

Indigenous participation in the planning and delivery of National Landcare Programme investment

Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage (Closing the Gap) is a commitment by all Australian governments to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians. Natural resource management (NRM) programmes contribute to the Closing the Gap goals and provide opportunities for stronger Indigenous participation in the planning and delivery of investment outcomes and contribute to wider social benefits.

The National Landcare Programme (NLP) is designed to be simple, reflect local and regional priorities, and be long-term. This includes investing in projects that build on our partnerships with Indigenous people and communities so they have the opportunity to fully participate in land and sea management, drawing on their significant and unique knowledge, skills and responsibilities.

How is Indigenous participation expected through Regional delivery?

Regional NRM organisations have a central role in supporting Indigenous people and organisations to participate in the delivery of NRM and contribute to wider economic and social benefits. They can achieve progress in this area through activities such as planning support, utilising and respecting Indigenous ecological knowledge, capacity building and the delivery of on-ground activities including employment and contracting opportunities.

Regional NRM organisations are expected to involve Indigenous people in both the planning and delivery of all NLP investment. This will ensure that Indigenous engagement and participation features strongly as an investment, project and employment outcome for the NLP. Regional NRM organisations should investigate and identify opportunities in conjunction with Indigenous communities and either include these as a part of their projects or provide a satisfactory reason for not doing so.

How can Indigenous participation be included in regional investment?

Indigenous people and organisations have cultural responsibilities for managing their traditional lands in the area of operation of all regional NRM organisations. Regional NRM organisations are expected to include in their projects and project MERI plans support for Indigenous people to deliver NRM activities that address NLP Strategic Objectives and Outcomes. Activities may include:

- clear articulation of Indigenous land and sea aspirations in regional NRM plans and the development and implementation of regional NRM Indigenous participation strategies;
- appropriate referencing and linking of regional NRM plans and activities with relevant whole-of-government Indigenous plans (e.g. the Australian Government's Indigenous Economic Development Strategy, Overarching Bilateral Indigenous Plans and the Invest Implementation Plan);
- development of land and sea management plans;
- on-ground NRM activities (e.g. fire, rehabilitation, weed or pest management);
- the recording and continued use, support and reinvigoration of Indigenous ecological knowledge to underpin biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources; and
- employment and capacity building, including access to appropriate training, education, land and sea management planning, management activities and enterprise development.

Some regional NRM organisations have a strong working relationship with local Indigenous organisations, including NRM board representation, being involved in the planning and decision making of projects and being trained and employed to deliver on ground outcomes.

Generally the level of Indigenous activities supported by regional NRM organisations has centred on Indigenous ecological knowledge and specific cultural heritage protection. While these are important foundational activities, they can usually be undertaken in a relative short timeframe and do not fulfil the broader aspirations and opportunities that Indigenous people have for managing their land and sea country.

Many regions have identified funding for Indigenous specific projects but this does not preclude Indigenous people being involved in the delivery of projects that address the full range of funding against other priority outcomes. This can best be identified and expressed by a regional NRM organisation including Indigenous people in the delivery mechanisms and across their key activities in their project MERI plans.

While Indigenous specific funding is important, Indigenous participation does not have to equate directly to stand-alone funding, it's the broader opportunities to be involved that matter. The identification and inclusion of Indigenous participation across all investment comes down to two key areas: planning and delivery.

Including Indigenous people in regional and project planning is an essential foundational activity to ensure that Indigenous knowledge and aspirations are incorporated into the delivery of an investment from the beginning. Some examples may include activities such as: discussing a proposal with the relevant organisations representatives; including Indigenous representatives on a working group or on the organisations board; or developing a project that has been identified as a priority through the inclusion of land and sea management in a regional NRM plan.

What are some examples of Indigenous land management activities?

The opportunities for Indigenous participation in the delivery of NRM activities is only limited by the capacity and experience of an Indigenous community to be involved and identifying the most suitable and practicable level of involvement. Some examples of activities that can be undertaken by Indigenous people in the delivery of a project are in the following diagram and do not represent the full suite of what is possible.

Indigenous Land Management Opportunities

<p>Identification, assessment and planning for cultural heritage management</p> <p>Small and large scale rehabilitation</p> <p>Ongoing management of rehabilitated areas</p> <p>Mapping and management of exclusion zones</p> <p>Active protection of sites</p> <p>Baseline monitoring of environmental and cultural aspects</p> <p>Preliminary assessments of key environmental matters, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • surface and groundwater quantity and quality • soil types • vegetation types • climate data • fauna <p>Vegetation clearing including topsoil management and seed banking</p> <p>Management of plant nursery</p> <p>Fencing</p>	<p>Fire management and improved fire regimes</p> <p>Pest animal and weed management</p> <p>Marine debris prevented from entering/removed from urban/coastal waterways</p> <p>Compliance to address illegal activities that threaten cultural and natural heritage values</p> <p>Ongoing seed collection and preparation</p> <p>Possible economic opportunities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agriculture • bush foods • commercial forestry • aquaculture <p>Protection of rare and endangered species and habitat trees</p> <p>Plans for rare and endangered species and habitat trees</p> <p>Management of buffer zones and offsets</p>	<p>Progressive rehabilitation of areas including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • landforms • erosion control • seed supply, treatment and seed spreading • replanting with seedlings • watering • constructing fauna habitat <p>Ongoing environmental monitoring including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • water quality • landform stability • acid drainage • success criteria for rehabilitation • recolonisation of fauna • noise • dust • vibration etc <p>Domestic stock exclusion</p> <p>Design and development of management plans for environmental offsets</p>
---	---	--

What is a satisfactory reason for not including Indigenous participation?

First and foremost, if an Indigenous organisation does not want to be involved in any activity being undertaken by a regional NRM organisation, we will respect this decision and not require Indigenous participation to be included. Where this is the case, it is expected that the regional NRM organisation can provide evidence from the relevant Indigenous people and/or organisations that they have been consulted and do not wish to participate.

However, in some cases, the reason that the Indigenous organisation may not want to participate could be that they do not have the capacity to be involved or have previously had negative dealings with the regional NRM organisation or staff. In this case, the development of a regional Indigenous participation strategy in partnership with the Indigenous organisation is a good first step and can form the basis for the development of a productive partnership, identifying capacity building opportunities and incorporation of land and sea aspirations into regional NRM plans for implementation in subsequent years.

In other cases, a project may be based around a specific site with activities that are of a specialised nature and there is no opportunity for Indigenous involvement. In this case, the onus is on the regional NRM organisation to explain this.

What is expected to be included in an Indigenous Participation Strategy?

An Indigenous Participation Strategy provides a framework and practical guide for regional NRM organisations to partner with and include Indigenous people in the planning, consultation and implementation of NRM investment.

A strategy can support the organisation to improve its Indigenous engagement and participation, provide clear guidance on the opportunities available through effective Indigenous participation in NRM planning, programs and processes, provide the foundations for increasing Indigenous employment opportunities within each regional NRM organisation and partner organisations and clearly set out targets and measures of success to ensure the strategy is successfully implemented.

While the content and intent of an Indigenous Participation Strategy will vary from region to region and across relevant tribal and language groups, there are a number of key areas that should be included and expanded on in a strategy. These are:

- Purpose
- Acknowledgement of Country
- Vision and guiding principles
- Indigenous land and sea management across the region
- Key objectives, outcomes and activities
- Implementation of strategy
- Measures of success
- Review and evaluation

What is expected to be included in Regional NRM Plans?

Regional NRM organisations are encouraged to engage and form partnerships with Indigenous people and communities so that their land and sea management interests and aspirations are incorporated into regional NRM plans and the implementation of the plans.

Most NRM regions include more than one Indigenous tribal and/or language group and this may mean that it is necessary to support collaborative discussions between and among Indigenous groups associated with an NRM region.

How this is done will vary from region to region and across relevant tribal and language groups but there are a number of guiding principles that should be followed. The regional plan should:

- clearly identify and acknowledge the various Indigenous tribal and/or language groups, their interests, responsibilities and relationships to land and water and consider roles, responsibilities and capacity to achieve the outcomes and targets of the plan;
- incorporate Indigenous ecological knowledge, where appropriate, in accordance with agreed protocols and with prior approval of the Indigenous custodians of the knowledge;
- clearly articulate Indigenous land and sea management aspirations and opportunities and identify strategies to prioritise and implement them; and
- clearly identify the economic and social opportunities and benefits to be gained from Indigenous land and sea management aspirations and opportunities.