commitments to provide stability within this industry By enhancing what is working presently
 - ✓ Build a career path structure for NRM (Indigenous) that includes opportunities to become environmental leaders on local planning decisions (as well as at state and federal levels) in higher management.
 - ✓ Giving Aboriginal NRM projects the ability to draw funds from the tourism industry, to create partnerships with profits going back into NRM and thus creating self sustaining NRM business's/ projects. And creating career paths for Aboriginals.
- **All aspects of Aboriginal culture should be viewed as Natural resources, including culture, language and history. All of these are presently producing funds but nothing is going back to the land.**
- ✓ By enhancing what is working presently
 - ✓ Build a career path structure for NRM (Indigenous)
 - ✓ Recognition to individuals for there achievements
 - ✓ Incentives built into Indigenous NRM Program
- **The overall costs and benefits of a regional approach to planning and management of Australia's catchments, coasts and other natural resources,**
- ✓ The overall cost of implementing a Regional NRM Strategy or Plan far outweighs what Governments want to spend in trying to save the Environment
 - ✓ The Regional Delivery Model is the best way of Delivering NRM in catchment areas around Australia
 - ✓ The benefits of the inclusion of the Aboriginal element to “Caring For Our Country”
- **The need for a long-term strategic approach to natural resource management (NRM) at the national level,**
- ✓ If this is to happen effectively there needs to be a multi-lateral agreement reached between all of the existing Ministerial Councils to effectively dealing with the impacts of climate change (it needs to be core business of all Government Agencies)

- ✓ The Aboriginal component of the NRM Structure needs to be factored into all planning into the future, that produces a all hands on deck approach to land management in Australia
 - ✓ There needs to be long term funding allocated to the Aboriginal delivery of NRM in Australia
 - ✓ If this is to happen effectively there needs to be a multi-lateral agreement reached between all of the existing Ministerial Councils to effectively dealing with the impacts of climate change (it needs to be core business of all Government Agencies)
 - ✓ There needs to be a shift from piecemeal isolated models of community land management to an approach that sees land as a connected system that is managed to support multiple community goals, in particular physical, mental and community health outcomes. An example of an activity under such an approach would be an outreach program promoting physical activity through land management activities (walking, biking, nature study, water monitoring, etc.), with trained older adult senior leaders educating young adults about environmental management.
- **The capacity of regional NRM groups, catchment management organisations and other national conservation networks to engage land managers, resource users and the wider community to deliver on-the-ground NRM outcomes as a result of the recent changes to funding arrangements under the Caring for our Country program, and**
- ✓ Equal distribution of funds allocated across Australia under the “Caring For Our Country” Program
 - ✓ The Bilateral process needs to be inclusive of all stakeholder groups to effectively dealing with our environmental problems as a whole
 - ✓ Don’t agree with the top statement unfortunately. The level of threats associated with an assets based approached does allow this to occur effectively. The process needs to be based from an Aboriginal ecological view point to provided a firm and strong foundation to provide equality.
- **The extent to which the Caring for our Country program represents a comprehensive approach to meeting Australia's future NRM needs.**

- ✓ The “Caring For Our Country” program could be better utilised to effectively mobilise the community to effectively combat the threats to our Natural Environment by implementing Heritage Management Planning across the whole country to effectively bring everyone together (reconciliation) and produce sustainable management plans long are adaptable to the changes we all face into the future

- **The capacity of regional NRM groups, catchment management organisations and other national conservation networks to engage land managers, resource users and the wider community to deliver on-the-ground NRM outcomes as a result of the recent changes to funding arrangements under the Caring for our Country program, and**

- ✓ Equal distribution of funds allocated across Australia under the “Caring For Our Country” Program

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- **The need for a long-term strategic approach to natural resource management (NRM) at the national level,**
 - ✓ If this is to happen effectively there needs to be a multi-lateral agreement reached between all of the existing Ministerial Councils to effectively dealing with the impacts of climate change (it needs to be core business of all Government Agencies)
 - ✓ The Aboriginal component of the NRM Structure needs to be factored into all planning into the future, that produces a all hands on deck approach to land management in Australia
 - ✓ There needs to be long term funding allocated to the Aboriginal delivery of NRM in Australia;
 - ✓ An Aboriginal NRM national representative body which should be large enough to allow all Aboriginal communities the means to voice their concerns on NRM.

Some issues that need to be addressed:

- Proper wages for Indigenous Managers.
- Vehicles attached to Indigenous position
- Indigenous Managers Package
- Indigenous membership on State NRM Boards
- Indigenous Reps on National NRM Boards (not white fella representing us)
- Priority of Elders on Catchment Council Boards
- Copyright of Indigenous knowledge
- “Doing it Our Way” approach and respected
- 50% of Catchment Council Business needs to be Indigenous
- Indigenous NRM Centre
- 99 year land leases for Indigenous NRM
- Indigenous NRM land purchases for families (to go back to country)
- Government recognition of traditional ways of Caring for Country
- Noongar Maaman to speak for his Country
- Australian society has not yet developed a culture that is connected to country - we are still struggling to adopt exploitative methods of natural resource management that are largely based on environments and cultures on the other side of the planet.
- The impacts on the environment of this land are significant in terms of the present and future sustainability of Australian society.
- Prior to European settlement the many Aboriginal nations that existed had separate yet interconnected cultures based around sustaining their people and country.
- One of the essential differences between the still developing Australian culture, and accompanying interaction with country, and the Aboriginal ones is the Aboriginal cultural recognition of the spiritual aspects of all components of nature, and the Australian land mass as a whole.
- In relatively recent times there have been moves by Australian society towards Aboriginal understandings such as the landcare and catchment management groups - unfortunately, their practical impact on methods of land and resource management (interaction) is minimal.
- One of the primary differences that is responsible for substantial degradation of this country in a relatively short period is the European perception of nature being there for exploitative purposes rather than the nurturing and synergistic interconnected perspective of Aboriginal societies.

- The recognition of the value of Aboriginal interactive cultural practice with nature is unfortunately primarily tokenism.
- Given the Aboriginal spiritual reverence for the natural environment, the continuing exploitative degradation of this country is akin to the wilful destruction of a place of worship and religious discrimination and genocide.
- Our society is presently attempting to move towards an understanding of the inter-connectedness of all aspects of our environment and develop a framework for sustainable development.
- Aboriginal cultures in this country (and those of first peoples globally) have long been based on these understandings. The three cornerstones of Aboriginal societies (culture, country and people) have simultaneously been degraded by the dominant and transplanted Australian society.
- Given that Aboriginal societies were not materialistically based, the 3 recognised components of sustainability (social, environmental and economic) are comparable to the three components of Aboriginal cultures. Yet our society persists in adding bandages to our ways of interacting with country rather than drawing on the collective wisdom at the heart of Aboriginal culture, to the detriment of all Australians.
- Sustainability (livability) is the simultaneous consideration of social, environmental and economic factors in decision making and action for present and future. The past and continuing predominance of economic considerations in our decision making and actions have resulted in an increasingly unsustainable society. For Australia to become more sustainable we urgently require an increased emphasis on the environment to counteract and make up for the past.
- The inter-connectivity of all aspects of nature on the planet was recognised by western society in the GAIA hypothesis, which has become widely accepted as a fact. Again, this interconnectedness is not new to Aboriginal understandings. If we compare the sophisticated and integrated understandings in the concept of songlines compared to say our belated societal recognition of the connections between the upper and lower reaches of the Murray River system, it is again obvious we have much to learn and that much of this learning will be socio-cultural rather than economic-scientific.
- Nurturing and revering country is the primary basis for a reconciled and sustainable Australia. A socio-cultural emphasis in doing so will enhance the economic potential and scientific understandings of this country
- One way this could occur is for every region to have an equivalent of the Desert Knowledge CRC.

The committee invites written submissions, which should be lodged by Thursday, 14 August 2008:

**The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional
Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600**

The Committee prefers to receive submissions electronically as an attached document - email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

Submissions become Committee documents and are made public only after a decision by the Committee. Once submissions are authorised for publication by the committee, they are posted on the committee's website and become public documents. Please ensure that any submissions or attachments you wish to remain confidential are clearly marked as such and contact the secretariat if you require further advice.

Persons making submissions must not release them without the approval of the Committee. Submissions are covered by parliamentary privilege but the unauthorised release of them is not.

Following consideration of submissions, the Committee is proposing to hold a public hearings. The Committee will consider all submissions and may invite individuals and organisations to give evidence at the public hearings.

Inquiries from hearing and speech impaired people should be directed to the Parliament House TTY number (02) 6277 7799. Adobe also provides tools for the blind and visually impaired to access PDF documents. These tools are available at: <http://access.adobe.com/>. If you require any special arrangements in order to enable you to participate in a committee inquiry, please contact the committee secretary.