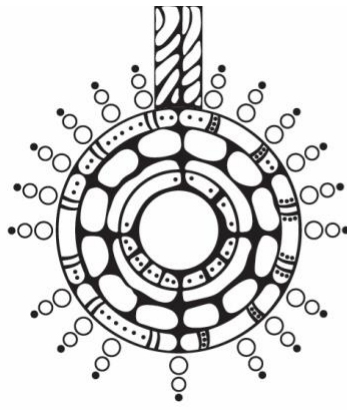




Aboriginal Collaboration  
Case Study July 2020



**Our Coast**  
**Our Land**  
**STRIVING TOGETHER**



Bernadette Angus (Bardi Jawi Oorany Ranger) and Malcolm Lindsay (Environs Kimberley) (Photo Source: Julia Rau)

## Environs Kimberley's Nature Project

13 years of collaborating with Aboriginal Rangers to look after country in the Kimberley

By Dr Malcolm Lyndsey  
Program Manager, Environs Kimberley

*Our right-way collaboration model has been successful as it is respectful, places equal value on both partners' priorities and knowledge systems, works with individuals' strengths, and recognises that Aboriginal people have chief responsibility for their country and culture.*

Environs Kimberley is the peak environmental NGO for the Kimberley region in far north-west Australia and is dedicated to looking after the health of the land and waters of the region. Formed in 1996 to protect the Fitzroy River, we expanded our work across the Kimberley and in 2007, we initiated on-ground cultural and natural resource management projects, now grouped under the name the Kimberley Nature Project (KNP).

Over the past 13 years the KNP has grown to employ a team of seven ecologists and environmental scientists, collaborating with Aboriginal and community groups across the region to protect, manage and document ecologically and culturally important species and ecosystems. Project activities include weed, fire and feral animal management; seed collection and propagation; revegetation; targeted and general biodiversity surveys; documentation of traditional ecological knowledge; designing, funding and managing projects; Conservation Action Planning; and regional networking. We have funded these projects from over 60 grants and consultancy contracts from state and federal governments, philanthropists, universities and government departments.

Kimberley Rangers during the Kimberley Bilby Workshop (Source: Kimberley Land Council)



The majority of these land management projects have been carried out in collaboration with Aboriginal rangers and their communities, they are Australia's oldest land managers after all. Initially we were working with ranger groups close to Broome, such as the Karajarri Rangers, with whom we have worked for over 13 years on a range of projects. But due to the success of our working model and the growth in the Aboriginal ranger network, we have expanded to support groups across the southern Kimberley, the Goldfields and even Victoria. Our projects include:

- Large collaborative projects with seven Kimberley ranger groups (Bardi Jawi, Nyul Nyul, Yawuru, Karajarri, Nyikina Mangala, Ngurrara and Bunuba)
- Ongoing In-kind or historical support for a further five groups in the Kimberley (Ungurr, Goolarabooloo, Gooniyandi, Kija, Paruku and Nyangumarta) and Wathaurong in Victoria.
- A new partnership with the Ngalia Rangers in the Goldfields region.

Our right-way collaboration model has been successful as it is respectful, places equal value on both partners' priorities and knowledge systems, works with individuals' strengths, and recognises that Aboriginal people have chief responsibility for their country and culture.

This model has been developed over time and is now formalised through internal policies and MOUs or contracts with ranger partners. We regularly seek feedback from our partners over how we are doing as a project partner and review our model to ensure that it is a genuine two-way collaboration.



*Ayesha Moss (Environs Kimberley) and Cecilia Tigan (Bardi Jawi Oorany Ranger) discuss cultural signage for the Endangered Monsoon Vine Thickets at Kooljaman (source: Julia Rau)*

Key aspects to our right-way collaboration model includes:

- Working with partners from the beginning to the end of a project, including:
  - designing the project together based on both parties' priorities.
  - getting endorsement from Aboriginal communities through governance bodies, recognising them as the authority over their county and culture
  - funding the project, for us, the rangers and elders where the latter are needed
  - conducting fieldwork together using the best scientific and traditional knowledge and practices
  - adhering to cultural protocols, either discussed informally or through cultural induction
  - working together on project management and reporting
  - presenting the results of the project together to multiple audiences, e.g. as written scientific reports and plain English reports for local communities, or orally at scientific conferences and to the local community
- Recognising cultural knowledge systems and practices as not only equal to science, but essential to better conservation outcomes. For example, traditional burning is now acknowledged as being ecologically important, but few other cultural activities are recognized.
- Recognising that people and the land are intertwined, both for Aboriginal cultures and the wider community. Many of the environmental issues we try to manage have social/cultural causes or solutions. We therefore use the term Cultural Natural Resource Management to recognise this.
- Using and documenting traditional languages where possible, as many languages are endangered.



- Recognising the importance of elders' participation in projects and providing wages for them.
- Recognising the importance of the participation of young people, to allow intergenerational knowledge transfer
- Recognising existing governance bodies (e.g. PBCs) and management plans developed by the communities (e.g. Healthy Country Plans).
- Adapting our support and goals to the level of the rangers, for example:
  - New ranger groups: assisting with all aspects of project management, basic field work, capacity building, technology (e.g. GPS)
  - Experienced and highly professional groups: Little support needed with land management activities, more support with higher scientific and technical aspects e.g. CAP planning, GIS analysis, drone mapping, research partnerships with universities
- Fostering long-term personal relationships with our partners; these are invaluable.
- Having fun! Laughing at oneself. Bringing cake!



A key aspect of the success of our projects and growth is the growth and achievement of the Aboriginal rangers, particularly in the Kimberley.

We recognise the important role of the Kimberley Land Council in establishing and supporting the majority of ranger groups in the Kimberley. The rangers are also supported by their own communities and governance bodies, many of whom have developed ranger programs independently of the KLC.

Without these supporting bodies it would be much more difficult for us to carry out our projects. So, thank you!

We understand that the situation in the Kimberley is different from that in many places in Australia. We are lucky enough to have 90% of the Kimberley under Native Title, some communities with elders who walked out of the desert when they were teenagers, numerous Indigenous Protected Areas, a network of 16 active and experienced ranger groups and their Prescribed Bodies Corporate, and a Land Council supporting this network. Right-way collaboration should be occurring across all of Australia as it leads to better conservation outcomes while building better networks and recognition for indigenous custodianship, knowledge and cultural practice.

*Steve Reynolds (Environs Kimberley) and Eilane (Bunuba Rangers) documenting Bunuba cultural plant knowledge. (Source: Kylie Weatherall)*

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