

**DHIMURRU LAND MANAGEMENT ABORIGINAL CORPORATION
(NORTHERN TERRITORY)**

Using agreements and partnerships to generate support for biodiversity on-country

Northern Territory:

Region: Northern Territory

Affiliated Regional NRM Group: Northern Territory (under discussion)

Background

Dhimurru is an incorporated Aboriginal organisation established by the Aboriginal or Yolngu land-owners in Northeast Arnhem Land. Dhimurru's area of responsibility includes the estates of 14 Yolngu clans whose land covers approximately 8,500 sq kms.

The aim of Dhimurru is to address natural and cultural management priorities identified by its members, with particular emphasis on designated recreation areas, and to deal with them in accordance with the directions of the traditional owners.

In initiating Dhimurru, traditional Yolngu landowners recognised the urgent need for planned, sustainable and culturally appropriate management of the recreation areas as the township of Nhulunbuy developed and visitor numbers increased.

The Corporation employs traditional owners as Rangers to undertake associated activities and engages in participatory planning with senior community members to develop and implement management strategies.

Since its inception, Dhimurru has instituted a comprehensive and inclusive approach to conservation and resource management planning. Planning exercises undertaken by Dhimurru have addressed such diverse issues as soil conservation, fauna and flora conservation, visitor management and cultural resource conservation.

Twenty years of virtually uncontrolled recreation access by the residents of Nhulunbuy and visitors to the township up to 1992 had resulted in severe localised land degradation impacts and posed a major threat to the maintenance of natural and cultural values. The introduction of exotic invasive plants, the increasing prevalence of feral animals and growing concern about the impact of marine debris in the Gulf of Carpentaria added to the urgency of developing a strategic and cohesive approach to resource management.

While the efficacy of traditional resource management is a central tenet of Dhimurru's activities, it is acknowledged by the Yolngu community that many of the more recent impacts on natural and cultural resources are beyond the management capacity of traditional regimes.



INTEGRATION OF BIODIVERSITY INTO REGIONAL NRM PLANNING

To address these obstacles, Dhimurru has sought to evolve a 'two ways' approach to many management issues; a synthesis of indigenous and non-indigenous resource management approaches, with final decision-making resting with the relevant traditional owners.

Achievements to Date:

- ❖ Fauna and Flora Survey of Cape Arnhem, with the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory.
- ❖ Threatened Species Fauna Survey with the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory and the Threatened Species Network (NT).
- ❖ Heritage Survey of Cape Arnhem, with the Australian Heritage Commission.
- ❖ Survey of Stone Picture Arrangements, with the Northern Territory Heritage Conservation Branch.
- ❖ Turtle Management Project to determine sustainable harvesting levels and develop a Turtle Management Strategy.
- ❖ Gove Crow Butterfly Project (endangered species IUCN categories) with the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory and the Threatened Species Network.
- ❖ Research on the ethno-zoology of frogs (and toad) in North East Arnhem Land, to create a record before the expected devastation by cane toads.
- ❖ Development of partnerships for collaborative research, planning and on-ground initiatives with partners including:
 - Yolngu landowners;
 - Alcan Gove Pty Limited;
 - ATSIC – Miwatj Regional Council;
 - Nhulunbuy Corporation Limited;
 - Northern Territory University;
 - NT Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment;
 - NT Department of Business, Industry, and Resource Development;
 - Australian Quarantine Inspection Service;
 - World Wide Fund for Nature (Australia);
 - Environment Australia;
 - Northern Land Council;
 - Aboriginal Benefits Account;
 - Indigenous Land Corporation;
 - Nhulunbuy Volunteers;
 - Australian Conservation Volunteers;
 - Humane Society International;
 - Marine and Coastal Community Network (NT).
- ❖ Fire management research and workshops that promote Yolngu land management and ecological knowledge to maintain the biodiversity values of the cultural landscape created by their ancestors.
- ❖ Establishment of the Dhimurru Indigenous Protected Area (Dhimurru IPA) to protect a land area of approximately 92,000 hectares (including the designated recreation areas), supplemented by approximately 8,000 hectares of adjacent marine areas, with both areas having acknowledged biodiversity and cultural values of a very high order.
- ❖ Creation of the Dhimurru Ranger scheme to build local capacity and maximise skills to manage resources, with four Rangers on IPA funding and four Rangers on CDEP funding.
- ❖ Establishment of a local environmental volunteer group, primarily comprised of non-indigenous residents of Nhulunbuy, to assist the organisation with on-ground projects. Volunteer activities provide an invaluable context in which to disseminate information to the broader community regarding Dhimurru's management priorities, activities and corporate ethos.

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- ❖ Initiation and support of the local Waterwatch group, Gapuwu Mel'ngu Mala - North East Arnhem Land Waterwatch NT Inc.
- ❖ A land management agreement, involving Dhimurru Land Management Aboriginal Corporation, the Northern Land Council, Environment Australia, and the Parks & Wildlife Commission NT under S.73. of the Territory Parks and Wildlife Act. Section 73 makes provision for the NT Parks and Wildlife Commission to enter into an agreement relating to management to protect and conserve wildlife on the land and to protect the natural features of the land. The agreement also involves the Northern Land Council as the relevant Land Council responsible for ascertaining the wishes of the traditional owners and Environment Australia representing the Commonwealth and administering the Indigenous Protected Area program.

The agreement:

- establishes an Advisory Group to provide formal recommendations relating to the management of the land for consideration by the Dhimurru Executive Committee;
 - recognises Dhimurru Land Management Aboriginal Corporation as the agency established by the Yolngu land owners for the purpose of managing natural and cultural resources;
 - specifies the services that are to be provided to land owners by Dhimurru, the Northern Land Council, and by the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the NT;
 - requires the development of a Plan of Management;
 - delegates Dhimurru to issue Visitor Permits for access to designated recreation areas.
- ❖ Development of the Dhimurru Visitors Guide and the Dhimurru web site.
 - ❖ Hosting of visits by other indigenous and non-indigenous groups, representation at state, national and international forums and hosting of the 4th Annual Indigenous Rangers Conference to lift the profile of community-based indigenous resource management.

Information Used:

National data sets:

- ❖ Endangered species listings
- ❖ IUCN standards

State data sets:

- ❖ Accessed as needed, depending on the projects, through:
 - Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory
 - Heritage Branch of the Department of Land, Planning and Environment
 - Northern Territory University

Regional data sets:

- ❖ Traditional owners knowledge.

Market and Non-Market Mechanisms for Biodiversity Conservation:

Regulatory mechanisms:

- ❖ IPA agreement with the Commonwealth Government to enable Dhimurru to support local, national and international priorities.
- ❖ Land Management Agreement under Section 73 of the Territory Parks and Wildlife Act to foster co-operation between the parties in the management of the area, without compromising traditional owners' rights.
- ❖ Implementation of Bylaws to enforce protection measures for recreational areas.

Economic instruments (financial mechanisms):

- ❖ All income from Visitor Permits goes to land management activities.
- ❖ Contracting the supply of services for quarantine, customs and interpretive services.
- ❖ Merchandising of multimedia products developed by Dhimurru.

Community measures (motivational mechanisms):

- ❖ Getting traditional owners back on-country.
- ❖ Local champions.
- ❖ Icon species as a focus for activities and protection.
- ❖ Philanthropic funding from Alcan to assist with the management of off-site impacts of mining.
- ❖ Access to technical information and resources from Territory agencies and non-government organisations.
- ❖ Awards.
- ❖ Education and extension.

Critical Success Factors:

- ❖ A 'two ways' approach to many management issues that integrates indigenous and non-indigenous resource management approaches.
- ❖ Landscape level approach is inherent in Yolngu land management.
- ❖ Biodiversity objectives have high compatibility with Yolngu land management objectives.
- ❖ Indigenous Ranger scheme provides a real role model to other community members.
- ❖ Active undertaking of traditional resource management practices such as the use of fire, within the Dhimurru IPA.
- ❖ Adoption of a partnership approach that has resulted in a wide range of agreements for collaborative research, planning and on-ground initiatives with external agencies.
- ❖ Use of agreements backed by legislation, at the Commonwealth, State and community levels.

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- ❖ IPA process has given a plan of management and considered objectives for the area.
- ❖ Initiatives around biodiversity to attract corporate sponsorship, contract the supply of services and merchandise a range of multimedia products developed by Dhimurru.
- ❖ Willingness to take a leading role in indigenous land management and an emphasis on building local capacity.
- ❖ Absolute commitment of key individuals, backed by effective support people.
- ❖ Integrated approach that combines cultural priorities, on-ground action, legislative agreements and strong partnerships with external agencies.

Further Reading:

- www.dhimurru.com.au

Contact for Further Information:

Steve Roeger
Executive Officer
PO Box 1551
Nhulunbuy, Northern Territory
(08) 8987 3992 (Phone) (08) 8987 3224 (Fax)
dhimurru@dhimurru.com.au

Quote:

“Getting the people back on-country is the only way that these ecosystems will be effectively managed into the future”.

Steve Roeger, Dhimurru Land Management Aboriginal Corporation.