

SESSION 12

Working Country: Making Country pay?

Convener:

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RATIONALE

Since colonisation of Indigenous lands and waters of this continent, Country has been ‘paying’ for the creation of the Australian Nation State. Mainstream western development has lent heavily against the ability of future generations to exist sustainably with the lands and waters that are the foundation of our existence. Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are now ingrained in this system to varying degrees. This largely occurs across a vast divide of economic and political inequality for Indigenous peoples in comparison with non-Indigenous advantage.

Post 1967, Indigenous political, cultural and economic activity has been centred on existence with and increasingly on Country. This has occurred through upholding Indigenous rights, investing in cultural continuity and seeking to restore viable and self-determining Indigenous governance. Urban, rural and remote Indigenous communities and individuals have also been engaging with mainstream economic activity where able, or where deemed appropriate against other responsibilities to family, to culture and to Country. Similarly, within the last 40 years Indigenous political action and mainstream environmental awareness of the impacts of an increasingly globalised economy have converged with developmental (ecological) economics to create a field (discipline/ movement) known as Sustainable Development (Sustainability). This session will consider the ways in which Country is being expected to ‘pay,’ against divergent ideologies that are in tension within the spectrum of Sustainability. It will consider the value and role of culture within this debate, and the often overlooked bottom line of Ecosystem Health, or the viability of Country.

Session comprises four presentations (NB session finishes 1730):

1. Moving towards sustainable economies tied to ecosystem services on Country

Dr Anna Straton

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ABSTRACT

The potential for sustainable economies based on the provision and maintenance of ecosystem services on country is recognised. Visions of what such sustainable economies do and could look like have been articulated in some cases. The extent of country, the comparative advantage of ecosystem service provision on country, and the multiple payoffs from such activities on country are known. There remains a degree of uncertainty surrounding the likely development of markets or payments for ecosystem services; the property rights over the physical components of ecosystem services and their management; and other factors relating to the measurement, verification and certification of ecosystem service products. This paper reviews

what is known and explores some economic, institutional and technical issues that remain to be clarified for further progress to be made. These issues are illustrated using the West Arnhem Land Fire Abatement project as an example.

2. The Working on Country Program

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous Australians have long protected and managed land and sea country using traditional knowledge. The Australian Government has a new programme called *Working on Country* that builds on this by contracting Indigenous people to provide environmental services. This work aims to maintain, restore, protect and manage Australia's environment including land, sea and heritage. *Working on Country* has a focus on creating employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians in regional areas of Australia where there are often fewer jobs compared with large regional centres and urban areas. This session explores the nature, structure and delivery of this Programme and some recent related developments in the Northern Territory. It considers the role of the *Working on Country* programme in relation the broader Natural and Resource Management Economy with a focus on Northern Australia and shares some of the early learning's of the program so far.

3. Caring for Country with UWS

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Chris Tobin

Darug Aboriginal Educator

ABSTRACT

Aboriginal understanding of the Australian continent is an essential part of good natural resource management.¹ This paper draws on an initiative of the University of Western Sydney, *Caring for Country with UWS*, as a case study. The university's School of Natural Sciences invited Aboriginal high school students to attend one-day field trips, where they experienced a day in the life of an applied science degree undergraduate enrolled in an environmental management and tourism program. Aboriginal content is essential to applied science degrees and the practitioners these students will become. Equally, natural resources agencies, local councils, tourism operators, museums and other cultural centres, and the travel and hospitality

¹ The terms *Aboriginal* and *Indigenous* both appear in this paper. Koori is used occasionally, but is inaccurate particularly because many western Sydney students are from other areas. This paper conforms to NSW practices: NSW government agencies use *Aboriginal* to mean *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander* (AECG, 2004, p.11). Commonwealth agencies prefer *Indigenous*, which is therefore reproduced where a national perspective or direct quotations require. *Aboriginal* was almost invariably used in earlier publications and is retained in that context.

industries require Aboriginal expertise for both commercial and compliance aspects of their operations.

The experience of Aboriginal workers and business owners, when responsibility to family and community overlaps with their professional roles, plays out in ways that non-Aboriginal workers do not have to manage. This is particularly so for those working alone or with only non-Aboriginal colleagues in the employment, housing, child protection, and education sectors. One driver for our project was to appeal to ‘Koori kids to study science’, thereby going outside the courses where Indigenous enrolments are best represented (the arts and humanities, and education). In this way, on site, students are introduced to both Aboriginal and western ways of knowing that touch on climate, river flows, scarcity, seasonal abundance, biodiversity, conservation, and land management. By supporting urban Aboriginal young people to take up careers in natural resource management, we are aiming for better practice in this field overall. Through a small, local effort, this paper will reveal how *Caring for Country* is contributing to long-term environmental and social sustainability.

4. Sustainable Indigenous livelihoods: Strength in regional diversity

Steve Kinnane

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable Development or Sustainability has become the goal of almost every non-government and government organisation across a range of local, regional, state and federal jurisdictions. Sustainability’s foundations leading up to the 1972 World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), and the landmark Brundtland Report of 1987 (*Our Common Future*), were based within the realisation that environmental conservation, alleviation of poverty and long-term ‘sustainable’ economic development are intrinsically linked and interdependent. Significantly, major supporters of sustainability arose within Indigenous International and regional movements aimed at reinvigorating Indigenous rights, responsibilities, ownership and management of Indigenous lands and waters, or Country. This paper will examine the difficulty of implementing Indigenous visions of Sustainability tied to socio-cultural and political affirmation and practice mediating Western economic systems. Through investigating a Sustainable Livelihoods model for the Kimberley Region, envisaged and promoted through the Kimberley Culturally Appropriate Economies Round Table of 2005, I will reveal the threats and opportunities for Indigenous visions of sustainability in the Kimberley region. Finally, within the context of increasing pressures to develop the natural and cultural resources of the region, native title determinations and desperate Indigenous need, I will discuss the need for authoritative regional Indigenous Sustainability power bases tied to integrated Country management.