



Australian Government

**GUIDELINES FOR INDIGENOUS  
PARTICIPATION IN NATURAL  
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**



Indigenous Knowledge

Regional natural resource management (NRM) groups have different management plans for diverse settings throughout Australia. It can be difficult for people outside specific regions to fully appreciate these diverse and distinct social, economic, geographic and cultural environments in which you each work.

For this reason the Australian Government is keen to see each regional NRM group guide the implementation of their plans in a way that responds to regional difference. Yet we are also keen to see that all interested parties have opportunities to contribute to NRM in ways that reflect their needs.

Indigenous people throughout Australia have links to the land and sea that are historically, spiritually and culturally strong and unique. In respecting these links, we encourage regional NRM groups to engage and form partnerships with Indigenous people so that their interests are incorporated in regional planning and the implementation of plans.

We are aware that many regional NRM groups have already established their group membership and are well underway in implementing plans. But please, take the time to consider these principles that Indigenous Land Management Facilitators agree will encourage Indigenous people's involvement in your region.

Further help can be gained from the Indigenous Land Management Facilitator for your region.

## SOME GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1


Indigenous people need to be represented on regional decision-making committees. Regional NRM groups should ask the regional Indigenous community to help establish an appropriate process for gaining Indigenous input to NRM planning. In some areas you may need to have more than one Indigenous person on the committee to adequately represent the community's interests. Indigenous representation should be undertaken as a matter of protocol and respect for Indigenous people, while recognising the limitations arising from placing such responsibility on any Indigenous person who may not have authority to speak on some matters.

2

As with other key stakeholders, regional NRM groups should consult and incorporate the views of all peak Indigenous organisations, such as land councils, concerned with land and water management in their regions.

3

Many of the physical markers of Indigenous history and culture are known and recorded as archaeological and historical sites accessible through government agencies such as national parks and heritage registers. The need to protect these sites should be reflected in plans and the implementation of plans.



4 Indigenous land ownership and or management and joint management agreements should be identified and their special cultural and practical significance taken into account. For example, some properties acquired by the Indigenous Land Corporation are devolved to local Indigenous people and may have complex multiple purpose use such as a pastoral enterprise managed by a Board of Directors and cultural use by the traditional owners. Regional NRM groups should seek to identify all Indigenous owned or managed land and plan with the prescribed uses in mind.

5 There may be existing partnerships between Indigenous people and other landowners that are both public and private. Regional NRM groups can build upon and strengthen these partnerships.

6 The regional plan should acknowledge Indigenous interests and relationships to land and water and consider these matters in the plan, which might be achieved through a section on Indigenous culture and land management.

7 The regional plan will contain a section that responds to legislative and legal requirements and responsibilities. This section should include any such matters relating to Indigenous land and water management.

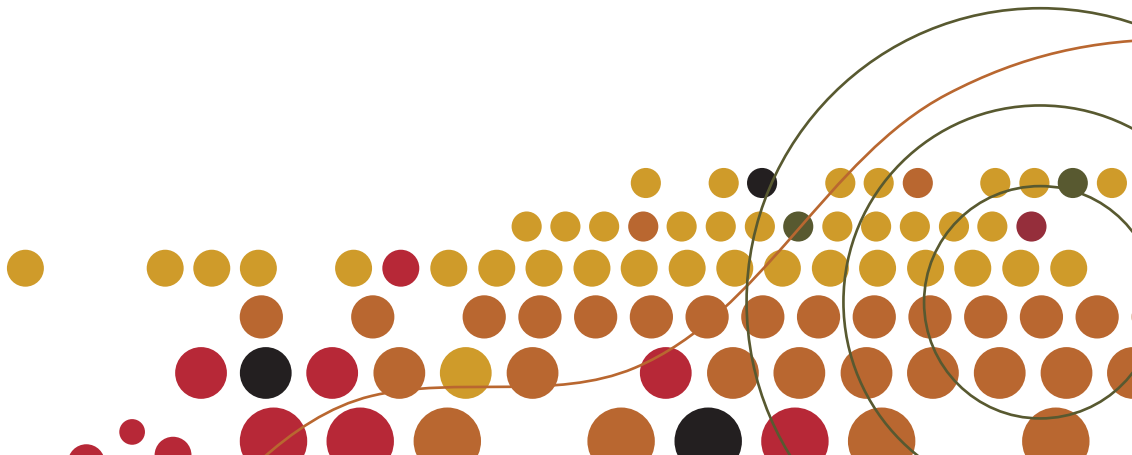
8 There might be a large number of Indigenous people and specific communities in some regions. These communities should be identified and their interests taken into account through direct consultation. Also note that Indigenous people participate or have an interest in all NRM sectors, not just in a sector pigeon-holed as “Indigenous”.

9 It is helpful to remember that all planning is culturally embedded. Natural resources are viewed in different ways by various groups. The values of all groups including those of Indigenous people need to be incorporated into planning processes.



## ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Many decision-making groups find it difficult to engage with Indigenous people. Despite well-intentioned efforts, Indigenous people might find it difficult to attend and contribute to meetings. There are a variety of impediments to Indigenous engagement that include the following.

1. It is often very difficult to identify Indigenous people who have the right to speak for a particular resource or area of country.
  2. There may be family hierarchies or obligations that prevent an individual speaking on the management of certain resources or areas of land and water.
  3. NRM meetings can be intimidating situations for Indigenous people.
  4. NRM might be irrelevant or of low importance in comparison to other issues that they face on a daily basis.
  5. There can be fundamental differences in the way Indigenous people relate to land and water and make decisions compared to non-Indigenous decision-makers.
  6. Like many regional NRM representatives, many Indigenous leaders are over-worked. They get invited to participate on many committees covering a range of issues such as health, education, employment and justice.
  7. Indigenous people may need financial support and help with transport to attend meetings. It can't be taken for granted that they will have a car and be able to get to meetings whether held during the day or night.
- 

# POSITIVE APPROACHES



1. It is possible to map the known physical expressions of Indigenous culture and incorporate their protection and management in NRM plans. Many of the following can be identified within the resources most regional NRM groups have available to them:
  - Cultural sites on government registers
  - Historic sites such as mission building and special schools and places of incarceration
  - Present and past communities
  - National parks and equivalent reserves in joint management arrangements
  - Rural land holdings such as those acquired under various historic arrangements, current land rights legislation and purchase through organisations such as the Indigenous Land Corporation.
2. Indigenous consultation may be more successful and productive when carried out as a separate parallel process. This could mean that a representative of the regional NRM group meets on a regular basis with one or more local Indigenous leaders to discuss issues raised by the regional NRM group and to provide feedback to the group from Indigenous leaders. In this way, a regional NRM group member can get to know the issues of local Indigenous people and also build up a long-term relationship.
3. Indigenous people should be considered as part of the implementation of regional planning. Consider, for example, learning experiences and skills training in natural resource management for Indigenous youth.

## CHECKLIST

- Have you developed a process or contacted Indigenous leaders or Indigenous organisations that have an interest in natural resource management in the region? The plan should identify how partnerships with local and regional Indigenous people are formed so that a long-term interaction can occur.
- Have you considered Indigenous needs within your region and consulted Indigenous people about ways of involving them in natural resource management? Each plan should have a statement compiled by local Indigenous people about their interests and aspirations.
- Have you reached agreement with the regional Indigenous community on how you will provide feedback to and gain further input from Indigenous people in the region? Regional NRM group communication should demonstrate a commitment to keeping Indigenous people informed about what is happening in the Region and also gaining their ideas about what they would like to see happen. The process of communication is just as important as the outcomes. Ways that Indigenous people want specific cultural sites, knowledge and intellectual property protected are important considerations.
- Have you identified Indigenous rights to land and water in the region including, any Native Title Claim or Indigenous Land Use Agreements?
- Have you contacted local Indigenous leaders and government departments to find out about local and regional sites of significance and protocol agreements in your State or local area?
- Have you contacted the Indigenous Land Management Facilitator for your region?

For further information, go to:  
[www.nrm.gov.au/indigenous/](http://www.nrm.gov.au/indigenous/)

