Contents

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia was established in 1971. Previously, some of the functions were carried out through the Social Science Research Council of Australia, established in 1942. Elected to the Academy for distinguished contributions to the social sciences, the 466 Fellows of the Academy offer expertise in the fields of *accounting, anthropology, demography, economics, economic history, education, geography, history, law, linguistics, management, philosophy, political science, psychology, social medicine, sociology and statistics.*

The Academy's objectives are:

- to promote excellence in and encourage the advancement of the social sciences in Australia;
- to act as a coordinating group for the promotion of research and teaching in the social sciences;
- to foster excellence in research and to subsidise the publication of studies in the social sciences;
- to encourage and assist in the formation of other national associations or institutions for the promotion of the social sciences or any branch of them;
- to promote international scholarly cooperation and to act as an Australian national member of international organisations concerned with the social sciences;
- to act as consultant and adviser in regard to the social sciences; and,
- to comment where appropriate on national needs and priorities in the area of the social sciences.

These objectives are fulfilled through a program of activities, research projects, independent advice to government and the community, publication and cooperation with fellow institutions both within Australia and internationally.

President's Report

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia has enormous potential. From a diverse range of social science disciplines, it brings together experts who, for the most part, have strong connections with professional associations in their own disciplines. What the Academy can add is a significant opportunity for Fellows to work across disciplinary boundaries to address important research and policy questions.

Multidisciplinary engagement can be achieved through active collaboration in projects that the Academy organises or is commissioned to undertake, but it can also be achieved in less structured and more informal ways. Discussions in Academy workshops, roundtables and symposia expose individuals to advanced ways of thinking about issues from the perspectives of other disciplines; thinking that they might not readily encounter in their own work settings. Where policy makers are also involved, the mix can be even more powerful. The discussions can be subjected to the double discipline, on the one hand, of addressing the complexities and realities of the policy context and, on the other, of eschewing simplifying assumptions that might more readily be adopted in a single disciplinary framework than a genuinely multidisciplinary one.

The early part of 2010 will provide an opportunity for reflection on how the Academy might better capitalise on its strength and diversity. The Executive commissioned an independent review of the Academy that will be completed by the end of 2009 and will then provide the basis for strategic planning of the Academy's future program.

This will provide an opportunity to think again about broad questions of purpose for the Academy, as well as the kind of program that it might most productively pursue. It will raise important issues about connections between research and policy and provoke consideration of how the relationship might be enriched for mutual benefit. It will invite reflection on the advocacy role of the Academy, not only for the role of the social sciences *per se*, but for policy positions that are supported by the scholarship of the Academy's Fellows and their collective work through the Academy.

The reflection will also enable the Academy to address some internal issues that are also important for its work. One is the manner in which it organises itself around discipline-based panels. This will allow consideration of the place of new disciplines or sub-disciplines that are not congenially accommodated within the disciplinary structures of the existing panels. It will also allow consideration of the place of domains such as management and education that are not disciplines but rather fields in which work is undertaken from a range of disciplinary perspectives.

Barry McGaw

Professor Barry McGaw was elected president of the Academy at the AGM in November. He is half-time Professorial Fellow at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne where he is Executive Director of the Cisco-Intel-Microsoft Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills project. He is Chair of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

The Heartland: Voices from Central Australia
Part I

Editorial

25 May 2009: As I lipped the rise departing Port Augusta, heading north, before me was the saltbush plain stretching as far as I could see, and to the west, mesas; the sun struck through the early morning clouds just at that moment and glowed on the bluffs, golden red. My heart opened….

This edition of *Dialogue*, and the next, are about Central Australia, 'The Heartland'. They are rather different from previous issues of *Dialogue* in several respects, and the process requires some explanation.

The idea of an issue of *Dialogue* devoted to Central Australia grew during the time I spent there in 2007 and 2008, talking, listening and observing. In 2008, after the Howard Government's Northern Territory Emergency Response (the Intervention), which included suspension of the Race Discrimination Act, I went to Alice Springs (*Mparntwe*) armed with introductions from anthropologist friends, hoping to discover what those affected thought about the new set of policies, and to see the impacts for myself. I contacted many people, telling them about my plans for *Dialogue.* I spent time at places like the Courts, along the Todd River, the multiple art galleries, talking to residents of the town camps and their representative body, Tangentyere Council, to those at the Central Land Council and the Centre for Appropriate Technology, and with the very mixed clientele of the Desert Rose Inn, which has been my home on each of my visits.

Considerable planning and research followed that visit, and it became increasingly apparent that even two editions of *Dialogue* would scarcely do justice to the complexity of the issues faced in Central Australia. Nor were they wholly region-specific issues, but instead were those that are faced by all Australians, albeit in the Centre they might be visible in their rawest forms. I refer not only to the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, but to a serious acknowledgement that 70 per cent of our country is desert. Remoteness, scarcity of water and a harsh, unreliable and sometimes savage climate have moulded many of those who live there into resilient and inventive people, who have lessons to teach the rest of us we may well need to learn. It has been the skills of adaptation and deep ecological understanding that has enabled Aboriginal desert peoples to survive through millennia. The environment in which they live shows the same resilience and inventiveness in plant and animal life, as ecologists there have learnt, working alongside their Aboriginal informants and colleagues.

In May 2009, I drove 3400 km, around the coasts of southern NSW, Victoria and South Australia, through the long-colonised regions, before heading north from Pt Augusta into the desert: past the salt lakes, Woomera (and the enormous Woomera Prohibited Area) and the Roxby Downs/Olympic Dam turnoff; Coober Pedy, Marla, Kulgera and Erldunda roadhouses, the turnoff to Uluru 450 km to the west; and on to Alice Springs. I would stay in Alice for 3 months, in order to talk to people, to be among them and share some of their daily lives and concerns, and expand my own knowledge.

There has been something of a surge of 'news' from the Centre in the past year or so, most of it either disturbing or puzzling to people unfamiliar with the place, or just plain ugly. The federal Government's decision to extend the Northern Territory (NT) Intervention into a policy program of 'Closing the Gap' raised the media profile of the NT.

Federal Minister Jenny Macklin's visits to Alice Springs town camps and discussions with Tangentyere Council were widely reported, usually replete with rubbish-strewn and run-down houses to illustrate the need. But town camps in the 2006 Census (ABS QuickStats) housed just under 1200 Aboriginal people, in 180 dwellings; where over 80 per cent of those over 15 were employed. Almost three times that number of Aboriginal people in Alice Springs (3368), lived in houses (1130 of them) like those of non-Aboriginal people, and more than 90 per cent of the occupants over 15 were employed. Dwellings in both sectors have fluctuating occupancy, with family visiting from remote communities for health treatment, funerals, time-out to visit or other kin-related business. There may well be changes in these data after the Intervention (from June 2007), but it would have been helpful to dampen the sensationalism had readers/viewers been better informed by reporters and politicians.

Housing is not a simple issue. The very idea of a 'house' and its meaning are not universal concepts, and it cannot be assumed that all Aboriginal people conceive of a dwelling in the same way as most non-Aboriginal readers and I might. A few days after I arrived in Alice, I was given a copy of *Yuendumu Everyday* by Yasmine Musharbash, just published (reviewed in the next issue of *Dialogue*). Beautifully written, it elaborates the daily life of women in the remote township 300 km northwest of Alice Springs, founded as a ration station and Baptist mission the year I was born, 1946. She identified within the community three characteristics of daily behaviour, based on the conception and use of the dwelling (house): mobility – immediacy – intimacy. Mobility between houses occurs because where one sleeps in an extended kin community (intimacy) depends on a whole range of factors operating on any particular day: does a grandmother feel sick and need care? the kids (not necessarily 'yours')? who is arguing with each other? has there been a death (when a house is abandoned)? is there a bushfood-gathering excursion planned for the next day? who has kangaroo tail for dinner? who has more flour for the breakfast damper? was someone drunk and abusive where you slept last night? A house is seen as a temporary shelter (immediacy) rather than a permanent one; nor is it an investment in the future, since who knows the future? Even if the bureaucracy paperwork demands that the house 'belongs' officially to someone who pays the rent, that does not necessarily indicate who 'lives' there. These are the circumstances in this remote community, Yuendumu (with about 1000 residents), as in others.

For most non-Aboriginal people the dwelling means security/permanence – investment in the future – nuclear family life, a quite different conception of the house. Nor do we non-Aboriginals cook most meals on an open fire outdoors, shift mattresses around for sleeping according to the weather or who feels closest to us that evening or from whom we would like to receive or give comfort.

The focus on *some* Aboriginal people, and their often dire living circumstances, compared with other Australians, certainly looks pretty damning. But the generalisation and stereotyping are deceptive (as the figures on housing in Alice Springs suggest). This is not to say that alcoholism, ingestion/sniffing of substances and subsequent neglect and/or abuse of children, low school attendance, poor literacy and numeracy skills, health problems and domestic violence are not serious issues, and if media attention can persuade more of us to try to understand how things have reached this pass in Aboriginal communities, the better might be the attempts to deal with such problems and find a cooperative, and long-term, commitment to change. There is a wide choice of explanations of the problem/s available: successive government policies misdirected, or poorly evaluated, or under-funded; a failure to base policies on research and evidence;

the eating-up of funding by inadequate or improper administering bodies, or plain old corruption; the funding of education or health infrastructure in the form of buildings, without adequate or ongoing funding of staff; the comprehension gulf between bureaucratic systems and Aboriginal social structures; institutional (or institutionalised) indifference to the needs of a place remote from government decision-making; an emphasis on a rights-based agenda at the expense of humanity by activists or the well-meaning; a reliance on 'welfare' or 'sit-down' money; gambling; a colonial mentality; inappropriate or self-serving behaviour by some Aboriginal (and non-Aboriginal) leaders and spokespeople, or simply the enormous burden of pressures on them; kin responsibilities and oppressive obligations; lack of respect for those different from oneself and consequent lack of consultation and acceptance of decisions made by Aboriginal people about how to live their own lives; and, indeed, racism. Which explanation or combination of explanations you favour depends on your personal and political leanings, degree of knowledge or ignorance, and how much time and reflection you care to devote to understanding.

Central Australians are accustomed to these surges of interest; both the brief flair of outrage aroused by media exposure of dysfunction, and the long history of visiting politicians, academics or philanthropists, who want to make a difference. It is frustrating. It can be heartbreaking. In the Centre, there was talk about the 'narrative of failure' gathering force in bureaucratic and political circles about the policies enacted in the past 30 years; then the 'failed state' (NT) analysis of Nicolas Rothwell in *The Australian* and the expansion of his analysis by Chris Graham in the *National Indigenous Times*, with a very different emphasis, detailing an appalling history of NT government diversion of funding supposed to be spent on Aboriginal programs, signalled another round of 'maybe it's all too hard'. But there is also what one contributor describes as the 'narrative of wonder', which runs parallel to that of failure. One of the characteristics I found among those who live in the Centre was an intense attachment to the place, a sense of connection, not only to the land itself that they call 'the bush', but to each other. This was not particular to Aboriginal people; it was remarkable – and acknowledged – among non-Aboriginal people. A common experience is that of Tony, who came to Alice for a month and has been there for 18 years. He told me he tried going back east, but lasted only 3 months before returning to the Centre. 'It had entered my skin', he said.

Central Australian Aboriginal people were among the last to experience colonial settler society, and much of the contestation involved is of very recent memory. It should not be forgotten that there are Indigenous people alive in Central Australia who saw their first 'white' person as children or young adults. Aboriginal languages are still spoken – and what I heard on Alice Springs streets was almost always their languages, not mine - and many speak two, three or more languages, though their English may be limited. The generational change is accelerated in circumstances where the technology of modernity is employed even in the most remote communities. Satellite communications were adopted almost immediately they were available, with great foresight, energy and immense hard work from the Aboriginal people involved, as Wendy Bell has documented. Almost all Aboriginal people watch television, powered by the Centre for Appropriate Technology's (CAT) Bushlight energy supply; the satellite phone (also from CAT), featured in that wonderfully honest film (made by and with Aboriginal people from the Centre) *Samson and Delilah*, permits connections over long distances; and the young and not so young use their mobile phones as constantly as everyone else, wherever there is coverage. The Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association's (CAAMA) radio,

predominantly Aboriginal-staffed and run, reaches far into the desert, broadcasting, for instance, requests and messages from the Alice Springs gaol to let family know where inmates are and when they will be out; its video/film unit has produced some fine professionals, including the director/writer of *Samson and Delilah*. CAAMA's offshoot, IMPARJA Television, has now been operating for more than 20 years.

Certainly, it is hard, but it is not 'too hard', and goodwill two-way is necessary, but insufficient. Hard work, patience, negotiation and consultation that is real and transparent, commitment to longterm goals and ways to reach them, pay dividends; small dividends often, but incremental and cumulative. I deliberately sought contributors to *Dialogue* from among those who live and work in Central Australia, most for many years, or those who have done so in the past. The perspectives are from those who know the place intimately, on the ground. Their stories are not always 'good news' ones, but some are, or parts of them are, and these need to be publicised and applauded. Their ideas, their imagination and their dedication to the work they do in building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, in bridging the gulfs between expectations and realities in two-way programs are often remarkable.

Most contributors are non-Aboriginal, partly because literacy in writing English is rare. But then, a majority of those who live in Central Australia are not Aboriginal; in Alice Springs the proportion of Aboriginal people is less than 20 per cent; in the whole of Central Australia about 30 per cent. This does make Aboriginal people in the Centre the most substantial minority anywhere in Australia (nationally, they make up 2.5 per cent of the Australian population, with that proportion growing, and marrying 'out' at a rate of just over 50 per cent). It also makes Aboriginal people visible in the Alice community. Most of the people to whom I talked worked with, beside, within or for Aboriginal people and/or their organisations, to a lesser or greater extent. Some spoke one or more Aboriginal languages; many had at least a minimal level of communication in a local language. But at the visibility level among the general population of Alice Springs – what I saw in daily walks on the streets of the town, in the shopping centres and, especially, in the Courts – gave the impression of lives experienced in different dimensions.

'Central Australia' is a loose term for a region comprising perhaps two thirds of the Northern Territory, northern South Australia, and extending into Queensland and Western Australia. This region includes Aboriginal peoples of the Arrernte (Eastern, Central, Southern and Western), Luritja, Yankunytjatjara, Pitjantjatjara, Ngaatjatjara, Pintupi, Pintupi/Luritja, Kukatja, Warlpiri, Anmatyerr, Kaytetye, Warumungu, Warlmanpa, Alyawarr, and Akarre language groups (based on the map drawn by the Institute for Aboriginal Development, 2002); or, in other words, from north of Tennant Creek, into the Barkly Tableland, across towards Mt Isa and south and west into the Simpson, the Great Victoria and the Gibson Deserts. The 'boundaries' wander into lands of a dozen other language groups, particularly to the north. Even this fairly loose definition is awkward, since some of the contributors operate within the Northern Territory jurisdiction only (as their maps indicate), and many statistics appear only in this form too. Some would limit the definition to the 'Red Centre' of the tourist, the area which includes Uluru, Kata Tjuta, Kings Canyon and the West and East MacDonnell Ranges, but although tourism is touched on in the next edition of *Dialogue*, it is not the focus.

For the purposes of *Dialogue*, I conceived Central Australia as the area for which Alice Springs is the principal town: an administrative centre for government and other services; for health care (major hospital, Centre for Remote Health, renal clinic, Royal Flying Doctor) and education (School of the Air, high schools, boarding schools, various training

bodies, branches of Batchelor Institute at the Desert Peoples Centre, and Charles Darwin University); a transport focus (the railway, the sealed Stuart Highway Adelaide-Darwin); the legal system centre (legal aid, solicitors, the Courts, venues for diversionary programs and a Correctional Centre of 400 beds - soon to be 500, since in the past two years it has been required to house more inmates); and the headquarters of many Aboriginal organisations serving the region, like the Central Land Council, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, the Centre for Appropriate Technology and the Institute for Aboriginal Development Press.

Originally, I hoped to devote the first edition of *Dialogue* to 'the land', the second to 'the heart'. Taking into account the busy schedules of contributors however, this did not quite work out. In this edition, we have theoretical articles which invite a reader to consider some other lenses for viewing: Mark Stafford Smith and John Huigen on the 'desert syndrome', which asserts that there are particular drivers operating in Central Australia that, in combination, make the desert lands a unique case; and Bruce Walker, Doug Porter and Mark Stafford Smith on their ideas for a rationale for a whole new approach to managing desert Australia, including the Centre. Veronica Perrurle Dobson, senior Elder of the Eastern Arrernte people writes of 'how it was' when she was younger, caring for country, illustrating the richness and variety available in a desert environment for those living in, with and from it. Andy Bubb describes aspects of the pastoral industry and its practices through a boom/bust history, Peter Yates explores the possibilities of bushfoods, and his practical experience of that enterprise, and Rodger Barnes outlines the long process of negotiating mining enterprises on Aboriginal land. John Oster talks of the Aboriginal art 'industry' and its recently adopted Code of Conduct, and Peter Sutton introduces a lighter note, with a subtle subtext, in writing of 'Melbourne's outback' (his recent controversial book, *The Politics of Suffering*, is reviewed in the next issue).

The March issue of *Dialogue* will continue the discussion, considering housing and employment; livelihoods; bilingual education; and camels in the tourist imaginary; as well as case studies illustrating community development programs, Court diversionary programs, youth support services, family health care, and other practical programs – government policies and local Aboriginal initiatives - on the ground.

Mostly, I invited those with whom I wanted to talk to share a meal with me, so that I did not interrupt their daily schedules, and we had the leisure and relaxation of several hours together. Those discussions were – without exception – both pleasurable and fascinating. I learnt so much, conscious of the privilege of frankness. Many linger with a smile, like lunch at Olive Pink's Botanic Garden with Dick, an historian, which extended to a delightful 4 hours as he yarned; others with poignancy, like a meal with Jocelyn, as we shared outrage about the proposed 84 new local government by-laws (protests subsequently stopped some of these) prohibiting begging, camping, cooking food and the like in public places, without a permit. Fines started at $130. These were in addition to the Territory and Federal laws already in place and enforced by the police stationed in Alice Springs: 260 of them, I read in the local paper. Yet other discussions dwell in sadness, like visiting what is locally known as the 'animal bar' in the Todd Tavern with Vanessa; a bar beside the river bed which at 11.40 am contained 80 Aboriginal people, two pool tables, about a dozen chairs or stools, the barman Peter, and us two. We were noticed, then ignored; no-one humbugged or bothered us at all. Peter told us that at 2 pm, when grog outlets open, there can be as many as 300 people in this bar – with a max capacity noted on the wall, of 100. Drinking in public places is against the law in Alice Springs.

Some meetings were magical, like the evening Meg and I went bush (though barely outside the town), built a fire in a creek bed and ate our kangaroo stew as the sun set and the stars slowly filled the sky. In the deep silence, a lone euro mounted a rock several hundred metres away, and watched us for at least 20 minutes, occasionally circling to inspect the surroundings..

I owe many debts of gratitude; for memories that are irreplaceable, for experiences that widened my knowledge and thinking, for hospitality and the generosity of time spent with me by people whose free time was rare. My thanks to Jon and Melinda, Jacquie, Bruce M, Liat and Assi, Wendy and John, Tim, Saan and Sue, Anne and Joe, Marlene, Lisa, Rowie, Tristan and Megan and boys, Blair, Richard, Brendan, Meg, Dick, Peter Y, Jocelyn, Fiona, Josie, Liz and boys, Petronella, Jenny, Mary, Bruce W, Metta, Peter T, Jayne, Rodger, Danielle, Phillip, Craig, Andy, Vanessa, Scott, Brian and family, Alison, Tony, Freddie, Michael, John O, MK, Natalie, and their organisations; and a variety of anonymous people who were willing to chat in settings as various as Desert Park, the gym, the railway station, the queues at Woolies/Coles, the track to the Telegraph Station, the communities of Hermannsburg and Atitjere, galleries and the Araluen Cultural Precinct, Alice Springs Hospital, a half dozen roadhouses and along the base walk at Uluru.

I hope readers find these issues of *Dialogue* interesting and challenging, and that you leave them both better informed and encouraged to add your voice to those of us who want a more imaginative and equitable future for our desert lands and the communities of people – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal - who occupy them.

Peg Job, Editor

Please note: 'Aboriginal' and 'Indigenous' are used interchangeably thoughout; some prefer one, others the alternative. Spelling of names in Aboriginal languages varies; I have used those of each contributor.

Some useful websites relating to Central Australia

National Indigenous Times : http://www.nit.com.au/
Central Land Council: www.clc.org.au/
Tangentyere Council: tangentyere.org.au/
Centre for Remote Health: http://www.crh.org.au/
Central Australian Aboriginal Congress: http://www.cuzcongress.com/congress_help.html
Charles Darwin University: www.cdu.edu.au/
Centre for Appropriate Technology: http://www.icat.org.au/
Sustainable Systems, CSIRO: www.cse.csiro.au/
Centre for Arid Zone Research, CSIRO: www.cazr.csiro/home.htm
Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre: www.desertknowledgecrc.com.au/
Desert Knowledge: www.desertknowledge.com.au/
The Rangeland Journal: www.publish.csiro.au/nid/202.htm

From Desert Syndrome to Desert System:
Developing a science of desert living

Mark Stafford Smith and John Huigen

Introduction

Global research over the past decade has increasingly emphasised the fundamentally linked, or 'coupled', nature of what have been called human-environment or social-ecological systems. [1] One strand of this thought focuses on drylands. This strand was originally triggered by debates on the nature and causes of desertification,[2] where differing social and biophysical science paradigms put blame respectively on the socio-political factors, or on the biophysical nature of drylands and their climates. Clearly *both* were part of the story, a view synthesised by a Dahlem conference in 2002[3] and further refined to five principles stated as a 'dryland development paradigm' in 2007. [4] From this thinking have followed many threads related to the interactive nature of humans and their environments in drylands,[5] including those of Australia.[6]

At the same time, a homegrown and grassroots set of concepts was being developed under the rubric of 'desert knowledge' in central Australia. These ideas were pioneered by Bruce Walker at the Centre for Appropriate Technology in Alice Springs (see his article elsewhere in this volume) but taken up by a diverse group of organisations, people (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) and governments. The movement has spawned several complementary organisations, in particular, Desert Knowledge Australia, the Desert Peoples Centre and the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre,[7] all seeking to operate across the Australian deserts. A series of worthy ideas and approaches has emerged from the various workings of these organisations; these have recently been synthesised as concepts to underlie a 'Science of Desert Living', drawing on the principles being espoused for drylands internationally. A key step in this endeavour was to identify a suite of 'desert drivers' – interlinked characteristics of desert regions (described below) that appear to underpin many of the features that various researchers have identified in compartmentalised studies of the biophysical and social functioning of desert Australia.[8]

It should instantly be acknowledged that the resulting framing, whilst widely discussed, arose from a viewpoint steeped in systems ecology. Had the attempt been from a historical, economic or anthropological perspective, different elements would no doubt have been emphasised. Readers from the social sciences and humanities are therefore entreated to persist with an open mind to see whether this analysis provides any opportunities for synthetic insights to their own disciplines.

The desert drivers (Figure 1) are conceived as a set of forces acting on life (human, plant and other animal) in desert regions which are, importantly, causally linked, so that the occurrence of some leads inexorably to the others. The original treatment[9] assesses the extent to which specific drivers are peculiar to Australia and to drylands, and many are not. However, the case is made that the combination of them creates a system that functions in a particular way, one which differs from most regions that are wetter and more densely settled.

The drivers were originally presented as a linked set of factors which were termed a 'syndrome', a term with possibly unduly negative medical connotations given that it was supposed to emphasise their systemically linked nature rather than their deleterious impact. In this essay we wish to extend the 'syndrome' into a systems view, and briefly

explore how it then provides a background for framing issues under a science of desert living.

From 'desert syndrome' to 'desert system'

The three-quarters of Australia that we loosely term 'desert' possesses some essential features shared with desert regions elsewhere in the world, but which differ from non-desert areas. These features drive how deserts function, both physically and socially – they are 'desert drivers' (Figure 1).[10] They are also causally linked, and understanding these links is central to understanding how deserts work.

Figure 1: The 'Desert syndrome' as a system with feedbacks.[11]
See text for explanation of the individual drivers and linkages.
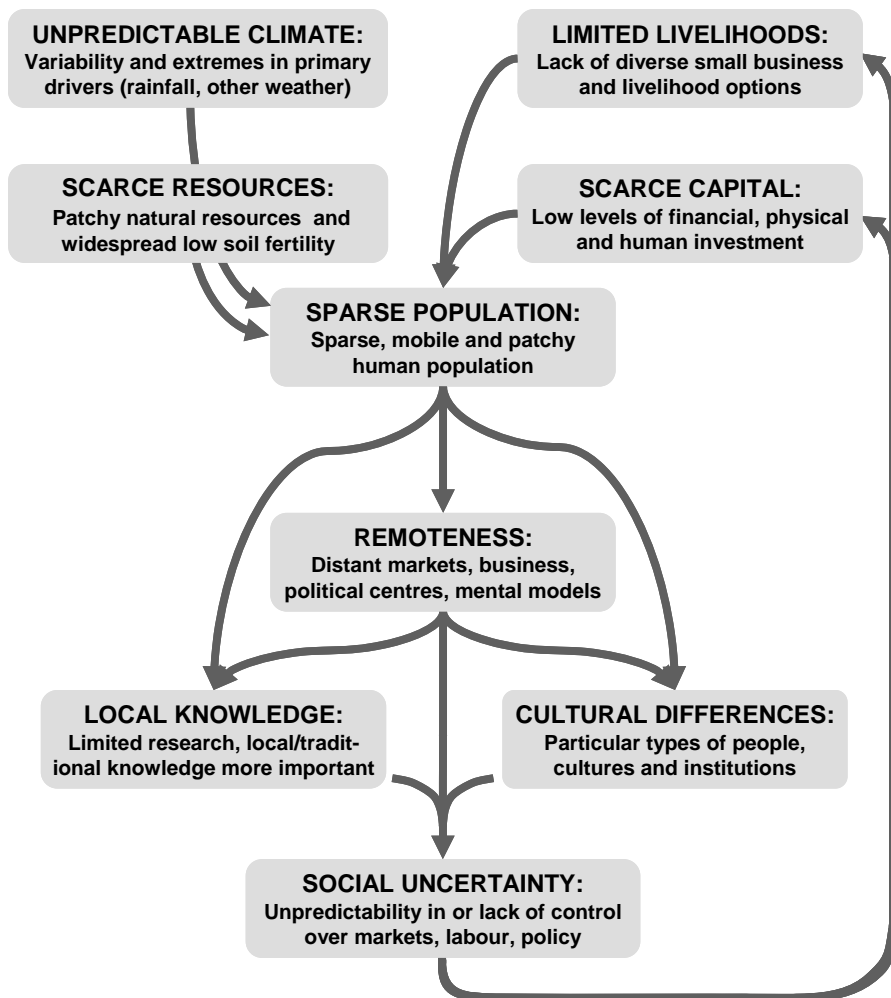
Underlying climatic variability, extremes and unpredictability, results in primary productivity being low and highly variable in time. This is exacerbated by ancient, nutrient-poor soils in some regions of flat worn-down continents like Australia. [12]

Landscape redistribution processes by wind and water, as well as intrinsic landscape variation, drive spatial variability in this productivity, without which many organisms could not survive. Though caused by other processes, scattered mineral resources and natural attractions for tourists add to this spatial heterogeneity. Thus resources in general are scarce and patchy.

The net result is a generally sparse human population that is also patchy, and often mobile. Deserts are the natural realm of the nomad, the hunter-gatherer, the drover and the prospector. The sparse population results in low critical mass; most markets for goods and services are therefore distant, as are centres of decision-making in governments and organisations, with consequent economic flows out of the region. As a result, desert peoples often find themselves without a voice in the larger society. These factors, exacerbated by turn-over in the small labour pool, create another layer of unpredictability in markets, policies and labour, here summarised under the term 'social uncertainty'. Like the unpredictability of the climate, this source of uncertainty is generally outside the control of local people.

Remoteness and sparse population also contribute to relatively low levels of research effort and formal capture of knowledge in these regions, whilst often contributing to the development of local culture and local innovation. Traditional Aboriginal culture has persisted in desert regions when it has declined in less remote areas, and Aboriginal local knowledge is often particularly significant. The scale of the management required for landscapes, business networks and connections to regions outside the desert mean that local knowledge assumes particular significance, although it is also hard to develop in such an unpredictable environment where the same combination of events may never recur in a manager's lifetime. Furthermore, the type of people who like to live in these conditions tend to exhibit particular cultural and social characteristics, either in the long-term (because they were born into an Aboriginal desert culture, for example) or because they are the ones who visit and choose to stay. Local organisations that persist also tend to possess particular characteristics that respond to their context.

Unpredictability, scarce and patchy resources, sparse populations, mobility, remote markets and isolation from political power, cultural differences, local knowledge and social uncertainty are all linked '*desert drivers*'. The hypothesis is that these are, *ceteris paribus*, causally linked in deserts (Figure 1) in ways that they are not in other environments that may otherwise share some of the features, and that, because this occurs over a very large area (and proportion) of the continent, their effect is especially magnified in Australia. Many of its conjectures may apply equally well to other types of remote regions, given whatever other driver may cause low population in the first place. [13]

From syndrome to system. These desert drivers are not to be taken lightly. They tend to limit the conventional livelihood options open to people, and to cause money and people to be drawn out of the desert. Left unmanaged, these effects result in a feedback loop that keeps the population low and sparse, completing the cycle of the 'desert system'[14] (Figure 1, top right). This system is self-reinforcing in the absence of intervention. It is pointless to rail against the desert drivers themselves, but it is possible to mitigate their feedback effects. Just as pastoralists and pre-settlement Aboriginal people came to terms with the inevitability of droughts and floods and learned to manage *for* them instead of *against* them, so other desert dwellers need to come to terms with the

effects of the desert syndrome. Governments will inevitably focus elsewhere – because that is where most of the people are. Markets will inevitably be small – it is just a characteristic of the desert. Social networking will inevitably be harder – it is just the result of a remote, sparsely distributed population.

These conclusions are not a cause for despair (the term 'syndrome' is not actually normative!) – they are a call to action! Every desert driver creates as many opportunities as it closes off: small markets offer the opportunity to test products that would not be viable elsewhere, such as remote area power systems; the difficulty of networking creates revolutions in transport and communication, such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service; even distant government can also allow greater freedom for local interpretation. The desert syndrome creates a context for all these things which is different from that of urban areas. It is not a better or worse context than that of urban areas, just significantly different.

Problems arise when urban norms are enforced on the desert context. Sometimes this happens because people coming to live in the desert expect their urban experiences to apply. This can be fixed by the desert dwellers coming to understand how the desert really works and explaining this to newcomers. At other times outside decision-makers set up the business, service and administrative context within which desert dwellers have to operate in ways that clash with desert needs. This is common, and more awkward to fix, precisely because of the desert syndrome and the difficulty of influencing distant decision-making. But the first step to a solution is greater awareness about these issues.

Understanding the desert *system* enables players within that system (and outside it) to work proactively with the challenges of the system, and to create opportunities by harnessing the system to the benefit of desert dwellers.

The implications of a 'desert system'[15]

Desert plants and animals, desert livelihoods and small businesses, desert settlements and their services, desert governance and institutions, all must deal with a greater diversity and perhaps magnitude of uncertainties than most of their counterparts in the more populated regions. They must also deal with issues of critical mass, mobility, physical remoteness, and distant voice. This has spawned both innovation and difficulty for life in desert Australia – even disaster, when their strategies are misunderstood by a distant outside world.

Desert ecology and management. The variety of plants and animals that make the desert their home have evolved life history strategies to cope with highly variable and resource-poor environments.[16] They become ephemerals or persistent perennials, nomadic or focused on special refuge spots, or organise themselves to help each other (various forms of unconscious facilitation). Each of these strategies has weak points, where inappropriate management can undermine the strategy – for example, perennial plants need to be able to re-invest in root reserves in good times to be able to survive through the bad ones, but this can be upset by over-grazing just after a drought breaks. Pastoral management in the past has upset many of these weak-points, but today is increasingly adopting best practices that seek to avoid doing such damage. Understanding the strategies used by plants in the desert is helpful for understanding analogous weak points in other activities that depend on variable scarce resources, like some small businesses and specialised desert settlements that also need to build up reserves against bad times.[17]

Desert livelihoods*.* There are relatively few livelihood options in remote areas, because of sparse populations, remote markets for most products and the costs imposed by distance. To have reliable livelihoods in the desert, people need to focus on those that have a desert competitive advantage – which is often based on natural or cultural resources that do not occur elsewhere, or which are of high value to offset the high cost of transport. These include cultural and environmental tourism, mining, sustainable precision pastoralism, bush products, and cultural products like art and music. They also include natural and cultural heritage management on behalf of society, including managing issues like fire and biodiversity where local management saves the nation money and provides all sorts of side benefits in health and safety.[18] Most of these sources of livelihood are variable and patchy and anyone, public or private, who invests in them needs to adopt the same strategies that desert plants and animals exhibit – build reserves, facilitate mobility, take advantage of transient good times, and go quiet in lean times.

Desert businesses*.* Small businesses in deserts struggle because of the limited size of local markets, distance from larger markets, lack of critical mass among operators, and huge problems with social uncertainty, like staff turnover and uncertain government policy and funding regimes. There are success stories, where business sectors build critical mass through long distance (and local) partnerships between like-minded businesses, or alliances with the few large businesses (like mining and larger tourism operators). This can be assisted through business clustering.[19] Another strategy is to apply smart desert innovation to niche products that are economically viable in desert regions but will have markets elsewhere once prices are brought down, like remote area power supplies and desert health and education services. Building a strong culture of celebrating and supporting desert innovation is vital.

Desert settlements*.* Because of the sparse and patchy nature of desert populations, most of their settlements have odd characteristics compared to those of more settled regions.[20] The common interests of desert communities are usually narrower (for example, many are mining, tourism, pastoral or Aboriginal settlements) and their actual nature is unconventional (some are ephemeral like many mining towns, dispersed like most pastoral settlements, or used 'nomadically' like fly-in-fly-out mining camps and some Aboriginal settlements). A few larger service centres earn their living by servicing the smaller settlements. Thus administrators must pay special attention to understanding the distinctive aspirations of different communities. The communities themselves must also play a significant role in delivering their own services to their own satisfaction. Where this does not happen, there are perverse and messy misconceptions about what constitutes a 'viable' desert settlement, resulting in supply-driven services, a waste of public resources, an undermining of private initiative, and even the potential for a distant and autocratic decision to close the community down because it does not fit the paradigm in the mind of a far-off government.

Desert governance*.* Governance for local services presents special problems in deserts, whether those services are power and water, natural resource management, or education and health. Sparse remote populations mean that whilst accountability needs to be as local as possible to be tuned to local conditions in this vast country, some services need to be delivered at a large regional scale to make them economic.[21] Even then, delivery organisations need to combine different types of services to be efficient (economies of scope rather than scale). Attempts to have elections and service delivery at the same scale (as is common in more settled regions) therefore generally fail.

Successful case studies of regional governance are based on autonomy at the most local scale ('subsidiarity'), linked with (but separate from) flexible regional organisations to deliver the services, a combination which seems especially important for sparse, remote populations. These principles of good governance design and practice can also be found in Aboriginal society.[22]

These are key lessons for various sectors. But the desert system has other general and pervasive effects that need to be acknowledged.

Paying attention to the desert. Behind the desert system represented in Figure 1 is a fundamental, and quite understandable, reality for any remote area. Because it is remote, it is bound to have far less attention paid to it than well-populated cities and towns. Yet desert Australia is important in the psyche and economy of urban Australia and thus of central governments. So, from time to time, interest will turn to the desert, and people will want to make changes to how it operates. Desert dwellers should be aware from historical experience that the interest soon passes, so the important thing is to use it to establish structures that are resilient to fluctuating levels of interest. The structures should allow local people to make their own decisions that do not always depend on central funding and support, which will invariably change or be withdrawn.

Local knowledge and culture. The desert system also highlights the special significance of local knowledge and cultural differences in remote regions, whether it is the special landscape knowledge of the pastoralist or ranger, the geological understanding of the miner or, particularly, the persistence of Aboriginal culture and desert wisdom over eons. Part of the reason local knowledge is so important is that central government is just too far away to understand and sensibly manage day-to-day activities in these remote regions. This means that letting local people have the rights and responsibilities over what they do, within whatever national guidelines and standards are deemed appropriate, is vital for the future of desert Australia. This does not mean an open slate to wreck public resources, but it does mean giving people the freedom and opportunity to work with local conditions. This is one of the structural changes towards resilience that needs to be established during one of those transient periods of interest in the desert.

Capital leakage. Desert Australia has been a source of wealth to the nation for the past century and a half, principally through mining and grazing exports, through cheap labour obtained from Aboriginal people in earlier years, and through tourism and the Aboriginal art industry today. This export of natural and social capital has only been very partially compensated by return flows of financial capital from national beneficiaries. The status of desert natural, social and human capital has therefore been greatly run down. As noted in Figure 1, the limited supply of capital is one key to the desert system's feedback; this can only be mitigated by funding mechanisms which are independent of the waxing and waning of interest from the centres of governance. One proposed approach for the future is to establish an Outback Capital Trust Fund able to levy resources rents which can be reinvested in all forms of desert capital, supported by changes to the handling of Commonwealth Grants Commission recurrent funding.[23]

Aboriginal disadvantage and opportunity. Aboriginal matters have not been especially highlighted in this essay, but their resolution is profoundly important to generating a shared future for inland Australia. The characteristics of the desert system suggest that many of the current problems of Aboriginal settlements and communities derive more from their remoteness than from cultural or racial factors. Consequently they need to be tackled as part of a set of remote issues for all of desert Australia that are

distinct from the concerns of more settled regions, rather than simply as issues that affect Aboriginal people.

Managing natural resources, creating livelihoods and businesses, understanding settlements and their service needs and improving desert governance are all issues in which the difference between remote and settled areas is actually far larger than the difference between Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal concerns within the desert.

Figure 2: The desert system illustrating some points of intervention to help live with and take advantage of desert differences.
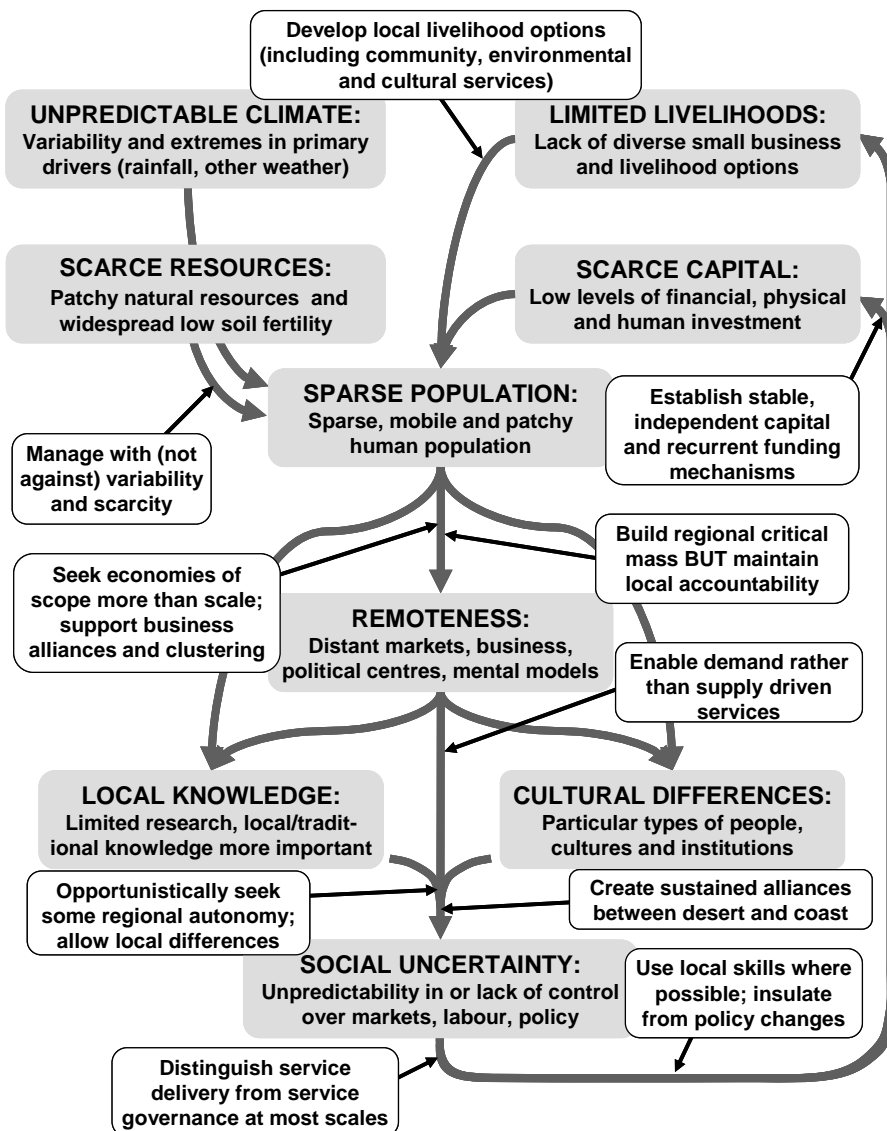
However, there is no doubt that many of these issues need to be tackled in somewhat different ways in an Aboriginal-dominated context – for example, culturally-matched livelihoods for Aboriginal people, such as managing the land, may differ from those for non-Aboriginal people. Nor should there be any doubt that special attention is needed on Aboriginal health, education, safety, alcohol and poverty,[24] and in response to Aboriginal peoples' very legitimate sense of loss as a result of past policy failures and outright racism. There are also opportunities with a powerful Aboriginal flavour – the maintenance of culture, languages and attachment to land, and their powerful impact on creative industries.

Thus each of the issues raised above needs to be considered generally as it applies to desert communities, and then considered again to ask whether there are special actions (or special approaches to general actions) needed for Aboriginal communities.

Discussion and conclusion

Over half a million people live in desert Australia, with the highest proportion of Aboriginal people in the country, and over $90 billion of goods and services are produced annually from this three-quarters of the continent that is deeply embedded in the national identity. Getting its future on better tracks is a vital concern for all Australians.

The previous section has outlined some implications for a 'desert system' analysis of various sectors and the functioning of desert life in general. Awareness of the potential existence of the desert system allows desert dwellers and researchers to ask what strategies may make desert life resilient to its effects; in essence, where in the cycle should desert people put their efforts to change the system? In true desert style, it is evident that there could be many points of possible intervention, some of which are identified on Figure 2. Such a list of actions will always be very partial, though. The most important message is that desert dwellers (and those outside the desert who care about it or exert power over it) should seek to understand the desert drivers; and they should use them to analyse what goes wrong in their day-to-day dealings with desert life, with a view to developing more effective and long-lasting outcomes.

It is likely that some attention needs to be paid to all of these intervention points at once, as investment in one area at a time means that failings elsewhere in the diagram are likely to render that investment void. However, we do not yet have a strong understanding of the relative importance of different parts of the cycle, nor of the potential for rapid synergies between investments at different steps. There are also profound theoretical questions regarding the degree to which the desert system may exist in different stable equilibria, and what actions are needed to move between these. Given this firm conceptual model, however, the future of a science of desert living must encompass systematically elucidating a quantitative understanding of the desert system.

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Acknowledgements

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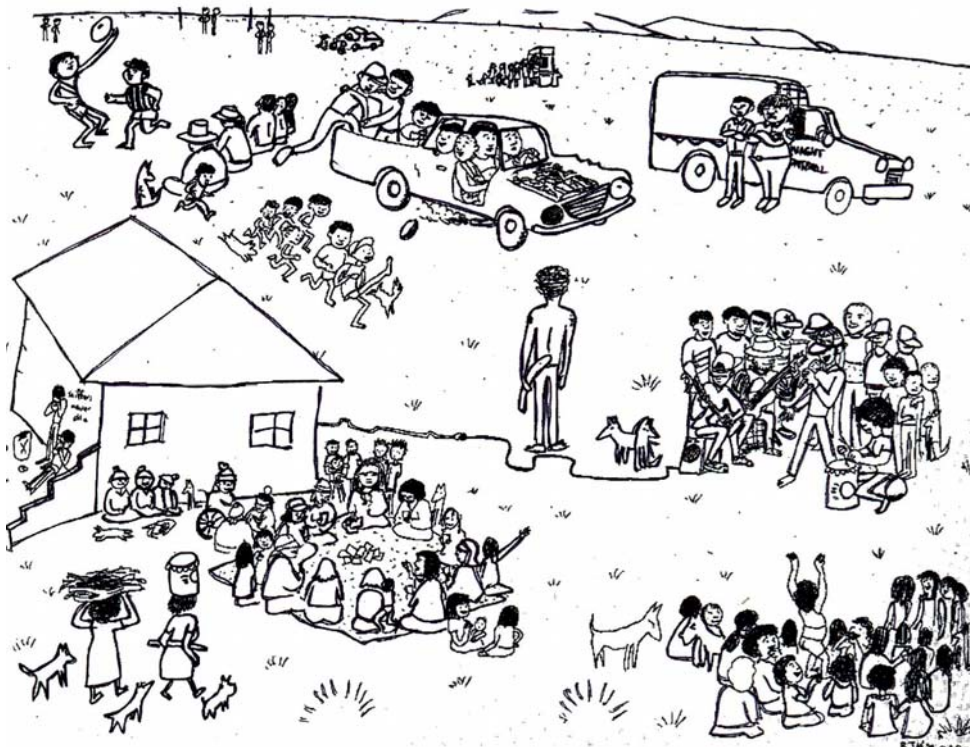
Investing in the Outback:
A framework for Indigenous development within Australia.
Bruce W Walker, Doug J Porter, Mark Stafford Smith

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The task is not so much to see what no one has yet seen, but to think what no one has yet thought, about that which everybody sees.   Erwin Schrodinger

What is called 'Central Australia' is a substantial part of that two thirds of the continent known as the Outback, home to more than half a million people. The demographic profile is dynamic; a rapidly growing Indigenous population that is also highly mobile, contrasted with a non-Indigenous population that is continuing to reduce in some areas and expand in others, particularly as a consequence of mining activity.

The region suffers from dysfunctional governance for a range of reasons, including: ineffective cooperation between jurisdictions; the failure of fiscal federalism to ensure the proper allocation of funding to remote and rural regions; little local decision-making or devolved financial power and authority; and, lack of sustained public investment in services, infrastructure and public administration. The sparse, patchy and mobile populations of the remote regions have little political voice or capacity to influence markets (except in the niche market of cultural tourism and arts and crafts). The outback, its peoples and its governance are overlooked too much of the time – with increasingly significant consequences; consequences that are beginning to demand the attention of the wider public and governments. It is only times of almost irreparable crisis that command attention.[1]

Indigenous Australia has always been a casualty of short termism and constant change, as a consequence of national and state electoral politics. Indigenous issues are dragged into parliaments and the media, commitments are made, and then jettisoned with impunity and without explanation to the target recipients once the heat is lost. The outback is thus characterised as a landscape of partially implemented reform measures, each layering and contesting the other. Services and economic livelihoods have become weakened, just as political accountability has become diffused. In the public eye it is a place of deficit and disadvantage

Stafford Smith and Huigen (this issue) argue that a desert syndrome, independent of race considerations, underpins these characteristics. This paper examines recent changes in Indigenous policy and suggests a 'framework' for how this policy could be reconceived, taking account of the desert syndrome to provide opportunity and investment for the benefit of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents of the outback.

The Australian Indigenous context

Indigenous Australians have seen significant change over the past ten years. The practical reconciliation of the Howard government foreshadowed a shift from rights-based agendas, or at least a balancing of these agendas with a stronger emphasis on responsibilities (1997). The introduction of whole-of-government and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) trial sites (2000); the constant blaming of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) for a lack of action, leading to the division of responsibility between ATSIC and its funding arm, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) (2002) followed by the dissolution of ATSIC (2004); the debate about the end of separateness and the ongoing viability of remote communities (2006-07); and more recently the 2009 COAG agenda on Remote Service Delivery in 26 hub towns nationally, shaped an environment riddled with uncertainty, resistance and change

fatigue. These changes also provoked a rising cynicism to match each new policy announcement aimed at resolving the embedded issues.

Outback Australia has long been a place of great wealth (pastoral, mining and, more recently, art production), but suffers classic capital flight where little 'sticks or remains' in the local economy. The low level of development in remote Australia has permitted Aboriginal culture to survive much longer here than in more densely settled areas. Aboriginal settlements in this region of Australia are also subject to the desert syndrome (discussed in the previous article). Due to residents' low levels of personal savings and disposable incomes, Aboriginal settlements have historically failed to attract private sector consumer services such as banking.[2] Economic globalisation has favoured intensification in urban centres in Australia, resulting in increasing capital leakage from rural and remote areas.[3] Market failure, and a lack of creative economic, social and settlement policy responses has led to a welfare economy.[4]

Contrary to this logical analysis, the root cause of the malaise in these remote Aboriginal communities has been deemed to be 'welfare'. Having identified what appeared to be a cause and the linkages between welfare, alcohol, unemployment, drugs, poverty and ultimately child sexual abuse, it was only a matter of time before radical action would be taken as a result of this conception of the problem. On 21 June 2007 the Howard Government acted by declaring a National Emergency response in the Northern Territory (NT), which was subsequently maintained by the Rudd government elected in November 2007. Following a national apology to the stolen generation of Aboriginal people in February 2008, government has further attempted to stabilise the situation in remote Aboriginal communities with an expanded policy set, targeted at Closing the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage.

No matter what the reader's analysis may be, it is safe to say that things have shifted irreversibly. Many may regret this shift, others will feel constrained by the acquired culture and learned practices and protocols of the past 30 years. It does, however, present an opportunity to recalibrate, adjust and change. First, let us examine the context in which the changes have occurred.

The international context

These policy directions and their rapid changes echo the neoliberal adjustments that have featured in the international development arena over the past two decades, particularly where 'failed states' have been declared. International interventions into 'failed states' have three main thrusts.

a) security/policing, in order to re-create the primary public good of peace, order and stability;

b) executive solutions, that is, effective ceding by the state of executive authority to control of higher level external agencies (over, typically, budget making and spending, audit and interdiction) in return for concessions (aid, trade and other benefits). Elected representational political processes are secondary to executive solutions; and

c) 'community solutions'- a series of community based water, health, education and governance projects. Problems are seen as 'community/local' issues (not as the product of the society's geopolitical or trade position on the periphery of the global economy, etc), for which there are few 'community solutions'.

As Craig and Porter argue,[5] these three features of policy come together in the decentralisation of responsibilities for economic activity and governance. Typically this

has created a plethora of local authorities, many of which are elected, assigned with expansive mandates (welfare, development, security obligations and so on), but with insufficient authority and resourcing to match.

New institutions are assigned functions that are inappropriate to that scale of governance, or combinations of functions,[6] which create obvious internal conflicts and weakened forms of political accountability. There are many examples of this in the remote Indigenous context, such as granting a public safety or personal security obligation to local authorities which are 'populist' (such as night patrols); such people may be 'local', they may know the situation and causes far better than higher level authorities, but they may also be compromised by family affinities, social obligations and under resourcing that stymie their ability to serve public good. They are set up, therefore, to fail. Of course, when they fail, often, this is taken as yet another indication of 'incapability'.

Craig and Porter's[7] account of the global economic impact of neoliberalism on international development practices offers a compelling preview of what the future may hold for Indigenous affairs. In the international arena, neoliberalism heralded a range of structural adjustment programs implemented under the banner of law and order, good governance and poverty reduction. Intermediary organisations were repositioned as 'service providers'; their political representative functions were carefully curtailed and disciplined through a range of fiduciary and anti-corruption measures.

This description resonates with the abolition of ATSIC, and the ongoing discrediting of representative Indigenous structures in Australia. As state and commonwealth governments retreat from the field, commercialisation (eg, contracting, privatisation) and re-territorialism (eg, regionalism) gather pace, as do the police numbers in remote communities and regional centres. Contrary to the claims of joined-up, whole-of-government and partnership approaches, what emerges is what Craig and Porter describe as *quasi-territorialisations*; vague and ineffective organisations that fail in service delivery and in accountability. The net effect of these initiatives is an increase in the complexity of the governance environment, increasing the transaction costs of administration,[8] and ultimately - as change is the only constant - accountability, political and administrative, is reduced at all levels.

Typically, international experience has been that where local leaders deliver services that are wholly dependent on external fiscal transfers, problems arise with responsiveness, responsibility and accountability. It holds therefore that until jurisdictions have a sound economic base from which they can derive a significant share of their income to 'pay for services, representation, entitlements etc', it is difficult to go forward. It also holds that if people are stretched to provide services that take them beyond their means, then representative authority is further undermined. Empowerment is re-conceptualised as participation in local and global markets; institutional capacity building becomes preoccupied with commercialisation and financial accountability at the expense of political accountability; human capital is built through services rather than education; vulnerability is aided by formal legal access rather than welfare; and local ideologies are conceptualised as moral obligations to community and work.

Implications of international observations for Indigenous futures

It appears clear that what the nation has seen unfold in remote Indigenous Australia has mimicked what we have seen in other fragile, weakly performing states and their peripheral community situations. Nationally we have seen a plethora of vertical programs addressing singular issues operating at a range of scales (federal, state/territory and

community) with awful problems of coordination, significant administration and political overload on clients, blowouts in administration transaction costs and a consequent disabling of governing capacity.[9] This has occurred in an environment where Indigenous people have been urged to accept greater responsibility to 'govern' services themselves, or at least be 'accountable' for the results. This has had the converse effect of strengthening patronage/client systems and created big accountability issues, with consequent shaming through audit processes. There is evidence these systems actually disenfranchise Indigenous engagement and participation.

Yet these conditions have little to do with the personalised welfare dependency that has been identified as the supposed root cause of the current malaise.

To some extent the Australian focus on income management and passive welfare dependency has eclipsed the more serious long term discussion of the bigger issues of political economy and delivery of services.

From a policy maker's perspective you cannot build broad based systems of local accountability through a social service delivery model. Moreover, pushing or supplying social service, however efficiently and effectively delivered, will not deal with the fundamental causes of the 'social gradients of inequality', and often leads to unintended consequences – it will always be akin to pushing on a string. In short, you cannot change political economy through service delivery alone (even if this supports a significant employment economy), no matter how much you play around with the service delivery paradigm to make it more participatory or transparent.

The challenge is to respond through a policy framework that creates an economic base for Indigenous Australian futures. If the current market opportunities and settlement choices do not allow for this, the current reliance on 'non welfare solutions' is pie in the sky. This is not to say federal/state transfers in support of welfare (as is an *entitlement* for all Australian citizens) cannot be handled better, or that serious debate about the enabling and disabling effects of various modalities should be discounted – it's just that if a person is welfare dependent, in the absence of economic opportunity, they will basically remain welfare dependent. Policy makers and governments can play around the margins in health, security, education and jobs outcomes – but it will be very difficult to get more than 'better targeting' and related efficiencies.

The failure to conceptualise the problem in this way has promoted policy iterations of retreat, withdrawal and intervention to secure and force change. This approach is prone to high levels of policy fatigue – soon the view forms that it is all too messy and complex. There are too many issues of mandate of different scales of government to sort out, too many horizontal co-ordination problems at the same scale; it requires long term investing in governance that is difficult to sustain. It is an issue that does not deliver in the short-term electoral cycles. Policy retreats, reversals and isolated quick fixes become routine practice. In the Australian Indigenous context policy retreat tends to involve:

- Creating direct relations between the highest level of authoritative governance and local recipients regarded as 'risky' or 'at risk' (in the NT case directly linking the federal government and the children in risky places);

- Sidelining intermediating agencies (eg, introducing tent clinics to operate alongside the community controlled health services next door);

- Creating systems of surveillance and contractualised accountability in which recipients respond to the policy priorities of central authorities (eg, through income management);

- Using hard-edged 'command' and 'control' systems to intervene, to cut away all the other messy arrangements, and make it easy to access land (eg, using the army to resolve logistic matters in remote communities, and directly/compulsorily leasing parcels of land, for instance in Alice Springs town camps); and

- Reducing high level policies to directly measurable outputs (eg, number of kids checked, decrease in outbreaks of violence, or number of sexually transmitted diseases).

This mode of response improves direct security and can quickly channel large volumes of resources for popular services into peripheral places. It is highly desired by community members who want relief and it places executive staff in control of local institutions with direct lines of accountability to the central government. In the short term it puts kids in school, delivers additional primary health care, sees infrastructure built and initiates a round of small and relatively inconsequential income generating projects. What it does *not* do is improve the long-term governance or the political economy. It creates islands of exception, where things are said to 'work' and can be held up as a success in terms of very narrow output categories, provided the activities are hugely and unsustainably resourced according to national and global service standards, and provided they are thoroughly policed on a continuing basis.

Ultimately this stabilising response increases dependency, reduces local capacity and disables institutions that allow people to engage in civic life, because the stabilising institutions are external to the local institutional support system.

Indigenous people in remote Australia are attempting to understand their future amidst significant other change processes, where a federal government is wrestling with new policy settings. The NT Local Government reform has dissolved existing Community Council structures. The NT Housing reform agenda is engaged in massive expenditure on public housing that is set to distort the local construction market.[10] The associated training and employment agenda is attempting to cope with labour shortage to meet both the change and the booming economy. At the same time there are changes proposed for native title, royalty payments and land reform. In the main, local leaders who are not across these changes, or not ideologically aligned or rewarded and muted, will be placed in a situation where they can only be 'spoilers, disrupters, antagonists'. In general, rather than seeing opportunities to engage in debate about the future, the modalities or political economies, they feel locked out. This response further disables long term governance solutions.

The similarities to, and learning from, the international context go unnoticed in Australia because of the language, stereotyping and expectations that we have built up over the years around Indigenous issues, and the limitations of communicating such complex issues in the popular media. Too often we are blinded by our own history and rhetoric to the point we are unable to conceive of change in a positive or incremental way. We argue about the pieces that are on the table, instead of debating whether they are the right pieces on the right table. Accordingly, local analysis of Indigenous issues has coalesced around social dysfunction, welfare reform and viability of small remote communities. It appears the alignment of views around the damaging impact of welfare is such that there is little political will to return to the practices of the past or to explore alternative options for the future, beyond attempting to modify individual behaviours. It is clear that as we approach the stage beyond the 'stabilisation' of Indigenous communities we will need to find a new pathway. It may also be, inexorably, that the short-term executive solution

makes the challenge even greater – despite the fact that it may stabilise the existing, worrying situation. This is a policy paradox but one that should not be allowed to mask the underlying long term issues.

Social gradients of health

> *Essentially it is the nature of social and economic life rather than medical services which determines the health of populations.[11]*

A recent Australian Government publication contains some high level insights into Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations of remote Australia.[12] The most significant finding is that remote Australia tops the nation on every measure of social capital. People in remote Australia are more likely to feel part of the community, get together at least weekly with friends and relatives, volunteer more each week, belong to community based hobby or sporting organisations, could easily raise $2000 in one week in an emergency and can usually find someone to help out when needed. In spite of under investment or the absence of government services, community resilience in remote Australia appears to survive through high levels of linking and binding capital across cultural divides.

The growing body of evidence[13] on the societal determinants of health, however, indicates 'that the scale of income differences in a society is one of the most powerful determinants of health standards in different countries, and that it influences health through its impact on social cohesion'. There can be no doubt that economic systems that destroy a spirit of social cooperation may incur very high additional costs as a result. A comprehensive futures agenda that contemplates sustainable and better futures for Indigenous Australians cannot escape analysis of how health issues and housing responses might articulate with the earlier analysis, leading to a focus on political economy and governance, rather than merely relying on better service delivery to sustain improvements. One could postulate that a future tied to welfare is never going to reduce the income differential confronting Indigenous Australians, and that contemplation of levels of income tied to greater levels of responsibility will do little to reduce income differentials, while ever they are not benchmarked against market level incomes.

There is a significant message for people in the Australian outback that flows from this analysis. It becomes critical to the futures for Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous people that the intervention into NT Indigenous affairs and subsequent programs to Close the Gaps in Indigenous disadvantage strikes at the core of the bigger economic picture as well as that of Indigenous-specific activities. The real gap that needs bridging between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is the *income* gap, for without this reduction the health gap will remain resistant to change.

To date welfare has been the source of concern across the Indigenous community and governments alike. A reliance on welfare has done more than contribute to the problems of alcohol and substance abuse. It has led to the settlement pattern that exists across remote Australia[14] and the service delivery dilemmas evident across the Indigenous community. As Noel Pearson says, it is the poison that has fed the social dysfunction and community breakdown. As things stand at the moment, most writers acknowledge there is market failure in most areas of remote Australia. A future that substitutes the market for welfare will require more innovative responses if people will not, cannot or do not move to meet the market. Government will need to use all manner of tax and non-tax measures – as they do in most other jurisdictions – to influence economic outcomes. This is often the missing piece in responses to failed state situations. Under this analysis a focus on jobs or employment will, of themselves, be insufficient.

Stafford Smith *et al*[15] advance an argument that encourages a widening of the rather strict economic measures used in viability assessment in remote settlements. They highlight the need to encourage a diverse response to livelihood opportunities that includes the services and knowledge sectors of the economy, even if they are currently underdeveloped.

Settlements and regional futures

The nature of Indigenous settlement and housing has been identified as a contributor to the current malaise. The early settlements were ration points and mission posts, established as convenient staging points away from major centres, or in support of the pastoral industry.

Over the past 30 years culture and land attachment have driven development of more than 1000 new settlements by (mainly) Indigenous groups. These include some established as a retreat from the dysfunction of larger settlements, where forced co-location of different groups created social tensions and conflict. Under today's conditions this re-engagement with culturally significant country through the outstation and homeland movement has been questioned on grounds of economic/service delivery viability. This settlement pattern, driven by cultural attachment, is now problematic because Indigenous culture is seen to not support increased engagement in the mainstream, and in the view of some[16] has helped create the social dysfunction evident in many communities. Further, the nature of the land holding is seen as an obstruction, when conventional models of economic development are applied to Indigenous interests.

There are few settlements around the world that survive and thrive, if not associated with a significant economic resource or market adjacent to them. It does not mean that every community has to have a mine next door, but issues of water, energy, resources, skills, markets, transport and services are relevant factors in the resilience of settlements. If culture and land are seen as necessary, but not sufficient, factors in future settlement viability, then more time needs to be spent examining what might form the economic base for the dispersed network of settlements across remote Australia, beyond small, piecemeal, ad hoc, place-based efforts. In what way could the national interest be served through a vibrant network of settlements and people dispersed across our most remote regions?

A combination of policies that have the effect of moving Indigenous people through the settlement hierarchy, from outstations to townships and from townships to mainstream urban employment, could see urban migration across outback Australia at an unprecedented level. Even before the National Emergency measures were announced, it was estimated that if the Alice Springs hinterland was emptied of Indigenous people living on their traditional lands, the Indigenous share of the Alice Springs population could increase from 20 per cent to about 50 per cent. This may be a statistical extreme, but if the full suite of government policy is taken at face value, and is effective, then this could be the outcome. Negative social cohesion impacts from relocation would make Alice Springs a very different kind of town.[17] It is also difficult to see how employment opportunities will be found should people abandon their communities and move to town. The social trauma and dysfunction currently faced by people is unlikely to be relieved by creating a series of fringe settlements or new suburbs around Darwin and Alice Springs or the service towns in between. Whilst there are skilled and unskilled jobs available in these places, the mismatch of skill profiles and the lag time in training people to competence suggests there is limited short term relief.

There has been much discussion around Indigenous housing and the cost of construction and the short lifecycles of these investments in existing settlements. The NT Government estimates required expenditure of $1.6 billion on some 4000 houses in the NT. Currently design and technology of house dominate what is increasingly an issue of regional capacity and settlement dynamics. The future housing policy will require a shift from a primary focus of building bedrooms, normalising services and minimising disadvantage to a process that is principally driven by investment potential in a regional economy.

One would imagine it would be a shaky investment, in the current climate of uncertainty, about where people would finally locate or where economic and social opportunities might emerge to sustain gap-filling investments. In the absence of a strategic rationale for the investment, beyond providing accommodation for Indigenous people, this could further contribute to misalignment between location and opportunity. Home ownership and individual land holding only make sense if there is a reasonable prospect of the owner having an income source that is commensurate with the nature of the investment made and/or the risk in maintaining the investment value where settlement patterns are unstable. This is a circular logic that leads back to the question – if not welfare, then where do we find the alternative income source? Where do people have to live to access that income and what services make it viable for them to live there and to be enthusiastic about home ownership, or wealth creation, or social mobility?

'The truth is that people can choose to make almost any scale of settlement and remoteness work if they are prepared to adjust their aspirations and take on an appropriate service delivery model (probably involving a great deal of self-reliance)'.[18] Such a position challenges Government to rethink how it applies some basic equity principles that do not necessarily result in the statistical equality that comes with policies of practical reconciliation, normalising and mainstreaming.[19] Indeed, in the absence of such a rethink there is a peculiar divide between Aboriginal settlements and neighbouring pastoral stations that have long accepted the need to manage their own water, power, rubbish and many other services in exchange for the option of making a livelihood in the remote locality. This position also challenges Indigenous communities to fully understand the reality of their expectations or the politicisation of their inequality by external interests.

Housing must be positioned in a regional development context and investment decisions made around the capacity of the industry to deliver, and the capacity of the users to manage and sustain the service they obtain through the house. The future of all settlements across remote Australia requires a clearer agenda for investment and development. Determining a narrative framework around a settlement pattern that is in the national interest could be the most important decision that government takes, to secure its future investment in the health, education and safety of Indigenous people. There is potential for significant frustration in the current approach to housing, as it is physically impossible to deliver the number of houses required ,to have the impact desired, in the time frame that the nation plainly expects.

This analysis has relevance to more recent service delivery decisions focused on an investment in 20 hub or growth towns across the NT. In the absence of a compelling narrative that demonstrates how these service towns will link residents to opportunities to tap into the global economy, their future is questionable, as they are likely to be just larger welfare settlements that will almost inevitably generate the social and other pressures that were a major contributor to the outstation movement in the first place.

New policy settings and institutions for engagement, enterprise and development

Dillon and Westbury[20] examine the institutional and structural dilemmas faced by government in dealing with Indigenous issues across Australia; engagement has been driven by successive policies of protection, integration, assimilation, self-determination, self-management and, more recently, intervention and normalisation. Over the past 30 years, the rights espoused in international covenants and the Race Discrimination Act, and principles of equity for all Australians, provided the policy rationale for service provision, they argue. The application of these covenants and principles has inherently been directed towards achieving a position of similarity or comparability. As a result, efforts have been directed to eliminating difference and disadvantage. Dillon and Westbury conclude by recommending a 'meta-policy' reform strategy, that will inevitably require new institutional arrangements, as well as the development of effective whole-of-government policies related to the underlying institutional frameworks that are inhibiting progress at present. They claim these reforms should be based on a systemic investment policy framework. It is difficult to see how new policy might be developed without a critical review of the outcomes of the application of the existing equity principles across the remote communities of Australia. *There is a clear distinction between policy that reduces disadvantage and policy that enables development as a people. This distinction has not been clear in the policies and programs of the past 30 years.*

One of the challenges for governments will be to achieve a transition from the emergency intervention of law and order into a longer-term sustainable development phase that responds to the underlying conditions. New entities will be required, that encapsulate the norms and rules for enterprise, development and social cohesion providing services, support and hand-ups as required. The development phase of the intervention will need to identify new forms of institutions.[21] In a systemic view of the future the required linking and bridging capital necessary to achieve this will need developing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents of the outback.

Behavioural change begins with individuals but supportive organisations give help to embed the changes that will support new engagement models. Martin argues that support of effective and creatively managed organisations by government, NGOs and the philanthropic sector is a crucially important component of enabling a process of socio-cultural change in which Indigenous people themselves actively participate. Such supports are a crucial addition to market-based policy frameworks, focused largely on the individual.[22] The challenge for future policy is to strike the right balance of government intervention, market incentives and community aspiration to harness the opportunities that might arise from the changed circumstances and ongoing differences.

Reconstruction – a settlement strategy for remote Australia

The pattern of settlement throughout remote Australia has changed over the past 30 years as a result of economic, social and technological changes. Whether you hold the view that Australia was invaded, settled or colonised, Indigenous futures and settlements are now inextricably bound to a much larger system of settlement, to the point that non-systemic solutions are likely to be unsustainable. Therefore, unless we are able to adapt the 'operating system' across outback Australia we are unlikely to sustain basic improvements in conditions for either Indigenous or non-Indigenous residents.

There are four foundational activities that, taken together, could provide a framework to respond to the foregoing analysis.

First, there must be a focus on **enabling livelihoods**, particularly (but not only) those that generate income. If we recognise that there is no silver bullet, the development of a sophisticated complex of locally-differentiated options becomes crucial, particularly where there is no opportunity to tap directly into places where the global economy touches the outback. These options will encompass some local service roles such as mechanics, building construction and maintenance, and hairdressers; local government and community services such as road maintenance, settlement management and rubbish disposal; services to society at large such as controlling weeds and fire, quarantine and caring for endangered species; opportunistic engagement, where available, with larger enterprises such as mines and tourism; all linked to a generous interpretation of cultural activities including art, music and performance, sport, but also – crucially - traditional cultural activities on country, that sustain language and other cultural capital that is valued by the nation.[23]

In facilitating these approaches to livelihood, there will need to be a great deal of local flexibility to link intermittent livelihood opportunities into a pathway that demonstrates value to non remote people; people who appreciate that occupation of the land, and the livelihood opportunities required to achieve that occupation, contribute to national heritage and identity. Whilst the concerns here are conceived primarily around remote Aboriginal settlements, it should be apparent that the same issues increasingly apply to all remote settlements, and the approach should be universal in outback Australia. As a guide, new livelihood opportunities should support a vision of a strategic network of settlements and governance across the breadth of Australia's outback to provide safety, security and services to all Australians, in the national interest.

Second, we need broad **agreement on the settlement patterns** of outback Australia, and their consequences for services. All outback dwellers need to acknowledge that the futures of service centres and their hinterlands are intimately intertwined. The suggestion that particular settlements are viable or un-viable needs to be set aside by all, and replaced by a realistic discussion of the trade-offs between remoteness and self-reliance in determining service levels; feasible balances in this trade-off will be determined largely by livelihood options (as above) and capital investment, which require time to work through. Government will need to facilitate a process of proper demand expression (not just wish lists or normative measures) by communities. On their part, communities need to acknowledge that the trade-off between remoteness and self-reliance means that a simple deficit view of services is not reasonable.

Achieving true demand expression almost certainly means creating a process of local and regional governance in which all inhabitants are empowered partners, and which allow sensible local solutions to emerge bottom up within a general framework provided top down (rather than the current supply-driven tendency to devise detailed solutions top-down). This does not absolve either society or local communities from accepting and ensuring certain minimum standards in a variety of outcomes demanded by the nation.

Regional service models need to emerge which are related to but potentially distinct from appropriate local government arrangements, and which allow governance, leadership, cultural and business activities to be kept somewhat separate. Examples of such models exist (*cf* Ngaanyatjarra Council), and their lessons learned. Finally, a national outback development plan should be prepared in response to the desired settlement pattern, and a fifty-year investment strategy developed.

Third, there need to be new approaches to **re-invigorating capital investment** in outback Australia, in order to make the region less dependent on capricious government largesse in the future. Opportunistic advantage of potential public/private partnerships needs to be taken in the rare cases where these are possible, such as around mining activities (Argyle and Tanami are current outstanding examples) or major tourism developments (Uluru and Yulara could be one model). This is a matter of efficiently retaining some of the benefits obtained by private investment in extracting capital from outback Australia. Changes in tax regimes and incentives offer a cheap route to encouraging more such activities through self-enlightenment.[24] A further substantial structural change would be amendments to the operation of the Grant Commission process, as suggested by Dillon and Westbury, though preferably implemented at an outback-wide scale to help to rectify the leakage of recurrent government spending from the region; recognising that this proposal targets recurrent spending rather than capital investments. At the very least there should be tagging of these funds to remote outcomes.

Additionally, however, the establishment of an **Australian Outback Capital Trust Fund** could provide the capital investment to stem the haemorrhaging of outback environmental, social and cultural capital resources and permit a new future to be truly realised. This would be established through collaborative state, territory and federal legislation. One model could be that of the Alaska Permanent Fund,[25] with the power to levy rents on all uses of natural resources in the outback zone. The trustees would obey a charter to invest the financial capital from those levies to the best effect in environmental, social, human and physical infrastructure of the outback. The trust beneficiaries would be defined as all inhabitants of the outback. A variety of natural resource management, conservation, Aboriginal and social, but also communications and transport projects, would be funded by the Trust Fund. Such a fund would be vested in the interest of the outback, managed by an independent group of trustees. While it could be argued that State and Commonwealth capital funds are already available on a nationally contested basis, the representation of the outback in such political fora is always subject to the democratic deficit imposed by more pressing urban electorates. A dedicated Outback Capital Trust fund that is complementary to, and not substituting for, the existing annual expenditures of government brings a greater sense of equity to these negotiations.

Fourth, the current **governance** arrangements for outback Australia work to the detriment of those who live within the outback, and need amending. The urban and coastal preoccupation of existing governance arrangements means that it is only in times of crisis that the 'forgotten' two thirds of the continent and the people living therein receive attention. The dispersal of the outback's fast growing population across multiple small settlements, the increasing importance of the mineral, environmental and cultural resources that originate there, in the face of climate change and global economic recalibrations, demands effective governance arrangements. One possibility would be the establishment of an **Australian Outback Commission** charged with developing the outback narrative and representing the best interests of remote Australia. The challenge is to establish this in a way that independently complements the current Australian federation, but at the same time places the Australian outback first.

Terms of the elected Commissioners would be longer than current electoral cycles. Members would be elected by residents of the outback either individually or on an electoral college basis. The Commission would analyse and advocate a set of policy

conditions that would highlight needs and benefits to be gained across the outback and provide a framework for governments and the Outback Capital Trust Fund to respond with relevant policy and investment decisions. The establishment of a National Australian Outback Commission and an independent Australian Outback Capital Trust Fund provides a mechanism to progress the vision of a well governed and thriving outback, and an alternative paradigm to contemplate Indigenous representation, governance and development across the region.

Conclusion: Investing in the future of outback Australia

A focus on Indigenous communities or Indigenous futures alone will not lead to sustainable lives for them as a people. The vision outlined in this paper reconciles the past with a future that is determinedly in the national interest. It provides a framework in which Indigenous peoples can achieve a greater stake in the political economy that engages them.

In searching for a framework for Indigenous development within Australia, government can assist Indigenous opportunity by guaranteeing support for a pattern of settlement and services that enables the market to expand into the regions of need, and at the same time provides certainty and responsiveness around levels of service and service responsibilities. The establishment of an Australian Outback Commission would create a multi-jurisdictional framework to develop a social and economic strategy, including a strategic network of settlements and governance, across the breadth of Australia's outback, that taken together, provide safety, security and services to *all* Australians. In effect it would provide a unifying platform for common accountability and a working strategy for the investments in people and place over the next 50 years.

A response of this magnitude by the national, state and territory governments would provide a system for unifying the interests of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and a rationale for investments in infrastructure, health, housing and education and governance over Australia's vast outback. A firm commitment will also encourage the development of livelihood opportunities across the outback that respond to the safety, security and service requirements that will be required. Australia has the opportunity to turn the current unease across remote Australia into a positive investment – one that is surely in the *national* interest?

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The views expressed here are those of the individuals concerned and should not be taken as representing the views of their employers.

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Caring for Country:
Hayes Springs, *Mparntwenge*. Salt Springs, *Irlkerteye*

Veronica Perrurle Dobson

Springs and other water places

Our old people in the early times taught us about the importance of water sites on the lands that our people lived on for centuries; these were our drinking waters. Spring sites were very special, significant places for my people. On their homelands these waters were permanent. Before white men came and sank bores for communities and missions, people used waters from rockholes, soaks, springs, *inpe* holes, and from waterholes in creeks. The animals that people hunted drank the same waters: the euros, kangaroos, wallabies, emus, perenties, goannas, bush turkeys, birds, snakes and all the little animals that live in the waters. We have always cared for these water places: kept them clean, made sure that the waters didn't dry out.

The desert people, who are Traditional Owners of these lands, have the knowledge of where these waters are: *kwatye apirnte*, springs; *kwatye arnerre*, rockholes; *kwatye ngentye*, soakages; *kwatye inpe*, waters in small or large round holes, covered with flat stones, in hills or at the foot of hills; *kwatye lherele athertneme,* creek waterholes; *kwatye alaye,* swamps; *kwatye utnarlperte*, waters in tree roots. There were also *kwatye wape*, waters in tree hollows; and *kwatye awenge*, waters in rivers that last for long periods of time. These waters were used for drinking, swimming, bathing and other uses. These waters have been on the land since the creation time, before bores, tanks, dams and taps were ever thought of. On these sites waters were always there; they weren't manmade like everything now.

All Aboriginal people in their traditional areas on homelands scattered around Central Australia have lots of sacred sites. They are where waters or cave paintings or meat animals or seed-bearing plants or other plants that are used for food or medicine are located.

Visiting and staying at the springs

These springs have always been there – as long as my people have lived on their homelands, before cattle stations were around. There is archaeological evidence to prove it. You can find grinding stones, used to grind edible seeds into flour to make a paste to eat raw, or cook as a small damper; and splint rocks used for making stone knives and small chisels. These chisels were used for carving wood to make tools like *ilye,* boomerangs; *alkwerte,* shields; *utne,* coolamons; *irrtyarte,* spears; *mulke,* scoops; and lots of other implements.

People stayed around these waters for a long period of time while there were plenty of seeds, fruit and other edible plants, and animals for meat. When these resources became scarce, they would move on to other springs where food was more plentiful. People followed the seasons and when good rains brought lots of foods we would stay in an area for a long time. If they were going to move, they might go and stay on other parts of their land, looking after sites, doing what they always did before cattle stations and other influences put a stop to our people caring for the lands and what is on them. When I was a child, our family would come here a few times a year for up to several months. They stopped camping here a lot when Santa Teresa mission (about 80 km south of Alice Springs) was set up.

People would come back to the springs when they thought these places needed burning, or maybe to clean out the waters and touch up paintings, or just to stay for a while if there was plenty of food. Or they came to hold ceremonies. There were ceremonies held at these sites: women's dancing, *anthepe*; men's dancing, *altharte*; and other important ceremonies. These are the people who belong to these areas, the Traditional Owners themselves and their families. The custodians of these areas lived mainly near these waters and hunted and gathered close by, not entering into other people's land. They collected medicine plants when they needed them and firewood only in their own areas. They only travelled on their own land, not on to other people's land. At ceremony times, they might get together with other landowners, close by. Any time of the year or after a good rain, ceremonies were held, thanking the land for very good seasons which brought fruits, meats and medicines.

Animals and plants at the springs

These springs and areas along the *Ulampe-Arenye* ranges were always used as hunting grounds, and certain ceremonies took place in these areas. We ate *arlewatyerre,* sand goannas; *aremaye,* short-tailed goannas; *atyunpe,* perenties; *arntetetherrke*, carpet snakes; *arleye*, emu; *thipe,* birds; *aherre*, kangaroos; *arenge,* euros; *arrwe*, rock-wallabies; *tyape*, edible grubs. All these animals, except maybe the emu, are still at the springs, as are *arlantye*, bicycle lizards; *arlpatye*, ringneck parrots; *arrewelkere*, cockatiels; *arretyaletyale*, spiny-cheeked honeyeaters; *nyingke*, zebra finches; *ntyerrankwe*, painted finches; *uringepuringe*, mulga parrots; *arntepe*, bronzewing pigeons; *akerrke*, bowerbirds; *lyerre-lyerre*, blue wrens; mistletoe birds; Bourke's parrots and lots of other birds. There are birds that come to feed and water only after big rains, like *atetherre*, budgerigars. And there are others that haven't been seen for a long time in and around these sites, like *arleye*, emus; *artewe*, bustards; *nturrerte*, spinifex pigeons; and princess parrots.

People noticed the big and small creatures that live in these waters – *iwenye*, mosquito larvae; *angkeme alhwe-kenhe*, midge larvae or bloodworms; *nanthe angeme*, horse fly larvae; *irrkwentye angeme*, policemen or soldier fly larvae; *urrwape-irnperrenhe,* dragonfly larvae; *atnetharkerte kwatye-arenye*, water scorpions; *kwatye aknerte-arenye,* water striders; *artepenye-werne akngelhentye akngerre*, backswimmers; *pmware-pmware*, diving beetles; *mpwaltye*, frogs; *irrpennge,* fish. Also other animals like *antyipere*, bats; *angkelye,* children's pythons; *inurle,* spiders; *arnperrke,* centipedes. These are only some of the native animals that live here on these sites.

We ate seeds from different acacias, *ntange arlepe*, Victoria wattle seed; *ntange arlketyerre*, dead finish seed; *ntange anterre*, colony wattle seed; and *ntange name*, grass seeds, *ntange uluawe*, pigweed seed. We also ate roots and bulbs, like *alatyeye,* pencil yam; *yalke,* bush onions; and *alatyeye,* wild yams; and *athenge arlpelhe*, edible gums. There were lots of fruits, like *atwakeye,* wild orange; *arrutnenge*, wild passionfruit; *arrangkwey*e, plumbush; *utyerrke*, bush fig; *awele-awele*, bush tomato; *ntyemenye*, ruby saltbush; and also *arrkirlpangkwerle*, bloodwood galls. There were sweet foods like *untyeyampe*, honey from the corkwood flower; *urltampe*, bush bee honey; *aperaltye*, river red gum leaf scale; mallee leaf scale; and *aperarnte*, river red gum honey dew. There were also lots of sweet gums that were eaten like chewing gum, *athengalpelhe*, from the ironwood tree; *anterrampwe*, from the colony wattle; *alkerrampwe*, from the dead finish wattle.

There are bush medicines at the springs, like *arrwe-atnurlke*, striped mintbush; *arrethe,* native fuchsia; *utnerrenge,* emu bush; *kwele-kwele*, caustic vine; *aherre-aherre*, native

lemongrass; *untyeye arntape*, corkwood bark; medicinal saps; and lots of other plants used for medicines. *Uyenpere*, spearwood, is used to make hunting spears. Mulga is used for making *ilye,* boomerangs; *alkwerte*, shields; *kwetere,* nulla-nullas (hitting and digging sticks); *terurre,* music sticks; the important men's ceremony spear; and *urrempere,* shovel-headed spears.

Managing the springs and other waters

Men were the ones who took care of these sites, working with the *kwertengerle*, manager, and the *apmereke artweye*, the owner, of the land. Both care for and look after the springs and the surrounding lands. Our old people always looked after and cared for these waters, and we are carrying on this legacy. It's our responsibility because these sites are just as important to our people as other sacred sites.

Spiritually, one of the most important management activities was touching up the paintings when needed, at sites where special ceremonies took place. When people did things like burning, cleaning out the pools, touching up the paintings, all the time they were talking to the spirits of the land. We used small branches to sweep off the slime in the pools. Sometimes a hand was used to flick the slime to one side before drinking water or collecting it for later use. Our people lived around these waters for long periods of time, so the water would be kept clean for animals and for people. People would also clean soil and other debris from the sources of the spring.

Burning was done at certain times, to control vegetation growing in and around the pools. Overgrown grasses and other vegetation were burnt to keep the springs clear and clean for people and the native animals – so people could easily get in and out collecting water, and native animals could come in and drink. Burning also made it easy to hunt for euros, kangaroos and reptiles that came to the springs. People depended on burning for their survival. They burnt country to bring back new growth and to get rid of fuel that clogged up the waterways. They also burnt when there was a build-up of trees and bushes, to stop fires from lightning strikes burning very hot and killing off everything in their path. Our elders knew when to burn and how much of the country they needed to burn. They would have long discussions before the burning took place, letting their neighbours know what they were going to do. Our elders didn't just go along with a firestick and shove it into anything. They burned areas that needed to be burnt. That's the reason why the land is still mainly the way it was.

Our elders taught us where to find water in harsh times – in *inpe*, small holes, beside hills or on *apwerte athinte*, flat smooth boulders. Our elders kept these waters clean by using bunches of grass to scoop out the water, and flick it into a wooden dish. They kept a bunch of grass – windmill grass and other smaller grasses which grow on the hills – in the rockhole. They covered the rockhole with a flat rock to keep the waters clean, and stop animals from polluting them. When it rains, these *inpe*, rockholes, fill up and water lies in them for a long time. Some are bigger and you can't cover them up, so they dry out a lot faster.

We would like to see young people manage the land and these waters like our people did in the past, caring for the land.

The arrival of stations and cattle, horses, camels and donkeys

The early settlers used camels to bring materials to places in and around Alice Springs – for their homes, schools, hospital and other things they needed to live, and for the gold mines at Arltunga. They lived pretty tough in those times, leaving their safe friendly homes in the cities. And that's when they uprooted Aboriginal people from their

homelands, putting them on communities and missions. Our people started to lose contact with their tribal lands. I remember as a child there were always cattle. Our people used to tell us stories about when cattle and horses were first brought here. People thought they were devil-devils because they were very big and made funny mooing calls, and because of the way the horses waved their tails around to brush away the flies from their eyes. Our people thought that these devils were beckoning them to come. Then they would run away scared, thinking that the horses were devils wanting them. Little did they know that they would learn to ride these devils, to round up cattle.

These are the animals that came to change the face of our homelands, pollute our waters, kill off our native vegetation and trample down the homes of reptiles and other animals. Waters in springs, rockholes and rivers are all dirtier than they used to be, polluted by cattle, horses, camels and donkeys. These waters were our people's drinking water before these animals, many becoming feral, were brought on to our homelands. These animals are very destructive to the land and everything that's on it – the waters, the plants and the animals. The feral animals' tracks and pads erode and turn into gullies, and the top fertile soil gets blown or washed away and nothing much grows there anymore.

Marion Springs

Everything changed for the worse when cattle stations started taking over traditional lands in Central Australia. Permanent water sources, like *Itnewerrenge,* Marion Springs, were destroyed. When a bore was put down right at the springs, to water cattle, the spring didn't work anymore, the waters dried out. The wildlife is not the same as it was, when the natural water from the springs bubbled and spilled out on to a rock platform at the foot of the hills, and lay there for a long time. There used to be lots of *thipe*, birds; *aherre*, kangaroos; *arenge*, euros; *artewe*, bustards; lizards and lots of other animals. Also there were lots of *arne*, plants, including *arne merne akerte*, food plants. People living in the early days at *Ltyentye Apurte*, Santa Teresa community, used to spend Christmas holidays out at *Itnewerrenge*, Marion Springs. They drank the spring water before the bore was put down. Now the birds and other animals and plants have moved away or died. Men wrecked these springs because of their greed, sinking bores to sustain cattle.

What Aboriginal people have lost

Since the cattle, horses, camels and donkeys came, it has never been the same. Station owners put a stop to our traditional burning practices, and didn't let people look after their sites, their waters or country. A lot has been lost and is not being handed down to our young people. Not only the burning practices but the relationship to and knowledge of the land is slowly disappearing. The caring for sites, songs, stories, paintings and dancing are not being handed down. The knowledge-givers are passing away. The young people are not learning their traditional responsibilities for their ancestral land.

Station owners took up most of the prime lands and lands that were very sacred and very dear to our people, forcing them to become welfare recipients. They seem to be lost, not knowing where they fit in. They used to live on their ancestral lands, looking after their *apmere ahelhe anteke*, environment: *ameke-ameke*, sacred sites; *kwatye,* waters; animals, plants, songs, stories, paintings, dances, sky, stars, milky way, moon, sun, clouds, rain, wind, in cold weather and hot weather. The laws of the land, kinship rules that our people lived under for thousands of years, are slowly fading. Our ancestral cultures and languages are all dying, and our ancestral lands and living are all trashed.

No more hunting, no more walkabout. We have lost everything, the knowledge of our ancestors has all been forgotten.

Men were the ones who took care of these sites working with the *kwertengerle,* manager, who was chosen by law, like Bobby Hayes for my brothers. That is how the law of the land and the relationship system worked. All of this is slowly becoming extinct and it's sad to see. When our old people were around, my brothers didn't learn from them how to care for these sites. Today the younger people go and get help from Central Land Council because they would not know where to start to clean or care for these water places.

Moving between stations and homelands

Once cattle stations had taken over a lot of the land, our people worked there when there was work for them. Sometimes older men, women and children would stay at these springs while some of the men went away to work. After the cattle work finished, they came back to their homelands to do what they had to do there – looking after their sites, having ceremonies in different areas, looking after the waters, burning certain areas that needed to be burnt. Station owners said our people went walkabout after the station work was done, but they went back to look after their homelands, to take care of their land, their livelihood.

Our people lived on bush foods before working for stations and being introduced to rations like flour, tea, sugar and nekkie tobacco. Some of our old people still lived on bush foods and meat in the early days; rations were only for the people who worked at that time, as housemaids, gardeners or stockmen. Other families kept living off the land, going hunting even when station owners tried to stop them hunting too close to their stations.

In the early days, no tourists ever came out to the springs, only the *alhentere,* whitefellas, who lived at *Ltyentye Apurte,* Santa Teresa, community, or cattle stations owners from *Althenge*, Dodd River; *Ntulye*, Undoolya; *Inteye-arrkwe*, Ross River. They were the only visitors we saw, when they wanted stockmen. We didn't know much about tourists when we were living out on our homelands. We only started seeing more whitefellas when we started getting put in the dormitory by the Catholic missionaries. They would come and go, a new face every two to three weeks. Our people are always there. We never intend to move anywhere fast or leave our homelands. These homelands are where our roots will always be, even for the younger generation.

Water flow and changes in springs over time

The pools at the springs are still much the same size as they used to be. Maybe some are a little wider and deeper because of waters rushing down the gullies after rain. Water flows down the gullies from the plateau when it fills up after heavy rain. The water lifts loose rocks in and around the pools, and shifts some of the big boulders along as well. The running water flows fairly high and fast, depending on how much has collected on the plateau. After heavy rains, some of the pools have changed, so the water no longer reaches to the edges of the river banks. Everything changes over time, with the weather patterns – rain, wind, heat, cold.

In these two springs, (Hayes and Salt Springs) the water flows from the gullies into the rivers and out on to floodouts, or lies in deep pools in the rivers until it soaks away into the ground. Sometimes the water formed swamps at the end of the rivers, and water lay there for a long time. Over time, these waters became more salty. Both Salt and Hayes Springs had good water and salty water.

These waters were always here. Even if there was a drought, you could find water in some of the springs. The water might be stagnant, not flowing or changing, but it was still lying in the pools, maybe up to ankle high. In really dry times, if the springs were too polluted or salty, you could find drinking water further down the gully by digging a *ngentye*, soak. You could also find water in the roots of river red gums or coolabahs. There's always water if you know where to find it. These springs never dry out, unless camels and other feral animals fill them with dung or drink them dry.

The weather

It is hard to know if the weather has changed or it's still the same as it was back then, hard to know. When you're younger, you don't take much notice of important events. As you get older, you seem to notice these changes more. The changes are happening all the time, little by little, every second of our lives. Our people told us how the weather changes with the seasons.

The change to cold weather happens when the Milky Way starts sloping towards the southwest. The colder it gets, the lower the Milky Way gets; and sometime the moon is still in the sky when the sun has risen, at about nine or ten in the morning. It hasn't disappeared down into *alturle*, the west. In the colder weather, when the wispy clouds appear from the *ayerrere*, north, and *ikngerre*, east, looking like waves in the sky, you know rains will follow. Sometime the rain makes it cooler, and cold winds start blowing from the *antekerre*, south, and *ikngerre,* east; and maybe *ilweltye*, frost, comes, making it very cold in the mornings, burning off plants, drying them out.

After the cold weather has gone, spring comes. That's when the plants start growing lots of leaves. Flowers, grasses, small fruits and seeds appear. Birds are feeding and breeding, everything comes back to life after the winter. Maybe rain will come. Our elders used to say the *arnwangkeme*, first thunder, and *alhrrkemele*, lightning, woke up the lizards, snakes, and other animals that had been *ilkeke irrpeke*, hibernating. They all start to come out, and start feeding, making themselves fat. Then they mate and lay eggs and give birth to young ones, and the cycle goes on. When the hot weather is on its way, the *ayerrere*, north, and *alturle*, west, winds start blowing. These winds, *aretharre,* they're the bad winds, that's what our elders called them. They blow and dry out the vegetation, making it very dusty and prone to fire. They also make people irritable, tired and cranky. Then we are in for the long hot summer.

Our people seem to have monitored these weather changes over a long period of time, as they travelled around, living on the land and sleeping under the stars. They studied the stars and the moon, observed changes in land formations, the life cycles of animals, grasses, trees, shrubs, small plants like bush onions and other bulbs – foods our people collected.

Managing the springs now

The springs are still very special to us. We have to rely on funding to care and look after them because feral animals are destroying these waters. We need to care for them and protect them by keeping out horses, bullocks and camels. These feral animals pollute the waters, killing off the small water creatures which are a food source for other animals. The feral animals are also killing other animals and plants that grow in and around these waters. Now we are making changes like putting up fences to keep out the feral animals from these main sites; and getting rid of foreign grasses that these feral animals bring in. We Traditional Owners are not wanting any big changes, just keeping watch with what changes are happening, like we have been doing since we started monitoring these two

springs – the waters and the little creatures that live in them, and also the plants and animals that live on these sites.

The country changes with time – for better or worse, time will tell. We may stop these feral animals from damaging and destroying these sites, but who knows what might happen in the future. Time and weather play a big role in how the country stays intact. Who knows, we may be doing the land harm by what we are doing. Hopefully, management of these sites will help preserve the native habitats for the native animals and plants, and prevent the extinction of some plants and animals.

Management of the sites should be given back to the Traditional Owners. They have the responsibility to care for these sites. That is why we have the kinship system. It's the law of our people – looking after languages, country, sites, waters, stories, songs, dance, paintings, plants, animals.

Some of us hope the land, water sites, animals, plants and all the environment are always protected, for our children's children to come.

Veronica Perrurle Dobson *is a senior Eastern Arrernte elder.*

(photo courtesy of Fiona Walsh)

Tackling the Boom and Bust – Desert Pastoralism
AJ Bubb
Introduction

The arid climate of central Australia has provided a continuous habitat and livelihood for Aboriginal people for over 40 000 years. A unique understanding of the environment allowed them to live in a difficult and harsh climate. For about 130 years the settler pastoral industry has both prospered and battled to survive in central Australia. Settlement of the central Australian region came from the south and the east with both beef and sheep being driven from South Australia and Queensland. Vegetation types, the harsh climate and the native dingoes contributed to the predominance of cattle as the more suitable stock for the region. The continuous operation of grazing enterprises has helped to develop inland and northern Australia and to shape the social fabric of the area.

Today cattle production is the major primary industry in central Australia and occurs on stations with areas measured in square kilometres rather than hectares, due to their extensive size. The average property in the region is 3885 square km and carries approximately 6000 head, which graze the native pastures of the arid zone. The survival of the stock, and production system based on them, is intimately linked to the region's climate. There are 64 cattle enterprises in central Australia, predominantly family owned businesses, as opposed to the large corporate companies found in northern Australia.[1]

The ownership of properties in central Australia is relatively stable; the average length of tenure is 25 years, and approximately half of the stations are owner/operator enterprises. While new technologies have helped to reduce the level of physical labouring required on stations, a ready workforce is still required to keep the enterprise operating. The average station in the central Australian region employs three permanent staff, and an additional three seasonal staff are employed during busy times.

Aboriginal people and the pastoral industry

Engagement by settlers with the traditional owners of the pastoral land has been long, although sometimes tense. The establishment of Aboriginal settlements on cattle stations created strong associations between generations of Aboriginal people and pastoral families, and many Aboriginal people took the last names of the family that operated the station. Teams of Aboriginal stockmen worked alongside white stockmen mustering and processing cattle while their families lived and worked around the homestead completing domestic work. Payment for the work was in the form of basic rations of tobacco, meat, flour, salt and other supplies.

The combined impact of low beef prices and the introduction of award wages in the late 1960s and early 1970s resulted in a dramatic decline in the level of Aboriginal involvement in the pastoral industry. The downturn in available markets for Australian beef produced an oversupply of meat, lowering the beef price and the subsequent profits back to the producers. With the enterprise no longer supporting the extended families, they moved to the fringes of towns or to traditional homelands where communities were established. The success of this movement was limited and is a contributing factor to the social disadvantage still experienced by Aboriginal people.[2]

The problems of distance

The isolation of pastoral enterprise in central Australia and the harshness of climate provide the two most defining elements of the industry. The vastness of distances to be travelled limits the opportunity for inputs and the markets available for produce. Some of

the earliest supply transport came from Afghan traders and their camel trains. An enduring legacy of this form of transport is the feral camel population causing widespread damage across Australia's desert regions; 2008 estimates place the population in excess of one million animals.[3]

The establishment of the overland telegraph line in the early 1870s and the evenly spaced telegraph repeater stations along the line, created the need for a regular supply convoy to travel through from south to north, and support the fledging pastoral industry. The building of the Ghan railway line from Port Augusta to Alice Springs revolutionised both the freighting of supplies into the town and exporting commodities out. Drovers were able to walk cattle from surrounding stations to the railhead at Alice Springs where they were loaded onto the train with other goods to be sent south. Such was the reliance on the train for importing and exporting goods into Central Australia that the 'south' road was only completely sealed to Port Augusta in 1987.

The distances between stations and markets in more recent years has required the use of trucks towing multiple trailers (road trains) to move livestock in and out of the region. Unlike the mining industry, with fixed locations of production and port, the pastoral industry does not have the scale and the permanency of production to establish heavy infrastructure. The flexibility offered by road trains, capable of carrying up to 130 full grown cows and measuring up to 53 meters in length, makes them a critical component of the beef supply chain. The time animals are in transport can reduce their weight at the point of sale and the consequent price received per head. For this reason the condition of major and minor roads within the region has a substantial bearing on the state of the industry.

Resources of the Arid Zone

The industry is built on the diverse biophysical resources of the arid zone. Within central Australia over 2000 different plant species can be found.[4] The nutritional value of these species to cattle is widely varied. Although many provide little nutritional value, the diversity of pasture composition contributes to an adequate diet, due to the differences in life cycle and the timing of peak nutrition after rain. Rain is a transforming event in the landscape, and its presence or absence decides the boom or bust state of the pastoral industry.

Creek-lines and the flood-out country provide the 'stable retreat', the most long growing areas for plants, and are preferred by stock. Annual grasses including Oat (*Enneapogon avenaceus*) and Woolly oat (*Enneapogon polyphyllus*) provide bulk green feed for stock within a week of rain events. Non-grasses, including Parakeelya (*Calandrinia sp*), also quickly appear, providing protein rich feed allowing cattle to gain weight at a rate of up to 1.2 kg per day. The perennial grass species take longer to respond to rain, with maximum bulk being achieved approximately four weeks later. Whilst not of the same high quality as the annuals and non grass species, perennials provide the long term supply of feed once others have been consumed or blown away. The perennial species also help to reduce the wind erosion when the dry times return. Leaf litter and perennial grass butts also help to slow the flow of water across the landscape allowing for better infiltration when the rains return, thus limiting water erosion.

The most widely-spread introduced perennial species in central Australia is Buffel Grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*). While regarded as a high value stock feed, Buffel Grass is also recognised as an invasive species capable of smothering native species and changing landscapes. Fire regimes of central Australia have been altered through the presence of

Buffel Grass due to its high fire loads. The best way to manage Buffel grass is a contentious issue and will continue to be into the future, due to its high production value and its failure to stay contained within station fences.[5]

Climate of the central Australia

Figure 1
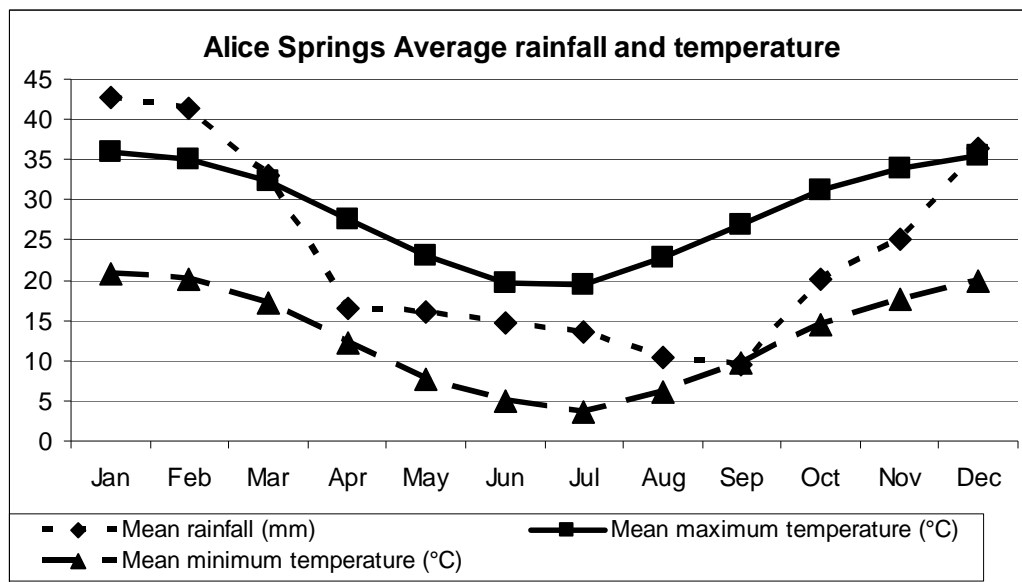
The rainfall experienced in central Australia is low; the average annual rainfall in Alice Springs is 279 mm (compared with 647 mm in Melbourne, and 1149 mm in Brisbane, for example). Rain usually comes in the form of storms, so runoff can be rapid and quickly dispersed. The average daily temperatures experienced in Alice Springs are high, with the daily maximum above 19ºC in all months of the year (Figure 1). The coupling of this high average temperature with low rainfall results in high evaporation from the land.

Forms of adaptation

The industry is based on perpetual pastoral leases for the purposes of grazing. In comparision with other States, the size of pastoral leases has remained large, and this lack of intensification has helped maintain land condition. Pastoral leases range in size from about 450 square km to about 10,000 square km.[6] Since the establishment of the Centralian Land Management Association (Landcare) in 1988, land management projects have assisted cattle stations with research, advice, equipment and help in their practices. About 70 per cent of pastoral properties in central Australia belong to this organisation, spread over around 300,000 square km.[7]

Initial pastoral leases were granted on the condition that minimum cattle numbers were maintained, in order to aid the development of a pioneer industry. Establishment was slow, due to the high cost of development and the insecure nature of returns. While economic benefits were foregone, the condition of the pastoral land – although described as 'marginal' - was maintained in a better condition than that of the States which had carved the rangelands into smaller holdings. The selection of land for grazing purposes was unashamedly on the best production areas and the most unique areas of the Centre and the Northern Territory. The land judged unsuitable for grazing, sometimes

abandoned pastoral leases, is now the site of fledgling Aboriginal pastoral enterprises. With approximately 47 per cent of the land under Aboriginal control, the opportunities for entering the pastoral industry are being investigated and initiated by Aboriginal people (often with assistance from the Central Land Council), in addition to the exploration of other economic pursuits that provide a link between country and culture.

In adapting an industry to the harsh climate of central Australia, settler pioneers applied the methods in the southern and east coast colonies. Whilst adequate for production and survival, major production benefits occurred with the infusion of tropically adapted *Bos indicus* genetics into herds, starting in the middle of the 20th century. These animals have the ability to survive and prosper in the heat of summer when feed availability drops and distance from water increases. For the pastoralist, the limitations of domestic markets open to tropically adapted cattle is outweighed economically by their increased production.

Production methods

Production methods of the central Australian pastoral industry are low in intensity, and remain viable through the adoption of a low input / low output regime. Grazing activities and areas under production have grown through the introduction of artificial watering points. The availability of water, in many instances, is more limiting than the availability of feed. Sub-artesian water is the most common supply for stock and the many other native and feral animals which take advantage of the artificial watering source.

Variations in the quality and quantity of the water available ensure that cattle waters are checked by station staff at least weekly, and more frequently during hot weather. The risk of stock perishing through water running out, or being fouled by the carcass of dead wildlife, makes the 'bore runner' position one of the most important on the station. While commercially available technologies, in the form of telemetry systems, provide opportunities for the monitoring of water to occur remotely, many stations still perform this activity by driving around the station, a journey often in excess of 300 km.

The reliance of stock on artificial water is utilised by the station staff to capture cattle, reducing the costs of mustering. This is achieved by using a series of one way gates and trap yards, allowing the animals to enter the yard through only one gate, drink from the water trough and exit the yard through a second one-way gate. When the station is planning to muster the paddock, the exit gate is closed, preventing the animals from exiting the yards after drinking. The absence of alternative surface waters makes this a simple and effective method of capturing the cattle, for minimal labour input.

When animals are unable to be trapped at water, mustering is done with a mix of helicopters, fixed wing aircraft, motorbikes and people on horses to drive the cattle into the yard. The type of terrain making up the paddock, the number of animals in the paddock and the financial position of the enterprise have the biggest bearing on the configuration of the muster. Individual paddocks on stations are only mustered once or twice a year, depending on the season and the subsequent amount of feed available, and, to a lesser degree, the state of the markets. When the cattle are contained in the yard, the stock camp - made up of a mix of experienced cattlemen, international backpackers on a gap year and everyone in between - begin processing the cattle. A major activity is to separate the calves from the cows in order to vaccinate, castrate, dehorn and provide individual animal identification tags. Calves that are small are released back to their mothers to continue to grow on a milk-supplemented diet while those heavy enough are weaned. Animals that are weaned may be moved to another

part of a property to be 'grown out' if the feed is available. Alternatively, they may be trucked to other properties owned by the enterprise, or sold for growing out elsewhere.

The weaning of calves from the cows is an important management practice and has significant bearing on the production to come from an individual cow; weaning can reduce her daily energy requirements by 15-30 per cent, depending on her pregnancy status. In many cases, desert pastoral stations can be regarded as calf factories, with the main aim of the enterprise being to produce as many viable offspring as possible. It is common for animals to then be moved or sold on to other properties to be fattened for slaughter, although the latter can occur opportunistically in the desert, depending on the season.

Steers (castrated males) represent the most common class of animal sold from central Australian stations and are usually destined for abattoirs or feedlots located in South Australia or Queensland. While local abattoirs existed in the past, there are currently no abattoirs located in central Australia with the capacity to process all of the livestock turnoff from the region. Approximately 10 per cent of sale animals in the region are destined for the live export markets in South East Asia.

Communications

Methods of communication both between and from stations to the outside world has been limited until recent years. Satellite broadband internet is worlds away from a postal service which took weeks or months to reach a destination. The development of the Royal Flying Doctor service pedal radio network offered a new method of communicating with the outside world, and support for health and other services previously lacking. While initially created for emergency purposes, designated times during the day allowed for party lines, and for calls to be patched through from radio to telephone networks. While beneficial to stations, all calls were broadcast to anyone within reception range, meaning little privacy was ever experienced. Present day communications on stations have advanced to satellite internet based services allowing the information superhighway to be available to the most remotely based cattle stations. Outback institutions including the School of the Air now conduct interactive lessons using the service, greatly reducing the difficulties faced by families on cattle stations in educating their children.

Technology

The huge geographical scale of stations in central Australia is forcing enterprises to look at alternatives to production activities which have high labour and infrastructure requirements. Remote management technologies are providing these alternatives through allowing data to be collected and relayed to another part of the property. The two major areas of production in which remote management technologies are being used, or developed for use, are the provision and monitoring of stock water and the individual management of animals.

Telemetry systems capable of collecting information from watering points and transmitting it back the homestead are now appearing on stations across northern Australia. Commercially available systems are able to collect water level, flow rates and photographs of troughs, and transmit the information to the manager, using UHF radio. This can reduce the frequency of visits to watering points, cutting production costs substantially. Through research work conducted in central Australia, the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (DKCRC) was able to demonstrate how stations were able to reduce the cost of providing and monitoring stock water by 30-50 per cent.[8] An important aspect of this research was into the adaptation of telemetry systems to the arid zone. While initially focused on thermal adaptation to the climate, later

work addressed issues of damage caused by wildlife, including wild dogs and cockatoos which enjoyed chewing the wiring, cables and aerials of the system.

Remote management technologies capable of collecting data on individual cattle and implementing management decisions have also been developed in central Australia, and are likely to have an ever increasing presence in the region. Developed as a collaboration between private companies and the DKCRC, the system is capable of collecting individual cattle weights and then implementing a draft using an automatic gate. Animals are individually identified through the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) using electronic ear tags. By collecting data on individual animals, managers are able to make more accurate and precise decisions within their production system, increasing the likelihood of profit. This may involve identifying slow growing or poor producing animals and removing them from the herd or, alternatively, identifying the high producing stock and favouring them in breeding programs.

The Remote Livestock Management System (RLMS) that has been developed is solar powered and is also able to be integrated with the telemetry system, which can transmit the animal weights back to the homestead, possibly many kilometres away. This then allows a producer to be aware of the performance of their stock without needing to go through the laborious and expensive task of performing a muster.

The future

The pastoral industry of central Australia has an intrinsic link to the economic and social makeup of the region. While its contribution to the economy may be a smaller percentage of the national gross domestic product than it was in the past, its contribution to sustainable desert communities cannot be overstated. The challenges of climate, market forces and distance will be constant forces which will work both with, and against, the industry into the future. The use of technology, engagement with the wider desert community and access to profitable markets will be some of the ways pastoralism will continue to endure; tackling the ongoing boom and bust nature of the industry.

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TV/Radio Programs that may interest readers:
Message Stick ABC1 TV Sunday 1.30 pm, Friday 6 pm
Living Black SBS 1 TV Friday 3.30 pm
The Circuit SBS 1 TV Tuesday 8.30 pm (while set in the Kimberley, many of the issues raised in this drama about the Aboriginal Legal Aid service echo those faced in central Australia)
Awaye! ABC Radio National Sunday 6 pm; Monday 3 pm

Aboriginal TV/Radio in Central Australia
Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA): www.caama.com.au/
IMPARJA TELEVISION: http://www.imparja.com/

The Bush Foods Industry and Poverty Alleviation in Central Australia

Peter Yates

The commercialisation of native species has some potential to contribute to the reduction of income poverty levels in remote Aboriginal communities in Central Australia. Aboriginal people hold significant knowledge, skill and land resources that if brought together in the commercialisation of one or more species, could contribute to more secure and sustainable livelihoods. Despite this potential, there are also very serious obstacles to Aboriginal people successfully participating at any level of the commercial marketplace, whether as producers, processors or retailers. Remote Aboriginal communities typically lack infrastructure, management skills, and understanding of business, and even given access to appropriate infrastructure, few individuals could be expected to meet the rigorous health and safety regulations that control the food and pharmaceutical industries. In addition, significant elements of Aboriginal knowledge have been placed in the public domain over the past century, so that much of the potential advantage has been nullified or reversed. There is, furthermore, a disconnection between the understandings that Aboriginal people in remote areas hold with regards to many traditional foods and medicines, and the imperatives of successful commercialisation. In this paper, I will reflect on my experiences working in a loose partnership with Aboriginal people to trade two 'bushfoods': the 'bush tomato' (*Solanum centrale*),[1] and 'wattleseed' (various *Acacia* species, particularly *A victoriae, A colei and A coriacea*). I will also explore the structural and cultural nature of poverty in remote Aboriginal settlements, with a view to showing how natural resource commercialisation may contribute to poverty alleviation, and how it may not.

Commercial potential has been identified for a wide range of Australian native plant products, including foods, medicines, essential oils, wildflowers and boutique timbers, and of these, three desert food products (quandong, wattleseed and 'bush tomato'), are already the subject of considerable trading activity. Australia-wide, the bushfoods industry has been estimated to value between $10-15 million [2] though it is important to note that desert Australia's share of this figure is probably well under 1 per cent.

Given the industry's relative youth, it is reasonable to assume that its value will increase several-fold over the coming decades. With appropriate investments in research, market development and production systems, some or all of the other product categories could be expected to achieve similar results. However, the existence of a market for desert products is in no way an assurance that Aboriginal people will be positioned to reap any benefits: there are a range of impediments to substantive Aboriginal involvement in these (existing and potential) natural resource industries, despite the fact that the products are based to a very significant degree on Aboriginal traditional knowledge.

The poverty alleviation values that can be realised through commercialising natural products are intimately bound up with the cultural economy of remote Aboriginal settlements, and with the position that these settlements occupy *vis-à-vis* the dominant culture and economy of Australia. Success in poverty alleviation requires much more than mere increase in incomes, and the substance of *how* production is undertaken may have profound implications for the degree to which any commercialisation project will deliver benefits to Aboriginal people.

The enterprise Outback Bushfoods, of which the author is a Director, was established with a vision that trade in bushfoods would make a significant contribution to incomes,

health and wellbeing in and around remote settlements. In particular, the hope was that by enabling Aboriginal people to rebuild an economy that stemmed directly from their lands, neglected land management practices might be stimulated. The growth of many bushfoods is promoted by fire, and it was hoped that a market for bush tomatoes could provide the rationale for a resumption of burning regimes that promote plant species diversity, and improve ecological health across a range of measures.

Outback Bushfoods grew, to a large degree, out of a Central Land Council project run by Jock Morse between 1997-1999, that set out to explore the best means by which to secure Aboriginal involvement in the emerging bushfoods industry. In its final form, however, the enterprise was established as a private company.[3] Discussions had been held with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC, disbanded in 2004 by the Howard Government), the Indigenous Land Corporation and CentreCorp (an Aboriginal investment agency), but all declined involvement in the venture, citing as reasons the risk and infancy of the industry. Some assistance was received in 2002-03 from the Natural Heritage Trust and the Coles Indigenous Food Fund.

Outback Bushfoods found a niche partly as industry financiers, and partly as something akin to interpreters. Aboriginal people from remote areas were simply not able, and did not want to interact with distant food processors. Outback Bushfoods provided an interface between the poles of the industry, so distant geographically and culturally. To Aboriginal people, we provided the known face that is a prerequisite for trusting engagements. We provided on the spot transparent cash payments, when we bought product. We also offered loans of vehicles, countless lifts and jump-starts to recalcitrant cars along many remote desert roads. To downstream processors we provided secure supplies of raw materials (and later partially processed ingredients); we ensured quality and carried the risks; we provided marketing materials, advice and product knowledge; and to some processors (reluctantly), we provided 'credit' of tens of thousands of dollars over many months.

Outback Bushfoods was 'blessed' in its early years by a series of above average rainfall years, and with enthusiastic involvement from people on the Pitjantjatjara Lands of South Australia, the Ngaanyatjarra Lands of Western Australia, and a number of Anmatjere, Warlpiri and Waramungu communities to the north of Alice Springs, stockpiles of wattleseed and bush tomato were quickly amassed. Then came the problem of selling the stock. Processors had seriously exaggerated the volumes that they were able to buy and use, and the company quickly found itself hobbled by a shortage of working capital.

In the background, industry stakeholders and Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (DKCRC) researchers increasingly began to call for horticultural production of bush tomatoes, to 'secure supply', and to 'provide training and jobs for Aboriginal people'.[4] A number of horticultural bushfood plots were established in partnership with Aboriginal organisations by Reedy Creek Nursery (trading under the name Outback Pride), in Alice Springs and in northern South Australia, with varying success.[5] To a company struggling to operate under a mountain of bush tomatoes that it could not sell, such activities, and all the interest in horticulture, was bemusing. Outback Bushfoods argued that as long as benefits for Aboriginal people, and land management outcomes were the main objectives of the industry, then wild harvest must be protected. Nevertheless, a strong sense of some real limits to the volumes of bush tomatoes that could be produced from the wild was starting to emerge. We came to feel that the average harvest possible from all sources across Central Australia is certainly less than

2000 kg/annum. This posed the problem that an industry this small was simply not able to deliver benefits to anyone.

Of course, sales eventually did improve, at just about the time that drought set in, in the second half of 2005, and before long the industry was plunged into a bush tomato crisis. By this time, Outback Bushfoods was exploring the possibility of horticultural production, with a one hectare plot on the Horticultural Research Farm at Ti-Tree, and was negotiating with CentreFarm[6] for a larger block near the Pmara Jutunta settlement. A key proviso to our exploration of horticulture was that benefits could remain with Aboriginal people, and we conceived a system wherein we would grow the bush tomato crop, but discount the fruit value. Aboriginal people would be invited to pick the fruit, and would be paid as though the fruit were brought in from the wild. By this means, we hoped to be able to support collector livelihoods, even in dry years, and also achieve an efficient fruit harvest, since skilled collectors were readily available. In the event, the CentreFarm proposal was mired in bureaucracy, and the Aboriginal response to our horticultural plot was very disappointing. Women brought to the site to harvest showed little interest and asked to be taken home after only a few minutes. The horticultural environment certainly had its challenges, not least being the profusion of small black ants that had bred under the moist conditions and had a great taste for tender human flesh. Another possible deterrent was the formal nature of the research farm itself, with its rules and regulations. At a deeper level however, it is likely that seeing bush tomatoes growing in neat horticultural rows was disturbing. Bush tomatoes, as with everything else in the world, are supposed to be *made* through ceremony, not grown by people, so it is possible that rather than tapping into and resonating with the past, these captive plants may have seemed to the women to challenge to proper order of the world; in short, to be sacrilegious.

The failure of our plan to involve Aboriginal women in picking the bush tomato crop raised a further set of questions. Without doubt, we could secure the business by scaling up production, but it was now clear that this would necessitate further substantial investment and the adoption of mechanical harvest techniques. In other words, the logic of the market was pushing us steadily away from our original vision, values and motivations. Success in bush tomato production was clearly possible – we had identified potential cultivars capable of producing up to one kilogram of dry fruit in the first six months (suggesting per hectare yields of at least 5000 kg/annum), but who would benefit?[7] It was clear to us that horticultural development of bush tomato could only deliver this 'crop' into the hands of well resourced, and highly skilled (ie, white) farmers.

It is important to note that there are significant differences between products in terms of potential. Bush tomatoes found a ready acceptance in the food industry, and with this has come a rapid growth in demand that cannot be met without horticultural production. In the case of Acacia seed however, collections have only ever been a fraction of what could be sustainably achieved from the wild. Acacia seed has real potential as a volume crop that could generate significant seasonal incomes in remote settlements. It is, furthermore, a product that seems to be less encumbered by cultural values than is the case with bush tomatoes. The two main limiting factors are the price of labour, and the lack of a market that can absorb more than a few tonnes per year. Acacia seed has tended to be used in very small volumes as a flavouring in luxury goods such as ice-cream. In an attempt to build sales volumes, Outback Bushfoods developed and produced a 'Wattleseed Bread' in Alice Springs that, if it could be expanded into national markets, could easily account for 10,000 kg/annum, amounting to payments of around $100,000 spread between 50-

100 collectors. Price remains an obstacle, since margins are very low in wholesale baking, but the real obstacle seems to have more to do with the reluctance of medium to large baking firms to risk a new and different product.

The bushfoods industry is inherently a cross-cultural enterprise. It might be a surprise to many participants, however, just how deep are those cultural divides. For Aboriginal people, the idea that their traditional foods could be a mere commodity is almost beyond comprehension. To them, these are not just foods: they are bound up in stories of creation, in kinship, and in multiple layers of personal and collective memory, recalling people, places, times and *Tjukurpa* (Dreaming). For Aboriginal people, it is as though bushfoods are an inseparable part of themselves. For the 'whitefellas', further down the value chain, such understandings – if they are held at all – are at best thought quaint, and viewed as potential marketing tools. For the processors, who have invested large amounts of time and money to develop supply lines, facilities, products, labels and markets, the bottom line consideration can only be continuity of supply, to appease a marketplace that cannot forgive the vagaries of nature (let alone of culture).

In these differences lie both the strength and the weakness of the bushfoods industry in the alleviation of poverty on remote settlements. To understand this, it is necessary to explore a little the nature of Aboriginal poverty.

Aboriginal poverty

With the increasing acceptance of the Sustainable Livelihoods paradigm in International Development in the 1990s came a realisation that poverty – once thought to be easily defined as an income inadequate to provide for basic needs – needed to be understood in much more complexity, if successful and sustainable poverty reduction strategies were to be found.[8] Researchers began to realise that poverty is the product of diverse factors including resource access, climate, and political and bureaucratic factors, coupled with livelihood strategies that are strongly shaped and informed by culture and identity. Poverty alleviation strategies thus needed to be designed for each specific situation, taking account of the various factors that bear upon people's livelihoods.

It is widely accepted that three decades of well intentioned policy and significant investment have failed to make any appreciable impact on key health and wellbeing indicators.[9] Have the understandings of Aboriginal poverty that have underpinned development policies in recent decades been adequate? If a people see themselves as independent and empowered within their own world, and eschew many of the material 'benefits' of another social group, can we confidently use a term like 'poverty' to describe their condition?[10]

On the surface there is much in Aboriginal 'poverty' that is shared with the developing world. According to Altman,

> …this population demonstrated many characteristics…that are distinctly Third World: nearly 40 per cent are aged less than 15 years (reflecting high fertility); only eight per cent live beyond 55 years of age (reflecting very low life expectancy); levels of formal employment are extremely low (only 18 per cent have wages and salaries as their main source of income and another 28 per cent work for the dole); education levels are low (only one in 20 has a post-school qualification in very remote Australia); household income levels are low; and people are poorly housed, often living in extremely over-crowded conditions.[11]

Aboriginal poverty is often explained as the result of pervasive processes of social exclusion, and whilst this provides a partial explanation, particularly in terms of geographic marginality and lack of access to formal Western education and employment

opportunities, the persistence of classical Aboriginal values and economy offer a compelling alternative view. The classical Aboriginal economy of Central Australia was finely tuned to a stochastic desert environment. Social values highlighted the importance of interdependence, and surpluses were strictly redistributed. Kinship networks linking people and land provided the central organising principle of social life. Having one's family around one, and/or being on one's own country was – and still is – the main indicator of health and contentment. Specialised sacred knowledge was the primary commodity, and was socially constructed as the key requirement for healthy human life and a productive environment. Production clearly involved human labour, but at a deeper level it was a magico-religious process, and human agency (as in management practice for example) was denied.[12]

In contemporary remote Aboriginal settlements, these principles still lie at the heart of social life, albeit more than a little distorted after several decades of unprecedented plenitude.[13] Settlement has brought, within a very few years, a life of relative material wealth compared to the austere past remembered by most Aboriginal people over the age of fifty, and yet a life of lamentable poverty relative to 'mainstream Australia'. Ironically, a central rationale for the establishment of missions and settlements was the alleviation of the perceived poverty of the desert Aborigines.[14] The substitution of the store for the environment, and of welfare transfers for subsistence labour relieved Aboriginal people of the uncertainties of the desert environment, but unbeknownst to them, delivered them into a relationship of dependency *vis-à-vis* the Australian government.[15] The apparent ease and comfort with which Aboriginal people were able to adopt a welfare based lifestyle is quite consistent with classical values. In this conception, the provision of welfare, and its acceptance by Aboriginal people is no less than an expression of kinship:

> …'dependency', in terms of a culturally established and validated capacity to demand and receive resources and services (symbolic and tangible) from others, is a core principle through which Aboriginal agency is realised in the structuring of social relationships. This principle operates both within contemporary Aboriginal groups and in the intercultural zone between them and the wider society [16]

For Pearson, welfare is much more problematic. He argues that rather than reflecting a 'core principle' of social organisation, welfare in effect denies relationships:

> Common to the real economy of traditional society and the real economy of the market is the demand for economic and social reciprocity. This reciprocity is expressed through work, initiative, struggle, enterprise, contribution, effort. The key problem with welfare is that it inherently does not demand reciprocity.[17]

The real issue may lie less in the meaning of, or the need for, reciprocity, than in the need for actions in daily life that knit together the social meanings of past and present. Welfare can be understood as a right, as the 'proper' way for a wealthy entity such as a state to act in relation to 'poor' Aborigines, but a livelihood built on passively received income risks a lack of resonance with the elements of culture, language and history that make up identity. Where classical daily life was rich with physical experience, with empirical knowledge of the environment, of kinship and of *Tjukurpa*, with constant connections drawn between these elements, the orbit of the welfare driven life is crushingly small by comparison. Put another way, this is in many ways an *impoverished* life.

What is unique about Aboriginal poverty is that it is not generally speaking, a lack of income that lies at the heart of the situation. Certainly, Aboriginal incomes in remote Central Australia

are well below the national average, whilst the cost of food and transport are well above, but this does not tell the full story:

> The concept of income poverty is inadequate, with many high-income Indigenous families experiencing as much socioeconomic disadvantage as low income families.

And further:

> The distinguishing feature of the Indigenous poor is the depth of poverty they experience across a range of welfare indicators. That is, poor outcomes in various spheres of life are not confined to those in the Indigenous community conventionally defined as poor (ie, poor in terms of income). Simply increasing the financial resources available to the Indigenous poor may not be sufficient to alleviate their particular form of poverty.[18]

Increased income does not bring the material benefits one might expect on remote settlements for a number of cultural reasons essentially related to kinship. Firstly, demand-sharing strongly limits the individual's ability to hold on to – let alone accumulate – anything.[19] There is very little incentive to earn more money when one's wages are quickly dissipated among relatives. Objects, be they motor vehicles, clothing or electrical goods are little cared for, being seen as only temporary possessions. Secondly, there is little understanding of the nature of money as an abstracted value. Concepts such as saving and investment are foreign to Aboriginal society, and given the emphasis on sharing within the kin network, are often cast as antisocial behaviours. Thirdly, a large proportion of income is diverted into alcohol and marijuana consumption, with abusers able to fund their addictions through demands on the kin network (often backed by the threat, and use of violence). Fourthly, high values are placed on mobility, with a significant portion of household income being directed into motor vehicles. Carloads of people travel about endlessly between settlements and towns, attending sporting events, funerals, 'going hunting', plying an illegal trade in alcohol or marijuana or visiting family. Finally, increased incomes in remote communities are likely to increase the consumption of foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar, leading to obesity and type 2 diabetes.[20]

A sustainable livelihood is more than a matter of income: it is also about what people do, and why. To be sustainable, poverty alleviation in remote Aboriginal settlements must rest on income generating activities that are culturally meaningful. Without such meaning, action may seem pointless, and motivation hard to maintain. This describes a condition that has much in common with depression, and outcomes such as poor health and hygiene, substance abuse, violence and chronic ill health are observable results.

The value of bushfoods

In order to reduce poverty in remote Aboriginal settlements, Altman calls for: '…a fundamentally different [policy] approach…that empowers communities to grow all sectors of the hybrid economy…'. Altman's 'hybrid economy' combines the familiar formal elements of economic life in remote communities, such as government transfers, CDEP employment and formal employment, the customary economy, which takes in the products of hunting and gathering and the economic activity that sits between formal and customary, such as bushfoods harvest for sale; painting (and other artistic activities), and land management services: 'work on country'.[21] What is important about this latter category is that the activities provide sustenance on two levels: they bring income and they bring meaning. They often bring a lot more besides, such as physical activity,

opportunities for hunting and gathering (and thus a better diet), to pass knowledge between generations and to have particular expertise widely recognised.

On one *Acacia victoriae* seed collecting trip in 2002, the author accompanied around twenty Yangkunytjatjara people, comprising four generations of an extended family, for nearly three weeks. *Acacia victoriae* seed is harvested in northern South Australia in late December and early January, a time when the community office in that period would close for holidays. CDEP payments during this period were paid in a lump sum before Christmas, and were quickly spent, leaving a 'hungry gap' when entire families were forced to rely upon the pension income of the elderly. The family that chose to collect seed during this time expressed clearly what the benefits were to them: they had cash to spend (and therefore food), where others had none; they had both reason and means to camp out in the bush, visiting the many areas where seed was to be found; they were all together as a family in something approaching a traditional residential group; they were away from the boredom of the home community (Kaltjiti); they enjoyed the sense of common purpose; and one woman in her thirties commented with satisfaction that the hard work made her feel good, and that she had lost weight.

In the areas to the north of Alice Springs, acacia seed and bush tomato collecting are energetically embraced by a high proportion of the population of several remote settlements. Outback Bushfoods would visit each settlement in turn, prior to the collecting season, with a request for various products. Once collecting started, settlements would be like ghost towns, with people out working all day, often camping in extended family groups for several days at a time. Cleaning the product for sale provided highly valued communal time, when several women would sit around a tarpaulin, sieving, winnowing and talking. Away from the settlement, they were free to set their own timetables, free of trouble from drinkers and from the general 'humbug' of community life. One community nurse working in the Barrow Creek district commented that she had felt serious reservations about bushfoods harvesting, when all the older and middle-aged women – many of them diabetic and overweight – walked out into the bush to collect, despite temperatures in the 40s. Over the course of the three week collecting season however, she observed a significant lowering of blood pressure and blood sugar amongst the women. The nurse concluded that the improvements were brought about by a combination of exercise, personal satisfaction and escape from the constant stresses of the community.

If increased incomes are not clearly reflected in improved material conditions of life on remote settlements, this does not mean that the opportunity to earn extra money is not valued – and in the case of bushfoods harvesting – seized upon by many when the opportunity presents. A long term bushfoods trader points out that with the average personal income of people in remote areas being only a little over $10,000/annum, the income gained from the sale of a single flour drum (about 10 kg) of seed or fruit amounts to a 1 per cent increase in income.[22] In fact, if the product is there to be harvested, people will often present with hundreds of kilos of product, amounting to income totalling some thousands of dollars.

In an environment of constant cash shortage, a lump sum such as this has particular value. Such a sum can be sufficient to purchase major household goods, such as washing machines, or perhaps more often, motor vehicles. Under normal conditions, such large sums can only be obtained through periodic windfalls such as mining royalty disbursements, compensation payments, or by consolidating small amounts of money through gambling.[23] In the author's experience, collectors often preferred to make

transactions in the neutral space of Alice Springs, where money could be spent to better effect in the major stores before demands could be made upon it by relatives, and to avoid the windfall being 'lost' in paying off a community store debt. Income from bushfoods is not always well used, and many drinking trips have followed the sale of product. Echoing Michael Taussig's classic descriptions of economy and social value amongst Bolivian tin miners, there is evidence that bushfoods income is viewed as being qualitatively different to welfare income, carrying some inherently positive quality.[24] The author witnessed a verbal exchange between a woman who had just received several hundred dollars, and her son, who was demanding the money so that he could go drinking in Tennant Creek, 200 km away. Speaking with authority, the woman refused, saying 'This is *my* money! I got this money from hard work. Hard work collecting seeds! This is not money for grog!'

The future

It is a bitter irony that the more successful the bushfoods industry, the less relevant it may be for remote Aboriginal people, and the less likely it is to be able to deliver even moderate benefits. In large part this is to do with the mismatch between the priorities of Aboriginal collectors and downstream processors. Matters of quality, reliability and timeliness of supply seem to push bulk processors inexorably towards supply options that better serve their needs. It is possible, in the case of bush tomatoes, that industry sectors based on horticulture and wild harvest may be able to co-exist so long as prices remain high enough to support labour intensive hand harvesting. There is a risk, however, that mechanical harvest methods, and competition for markets will result in over-production and a sharp drop in prices over the next few years.

If Aboriginal ownership and involvement in this sector of the bushfoods industry is valued, then it is imperative that the relevant agencies act quickly to make appropriate investments in land, cultivar research and harvest technologies. Investments in Aboriginal owned and controlled processing facilities (perhaps in partnership with urban Aboriginal organisations) may provide the means to accommodate Aboriginal priorities and practices. Government needs to take on the role, and the risk that Outback Bushfoods has shouldered over the past seven years. This should be seen as an investment in social inclusion, rather than the subsidisation of an industry. Such developments are unlikely to generate significant Aboriginal employment or involvement in the short term. Rather, they are an effort to ensure that Aboriginal interests retain a leading position in terms of production technologies and market share. Individual involvement may be accelerated over time with changes in the policy environment that encourage productive employment.

Tourism related markets may provide one opportunity by which Aboriginal people may be able to achieve good returns on relatively small amounts of product. While the commercial realities of the bulk market tend to strip away the Aboriginal identity of the product, the tourism market by contrast depends on Aboriginal identity as a the key marketing message. An excellent example of this is the combination of art, product and *Tjukurpa* in small packages that were developed by Dr Glenn Wightman in association with Arnhem Land communities.[25] Such enterprises are extremely efficient in terms of the amounts of product required, the technology required to participate, and they can encompass a wide range of species. They can add value to a range of other existing enterprises, as well as playing an important political and educational role, by asserting Aboriginal knowledge of plants and animals, and through this, asserting ownership of the land. Such products also have great potential value within the community itself, as

economic activities around which traditional knowledge, trips to country and *Tjukurpa* can crystallise.

Across Central Australia, the understanding that Aboriginal land management practices were, and are, of critical importance to landscape health is growing, and the involvement of Aboriginal people in joint management of National Parks and Indigenous Protected Areas continues to gain momentum.[26] Such movements lie at the heart of the hybrid economy. The success of this approach will depend on its being built on as broad a base of activities as possible. Bushfoods harvesting – from the wild, whether for subsistence use or for sale, will provide an important element of economic opportunity and motivation to other land management activities. Indeed, without reference to bushfoods, crucial land management practices such as mosaic burning could be cut loose from their primary rationale. Bushfoods provide to land management activities a unifying cultural motif: for Aboriginal people, there is no more powerful truth than that the land provides sustenance for the people.

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1   'Bush Tomato', though a name accepted throughout the commercial industry for *Solanum centrale*, is in fact the standard English common name for *Solanum chippendalei*. *S centrale* is also known as Desert Raisin, *Akatyere, Kampurarpa, Kampurrat* and *Yakatjirri*.

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3   Owned by Jock Morse and the author.

4   Outback Pride (ND). http://www.outbackpride.com.au/project/ Accessed 11/08/2008.

5   See White, J (forthcoming) PhD Thesis, Uni SA. Due for completion 2009.

6   An off-shoot of Central Land Council that sought to make Aboriginal land available as leasehold for agricultural development.

7   Even at this late stage, with assured markets and a good knowledge of horticultural protocols, an approach to CentreCorp for investment to ensure at least Aboriginal ownership was rejected.

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Further useful websites:

Araluen Arts Centre and Cultural Precinct: http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/arts/ascp/araluen/
Desert Park: http://www.alicespringsdesertpark.com.au/
NT Dept of Justice: http://www.nt.gov.au/justice/policycoord/researchstats/index.shtml
Batchelor College: www.batchelor.edu.au/
Institute for Aboriginal Development (Press):
http://www.iad.edu.au/press/iadpresshome.htm

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Mining and Land Rights in Central Australia

Rodger Barnes

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Introduction

Mining in Central Australia is considered here; in particular how mining occurs in the context of statutory Aboriginal land rights that exist in the Northern Territory. The mining industry is important to the economy of the Northern Territory and has significant political influence. The intersection of interests between miners and Aboriginal people, historically, is a point of contestation. Negotiation and agreement is the preferred method to manage access to land for resource development whilst protecting landowner interests. While the benefit of reaching agreement is often extolled, this article focuses on how agreements are put into effect and how outcomes are dependent on effective implementation.

A brief overview of mining in the Northern Territory and Central Australia follows. Agreements and their implementation are considered through an examination of employment outcomes under an agreement for the Granites Gold Mine in the Tanami Desert: also briefly considered is how the experience under such agreements may affect the course of future developments.

Figure 1: Central Australia: Central Land Council (NT) region and Aboriginal Land
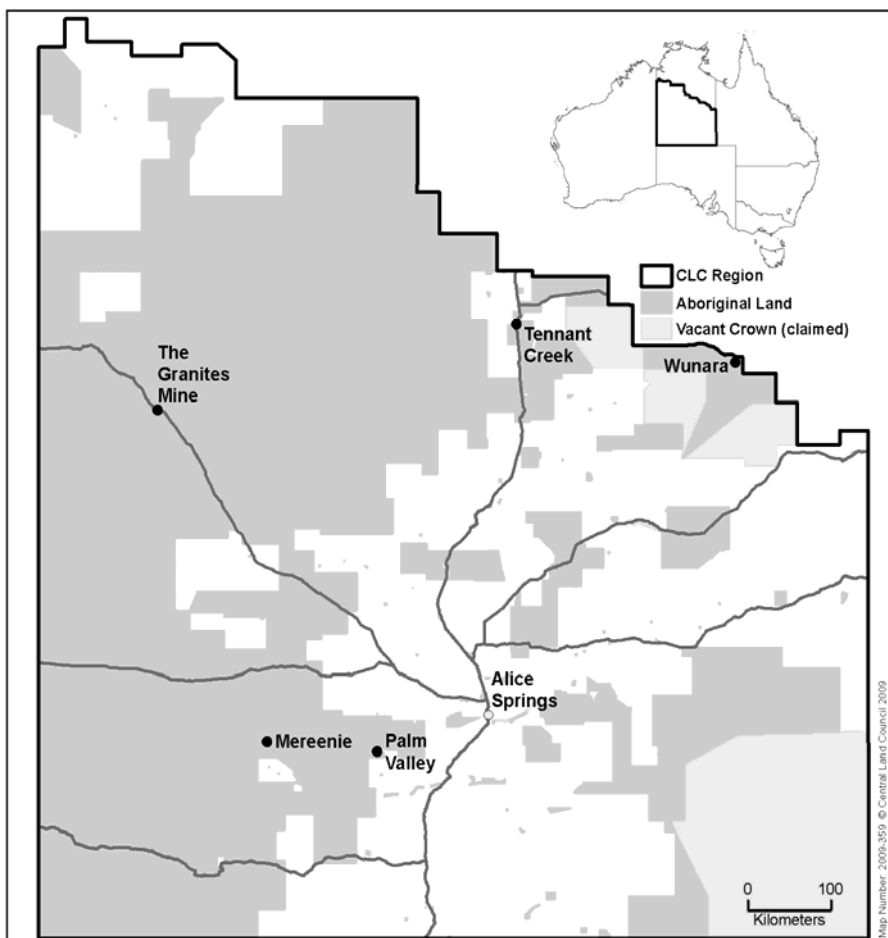
Mining in Central Australia

Mining is the largest contributor to the Northern Territory economy, with mineral and petroleum production accounting for around 20 per cent per cent of the Gross State (Territory) Product. The value of minerals produced, excluding petroleum, is now worth over $2 billion annually. Much of this production is from several large long life operations in the Top End including bauxite and alumina production at Gove, Groote Eylandt's manganese mine, the McArthur River lead and zinc mine near Borroloola, and Ranger Uranium in Kakadu.

In Central Australia, gold has been the most significant commodity. Over the last two decades the search for gold deposits has dominated mineral exploration expenditure. Most of this exploration has focused on two major gold provinces, the Tanami[1] desert and Tennant Creek, which together have seen the bulk of mining activity. The Granites Gold Mine, owned by Newmont, is located in the Tanami 550 kilometres north west of Alice Springs.[2] Mining in Tennant Creek halted in 2005 after the unscheduled closure of Giants Reef Ltd's Chariot mine, ending some sixty years of almost continuous mining in the region. Gold exploration is continuing to the west of Tennant Creek. Central Australia also produces oil and gas. Since 1981 the Northern Territory's only on-shore oil and gas production has occurred at Palm Valley and Mereenie, west of Alice Springs. With petroleum maintaining a high value, there is renewed interest in the Central Australian geological basins for petroleum.

While mining is similarly important to the economy in other resource-rich states such as Western Australia and Queensland, the Northern Territory is unique in a number of ways, particularly with respect to the interaction with Aboriginal people. Foremost, it is a territory and not a state. Self-government was enacted in 1978 (*Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978*), but ultimate legislative and administrative control rests with the Australian Government in Canberra.

European settlement occurred at a relatively late period in the history of Australian colonisation. While the first outposts were constructed in the early 1870s, associated with the Adelaide to Darwin Telegraph Line, it was not until the construction of the railway from Adelaide in the 1930s that the main settler populations of Alice Springs and Tennant Creek achieved significant numbers. The better land for grazing was taken up for pastoral leases during this period, but vast tracts of more arid areas, particularly west of Alice Springs, were never alienated, and some areas were eventually declared reserves for the benefit of the Aboriginal inhabitants. The colonisation of the arid interior saw its share of bloody and brutal episodes; however, in many ways the harshness and remoteness of the region forced settlers to depend on Aboriginal knowledge and labour, which reinforced a preference for avoiding direct conflict. The South Australian Post Office sponsored the initial pioneering development, which possibly softened the dispossessing blow of settler encroachment on Central Australian Aboriginal society.

Remoteness, vast distances and extreme climate all play a role in slowing dispossession and keeping the non-Aboriginal population relatively small.[3] According to the 2006 census, around 200,000 people reside in the Northern Territory with 28 per cent of the population being Indigenous. Around half the population lives in the capital city of Darwin. Of the balance, just over half are Indigenous. The remote regions outside centres such as Alice Springs are essentially Aboriginal, made up of many small communities often in incongruous locations, chosen in most cases by either missionaries or government. Yuendumu, 300 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs is one of the largest communities, with approximately 1000 people (second behind Wadeye in the Top End with around 2,000).

Land rights and agreement making

A significant feature of Central Australia is the extent to which traditional Aboriginal culture has survived, with Aboriginal languages used (although increasingly mixed with English) as the first language for some groups. Many areas continue to practice certain traditional ceremonies. Although Aboriginal culture is undergoing significant change, as it is challenged by the overwhelming influences of modern living, the majority of Aboriginal people in Central Australia identify strongly with the land of their ancestors. In many parts traditional patterns of land tenure and kinship remain strong.

It is in this setting that the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) 1976 Cwth* (herein Land Rights Act) was enacted. Unique in Australia, it is a further significant element that distinguishes the Northern Territory, particularly when it comes to mining. The Land Rights Act was a rare act of bi-partisanship, coming into effect in 1977. Gough Whitlam had promised to deliver land rights to Aboriginal people and when he won the 1972 Federal election, promptly commissioned Justice Edward Woodward to inquire and report on how (not whether) land rights should be granted including the 'arrangements necessary in the Northern Territory for vesting title to Aboriginal reserved land, including rights in minerals and timber, in the Aboriginal groups and communities concerned'.[4] In April 1974 Woodward delivered his final report, which laid the legislative foundation for the Land Rights Act. During the inquiry, the mining industry argued strongly against granting any rights that would alter the hitherto relatively unrestricted access to land for exploration and mining in regional Australia. Woodward was not convinced. He cast the issue of the right to refuse consent to mining as a fundamental tenet of Land Rights.

> I believe to deny to Aborigines the right to prevent mining on their land is to deny the reality of their land rights. I find it quite impossible to inspect the developments on Groote Eylandt or the Gove Peninsula or proposed works on uranium deposits in Arnhem Land and to say that such developments, without consent, could be consistent with traditional land rights for Aborigines.[5]

The Land Rights Act originally established two mainland statutory bodies to administer Aboriginal land, the Central Land Council (CLC) with responsibilities in the southern part of the Northern Territory. Aboriginal Reserves were returned and a claims process for unalienated Crown land was introduced. By 2009, through the land claim process and other land settlement negotiations, just over 50 per cent of the CLC region is Aboriginal land.

The original legislation gave traditional Aboriginal landowners the right to consent to exploration and to any subsequent application to mine. Such rights were anathema to the mining industry, which in response organised politically to lobby for change. One of its first successes was scuttling Labor's moves for national land rights in 1984 through an infamous media campaign in Western Australia championed by the Western Australian Chamber of Mines.[6] Subsequently the national body, the Minerals Council of Australia, through persistent and concerted effort, caused the Commonwealth Government to amend the mining provisions of the Land Rights Act in 1987.

The mining industry did not get all it wanted in the 1987 amendments. The right to consent to exploration remained, albeit in a substantially qualified form. It is not a 'veto' in the absolute sense as it applies only to exploration and not mining. Where traditional Aboriginal owners refuse exploration, the effect is a moratorium on further application for five years after which time the same applicant may re-apply. There is also a limited statutory period available to either refuse or consent, which if not exercised, ends the negotiations. Furthermore, the Government can invoke the national interest provisions that can force an exploration to be granted.

Despite the amendments, some sectors of the mining industry remained doggedly opposed to the Land Rights Act, with opposition led especially by the Northern Territory Chamber of Mines, which was claiming ruination as late as 2002.[7]

> Until there are amendments to this problematic piece of legislation, the minerals industry will be unable to move ahead with exploration and subsequent developments to any extent that will bring benefits to stakeholders. Detrimental impact not only on the minerals industry and the future economic development of the Northern Territory, but other stakeholders including Aboriginal people and communities.[8]

When viewed from this perspective, exploration and mining in the Northern Territory can be seen as an arena of contestation where (particularly provincial) government and miners' demands for unfettered access to mineral resources are met with Aboriginal people's demands to be recognised as landowners, with not only special rights and interests that need to be protected, but also a right to share in benefits from resource extraction on their land.

Under the Land Rights Act such contestation is mediated through a negotiations framework aimed at achieving agreements between miners and Aboriginal people.[9] Negotiations and agreements provide the mechanism by which Aboriginal interests are protected and benefits secured. The process also delivers the certainty the miners demand and establishes terms for ongoing engagement and relationships during the life of an operation.

In the modern era agreements with traditional Aboriginal landowners are increasingly promoted as the most effective way to resolve often competing interests, and avoiding disputation and disruption to mining projects, while recognising and protecting Aboriginal interests in land. This is also seen in the way agreements feature in the *Native Title Act 1993*. The Act is Commonwealth legislation that applies across all states and territories and was introduced following the High Court decision in the *Mabo* case. Like the Land Rights Act, the Native Title Act relies on agreement making, under the 'right to negotiate' provisions to resolve competing interests between Aboriginal people and miners. No right exists, however, to refuse consent under the Native Title Act.

The Granites Agreement case-study

In Central Australia the first agreements negotiated by the CLC were the oil and gas agreements at Palm Valley and Mereenie in 1981 and 1982 respectively. In August 1983, the original Granites Gold Mine Agreement was signed. These are some of the earliest production agreements signed under the Land Rights Act (and in Australia), all of which continue to the present, although each is in a renegotiated form. This section provides a brief background to the Granites Agreement and highlights aspects that make it an interesting case study.

The Granites Agreement is the first agreement for extracting minerals in Central Australia. The development of the mine from abandoned historical goldfield, to 'world class' operation, has occurred entirely under the auspices of the agreements made with Aboriginal landowners. The mine has operated continuously since that time without disruption or disputation with local Aboriginal groups. In many ways the agreement represents a benchmark with respect to negotiating capacity and giving effect to Aboriginal land rights, having been negotiated under the mining provisions of the Land Rights Act. While some of the mining company's titles pre-dated the land becoming Aboriginal land and there was no legal capacity to refuse those particular tenements, the reality was that traditional Aboriginal landowners had considerable sway over the development of the mine. If traditional owners had withheld consent to certain additional leases required by the company, development of the mine would have been

severely disrupted as the pre-existing interests held by the mining company were far too small to support a modern mining operation.

Of particular interest in terms of investigating implementation practice is that over the 23 years of operation, ownership of the mine has changed. As a result of corporate takeovers, there have been effectively three distinct corporations that have operated the mine – namely North Flinders Mines (NFM), Normandy Mining, and Newmont. Each owner has brought a different corporate style and approach that has influenced the outcomes of the agreement. In addition, the political and social context in which the agreement has operated has changed over time. Strong political hostility existed in the 1980s when the mine commenced. The era was characterised by a strong oppositional stance on the part of the mining industry lobby to the legal recognition of Aboriginal land rights. During the last decade or so, globalisation, coupled with modern society's rising expectations for responsible development, has influenced the mining industry in Australia to recast its policy agenda to incorporate the elements of corporate social responsibility and the principles of sustainable development.

In relation to the Granites, achieving benefits for Aboriginal people has taken far more than the act of reaching agreement. The intended positive outcomes that occurred at the Granites depended on how the agreement was implemented. Some of the key measures taken include:

- A clearly articulated corporate social responsibility policy, backed strongly with leadership and support at the corporate and managerial levels within the operating company;
- Organisational structures that facilitate positive engagement between the company and Aboriginal people;
- Collaboration between the company, Aboriginal people, and government in developing strategies to address Aboriginal disadvantage;
- Making sufficient human and financial resources available to implement initiatives; and
- 'On ground' personnel who possess a strong motivation to cause positive changes for the benefit of Aboriginal people.

Outcomes under the employment provisions of the agreement, which are intended to give preferential employment for local Aboriginal people, are examined in the following section. One component of the benefit package, employment, provides a convenient illustration of the effect of the implementation of such measures.

Employment under the Granites Agreement

The potential benefit from the work at the mine for local Aboriginal people was recognised, and the matter raised at the initial consultations over the mine proposals with the Warlpiri traditional Aboriginal owners in 1982. It was agreed that the company would give employment and contract opportunities to Aboriginal people or groups and ensure that as many as practicable be employed or contracted 'where they are capable of carrying out in a satisfactory manner the particular work required'.

Currently Indigenous people make up a substantial portion of the employees at Newmont's Granites Gold mine. As at August 2009 there were 97 Indigenous people employed, representing 14 per cent of the total workforce of around 700 company personnel and contractors. Jobs are with either the mining company or its contractors and include a range of occupations: truck drivers, mill technicians, work supervisors, trades, services and labourers. Nearly half of the Indigenous employees work with the underground mine contractor and the next biggest employer is the catering and camp services contractor.

The remarkable aspect is that the mine has maintained a steady level of Aboriginal employment over the last decade with numbers fluctuating between 70 and 100 Aboriginal people at any one time over the past 5 years. This level of employment has been maintained during the time Normandy owned the mine and continued since Newmont took over in 2002. Prior to this the outcomes around Aboriginal employment were quite different. Figure 2 shows the employment trends over the life of the Granites.[10]

Figure 2
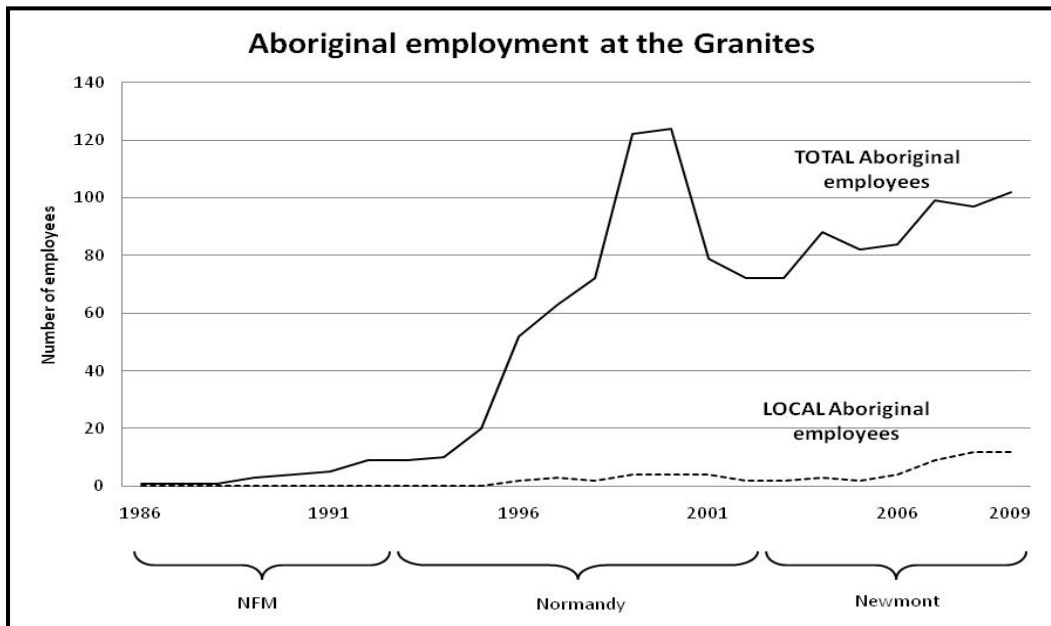
The first 10 years of the operation of the Granites Mine delivered very little employment to Aboriginal people. Up to around 1996 there were no more than 10 Aboriginal people working at the mine at any one time and no one from the remote communities closest to the mine. This was despite obligations in the mining agreement to employ as many Aboriginal people as practicable. Converting those obligations into practice clearly needed a significantly greater level of effort.

The operating company over this time was NFM, which initiated the Granites project, negotiated access, and developed the mine. NFM was a fledgling company with strong technical and engineering capacity and almost entirely focused on this one project. The early priorities were establishing a profitable mine and paying back capital. The approach to Aboriginal employment over this time was essentially on a basis equivalent to anyone else who might want to seek work on the mine. In other words the work was there if Aboriginal people could do the job. No proactive scheme was applied to train or attract Aboriginal people to work at the mine; the focus was on production and mine development, and there was little experience or working precedents for achieving Aboriginal employment more widely in the mining industry. Within the company, nor was there the particular skills set required to recognise and address issues associated with the massive disadvantage faced in Aboriginal communities.

A marked improvement in numbers of Aboriginal employees occurred in the period leading up to 2000, when Aboriginal employment reached 120 employees. This was a result of a number of factors. Importantly the operation was as its most expansive stage with open cut operations at two locations, the Granites and Dead Bullock Soak, where there was also underground mining development. The amount of material being mined reached record levels at this time.

There were also a number of factors that encouraged local Aboriginal people to take up the employment opportunities. First, the corporate ownership of the mine changed. Through a series of convoluted corporate dealings, Normandy assumed effective ownership of the mine. Normandy was founded by Robert de Crespigny, who grew the company through a series of corporate acquisitions into the largest Australian owned gold miner. In contrast to the normal engineering or geological background for mining company executives, De Crespigny was an accountant who was interested in improving relations between Aboriginal people and miners. In 1991 he became a founding member of the Council of Reconciliation and chaired its Mining Committee, which included ex-Central Land Council Chair, the late Wenten Rubunja, and the then Northern Land Council (NLC) Chair, Galarrwuy Yunupingu. An aim of the committee was 'improving consultation and understanding between the mining industry and Aboriginal people'.[11] Normandy was probably one of the first major corporations to engage Aboriginal people in senior advisory positions and give them the task of developing schemes to address Aboriginal employment.

Around this time the mining industry signaled a fresh approach to Aboriginal issues. For example in 1995 Leon Davis, Chief Executive Officer of CRA Ltd (now Rio Tinto), Australia's largest mining company, shook the industry's anti-land rights agenda in his speech to the Securities Institute where he said:

> The Native Title Act laid the basis for better exploration access, and thus increased the probability that the next decade will see a series of CRA operations developed in active partnership with Aboriginal people.[12]

He subsequently told his managing directors of his desire 'to move away from a litigious framework … and to establish innovative ways of sharing with/or compensating Indigenous people'. In April that year CRA's exploration division signed the first native title agreement in Australia for an exploration program over the St Vidgeons pastoral lease just south of Arnhem land. This predated the High Court's *Wik* decision, which brought pastoral leases into the Native Title regime and ultimately persuaded the industry to come to terms with the legal reality of Aboriginal interests in land over the large proportion of Australia.

In addition to shifting attitudes within the mining industry, pressure was mounting at the operational site level to deliver positive social outcomes. By 1998 the Granites mine was well established and becoming quite profitable. It was increasingly clear from the landowners' view that the mine's immediate future was secure, which lead to the CLC agitating particularly hard for improved Aboriginal employment.

Responding to the shifting corporate expectations as well as external demands of Aboriginal organisations, the mine management at the Granites established a dedicated Indigenous Affairs Unit in 1997. The unit was able to concentrate on addressing the barriers hindering increased Aboriginal employment. Being part of the larger Normandy group with experience with other mine sites around Australia, the Granites site was able to draw on precedents for Aboriginal training programs in other areas, particularly those in Tennant Creek. Furthermore, obligations for Aboriginal employment contained in the Agreement were for the first time written into contracts for mine services, thereby passing on the obligations under the agreement to the contractors.

Major contractors such as Roche Mining and the ore haulage contractor Bulkhaul responded positively and encouraged Aboriginal people from the region to take up employment opportunities. At the height of the open pit mining contracts there were 120 Aboriginal people working at the operation. Around thirty of these were with one contractor alone, Central Desert Enterprises (CDE), which was Aboriginal owned and operated. Over time, as the open pits were completed, employee numbers reduced as contracts wound up.

In 1998 the CLC set up its Mining Employment Unit specifically aimed at supporting initiatives to get Aboriginal people work at the mine. This unit was funded initially by the Australian Government Structured Training and Employment Projects (STEP). In collaboration with Normandy, a pre-vocational program was designed to give Aboriginal people introductory training to mine work. These early attempts to engage local communities in the pre-vocational employment program were met, initially, with a lack of enthusiasm. Following several community information sessions, one of the pre-vocational courses was able to be made up of entirely community people. While the majority finished the course, retention was disappointing. Low levels of literacy and numeracy, limited experience with full time work, cultural and family obligations back on the community, and homesickness, are some of the hugely challenging factors that make transition to work on the mine very difficult.

In 2002, Newmont, a US based global gold mining company, bought Normandy and became the owner of the Granites gold mine. As a result of the acquisition, Newmont became the world's largest gold producer with operations in several continents. Newmont places a high value on its *social licence to operate* as the Managing Director, John Dow, explained in 2004:

> We have committed to supporting and promoting Indigenous economic, social and cultural rights and working toward the achievement of a positive social impact for all our operations. … We – Newmont and the Industry, need to be responsible tenants through providing employment and business development, building community capacity, governance support and education and health.[13]

Newmont continued to work with the CLC and used the experience from the initial training programs to develop further the Aboriginal employment program. With funding assistance from the Australian Government, the pre-vocational course was improved. The content was refined, time spent on the mine increased, training wages paid, and work on the mine in real jobs was guaranteed for successful participants.

Currently pre-vocational courses are made up of 10 weeks training and 10 weeks job rotation. Courses take in 10 to 12 Aboriginal people and are run once or twice a year. Participants are drawn from the CLC's Mining Employment Unit register of interested people. A range of tickets and licences for plant and machinery and first aid certificates are gained, along with first-hand experience of life on the mine site. Approximately 20 per cent of the cost of the pre-vocational course is supported by Government employment programs, with Newmont funding the balance. Full time work is offered for those successfully completing the program. The participants are rotated through several departments during a probationary period that is followed by taking up vacancies as they arise in their preferred department. Australian Government funding also supports an on-site Indigenous mentor. Positive collaboration and cooperation between the mining company and land council has made the Granites into one of the largest employers of Aboriginal people in the Central Australian region.[14]

While the strategy using the pre-vocational course was successful in bringing Aboriginal people in Central Australia into work at the mine, the low numbers of Aboriginal people employed from the remote communities closest to the mine remains disappointing. The most recent strategy developed by Newmont in collaboration with the CLC to address this is the

'Yapa Maintenance Crew', which brings community based workers to work on site as a casual labour pool.[15] The crew is supervised outside the mine's operational departments and offers a range of labouring and semi-skilled services across the mine. This format offers a more flexible and supportive work environment and gives employees time to adjust to the long shifts and structured life on the mine. The aim is to provide the employees an opportunity to transition into the operation departments. Currently Newmont has around 12 local community members working on the mine, which is an all-time high.

Higher rates of Aboriginal employment remain a goal for the mining company and the CLC. This will be achieved provided the implementation initiatives and support both continue and expand. Another challenge is retention of recruits, which hinges on ensuring support and mentoring, continued training and career development.

Employment has been considered in some detail, but employment is only one component of the benefits package under the Agreement. The most significant, from the traditional Aboriginal owners' point of view, are the royalty payments under the agreement. There are very few jobs available in remote Aboriginal communities, and royalty payments are often the only source of income other than social security payments. Royalties also represent tangible recognition and respect of Aboriginal people's traditional ownership of the land. Land has traditionally provided the resources to sustain life, and access to those resources by others has always carried obligations.

A detailed analysis of payments is complex and beyond the scope of this paper; however, in terms of generating positive outcomes, the approach taken to implementation is critical. For instance there are clearly tensions between directing payments to the immediacy of everyday needs - cars for transport, household items, paying off debts - as against pursuing the longer term goal of creating a sustainable benefit beyond the life of the mine. Currently this is managed through a mix of payments to royalty association members and long term commercial and financial investments.

In an effort to pursue sustainable outcomes, a recent initiative has been the development of the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT). The trust was established in 2003 following renegotiation of the Granites Agreement with Newmont. The company and Aboriginal groups shared an interest in promoting long term community development. Negotiations lead to additional annual payments being made and an agreement that part of the these additional amounts are to be paid to WETT, the rules of which limit the use of moneys to the improvement of educational and training outcomes for Warlpiri people. An Aboriginal royalty association functions as the WETT Trustee and makes all funding decisions. This association is assisted by a WETT advisory group which advises on the development of appropriate projects and is made up of affected community members, representatives from the mining company, the CLC, and Commonwealth and Northern Territory Government officers. Collaboration is a key principle here, as one of the major concerns is over the risk that the Government will withdraw from basic service delivery and leave it to Aboriginal associations and trust money to substitute normal government expenditure. The preferred approach is to collaborate with government, to lever complementary government program funding into areas identified and supported by the Aboriginal community.

The CLC has established a dedicated Community Development Unit that has officers responsible for WETT. In developing the WETT programs the emphasis is on community member participation and creating community ownership of projects that seek to achieve wide and lasting community benefit. The aim is to provide learning opportunities for all Warlpiri people from young children to adults. Aboriginal educationalists and their existing advocacy structures are used to give oversight and advice on the development and monitoring of

progress in the programs. As a result, there is an emphasis on two-way learning so that language and cultural learning are supported, as well as more mainstream vocational skills, education and training.

Those same factors identified in relation to implementation of employment provisions operate in relation to the positive outcomes from payments under the Agreement: having a strong sustainable development agenda, appropriate structures that facilitate cooperation and collaboration between miners, Aboriginal people and government, appropriate resourcing, and personnel committed to community development.

Conclusion

Through experiences at such sites as the Granites, the mining industry is developing a level of sophistication in dealing with Aboriginal landowners. Responsible mining companies are using the lessons learned and seeking to engage positively through agreements with traditional Aboriginal landowners. There is a growing understanding that positive outcomes from agreements are very closely linked to effective implementation. This is evident at several sites where prospects are being developed, such as Arafura Resources, which has a rare earths project at Nolans Bore, 120 kilometres north of Alice Springs, and also Minemakers in the Barkly Tablelands east of Tennant Creek, which is developing a phosphate rock mine at Wunara. The companies at both these locations are working closely with the CLC through the feasibility process that decides whether mining is viable.

A significant trend over the last two years has been the renewed interest in uranium. There is currently serious re-evaluation of the known uranium prospects in Central Australia. Intensive exploration activity is currently being undertaken by Cameco at the Angela Pamela deposit 25 kilometres south of Alice Springs, Toro Energy's Napperby deposit 100 kilometres north west of Alice Springs and the Pikili deposit on Mt Doreen owned by Energy Metals. Significant investment is being made at each deposit by the respective explorers. Decisions whether to mine for each of the projects remains several years away, as the deposits are systematically sampled and their respective commercial feasibility tested. These deposits are not on Aboriginal land; however, through the Native Title Act, the CLC has negotiated exploration agreements with the respective companies for each of the projects. The agreements relate to exploration only and are mainly for the purposes of protecting sacred sites and ensuring Aboriginal land owners are consulted over exploration work. The agreement with Cameco over Angela Pamela has a particular emphasis on Aboriginal employment. This has resulted in two positions being held by Aboriginal people since January 2009 and at least a dozen other local Aboriginal people working in shorter term work on various surveys.

Positive engagement with Aboriginal groups is high on the uranium industry agenda. The industry representative body, the Australian Uranium Association (AUA), states that 'the economic, health and social wellbeing of Indigenous people who own land containing uranium deposits is a paramount issue of social responsibility and business sustainability for the uranium industry'.[16] The AUA has formed an Indigenous Dialogue Group which includes several high profile Aboriginal leaders. Information on uranium is a focus of the group which is co-convened by Warren Mundine. Talking at the launch of the group, Mundine said 'from an indigenous point of view, there is little sense in excluding opportunities for economic development on the basis of poor information'.

The CLC has focused its efforts on providing affected Aboriginal land owners and groups with information on the unique nature of uranium and risks associated with radiation. Peak conservation body, the Australian Conservation Foundation, as well as the AUA

assisted with community information sessions and production of material and media for on-going educational purposes.

While Aboriginal people across Central Australia remain ambivalent about the prospects of uranium mining, the potential for deriving benefits becomes a major factor for consideration, particularly where there are agreements on offer that are backed by a commitment to implementation to achieve positive outcomes. In terms of mitigating risks, many claims are made about how well regulated the uranium industry is and how well the environment will be protected. A major outstanding matter, from the Aboriginal landowning point of view, is how risks will be monitored, particularly in the absence of any objective and independent regulator in Central Australia. In Kakadu such a role is performed by the Office of the Supervising Scientist. Without the reassurance provided by such a body, it is difficult to envisage traditional Aboriginal landowners in Central Australia giving wholehearted support for uranium developments on their country.[17]

Current government policies, such as the Commonwealth's Intervention, including community leasing, the Northern Territory Hub Towns policy and the introduction of mega-shires, have combined to cause major upheaval in Aboriginal communities. The result is an overwhelming feeling of detachment from the new governance regime that controls life on communities.

In contrast, the consultation processes over exploration and mining, agreement negotiation and implementation have operated relatively consistently over the last 25 years, and are now well understood by Aboriginal people. It remains one of the few areas where Aboriginal people are actively engaged, their views and interests respected, and where they can determine outcomes. Where agreements are entered into, it is incumbent on companies, land councils and government to plan for effective implementation in order for Aboriginal people to benefit from mining developments. As can be seen from the Granites, this leads to benefits for both the company and Aboriginal people.

Rodger Barnes has worked for many years as Manager Mining at the Central Land Council in Alice Springs. His role has been to consult with traditional Aboriginal landowners and represent their interests in dealings with exploration and mining applications. He holds a BSc (Hons) in Geology and Geography from James Cook University. He is presently undertaking postgraduate studies at The University of Queensland through the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre and the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining. His research is on agreements between Aboriginal groups and mining companies, using the Granites Gold Mine as a case study.

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1   Tanami is the anglicised version of the Warlpiri name *Janami,* a rockhole 100 kilometres north-west of the Granites. The Aboriginal guides who accompanied Davidson no doubt lead him to the rockhole where he established a camp and marked 'Tanami' on his map.

2   At the peak of open-cut mining in 2004-2005, Newmont Tanami Operations was the second largest producer of gold in Australia (source: Surbiton Associates 2007).

3   In the 2006 Census there were 192,898 persons usually resident in Northern Territory. Of the total population in Northern Territory 27.8 per cent were Indigenous persons, compared with 2.3 per cent Indigenous persons in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics).

4   From the Prime Ministerial press statement announcing the inquiry into Aboriginal land rights and commissioning of Justice Woodward to conduct the inquiry, 15 December 1972.

5   Aboriginal Land Rights Commission, Second report (April 1974), Justice Woodward, para. 568.

6   The CLC principal lawyer at the time suggests that national land rights were scrapped as a result of 'those hideous advertisements depicting land rights as a set of walls built by black hands across the country' See Donald, Bruce (1998) in Wright, Alexis (ed) 'Take Power – like this old man here', IAD Press, Alice Springs, pp. 78-84.

7   The Northern Territory Chamber of Mines is now superseded by the Northern Territory Resources Council.

8   See submission (2002) by the Northern Territory Chamber of Mines to the (former) Standing Committee on Industry and Resources' inquiry into impediments to increasing investment in mineral and petroleum exploration in Australia (the *Prosser Inquiry on Resource Impediments*).

9   Agreements are legal documents made by mining companies and Aboriginal groups with interests in land affected by an exploration or mining project. Agreements can be voluntary common law contracts, or more usually, negotiated pursuant to statutory provisions of legislation such as the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cwth) and the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976* (Cwth). The terms and conditions of agreements define the relationship and understanding of the parties and establish processes for future dealings. Substantive matters generally include such things as: project approval and support; recognition of Aboriginal interests; compensation and financial payments to Aboriginal landowners; sacred site and heritage protection; instruction on Aboriginal culture; Aboriginal employment, contracting and business development; liaison and communication; and environmental management and protection.

10   The data from 2004 onwards is based on monthly Indigenous employment tracking figures kindly provided by Newmont to assist with the research. Data prior to 2004 is taken from a range of sources including reports, announcements, and interviews with personnel from that time. While the earlier data is by no means as dense there is a good coincidence of estimates of numbers of Aboriginal people between sources.

11   Viewed 30 October 2009 at http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/1992/2/7.html.

12   Cited in Bruce Harvey (2002) speech to Institute of Postcolonial Studies, 'Mining-Indigenous Agreement Making: A Global Context'.

13   Dow, John (2004) Managing Director Newmont Mining, speech at the Minerals Council of Australia Sustainable Development conference in Alice Springs.

14   The 97 Indigenous employees exceed the CLC's 88 Aboriginal workers. The CLC is historically the largest employer of Aboriginal people in Central Australia.

15   *Yapa* is the Warlpiri word for people, being Warlpiri Aboriginal people in this context.

16   Australian Uranium Association (2009). 'Australian Uranium' *Quarterly Bulletin* 7: 1.

17   The position of Supervising Scientist for the Alligator Rivers Region was established following the Australian Government's decision to approve uranium mining at Ranger, to meet the need for an independent supervisory body to ensure that the environment of the Alligator Rivers Region is protected from the potential impacts of uranium mining activities.

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Movements in Aboriginal Art
John Oster

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The Aboriginal art 'industry'

Traditionally the production of creative arts in all its varied forms sits well outside what we would normally classify as an industry. It's too chaotic, too ephemeral and too reliant on individual creative juices to fall into our usual perceptions of corporate enterprise and more formal industrial systems. But it is important to understand (as in the mainstream non-Indigenous art scene), that Aboriginal art has industrial elements, such as some systematic approach to production, marketing, promotion, and now, regulation. Perhaps 'art scene' or 'art sector' are more apt terms to use, but for present purposes let's use the term 'industry' because I want to talk about factors that are separate from the actual creation of art works by artists.

Historically art movements have come and gone; French Impressionists sustained an art movement for some 50 years from about 1840 to 1890 almost solely through the efforts of artists and collectors. By contrast, the Aboriginal art movement in Australia is sustained with additional industrial devices working alongside artists and collectors. These devices include Government funding, an infrastructure of art organisations, substantial reliance on Information and Communications Technology, employment strategies and an extensive product range. It is likely there will always be an artistic expression by Aboriginal people, and therefore an Aboriginal art sector, as there has been for thousands of years. Naturally, this will involve development and morphing of genres and products with a greater or lesser concentration on what we understand as fine art. The point is that this expression is now sustained and promoted with the aid of industrial devices.

At the heart of the Aboriginal art industry are some 100 organisations known as Art Centres owned and operated by Aboriginal artists. These organisations typically operate in remote communities as not-for-profit corporations with a board of Aboriginal artists. Also typically, they are managed by non-Indigenous Art Centre managers whose main role is to broker the relationship between artists and the marketplace.

This environment is at once both chaotic and well organised.

It is chaotic in the sense that Aboriginal communities are themselves chaotic places. There is constant movement of people within and between communities, and there are many local misconceptions about markets and mainstream Australian culture. There is limited understanding by whitefellas about a mysterious cultural narrative contained in the artwork, and there are similar misunderstandings where blackfellas have poor literacy and numeracy skills.

This environment is also well organised in that Art Centres have grown up with a particular culture and established a strong presence both in the marketplace and in remote communities. Historically they have been represented by peak organisations such as the Association of Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA) based in Darwin and Desart based in Alice Springs. These organisations have tended to influence operations as their resourcing, training and advocacy for Art Centres have upheld particular values around promotion of Aboriginal culture, fair trade and due process.

Aboriginal artworkers

We understand that there are many Aboriginal people working as artists – as many as 3,000 in central Australia. But there have been very few Aboriginal people formally trained and employed in administrative positions in central Australia. In the language of this industry Aboriginal artworkers are those people who work in an Art Centre, not as artists but in some kind of support capacity, either as manual labourers or administrative and clerical workers. In the run up to the 2007 federal election there was much debate about the role of the Government's Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) and Aboriginal employment generally. As the Howard Government moved to scrap CDEP in the context of the NT Emergency Response (The Intervention) the debate focused on how many people working in Art Centres might lose their jobs and, consequently, how many Art Centres might be forced to close.

In this context Desart conducted a survey of central Australian Art Centres to assess the number of people who might be affected and the impact of proposed changes. It was found that there were as few as 13 Aboriginal people working as artworkers in Art Centres – this in a region where there were 47 art organisations and as many as 3,000 Aboriginal artists. Desart took the position that Art Centres as Aboriginal organisations should be employing more Aboriginal people to meet the genuine aspirations of local people who wanted to work, as well as other political and social considerations.

In 2008 Desart instituted an Aboriginal Artworker Program with the aim of training and employing 60 Aboriginal Artworkers over 3 years. In the first year, 70 people engaged with the program.

One of the failures in the past was that too many CDEP workers were drafted into part time employment doing the most menial of tasks, offering little real training or skills development. Traditionally this work involved stretching canvas, mixing paint, cleaning and rubbish collection. It is little wonder that recruitment and job retention was low. There is now a genuine shift taking place. A good number of artworkers will now be engaged in formal traineeships with training towards Certificate III in Arts Administration - and ongoing employment. This is not an easy achievement. In central Australia there are only 7 secondary schools, in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek, and none in the many outlying Aboriginal communities. The culture of schooling stops at the end of primary school if, in fact, such a culture even exists, for many communities. It is estimated that some 2,000 children in the Northern Territory are not enrolled in education. This space is not a training void, but delivery of non school VET training tends to be fragmented and dispersed.

The responsibility for providing post school training is taken up by TAFE institutions and private Registered Training Organisations that are presented with the ongoing challenges of distance, remoteness and endemic low literacy and numeracy. This means that the case management of students on an individual basis is critical. Mentoring is a decisive element, working side by side with training. Because training is often delivered in short blocks of time whether on site in communities or at some central location, it means there is considerable lag time, which needs to be filled with mentoring that is culturally aware and sensitive to community pressures.

There is a kind of mantra around training in central Australia that says people are often over trained and under employed. Training organisations have often provided training on demand that has not been tied to a particular job. This has applied particularly in the art industry. Art Centres have used training organisations to provide a whole raft of arts

development training leading to better art production, better print making and the like. But in the past there has been little attention to the kinds of areas that will sustain artworker employment such as marketing, computer training and customer service. Happily, these subjects are now being offered, albeit on a limited basis.

At the same time the federal government has moved to fill the employment gap by providing funding for paid Aboriginal positions as artworkers in Art Centres. Over the past two years there have been 54 places created which have moved people from CDEP to Art Centre work. It means that artworkers can be employed in a regular part time job of 20 hours per week at a salary of around $19,000 pa including benefits. It means more autonomy for organisations in meeting staffing needs, as well as providing an opportunity for sustainable employment and professional development for Indigenous people. It also means employees benefit from mainstream employment conditions such as wages, superannuation and access to training and professional development.

This has been a positive and thoughtful development when we look back at the prospects on offer in 2007.

The Indigenous Art Commercial Code of Conduct

Much is written and spoken about Aboriginal art. Generally these pronouncements come from factional interests or from some commentators and journalists eager to latch onto emotive description of dysfunction and malpractice.

The world's art market has been described as the last unregulated market in the world. On 25 October 2009 the ABC screened 'The Great Contemporary Art Bubble',[1] an investigation of the greatest rise in art value the world has ever seen. The program highlighted an international art market dominated by dealers and auction houses and sustained by billionaire hedge-funders and insider trading practices.

In Australia the commentary about Aboriginal art often focuses on two extremes; the creative wonders offered by Aboriginal artists which portray a rich and vibrant traditional culture reaching out to a contemporary reconciliation between black and white Australia, side by side with the scams perpetrated by rapacious dealers against unsuspecting Aboriginal artists. The art and the artists have been able to maintain our respect, but we have tended to have a more jaundiced view of the dealers in Aboriginal art even when they have operated respectably.

The ABC Four Corners program has also waded into the debate examining the machinations of the Australian art market in their program 'Art for Art's Sake' screened on 28 July 2008.[2] The program focused on the nefarious dealings in the Lawson Menzies auction house and the activities of various backyard dealers in Alice Springs.

Clearly the Aboriginal art industry is an area of important economic activity generating perhaps $500 million per year, and crying out for some regulatory structure. This has lead to the development of the Indigenous Australian Art Commercial Code of Conduct[3] (the Code) which is now ready for imminent release following a four year gestation period, since April 2005.

In June 2007 the Australian Senate Inquiry into Australia's Indigenous Visual Arts and Craft Sector[4] released its report in which 9 of its 29 recommendations focused on the Code. It's interesting that development of the Code was an industry-driven initiative that predated the inquiry by more than a year.

During 2008 the Australia Council for the Arts brought together an Industry Reference Group to determine the values and language of the Code. This in itself has been a

challenging journey. For the first time ever the significant players in the industry sat down in one room. They built a document describing the fundamental values and minimum operating standards, based on values that might be expected in any industry. It is also pertinent that the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) have been closely involved in the process.

In October 2009 the Cultural Ministers Council endorsed the Code. Their endorsement is significant because the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) will administer the Code initially, and it brings into play Australian Government compliance with the Code through public galleries, notwithstanding that the Code is essentially a private industry device.

It is expected that there are some 500 potential signatories to the Code taking in galleries, agents and private dealers along with Aboriginal Art Centres. The Code has been criticised because it involves voluntary signatories rather than mandatory compliance. It needs to be noted that there are only two mandatory codes in Australia – one in the franchising industry and the other in the horticulture industry. Generally the ACCC is reluctant to impose mandatory codes unless there is significant and uncontrollable industry mischief that cannot be solved, first, by voluntary measures.

Consideration of the Code leads to the notion of regulating what is essentially a creative environment by using a regulatory tool more apt to an industrial setting.

Nicholas Rothwell, the arts and culture writer for *The Australian*, examined the issue in his article 'Indigenous Art Market Enters Era of the Code'.[5] He promoted two essential theories. The first is that the Code represents the moralisation of the industry in line with particular Art Centre values with the intent that Art Centres hold some kind of self righteous moral high ground. His second theory is that the introduction of regulation will lead to production of more generic lower quality art. Both of these positions need to be debunked.

Rothwell contends that

> Art centre work is marketed as untainted, as against the work of carpetbaggers and independent operators. This is where the code fits in: it is part of the intense moralisation of the indigenous art selling space…Together, these acts chart a course. They mark the official triumph and enthronement of the art centre paradigm.

The common values promoted by Art Centres consist of fairness for artists, transparency in transactions and due process in dealing with people. There is nothing particularly radical in these values and they form the basis of minimum standards in most industries. The Code is not a radical document because it has been combed by major players, each with differing vested interests. Its oversight by the ACCC has also ensured that it is consistent with Australian trade practices law. This is hardly a home town victory for the Art Centre corner.

In terms of regulation versus creativity he says,

> In short, indigenous art is no longer quite what it was 20 years ago: the wild freedom-rider, expressing the truth of deep culture and tradition to a blind, uncaring world. It has been regulated and rationalised. It is an industry, an export trade in beauty, clustered over by well-meaning managers. The era of the code now begins. It remains to be seen whether it is an age of gold.

He is concerned that regulation will stifle creativity and destroy the very ground on which the sector is built. He fails to understand that regulation of *artists* is impossible. Artists always march to the beat of their own drum as they produce works from a well spring of a complex and vibrant culture. No amount of regulation in far off Sydney or other major cities will stop them or change what they produce.

What the Code is trying to regulate is the behaviour of non-artists in the industry – dealers, agents, retailers and galleries. These are eminently open to regulation, as are dealers in motor vehicles or real estate. Regulating the dealing doesn't regulate the product. No amount of dealer regulation will change a vehicle, a house or a piece of land – let alone the work of Tiger Palpatja or Hector Burton sitting under a tree at Amata.

John Oster is Executive Officer of Desart, the peak organisation for central Australian Aboriginal Art Centres. He has worked in the Aboriginal arts area for the past 13 years with significant time spent in remote communities at Balgo and Mawanjum.

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1   http://www.abc.net.au/tv/guide/netw/200910/programs/ZY9814A001D2009-10-25T150000.htm accessed 26/10/2009.

2   http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2008/s2314182.htm accessed 26/10/2009.

3   The code can be viewed at http://www.indigenousartcode.org.

4   Details of the senate Inquiry can be viewed at http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/Committee/ecita_ctte/completed_inquiries/2004-07/indigenouis_arts/index.htm.

5   On 12 October 2009. Rothwell's article can be viewed at: http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,26195067-16947,00.html.

Melbourne's Outback

Peter Sutton

Anthropologists, naturalists, artists, writers and pioneer motorists established an intriguing set of links between deeply suburban Melbourne and the Red Centre before the end of the 1930s. The Centre thus took on the role of a hinterland counterpoint of Melbourne itself, a Wild Beyond from which the restrained civilisation of Marvellous Melbourne could be distinguished, but with which it might also be advantageously associated.

The story of this love affair is partly one of post-colonial progressivism and modernism in suburban Australia, when self-acceptance of Australia and the bush as part of Us, and of Indigenous Australians as fully human, gradually overwhelmed a former attitude of huddling against a threatening wilderness and its imagined savageries. With virtuous hindsight it is also possible to see a darker side to the relationship, one in which, as Tom Griffiths eloquently put it, 'urban progressives pursued their fascination with the inscription and ritual of place, with the invention of names, monuments, cairns and pilgrimages. They were drawing the land into their grasp with a net of meaning and ceremony, filling its spaces and defending its silences'.[1] Here I have space only to sketch some of the Melbourne/Centre liaison.

I was born and raised in Melbourne 1946-66 and became aware of the allure of the Red Centre in childhood, at one of those just-back-from-my-trip slide shows that filled the evening hours that, after the conquest of television in 1956, would be eaten by *Gunsmoke*, *Zorro* and *In Melbourne Tonight*. In those days the magazine *Walkabout* was popular and always contained some stories and tourist advertising relating to parts of Central Australia. Much of the tone of popular exposure of the Centre was upbeat. It emphasised stark grandeur, the beauty of wildflowers after rain, the fellowship of the road, the toughness of the settlers. There was an odd mixture of racist stereotyping in the downmarket *Pix* or *Australasian Post* cartoons that were juxtaposed with the photogenic dignity of First Australians in ceremonial paint and *nagas*. These were the racier magazines that we found, naturally, only at the barber's.

The loneliness and menace of the Centre were also already well entrenched in its popularisation. I recall the pathos of John Heyer's brilliant film *The Back of Beyond* (1954) from some early viewing in Melbourne. The title itself, of course, is spoken from the lookout of an unstated coastal metropolis. From 1959 onwards the Leyland Brothers brought the Outback to town with a new, lighter touch, in four wheel drive, and in shorts, Speedos and bikinis. It was easy for us not to be aware that this City/Centre courtship was not young love, but had begun long before, in our grandparents' adulthoods and parents' childhoods.

On his return to Melbourne from anthropological field work in the Centre with Francis Gillen, Baldwin Spencer (1860-1929) gave illustrated lectures. Amongst those who attended was a young Charles Barrett (1879-1959). Barrett was deeply impressed. 'I heard the first phonograph records ever made of aboriginal songs: saw, on the screen, pictures of savage life in my own country that revealed a new world to me'.[2] 'A small boy to whom a shilling was riches paid a florin to hear a lecture on Aboriginal Life in Central Australia. It happened so long ago, every word the lecturer said is forgotten; but not the lantern picture of an Arunta corroboree, which made the boy vow that he would see the real thing – when he grew up'.[3] Barrett can't, it seems, have been a small boy at this event, since even Spencer's first experience of the Centre was in 1894 when Barrett was

already fifteen.[4] Spencer's first showing of ethnographic film from the Centre was at the Melbourne Town Hall in 1902.[5] By this stage Barrett was twenty-three. Maybe he wanted to imagine, in retrospect, this idea growing up inside him from almost his beginning. That would have given it greater authentication as a form of nativism. Barrett was big on Australian nativism, Black or White.

In due course Barrett, as an established and prolific Melbourne journalist and field naturalist, visited Central Australia more than once, publishing numerous popular accounts of its natural history and Indigenous culture. (He also travelled widely elsewhere.) From an early date he marked himself as a defender of the humanity of Aboriginal Australians and an advocate of respect for their culture, especially their art. He was also prepared to be frank about mistreatment and atrocities committed against Aboriginal people: 'There are dark pages in Australian history', he wrote in one of his earlier books.[6] These were still brave words in 1919. The Coniston Massacre (in the Northern Territory), and its exonerating jury, was yet to come.

Another prominent Melburnian writer of this inter-war period, Robert Henderson Croll (c1869-1947), also became fascinated by Central Australia. Over ten years from 1929 Croll visited the region six times, in the company of artists and scientists.[7] Rex Battarbee (1893-1973), the Melbourne artist who taught Albert Namatjira to paint in watercolours, was a friend of Croll's.[8] Battarbee, Croll and another Melbourne artist called John Gardner travelled together to Central Australia in 1934. This was the visit during which Namatjira and Battarbee began their historic relationship.[9] Gardner and Battarbee had already been to Hermannsburg Mission in the Centre in 1932.[10] Will Rowell (1898-1946) was another Melbourne artist who travelled to the Centre, with Croll in 1938.[11] More recent Melbourne artists, along with many others, have continued this hajj.

The prominent Melbourne artist Violet Teague (1872-1951) visited Hermannsburg in 1933, where her sister Una had first been in the previous year. This relationship of support for the Hermannsburg people by the Teagues continued for many years.[12] At one point Violet Teague sent the Mission samples of water piping recommended by Melbourne water engineer AS Kenyon (1867-1943). Kenyon was an ethnologist, naturalist and historian. He was also part of the progressivist circle that included Charles Barrett, with whom he published two books on Aboriginal subjects,[13] and Bob Croll, with whom he travelled to the Centre in 1933.[14] Barrett and Croll also published a book on Aboriginal art together.[15]

A key thread linking these people and many of their contemporaries is a rejection of the sense of a non-Aboriginal Australian as a displaced European, and a rejection of the bush as an alien and dangerous wildness that had to be brought under control in order to become something positive. These people included many bushwalkers and hikers, recreational campers, beach-worshipping vitalists, and nature preservationists. Their usual escapes from suburbia were the hills and coasts near their cities, but the Outback in a way represented the ultimate challenge to their own naturalisation as Australians who felt they belonged to this continent. It required redefinitions of beauty. At times it is possible to sense a displacing envy alongside their admiration for the deeply Indigenous Australians about whom they wrote, whose portraits they painted, or whose designs they borrowed for fabrics or woodcuts.

In various ways Barrett, Croll and company typify an urban middle-class Australian tradition in which progressive values are combined with a positive vision of a remote and natural hinterland and its traditional people, people who still live close to Nature and far from materialism. The Centre complements the City in ways that seem, at times,

medicinal. I do not relish cynical analyses of such things, their reduction to mere politics, their deconstruction without sympathy. But any ideology can become a problem.

Although Central Australia holds a similar history of symbolism for many Australians from all parts of the country, I am inclined to suggest that for Melburnians the connection is rather distinctive. Part of each major city's character and emplacement consists of the remoter hinterland to which it stands in contrast. All the other mainland capital cities of Australia have their own arid deep intra-state hinterlands reached only across huge distances. Brisbane has the Simpson Desert, as does Adelaide, but for Brisbane the entailed remote region is increasingly recognised to be Cape York Peninsula. Adelaide also has its far north-west, owned by some of the most traditional Aboriginal people remaining in the outback, a region known in supportive professional metropolitan circles as *The Lands*. There is an intimacy, a history of protective affection, in this in-house speech. In Brisbane, the equivalent shorthand among those who actually know first-hand what lies north of *FNQ* (far north Queensland) is *The Cape*. You say '*Up on the Cape*' rather than '*In Cape York Peninsula*'. Sydney used to have its *back o' Bourke*, the far west of New South Wales, but seems to be less in need of a validating hinterland than any other town in the country, and the phrase now sounds archaic. Perth has its vast hinterland of desert and traditional people but this is complemented by Western Australia's equivalent of *The Cape*: *The Kimberley*.

But Melbourne, even with its Wimmera and its Mallee, being in the smallest mainland state, could only manage *The Little Desert*. My home town would not be complete without having borrowed the Red Centre.

Peter Sutton *FASSA, is an anthropologist and linguist at the University of Adelaide and South Australian Museum. He has worked with Aboriginal people across much of remote Australia since 1969.*

His latest book, The Politics of Suffering, *will be reviewed in the next edition of* Dialogue.

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1   Griffiths, Tom (1996)*. Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 175.

2   Barrett, Charles (1942). *On the Wallaby: Quest and Adventure in Many Lands*. Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens: 190.

3   Barrett, Charles (1939). *Koonwarra: a Naturalist's Adventures in Australia*. London: Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford: 200.

4   Chisholm, AH (1979). Barrett, Charles Leslie (1879 - 1959). *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 7. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press: 185.

5   Limelight (2009). http://www.abc.net.au/limelight/docs/films/5_1_2_3.htm, accessed 17/11/09.

6   Barrett, Charles (1919). *In Australian Wilds: the Gleanings of a Naturalist*. Melbourne: Melbourne Publishing Company: 135.

7   Griffiths (1996) *op cit*: 174; Croll, Robert Henderson (1937). *Wide Horizons: Wanderings in Central Australia*. 2nd edition. Sydney: Angus & Robertson Ltd.

8   Croll, Robert Henderson (1939). *I Recall: Collections and Recollections*. Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens Limited: 104.

9   *ibid*: 105; Griffiths (1996) *op cit*: 184.

10 Griffiths (1996) *ibid*.

11 Croll (1939) *op cit*: 105.

12 Henson, Barbara (1992). *A Straight-out Man. F.W. Albrecht and Central Australian Aborigines*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press: 73, 85, 88, 95, 111, 204.

13 Barrett, C and Kenyon, AS (1929). *Australian Aboriginal Art*. Catalogue for Australian Aboriginal Art Exhibition, National Museum of Victoria. (preface by JA Kershaw) Melbourne, July; Barrett, Charles, and Kenyon, AS (c1935). *Blackfellows of Australia*, Sun Nature Book No 6, Sun News Pictorial, Melbourne.

14 Croll (1939) *op cit*: 105; Griffiths (1996) *op cit*: 189.

15 Barrett, C and Croll, RH (1943). *Art of the Australian Aboriginal*. Melbourne: Bread and Cheese Club.

Cartoons by **Blair McFarland**, who, with Tristan Ray, is Coordinator of the Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service (CAYLUS), which supports community initiatives that improve quality of life and address substance abuse affecting young people. Their work has reduced sniffing by up to 90 per cent in Aboriginal communities. They will report in the next issue of *Dialogue*.

we worry about the sniffers, esp the kids

Academy News

Australia – France Joint Action Program (SSP)

• *Ann Harding* has reported on the project 'Population Ageing and Social Policy: Modelling Our Future' (the APPSIM project), jointly with her French counterpart, *Dr Sophie Pennec*.

Professor Harding had a very successful week in Paris in September 2008, sponsored by FEAST/SSP, holding discussions with Francois Heran (Director of the Institute Nationale Economique and Demographique (INED) and with Sophie Pennec of INED; Peter Scherer, director of the OECD's health division; Chris Heady of the OECD's taxation policy area; with Asghar Zaidi, Herwig Immervol and Michael Forster of the OECD's Social Policy Division; and Didier Blanchet, Director of the Department of Economic Studies at INSEE, about France's use of microsimulation modelling and, in particular, about the use of the Destinie dynamic microsimulation model of pensions in French policy making. She also presented a seminar to the OECD on the use of microsimulation models in policy making in Australia, and to INSEE and to officials from a number of French Ministries and Research Institutes (including CNAV, IRDES, Ministry of Social Affairs, Treasury, etc) about new developments in microsimulation modelling in Australia.

Sophie Pennec visited Canberra February-May 2009, making contributions to both the APPSIM Project) and DYNOPTA with NATSEM.

The aim of the APPSIM microsimulation model 'is to provide a national dynamic microsimulation model able to project 50 years into the future and assess the future distributional and revenue consequences of changes in tax and outlay programs of Commonwealth Government Policy'. Simulating the future in the next 50 years requires complex and comprehensive modelling of numerous events and processes, as the population evolves not only in age but also in family structure, education, labour force participation, income, health, wealth and in the effect of different tax and transfer programs (income support, family payments, income tax etc).

During her previous visits to NATSEM, Dr Pennec has been mainly involved in the design and building of the demographic and household modules of APPSIM. She presented the design of the demographic modules at the conference of the Australian Population Association in 2008.

Her focus during the extended 2009 visit has been on the validation of the demographic modules, now that the APPSIM model has been programmed and the first version of most modules has been finished. Dr Pennec also took the opportunity during her stay to finalise a working paper on a macrosimulation model for demographics that can be used to link macrosimulation results to microsimulation model. She also prepared papers for the 2nd General Conference of the International Microsimulation Association, with Bruce Bacon, on demographics and on model validation, alignment and micro-macro linkages.

Dr Pennec also made a major contribution to the DYNOPTA project while in Australia. This is a large multidisciplinary research project led by the Australian National University, with participation by the University of Canberra. The project deals with risk factors that can affect heath during old age, costing their effects upon society. It is based on a pooled dataset of 9 longitudinal surveys, and a microsimulation model is being developed by NATSEM to project health, and the effects on changes in health, for the baby boomer

cohorts. Dr Pennec has been involved in the design of the microsimulation model; she wrote a technical note to propose a skeleton for the model and devised a prototype programming approach, using the software chosen for the model (ie, SAS). She also contributed to a DYNOPTA paper for the IMA conference that will subsequently be submitted to the *Journal of Population Research*.

During her stay, Dr Pennec also began her collaboration with Heather Booth from the Australian Demographic and Social Research Institute at the Australian National University, on population forecasting applied to France.

To date, the SSP project has produced five papers presented to international seminars and one Working Paper.

• *Christian Kull* (Monash University) has reported on his SSP project, jointly with *Jacques Tassin* (CIRAD Montpellier), 'Good or bad trees? Social and ecological debates over neo-Australian landscapes in Madagascar'.

A workshop was held in June at CIRAD's Campus International de Baillarguet (Montpellier, France). It was titled 'Paysages néo-Australiens à Madagascar: perspectives interdisciplinaires sur les conséquences socio-économiques et les opportunités offertes par les espèces ligneuses exotiques' and participants included: Christian Kull; Jacques Tassin; Stephanie Carrière (IRD, Montpellier); Sophie Moreau (Univ Marne-la-Vallée); Herve Rakoto Ramiarantsoa (IRD Orléans / Univ Poitiers); Chantal Blanc Pamard (IRD / CNRS / Centre d'Etudes Africains / EHESS, Paris); and Pierre Montagne (CIRAD, Antananarivo Madagascar. Several additional interested scholars from CIRAD attended portions of the workshop, notably Pascal Danthu (CIRAD Antananarivo Madagascar) and Jean-Michel Sarrailh (CIRAD Montpellier).

The workshop was a resounding success, judging by the interest of the invited participants and their comments during and after the event. The core group of six researchers (listed above) worked together throughout days 2 and 3 of the workshop to outline a proposed joint paper tentatively titled 'Hotspot or melting pot? The saga of Madagascar's alien biodiversity', to be targeted for publication in a high-level journal. The article argues that there is a lack of appreciation for introduced, or 'man-made' biodiversity, and that a more productive focus for policymakers than straight biodiversity conservation is a broader concept of sustainability. It uses the examples of important introduced trees in highland Madagascar: acacias, eucalypts, and pines. We emerged from the workshop with a clear theme for the article, a detailed outline, and a clear division of tasks.

Kull also met with Tassin for several days outside the workshop to a) finalise workshop logistics, b) finalise notes and disseminate the action plan regarding the workshop joint article, and c) discuss progress on a separate joint paper project. Tassin and Kull now have 5 joint publications and two in preparation.

The links established through this workshop have already produced two additional collaborations. Kull has been invited by Rakoto-Ramiarantsoa to a workshop in Orléans, France, in December 2009 on 'Géopolitique et environnement à Madagascar'; and by Montagne and Danthu to serve as an external evaluator of their research group in Antananarivo, Madagascar (Nov 2009).

Entirely by coincidence, a separate opportunity to build links to France presented itself during Kull's visit to Montpellier. The research agencies CIRAD, Agropolis, Cemagref, INRA, and IRD were sponsoring a major project called SETER (or 'Challenging theories and frameworks on socio-ecological systems with empirical results') that brought eight

high-profile international scholars to Montpellier for a month to evaluate and discuss a series of CIRAD research projects. A major focus of this project (and of an affiliated 'research school') was political ecology, a subfield in which Kull is an important participant. The invited international scholars included Nancy Peluso, Tom Bassett and Paul Robbins (all known to Kull) and he was invited to serve as a discussant in a public lecture series on political ecology on July 2-3. Feedback about his presentation was uniformly enthusiastic. Interactions with these invited scholars, their hosts (in particular Denis Gautier), and other French participants in the project (including Geneviève Michon, Bruno Locatelli and, others) were very fruitful, and will undoubtedly facilitate further links in the future.

Further information about the workshop and CIRAD is available at:
www.cirad.fr/ur/dynamique_forestiere/actualites/derniere_actualite/workshop_neo_austra lian_landscapes
www.cirad.fr/ur/green/actualites/conferences/seter or http://www.agropolisfondation.
fr/news/31/68/Seminar-series-on-Challenging-theories-and-frameworks-on-socio-
ecological-systemswith-empirical-results.html
formation.cirad.fr/actualites/la_political_ecology_theories_et_applications

Australia-China Exchange

Jan Pakulski, University of Tasmania has reported on his visit to China in May.

'I visited Fudan University in Shanghai, where I gave a paper on 'Elite and Society: Classic and Contemporary Elite Theory and Research' to the National Institute of Advanced Studies in Social Science; then Renmin University in Beijing, where I presented a paper on 'Social Inequality and Conflict Beyond Class' at the ISA RC28 meeting in the School of Sociology and Population Studies; and then at the Chinese Academy of the Social Sciences in Beijing, where I met colleagues-sociologists and discussed issues of sociological research and possible collaboration in the context of social and political change in China.

This was an exploratory and contact-establishing visit, resulting in food research contacts and exciting plans for collaboration with leading Chinese social scientists, in particular, Professors Deng Zhenglai, Dean of National Institute of Advanced Studies at Fudan, and his IAS team, Lang Youxing, Chair of Politics at Zhejiang University, and Wang Chunguang from the Institute of Sociology, CASS. Sociological research in China is developing very rapidly, and it is dominated by applied and policy research. Judging by the warm reception of my papers and endorsement of the proposal for collaborative study of reformist political elites, there is also a growing interest in political sociology – a novel domain of research and theoretical reflection in China. I was most impressed by the openness of discussions, depth of theoretical reflection and, above all, by the very warm reception, doubtless reflecting extremely good relations between the ASSA and CASS, between our countries, and between disciplinary colleagues.'

Australia-Japan Foundation Project

In 2008 the Academy assisted *Ann Harding*, from the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) at the University of Canberra, to obtain a grant from the Australia-Japan Foundation (AJF). Professor Harding has pioneered the development in Australia of microsimulation models, which have quickly become one of the critical tools allowing policy makers to assess the distributional impact of policy changes that they are

considering. The grant provided assistance to Professor Harding to hold a series of seminars in Japan which described the types of microsimulation models being constructed in Australia and their current use in policy reform processes. The objective in holding these seminars was to identify key government agencies and academic research institutes in Japan with an interest in assessing the consequences of social policy change and population ageing, and initiate a dialogue with selected academics and government officials to explore scope for future collaboration and identify possible areas for the exchange of technical expertise and skills.

Prior to this AJF project, there had not been any contact between NATSEM, Australia's key microsimulation modelling centre, and Japanese government agencies or academics. Many of the NATSEM models are designed to help assess the impact of population ageing upon the future shape of the economy and society and to help predict the future distributional consequences of possible policy changes. Such models are potentially of enormous use to Japan, as it faces population ageing on a scale that is much more severe than in Australia.

This AJF project had a profound impact, by establishing contacts, creating an ongoing dialogue and by establishing constructive working relationship between key Australian and Japanese researchers in the area of population ageing, policy responses, workforce ageing and associated subject areas. A further very positive outcome was that Professor Harding's visit to Japan helped kindle greater interest in microsimulation modelling in Japan. Subsequent to her visit in late January 2009, two officials from Japan presented papers at the 2nd General Conference of the International Microsimulation Association in Ottawa, Canada in early June 2009. To the best of Professor Harding's knowledge, no Japanese officials attended the first General Conference two years earlier in Vienna, providing evidence of new developments in this field in Japan.

Whilst in Japan under the auspices of the AJF visit, Professor Harding gave 3 seminars, followed by meetings and other consultations, with the Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry (RIETI), the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (IPSS), both in Tokyo, and at the Research Centre for Socionetwork Strategies at the Kansai University in Osaka. The three seminars presented were:

- Harding, A (2009). 'Social Policy in Australia: Recent Directions and the Use of Microsimulation Models in the Policy Reform Process' Presentation to 'Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry' Seminar Series, Tokyo, 26 January.
- Harding, A (2009). 'Who Wins, Who Loses and By How Much? Predicting the Current, Future and Spatial Impact of Policy Change Using Microsimulation Models', Presentation to 'National Institute of Population and Social Security Research' Seminar Series, Tokyo, 27 January; and to the 'Research Centre for Socionetwork Strategies' Seminar Series, Osaka, 29 January.

Professor Harding met key officers from all three organisations and shared a working lunch with them. At RIETI she held consultations with Daigo Nakata, Fellow; Dr Masahisa Fujiya, President and Chief Research Officer; and Kozo Oikawa, Chairman. At IPSS, among others, she met with Dr Tabkanobu Kyogoku, Director-General and Dr Aya Abe, Senior Researcher, Department of International Research and Cooperation. She also gave a two hour demonstration to interested officials at IPSS of the user-friendly interface version of NATSEM's static microsimulation model STINMOD. (STINMOD allows assessment of the immediate distributional impact of income tax and cash transfer policy change – who wins, who loses, and by how much.) IPSS were particularly interested to

see how NATSEM has sought to make microsimulation accessible to policy makers, through an easy-to-use interface.

At another of the official functions, Professor Harding visited Professor Yasuharu Ukai, Director of the Research Institute for Socionetwork Strategies at Kansai University, and his colleagues in Osaka. This institute specialises in using databases and software to model policy and society.

NATSEM and the University of Canberra recently won $11m from the Australian Federal Government to build the International Microsimulation Centre. One of the goals of the new International Microsimulation Centre is to help NATSEM export microsimulation technology to the Asia-Pacific region. In recent years, delegations and visitors from countries as diverse as China, Mongolia, France and England have visited NATSEM to see how Australia uses microsimulation modelling in its policy development processes and in research. The visit to Japan sponsored by the AJF was thus extremely well timed. Microsimulation is relatively underutilised in Japan, with new static and dynamic microsimulation models now starting to be constructed.

Research Program

Creativity and Innovation ARC Learned Academies Special Project

The Academy congratulates Leon Mann and Janet Chan, who directed the Academy's 2007 ARC-funded Learned Academies Special Project, 'Creativity and Innovation: Social Science Perspectives and Policy Implications'. A contract has been signed with Routledge New York to publish the findings as (working title) *Creativity and Innovation in Business and Beyond: Social Science perspectives and policy implications*, in 2010.

ASSA/ABS Census 2006 Project

The Academy is pleased to announce the publication of the fourth paper in the ASSA Census Series, *Living Alone in Australia: Trends in Sole Living and Characteristics of Those who live Alone*, by David de Vaus and Sue Richardson.

The Census 2006 Project is the result of a collaboration between the Academy and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Overseen by ASSA and using funds and customised Census data from the ABS, the project applied the expertise of leading social scientists to the Census in order give a series of snapshots of the Australian populace in 2006. This most recent paper is timely, addressing as it does the significant characteristics of the relatively recent but dramatic increase in the prevalence of single person households in Australia.

This paper will be followed by Census Series papers from Diane Gibson, addressing the societal characteristics evident from a sustained increase in life expectancy, and Jeff Borland and Andrew Clarke, considering aspects of immigration to Australia.

Copies of these and all Academy *Occasional Papers* are freely available for download from: http://www.assa.edu.au/publications/occasional_papers/

Multiculturalism and Integration ARC Learned Academies Special Project

The contributors to the 2008 LASP, 'Multiculturalism and Integration: A harmonious combination' - led by Michael Clyne and James Jupp - held the second project workshop

in Melbourne in May 2009. The focus of the project has been on issues raised by the transformation of Australia into a multicultural society as a result of post-1945 immigration, amongst which are the maintenance and consolidation of social cohesion, the development of a common national identity and core values, and the role of public agencies in securing these objectives.

The May workshop was held as a seminar, with the nine project contributors joined by 15 social scientists for whom the research was of interest. The contributors presented their preliminary findings to the assembled researchers, from whom they then took comments and questions. Thanks in particular to the energy and organisation of the project leaders, the day was extremely productive and because of careful selection of the host city to coincide with a high number of interested researchers, was a cost effective method of disseminating the project's findings.

The project leaders have now assembled the contributions, and these will be published as an edited book in 2010.

Human Security ARC Learned Academies Special Project

The Academy has received approval from the ARC and the Office of the Minister for Innovation to fund the Learned Academies Special Projects proposal submitted by Dennis Altman, Joseph Camilleri and Robyn Eckersley in late 2008. The project is titled 'Reconceptualising human security: Its uses and limitations for developing Australian foreign policy'.

The project aims to 'interrogate the concept of human security and the potential to apply the concept to key aspects of Australia's foreign policy and external relations, both in the Asia Pacific region and globally'. It will do this by examining the manner in which emerging security issues, such as identity based conflicts, terrorism, the drug trade, human trafficking, new epidemic diseases, climate change and food security, might be more efficiently connected with more traditional concerns of inter-state armed conflict. In particular, the project will question how far the concept of human security needs to be analytically refined in order to be of practical use in policy making and policy delivery, with particular focus on the Australian context.

The project leaders have commenced interviews and the preparation of the project's first discussion papers in preparation for a two-day workshop. This workshop, to be held in Sydney in May 2010, will assemble researchers drawn from disciplines such as politics and industrial relations, development studies and other relevant areas; government officials, including representatives from DFAT and AusAID, senior staff from development NGOs and foreign correspondents, in order to discuss the issues and proposals raised in the discussion paper, with a view to identifying developments of relevance to stakeholders in Australian foreign policy in the human security sphere.

Public Forums Program

Academy Named Lectures

The procedure for the Keith Hancock, Fay Gale and Paul Bourke Lectures has been finalised. The Paul Bourke Lecture is to be given annually by the Paul Bourke Early Career Awardee. Nominations will be sought from the Fellowship each April for the Keith Hancock and Fay Gale Lectures, for the consideration of the Public Forums Committee.

Fellows' Colloquium 2009
The 2009 Fellows' Colloquium, 'The Ecological Opportunities of the Economic Crisis', was held on 2 November, convened by Professor Ian Lowe (FTSE, ACF), Dr Steve Morton (CSIRO), and Dr Brian Walker (CSIRO). The convenors provided unique perspectives from their respective scientific backgrounds and engaged in lively debate with the Academy Fellows that attended.

ASSA Symposium 2009
The 2009 Symposium, 'Space and Place: Informing policy and planning through spatially integrated social science', was jointly organised with the ARC Research Network in Spatially Integrated Social Science (ARCRNSISS), and held on 3 November. Proceedings will be published at a later date.

Cunningham Lecture 2009
The 2009 Cunningham Lecture, 'Green Democracy, Global Governance', was presented by Professor John Dryzek (Australian National University) and will be published as an ASSA *Occasional Paper* early in 2010.

Workshops Program

The Call for Proposals for the 2010-2011 round of Workshops closed on 30 October 2009.

Recently completed workshops:

Consolidating Research in Australian Teacher Education, held in July at the University of Sydney, convened by Raewyn Connell (Sydney), Bill Green (CSU) and Marie Brennan (USA).

Privatisation, Security and Community: How Master Planned Estates are Changing Suburban Australia, held in September at the University of Queensland; convened by Lynda Cheshire, Geoffrey Lawrence, Peter Walters and Rebecca Wickes (all from UQ).

Forthcoming workshops:
Ethics for living in the Anthropocene, to be held in February at The University of Western Sydney; convened by Katherine Gibson (ANU), Deborah Bird Rose (ANU) and Ruth Fincher (Melbourne).

Philanthropy and Public Culture: The Influence and Legacies of the Carnegie Corporation of New York in Australia, to be held in February at the University of Melbourne, convened by Kate Darian-Smith (Melb), Julie McLeod (Melb), Glenda Sluga (Syd) and Barry McGaw (Melb).

Reports from workshops conducted under the Workshop Program, including policy recommendations, are published in *Dialogue*, usually in the first issue following the workshop.

Reports from Workshops and Roundtables

Religion and the State: Regional and Global Perspectives
Jack Barbalet, Adam Possamai, and Bryan Turner

On 17-18 July, the workshop on religion and the state was held at the University of Western Sydney (Parramatta Campus) in the heritage building, the Female Orphan School: the oldest three-storey brick building in Australia, and the nation's oldest public building. It was opened by the Dean of the College of Arts at UWS (another sponsor of this workshop): Professor Wayne McKenna.

The workshop addressed the formational relationship between religion and the state through investigation of historical cases and recent developments. The political dimension of religions and their necessary relations with the political state in terms of both competition and sponsorship havd frequently been ignored by sociologies of religion, which have instead attempted to analyse religions through the social and organisational sources of transcendental aspirations inherent in religious doctrines. Such tensions within religion, between organisational imperatives and political interests on the one hand and spiritual experience and sacred symbolism on the other, needed to be also explored in the workshop.

Social scientists are beginning to grasp the significance of political interests within religions and relations of religions with the political state, as these vectors have impact on such contrasting cases as the United States and Iran, for instance, as well as in several European and Asian societies. To this end, the workshop brought together established and emerging scholars from various disciplines (history, politics, religious studies, sociology, social work, theology) to analyse the links between religion and the state from a global perspective, both historically and in the 21st century.

The workshop was divided into 8 sessions with 3 of them focusing on the relation between religion and specific States such as Australia (Stephen Chavura), China (Jack Barbalet), Israel (Gal Levy), Singapore (Michael Hill), and the United States (Doug Porpora). Broader regions such as Eastern Europe (Sinisa Zrinscak) and Muslim countries (Riaz Hassan and Kevin McDonald) were also covered. Other papers looked at the tension between the state and religion through specific case studies of consumerism (Bryan Turner), of the prison system (Jim Beckford), of popular religion (Adam Possamai) and of New Religious Movements such as ISKCON (Brian Salter). Another session looked at the past (Graham Maddox) and the present (Patrick Michel) (re)composition of religion and politics.

The workshop was international in terms of its participants. Jim Beckford travelled from the University of Warwick (UK), Michael Hill from the National University of Singapore, Gal Levy from the Open University of Israel, Kevin McDonald from Goldsmiths (University of London), Patrick Michel from *L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales* (Paris), Doug Porpora from the University of Drexel, Bryan Turner from Wellesley College (USA) and UWS, and Sinisa Zrinscak from the University of Zagreb. It is unfortunate that two presenters were not able to attend this event due to swine flu in Hong Kong and to a personal tragedy. The workshop was also international in so far as it discussed Abrahamic as well as Chinese and Indian religions. Treatment of the political elements of religion allowed consideration of local, as well as global, sources and influences on religious developments.

This approach to the study of religions addressed socio-political trends for the twenty-first century revealed many insights. For example, while Australia, Britain and the United States have similar policies to manage religion, their approach will probably remain primarily minimal and liberal. Liberal post-secular consumer societies may be prevented from adopting an explicit policy of management and are more likely to continue to treat religion as a lifestyle option. In short, they will probably attempt to resist the 'deprivatisation' of religion by simply ignoring it. The liberal legacy suggests that we must always examine policies towards religion against the background of different forms of citizenship. However, even liberal societies may be forced, perhaps reluctantly, to take an interest in the 'quality' of religious products on the market. Just as states intervene in issues to do with secular consumerism – for example testing the quality of food and the cleanliness of restaurants through various agencies charged with oversight of public health and hygiene – so we can expect states in liberal societies to manage religions through testing the quality of their products, for example in terms of 'brain-washing' and their treatment of minors. States frequently intervene to monitor, regulate or eliminate so-called 'cults' - the case of Scientology in contemporary France is a case in point. There is therefore a strange and possibly ironic relationship between the emergence of passive consumer citizenship and the growth of religious markets on which individuals may 'mix and match' religious products as spiritual consumers.

Governance is clearly more problematic in pluralistic environments where there is plenty of scope for religious competition and conflicts. Because virtually all modern societies are multicultural and multiracial, the 'management of religion' is an inevitable component of modern government. In other words, there is a paradox: precisely because religion is important in modern life as the carrier of identity, it has to be controlled by the state to minimise the costs of government in reducing friction between competing groups.

In liberal democracies the active citizen shows signs of becoming increasingly a passive consumer in which work, public service and reproduction are no longer the fundamental bases of citizenship entitlement. This erosion of citizenship was dramatically illustrated by the recent credit crunch in which citizens in Britain, Australia and the United States were admonished by their governments to shop in order to save both the economy and the society. The new duty of the citizen is to consume and, paradoxically, at the same time to save. States increasing treat citizens as an audience that must be managed by sales techniques (focus groups, opinion polls, marketing strategies, national identity as branding) and the quality of political leadership is tested by rating in opinion polls. The new spirituality in the West and commodified religions in Asia may also fit into a pattern of citizenship as consumerism. Modern spirituality is post-institutional, subject and privatised.

Another insight was the fact that the debate about deprivatisation and secularisation is not only closely associated with the impact of fundamentalism, but also by the threat of terrorism. To understand religion in the modern world, we also need to look at the issues of securitisation. While the state and religion were held to be separate in liberal theory, the security issue has meant that states interfere more and more in the role and organisation of religion. When we talk about the management of religions or the crisis of multiculturalism or the problems of secularism, we are essentially talking about how modern liberal states respond to the revival of global Islam, or more generally to 'pietisation', or more crudely to 'fundamentalism'. Nevertheless the particular issues surrounding Muslim minorities in non-Muslim secular states can be seen as simply one instance of the more general issue of state and religion in modern complex societies.

There is increasingly an awareness of the limitations of the Westphalian solution to religious wars, the Hobbesian social contract and Lockean liberalism as political strategies to manage conflicting religious and ethnic interests. In the modern world, there is manifestly the need to think seriously about what Habermas and others are now calling 'post-secular society'.

From this workshop, two paradoxes were identified: (1) as religion (re)enters the public domain (deprivatisation) the state moves in to manage it (securitisation), and (2) as religious lifestyles become more pious, they can also become more dominated by consumerism. These will be explored at length in one of the two publications from this workshop.

All presentations had policy relevance in so far as they discussed the relations between states and religions. Some particular papers had an explicit policy focus. One designated outcome for discussion in the concluding session of the conference had been concerned with policy implications of social scientific research on the relationships between the political state and religious organisations and movements. This discussion will be extended in the two publications arising from this workshop.

As this workshop generated much more than an intellectual exchange between international social scientists, as it lead to the discussion and debate on new findings, a decision has been made to ensure that all papers and discussion be available to the public at large. Following the usual refereeing process, all the papers will thus be published in a book (a contract with a major publisher is currently under discussion) and a forthcoming special issue of the *Australian Religion Studies Review* (an agreement has already been made with the editor of the journal and its publication will be in 2010-2011). Both volumes will be edited by the three workshop convenors.

Energy Security in the Era of Climate Change:
A dialogue on current trends and future options

Luca Anceschi and Joseph Camilleri

Background, approach and method

The workshop, convened by Luca Anceschi and Joseph Camilleri, was held at the Bundoora campus of La Trobe University on 16-17 July 2009. Seventeen participants (of whom thirteen delivered papers) were invited to the seven sessions into which the two-day workshop was divided.

The workshop was structured in line with the dialogical method developed by the Centre for Dialogue at La Trobe University. Participants presented a wide range of views on the complex issue constituted by the interconnection between energy security and the politics of climate change. This was an intellectual, but policy-oriented encounter, in which listening was at least as important as speaking. The aim was to ascertain the gap that separates different approaches, and ways in which that gap can be constructively bridged, or at least negotiated.

The interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary workshop was primarily designed to discuss the interplay of four key sets of considerations in the assessment of energy security options for Australia and the world: geostrategic, economic, environmental and cultural. It is this complex interplay that is often lost in current academic and policy discussions. In this sense, the papers presented at the workshop and the ensuing in-depth discussions have made useful contributions to the emerging intellectual debate on one of the most pressing issues confronting the national and international policy agenda.

Participants

The workshop's convenors carefully selected the workshop participants from three main arenas – academia, private sector and government – all of which continue to play a crucial role in defining the current Australian debate on the politics of climate change and its interconnection with energy security. The high profile of the participants – which included a well-balanced mix of both senior and younger scholars and experts – represented one of the major strengths of the workshop. The number of participants was limited, in order to promote in-depth debate during the different sessions. Summary papers (approximate length 2000 words) were circulated well in advance amongst participants, in order to make for more informed and well-coordinated discussions.

The final list of invited participants included: Dr Luca Anceschi (Centre for Dialogue, La Trobe University), 'Energy security, regime stability and climate change: The case of post-Soviet Central Asia'; Dr Tulsi Charan Bisht (La Trobe), 'Energy security and climate change challenges - India's dilemma and policy responses'; Joseph A Camilleri (Centre for Dialogue, La Trobe), 'The Dilemmas of Energy Governance in the Era of Climate Change'; Josh Cosgrave (Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism), 'Australian Government Energy Security Initiatives'; Mark Diesendorf (University of New South Wales), 'Are energy security and effective climate change policies contradictory objectives?'; Jim Falk (ACSIS, University of Melbourne), 'Climate and Energy Security – An uneasy nexus?'; Leigh Glover (GAMUT, Melbourne), 'More fossil fuel use and less carbon emissions: Australia's policy paradox'; Stephen James (La Trobe), Mendo Kundevski (City of Darebin) and Mark Lister (Szencorp), 'Seeing the Invisible Giant: The Role of Energy Savings in Energy Security and Climate Change Policy'; Stephanie Matti (Centre for Dialogue, La Trobe) and Hugh Saddler (Pitt & Sherry), 'Domestic energy security in a world where use of fossil fuels is constrained'; Jon Symons (Lingnan University, Hong Kong), 'Energy Security and Climate Security: Complementarity and contradiction'; Stephen Norman (Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism), and Xu Yi-Chong (Griffith University), 'Energy and environmental challenges in China'. Robyn Eckersley (Melbourne) and Peter Christoff (Melbourne) enthusiastically supported the workshop in its preparatory stages, but were unable to participate. Their papers are to be included in the publication arising from the workshop. A paper sent by Peter Droege (University of Newcastle) was read during the workshop, and Richard Leaver (Flinders University), who could not participate due to illness, agreed to contribute to the publication.

Highlights of the workshop

1. Case studies highlighting the complex relationship between climate and energy policy: China, India, post-soviet Central Asia and Australia.
2. A detailed assessment of the influence of energy security concerns on multilateral climate negotiations and, conversely, the impact of the emerging climate change regime on global energy security and global geopolitics more generally.

3. A re-evaluation of the relationship between energy and climate policy in the light of the many obstacles to achieving a coherent global response to climate change and the present-day competitive scramble among states to secure long-term energy supplies.

4. A reconceptualisation of the multiple ways in which the competing imperatives of climate and energy policy can be reconciled – hence the need to redefine the concept of energy security, so as to incorporate the social and cultural implications of different levels and patterns of energy consumption.

Publication

Publication was canvased in the final session of the workshop. Participants expressed enthusiasm for a highly integrated, edited volume, to be submitted to a leading international publishing house. Luca Anceschi and Jon Symons were asked to identify a suitable publisher and co-edit the volume.

Palgrave Macmillan was approached to include the volume in their prestigious series on *Energy, Climate and the Environment*. Negotiations are now well advanced and a book contract is about to be signed. Publication is tentatively scheduled for mid 2010, with a provisional title *Energy Security in the Era of Climate Change: The Asia-Pacific experience.*

Privatisation, Security and Community:
How Master Planned Estates are Changing Suburban Australia
Lynda Cheshire, Peter Walters and Rebecca Wickes

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) workshop on Master Planned Estates (MPEs) was held on 28-29 September 2009 at the University of Queensland (UQ), convened by Drs Lynda Cheshire, Peter Walters and Rebecca Wickes with the assistance of ASSA Fellow, Geoffrey Lawrence.

The aim of the workshop was to assemble a cross-disciplinary group of established and emerging researchers to share and build upon existing work on the MPE. In particular the workshop was designed to use the differing disciplinary and methodological approaches of participants in the fields of sociology, geography, planning, criminology, labour studies and social work to address two key aspects of this phenomenon:

a. The question of governance and privatisation of the public realm, with particular regard to the long term implications of the market construction of social space, the developer as provider of shared amenity, the potential loss of a civic culture, and consequences for the continuing role of the state.

b. The issue of community, in its broadest sense, and the way it is imagined and experienced, both by property developers as they seek to market the MPE, and by residents who bring with them their own understandings of community, which are often bound up with notions of place, security, aesthetics, family and lifestyle.

By all accounts, the workshop was highly successful in terms of three key areas. First was the nature and extent of critical engagement by leading urban scholars with the phenomenon of master planned estates and the ways in which they are changing the outer-suburban landscape of Australia's capital cities. Second was the degree to which the workshop considered the policy implications of these estates for planners, government and service providers, by inviting representatives from the planning industry, local and state government, and private development companies to attend and actively participate in workshop debates. Finally the workshop will produce a number of important scholarly outputs including a special issue of a journal on the topic; a commitment to pursue funding opportunities for future research in the area; and an agreement to continue discussions on this topic at forthcoming conferences.

The workshop attracted 25 participants in total, including five early career researchers. The majority were academics who travelled from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and the Gold Coast but there was also a significant number of policymakers and planners in attendance, including representatives from the Queensland Government and various planners from the private and non-profit sectors. The workshop was officially opened and welcomed by David De Vaus FASSA, Executive Dean of the Social and Behavioural Sciences Faculty at UQ. The keynote speaker was Louise Johnson (Deakin) who gave an excellent historical overview of the Australian suburbs and the emergence of master planned estates within that history in her paper 'Master planned estates: pariah or panacea?'.The remaining 11 academic papers were presented in the following four sessions: 'Exploring social life in MPEs'; 'The privatisation of MPEs'; 'Place-making and governance in MPEs'; and 'The construction of suburban social space'.

As part of the commitment of both ASSA and the workshop conveners to harness workshop discussions to public policy development, the workshop featured a policy roundtable entitled 'The future for suburban governance' with speakers from Delfin Lend Lease, The Urban Land Development Authority, the Hornery Institute and the Queensland Department of Communities. The key messages arising from this session, along with those from the academic papers, were discussed at length in the conference summary at the end of the second day. Briefly, these included the following key points:

1. Presently there is a great deal of myth and misconception surrounding MPEs, and it is the task of academic researchers to empirically and critically assess the various discourses associated with these estates. In particular, master planned estates are much maligned and often viewed as symptomatic of everything that is wrong with contemporary society. Yet MPEs represent an attempt by property developers to adopt a more comprehensive approach to planning new suburbs in a way that has not previously occurred. MPEs comprise only 25 per cent of all new housing constructions on new land, which means 75 per cent are not part of a comprehensive urban plan. Thus, those from government and industry felt that increased attention on the 75 per cent of greenfield residential developments that may be fragmented and disconnected to other development plans was important.

2. The second issue of policy relevance also involves deconstructing various myths about MPEs, particularly those that view them as elite enclaves of urban affluence. Researchers pointed out that MPEs are also sites of economic disadvantage as families face mortgage stress, isolation, a lack of infrastructure, under-employment among women and young adults and relatively low levels of community capacity. Yet traditionally government have channelled their human services into areas that are viewed as more conventionally disadvantaged, with the effect that problems of

domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, poverty and relationship breakdown in MPEs are left unaddressed. Non-profit organisations that provide these kinds of support services are also unable to establish themselves in MPEs because of the lack of availability of subsidised rental space on a MPE where land is sold and rented through the market, not the state.

3. A third issue that dominated discussions was the question of governance and the way in which lines of accountability between private property developers and public agencies, such as local or state government, have become blurred. Developers often find themselves intervening in matters that would otherwise be beyond their purview partly, perhaps, out of a desire to protect their investment and reputation by ensuring residents are appeased. Conversely, local authorities are often reluctant to invest resources into areas that are seen as less disadvantaged than others. The result is that MPEs become either 'private neighbourhoods', governed by a property developer, or they are 'abandoned' to manage their own affairs. This suggests that the process of establishing appropriate governance structures for MPEs is not a straightforward process but requires complex and ongoing negotiations with residents and other governmental authorities, often with unintended outcomes.

4. Finally there is the issue of resource dependency in the outer suburbs and the need to create more sustainable suburbs that are less car-dependent and less susceptible to the challenges of climate change. While it was noted that, in comparative terms, houses on a single block are less resource intensive that inner city apartment living, governments and property developers will need to work together to create new suburbs that are more adaptable to climate change through different approaches to urban planning, building design and vulnerability assessments to drought or bushfire.

In addition to the policy implications of the workshop, a key academic output will be a collection of papers on MPEs in a forthcoming special issue of *Urban Policy and Research* in December 2010. The guest editors will be Lynda Cheshire, Peter Walters and Rebecca Wickes and the issue will feature the best 7-8 peer-reviewed papers arising from the workshop. Participants were also keen to keep the debate around MPEs ongoing and to find other fora for this to occur. One suggestion is to have a sponsored workshop on MPEs or the suburbs more broadly at forthcoming State of Australian Cities Conferences (SOAC). Delfin Lend Lease has already expressed interest in sponsoring the workshop on the basis of the immense value they saw arising from the ASSA workshop.

In closing we would like to express our appreciation to ASSA for supporting our workshop and for giving us the opportunity to host such a worthwhile event.

Roundtables

Health Governance

On 17 March, the Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) with the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia and the Australian and New Zealand School of Government, convened a policy roundtable, 'Health Governance: Designing the structure for Australia's national health system'. Sponsorship of the event by Ernst and Young and Minter Ellison was organised by IPAA.

The event was held in Melbourne at the Ernst and Young offices, and addressed the public policy issues surrounding the development and implementation of the systematic delivery at the national level of health care to Australians. This is the third such collaboration by IPAA with ASSA on a policy roundtable.

The event was preceded by a dinner at which Dr Christine Bennett, Chair of the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission, spoke to participants on the recently released Interim Report of the Commission. The Report set out 116 strategic directions, from the very specific to the aspirational.

Participants in the day-long roundtable discussion in numbered roughly forty and were drawn from a variety of professional backgrounds, including politics, the public service, health care practitioners and administrators, researchers, the media and groups representing end users. The dialogue, which was informative and largely constructive, focused in particular on the issues of governance. The split of responsibilities for health across the Commonwealth, State and Territory and, to some extent local, governments has long been criticised for duplication of administrative effort, incentives for cost-shifting and lack of national focus. The Commission suggested three alternatives: basically a streamlining of current responsibilities with clearer accountability; the Commonwealth taking all responsibility with public services delivered through regional authorities; or competing insurers/delivery networks. These three alternatives were the main theme running through the day's discussion, with no one model emerging as clearly superior. However, whichever model is pursued, there is a range of issues which need to be addressed: de-politicising health care funding; developing a purchasing role and increasing the capacity for this within Australia; developing appropriate incentives; expanding performance monitoring and reporting.

An ASSA *Occasional Paper* reporting on the event and its implications for researchers across a range of disciplines is currently in press.

Environmental Governance

On 4 August a policy roundtable was convened by the Committee in Canberra, *Bringing the 'R' Word Back In: Regulation, environment protection and natural resource management (NRM)*. The roundtable was convened by Neil Gunningham, and was attended by 14 social scientists, government (State and Commonwealth) policy practitioners, regulatory officials and private sector representatives.

The roundtable was convened to address the issue of an appropriate regulatory regime for so-called 'brown' (pollution) and 'green' (NRM) issues, and in particular the appropriate mix of incentive-based policies utilising market instruments such as subsidies, and straight regulatory measures.

Participants noted the artificiality of a division between brown and green policy measures in many circumstances, and the discussion included an agreement that a holistic approach to policy formation was invariably more useful to achieve environmentally desirable outcomes. Further, it was noted by participants that such outcomes are often not clearly defined in policy documents as explicit objectives. In support of a holistic approach to NRM policy, the gathering heard that policy measures are often used inefficiently; many extensive policies which contain complex architecture and have substantial fiscal implications, are often established with a view to regulating only one element or component of an ecosystem. The Commonwealth's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) was cited as an example of this.

Neil Gunningham and Cameron Holley, an early career researcher from the Regulatory Institutions Network at ANU, will collaborate in the production of an Academy *Occasional Paper* reporting on the event, to be available early in 2010.

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Branch Convenors: Professor Susan Spence (Qld); Professor David Goodman (NSW); Professor Darrell Turkington (WA); Professor Jeff Borland (Vic); and Professor Alison Mackinnon (SA)

Panels:

A *Anthropology, demography, geography, linguistics, sociology.*
Chair: Professor Michael Bittman
B *Accounting, economics, economic history, statistics.*
Chair: Professor Simon Ville
C *History, law, philosophy, political science.*
Chair: Professor Joy Damousi
D *Education, psychology, social medicine.*
Chair: Robert Boakes

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