



Northern Australia  
Environmental  
Resources  
Hub

National Environmental Science Programme

## Research priorities for Indigenous Protected Areas across northern Australia

Project summary

*'There is a lot of gaps in any research, but the key thing is getting the TOs involvement in any research, if you're not engaging with the relevant TOs well the research sort of fails.'*

(Waanyi Garawa IPA Senior Cultural Advisor, May 2016)

*'Research into weeds and the spread of weeds and all that is very important. But unless you've got some kind of model of sustainability for ranger groups, a lot of that work is just not going to happen ... [We need] the research into how these things become sustainable.'*

(Balkanu Interview, April 2016 )

### Understanding information needs of Indigenous Protected Areas and Indigenous land management

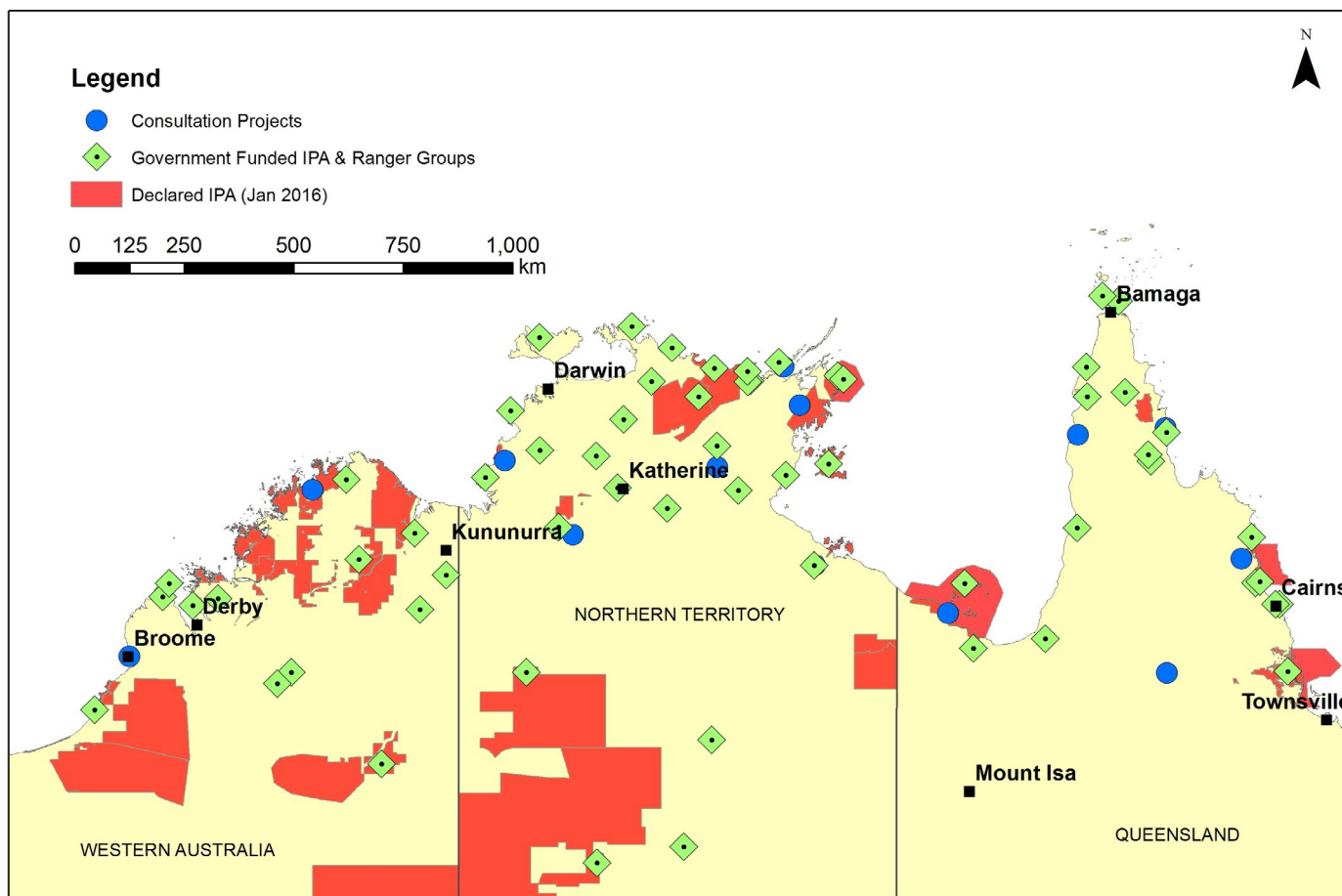
Indigenous Protected Areas, or IPAs, are areas of land or sea where the natural and cultural values are actively conserved and managed by Indigenous Traditional Owners for the benefit of all Australians. The 72 existing IPAs cover approximately 64 million hectares which is more than 40% of the total area under the Australian National Reserve System.

IPAs have unique features compared to other types of reserves including governance arrangements founded in Indigenous customary law, strong emphasis on traditional knowledge systems for management practice, and a priority to deliver multiple economic and cultural benefits alongside nature conservation. They also differ greatly from

one another, ranging from large relatively remote areas on Indigenous-owned lands to small, multi-tenured sites where the IPA co-exists with national park, lease-hold or privately owned lands. Understanding these features is critical to facilitate the improvement and refinement of IPA management and to provide information useful to collaborative stakeholders including Traditional Owners, community, and government.

In an effort to progress understanding, this project identified the research needs of IPAs across northern Australia. The research needs were seen by participants to apply to broader Indigenous land management activities which is reflected in project findings.





Location of declared IPAs, ongoing IPA consultation projects, and Australian Government-funded IPAs and Ranger groups across northern Australia.

*'A lot of research has been done, but it's still a top-down situation, this has got to change ... We'd like to work from the bottom up and involve people here ... it's a difficult nut to crack. It's a chestnut that's been in the bottom of the fire for a long time and no one's done anything about it'.*

(Kowanyama Land and Sea Manager, April 2016)



Traditional resources, photo: Glenn Campbell. Front cover: Yugambah men demonstrate fire-making ©ChameleonsEye/Shutterstock.com. Reproduced with permission of the Yugambah artists





## The research

The work was guided by a Steering Group of four people from Indigenous organisations in the Kimberley, northern Queensland and the Northern Territory, one person from a philanthropic organisation and two Australian Government representatives.

The research was done by:

- reviewing and analysing IPA plans and related documents
- holding 4 workshops (attended by the Steering Group, 21 Traditional Owners and 7 staff from across the Kimberley)
- presenting interim findings at three workshops and obtaining further input
- conducting 9 formal interviews with Indigenous land managers
- distilling all input to identify 5 priority research topics and questions, and 6 key findings relevant to IPA management and research.

## Priority research needs identified by this project:

1. **New research models:** What innovations and adaptations to environmental research models can enable Indigenous people to be central and gain greater benefit from current and new research?
2. **Economic dimensions:** What does Indigenous land management contribute when valued through economic approaches?
3. **Knowledge brokering:** How can both science and Indigenous knowledge be made more accessible and useful to Indigenous decision makers?
4. **Sustainable enterprise:** How can Indigenous caring for country be made sustainable through models of planning, innovation, governance, and business that can be tailored to diverse contexts?
5. **Frameworks responsive to new impacts:** What participatory monitoring, participatory impact assessment methods, and institutional or tenure responses, enable protection of country in response to new impacts e.g. new conservation and development proposals?

*'Being able to demonstrate multiple outcomes through monitoring and evaluation and link these to investment opportunities.'*

(Broome Workshop, October 2015)

*'Engaging with the TOs, share ideas of what has worked and what hasn't worked ... [where] room for improvement, meeting other IPA groups where some things might have worked, and exchange ideas.'*

(Djelk Rangers, May, 2016)



From left: Peter Murray, Brendan Fox, Ian Pederast and Anne Poelina at the Fitzroy Crossing Workshop, October 2015. Top image: Peter Murray (background), Natalie Davey, Melinda Sheppard (background) at the Fitzroy Crossing Workshop, October 2015. Photo: Michael Douglas





*Cattle mustering on horse back (left) and bush tucker (top right). Photos: Glenn Campbell. Jack Green, Garawa Gudanji Traditional Owner and Ron Archer, Djungan Elder (bottom right). Photo: Melissa George*

## Key findings that underpin research needs:

1. Caring for country through IPAs across northern Australia forms part of the broader spectrum of Indigenous land management activities that have similar features, resulting in similar research needs.
2. All research needs identified fit within the theme of understanding how to manage country for multiple values and multiple benefits while supporting today's youth into the future.
3. The greatest priority of Indigenous land managers for research is the development of new research models in which they are central. These should be tailored to their diverse environmental, economic and social information needs. Peer to peer Indigenous networking is vital here.
3. Place-based, integrative research and practice through Indigenous-driven case studies provides the best model to address the diverse, *area-specific* research needs of land managers.
5. Systematic and participatory prioritisation of research needs can be supported through: looking at priorities listed in strategic plans; identifying current and future factors that affect people and country; Indigenous-led group discussions about criteria to guide decisions; ranking based on these criteria in workshops; interviews to discuss priorities; and review and feedback before finalisation.
6. Current factors that influence research priorities for land management are a mix of opportunities, challenges, and factors that could be considered as both. For example: deriving economic and other benefits is an opportunity; prevalent community socio-economic disadvantage is a challenge; and large numbers of youth in communities can be viewed as both an opportunity and a challenge.



## Further information

The full report is available at [www.nespnorthern.edu.au](http://www.nespnorthern.edu.au). Please contact Ro Hill or Melissa George if you would like clarification, further information or to give feedback.

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## How will this research be used?

The research priorities and key findings identified by the participants of this project will help guide future research activities and approaches by IPA and other land managers, research organisations and other stakeholders.



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



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