

Recording Traditional Knowledge Project

Aboriginal Employment Opportunities in the Avon River Basin

2008

Wheatbelt Development Commission
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Introduction

This document is a direct outcome of the Recording Traditional Knowledge Project (RTKP), which is an initiative undertaken by the Avon Catchment Council (ACC) as part of its engagement with Aboriginal people regarding Natural Resource Management (NRM) in the Avon River Basin (ARB).

The basis for the RTKP is established by the document *Ballardong Noongar Budjar: Healthy Country, Healthy People*, which is the Ballardong Natural Resource Management Working Group's (BNRMWG) contribution to the ACC's Investment Plan to June 30th, 2008. As the first of the Five Year Targets described (p13), it involves the recording of stories, songs and other information of significance to Noongar people, from the Yilgarn, Lockhart and Avon / Mortlock sub regions of the ARB. These locations typically express quite differing geological, botanical, hydrological and fauna attributes. They are also represented traditionally by different Noongar elders(see Appendix I re tribal boundaries), whose knowledge helps inform ACC decisions on investment into natural resource management activities for Aboriginal people in the region.

The document also outlines Ballardong peoples' desire for development of employment and economic opportunities in NRM. In particular, in the Five Year Targets, point No. 5, it discusses the rationale for this and then recommends the following:

- "That the ACC implement some form of affirmative action process to explore opportunities and to encourage and support Noongar people to take responsibility and to become pro-active in pursuing and fulfilling their aspirations in the activities of NRM in the Avon River Basin.
- That Council develop and implement policy that facilitates economic benefits to Noongar people involved in NRM activities and projects across the Avon River Basin." (p16)

These recommendations have been formally accepted by ACC (p15) and this document outlines some potential for this to occur through the RTKP and following activities.

History of “Working in the Land”

Traditional Noongar peoples association with the ARB is well documented through history and clearly described by the BNRMWG in *Ballardong Noongar Budjar* as an expression of both physical and spiritual relationship. Therefore it provided both a physical economy (food, shelter, water, warmth) and a spiritual foundation for existence, as part of a greater responsibility of ‘caring for country’ expressed through the Dreaming laws.

Therefore ‘working in the land’ traditionally wasn’t undertaken just to satisfy physical needs but was an essential part of a greater relationship and responsibility to the land. As the BNRMWG states;

“Our relationship with the land involved more than meeting the basic survival needs of food resources or materials for shelter and clothing. The land is not rocks, trees, animals and soil, all ripe for the taking; it provides an expression of the Dreaming, which guides and teaches people through a framework of traditional stories, rituals and ceremonies.”

Since the introduction of *wadjeila* (non-Aboriginal) people and culture, a more contemporary association has occurred through working for farmers in clearing and developing land, primarily in the first half of the twentieth century, but has continued to a much lesser degree to the present day. This was done for two main reasons. Firstly, to maintain where possible their connection to their land by staying and working in their ‘*ngank budjar*’, their mother country. Secondly, this provided some economic resources instead of total reliance on Mission or Government distributed rations (Haebich, 1988).

As the agricultural area continued to expand and farms became more mechanised, so Noongar people were hired less and less for farm labour needs. In addition, the clearing continued to such an extent that the natural bushland that was both an economic resource and home to the spirit beings of their Dreaming was drastically reduced. As Haebich states in “For Their Own Good”:

“Between 1903 and 1912 the area of alienated land in the State increased to 20 million acres and the wheat acreage grew from 138,000 in 1903 to 1.4 million in 1914 with an export value of 2.7 million pounds.”

Therefore the capacity of Noongar people to adequately provide their own ‘land-based’ economy, and care for and manage their land according to the laws and mandates of their dreaming is drastically reduced to almost non-existence in the twenty first century.

Discussions by the author with the members of the BNRMWG during 2007 suggest that this removal from their traditional lands and responsibilities is a key reason for many of the negative social, spiritual, mental and economic indicators in Noongar society; and for the devastated condition of the agricultural region that now necessitates the input of many millions of dollars to rectify through NRM and other land management practices. In other words, they suggest that the health and care of the land is intrinsically connected to the health of the Noongar people, as expressed in the title of their contribution to ACC’s Investment Plan; *Ballardong Noongar Budjar: Healthy Country, Healthy People*.

Potential Contributors & Resources for Employment Opportunities

This current document outlines opportunities for engagement of Noongar people in NRM and associated land management activities in the ARB, with a view to improving the health and wellbeing status of both the land and associated people (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal).

Development of any outcome will require human, financial and other practical resources. These are potentially available from several contributing groups including the local population, State and Commonwealth Governments, private investors, philanthropic sources and public lending institutions such as banks.

As stated, this aspect of the RTKP is primarily about identifying engagement opportunities, particularly for regional Aboriginal people in associated employment and economic development activities in NRM, in the ARB. Inevitably, the effectiveness of any initiative will depend on the participation of those people, preferably as early in the development process as possible. As the Project Period is rapidly passing, information gathering has just begun, and minimal exposure to the associated elders and groups has been available, any models suggested in this paper are prefaced with this point: "If the people want to...".

As it is unclear at this stage exactly what:

- works indigenous people are prepared to be involved in;
- age groups the workers might be; and
- status they may wish to work under,

it's not possible to say exactly who the contributors to employment and economic options will be. ACC has specific ideas of the work they are prepared to fund, however this is 'untested' regarding indigenous peoples work desires. There are also likely to be capacity issues for some people that may require addressing through pre-employment processes.

Given the previous cautions; there are also a large number of potential contributors and their resources available to help facilitate creation of sound economic opportunities, and the most relevant are presented for consideration.

Potential Contributors and Resources

Many relevant individuals and agencies, including regional Aboriginal people, NGO's, and both Commonwealth and State Governments; have long expressed strong concern about the condition of both Australia's natural environment and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As a consequence, there are a considerable number of agencies that may contribute to improvement in both. For example, while the Commonwealth Government has primary responsibility for indigenous affairs in Australia, the State Government also has a mandate and has recently (August 2007) expanded this to include indigenous economic development in a much bigger way.

Also, while the State Government has responsibility for conservation estate management and legislation such as the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1984* which is applicable to all land tenures, the Commonwealth shares some responsibilities for NRM activities and land rehabilitation on private property and government reserves. The Avon Catchment Council is an NGO with major responsibility to implement the Commonwealth's NRM programs, but also works closely where possible with the State Government through Department of Environment and Conservation. This interaction of responsibilities clearly demonstrates need for an integrated and coordinated inter-agency approach. Table 1 below shows the main potential contributors to economic development opportunities in the RTKP.

Table 1 Potential Contributors and Resources for employment and economic development opportunities identified through the RTK Project

Contributors	Agency type	Contribution
Aboriginal people, corporations and business aspirants.	Community based groups and individuals in the ARB wanting to work on the land.	Wide range of potential engagement activities and processes in labour service provision for <i>land based activities (lba's)</i> ; including employment, business management, conservation, heritage, and training. Some are operating already, others need facilitation services, capacity building and resources to engage.
Avon Catchment Council	Non Government Organisation(NGO)	Principal NGO responsible for NRM in the ARB. A potential employer in a cost sharing arrangement. Also cross regional capacity for developing opportunities that can be explored by ACC.
South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council (SWALSC)	Native Title Rep Body and NRM delivery agency	SWALSC are a key potential contributor as they are an employment provider for other NRM regions and may be part of future ACC investment phases.
Greening Australia, World Wildlife Fund etc.	Other Non-Government Organisations	Several other NGO's are NRM delivery agencies, have Aboriginal employment policies and strategies and are therefore potential employers.
CY O'Connor TAFE	Education Institution	Commonwealth funded tertiary education provider; possible training course design and delivery.
Local Government Authorities in the ARB	Government Authorities	The role of 34 Local governments within the ARB in NRM is becoming more apparent - they are key body to protecting cultural integrity at a local scale and may become employers through partnership arrangements.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	Commonwealth Government	Caring For Our Country Program Co-managers as part of the Australian Government Natural Resource Management Team
Department of Education, Training and the Arts	Commonwealth Government	Australian Government Apprenticeships Program
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations	Commonwealth Government	National Indigenous Cadetship Program. Up to \$15,400/annum to employers.
Department of Environment and Conservation	WA State Government	Potential employee 'sharing' arrangement to have 2 people working in Conservation Estate for 6 months of the year with onsite training in short course competencies. MATES Program- Three year on-job training up to Certificate IV in Conservation and Land Management. Graduate Recruit Program – 10 week intensive course with Cert IV CALM Certificate as pre-requisite. Heritage Officer positions.
Department of Indigenous Affairs	WA State Government	Primary State Government Aboriginal economic development agency. Coordinating role among key agencies forming CONRACE-the Council of Natural Resources Agency Chief Executives(Hicks, 2006,p53) These are now DAFWA, DEC, DPI, DoW and DIA. Heritage Officer positions.
Dept Agriculture & Food WA	WA State Government	Information provider on NRM issues in the ARB, available though website. AgBis-Indigenous Program provides assistance to indigenous people in developing farm forestry and other sustainable agricultural opportunities. Recent commitment by Northam office to help develop indigenous opportunities.
Dept of Education and Training	WA State Government	Traineeships and apprenticeships providers. Recent contact with VET Officer suggests strong interest in developing transitional programs.
Dept of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts	Commonwealth Government	Caring For Our Country Program Co-managers as part of the Australian Government Natural Resource Management Team

		<p>\$2.25 billion over 5 years from 1 July 2008. Relevant funding includes Indigenous Rangers (\$90m), Indigenous Protected Areas (\$50m) & Indigenous Carbon Trading (\$10m)</p> <p>Environmental Stewardship Program provides long term payments to landholders (up to 15 years) to achieve conservation objectives on their land.</p> <p>Indigenous Heritage Program provides grants of \$5,000 to \$100,000.</p>
Dept of Industry and Resources-Office of Aboriginal Economic Development	WA State Government	Project based indigenous economic development funding through Regional Development Commissions and own projects.
Dept of Water	WA State Government	Natural Resource Management Officer (NRMO) position and associated JDF. Potential for indigenous NRMO positions in future.
Forest Products Commission	WA State Government	Farm forestry services contractor.
Land Conservation District Committees	NGO	Community based coordination for small catchments; planning and service providers in NRM activities.
MaxNetWork Employment	Wheatbelt Job Network Member & Placement Company	Training and employment services provider.
Wheatbelt Development Commission	WA State Government	Information and facilitation services in indigenous economic development.
Private Forestry Companies	Private companies	Have planted areas with different species and products. May require extra labour force to tend plantations.
Managed Investment Trusts	Private companies	As above; have invested in farm forestry and may require extra labour force.

Some of the opportunities, key contributors and potential resources from Table 1 are expanded in the following section.

Opportunities, Contributors and Resources

1. Aboriginal people in the ARB are the primary contributors to their own economic development in *land based activities* (*lba's*). 'Lba's" refers to a wide range of any employment or economic development activities undertaken on the land, including agriculture, farm forestry, rehabilitation and conservation. The full extent of ARB Aboriginal people's aspirations in this area are unknown, but information gathered over nearly 20 years of work in this field provides strong indication of desire to work on the land in a range of capacities and activities.
2. As the primary community NRM delivery agency in the ARB, the Avon Catchment Council is strategically well placed to provide funding through the Caring For Our Country Program; and hosting, mentoring and training services for potential employees. ACC has indicated it is willing to explore this potential further and is keen to assist the implementation of appropriate employment models to facilitate the desired outcomes. Short term funding cycles and the uncertain future of the regional NRM model both present constraints to providing long-term or permanent employment opportunities desired by Aboriginal people in the region. ACC also provides opportunity for direct employment in two organisational positions as Indigenous NRM facilitator or Indigenous NRM Coordinator. Appendix II attached shows the staff structure for ACC.
3. The main potential provider of external funding is the Commonwealth Government through two agencies: the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) and Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). They co-manage the recently released "Caring For Our Country" Program, providing \$2.25 billion over 5 years. According to DEWHA:

"Caring for our Country is the Government's new natural resource management program. Caring for our Country is designed as an integrated package with one clear goal, a business approach to investment, clearly articulated outcomes and priorities and improved accountability"[\[nrm.gov.au\]](http://nrm.gov.au).

It combines several existing programs (such as Natural Heritage Trust, National Action Plan for Salinity, Caring For Country) and the new Environmental Stewardship Program. According to DEWHA, Caring For Our Country will focus on achieving strategic results in six main areas:

- a national reserve system*;
- biodiversity and natural icons*;
- coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats;
- sustainable farm practices*;
- natural resource management in remote and northern Australia; and
- community skills, knowledge and engagement*.

At least four of these strategic result areas have potential relevance to the RTKP and therefore funding through this program will be pursued. This can be combined in several ways to achieve outcomes, depending on the desires of the associated indigenous people. Particular relevant funding streams are:

- Indigenous Ranger Program \$90 million
- Indigenous Protected Area Program \$50 million
- Indigenous Carbon Trading Schemes \$ 5 million

As a newly released Program, some guidelines are available but the finer details are not easily attainable at present and inquiries are ongoing. However, recent discussions with a DEWHA Policy Officer in this area revealed the following relevant information on the Indigenous Ranger Program funds (which was developed from the Working On Country' Program):

- *are not* available for work on conservation estate managed by State agencies;
- there is no upper limit to the amount of funds that can be applied for;
- mainly covers wages and equipment but not infrastructure costs;
- next funding round is in two months time; and
- a receiving body can be NGO, Aboriginal Organisation or Local Government Authority, but not State Government agencies.

Further information is expected to be available soon. The Environmental Stewardship Programme is also a high potential contributor to economic development opportunities as it provides funds to landholders for up to 15 years to achieve conservation objectives on their land. This is significant because it provides an income stream as a major incentive for the landholder to manage conservation values on their property, a service they may either share or fully hire out to Aboriginal people to undertake. In the 2008-09 year this Program will be focussed on the Grassy Box Woodland of eastern Australia. However it provides potential for future engagement options.

4. The Department of Environment and Conservation (WA Government) is the lead conservation management agency in Western Australia. As such it is primarily responsible for management of the conservation estate, including more than 660 reserves in the Wheatbelt Region and large areas of unallocated Crown land. The Merredin District (approximately eastern half of ARB) is responsible for approximately 150 reserves totalling more than 700,000 hectares, and 1.2 million hectares of unallocated Crown land. Discussions with the District Manager indicate several important points relating to this project. Northam district has over 150 reserves which are currently allocated one Reserve Officers' time by DEC; insufficient resource to provide proper management.

Two significant options exist with DEC at present. They are:

- The Mentored Aboriginal Training Employment Scheme (MATES) has been operating in the Wheatbelt Region since 2003 with variable successful in training and preparing local Aboriginal people in conservation and land management activities. Within the ARB, there is currently one employee at Merredin who will complete the program with the Certificate IV in Conservation and Land Management.
- DEC Merredin is keen to examine employing two staff, initially over the fire season period(November to April) to augment their current staff numbers during this critical operational time. If successful, further work will be available

to employ them for the remaining time, but is subject to funds availability. DEC has also suggested a possible ‘employee sharing’ process whereby staff are employed by them for six months over the fire season, and six months by another agency to conduct NRM activities during the cooler seasons. Further discussions about placement of employees in other districts relevant to the project area will continue.

5. CY O'Connor TAFE is the main tertiary education provider in the ARB and may provide courses in Landcare, Conservation & Land Management and other related disciplines. Availability of courses is always subject to sufficient enrolments and individuals will often miss out on courses because of this, or the course will be only partially suitable to their purposes. Future discussions with TAFE can include well planned and delivered courses based on expanded employment options in a range of *Iba's*. Coordination of agency and employee training needs with courses will be vital to participation in this range, and CY O'Connor can take a lead role in ensuring this happens.
6. The State’s Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) was given primary economic development responsibility for Aboriginal people in Western Australia by the Premier in August 2007. Full details of how DIA will achieve this, the proposed activity areas, resources available and expect outcomes are not yet clear. However DIA doesn’t currently have the field staff or resources in place to fulfil this responsibility in the ARB.

Experience by many stakeholders in development of *Iba's* shows that face-to-face service delivery is necessary to achieve the desired outcomes. As the States Regional Development Commissions are currently engaged in Aboriginal economic development projects and activities, it is understood that DIA is exploring options such as Service Level Agreements (SLAs) to continue delivery until DIA has achieved the necessary capacity to deliver these services.

In addition, the formation of CONRACE (Council of Natural Resources Agency Chief Executives) in 2006 presents a high level opportunity to create programs that encourage indigenous participation in NRM. Departments of Agriculture and Food Western Australia, Environment & Conservation, Planning & Infrastructure, Water and Indigenous Affairs, and Chairs and CEO representatives of all regional NRM groups. This Chief Executives group was formed by the Premier to focus on NRM in the State, suggesting strong Government support for development of economic opportunities in this area. As Hicks writes in the State Governments review of NRM:

“In proposing a way forward, this Review reasserts the sovereign and solemn duty of the State Government and its responsible agencies to develop, promulgate, sustain, implement, and monitor a co-ordinated State NRM Policy/Strategy.”(p53)

7. The Department of Industry and Resources (Office of Aboriginal Economic Development) is currently funding Aboriginal economic development projects in Western Australia. Some projects have received funding in the ARB previously, but with little return by way of employment and economic outcomes. A coordinated agency approach and strategic input of funds into developing NRM

economic opportunities in the Basin is required, utilising the best combination of agencies and resources available for the particular engagement activities.

8. The Forest Products Commission (FPC) is a major contractor of farm forestry services in the south west. The extent of future plans for the ARB regarding farm forestry needs to be explored with FPC; with view to increasing Aboriginal engagement in their activities. This has been requested by FPC previously for the Moora and Wagin areas, and work is currently underway developing those teams. Similar discussions will occur regarding the ARB and potential for employment and economic opportunities developed. While FPC are required to tender contracts openly to the market place, there may be other ways Aboriginal people in the Basin can engage with FPC to satisfy both parties requirements.
9. MaxNetwork is the allocated employment services delivery agent for the Wheatbelt Region. Historically, MaxNetwork have had minimal experience in placing Aboriginal people in NRM based activities in the ARB. Several factors suggest it may be worth them taking a greater interest in the field; such as:
 - their financial returns from Commonwealth funding are based on successful placement,
 - the land based industries discussed are increasing, and
 - the available labour sources are decreasing.
- As the key employment service deliverer they can take a lead role in coordinating the match between employers and employees for the whole Basin. By being familiar with the full range of Regional people's *engagement activities and processes* they can facilitate placements strategically and geographically.
10. The Wheatbelt Development Commission, as previously mentioned, is negotiating with DIA on a Service Level Agreement for the delivery of Aboriginal economic development services in the Wheatbelt Region. The Commission provides two main services which are: information provision, and facilitation; and provides the same services in Aboriginal economic development. Funding may be possible through the SLA with DIA, or through OAED, to engage WDC in project management, coordination and financial administration roles, plus information and resources facilitation in developing some of these options. WDC is also developing opportunities such as an Indigenous Ranger model and positions with DEC and DEWHA.
11. Private Forestry Companies, including those working through Managed Investment Trusts, have plantations of varied species and products, some requiring routine maintenance services to maximise their product profits. The key issue for most industries in the Region is lack of labour force and anecdotal evidence suggests that forestry companies are similarly challenged. Regional Aboriginal people can offer economic alternative to importing labour from interstate or overseas, which is currently being considered.

How these and other contributors and resources combine to facilitate *engagement activities and processes* in Iba's will depend on a range of factors as suggested, and definition of all possibilities is fruitless and potentially confusing. However some models have potential for Aboriginal people to be gainfully employed and engaged in caring for their country, and are presented here.

Potential Models for Involvement or “Engagement Activities and Processes” (EAP’s)

As previously discussed, Aboriginal people in the Wheatbelt region have consistently asked for opportunities to work in land based activities in both conservation and commercial enterprise areas. While the RTKP is primarily a very important information gathering exercise for Noongar people and the ACC from several perspectives, this does not necessarily create positive employment and economic outcomes for regional people. What is needed is a practical arm to the process that will take the information, and where culturally appropriate, apply it to the development of these outcomes.

Cultural heritage information collected during the RTKP, in particular environmental management information, can be used in a range of NRM related activities. For example, wildlife rehabilitation practices, such as habitat re-establishment to encourage return of bird or fauna species traditionally in an area but either endangered or extinct, can help develop conservation strategies. These physical actions are based on the spiritual foundations of associated Dreaming stories, thus linking the two intrinsically together. Physical rehabilitation and restoration of degraded land around a traditional waterhole, and the telling of the stories can carry equal importance.

The ACC has prepared an Aboriginal Area Management Planning process as part of the RTKP. The Plan itself links these various aspects with non-Aboriginal aspirations; and includes activities to protect natural values of cultural significance; such as:

- Revegetation
- Weed and pest control
- Restoration and maintenance of cultural aspects of sites
- Flora and fauna identification
- Design and erection of signage
- Fencing
- Conservation of flora and fauna
- Monitoring change in condition of sites
- Provide education and training to local Indigenous people
- Negotiation and mediation for Aboriginal Area Management plans (where not a stakeholder)
- Occupational health and safety
- Assist build infrastructure to improve low impact access to sites (e.g. boardwalks, viewing platforms)
- Fire management

The desired development level, duration and intensity of engagement differs considerably; as does the amount of training and qualifications both needed to engage, and desired, by potential participants. This means that setting out specific models can be problematic in trying to achieve the requirements of both Aboriginal people and the mainstream commercial world. Following is a list of nine potential *engagement activities and processes*.

Engagement Activities & Processes

1. Elders doing cultural heritage information provision, site or area rehabilitation or clearance work; particularly on RTK project areas. It is planned to eventually include in all ACC NRM activity places. High qualifications required as elder at community level, nil formal qualifications.
2. Farm labour as casual work in activities such as tree planting, fencing and other *land based activities (Iba's)*. Nil qualifications required, but desire for qualifications by employee can range from nil to high, such as Certificate III or IV in Conservation and Land Management, Horticulture or other related disciplines. Work is generally short term contracts and unstable in duration and consistency.
3. Commercial Aboriginal entity/business providing contract services in *Iba's*.
4. Commercial Aboriginal entity providing contract services *and training* in *Iba* services. This is a significantly different entity that generally has to engage with the training and education industry to provide development opportunities for employees.
5. Commercial entity operated by non-Aboriginal employer who contracts Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal labour to provide private property based *Iba* services. Preference is given to Aboriginal labour, but if unavailable can contract non-Aboriginal labour to fulfil contracts. Contracting to agencies such as Forest Products Commission and private farm forestry companies in products such as sandalwood, brushwood, sheoak and oil mallees.
6. Commercial entity as above, but also providing nature conservation and Aboriginal cultural heritage management services. Employees can be contracted to provide services on private property (farm forestry etc.) and State managed reserves (nature conservation and cultural heritage) for an agreed portion of the year. On-the-job training in nature conservation and heritage management is provided by DEC up to Conservation and Land Management Officer trained to Certificate IV level; competencies and qualifications in farm forestry and similar activities are provided by appropriate RTO's.
7. Conservation and Land Management Officer (Cert IV) fully employed by DEC as permanent staff.
8. University graduate in Conservation and Land management Officer (Bachelor of Environmental Sciences) or other similar biological degree employed by agencies such as DEC, DoW and DAFWA.
9. Post-graduate student in biological sciences applicable to above agencies; can be employed by agencies part or fulltime while completing studies. Full time employment available through host agency or others with applicable needs.

See Appendix III attached which shows more detail for qualifications in each category.

There are certain to be other potential models and these will be explored as they arise. Inevitably though, there is likely to be a range of engagement activities undertaken, some of which have begun already and are likely to expand. For example, ACC is currently engaging elders in short term projects under a terms of reference for community reference groups to provide information for the RTKP, various individuals work on farms in NRM activities, and several groups are building their land management capacity through training courses and employment.

The above activities involve various work opportunities, employment duration, and qualifications requirements. For instance:

- Number 1 is the elder/cultural informant providing services; which are usually short term and irregular. There may be as little as one day per year and unlikely to be more than 1 day per week, or 20% of available time.
- Number 2, is the farm labourer who can be employed as little as 1 day a year, up to full time work, depending on arrangement with employers and availability of work.
- Number 3 is the first of four options that has a commercial agent hiring people, to then sell their services to employers.

The business has to operate between 80% and 100% capacity to survive, but individuals can be hired from 1 day per year to fulltime, depending on issues such as client needs, amount of work available, funding etc. At the end of the list, numbers 7 and 9 are full time employment opportunities with government agencies or private businesses.

Discussion and Recommendations on Potential Models or Partnerships

At the recent Indigenous NRM Conference in Perth, participants strongly stated the need for action around developing NRM possibilities for indigenous people. This included regional and urban Aboriginal people, NGO's, State and federal Government Agencies.

Potential development of models and partnerships are strongly affected by two main related issues. First, while there is some attention given by State Government (eg CONRACE) to the development of NRM industries in the State, this has yet to translate to many real outcomes in the ARB. The existence of so many agencies and interested parties (see Table 1) probably confuses rather than clarifies the achievement of real employment outcomes. While there are at least twenty potential contributors(Table 1)and nine engagement possibilities(Table 2)identified, *there is still a critical lack of dedicated resources(personnel and financial) to specifically develop these employment opportunities in the ARB.* While ACC is the key NRM delivery agency and will continue to try and develop some indigenous employment outcomes, it doesn't have indigenous economic development as core business, nor is it resourced to undertake this role. This lack of dedicated resources and attention contributes to confusion among Aboriginal people about assistance to develop opportunities.

In addition, there may be significant capacity issues for people in e.g. education and health that need to be dealt with in order to engage fully in their own economic development. WDC's experience over the past four years suggests that these issues are often critical for Aboriginal people in both entering and continuing in mainstream employment and economic development, and should be assessed and catered for in any proposed employment project developed. Recent discussions with DEC staff regarding the MATES Program indicates the same difficulty in capacity issues.

Given these points, these agencies and resources may provide opportunities in several ways to produce the desired outcomes. Several points for consideration and recommendation are:

1. While some Aboriginal people have expressed aspirations for working on the land, more work is required to assess which communities and individuals are prepared to make a firm commitment in the short term to be engaged in land based activities. WDC is identifying discrete groups in the Region as part of a Mapping and Gap Analysis, and identification of those that wish to focus on NRM.

RECOMMENDATION 1: WDC and ACC develop a process to identify these communities.

2. DEC's offer for two Merredin people working on the Conservation estate this summer provides an excellent opportunity, and may be coupled with ACC's potential to hire two people for NRM related activities. However the balance of input by these into Merredin District and Northam Districts (part or all of the ARB) will need to be worked out as people suitable for one area may not be able or willing to work in another.

While DEC is prepared to directly employ personnel over the six month summer period, ACC does not have the same capacity and will require some other employment method. This can be facilitated by some form of business establishment as represented

by Engagement Activity Processes numbers 3 to 6. This will require either finding and engaging a business that is prepared to employ and sub-contract people's services in this way, or the establishment of such a business. There are 'fledgling' Aboriginal business aspirants in the ARB, most with capacity issues; that could benefit with assistance and resources to deal with these and be able to take on the role.

RECOMMENDATION 2.1: ACC and DEC negotiate co-placement/employment of two 'Indigenous Land Workers' to carry out duties on Conservation and freehold estate.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2: ACC organise their own capacity to hire the services of the two workers during their time on freehold estate.

3. WDC's experience with developing opportunities in this field suggest that a combination of:

- sufficient financial resources;
- a registered business entity to employ, administer and sub-contract people;
- a suitable pre-employment and employment process including assessment, preparation and mentoring; and
- strong on-ground community based leadership.

are likely to achieve the best outcomes.

While a few people may gain work as direct employees with landholders, the options for this are limited due to increasing financial pressures in agriculture, such as fuel and fertilizer costs. WDC suggests the existence of a business to hire and then subcontract labourers (EAP's No# 3 to 6) is the easiest avenue to employ people and deliver services. Again, drawing together the combination of resources and factors requires financing and staffing. Due to various factors, it is yet unclear how the Government will resource, implement and manage the development of NRM activity opportunities. While there are suggestions of DIA taking the lead role in this, future funding arrangements are unclear at this stage. As the delivery agent of this project focussing on employment opportunities through the RTKP, and the Basin's NRM agency , ACC can take a lead role in drawing together these factors through their Project staff's services.

RECOMMENDATION 3.1: ACC commit to continuing economic and employment development process in NRM in the ARB by assigning staff and other resources to this purpose; with particular attention to finding and/or developing a business or similar employment agency process that can then sub-contract the delivery of NRM services.

RECOMMENDATION 3.2: WDC continue to seek clarification on indigenous economic development future funding in the region, and meet to coordinate further developments based on funding and resource provisions.

4. The lack of apparent coordination and dedication of services to this area has been recognised by the Government to some degree. DIA provided a brief at the recent indigenous NRM conference, of current Government direction and action regarding NRM, including CONRACE, and establishment of a Level 6 position to work in developing opportunities and indigenous participation. Given normal bureaucratic processes, establishment of this position and effective operation may take time, and effectiveness may be related to the level of regional coordination. WDC may be able to assist as an advocate with Government.

RECOMMENDATION 4.1: ACC forward copy of this report and supporting letter to CONRACE. The supporting letter should outline the importance of delivering on ground services and resources to facilitate opportunities, and the necessity of implementing the Level 6 position as soon as possible.

5. Indigenous Ranger employment has been consistently requested by Aboriginal people as a way of ‘caring for country’. While this has been successful in the north of the State; those models are unsuitable for the Wheatbelt Region and a different model/s is required. WDC has been working on this potential development with DEC for 18 months.

The Australian Government Indigenous Rangers programme in the “Caring For Our Country” package currently provides minimal possibilities for employment as their funding doesn’t apply to State managed estate. There may however be cooperative arrangements possible in the future involving landholders, Indigenous Rangers, Department of Environment and Conservation and the ACC as the Regional NRM Organisation. DEWHA senior staff have indicated that they, and State agencies are both working on ways of dealing with this program mismatch and providing funding for Indigenous Rangers on the Conservation estate as well as private property.

RECOMMENDATION 5.1: WDC continue to develop a suitable Indigenous Ranger model with DEC at Regional level.

RECOMMENDATION 5.2: WDC continue to work closely with DEWHA staff in Canberra on funding and resourcing of a suitable Indigenous Ranger model for the Wheatbelt Region, with a pilot model prepared for January 2009 funding round.

6. WDC is concerned about the lack of a dedicated body or group to drive the development of employment potential in this area, and encourages the continuation of the current Project Reference Group as representative elders for the ARB, with modifications.

RECOMMENDATION 6.1: ACC continue the Project Reference Group, but strengthen and widen its charter for it to include ongoing work in developing potential in this area. ACC can fund and facilitate the Group, and WDC act as ex-officio observer, to develop a focal point for recommendations of this report.

The WDC also suggests that:

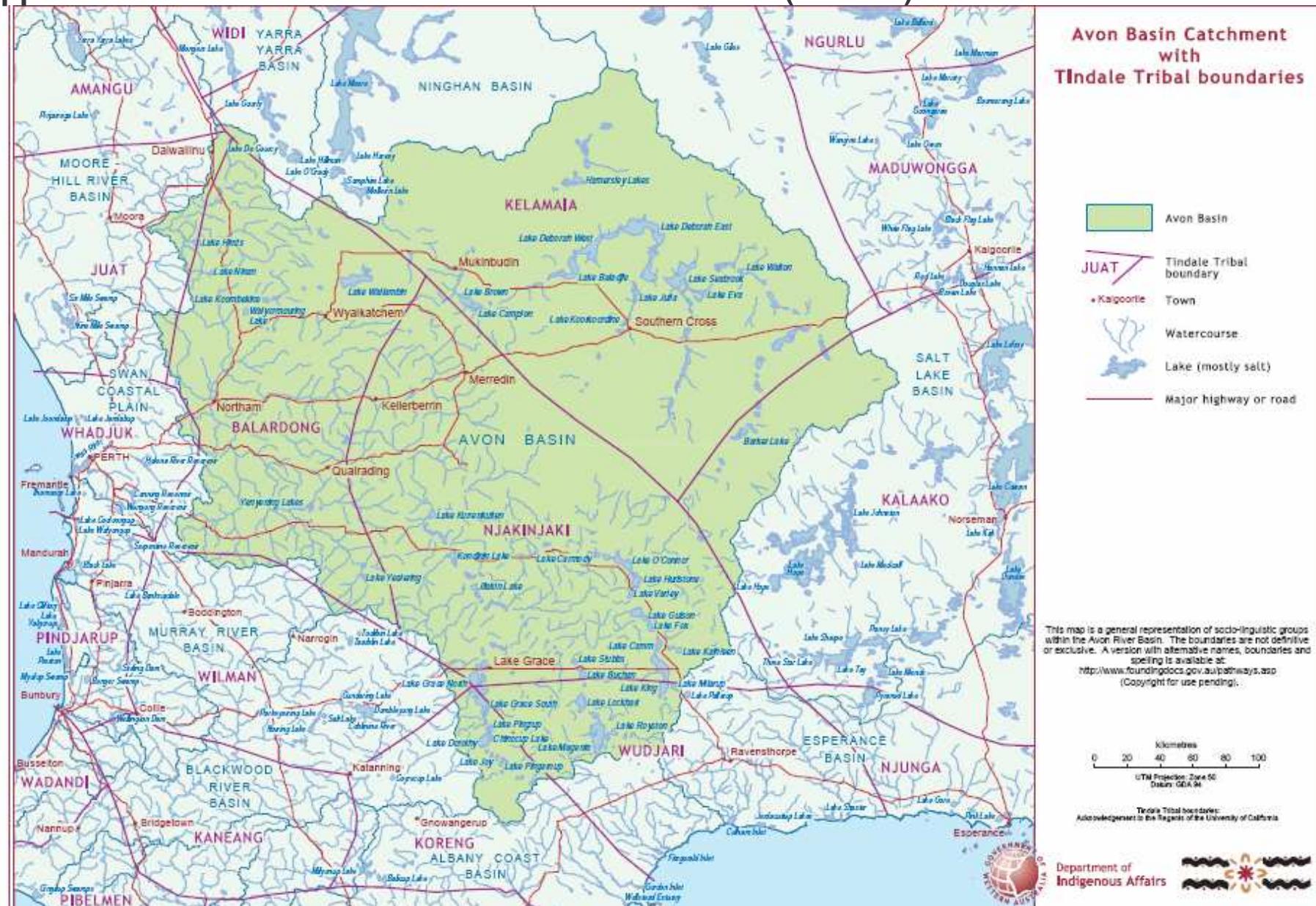
- each Group member identify a younger proxy's(20 years younger if possible) to accompany elders, to provide longevity and succession. The proxy can accompany, or be required to represent if the elder is not available, and become leaders in years to come.
- WDC and ACC should get together to formulate a plan and budget for this Group,
- this process will operate similar to a Board of Management and that this group be developed to a point where it can provide advice for funding applications and project prioritising for NRM, and become a lobby body for indigenous NRM.

References

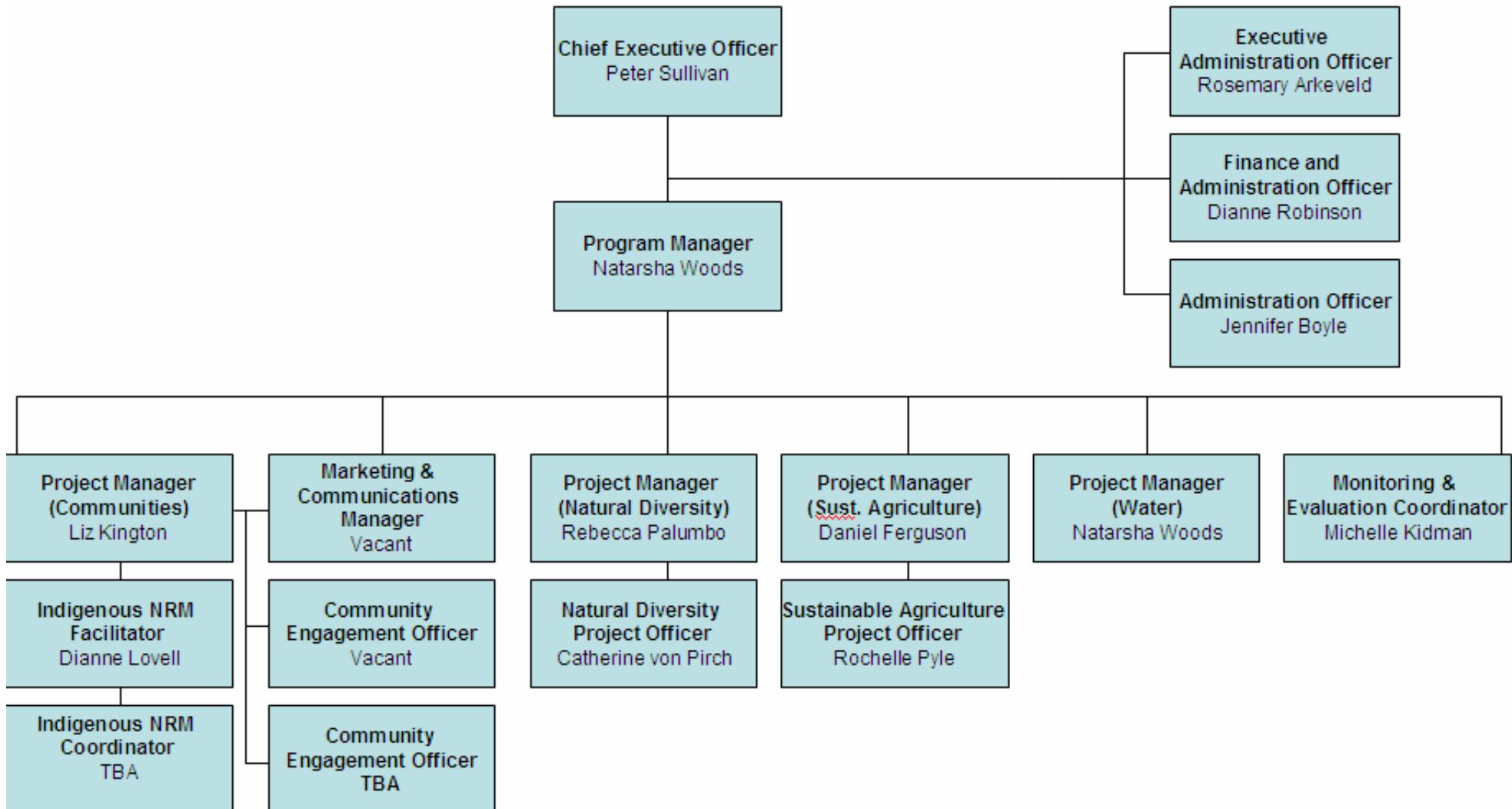
Ballardong NRM Working Group “*Ballardong Noongar Budjar:Healthy Country,Healthy People*, Avon Catchment Council 2006

Haebich Anna 1988, *For Their Own Good:Aborigines and Government in the SouthWest of Western Australia*. University of western Australia Press Nedlands.

Appendix I Avon River Basin and tribal boundaries (Tindale)



Appendix II Avon Catchment Council Corporate Structure



December 08

Appendix III Qualifications: Who Needs Them?

Each engagement Activity and Process(EA&P) has qualifications needs and desires for both employer and employees. That is, the employer may *require* specific qualifications from employees, and *desire* other qualifications as additional. Employees may be content to enter the work force with the *required* qualifications and experience, but *desire* to improve their qualifications through their employment time. Potential qualifications for the nine options are presented in these four aspects; those required and desired by both employer and employee, in theTable below. This shows people that may be required to engage in an activity, and some potential pathways for development that may be available. The Table is not exhaustive, as there are potentially other qualifications such as in agriculture, horticulture or similar fields that Aboriginal people may choose to engage. Again this may range from Certificate level through to Degrees and Post Graduate Diplomas, depending on the desires of the person, financial costs and availability of courses.

Table Qualification Level Required and Desired by Employer and Employee {Australian National Training Authority approved++}

EA&P Number	Required Qualifications	Desired Qualifications
1	Nil ANTA qualifications; but community identity as elder and spokesperson for particular are necessary.	Usually no change required
2	Related to task and competency required.	May want Cert I >IV Landcare, or C&LM.
3	Employer needs business operation and management skills & knowledge. Emp/ees nil, just capacity to do the work.	May want some staff to be trained for specific Certificate based tasks such as machinery operation
4	Competencies and Certificates applicable to works undertaken. Certificate I>III in Landcare. Employer needs business skills.	May wish employee to complete Cert IV C&LM or related qualification.
5	Competencies and Certificates applicable to works undertaken, such as Certificate I>III in Landcare.	May wish employee to complete Cert IV C&LM or related qualification.
6	Employer needs business operation and management skills & knowledge. Can begin on the job training in Certificate I to IV, Conservation and Land Management. DEC will train in competencies towards Cert IV.	Training provided by DEC up to Conservation and Land Management Officer trained to Certificate IV level
7	Certificate IV, Conservation and Land Management. DEC will	Certificate IV, Conservation and Land Management

	train in competencies towards Cert IV.	
8	BA Env Sciences	BA Env Sciences May continue Post Graduate studies
9	BA Env Sciences	Post Graduate diploma in biological and' or conservation studies