

Western Australian Service to Aboriginal Pastoralists

**Kay Bodman and Mark Chmielewski Department of Agriculture and Food
Western Australia**

Introduction

Sixty culturally and geographically diverse Aboriginal communities in Western Australia hold commercial pastoral (beef) leases. These often very isolated communities have varying skills requirements for animal husbandry, business operation and regulatory observance. Like all developing enterprises they also need strategies for improving infrastructure (fences, yards and waters) and improved herd characteristics (genetics and viable numbers). Other communities manage rural land where agricultural and horticultural crops and sheep are the foci.

The Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia has worked in formalised relationships with Aboriginal primary producers for the last seven years. From 2001 a holistic government service woven from a broad raft of disciplines has worked in close partnership with more than thirty widely dispersed Aboriginal communities. This relationship is characterised by the ratio of government officers to the number of properties - one officer to two Aboriginal pastoral trainees to three properties – to provide action based business mentoring and in-situ skills development. Each property may have up to 20 people who are being assisted by this mentoring process. Training is concentrated on business governance, herd development and management and cattle marketing, and for the optimum use and return from the land and infrastructural investments. Income from cattle or wool or other produce and services (eg agistment) generate income for business and community development.

The understanding between a Departmental officer and the directors of the property begins with an assessment of the property and the aspirations of the community. A training-needs analysis is then conducted for each person from the community nominated to work in the agricultural enterprise and an individual training plan developed for the purposes of individual skill development. The governance structure within each enterprise is strengthened by skills transfer in: communication protocols, setting and observing role responsibilities, financial management, workforce management and supervision and business reporting. This in-turn helps to develop production and marketing strategies.

To date the successes include:

- 17 full-time jobs,
- 67 part-time jobs,
- 1,245 training participations between June 2006 – June 2008,
- 98% reduction in animal welfare issues,
- 536% increase in herd size,
- 780% increase in herd value,

- 272% sales increase and
- 30 business plans developed and in operation.

Background

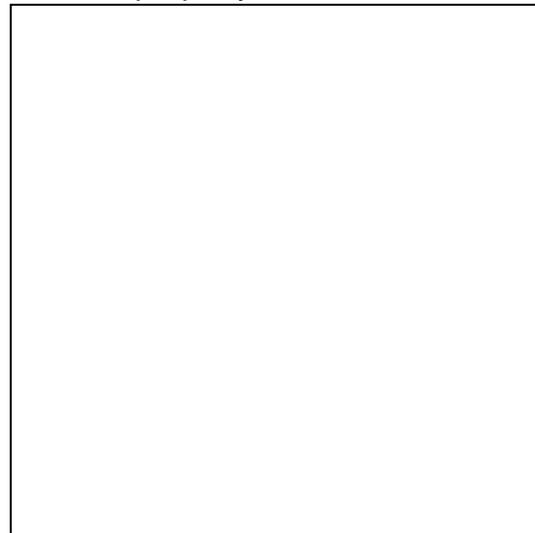
Aboriginal corporations hold over 100 rural properties with varying potential for primary production in the State of Western Australia. Over the last two years the operators of sixty-four properties have requested sometimes very substantial assistance from government. The support required mentoring, access to training and production advice and these were jointly funded by the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) and the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia (DAFWA).

Thirty of the enterprises partner formal Aboriginal mentoring projects led by DAFWA. The successful Indigenous Management Support Service (IMSS) program formally commenced in 2002. Its concept was refined from an earlier pilot partnership arrangement with one of the far NW West Australian Kimberley-based Aboriginal properties.

History

In 1997 a DAFWA Stock Inspector employed on the Bovine Tuberculosis Eradication scheme began a productive relationship with an Aboriginal Director from the remote Noonkanbah Pastoral Station while working with that property. To ensure continuity the Station Director and his community proactively sought a then unorthodox arrangement with government where the pastoral station purchased the consultancy time of the officer. For the next five years the officer and the Aboriginal pastoralist worked with the employees of the station to improve their animal husbandry practices, the herd numbers and health, and the infrastructure of the station. Through strong Aboriginal leadership and the officer's external skills input into that business, the pastoral company climbed out of chronic debt into a position where it

could grow the business to make a positive return to the 450 people representing the community connected culturally to, and living on the property.

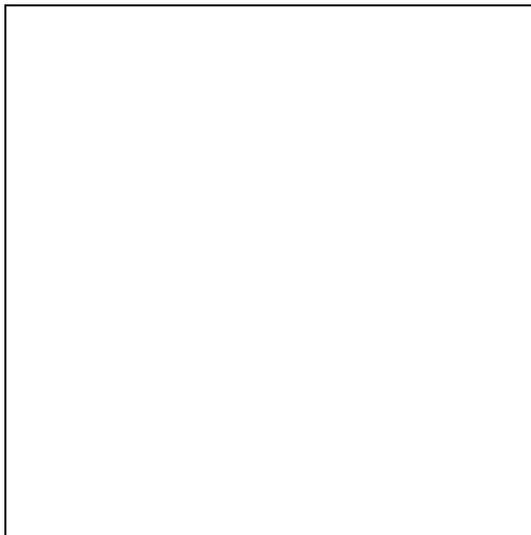


Insert Picture 1 here Ngi Ngi

Station Director Dicky Cox with trainer Bevan Bessen tell the benefits of Governance to neighbouring station

During those five years (1997 to 2002), a strategic plan and a pastoral plan were developed and these became the foundations for governance of the pastoral business by the community through its Directors. While skills in animal management had developed well, the need for skills in the business-management side of the property (a company now making large incremental changes) became very apparent. In 2002, the need for similar business management and production skills was as evident to other Aboriginal held properties and the Kimberley Indigenous Management Support Service (KIMSS) began, enabled through a resource partnership between the DAFWA and the federal agency, the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC)

Insert photo2 – Noonkanbah - Millijiddee



Training session at Noonkanbah Station

The initial stimulus to partner a project depends on individual leaseholder circumstances. For instance many facets of production can cause concerns pertinent to the conditions of the lease, and when working through these issues the underlying cause may be revealed as a breakdown in the governance of the necessary business processes. Other prompts to join could include the need to improve profitability, taking care of country and the need to improve infrastructure through more widely formed decision-making.

Starting with six properties that were on average visited once a fortnight by a DAFWA officer, KIMSS has now grown to include 16 properties in the Kimberley with many more communities there and elsewhere requesting to join the project. The major limitation is the number of officers suited to the task of participating with remote and substantially nomadic communities with English as a second or third or fourth language. The ratio is one officer to three properties, so that each property can receive both routine and reactive attention. One DAFWA officer to 100 people requiring in-situ and strategic skills development is just manageable in remote locations.

That model of engagement started in the Kimberley, has been adapted to other regions of Western Australia where other formal regional programs engage in either or both the development of Aboriginal agricultural and pastoral enterprises and protection of a group's natural and spiritual heritage. Aboriginal connection to country, its spirit and nurturing ability is the core to their culture.

Context of Properties

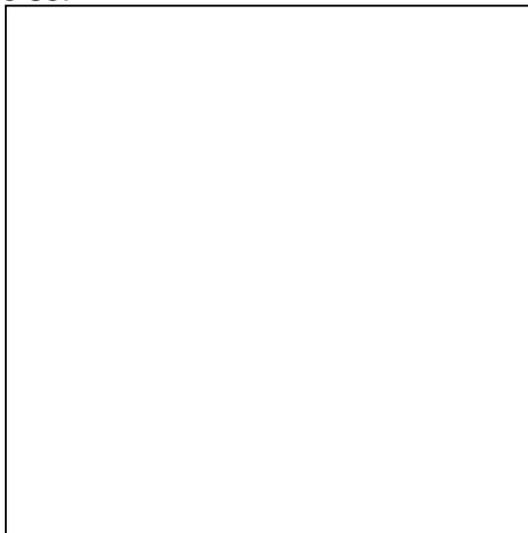
As of December 2006, Indigenous land holdings in Western Australia were in excess of 2.5 million square kilometres - which is 14.5% of the State's land mass. Much of this has been leased/purchased by government on behalf of Aboriginal Communities, Aboriginal groups or an Aboriginal family or handed back from state lands. When the land has been divested to communities, groups or families the legal administration is under a Community Land Title, which is non bankable. The land cannot be traded or used as collateral for a bank loan. Many of the properties on handover therefore required investments not achievable by the recipients.

There was, and still is a traditional expectation that pastoral operations are to provide jobs, a living area and income to support the group that could be just a family unit of six (6) to a community of 500.

Aboriginal people holding farming or pastoral properties have the common goals of reconnecting their people to the land and culture, to gain an extra source of income for the community, to create jobs for community members and to develop profitable and sustainable animal or cropping production. Entry to a project is enabled when the Directors of the property are committed to long term goals and strategies agreed to by their communities.

The DAFWA Indigenous Land Management Support Service

In Western Australia the majority of farmers and pastoralists gain their production information from a wide range of sources such as agricultural consultants, farm days or production groups. Not many Aboriginals participate in such forums. The Department's Indigenous Land Management Support Service doesn't replace these extension services, but gives Aboriginals with the confidence to participate in those production forums if they choose to do so.



Insert photograph 3 DAFWA Indigenous Management Support Team

Officers of the Indigenous management Support Team, DAFWA

The Department has developed its Indigenous Policy Statement, which is now in its second, five year phase.

The framework sets out the principles of engagement for the projects. By working collaboratively with Aboriginal land managers and other support agencies the Department will strive to maximise available funding and coordinate efforts to assist self sustainability in land management and economic development in all Aboriginal primary production pursuits.

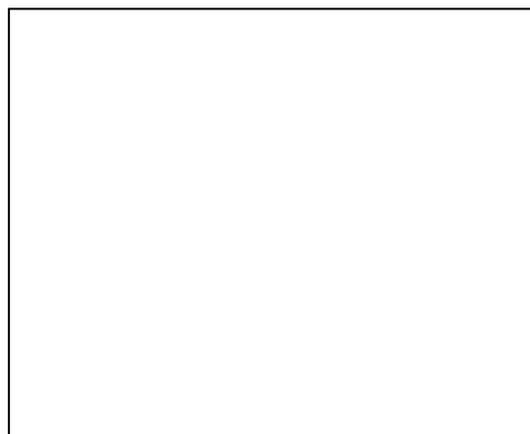
DAFWA is committed to the improvement of Aboriginal wellbeing and recognises the role traditional land owners play in managing and utilising the State's agricultural and pastoral resources. This strategy is built on a commitment to:

- Establishing linkages and partnerships with the Aboriginal communities, Individuals and other agencies to maximise the Agency's capacity to work for Indigenous Land Managers
- Reviewing and, where appropriate, re-engineering Agency policies, products and services
- Expanding Indigenous employment, development and management opportunities within DAFWA
- Providing new services with a goal of equity of service and outcomes for Indigenous clients.

When first developed in 2002 the Kimberley Indigenous Management Support Service was based on these commitments and strong partnership with the Aboriginal Directors of the participating properties to build strengths in:

1. Production Management
2. Marketing
3. Business Management
4. Capacity Building

All DAFWA Aboriginal projects focus on a partnership approach to build and improve the economic capacity of Indigenous held land where the land managers want to pursue agricultural activity. The outcome is to develop the properties and their management into sustainable economic units and be employers within their communities.



Insert photo 4 Gibb River Mt Barnett

Planning at Mt Barnett and Gibb River

Capacity building underpins the development of the business giving confidence in all facets of farming and pastoral practice as well as business management. Innovative governance and business skills development were identified as being pivotal to the long-term success and sustainability of the properties. The governance, leadership and workforce management training is increasingly necessary to formulate more complex operational processes and to do this the Aboriginal company directors and the communities they represent need to determine:

1. Future directions for the businesses and how these changes would be managed in the context of community rather than individual ownership of its land base and company resources,
2. How to best employ these resources to allow the communities to maintain the integrity of their traditions and cultural inheritance,
3. To determine who would take responsibility for what and what were the roles they needed to play,
4. What needs occur in the operational and daily workloads for each part of the business,
5. What skills are needed? Who has them? Where are there gaps? How are the gaps going to be managed? Who is going to be trained, how and by whom?

While each property has an individual property workplan, a common thread exists in the approach within the projects:

1. Determining the strategic future of enterprise through:
 - scoping the Community's and/or Business Director's ideas, wants, desires,
 - reviewing the land capability, infrastructure, stocking or cropping potential,
 - doing a gap analysis of land capability against community wants and desires revealing critical decision points for the ways forward.
2. Business development – based on decisions for a way forward through:
 - structuring the business,
 - governance of the business, and the formalising of the business practice,
 - setting and agreeing on the budget.
3. Production Plans which set the production cycles:
 - yearly workplan with priorities for each season
 - inputs budget,
 - marketing,
 - production development plan.
4. Infrastructure audit – infrastructure plan:

- what is currently there, water etc.,
 - what is required ie water points, irrigation, growing paddock etc.,
 - plan for purchasing, maintenance or replacement of priority infrastructure,
 - obtain funds, and if needed, assistance with writing of funding applications.
5. Training needs analysis – for the business and individuals:
- skills needed by the business,
 - skill available in the community, and within those people who will be working there,
 - training needs,
 - skills that will be bought in,
 - broker the training.
6. Benchmarking against industry standards:
- gap analysis and analysis of what needs improving.
7. Interacting with industry groups

Building capacity in Aboriginal community governance underpins all production development and aims to:

1. Educate and train members of the community to a standard and level of self-management that will enable them to run profitable and sustainable businesses and communities,
2. Provide Board members of the enterprises with an understanding of due diligence, their roles and responsibilities as Directors, and
3. Build the capacity in the community to understand

business needs and to train themselves.

This integrated approach provides many outcomes and benefits to all involved.



Insert photo 5 Revegetation project
Revegetation in the Great Southern

Seven years on and now into 2009, the Department has four formal Aboriginal capacity development projects:

1. The Kimberley Indigenous Management Support Service (KIMSS) with 15 properties formally involved 3 want to join.

2. The Pilbara Indigenous Management Support Service (PIMSS) with 8 properties involved and 1 joining in May
3. The Southern Agricultural Indigenous Landholder Service (SAILS) with 10 properties involved
4. New Opportunities in Tropical and Pastoral Agriculture (NOTPA) with 6+ enterprises involved

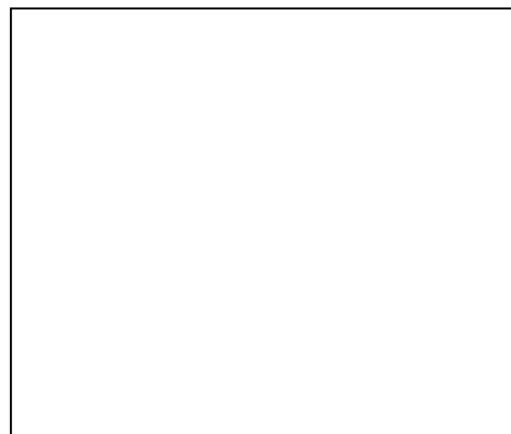
The NOTPA project concludes in June 2009, and leaves as one of its legacies the transforming the pick of wild harvested Indigenous plants such as gubinge (a number of *Terminalia* species, but predominately *F. ferdinandiana* used traditionally in Aboriginal diets) into commercial harvest of cultured crops. DAFWA is interacting with a number of other properties that want or are waiting to join a formal DAFWA project.

The KIMSS, PIMSS and SAILS projects each works differently, reflective of the types of pastoral business or farms, the expectations of the groups and differing climatic and farming conditions. Many of the farms and pastoral companies or farms are located in very remote areas of West Australia. Distance, community dispersal and for some properties almost total isolation during monsoonal conditions prevents a lot of travel and tele-communication, therefore the need is to work with directors and staff to develop a wider range of abilities which allow for on-going management and responsibility for achievement remains a priority with the group.

The projects are effective due to the commitment of the partners and the relationship formed between the Directors and staff on the properties and the DAFWA officers. This is all underpinned by training which is in the majority organised from the State's capital, Perth in collaboration between the project Departmental staff and the directors of the properties. To ensure effective learning most training is conducted on-farm in real life situations with trainers selected for their expertise, their abilities to work with Aboriginal people and their willingness to form an enduring partnership with the people.

One of the trainers has been working with Aboriginal agricultural businesses for the last ten years. He is keenly sought after to assist groups with their strategic planning and governance training. He also works in South Africa with the National Emergent Red Meat Producers' Organisation (NERPO). NERPO aims to improve commercialisation of the developing agricultural sector and in doing so ensure meaningful participation of Indigenous South Africans within the mainstream commercial agribusiness sector, hence ensuring the long-term

sustainability of the agricultural sector in South Africa.



Insert photo 6 NERPO

Trainer Beven Bessen at a NERPO meeting in South Africa

The DAFWA officers are in the projects because of their knowledge, their ability to work for a developing business, and their ability to be accepted by their clientele. The staff work physically very hard and during mustering, shearing and harvesting often work seven days a week for sustained periods. They become very much an integral part of the businesses, and at the request of the Aboriginal Directors may sit of Board of Management (as non-voting members) offering formal advice to all members of the Board. Such advice may include budgeting priorities, investment strategies and training needed to overcome major issues such as animal welfare.

Training

As training is the underpinning element of the service it is crucial that it be the best that can be sourced. While still maintaining broad community wishes, trainers are required to work in community context. Of similar, or even more importance, the success of training was considered by the community to be better assured if it occurred within its traditional Aboriginal environment and culture, giving a learning experience that was comfortable, relevant and reassuringly applicable. It can take several months to put this training into place, and its success relies on solid planning, consultation between participants and trainers, and commitment by the Enterprise Directors and Community Elders. Not only do the trainers have to work in and around the on-going work of the station or farm, the learning resources had to be created and translated into a language and style that met the needs of all.

The process that has proved successful for these communities, and has built community stakeholder-ship, is one that has had:

1. The right environment. The businesses were at the right stage of development for capture of external inputs and the need for consolidation before further growth occurred was recognised by ALL of the stakeholders.



Insert Photo 7 Mowla Bluff
Mowla Bluff Community Meeting

They had also recognized that success was contingent on ownership of the change process by Aboriginal decision-makers and that this was a complex process dependant on stakeholders regularly meeting, discussing and planning.

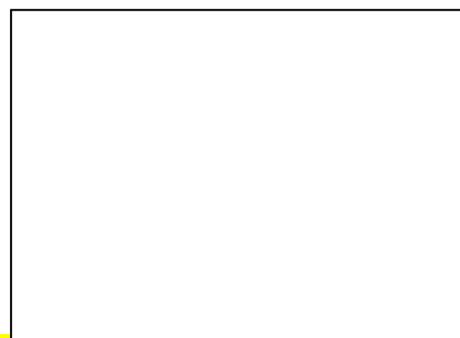
2. A mentor or on-going point of contact for the Directors and Community and the workers.

3. A Director-appointed training committee to ensure planning and participation and total commitment by all.
4. All resource materials prepared in styles, formats and languages that the Community feel comfortable with, and can learn from.
5. The best possible trainers who can form an on-going relationship with the Directors and Community
6. All stakeholders celebrating the success of the Directors and Communities when milestones are reached.

While production skills are important as 'tools' of the trade, it is strong governance which underpins business development and sustainability. In practical terms the impact and results of governance training are:

1. Improvements in governance as evidenced by:
 - a. A current Constitution which reflects current financial and business activity and current membership of the companies,
 - b. Defined functions, roles and responsibilities,
 - c. Constant reviews of budgets, strategic plans and cattle sales targets,
2. Qualified Community Trainers, with Aboriginal people now training others,
3. A positive change in confidence and self esteem and consequent willingness to strive further to achieve higher goals,
4. A thirst and eagerness for learning,
5. Changing attitude to working in a business environment,
6. Increased community morale and community members self esteem,
7. The Directors' pride, and this is summed up in one Chairman's (Dickey Cox) comment "This (business governance) is what we have needed for a long time",
8. The effects of the training are evidenced in the other businesses and conduct of Communities. There is a spill over effect. If the business is improving and creating extra income, the associated community benefits in many other ways.
9. Resource materials which meet Australian National Best Practice Framework and Guidelines for Advancing Reconciliation.
10. A community feeling of well-being.

Where possible we seek formal qualifications for production skilling with Certificates and Diplomas in Pastoral Production and Natural Resource Management. In many cases the training will be non-credentialed but can be accredited through recognition of prior learning (RPL), or recognition of current competencies (RCC).



Insert photo of Trevor

Trevor parker of Peedamulla Station

To best illustrate the achievements of the projects, the following is a case study on job creation with the KIMSS project. Self-funding and sustainable work opportunities are welcomed outcomes of the projects. Jobs show that the input mix is correct and that mentoring partnerships deliver long term futures especially in job creation.

Job Creation

The Kimberley Indigenous Management Support Service (KIMSS) is a joint initiative of DAFWA and the ILC. It is the first time that significant financial, human and infrastructure resources have been delivered to Aboriginal pastoral enterprises in a planned and comprehensive manner. This was a major step forward for Aboriginal pastoralists and has allowed them to develop their own enterprises that have subsequently achieved a variety of economic, social and employment outcomes. KIMSS itself is made up of, the project manager, 3 coordinators, 1 technical officer and 3 trainees. Of the 8 staff 5 are Aboriginal people from the Kimberley. It is expected that a further 4 Indigenous staff, in the Halls Creek area, will join the project team early in 2009.

Through the provision of a robust model for Aboriginal pastoral engagement, KIMSS has achieved excellent economic and production results and is responsible for a host of positive social outcomes across different Aboriginal stations. KIMSS has for several years facilitated fulltime, seasonal and part time employment of Indigenous people by providing mentoring, training and management support to establish and build viable Indigenous pastoral businesses.

There is considerable opportunity for Aboriginal employment initiatives to dovetail with KIMSS. Many of the KIMSS staff is well placed to identify young Aboriginal participants for employment initiatives. In addition, KIMSS staff can help identify non-Aboriginal properties suitable for the placement of Aboriginal people and could suggest appropriate mentors for the employment programs.

Indigenous corporations such Yungngora and Ngunjiwirri have strong working relationships with DAFWA. These successful relationships have resulted in increased productivity of the cattle enterprises, proving that Aboriginal stations can be productive when the right support structures are provided and with negative stereotypes about Aboriginal people and enterprises being successfully challenged.

In 2008 the project facilitated the employment of 86 Indigenous Kimberley workers in the Indigenous pastoral industry, 67 seasonal, 17 fulltime. Additionally a further 19 were trained in the Halls Creek area with 15 finding employment in the mining, local government and pastoral sectors, this training was assisted and supported by KIMSS officers and Lamboo Station. A further 5 men were employed in contract mustering camps outside of the Kimberley in a joint management agreement setup by KIMSS between and Indigenous corporation and a pastoral contractor. In addition to all of this 6 Indigenous

men worked on a property near Derby with no pay at all, they were simply happy to see their property being managed for the first time in 27 years.

KIMSS has found the following principles critical in developing employment opportunities for remote Indigenous people:

- **Ownership**. The cattle company is owned, managed, operated and staffed by Indigenous people.
- **Commitment**. There is a determination and commitment by the Aboriginal Corporation to work in the business in all aspects where they have the capacity to do so.
- **Key People** The roles and responsibilities of key people clearly defined.
- **Governance** The most important of all. The capacity of the corporation Directors to develop and implement sound management systems. Nothing is achievable without sound corporate governance.
- **Training** develops the technical and management skills of Indigenous station directors, managers and workers for employment in the pastoral industry. Training pathways are developed to provide meaningful training and employment to the individuals involved. No 'training for training's sake'.
- **Education** Yungngora Aboriginal Association has established the Noonkanbah Agricultural Academy. The Academy has a focus on creating education pathways from School to employment directly addresses the existing 'school to welfare' pathway that has become a community vortex affecting the majority of school leavers in this remote region. The Academy operates in the classroom and the training environment of an operating business situation.
- **Relationships** The relationship between the extension officers and the station owners, managers and wider community is critical. Extension advice and management support is provided by DAFWA KIMSS project staff, all of whom have pastoral experience and networks in the broader industry.
- **Partnerships** Partnerships are vital to development of the business and creating employment options. An example of an important partnership is that between Indigenous Corporations and the ILC Land Management partnerships/support for infrastructure development.
- **Mentoring** The KIMSS Indigenous Trainee Manager Program is a targeted mentoring program addressing a skills deficit area in pastoral management. Most KIMSS staff have mentored an individual whom they have watched grow and become a key person on the properties that they work on. Achievements at an individual level have engendered pride, self-esteem and confidence. The level of mentoring is significant.
- **Responsive** Blanket approaches do not work; extension services must be sensitive to particular needs and issues. KIMSS program is robust

yet remains flexible to respond to localised needs. KIMSS staff describes KIMSS as a community-grown, community-directed program.

- **Stability** A core group of people have been involved on a regular basis with station operations began.
- **Opportunity** The ongoing development of new employment positions all filled by local community members. Opportunities for employee career development with the enterprise offering higher level managerial and directorship positions. Opportunities for community members to develop smaller supporting business ventures, such as contract mustering and contract fencing.
- **Tradition** The historical legacy of Aboriginal involvement in the pastoral industry is an important aspect of the KIMSS program.
- **Self Determination** An independent commercial source of income broadening the economic base enabling community investment in new enterprises that will offer further employment and income streams. Currently employees of are engaged through the federally funded Community Development Employment Program (CDEP). Wages are complimented with a 'top up' or bonus that is apportioned by the directors to employees on an individual performance assessment. All pastoral operations KIMSS works with aspire to provide employees with an income equivalent to the award wage and move off the CDEP, a real wage rather than handouts.

Conclusion

In Western Australia Aboriginal economical development in agriculture and pastoralism has been facilitated by an inclusive, strategic and intensive support effort from the Department of Agriculture and Food. Many of the underpinning processes for sustainable development hinge on strengthening governance and strategic, culturally sensitive skill development.

While the department has regionally-based projects each with its specific emphases, there are strong common elements for success.

There cannot be enough emphasis given to the reinforcement of Aboriginal understanding and ownership of all strategies and processes and the recognition of the community's and the case workers' combined determination for creating profitable enterprises providing jobs on traditional lands and pride in this accomplishment.

Further information about Aboriginal participation in agriculture and pastoralism

The National Emergent Red Meat Producers' Organisation (NERPO) aims to commercialise the developing agricultural sector and ensure meaningful participation of black individuals within the mainstream commercial agribusiness sector, hence ensuring the long-term sustainability of the agricultural sector in South Africa.

<http://www.nerpo.org.za/>

Lands of Promise and Opportunity, Aboriginal Pastoralism in Western Australia, 2008

http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/mediaFiles/pastoral_RITAP.pdf

For a starting point into the complex area Aboriginal Land ownership

http://ntru.aiatsis.gov.au/research/resourceguide/national_overview/national10.html

Kay Bodman

Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia

Kay.bodman@agric.wa.gov.au

27 February 2009