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The Australian Rangeland Society

THE INDIGENOUS PASTORAL PROJECT: PEOPLE ACHIEVING DEVELOPMENT, CONSERVATION AND PEOPLE OUTCOMES

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The Indigenous Pastoral Project (IPP) was developed during 2003 to improve land management and pastoral outcomes for Aboriginal people in the rangeland regions of the Top End of the Northern Territory. Currently Aboriginal people own and manage approximately 65,000 sq km of rangeland areas within the Northern Land Council (NLC) region. The IPP will assist Traditional Owners achieve land management outcomes by establishing sustainable economic enterprises on Aboriginal owned pastoral stations. The IPP takes a 'people first' approach, incorporating capacity building and training programs on topics such as land and financial management and corporate governance.

The IPP will use multiple land use planning to identify compatible land use options and develop economic activities. These enterprises could then contribute to the cost of land management activities such as weed and feral animal control as well as cultural site protection and fire management. It is anticipated that the use of multiple land use planning will provide a mechanism to address community conflict that sometimes occurs with communal land ownership, by accommodating different land use aspirations in specific areas, culminating in a land management and development consensus. The project will use a whole-of-property approach and aims to develop Property Management Plans that address environmental protection as well as pastoral and other production.

An essential part of the IPP process is the acknowledgement of Aboriginal land ownership, emphasising the rights of Aboriginal people to drive the agenda on their own land. Involvement of Aboriginal landowners in the planning process is a fundamental aspect of the project which aims to utilise a 'people first' approach that encourages Aboriginal landowners to be pro-active in determining the level and type of enterprise development on their land.

The IPP is a joint project incorporating staff and funds from the NLC, the Northern Territory Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development (DBIRD), the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC), and "in-kind" support from the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment (DIPE). Each agency provides specialist skills: the NLC provides anthropological advice and conflict resolution skills, NT DBIRD provides technical pastoral production support and the ILC provides project management support, and operational funding requirements.

To date the project has been successful in a number of areas:

- It has supported Traditional Owners to resolve long-standing conflict and commence pastoral and land management activities in the western Victoria River District.
- It has facilitated partnerships between an existing Aboriginal property in the Roper Valley Region and business investors, to increase the economic and environmental sustainability of the property.
- Is working with Traditional Owners of a large property in the Gulf Region who have resolved significant conflicts and are committed to exploring multiple land use options.

These areas of Aboriginal land represent approximately 5,800 sq km in total that now have an economic base for improved land management and are contributing to the economic strengthening of Aboriginal Corporations.