

# Land and Culture

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders have, as first peoples, long histories of strong kinship, strength and pride in culture, and a special relationship with place, land, waters and sea which has endured for thousands of years. These continue to be important features in the everyday lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. They are widely regarded as central to the positive maintenance of all aspects of health and wellbeing.

## Overview

The Queensland Government acknowledges that to 'Close the Gap' in Indigenous life outcomes, recognition of the importance of land, culture and history must inform the other areas of action dealt with in this report.

To this end, the Queensland Government endeavours to promote and affirm Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, create access to and management of land and sea as a base for wellbeing and cultural affirmation, and encourage stronger involvement in and influence on natural resource management planning and policy.

While there is no COAG target or Q2 target which is directly addressed by this strategic action area, improvements in service delivery in this arena will have long-term impacts on a number of the COAG targets. For example:

- increased acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land and sea use and care practices may lead to employment opportunities
- increased opportunities in the arts may result in enhanced employment opportunities, personal income earning potential and greater community sustainability.

The measures which will be used by the Queensland Government to monitor progress are under development. The following are strategies which will best support the importance of land and culture in 'closing the gap':

- promote and affirm Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts, culture and language
- support access to, and management of, land and sea
- support and enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to protect and strengthen their cultures and to record and manage their cultural heritage and language.



## Key Queensland Government actions to close the gap

### Promotion and affirmation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

The Queensland Government has an ongoing commitment to promoting and affirming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

A range of initiatives are underway to support and promote cultural production through the arts. The Department of Education, Training and the Arts:

- provides support to arts organisations such as the **Aboriginal Centre for Performing Arts (ACPA)**, which is dedicated to the development and training of Indigenous performing artists. It is the only Indigenous registered training authority in Australia delivering a curriculum that spans acting, dance, music and voice and boasts one of the highest retention rates for an Indigenous training institution. ACPA provides a nurturing environment that celebrates artistic excellence in contemporary performing arts practice and training, and gives a ‘voice’ to the next generation of Indigenous Australian performing artists. The Centre is a Government-owned, not-for profit company based in Brisbane, taking students from across Australia
- promotes internationally quality Queensland Indigenous art through the **Queensland Indigenous Art Marketing and Export Authority (QIAMEA)**
- provides support at a community level through programs such as the **Indigenous Regional Arts Fund** and **Backing Indigenous Arts (BIA)**. With a budget of \$10.7 million over four years (from 2007 to 2011) the BIA program recognises that arts play a pivotal role in building and sustaining communities through preserving and promoting culture and

creating opportunities for communities to shape their own future. It provides places and tools for creating art, as well as skills development opportunities, and helps artists to secure broader public recognition and an economic return for their work. The program consists of four initiatives:

- › the **Indigenous Art Centre Network**. \$1.2 million was allocated in 2007 to nine art centres and art hubs across Far North Queensland, including the Torres Strait, which are cultural focal points in remote communities
- › the **Cairns Printmaking Centre** which recognises the success and supports the work of Indigenous artists such as Alick Tipoti, Billy Missi, Dennis Nona and Brian Robinson, who are pioneering an exciting new movement in fine art printmaking. When operational in 2009, the centre will enable local artists to have larger print runs of their work and more opportunities to make an income
- › **Building Skills and Opportunities** initiatives, with \$806,000 in 2007/08 across 25 projects, developed the skills of artists, engaged young people in making arts, and kept cultural traditions alive through artist-in-residence and mentoring programs, the expansion of arts opportunities for children and young people, Indigenous dance and music projects including festivals, touring and showcasing opportunities, digital story-telling and writing initiatives
- › the **Cairns Indigenous Art Fair** is to be held in August 2009 and will provide a significant opportunity to celebrate and profile Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists from Far North Queensland and

# Land and Culture

introduce their unique work to new audiences both at home and internationally. A symposium on Indigenous issues and a performing arts festival will complement the Fair.

The State's main cultural institutions are also actively pursuing opportunities to promote and protect Indigenous cultures. For example:

- the State Library of Queensland allocates over \$1.8 million per annum to Indigenous Library Services, and has since 2002 supported **Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs)** in remote communities without library services. Services are also provided in Brisbane through the Kuril Dhagan centre within the new State Library building. IKCs have been established in 17 communities on Cape York Peninsula, in the Torres Strait and at Cherbourg. These Centres complement traditional library services with services based on the oral and visual traditions of Indigenous culture. They also provide literacy and technology training programs, help to preserve culture and act as community meeting places
- the State Library of Queensland is continuing to explore ways to work with Indigenous communities to document, record, access and promote their languages through the **Queensland Indigenous Languages project** funded by the Commonwealth Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, and to engage with communities to support the online sharing and preservation of cultural heritage material through the **Keeping Culture Strong project**. Footprints before Me, a joint project with the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships Community and Personal Histories Unit, has enabled Indigenous people to access a comprehensive website for family history and community research
- the Queensland Museum is committed to affirming respect for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders and their cultures. The Museum maintains a culturally appropriate and comprehensive program of **returning Ancestral Remains and Secret or Sacred Objects to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait**

**Islander communities.** Where Traditional Owners are unable to repatriate remains and objects – due to Native Title Claims, lack of facilities (i.e. keeping places) or lack of access to traditional country, the Museum transfers 'ownership' to Traditional Owners and continues to care for cultural property until such time as communities are ready to receive their property. Groups are encouraged to visit remains and objects whenever they wish. Assistance in the way of advice is provided to communities establishing small museums and keeping places. Further work is underway with the Centre for Indigenous Cultural Policy on cultural heritage and repatriation protocols

- the Queensland Museum's **Dandiiri Maiwar Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures Centre** and **Binangar Language Centre**, provide programs for schools (preschool to adult learners) and general visitors that showcase the diversity, histories, cultures and perspectives of Queensland Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. Through its **Cultures and Histories Program**, the Museum encourages visits from Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders to view and research objects in the collection that relate to their groups. This has been significant for groups participating in cultural retrieval and revival projects for their people.

## Land and sea country

The Queensland Government is supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders' access to, and management of, land and sea country as a foundation for wellbeing and cultural affirmation. The Government is also encouraging Indigenous peoples' stronger involvement in, and influence on, natural resource management planning policy.

The Department of Natural Resources and Water (DNRW) administers key legislation that recognises Indigenous interests in land including: the *Aboriginal and the Torres Strait Cultural Heritage Acts 2003*; the *Aboriginal and the Torres Strait Land Acts*; the *Native Title Act 1993*; and the *Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act 2007*. This legislation is supported by a number of initiatives, including:



- the **Capacity Development Officer Program** which provides funding to **Native Title Representative Bodies** to assist and support Traditional Owner groups in meeting their obligations in relation to mineral exploration activities on their traditional country. Since the Program's introduction in 2004 the Department has provided approximately \$2 million and, in collaboration with Native Title Representative Bodies, has delivered over 120 information workshops across the state
- the **Looking After Country Together strategy**, a three year state-wide program to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access to traditional land and sea country, support stronger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in the management of traditional land and sea country, and encourage stronger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in and influence on broader natural resource planning and policy development
- the **Wild River Rangers program** under which twenty Indigenous Rangers have been appointed with a further 80 positions being negotiated. The rangers provide environmental services to Queensland by looking after the cultural and natural values of the pristine river systems in their traditional country. An evaluation of the program is currently underway
- development of **access to country protocols** and **natural resource management jobs** to facilitate the *Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act 2007*
- the **Cultural Heritage Body Grants Program** which supports registered Cultural Heritage Bodies in Queensland to help them fulfil their legislative role under the *Cultural Heritage Acts* to preserve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage sites and areas in Queensland
- introduction of a **new leasing regime** to enable the trustees of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land to issue **long-term leases** (up to 99 years) for residential, public housing, commercial development and community infrastructure purposes. Long-term leases provide security of tenure for home owners, business people and government and confidence to invest in Indigenous communities
- the **Improved Future Land Practices (Palm Island) Project**, a pilot for reforming tenure and improving land management in Deeds of Grant in Trust communities throughout Queensland. The Project, with a budget of \$2.3 million over three years aims to deliver an effective system for granting tenure appropriate to the land use needs of the Palm Island community, Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council, the Manbarra People and the Queensland Government
- the **Delbessie Agreement (State Rural Leasehold Land Strategy)**, which came into effect in January 2008, which provides incentives for leaseholders who negotiate Indigenous access and use agreements. Such agreements will allow certain traditional activities, defined as camping, fishing, gathering and hunting, performing rites or ceremonies, and visiting sites of significance, to be carried out on country.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has allocated \$11 million over the next four years to implement their responsibilities under the *Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act 2007*. The objective of the funding is to deliver enhanced natural and cultural heritage protection, and improve social and economic opportunities through Traditional Owners' ownership, management and presentation of existing and future national park estates. The EPA will facilitate the inclusion of the existing national park estate on Cape York Peninsula and future national parks within a joint management framework. To achieve these objectives, the EPA has entered into **Indigenous Management Agreements** and **Indigenous Land Use Agreements** that provide, among other things, employment of additional Indigenous Rangers and the establishment of contracts with Individual Land Trusts to support their involvement with national park management.

Since the *Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act 2007* was introduced **almost 293,000 hectares have been transferred as either Aboriginal freehold grants or national park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land)**. In August 2008, the Queensland Government handed back land to the Kulla Land Trust on Cape York Peninsula and signed historic agreements establishing the second national park on Aboriginal land in Queensland –

# Land and Culture

KULLA (McIlwraith Range) National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land). The Government also handed other areas of land in the Coen area to the Toolka, Kulla and Muluna Land Trusts. Each of the three land trusts signed conservation agreements for nature refuges on these lands.

The **Cape York Peninsula Regional Advisory Committee** has been established, with 50 per cent of the members being Indigenous, and has held its first meeting. This Committee will advise Ministers on matters relating to the declaration of Areas of International Conservation Significance and Indigenous Community Use Areas, and other matters such as land management.

To ensure that the cultural heritage values of intended building development sites for government projects are not compromised by development, the Department of Public Works administers the **cultural heritage management program**. This involves liaising and consulting with Traditional Owners and other interested parties on behalf of the client agencies undertaking the development. This program has the effect of meeting the requirements of legislation relating to native title and cultural heritage.

Agreements have been negotiated and signed in relation to a range of regional **land and sea management opportunities** on mainland Queensland and in the Torres Strait. The agreements restore the capacity of Traditional Owners to influence the management of traditional country and meet their custodial responsibilities. They apply in the Wet Tropics Region and the Cape York Peninsula and Savannah of Far North Queensland, and in the Northern Queensland Marine Region.

As at November 2008, the Environmental Protection Agency had 67 **identified Indigenous employees** across the State; principally in North Queensland, working directly in protected area management and environmental protection. This enables Traditional Owners to influence management of traditional country and meet their custodial responsibilities.