

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION ON KARAJARRI COUNTRY

COMMUNITY REPORT

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)

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ABOUT THIS COMMUNITY REPORT

This community report is about the climate change research project carried out by AIATSIS in the Bidyadanga community with the Karajarri Traditional Lands Association RNTBC.

This project ran from September 2011 – March 2013. This community report aims to provide a summary of this research project.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

AIATSIS was funded by the Federal Government through the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency's Climate Change Adaptation Research Grants Program administered by the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF).

The University of Melbourne was also funded by NCCARF to run a separate research project focused on risks and perceptions on climate change on Karajarri country. These questions connected with the AIATSIS project about who makes decisions about responding to climate change and the role the KTLA should have in planning.

AIATSIS and University of Melbourne ran some of their workshops together to make it easier for KTLA directors by having less meetings.



Dr Lisa Strelein, Dr Jessica Weir, Anna Dwyer (Nulungu Centre for Indigenous Studies) and Claire Stacey (Image: Bruce Gorrington)





WHAT WAS THIS PROJECT ABOUT?

“how traditional owners, who have had determinations of native title on their country, make decisions about the management of their land and ground waters, to help them to better respond to changes in climate”

How adapting to climate change means being involved in decision making about country.

What opportunities and what barriers KTLA face in being involved in decision making about country.

AIATSIS worked with two PBCs: KTLA and also AbmElgoringAmbung RNTBC in Kowanyama, Cape York, Queensland.



WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE?

When we talk about climate change we are talking about how the seasons and weather are changing, and how this affects Karajarri people and country. Climate change has caused changes in seasons and weather such as:

- Warming temperatures
- Sea level rise
- Different rain patterns
- More and stronger cyclones, floods and storms

We can help deal with climate change by working to manage the important impacts. For example if there is less fresh water, Karajarri people can be part of changing water management practices so that key *jilas* are not impacted by agricultural and mining activity. Another impact from climate change might be more damage from cyclones, floods and storms. This would mean having better land use planning so that infrastructure, like housing, is safe.

This work is called **climate change adaptation**.

HOW DOES CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION RELATE TO NATIVE TITLE?

Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate (RNTBCs or PBCs as they are commonly known) like the KTLA are in a strong position to contribute to climate change adaptation because of their:

- Unique knowledges and experience
- Native title and other land holdings;and
- Responsibilities under legislation.

The KTLA and the Karajarri rangers are already playing a role in climate change adaptation through work such as:

- Town planning
- Water planning
- Coastal erosion monitoring
- Feral/animal eradication
- Cultural mapping

In looking after country, this work has important links with the role of the Karajarri people in climate change. However, PBCs are not always included in the governance, institutional and other decision-making structures and practices within local and state government that are important for climate change adaptation.



WHY IS THE PBC EXPERIENCE IMPORTANT?

Setting up the Karajarri Traditional Lands Association (KTLA) has created an organisation to represent and protect native title for the Karajarri people.

With native title determined in 2002, 2004 and 2012 the Karajarri people have had their culture and relationships with land recognised under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). The PBC has a legal responsibility to look after Country.

It is important for government and others who want to do business on Country to talk to the Karajarri native title holders.



Jessica Weir, Lisa Strelein and Thomas King visiting sites impacted by climate change (image: Claire Stacey)





RESEARCH FINDINGS

In Bidyadanganative title has brought about the need to consider everyone's roles and responsibilities on Karajarri land. In our research we found that relationships and resources are the most important things for KTLA to make effective decisions about their Country.

For example:

- KTLAs voice being included in land and water planning with government
- Relationship with Bidyadanga Council
- Relationships with all important organisations
- Respect, recognition and acknowledgement of KTLA



TALKING TO GOVERNMENT

We hope the research will encourage government agencies to consider the priorities of native title holders in their planning decisions. This could affect for example:

- how *jilas* are protected in water planning
- the construction of a potential cyclone shelter
- funding for the work of the rangers to look after country
- funding and resources for the KTLA to carry out its land management responsibilities

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

National Native Title Conference Townsville, 4-6 June 2012

Mervyn Mulardy, Joe Edgar, Jacqueline Shoveller and Billy Joe Shoveller were funded to participate in a workshop at the 2012 National Native Title Conference in Townsville.

At the workshop, Mervyn spoke about the importance of traditional knowledge in healing and managing Country. Mervyn also talked about the impacts of the changing climate upon cultural practices and ways of maintaining cultural identity. Joe Edgar spoke about how securing native title recognition has meant that the KTLA have a legal right to be formally consulted about projects that are important for climate change adaptation (such as town planning and water planning).

The conference was attended by native title holders across Australia. Dr Christine Regan wrote a newsletter article on the workshop and a longer workshop report.



Mervyn Mulardy and Rodney Whitfield presenting at the National Native Title Conference in Townsville (image: Gabrielle Lauder)



RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

14 August 2012 – Climate scenarios, impacts and responsibilities, Bidyadanga

A workshop was organised by KTLA and the research partners and was held at the Bidyadanga Community Resource Centre. KTLA members who attended include: Joseph Munroe, Faye Dean, Joseph Edgar, Thomas King, Lenny Hopiga and Sylvia Shoveller. This workshop was organized with the University of Melbourne, and while the morning focused on their research project, the afternoon focused on the AIATSIS research project.

At the workshop, we discussed what is climate change, the risks and impacts of climate change on Karajarri country and what we need to do to adapt to climate change. We also identified important areas that will be affected by climate change and how the KTLA can be involved to protect these areas. We also spoke about the role of the KTLA in climate change and the partnerships that will need to be formed to better manage country to respond to climate change.

Apologies: Mervyn Mulardy, Cecelia Bennett, Elaine McMahon and Gordon Marshall.

Research participants: Lisa Strelein (AIATSIS), Jessica Weir (AIATSIS), Claire Stacey (AIATSIS), Anna Dwyer (Nulungu) and Sonia Leonard (University of Melbourne)



*KTLA directors and members participating in the 4 August 2012 workshop.
(left to right) Joe Edgar (Deputy Chair), Lenny Hopiga (Director), Faye Dean (Director),
Joseph Munro (Director) Anna Dwyer (Nulungu)
(image: Jessica Weir)*

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

8-12 October 2012 – Impacts of climate change on Karajarri country and governance structures and stakeholders on Karajarri land, Saltcreek

A second workshop was planned for four nights camping on Karajarri Country at Saltcreek. The agenda included:

- a survey of cultural sites impacted by climate change, and
- a stakeholder meeting.

Invited stakeholders include Federal and state agencies, neighbouring traditional owner groups, surrounding stations and other organisations such as the Kimberley Land Council.

The meeting was unfortunately cancelled due to sorry business in the community.

There has not been an opportunity to reschedule this workshop before the end of the AIATSIS project (end of March 2013) but we hope that a similar meeting could be held in the future.



Joe Edgar (Deputy Chair) near the private road (image: Jessica Weir)

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Community interviews, November 2012



Anna Dwyer has been conducting interviews throughout the Bidyadanga community using the interview workbook. Anna has been focusing her questions on what climate change means and the biggest threats to the Bidyadanga community and Karajarri country. She also focused on the role of the KTLA in decision-making and the partnerships needed to work on climate change.

Anna interviewed:

- Mervyn Mulardy, KTLA, Chair
- Joe Edgar, KTLA, Deputy Chair
- Elaine Marshall, KTLA Director
- Faye Dean, KTLA Director
- Thomas King, KTLA, Director and Ranger Coordinator
- Barbara White, Bidyadanga Community Council, Karajarri Councillor
- James Yanawana, Bidyadanga Community Council, Chair
- Peter Yip, Bidyadanga Community Council, CEO

These interviews have informed the final project report. Anna is also working with Gillian Kennedy from Nulungu to write a report on her findings from the interviews.

As a part of the terms of Anna's involvement, consultancy money has been paid to Nulungu to be used for future research as decided by the KTLA. Anna Dwyer will be writing a research report about this project which will become a discussion paper that will be publicly available.

CASE STUDY 2: ABM ELGORING AMBUNG

Kowanyama, Queensland

“Kowanyama people really look after their land, and manage their land...but under the structure of the Shire Council...most communities are not going into local government, so I think there should definitely be a board of PBC representatives that represent the community and their traditional land.”

Leslie Gilbert, Former Mayor and Kokoberra traditional owner

“If you don’t spend the time and effort with your foundations and building your supporting the correct way then you are in trouble from the start. You can’t build anything without putting these steps in place. If you go full steam ahead and build the top floor penthouse suit with all the trimmings before the correct supporting walls and foundations then you will end up in a pile of rubble and dust in no time.”

Rodney Whitfield, AbmElgoringAmbung, General Manager



AbmElgoringAmbung directors and staff (left to right) Anzac Frank, Rodney Whitfield (General Manager) and Charlotte Yam (image: Gabrielle Lauder)

CONTACT US

If you have any questions please contact the research team:



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Thank you for taking part in this research

