

ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



LEGISLATIVE POWERS

The environmental responsibilities of the ILC in the ATSIC Act include the following:

- provide environmental benefits through land acquisition and management (s. 191B)
- pursue sound land management and environmental management practices (191E(3)(a))
- may provide environmental land management services (191E(5)(c))
- cover environmental issues relating to Indigenous-held land in the NILS and RILS (191N(2)(c); 191P(4)(c)).

POLICY FRAMEWORK

The NILS states the ILC will endeavour to ensure "a balance between two key elements: the need to maintain and protect the land and the derivation of economic gain from it. Modern scientific techniques, including best management practices, and appropriate evaluation and rehabilitation strategies will be identified as appropriate" (p.14, NILS).

Land management program guidelines require applications to demonstrate how the proposed activities will pursue sound environmental and land management practices (p.76, Programs Guide).

The Environmental Acquisition Program acquires land that will deliver environmental benefits and defines sound land management and environmental management as being "management activity that repairs, enhances or protects the land and does not result in degradation or damage to the land; (and) activities that are consistent with environmental better practice" (p.25, Programs Guide).

The Cultural, Social and Environmental land acquisition programs require Property Management Plans to be consistent with sound land management principles (pp.15, 21, 28 and 36, Programs Guide). Property Management Plans must also show how the intended activity will "repair, improve, maintain or protect the land, and that [the activity] will not do more damage or degrade it" (p.92, Programs Guide).

The Programs Guide, in part, defines sustainable land uses as those that "encompass sound environmental management so that land is cared for and not degraded by the activity" (p.116).

The Economic Acquisition Program requires applicants to identify environmental risks and related management strategies, and to incorporate natural resource management planning to establish the ecological sustainability of the project in their business plans (p.4, *Terms of Reference – Business Plan*).

OUTCOMES

The NILS, RILS, and land acquisition and management programs contribute to ensuring that the ILC's land acquisition and land management functions are ecologically sustainable.

The assessment and decision-making processes address both long-term and short-term economic, environmental, social and cultural considerations with benefits for future generations.

IMPACT OF ACTIVITIES ON THE ENVIRONMENT

The ILC facilitates and undertakes a variety of agricultural, pastoral, quarrying, aquaculture and dairy activities that have a range of environmental impacts, both positive and negative. The ESD Examples section below contains information on the environmental impacts of specific activities.

MECHANISMS FOR REVIEW

The NILS and RILS are reviewed on an annual basis. Continual input is sought from staff, clients and ATSIC Regional Councils on improvements to the policy framework of the ILC, which is also informed by developments in industry best practice, environmental management, ESD and related topics.

ESD EXAMPLES

Cape Elizabeth - South Australia

The 2000 ha Cape Elizabeth property on the Yorke Peninsula of South Australia is a highly significant property to the Narungga people.

The property was used historically as marginal cropping and grazing country until it was sold in 1993 to Earth Sanctuaries Ltd (ESL), which intended to create a native wildlife reserve. The ILC acquired the property from ESL in April 2002 and will look to divest the property towards the end of 2003.

A Narungga organisation, which has previously assisted with the revegetation of Innes National Park and is undertaking native vegetation trials for CSIRO, is responsible for the property's environmental management. The organisation developed an interim property management plan during 2002-2003, which includes an eco- and cultural-tourism venture to provide students and tourists with a glimpse into Aboriginal culture, language and use of the environment.

The Narungga people are also considering Cape Elizabeth as an appropriate location to bury skeletal remains repatriated from museums around the world. They will also be able to protect and maintain significant sites on the property through heritage grants.

Environment Australia advised the ILC that the Yorke Peninsula is a 'high priority' Interim Bio-Geographic Region of Australia. The use of part of the property for grazing provides part funding of the environmental management program and will have little negative environmental impact as the stocking numbers are kept low. The leasing arrangement will improve the condition of the land as it includes steps to remove boxthorn and plant saltbush in the grazing area. The arrangement is expected to produce a small profit while being ecologically sustainable.

The remainder of the property will be fenced, weeds will be removed after native species have been established to prevent erosion and access by recreational four-wheel drive vehicles will be controlled.

The property will complement existing native food and revegetation programs, as well as provide work through approximately 25 km of fencing, signage and woody weed control. Twelve local Aboriginal people have undertaken Coast Care training and this acquisition provides an opportunity for them to put their training into practice.

Feral Animal Control - Victoria River District, Northern Territory

In 2002-2003, to provide environmental benefits to Indigenous landowners, the ILC agreed to resource the NT Government to conduct a feral horse and donkey eradication program in the Victoria River District (VRD) on relevant Aboriginal lands where local Indigenous landholders supported such control. Surveys in 1996 and 2001 by the then NT Department for Lands, Planning and Environment indicated that feral donkeys and horses were in plague proportions across most properties in the VRD.

Feral horses and donkeys in large numbers significantly reduce biodiversity. Among the environmental problems that arise:

- Gully erosion is caused and exacerbated by their hard hooves.
- Competition with native animals for food increases and habitat is destroyed.

- Waterholes are fouled and weeds are introduced to an area through seeds carried in their dung or manes and tails.
- The large areas of vegetation needed to sustain both native wildlife and commercial herds of livestock are adversely affected.

Thirty-nine properties (Indigenous and non-Indigenous-held) in the VRD region have undertaken feral horse and donkey control. Six Indigenous-held properties required control. Negotiations with Indigenous landholders from these properties indicated support for reducing the feral population across the whole region.

As at 30 June 2002-2003, three Indigenous-held properties had undertaken feral population control, while three others will become involved in 2003-2004.

The NT Government reported at the end of 2002 that control works had resulted in the removal of 103,999 feral horses and donkeys, of which 38,104 had come from three Indigenous-held properties.

This indicates the value of feral animal control on Indigenous properties from the perspective of sustainable management of the region. The results of control are an improvement in biodiversity, ecological integrity and land capability, which also improves prospects for sustainable land-based enterprises.

A major emphasis of the project was on increasing awareness and capacity to prevent a recurrence of the plague. The VRD Conservation Association (VRDCA) has significant regional Indigenous participation. The VRDCA managed a significant grant from the Natural Heritage Trust to assist in reducing feral population size. Indigenous lands have benefited through this program.

The ILC is currently working with NT Land Councils and the NT Government to increase pastoral production from Aboriginal land through sustainable management and partnerships. The removal of these feral herbivores will enhance the economic opportunities for landholders pursuing pastoralism across the VRD.

Udialla Springs

The ILC purchased Udialla Springs, a freehold and leasehold property located on the Fitzroy River near Derby, in December 2002. The purchase will serve to protect and maintain the cultural and natural heritage values of this unique property, which includes sensitive and unique areas of *riparian* habitat and freshwater springs.

ILC and Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Pastoral Management Support Services Program

On 1 January 2003 the ILC entered into a three-year partnership with the Department of Agriculture (WA) to provide pastoral management support services to Kimberley Aboriginal pastoralists.

The program is promoting sound land management practices which will increase the productivity of the land and protect susceptible environments, at a landscape level, from the potentially damaging impacts of overgrazing and inappropriate fire regimes.

Indigenous Start Up and Incentive Landcare Grants – Western Australia

Indigenous Start Up and Incentive Landcare Grants was a pilot project aimed at increasing WA Indigenous communities', groups' and organisations' awareness of landcare issues and improving their access to Natural Heritage Trust funding. The project was a jointly funded initiative with \$100,000 of ILC funds, \$100,000 Aboriginal Lands Trust funds and matching funds of \$200,000 from the Natural Heritage Trust, providing \$400,000 for applications to the project. In addition, the Department of Indigenous Affairs (WA) provided in-kind support to coordinate the project and administer the funds. The final report is due in December 2003, providing a suitable timeframe for on-ground outcomes to be adequately reported.

The project successfully promoted sustainable natural resource management objectives in Indigenous communities, groups and organisations by increasing awareness and involvement of Aboriginal people in projects that ameliorate the impacts of environmental degradation on their lands. Forty-five applications were received for a wide range of activities from across the State, with bids totalling over \$600,000.

In addition, Natural Heritage Trust funds became more accessible to Indigenous landholders in Western Australia through a devolved grants process. Previously, Indigenous organisations were not aware of the range of landcare activities that could be funded and when applications were made they were mostly unsuccessful for a range of reasons. The devolved grants process provided Indigenous organisations year round access to small amounts of funding. The three Western Australian Indigenous Land Management Facilitators, who reside and work in regional settings, were able to provide localised advice to the assessment panel on project feasibility and relationship to regional strategies. The assessment panel consisted of representatives from the Department of Indigenous Affairs (WA), Aboriginal Lands Trust, the ILC, community (Indigenous and non-Indigenous), Landcare and Bushcare programs.

The types of projects that were successful in receiving funds involved activities in maintenance of knowledge and education in natural resource management, community-based landcare projects, stock and/or feral animal management and restoration of degraded environments. Outcomes of the project are primarily environmental with significant, subsidiary social benefits.

FUTURE INITIATIVES

The need to develop relevant review and evaluation tools, including project, program and policy performance indicators, has been recognised by the ILC and establishment of these measures will be progressed in the 2003-2004 financial year.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

It is the responsibility of the ILC Board to ensure the proper and efficient performance of the ILC and to determine the policy of the ILC (s.191W). Of the seven Board members, six are appointed by the responsible Minister (including the Chair, Deputy Chair and an ATSIC Commissioner). The remaining director is the ATSIC Chairperson.