

Bid to lift indigenous skills



By property
 writer
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INDIGENOUS Land Corporation chairperson Shirley McPherson said the ILC was broadening its land acquisition and management focus to include education, training and employment of indigenous people with skills so they could run their own properties after ownership was transferred to them.

Speaking at the 2009 Pastoralists and Graziers Association convention at the Hyatt Perth hotel last week, Ms McPherson said the pastoral and tourism industries are being targeted for employment and training opportunities for indigenous people.

In December last year, the ILC launched an initiative to provide 530 certificate-level training places and employment for up to 400 indigenous graduates in the pastoral, tourism and resource sectors.

The ILC is also a signatory to the Australian Employment Covenant, started by Fortescue Metal Group chief executive officer Andrew Forrest, which aims to create 50,000 jobs for indigenous Australians.

The Federal agency had also spent \$2m on establishing an export cattle yard operation, the

Roebuck Export Depot, by purchasing land adjacent to the ILC-owned Roebuck Plains station near Broome.

"We could see it was very important to have close at hand some export cattle yards, as one of the major cattle export yards in Broome had closed earlier, Ms McPherson said.

"The cattle yards are now nearing completion and are due to open on May 1.

"The yards will be able to hold up to 8000 head of cattle at any time, with trials beginning next month."

Ms McPherson said the new yards would help pastoralists in the area, with the location near Broome a "very efficient and appropriate" place to put cattle yards.

"There are 22 indigenous properties across the Kimberley, with the new cattle yards helping them with pricing and marketing as it will be closer to home."

A training centre had been established at Roebuck Plains station, with one group of trainees going through and 14 out of 15 completing the course.

Some will be employed to the cattle yards or work on the export boats.

The widely acclaimed

Kimberley Indigenous Management Support service was established in 2002 to provide advice and support services to indigenous-owned pastoral landowners.

This had been a very successful program, with similar programs now adopted in the Pilbara and the Northern Territory.

Ms McPherson said it was preferable that indigenous people learn how to run and operate their own land.

"A great partnership has been forged with the Department of Agriculture and Food, who are able to supply the expertise needed to help indigenous groups learn how to improve things like herd genetics, fencing and the quality of water holes," she said.

"The majority of indigenous properties in the Kimberley, 18 out of 25, were now involved in this project, which meant 18,500km2 of land was now under increasingly effective management."

There was also an increase in the number of people now in full time employment or trained to go on these properties, with an additional 56 part-time people in the last financial year 2007-08.

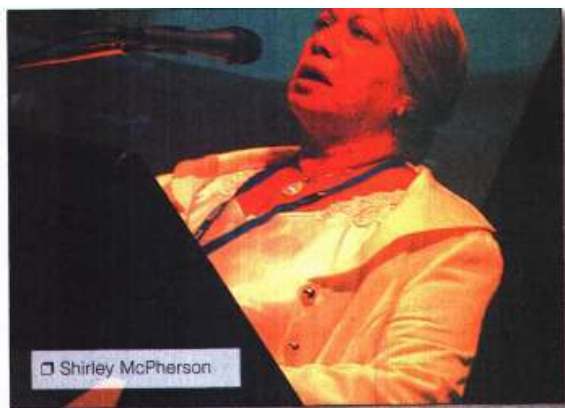
Home Valley station at Kununurra had been developed into a major tourist area and though the tourism industry was experiencing a major downturn, a lot of people still wanted to come to the Kimberley area, Ms McPherson said.

There had been a lot of publicity about the Kimberley created from the film Australia, with footage shot on the Home Valley station.

"The ILC believes that economic development along with other key challenges such as education, health, housing and infrastructure will provide the tools, the capacity, the pride and the dignity, so that there is truly an equality of life and opportunity for our indigenous people in Australia," Ms McPherson said.

She acknowledged divestment of land was a slow process, with the ILC reluctant to hand over ownership unless indigenous groups were capable of managing them.

PGA president Rob Gillam said it was no easy task to manage the enormous resources under the ILC's control.



Shirley McPherson