

Knowledge brokering for Indigenous land management



Northern Australia
Environmental
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National Environmental Science Programme

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Waanyi Garawa case study update, Sept 2018

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Waanyi Garawa case study

Walking in country offers a powerful way of drawing together some of the many threads of Aboriginal past, present and future

The research to date shows that walking in country can play a valuable role far beyond immediate land management objectives. Walking may not be the most efficient way to 'get the work done', but it is valuable work in itself.

Thoughtful physical engagement with the land is possible through walking in country

Two short walks were held in the Mimina area of the Garawa Aboriginal Land Trust while a 10-day event was held at Jilundarina/Seigal Creek on the Waanyi Garawa Aboriginal Land Trust. The purpose of the walks was to explore the range of benefits – health, social, psychological and land management-related – that a previous part of the project indicated might derive from the type of slow, thoughtful physical engagement with the land that is only possible through walking on country. A specific aim was to explore the benefits of walking in country for showing and sharing knowledge for country planning.

Mimina walks

In June 2018, a small group undertook day walks in the Mimina area of the Garawa Aboriginal

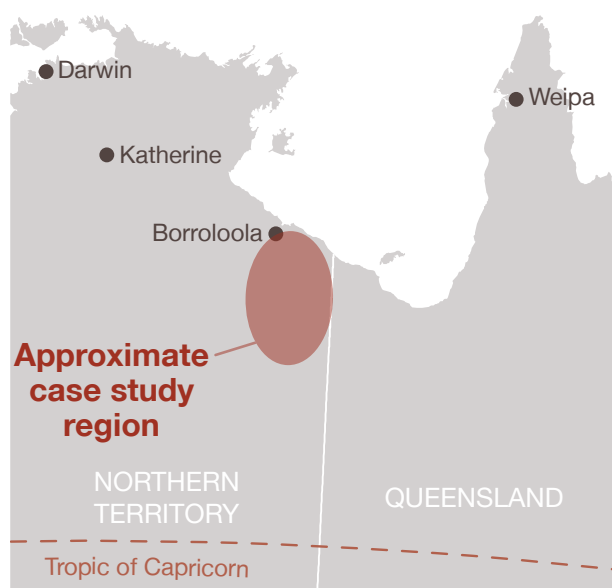
Lands Trust. The walks were experienced by Traditional Owners as both sobering and uplifting. Sobering because the experience laid bare the fading knowledge that even senior people had of the country. One senior man was shocked and chastened on going for a walk, to 'discover' a beautiful gorge, teeming with fish, that in all his 60+ years, he never knew was there, though it was his own country. The experience was also uplifting because by getting out on foot, knowledge and connection were renewed. A determination was expressed to bring children out to visit so that they can know such places.

Jilundarina walk

In July 2018, a camp was held at Jilundarina/Seigal Creek to explore with Traditional Owners the value of walking in country for the purposes of land management and country planning. Over the course of 10 days in the bush, participants settled into a relaxed and thoughtful frame of mind, thinking about what they want from life and what their aspirations were for their country. Young people were taken, on foot, to visit places that the older people had themselves visited on foot in their childhood.

A filmmaker was present throughout, capturing footage of country and people's reflections on the country and their lives, both good and bad. The result was a film 'Getting back to Jilundarina' that gives a prominent place to Indigenous voices as they express their frustrations with community life and their wish for a better future that is more connected to their homeland and to the past.

Throughout the visit, Traditional Owners strongly expressed the desire to return to their country to live. Towards the end of the camp, a session was



Approximate location of the case study region near the Robinson River in the Northern Territory.



Walking in the Northern Territory, photo NAILSMA.

held to workshop the many reasons why people have been consistently unable to make the change from the community of Doomadgee to the Jilundari outstation. Many reasons were put forward, some of which were deemed 'under people's control', whilst others were 'things they would 'need help with'. This first workshop produced a significant list, and was valuable in itself, but there would be great value in returning to the task and considering a selection of 'reasons' in detail, with the objective of better understanding these obstacles. The process may also provide a means of 're-setting' the prevailing mindset, from a sense of powerlessness, to a way of thinking wherein a determined people acting in concert can forge their own future.



Walking in the Northern Territory, photo NAILSMA.

Project summary

Indigenous land management (ILM) occurs over significant proportions of northern Australia that contain many high-value environmental assets. Effective land management is vital to northern Australian development and Indigenous land managers have a strong desire to engage in the increasing level of development planning. Traditional Owners hold substantial knowledge about using, managing and safeguarding northern Australia's natural and cultural resources, and a significant body of scientific research is also available. However, these knowledge resources have not yet fully empowered Traditional Owners' land management and development capability.

Effective knowledge brokering can help overcome barriers and the project's co-research approach

places Indigenous people as central to driving the design, testing and knowledge brokering tools. Two case studies will support Indigenous land managers to a) explore stakeholder influence mapping and build a 3D model of country to assess risks and opportunities in the Fitzroy River catchment of Western Australia, and b) evaluate the potential of walking in country for land management with the Waanyi and Garawa people in the Nicholson region of the Northern Territory, and use the results for more holistic planning. The project will deliver:

- tailored knowledge brokering tools and guidelines for their use
- knowledge-sharing among Indigenous land managers across northern Australia through workshops and digital networking activities
- a diagnosis of the conditions under which knowledge brokering can improve Indigenous adaptive management of environmental assets.

Further information

Contact project leaders Ro Hill at ro.hill@csiro.au or Ricky Archer at ricky.archer@nailsma.org.au or case study leader Peter Yates at peter.yates@nailsma.org.au

The project page can be found [on the Hub website](#), along with the [start-up factsheet](#) and research essay.



Waanyi Garawa Rangers and Traditional Owners are collaborators in this research.

This project is supported through funding from the Australian Government's National Environmental Science Program.



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September 2018