



fact sheet

knowledge for managing Australian landscapes

Developing a Cultural and Conservation Economy for Northern Australia

Northern Australia, a region that offers unparalleled conservation and cultural opportunities, is home to many socio-economically disadvantaged Indigenous communities.

Indigenous peoples' views of sustainability emphasise the centrality of culture and Indigenous governance, and Indigenous communities are driving the development of sustainable economies which conserve, rather than degrade, their natural and cultural capital.

The Project

The project examined the suitability of Canada's Ecotrust 'conservation economy' model for enhancing sustainable development in rural and remote Indigenous communities in Australia.

Three community case studies and a broad regional case study were undertaken to ensure the research was grounded in remote Indigenous peoples' experiences.

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) initiated the collaborative research project, funded by Land & Water Australia. Project partners included:

- ▶ Kimberley Land Council
- ▶ Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation
- ▶ Arnold Bloch Leibler
- ▶ Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation
- ▶ Bendigo Bank
- ▶ Poola Foundation (Tom Kantor Fund)

- ▶ Community Sector Banking
- ▶ Australian Tropical Forest Institute
- ▶ The Christensen Fund
- ▶ The Wilderness Society.

What is a Cultural and Conservation Economy?

A cultural and conservation economy supports long-term, sustainable solutions for maintaining country and culture in Indigenous communities.

The approach draws on the Canadian 'conservation economy' model, Ecotrust, and has been adapted for the Australian context through collaboration with Indigenous organisations. The model applies a 'quadruple-bottom line' approach to economic development, which balances economic, environmental, social and cultural needs.



Sustainability/ Caring for Country

- ▶ offers a choice
- ▶ quadruple-bottom line orientated
- ▶ Indigenous concepts of sustainability
- ▶ research support
- ▶ institutional/policy innovation

Local, Indigenous culture & institutions

- ▶ respect rights, interests
- ▶ build on local initiatives
- ▶ Indigenous governance, cultural fit



Relationship based

- ▶ trust, long-term commitment
- ▶ partner with existing organisations
- ▶ develop capacity over time
- ▶ flexibility to work at family, clan, community levels

Community development

- ▶ single portal to services
- ▶ brokering role
- ▶ fosters strategic vision
- ▶ local ownership, access to capital
- ▶ community banking, local capital

Key Findings and Recommendations

The Canadian Ecotrust approach to fostering sustainability was found to be highly relevant to the development of a cultural and conservation economy in Northern Australia.

To fully realise the potential of a cultural and conservation economy, the report recommends several changes to key institutional arrangements, including:

- ▶ A new tax incentive scheme and a loan guarantee fund to increase access to capital for remote, rural and underdeveloped communities.
- ▶ Tax deductibility for Community (Indigenous) Development Organisations.
- ▶ Dedicated recurrent funding for the Indigenous land and sea management organisations across the north, to secure their core capacity to engage in natural resource and conservation management.
- ▶ Expansion of Indigenous Protected Areas and joint management of national parks with acquisition and return of lands of high conservation value to Aboriginal ownership.
- ▶ Funding for a brokering program to facilitate the emergence of an ecosystem services market in Northern Australia.

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The report can be downloaded from the Australian Conservation Foundation website at www.acfonline.org.au/cce and the Land and Water Australia website at www.lwa.gov.au/sirp

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