

Appendix 2

Engaging the state

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A core objective of the People on Country, Healthy Landscapes and Indigenous Economic Futures project, as outlined in Appendix 1, is to assist Indigenous land and sea managers to strengthen what we term the Caring for Country social movement by seeking the development of government policy and programs that recognise and support traditional owners to care for land and sea country. This objective reflected our aspiration in undertaking this research as well as those of our major sponsor the Sidney Myer Fund. The Sidney Myer Fund envisaged that more effective Indigenous natural and cultural resource management policies might generate significant national benefits including – economic benefits (addressing the costs of Indigenous disadvantage for both governments and Indigenous citizens); environmental benefits (facilitating better conservation and biodiversity outcomes in the face of serious and pressing threats); and social benefits (enhancing Indigenous cultural contributions, strengthening the reconciliation process and counteracting risks to the nation’s social fabric arising from disengaged and dysfunctional communities). Our sponsors were keen for the People on Country project to influence the Australian as well as State and Territory governments to enhance support for Indigenous land and sea management groups.

To achieve this objective is a challenging task, especially in an Indigenous policy environment where the ideas, aspirations and success of Indigenous initiatives are all too often based more on ideology and political considerations and less on evidence. To overcome such hurdles, the People on Country research staff engaged in an active publications program, in part for public education and in part to provide material for strategic use by our Indigenous research partners, but perhaps most importantly, as input to government policy-making processes. The goal of influencing policy formation with evidence from our research with community-based ranger groups was given high priority, because it facilitated the presentation of Indigenous views, primarily from remote and regional parts of Australia that are often absent as stakeholder input to government policy-making processes.

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