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South Australian Arid Lands Natural Resources Management Board
Towards a cooperative approach to the cultural
and ecological assessment and management
of rock-holes in the Gawler Ranges Native Title
claim area

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Cover photos: Left: Field work participants examining rock-holes at Pilleutta Rocks, Kokatha Station
Right: Tunkillia rock-hole, Wilgena Station.

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SUMMARY

This report details the activities and outcomes of an ongoing collaborative project looking at the cultural and ecological significance and health of rock-holes in the Gawler Ranges native title claim area, South Australia. The project is funded by the South Australian Arid Lands (SAAL) Natural Resources Management (NRM) Board and delivered through a partnership between the SAAL NRM Board, the Gawler Ranges native title claim group, the South Australian Native Title Services Ltd (SANTS), and the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation (DWLBC) of the State Government.

The project objectives include raising awareness and improving the protection and management of culturally significant rock-holes and waterholes, enhancing knowledge and understanding of the cultural, ecological and productive values of rock-holes; increasing stakeholder engagement in rock-hole management; and, identifying and documenting specific principles or protocols for engaging the Aboriginal community in such projects.

The focus of this report is the findings of field work undertaken in March and June 2009 on Wilgena and Kokatha pastoral stations in the north-western portion of the Gawler Ranges native title claim. Eight rock-holes were assessed during the June field trip, with cultural and ecological information recorded at each. This report summarises the site assessments primarily from a cultural perspective, particularly those of members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim, but also local pastoralists. Ecological information, while touched on in this report, is to be detailed in a further publication.

The field work confirmed the cultural and ecological significance of rock-holes in the Gawler Ranges through a collaborative approach to rock-hole identification, assessment and management. Many of the rock-holes were associated with Aboriginal law or *Tjukurrpa* which forms part of a rich cultural landscape passed from generation to generation through story and song. The members of the native title group spoke of these *dreaming* stories during the field work in highlighting the cultural significance of the rock-holes. Furthermore, the value of water across this arid landscape was emphasised, with rock-holes being well-known and cared for by



generation after generation of traditional owners. Rock-holes were also spoken of in terms of traditional productive values, with rock-hole complexes providing important resource utilisation areas rich in bush tucker and bush medicines.

As a collaborative project, one of the objectives is to bring together traditional and western ecological knowledge and science to enhance understandings and improve management decision-making and outcomes. During the field work, discussions between members of the native title group and DWLBC ecologists formed the basis of this knowledge sharing. It is hoped that this can be built on in future stages of the project to achieve a more sophisticated engagement around the sharing and application of different knowledges and understanding of rock-holes and country. This also applies to pastoral knowledge.

This report confirms the many and varied positive outcomes that stem from this collaborative rock-hole project, particularly for the native title claimants. It also highlights some of the challenges and makes a number of recommendations for future work in this area. The recommendations cover Aboriginal and pastoral engagement; field work and research methods; project scope and objectives; and the management of information. The report conclusions reiterate the importance of this project in achieving a broad range of outcomes from direct community engagement in the delivery of NRM projects to improved social, cultural and ecological outcomes.



1. INTRODUCTION

This project is a continuation of a 2008 project on rock-hole and waterhole protection in the Gawler Ranges native title claim area. As with this project, the earlier work was funded by the South Australian Arid Lands (SAAL) Natural Resources Management (NRM) Board and delivered through a partnership between the SAAL NRM Board, the Gawler Ranges native title claim group, the South Australian Native Title Services Ltd (SANTS), and the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation (DWLBC) of the State Government. The outcomes of the 2008 project work confirmed the cultural and ecological significance of rock-holes or *gnammas* in the Gawler Ranges and established a framework and methodology for a collaborative approach to rock-hole identification, assessment and management (see Harding & Blesing 2008; White 2008). The project outlined in this report, builds on this earlier work.

The cultural and ecological information available on rock-holes across the SAAL NRM Board region is limited. Thus one of the key aims of this project (and the earlier work) is to develop an inventory of culturally important rock-holes and waterholes in the Gawler Ranges. This will provide the Board with strategic management opportunities of these resources, which are culturally, ecologically and productively important water resources in the region. The SAAL NRM Board has thus invested in this project to improve NRM outcomes for the region particularly with respect to water resources and to support stakeholder engagement to deliver such outcomes. For the project partners in DWLBC and SANTS, the project is important in working with all interest groups, particularly Aboriginal people and pastoralists, to identify and assess the ecological, cultural and productive values of rock-holes across the region and identify suitable management options. For the Gawler Ranges native title claim group who approached the SAAL NRM Board to develop this project, there are a range of aspirations for this project which include getting back on country, caring for important places and maintaining and protecting cultural heritage. For all partners and stakeholders, the project provides a cooperative framework for delivering on mutual interests including cultural and environmental protection, opportunities for positive community engagement, the bringing together of western and Aboriginal knowledge,



and providing landholders with opportunities for improved productivity and management.

The project anticipated that a collaborative report would be developed by SANTS and DWLBC bringing together the cultural and ecological values and perspectives on rock-holes in the Gawler Ranges native title area. However, due to limited resources, a collaborative report is now envisaged for the next stage of the project. That report will combine the findings outlined in this report, with those contained in Harding & Blesing (2008) and White (2008). As a result, this report focuses on the documentation of the values, knowledge, and aspirations of members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group and to a lesser extent the values and knowledge of pastoralists. It also seeks to complement and build on the previous work, and thus does not recite some of the background information contained in these reports, in particular White (2008) which provides a useful review of both the ecological and cultural values of rock-holes.

Project Objectives

This project has the following objectives:

- To raise awareness and improve the protection and management of culturally significant rock-holes and waterholes of the Gawler Ranges;
- To provide a database of rock-holes and waterholes for the Gawler Ranges Native Title Management Committee (GRNTMC) and other Aboriginal community members, landholders, NRM regional bodies and government agencies as deemed appropriate by the GRNTMC;
- Fill key knowledge gaps regarding the cultural, ecological and productive (values) importance of rock-holes and waterholes in the Gawler Ranges native title claim area;
- Provide the Board with ecological data and cultural knowledge to assist in the protection and management of rock-holes and to increase stakeholder engagement;
- Develop spatial data for the location and cultural importance of rock-holes and waterholes in the Gawler Ranges native title claim area.

The SAAL NRM Board was also interested in identifying and documenting specific principles or protocols for engaging the Aboriginal community in such projects.

As discussed above, the Gawler Ranges native title claim group also has a number of objectives or aspirations for this project. These include:



- To get back on country;
- To look after rock-holes and associated landscapes which are of great cultural significance;
- To exercise native title (cultural) rights and interests across pastoral lands, including sharing of knowledge and teaching of young people;
- To build understandings as to the cultural significance of rock-holes;
- To develop sustainable partnerships with key stakeholders including pastoralists; and
- To secure meaningful employment to care for environmental and cultural heritage.

These objectives are largely compatible with the 'project objectives' given the delivery of the project through a collaborative, participatory process involving all project partners, and in particular the Gawler Ranges native title claim group.

Project Methods

This project stemmed from the interests, aspirations and requests of members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group to look after country and in particular rock-holes. For this project to build on the previous work, it was crucial that community participation continued at all levels. A significant aspect of the project methods for SANTS has been maintaining a dialogue and engagement with the Gawler Ranges native title claim group around this project.

To this end, the SANTS project coordinator (then Samantha Muller) met with the Gawler Ranges Native Title Management Committee (GRNTMC) to discuss the project, identify the right people to participate in field work, ensure community support for the project and establish priority sites for the project within the Gawler Ranges native title claim area. This involved two visits to Port Augusta for meetings with the GRNTMC on 5-6 February and 2-3 April 2009. This supported SANTS in negotiating the scope and objectives of the project with the SAAL NRM Board.

In delivering the project, SANTS and the project team (including DWLBC) utilised a range of methods. Primarily these centred on social research methods in the field, with on-country qualitative interviews and conversations being the principal means by which data was obtained.¹ To assist in this process, question guides and data proformas were created (see Appendix A). The guides covered a range of topics

¹ Project team members from DWLBC, Mel White and Glen Scholz, used a range of ecological assessment methods which are not outlined in this report.



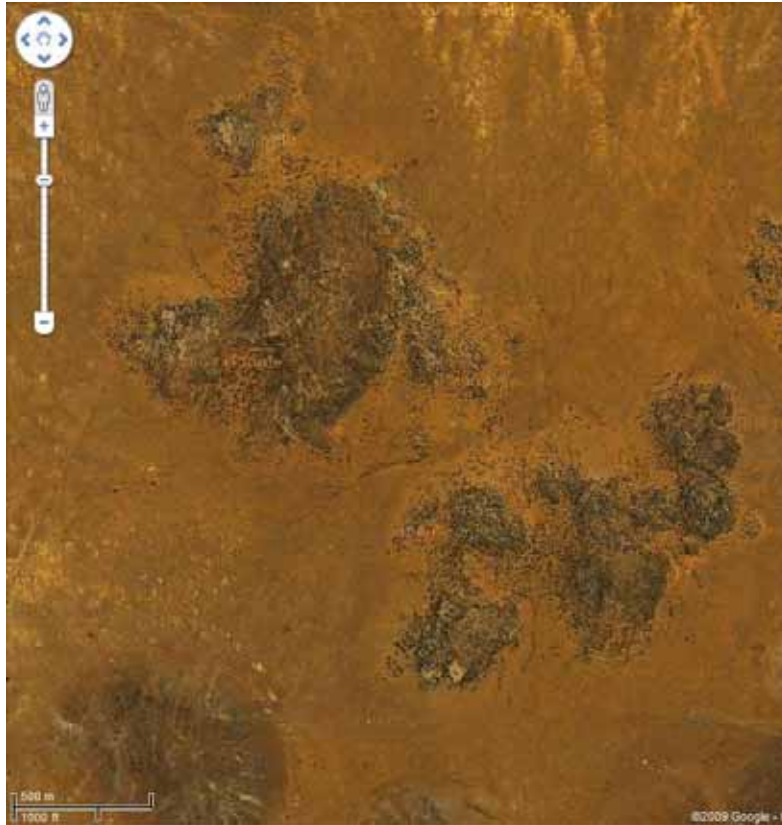


Plate 1: Example of satellite imagery of a rock-hole on Kokatha Station used to locate and estimate size of rock-holes (Source: Google Earth)

deemed critical by the project team to the delivery of project outcomes, specifically the identification of cultural values and aspirations for the management of each of the rock-holes visited.

Desktop research and analysis was also undertaken prior to, and following the field work. In addition, SANTS provided the project liaison with the region's pastoralists in order to share the project objectives, negotiate access to lease areas and seek to arrange times to meet and discuss ways forward for the project. During the field work, a range of mapping resources were used to locate rock-holes, including satellite imagery accessed via 'Google Earth' (see plate 1).

The field work for the project focussed on Wilgena pastoral station (as per previous project) in the north west of the Gawler Ranges native title claim area (see figure 1). The field work was undertaken in two stages. The first trip in April was a reconnaissance field visit which was undertaken to locate identified priority rock-holes prior to a full field trip involving cultural and ecological assessments. The main purpose of the reconnaissance trip was to pave the way for a more efficient full field trip.



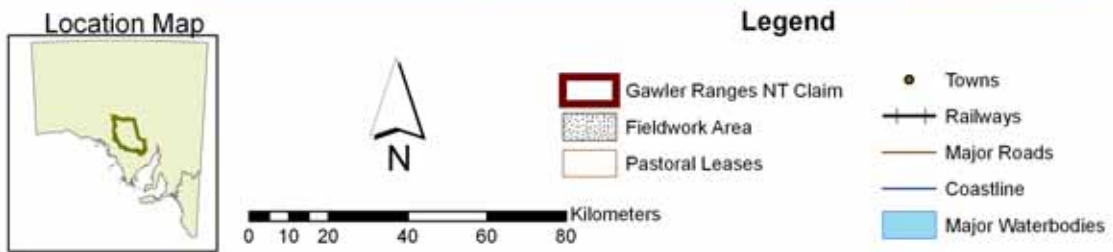


Figure 1: Map of field work area showing Wilgena and Kokatha pastoral stations and Gawler Ranges native title claim area.



The participants on the reconnaissance trip were as follows:

- Dr Samantha Muller and Lynette Ackland (Project Team SANTS)
- Don Blesing (SANTS Pastoral Consultant)
- Rod Lucas (SANTS Consultant Anthropologist)
- Bob Starkey, Brandon McNamara, Fred Smith and Tony Smith (Gawler Ranges Claim Group Members)

The full field trip with all project team members and eight members of the Gawler Ranges claim group was then undertaken in mid June. Over five days, this trip aimed to visit 10 rock-holes and undertake cultural and ecological assessments at each. The field work was based out of the shearers' quarters at Wilgena station, with day trips made to rock-holes on Wilgena (including North Well) and also Kokatha stations. The participants on this trip were as follows:

- Lynette Ackland, Dr Tom Jenkin and Colin Darcy (Project Team SANTS Staff)
- Mel White and Glen Scholz (Project Team DWLBC)
- Bob Starkey, Keith Smith Jnr, Eileen Wingfield, Janice Wingfield, Brandon McNamara Snr, Luke Mundy, Edith Burgoyne and Sayonara Smith (Gawler Ranges Claim Group)
- Barry Lincoln (Project Evaluation Consultant)

On the first two days of the field trip, we were also joined by two pastoralists from Mt Ive station in the south of the Gawler Ranges native title claim.

Field work findings were then analysed by the project team and a report drafted. Members of the Gawler Ranges native title group provided comments on early drafts and this report was then finalised.



2. PROJECT BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Gawler Ranges native title claim group members have been vital players in the establishment and delivery of this project. It is the aspirations of some of the members which prompted SANTS to approach the SAAL NRM Board to seek investment in a project around rock-holes and their cultural management. Through a successful partnership with the SAAL NRM Board and DWLBC, this project has grown to offer a cooperative framework for the cultural and ecological assessment and management of rock-holes in the Gawler Ranges claim area. In doing so it meets the compatible but often different objectives of the project partners including those of the Gawler Ranges who want to, for example, get out on country and care for important places and maintain cultural knowledge. This section outlines some of the key developments that have led to or support (in some way) the delivery of this project.

Native Title interests in the Gawler Ranges

The *Native Title Act 1993* (Cwlth) has provided opportunities for the legal recognition of Indigenous people's rights and interests in country. It has also offered opportunities for native title claim groups to negotiate with other stakeholders in regard to their respective rights and interests, principally through the making of Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs).

The Gawler Ranges native title claim was filed with the Federal Court in September 1997 (Federal Court: SAD6020/98) on behalf of the Gawler Ranges claimants who identify as Kokatha and Barngarla peoples. The claim area lies wholly within the SAAL NRM Board region and covers over 50,000 sq km to the west of Port Augusta and north of Wudinna (see figure 2). The claim area includes some 30 pastoral leases and three National Parks.



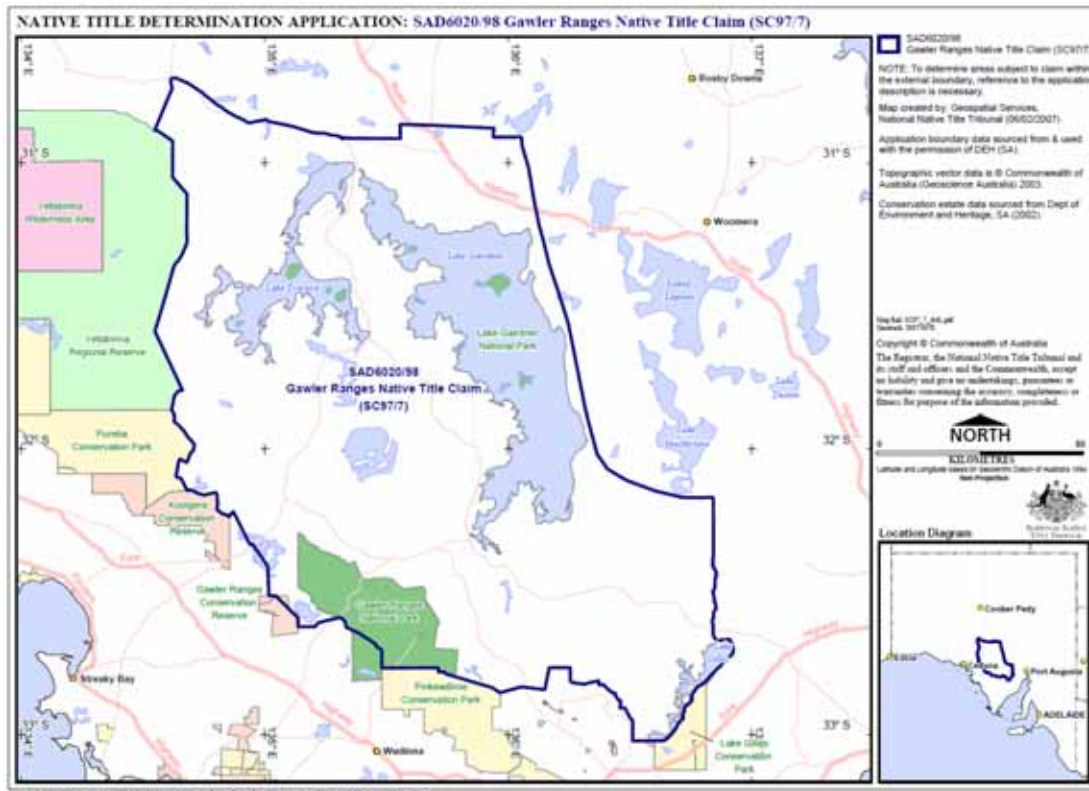


Figure 2. Gawler Ranges Native Title Claim Area (Copyright NNTT)

Native title interests on pastoral lands

In South Australia, the persistence of native title rights and interests across the pastoral lease estate was confirmed in the case of *De Rose Hill*. In that case, the claimants obtained a successful native title determination from the Court after a number of years of litigation. The rights recognised in the determination include the right to:

- hunt on the land;
- gather and use food from the land;
- gather and use bush medicine and wild tobacco from the land;
- access and use water on and in the land;
- gather and use timber, stone, ochre and resin from the land;
- conduct religious activities on the land;
- hold meetings on the land;
- have access to all parts of the land, subject to restrictions in accordance with traditional laws and customs;
- camp and erect shelters on the land;
- participate in cultural practices on the land relating to birth and death;
- teach on the land the physical and spiritual attributes of places.



The exercise of such rights by Aboriginal people is also largely protected by State legislation under the *Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act 1989* (SA). Section 47(1) of the Act states that "...an Aboriginal person may enter, travel across or stay on pastoral land for the purpose of following the traditional pursuits of the Aboriginal people."

These native title and statutory rights and interests are held and/or claimed by the Gawler Ranges native title claim group. While this project is not connected to the legal processes for the resolution of native title, the project recognises the specific rights and interests and knowledge held by members of the Gawler Ranges claim group with respect to rock-holes and other elements of country. Furthermore, the project is making important contributions to respecting and facilitating the exercise and protection of native title interests through a collaborative and cooperative framework.

Trial Pastoral Lease Assessment

In June 2006, members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group participated in a trial pastoral lease assessment. Typically under the *Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act*, lease assessments are done by rangeland ecologists to assess the environmental condition of the lease. This is done on a rolling basis across all leases. Through the leadership of SANTS and the Pastoral Board, a pilot project was negotiated to trial Aboriginal involvement in pastoral lease assessment. The trial was subsequently undertaken on Wilgena station (inc. North Well) with members of the Gawler Ranges claim group working alongside the State Government's lease assessors.

The following project outcomes were presented at a national conference in 2008 (Agius *et al.* 2008):

- Lease assessment using Aboriginal assessors was a very effective way of considering the impact of pastoralism on issues important to Aboriginal traditional owners;
- Mutual regard and respect;
- Aboriginal Assessors identified 20 novel indicators (with each indicator important to the Aboriginal traditional owners; to the lessee; and the general community);
- Native vegetation important to Aboriginal traditional owners was in good condition;



- Water supply arrangements were excellent (more work needed on important rock-holes); and
- Additional cost of skilled Aboriginal assessors was relatively small.

Through this trial assessment, the Aboriginal participants from the Gawler Ranges walked away with a strong desire to visit, clean and care for rock-holes – to improve the cultural values of the lands they had just assessed. Here the seeds for the project were sown, and with the investment by the SAAL NRM Board and the support of other project partners, the project has been made possible.

Native Title and Agreement Making

While the De Rose Hill case resulted in a successful outcome for the native title group, the financial and human costs of the litigation were high for all parties. Thankfully it has been the only native title claim in South Australia that has proceeded to contested litigation. This is a direct result of the State Government, native title groups and other stakeholders pursuing negotiated outcomes and consent determination as a means of resolving native title claims. This approach, now known as the South Australian Native Title Resolution (SANTR) process, has brought all stakeholders together in a cooperative manner to build relationships and coexistence through the negotiation of sector based ILUAs (see Jenkin 2008; Dixon *et al.* 2005; Agius *et al.* 2004).

The Gawler Ranges native title claim group has been an active participant in this process over the last five years. Of significance to this project, this has included the negotiation of ILUAs with pastoral lessees in the claim area. Specifically, over a four year period the Gawler Ranges native title claim group negotiated directly with pastoralists and successfully concluded 24 ILUAs in May 2008 (NNTT 2008: 5). These pastoral ILUAs confirm the Aboriginal access rights under Section 47 of the *Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act*, but importantly establish relationships and protocols for access and the protection of Aboriginal heritage as well as the ongoing nature of pastoral operations. This project builds on the foundation established by the negotiations and the ILUAs, to enhance understandings and working relationships between the Gawler Ranges native title claim group and pastoralists in jointly caring for country.

Land, Water and Indigenous peoples

The land is a sacred entity, not property or real estate; it is the great mother of all humanity. (Graham 2008: 181)



Indigenous Australians have strong connections to the environment — to ‘country’. According to Rose (1996: 8) country is multi-dimensional and “consists of people, animals, plants, dreamings, underground, earth, soils, minerals and waters, surface water and air”. Country is all encompassing: “There is sea country and land country; in some areas people talk about sky country. Country has origins and a future; it exists both in and through time” (Rose 1996: 8). Traditional lands were sustaining, not only providing the materials for survival, subsistence and development, but also being elemental to cultural beliefs and customs. Aboriginal law and creation or ‘dreaming stories’ assert and communicate connections between Aboriginal people, culture and country (Graham 2008; Gould 1969). As Graham explains:

Stories are like our archives, detailing how Creator Beings from under the earth arose to shape the land and to create the landscape. There are myriad variations of the story, but the theme stays the same. (Graham 2008: 182)

Aboriginal people believe in custodianship of the land rather than western notions of ownership, and hold a non-human centred, holistic view of the cosmos that incorporates a strong land and water ethic (Graham 2008; Weir 2008; Rose 1988, 2004).

Water is “a sacred and elemental source of life” (Langton 2002: 43) for Indigenous Australians. Water features and sources — rock-holes, soaks, wells, rivers, claypans and springs—form important elements of the cultural and sacred landscapes (Rose 1996). The water places are understood, respected, cared for and nurtured:

Indigenous Australians learned to understand water in order to adapt themselves to it—to its unpredictability, its capacity to support life, its dangers, and its hidden places. Not only did they acquiesce and adapt to the water conditions of the Australian continent, they also enhanced the capacity of water to sustain life. Acceptance of the water conditions of any given territory was not passive non-action, but rather was and is an active way of working with water’s own action. Practices of care involve relationships between people, water, and all the living things that depend on water, and thus entail ethics. (Rose 2005: 37)

The knowledge and careful management of scarce water resources in arid Australia was central to Aboriginal occupation. In the Great Victoria Desert, for example, the presence of large soaks and some substantial springs and waterholes spaced across



the desert were vitally important to settlement and subsistence by the Spinifex people (Cane 2002: 163).

Aboriginal law assigns direct responsibility to look after water sources, adhere to protocols and pass on knowledge through song and narrative. Certain water sources have deep cultural and ceremonial significance and are often inscribed in Aboriginal law and dreamings and are connected with the wanderings of ancestral beings such as water snakes or serpents (Cane 2002; Yu 2000; Lowe 1990). Protocols often govern the approach and use of water sources with access often restricted in accordance with Aboriginal laws and customs. Some water sources are considered dangerous while others might be of importance to, for example, rain making (see Cane 2002; Yu 2000).

Looking after such water places in accordance with Aboriginal law and custom is an important responsibility, which requires traditional knowledge and authority. Aboriginal water knowledges are passed on through law, dreamings and associated customs and maybe expressed in song and dance (Toyne *et al.* 1996). Long sequences of named waterholes are often 'recorded' in song and story and 'mapped' as part of a complex cultural and ecological knowledge system (Cane 2002; Gould 1969). In a recent review of wetlands in Central Australia, the following comment was made with regard to Aboriginal knowledge of water resources:

Indeed, it may be said that Aboriginal people had an encyclopaedic knowledge of all waters within their own traditional country, and often a good knowledge of waters in the countries of their neighbours. This included recording and mapping within their oral traditions as well as active management (e.g., "brush matting" or covering waterholes with dead branches) of many sites. (Box *et al.* 2008: 1401)

It is this knowledge and the practice of Aboriginal laws and customs which this project aims to facilitate and support with respect to the management of rock-holes in the Gawler Ranges.

Indigenous peoples and water resources planning and policy

Australian approaches to water planning, development and management have largely proceeded with little regard to Aboriginal people's knowledge of water places or their rights and interests in the 'resource'. When the Intergovernmental Agreement on a National Water Initiative (NWI) was signed at the 25 June 2004 Council of Australian Governments meeting, this represented a substantial policy change with



recognition given to the “the special character of Indigenous interests in water” (Jackson & Morrison 2007: 23). Under the NWI, all state and territories committed to:

- include indigenous representation in water planning;
- incorporate indigenous social, spiritual and customary objectives and strategies;
- take account of the possible existence of native title rights to water.

While the overall objective of the NWI is to achieve a nationally compatible market and a regulatory and planning based system of managing surface and groundwater resources for rural and urban use that optimises economic, social and environmental outcomes, Indigenous rights and interests are recognised with associated commitments. For example, under the NWI there should be Indigenous representation in water planning with incorporation of Indigenous social, spiritual and customary objectives and strategies for achieving these objectives. Governments are now in the early stages of implementing the NWI objectives and “formally recognising Aboriginal relationships with water for spiritual, cultural and economic purposes” (Rural Solutions SA 2008).

In 2006, the Indigenous Water Policy Group was established to raise awareness of, and research the implications of the government’s current policies for water reform, particularly for Indigenous people of Northern Australia (see Calma 2009: 199-202). In recent years, there has been a greater push for a more holistic perspective on water reform and Indigenous Australians – one that involves the southern regions. Key developments in this regard were the holding of an International Water Experts Forum at the Garma Festival in Arnhem Land in 2008 and a subsequent Australian Indigenous Freshwater Forum in Adelaide in 2009. These forums considered the implementation of the NWI with respect to Indigenous participation, rights and access provisions and the establishment of a national Indigenous body to represent water issues in Australia (see, for example, Calma 2009; Jackson 2009). Members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group attended the Adelaide forum, with the outcomes of the meeting and future policy developments likely to feed into future activities of this project.

To date, the implementation of the NWI has had mixed success in terms of improved Indigenous participation in water planning and increased access to water resources (see, for example, Calma 2009; Jackson 2009; Jackson & Morrison 2007). The recent assessment of the implementation of the NWI found:



It is rare for Indigenous water requirements to be explicitly included in water plans, and most jurisdictions are not yet engaging Indigenous people effectively in water planning processes. The Commission notes that Indigenous groups are, at their own initiative, currently developing the capacity to participate more fully in water planning processes.

(National Water Commission 2009: 27)

In South Australia, the NRM Boards engage with relevant Indigenous communities in developing water allocation plans with the manual *Engaging South Australian Aboriginal Communities in NRM* (DWLBC 2008) providing guidance to NRM officers (National Water Commission 2009: 26). However, there remains no statutory requirement for Indigenous participation in planning and no mechanisms to allocate water specifically to Indigenous purposes (Jackson 2009: 41). It is understood that the State government is considering further policy responses to the Indigenous requirements of the NWI.

Indigenous engagement and participation in NRM

Over the last 20 years, there has been an increasing involvement of Aboriginal people in environmental management projects. This has mirrored a growing appreciation of the environmental knowledge held by Aboriginal people and the associated sustainable management approaches that have been practiced for thousands of years (see Northern Land Council 2006; Baker *et al.* 2001a; Davies *et al.* 1999). These projects often are undertaken in partnerships, bringing together Indigenous peoples with scientists and other western experts in a two-way learning process. Indigenous employment is increasingly seen as an important aspect of such projects being a key aspiration for Indigenous groups and also a key building block for sustainability (including through the support of the Commonwealth's Working on Country program). The success of such projects and programs are characterised by an evolving inter-cultural relationship which has a number of expressions and requirements. Baker *et al.* (2001b: 338) identify three important themes across Indigenous land management projects, programs and partnerships:

1. there are a diversity of approaches to working on country;
2. there is a need for sharing of knowledge and communication of both concepts and tools to assist these approaches, within a two-way learning framework;
3. the role of negotiation is important in the development and support of effective working on country initiatives.



Aboriginal land management projects are also not without significant challenges, which include the environmental degradation caused by non-indigenous land use, land tenure and access, demography of Indigenous Australians, diversity within Indigenous society, and the impacts of colonisation including the loss of cultural knowledge (see Baker *et al.* 2001c). Nevertheless, such initiatives are of much value and significance to equitable and sustainable natural resource use and management.

The value of Aboriginal engagement and application of Aboriginal traditional, cultural and ecological knowledge to NRM is recognised by the Commonwealth government's *Caring for our Country Business Plan 2009-2010* which states in relation to project funding:

Proposals that incorporate Indigenous ecological knowledge with the delivery of Caring for our Country targets are encouraged, in particular, those that draw together the use of traditional ecological knowledge, local knowledge and western science to protect, restore and better manage the environment and productive agricultural lands. (Commonwealth of Australia 2008: 22)

It is beyond the scope of this report to review the numerous NRM projects and programs being undertaken with Indigenous Australians. However, two projects which are of particular relevance to this project are:

- Kuka Kanyini ('*looking after game animals*')
 - The vision for this initiative is: "restoring landscape, animals, plants, skills, health, pride and knowledge to ones country and people" (McFarlane 2005: 5). The project is centred on the community and nearby country of Watarru on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in the far north-west of South Australia.
 - The initiative is a partnership between the Watarru community, APY Land Management, State Department for Environment and Heritage. It commenced in 2004 and evolved out of a 10 years biological survey program across the APY lands undertaken by DEH in partnership with Anangu (see Nesbitt *et al.* 2001).
 - The project involves senior men (Tjilpis) and senior women (Minmas) and young people in caring for country through the application of traditional knowledge and practices and the incorporation and application of western approaches to land management. Initiatives to date have included fire management, rock-hole management and



protection, threatened species management, feral animal control, animal tracking and monitoring, and education and training (Kuka Kanyini 2006).

- The project also includes managing the Watarru Indigenous Protected Area.
- This initiative is delivering a range of outcomes including improved health of country and enhanced well-being of Anangu (see Hollinsworth & Carter 2007).
- The Anmatyerr Story (see Rea and the Anmatyerr Water Project Team 2008)
 - This project stemmed from a review of a Ti Tree Water Resource Strategy in 2008 and focussed on addressing the lack of consideration and recognition of Aboriginal values in water planning.
 - The project focussed on the Ti Tree region 200 km north of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory and involved a partnership between the Anmatyerr people and staff from Northern Territory Government and research institutions with funding provided from Land and Water Australia.
 - Specific objectives included:
 - Demonstrate how to document cultural values of water and translate these into cultural water provisions;
 - Convey cultural water provisions in ways everyone would know how to make them a reality;
 - Further understandings of Aboriginal law and customs;
 - Inform those who seek to incorporate Aboriginal interests, rights and perspectives into water management and planning.
 - The project identified the cultural values of water for Anmatyerr people (including for rock-holes) with these falling within the five categories of:
 - Law;
 - Responsibilities and Protocols;
 - Economies, Environment and Education;
 - Recreation and Well-Being; and
 - History of People and Place.
 - The project was delivered with the community in accordance with “the principles of Collaborative Indigenist Research, where Aboriginal people inform the research direction and content and Aboriginal



knowledge and ways are considered equally valid to empirical methods” (Rea and the Anmatyerr Water Project Team 2008: 13).

- It is hoped that the project will lead to the development of an Anmatyerr Water Agreement that will provide cultural water provisions for Anmatyerr people.

There are many other Indigenous land and water management projects which could be discussed. Each have unique elements and different objectives. The benefits, however, are often similar in providing enhanced health of country and health of people, and greater understanding of the Aboriginal knowledge and the benefits (and challenges) of two-way learning and collaborative land and water management approaches (Kingsley *et al.* 2009; Northern Land Council 2006; Baker *et al.* 2001a).



3. FIELD VISITS AND ASSESSMENTS OF ROCK-HOLES IN THE GAWLER RANGES

Field work for this project was undertaken primarily on Wilgena station which lies to the south east of Tarcoola in the north western portion of the Gawler Ranges native title claim. Wilgena station was also the focus for the earlier rock-hole project in the Gawler Ranges (see Harding & Blesing 2008; White 2008). It was decided by the project team to try and complete an inventory of Wilgena through this project, rather than look to expand field work to other areas. The project team and management committee of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group also felt it important to build on the positive working relationships that had been established with the managers of Wilgena station. The field work did, however, include a day visit to a rock-hole complex on Kokatha station to the south east of Wilgena.

As detailed above, the field work was undertaken in two parts. First, a 5 day reconnaissance trip to Wilgena and Kokatha stations in April with a small group (see plate 2) to search for and locate rock-holes and record access information. Second, a 5 day field trip to Wilgena and Kokatha stations with a greater number of participants in June (i.e., all of the project team and 8 members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group) to undertake cultural and ecological assessments of ten rock-holes.

The April fieldtrip was successful in locating five of the ten rock-holes previously identified for assessment (see table 1). The rock-holes were located through bringing together the knowledge of Aboriginal participants, pastoralists and a variety of mapping resources (including pastoral infrastructure maps). Nevertheless, it was still a challenging task to locate the rock-holes and significant time was spent searching by both vehicle and on foot.

During the June fieldtrip, five rock-holes were revisited and assessed, and a further three were located and assessed (see table 1). Another rock-hole (Pildinga) was searched for but not located (see below). At each rock-hole, a range of ecological and cultural information was collected (see plate 3). Of significance to the June field trip were the recent rain events in the region, with around 40mm falling in the three weeks prior (Bureau of Meteorology 2009). This meant that in contrast to the previous project, the majority of rock-holes visited were holding water.





Plate 2: Participants on Reconnaissance Field Trip to Wilgena and Kokatha Stations, April 2009 (Back from left: Francis ?, Fred Smith, Don Blesing, Samantha Muller, Rod Lucas, Brandon McNamara Snr; Front from left: Bob Starkey, Tony Smith, Lynette Ackland.

Table 1 Rock-holes visited on Wilgena and Kokatha stations in April and June 2009

Rock-hole	Station	April Fieldtrip	June Fieldtrip
Tomato Camp	Wilgena	Yes	Yes
Tunkillia	Wilgena	Yes	Yes
Arcoordaby	Wilgena	Yes	Yes
Bulpara	Wilgena	Yes	Yes
Mullina	Wilgena	No	Yes
Darebin	Wilgena	No	Yes
Moolkara (soak)	Wilgena	No	Yes
Pildinga	Wilgena	No	Yes*
Blue Dam	Kokatha	Yes	No
Pilleuta	Kokatha	Yes	Yes

Note: * Rock-hole not located, but region searched extensively with conclusion that the rock-hole, if it exists, is likely only to be very small.

The remainder of this section focuses on documenting the Aboriginal cultural values, perspectives and aspirations for each of the rock-holes visited. Prior to discussing specific rock-holes, a general overview of the cultural values of rock-holes to members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group is provided. As previously noted, it is anticipated that a collaborative report will be developed in the next stage of the project incorporating ecological and cultural information and assessments.





Plate 3: Mel White and Glen Scholz (DWLBC) undertaking ecological assessment at Mullina rock-hole (left); Lynette Ackland (SANTS) interviewing Eileen Wingfield and Bob Starkey at Mullina rock-hole (right).

Overview of Aboriginal Cultural Values of Rock-holes

All of the rock-holes visited during the fieldtrips are of cultural significance to members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group. The rock-holes are integral parts of the cultural landscape, being key mythological sites and elements of Aboriginal law or *Tjukurrpa*. Many of the rock-holes are connected through song, story and ceremonial lines which cross and form this landscape. Knowledge of these places has been passed down through generation after generation in accordance with Aboriginal law and custom. The significance of these places is such that specific cultural protocols need to be followed, including at times in relation to gender and also in regard to undertaking specific cultural actions to ensure safe approach to the rock-holes. These protocols were followed in approaching rock-holes during field work under the guidance of senior Aboriginal men and women. While recording the cultural values of rock-holes is an objective of this project, it is important to note that this report does not document cultural information which is sensitive and/or restricted in accordance with Aboriginal law and custom and the wishes of members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group.

Related to the storylines are the traditional Aboriginal tracks that linked rock-holes, forming water routes or *kapi iwari* between the rock-holes. These tracks facilitated Aboriginal people's travel and access to water sources across this arid region (see also Bayly 1999a), and later similarly supported and guided early settlers and their colonising efforts as elsewhere in Australia (see, for example, Reynolds 2000). While not all Aboriginal participants on the field trip knew the specific cultural stories for each site, the rock-holes were of immense cultural and spiritual significance to all



participants. Many of the Aboriginal people on the field trips spoke of thinking about their ancestors travelling across this landscape, finding water and moving around with the seasons and fulfil their cultural responsibilities. Furthermore, comments were made about visiting the rock-holes as being a cleansing and invigorating experience for both self and country. Having the right people visit these places was an integral part of management.

Beside the water available at rock-holes, the vegetation and surrounding landscape is also often of great cultural significance. During the fieldtrips, the Gawler Ranges claim group participants regularly identified, spoke of or demonstrated the resource value of plants and animals growing or found within and around rock-hole complexes. A number of medicinal plants were noted and also collected, as were a number of food plants most of which are still being utilised today (see plates 4 and 5). The presence and condition of such plants are important in Aboriginal assessments about the health of the rock-hole and its cultural value. Furthermore, in some cases specific plants are part of Aboriginal law and the storyline associated with the rock-hole.



Plate 4: Jungul Jungul (possibly *Wurmbea tenella*) being dug up by Eileen Wingfield with the rhizome providing a traditional food resource





Plate 5: Examples of culturally important plants located at or near rock-holes: Wollybutt grass (*Eragrostis eriopoda*) used to make a traditional flour (left); Wild tobacco (*Nicotiana simulans*) which is a traditional medicine and narcotic (right)

The broader ecological role rock-holes have in the landscape is also of cultural significance. The Gawler Ranges claim group participants spoke of the use of rock-holes by numerous animals (e.g., kangaroos, emus, and goannas) and the importance that they have access to these water sources. Senior Aboriginal men and women also discussed how rock-holes would be managed so that animals could access some of the rock-holes in a complex, but would be prevented from accessing and contaminating others by covering rock-holes with capping stones or branches. Where animals frequented rock-holes, Aboriginal participants on the field trip also discussed how these provided highly valued hunting spots. Thus across a rock-hole complex, the cultural significance and cultural use of rock-holes varies. This has implications for how they are or might be managed.

In terms of management, the Gawler Ranges claim group participants all expressed an aspiration to have ongoing involvement in the management of rock-holes across their claim area. Accordingly, this involves the right people to visit rock-holes, appropriate cleaning of important rock-holes (including removal of excessive sediment and any dead animals), covering important rock-holes (with capping stone or sticks), and recording of cultural heritage and knowledge and possible site registration. In most cases, fencing off of rock-holes was seen by the Gawler Ranges native title claim group participants as mostly undesirable unless stock was having a



significant impact on the cultural and ecological values of the rock-hole. In all cases, it was acknowledged by members of the Gawler Ranges claim group that management needed to be done in a partnership with pastoralists and other stakeholders including the NRM Board.

Rock-hole Assessments

During the June fieldtrip, nine rock-holes were visited by the project team and members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group. The remainder of this section presents a summary of the field work and findings for each rock-hole. While the location of each of the rock-holes was recorded, a map showing the locations is not included in this report as it is subject to further negotiation with the Gawler Ranges native title group to confirm buffer zones given the cultural significance and sensitivity of rock-holes (see chapter 5 for further discussion).

The 'classification' of rock-holes is discussed in the previous project report by DWLBC (see White 2008). While readers are encouraged to consult that report and the work of Bayly (1999b) and Main (1997), some explanation of the terms used in the rock-hole assessment summaries below is warranted.

The broad classification of granite outcrops or inselbergs (islands), upon which rock-holes are typically found, is pictured in Figure 2. Here Main (1997) categorises inselbergs as dome, pavement, 'fugutive' outcrop or tumulus. These categories are referred to below to describe the granite form for each rock-hole.

In regard to rock-holes or gnammas, these also vary in form with Bayly (1999b) classifying them as either pit-gnammas or pan-gnammas with:

- Pit-gnammas being typically hemispherical in shape and sub-circular in outline with a large depth to surface area ratio and often contain water for extended monthly periods; and,
- Pan-gnammas having flat floors and sloping sidewalls with a small depth to surface area ratio, are highly irregular and often contain water for a limited time of weeks rather than months.

Again these terms are used below where appropriate to describe rock-hole forms in the Gawler Ranges.



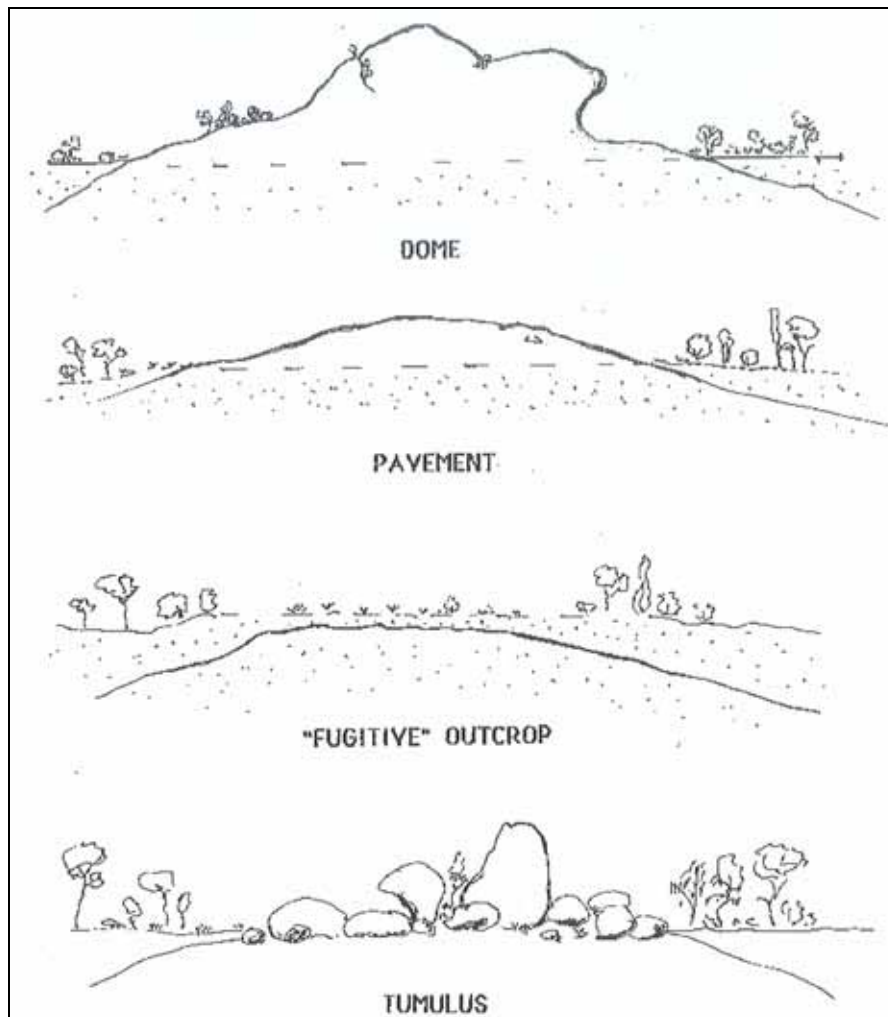


Figure 3. Different topographic forms of granite outcrops (Main 1997)

Mullina Rock-hole

Mullina rock-hole on Wilgena station proved difficult to locate with almost half a day spent on the first day looking for the rock-hole without success (though a stone quarry site was located). On return the next day (12 June) following further consultation with the Gawler Ranges native title claim group members, map and satellite imagery resources, the rock-hole complex was located with a new track created off a nearby station track (with permission of station manager).

The Mullina rock-hole is a large complex on a mixture of Tumulus and Pavement granite forms that extends over some 500 metres in length, and some 300 metres wide. Numerous pit and pan gnammas occur across the pavement, with the larger and higher concentration of gnammas present in the eastern extreme. Most contained water and some contained plants (see plate 6).





Plate 6: Mudwort (*Limosella grantica*) growing in a rock-hole at Mullina

Mullina is a place of cultural significance to members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group. The rock-hole is open to both men and women and is a part of the Seven Sisters dreaming. The concentration of rock-holes in the eastern margins also coincides with the area of most cultural significance. Here rock-holes were located which had capping stones in place (see plate 7) and one of the senior Aboriginal women spoke of the particular importance and special qualities of the water being held in such rock-holes. Time was also spent talking about and collecting bush foods, with the importance of the surrounding landscape highlighted as a place for camping, gathering and hunting. Protocols were also discussed which Aboriginal people followed in terms of camping in different areas and away from the rock-hole and water source and how children would be mostly kept away from the rock-holes.

Mullina rock-hole was considered to be in good condition by members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group. There was evidence of some previous grazing pressure on the vegetation, but there was important regrowth and regeneration of most vegetation, including Mulga. The management of stock was thus not of concern given grazing pressure appeared low with apparent minimal impact on the rock-hole and surrounding landscapes. Most of the rock-holes had signs of increased sedimentation, and thus some cleaning of important rock-holes within the Mullina complex was discussed as a management aspiration (see plate 8). A further



management aspiration first highlighted at Mullina was to hold a larger community cultural event with *inma* and ceremony, bush tucker and medicines, and sharing of stories and passing on of knowledge.



Plate 7. Rock-hole at Mullina with capping stone in place (Photo Credit: DWLBC)



Plate 8: Example of a 'cleaned' rock-hole at Mullina



Darebin Rock-hole

Darebin rock-hole on Wilgena station is of cultural significance to members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group. It is a restricted men's site and is thus of particular significance to men as an important *Tjukurrpa* site. This is supported by archaeological evidence (e.g., chippings and tools) around the rock-hole complex which is comprised of tumulus and pavement forms. The site is easily accessible and is quite large, with the bulk of the complex lying within a 200 x 300 metre area. A significant rock-hole is located at the south western extreme, which contained large amounts of water and was supporting at the time of visit (11 June) a number of unidentified aquatic invertebrates (see plate 9).



Plate 9: Unidentified aquatic invertebrates at Darebin rock-hole

The condition of Darebin rock-hole was considered by the Aboriginal men to be good, with minimal stock impacts due to low stock levels in the paddock. Some important vegetation was identified around the rock-hole complex including bush foods and ceremonial plants. Sedimentation of some of the rock-holes was evident, along with fouling of water from native animals. Thus the only management options considered was the cleaning out of some of the rock-holes to reduce sediment levels and improve water quality. Registering Darebin as an Aboriginal heritage site was also discussed which would need to involve having the appropriate Aboriginal people there to record cultural information.

Moolkra Soak

While the senior men visited Darebin rock-hole, the remainder of the field team searched for Moolkra rock-hole on Wilgena station. While the rock-hole was not located, a clay pan soak (*kapi tjintjira*) was found (see plate 10). It was anticipated that a further visit would be made to Moolkra rock-hole as its location is known by



one of the Aboriginal men, however, this could not be accommodated in the time available in the field.

In terms of Moolkra soak, it was useful to highlight a further water resources traditionally utilised by Aboriginal people. While little was said about the place in the field, soaks are an important traditional water resource for Aboriginal people. Ephemeral clay pan water, for example, could be utilised opportunistically and thus reduce pressure on other water resources such as rock-holes (Rolls 2006).



Plate 10: Moolkra soak

Tomato Camp Rock-hole (1 and 2)

Tomato Camp rock-hole comprises two separate rock-holes near the north western shores of Lake Gairdner on Wilgena station. Both rock-holes are not a true rock-hole, but are in stream pools or scour holes (Box *et al.* 2008). Being near the shores of a salt lake, the water in both pools is rather saline. The landscape around Tomato Camp is of cultural significance. The area has mythological significance and is an important occupation and resource site with much archaeological evidence to support this (see plate 11). Some culturally important plant species were also identified in the area.

The saline nature of both Tomato Camp rock-holes means that they are of minor interest as a water resource for drinking, though following rainfall events it is anticipated that the salinity levels would drop to enable its consumption. The greater concern with both rock-holes is to prevent animals from dying by being injured and/or trapped by trying to access the rock-holes. The second rock-hole at Tomato Camp,



for example, had a number of rotting kangaroo carcasses (see plate 12). Thus key management aspirations for the Tomato Camp rock-holes was to clean them out (during summer when dry) and consider if the rock-holes could be fenced off in any way to prevent animals accessing the waters.



Plate 11: Example of stone tools in the vicinity of Tomato Camp rock-holes



Plate 12: Rock-hole or scour hole at Tomato Camp Rock-hole with rotting kangaroo carcasses



Pildinga Rock-hole

Pildinga rock-hole is identified on pastoral infrastructure maps in the southern part of Wilgena station. Pildinga rock-hole is also referred to on early Pastoral Lease Field Diagrams from 1899 – 1901 (see White 2008). All field participants searched for Pildinga rock-hole on 12 June without success. Some granite pavements were located near the assumed location of Pildinga, however, no rock-hole was found. In later speaking with the Wilgena station manager, he had not heard of a rock-hole in that vicinity and thought it might have been an old well. In searching for the rock-hole, we did encounter some 20 camels which represent a significant threat to rock-holes through drinking them dry and spoiling the water quality (see Copley *et al.* 2003: 216).

Tunkillia Rock-hole

Tunkillia rock-hole is in the southern part of Wilgena station and comprises two mound like granite pavements. Numerous pan gnammas and some deep gnammas occur across the pavement (see plate 13). A soak also is situated in between the two granite pavements. Most of the pools contained water when we visited on 12 June.



Plate 13: Tunkillia rock-hole showing large gnammas on granite pavement (top); Wombat burrow in soak between two pavements (bottom left); View away from Tunkillia rock-hole highlighting denuded state (bottom right).



Tunkillia rock-hole is of great cultural significance and is part of the Seven Sisters dreaming. The site is open to both men and women and it is an important meeting place. Some distance from the rock-holes are significant camp sites along a creek-line (not visited on this trip) where we were informed there is a rich archaeological record of camping and resource use. The rock-hole and its immediate surrounds has been badly degraded and denuded by stock, with evidence of a complete vegetation change with a bluebush monoculture emerging. The rock-hole itself is also being damaged by stock and water quality is being spoiled through defecation by stock and native fauna. The area is also heavily used by wombats, with the soak most recently used as a wombat burrow which has resulted in erosion and sub-surface collapse of the soak.

Greater protection for Tunkillia rock-hole is seen as a priority by senior Aboriginal men in order to protect its cultural heritage values. A preferable management option would be to fence the rock-hole off (including a buffer area) or destock the paddock or part thereof. Some initial conversations have been had between the claim group and pastoralists with both hopeful a suitable management approach can be negotiated.

Pilleuta Rock-hole

Pilleuta rock-hole is on Kokatha station and comprises two large granite outcrops (hills comprised of dome, tumulus and pavement forms) which both extend some 2 kilometres. There are numerous rock-holes throughout this complex (see plate 14) and most contained significant amounts of water when we visited on 13 June. The station managers and their family also joined us on this site visit.

The area is of great cultural significance and it is an important part of the Seven Sisters dreaming. Some of the areas (specific features, rock-holes and water) are restricted to women, as are other landscape features in the vicinity. The rock-hole complex is also rich in cultural plant resources with an array of bush food and medicinal plants (see plate 15), some of which also form part of the *Tjukurrpa*. The senior Aboriginal women commented that the bush medicine plants growing at Pilleuta were much stronger in scent than in other places.





Plate 14: Examples of rock-holes and granite forms at Pilleutta Rocks



Plate 15: Janice Wingfield collecting traditional bush medicine (*Eremophila alternifolia*)



The condition of Pilleuta rock-hole was seen as very good, with claimants congratulating the pastoralist on the management of the area and station. The only concern, which was shared by the pastoralist, was the impact of goats on the vegetation. The senior women also wanted to return with other important women to undertake cultural activities, and possibly have a community event and *inma* to look after country, teach younger people and pass on knowledge.

Arcoordaby Rock-hole

Arcoordaby rock-hole is on Wilgena station and primarily is comprised of one granite pavement. A number of rock-holes are located on top of the pavement and a large pool near one of the edges. A large amount of water was held in the rock-holes when we visited on 14 June.

Arcoordaby rock-hole is of great cultural significance and is a restricted men's site. It is important to the *Tjukurrpa* and is associated with other rock-holes in the region. The significance of the site for ceremony is supported by a richness of archaeological material.

The rock-hole and its surrounds appear to have been heavily impacted by grazing. The vegetation has been grazed out as far back as 300 metres from the rock-hole, exposing sandy soil to erosion (see plate 16). This has likely resulted in increased sedimentation of the rock-holes. As a result of the apparent over grazing, the senior men would like to have the rock-hole fenced off with an adequate buffer to allow for natural regeneration of the landscape (if at all possible). Fencing should be accompanied by a cleaning of the important rock-holes at Arcoordaby.



Plate 16: Glen Scholz (DWLBC) with Bob Starkey (left) and Keith Smith Jnr (right) identifying plant species at Arcoordaby rock-hole.



Bulpara Rock-hole

Bulpara rock-hole is on Wilgena station and is located at the eastern extreme of the sand dune country which stretches west across the Yellabinna Regional Reserve and beyond. The rock-hole comprises of two large pavement and tumulus granite forms (stretching over 1 kilometre) across which there are numerous rock-holes. Most of the rock-holes held significant amounts of water when the senior men (see plate 17) visited the site on 15 June. Bulpara is also of interest historically, with the existence of an earth dam wall constructed by the Afghan cameleers. The dam contained a significant amount of water on our visit supporting a range of plant species including Nardoo (see plate 18).



Plate 17: Brandon McNamara Snr, Bob Starkey, Keith Smith Jnr and Barry Lincoln (consultant) at Arcoordaby Rock-hole (from left to right)



Plate 18: Nardoo growing in the Afghan earth dam at Bulpara rock-hole



Bulpara rock-hole is of great cultural significance and is a restricted men's site. It is important to the Tjukurrpa and its significance is supported by a richness of archaeological material.

The condition of Bulpara is considered by the senior men to be good, with no further management required beyond cleaning of important rock-holes and ongoing visitation by senior men. The possible registration of the rock-hole as an Aboriginal heritage site was also discussed as an aspiration.



4. ABORIGINAL ENGAGEMENT, PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION

This project was founded on Aboriginal engagement and participation. As has been discussed, the project came about through members of the Gawler Ranges native title group expressing a desire to care for rock-holes. A project and a partnership evolved which built on this initial desire while incorporating the interests of all project partners and stakeholders. Ongoing and meaningful engagement and participation of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group continues to be fundamental to the success of this project. Thus, one of the objectives of the project was to identify protocols for successfully engaging Aboriginal people in NRM projects.

This section summarises some of the protocols which were incorporated at various stages throughout this project. A more detailed summary of these engagement considerations is also provided in Appendix B. In presenting these ‘protocols’, we do not seek to provide a comprehensive manual or guide to Aboriginal engagement. This is beyond the scope of this project and has been well covered elsewhere, perhaps most comprehensively in the publication *Engaging South Australian Aboriginal Communities in Natural Resources Management — A Practical Resource Manual* (see DWLBC 2008). More specific aspects of engagement have also been subject to considerable community research including the recently released *Desert Knowledge CRC Protocol for Aboriginal Knowledge and Intellectual Property* (see Calma 2009) and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* (AIATSIS 2000). The NRM manual on engagement talks of five levels of engagement with information sharing, consultation, involvement, collaboration and partnerships (DWLBC 2008: 64). In this project, engagement refers to a partnership which necessarily involves all levels of engagement.

Project Reflections on Principles and Practices for Aboriginal engagement and participation

In this project, we adhered to a principle based approach to engagement. That is, seeking to adhere to a number of principles from which follow various engagement processes, practices and initiatives. In presenting the following summary of some of



the principles and practices that underpinned the delivery of this project, it is not to say that all aspects of engagement were as successful as they might have been. Some areas where improvements might have been made are discussed in the final two chapters.

Some Principles for Engagement

The starting point for engagement of Aboriginal people in NRM projects is recognising and respecting a number of principles that underpin Aboriginal relationships to land and water and their cultural knowledge in looking after country. For example, some of the principles that we recognise and respect which in turn support the collaborative delivery of this project and associated initiatives include:

- Aboriginal people have unique rights, interests and responsibilities in their country which is inherited from their ancestors and country itself;
- Aboriginal people have significant traditional and contemporary knowledge of country including ancestral stories which belongs to Aboriginal people and this must be respected;
- Aboriginal laws and customs involves systems of authority and protocols for speaking about country and making decisions about country that need to be respected and considered at all times;
- Aboriginal communities and their laws, customs and cultural protocols are diverse and no one approach suits all communities or even all elements of one community;
- Aboriginal people have suffered much loss and grief as a result of the colonisation of Australia and subsequent policies and practices;
- Engagement and participation of Aboriginal people in the management of lands and waters is fundamental and is important to the reconciliation of past actions;
- Bringing together western management strategies with those of the traditional and contemporary land management skills and practices of Aboriginal people strengthens the protection and management of environmental and heritage values; and
- Aboriginal people should have ultimate decision-making authority with respect to engagement.



It is also important that Aboriginal people are involved early and in all aspects of the project including scoping, planning, development, implementation and reporting.

Other principles underpinning research and project partnerships must provide for:

- informed consent;
- open, transparent and appropriate communication;
- shared understandings;
- mutual recognition, respect and support;
- relationship building; and
- cooperation and collaboration to achieve shared goals, fulfil shared responsibilities and deliver mutually beneficial outcomes.

It is from such founding principles that this project has developed and continued to evolve.

Putting Principles into Practice

There are numerous potential engagement practices and initiatives which might contribute to the above principles being upheld. This section highlights some of the key steps taken in engaging with the Gawler Ranges native title claim group through this project.

Engaging with the right people

Native title and NRM have important connections – “Country is about NRM and so is Native Title” (Tanner in DWLBC 2008: 61). Native title rights and interests include the traditional use of plants and animals, the teaching of knowledge about country, and the looking after of important places in accordance with laws and customs.

Engagement with native title groups (including native title holders or claimants) is thus important in developing Aboriginal partnerships in NRM (see Agius 2009).

This project (including the previous work - Harding & Blesing 2008; White 2008) originated directly from the interests and aspirations of some members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group. However, it was important that the project had broader community support. The project was thus discussed and developed with the management committee² of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group on a number of occasions. This management committee is elected by the broader Gawler Ranges community and is authorised to make various decisions on the community’s behalf.

² In South Australia, all native title claim groups have established governing committees which are often referred to as ‘native title management committees’ or NTMCs.



Obtaining the support and input of this group was critical to the success of the project and ‘engagement’.

Developing the project

The development of the project³ was undertaken by the SANTS project team in consultation and collaboration with the Gawler Ranges native title management committee (NTMC). Project team members met with the committee on a few occasions to workshop community aspirations, needs and concerns and agree on project objectives, methods and protocols. This also included obtaining informed consent for the project and various aspects of the project. Important to the success of this stage was:

- spending time building relationships and understandings between project team and NTMC members;
- developing clear and appropriate communication material (e.g., clear power-point and verbal presentations);
- listening, learning and ‘actioning’; and
- respecting decision-making processes of the members and committee including in relation to timing and authority of some members.

Through this process, objectives were clarified and some of the concerns of members addressed. This included an agreement around the management of knowledge and information and protection of intellectual cultural property.

Agreeing on participation

As with developing the project, the direct participation of members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim groups was determined in collaboration with the NTMC. Specifically, this required the appointment of members to the field work team to identify and assess rock-holes with the project team. While the decision was that of the committee, it is important to note that ultimately the make-up of the team selected was determined with consideration given to:

- gender (e.g., there needing to be a gender mix given the cultural separation in knowledge, authority and responsibilities);
- cultural knowledge (e.g., certain elders and senior people with specific knowledge needing to be involved);
- representation (e.g., different family or language group members needing to be represented); and,

³ It should be noted that the project was also developed through concurrent and related processes of consultation and collaboration with other partners.



- age (e.g., the need for younger people to be involved to look after elders and also to learn from elders).

Reaching agreement on participation also required consideration as to the terms of the participation. This included agreeing on travel and other field arrangements and the payment to Aboriginal team members for their contribution to the project through the sharing of their knowledge and expertise.

Out in the field

In field work for any collaborative partnership there are complexities that need to be managed. In relation to this partnership, some of the specific matters that needed to be respected and addressed included:

- knowledge not being able to always be shared with all Aboriginal people, or all members of the project team;
- knowledge of particular places (etc) varying between Aboriginal participants and the right to speak for country being potentially only held by certain members;
- the existence of cultural protocols for visiting some places with respect to gender and/or cultural knowledge and 'status';
- recognising when knowledge is shared in the field but is to remain confidential and not reported on as part of the project;
- the existence of cultural protocols around the taking of samples (e.g., plant specimens) and taking of photographs; and
- the demands of field work in remote locations particularly for Aboriginal elders.

Given these elements, it was important that the project team had a cultural awareness, maintained open communications and was reflexive to ensure the project and field work was conducted in a respectful manner. In terms of communications, this involved group debriefing sessions and also discrete conversations with some members to ensure protocols (etc) were followed and any issues were addressed wherever possible.

Reporting on the Project

What is reported out of projects and partnerships is important to Aboriginal participants, particularly in terms of protecting any cultural intellectual property and upholding Aboriginal law and protocols (see Calma 2009). In this project, the writing up of the field work as presented in this report was only done by the SANTS project team. A collaborative writing process with selected members of the Gawler Ranges



claim group would be a far better engagement strategy and partnership. While time and resources prevented such a collaborative report writing effort, the project team has sought to engage the Gawler Ranges members in other ways through providing drafts to key members for comment.

What next

Addressing and/or managing expectations of the Aboriginal community (as with any project stakeholder or partner) is an important aspect of engagement and project management. In this project, the expectations of the project were discussed during the collaborative development of the project through open and honest communication. The limitations of what the project could deliver were also discussed. Where expectations exceeded those likely to be delivered through the project, the SANTS project team has looked to develop future initiatives to deliver on these aspects. Nevertheless, if expectations are not able to be met it is important to make this known to Aboriginal project partners.



5. ADDITIONAL PROJECT OUTCOMES AND OBSERVATIONS

Besides the identification of the cultural values and management aspirations of Gawler Ranges claim group members, the project also seeks to provide a range of other objectives. In addition, through undertaking the project work, a range of other outcomes are produced. This chapter details some of these other objectives and outcomes.

Pastoral engagement and participation and values of rock-holes

Pastoralists are one of the key partners in the delivery of this project. All the rock-holes visited through this project are on pastoral stations with the land leased under the State's *Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act*. As previously discussed, the Act provides for Aboriginal access and it also does not have an extinguishing effect on native title rights and interests. In the Gawler Ranges, the majority of pastoralists have entered into ILUAs with the Gawler Ranges native title claim group. There is thus a strong platform for collaborative engagement between pastoralists and native title claimants in the Gawler Ranges. This section reflects on engagement with pastoralists and the identification of pastoral values of rock-holes.

Pastoral engagement

The previous rock-hole project work (Harding & Blesing 2008; White 2008) and the pastoral lease assessment trials (Agius *et al.* 2008) focussed on Wilgena station. These 'projects' built positive relationships between the lessee and manager of Wilgena station and the Gawler Ranges native title claimants. In this project, it was decided to continue to focus on Wilgena station given the existing relationships, and the significant number of rock-holes on the station. Pastoral engagement in relation to this project benefited greatly from the previous collaborative projects. Nevertheless, the project needed to continue to uphold access protocols and engage in developing and delivering a collaborative project. In particular, ongoing engagement and collaboration was required to identify the cultural and productive values of rock-holes for pastoralists.



The initiatives undertaken by the project team in relation to Wilgena and the station manager included:

- Talking to the manager about the project as early as possible and during the subsequent development and delivery of the project;
- Sending information about the project to the manager;
- Obtaining support for the project from the manager;
- Negotiating access arrangements including dates, accommodation and travel routes and permission for all project participants to travel across and camp on the lease in accordance with the Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act; and
- Meeting and greeting the manager on arrival at the property and extending an invitation to visit rock-holes with the claimants and project team and to join everyone for evening meals.

These initiatives were successful in ensuring continued support for the project and negotiating appropriate access arrangements. However, less successful was the collaboration facilitated by these initiatives in terms of direct participation in the project and the sharing of pastoral knowledge and values. More suitable project methods perhaps need to be devised to encourage this input from pastoralists. This might include pre-field work trips specifically aimed at meeting with and talking to pastoralists about rock-holes and the project. This could be undertaken by members of the project team with potentially one or two members of the Gawler Ranges native title group.

In addition to pastoralists on Wilgena station, a broader engagement was initiated by the project team. This included:

- Writing and talking to all pastoralists in the Gawler Ranges native title claim about the project;
- Inviting pastoralists throughout the region to join the project team at Wilgena to meet Gawler Ranges claimants, discuss the project, and visit a rock-hole; and,
- Obtaining necessary approvals to visit other stations which were to be accessed during the field work and meeting pastoralists at a rock-hole (e.g., Kokatha station).

The success of these strategies was again mixed. There was widespread interest and support for the project and a desire to know more. There was a positive initial meet and greet on-country with the lessees of Kokatha station. However, only



pastoralists from Mt Ive station were able to attend Wilgena during the June field work. Furthermore, the presence of the pastoralists made some of the field work aspects problematic. For example, additional expectations and interests added to the complexity of undertaking what is often challenging and sensitive field research.

Pastoral values

The project aimed to engage pastoralists in the assessment of rock-holes in regards to the cultural and productive values for pastoralists. As discussed above, the success of the field work in this regard was limited. However, from the limited and discussions with the station managers of Wilgena, Kokatha and Mt Ive some general values can be derived. These include rock-holes having:

- cultural and social values for family-based and recreational activities;
- cultural and historical interest with associated Aboriginal history, understanding and use (though little known by pastoralists) and the use by explorers and settlers;
- scenic value through associated landscape elements (i.e., granite outcrops); and,
- minimal productive value with often rock-holes being a negative factor with loss of stock (though it was noted that some palatable species are associated with rock-holes).

Additional research is required to further clarify these pastoral values. In addition, more opportunities for collaboration and sharing of values and aspirations are required in order for pastoralists and Gawler Ranges claimants to build understandings and identify appropriate management approaches.

Complexity of Aboriginal knowledge and its maintenance and sharing

The project and the field work revealed the depth, resilience and vulnerability of Aboriginal knowledge, and some of the intricacies and the importance of respecting associated cultural protocols (as discussed in the previous chapter). This section discusses these aspects of the project.

The depth of Aboriginal water knowledge and that of rock-holes and associated landscapes of the Gawler Ranges was evidenced during field work. This knowledge formed part of a broader, holistic belief system connecting all aspects of culture, country and life. The knowledge of water sources and key landscape elements was



shared with project team members in relation to Aboriginal law or *Tjukurrpa* and the associated dreamings or story and song-lines that criss-cross and form the cultural landscapes of the Gawler Ranges. The knowledge was also expressed through reference to Aboriginal customs and protocols and the traditional practices and rituals around resource use informed by *Tjukurrpa*. Such protocols and practices included 'talking to country', restricting behaviours and access, collecting bush medicines and bush tucker, introducing and protecting strangers and looking after places (for examples from other regions, see Cooper & Jackson 2008). The historical and contemporary events and relationships with the country was an additional vehicle through which knowledge was shared. Each rock-hole complex was also not simply a homogenous, single entity, but characterised by complex value systems which, for example, afford cultural and spiritual significance to particular rock-holes and the waters they held.

This knowledge exists and is maintained against a backdrop of colonisation, inappropriate government policy and administration and pastoral occupation (see, for example, Raynes 2002; Foster 2000a,b; Pope 1989) which has placed considerable strain on Aboriginal culture—land—water 'connectivity' (see Weir 2008). During the field work, senior men and women spoke of the troubled relations with settlers and pastoralists during much of the 1900s and the injustices that occurred, and how this history continues to have significance. Despite statutory access rights, people spoke of being unsure in accessing pastoral lands due to not knowing pastoralists and the changes in the landscape (e.g., fencing and gates). Such barriers combined with a lack of resources to support remote travel meant that most of the rock-holes assessed in the field-work had not been visited by the Gawler Ranges native title claimants. However, the places were well known through *Tjukurrpa* and the knowledge handed down. In driving along, senior men and women recognised landscape elements which featured in the story-lines and the cultural map that had been passed on in story and song from generation to generation. Despite not ever visiting these places, through a story based cognitive cultural landscape map, the places are known, the cultural values are known, and the cultural responsibilities are known.

While this demonstrates much resilience, it also indicates the vulnerability of Aboriginal knowledge and the need to support the maintenance and application of traditional cultural knowledge. Projects such as this provide (unfortunately) rare opportunities for Aboriginal people to get out on country and teach younger generations about country and cultural values and responsibilities. The lack of such



opportunities represents a significant risk to maintaining Aboriginal knowledge (Cooper & Jackson 2008: 48). It is undoubtedly with such issues in mind that the Gawler Ranges committee appointed a mixture of elders and younger members to the field work team.

How knowledge is shared and managed is an important element to the success of the project including contributions to recording and maintaining Aboriginal knowledge. Given that cultural knowledge was held largely by senior men and women, large group discussions aimed at either collecting or sharing water knowledge was typically inappropriate. It was necessary for field methods to respect gender and seniority restrictions and other protocols for teaching and passing on knowledge. Furthermore, it was important for the project team to respect confidentiality and the rights of individuals to not share their knowledge. The field approach taken was to speak to people on an individual basis or in small groups of members who had similar knowledge and/or authority. Requests for confidentiality were common, and hence much of the stories shared during the course of the field work are not reproduced in this report. While SANTS is holding some of this information (including photos) in accordance with the wishes of the claim group members, the establishment of a community repository or database for such information would ensure that this knowledge is recorded and has every opportunity to be maintained and passed on from generation to generation. Such a central, community-based and managed 'archive', would also enable the claim group to consider more closely what information can be freely shared with all project partners and the general public.

Establishing an inventory and spatial database of rock-holes in the Gawler Ranges was one of the key objectives of the project. During the field work, the spatial location and extent of each rock-hole was recorded. However, as with the earlier project (see Harding & Blesing 2008), the sharing of locational information and the spatial representation or mapping of rock-holes remains a concern for the Gawler Ranges claim group. Further discussions need to be held with the claim group to establish protocols for the release of locations and the production of maps showing rock-hole locations. These would likely include the incorporation of buffer zones for any spatial information released. The establishment of a community database would again provide the most suitable mechanism for managing any spatial information.



Outcomes for Aboriginal participants

As a collaborative project, each partner has a range of aspirations for the project. While it is important that project limitations are upfront in that the project cannot deliver on all aspirations and expectations, it is important to recognise that the project delivers on much more than a bio-diversity outcome. This is particularly the case for the participating members of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group. Thus it is worth summarising some of the outcomes for Aboriginal people highlighted during the course of the project. In short, these include:

- Getting back on country;
- Fulfilling cultural responsibilities including continuing on the work of uncles, aunties, grandparents and previous generations;
- Accessing and visiting sites of significance;
- Collecting bush tucker and medicines
- Looking after country and important places (including through the right people visiting these places and ‘talking to country’);
- Spending time with elders on-country and sharing of stories and passing on knowledge;
- Building and/or enhancing relationships with pastoralists (providing a basis for further visits to property for traditional pursuits);
- Building and/or enhancing relationships with researchers and sharing knowledge (e.g., traditional and ecological); and
- Providing a foundation for further project work on-country.

There are also broader health and well-being outcomes for the participating Gawler Ranges claimants. In recent studies in other ‘caring for country’ projects, it has been shown that benefits include building self-esteem, maintaining cultural connection, and improved key health indicators (Burgess *et al.* 2009; Kingsley *et al.* 2009; Luckert *et al.* 2007).



6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This project represents an evolving and promising partnership. From the initial aspirations of Gawler Ranges native title claimants to care for rock-holes, a project (or series of projects) has developed that brings together a number of interest groups and different perspectives to understand and assess rock-holes and make informed, appropriate and collaborative decisions about their management. This report has focussed on the second stage in this project, which involved further refinement of project objectives and methods and field visits to more rock-holes in the Gawler Ranges native title claim area within the SAAL NRM region. This builds on the earlier project and field work (see Harding & Blesing 2008; White 2008).

As discussed in this report, this project has delivered on a range of outcomes and findings. These include:

- Engagement of Aboriginal people in the delivery of NRM projects and outcomes, including through the application of traditional and cultural knowledge;
- Mapping and ecological and cultural assessment of 8 rock-holes including one clay-pan soak (noting that ecological information will be subject to a further report);
- Recording of cultural and ecological information and values of rock-holes and associated landscapes with improved understandings of these places;
- Development of positive relationships between Gawler Ranges native title claimants, DWLBC ecological staff and SANTS project staff;
- Continued support from pastoralists for the project with (limited) recording of pastoral knowledge and values of rock-holes;
- Identification/confirmation of important principles, protocols and practices for engaging Aboriginal people in NRM projects and outcomes.

Nevertheless, the project remains at the starting point. There is much work to be done to meet all the project objectives in relation to the Gawler Ranges native title claim area, let alone the broader SAAL region or State (see recommendations by White 2008). The project is ambitious with, for example: field work being undertaken



in remote locations with rock-holes often in areas which are difficult to access; the project directly and collaboratively involving Aboriginal people, pastoralists and western scientists; the existence of various protocols for access, sharing of knowledge and knowledge management which must be respected; and there being little research on rock-holes in South Australia. The project, however, is an important vehicle for achieving a broad range of outcomes, including community engagement in the delivery of NRM projects and outcomes.

As a project which will hopefully continue and build, it is important to reflect on what improvements might be made and what areas need to be focussed on. The final section of this report, thus details some recommendations for future project work.

Pastoral engagement

The engagement of pastoralists at various stages in this project was insufficient or problematic. It is thus advisable that the project team revise strategies for pastoral engagement. Some of the areas or initiatives that such a review should consider include:

- Pre-field trip contact and research: The project team members should consider meeting directly with pastoral lessees to outline the project, discuss access issues and arrangement, and share information (including maps, and spatial knowledge). It might be useful to incorporate one-on-one interviews during this process to ascertain values and aspirations. If possible, one or two members of the claim group should be involved in this process;
- During field trips: Holding joint meetings at a non-restricted rock-hole with native title claimants and pastoralists in the early stage of the field trip (e.g., on the first day). This should be followed up with further 'catch-up' meetings throughout the field trip, with a final meeting/workshop to discuss findings and management aspirations, priorities and actions as appropriate;
- Communications: More tailored communication material should be developed to inform pastoralists (and the community) about the project; and,
- Project engagement: Pastoral engagement on (say) a project steering committee might bring valuable strategic advice to the project.

Such initiatives should lead to stronger pastoral engagement, greater understanding of pastoral values, enhanced relationships between pastoralists and Gawler Ranges members, and support for any future management activities.



Field work and research methods

The field work presented many challenges and it is recommended that approaches and initiatives during field work be reviewed. This review should consider:

- More preparation is required to analyse maps and satellite imagery prior to field work to assist in locating rock-holes whilst in the field. This also would involve a meeting with the pastoralist to consider maps and access issues (see above). This should provide significant time savings in the field;
- While the project is based on collaboration, the level of collaboration in the field could be greatly improved to ensure there is quality exchanges of information and two-way learning and decision making processes. This could include some training and/or mentoring and/or formation of multi-sector teams for field assessments;
- Collaboration is also about sharing of information. To enhance sharing of information and ideas, more sharing opportunities should be provided during field work. For example, nightly presentations on each day might be provided by the project team to stimulate discussion and consider management options and priorities;
- Data collection templates should be refined and be completed through collaborative means, including both ecological and cultural perspectives. Future work should also focus on identifying key cultural indicators (see, for example, Ministry for the Environment 2003, 2006) that can be used in conjunction with rapid ecological assessments; and
- The focus of the Aboriginal cultural information being collected in the field at each rock-hole should be on cultural values, use and management, rather than specific cultural information (e.g., Tjukurrpa or dreaming stories). Where specific cultural information and knowledge is required, this should be gathered as much as possible through separate research methods. This might include individual interviews with key people outside the field work period.

Aboriginal engagement

Aboriginal engagement and participation of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group is paramount to the success of this project. The ongoing delivery of this project should continue to be negotiated with the committee of the Gawler Ranges claim group. Furthermore, any on-ground works that stem from this project must be done



with the approval of the Gawler Ranges group (along with relevant pastoral interests) and preferably with direct participation (and possibly employment) of claimants in any management and monitoring activities. Where the Board is not able to support such participation and employment, other funding and partnership opportunities should be explored.

A Country-based management plan

Given that there are possibly hundreds of rock-holes within the Gawler Ranges native title claim area, it is important that this project develops a strategic framework for implementation. Ideally this should be developed collaboratively but should focus on developing a country-based (i.e., that of the Aboriginal group) cultural and ecological management plan for the rock-holes. Some of the potential benefits of such a plan include:

- Consolidates learning to date with, for example, development of cultural and ecological indicators for rock-hole health;
- Establishes a framework for prioritisation, management and monitoring;
- Identifies clear responsibilities and actions;
- Provides a basis for securing additional funding resources, particularly for the Gawler Ranges native title claim group;
- Provides basis for sustainable partnership; and
- Provides basis for Aboriginal employment.

The development of the plan should be led by the Gawler Ranges claim group with the intention that the interests and perspectives of all parties would be included through a collaborative process.

Cultural information management

The management of cultural and sensitive information was a concern for many of the claimants participating in field work. This regularly restricted the information they shared with the project team or further limited what was approved as 'public' information. Greater ownership of information management by the community is required. It is recommended that the project supports the establishment of an ecological and cultural heritage database which would be owned and managed by the Gawler Ranges native title claim group. This will provide:

- security for claim group and individual informants;



- a vehicle to store and share data in a manner that respects Aboriginal protocols, but provides project partners with necessary information in a compatible format; and
- a means for instigating an ecological and cultural monitoring and reporting program.

Importantly, all access and sharing requirements and aspirations would be worked through during the development of the database thus facilitating a stronger and more transparent framework for sharing of information.



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8. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Field Question Proforma

The following question guide and proforma was used in the field by SANTS project team to record cultural information and values for each rock-hole visited in the June 2009 field trip.

Gawler Ranges Rockhole Project Proforma

Name of people recording:

Date:

Location details:

Name of rockhole:

Pastoral lease / Landholder contact name and number:

GPS location:

Access route information:

Photo numbers:

Description of rockhole (including rainfall information over last 6 mths and fire history in area):



Indicator of Cultural Priority and Significance

Indicator	Comment
Related cultural story	
Ability to access rockhole	
Cultural artefacts present	
Why is this Rock hole / granite outcrop important to you?	
How was this area (outcrop) used in the past? What sites (rock holes) were used? What was gathered from these areas?	
How is this site used today? What sites are still used? What is gathered now from these areas? If none are used - can you still use this site today?	
What seasons and or events did you visit these areas and why did you visit them? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food / water • Fire history • Cultural ritual 	
Were there seasons / events that you couldn't visit these areas and why couldn't you visit them?	

Indicators of Rockhole Health

Indicator	Comment
What was gathered from these areas? What is now gathered from these areas? Can you still use each of these sites today given the current conditions?	
What are the main changes you have seen in this area (outcrop / rock hole) over the years? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetation • Soil / landscape / silt • Domestic stock • Feral animals (rabbits, cats, goats, pigs, camels) • Water quality • Flow changes • Infrastructure 	
What was the natural condition of these sites rockholes? (vegetation, water quality, silt, dung) Are they in a better or worse condition now and why?	
What are the culturally important vegetation and animals (bush tucker, bush medicine) present at this site? For each species noted above <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important was the species in the past? • How abundant was the species in the past (relative to the current time) • What was it used for? 	



Management aspirations

What would you like to see happen with this site in the future and why?	
Is the management you want your (groups) responsibility or some one elses?	
Is the management you want for this site something (you, group, others) feel you have control over to achieve?	
Do you think that the condition of this site will be better or worse in the future and why?	
If you could protect a number (5-7) of rock-holes in this area, which sites would you choose, which are the most significant and why would you protect them?	
What changes have taken place in the region that have affected your traditional sites?	

Other comments or notes

Is there something else you'd like to say that we haven't asked you?	
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Appendix B: Protocols for Aboriginal Engagement

This project was founded on Aboriginal interests and the desire to engage and participate in looking after rock-holes across traditional lands. A project and a partnership between a number of diverse stakeholders evolved with ongoing and meaningful engagement and participation of the Gawler Ranges native title claim group remaining fundamental.

An objective of the project was to identify protocols for successfully engaging Aboriginal people in NRM projects. This section summarises some of the protocols and engagement considerations of the SANTS project team and the claim group in the delivery of this project. As stated in chapter 4, in presenting these 'protocols', we do not seek to provide a comprehensive manual or guide to Aboriginal engagement as this has been well covered elsewhere (see, for example, DWLBC 2008). Rather, the following 'protocols' represent a summary of important considerations for successful engagement of Aboriginal groups in NRM projects. The summary draws on the discussions with members of the Gawler Ranges claim group, the experience of SANTS project team, and a range of published material that deals with research and engagement with Aboriginal communities (this includes: Calma 2009; DWLBC 2008; AIATSIS 2000).

Protocols and Procedures for Aboriginal Engagement in Projects: Gawler Ranges Project

Engagement with the Aboriginal community

Each Aboriginal community is culturally diverse and distinct. As a consequence, communicating with Aboriginal people may differ between different Aboriginal groups and communities. Furthermore, Aboriginal communities and associated organisations have developed and maintained networks with government and non government agencies. Often this engagement is through a community authority (i.e., governing committee) or community representatives who are often well respected in their own community. Each community will have its preferred process through which engagement should occur and it is important to take time to make some strategic



contact to find out what is happening on the ground and what the appropriate community processes are for engagement.

Principles for engagement

Parties should recognise, acknowledge and respect the following principles that support Aboriginal engagement and the collaborative delivery of a project and associated initiatives:

- Aboriginal people have unique rights, interests and responsibilities in their country which is inherited from their ancestors and country itself;
- Within Aboriginal communities the right to speak for country belongs only to Traditional Owners and those who have inherited such responsibilities in accordance with local law and customs;
- There is diversity between and within Aboriginal groups and this extends to decision-making processes, values, needs and aspirations;
- Aboriginal people have significant traditional and contemporary knowledge of country including ancestral stories which belongs to Aboriginal people; and
- That Aboriginal knowledge of country must be valued and respected as having a significant role in looking after environments, including through cooperative approaches to caring for country.

To abide by these principles, there are numerous procedural, substantive, and emotional matters that need to be considered.

Key considerations for successful engagement

Whom to talk to?

- Aboriginal people are aware of the families, kinship relations and law and customs in their communities and therefore know who have responsibilities for country and who can speak with authority.
- Through the native title process there are typically identified Traditional Owner groups with authorised decision makers established and these should be approached to identify who the right people are for particular areas of country.

When to listen?

- Be mindful that Aboriginal people like to meet on country and in their own environment, which may involve sitting on the ground in an informal situation.



- Relatively long periods of silence are quite normal when engaging with Aboriginal groups. Silences can be important in providing opportunities for Elders (and others) to speak.
- Non-Aboriginal people should avoid becoming the controlling influence in any discussions with Aboriginal community members particularly when undertaking project planning, consultations and building relationships.

Building Relationships

- Building relationships with Aboriginal people is often a process which takes some time;
- Relationships are built on getting to know each other and reaching an agreement about what each party is wanting and needing;
- As all relationships are based on trust and mutual respect, efforts to establish trust should be paramount in engaging with the community.
- Do the things you say you will do and follow-up agreed outcomes and maintain regular contact with the community (and not just when you want something);
- Sustaining a long term relationship requires continuous involvement, feedback, and the establishment of processes agreed to by both the proponent and the community.
- Supporting training and education initiatives and attending community events are excellent ways to help build a relationship.

Communicating appropriately

- Be mindful that many Aboriginal people have English as a second (or third etc) language, so always ensure that interpreters are engaged wherever appropriate.
- Use plain English wherever possible and support your communications with plenty of visual aids including diagrams and pictures to help explain the information being shared.
- Summarise the key issues and encourage discussions of the issues and always provide timely feedback and seek verification about any presentations or results to confirm understanding and agreement (preferably by consensus).

Commitment and Continuity

- Working with Aboriginal communities often results in long term relationships which are of great benefit to all parties.



- To ensure benefits flow to the community, keep communications open at all times and encourage Aboriginal people to make decisions and undertake their leadership roles in the community.

Trust and Honesty

- Open and transparent communication is an important to building a relationship of trust and honesty.
- Be upfront and clear about what you want from the project and what you think the benefits are to the community. All projects must provide a benefit to the community.
- It is important to manage expectations and not to set up false hope about what can be delivered to the community or what should be expected from the Aboriginal community.

Priorities and Timeframes

- Aboriginal communities have numerous demands (internal and external) and they must often prioritise their limited human and financial resources and this might result in delays;
- Be prepared to spend time getting to know Aboriginal communities and developing shared understandings and support for all aspects of the project prior to project implementation.

Travelling in Aboriginal lands

- Be aware that permits are often required to enter Aboriginal Lands in South Australia and that permission (e.g., a permit) must be obtained to travel in such areas.

Having Cultural Awareness

- Aboriginal 'heritage' and 'culture' make Aboriginal people who they are – how they live, what they believe in and what makes one group of people different from another.
- Aboriginal people and communities have their own rights, beliefs, customs and laws. These are important to respect if you wish to successfully engage with Aboriginal people.
- Some characteristics may be common across Aboriginal society and may include:
 - a clear distinction between the roles of men and women in the community group;



- a strong respect for Elders. It may be inappropriate for Aboriginal people to make decisions without referring to the Elders or those who have responsibilities under Aboriginal law;
- a detailed knowledge of country and its animal, plant and water resources based on oral teachings and Aboriginal law and customs.

Respecting Aboriginal law and customs

- Aboriginal culture law and custom often dictates how Aboriginal people engage and participate in projects and initiatives that involve country and heritage.
- Aboriginal law and custom is important to how people relate to and are connected with country and heritage.
- The cultural meaning and values of sites or areas of country include:
 - *Tjukurrpa* (Aboriginal law or dreaming) associations;
 - A personal or kinship association through historical links, birthplace, or places of death and burials;
 - A place of residence (permanent, temporary or seasonal);

Understanding Native Title and Connection to Heritage

- Native title rights and interests include:
 - the right to hunt on the land;
 - the right to gather and use food from the land;
 - the right to gather and use bush medicine and wild tobacco from the land;
 - the right to access and use water on and in the land;
 - the right to gather and use timber, stone, ochre and resin from the land;
 - the right to conduct religious activities on the land;
 - the right to hold meetings on the land;
 - the right to have access to all parts of the land, subject to restrictions in accordance with traditional laws and customs;
 - the right to camp and erect shelters on the land;
 - the right to participate in cultural practices on the land relating to birth and death;
 - the right to teach on the land the physical and spiritual attributes of places.



- These rights are communal in nature. However, specific responsibilities to parts of country are often assigned to certain individuals in accordance with the law and customs of a group. Such a connection to country and heritage may arise from the following:
 - By being born on or near a site;
 - By having a one or both parents born on or near a site;
 - By having one or both grandparents born on or near a site;
 - By having a long term physical association with the sites and areas within the country;
 - By having a parent or grandparent buried on the country;
 - By having been taught cultural information associated with sites and areas of the country;
 - By being recognised by the wider group as a person with the right to disseminate such information to others.

Getting Key Project Activities Right

Meetings

- Meetings between the Aboriginal community and other project partners are a key vehicle for engagement. It is here where views, values, understandings, needs and aspirations are exchanged and the project shaped and supported or not.
- When meeting with Aboriginal communities, visitors should acknowledge the traditional custodians of the place of the meeting in the following matter (or similar):

I/We would like to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of this land we are meeting on.

- This custom is important sign of respect to the rights and interests of Aboriginal people to country.
- In terms of the physical setting, on country meetings are typically preferable. 'Seating' layout is also of importance with sitting side by side often more appropriate than sitting on opposite sides of a table.
- Different types of meetings will be suitable for different circumstances depending on the subject matter (e.g., stakeholder meeting, public meeting, workshop, committee meeting, leadership meeting).



- If in doubt about what is appropriate, discreetly ask for some guidance. It may be of value to speak to people who have worked with the community before and can clarify specific protocols and procedural preferences.
- Changing of persons (staff) whilst engaging with the Aboriginal groups can interfere with the relationship building. Aboriginal people like to get to know individuals on a personal level, giving trust through personal contact and communication rather than through good faith. If there is a change in personnel, then it can have affect relationships with the Aboriginal community.
- Communications is an important aspect of successful meetings. Getting this right might involve the use of an interpreter, visual aids and active listening.

Accessing Information

- Respect for knowledge and information
 - It is vital that project staff respect that cultural knowledge is held by Aboriginal communities and individuals and its sharing is the choice of those who hold the knowledge;
 - Participants must also be respected for any stipulations they place on the use of material gathered, including stories, traditional knowledge and information about life experience.
- Aboriginal control as principal decision-makers
 - Aboriginal people have the right to self-determination in their cultural affairs including any reproduction and interpretation of their cultural knowledge.
- Recording an oral tradition
 - Aboriginal stories form the basis of Aboriginal traditional teaching and the sharing of knowledge through the generations;
 - Recording such knowledge (i.e., in research notes and publications) introduces western legal concepts of copyright which likely is very different to how Aboriginal people view ownership of that story (e.g., owned communally and passed down);
 - The ownership of stories by Aboriginal people in accordance with their laws and customs must be upheld.
- Understanding sensitivity of certain information



- In Aboriginal society, various restrictions are placed on certain information (e.g., stories, song, law) which might be based around gender or seniority.
- Researchers need to be aware of such division of responsibility and knowledge and respect that there is sensitive material (including secret and sacred material⁴) that requires special information management and communication protocols.
- Such protocols should be ascertained from the community upfront and built into the project. Consultation may take time depending on the sensitivity of the material.
- The reproduction or unauthorised use of secret and sacred material may be a transgression of Aboriginal law.
- Interpretation, integrity and authenticity
 - It is important for Aboriginal culture that the interpretation, integrity and authenticity of a story is maintained. This means that Aboriginal people will need to be consulted on how Aboriginal heritage is presented.

Intellectual Property Rights and Project Publications

- Where any Aboriginal Intellectual Property is disclosed, collected, used or created in the course of a project the researchers involved must ensure they comply with appropriate Aboriginal Cultural Intellectual Property protocols (see, for example, Calma 2008).
- The project should meet the following requirements:
 - Ethics clearance (or similar) which meets national standards such as those detailed in the AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Aboriginal Studies which includes requirements for informed consent.
 - Upfront agreement between Aboriginal community and project proponents about Aboriginal Intellectual Property informed by a clear understanding of the purpose and conditions of the research and its potential outcomes and future use.

⁴ Secret and sacred refers to information or material that, under customary law is: made available only to have seniority under traditional law; used for a particular purpose or a particular time; and information or material that can only be seen and heard by particular language group members (such as men or women or people with certain knowledge (Australia Council for the Arts 2008).



- Respecting requirements for information management including requests for confidentiality.
- No reproduction or commercialisation of Aboriginal Intellectual Property without the full and informed consent of the Aboriginal community through appropriate decision makers.
- Publications reporting on any aspect of projects with Aboriginal people need to be approved by the Aboriginal community through appropriate decision makers.
- Aboriginal people are often concerned about the publication of Aboriginal culture and heritage.
- There are specific protocols relating the representation of Aboriginal culture and knowledge, including the use of photographs, locational information, and the names of places and people. The reproduction of names and images of deceased persons, for example, may be inappropriate and offensive.
- The medium for publication might also be important. Publishing material on the internet, for example, might be a concern given its digital nature and the ease of access and reproduction. Before publishing any material, permissions must be obtained from the Aboriginal group with opportunities for the group to comment and make changes etc.

Field Work

- Consultation (and ideally collaboration and participation) with the Aboriginal group when engaging in field work on country is always a must with the group from that area of country.
- In conducting field work, there is also a number of considerations that need to be taken into account. These include:
 - *Gender sensitivity:* Allow for both men/women separation during the field trip when necessary as some areas may only be seen or visited by men/women. Ensuring that such protocols are followed in the field requires an open, respectful working relationship.
 - *Elderly:* Elders are important holders of Aboriginal knowledge and Aboriginal law and thus valuable members of project field teams. Elderly may need to have a carer in the field due to health issues or being frail, but never make the decision they are not well enough to attend a field trip as they are aware of what is required when travelling



on country. Sometimes going back to country can help with the health and well being of Elders.

- *Camping:* Moving camp as the trip progresses can save on travel. However, it can also be taxing and thus having a central camp can be more appropriate. In all cases, Aboriginal people need to be involved in identifying camping areas as some places are not appropriate for camping.
- *Roles of staff attending:* It is important that project team roles are well defined and communicated to Aboriginal participants. Field work can be very hectic with many activities, events and/or issues arising. Field work can also be logistically challenging and complex in getting people out on country and working in accordance with Aboriginal protocols (i.e., a field work team being separated due to gender restrictions). Being prepared is essential as is working with the Aboriginal community to plan field trip programs.
- *Knowledge of gender areas for access/restrictions:* As the Aboriginal group have the knowledge of sensitive areas (e.g., places with gender restrictions), it is important that any information recorded or physical evidence shown is to be kept restricted to those who have the information. Discussion or presentation of such information should not occur unless permission is granted from those who have given the information. This aspect of Aboriginal law is important in keeping men and women's business separate.
- *Payment for Aboriginal knowledge:* It is important that Aboriginal people who participate in project field work and research and share their knowledge are afforded appropriate financial compensation. Aboriginal knowledge needs to be considered on the same basis on which the project values input from other experts. The level of payment to Aboriginal participants should be settled prior to undertaking any project work.
- *Other cultural activities while out on country:* Often when on field trips, Aboriginal people like to gather the local traditional food resources. Getting out on country is often expensive and problematic for many traditional owners. Project field work provide Aboriginal people with opportunities to practice their traditional law and customs and this



should be respected as an important aspect of engagement and the project.

Information sharing/Communication Management

- The project needs to uphold the principle that information (e.g., stories, knowledge of places and plants and animals) shared by Aboriginal people remains their intellectual property.
- Information should be collected in an inclusive manner with an upfront understanding about how information can and can't be used.
- Project members need to establish and maintain clear and open lines of communication with the Aboriginal community and manage information in accordance with agreed guidelines. This includes discussing and agreeing on all aspects of the project from objectives to results and matters of confidentiality and other restrictions on the use of information. ;
- The project should also contribute to the enhanced management of information from a community perspective. For example, one way this might be achieved is through establishing a community database for the storage and retrieval of cultural information (e.g., Keeping Places Heritage Management Tool, see www.keepingplaces.com).

Partnerships

- Developing partnerships between Aboriginal people and other parties to manage country cooperatively is important part of reconciliation and leads to enhanced management of country through the bringing together of modern and traditional land management strategies.
- Partnerships around NRM can deliver numerous outcomes and lead to a range of other initiatives including:
 - Traineeships;
 - Mentoring;
 - Flexible employment;
 - Career development;
 - Self determination;
 - Collaborative NRM decision making and planning processes;
 - Individual and community well-being (healthy country, healthy people);
 - Community engagement and leadership;



- Greater recognition of connection and knowledge of country and values of Aboriginal heritage and culture.
- Non-Aboriginal parties also gain much through such partnerships through enhanced diversity, inclusiveness and broadening of knowledge and network base.
- Partnerships should be based on meaningful and genuine relationships with principles of mutual respect, honesty, empathy, and openness being critical.

Key Summary Points

- Aboriginal people have unique rights, interests and responsibilities in their country which is inherited from their ancestors and country itself;
- Building relationships with Aboriginal people takes some time;
- Sustaining relationships and partnerships over the long-term requires continuous involvement, feedback, and the establishment of agreed processes;
- Working with Aboriginal communities often results in long term relationships which are beneficial particularly where Aboriginal people are encouraged to make decisions and take up leadership roles in their community;
- Successful engagement requires an awareness and respect for Aboriginal cultural protocols including gender division of responsibility and knowledge..
- Project activities (including reports) must uphold the principle that Aboriginal people are the owners of their information, culture and heritage and any associated Aboriginal Intellectual Property. Any information shared by Aboriginal people remains their intellectual property;
- Consultation with the Aboriginal group when engaging in field work on country is a must;
- Partnerships between Aboriginal people and other parties to manage country cooperatively are important in reconciliation.

