



Realising the Opportunity

Enhancing and strengthening Indigenous engagement as part of the growth of Australian agriculture

May 2023



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Glossary

Abbreviation	Definition
Traditional Owners	Includes people recognised by the Attorney General based on their traditional and cultural associations with the land (As defined in the Australian Government Native Title Act, 1993) ¹
Caring for Country	Refers to the approach of Indigenous Australians regarding land and water management, which is linked to culture, identity, autonomy, health and environmental benefits ²
Co-Design	A participatory approach to collaborating with stakeholders during design or research ³ that synergies diverse knowledge and experiences ⁴
Sustainable Farming/ Sustainable Agriculture	Agricultural practices and activities that meet the present food and textile needs of society whilst simultaneously avoiding any compromise to the ability of future generations to meet their food and textile needs ⁵
Indigenous Land Management	The diverse range of environmental and natural resource management activities undertaken by groups, organisations and individuals in Australia, as well as commercial, economic and cultural resource management activities ⁶
2030 Roadmap	2030 Roadmap – an initiative of the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) - refers to Australian agriculture's collective ambition, vision and roadmap to increase gross farm-gate production to \$100 billion by 2030 ⁷
Closing the Gap	Developed by the Australian Government to intentionally drive and report against national efforts to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians ⁸
Indigenous Water Management	Use and management of water resources by Indigenous people for cultural, economic, customary and spiritual purposes as part of Caring for Country ⁹

The authors wish to acknowledge that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers may take offence to terms used within the report, including “Indigenous” and “Native Foods”. Authors want to assure these readers that this is not our intent, and that these terms have been used with care and in the interests of improving understanding.

¹ Australian Government, 1993, Native Title Act 1993

² AISTSIS & Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, 2011, the Benefits of Caring for Country

³ Scariot, C., Heeman, A., Padovani, S., 2012, Understanding the Collaborative-Participatory Design

⁴ Sherriff, S., Miller, H., Jaure, Al., Williamson, A., 2019, Building Trust and Sharing Power for Co-creation in Aboriginal Health Research: a Stakeholder Interview Study

⁵ UC Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2021, What is Sustainable Agriculture?

⁶ CSIRO & Australian Landcare Council, 2013, Indigenous Land Management in Australia

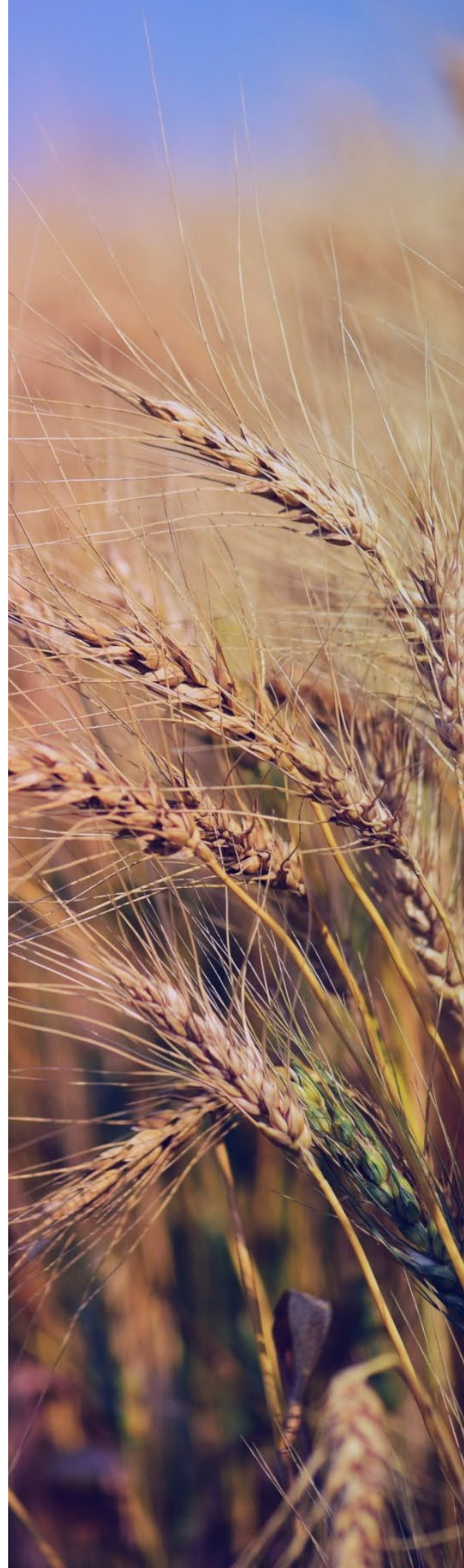
⁷ National Farmers Federation, website, Talking 2030

⁸ National Agreement on Closing the Gap, website, National Agreement

⁹ Victorian State Government, 2022, Water is Life Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap

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National Farmers' Federation Foreword

Australian agriculture is a growing industry in very real ways. Both in growing the fantastic food and fibre enjoyed by consumers at home and abroad, and also in terms our expansion to meet the needs and demands of these same consumers.

Achieving our shared goal of exceeding \$100 billion in farm gate output by 2030 will in large part be driven by a need to find a way to sustainably feed an estimated world population of 10 billion by 2050. To help meet this need, the Australian agriculture industry has to be firing on all cylinders.

Indigenous Australians are the original farmers of Australia. For millennia they have managed and shaped landscapes for a range of purposes, including the production of food. For Indigenous Australians these practices, products, skills and knowledge form an incredibly rich tradition of significant ongoing cultural importance, and also of future economic potential.

Together, these are significant assets whose further development and commercialisation requires our broad support but should be led by Indigenous Australians and lead to their empowerment.

This report necessarily draws a distinction between Indigenous agriculture and contemporary agriculture, as a set of practices introduced and subsequently tailored to Australian landscapes in the last couple of centuries. But in making this distinction, what cannot be lost are the significant historic and ongoing contributions Indigenous Australians make to contemporary agriculture.

We have a real opportunity and need to amplify these valued and valuable contributions from Indigenous individuals and organisations. We need to do a better job of attracting Indigenous Australians to the industry and preparing employers to engage with this potential workforce. We

also need to assist with retention of current workforce and ensuring our workplaces are culturally safe and inclusive.

We know that secure, rewarding employment is a key determinant of physical and mental health and of general wellbeing, instilling self-esteem and affirming a positive sense of identity. This is particularly true for Indigenous Australians engaged in work that draws on their own culture and practice, is on their own Country, or both.

So, there is a very real and direct connection between reaching our ambitious goals for growing the agriculture industry, the economic empowerment of Indigenous Australians, and Closing the Gap across the full range of social outcomes.

The National Farmers' Federation is especially proud to be partnering with KPMG in the delivery of this report.

We wish to express our gratitude for the work and expertise of KPMG in bringing it together, and especially those individuals and organisations who have made a contribution to the report in one way or another.

The report itself makes an important contribution to our understanding of the great opportunities in building on top of and expanding the already outstanding contributions Indigenous Australians are making in agriculture. The case studies in particular are an important part of the report, as powerful and persuasive demonstrations of what can be achieved through people coming together and collaborating more closely.

Thank you for picking up this report, which also serves as an open invitation from the NFF to you as a potential collaborator concerned with realising the many opportunities for further strengthening Indigenous contributions to Australian agriculture.



Fiona Simson
President



Natalie Sommerville
Director

KPMG Foreword

Indigenous Australians have been Caring for Country and involved in agriculture for millennia. However current data limitations present a challenge to outlining the extent of Indigenous Australian's engagement, representation and contribution to Australian agriculture. In the latest statistics from 2016, Indigenous Australians working in agriculture was reported to only be 1% of the Australian agriculture workforce¹⁰. Despite the seemingly low representation of Indigenous Australians in the agricultural workforce figures, in 2018-2019 the total economic contribution of the broad Indigenous agribusiness sector was estimated to be \$85.4 million to the Australian economy¹¹.

To build on from the limited current quantitative data available, broad stakeholder engagement and consultations informed this report by further outlining the extensive landscape of economic challenges and opportunities which Indigenous Australians, businesses and industries currently face. Such opportunities include proactive engagement, building culturally appropriate education and employment pathways and enhancing leadership and capacity building opportunities across agriculture. Through hearing and sharing a cross section of informative industry examples and recommendations we hope this report will further highlight and support increased Indigenous engagement, representation and

leadership in Australian agriculture. The industry case studies enclosed demonstrate the meaningful engagement and shared opportunities available to assist the agriculture industry build on existing efforts and foster increased understanding, collaborations and opportunities to further enhance and unlock Indigenous engagement in Australian agriculture.

KPMG Australia, with the National Farmers' Federation (NFF), aim to outline in this report the existing and needed industry efforts to deliver tangible benefits and progress against the two national agendas, *2030 Roadmap* and *National Closing the Gap*. Delivering against these two important national agendas with the commonality of Australian agriculture will help achieve improved outcomes for Indigenous communities, rural, regional and remote Australia and contribute to achieving the \$100 billion ambition for Australian agriculture through meaningful long-term engagement.

We thank the many industry stakeholders, Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals who shared their time, and contributed their thoughts, insights and vision to enable this report. We look forward to the continued progress unlocking indigenous agriculture can have to drive prosperity across the full breadth of Australian agriculture now and into the future.



Georgie Aley
Partner, National
Sector Lead –
Consumer Packaged
Goods & Agribusiness



Glen Brennan
Lead Partner –
KPMG Indigenous
Services

¹⁰ Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2016, Snapshot of Australia's Agricultural Workforce

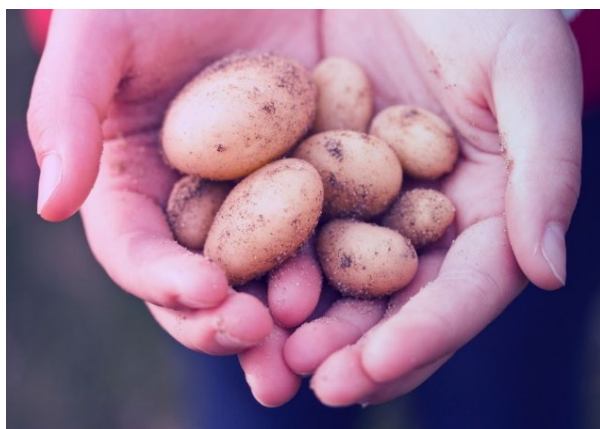
¹¹ National Indigenous Land and Sea Strategy, 2022, Agribusiness Factsheet

Executive Summary

All Australians rely daily on the agricultural sector to provide the food we eat and the fibre we wear. Australian agriculture, including Indigenous Caring for Country, is synonymous with - and the lifeblood of - our rural, regional and remote communities. People's knowledge and connection to agriculture can be vastly different depending on their locality, engagement and connection to agriculture or primary production and their interest to learn more about where, what and who is involved in producing the food and fibre we all rely on.

The Australian agriculture industry is diverse and dynamic. Since 2018 and under the leadership of the NFF the sector has set an ambitious vision and Roadmap to drive significant growth and increase the value of farm-gate output to \$100 billion by 2030. To achieve this vision, it will take a whole-of-agriculture approach. There is also an opportunity and willingness for all agricultural stakeholders to engage, collaborate, learn and contribute to this shared vision for prosperity to benefit all people and communities across agriculture, including Indigenous Australians.

Indigenous Australian's have long played an important and underacknowledged role in agriculture and this report details the contribution, positive impact and opportunities we all have to support increased engagement, representation, and leadership of Indigenous



Australians in Australian agriculture. This report has been informed by available statistics and extensive stakeholder engagement from organisations and individuals from across the agricultural, Indigenous and non-Indigenous landscape.

The purpose of this report and stakeholder research was to purposefully support and assist the NFF, Indigenous Australians and Australian agriculture to build on existing foundations to drive progress and deliver against two interlinked national targets – the Australian Government's National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the NFF's 2030 Roadmap. By working collectively to deliver against these ambitions we can realise shared opportunities and mutual benefits for all involved across agriculture, detailed below in **Figure 1**.

There is a shared vision and intertwined aspirations within these two national targets to expand, increase and strengthen Indigenous pathways and engagement in agriculture to enable shared opportunities and mutual benefits for the Australian agricultural sector and Indigenous communities.

The national vision for Australian agriculture was outlined in 2018 in a discussion paper developed by KPMG, NFF, Telstra and through targeted industry consultation. In 2018, the sector baseline was valued at \$59 billion gross farm output¹², and according to the latest figures for 2021-22 was The NFF 2030 Roadmap has five priority pillars, the focus of this report aligns with Pillar 1 and Pillar 4, highlighted in the inner circle of **Figure 1**.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Closing the Gap) was developed by the Australian Government to intentionally drive and report against national efforts to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians¹³. Closing the Gap details 17 socioeconomic outcome areas, with this report

¹² KPMG, Telstra and The National Farmers Federation, 2018, Talking 2030

¹³ National Agreement on Closing the Gap, website, National Agreement

aligning closely with targets, 6, 7, 8, 15, and highlighted in the outer circle of **Figure 1**.

Both national agendas and underlying targets are symbiotic in nature and are interconnected to strive for better outcomes for all involved. Consideration and alignment to these two agendas has been embedded into the narrative and recommendations from this study, with the potential to support both national agendas, particularly with respect to the interconnected targets illustrated in **Figure 1**.

In 2018-2019, the total economic contribution of the Indigenous agribusiness sector was estimated to be \$85.4 million.¹⁴

Across the NFF membership base, which comprises of state farming and agriculture industry representative bodies, there is known and unknown engagement with Indigenous agriculture, Indigenous agricultural leaders and Indigenous workforces. This report provides insight into current known Indigenous participation and engagement in agriculture, identification of current barriers to these contributions, and industry informed opportunities on how Australian agriculture can support a shared vision for agriculture, including a broad range of empowering Indigenous agriculture businesses and training pathway case studies. This report also outlines key opportunities to build on the current industry engagement to further support meaningful opportunities for Indigenous Australians and agricultural entities of all sizes to jointly shift the dial and deliver against the two national agendas for increased prosperity across Australian agriculture as the lifeblood of rural, regional and remote Australia.



Figure 1 – Related Closing the Gap and NFF 2030 Roadmap targets (National Agreement on Closing the Gap and NFF 2030 Roadmap)

¹⁴ National Indigenous Land and Sea Strategy, 2022, Agribusiness Factsheet



Understanding the barriers and the shared opportunity

Indigenous Engagement in Agriculture

While there is opportunity to broaden future Indigenous engagement, representation and leadership by expanding the agriculture sector's collaboration with Indigenous Australia, there is also a need to better acknowledgment of the diverse ways in which Indigenous individuals, businesses, and industries are already contributing to the industry.

There is a significant gap in representative data to accurately reflect the broad contributions of Indigenous people to the Australian agriculture industry, the most recent figures indicate limited participation with major capacity for growth.

There is no current figure on the exact proportion of Indigenous people working in or in some way connected to the Australian agriculture sector. **Figure 2** reflects the current Indigenous representation in Australian agriculture via the latest Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) workforce report from 2016.¹⁵ This ABARES report has not been re-produced in recent years.



¹⁵ Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2016, Snapshot of Australia's Agricultural Workforce

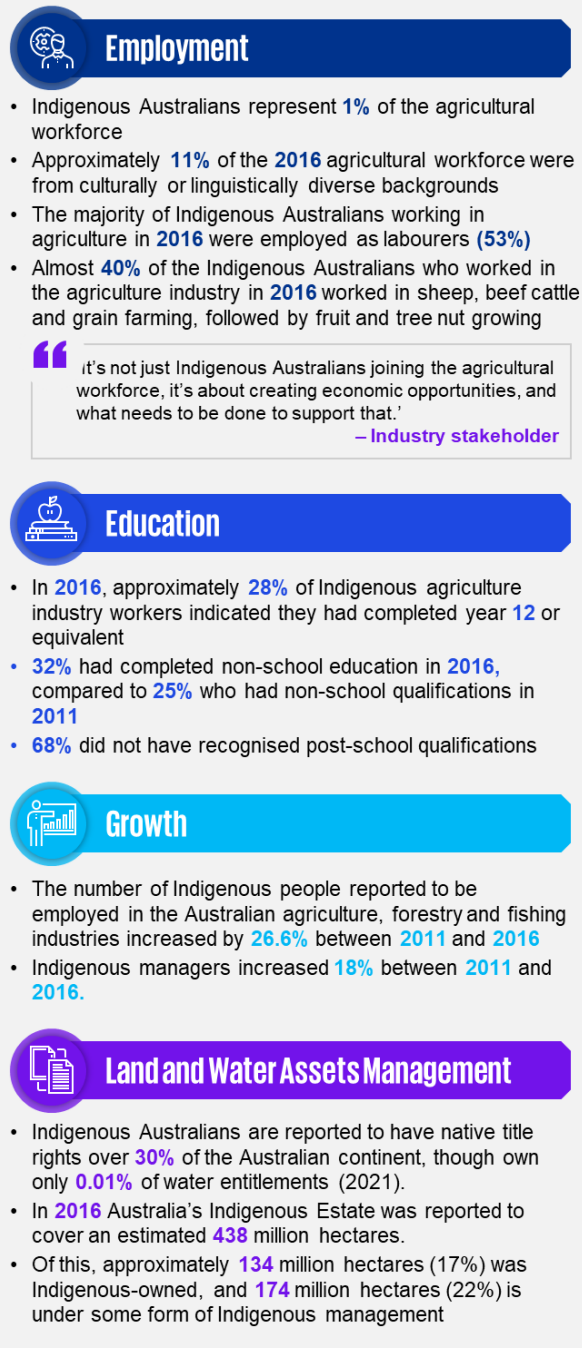


Figure 2 – Australian Agricultural Workforce Statistics (ABARES)¹⁵

The Indigenous Agriculture Sector

While limited reliable data has inhibited attempts to accurately quantify the economic contributions of Indigenous Agriculture in its own right, recent baseline analysis into the agricultural capacity of the Indigenous Estate indicates that the sector is diverse and thriving, spanning a mix of agricultural sub-industries including beef, sheep, aquaculture, fisheries and horticulture.¹⁶

The Cooperative Research Centre for Northern Australia (CRCNA)'s 2022 baseline study of the Indigenous Estate found that although relatively small, the emerging Indigenous primary production industry is increasingly financially stable, delivering meaningful cultural, environment and social benefits back to Indigenous communities. This study identifies there are at least 95 Indigenous primary production businesses operating on 8.1 million hectares of land spanning every state and the Northern Territory. The total 8.1 million hectares is equivalent to 2% of the Australian agricultural estate.¹³

The case studies below and included throughout this report help highlight the vast ways in which the Indigenous Agriculture sector forms an active contribution to a thriving agriculture industry in Australia, ranging from cattle and cropping production, native foods, fisheries, Caring for Country, agricultural training, youth employment pathways and leadership development programs.



Case Study | Roebuck Plains Station

Roebuck Plains is a successful Indigenous-owned cattle station spanning over 275,540 hectares in Gumaranganyjal, Western Australia, and with the capacity to support around 18,000 head of cattle. The pastoral lease for the station is held by Nyamba Buru Yawuru Limited (NBY),

a not-for-profit investment and development company established by the Yawuru Native Title Holders Aboriginal Corporation established to manage the native title interests of the Yawuru nation. Strategically located close to Broome, Roebuck Plains enjoys close access to high-value export markets via NBY's adjacent Roebuck Export Depot.

The Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC) purchased Roebuck Plains in 1999, then divested ownership of the station and the depot to NBY in 2014 through a subleasing arrangement. The transition period from 2014 enabled the Yawuru nation to build the capability to successfully takeover full management of the station as NBY and ILSC worked together to build a viable business model. The subleasing arrangement ended in February 2022, when ownership of the station was formally handed over to the Yawuru nation. The export depot will soon be transferred to the Yawuru as well.

Today, Roebuck Plains uses a shared management model to balance Yawuru cultural values and sustainable land use. The station also provides expansive training and employment opportunities to the local community, employing three permanent and 18 seasonal staff members. The Roebuck Plains employment approach prioritises Indigenous Australians where possible, providing a training program for young people on country that has seen 160 Indigenous recruit graduates since 2008.¹⁷ Caring for Country is an integral part of the station's business model which has included establishing an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) that overlaps with parts of the pastoral lease area. Further, the station uses sustainable grazing practices across the land with significant involvement of the Yawuru Ranger group. As such, business operations and management are continually underpinned by Yawuru cultural, social and environmental values.¹⁸

In the long term, the Yawuru nation is expected to benefit from income generated by both the station and the depot, as the financial sustainability of business models are continually strengthened. Moving forward, the station is looking to expand its operations both up and downstream, as well as diversify across tourism, hunting and resource collection, minerals exploration, and carbon offset market opportunities.

¹⁶ Barnett, R., Normyle, A., Doran, B., Vardon, M. 2022. Baseline Study- Agricultural Capacity of the Indigenous Estate

¹⁷ ABC News, 2022, Yawuru traditional owners take the reins at outback cattle station in WA's Kimberley region

¹⁸ CRCNA, 2022, Baseline study - Agricultural Capacity of the Indigenous Estate

Another key strength of current Indigenous contributions to agriculture is the native foods industry. While official data is limited, the value of the industry is increasing. For example, current estimates suggest that the farm-gate

value of the native foods and botanicals industry is close to \$50 million.¹⁹

A substantial increase from an estimated \$22 million in 2006.²⁰

There is room to support and expand Indigenous participation and leadership in native foods, with research conducted in 2018 suggesting that only 1% of native food industry produce and value is generated by Indigenous Australians.²¹

While the scope of Indigenous agriculture extends far beyond native foods as emphasised in this report, the industry demonstrates the economic contributions of intergenerational Caring for Country practices and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to agriculture, highlighted in the following case study.



¹⁹ Federation of Victorian Traditional owners & Victorian State Government, 2021, Victorian Traditional Owner Native Foods and Botanicals Strategy

²⁰ Victorian Government. 2006, 'Flavoured To Win' - A Strategic Plan For The Native Foods Industry in Victoria: 2006 – 2011

²¹ Mitchell, R., Becker, J., 2019, Bush food industry booms but only 1 percent is produced by Indigenous Australians



Case Study | Indigenous Native Foods

The Northern Australia Aboriginal Kakadu Plum Alliance (NAAKPA)

NAAKPA is an alliance of Indigenous-owned enterprises across Northern Australia that harvest, process and market Indigenous native food Kakadu plums. NAAKPA strives to assist its members in becoming industry leaders with greater influence and control over the end-to-end Kakadu plum supply chain, from growing and propagating to processing and harvesting

NAAKPA became an incorporated co-operative in August 2022 and now uses its efforts to develop industry guidelines for quality and production standards of Kakadu Plums.²² The Co-operative also seeks to support its members to have greater control over the sale of Kakadu plums and its products across physical and digital distribution channels, management of funding for Kakadu plum research and industry advocacy.²³

NAAKPA is also collaborating with Australia's Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) as part of a provenance and traceability project that leverages isoelemental signature technology. Funding from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is being used to run the three year project which seeks to establish a Kakadu Plum Provenance Database and map the mainstream Kakadu plum supply chain to establish industry standards and benchmarks.²⁴

By empowering Northern Australian communities to draw on their natural land assets and TEK, NAAKPA is a prime example of how Indigenous-owned native food enterprises can build economic opportunities, by combining to create scale, for Indigenous Australians and increase current Indigenous contributions to agriculture.

Black Duck Foods

Black Duck Foods is a social enterprise located in Mallacoota Victoria that aims to re-develop traditional Indigenous food growing on Country.²⁵ The enterprise is currently developing and commercialising a range of native foods and seek to economically empower Indigenous communities through the use and proliferation of pre-colonial food systems and land stewardship practices.

Indigenous people employed by Black Duck Foods use their cultural expertise to grow and harvest a variety of native crops, including Australian tubers Munyang, Murnong, Yaama, and Australian grains, Gunalay Bumbaali Bulaawa (Australian Mitchell and Button grass flour).

Black Duck Foods is also currently involved in the preparation of the Traditional Grains Industry Research, Development & Extension roadmap with The University of Sydney and AgriFutures Australia. The report is being developed to support Indigenous people to obtain food sovereignty over native grains. In addition, the enterprise also hopes to establish an independent, Indigenous led body known as the Traditional Native Grain Network (TNGN).²⁶



“Mandadyan Ngalluk (dancing grass) being harvested”, by Black Duck Foods

²² Northern Australia Aboriginal Kakadu Plum Alliance, 2022, NAAKPA becomes an incorporated Cooperative

²³ Northern Australia Aboriginal Kakadu Plum alliance, 2022, About Us

²⁴ Northern Australia Aboriginal Kakadu plum Alliance, 2022, Provenance and Traceability Project

²⁵ Black Duck Foods, n.d., Our Story

²⁶ Sustainable Table, n.d. Black Duck Foods

Caring for Country - Agricultural Land and Water Management

The Indigenous Australian approach to land and water management, otherwise known as 'Caring for Country' mirrors the sustainable land management techniques of modern agriculture. Caring for Country is deeply entwined with the cultural life, identity, autonomy, and health of Indigenous Australians, and has been progressively integrated into contemporary agriculture practices over time.

For centuries, Caring for Country has enabled the Indigenous culture to co-exist with modern commercial agricultural production. While the proportion of Indigenous Australians actively managing land and sea assets independently is still relatively limited, enshrining Caring for Country practices in modern agriculture is going to be a critical mechanism to driving future Australian sustainable agricultural production.

Bespoke programs implemented in recent years have succeeded in developing models that support Indigenous groups to invoke commercial outcomes from Caring for Country practices in contemporary agribusiness settings. The ILSC, for example, has played an intermediary role acquiring land, enabling commercial growth through funding and programs, and then returning ownership back to Indigenous groups. The learnings and successful outcomes of such a model have the potential to be replicated to scale shared opportunities and mutual benefits for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders.



Barriers to Current Contributions

Measurement and Reporting

Indigenous contributions to Australian agriculture are often under-acknowledged and misrepresented in current research and reporting mechanisms. Too often, stories of successful Indigenous agricultural businesses, particularly those which sit outside the heavily covered realm of traditional Indigenous agriculture such as native foods, go unnoticed. Qualitative stories are critical to acknowledging the ongoing contributions and supporting increased Indigenous engagement, representation and leadership across the agricultural landscape. In order to work towards creating shared opportunities, genuine long-term partnerships and mutual benefits, greater recognition of this existing contribution is needed.



'From a data visibility perspective, we don't collect or ask for background to see if they are Indigenous. Unless people are forthcoming, we couldn't tell you how many of our employees are Indigenous.'

– Industry stakeholder

From a quantitative perspective, there is a lack of representative data to reflect the current contributions of the Indigenous sector to contemporary agriculture. While formal participation appears limited and there is undoubtedly capacity for improvement in Indigenous participation, the current reporting does not paint a holistic picture. Participants in Australian agriculture of any cultural heritage are not always given the opportunity to identify their cultural heritage should they wish, which leads to a lack of understanding of the industry's true makeup across the board. Addressing this issue is discussed in more detail in the *'Leading and supporting a Shared Vision for agriculture'* section.



Case Study | The Indigenous Estate

One of the vehicles through which Indigenous Australians currently contribute to the agriculture industry is through the Indigenous Estate. This includes land that is Indigenous-owned, managed, co-managed or subject to special rights, including native title determinations, registered Indigenous Land Use Agreements and legislated special cultural agreements.²⁷ While a significant proportion of Australia's primary production occurs on the Indigenous Estate, the majority is not undertaken specifically by Indigenous primary production enterprises.

Recent attempts to baseline the agricultural capacity of the Indigenous Estate have revealed high agricultural potential. Around 10% of the Estate indicated highly suitable for agricultural development across Australia's northern coastline the east coast and south-west of Western Australia.¹⁴

While this potential highlights opportunities for further land development, attempts to quantify current and potential production value derived from the Indigenous Estate, to the level of detail required to inform investment, have been hindered by the current standard of data maintained.²⁸ Quantification challenges also extend to water management and ownership, with the 2020 National Agreement on Closing the Gap commitment highlighting the need for statistical baselining of Indigenous water ownership.²⁹ If expanded economic contributions of the Estate, as well as water-based production, are to be realised, greater transparency in measurement and reporting and production will need to be a focus.

Further, Indigenous contributions via direct land management are limited by a lack of nationally consistent protocol for recording land tenure and land use information. There is no established definition of what constitutes ownership or control, which can limit Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous stakeholders from leveraging natural assets to their true potential and including this contribution.

Consistent data standards or a national register of land would assist in encouraging agricultural investors to better understand Indigenous land ownership and what this means for the productive capacity of agricultural resources and assets.³⁰ Recommended actions to advocate for necessary improvements in this space are discussed in Opportunities.

²⁷ Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2020, Australia's Indigenous land and forest estate

²⁸ Barnett, R, Normyle, A, Doran, B, Vardon, M. 2022. Baseline Study- Agricultural Capacity of the Indigenous Estate

²⁹ Joint Council on Closing the Gap. 2021. Seventh Meeting of the Joint Council on Closing the Gap

³⁰ Nicholas, J., Wahlquist, C., Ball, A., Evershed, N., 2021, Who Owns Australia?

Education and Talent Attraction



'Other industries and sectors will be investing in education right from the school level through to the tertiary system. If agriculture isn't doing it, we won't have a workforce at all'

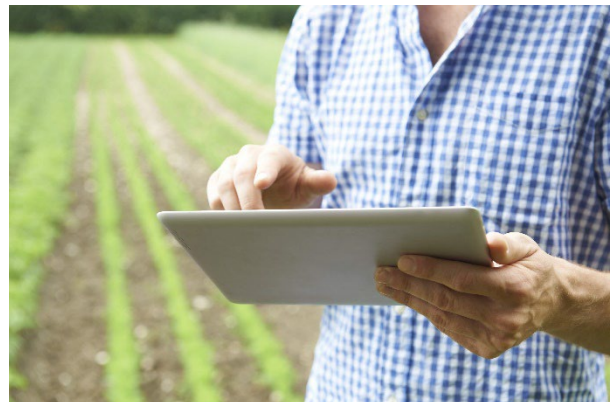
– Industry stakeholder

The formal contributions of Indigenous Australians to contemporary agriculture, both pre and post farm-gate, can be hindered by limited participation of Indigenous Australians in Australian agricultural education and training opportunities. Despite many tertiary institutions offering scholarships and grants to Indigenous students, enrolment and graduation rates leave room for improvement. At the tertiary level, attraction of Indigenous students to agriculture-related degrees is currently low, with Indigenous students only accounting for approximately 0.9% of agriculture students in Australia.³¹ The top three fields of tertiary study reported for indigenous students in 2018, was society and culture (6,172 students), health (4,169 students) and education (2,448 student).³² In the same period, 294 students were enrolled in agriculture, environmental and related studies³³.

Limited participation in agriculture-related training has been reported as driven by several key barriers rooted predominantly in accessibility, as well as financial and sociocultural capacity. Further, a lack of community support and understanding of the opportunities offered by formal agricultural education can limit the potential of Indigenous students to be engaged. While the situation is improving, with the proportion of Indigenous agriculture employees who have attained non-school qualifications increasing from 25% in 2011 to 32% in 2016, there is strong support to further enable and grow education and training opportunities and pathways.

Education industry consultation indicated that perceived value or awareness of agriculture as a rewarding, viable career path, and the employment opportunities offered by the agriculture industry beyond the farm-gate, is another barrier to current participation in this space for attracting students. Consultation with experts in the Indigenous agricultural education space raised the challenge that if Indigenous students are unable to visualise the role or end-outcome agricultural studies can allow them to achieve, retention is often limited. Finally, general competency and awareness of the nuances of traditional Indigenous culture in formal agriculture courses was also reported to inhibit engagement.

From a physical land management perspective, educational programs that aim to preserve and build upon the legacy of Indigenous agricultural knowledge are growing. For example, an Indigenous regenerative land management agricultural program implemented at TAFE has seen success in recent years. A first of its kind, this program combines Indigenous conservation methods with western agriculture, covering traditional concepts such as controlled burning, water rehydration and sustainable regenerative pastoral techniques.³⁴ The integration of traditional and contemporary agriculture knowledge and practices is also a core principle of the Real Jobs Program, detailed in the case study below.



³¹ Jim Pratley, 2018, Indigenous Students Do Not Choose Agriculture at University

³² Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Health Performance Framework 2023 summary report

³³ Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Health Performance Framework 2023 summary report

³⁴ Bardon, G., 2020, Indigenous Regenerative Land Management Included in Agricultural Program at TAFE

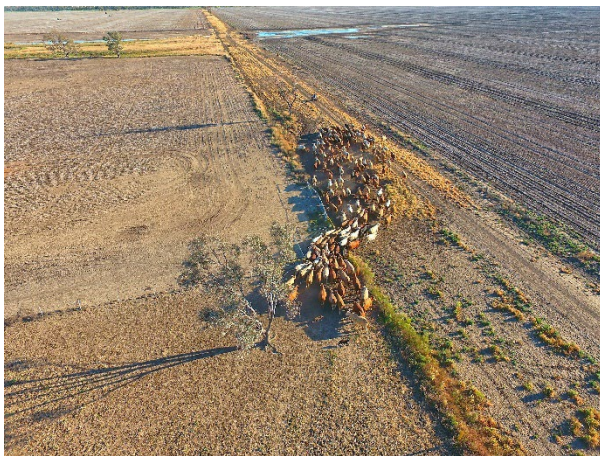


Snapshot | The Real Jobs program

The Real Jobs Program (RJP) was implemented in 2008 to build the capacity of young, unemployed Indigenous Australians by providing local work-based training and employment³⁵. The ILSC manages the RJP on behalf of the Australian government³⁶ and works in partnership with the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association (NTCA) to deliver the Pastoral RJP.³⁷ The Pastoral RJP trains and mentors Indigenous young people across a two-year placement program to provide the skills required for a lasting role in the industry.

The NTCA has seen up to 30 young Indigenous participants trained and employed through the program annually, highlighting the pivotal role the RJP has played in fostering industry cross-cultural awareness, meeting labour requirements in the Northern territory and developing Indigenous role models in local communities.

Consultation with stakeholders across the Australian agribusiness sector revealed high levels of support for the program given the opportunities it provides for local Indigenous communities, calling for a need to expand and develop similar initiatives.



³⁵ Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation, n.d., Real Jobs Program

³⁶ Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation, n.d., Real Jobs Program

³⁷ Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation, 2021, Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation Annual Report 2020-2021



Snapshot | Charles Sturt University Agriculture Education Programs

Australia's largest provider of undergraduate agricultural education is seeking to expand opportunities for Indigenous students to study agriculture at the tertiary level. Through the development of the Indigenous Agriculture Initiative, CSU is taking proactive steps to address the underrepresentation of Indigenous students in agriculture.³⁸ A crucial element of the initiative is its desire to generate a new curriculum that acknowledges and appreciates the synergies between Indigenous and non-Indigenous land management practices.

As stated by CSU, the initiative aims to collaborate with Indigenous people to create a repository of Indigenous knowledge and other opportunities related to:³⁹


- Applying landscape management practices
- Identifying and evaluating the commercial potential of native plants
- Developing technology to disseminate and augment environmentally significant Indigenous knowledge
- Evaluating how Indigenous land management cultures can be synergised for improved outcomes, drought preparedness, greater mutual understanding and reconciliation

As part of the initiative, CSU partnered with AgriFutures Australia in April 2022 and offered two scholarships for Indigenous scholars to support research and entrepreneurialism in native foods and agriculture. Each scholarship provided recipients with the opportunity to leverage CSU's network of existing partnerships and connections with Indigenous innovators within industry as part of a collaborative project.⁴⁰

³⁸ Gilbert, J., Pratley, J., 2021, Australia's Agriculture Sector Sorely Needs More Insights From Indigenous People. Here's How We Get There

³⁹ Charles Sturt University, 2020, Indigenous Agriculture Initiative Fund

⁴⁰ Charles Sturt University, 2022, Scholarships for First Nations Scholars to pursue agricultural entrepreneurialism



Empowering a wider scope of Indigenous individuals to embark on formal education, and finding ways to make this education more accessible, will be critical to empowering Indigenous Australians to maintain and expand their contributions to contemporary agriculture. Greater involvement in agricultural education specifically, stands to diversify and modernise the agricultural sector's approach to inclusive and sustainable farming.⁴¹

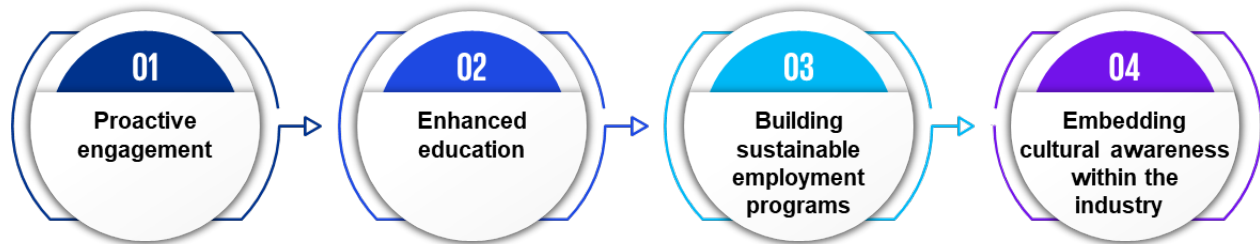
⁴¹ Jeffery, C., 2020, Australian agriculture needs more Indigenous graduates with fewer than five graduating each year



Leading and supporting a shared vision for agriculture

Strengthening Indigenous engagement is a goal that sits within a broader Australian economic, environmental and policy landscape. Whilst agriculture accounts for only one component of this landscape, there are steps the industry can take now to support and raise the profile and participation of Indigenous Australians within the agriculture industry.

Collaboration between Indigenous and contemporary agriculture will be driven by a number of key enablers including:



1. Proactive engagement

The ownership of over 40% of Australia's landmass by Indigenous Australians brings massive potential for sector contribution and economic growth. With the right recognition, support and understanding, there is opportunity for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous land and water managers to share the knowledge of their management practices at scale and enable a more holistic, collaborative approach to agriculture.

Engagement includes increasing awareness of 65,000-year-old Indigenous land and water management practices, fostering co-operation and co-contribution in the preservation of Australia's natural assets whilst increasing commercial productivity. Key to engagement is the sharing of information to provide mutual opportunity and benefit on anything from carbon sequestration practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, incorporating more traditional fishing and aquaculture practices to enable more ecologically diverse ecosystems, to enhancing biodiversity through cultural burning. The case studies detailed in the following pages help demonstrate and highlight the current contributions and opportunities to leading and supporting a shared vision for Australian agriculture.



Case Study | Wanna Mar⁴²

Wanna Mar is a 100% Indigenous-owned commercial fishing venture on the Far West Coast of South Australia. Meaning 'sea food' in Mirning and Wirangu languages, Wanna Mar aims to provide Indigenous people the opportunity to participate in and shape the future of the bluefin Tuna industry, with the future goal of becoming a diversified Indigenous seafood brand.

The formation of Wanna Mar was led by Wirangu man Paul Vandenberg ('Pauly'), now the director of Wanna Mar Stehr Group, with the support of the Far West Native Title Group and the ILSC.

Vandenberg was raised in the Far West Coast of South Australia and is part of the Wirangu and Kokatha peoples of the region.⁴³ Vandenberg is an Indigenous leader with a decorated career in professional sport, agribusiness ventures and cultural education. Across this diverse range of endeavours he has aimed to promote and strengthen the identity and pride amongst Indigenous Australian communities.

Vandenberg's vision for Wanna Mar stemmed from the deep cultural connection of his family and community with 'Sea Country' and its offerings, having grown up actively partaking in

⁴² The ILSC Group, 2021, Southern Bluefin Tuna Joint Venture in South Australia

⁴³ Vandenberg Consultancy, n.d., website, About

recreational fishing. He notes that despite this participation, historically, Indigenous Australians have not received the level of inclusion in the commercial fishing industry that aligns with their traditional ownership over natural water assets or an Indigenous history of sustainably harvesting fish for generations:



'I always wondered why my family or community wasn't in the fishing game... We've grown up watching commercial fishing but have never been a part of it... Despite the fact my family and our ancestors have been fishing in the region across generations...'

– Paul Vandenberg

A chance meeting in 2019 between Vandenberg and Hagen Stehr, head of the Stehr Group and chairman of the Maritime Fishing Academy, bolstered Vandenberg's vision and ultimately paved the way for the establishment of Wanna Mar.⁴⁴

Vandenberg and the Wanna Mar story are a prime example of the opportunities that exist for Indigenous people to scale traditional practices and tap into new, high-value markets to access vast economic and employment opportunities. Core to the Wanna Mar business plan is the ambition to use future profits to support disadvantaged members of local Indigenous communities and expand opportunities for their participation in the seafood industry.

In order to work toward ambitious economic and social visions, Wanna Mar formed a Joint Venture with Far West Coast Investments and the Stehr Group in 2021. Wanna Mar secured \$3.5 million in funding from the ILSC to launch its half of the venture. The business has since worked with the Far West Native Title Group to acquire a quota for 25 tonnes of Southern Bluefin Tuna. When reflecting on the deal, Vandenberg stated that:



'Southern Bluefin Tuna is a \$130 million dollar industry that is undergoing a phase of renewal and we see Wanna Mar Stehr playing a leading role in transforming the sector by not only participating in the industry but influencing the way things are done.'

As outlined by ILSC Group CEO Joe Morrison, it is important for Indigenous Australians to grow and maintain equity in the seafood sector in order to be agents of their own economic, social, environmental and cultural success:



'Strategic investment in the Wanna Mar Stehr Joint Venture is enabling Indigenous Australians to take their rightful place in the fishing industry, and to be front and centre in growing the Southern Bluefin Tuna sector'

Vandenberg's future vision for the Wanna Mar business covers a diverse scope of goals:⁴⁵

1. Understand, restore and teach traditional practices that can integrate with modern fishing enterprises;
2. Continue to invest an increased proportion of profits in local Indigenous communities of the region, providing funding for recreational, educational and social enterprises;
3. Educate and offer training to Indigenous people to enable increased awareness of the opportunities offered by the seafood and maritime industry;
4. Employ Indigenous individuals across the Wanna Mar supply chain, increasing Indigenous participation in an industry with capacity for greater diversity;
5. Expand to a more vertically integrated supply chain, with the ultimate goal of developing a Wanna Mar processing facility which employs and educates Indigenous people;

⁴⁴ Adelaide AZ, n.d., Wanna Mar Aboriginal firm in Port Lincoln venture with Stehr Group: southern bluefin tuna industry first

⁴⁵ Wanna Mar, n.d., WANNA MAR- Putting the Coast back into West Coast

6. Develop a recognisable Indigenous brand that reflects the way of life, sustainability and ethos of the Indigenous people of Australia, and
7. Establish a distinct Wanna Mar Indigenous brand in both domestic and export markets, which tells the Wanna Mar story and articulates the key role played by Indigenous people in the past and present of the Australian fishing industry.

Given Vandenberg's leadership and experience in driving improved outcomes for Indigenous communities, the employment and education of Indigenous people is a top priority for Wanna Mar. The company is looking to expand its Indigenous employment strategy with the development of a complete training program in partnership with the Far West Coast group, with Vandenberg envisioning a thriving Indigenous seafood workforce in the future:



'Indigenous employment is extremely high on the agenda...I would love young people to work in the business, tell our story and educate the whole industry about Sea Country...The dream is to have our own processing plant and boat with an Indigenous workforce. I think it would be amazing seeing my aunties working in processing plant and taking fish home to feed the family in the future one day...'

– Paul Vandenberg

A key focus point of Wanna Mar's future growth ambition is to redirect Australian seafood products back to the domestic market. While demand for tuna from high-value export markets such as Japan and Korea represents an attractive economic opportunity, there is also an imperative to ensure such products, which are high in nutritional attributes, first meet the needs of Australian people. There is a desire in Wanna Mar to restore the role of seafood in the diet of Indigenous people in particular, a food group that has historically been a staple to everyday life.

Once the business achieves a greater level of economic security on profits from existing export markets, there is a strong aim to build a distinctive Indigenous brand in the domestic market to acknowledge and promote the inclusion of Indigenous people in the Australian seafood industry.

The region in which Wanna Mar operates offers a natural ecosystem with one of the most rich and diverse range of living species in the world, and Vandenberg is eager for Wanna Mar to capitalise on the opportunities this entails. In the future Vandenberg would like to see an expansion of the Wanna Mar business into other products and markets through the acquisition of additional quotas beyond tuna. Vandenberg sees potential for the business to gain quotas for pilchards, razor fish and other species that have been enjoyed by local Indigenous communities throughout Australia's history. Vandenberg noted a desire to direct the seafood products back into his community that he and his family grew up on, yet not enough people know of.

Despite pandemic-induced disruptions Wanna Mar has seen favourable success in the most recent season, sending products to high-value markets Japan and Korea, with strong growth trajectories ahead paving the way for success in both export and eventually domestic markets.⁴⁶ This growth will help increase the current 4% share of profits going back to support Indigenous communities, enabling the business to play an increasingly important role in furthering Indigenous representation and inclusion in Australia's primary industries.



⁴⁶ National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2021, Joint venture a first for Aboriginal participation in SA tuna industry

Creating forums through which stakeholders across the agricultural supply chain, including Indigenous, non-Indigenous and those of other cultural heritages, can share knowledge and learn from one another will be the key to successful engagement. Intermediary bodies such as the ILSC, as well as government, industry groups and land councils all have a role to play in facilitating discussion and consistent consultation by creating these forums, whether in the form of site visits, conferences, roundtables, and so on.

Moving forward, development of economic opportunities between contemporary agriculture and Indigenous Australians will continue to uphold Free, Prior and Informed Consent as non-negotiable input. Strengthening engagement will hinge on embedding Free, Prior and Informed Consent in all processes when consulting traditional landowners to embark on co-creation and other joint initiatives.⁴⁷



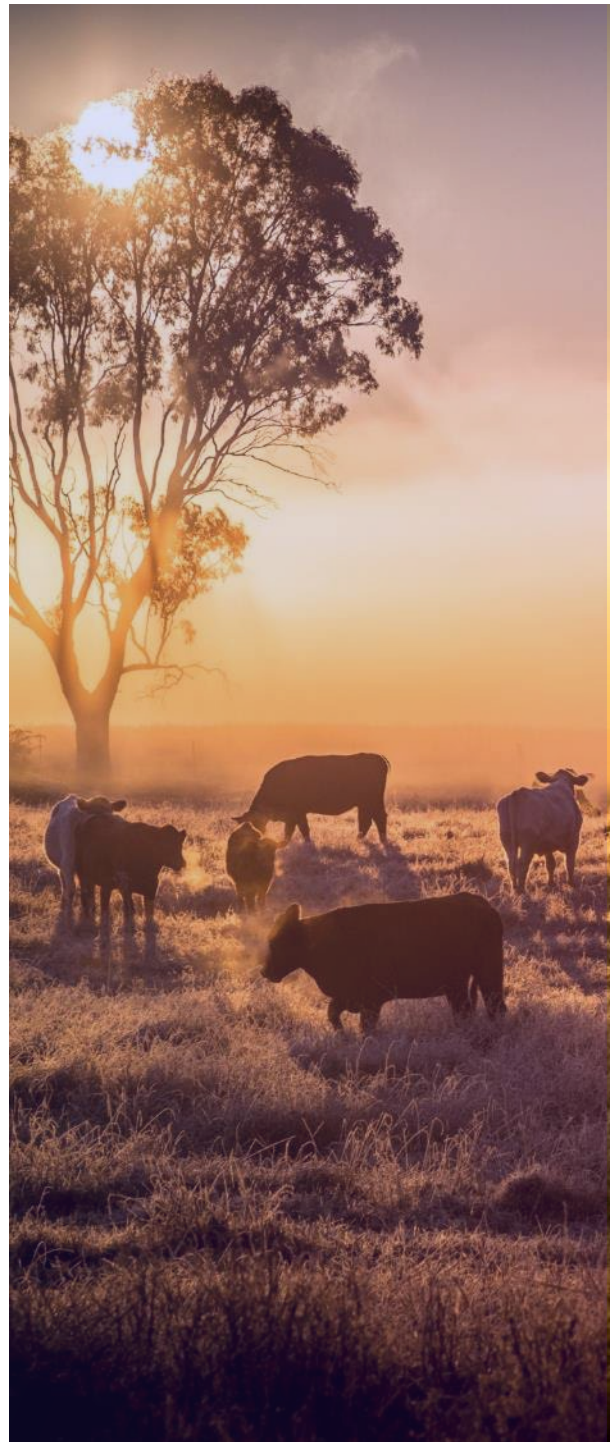
Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous Australians | United Nations

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Australians requires governments to consult and co-operate with Indigenous representative institutions to obtain their Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) before implementing any legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.⁴⁸ This includes obtaining consent prior to undertaking any projects that may impact Indigenous Australian's rights to land or resources.



'Relationships are the bedrock to facilitating opportunities and addressing needs. Communities have long memories, we need to understand and address the local need and circumstances of the community.'

– Indigenous stakeholder



⁴⁷AIATSIS, 2020, Engaging with Traditional Owners

⁴⁸ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2013, Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous Australians

2. Leadership and capacity building

Consultation with industry stakeholders specifically highlighted the importance of advocating for programs that foster leadership and capacity building for Indigenous Australians across various stages of their careers in agriculture. Indigenous representation in senior-level positions generates valuable social dividends for rural and remote communities. As outlined in the case study below, tailored programs designed to build a network of Indigenous role models and leaders who can inspire younger generations are a valuable means of increasing attraction and retention of Indigenous Australians in agriculture.



Case Study | The Australian Rural Leadership Foundation (ARLF)

The ARLF is a national not-for profit organisation that has been providing leadership development programs for over 30 years. The ARLF's 15-month Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP), open to both Indigenous and non-indigenous people, demonstrates how experiential learning on Country can be used to foster resilient and courageous leaders equipped to respond to the challenges facing rural communities and agribusiness.⁴⁹

The ARLF has a network of more than 400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Alumni and takes participants to remote locations in Australia to connect with Indigenous communities. Program alumni include Elder and Traditional owner Kenny Bedford from Erub in the Torres Strait, a graduate of the ARLP Course 20.

With a background in commercial fishing and the portfolio holder of fisheries of the Torres Strait Authority, Bedford gained greater confidence in roles such as Councilor and Deputy Mayor of the Torres Strait Island Regional Council and being a local member of his island community after completing the program.⁵⁰

Bedford now continues to serve as a Director on multiple boards since stepping away from more demanding political leadership positions. When reflecting on his ARLP experience, Bedford stated that:



'This set me up well on a course of being part of leading what was a period of significance in fisheries development in the region for my people that ultimately saw us gain much greater control and ownership over the resources in our waters'

– Kenny Bedford, ARLP Graduate

The ARLF also offers the 'Milparanga Emerging Leadership program' for both emerging and established Indigenous leaders, designed to provide networking and mentoring opportunities in a culturally safe environment to build Indigenous leadership throughout rural and regional Australia.⁵¹

The ARLF has a network of more than 400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Alumni across their four programs.⁵²

⁴⁹ Australian Rural Leadership Foundation, n.d. About Us

⁵⁰ Australian Rural Leadership Foundation, n.d. Leadership Impact Case Study: First Nations Australia

⁵¹ Australian Rural Leadership Foundation, n.d. Milparanga Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership

⁵² Australian Rural Leadership Foundation, n.d. History

3. Building sustainable employment

There is a clear need to more intentionally foster meaningful and inclusive talent pipelines through education and training programs tailored to the unique needs, and relatively untapped potential, of Indigenous Australians. Indigenous youth is the only growing youth demographic in Australia, indicative of the immense potential future workforce segment facing the agriculture sector. Australian agriculture has capacity to further develop employment-based programs that empower and upskill Indigenous Australians to advance beyond entry level roles.

On-farm work placement is commonly used to upskill Indigenous youth in agriculture, particularly in the cattle industry.⁵³ However, further capacity building to enable Indigenous ownership and self-determination is needed. Specifically, consultation with industry highlighted the importance of investing in employment programs that enable flow-on effects to individuals, families and communities, such as, budgetary, financial management skills, time management, and business processes and design. This includes supporting and encouraging knowledge sharing and the importance of intergenerational continued connection to land and family.



Case Study | Woorabinda Pastoral Company (WPC)

Woorabinda Pastoral Company (WPC) is a beef and cropping enterprise located on the traditional lands of the Wadja Wadja and Gungaloo people, south-west of Rockhampton in central Queensland.

WPC is driven by empowering and benefiting their community and workforce. They play an important role in the Woorabinda community, providing local employment, training opportunities. WPC is active in local community engagement initiatives and is committed to building a cohesive workforce and career development opportunities in agriculture.

WPC covers approximately 47,000 hectares (ha) across 5 different properties, with Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council being the sole company shareholder. WPC currently employs 21 staff, 18 of whom are from Woorabinda and they run approximately 6,000 head of cattle. Up to 5,300 ha of land across the five properties is dedicated to crops such as wheat, corn, chickpeas, sorghum and mungbeans.⁵⁴

Woorabinda township and community

Woorabinda is a vibrant community, representing approximately 52 Aboriginal clans.⁵⁵ It has a population of 1000,⁵⁶ over 94% whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.⁵⁷ The town was established in 1927 with strong livestock roots, which led to the formation of WPC.⁵⁸

Woorabinda currently faces challenges relating to high unemployment, however, WPC is providing a range of pathways and flexible career opportunities for the community, allowing and encouraging people to gain exposure to and training within different roles on the properties and in agriculture:

⁵³ The ILSC Group, n.d., Real Jobs program

⁵⁴ CRCNA, 2022, Case Studies Report Baseline Study - Agricultural Capacity of the Indigenous Estate

⁵⁵ Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council, About Woorabinda, n.d.

⁵⁶ Stunzner, I, 2019, ABC news website, When will they release us from the shackles and chains?: Woorabinda pushes for freehold land

⁵⁷ Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council, Annual Report 2016-17

⁵⁸ Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council, Annual Report 2016-17



‘Woorabinda is a vibrant community, but it does face challenges regarding unemployment. A major goal of WPC is to provide employment and training, helping people to get skilled.’

– David Galvin, Chairman, WPC.

Career development and community engagement

Community empowerment and engagement is at the core of WPC’s vision and mission. The company strives to create a cohesive workforce with a focus on flexibility and building around skillsets. For example, WPC supports employees to gain licenses they can use within and outside of agriculture, (e.g. chainsaw, bobcats and heavy machinery). This has seen numerous staff develop through the company, enabling them to seek employment in larger agribusinesses, non-agricultural enterprise and even pursue their own business endeavors providing contractual services, including back to WPC. In addition, when engaging with external consultants, WPC seeks to pair them with employees to accelerate learning and training opportunities.



‘In terms of our vision and mission, we have always considered consistently empowering and embedding community...’

– Amy Brooks, Non-Executive Director WPC

Empowering local communities

Social impact is also a core priority for WPC. This drives their approach to enable skills development, workforce capacity building and community engagement, particularly when it comes to spreading awareness and exposure to agriculture. While the Woorabinda Council receives dividends from WPC to invest back into the community, WPC are active in their participation and communication around community events.

For example, WPC facilitate and help build broader community engagement around Beef Week, a global event held in Rockhampton, QLD, where they actively showcase Indigenous culture. In addition, WPC also hold school tours to raise awareness around their business and agriculture. These initiatives have helped WPC to create career pathways that are flexible and grounded in community needs, as highlighted by Amy Brooks, Non-Executive Director of WPC:



‘In terms of our vision and mission, we have always considered consistently empowering and embedding community. A lot of that is around having a great team on site that is able to look at workplace health, safety and training for employees, being able to look at the perspective of the individual as not everyone learns same way.’

– Amy Brooks, Non-Executive Director WPC

Impactful partnerships

Partnerships also play an important role for WPC, enabling them to create greater opportunities for their employees and the broader Woorabinda community. For example, in 2019, WPC partnered with the QLD Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF), working with officers to develop high end beef products. The partnership facilitated training opportunities for WPC staff in cattle nutrition, reproduction, and health⁵⁹ and DAF agricultural economists worked with WPC managers to develop a business plan for scaling high-end products.

WPC was also heavily involved in the Woorabinda Healthy Country Plan which co-designed a pathway for First Nations-led employment, enterprise and healing of country.⁶⁰ The project involved collaboration between Indigenous Australians, Greening Australia and BHP/BMA to heal Country in The Great Barrier Reef catchment as part of the Queensland Indigenous Land Conversation project (QILCP).

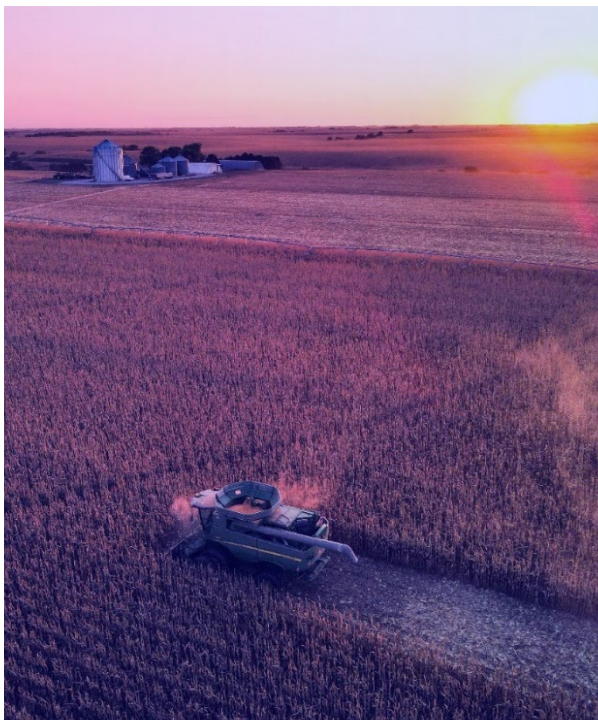
⁵⁹ The Queensland Cabinet and Ministerial Directory, DAF helping to grow Indigenous beef industry, 2019

⁶⁰ Greening Australia, Healing Country in Woorabinda, 2022

The Woorabinda Project Reference Group included representatives from WPC and provided resource consulting services. WPC were also involved in assessing and developing land management plans to support the project.

Looking to the future

WPC plays a pivotal role in enabling Indigenous people in the local Woorabinda community to pursue a career in agriculture and attaining new skills. The company is also looking to further engage women and youth, emphasising the importance of early industry exposure and positive role models. Ultimately, placing social impact, empowerment, community engagement and culture at the core of operations has been key to WPC's success and workforce growth. This has enabled the creation of career pathways in agriculture for the local community that are accessible, focused on capacity building and geared towards long-term employment outcomes.



Snapshot | NT Farmers Indigenous Agriculture Development Project

In 2020 NT Farmers proposed the Indigenous Agriculture Development Project (IADP) to assist Indigenous groups in Australia to enter the agriculture, forestry and fisheries industry.

NT Farmers highlight that Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves represent an untapped opportunity to develop successful businesses on the Indigenous Estate. The IDAP has been put forward as a mechanism to support and include Indigenous people through the end-to-end process of conceptualising and establishing their own Agribusiness enterprises on Country.⁶¹

The IADP also proposes the development of an 'Indigenous Food Futures' network, which seeks to provide education field days on Country for Indigenous Australians. With a focus on mentoring, advocating and opportunity identification, it is hoped that investing in programs such as this will expose aspiring Indigenous individuals to the opportunities offered by agriculture and provide guidance on the process involved to directly engage with the sector.⁶²

Ultimately, the IADP serves as a key example of initiatives and programs in need of support to enable greater Indigenous inclusion and representation throughout Australian agriculture.

⁶¹ NT Farmers, 2021, Indigenous Agriculture Development project (2020)

⁶² NT Farmers, 2020, Indigenous Agriculture Development Project

4. Embedding cultural awareness within the industry

Consultation indicated that one of the most significant barriers to attracting and retaining more Indigenous participation in contemporary agriculture is a lack of cultural awareness and cultural competency within organisations, sectors, training and education forums and other everyday industry settings. Greater cultural competency and awareness building can be integrated into the everyday functions of all industry workplaces, including within and between peak industry bodies, research and development corporations and contemporary agribusinesses of all sizes, to support and enhance opportunities for Indigenous engagement. Small family agricultural businesses also have the opportunity to engage with and endorse larger organisations who embrace these principles.



'The cultural element needs to be embedded from the get-go'

– Indigenous stakeholder

When considering the future of agricultural work and training pathways, for example Jackaroo and Jillaroo programs designed to capture the potential of school-leavers, both industry and Indigenous consultation highlighted an inherent risk that a lack of cultural sensitivity, respect and inclusion from participants can deter Indigenous participation. In part this can be attributed to a lack of cultural awareness training in high schools and other educational environments, as well as vocational

and higher education. For educational institutions and programs with a specific focus on agriculture, inclusion of cultural awareness units to avoid instances of insensitivity in these kinds of programs merits greater focus.

More formally, current contemporary Australian major agribusinesses, particularly those engaged in the pastoral sector, are committed to increasing education of workforce members on cultural competency. In the past, limited education in this space has enabled a workplace culture where Indigenous participants are isolated and lack the support needed to make viable economic contributions. Agricultural businesses of all sizes and localities have made significant progress to ensuring Indigenous participation, respect and increased cultural awareness is increasingly embedded into organisational culture. This includes appreciating and acknowledging differences and different cultural needs.

The current makeup of the agricultural workforce at the board and executive level is currently not reflective of the diversity of industry, specifically with respect to current Indigenous contributions both pre and post farm-gate. Company-wide training and education programs, as well as embedding diversity initiatives in company strategies, were all raised as mechanisms to ensure inclusion and diversity permeate corporate culture in agriculture. Tangible action is required across the agricultural landscape, and there is significant opportunity for industry, advocacy bodies and peak councils to lead and support this change.



Snapshot | Mandatory Cultural Awareness Training in Western Australia Government

The WA Government mandates Indigenous cultural awareness training for all individuals who work in the public sector for over 3 months, and for public sector board members. This requirement is seen as a critical, as well as interesting and engaging, means to ensure all Government employees can work in a culturally informed way.⁶³

⁶³ The Government of Western Australia, 2022, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Awareness Training

From recognition to reconciliation

There are a number of proactive steps that businesses and organisations of any size can take to help start and support their cultural awareness journey. Examples and suggestions have also been outlined in the different sections and case studies of this report. Starting and embedding cultural awareness truly is a shared responsibility and some early steps can include:

- Starting the dialogue about cultural awareness with your team and management
- Discussing and identifying what cultural awareness means for your team and organisation
- Finding out the name of the traditional owners and the Country that your organisation is located and operating
- Seeking external support to assist with foundational cultural knowledge and awareness, such as common terms and language, local indigenous culture and your local history. There is an abundance of online Government resources, local indigenous organisations and cultural competency organisations available to assist with this
- Engaging in dialogue about cultural awareness and Reconciliation Action Plans with suppliers, service providers, industry representatives to learn what others are doing and where they might be on their cultural awareness journey.

Reconciliation Action Plans

An important mechanism by which cultural competency is raised, and commitment to progress is demonstrated through a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). A RAP is designed to enable an organisation to address reconciliation in a strategic, sustainable and tangible way.⁶⁴ A RAP focuses on long-term strategies that provide shared opportunities and mutual benefit for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The

tool acts as a formal commitment to addressing reconciliation and provides organisations with a framework to deliver sustained and tangible benefits for organisations and Indigenous Australians.

There are five, interrelated dimensions of reconciliation that the formal RAP process aims to progress towards⁶⁵

RAPs are designed for corporate business, including small, medium and large size businesses and corporate farming operations. While the tool is not necessarily related to the ways of working of a family farming business, these kinds of stakeholders have a role to play in supporting and endorsing larger agribusinesses in their respective reconciliation journeys.

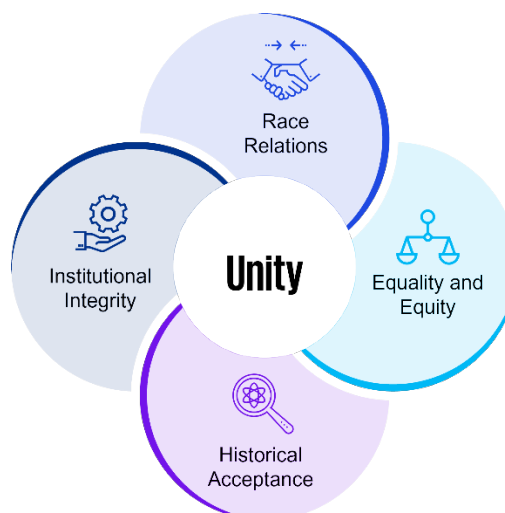


Figure 3 – Five dimensions of reconciliation (Reconciliation Australia – What is reconciliation)

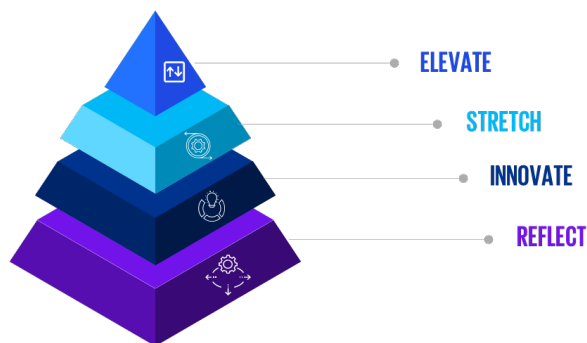
RAP Classifications

Reconciliation Australia's RAP Framework includes four different types of RAPs which allow organisations to continuously develop their reconciliation commitments. Listed in the graphic above, each classification of RAP is designed to align with an organisation's point in their reconciliation journey.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Reconciliation Australia, n.d., Reconciliation Action Plans

⁶⁵ Reconciliation Australia, 2021, State of Reconciliation Australia Report

⁶⁶ Reconciliation Australia, n.d., The RAP Framework



'Action needs to go further than an engagement strategy, we are already engaging'

– Industry stakeholder

Figure 4 – The RAP Framework and four RAP types (Reconciliation Australia)

ELEVATE

- **How long:** ongoing
- **For:** Organisations with a 'proven track record' of embedding effective RAP initiatives via stretch RAPs, and are ready to take on leadership to advance national reconciliation
- **What:** Have specific requirements, expectations and processes
- **Commitment means:**
 - Maintaining a strong strategic relationship with Reconciliation Australia
 - Actively championing initiatives to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and create societal change
 - Requirement for greater transparency and accountability through independent assessment of their activities

STRETCH

- **How long:** 2-3 years
- **For:** Organisations that have developed strategies and established a strong approach to advance reconciliation internally and within the organisation's sphere of influence
- **Commitment means:**
 - Requirement to embed reconciliation strategies and initiatives into everyday operations and functions so they are 'business as usual'
- **Focuses** on long term strategy development and working towards defined measurable targets and goals

INNOVATE

- **How long:** 2 years
- **For:** Organisations ready to outline actions to achieve its reconciliation vision
- **Commitment means:**
 - Deepening an organisation's understanding of its sphere of influence
 - Establishing best approach to advance reconciliation journey
 - Developing and piloting innovative strategies to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- **Focuses** on strengthening relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, engaging staff and stakeholders in reconciliation

REFLECT

- **How long:** 12 months
- **For:** Organisations new to reconciliation and not sure how to get started
- **What:** Lays out steps to prepare an organisation for reconciliation
- **Commitment means:**
 - Scoping and developing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders
 - Exploring an organisation's 'sphere of influence'
- **Focuses** on determining an organisation's vision for reconciliation

Who has a RAP?

Over 1,100 organisations across the private, public and not-for profit sector currently have a RAP in Australia.⁶⁷ Since 2006 over 970 organisations have created a RAP, among them a handful of agribusinesses including GrainCorp, Incitec Pivot, and the ILSC.⁶⁸

However, consultation with key Indigenous and agricultural stakeholders highlighted there is capacity to increase Indigenous participation in agriculture by driving agribusiness to develop a RAP increasing commitment across the industry.

Goal of a RAP

RAPs are used to build and signal an environment of cultural safety across workplaces, education and training institutions, and industries. Consultation emphasised the importance of RAPs to create a stepping stone in building mutual understanding, cultural sensitivity and solidarity with employees from diverse backgrounds, and that the importance of executive and board-level involvement in such programs should not be underestimated. These are critical tools through which the Australian agriculture industry can reflect whole-of-organisation and industry support for inclusion, acknowledge the past and progress forward.



‘RAPs create an inclusive space for Indigenous Australians within industry... They are a critical element necessary to sustain inclusion efforts and highlight to Indigenous Australians that their respective employer or future employer has taken meaningful action to advance reconciliation.’

– Amy Brooks



Case Study | Indigenous-informed Reconciliation at OBE Organic

Empowering Indigenous people to lead reconciliation journeys and tell their stories plays a critical role in fostering change and respect. OBE Organic (OBE), a Queensland-based organic beef export and marketing business, demonstrated the importance of this dynamic in its own reconciliation journey starting in 2017, which has since set a valuable example to other Australian agribusinesses.

In discussing the company’s reconciliation journey, OBE stakeholders insisted on hearing the voice of Traditional Owners. They determined that essential to the success of their journey, was ensuring Owners were included and aware that they had a voice. In 2017, Wangkangurru woman Joyleen Booth and Wulli Wulli woman Amy Brooks contributed to the design and implementation of OBE’s first RAP as part of a diverse working group which would inform and advise on the development of the RAP’s contents. The leadership of Brooks and Booth was instrumental in bringing the importance of cultural awareness to life in the company, improving staff’s knowledge and holistic understanding of the history of Indigenous contributions to agriculture.⁶⁹

As one of the first Australian agribusinesses to adopt a RAP, OBE has stated it hopes to inspire other organisations across the industry to also acknowledge the valuable contributions made by Indigenous Australians to agriculture by embarking on the RAP journey.⁷⁰ To date, OBE has implemented two RAPs (Reflect and Innovate), developed a vision for reconciliation in Australia and identified the role of OBE in realising that vision.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Reconciliation Australia, n.d. Who has a RAP?

⁶⁸ OBE Organic, n.d., OBE Organic initiates its Reconciliation Action Plan

⁶⁹ Red Meat Advisory Council, 2022, Australian beef Sustainability Framework, Annual Update 2022

⁷⁰ OBE Organic, n.d., OBE Organic initiates its Reconciliation Action Plan

⁷¹ OBE Organic, 2022, Sustainability Report 2022



‘Our Vision for reconciliation is an Australia that proudly embraces Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as integral to our national identity. An Australia that does this will instinctively recognise past wrongs and include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people in all aspects of our society. For OBE Organic to play our role in this vision, we will work to build respect, relationships and opportunity in our business, in our supply chains and in our industry.’

– OBE Organic

OBE’s RAP enables all employees and stakeholders to thrive in a culturally safe environment. The release of OBE’s Reflect RAP, for example, included company training in cross-cultural awareness and appreciation. The company also promotes the inclusion of Indigenous people and culture by recognising and promoting significant dates, stories and events for Indigenous Australians. OBE has hosted screenings of Indigenous films as a way to build an inclusive work environment, pay respect and embed diversity in company culture. The goal of these kinds of programs is to continue to work toward an authentic cultural shift in the business, where all stakeholders appreciate the benefits of diversity and the importance of cultural competency.⁷²

When reflecting on OBE’s RAP journey, Booth stated:



‘OBE has learnt so much in the reconciliation journey. I don’t mind if other businesses don’t have a RAP, but given the contribution of Aboriginal stockmen and stockwomen to the development of the pastoral industry [for example] – why wouldn’t you want to acknowledge that? Why wouldn’t you want to use a simple process that signals to others you want to learn and show respect?’

– Joyleen Booth

From a communications perspective, OBE uses its social media platforms as a vehicle to profile Indigenous stakeholders and spread awareness of their contributions to the red meat industry. The company’s published Reconciliation Vision outlines the milestones of the OBE’s reconciliation journey and promotes transparency in reporting on progress toward these milestones.⁷³

As demonstrated by the contribution of Booth and Brooks as members of OBE’s Reconciliation Action Plan committee, agribusinesses have the power to embark on a journey towards reconciliation that is Indigenous-informed and industry-aligned. OBE Organic Managing Director Dalene Wray reflects on the importance of this inclusion:



‘Working with Joyleen and Amy has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career. Developing our RAP has made me look at our business in a new light, and I would recommend any company to undertake this process’

– Dalene Wray

Whether through the implementation of a RAP or the pursuit of an alternative pathway to reconciliation, Australian agribusinesses have a responsibility to foster an industry underpinned by cultural awareness and inclusion, and more importantly give Indigenous individuals the platforms to spread this awareness. Given the historic, ongoing and future contributions of Indigenous men and women to Australian agriculture, initiatives that seek to amplify the voice of Indigenous people to acknowledge these contributions will be game changers in reconciliation.

⁷² OBE Organic, 2021, Milestones in our Journey to Reconciliation

⁷³ OBE Organic, 2021, Milestones in our Journey to Reconciliation

An aerial photograph of a red harvester operating in a forest. The harvester is moving through a dense stand of trees, leaving a trail of cut logs behind it. The image is oriented vertically, with the harvester at the top and the forest floor at the bottom. The harvester has a yellow canopy and a large engine compartment. The forest floor is covered in brown leaves and branches.

Taking action

Opportunities to increase Indigenous engagement, recognition and participation in Australian agriculture will only succeed through a shared approach. Agribusinesses, peak industry bodies, government, land councils, education and research bodies and importantly, individuals within these entities, all have a role to play in driving a new era of growth and mutual benefits.

Agricultural organisations and individuals are committed to leading this change and doing so in a way that is mindful of the past yet focused on the future. However, tangible change will not be achieved without all parties at the table.

We acknowledge that Indigenous participation is an iterative, evolving space within a much larger context and policy landscape than just one industry lens. However, this report seeks to unpack and recommend the ways in which engagement can be strengthened within the agriculture sector specifically and contribute to the broader trajectory of reconciliation in Australian society.

Recommendations to strengthen recognition, engagement, and participation of Indigenous Australia in contemporary agriculture have been divided in to two overarching categories illustrated in **Figure 5**.



Figure 5 - Recommendations to strengthen recognition, engagement, and participation of Indigenous Australia in contemporary agriculture (KPMG)

Co-creating economic partnerships and culturally safe environments

Expand current industry diversity and leadership programs to focus more heavily on Indigenous inclusion.

Current programs in place across the agriculture sector, such as the NFF's Diversity in Agriculture Leadership or AgCAREERSTART, as well as the Federal Government Community Development Program (CDP) (currently in a process of being updated to a new jobs program) administered by the National Indigenous Australians Agency and the Indigenous Ranger Program. These programs have the capacity to give priority to Indigenous Australians and groups. While the focus of the two listed NFF programs to date has been on increasing gender diversity in the agricultural workforce which has its place in the current market, there is a gap in providing greater opportunities for Indigenous individuals in their own right to contribute. This is not dissimilar to most agricultural diversity programs in place across industry, with a strong focus on gender over cultural diversity.

Similarly, programs designed to accelerate the involvement of young people in agriculture could be strengthened by attraction and retention mechanisms designed specifically for Indigenous groups, which will in turn help address perceptions of potential isolation in the sector. Currently, Indigenous Australians are seen as a 'subset of a subset' in these kinds of initiatives, which leads to feelings of resistance and exclusion from the sector.

Government and industry are well-placed to develop Indigenous-specific leadership programs to empower Indigenous youths, the only growing youth demographic in Australia, to capitalise on

the range of career opportunities available in the agriculture sector both pre- and post-farm-gate. Further, Federal Government programs such as the Indigenous Ranger Program could see greater success and reception through an increased focus on Indigenous groups and businesses.



'The cultural element needs to be embedded from the get-go'

– Indigenous stakeholder

Promote the development of Indigenous awareness, engagement and Reconciliation Action Plans.

Australian agricultural leaders face a pressing need to develop and enforce robust, culturally literate frameworks and strategies for Indigenous engagement that foster inclusion, mutual understanding and respect. In the best-case scenario this framework will come in the form of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), for contemporary agribusiness.

While Indigenous cultural awareness and engagement strategies are an important starting point, the progression to and development of a RAP is a demonstration of a commitment and willingness to drive tangible change in the involvement of Indigenous Australians in the agriculture sector. However, it is important that RAPs are not treated as a means to an end, paving an industry's and organisation's clear, actionable pathway to reconciliation which does not disregard the past but signals of aspirations for a new future.



'We need to approach this space genuinely...reconciliation cannot be treated as a box-ticking exercise or a bolt-on'

– Industry stakeholder

Endorse models such as Joint Ventures which balance the co-existence of Caring for Country and commercial agriculture, with specific relevance to government-driven initiatives and on-the-ground participants. Ensure there is consistent consultation with Indigenous stakeholders, underpinned by FPIC principles, in establishing these models.

The success factors of mixed-use models which balance Caring for Country with contemporary sustainable agricultural practices, need to be explored and expanded at scale. Particularly with regard to driving investment in native land titles recently handed back to Indigenous groups, joint ventures or other shared models are important mechanisms to create shared opportunities and mutually beneficial commercial and cultural outcomes.

Both government and industry have a role to play in providing Indigenous Australians with opportunities to pursue business and conservation endeavours on land and water assets shared with contemporary agriculture businesses. It is recommended that government and industry endorse the use of mixed models such as joint ventures to enable this connection, with appropriate management support in place.

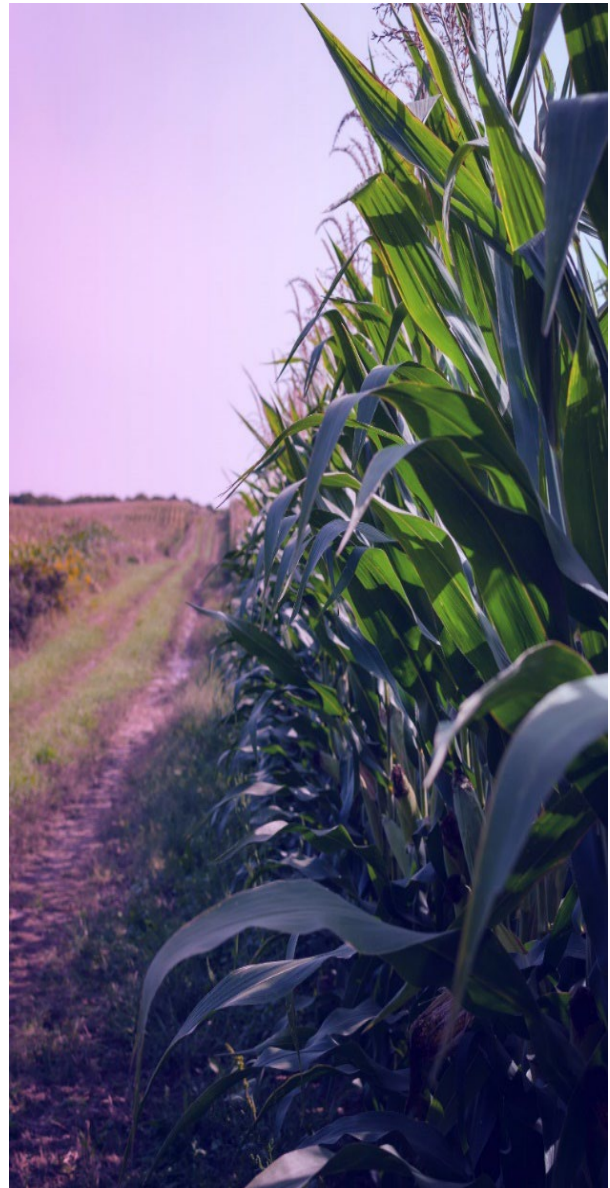
All new joint business ventures also require a holistic element of consultation with relevant leaders and stakeholders to ensure long-term viability. This may require involvement from organisations like the ILSC to act as an intermediary body to facilitate connection between Indigenous groups and agribusiness opportunities, and support in capability building and empowering on-the-ground leadership. This could also involve scaling successful initiatives such as the Indigenous Rangers Program to drive greater commercial opportunities which balance productivity with conservation.



‘With industry partnerships, addressing conflicting priorities is a key element...If looking for a partnership, understand how you will align and what the goals are.’

– Industry stakeholder

Emphasising localisation will be key to actioning this recommendation, as agricultural stakeholders must appreciate the cultural nuances of various Indigenous groups according to geography, history, and custom. Both industry and government need to acknowledge that Indigenous Australia is not a homogeneous culture and therefore any efforts to drive shared economic opportunities must be tailored to the unique ways of working and particular circumstances of all Indigenous Australians.



Advocate for the integration of cultural awareness and cultural competency training in agriculture-related education and training environments, and workplaces.

Broad consultation across the Indigenous and agriculture landscape highlighted a key issue in lack of awareness and general competency amongst agribusinesses of Indigenous culture. This is a major barrier to the attraction and retention of Indigenous participants in agricultural education as well as workforce opportunities, driving inherent misperceptions and negative attitudes towards the industry.

Industry organisations have a role to play in advocating for and endorsing Indigenous education and employment programs, in place by both government and industry, that:

- Respect the individual nuances and ways of working of different Indigenous groups
- Enable mobility of participants to ensure connection back to family and community support structures
- Are outcome-led, meaning programs show individuals the potential career pathway opportunities to which participation can lead
- Encourage participation and enable career opportunities in agriculture beyond the farm-gate
- Create forums to enable and promote knowledge sharing inclusive of traditional land and water management practices

It is recommended that industry bodies and large agricultural employers advocate for the integration of cultural competency training as a consistent requirement across all agricultural university degrees and other training programs, as well as in agribusiness workplaces. As a first step, this could include board members undertaking cultural awareness training to ensure they are able to be more supportive of an inclusive, respectful company agenda.



'Organisations need to look internally at what they can do to make people want to stay. Embed cultural awareness and frameworks to appropriately accommodate cultural leave...Do the work to make sure you are an employer of choice'

– Industry stakeholder



Promoting and expanding current contributions

Greater emphasis on diversity, commitment to workforce development and strengthening of Indigenous industry leadership is needed to increase inclusion in the sector and facilitate the expansion of self-determination and economic prosperity.⁷⁴

Ensure opportunities available for Indigenous businesses to access capital are designed in line with cultural considerations and nuances.



'Some of the biggest producers identify as being Indigenous but have never been asked'

– Indigenous stakeholder

There are various ways in which new and evolving Indigenous agricultural businesses and joint ventures can access government funding through grants as well as institutional investment mechanisms. However, the design of this capital in terms of application, verification and proof of progress requirements is not reflective of the diverse ways of doing business.

Indigenous agricultural leaders and enterprises need confidence they can succeed in attracting and utilising investment in circumstances that may not include a typical corporate boardroom scenario. Further, they need to have the option to demonstrate return on investment according to their own timelines and indicators, in line with traditional land and water management practices and general Indigenous ways of working. If capital investment opportunities can be expanded through a cultural lens, Australia's government and financial sectors may just unlock a whole new realm of thriving Indigenous business opportunities.

Improve reporting and measurement of current Indigenous contributions to Australian agriculture.

To better reflect the true contributions of Indigenous Australians to Australian agriculture, it is recommended that work be undertaken to improve measurement and reporting to extract more recent, holistic data. Currently, workforce members in the Australian agriculture sector are not given sufficient opportunities to identify their cultural heritage. Workforce reporting at the company and industry level should give all members the option to do so, in order to create a more accurate picture of current participation across land and sea agricultural businesses.

Strengthen publicity and promotion of Indigenous participation in agriculture, beyond the scope of niche, pre-conceived forms of participation.

Current media exposure of Indigenous participation in agriculture is sourced predominantly in specialist diversity media agendas, which are disproportionately focused on traditional perceptions of Indigenous agribusinesses such as native foods. Opportunities to increase industry awareness of the contributions of Indigenous Australians to contemporary agriculture, beyond this scope are limited. Further, there is a lack of specialist focus on Indigenous groups specifically in Australia's agricultural research and development landscape to support these contributions.

It is recommended that government consider means to increase the exposure of Indigenous agriculture businesses as well as the coverage of issues impacting them in research and development investments. The Federal Government should ensure all Rural Research and Development Corporations are allocating proportionate investment to Indigenous inclusion and participation in the sector. This means including Indigenous issues in research and development investment and highlighting Indigenous involvement in reporting, particularly where Indigenous businesses are heavily contributing to existing levy fund structures. This also includes providing opportunities for levy payers to identify cultural heritage in order to formally acknowledge their contributions and raise the public profile of the Indigenous sector.

⁷⁴ National Agricultural Labour Advisory Committee, 2020, National Agricultural Workforce Strategy



Improve the visibility of Indigenous agribusiness and agricultural products

Indigenous commercial or competitive advantage within markets is most evident in culture-based industries where the advantage is in the uniqueness of the product, including arts and crafts. But also, where products or services are land or location based and where practices are underpinned and informed by Indigenous cultural values, such as natural resource management and primary production.⁷⁵

While there are many Indigenous peoples and cultures in Australia, those commonly held cultural values particularly relevant to agricultural production include a holistic sense of oneness and interdependence with, and reverence for land that is encapsulated by the concept of Caring for Country.

Indigenous agribusinesses have an opportunity to differentiate their products, and earn a premium for them, where consumers place a value on production practices consistent with Indigenous culture, or simply wish to preference Indigenous products as positive act of economic inclusion.

There is an opportunity to deliver ongoing and additional prosperity for Indigenous communities and agribusinesses by making it possible to prove the provenance of Indigenous agricultural products in the marketplace.

It is recommended stakeholders, including Indigenous peoples, government and industry, consider exploring options for making Indigenous agribusiness and agricultural products more visible, along supply chains and in markets

⁷⁵ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 'Open for Business: Developing Indigenous enterprises in Australia', Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, p 20. At:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=atsia/indigenousenterprises/report.htm (accessed 7 May 2023).

Contributors and Acknowledgements

KPMG Contributors

Georgie Aley
Glen Brennan
Robert Poole
Jacqui Payne
Bernard Kelly
Evie Murdoch

NFF Contributors

Fiona Simson
Tony Mahar
Natalie Somerville
Richard Shannon
Alkira Remaj
Chris Young
NFF Indigenous Engagement Working Group

KPMG and the NFF would also like to acknowledge the additional external contributors who provided input and feedback to the report.



Contact us



Georgie Aley

Partner, National Sector Lead – Consumer Packaged Goods and Agribusiness

M: 0447 680 359

E: galey@kpmg.com.au



Glen Brennan

Lead Partner - KPMG Indigenous Services

M: 0410 448 929

E: glenbrennan@kpmg.com.au

[KPMG.com.au](https://www.kpmg.com.au)



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