

# Spotlight on Carbon at New National Indigenous Carbon Forum

**Cissy Gore-Birch, Co-Chair, Indigenous Carbon Industry Network  
Jarú/Kija nation with connections to Balangarra, Nyikina and Bunuba country**

Indigenous groups from around Australia came together in February to hear the latest on the carbon industry at the first-ever **National Indigenous Carbon Forum**, which was held online due to COVID risks and hosted by Federal Parliament and Olympian Nova Peris.

The Indigenous Carbon Industry Network (ICIN) was proud to organise the event.

A national forum has been a long-held dream of Indigenous land-owners and managers from the north. Traditional Owners have been driving recognition of Indigenous rights and interests in carbon and developing opportunities for Aboriginal people to actively manage their country for many years.



Indigenous-owned carbon projects across northern Australia are making a huge difference to our lives through creating jobs and supporting opportunities for Indigenous people to care for country.

The network wants to give Indigenous groups interested in

becoming involved in the carbon industry the chance to meet with those already working in this space – so we can all share stories, information and experiences.

Our recent scoping work shows that there are currently around 35 Indigenous-owned



Nova Peris OAM hosts the 2022 National Indigenous Carbon Forum. Photo: ICIN

savanna fire management projects, as well as several Indigenous-owned Human-Induced Regeneration vegetation carbon projects registered in Australia through the Federal Government's Clean Energy Regulator. The projects are predominantly located across north Australia, and collectively abate or store around 1.2 million tonnes of greenhouse gases each year.

This is an important achievement, but there's room for growth to enable more First Nations people to benefit from these opportunities.

It's time for First Nations people to come together, to understand more about opportunities in the carbon industry, particularly around their rights and interests.

### **Indigenous Carbon Industry Network Launched**

Indigenous organisations from across Australia launched the Indigenous Carbon Industry Network (ICIN) at the forum as Australia's first independent Indigenous-owned not-for-profit company owned by Indigenous producers of carbon credits.

This is a significant milestone in the evolution of this Indigenous-owned and Indigenous-led industry and in supporting more Indigenous groups to benefit from opportunities emerging in carbon markets and carbon methods.

It is a huge achievement and demonstrates the growth and leadership of Indigenous people in the carbon industry.

The network aims to provide a voice for the Indigenous carbon industry and to enable more groups to gain a seat at the table of important industry and policy discussions.



Cissy Gore-Birch addressing the National Indigenous Carbon Forum. Photo: ICIN

Dozens of Indigenous organisations with carbon projects across Australia have been working together over many years to form this network. Our next step was to become a fully independent entity and this year we celebrate this achievement during the national forum.

It's great to see the carbon industry growing so quickly and we want to make sure that Balanda (non-Indigenous people) don't leave us behind.

In particular, the network would like to acknowledge the support Warddeken Land Management has provided in hosting ICIN, and thank its chair Dean Yibarbuk, who is now also ICIN's fellow co-chair together with me.

The Indigenous Carbon Industry Network is owned by its full members, being Indigenous groups that directly produce carbon credits across Australia, making it Australia's first peak industry body for the Indigenous carbon industry. It is overseen by a Board of seven Aboriginal people appointed by members, including myself and Dean. Indigenous groups with an interest in carbon are encouraged to join the network

as Associate Members to keep informed about the industry.

CEO of the Northern Land Council, Mr Joe Martin-Jard, said the land council was proud to be both a founding member of ICIN and Gold Sponsor of the Forum.

"As the Gold Sponsor of the National Indigenous Carbon Forum the NLC continues to recognise the importance of the innovative work done by the Indigenous Carbon Industry Network and its partners.

"We congratulate everyone involved in savanna fire projects, the ICIN and all those who have contributed to the design and development of this unique network.

"We are especially proud of the NLC ranger groups, who are at the tip of the spear of our war on carbon – these include Yugul Mangi, Numbulwar, Garawa, Waanyi-Garawa, Timber Creek, Wardaman and Wagiman Rangers, to name a few.

"We look forward to participating in a productive forum this week and to our continued engagement with ICIN and the continued success of Indigenous-led carbon initiatives."

## Forum highlights growing opportunities in a carbon market boom

**Anna Boustead, CEO, Indigenous Carbon Industry Network (Balanda/European heritage)**

Australian Government Clean Energy Regulator's Jennifer Bradley told the forum about the Federal Government's priorities for creating new methodologies that assess and award carbon credits, including new Savanna Fire Management methods and a new Integrated Farm Management method to support method stacking across the landscape. The Regulator also recently developed new methods for Blue Carbon, measuring the benefit from tidal restoration resulting from removing a barrier to the natural tide, and to measure Soil Carbon benefits from better land management.

The Carbon Market Institute and Market Advisory Group spoke of

a positive outlook in the national and global carbon market, where the price of carbon on the voluntary market has tripled in the past year to around \$53 per tonne, but since fell to around \$30 a tonne in March after the government announced it would allow some contracts to be released from the government market, the Emissions Reduction Fund.

Market Advisory Group's Lachlan Ince explained how Indigenous-owned ACCUs are a highly-sought premium product. "These credits are in demand due to the additional co-benefits they offer – from management of country, fire prevention and biodiversity outcomes."

Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation CEO Joe Morrison said that Aboriginal people are making a significant contribution to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in Australia.

"Indigenous projects account for 75 per cent of the emissions

abatement from the savanna sector at 1.2 million tonnes," Mr Morrison said.

"That's roughly 8 per cent of Australian carbon abatement – and it's growing.

"It's an incredible contribution given indigenous people comprise 3.3 per cent of the Australian population.

The forum also heard of Indigenous-led science aimed to develop methods to earn credits for broader land management, including the removal of feral buffalo and pigs.

Mimal Land Management CEO Dominic Nicholls said a collaboration with ranger groups and NAILSMA facilitated by ICIN has led to the draft of a wild herbivore management carbon method.

"It's one of our priorities for our land management activities, trying to find a solution to one of our biggest problems," Dominic Nicholls said. "Feral animals



Tyrone Garstone addressing the National Indigenous Carbon Forum. Photo: ICIN



are a massive threat that is devastating landscapes on a large scale.”

### **Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Interests in Carbon is Critical**

ICIN co-chair Cissy Gore-Birch told the forum that as groups begin to enter the market and as new opportunities come online, it's important to get the right information and to protect Indigenous rights.

“When you think about the story it's a win-win situation, you can't really lose out on this,” Ms Gore-Birch said. “It's really important to really think about where you are as Traditional Owners, understanding your rights and interest in this space, and making sure you get the right people and the right information.”

“The role that ICIN is playing in this space is to really get the information out to our members and to other Indigenous group about your rights and interest in the carbon space, to be able to advocate on our behalf to the federal government, to work in partnership with land councils and other groups.”

The forum also heard from Kimberley Land Council CEO, Tyronne Garstone – also a Director of ICIN – who said industry and governments must ensure that groups were not locked out of important opportunities to earn revenue by caring for their country.

“While carbon projects offer significant opportunities, without proper consultation and appropriate checks and balances, and a commitment to seeking ongoing free, prior and informed

consent, there is a risk of third-party projects contributing to the disempowerment of Indigenous people.”

“We need industry and policy-makers actively working to protect Native Title rights and interests, and ensuring access to these economic opportunities for Traditional Owners – in method development, consent considerations, and pricing discussions – to put Traditional Owners in the driving seat.”

#### **Further information**

See [www.icin.org.au](http://www.icin.org.au) for more information about the Indigenous carbon industry.

See [www.savannafireforum.net](http://www.savannafireforum.net) to view forum presentations and videos.

Sun shining through the trees, Kabi Kabi Country (Sunshine Coast). Photo Dora Bowles

