



**NINTI ONE: CRC REMOTE ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION**

# CRC for Remote Economic Participation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism Project

**Workshop to be held Tuesday 18 October 2011 at Iga Warta,  
South Australia**

**CRC for Remote Economic Participation**

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## Background to CRC-REP

The CRC for Remote Economic Participation ([www.crc-rep.com.au](http://www.crc-rep.com.au)) is a public good research centre established to deliver solutions to economic disadvantage in remote Australia. It started in July 2010 and will run for seven years. Three research programs encompassing 13 projects will systematically investigate regional economic systems, developing enterprises industries and education and employment systems. The CRC-REP is supported by the Commonwealth government and has 54 partner organisations that contribute \$110M in cash and in-kind resources to achieve the goals.

The CRC-REP is governed by Ninti One Limited and its Board of ten people. Jan Ferguson is the CRC-REP Managing Director. Other members of the Board are Paul Wand (Chair), Tom Calma (Deputy Chair), Glenise Coulthard (Adnyamathanha woman and Manager Aboriginal Health for the Port Augusta Hospital Cluster), Ian Davey (Emeritus Professor, University of South Australia), Harold Furber (Arrernte man, and Chair of the Desert Peoples Centre), Tanya Hosch (Social Policy Consultant), Alison Page (Tharawal woman and designer, artist and cultural planner), David Ritchie (CEO NT Department of Lands and Planning) and Tony Tate (Director, Research and Development, Curtin University).

The CRC-REP research Programs are outlined below.

**Research Program 1 – Regional Economies:** This Program aims to build robust and strong regional economies throughout remote Australia through our partners in government, industry and communities. Remote regions have unique characteristics that affect their economies. The projects comprising Program 1 are:

- Population Mobility and Labour Markets
- Enduring Community Value from Mining
- Climate Adaptation and Energy Futures.

**Research Program 2 – Enterprise Development:** This Program will create models for successful medium and small enterprises that best suit remote locations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and industry opportunities. It will explore barriers to growth, such as distance from markets, fragile or faulty supply chains and ways to overcome high production costs. The Projects in this Program are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Economies
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism Product
- Aboriginal Cultural Enterprise
- Carbon Economies in Remote Australia
- Plant Business
- Precision Pastoral Management Tools.

**Research Program 3 – Investing in People:** This Program is about finding and getting the very best from all the talent, ability, skills and potential of two thirds of a million people who live in remote parts of Australia. The current education and training pathways have largely failed to deliver what is needed by remote people, which in turn limits their later ability to participate in local, national and world economies. Our aim in this Program is to find ways to overcome this and deliver the employment, livelihoods, education and training most needed in remote communities and enterprises. The Projects in the Program are:

- Interplay Between Health, Wellbeing, Education and Employment
- Pathways to Employment
- Remote Education Systems

Over 20 workshops with a wide range of stakeholders were conducted in 2008 and 2009 to determine the topics to be researched in the CRC-REP. Since these workshops were held, an application for the CRC was submitted; it was successful in December 2009 and the legal and administrative start-up procedures have been completed (Jan–Nov 2010). The time has finally come when stakeholders and researchers can reconvene to plan and commence the projects of the CRC-REP.

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism Project

## Objective

This project will address ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprises can become more adaptive to challenging demand contexts and generate new market opportunities. Research will describe the complexity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tourism enterprises at the local community level in order to ensure the industry has the capacity to meet ongoing demand.

## Project outputs

- New Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tourism products and markets identified and effective value-chain structures and business models developed to take advantage of these new opportunities
- Training material to support new market opportunities and business models developed for tourism businesses
- At least three postgraduate students; 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders trained as paid field researchers; one honours, VET or vacation student.

## Project impacts

- More profitable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned and -controlled tourism businesses
- Micro-businesses and small-to-medium-sized enterprises will derive additional income
- New tourism businesses linked into local and international tourism markets
- New insights that maximise the potential contribution of tourism to bridging the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

## Workshop objectives

This workshop is open to CRC-REP partner organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tourism sector stakeholders.

The objectives of this workshop are:

- To reanimate discussions that framed the project in the CRC-REP bid
- To hear from CRC-REP partners and sector stakeholders regarding:
  - Current and predicted future opportunities, challenges and aspirations
  - Research needs and priorities
  - Recommended models of stakeholder engagement
- To discuss the processes by which research activities will be developed and initiated including:
  - Consultation with additional relevant stakeholders
  - Formulation and confirmation of research questions that CRC-REP research can address
  - Development of project activity plan and project proposal

## Project leadership group and research team

*Kevin Williams* is General Manager Research, Evaluation and Impact responsible for Program-level management in the CRC-REP. Kevin manages all projects in Program 2 including the 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism project.

*Damien Jacobsen* is a tourism project researcher, based at Southern Cross University, Lismore. Damien is of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage and before joining CRC-REP he completed a Desert Knowledge CRC-funded PhD titled *Domestic Tourists 4WDing in Central Australia: Implications for Desert Aboriginal People*.

The tourism project leader position is currently under recruitment.

## Broad trends and issues affecting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism sector

### Remote tourism

Remote Australia appeals to tourists, many of whom consider it essential to make the journey to Australia's 'Outback'. The iconic landscape and the remote conditions offer visitors some unique and memorable experiences. Ironically, however, the remoteness and landscape conditions that travellers find appealing can be a challenge for tourism operators and local communities. The distance from service centres, as well as a lack of industry, skilled labour and infrastructure are some of the everyday issues of living with remoteness. Some studies indicate that the success of tourism in remote areas relies on factors such as careful planning, leadership, access to finance and developing unique tourism experiences (Blackman et al. 2004).

Recent research has focused on the issue of collaboration between remote tourism businesses. One study suggested that remote businesses need increased understandings of inter-business collaboration (Tremblay & Wegner 2009). That project also showed that remote businesses in the NT expressed that collaboration involved activities like marketing and sales, regional development, business information and research. The study suggested various avenues to increase the level of collaboration among remote businesses, including active networking opportunities and re-thinking the role of tourism associations to generate such activity.

Improvements in information technology can also facilitate networking and collaboration that overcome challenges of remoteness (Taylor et al. 2008). There are various forms of collaboration, but the needs will usually be different from business to business (Tremblay & Wegner 2009). The value of creating collaborating opportunities for remote businesses was highlighted by a study (Friedel & Chewings 2011) conducted under the DKCRC, where participants indicated that the research process offered them a valuable opportunity to engage with other organisations that they are otherwise unable to access.

Recent tourism development initiatives in remote Australia include Desert Knowledge Australia's 'Our Outback' to improve tourism industry partnerships, as well as the 'Outback Way' and the Tourism NT branding of the 'Red Centre Way'. Other notable developments in remote Australia include the purchase of Yulara by the Indigenous Land Council in 2011; Tourism Queensland opened new visitor information centres in Bedourie and Birdsville in 2011; Central Australia Aboriginal experiences commenced in 2009; the Outback Communities Authority in South Australia commenced in June 2010; Aboriginal tourism is a central focus of tourism development strategies in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, Queensland and NSW; and Outback/remote regions are also receiving greater development input from state tourism authorities.

The main visitors to remote Australia are domestic travellers. Of eight key Outback tourism regions located in the NT, WA, Qld, SA and NSW, only the Petermann region of NT (containing Uluru and Kings Canyon) attracted more international than domestic visitors in 2008/2009. While there are various market segments that visit these areas, a key market is visitors driving 4WD vehicles. Insight into desert 4WDers has emerged from various studies conducted by the DKCRC (e.g. Carson & Taylor 2008). This research has increased understanding of 4WDer market segments, spending behaviour, preferred activities, industry needs and challenges for future development. For Aboriginal communities, an issue that continually arose during different stages of the DKCRC research is that Aboriginal tourism products and experiences are a low priority for desert 4WDers. Despite this challenge, 4WD tourism is a key tourism market in remote Australia and, along with other tourist market segments, offer the potential for numerous forms of development (Taylor & Carson 2010).

## **Aboriginal tourism**

There are more than 300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tourism businesses throughout Australia, the majority of which aim to share culture, landscapes and sense of country unique to their specific region (TRA 2009). Tourism is an industry that can offer a range of economic benefits, but there are also social, cultural and political rewards for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people showcasing identity and presence in the landscape.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in tourism was recommended by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC 1991) and been a component of successive national tourism strategies developed by the Australian Government. Most Aboriginal tourism publications describe it as a tourism product which is either Aboriginal-owned or -operated, employs Aboriginal people, or provides consenting contact with Aboriginal people, culture or land. The most recent National Long-Term Tourism Strategy released by the Federal Government (Commonwealth of Australia 2009, p. 11) states that "employment and economic development programs should recognise the potential benefits of tourism to enhancing the social and economic status of Indigenous people". The Government views increasing participation and employment of Aboriginal people in tourism as a way to deal with Aboriginal disadvantage and labour shortages in rural/regional Australia. This approach signifies a renewed emphasis on tourism and commitment to a broader approach than in previous years.

## Emphasis on developing Aboriginal tourism businesses

Aboriginal tourism agencies and academics have produced numerous business development models and research programs over the past few decades. Some of the earlier versions of these initiatives include 'The Business of Indigenous Tourism' kit (ATSIC 1995) and the 'Tourism Our Way' package (Tourism Training Australia 1996). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) released *Strong Business, Strong Culture, Strong Country* in 1996 as a guide to strategies to managing tourism development in Aboriginal communities. These training and educational programs aim to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to become successful in tourism industries. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to business strategy because there are different kinds of organisations, geographic challenges, different industries, and the reasons behind operating a business differ from operator to operator.

Today there is a wealth of resources available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who want to develop a tourism business. One of the main sources is Government tourism development organisations such as Tourism NT, Tourism Queensland, Tourism South Australia and Tourism Western Australia. A key resource is also Indigenous Tourism Australia. With information available via the Internet or on request, these agencies provide assistance in areas such as business start-up, marketing, industry characteristics and regulations.

Other key agencies include Indigenous Business Australia, which offers a range of resources, and AusIndustry, which has developed a Business Ready mentorship program. Such initiatives were recognised in the 2003 Tourism White Paper, (Commonwealth of Australia 2003, p. 32), which noted that "the skills and capacity needed to set up a business, manage it soundly, research the market and establish relationships with potential investors ... are absent or not well developed in many Indigenous communities or ventures". A comprehensive list of resources available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who want to develop a tourism business is available through the Australia Unlimited website (see Australia Unlimited 2010).

Academics have invested considerable effort into exploring factors of success and failure behind Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tourism businesses. Added to this, profiling successful tourism businesses run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been an ongoing Government initiative. From the early booklet *A Talent for Tourism* (CDT 1994) to the recent joint initiative between Indigenous Business Australia and Tourism Australia called Champions of Indigenous Tourism, showcasing best practice highlights ingredients for success to the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. A remote operator listed as a 'Champion' is Kimberley Dreamtime Adventure Tours. The Indigenous Tourism Australia website profiles a collection of Aboriginal tourism businesses, some of which include remote area enterprises such as Kooljaman at Cape Leveque in Western Australia.

Government tourism agencies also release publications designed to increase industry exposure and assess the industry readiness of Aboriginal tourism businesses. Examples include *National Indigenous Tourism Product Manual* (TRA 2009), *Western Australian Aboriginal Tourism Product Manual 2011* (WAITOC 2011) and *Queensland Indigenous Tourism Product Manual 2010/2011* (Tourism Queensland 2010).

## Tourism's contribution to Closing the Gap

Along with the various benefits of development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, tourism can play a role in contributing to Reconciliation and Closing the Gap. In her *Closing the Gap* report (Commonwealth of Australia 2011), Prime Minister Gillard earmarked tourism as an important sector in these initiatives. The issues behind the Closing the Gap campaign (wellbeing, health, education, addiction) are not new, so while Closing the Gap suggests that people are now 'at a crossroad', it is more reflective of long-term troubles that have no easy solutions. While operating a tourism business may not have a direct impact on life expectancy or health, it may have indirect effects that transform everyday patterns which then flow on to general wellbeing. The variety of tourism development and employment options available for development can lead to the creation of diverse educational pathways based on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learning objectives.

The potential of tourism to contribute to Reconciliation was recognised in the earlier Aboriginal Tourism development initiatives. In *A Talent for Tourism*, (CDT 1994, p. vii) tourism was considered to "play an important role in reconciliation by helping non-Indigenous people to understand and appreciate Indigenous cultures and values". More recently, Tourism Australia released a Reconciliation Action Plan (Tourism Australia 2010) concerned with improving linkages between Aboriginal tourism operators and distribution channels, strengthening marketing messages and working towards sustainability. This Plan emphasises that strengthening reconciliation principles at the industry level will filter down into better experiences for tourists. Recent work conducted by the DKCRC (Jacobsen 2010) suggests that reconciliation issues are complex and much work is needed to understand the role of tourism in tackling issues from the past.

## The need to monitor global contexts

The sensitivity of tourism in remote Australia to external influences highlights the need to monitor international and domestic tourist activity as well as global trends. Government agencies monitor the effects of unforeseen events on the Australian economy and attempt to develop resilient tourism industries that endure difficult circumstances. In the past five years, flu epidemics, the global financial crisis and the Iceland volcanic eruptions affected international tourist visitor numbers in Australia, while the effects of the various 2011 natural disasters are yet to be documented. Some international sources suggest that the global financial crisis may lead to an increase in domestic travel (Sheldon & Dwyer 2010); however, Australian forecasts are less clear on the matter. For instance, the Tourism Forecasting Committee (2010) suggest that domestic travel is likely to increase at 0.3% per year until 2020, whereas DRET (2010a) project that the proportion of domestic tourist spending in overall tourism expenditure will fall from 62% in 2010 to 55% in 2020.

The Tourism Forecasting Committee (2010) observed that competition from international destinations is expected to reduce international arrivals and stimulate further overseas travel by Australians enjoying the strong Australian dollar. An issue attracting increasing attention, however, is the rising cost of oil. For tourism, this raises concern about air travel prices and rising costs of motor vehicle fuel. In April 2011 an airline industry publication stated that airline companies increase prices as fuel costs rise and can adapt in order to cope with those rises (Airline Leader 2011). Of greater concern,

however, is that if oil prices rise too quickly then some airlines may find it difficult to adapt. In regards to rising motor vehicle fuel prices, the Tourism Forecasting Committee (2010, p. 10) observed that it is “an important consideration for domestic travellers in Australia, with around 70% of overnight visitors travelling to their destination by motor vehicle”. Tourism organisations and developers in remote Australia must monitor and adapt to these broad trends, especially given the challenges of remoteness and importance of markets such as 4WDers.

## International tourists in Australia

The February 2011 Quarterly Market Update released by Tourism Australia (2011) indicates that by December 2010 Australian inbound tourism had continued on an upwards trend of recovery. The milestone of 5.9 million arrivals exceeded the previous high of 5.7 million in 2007. This new benchmark comes in the wake of downturns created by global events such as the 2008 global financial crisis, the Iceland volcanic eruptions and swine flu concerns. Visitor numbers increased from seven of our ten major markets (including New Zealand, Japan and South Korea), but the highest growth in visitors numbers came from China. Even though inbound travel from the United States dropped 1.6% in 2010, Tourism Australia expects that initiatives such as the Oprah Winfrey Ultimate Australian Adventure will stimulate visitation by American tourists.

Targeting international visitors has been an ongoing impetus behind Aboriginal tourism and development. This is largely a by-product of the role Aboriginal culture plays in Australia’s national tourism product. For instance, the 2003 Tourism White Paper indicated that “International visitors are clearly interested in experiencing these cultures but, at this stage, our tourism industry has not been able to develop sufficient Indigenous tourism product to meet that demand” (Commonwealth of Australia 2003, p. 31). Tourism Research Australia statistics suggest that international tourist participation in Aboriginal tourism has been in decline from 18% of overall international visitors in 2006 to 14% in 2009 (TRA 2009). Experiencing an art, craft or cultural display is the most common activity for international visitors. Almost half of the market is made up of European visitors, with visitors from the United States and China comprising large proportions of the remaining participants.

## Domestic tourism trends in Australia

The majority of tourism activity in Australia is travel by Australians. Statistics for 2009 indicate an ongoing downward trend of domestic tourism in Australia. The Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism suggested in 2010 that between 1998 and 2009 domestic overnight trips have decreased an average of 1.0% per year (DRET 2010b). While recent statistics for 2010 suggest a slight change in this trend (TRA 2011), Tourism Research Australia (TRA 2010a) point out that numerous issues contribute to the ongoing decline, including the strong Australian dollar, consumer perceptions of domestic travel, demographics, changing consumer behaviour, competition and availability of overseas travel. In the recent forecasting document titled *2020: Tourism Industry Potential...a scenario for growth* (DRET 2010a), the Government predicted that the downward trend is likely to continue, perhaps due in part, as the Tourism Forecasting Committee (2010) suggests, to the increase of overseas travel by Australians.

Marketing and research devoted to domestic markets for Aboriginal tourism has been limited; however, the 2007 *National Strategy for Indigenous Tourism 2007–2012* discussion paper highlighted a need for both domestic and international market research (Indigenous Tourism Australia 2007). Past studies show that domestic tourist interest in Aboriginal tourism products is minimal (SATC 1995; Pitcher et al. 1999), while actual participation is often incidental (Ryan & Huyton 2000). In 2009, 0.5% of domestic tourists participated in Aboriginal tourism activities (TRA 2010b). Recent research suggests that while domestic tourists account for up to 71% of all Aboriginal tourism visitors, less than 3% of all domestic tourists might be interested in Aboriginal tourism products or experiences (TRA 2010c).

An important consideration about the recent figures, however, is that activities such as seeing any Aboriginal art, craft or cultural display is by far the highest ranked form of participation by domestic tourists (TRA 2010c). It is unclear whether there is a difference between remote regions and other parts of Australia. Recent research conducted by TNS (2011) highlights that domestic markets generally have perceptions that Aboriginal tourism is inauthentic.

## Where to from here?

The issues and trends highlighted above point towards a range of challenges facing tourism in remote Australia, challenges which become greater because issues related to tourism development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must also be considered. Issues such as sensitivity to rising oil prices and limited access to travel markets highlight the fragility of remote tourism. With global contexts and the changing travel patterns of recent years, now may be a period when remote areas of Australia must become adaptive in order to remain viable. It may be wise to embrace the visionary approach of the Federal Government's *National Long-Term Tourism Strategy* (Commonwealth of Australia 2009). Such an approach calls for innovation, creativity and breaking existing moulds to develop unique products that exceed visitor expectations of possibility in remote Australia.

The path forward for tourism development in remote Australia may involve finding ways to bridge gaps between 4WDer travel behaviour and tourism development goals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. It may involve diversifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in tourism, diversifying products and experiences on offer in remote Australia, while also diversifying pathways of education and training. It may be important to determine the socio-political nature of travel, with the aim of implementing strategies to ensure that person-to-person reconciliation becomes an everyday component of tourism in remote areas. The path forward for tourism development in remote Australia may also involve devising innovative strategies to overcome the hurdles of lacking infrastructure, critical mass and limited market access. Other options may include finding creative approaches to generating investment or pioneering business ventures that respond to the challenges of remoteness. The opportunities for remote Australia are ready to be voiced and this workshop aims to bring together stakeholders from all over remote Australia to discuss possibilities for the future and the role CRC-REP can play in making this happen.

For more information on CRC-REP, or other CRC-REP projects visit: <http://www.crc-rep.com.au/>

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## Further reading

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