



policy fact sheet

knowledge for managing Australian landscapes

Research project number TRC2 of the Social and Institutional
Research Program of Land & Water Australia.

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Integrated natural and cultural resources management options for pastoral lands in the East Kimberley

A research outcome that you can use

The research project highlights the challenges involved in promoting sustainable development on Indigenous-held pastoral properties in the East Kimberley. Cultural traditions and aspirations, conventional natural resource management (NRM) practices and institutional issues all need to be addressed simultaneously to improve management outcomes in northern Australia. Integrated planning options identified by the project will inform policy makers on indigenous NRM practice and may well highlight weaknesses in existing policies.

How can you use the research?

The research can be used as a resource for future planners of any indigenous NRM projects and policy makers, or to inform any interested parties. For example, northern Australian land managers, regional planning authorities, State and Federal organisations involved in promoting sustainable development on Indigenous-held land and any Indigenous communities involved in planning and management processes will find the research of particular use. All will benefit from a greater understanding of Indigenous NRM challenges and complexities and this in turn should lead to more effective long-term solutions.

How was the knowledge/product developed?

There is a clear recognition of the potential to improve NRM practices and perhaps to diversify activities on many pastoral properties, particularly those which are Indigenous-held. The research project was unusual in that it used an integrated social and NRM participatory approach, involving local communities as much as possible from an early stage.



Options were identified for implementing environmentally, culturally and economically sustainable NRM outcomes in the East Kimberley, with an emphasis on Indigenous pastoral lands. At the regional scale, institutional and policy impediments to, and opportunities for, developing sustainable NRM pastoral management practices in northern Australia were identified.

Can I rely on it?

The committed expertise of the project researchers took a 'whole-of-problem' approach, rather than trying to solve segments of the problem in isolation. Every effort was made to verify facts and to identify uncertainties where they existed.

Key findings

A significant number of key findings centred around the evaluation of the challenges encountered in the project process itself. Issues that needed to be addressed include the confidentiality of cultural information, gender balance, organisational resource bases and processes, cross-cultural communication and the need for preparatory research.

Land-use options reports were completed for two case study properties (Bow River and Violet Valley). In addition a fire management plan was completed for Bow River. At the property scale, the vulnerabilities that could block development included: pressure on natural resources; the requirement for protection of cultural and significant areas; the impacts of fluctuations in the number of people living on site; the lack of appropriate dwellings and community resources; maintenance of capital, capacity and/or interest in enterprise development; inadequate financial management and; lack of human resources and skills.

The two properties are also exposed to a very complex institutional environment which has the potential to create both barriers and opportunities. In many regions, groups seek assistance with this complexity through a 'resource agency' - a non-government organisation which acts as their development agent. There is no such agent in the Kimberley region, although the work of the project field staff on the properties may have raised the expectation that such field contact will continue. In studies such as this it is important that there should be an exit strategy and/or a strategy to pass the project to another body that would act as an ongoing agent.

Further information

- ▶ The full report from this project is available on the Social and Institutional Research Program's website at lwa.gov.au
- ▶ Published by: Land & Water Australia
- ▶ Land & Water Australia and the Commonwealth of Australia © July 2009

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