

Research priorities for Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) across northern Australia

Key findings



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. The 72 existing IPAs cover around 64 million hectares (over 40% of total area under the Australian National Reserve System); they have unique governance arrangements founded in customary law, strong emphasis on traditional knowledge systems, and deliver multiple economic and cultural benefits alongside nature conservation.

Understanding these unique features is critical to improving IPA management. In an effort to progress understanding this project identified the research needs of IPAs across northern Australia through an extensive process of participatory consultations with Traditional Owners, land managers and others. The outcome was 5 priority research topics and questions and 6 key findings relevant to Indigenous land management more generally; these will guide future research activities and approaches by IPA and other land managers, research organisations and other stakeholders.

Priority research needs for Indigenous land management identified by the 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?



Herding cattle on horseback, Photo: Glenn Campbell. Front page: Yugambeh men demonstrate fire-making ©ChameleonsEye/Shutterstock.com. Reproduced with permission of the Yugambeh artists.

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 research priority of Indigenous land managers 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.



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'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)

'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)



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