

Healthy Country: Healthy People

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Welcome to the first newsletter!

Healthy Country: Healthy People is a Charles Darwin University (CDU) project funded by Land and Water Australia, NHMRC, the Northern Territory Government, GPET and Pfizer. It involves Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal stakeholders and a trans-disciplinary research team. This exciting project is exploring the relationship between landscape health and Aboriginal health, with the aim of informing policy regarding sustainable Aboriginal futures in northern Australia.

This research question is not new. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have long maintained that continued association with, and caring for ancestral country (land and sea), is an important pre-requisite for human health. What is new about this project is that it is an example of the research community responding to Aboriginal requests to investigate issues significant to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

The issues

Northern Australia is grappling with two crises of national significance:

- Firstly, the protracted ill health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Secondly, an emerging crisis of ecological decline due to wildfires, invasive weeds and feral animals

The Objectives

- To seek Aboriginal views about sustainable northern Australian landscapes.
- To determine if landscape health, using a number of simple measures, is different under contrasting Aboriginal land management regimes.
- To initiate a critical evaluation of policy options for Natural Resource Management (NRM) that will contribute to the development of sustainable Aboriginal futures.
- To compare the health and well being of Aboriginal participants in NRM with non-participants.

The plan

This trans-disciplinary study comprises four overlapping modules:

1. *Aboriginal perspectives*

This project originated from the observations of Aboriginal informants in Arnhem Land. Community members, Aboriginal advocacy agencies, Aboriginal NRM practitioners and

Aboriginal land owners continue in their involvement with the process of this study. Strong community collaborations are essential to ensure the relevance of policy outcomes associated with this project. Collaboration with Aboriginal informants underpins the remaining three modules.

2. Landscape ecology team:

Professor David Bowman, Dr Don Franklin, Mr Aaron Petty

Led by Prof David Bowman, director of the ARC-Key Centre for Tropical Wildlife Management (CDU), this module involves an appraisal of landscape health under differing management regimes using the indicators of fire ecology, weed and feral animal density. Collaborating with Aboriginal NRM practitioners and land owners, Aboriginal perspectives on healthy landscapes will also be sought.

Contact Person: Prof David Bowman: David.Bowman@cdu.edu.au

3. Policy team:

Dr Tess Lea, Dr Bevlyne Sithole, Dr Peter Whitehead

Led by Dr Tess Lea, director of the School for Social and Policy Research, (CDU), this team will interpret the empirical data produced in the project in a broader policy context using their professional networks as senior advisers in the Northern Territory Government. As part of this task, Dr Sithole will provide an initial review of community based ranger programs in terms of their ecological outcomes and long term viability. This component is also linked to a broader project that focuses on evaluating community-based options for land management on Aboriginal land co-financed by the Northern Territory Government, CSIRO, and the NLC.

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4. Health team:

Professor Kerin O’Dea, Dr Fay Johnston, Dr Gary Robinson, Dr Paul Burgess

Led by Prof Kerin O’Dea, director of The Menzies School of Health Research (CDU), this module involves the investigation of the health benefits derived from participation in NRM activities. Anecdotal observations and preliminary research suggests that NRM activities have significant potential to promote the health and wellbeing of participants. The benefits are likely to involve social, cultural and biophysical determinants of health.

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Project activity

<i>Module</i>	2004 jan-dec	2005 jan-jun	2005 jul-dec	2006 jan-jun	2006 jul-dec	2007 jan-jun	2007 jul-dec
<i>Aboriginal perspectives</i>							
Consultation	Ongoing throughout entire project						
Qualitative Data	Data collection					Data collection completed	Data analysis and reporting
<i>Ecology</i>							
Remote fire sensing		Data acquisition and interpretation				Data analysis and reporting	
Fuel survey	Field program			Data analysis and write up			
Weed survey	Site selection	Field program				Data analysis and reporting	
Feral animal survey	Site selection	Field program				Data analysis and reporting	
<i>Policy</i>							
Policy	Communicate aims and objectives to appropriate client groups	Policy review				Reporting and policy formulation and planning subsequent programs	
<i>Health</i>							
Health data		Data collection				Data collection completed Analysis commenced	Data analysis and reporting
Feedback & Follow-up		Clinic and Individual feedback & follow-up				Community Report	

Expected outcomes

- Benefits to participating Community members through employment, training and by addressing significant Aboriginal issues in the research and policy environments.
- Demonstrable link between continued NRM and biodiversity preservation.
- Significant association between participation in NRM and indicators of health & wellbeing.
- Policy relevant outcomes for NRM, employment, welfare and health promotion.
- Focus the attention of disparate Aboriginal stakeholders on issues affecting Aboriginal futures in a holistic manner.

“No English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an Aboriginal group and its homeland.... A different tradition leaves us tongueless and earless towards this other world of meaning and significance.” (W.E.H Stanner)

Next Issue: Landscape Ecology Feature