



# POLICY BRIEF

## ENVIRONMENT

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The **Outback Alliance** is a cross-sectoral group of non-government organisations and individuals whose goals are to drive the development of policies for the better development, welfare and protection of Outback Australia's communities and environment. The Alliance has four thematic focus areas: environment, health, land-based livelihoods, and economic development. Each theme is informed by Indigenous Connection to Country perspectives, context, and cultural respect.

### ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY FIT FOR THE OUTBACK

Maintaining the exceptional environment of the Outback is intertwined with maintaining socially and economically healthy Outback communities. Many of its nongovernment 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 is the imperative for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to care for their individual traditional lands, both culturally and environmentally.

### KEY 2021 POLICY PRIORITIES

- A. **Outback Sensitive Procurement**: include criteria that value working with Outback processes (for example, requiring local expression of needs mediated through locally networked organisations, and valuing economies of scope associated with these existing social networks).
- B. **Working across funding silos**: Coordination in timing and criteria is achieved across funding sources for NRM, regional development, infrastructure, indigenous programs, health and social services delivery and local government in outback regions, such that linked outcomes can be achieved through integrated program delivery, with devolved granting where appropriate.
- C. **Demonstrated local demand**: Require all external service providers to demonstrate genuine local engagement in determining local service needs and provide a plan for implementing these that is publicly approved. The locus of control needs to shift to communities; co-design of programs is critical.
- D. **Capacity building**: All policy engagement demonstrates flow-on and durable impact on local capacity, human and physical resources.

### OUTBACK SENSITIVE PROCUREMENT

Long-term provision of environmental services in Outback landscapes works best through supporting and building the capacity of the small number of landholders and local land management and conservation organisations.

- The focus should be on provision of contracted services through locally based organisations. There will usually be only one potential provider of environmental services in a district, so competitive tender processes will largely not work, or may favour Fly-in-Fly-out operators who do not improve the long-term capacity of local communities, nor understand local social dynamics.
- All procurements that apply to Outback areas should be updated to include criteria and bureaucratic processes that specifically value and work with processes, organisations and labour that is available in remote communities processes [e.g. require local expression of needs mediated through locally networked organisations, value economies of scope associated with existing social networks, etc].

## WORKING ACROSS FUNDING SILOS

Environmental funding is often allocated for geographically local projects, based on mental models of small-scale landscapes with fragmented habitats, and relatively high populations. This biases against the exceptional opportunities for improving management at the huge scales of the intact Outback landscapes.

- Environmental spending associated with mining is largely focussed on compliance and a high level of rehabilitation around the small immediate footprints of mines. Allocation of greater funding from mining to broader landscape management of fire and invasive species issue would obtain much greater environmental outcomes than a narrow focus on attempting to achieve perfect rehabilitation outcomes very locally. The Northern Territory Government draft [environmental offsets program](#) is leading in this direction.
- Funding for invasive species such as feral ungulates (e.g. donkeys, horses and camels) and transformative weeds (e.g. gamba grass, prickly acacia) often provides economic benefits for the pastoral industry as well as environmental benefits.
- Funding for the successful Indigenous land and sea management organisations also provides proven additional co-benefits of support for cultural activities, health benefits and other socio-economic outcomes such as reduced incarceration rates.
- Funding that supports local adaptation to climate change will provide opportunities for long-term gains by supporting Outback people to continue to live in bush communities and maintain connection to country and its management.
- Justice reinvestment programs like that operating successfully in Bourke could support young people to engage in conservation. Land management activities can play an important role in building local capacity. These are pathways to employment and building local leadership.

## DEMONSTRATED LOCAL DEMAND

All external service providers should demonstrate genuine local engagement in determining local service needs, and provide a plan for implementing these that is publicly approved:

- Indigenous land and sea management organisations provide an ideal and now generally well-tested pathway for provision of environmental services in remote landscapes (for example [Kimberley Land Council](#)).
- Service provision through engaging pastoral and other landholders is currently an under-used pathway for obtaining large scale outcomes. This can be through natural resource management organisations, other conservation organisations, or through direct engagement by government with individual landholders, such as occurs in the provision of [conservation covenants in Queensland](#).
- Programs and funding should be aligned to integrated natural resource management plans that have been developed through widespread local consultation like that of the Territory Integrated NRM Plans.

## CAPACITY BUILDING

All policy engagement should demonstrate flow on and long-lasting impact on local capacity, human and physical resources:

- Education and training programs should be embedded in any service delivery and part of its deliverables. Physical resources should be built and left in place. There should be a requirement for local employment in programs.
- Programs and contracts should support local leadership development and capacity by supporting opportunities for enterprise development and building operational capability.
- Building capacity and capability for climate adaptation in remote areas is embedded as part of all policy engagement.

