



STRONG WOMEN ON COUNTRY

The success of women caring for country as Indigenous rangers and on Indigenous Protected Areas



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Acknowledgements

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women around Australia built this report, sharing their stories, their journeys, their achievements, their careers and their dreams. Thank you to the women and their representative organisations for your contributions: to the rangers, chief executive officers, women's ranger coordinators, communications officers, dedicated scientists and support staff who gave their limited time and energy to helping Country Needs People ensure the work of Indigenous women rangers is nationally recognised.

We further acknowledge the Indigenous women, ranger groups and traditional owners around the country who are working to protect nature for all of us, and who are at the same time delivering benefits for their communities that are transforming lives. None of the success we're celebrating would be here without you.

We recognise the vital importance of long term, well directed funding by federal governments across political lines to the development, growth and ongoing success of Indigenous Protected Areas and Indigenous rangers. We also recognise the increasing contributions of state governments and partnerships with non- government organisations, research institutions and the business sector.

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Country Needs People is an alliance of more than 30 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations from around Australia, and The Pew Charitable Trusts. The campaign is calling for the growth of funding and long-term security for Indigenous ranger and Indigenous Protected Area programs because of their unique success in delivering outstanding results for the environment, people, communities and the economy.

This report was coordinated by Patrick O'Leary and Sophia Walter for the Country Needs People campaign.

Cover photo

Nantawarrina Rangers Julette and Joelwyn Johnson proudly work on Australia's first Indigenous Protected Area, which celebrates 20 years of work protecting nature and sustaining culture in 2018.

Credit Annette Ruzicka.

countryneedspeople.org.au

Foreword

The role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women around Australia in caring for our country is a little known but inspiring story. Women as carers of country is more than a romantic notion, it's a real confirmation of what we have always known: As Aboriginal women, we have a responsibility to our lands and seas and we bring a unique, essential and powerful contribution to their protection and management.



Working as rangers, managing the growing number of Indigenous Protected Areas across Australia, as managers of local land and sea management groups, this is a story about women's strength and confidence.

In the pages of this report you will see just a sample of the many ways women are using land and sea management to apply leadership in their own communities. This practical job women are doing for the benefit of all Australians is so important. We all have a stake in a healthy environment, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are a key part of ensuring that country and culture stays healthy.

Many of the women in these pages were the first female rangers in their community. They are often mothers and grandmothers. This kind of work is not easy. Being committed to your local community brings many challenges. Working out bush, often in remote areas, demands strength and determination. These are the inherent attributes our women are bringing to the task. But also in these pages you will see the joy and pride in the way women talk about their work and their country and the success they are achieving.

All across Australia, women are applying their know-how, learning new skills, sustaining local knowledge, creating opportunities for kids and younger women, bringing their own inherent leadership qualities to the job, and being positive role models. There are many connections between women and their local schools, stories about women and men working together constructively, examples of how women are leading in tackling pressures on our iconic threatened species like the bilby.

The vital cultural role that women play on country goes without saying. It has always been threaded throughout land and sea management; an essential element of a balanced approach between women and men. Work by women rangers and on Indigenous Protected Areas is sustaining those cultural values, grounding land and sea management in those long traditions, and ensuring they can be passed on to younger generations in a modern context.

The examples here are an exciting and positive glimpse of what Indigenous women are achieving already, and there is so much more to do, so much more country to manage, so much need to sustain our cultural connections and local communities. There

are many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women around Australia that are working to protect country today and many who have gone before who are not in this report. Knowledge of their efforts past and ongoing should give us all inspiration.

The work of women on country makes us all stronger. We can aim higher; let's expand opportunities like Indigenous rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas that recognise the hope and empowerment that Indigenous women bring throughout Australia, give them the opportunity to show how much can be achieved.

More than ever we need to work together as Australians to forge a better future. The women in these pages show us ways we can do that. We owe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women rangers our support. I hope you will read this and join with me in urging all politicians and governments to secure and greatly expand support for Australia's Indigenous rangers and Indigenous Protected Area programs.

Our country needs its people and particularly its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls if we are going to have a healthy future for all.

Pat Anderson AO is an Alyawarre woman. Her ancestral country is on the Queensland - Northern Territory border. Pat chairs the Lowitja Institute and is a leading voice on community health. She co-chaired the Prime Minister's Referendum Council and co-authored the 'Little Children are Sacred' report.





Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Warru Ranger Elisha Roesch releases a female waru back to the environment after fitting it with a microchip and an ear tag.

Credit: Ethan Davis

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Indigenous Protected Areas ■

Northern Territory

- A Dhimurru
- B Andindilyakwa
- C Laynhapuy – Stage 1
- D Northern Tanami
- E Angas Downs
- F Warddeken
- G Djelk
- H Marri-Jabin (Thamurrurr – Stage 1)
- I Yanyuwa (Barni – Wardimantha Awara)
- J Southern Tanami
- K Wardaman – Stage 1
- L Katiti Petermann
- M Ganalanga-Mindibirrina – Stage 1
- N Marthakal – Stage 1
- O South East Arnhem Land

Western Australia

- A Paruku
- B Ngaanyatjarra
- C Ninghan
- D Warlu Jilajaa Jumu
- E Unguu -Stage 1
- F Birriliburu
- G Bardi Jawi
- H Wilinggin
- I Dambimangari
- J Balangarra
- K Karajarri - Stage 1
- L Kiwirrkurra
- M Nyangumarta Warrarn
- N Mutawa Kurrara Kurrara (CM)
- O Yawuru - Stage 1

South Australia

- A Nantawarrina
- B Yalata
- C Watarru
- D Walalkara
- E Mount Willoughby
- F Kalka –Pipalyatjara
- G Aparara –Makiri-Punti
- H Antara –Sandy Bore
- I Yappala
- J Wardang Island

Victoria

- A Deen Maar
- B Tyrendarra
- C Kurtonitj
- D Framlingham Forest
- E Lake Condah

Tasmania

- A Preminghana
- B Risdon Cove
- C Putalina
- D Mount Chappell Island
- E Badger Island
- F Babel Island
- G Great Dog Island
- H lungatalanana

Queensland

- A Guanaba
- B Warul Kawa Island
- C Kaanju Ngaachi
- D Pulu Islet
- E Jamba Dhandan Duringala
- F Mandingalbay Yidinji
- G Angkum - Stage 1
- H Eastern Kuku Yalanji
- I Giringun (CM)
- J Thuwathu/Bujimulla
- K Nijinda Durlga -Stage 1
- L Warraberalgal & Porumalgal

New South Wales

- A Wattlebridge
- B Toogimbie
- C Tarriwa Kurrukun
- D Boorabee and The Willows
- E Brewarrina Ngemba Billabong
- F Dorodong
- G Weilmoringle
- H Minyumai
- I Gumma
- J Ngunya Jargoan

Indigenous Ranger Groups ●

Northern Territory

- 1 Anangu Rangers on Angas Downs
- 2 Anangu Luritjiku Rangers
- 3 Anmatyerr Rangers
- 4 Muru-warinyi Ankkul Rangers
- 5 Tjuwanpa Rangers
- 6 Tjuwanpa Women Rangers
- 7 Kaltukatjara Rangers
- 8 Warlpiri Rangers
- 9 North Tanami Rangers
- 10 Bulgul Land and Sea Rangers
- 11 Malak Malak Land Management
- 12 Wagiman Guwardagun Rangers
- 13 Thamarrurr Rangers
- 14 Waanyi Garawa Rangers
- 15 Garawa Rangers
- 16 Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers
- 17 Tiwi Islands Land and Sea Management
- 18 Anindilyakwa Rangers
- 19 Warnbi Rangers
- 20 Werenbun Rangers
- 21 Crocodile Islands Rangers
- 22 Yirralka Rangers - Laynhapuy IPA
- 23 Dhimurru IPA Rangers
- 24 Djelk Rangers
- 25 Warddeken Rangers
- 26 Garngi Rangers
- 27 Gumurr Marthakal Rangers
- 28 Yugul Mangi Rangers
- 29 Arafura Swamp Ranger Groups
- 30 Mardbalk Marine Rangers
- 31 Mimal Rangers
- 32 Numbulwar Numburindi Amalagayag Inyung Rangers
- 33 Jawoyn Rangers
- 34 Njanjma Rangers
- 35 Mangarrayi Rangers
- 36 Tjakura Rangers
- 37 Asyrikarrak Kirim Rangers

Western Australia

- 1 Miriuwung Gajerrong Rangers for Reserve 31165
- 2 Balangarra Rangers
- 3 Bardi Jawi Rangers
- 4 Gooniyandi Rangers
- 5 Karajarri Rangers
- 6 Nurrara Rangers
- 7 Nyikina Mangala
- 8 Nyul Nyul Rangers
- 9 Paruku Rangers
- 10 Unguu Rangers
- 11 Wunggurr Rangers
- 12 Jigalong Rangers
- 13 Punmu Rangers
- 14 Parngurr Men Rangers
- 15 Parngurr Women Rangers
- 16 Warburton Women Rangers
- 17 Warburton Men Rangers
- 18 Blackstone Rangers
- 19 Warakurna Rangers
- 20 Kija Rangers
- 21 Nyangumarta Rangers
- 22 Goldfields Land Management Rangers
- 23 Spinifex Rangers
- 24 Marduthuni Rangers
- 25 Ngadju Rangers

South Australia

- 1 Anangu Land Management Rangers
- 2 Warru Kaninytjaku APY Rangers – Musgrave Ranges
- 3 Warru Kaninytjaku APY Rangers - Tomkinson Ranges
- 4 Gawler Ranges Rangers
- 5 Nantawarrina Rangers
- 6 Ngarrindjeri Rangers
- 7 Raukkan Rangers
- 8 Riverland Rangers
- 9 Yalata IPA Rangers

Victoria

- 1 Budj Bim Rangers

Tasmania - WOC Ranger Groups

- 1 Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre Rangers - Milaythina Pakana
- 2 Tasmanian Aboriginal Trainee Rangers (statewide)
- 3 Truwana Rangers

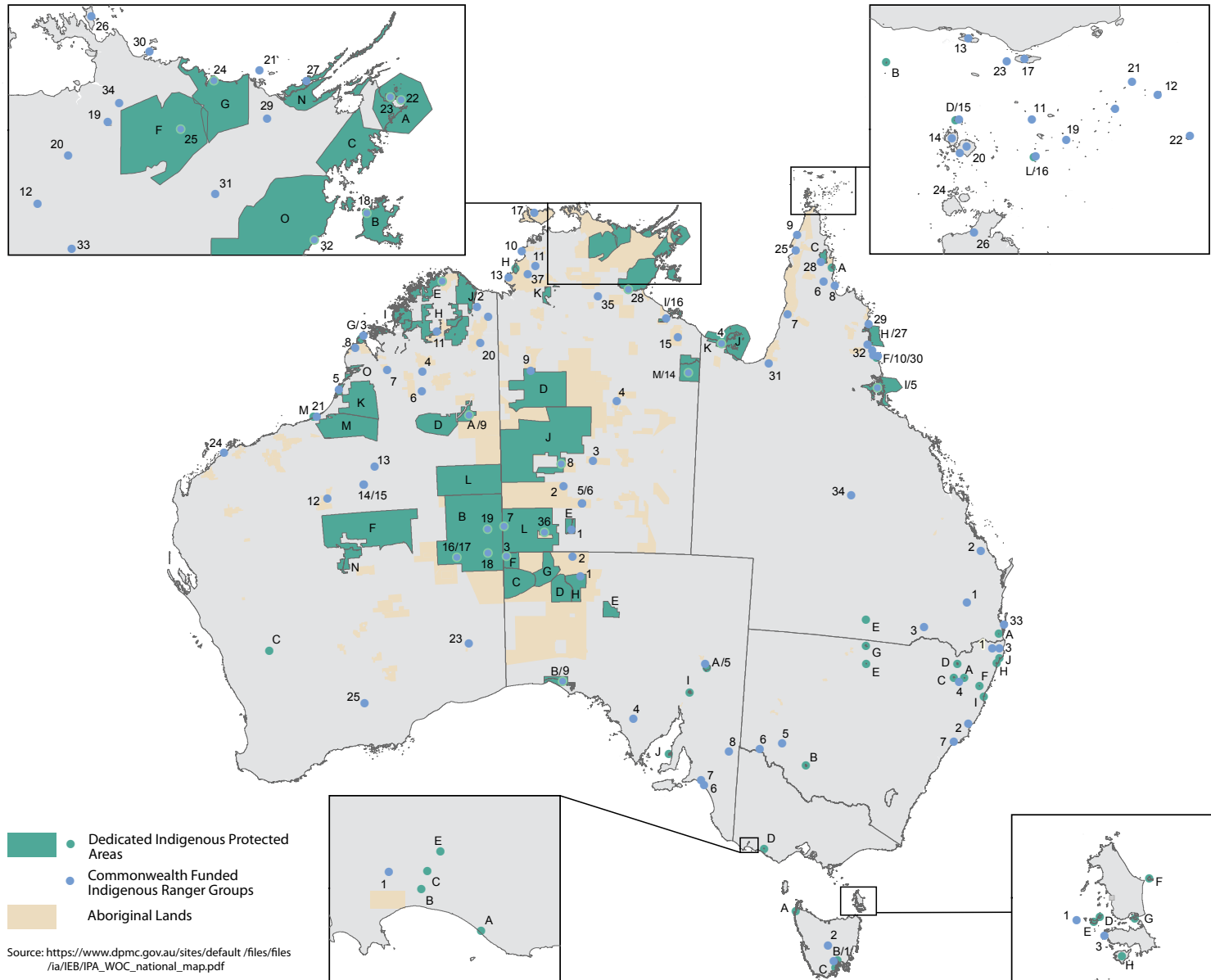
New South Wales

- 1 Githabul Aboriginal Rangers
- 2 TIDE Rangers
- 3 Ngulingah Nimbin Rocks Rangers 4 Wattlebridge & Tarriwa Kurrukun IPA Rangers
- 5 Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area Rangers
- 6 Barkindji Maraura Rangers
- 7 Worimi Rangers

Queensland

- 1 Bunya Mountain Murri Rangers
- 2 Gidarjil Rangers
- 3 Queensland Murray Darling Rangers
- 4 Gangalidda Garawa Rangers
- 5 Giringun Rangers
- 6 Kalan Rangers
- 7 Kowanyama Land Office Rangers
- 8 Lama Lama Rangers
- 9 Magoon Land and Sea Rangers
- 10 Mandingalbay Yidinji Rangers
- 11 Lamalgal Rangers
- 12 Erubun Rangers
- 13 Malu Kiai Rangers
- 14 Mura Badhulgau Rangers
- 15 Mabuuygiw Rangers
- 16 Warraberalgal Rangers
- 17 Mura Buway Rangers
- 18 Masigalgal Rangers
- 19 Porumalgal Rangers
- 20 Mua Lagalgau Rangers – Kubin
- 21 Mua Lagalgau Rangers – St Pauls 22 Ugaram Rangers
- 23 Meriam Gesep A Gur Keparem Le Rangers
- 24 Simakal Rangers
- 25 Nanun Wungthim Land and Sea Rangers
- 26 Apudthama Rangers
- 27 Eastern Kuku Yalanji Rangers
- 28 Chuulangun Rangers
- 29 Yuku-Baja-Muliku Rangers
- 30 Gunggandji Rangers
- 31 Normanton Rangers
- 32 Yirrganydji Rangers
- 33 Quandamooka Rangers
- 34 Midwest Rangers

Indigenous Protected Areas and Commonwealth funded Indigenous ranger groups





Meaningful work that people are proud to do: Karajarri Rangers Celia Bennett and Reeny Hopiga on a cultural awareness trip at Corkbark fishing spot near Bidadanga community.

Credit: Tom De Souza

Executive Summary

On the stone country of Arnhem Land, daluk rangers – Warddeken Women Rangers – are protecting nature and transforming lives. Through a concerted push, sparked by traditional owners' feedback on Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area management, women have more than doubled their participation in ranger work to over 40% per cent in just two years. Daluk rangers receive 'work ready' training alongside accredited and on-the-job training, and their duties include researching and recording data for the largest ever biodiversity survey in Arnhem Land. This is far from an isolated example of the environmental, social and cultural success achieved by Indigenous women rangers.

Across Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women play a vital role protecting nature and cultural heritage for the benefit of every Australian. Women rangers tackle environmental threats like feral animals, invasive weeds and destructive wildfires, as well as undertake cultural site and tourism infrastructure maintenance. At the same time, their work has transformative benefits for families, communities and for the women themselves.

This report is separated into chapters outlining the achievements of women protecting nature, demonstrating empowerment through their land and sea management careers, sustaining culture and strengthening communities. Each case study, however, demonstrates the integrated benefits of Indigenous ranger jobs and Indigenous Protected Areas for women, their communities and every Australian.

Laura Pearson, who began as a ranger and now supervises nine men rangers for the Torres Strait Regional Authority, is a good example. She has harnessed her passion for protecting nature and perpetuating culture to develop an impressive land and sea

Indigenous Protected Areas: Indigenous-led land and sea management

Indigenous Protected Areas represent an agreement between traditional owners and the federal government to look after the environmental and cultural values of land and sea country. Traditional Owner groups voluntarily enter IPA negotiations, and develop a plan to care for country in partnership with the federal government. Indigenous Protected Areas are managed by traditional owners and satisfy criteria established by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Over 67 million hectares of Australia – that's 10 times the size of Tasmania and close to half of the Australian National Reserve System – are cared for through Indigenous Protected Areas. It is a world-leading model that demonstrates the vital role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities play in protecting many of Australia's most precious places.

management career which has seen her build partnerships and speak at conferences beyond the country she is working on.

“I wanted to be a ranger, educating the community and our children. I wanted to achieve things for my community so people are safe and we live sustainably; protecting turtle and dugong, restoring and preserving our language, maintaining traditional gardens for community members to enjoy,” she says.

From the Torres Strait to Tasmania, the Western Deserts to regional New South Wales, the achievements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women represented in this report illustrate how growing Indigenous ranger jobs and Indigenous Protected Areas, and securing them for the long term, would deliver further benefits for people and nature across Australia.

Meaningful work where it’s needed most

In many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, Indigenous land and sea management work is one of the main opportunities to engage in meaningful employment.¹

In the 2014-15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey², 55 per cent of Indigenous women cited ‘No jobs in local area or line of work’ or ‘No jobs at all’ as a barrier to finding employment. In remote areas, this figure was 66 per cent.

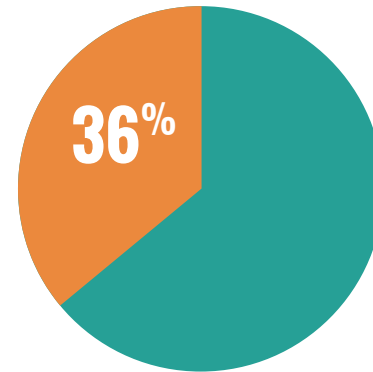
Indigenous ranger jobs address this barrier with real jobs that people are proud to do.

“Since I have been working as a ranger I have learnt a lot of things, gone for training and workshops, I’ve been to conferences and I would like to learn more. Now I am standing up in front of biggest mob of people and speaking aloud. I had never used a microphone before but now I am strong and I can do anything,” says North Tanami Ranger Helen Wilson.

Structures that support women

The number of women working as Indigenous rangers has grown steadily since the Working on Country program was established in 2007.^{3,4} The success of women rangers is supported by their

**In 2014 -15
women made up more than a third of Indigenous
land and sea management employees when
casual work was included.⁴**



■ Indigenous women employees

**Indigenous women held
just over 20 per cent of the part-time
and full-time positions.**

communities and representative organisations. Indigenous ranger jobs are designed to be flexible; part-time and casual employment arrangements are available, as well as full time positions, to support the employment of women and other community members needing to maintain family and cultural obligations.

Women rangers work in a variety of structures: sometimes women work alongside men in ranger groups, other times dedicated women ranger teams work together. But there is a common theme nationwide: the support and teamwork expressed by men rangers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations reinforces the important role women play in land and sea management. In Social Ventures Australia’s 2016 social return on investment analysis for the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, community members reported increased ‘respect for women’ as an important outcome of Indigenous Protected Areas.⁵

The wanyarr or 'water tree' is lifeblood for Ngadju people.

Traditionally, Ngadju shaped a bowl formation in very young red heart gums to catch water on Ngadju country, which covers nearly five million hectares of the world's largest and healthiest temperate woodland, the Great Western Woodlands in southern Western Australia.

Today, Ngadju Women Rangers, like Tiara Schultz standing here with her son Rezarlie and sister Joselyn, protect and preserve wanyarr through a program of monitoring, recording and cleaning. Wanyarr can store up to 40 litres of fresh water in some larger trees. The significance of this responsibility to Ngadju people is exemplified by the Ngadju Conservation logo which features a wanyarr at its centre.



Credit: Les Schultz

Securing the future for strong women on country

The case for growth of Indigenous ranger and Indigenous Protected Area programs is compelling. The case studies in this report demonstrate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are taking advantage of opportunities through land and sea management to further express and develop their strength, confidence and leadership. Properly funded, stable and predictable wages and operational support are critical elements of this success.

Australian landscapes are huge in scale, the demand for meaningful work that recognises and sustains cultural connections is enormous, and the success demonstrated by Indigenous land and sea management is clear. The evidence shows that we can achieve even more if Australia continues to expand and secure our investments in Indigenous rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas and ensure that they are the framework for a true partnership between government, traditional owners and others. We need to think beyond terms of government to the coming decades, when the need for careful management of our natural and cultural environment will only grow.

Now, more than ever, we need to recognise the value of strong women on country and expand our vision to match their commitment, resilience and optimism to deliver a stronger and healthier Australia for us all.

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Key findings

Frontline nature protection

“Our country is like our garden – we need to look after it. There are trees, birds, waterways, fish, mammals and reptiles, and they are all important. We keep country healthy and country keeps us healthy,” Dhimurru Senior Ranger Fiona Yupunu Marika.

Indigenous women rangers are making a significant contribution to the protection of biodiversity across vast areas of Australia, undertaking important work to protect native plants and animals and address environmental threats like feral animals, invasive weeds and destructive wildfires.

A platform for career development, leadership and empowerment

“I feel more confident and more independent. I am also more willing to take on or step into experiences, whereas before I would have been more hesitant,” Lama Lama Project Officer Mikayla Down.

Indigenous land and sea management is developing leadership opportunities and building the confidence of women to follow their career aspirations. Indigenous ranger jobs and Indigenous Protected Areas provide platforms through which women demonstrate leadership and participate both outside and within their own communities as key voices with cultural authority and legitimacy.

Inspiring role models

“To me, being a ranger coordinator strengthens me and the women rangers and the community and the country. I’m a good role model to women - and not only to women, to some men, that’s what they’ve said to me - and my family. Nothing is impossible for me,” Anmatyerr Ranger Coordinator Josephine Grant.

Indigenous women rangers are inspiring their communities, illuminating career pathways, applying their passion for culture, community and country through work, demonstrating active workforce participation, tackling issues like ‘shame’, promoting

gender balanced decision making and supporting young people to participate in work that contributes meaningfully.

Unique skills and knowledge

“Women rangers manage woman only cultural site, mentor female students from school. Women’s rangers are better at identifying bush tuckers and bush medicine, we learn from old ladies,” Gurindji Ranger Helma Bernard.

The knowledge, attributes and approaches of women are integral to a balanced approach to work caring for land and sea country. Indigenous women rangers often have exclusive access to places, and unique knowledge about the ecological processes in those places.

Sustaining cultural strength

“We need to teach our young people about culture so when they have kids and grow them up, they can teach them about the country they live in,” Karajarri Senior Cultural Ranger Jess Bangu.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women across Australia identify that nourishing culture is central to their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their communities.⁶ Indigenous Protected Area and Indigenous ranger programs are supporting increased community pride and wellbeing, fostering cultural connection and continuity for women and their communities.

Supporting community resilience

“Because of the IPA and Working on Country programs, we now have a real ability to help create futures for our people,” Banbai Manager Tanya Elone.

Indigenous women rangers are actively undertaking work to support their communities, engaging with young people and people experiencing difficulties, supporting traineeships and reinforcing the benefits of cultural identity and meaningful employment.



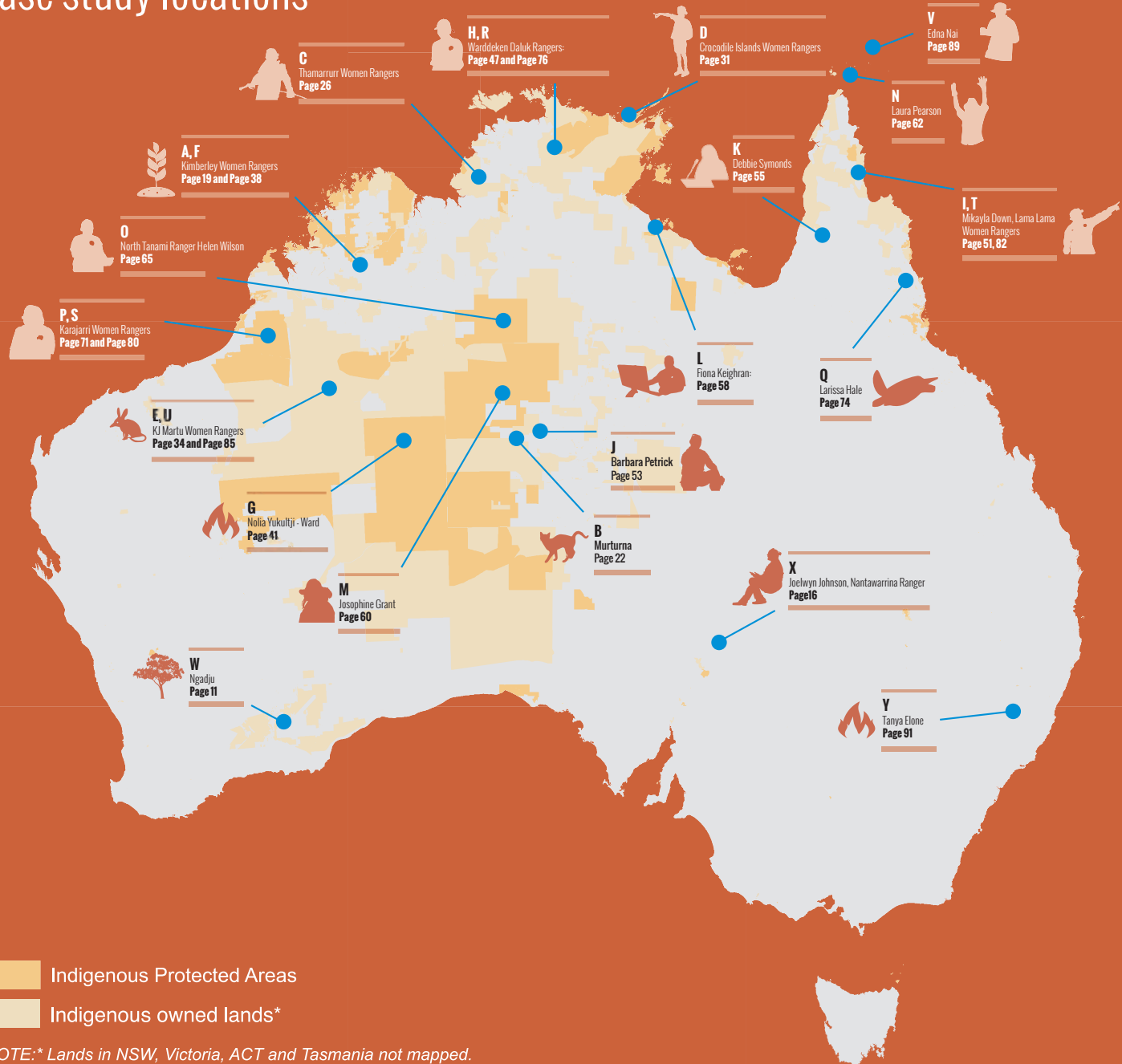
Nyangumarta Rangers install fencing at 80-Mile Beach in the Nyangumarta Warrarn Indigenous Protected Area to protect a 1.2km-long block from damage caused by unauthorised campers and cattle.

Credit: Yamaji Warpa Aboriginal Corporation

Nationwide examples of success

- A. Women rangers in the Kimberley** are using invaluable ecological knowledge of plants to protect and propagate native plant species, at the same time as working with their communities to share this knowledge and the benefits of meaningful work on country.
- B. Christine Michaels**, or Murturna as she is known, applies her specialist tracking skills to hunt feral cats, and to share her knowledge and skills with other rangers across the Outback.
- C. Thammarrur Women Rangers** are cleaning up land and sea country by establishing an integrated campaign which engages the whole community in recycling, and litter and marine debris collection.
- D.** The legacy of Australian hero and Crocodile Islands elder, Laurie Baymarrwangga, is carried forth by **Crocodile Islands Women Rangers**, who record, share and apply unique ecological knowledge to care for their country and community.
- E.** Aboriginal owned and managed lands remain the last stronghold for the greater bilby. **Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa Martu Women Rangers** are sharing and applying their knowledge and skills to protect this Australian icon.
- F.** In partnership with scientists, the government and men rangers, **Kimberley Women Rangers** have led the charge to protect an endangered coastal rainforest ecosystem through surveying, monitoring, weeding and rehabilitation.
- G.** The expert ecological knowledge of **Nolia Yukultji Ward** is contributing to the protection of millions of hectares of desert country through strategic fire management and feral animal tracking and hunting.
- H.** When **Warddeken** traditional owners expressed their wish to see more women involved in Indigenous Protected Area management, an inspirational project to boost women's engagement began.
- I.** Through the Lama Lama Indigenous Ranger program, **Mikayla Down** has pursued an ambitious career, rising from trainee to project officer and earning qualifications along the way.
- J.** Working as a ranger means **Barbara Petrick** can fulfil her passion for caring for her country and her community through land management and cultural continuity programs in her dream job.
- K. Debbie Symonds** is the inspirational chief executive officer of a leading Aboriginal organisation dedicated to empowering Olkola people to protect more than a million hectares of their country while sustaining culture.
- L.** After a rich and varied life working around the Northern Territory, **Fiona Keighran** returned to her country and began work with the li-Anthawirriyarr Sea Rangers. Her career has developed from administration support officer to ranger coordinator, and she says she's never looked back.
- M.** The accolades **Josephine Grant** has earned speak for themselves. She is a hard working and talented ranger, a role model for community members and other women in particular, and a leader in land management in Central Australia.
- N. Laura Pearson** says it was her passion and pride for country that made her apply to work as a senior ranger in 2012. It has taken her a long way – Laura now supervises nine rangers and remains passionate about protecting wildlife and sustaining culture.
- O.** Women rangers like **Helen Wilson** demonstrate how ranger jobs illuminate employment pathways for girls, support gender balance and provide opportunities for women to grow and challenge themselves professionally.
- P.** Young people in and around Bidyadanga are seeing the transformational community benefits of Indigenous rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas through the **Karajarri Women Rangers'** work engaging school-based trainees, teaching students about country and culture, and engaging young people experiencing difficulties in meaningful and positive projects.
- Q.** Managing director **Larissa Hale** has built the Yuku Baja Muliku Land Trust to employ 13 staff, including 9 Indigenous rangers, establish a renowned turtle rescue and rehabilitation centre, and support a junior ranger program involving 55 local kids.
- R.** Invaluable rock art sites, and the fragile first hand knowledge associated with them, are being protected and sustained by **Warddeken Women Rangers**.
- S. Jess Bangu** has used the skills and confidence she's developed since being a ranger to teach younger generations about Karajarri culture. She is considered a pioneer and a role model for women with aspirations to work on land and sea management in the Kimberley.
- T.** For **Lama Lama** people, women hold important leadership roles, sitting at the heart of their communities and working hard to create strong futures for their families. The Lama Lama community is proud of the gender balance their ranger team boasts.
- U.** Through the Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa Puntura-ya Ninti Program and Martu Rangers, activities that breathe life into Martu culture are being undertaken. Amongst these is a regular women's cultural camp supported by **KJ Women Rangers**.
- V. Edna Nai** is committed to instilling her sense of responsibility to take care of country to younger generations. Through her work as a ranger, Edna inspires her community to sustain culture and tradition as well as caring for country.
- W. Ngadju Women Rangers** protect and preserve wanyarr – the 'water tree' – through a program of monitoring, recording and cleaning. Wanyarr is an important cultural symbol for Ngadju people and the women rangers' duties in protecting it represent the community's respect for their work.
- X.** On Australia's first Indigenous Protected Area, Nantawarrina Ranger **Joelwyn Johnson** says working as a ranger means she can fulfil a responsibility to care for country: Joelwyn works to keep country healthy and country keeps her healthy in return.
- Y.** Under the stewardship of long-time manager **Tanya Elone**, Banbai-Wattleridge Indigenous Protected Area injects environmental, social and economic benefits to support community and country.

Case study locations





“Looking after country is more than just a job for me, it’s part of who I am. The trees, the soil, the water, the animals - we’re responsible for keeping them healthy. And when we keep country healthy, it sets us right too.” - Joelwyn Johnson, Nantawarrina Ranger. The Nantawarrina Indigenous Protected Area celebrates the twentieth anniversary of its declaration in 2018.

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Protecting nature

Indigenous rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas now represent the frontline of nature protection across Australia. More than 170 million hectares is held in Indigenous ownership, just under half of this area in Indigenous Protected Areas, and many of these landscapes are especially rich in native plants and animals, many threatened, which require active management to survive.¹

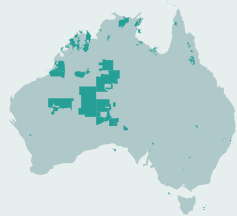
The knowledge, attributes and approaches of women are integral to a balanced approach to work caring for land and sea country. Across Australia, the contribution of Indigenous women varies significantly from place to place in how it is applied. Indigenous women rangers often have exclusive access to places, and unique knowledge about the ecological processes in those places. The traditional ecological knowledge of Indigenous women can include plant or animal behaviours, population and habitat dynamics, and management needs.

In some places, for example in the Kimberley, women's traditional ecological knowledge about plants is protecting endangered monsoon vine thickets, where practical, hands-on management alongside partnerships with government and non-governmental

“Human rights on paper and in law are essential but by themselves not enough. We need to be able to express those rights through living a meaningful life that contributes to our culture, our families and our communities. Women caring for country by working as rangers or in Indigenous Protected Areas are doing that, and through their work every Australian benefits.” **JUNE OSCAR AO**



June Oscar AO is a Bunuba woman and a strong advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, social justice, women's and health issues. June is the current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and was winner of the 100 Women of Influence 2013 in the Social Enterprise and Not For Profit category. She is widely recognised for her work on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.



INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREAS

represent a **TOTAL AREA** approximately

10 TIMES THE
SIZE OF
TASMANIA



“I’m a huge advocate for combining technology with land and sea management in a way which enhances our understanding of country and culture. I love the way women involved with Indigenous Protected Areas and working as Indigenous rangers around Australia are at the cutting edge of using technology to care for country and keep culture strong.” MIKAELA JADE



Mikaela Jade is a Cabrogal woman, past park ranger and environmental biologist, commercial drone pilot, chief executive officer and founder of Indigital - an innovative digital story telling company. Mikaela has received wide recognition and awards for her entrepreneurial work in digital media and natural and cultural heritage management. She is a delegate to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

organisations is delivering important biodiversity conservation. In other places, such as Wadeye where Thamarrurr Women Rangers have established a whole-of-community litter pollution strategy, ranger work by women is improving elements of land management through education, delivering benefits for nature with an eye to future generations. All these roles impact directly on improving the quality of land and sea management.

Environmental challenges like feral animals, invasive weeds and destructive wildfires are threatening the health of vast areas. Indigenous people have witnessed the effect of habitat destruction, weeds, feral animals, the over-allocation of water, and climate change on their country, and, often in partnership with government, have established regional and local environmental strategies to respond to these threats. Indigenous peoples’ caring for country is important not just for local places, but for the coordination of environmental issues that have national reach.²

The following case studies demonstrate how practical approaches to tackling environmental threats and protecting nature are being successfully undertaken by Indigenous women rangers. These efforts must be expanded to secure existing environmental gains and extend effective management to unmanaged or undermanaged regions.

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² Altman, J, K Jordan, S Kerins, G Buchanan, N Biddle, EJ Ens and K May 2009 ‘Indigenous interests in land & water’ in Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Northern Australia Land & Water Science Review 2009: Full report, CSIRO, Canberra, Chapter 7:1-56



Kimberley Women Rangers :

Applying Indigenous ecological knowledge for nature and culture

Kimberley Women Rangers are using their unique ecological knowledge of plants for the benefit of people and nature by:

- Collecting and propagating seeds;
- Maintaining a provenance seed bank;
- Undertaking revegetation, including of the endangered ecosystems, monsoon vine thickets;
- Developing plant story books to share Indigenous ecological knowledge;
- Developing a bush products social enterprise;
- Working with their communities and schools to share Indigenous ecological knowledge.

Invaluable knowledge about the medicinal, ecological, spiritual and ornamental uses of plants in the Kimberley is being nurtured and grown by Kimberley Women Rangers. Through a series of projects, rangers are both protecting plant life in the wild, and promoting the capture and sharing of knowledge about plant life.

Precious knowledge

Traditional owners in the Kimberley and around Australia have intricate knowledge of the ecosystems and dynamics functioning within land and seascapes. That knowledge extends to stewardship of country, bush medicine and bush tucker, maintaining water points, fire management and the functioning of biodiversity. Traditional ecological knowledge is bound up with culture and spirituality, and offers important insights into protecting nature into the future. In many parts of Australia, traditional knowledge has been integrated with Western scientific methods to develop approaches to managing contemporary threats to biodiversity.

Women rangers growing opportunities

Through a series of projects in the Kimberley, Indigenous women rangers have harnessed their ecological knowledge to protect plant species and foster culture in future generations.



Bardi Jawi Oorany Ranger Team in their nursery at Ardyaloon (One Arm Point) Community, the base for seed propagation. This was the women ranger group before funding expired in 2017, demonstrating the need to for fully-funded long term Indigenous ranger contracts.

The Kimberley Land Council hosts four women ranger teams who are in the early stages of developing social enterprises based on traditional bush products. The women have been experimenting with different plants and products, combining traditional knowledge with contemporary techniques, and have staged local workshops bringing together elders and expert consultants. They have already identified local markets such as tourism operators, cafes, market stalls, galleries, health services within their own communities, however in the long-term may look to develop high end products that can sell into national and international supply chains.

Kimberley Women Rangers have worked with other stakeholders to support sustainable social enterprise and protect plant species through the Kimberley Community Seedbank. The Seedbank is hosted by Environs Kimberley and has received funding from WA NRM, WWF Australia and the Belgiorno-Nettis Foundation. In 2017, the Seedbank activities included:

- Training in collecting and preparing seed for sale with Karajarri Rangers and Yawuru Country Managers;
- A workshop with the Karajarri Rangers to guide product development;



Senior Bardi Jawi Cultural Advisor Bernadette Angus works closely with the rangers, often travelling out on country to share her unique ecological and cultural knowledge of country and plants with the younger rangers.

With the help of senior women cultural advisers, the Bardi Jawi Oorany Rangers have also developed a plant story book that showcases traditional ecological knowledge. Created in collaboration with the Kimberley Nature Project and Environs Kimberley, Plant Stories records and shares cultural information about plants on country. The 11 species featured in the book all occur within monsoon vine thickets. It documents Bardi Jawi knowledge of the seasons in which these plants germinate, grow, flower and fruit, the animals and birds that rely on them for food and habitat, how the plants respond to noorroo (fire), and the ways people use the plants for food and medicines, as hair dye, fish poison and chewing tobacco.

Indigenous ranger jobs promote Indigenous ecological knowledge

Around the country, Indigenous ranger jobs are facilitating the recording and sharing of Indigenous ecological knowledge. This knowledge is an invaluable asset in protecting wildlife and wild places, at the same time as harnessing and perpetuating cultural heritage. Supporting Indigenous land and sea management does more than provide meaningful work and people on the ground caring for country, it is an investment in the future of environmental management through the capture and sharing of Indigenous ecological knowledge.

- Development of a business plan model for all rangers that could be modified for other economic bush products;
- Six seed collection field trips with Bardi Jawi Oorany, Nyul Nyul and Karajarri Women Rangers; and,
- A meeting to establish a network of Indigenous harvesters, pickers, business owners and rangers involved in the emerging Bush Resources Industry (including the Bardi Jawi Oorany, Nyul Nyul, Karajarri Rangers and Yawuru Country Managers).

Murturna:

Traditional skills for tackling a modern challenge



When the Indigenous ranger program started in the enormous (10 million hectares) Southern Tanami Indigenous Protected Area, Murturna was a natural fit. Growing up in a circle of elders at the remote Ethel Creek outstation, Murturna paid close attention to traditional hunting and desert management skills, what she calls 'bush school'. By sixteen, she was already an expert hunter. With her high-level tracking ability, detailed knowledge of flora and fauna, lifetime of burning experience and love of being out on country, Murturna saw ranger work as a perfect opportunity.

Starting as a casual ranger based at the community of Nyirripi in the Northern Territory, Murturna was soon invited to join the ranger group at the larger community of Yuendumu full time. Through the ranger program, Murturna learnt to supplement her traditional burning with aerial incendiary burning, extend her feral animal control from killing cats with crowbars to killing camels with .308s and to complement her tracking surveys for bilbies with motion-detector cameras.

“It makes me proud going out to other places and teaching other rangers now. It makes my family proud too, mum and my sisters and brothers.”

MURTURNA (CHRISTINE ELLIS MICHAELS)

Murturna, Christine Ellis Michaels, is an Indigenous ranger with specialist skills who is tackling feral cats head on by:

- Applying traditional tracking and hunting skills, combined with advanced ranger training, to increase the impact of feral cat eradication work;
- Sharing her knowledge and skills throughout the ranger network;
- Training young women to track and trap feral cats, passing on knowledge that could otherwise be lost.

Tackling the feral cat challenge

Feral cats present one of Australia's most pressing environmental challenges, a major factor in Australia's world-leading mammal extinction rate. But they are notoriously hard to kill.

Feral cat control work is Murturna's core expertise. Her knowledge of cat behaviour, exceptional tracking skills, fitness and stamina combine to make her one of the most accomplished cat control experts in Australia, and probably the world.



According to the Australian Department of Environment, feral cats threaten the survival of over 100 native Australian species. Here, Murturna has been hunting with her mother Alice Henwood.

Murturna's contribution – and ongoing support for her to train others – is an invaluable weapon in the battle to save species in Central Australia. She can follow a cat track all day without losing it and has now integrated the use of leghold traps, further increasing her efficiency.

Cat tracking is a rapidly disappearing skill in Australia. Murturna's family are the last cat hunters in the Northern Territory and there are now only two communities in Western Australia where cats continue to be hunted using traditional tracking techniques.

Embedding expertise across the desert

The ranger program means that rangers with expert skills like Murturna have a highly connected network across which to share and transfer their skills.

Murturna's cat control skills are in high demand and she works across several important projects. In 2015 she led a team of Central Land Council rangers to fulfil a mining company contract to control cats to protect a bilby colony.

She's spearheading the removal of cats from a 10 000 hectare mammal reintroduction site on Newhaven Sanctuary for the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. Stage 2 of this project will extend the cat-free area to 69 000 hectares, making it the largest feral cat eradication project in the world. Murturna is integral to the success of this project, having already captured more than 50 cats at Newhaven in the past year.

It's no wonder Murturna has won a string of Northern Territory Ranger Awards for her work: Indigenous Land Management Champion, Regional Ranger of the Year and Outstanding Frontline Achievement Award.



Credit: Inset: Schönfeld/ANWC

Murturna has also travelled to Punmu and Wiluna to demonstrate cat control techniques and inspire women rangers from these communities to become cat control experts. She recently assisted the Muru-warinyi Ankkul rangers from Tennant Creek to conduct cat trapping around a colony of black-footed rock wallabies.

Cat hunters of the future

Murturna's main co-workers are her mother and her aging uncle. It's vital the ranger program grows in order for her to continue to train younger men and women to come after her.

"When I was out bush with my mum and dad they taught me how to track. We used to go out and hunt and catch pussycat. Now I've been teaching my children and my nephew and nieces so that they can take over from me. I teach them how to track cats and tell the difference between dingo, fox and cat tracks," Murturna says.

It's not an overstatement to say the future of some of Australia's most threatened species hinge on women rangers like Murturna passing on their skills and knowledge. "Now there are girls asking me about this work, so they can learn and then teach others. They need to stay out bush working so they can look after their country too."

“It would be good to get more young girls working as rangers.”

◀ Christine's family (pictured) and others who know her call her 'Murturna', which means 'old lady', because she spent a lot of time learning skills like cat hunting from old ladies from when she was a teenager.



Murnkurrumurnkurru Women Rangers - Sharing knowledge of fish and birds

Indigenous ecological knowledge has developed over tens of thousands of years, but can be lost in an instant. Gurindji traditional owners are addressing this through projects to share their knowledge to younger generations. The Murnkurrumurnkurru Women Rangers have worked with a steering committee, the local school and a linguist to share their knowledge of local fish and birds with younger generations.

The rangers produced bilingual teaching resources like posters, presented to school classes, shared recordings of stories about the animals, and took students on trips to see the animals. The community and school found the project very valuable, and perpetuating that knowledge for Gurindji traditional owners protects one of our country's most valuable assets.



“It’s important to me to be part of the team work and encourage young kids to continue with their education and find employment.” - Murnkurrumurnkurru Ranger Helma Bernard.

“Little kids come up to me and say ‘I want to be a ranger like you’. That often makes me feel proud of myself inside or my family would tell me you have a good job never give up be strong for your kids. As for me, I want to be somebody, somebody who young girls with kids would look up to,” Murnkurrumurnkurru Ranger Ursula Chubb.

Thamarrurr Women Rangers:

Looking after community and country



Thamarrurr Women Rangers are cleaning up Wadeye community and land and sea country by:

- Establishing one of the largest container deposit schemes in a Northern Territory community that refunds people who collect and deposit used beverage containers at the local recycling depot;
- Regularly collecting and documenting ghost nets and other marine debris from the Thamarrurr coastline;
- Installing rubbish bins in areas where people like to camp and fish to reduce litter and keep country clean;
- Running an annual rubbish art competition as part of the Wadeye Festival that promotes the 'No Rubbish on Country' message;
- Operating a community nursery that collects and propagates local plants, bush foods and other plants;
- Running a community animal health program, to monitor and improve the health of dogs and cats;

- Managing significant weed problems, especially mimosa on floodplains, mission grass in disturbed areas and rubber bush in coastal dunes;
- Monitoring biosecurity threats through mapping of exotic food species and animal health surveys;
- Supporting early dry season burning to rejuvenate country.

The Thamarrurr Women Ranger Group is made up of six women who value their families, community, country and culture. Their work as rangers has created a foundation which has enabled them to achieve good outcomes for their community and for caring for nature in the Wadeye region. Through their 'No Rubbish on Country' project, Thamarrurr Women Rangers have engaged the whole community in keeping country clean through innovative activities including a container deposit scheme, a rubbish art competition, and installing rubbish bins in strategic locations. This complements other work Thamarrurr Women Rangers do operating a community nursery, tackling invasive weeds, supporting cultural activities, monitoring biosecurity threats and protecting turtle populations.



Mimosa pigra, here being controlled by Thamarrurr Ranger Francis Mardinga, is regarded as one of the worst weeds in Australia because of its invasiveness, potential for spread, and economic and environmental impacts. Mimosa forms dense stands that can replace all native vegetation on the ecologically and economically valuable wetlands of northern Australia.

Wadeye and surrounding land and sea country

The remote community of Wadeye in the Northern Territory is about 400km southwest of Darwin on the edge of the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf, looking out to the Timor Sea. Wadeye is one of Australia's largest Aboriginal towns with a population of over 2000 people.

The land and waters surrounding Wadeye are an important habitat for a range of birds and marine animals of conservation significance, including the vulnerable red goshawk and water mouse. The wetlands support up to 500 000 magpie geese, as well as other migratory water birds, fish, turtles and crocodiles.



◀ Marine debris is a serious threat to coastlines, waterways and open water right across northern Australia. Here Women Team Leader Maureen Simon cleans up a Thamarrurr beach and is joined by fellow Senior Ranger Wendy Simon to document and sort debris to better manage the clean up.



The Thamarrurr Rangers were established in 2001 to help look after this country and its rich natural and cultural heritage. Today, the Thamarrurr Rangers work across 18 000 km² of country and 240km of coastline. There are 17 Thamarrurr Rangers including six women rangers, making the rangers a significant employer of local Aboriginal people.

In 2010, the people of Wadeye declared the Marri-Jabin Indigenous Protected Area as the first stage of the larger Thamarrurr Indigenous Protected Area. Covering 712 km², including parts of the Moyle and Little Moyle river systems and adjacent floodplains, the IPA is recognised as an important part of Australia's National Reserve System. The management plan for the IPA includes fire and visitor management, control of weeds such as mimosa pigra, feral pigs and management of crocodiles that can threaten people's safety. Looking after cultural heritage sites, language and practices, and the need for young people to learn skills from their elders are also priorities.

Cleaning up country

In late 2015, Thamarrurr Women Rangers discussed the idea of a recycling program in the community. Rubbish in remote Aboriginal communities is a serious issue. Most waste products in remote communities end up in landfill or are left lying around the community where it can pollute waterways and surrounding land. Rubbish can affect the health of wildlife, killing birds, turtles and other sea life. Some waste products may leach chemicals into the environment affecting food sources for local people. Recycling waste products is important but a big challenge for remote communities due to distance, difficulty of access, lack of technical support and/or facilities, and excessive costs.

The Thamarrurr Rangers decided to start the recycling program with the items that were covered by the container deposit scheme (plastic bottles, aluminum cans and tetra packs) as there was an existing scheme in Darwin. The scheme is based on the system initiated in South Australia where people are refunded for collecting and depositing their rubbish at the local recycling depot

before it is sent off to be recycled. It led to a whole of community response with the local Community Development Project making steel frames for the recycling bags through their welding training program. The local shop, crèche, school, aged care, airport and other organisations volunteered to use the recycling frames and bags to collect rubbish. To date the community has collected and sent into Darwin for recycling more than 800 000 items along with more than 750 car batteries equaling more than 10 000kg of lead and acid out of the environment. This represents \$80,000 of income for the community.

Maureen Simon: leader and mentor

Maureen Simon has been a Thamarrurr Ranger for more than ten years. Now a Women Team Leader, she is a key decision-maker, planner, and mentor to other Indigenous staff. Non-Indigenous staff who work with Thamarrurr Rangers also look to Maureen to learn more about working within Aboriginal organisations and communities.

In 2016, Maureen won the local NAIDOC Employee of the Year Award for her dedication to her role as a Senior Ranger. She has won several other awards for her work and in 2016 presented at the Australasian Waste and Recycling Expo in Sydney about the 'No Rubbish on Country' project she helped to establish in Wadeye.

The Wadeye community recognise Maureen as representing Thamarrurr Rangers, and many of her family and community express pride about her work over the past decade. Maureen is also a proud mother and grandmother, and shares her knowledge and experience with other children by giving talks at the school and in the community.

For Maureen, the future is about continuing to work on country and being supported to do so. Ensuring her children and grandchildren have a chance of a full life – education, employment, access to country.

The *No Rubbish on Country* program also includes collecting and documenting marine debris that washes up on local beaches, installing and monitoring bins in popular recreation areas, running a recycling depot for the Container Deposit Scheme and old car batteries, and undertaking community education. The rangers have established a popular annual rubbish art competition that promotes the 'No Rubbish on Country' message.

Thamarrurr Women Rangers work with the men rangers on other activities to protect the natural and cultural values of the

“ I am a really proud of myself to be a ranger and grandmother of nine children. I like going out camping doing my job out bush and getting out of town with the team. I want to help the younger rangers to become senior rangers one day. ”



▲ Thamarrurr Women Team Leader Maureen Simon (right) and Ranger Marie Manby join other women rangers to manage a community nursery in Wadeye to propagate native plant species and encourage the community to develop gardens.

The Thamarrurr Women Rangers were instrumental in beginning this program. Because of their vision, Wadeye now has one of the largest container deposit schemes in a Northern Territory community.

traditional lands and waters surrounding Wadeye. They operate a community nursery that collects and propagates local plants, bush foods, and other plants. The rangers support research on billygoat plum – also known as the Kakadu plum - which is rich in vitamin C. And, as with many caring for country programs, eradicating weeds such as mimosa and rubber bush are key jobs as well as monitoring the large number of dogs and cats in the community as part of a community animal health program. Cultural events, such as the annual ‘Walk on Country’ that the rangers organise with traditional owners, are also a priority.

The Future

The Thamarrurr Women Rangers have won accolades for their initiatives, but recognise the need to grow their efforts to better protect country and deliver more benefits to their community. They have identified the need for ongoing support for their Indigenous Protected Area and surrounding homelands; more funding for Indigenous employment, including strong roles for women; mentoring of the next generation in natural and cultural resource management and continuing to manage their various contracts and work programs as priorities.

The growth and long-term security of the Indigenous ranger and Indigenous Protected Area programs would help develop the benefits evident over more than ten years of ranger work in the Wadeye region. It would assure that the Thamarrurr Rangers can offer long-term employment, skills development, natural and cultural resource management outcomes, and better health to the local community.



▲ Women Rangers run a coordinated community campaign to reduce rubbish, including an annual rubbish art competition and weekly container collections.



Crocodile Islands Women Rangers: Harnessing culture for people and country

Crocodile Islands Women Rangers carry forth the legacy of an Australian hero, Laurie Baymarrwangga. Baymarrwangga was the senior Traditional Owner of the Malarra estate. She was committed to ensuring the protection of cultural and natural heritage by the traditional owners of her country. In 2011, Baymarrwangga made a large donation of royalty funding to assist in establishing a ranger team in the Crocodile Islands. This team works to protect the coast and islands around Milingimbi in northeast Arnhem Land, within the proposed Crocodile Islands Maringa Indigenous Protected Area.

A vital part of the Crocodile Islands Rangers are the Miyalk Rangers – the Women Rangers – whose hard work protecting country and promoting culture is integral to their community.

Culture, community, country

Crocodile Islands Women Rangers promote culture within their community in several ways. The women sit with elders and talk to them about their knowledge, then record this traditional ecological and cultural knowledge. For example, they have made books, posters and short videos about bush medicine for children to use as learning resources into the future.

The women rangers spend a significant amount of their time helping to run the Junior Rangers program. This includes spending time with elders to discuss and decide on appropriate skills and knowledge to teach the youths on country, taking into consideration the seasons and the ages and genders of

Crocodile Islands Women Rangers are promoting culture by:

- Recording traditional knowledge and Indigenous ecological knowledge;
- Facilitating a junior ranger program which takes young people on country to learn cultural skills and knowledge;
- Creating books and short videos for children to learn cultural and ecological knowledge and associated language;
- Harvesting and propagating traditional food and medicine plants;
- Maintaining stewardship of country, for example through turtle conservation, cane toad control, biosecurity, revegetation projects.

the students. They then visit sites on country to prepare the sites and materials for lessons, before finally accompanying the young people out on country and assisting the elders and knowledge holders to teach the youths.



Rangers Amelia Bulpunga, Shantel Djunmuguntja, Doreen Collins and Chloe Rings participating in a shorebird monitoring survey.



▲ The Crocodile Islands Women Rangers facilitate the Junior Ranger program on Milingimbi Island.

Crocodile Islands Women Rangers also work on land and sea management projects, which include marine debris cleanups, turtle conservation, feral animal control, biosecurity monitoring, revegetation and biodiversity surveying. Some of this work is done on their own, and at other times they work together with the rest of the ranger team.

Some of the specific projects the women have been working on include routinely monitoring health of community trees and animals, reporting their findings to North Australian Quarantine Service (NAQS) and ensuring strong biosecurity for the region. The women have also been involved in the monitoring of nesting turtles at Gurriba Island (North-West Crocodile Island), a small (285ha) island approximately 50km from the mainland. The women's work in turtle research on the island, an established turtle sanctuary, has included recording hatchling numbers and nesting tracks through aerial surveys and ground truthing.

The women rangers enjoy learning modern methods to support their traditional knowledge, and have participated in a wide range of training including Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management, Coxswains, Fire Management, First Aid, and the recent Biosecurity Emergency Response Training.

An integral part of the community

Crocodile Islands Women Rangers are passionate about country, culture and community, and instil that pride by engaging young people and protecting nature. Further investment to grow and secure Indigenous rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas will mean supporting more inspiring work like that of the Crocodile Islands Women Rangers.

▼ Rangers Amelia Bulpunga and Solodi Buthungguliwuy working in the ranger nursery.



KJ Women Rangers: Protecting *mankarr*



KJ Women Rangers are protecting *mankarr* (the greater bilby) by:

- Sharing detailed and complex Martu knowledge of bilbies and their habitat, including changes over time;
- Applying Martu knowledge about, and skills finding, bilby tracks, diggings, burrows and scats to record data that guides management;
- Carrying out surveys to record data on bilbies;
- Undertaking fire management for bilby conservation by lighting small fires in strategic locations and at strategic times to reduce destructive wildfires and encourage bilby foods to grow;
- Cat hunting to reduce predation pressure.

Over the past 100 years, the range of the greater bilby has shrunk by 80 per cent. Today, small, scattered populations can be found only in the Australian desert, mainly on land that is owned or managed by traditional owners. Knowledge of and management by traditional owners is essential to the survival of bilbies. Ranger teams like the Martu Women Rangers from Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa play a vitally important role in saving the bilby from extinction.

“ We need to look after *mankarr* because it’s the only one left, those other animals they are all gone. Martu, we know where *mankarr* are, and how to look after them. ”

GLADYS BIDU, KJ RANGER



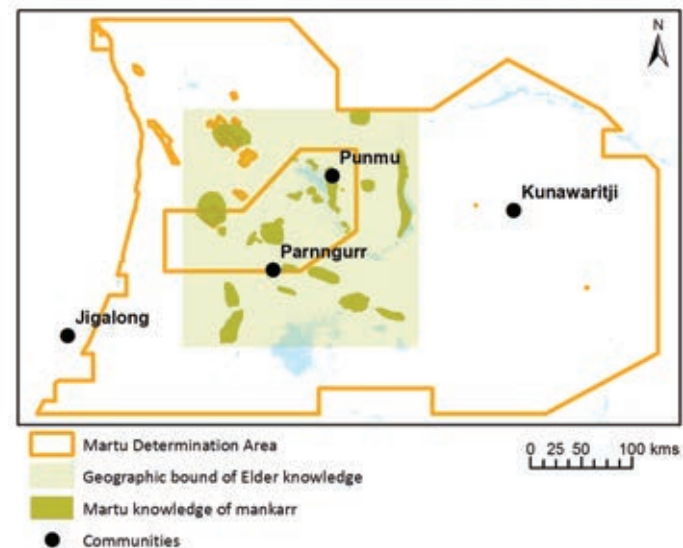


▲ The Jigalong Women Rangers team make identifying a bilby burrow look easy.

Mankarr, ninu, bilby

Bilbies, called *mankarr* or *ninu* in Western Desert Aboriginal languages, are a special animal for many Australians, including Martu. *Mankarr* is one of several mammals that are now less common on Martu country. Because of obligation to look after country and wildlife, and to share knowledge with children, it is a priority of Martu to look after *mankarr*.

There are three main threats to the health of bilby populations: large and hot wildfires, predation by feral cats and foxes, and competition from rabbits. There is also evidence that the overall range is still contracting, and that population decline is occurring locally within their distribution.¹



Working to protect bilbies

Martu knowledge and skills are fundamental elements in ensuring successful bilby conservation. Experienced KJ Rangers identify bilby burrows, diggings, tracks and scats, and identify the grasses and other foods that bilbies eat. Martu have detailed and complex knowledge about the ecosystems and population dynamics of bilbies, for example the rangers share descriptions of the different types of management that help bilby populations relating to rain/water and burning in different types of country.

During 2016 and 2017, KJ Martu Ranger teams from Jigalong, Parnngurr, Punmu and Kunawarritji contributed to redesigning the monitoring program that rangers use to assess the status of *mankarr*. The aim of the project was to track trends in bilby populations on Martu country over time. This design process has been assisted by Anja Skroblin from Australian Government's National Environmental Science Program's Threatened Species Recovery Hub.

“ Waka made a burn. Not round the *mankarr* burrow, but nearly, so that there will be food for the *mankarr*. When you make big fire where *mankarr* is, they move a bit further. When it's little fires they come back. I notice that every time.

On the sandplain, a little patch burnt with old spinifex on both sides - that's the right habitat for *mankarr*. In the burn is nothing - no food for *mankarr* - but still plenty of goanna to hunt. When the plants grow up there will be *mankarr* tracks all through there. ”

- CAROL WILLIAMS, KJ RANGER

- ▶ KJ Martu Rangers have expert knowledge about bilbies and their habitat, including remembering where they used to live and how their behaviours have changed.



KJ Women Rangers undertake surveys and habitat assessments, and identify what management activities are needed at each site to keep country healthy for bilbies and other wildlife. KJ Rangers have undertaken fire management and feral cat control to protect wildlife on country and ranger teams are building on this work to protect bilby populations and habitat into the future.

Protecting wildlife across Australia

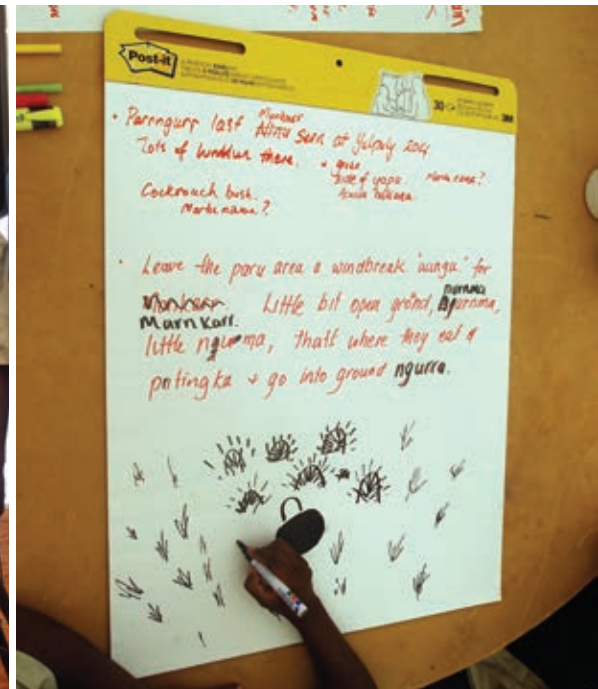
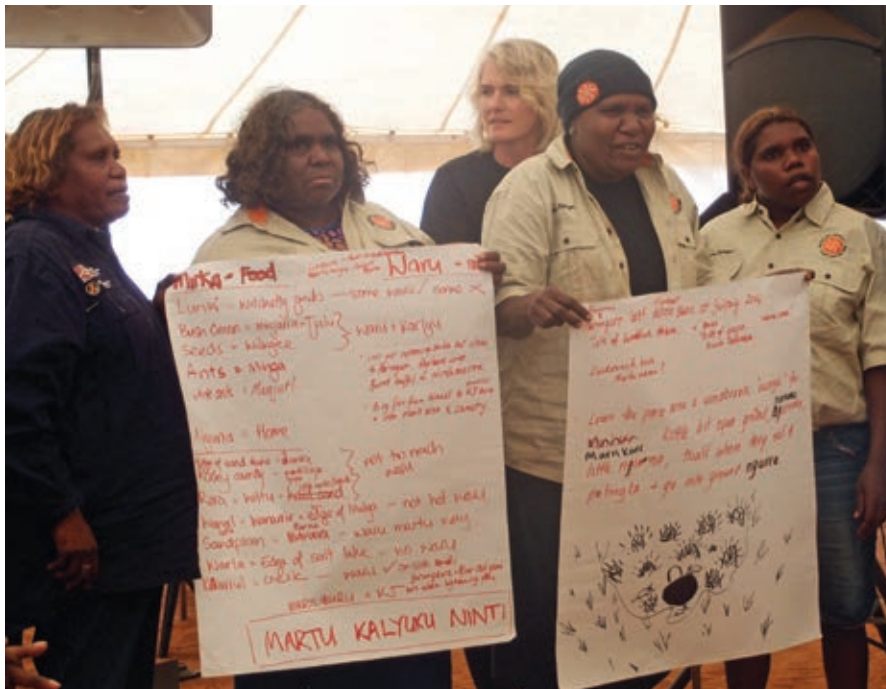
Through the KJ ranger program and as a priority for KJ Women Rangers, invaluable Martu ecological knowledge is being shared and applied to the protection of an Australian icon. With Aboriginal owned land making up around 20 per cent of Australia, including many of the last remaining populations of native wildlife species, Indigenous rangers are at the frontline of protecting nature across the country and their work needs to be recognised, fully funded and supported.

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¹ Woinarski J. C. Z., Burbidge A. A. & Harrison P. (2014) The action plan for Australian mammals 2012. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne

▼ Martu have detailed and complex knowledge about the ecosystems and population dynamics of bilbies.



▲ In 2016, Indigenous rangers from across the desert, including KJ Women Rangers, came together to share information and conservation techniques for protecting bilbies.

Kimberley Women Rangers:

Protecting endangered monsoon vine thickets



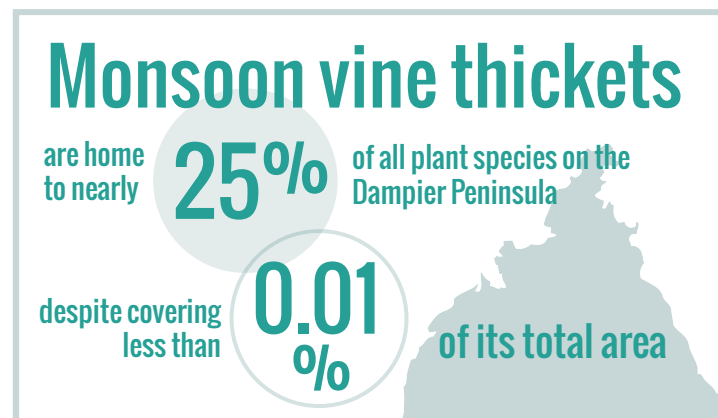
Kimberley Women Rangers are protecting monsoon vine thickets by:

- Undertaking weed management, seed collection, propagation and revegetation;
- Undertaking plant and animal surveys and monitoring ecosystem health;
- Documenting traditional ecological knowledge, preserving language, law and culture and enhancing conservation management of monsoon vine thickets;
- Working together with men rangers to map and monitor threats to monsoon vine thickets alongside scientists and representatives from non-government organisations. This work led to the listing of monsoon vine thickets as endangered under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act in 2013 and continues to inform conservation action plans.

During the hot and humid wet season, most people in the Kimberley region are sheltering from the heat and tropical rains, but a group of Aboriginal women rangers are busy getting on with the job of protecting discrete pockets of remnant endangered rainforest known as ‘monsoon vine thickets’.

Kimberley Women Rangers work alongside men rangers and non-government organisations to care for monsoon vine thickets through fire and weed management, seed collection and propagation, revegetation, research, monitoring and recording of history and traditional ecological knowledge.

Unfortunately, due to short-term funding cycles and the termination of the Green Army program in 2017, women’s ranger work in the Kimberley is under immediate threat. There is a demonstrated need for fully funded, secure Indigenous ranger jobs.



An ecological and cultural treasure

Monsoon vine thickets are found on the traditional lands of the Bardi Jawi, Jabirr Jabirr / Ngumbarl, Nyul Nyul, Nimanbur and Yawuru people in remote northwest Western Australia. Found amongst sand dunes and coastal areas around Broome and extending northward through the Dampier Peninsula to One Arm Point, monsoon vine thickets are incredibly valuable for their ecological and cultural contribution. The thickets are home to nearly 25 per cent of all plant species on the Peninsula despite covering less than 0.01 per cent of its total area. The

thickets are dense with traditional bush tucker, medicinal plants and materials for tools and artefacts. They are home to important groundwater sites shady camping spots and important dreaming, burial and law grounds.

Because of their ecological and cultural significance, Aboriginal rangers, Environs Kimberley scientists and other organisations monitored threats to monsoon vine thickets and undertook a fire history analysis to establish how much of this sensitive ecosystem was being destroyed. This collaborative work provided strong evidence that monsoon vine thickets are



Bardi Jawi Oorany Rangers Debbie Sibosado, Tasha Stumpagee, Cecilia Tigan propagating seedlings for revegetation of endangered monsoonal vine thicket sites.

facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild. In 2013, the Australian Government recognised this work and accepted the nomination from Environs Kimberley to list the monsoon vine thickets as endangered under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999).

Rangers at work

Because of their ecological and cultural significance, traditional owners have developed management plans for greater protection of monsoon vine thickets, which include fire management, weed control, fencing to keep vehicles along designated tracks, revegetation, restoration and signage. Together with their communities, government, NGOs and scientists, rangers have been undertaking work to protect these ecosystems.

Protecting monsoon vine thickets is a priority for women rangers in the west Kimberley and women rangers work alongside the men, sharing responsibilities based on their respective cultural knowledge. An example of this work is the Kooljaman Monsoon Vine Thicket Weeding Project, in which Bardi Jawi Oorany Women Rangers worked with local organisations to comprehensively tackle weeds in a priority monsoon vine thicket on Bardi Jawi country.

Another example is the development of a book called *Plant Stories* by the Bardi Jawi Oorany Women Rangers and Environs Kimberley. *Plant Stories* records and shares cultural information about plants on country. The 11 species featured in the book all occur within monsoon vine thickets. It documents Bardi Jawi knowledge of the seasons in which these plants germinate, grow, flower and fruit, the animals and birds that rely on them for food and habitat, how the plants respond to nooroo (fire), and the ways people use the plants for food and medicines, as hair dye, fish poison and chewing tobacco. Nyul Nyul Rangers are also developing a similar book detailing cultural and ecological knowledge of plants on country.



▲ Bardi Jawi and Nyul Nyul Women Rangers Debbie Sibosado Devena Cox, Cecilia Tigan and Tamara Sebastien work with local organisation Environs Kimberley's Kylie Weatherall and Apace's Cat Williams to protect monsoon vine thickets.

The future

When funding ceased in 2017, four women ranger teams established by the Kimberley Land Council suffered what was described as a 'huge blow' to the momentum built around Indigenous land and sea management work by women in the Kimberley. This highlights the need to have secure, dedicated, properly funded ranger jobs rather than stop gap or not fit for purpose measures. More than half of the Kimberley's women rangers have lost funding, and their contribution to the protection of monsoon vine thickets and restoration of cultural land management is diminished. The positive social outcomes on remote Aboriginal communities, families and individuals as a result of meaningful, flexible paid work cannot be overstated. Women rangers in the Kimberley are undertaking real work to protect nature for the benefit of every Australian. We need more Indigenous ranger jobs with real wages and job security that recognise the important contribution women rangers make to Australia.

Nolia Yukultji Ward:

Protecting country with expert knowledge and skill



For rangers like Nolia Yukultji Ward, working on her country around the community of Kiwirrkurra is intimately familiar. She grew up on it, living a traditional desert life with her family, members of the ‘Pintupi Nine’, who were one of the last recorded family groups to come in from the desert in 1984. Nolia has contributed this expert knowledge to her work as a Kiwirrkurra Ranger by sharing it with scientists and other traditional owners, and by applying it through land management work like ‘right way’ burning and feral cat control.

Kiwirrkurra is Australia’s most remote community, sitting around 150 kilometres from the Northern Territory border in the Gibson Desert of Western Australia. It’s surrounded by stunning desert landscapes, and the Kiwirrkurra Indigenous Protected Area covers 4.2 million hectares of it. It’s a globally important biodiversity zone, part of the largest protected arid area in the world.

Fire science

Nolia was just a teenager when she came in from the desert, and she now travels nationally, speaking about her ranger work, including recently as part of a delegation to meet with government and politicians in Canberra. While there, Nolia talked about her work conducting strategic patchwork burning, or what rangers like Nolia call ‘right way’ burning. These are carefully mapped small burns, planned with traditional owners and western scientists, following customary practices that Nolia and her family used, and those before her for tens of thousands of years.

As has been documented all over Australia, our landscape has been sculpted by human-managed fire. The desert is no different, and threatened desert species like the bilby rely on the fire regimes managed by Nolia and others to survive.

Kiwirrkurra Ranger Nolia Yukultji Ward is working alongside other rangers, traditional owners and scientists, to protect millions of hectares of desert country by:

- Sharing and applying expert desert ecological knowledge;
- Using traditional burning techniques to prevent damaging wildfires;
- Being a leading cat hunter, reducing the impact of feral cats on Kiwirrkurra country.
- Collaborating with Indigenous rangers from across desert country, for example at the 2016 Ninu (Bilby) Festival, which was hosted by Kiwirrkurra Indigenous Protected Area;
- Sharing her success with the Indigenous ranger program with the media and politicians.

Saving ninu

Nolia has extensive knowledge of desert animals that are either extinct or endangered, like bilbies. Bilbies require a pattern of small burns to shape areas to protect them from predators, harsh conditions and to provide food. Large, out-of-control wildfires clear the landscape, making it difficult for bilbies to find food and shelter.

THE IMPACT OF MANAGING COUNTRY WITH FIRE:

Average fire size in areas managed for fire by rangers:



Average fire size in unmanaged areas:



Smaller, cooler fires at strategic times of year reduce the broadscale, destructive wildfires which threaten wildlife and communities.



“ We’ve got to look after the ninu (bilby). The brush-tail possum has gone. The burrowing bettong is gone. The bilby is the only one left. The rufous hare wallaby has gone. The northern quoll is gone. We’ve got to look after the ninu. ”

Tracking surveys across the Kiwirrkurra IPA have revealed that threatened species like the bilby and great desert skink are now only found in the areas where Nolia’s community regularly goes hunting for cats, and conducts her fine-scale burning.

Although she has travelled nationally to Parliament House, the National Threatened Species Summit and Garma Festival to speak about her traditional land management work to politicians, government, media and scientists, what Nolia says she enjoys most is sharing her knowledge with other Indigenous rangers.

In 2016, Nolia was part of the Kiwirrkurra-hosted Ninu Festival, a gathering of Indigenous land management groups operating across the deserts of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. There, Nolia demonstrated cat-tracking techniques to a group 120 Indigenous rangers from 20 different ranger groups, scientists, conservation organisations and government representatives.

Ranger programs build bridges between cultures and generations

Along with obvious land management benefits, ranger jobs and the programs that feed into them have become bridges between traditional and contemporary, young and old.

Nobody demonstrates this better than rangers like Nolia.

◀ Indigenous rangers work with scientists to analyse the contents of feral cats’ stomachs to understand what native animals are particularly threatened by the presence of cats. Several native lizards were found in the contents of this cat’s stomach.

Credit Rachel Paltridge



There are many millions of hectares of Australia where strategic fire management is not yet supported despite the major and large scale benefits to people and nature.

The threatened species and fire management projects create a framework for traditional knowledge like Nolia's to be passed on and shared with scientists, conservationists and others. The benefits can be measured, the techniques shared widely with other groups.

The ranger program harnesses Nolia's detailed knowledge of the area, and supports work to apply that knowledge alongside mainstream science to protect nature. Nolia herself is something of a bridge between worlds, as one of the world's last knowledge-holders of everyday traditional desert living. Without the ranger program, the exposure of Nolia's expertise would be limited. With it, it's a rich trove of information that groups around the country can draw from to tackle some of our most pressing challenges.

In her family, the work that Nolia does makes a difference too, passing her knowledge and leadership down to her daughter, Jodie Ward. Recently, Jodie became the youngest

ever Chairperson of Kiwirrkurra community. Together, they advocate for the country they love and have a responsibility to care for, and they present a convincing case for the need to grow and secure Indigenous ranger and Indigenous Protected Area programs to ensure this work continues.

The Kiwirrkurra community are extremely proud of Nolia's expertise and the young women in the community look up to her and wish they had more opportunities to go out working with her. But Kiwirrkurra has only a casual Ranger Program, offering approximately ten days' work a month, and this has to be shared amongst a large pool of workers. With only one or two vehicles available for bush trips, seats are fiercely contested and the young women say there's rarely a spare seat for them. More funding for Indigenous rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas would offer more opportunities for the young women to be employed alongside the more experienced senior rangers.



“At the special women’s sites there has to be ladies to do work there, because the men can’t go in there. It’s good because I look forward to other girls being a part of our team and making new friends and working together and looking after the country.”
- Teresa Stokes, who joined the Goldfields Land and Sea Council after they received federal Working on Country funding in late 2017.

Credit: Katherine Miller

Empowering women

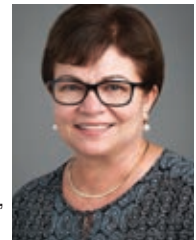
Across Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are strong voices on, and for, country. Increasingly, Indigenous land and sea management is a platform through which women provide leadership; speaking at conferences, forums and within their own communities as key local voices with cultural authority and legitimacy.

Indigenous land and sea management is developing leadership opportunities for women and providing pathways to building the confidence of women. As the following case studies demonstrate, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are increasingly holding roles such as senior rangers, chief executive officers and operational managers. Indigenous ranger and Indigenous Protected Area programs have increased opportunities for women to speak to the media, to politicians and in international arenas.

Women are finding a variety of avenues for empowerment through Indigenous land and sea management. Mikayla Down has learnt new job skills and accessed employment that may have otherwise been unavailable to her. Women rangers like Helen Wilson see themselves as important role models in their communities. Their successes illuminate pathways for girls and boys, providing role models engaged in meaningful work that is contributing to the health of country and promoting culture.

“I’ve worked extensively around Australia in remote areas, and in the private sector. One of the most exciting developments that I have seen in recent decades is the growing involvement and leadership of women working as Indigenous rangers and in Indigenous Protected Areas. The knowledge and contributions of these strong women are incredibly important to caring for country and must continue to be grown and supported.” **LAUREN GANLEY**

Lauren Ganley is a descendant of the Kamilaroi people and chief executive officer of Desert Knowledge Australia, a research and innovation hub based in Alice Springs. After a 30 year career in senior positions with Telstra, Lauren is now chair of Telstra’s Indigenous Advisory Committee, is a Director of Kakadu Tourism and has a range of other community leadership roles. In 2014 Lauren was recognised as one of Australia’s 100 most influential women.



“Being active on country and in connection with culture can be part of a positive approach to strengthening people’s sense of wellbeing. Women working in caring for country roles as rangers or in Indigenous Protected Areas are finding meaning in that work that has positive effects for individuals, families and community. Expanding these opportunities would be a really positive step for many women and girls.” PAT DUDGEON

Professor Pat Dudgeon is a Bardi woman and leader in the field of suicide prevention. She co-chairs the ministerial Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Advisory Group. Professor Dudgeon was the first Aboriginal psychologist to graduate in Australia and is a leading contributor to a wide range of mental health research and policy in Australia.



The Indigenous ranger program employs a flexible framework that encourages women to work alongside commitments to their families, culture and community. Women can earn a wage and undertake meaningful work on their traditional country, practising stewardship of country and sharing culture with younger generations. Indigenous ranger jobs provide significant employment in remote communities, where 66% of Indigenous women cited ‘no jobs in local area or no jobs at all’ as a key barrier to employment.¹

The following case studies show us how women are using Indigenous ranger jobs and Indigenous Protected Areas to empower themselves, protect our environment and support family, community, and culture around the country. They make a powerful case for growing these opportunities for the long-term.

REFERENCE

¹ National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (2014-15).
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4714.0>



Warddeken Daluk Rangers:

Women in the workforce

In 2015, when Warddeken landowners gave feedback to their Indigenous Protected Area management plan, an important wish was expressed: many Nawarddeken wanted to improve engagement by daluk (women) in the IPA's management. At that time however, women comprised 40 percent of Warddeken Land Management's workforce, and worked only 18 percent of hours. Through a concerted effort to boost women's engagement this has shifted dramatically with 46.7 percent of the workforce now being female and working 40.6 percent of hours. It's an inspirational Indigenous-led achievement supporting more women to engage equitably in culturally meaningful work keeping country healthy, whilst also improving longer-term job ready skill sets and leadership capacity.

A concerted boost

The feedback given by Warddeken landowners expressing the desire to see more women in the workforce guided the development of a goal in the IPA management plan to create more equality in employment opportunities for men and women. In 2016, the organisation established a dedicated daluk engagement project with a coordinator employed using funding secured by the Karrkad Kanjdji Trust. The project aimed to steadily increase the proportion of total hours worked by women, with the goal of taking hours worked by women from 18 to 40 per cent.

Due to overwhelming enthusiasm and commitment from Nawarddeken daluk, the project has enjoyed swift and solid growth and outcomes. A dedicated team of daluk, ranging from

Warddeken Land Management have grown their women ranger workforce by:

- Establishing ambitious goals and a dedicated daluk (women) engagement project after receiving feedback from Warddeken landowners;
- Ensuring women rangers feel 'work ready' with comprehensive accredited and on-the-job training;
- Encouraging young women to enter the Warddeken Land Management workforce;
- Employing daluk rangers in meaningful work to protect nature and cultural heritage, including biodiversity monitoring and cultural site maintenance

teenagers to elders, are now regularly engaged in the workforce at both Kabulwarnamyo and Manmoyi ranger bases. Women have been engaged in a wider variety of work activities, accumulating new skillsets and building confidence at a rapid pace.

According to Warddeken Land Management's daluk project performance report, in a short timeframe, there has been a burgeoning sense of pride and identity amongst Nawarddeken daluk.



Warddeken Daluk Rangers like Delvina Guymala have been instrumental in the delivery of the most comprehensive biodiversity surveys undertaken across the Arnhem Plateau

Credit: David Hancock

Young women want to be rangers

A cohort of young women between the age of 19 and 25 were amongst the most enthusiastic Warddeken employees in 2017. Four of these young women were recent year 12 graduates. Feedback from staff at Gunbalanya School indicates Warddeken has employed the most year 12 graduates of any employer in the region – significant given the organisation’s very remote location. Warddeken is a highly desirable workplace for graduates, with many senior students indicating they wish to work with the Warddeken Ranger program.

“I’ve watched young women join our workforce and grow into their roles as proud land and cultural heritage managers, bringing with it a sense of job satisfaction I doubt many people are lucky enough to experience.”

GEORGIA VALLANCE, DALUK PROJECT COORDINATOR

Pride and confidence

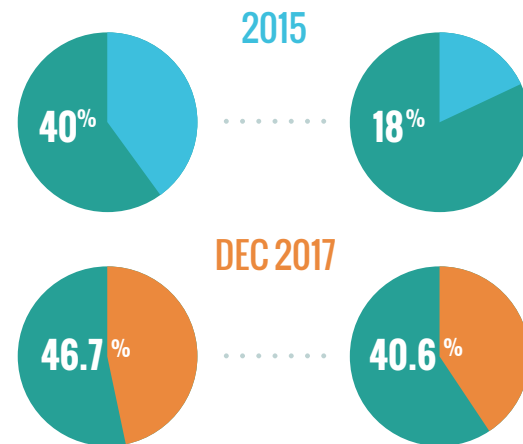
As of December 2017, 57 women have been employed by Warddeken Land Management to undertake ranger work. The daluk engagement project delivers benefits to women of all ages, above and beyond improved employment statistics. In particular, the program has boosted the self-confidence and pride of women living at Kabulwarnamyo and Manmoyi, and continues to showcase strong female role models. Women’s specific knowledge of language and land has flourished under the boost. The daluk project demonstrates social and economic benefits that could be delivered nationwide if the Indigenous ranger and Indigenous Protected Area programs are secured and grown.

- ▶ Under the leadership of ecologist Alys Stevens, daluk rangers have honed a range of skills relating to biodiversity survey work. This includes setting up and deploying motion sensor camera traps, recording geo-referenced data, undertaking vegetation surveys, post-survey analysis of images generated by the camera traps, and mammal, bird and reptile species identification.

WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

Percentage of women
in the workforce

Percentage of hours
worked by women



Training and capacity building

For many of the women involved in Warddeken's daluk project, ranger work represented their first engagement with the workforce. To build confidence and capacity, daluk rangers have participated in an intensive 'work ready' training program.

Rangers have also completed the following accredited courses and licencing:

- Provide First Aid and Remote Area First Aid;
- Firearms A + B;
- Control Weeds and Apply chemicals under supervision;
- Perform complex 4x4 operations and recover 4x4 vehicles;
- Workplace health and safety;
- Operate and maintain chainsaws;
- Operate tractors.

In addition, women have attained drivers licences, and been engaged in on-the-job training in biodiversity monitoring and cultural site management.

“Where I live at Kabulwarnamyo, the community has developed. It has become a big centre with work available for people and its influence is spreading out to other communities across the Arnhem Plateau as we continue to grow. Now the younger people are living and working here. I want to see this program continue; it allows young people to continue what our old people before us passed down to us.”

- Mary Kolkkiwarra, senior cultural advisor (translated from Kunwinjku).





Mikayla Down:

From trainee ranger to project administration

Mikayla Down, aged 26, is a future leader. The Lama Lama Indigenous Ranger program has supported Mikayla to develop her career while living and working on country, maintaining her culture, learning new skills and expanding her work experience. She began working with the Lama Lama Ranger Program as a trainee ranger in 2012 and is now Yintjingga Aboriginal Corporation's Project Officer – Engagement, Communications and Planning.

“I feel more confident and more independent. I am also more willing to take on or step into experiences, whereas before I would have been more hesitant.”

Building confidence

As a trainee, new to the conservation industry, Mikayla recalls being a little unsure what she was getting into.

“It was a challenge especially keeping myself motivated to continue the traineeship. I found out that I liked working outside and contributing to something bigger than myself. I saw it as an opportunity to test my limits and I pulled through when I thought I wouldn't last a week.”

Two years later, Mikayla had completed her traineeship, earned a Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management, and worked as a casual and then full-time ranger. Recognising Mikayla's aptitude and ambitions, Yintjingga offered her a new role with a focus on community engagement and communications, which has since been expanded to include community and land management planning.

Mikayla has developed her career through land and sea management at Yintjingga Aboriginal Corporation by:

- Launching her career from Lama Lama Ranger Trainee to Project Officer – Engagement, Communications and Planning;
- Attaining accredited qualifications in Conservation and Land Management, and Business Administration;
- Undertaking meaningful work while living on her traditional homelands and maintaining her connection to her family, country and culture;
- Introducing her to new people, skills and experiences, including presenting at conferences, developing her storytelling skills, and meeting with Ministers at Parliament House in Canberra.

Gavin Bassani, Operations Manager and Chairperson for the Yintjingga Aboriginal Corporation recalls, “Mikayla was really keen to get involved in many aspects of ranger work. She was keen and willing to take on extra responsibilities within the team. She also had a really keen eye for communications and she has brought her writing skills to her new role.”

EMPOWERING WOMEN

Mikayla has now obtained a Certificate III in Conservation and Land Management and commenced a Diploma of Business Administration to broaden her knowledge of both project and organisational management.

Why it works

Reflecting on her experiences within the Lama Lama Ranger program, Mikayla says one of the main reasons she loves working on Lama Lama land and sea management is that it gives her the opportunity to work on her traditional homelands, looking after country, maintaining her connection, her cultural heritage and her relationships with family.

“It not only builds a strong foundation in the workplace but also in our personal lives as well.”

Mikayla has built administrative skills, travelled to conferences, workshops and an international forum, and met with other rangers and representatives from organisations involved in the protection of the environment on a global scale. Her communications skills have developed to the point where she now confidently conducts presentations and produces written and visual materials.

Mikayla has learnt to navigate working remotely – slow internet, complex logistics, inhospitable weather – with patience. Despite the challenges, Mikayla feels like she has accomplished a lot in her day to day work life. An achievement of note is her management of the production of a regular newsletter that communicates to her community and external stakeholders about the range of activities Yintjingga Aboriginal Corporation undertakes.

Achieving her goals

Mikayla’s goal for the future is to keep working hard and develop her career in land and sea management administration.

The Lama Lama Ranger program continues to offer her training, work experience and opportunities for development. Gavin Bassani and the rest of the Yintjingga Aboriginal Corporation Board of Directors recognise the importance of involving young leaders. “Leadership is not an easy task. Building tomorrow’s leaders is a very important and valuable outcome of the Lama Lama Ranger program.”





Barbara Petrick:

Big dreams in a dream job

Barbara Petrick's dream job as a ranger is giving her the confidence to dream big, planning for the future of herself, her family and her community. For Barbara, working with the Arltarpilta Inelye Rangers, based at Atitjere (Harts Range) community in the Northern Territory, is the best job she's ever had. "I've worked in my community in aged care, for the school and the nutrition program. When they advertised for a ranger position I thought, 'yes! I'm going for it', and I haven't looked back."

Building strength from ranger work

Ranger work itself matters a lot to Barbara, and is deeply personal. "The love I have for my land was instilled in me as a young child by my grandfather. He was my very first teacher in caring for my country. He wanted more for me than anyone else and he saw in me what no one else did."

Barbara says being a ranger helps in her role as a single parent to three children and a grandparent to two. "The struggle I face daily in my life is balanced by drawing strength from the land. My work and my family are what keep me going despite the challenges I face."

With the networks and skills she's developed from her ranger work, Barbara has re-established her outstation and is exploring the development of a tourism business.

Looking after the land with, and for, future generations

Like many other ranger programs, Arltarpilta Inelye has a strong school-engagement emphasis. The rangers are active in

Arltarpilta Inelye Ranger Barbara Petrick demonstrates the enormous potential for ranger programs to grow, driven by the ambitions of the rangers themselves, through work including:

- Engaging schools and young people in programs creates a pipeline of new ranger talent;
- Providing the skills and the foundation to develop enterprises;
- Establishing new projects, like bush medicine product development;
- Cultural continuity programs, giving rangers the support to be proper custodians for their land.

“The work we do on our land makes not only the traditional owners happy, but the land itself. It also makes us feel proud of ourselves and what we're doing. Sometimes I feel very emotional because the work we're doing is the work our ancestors have been doing for many years before we came along.”



Credit: Ian Hoffmann

“Being a ranger is my dream job. I would not trade it for a million dollars.”

involving young people in their work, “We have junior ranger programs and that’s been going really well. At the end of the year we give the school kids certificates and they’re really proud of that. The other kids see that and at the next trip, we have an extra 10 kids,” Barbara says.

“We’ve been taking a lot of kids out on country trips, especially the teenagers. I like to educate the younger generation about staying out on country, doing the work, because that’s how I learned how to work. I started working at 14 after school. I spent my whole weekend out bush with my family, never in town. I’d really like more education both ways for our youth.”

The programs Barbara and the other rangers manage are ensuring knowledge is passed on and shared with young people and other community service providers. A good example of this is their bush medicine program. Rangers take elders and young

“In my culture, men and women contribute to country equally. Men have their responsibilities, as do the women. When needed, we work together to achieve what it is we are doing. Side by side with pride and respect we strive to be there for each other just like the land and the spirits of our land are there for us.”

people out on collecting and harvest-mapping trips. A range of bush medicine products have been developed and distributed to local clinics, where nursing staff are educated in their use. In 2016 Bush Medicines of the Plenty Region resource was launched, including information on 13 medicinal species collected during the last three years. The book is available to community members from schools, health clinics, child care centres and women’s centres in the region.

A plan for growth

Barbara sees the work the Arltarlpilta Inelye Rangers are doing as just the beginning. She has big plans. “Our area is from the Stuart Highway, along the Plenty Highway to the Queensland border. It’s a big area. We’d like to have more ranger staff, we’d like to do joint projects with other ranger groups, we’ve also been talking about exchanges between ranger groups. It’s all about sharing ideas with other ranger groups but for all of that to happen we need more funding. With more funding, I reckon we can protect more of our sacred land.”

For Barbara’s vision to be realised, she wants to see more female rangers in the pipeline. “We want to especially encourage more young girls and ladies, because at the moment, I’m the only female ranger in our group.



Debbie Symonds: Leading Olkola custodianship of one million hectares

“I think that being a Traditional Owner and the CEO for our own corporation is the most rewarding job that I have had, I love that I get to work with my elders especially learning from Uncle Mike and Uncle Johnny. Every day I learn something new and I believe that this is always going to be the case.”

Debbie Symonds heads up an inspirational organisation which is dedicated to empowering Olkola people to protect culture and country. With the leadership and guidance of the Olkola Aboriginal Corporation board of directors, Debbie leads work protecting country, invigorating culture, accessing carbon abatement, pastoral and tourism business opportunities, and pursuing native title and other land tenure negotiations across the more than one million hectares of country in Cape York Peninsula.



Debbie Symonds leads Olkola Aboriginal Corporation to:

- Employ a range of staff including two ranger teams, cultural advisors, caretakers, administrative staff and seasonal contractors;
- Foster cultural knowledge sharing by recording cultural heritage and holding on-country camps, including for women and children;
- Develop and support career paths for Olkola staff;
- Pursue long-term plans for caring for country, including by meeting with politicians and submitting applications to be included in Indigenous ranger and Indigenous Protected Area programs;
- Develop partnerships to protect country, for example with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Bush Heritage Australia, The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Australian Conservation Foundation;
- Access business markets including carbon abatement through early burning regimes on savannah country, pastoralism and eco-tourism.

◀ Debbie, joined here by then Operations Manager Tish Ross, launched the Country Needs People 'Protecting nature for all of us: Environmental benefits of Australia's Indigenous Protected Areas and Indigenous rangers' report in Parliament House in 2017. Debbie presented the report to the Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion, and met with politicians from the Coalition Government, Labor, the Nick Xenophon Team, The Greens and independent MPs.



"We're always the ones out in front," Debbie Symonds, chief executive officer Olkola Aboriginal Corporation. "It's the only way to get ahead," Uncle Mike Ross, Olkola senior traditional owner and chairperson.

Avast estate

Olkola people have been custodians of a vast estate in Cape York for thousands of years. After years of advocating and negotiating with government, Olkola Aboriginal Corporation now holds and manages 869,822 hectares of Olkola traditional lands, making it one of the largest landholders in the Cape York Peninsula. Olkola properties include the Olkola and Alwal National Parks and the Olkola (Kurrumbila) Regional Park, which is jointly managed with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, and the independently managed Olkola Nature Refuge and Glen Garland pastoral station.

Projects underway to protect nature and perpetuate culture on Olkola country include a savannah burning project which generates income in years when an early burning regime successfully reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Olkola Aboriginal Corporation has partnered with a number of non-government organisations, including Bush Heritage Australia for a project protecting the endangered Alwal, or golden-shouldered parrot, and the Australian Conservation Foundation for an eco-tourism venture. Rangers also work to control weeds and feral animals, maintain infrastructure and fencing, and monitor and protect wildlife.

Protecting nature, transforming lives

Under Debbie's leadership, Olkola Aboriginal Corporation is contributing to developing careers, engaging young people, promoting gender balance and sharing knowledge between younger and older Olkola people.

“There are not a lot of Indigenous female CEOs in control of their own Indigenous corporations but my family and staff are supportive and it all works well.”

Debbie encourages staff employed through Olkola Aboriginal Corporation to identify their career goals and they are supported to receive training and opportunities in that area. Karla Kulka is a good example. Karla began working as one of the organisation's first rangers in 2010, and has developed

“Being able to incorporate the women of Olkola and give a female voice to many of the issues that Olkola is working on gives me great hope for the future of our clan. Men's and women's business is the balance to good leadership and caring for country in a traditional methodology.”

an interest in managing country through a landscape-scale approach. Rather than specialising in one land management field, Karla has trained in fire management and carbon abatement, weed and feral animal control, and threatened species protection, so that she can contribute to planning across Olkola country.

Olkola also undertake cultural heritage work, including recording stories, songs and language, and mapping significant sites. A series of on-country camps foster cultural knowledge sharing, including camps to engage young Olkola people and women.

The need for long-term security

Olkola Aboriginal Corporation's unique success is not without its challenges. The organisation does not currently receive Indigenous ranger funding, leaving them with funding uncertainty in a sector where there is a need for long-term planning for both caring for country and to better support Olkola people. Debbie and the Board have identified this limitation, and the growth of the Indigenous Protected Area program and the state and federal Indigenous Ranger programs present key opportunities for funding stability for Olkola so that they can continue to grow their outstanding work. The inspirational leadership shown by Debbie and by Olkola Aboriginal Corporation demonstrates the opportunities that Indigenous land and sea management can deliver right across Australia.

Fiona Keighran: Back to country



After growing up on an Indigenous cattle station in the Gulf of Carpentaria and schooling in Alice Springs, Fiona Keighran worked in varied roles all around the Northern Territory. She initially worked as a station cook, then studied and worked in business administration for mainstream and Aboriginal organisations, whilst simultaneously raising five sons. But eight years ago, Fiona decided it was time to return to her country and help her own people in Borroloola. During an interview for a position with the li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers, one of the Yanyuwa elders said to her, “Its time to come home my girl”. Fiona has never looked back.

A career on country

Fiona has since progressed from administration support officer to Ranger Coordinator, and now manages 15 Indigenous rangers, mostly men, for the li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Ranger group. She is the first Indigenous coordinator of the group and is very proud of the achievements of the rangers, many of whom are part of her extended family. Overseeing the work of her relatives has its advantages and challenges, but the relationship she has with her staff is based on mutual respect,

“Some days when I see the rangers in uniform working on boats out on the water, I feel so proud and happy to be home. Those days make the stresses and struggles all worthwhile, knowing I have returned home to work with my own family and having the family’s acceptance and support.”



cultural understanding and a good sense of humour. Fiona is assisted by her senior operations manager and elders employed as cultural advisors to ensure the sea rangers’ governance and work programs remain culturally appropriate. She also has quarterly meetings with a steering committee of at least a dozen Yanyuwa elders.

Over time, li-Anthawirriyarra has established itself as a well-respected sea management unit. The rangers currently conduct several vital activities, which include regular patrols and maritime traffic surveillance, eradication of feral cats from the Pellew Islands, as well as long-term monitoring and management programs for turtle, dugong, threatened island

fauna, habitat health and marine debris. The unit is also involved in several public education programs and rangers regularly liaise and participate in joint patrols with other management and enforcement agencies.

The Yanyuwa people identify closely with the riverine, coastal and island areas of the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria. They

“Working in this position with my own mob has its challenges: Sometimes the rangers might lean on me a little bit because they know I’ll look after them but at the end of the day they do respect my authority because they know I’ve got their best interests at heart.”

are li-Anthawirriyarra, people of the sea, and have successfully managed the region’s maritime and terrestrial resources for many thousands of years. This commitment to country and the astute resource husbandry that accompanies it has not diminished over time.

Fulfilling work

Indigenous ranger funding meant Fiona could fulfil stewardship of country and pursue a meaningful career that gives back to her people and to nature. Fiona’s story demonstrates how meaningful work on country delivers benefits to land and sea management through Indigenous-led, culturally appropriate work.



Fiona with the li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers she manages and mangrove researcher Dr Norm Duke

Josephine Grant:

Career development in land management



Josephine Grant grew up about 80 kilometres north of Tennant Creek, where she walked an hour each day to school and home again. She learnt from her family the intricacies of her country. Josephine's work life also connected her with country – even as a carer for older people and children with disability, she and her sister would collect bush medicine to share with her community. When a friend told her about a ranger vacancy, she saw the opportunity to work caring for country. It sparked a career that now sees Josephine leading in land management.

Career achievements

Josephine says the awards she has won have been her proudest recognition of her achievements. The awards have celebrated the professional commitment Josephine has made to land

Josephine Grant's land management career has gone from success to success, demonstrated by:

- Her career climbing the ladder from ranger, to ranger support officer to now working as the Anmatyerr Ranger Coordinator;
- Three territory-level awards recognising her contribution to land management;
- Being identified as a role model particularly for women, but also for men and young people.



management, including her outstanding environmental achievements, innovation in planning and carrying out work, leadership, on-ground efforts, and commitment to working with partners and stakeholders to achieve good outcomes.

Josephine has attained qualifications since becoming a ranger. She has three accredited certificates in conservation management, and says her progress to become a ranger coordinator has been an important life achievement for her.

Josephine works hard. She leads work undertaking flora and fauna surveys, water monitoring, drives a bobcat, works with school students, and supports traditional owners to visit country. She has a target to introduce fencing to the long list of work the ranger group she manages undertakes.



Josephine says she is grateful for her partner Jeffrey Foster's support for her career in land management

2016
Northern Territory
Minister's Award
for Leadership in
Protected Areas
Management

2016
NT NRM Awards
Indigenous NRM
Champion

2017
Territory NRM
Rio Tinto Indigenous
Land Management
Award

An inspirational example

Josephine contributes her leadership qualities, passion for caring for country and maintaining traditional owners' connection to country, and determination to achieve her goals to being a land manager. Her career development provides an inspirational example of how Indigenous ranger and Indigenous Protected Area programs support women to pursue their goals. Josephine demonstrates how the growth and long term security of these programs would continue to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to achieve their goals.

“To me, being a ranger coordinator strengthens me and the women rangers and the community and the country. I'm a good role model to women - and not only to women, to some men - and my family. Nothing is impossible for me.”

Laura Pearson:

Harnessing ‘passion and pride’ for a career in the Torres Strait



Laura Pearson is a talented woman, dedicated to her job as a senior ranger supervisor. At age 34, she directly manages nine Indigenous rangers, all male and including three senior rangers and a ranger supervisor. Laura says it was her passion and pride for looking after land and sea country that was the reason she applied to work as a ranger back in 2012.

Beginning her career

Before working as a ranger, Laura worked as a kiosk manager in the take away shop selling fast food.

“I knew it wasn’t good for people’s health so when I saw the ranger job advertised, I remembered how my parents and grandparents would talk about the importance of land and sea and looking after them for the benefit of the community.”

Laura’s parents taught her and her siblings how to survive in the Torres Strait, respecting the land and sea and receiving from it when in need. She applied for the job and began researching how ranger work contributes to community.

Our passion and pride to look after our land and sea country and our connection to the land, sea and people on the island was the reason why I applied for the ranger position

Working as a ranger

Laura began work as a senior ranger, then was promoted to ranger supervisor, and now is a senior ranger supervisor for the

Being a woman ranger has developed Laura’s career by:

- Creating a career path from senior ranger to senior ranger coordinator;
- Developing skills in using cultural and ecological knowledge alongside western and mainstream science and structures;
- Giving Laura a job in which she feels she contributes positively to her community;
- Developing relationships, skills, knowledge and perspective by meeting new people and attending planning workshops and conferences;

“I wanted to be a ranger, educating the community and our children. I wanted to achieve things for my community so people are safe and we live sustainably; protecting turtle and dugong, restoring and preserving our language, maintaining traditional gardens for community members to enjoy.”

Credit: Kelly Harrington



Masigalgal Ranger Loice Naawi and Laura rest after setting 100 Elliot traps and undertaking a vegetation identification survey.

central island cluster of Iama, Poruma and Warraber Islands.

Torres Strait Regional Authority Rangers are a skillful team and they work with their community to plan and undertake land and sea management. The senior ranger position Laura was initially employed in was not identified as a woman only position. Currently there are only two other female rangers in the Torres Strait; both working on Masig Island.

“The community look up to us and have high confidence in us, so we deliver on our objectives according to our Working on Country Plan.”

“As a ranger group, we sit with the community and discuss what they would like us to do. They set a high benchmark for us and expect us to achieve it.”

Laura says her work as a ranger helps her build partnerships within communities, and relationships with other stakeholders at conferences where she gains knowledge, skills and understanding of how other communities manage issues like tourism.

Credit: Senior Ranger Supervisor West Cluster, Troy Stow



Revegetation work requires a boat trip in the Torres Strait. Warraberagal Ranger undertaking revegetation activities on Warraberagal & Porumagal Indigenous Protected Areas/ Back: Torres Strait Regional Authority Ranger Supervisor Laura Pearson with Warraberagal Senior Ranger Mark Pearson, Ranger Aken Baragud, Ranger Young Billy.

“I am fortunate that TSRA employ local people and support us and the community, empower us and give us opportunity to grow to become strong leaders for our people.”

“We share our knowledge – our traditional knowledge – and we learn from each other. Only some of us know the traditional names of animals, birds, marine creatures, tides, seasons, and plants; the traditional usage for cooking and medication. We share and seek confirmation and gather more information from our elders, so that this knowledge is stored in the Traditional Ecological Knowledge information system for future generations. We also take this information to share with the children at our schools and with the community members.”

As well as managing staff, Laura’s ranger work includes tagging and monitoring turtles, Indigenous Protected Area surveys, weed eradication, and educating the community about the sustainable management of turtles and dugong. Laura is also involved in work bringing together elders with the community to record and revive language and traditional knowledge.

EMPOWERING WOMEN

Laura is a role model for her children and other community members.

“My island home and my families have been motivators in my journey as a TSRA Ranger. Because of them, I’m excited to put my uniform on with the logo of my island attached, working with my work colleagues to learn new things each day – protecting our natural and cultural resources.”

Laura has attained Certificate III in Conservation and Land Management, Certificate IV in Indigenous Leadership, Certificate IV in Workplace Health and Safety, Certificate IV in Government Investigations and Certificate IV in Leadership and Management.

An example for all Australians

Laura sets an example for all Australians in harnessing her passion to pursue a successful career. She accessed this opportunity through the Indigenous ranger program that provides this chance for young women in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around Australia. Growing these opportunities is essential to supporting the positive benefits of a meaningful career to Indigenous women.

▼ Torres Strait Regional Authority Rangers undertaking a beach clean up and setting traps to survey reptiles on Ulu Island: Ranger Supervisor Laura Pearson, Senior NRM Officer - Land Team John Lynn, Warraberalgal Trainee Ranger David Pearson, Iamalgal Senior Ranger David Baragud, Warraberalgal Ranger Aken Baragud, Porumalgal Senior Ranger Freddie David, Senior Ranger Supervisor Trow Stow.





Helen Wilson:

‘Now I’m strong and I can do anything’



Working as a ranger, I’ve learnt a lot of things. I’ve gone for training and workshops, and been to conferences and I would like to learn even more. Now, I’m standing up in front of biggest mob of people and speaking aloud. I’d never used a microphone before. But now I’m strong and I can do anything.

North Tanami ranger Helen demonstrates why gender balance is important in ranger teams because:

- It is important to ensure intergenerational knowledge transfer occurs with both male and female elders;
- Women who work as rangers see themselves as important role models for family and community;
- Women ranger jobs illuminate employment pathways for girls as well as boys and tackle the issue of ‘shame’, which can prevent young women from taking up work;
- Ranger work is equally about country and community and there are important social benefits of a generation of children growing up in communities with active ranger programs.

As a member of the North Tanami Rangers based at Lajamanu in the Northern Territory, Helen Wilson is the only female ranger among her colleagues. She works across the 40 000 square kilometre North Tanami Indigenous Protected Area.

“[Being] a ranger meant I could be a role model for my kids and other women in the community. It’s been three years now, and while I find it hard to be the only woman ranger, I love my job.”



Rangers such as Helen Wilson and Gladys Brown train to use the Tracks app, the latest technology for monitoring threatened species.

Gender balanced ranger groups

“As a woman ranger I do all the same work a man ranger does. To me, it’s the same for both men and women, every woman can do a man’s job. Women are strong, people come to women for help.”

Helen thinks gender balance is crucial in ensuring ranger work covers the knowledge of male and female elders. “If we had more women rangers, we could be equal. It would make it easy for us to take the old women out on country and to share stories and knowledge. Then we can help pass it on to the younger people.”

 My knowledge for country and culture has become stronger so I can teach the younger generation. 

A recent project included going out with senior women traditional owners to paint a cultural map of significant yala or bush potato (*Ipomea costata*) sites and other important places.

For a female ranger like Helen, her job is also to forge a path for other women to follow, challenging the limitations of ‘shame’ and shyness that can prevent some women and girls from taking up jobs, “I want more women to work with me,” she says.

“I grew up with my brothers and uncles so I am ok working with the men. All jobs you are working with men, you need to mix in. I know my husband and my kids and my family support me as a ranger. They encourage me to keep going, to reach my goals. It’s hard when I am away but that’s what you do when you have a ranger job.”

Country, culture and community

Helen and the North Tanami Rangers see working with the school and community as just as important as the natural and cultural resource management activities they undertake. Growing the size and scope of the ranger program would mean they could operate effectively in all these areas.

This includes projects like returning with traditional owners to the recently rediscovered Kurlpurlunu water place to clean it and support ceremony and cultural knowledge sharing. Like

many hard-to-access and remote sites, Kurlpurlunu had not been visited for a long time and some ceremonies had not been performed for 70 years. Facilitating access to these important sites is a critical link in maintaining cultural continuity.

The work the North Tanami rangers do with the school is an investment in ensuring a whole generation of children are strong in culture, understand their responsibility for country and see real employment futures for themselves.

Helen says, “we really should have eight rangers in every group so we can help each other and get the job done. That means four rangers can be out bush working with traditional owners, and four rangers can stay in community and do work there.”

Aiming for equality

According to recent data, women currently make up 36% of Indigenous Land and Sea Management employees, and fill only 20%¹ of full and part time ranger jobs. At the Central Land Council, where Helen works, women rangers make up a third of all ranger positions. With the right funding support though, gender parity in ranger and IPA employment statistics is a realistic goal.

Job flexibility and a broad remit that includes both community and on-country work would also help to ensure ranger work is inclusive and groups are balanced and able to service the whole community. It would mean Helen, and all future women rangers that will follow in her tracks, get to continue to do work that they love, making a difference in community and on country.

REFERENCE

¹ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/2014-15-WOC-IPA-Reporting-back.pdf>



“Living and working on country is like medicine for my people. Being a ranger is meaningful work that makes us feel good about ourselves. It is vital that our young people know their country and care for it. Ranger jobs are giving us hope for the future.” - Nyangumarta Warrarn chief executive officer Nyaparu Rose, who has been a tireless champion for Indigenous land and sea management for decades.

Credit: Yamaji Marpa Aboriginal Corporation

Strengthening culture and community

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women across Australia identify that nourishing culture is central to their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their communities.¹ Indigenous Protected Area and Indigenous ranger programs are supporting increased community pride and wellbeing, and fostering cultural connection and continuity for women and their communities. Right across Australia women are a key part of ensuring land and sea management is in cultural balance.

Caring for country is a powerful way to express culture: traditional owners speak about the importance of country because identity, customs and practices are embedded in country. Caring for country constitutes more than just undertaking mainstream land and sea management activities to include looking after the values, places, stories, rituals, relationships, ancestors and history associated with country. Indigenous land and sea management work thereby reinforces and supports Indigenous peoples' relationships with their physical, cultural, social, economic, and spiritual environment.^{2,3,4}

There is a range of evidence available to governments about the positive impacts derived from expression of culture. In the Australian Government's Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicator Framework, for example, land and cultural activities have been identified as priority outcomes for a 'safe, healthy and supportive family environment with strong communities and cultural identity'.²

In 2009, the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA undertook research into the wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia. Aboriginal children and young people said their culture and traditional values were of great importance to them. They wanted to be able to spend time with their grandparents, listening to stories and learning about their culture.⁵ The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Incorporation (SNAICC) describes the

"The work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women on country is all about strength, culture, community and family. Women working as rangers and in Indigenous Protected Areas Australia wide are leaders, repairing and strengthening not only our environment but the fabric of our families and communities as well. We all have a role in increasing the opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to pursue leadership roles, including those focused on caring for country."

ANTOINETTE BRAYBROOK

Antoinette Braybrook is an Aboriginal woman with Kuku Yalanji heritage who was born in Victoria on Wurundjeri country. She is the chief executive officer of 'Djirra' formerly the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, and a leading national voice on issues relating to family violence and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's empowerment.



identity of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child as being intrinsically connected to their family and their relationship with the land.⁶

Across Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities identify the sharing of culture, particularly with younger generations, as a priority. Indigenous ranger groups, frequently led by Indigenous women rangers, are working to ensure culture is alive in children and young people in their communities.

The case studies in this report outline how Indigenous ranger groups are reinforcing cultural pride and knowledge. From individual leadership, like Jess Bangu's role contributing to the school curriculum in Bidyadanga, to Bidyadanga, to community-wide efforts, like Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa Martu camps which involve women, young and old, in cultural sharing, women use their work as Indigenous rangers and with Indigenous Protected Areas to promote cultural connection in their communities.

Indigenous women rangers are strengthening their communities in other ways too. Women rangers, like Edna Nai from the Torres Strait Regional Authority, are role models, tackling issues like 'shame' and presenting opportunities for gender balanced decision making. Rangers are also supporting young people through junior ranger programs like those of Yuku Baja Muliku, and workplace traineeships and projects to engage young people experiencing difficulties like the Karajarri Rangers' work does.

Indigenous rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas are increasingly an avenue for women to strengthen the cultural and social wellbeing of their communities. If the government wants to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led initiatives to strengthen communities, then growing and securing Indigenous ranger and Indigenous Protected Area programs should be an essential element of future investment.

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Karajarri Women Rangers:

Supporting youth for a strong future



As well as important environmental outcomes, Indigenous ranger jobs deliver social, cultural and emotional benefits. Indigenous women ranger groups, like the Karajarri Women Rangers, play a critical role in their communities. Karajarri people, country and culture are strengthened by the work of the Karajarri Women Rangers. Leading the way in strengthening the community in and around Bidyadanga, the women's ranger team is harnessing Karajarri culture, caring for country and working to engage school students and young people experiencing difficulties. The Karajarri Women Rangers, supported by the Kimberley Land Council, have achieved important developments in their community, by engaging school-based trainees, improving school curriculum through environmental and cultural classes, and engaging young people in positive and meaningful projects.

Thinking about the next generation

Bidyadanga Aboriginal Community is Western Australia's biggest remote Aboriginal community, with a population of 750 people. The town sits on the Kimberley coast, 180 kilometres southwest of Broome. Karajarri traditional owners and Bidyadanga residents from other language groups, including Juwalinny, Mangala, Nyungamarta and Yulparitja people, have expressed a desire to maintain and promote culture and language in their community, and in particular to encourage younger generations to maintain these important aspects of culture.

Karajarri Women rangers support young people in their community by:

- Undertaking school based cultural programs;
- Working with youth at risk;
- Engaging school-based trainees;
- Hosting a camp for 90 women and girls;
- Teaching and organising workshops focused on cultural knowledge exchange.

Evidence increasingly shows that connection to culture is fundamental to Aboriginal children and young people's identity and wellbeing. The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Incorporation (SNAICC) describes the identity of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child as being intrinsically connected to their family and their relationship with the land.¹

“Language, law, connection to the land and participating in cultural activities are very meaningful and are closely aligned to wellbeing.”²

The Bidyadanga community's desire to harness culture and language to support young people delivers positive benefits on several levels.



A women's camp organised by Karajarri Rangers and the Yiriman Project at Mangkuna on Karajarri country.

Women rangers working with the next generation

Karajarri Women Rangers have undertaken a range of activities to address the community's desire to promote language, connection to land and sea, and other aspects of culture with young people in Bidyadanga.

Through the support of Karajarri Women Rangers, two school-based trainees, one female, Petha Shoveller, and one male, Kamal Bamba, have worked towards future careers in caring for country. Petha and Kamal were engaged two days a week for the year and were involved in all activities with the rangers. They were being provided with on the job training and skills that developed over the course of the traineeship, so when they left school they were confident in continuing these skills into the future.

Working alongside the school to develop these two positions has enhanced community engagement within Bidyadanga, as well as creating community awareness on environmental issues through the ranger program. Petha Shoveller has shown initiative and

confidence in her position this year which has led to the Karajarri Women Rangers engaging her as a full-time employee after leaving school in 2017. Karajarri Women Rangers plan to recruit another female school based trainee in 2018.

Karajarri Women Rangers make weekly visits to the Bidyadanga La Grange Community School. Senior Cultural Ranger, Jessica Bangu, provides education sessions to two classes per week, one high school and one primary, covering a range of topics. The focus of these classes is to encourage and promote Karajarri culture and language, along with providing educational awareness on environmental issues impacting Karajarri country, such as the impacts of pollution at beaches or 'right way fire'.

The rangers have also developed an online educational resource within a Karajarri database that generates educational worksheets for different year groups. Jess has been working hard to develop further Karajarri language resources and work with teachers to mould the education sessions to suit curriculum requirements.

Petha Shoveller was recruited in early 2017 as a School-Based Trainee Ranger, working with the Karajarri Women Ranger team on all ranger duties two days a week, while completing her year 12 schooling three days a week. Now that Petha has finished her schooling, she has succeeded in getting a job as a full-time ranger with the Karajarri Rangers. Her school-based traineeship developed Petha's confidence and skills and she made a place for herself as a vital component of the Karajarri Ranger team. Petha is now completing, along with her fellow rangers, a Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management.

“I enjoy working out on country with my fellow rangers and family because it is my passion and I love knowing what I am doing is for my people and my country. I love learning more about my culture from the elders we take out bush and like knowing that I can then continue to teach these skills to the younger generations.”

Positive and meaningful projects

Working alongside the Yiriman Project, which is an intergenerational on country cultural program, six boys and three girls attended a six week Caring for Country Training Program supported by Karajarri Women Rangers. This program focuses its attention on the lower attending students that have been identified by the Juvenile Justice department, creating alternative opportunities to engage youth in positive and meaningful projects, which also gives them a feel for land and conservation work as a possible career opportunity. Students joined rangers to undertake several activities including reef surveys, fencing, bush medicine workshops and collecting, and turtle nest monitoring. The students assisted in hosting an end of the Caring for Country program event with the Yiriman families and children, Bidyadanga Police and La Grange School.

Through the Yiriman Project, the Karajarri Women Rangers also hosted a camp attended by over 90 women and girls, as well as local service providers. The camp aimed to promote cultural exchange through workshops about topics including bush medicine, dying, weaving and jewellery making. The project aims to link these products with the market through the development of a social enterprise.

We need more of this

The contribution Karajarri Women Rangers have made for young people in Bidyandanga is invaluable. Undertaken alongside work protecting nature by monitoring threatened species, maintaining infrastructure, revegetating and weeding, the Karajarri Women Rangers have become a fundamental part of caring for country, community and culture across a huge area in the Kimberley. As the community continues to encourage the growing benefits of promoting culture and language amongst young people, and with the scale of environmental need being so high, Karajarri Women Rangers make an excellent case for the need for more Indigenous ranger jobs and Indigenous Protected Areas right around Australia.

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Larissa Hale:

Putting family, country and community first



When Larissa Hale returned to country following her grandfather's death, she was determined to put family, country and community first. Larissa has since built the Yuku Baja Muliku Land Trust to employ 13 staff, including 9 Indigenous rangers, a renowned turtle rescue and rehabilitation centre, and a junior ranger program involving 55 local kids.

“I don't give up when it comes to looking after our land and sea. Our ranger program is about taking pride in country, returning to country and looking after each other.”



Larissa and Mick Hale used their own money to buy tanks so they could rescue turtles injured during Cyclone Yasi.

Yuku Baja Muliku Land Trust Managing Director Larissa Hale has led the way in Indigenous land and sea management by:

- Founding an Indigenous ranger program on Yuku Baja Muliku country;
- Establishing a turtle rescue and rehabilitation centre;
- Building a junior ranger program which involves 55 local kids;
- Growing the organisation to employ 12 staff.

A lot of hard work

Yuku Baja Muliku territory spans 22 000 hectares of land alone, and includes portions of two World Heritage-listed areas: the Wet Tropics and the Great Barrier Reef. In 2007, as secretary of the Yuku Baja Muliku Land Trust, Larissa laid the foundation of a ranger program by recruiting two traditional owners as rangers. By 2011, when the category five Cyclone Yasi hit the coast of Archer Point, the ranger group had grown to six. As sick and dying turtles washed up on their shores following the cyclone, Larissa and her husband Mick used their own money to rescue and rehabilitate the turtles.



Yuku Baja Muliku Rangers aiming high.

Since then, Larissa and Mick have opened the Archer Point Turtle Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre, with seed funding from the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. They have also developed a junior ranger program, which runs weekly after-school sessions on a range of subjects, including environmental education and cultural knowledge. There are now 65 junior rangers enrolled including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.

“We wanted to break down barriers—and it has worked a treat.”

An uncertain future

Larissa’s work since returning to country has put the Yuku-Baja-Muliku Land Trust on the map as a leader in Indigenous land and sea management. However funding to keep the turtle rescue centre open remains uncertain, and there is a need for more Indigenous rangers to meet the scale of environmental work managing Yuku Baja Muliku country. Larissa and her team continue to work every day to protect country, and should be supported to grow their efforts for the benefit of people and nature.

“I can’t express my gratitude enough to the YBM Rangers for what they have done for me, what they give to the community and to the youth of Cooktown. They try their best to help us Junior Rangers achieve our dreams. They educate through their actions and are not afraid to raise their voices for conservation and protection of our land and the planet.”

- Phoenix Seagren, Yuku Baja Muliku Junior Ranger Cadet



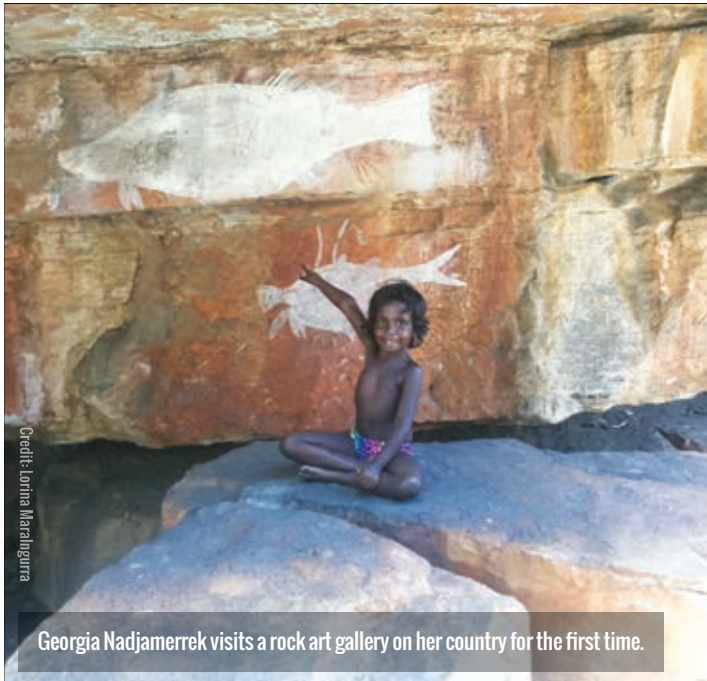
Phoenix Seagren, Yuku Baja Muliku Junior Ranger Cadet

Warddeken Daluk Rangers:

Taking a lead in protecting and sharing culture



The work of the Warddeken Daluk (Women) Rangers in fostering cultural connection and knowledge is part of the transformational effect that the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area and its ranger program has on Nawarddeken (stone country people). The daluk rangers have taken the lead in documenting and conserving cultural heritage sites within the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area, in particular rock art sites, and have been working with senior landowners and Nawarddeken cultural advisors to record the fragile first-hand cultural knowledge associated with such sites. The daluk rangers also work with the students of the Nawarddeken Academy to share and perpetuate traditional knowledge and practices.



Credit: Lorina Maranguna

Georgia Nadjamerrek visits a rock art gallery on her country for the first time.

Warddeken Daluk Rangers are protecting and promoting culture by:

- Contributing to the establishment of a cultural heritage management program;
- Leading in the documentation and conservation of cultural heritage sites within the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area;
- Undertaking conservation works at important sites, including the Kamerrhadjabdi rock art gallery;
- Working with students to share knowledge about traditional song, dance, ritual, language and practices.

“We’re protecting our rock art because it’s more than just pictures to us Bininj people. These sites are where our families lived, and where some of them are buried. It’s time for us to start caring for them properly.”

-Serina Namarnyilk



Daluk rangers Lorina, Lorraine and Tinesha and Nawarddeken Academy student Maureen gather materials for a ceremony.

Credit: Georgia Vellane

“ We sometimes take the children out and make sure they follow in the footsteps of the older people and know where they are from. I remember lots of stories that my grandfather used to tell me. When we go out with the younger ones, we talk about what they have to do when they grow up and tell them the names of the places and trees and animals.”

- Lorraine Namarnyilk

Protecting the past

In 2017, a team of daluk rangers from Kabulwarnamyo planned and implemented conservation works at an important site called Kamerrhdjabdi in the Mok clan estate. Paintings at the site has already suffered irreversible damage due to feral pigs and native wallabies rubbing against the rock surface. Kamerrhdjabdi is significant to landowners for several reasons, in particular because the rock art here includes some of the earliest known works of Warddeken’s late founder and leader Bardayal Lofty Nadjamerrek. It is also a burial site for Bardayal’s grandfather and was a seasonal camp for generations of Bininj throughout the years.

Survey and conservation work undertaken by daluk rangers at Kamerrhdjabdi included:

- Consulting land owners to discuss appropriate management actions;
- Locating legacy data relating to the site, including audio and written documentation of Bardayal’s knowledge of the site;
- Photographing and identifying each individual painting at the site;
- Completing site survey forms;
- Removing vegetation growing close to rock walls;



- Removing large fallen trees in the immediate vicinity of the site that posed a fire hazard risk;
- Undertaking a cool protective burn to reduce the fuel load;
- Removing cobwebs and mud wasp nests;
- Installing an animal exclusion fence around the damaged art; and,
- Locating and documenting multiple stone tools and placing them high on a rock ledge.

As well as this practical conservation work, rangers renewed cultural connections to the site by involving Nawarddeken Academy students in the completion of the works. This supported the students to record the paintings and artefacts in detail, and learn why rock art is important and how to look after it. The project has built pride for rangers and the broader community both in Warddeken cultural heritage and in its conservation.

Protecting the future

An important part of the daluk rangers' work program has involved working closely with students from Kabulwarnamyo's Nawarddeken Academy and the Manmoyi

Homeland Learning Centre on a regular basis. In this way, rangers are mentoring the next generation of landowners and providing strong female leadership and role models within the community.

Daluk rangers' engagement with students has included teaching them morrdjdjanjno (increase songs), kunborrk (dance), bushfood harvesting and ceremony. Students also worked alongside daluk rangers to set motion sensor camera traps, undertake vegetation surveys and analyse camera trap photos using a specially designed database.

Sustaining culture

Warddeken landowners are demonstrating a clear principle that is reinforced by a growing body of research: that fostering culture and identity is key to the health of Aboriginal communities. The Warddeken Daluk Rangers are making a huge contribution to this health, and through the Indigenous ranger and Indigenous Protected Area programs, are supported to contribute to both people and nature.



Jess Bangu:

Leading the way for Aboriginal women around Australia



Jess Bangu leans over a student to help identify a plant, painting a picture about where it grows, how fire affects it, and what its traditional uses are. This cultural leadership is invaluable not only in her community, but right around Australia. As the first woman ranger employed through the Kimberley Land Council, Jess's duties have grown beyond caring for nature, particularly through the knowledge and skills she has as a woman Traditional Owner, to guiding young people and community members in harnessing culture and language for social and environmental benefits.

“Being the first female ranger in the KLC ranger network gives me great pride, knowing I am a role model for all of our younger female rangers.”

‘Courage and strength’

“I have been with the Karajarri Rangers since mid 2006. As the years have gone by, I have been the only woman in the ranger group and have had to perform duties in the Caring for Country program with the men alongside my husband. It is a big and sometimes hard task to do, but I have managed to go along with the men.

“Since I lost my husband five years ago, I have thought about quitting, however, with way too many fond memories and

Jess Bangu is a leader for women because she:

- Has been pioneering in her work as a woman ranger, having begun work as the first female Kimberley Ranger in 2006;
- Has used skills and confidence she's developed since being a ranger to teach younger generations about Karajarri culture;
- Is a role model for women rangers around Australia; and,
- Contributes her unique knowledge as a senior woman to care for country.

friends we had gained along the way together through the ranger program, I am glad I decided to stay and continue on. I am very proud of how I have conducted myself through these evolving positions I have been engaged with over the years, now being the Senior Cultural Ranger position.

“This job has helped me find courage and strength to continue to work with Karajarri people and teach younger generations our knowledge. I would love to see more female rangers on board caring for country, because as women, our knowledge is needed to make the program complete.”



“This job has helped me find courage and strength to continue to work with Karajarri people and teach younger generations our knowledge”
- Senior Cultural Ranger Jess Bangu

Senior woman guiding young ones

Jess’s duties as a ranger and, now, as a senior cultural advisor have contributed to protecting nature and transforming lives on Karajarri country. Her work includes regular visits to the LaGrange Community School to teach students about Karajarri culture and guide the curriculum to incorporate Karajarri language and culture.

Jess has also been involved in plant conservation through a Kimberley seed bank, documentation of Karajarri knowledge about plants, and work to protect important coastal swale thickets on Karajarri country. She has been working to

digitise the Karajarri dictionary, recording five different dialects, and leading biodiversity surveys to record ecological knowledge.

Ranger jobs create leaders

Jess’s work as a ranger has harnessed culture and fostered leadership within the Karajarri community and beyond. It’s essential that these qualities are recognised and supported right across Australia so that communities can achieve the benefits to people and nature that the Karajarri community have drawn from Jess’s work.

Lama Lama Women Rangers:

A pathway to achieving community aspirations for looking after country



For the women who are involved in the Lama Lama Ranger program, being a ranger or a project officer offers a way to work together with their family to look after country and to drive their community's aspirations for the future. Of the 16 full-time and part-time positions based with the Yintjingga Aboriginal Corporation, seven of those are currently held by women. This is how the program has naturally developed over time and it is a feature that the Lama Lama community is proud of.

A leader with heart

Karen Liddy is the Chairperson of the Lama Lama Land Trust. She has worked for many years to help coordinate and develop the Lama Lama community, and is also proud to be a Lama Lama Ranger.

"Women have always played an important role in caring for and providing for our families, and in today's modern world, our connection is practiced by taking on the job of a ranger, or working as a project officer to help coordinate things."

“The ranger program offers a way women and men can work together, it opens up opportunities for women to be on country, providing a base and a stepping stone for us to be strong leaders, alongside our men.”

Lama Lama Women Rangers are engaging their whole community in caring for country by:

- Making the ranger program central to achieving community aspirations;
- Developing a gender balanced ranger team, including senior positions held by Lama Lama women;
- Supporting a junior ranger program that engages families as well.



Lama Lama Trust Chairperson Karen Liddy and Ranger Lisa Peter.



Lama Lama Rangers like Virginia Peter take care of land and sea country with a strategic approach to protecting wildlife and sustaining cultural heritage.

Credit: Anne de Ruiter

“We don’t consider ourselves above, below or in-between - everyone is equal, and as Lama Lama People we are all proud to be Lama Lama. We are all proud of who we are and where we have come from. We are all proud of each other. These are words we use and follow. What is important for us is that feeling of being on country, of being connected to each other, of being Lama Lama - and we are all equal, we all bring something to the job of looking after land and sea, and passing down our knowledge to the next generations.”

“Our Country, our land and our sea has always taken care of us in the past and it is now our job as rangers to do the same.”

Growing up, she watched and learnt from the tireless commitment shown by her elders to allow her families to return to country.

Involving everyone in caring for country

The strong drive to be involved in the ranger program is shared by many Lama Lama women, and it has encouraged the ranger program to think about how to involve the wider clan group, how to teach the children, how to support families, how to keep everyone healthy and strong and how to plan for and think about the future.

The Lama Lama Junior Ranger Program is coordinated by Alison Liddy, another Lama Lama woman who has been involved in the ranger program since its inception in 2009.



Lama Lama Ranger Lisa Peter.

Alison believes that involving young people in activities out on country is extremely important.

“Many of us, we grew up on country with our elders. For kids today, they are schooled in Coen, away from their homelands, so it’s important we have them out on country learning from our elders and from our rangers, as often as we can. We see the kids getting involved and they love it. Often we can’t fit everyone on the one activity, there is so much enthusiasm to participate. We see them happy, we know that they have that feeling about being on country.”

The Junior Ranger Program helps to bring families out on country. It is a way of bringing other Lama Lama people together and keeping traditional owners involved and informed about what is happening with country.

Employing women in the ranger programs is a great way to promote equal opportunity within the wider community, and

the Lama Lama Ranger team leads by example. Of the three team leaders currently employed, two are women.

Elaine Liddy holds one of these positions and is also the Cultural Officer. Elaine has been in this dual role for almost seven years. She helps to ensure cultural protocols are upheld and any organisations or individuals working with Lama Lama are kept informed on important matters and how to work effectively with their group.

“I really enjoy talking with our project partners and offering them an insight into the history of our Lama Lama people and country. When talking with them I highlight how our clan group, both men and women, young people, senior people and elders, all work closely together in making decisions and planning for and looking after our country. We respect our cultural ways. And we encourage as many Lama Lama People as possible to get involved in our ranger work.”

Setting an example

For Lama Lama people, women hold important leadership roles, sitting at the heart of their communities and working hard to create strong futures for their families. The Indigenous ranger program has become a platform for engaging young and old alike in caring for country and working together. The work of Lama Lama Women Rangers, alongside their male counterparts, demonstrates the success of Indigenous rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas that should be secured and grown into the future.



Lama Lama Rangers Lisa and Virginia Peter. Lama Lama Rangers work to protect some of Australia's most beautiful land and sea country in Cape York, Queensland.

Credit: Janelle Buzicka

KJ Martu Women Rangers: Reconnecting with culture



Martu women, young and old, are empowered by reconnecting with their cultural heritage. Through the Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa Puntura-ya Ninti Program and Martu Rangers, activities that breathe life into Martu culture are being undertaken. Amongst these is a regular women's cultural camp supported by KJ Women Rangers.

Martu Jukurrpa

The Martu world is ordered by Jukurrpa. This word, which has no English equivalent, covers several meanings: the creative epoch, during which the land, the law and the people all were given shape; the stories and songs that recount that time – the travels and adventures of the creative beings; the eternal, immanent power that derives from the creative beings; the continuing, vital action of that immanent power; and the ceremonies and sacred objects that represent, hold and engage with that eternal power. Where an English equivalent is sought, Jukurrpa is usually translated as 'Dreaming'.

Martu Jukurrpa is largely held and communicated in songs and stories. Some stories and songs are open and able to be learned by children. Over a lifetime, a Martu elder may have learned vast song cycles, many thousands of lines containing a containing several layers of knowledge, as well as a storehouse of more detailed stories. This accumulated knowledge is termed ninti and regarded with great respect.

Protecting and perpetuating ninti

Martu women's cultural camps create an opportunity for younger Martu women to participate in and celebrate their

The Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa Women Rangers support women's cultural camps to:

- Empower Martu women to reconnect with their cultural heritage;
- Reengage young Martu with their country and cultural legacy;
- Reinvigorate cultural practices through demonstration, practice and information sharing about traditional practices.



Parnngurr Women Rangers recording information about a grinding stone left behind by their ancestors.

“I learnt a lot this week. It is better here than going into town where there is trouble and I am losing my culture. When I am here doing this work, I remember my grandmother. She showed me her ways. I learnt from her. She made me strong.”

- Parnngurr ranger

cultural roots, access their traditional country and provide a learning environment for cultural exchange between the younger generation and the elder women.

The camps aim to empower Martu women both young and old to reconnect with their cultural heritage. The camps contribute significantly to maintaining Martu culture through demonstration, practice and information sharing about traditional practices. This transfer of knowledge assists in

reinvigorating cultural practices. The camps are inclusive and offer equitable access to all Martu women no matter where they are located and particularly encourage women who might not otherwise have this opportunity.

The cultural transfer builds on existing Martu skills, knowledge and confidence, and aim to influence young adults' assumptions and aspirations, and to encourage broader economic participation in the future. The camps can be seen as a foundation for young adult women to naturally develop the skills and confidence required in mainstream employment.

The theme of the camps changes. In 2015, the camp was focussed on sharing and recording knowledge of bush medicine and seed processing. In 2017, the focus of the camps was to trace significant portions of the Jakulykulyu (Seven Sisters) Dreaming Story, to keep the story strong and to pass on elders' knowledge and culture to younger women. Topics that

- ▼ Forty-two women rangers from Jigalong, Punmu and Parnngurr came together at Yulpu for a four-day plant and bush medicine workshop. Throughout the workshop senior women shared information about a variety of plants and guided the younger women through winnowing, yandying, and grinding different types of seed.



“It’s good to meet up with the other women, getting together and sharing things with them. Going out hunting, gathering and cooking. It’s good that we are teaching the young ones, young girls can learn from the old people. Next time they might take it on, when the old people get tired. They can follow it and show their kids.”

- Punmu ranger

have been requested by the women for future camps include traditional practical activities such as making sandals and hair belts.

The KJ Women’s Ranger Teams provide logistical support for the camps. The attendance of the women from the ranger teams also provides an opportunity for ongoing cultural work to be planned for and implemented in those teams’ regular work.

Country and cultural heritage

KJ’s integrated suite of programs engages young Martu with their country and cultural legacy because it has been the most effective strategy for building social stability, good health, an economic base for communities, as well as a viable future for communities. Cultural knowledge is central to much of the rangers’ work. It is vital and the health, wellbeing and successful development of Indigenous communities are enhanced by grounding social and economic programs within culture. Around the country, Indigenous rangers like the KJ Women Rangers are working to engage communities in perpetuating cultural heritage. There are clear benefits to the environment and for people in growing these important programs.



▲ Elder, Ngamaru Bidu, demonstrates how to rock and roll and shake the wangkulyi (yandy dish) to separate the seed from the chaff. Martu identify more than 60 plants with edible seed. Each plant has its own songs, places, stories and laws, and has special techniques, tools, knowledge and skills to prepare them.

Edna Nai:

Inspiring young and old in the Torres Strait



Edna Nai says it is her love of country that motivated her to become a ranger. And with her own children all grown up and living on the mainland, she draws inspiration every day from the next generation; her grandchildren and the children of the community.

Edna is committed to instilling her sense of responsibility to take care of country to younger generations. Through her work as a ranger on Masig Island in the Torres Strait, Edna not only undertakes important work such as revegetation and turtle population monitoring, but she promotes culture and tradition, demonstrates leadership in her community, and is a model of equality between men and women rangers.

A lifetime of caring for country

Edna Nai says it is natural for her to look after country. She comes from the central part of the Torres Strait Islands and has lived on Masig Island for much of her life.

Edna was always passionate about looking after country, and grew up knowing the traditional names and uses for native trees as well as volunteering for her community.

Her work experience set her on the path to being a ranger when Edna became involved in the TSRA's Landcare

“I love native trees and birds and I love our culture. It's natural for me to look after country - it was there before I became a ranger. I can't be happier now.”

Torres Strait Regional Authority Ranger Edna Nai is inspiring her community by:

- Being one of the first women Indigenous rangers in the Torres Strait;
- Sharing her passion for taking care of country with younger generations;
- Being a role model for young women to pursue their passion as a career;
- Getting respect from men and women alike for her dedication to working as a ranger;
- Being involved in revegetation and turtle conservation work.

program on the island. This was planting native plants and restoring native grass along the beach to stop erosion. Before working as a ranger, Edna worked with the local Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) and especially in the community nursery.

Working as a ranger: inspiring the whole community

Edna began work as a Torres Strait Regional Authority Ranger in 2012. She and two other women were the first rangers in the central cluster region of the Torres Strait, and the first women



Edna teaching school children about native trees, their names and what their cultural uses are.

“I hope that my work and life will inspire the children to reach their own goals one day - to get a better education and good job. I hope to push them to reach their goals on their own journey.”

rangers in the Torres Strait through the Working on Country program.

Because she works in a small community, Edna says everyone knows each other and her ranger work is widely known and respected by community members. This closeness means that, through working as a ranger, Edna can promote culture and tradition. She is passionate about passing on traditional knowledge for future generations so spends time engaging with the school children, passing on traditional knowledge. Each year during NAIDOC, the children are taken out and shown the native trees, teaching them the island names and cultural uses of each plant. Last NAIDOC, Edna worked with the children to plant a cultural garden.

Edna explains that her community encourages the women rangers and working as a ranger is given great respect.

Edna is a role model for other women through her ranger work. “I think younger women are inspired by us and that’s great.”



▲ Edna works to monitor the health of island forests and record language names for trees.



▲ Edna and Torres Strait Regional Authority Ranger Loice Naawi track and count hawksbill turtles for a biodiversity survey.

Achievements protecting nature

In her job as a ranger, Edna meets a lot of visitors. She says she is impressed by how many of them remark about the beauty of the Torres Strait Islands.

“My passion is to help look after the environment of the Torres Strait. I hear compliments from visitors all about our home, they say ‘how beautiful it is’ – so I want to keep it that way.”

Turtle surveys are a key activity for Edna’s ranger group. They count the number of turtles that bury their eggs on the island. All the data collected by the rangers during the survey period is

compared to past data so any changes can be identified. Rangers are also responsible for protecting the eggs from predators such as crocodiles, as well as from inundation during high tides. People too can inadvertently disturb or destroy the eggs so rangers work to educate the community to protect the eggs.

The Future

With assistance from other rangers, Masig Rangers look after nearby Aukane, Memay and Aureed Islands which are nesting sites for the vulnerable hawksbill turtle. Masigalgal RNTBC is keen to further protect the environment on these islands by creating an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) in the future.

Recently, during a bio-diversity survey conducted with Rangers, an endemic rare species of nesting bird has been found. According to Edna, this has inspired the community further to protect the environment.

Edna's inspiring work as an Indigenous ranger demonstrates the support and respect of the Masig Island community, and the desire by future generations to use her as a role model for caring for country and working hard. It is important that Indigenous ranger jobs grow and have long-term security to support the benefits to both nature and the men, women and children in Indigenous communities that Edna's story illustrates.

“Being a ranger, I feel a responsibility to look after country and it drives me to be better, to have more knowledge.”



▲ Torres Strait Regional Authority Rangers undertake a number of turtle conservation work. Edna is involved in monitoring hawksbill turtles on Aukane, as part of research to determine population dynamics, threats and management plans for the threatened species.

Tanya Elone:

Building a solid base for Banbai-Wattleridge Indigenous Protected Area



“The decision was approved to declare Wattleridge an IPA on the 30th June 2001. The first in New South Wales to declare an IPA, and it’s here in li’l old Guyra!”

Tanya Elone has grown Banbai Enterprise Development Aboriginal Corporation to become the largest employer of Aboriginal people in the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales. For Tanya, the Banbai-Wattleridge IPA has become a springboard for employment, new businesses opportunities and a revitalisation of cultural knowledge and pride.

Banbai Corporation oversees the Wattleridge Indigenous Protected Area. Wattleridge is about 35 kilometres north-east of the New England township of Guyra, and covers 640 hectares of bushland growing on outcropping granite country, only 20% of it cleared land.

“It’s Aboriginal owned, controlled and staffed,” says Tanya.

Building people up

Over the last 15 years, Tanya has grown the corporation from four to 15 employees, including five female rangers. She’s also brought young women into governing roles, with young female directors on both the IPA and Banbai Corporation boards. “Everything I do is about being able to help my people,” says Tanya, “not only has the IPA and Working on Country program given people work, it’s helped give us pride.”

Banbai rangers receive accredited training through a

Banbai-Wattleridge was New South Wales’ first Indigenous Protected Area. Under the stewardship of long-time Manager Tanya Elone, it’s leading the way in other important areas:

- Banbai is the largest employer of Aboriginal people in the NSW Northern Tablelands;
- Women occupy important ‘driver’s seat’ ranger and governance roles;
- Pathways are being created into enterprise for young people in fee-for-service work;
- The organisation injects significant economic lifeblood into a small community;
- Led by an Aboriginal woman, Banbai is Aboriginal owned, staffed and operated;

partnership with a local TAFE, where trainers deliver Certificate I to Certificate IV training with Banbai staff and local community members. The Working on Country program supports this ladder of training and employment, creating pathways for Aboriginal people in the region that didn't exist in the past.

“I want to be able to build people up, which is why I'm so focused on young people. We want to build capability and train local Aboriginal people so they can have a solid skill base as employees or small-business owners.”

Incubating businesses of tomorrow

“Because of the IPA and Working on Country programs, we now have a real ability to help create futures for our people.”

Not only do the core programs Banbai runs provide invaluable social, environmental and economic returns to the community, they create a platform to build the skills, confidence and capability for female rangers and other Aboriginal staff to launch themselves into new ventures.

Tanya sees enormous business development potential for the work Banbai is doing, potential that can help secure a prosperous future for young people in her community. There are extensive fee-for-service opportunities in the region, which is surrounded by national parks and other Indigenous land holdings requiring management. She envisages new, stand-alone ventures in areas her rangers are already trained and working: fire management, weed control, fencing and feral animal management.

Tanya's vision is that Banbai incubates these enterprises, supporting and developing the capability of staff until they're ready to establish themselves as small business owners. When realised, this expansion would see Banbai's work increase its already impressive local economic footprint.

“There's a lot of potential for tourism here too,” says Tanya, with plans underway with a coalition of neighbouring Indigenous organisations for an ecotourism venture.

A vision for future generations

“Before Wattleridge was handed back to the traditional owners there was a rock that looked like a face standing upright near the gates. We call it Birri-Birri. When the country was handed back, the rock laid down. For us that meant he no longer had to watch over it, because we were here to take care of it now.”

The IPA and Working on Country programs have become the backbone for a whole scope of activity and planning in the community.

LOCAL ECONOMIC IMPACT

of Banbai Enterprise Development Aboriginal Corporation
in the small community of GUYRA

BETWEEN
\$230,000
AND
\$260,000
A YEAR SINCE 2001.



That's an injection of around
\$3.25 million
in a town of 2,500 people.

IN ITS
LIFETIME

STRENGTHENING CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

It's a result that's being replicated through ranger and IPA programs around the country, with significant scope for the outcomes being generated in the Northern Tablelands to be recreated in more communities Australia-wide. As the Banbai experience shows, the dividends expand far beyond the programs themselves. They give Tanya and other people in the community the foothold to dream big.

“I want our country to be a place where our children learn cultural values as well as have access to economic and social opportunities. Our country is a meeting place for family and community gatherings where knowledge is shared and what we see now, generations will see in the future.”

“While the Indigenous Land Corporation bought the land in 1998, it was only becoming an IPA in 2001 and having the Working on Country funding that allowed us to properly manage it and use it as a basis for employment and enterprise.”



Women rangers work alongside men rangers to undertake strategic patch burning, reducing destructive wildfires on the Wattleridge Indigenous Protected Area



“There are a lot of people involved in the ranger program. We are learning new skills while we look after our ancestors’ country. That why I enjoy it.”
- Parnngurr Ranger Carol Williams, here working with other KJ Women Rangers to clean up a popular tourist spot on the Canning Stock Route.

Conclusion

This report was built on the strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women around Australia. It illustrates how Indigenous women rangers use culture, knowledge, leadership and hard work to achieve inspirational success for people and nature.

Indigenous ranger jobs and Indigenous Protected Areas provide a platform for women to show their many strengths, to further develop their skills and to contribute to the wellbeing of themselves, their families, their communities and to every Australian through land and sea management work.

Throughout the report, Aboriginal women who are leading in their varying professional fields have provided commentary reinforcing the value of women working on country. These experts have firsthand expertise in a range of areas, including human rights, family violence prevention, mental and emotional health, remote and regional employment and service delivery, private sector engagement, technology development, high level policy around reconciliation and constitutional reform. They are leaders grounded in practical experience. That they see the strong relevance of this work for women and communities is testament to the value of women working on country.

Indigenous ranger jobs and Indigenous Protected Areas support the vital role women play protecting nature across vast areas and transforming lives in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The stories in this report include the work of women rangers to protect wildlife, lead as role models, foster career aspirations, support younger generations and sustain invaluable culture and knowledge.

Rangers are at the frontline of mitigating environmental threats like feral animals, invasive weeds and destructive wildfires. The women rangers in this report are directly protecting wildlife, from endangered coastal rainforest ecosystems to bilbies in the heart of the desert.

Land and sea management work addresses many of the key contemporary issues faced by communities around Australia. Indigenous ranger and Indigenous Protected Area programs support meaningful work that people are proud to do, and provide support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to join the workforce at the same time as fulfilling family and cultural obligations. Culture and connection to country is seen as a strength and opportunity, not a problem or hindrance.

The argument for growth is compelling. The case studies in this report are just a small sample of the success being achieved by Indigenous women and men rangers across Australia. They represent an even smaller sample of the work that could be achieved if the Indigenous ranger and Indigenous Protected Area programs are grown and secured for the long term.

Key Findings

Frontline nature protection

Indigenous women rangers are making a significant contribution to the protection of biodiversity across vast areas of Australia, undertaking important work to protect native plants and animals and address environmental threats like feral animals, invasive weeds and destructive wildfires.

A platform for career development, leadership and empowerment

Indigenous land and sea management is developing leadership opportunities and building the confidence of women to follow their career aspirations. Indigenous ranger jobs and Indigenous Protected Areas provide platforms through which women demonstrate leadership and participate both outside and within their own communities as key voices with cultural authority and legitimacy.

Unique skills and knowledge

The knowledge, attributes and approaches of women are integral to a balanced approach to work caring for land and sea country. Indigenous women rangers often have exclusive access to places, and unique knowledge about the ecological processes in those places.

Inspiring role models

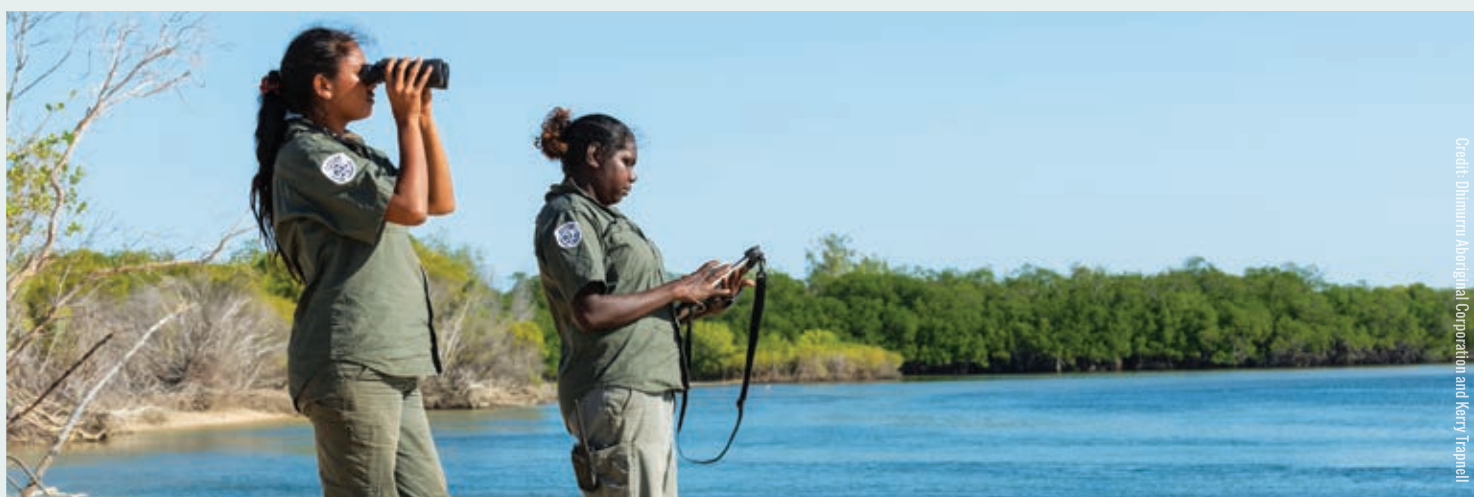
Indigenous women rangers are inspiring their communities, illuminating career pathways, applying their passion for culture, community and country through work, demonstrating active workforce participation, tackling issues like 'shame', promoting gender balanced decision making and supporting young people to participate in work that contributes meaningfully.

Sustaining cultural strength

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women across Australia identify that nourishing culture is central to their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their communities. Indigenous Protected Area and Indigenous ranger programs are supporting increased community pride and wellbeing, and fostering cultural connection and continuity for women and their communities.

Supporting community resilience

Indigenous women rangers are actively undertaking work to support their communities, engaging with young people and people experiencing difficulties, supporting traineeships and reinforcing the benefits of cultural identity and meaningful employment.



Credit: Dhimarru Aboriginal Corporation and Kerry Trappell

“ We don't see ourselves as below or above, we see ourselves as equal with men. And it's the same way around for how men feel about us. So everyone that works on country is equal. ”

- LAMA LAMA LAND TRUST CHAIR KAREN LIDDY, HERE WITH RANGER TEAM LEADER ELAINE LIDDY.



countryneedspeople.org.au
