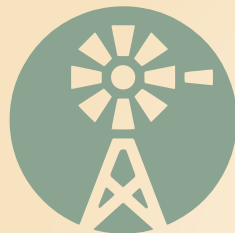


JOINING THE DOTS

POLICY PATHWAYS
FIT FOR THE **OUTBACK**





Split Rock Escarpment, Queensland. Photo: Kerry Trapnell.

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We acknowledge, with gratitude and respect, the traditional custodians of the land where we live, work and which we seek to nurture and protect. We pay respect to Elders – past, present and emerging.

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Simpson Desert, Queensland. Photo: Matt Turner.

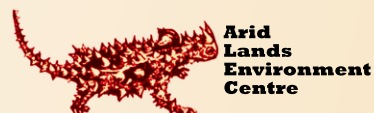
THE OUTBACK ALLIANCE

The Outback Alliance is a cross-sectoral group of non-government organisations and individuals that have a shared vision for the development, welfare and protection of Outback Australia.

The diverse members of the Alliance have a common interest in advocating for policies that are in the best interest of the communities and environment of remote Australia. Our sectors have come together because of our common and intertwined interests in supporting people in small and remote communities.

OUR VISION

The vision of the Alliance is for a thriving Outback Australia, for the people and the land.



OUTBACK AUSTRALIA

The Outback is an extraordinary place. It encompasses more than 70 per cent of the Australian continent, however less than four percent of the population lives there. It generates a considerable portion of Australia's wealth, while also being one of the few great natural places remaining on the globe.

A thriving Outback is good for all Australians. The Outback is fundamentally different from regional and urban Australia, however it is no less essential for Australia's economic development and global reputation. Boom and bust cycles of nature, new and ancient cultures, extremes in wealth and poverty, declining human and native species populations, complex systems of land tenure and mythological status all contribute to the Outback's unique characteristics.

At the heart of the Australian Outback are the history, stories, skills, knowledge and work of Aboriginal people. Many Outback places are home to the communities where Aboriginal cultures and languages thrive in their strongest form.

WHERE IS THE OUTBACK?

The Outback Alliance defines the Outback as all of the Northern Territory, most of Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland and the western area of New South Wales.



SHIFTING FOCUS TO AN OUTBACK LENS

It is vital that anyone interested in the Outback makes the necessary shift in thinking required to understand it from the perspective of the people who live there. For them, the Outback is not a far-off or isolated place, it is the centre of culture and stories for many families and groups. It is a complex place of multiple connections, networks, layers of history and locations with deep cultural meaning. Recognition of these connections, their centrality to families and their role in the practice of customs, culture and management is central to the work of the Outback Alliance.

This publication introduces six key thematic areas of focus, highlighting the extent to which they are intertwined, of equal importance and in need of equal attention.

THEMATIC FOCUS AREAS

THEMATIC GOALS



CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

Recognition of the Outback as a place of belonging for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*.



ENVIRONMENT

An ecologically robust Outback that sustains and supports nature.



HEALTH

Healthy Outback communities that have access to the services they need.



LAND-BASED LIVELIHOODS

Resilient Outback land managers delivering positive outcomes for Australia.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Integrated and thoughtful policy adjustments that enable the Outback to better contribute to the Australian economy.



DIGITAL INCLUSION

Improved connectivity and digital inclusion to engage and strengthen Outback communities.

* Also referred throughout the document as Aboriginal and/or Indigenous.

CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

Recognition of the Outback as a place of belonging for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

THE CHALLENGE

COMPOUNDED DISADVANTAGE

Aboriginal people in remote Australia face challenges that are associated with distance, limited employment and livelihood opportunities and barriers to access services.

Remote communities are isolated from goods and services supplied elsewhere in the country. Physical distance increases costs and presents barriers to education and work opportunities. Aboriginal people in remote Australia also say their experience is that of passive recipients of decisions made in far-away federal, state and territory capital cities.

Maintaining a livelihood in a remote location can be difficult. For Aboriginal people, connections with country can support employment and enterprise through land management, bush foods, arts and tourism. However, low levels of employment persist in many Outback communities.

Health indicators are significantly poorer for Aboriginal people in remote Australia compared with other regions. Aboriginal people with chronic mental or physical health conditions, disabilities or who require aged care, face complex challenges in gaining access to the services they need to live healthy lives.

The relationship between Aboriginal people and the Australian state plays a key role in policy development for remote Australia. Debates around self-determination, recognition and representation continually influence policy initiatives. Many Aboriginal people consider themselves engaged in a constant struggle to have their voices heard and to achieve their aspirations.

THE SOLUTION

RESPECTFUL, PARTICIPATORY POLICY AND PRACTICE

Partnerships, participatory processes and learning from evidence are critical in tackling the issues and challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Effective participation means that the voices of people are influential in processes that affect their lives. Given that the experience of Aboriginal people in remote Australia is one of isolation from decision-making, there needs to be a stronger role for participatory program design, planning and implementation. Access to the internet and digital tools will amplify Aboriginal voices and increase access to resources.

Research should be central to policy development. It enables government and communities to assess local needs and to monitor and evaluate the success of programs. Effective policy relies on producing evidence that enables sound decisions to be made. Importantly, service delivery tailored to locally-expressed needs can reduce long-term costs to central government.

Effective partnerships between local organisations, government agencies and specialist professional organisations are one way to improve initiatives for Aboriginal people.

The Outback Alliance advocates for bold initiatives that combine the skills and resources of multiple parties and are dedicated to achieving shared goals and collective strategies. Many success stories exist. The challenge is to overcome shortfalls in capacity and skills, scale up proven examples, and strengthen strategies that enable people and organisations to work together more effectively.

KEY POINTS

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples represent 45 per cent of the population of very remote areas of Australia, and 16 per cent of the total population in remote areas.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples were the first inhabitants of the Australian Outback and have inhabited it continuously for more than 60,000 years.
- All activities and investment in the Outback must be informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.
- Partnerships, participatory processes and learning from evidence are critical in tackling the issues and challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.



For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, connections with country support employment, such as through Indigenous Ranger programs. Photo: Kerry Trapnell.

JOINING THE DOTS



Aboriginal identity is closely linked with land and country. Plants and animals are part of every traditional story.



Social and cultural determinants of health are particularly influential in remote communities, for example, in situations where awareness of behaviours detrimental to health may be low; or where access to country may be especially beneficial for older people.



Ranger programs and other means of caring for country are a close match to the historical skills and interests of Aboriginal people and deliver the management needed by the wider Australian society.



Aboriginal enterprise in remote Australia is frequently very distinct from the major mainstream economic activities of pastoralism, mining, tourism and service provision, challenging the economic rationale that major industries necessarily support networks of small business suppliers.



Digital connectivity creates digital inclusion, enabling remote communities to reap the economic benefits of technology.

ENVIRONMENT

An ecologically robust Outback that sustains and supports nature.

THE CHALLENGE

THE OUTBACK ENVIRONMENT IS UNDER THREAT

Despite its huge size and relative protection from the population pressures that affect other parts of Australia, some components of the Outback's ecological systems are under threat. Even in areas remote from signs of people, some native plants and animal species are in decline, while others have already disappeared.

Nature in the Outback faces different types of threats. There are degrading processes operating over large areas, and more localised and destructive ones that can be caused by more intensive industrial and agricultural projects. Most of the pervasive degrading threats relate to introduced invasive species and changes in the patterns of fires. Across vast areas of the Outback, the intricate patterns and processes of fire management by Traditional Owners have been lost or withdrawn over the last 200 years. Much of the land now burns extensively and without purpose. Feral animals – camels, cats, horse, pigs, cattle, rabbits, goats, donkeys, and other species – now occupy different parts of the Outback. Invasive noxious weeds affect conservation and economic outcomes in many regions. Over-arching and exacerbating these threats is ongoing global warming – making all of the Outback hotter, and much of it drier.

These threats can be managed by local land managers, however large areas of the Outback now have fewer people actively managing the land than at any time since Aboriginal settlement of Australia, more than 60,000 years ago. Consequently, there is little or no land management now over large regions. Some landscapes are declining in ecological health with losses to the native plants and animals which live there.

THE SOLUTION

EXPANSION AND IMPROVEMENT OF ACTIVE LAND MANAGEMENT

Maintaining the exceptional environment of the Outback is intertwined with maintaining socially and economically healthy communities in the Outback. Many of its non-government economic sectors – tourism, pastoralism, carbon farming and fisheries – depend on a healthy and attractive environment. In turn, maintenance of the Outback's superlative landscapes requires active land management to control wildfires and eradicate invasive noxious species. Underlying this for its Aboriginal peoples is the imperative to care for their individual traditional lands, both culturally and environmentally.

In some areas, active and effective land management has been put in place to deal with environmental threats. More than 2,000 people are now employed by the modern Indigenous Ranger programs, a growing movement that has been highly successful. Rangers bring together traditional ecological knowledge and modern techniques to manage huge areas of land efficiently and effectively, by people who wish to live there.

New approaches and economies are also changing the face of the Outback land management on pastoral lands, and on other types of land tenure. Funding for carbon abatement is providing income for management to reduce wildfires in northern Australia, and new technologies are being used to monitor the condition of Outback lands and effectively manage natural resources. Expansion and improvement of these approaches over huge landscapes is needed.

KEY POINTS



- The Australian Outback is one of a very small number of vast natural landscapes remaining on Earth, making it an area of outstanding and global conservation significance.
- Healthy Outback environments support tourism, pastoral, fishing and other industries, delivering better economic and social outcomes nationally, as well as ensuring the protection of Australia's Outback heritage.
- Policy approaches are needed that are designed specifically for remote Australia and which expand on successful work to date.
- A key underpinning foundation is the maintenance of socially and economically healthy communities in remote Australia, to support resident land managers.



As a diverse country, Australia has high numbers of plant and animal species, most of which are found nowhere else. Photo: Ingo Oeland/Alamy Stock Photo.

JOINING THE DOTS



Maintaining high quality health services in remote communities is vital to retaining local residents and attracting skilled new people from outside areas, thus providing a foundation for viable land management in the long term.



Effective land management over huge areas is highly dependent on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional ecological knowledges and daily on-ground delivery of management work by Indigenous Rangers.



Supporting pastoralists, Indigenous Rangers, carbon farmers and others, is vital to maintain long term protection and good management of Outback landscapes.



Maintaining socially and economically healthy communities will retain residents and attract new workers prepared to live on lands often isolated from mainstream Australia.



New technology, such as drones, telemetry and satellite monitoring, provide more timely and efficient approaches, monitoring the condition of Outback lands and managing natural resources.

HEALTH

Healthy Outback communities that have access to the services they need.

THE CHALLENGE

THE OUTBACK HEALTH DEFICIT

People living in Outback Australia have a poorer health status than their city counterparts. Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare paints a bleak picture for people living in remote and very remote areas of the country: they are more likely to have coronary heart disease or diabetes, they have higher risk factors for ill health, they are more likely to be living with ill health, and they have a lower life expectancy compared to people living in metropolitan areas.

There are two main drivers of poor health outcomes for residents of the Outback: socioeconomic disadvantage and constrained access to health promotion, primary, and acute care services.

Outback Australia contains high levels of social disadvantage, and people living in social disadvantage generally have poor health outcomes. Medicare records show that remote Australians see doctors at roughly half the rate of city dwellers. The combination of social disadvantage and limited access to primary care services results in Outback populations having worse health outcomes than those in more affluent metropolitan areas who access health services more regularly.

As temperatures rise due to climate change, extreme heat becomes a health hazard, leaving people at risk of heat stroke and other potentially fatal outcomes. Outback Australia has some of the hottest locations in the country, with climate change forecast to make these even more challenging.

THE SOLUTION

IMPROVED SERVICE ACCESS AND ELEVATED SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Improving health outcomes for people living in the Outback requires improved social and economic conditions and expanded access to service.

Evidence proves that social and economic improvement leads to better health. Those able to complete school, to secure and hold a job, to live in adequate housing, and to have access to the resources required to participate in community life also enjoy better health. Efforts to ensure greater school completion rates, higher employment, and better housing are key ways to improve the social determinants of health in Outback Australians.

Expansion in health service access, and particularly expansion in access to preventative health programs, is also required to improve the health of Outback residents. Remote Australia has a shortage of health professionals. There are insufficient doctors, nurses, and allied health staff working in remote communities. Aboriginal Medical Services in particular are resource constrained, and not sufficiently supported to be able to provide the full breadth of services required by communities.

In the short term, more resources are required to expand existing remote Australian health care. Services that currently provide minimal primary care should be expanded to provide comprehensive care that includes access to specialist care and allied health, with a specific focus on mental health and wellbeing. Preventive health, particularly aimed at drug and alcohol management, disease avoidance, and healthy living, is a key priority for Outback communities that currently have inadequate service access. In the long term, these actions will reduce the costs of outback health care.

KEY POINTS



- Outback Australians suffer a wide range of avoidable poor health outcomes.
- Socioeconomic disadvantage and constrained access to health service are the main drivers of poor health in Outback Australia.
- Improving the social and economic conditions of Outback Australia will improve the determinants of good health.
- Expanding existing health services in Outback Australia, and increasing the preventive health focus of existing health services, will improve health, ultimately reducing avoidable hospital expenditure and promoting a healthier workforce.



Expanded access to service will improve health outcomes for people living in the Outback. Photo: Royal Flying Doctor Service.

JOINING THE DOTS



A healthy and sustainable Outback environment is central to the health of its population. Similarly, rising temperatures and biodiversity loss adversely impact population health.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have the greatest health need of any distinct Australian population. Strengthening self-determination through training of more Aboriginal health staff is a key way to improve health outcomes.



The population of Outback Australia is closely tied to the opportunity to derive land-based livelihoods. If the capacity to live and work on the land is eroded, population decline puts even more strain on the viability of remote health services.



Improvements in social and economic conditions of Outback Australia will lead to gains in the health status of Outback residents. A healthier Outback population, in turn, is able to make a greater contribution to economic growth in Outback Australia.



Fast, reliable and affordable access to broadband internet enables the delivery of telehealth services into remote communities. These services can reduce the need for travel, enable timely access to specialist service providers such as psychologists and health educators, and can be used to help educate remote healthcare workers and to support people with chronic illness.

LAND-BASED LIVELIHOODS

Resilient Outback land managers delivering positive outcomes for Australia.

THE CHALLENGE

LAND BASED ENTERPRISES UNDER VALUED

The major land uses in the Outback are grazing on natural pastures (around 50 per cent), Aboriginal managed land (approximately 20 per cent) and nature conservation (about 15 per cent not including Indigenous Protected Areas). Industries which occur in parallel with these are tourism; mining; bush food harvesting and sale; carbon farming and livelihoods based on public sector services. The land management issues which affect these major land uses are pest animals, weeds, water availability and quality, fire impact and management, climate variability and their effect on groundcover for pasture and ecosystem improvement. Good, timely information on land management issues and management impacts is often not available, yet perceptions of poor management in the age of social media can drastically affect Australia's export image.

Land management in Outback Australia is a highly integrated activity. Government approaches are often siloed, with different programs targeting finances, production, environment, human resources, and regional development. This leads to big overheads for outback businesses, which also get less support via resources, research and extension due to distances from decision making entities. This contributes to slow exposure and uptake of innovation and low financial literacy, and makes business success harder to achieve. Servicing remote areas with low numbers of clients is often seen by private companies as too expensive, increasing the cost to Outback businesses to source information to improve and absorb the cost of managing land on behalf of Australia. This distance from central services and agencies makes the provision of regional networks and services extremely important to business improvement.

Considering the extent and diversity of the Outback, its enterprises are not supported by the level of innovation investment needed to adapt to changing climate, grasp the opportunities that arise in carbon, natural capital and ecosystem services markets, and reverse the factors that lead to declining production and population. This is a long-term effort, with results likely to take years.

THE SOLUTION

DIFFERENT, NOT DIFFICULT

A focused Outback investment will give all land managers access to more appropriate support for sustainable productivity and environmental benefit. Investing in the capacity of producers to better cope with and adapt to change is the most logical approach to ensuring the sustainability of both the industry and of the rangelands environment and communities. This needs to be done in locally tailored ways using regionally based service providers. Existing networks like regional Natural Resource Management bodies, Landcare and producer/community groups can provide the links between land managers and the researchers and industry bodies with technology and information to improve their businesses.

Payment for reductions in greenhouse gas pollution, if done with an understanding of the Outback context, provides the opportunity for Outback enterprises to diversify incomes, return capital to regions and address critical outcomes for Australia and the world.

Programs for improving herd and grazing land management across the Outback will lead to improved pasture management and feeding practices, improved reproductive performance of livestock, improved land management outcomes, reduced methane emissions, increased production efficiency and financial viability for our struggling pastoral businesses.

Pastoral management practices in many areas have demonstrated the capacity to generate positive change. For example, in Western NSW the removal of feral animals and the building of total grazing pressure fencing, which allows better management of grazing animals, has brought some land back into pastoral use. This has directly contributed to improved profitability, a turnaround in the decline of native vegetation and reduced erosion.

KEY POINTS



- Rangelands cover approximately 80 per cent of the Australian continent and are a major contributor to the Australian economy.
- The people of the Outback are responsible for the management of these vast tracts of land.
- The Outback needs robust management to maintain a sustainable environment and industries that contribute to the Australian economy and protect our export image.
- Locally appropriate and regionally based delivery is important to land managers and communities.
- The cost of enabling good management will be far less than the cost of recovery for communities and environment in the future.



The environment and industries of the Outback are constantly adapting and, with targeted inputs, demonstrable, measurable benefits can be achieved. Photo: Kerry Trapnell.

JOINING THE DOTS



The intrinsic link between land-based enterprise and the environment in the Outback means that improvements in management of enterprises will result in improvements of habitat and ecosystem services.



Robust land management will result in a healthy environment and industries, giving people better environments to live in, and an improved economic situation. This means people will stay in communities, with larger populations encouraging health service provision.



Stable and long-term land-based livelihoods create employment and business opportunities for remote communities.



Digital inclusion and connectivity allows people to stay in the Outback and operate as part of wider Australian society. Businesses will be able to access timely and useful land management information and internet-based tools, such as cloud-based software.



Investing in thriving land-based livelihoods will see more people remaining in the landscape and may attract people to Outback areas.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Integrated and thoughtful policy adjustments that enable the Outback to better contribute to the Australian economy.

THE CHALLENGE

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

The Outback is the source of nearly half of Australia's export revenue and supports over 40,000 small and medium-sized enterprises. It is also the site of incalculable cultural and environmental capital. However, the critical importance of the Outback to the nation is undermined by the scarcity, transience and ineffectiveness of capital reinvestment.

Remote Australia possesses significant levels of economic activity, strong social capacity, and significant locally-relevant expertise. However, much of this activity occurs in ways that differ from economic activity in more densely populated areas, so that the interface between remote areas and Australia's coastal hinterland often fails, resulting in lost opportunities to contribute to the Australian economy.

Most policy instruments, implicitly or explicitly, promote economies of scale to reduce costs, by aggregating activity within one sector. In the Outback, these sorts of economies are often inefficient due to the huge distances and small populations. Additionally, external service delivery in the Outback often fails to consider local issues or opportunities, and has a tendency towards the application of 'one-size-fits-all' solutions. This results in ineffective services and a further erosion of the social capital needed to maintain the Outback's contribution to Australia.

THE SOLUTION

ECONOMIES OF SCOPE, NOT SCALE

A more effective approach is to make use of economies of scope that aggregate activities across sectors. This strengthening of Outback business development stands to deliver benefits beyond more effective services.

Attention should be paid to the delivery of integrated and thoughtful policy adjustments which enable the Outback to better contribute to the Australian economy.

These should include:

- governance processes that enable local expression of needs, supported through organisations with local knowledge;
- essential infrastructure to enable local organisations to work more efficiently and compete effectively with specialist organisations based in capital cities;
- improved public and private procurement criteria that value local knowledge and networks, local engagement processes and local capacity building;
- greater coordination of procurement to allow local economies of scope; and
- data systems that connect regionally to facilitate stronger decision making and planning approaches.

KEY POINTS



- The Outback is the source of significant economic, cultural and environmental capital. Despite this, its potential remains largely untapped.
- Policy instruments that operate well in populated areas, do not necessarily work well in a remote context.
- The Outback is best suited to 'economies of scope', which aggregate activities across sectors, rather than 'economies of scale', which recreate practices created in non-Outback environments.
- More effective policy outcomes, that are responsive to local conditions in the Outback, will be achieved by incorporating Outback systems into procurement processes.



The Outback is the source of nearly half of Australia's export revenue and supports over 40,000 small and medium-sized enterprises. Photo: Lauren Byrne.

JOINING THE DOTS



Natural resources are a key source of potential livelihoods and small business, providing an inclusive approach to assessing regional benefits.



Health services are both a great entry point for local networks and a place where people stand to gain from economies of scope that can coordinate health benefits with other regional activities.



Development issues, such as service provision and support for enterprises, benefit remote activities.



Enabling local management and ownership of land-based enterprises is key to improved economic multipliers in the Outback.



Digital connectivity and digital inclusion are crucial to a competitive and economically robust Outback.

DIGITAL INCLUSION

Improved connectivity and digital inclusion to engage and strengthen Outback communities.

THE CHALLENGE

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IS ALIVE AND WELL IN OUTBACK AUSTRALIA

Existing policy clearly articulates the Australian Government's priority of reliable and affordable access to effective telecommunications for all. However, the rollout of the NBN in the Outback has not ensured full connectivity, with many experiencing slow, expensive, capped satellite access that limits business, education, health and social services.

Mobile access is the preferred choice of technology for many in remote communities. Where individuals have access to mobile coverage and the Internet, it is generally through the use of pre-paid plans which have higher price points; people often have no or very limited phone credit. Access to landlines is limited in remote communities.

This digital divide has significant economic and social consequences. The move from bricks-and-mortar health and social services to online services has introduced a structural barrier to access for many people, particularly from the remote communities of the Outback. Where internet is slow, unaffordable or otherwise limited, it prevents access to services such as myGov or online banking, that other Australians take for granted. By way of example, the Central Australia Aboriginal Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS) has estimated that 20,000 of the 45,360 eligible people in remote communities in the Northern Territory have no income support, citing lack of telecommunications access as a key obstacle to communicating with Centrelink.

THE SOLUTION

CONNECTIVITY AND DIGITAL INCLUSION

In order for all remote and regional areas of Australia to be fully connected and contribute to the national economy, an investment in infrastructure and education must be made. A dedicated multi-pronged approach is urgently needed to ensure that the digital divide does not widen in Outback Australia.

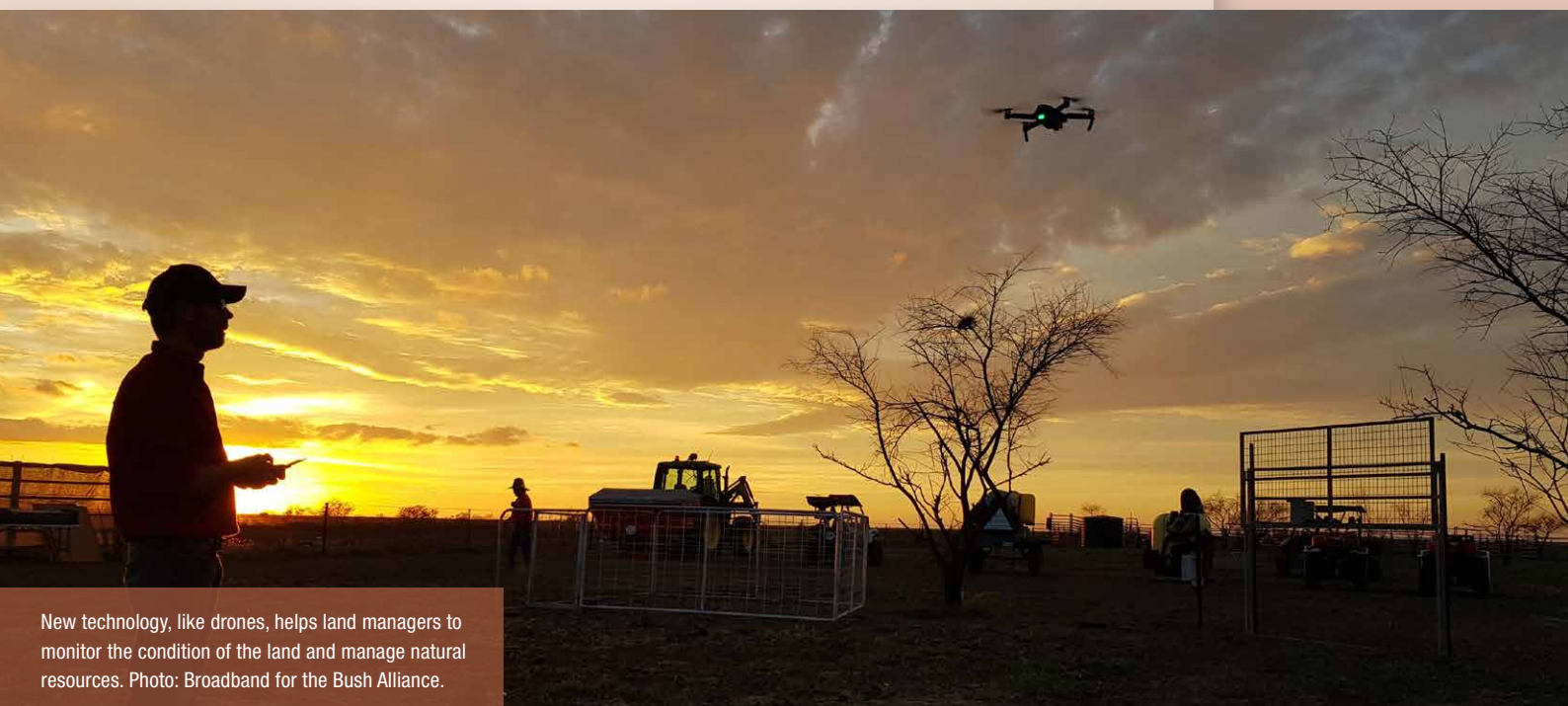
Such an approach must include both connectivity and digital inclusion, a key enabler for social, cultural and economic development. It should also incorporate improved data collection to inform an overarching policy, strategy and monitoring framework. It should also ensure that access to essential online services is unmetered.

Digital inclusion will drive opportunities for employment, enterprise development, and access to more affordable products and services. It also enables people to independently access online services and to engage in the digital business and social community, reducing support costs.

Given that Aboriginal people have been recognised to have a significant gap in digital inclusion compared with the broader Australian population, there is a need for Indigenous Digital Inclusion to be adopted by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) as a key performance measure within the Closing the Gap framework.

KEY POINTS

- Digital connectivity and digital inclusion are fundamental to an engaged and strengthened Outback.
- In order for Outback Australia to be fully connected, an investment in infrastructure and education must be made.
- A dedicated multi-pronged approach is urgently needed to ensure that the digital divide does not widen in the Outback, which would increase the costs of support from central government.
- Such an approach must include both connectivity and digital inclusion, a key enabler for social, cultural and economic development.



New technology, like drones, helps land managers to monitor the condition of the land and manage natural resources. Photo: Broadband for the Bush Alliance.

JOINING THE DOTS



Digital technologies create environmental efficiencies, as well as opportunities for broader engagement and immediate information sharing.



Improved connectivity and digital inclusion enable the use and uptake of vital telehealth services in the Outback.



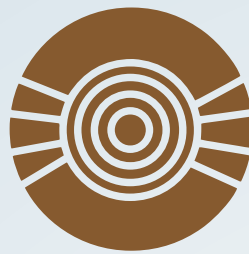
Indigenous digital inclusion is a key factor to closing the gap in the Outback.



Connectivity and digital knowledge can assist land managers with business activities.



Digital inclusion and connectivity are essential for businesses to thrive.



THE WAY FORWARD: JOINING THE DOTS FOR OUTBACK AUSTRALIA

Just as natural wet and dry cycles are tough in the Outback, with small effects multiplied by vast landscapes, so too are economic and social cycles tough on Outback communities. Decision makers tend to see Outback problems through the lens of specific areas of need, such as health, economy, or environment. In the Outback, everything is connected.

Population decline is just one area where we can see this clearly. Without economic opportunities and good services such as health and reliable internet, people tend to leave Outback communities for places that are better served. At the same time, a critical mass of population makes services easier and cheaper to deliver and provides opportunity to work and shop for necessities.

Once people start leaving an Outback community, this effect is multiplied, leaving those who remain less likely to find employment, and therefore poorer, and less likely to have access to health and other services, while businesses and government departments devoid of customers must close, amplifying the effects still further.

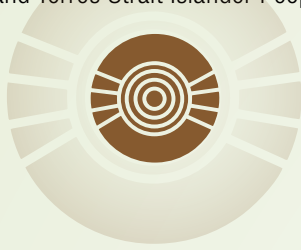
Integration and diversification are key to solving the problems of the Outback. Just as one person in a small Outback community might be running a post office, a grocery store and collecting the bins, the Outback land itself needs to be supported to serve multiple uses at the same time. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, environmental science and the capacity to learn from past attempts are all crucial.

We can solve the problems facing our Outback communities, and create a sustainable Outback for people and the environment. We can't do it without joining the dots.

A foundational approach is for government policies and services to be developed and implemented in ways that ensure appropriate and effective delivery for Outback towns and communities. Effective delivery in remote regions often requires approaches that differ from the mainstream. Costs are higher, while local capability and capacity is generally stretched. All relevant national and state policy processes should be required to show how they accounted specifically for the Outback in their design and their delivery.

CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

Recognition of the Outback as a place of belonging for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.



Effective land management over huge areas is highly dependent on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional ecological knowledges and daily on-ground delivery of management work by Indigenous Rangers.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have the greatest health need of any distinct Australian population. Strengthening self-determination through training of more Aboriginal health staff is a key way to improve health outcomes.

Stable and long-term land-based livelihoods create employment and business opportunities for remote communities.

Development issues, such as service provision and support for enterprises, benefit remote activities.

Indigenous digital inclusion is a key factor to closing the gap in the Outback.

ENVIRONMENT

Aboriginal identity is closely linked with land and country.

An ecologically robust Outback that sustains and supports nature.



A healthy and sustainable Outback environment is central to the health of its population.

The intrinsic link between land-based enterprise and the environment in the Outback means that improvements in management of enterprises will result in improvements of habitat and ecosystem services.

Natural resources are a key source of potential livelihoods and small business, providing an inclusive approach to assessing regional benefits.

Digital technologies create environmental efficiencies, as well as opportunities for broader engagement and immediate information sharing.

HEALTH

Social and cultural determinants of health are particularly influential in remote communities.

Maintaining high quality health services in remote communities is vital to retaining local residents and attracting skilled new people from outside areas, thus providing a foundation for viable land management in the long term.

Healthy Outback communities that have access to the services they need.



Robust land management results in an improved economic situation. This means people will stay in communities, with larger populations encouraging health service provision.

Health services are both a great entry point for local networks and a place where people stand to gain from economies of scope that can coordinate health benefits with other regional activities.

Improved connectivity and digital inclusion enable the use and uptake of vital telehealth services in the Outback.

LAND-BASED LIVELIHOODS

Ranger programs and other means of caring for country are often considered to be the closest match to the historical skills and interests of Aboriginal people.

Supporting pastoralists, Indigenous Rangers, carbon farmers and others, is vital to maintain long term protection and good management of Outback landscapes.

The population of Outback Australia is closely tied to the opportunity to derive land-based livelihoods. If the capacity to live and work on the land is eroded, population decline places even further strain on the viability of health services located in remote areas.

Resilient Outback land managers delivering positive outcomes for Australia.



Enabling local management and ownership of land-based enterprises is key to improved economic multipliers in the Outback.

Connectivity and digital knowledge can assist land managers with business activities.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Aboriginal enterprise in remote Australia is frequently very distinct from the major mainstream economic activities of pastoralism, mining, tourism and service provision, challenging the economic rationale that major industries necessarily support networks of small business suppliers.

Maintaining socially and economically healthy communities will retain residents and attract new workers prepared to live on lands often isolated from mainstream Australia.

Improvements in social and economic conditions of Outback Australia will lead to gains in the health status of Outback residents. A healthier Outback population is able to make a greater contribution to economic growth in Outback Australia.

Investing in thriving land-based livelihoods will see more people remaining in the landscape and may attract people to Outback areas.

Integrated and thoughtful policy adjustments that enable the Outback to better contribute to the Australian economy.



Digital inclusion and connectivity are essential for businesses to thrive.

DIGITAL INCLUSION

Digital connectivity creates digital inclusion, enabling remote communities to reap the benefits of technology.

New technology, such as drones, telemetry and satellite monitoring provide more timely and efficient approaches monitoring the condition of Outback lands and managing natural resources.

Fast, reliable and affordable access to broadband internet enables the delivery of telehealth services into remote communities.

Digital inclusion and connectivity allows people to stay in the Outback and operate as part of wider Australian society. Businesses will be able to access timely and useful land management information and internet-based tools.

Digital connectivity and digital inclusion are crucial to a competitive and economically robust Outback.

Improved connectivity and digital inclusion to engage and strengthen Outback communities.



CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

ENVIRONMENT

HEALTH

LAND-BASED LIVELIHOODS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

DIGITAL INCLUSION



Kata Tjuta, Northern Territory. Photo: Matt Turner.



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