

NRM ENGAGEMENT WITH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Forging new relationships and rekindling old connections with local communities



Cultural competency workshops



pakana services employees receiving training in oyster monitoring.

2018

Over the last two years, NRM South has been working closely with Aboriginal communities in southern Tasmania with the aim of improving their capacity and increasing their role in Caring for Sea and Country activities. Thanks in large part to the open and consistent efforts of our Aboriginal NRM Support Coordinator, NRM South's Working on Country program has gone from strength to strength during this period.

Building on the foundation of our Aboriginal Engagement and Participation Framework, completed in early 2016, we have shifted our focus over the last year towards providing opportunities for sharing information about Aboriginal cultural priorities and increasing opportunities for collaboration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations and community members.

Underpinning the success of relationship building actions have been five key actions:

- Ongoing and regular face-to-face meetings with Aboriginal community members and business directors to identify and discuss cultural priorities.

- Providing funding to support select cultural priorities - including fire management, bushfood education, cultural competency, certified training, coastal restoration, business development, and cultural heritage protection.
- Building cultural competency through regular NRM South forums and workshops with the NRM sector in southern Tasmania.
- Providing an environment where engagement processes are safe and relaxed.
- Dedicating a role to supporting Aboriginal participation in NRM in the region has been essential to reconciliation and closing the gap between policy goals.

"Our successful progress on the Working on Country program and the priorities of the Regional NRM Strategy has relied on both our Engagement Framework and the personal ethos of NRM South staff who remain dedicated to community cooperation. Without that ethos, all other NRM skills, experience and training could not overcome the ongoing challenges present in Tasmania."

Kathie Fletcher, Aboriginal NRM Support Coordinator

NRM South's Aboriginal Engagement and Participation Framework, Good Practice Guide (draft) and Reconciliation Action Plan (in development) aim to improve and develop good practice as part of the community engagement tools employed by NRM South staff when working with Aboriginal groups, organisations and communities.

By increasing land management opportunities at key sites, the Working on Country program has changed community capacity to care for Country and helped to improve the condition of natural and cultural resources, land and seascapes.

Active participation in looking after Sea and Country brings multiple benefits to the health and condition of those environments. One significant example is restoring traditional practices of integrated fire management - which has been facilitated by NRM South through a hands-on fire management workshop (led by a visiting expert in traditional fire management), support for a group to attend fire management training in Cape York, and assisting with the design of fire management plans for critical habitat and biodiversity on Murrayfield (Bruny Island).



Beach midden



Cape York fire workshop - July 2017

These opportunities have enabled community members to get hands-on experience in fire management and, in the case of the training workshop, to share their knowledge with staff from NRM South and the Tasmania Fire Service. This of two-way learning approach is helping to develop a mutual understanding on Aboriginal fire management values.

Supporting weetaipoona Aboriginal Corporation directors to design management plans for critical habitat and biodiversity on Murrayfield has changed their views and practices towards fire management, which will lead to environmental outcomes yet to be fully realised.

Another important area involves revegetation works with a focus on culturally and economically significant bushfood plants.

Parrdarrama Pungenna Aboriginal Corporation members in the Tasman region have worked on rehabilitating sites at Ferguson Bay to improve coastal habitat by clearing weeds and planting endemic bushfood plants. Revegetation is informed by traditional knowledge about what should be planted for optimum value to the community while enhancing native vegetation condition and species diversity.

The environmental outcome to be achieved is inextricably linked to the knowledge and experience gained by Aboriginal custodians.

Restricted access and control to land and sea resources, because native title is not afforded to Aboriginal community groups in Tasmania has led to many Aboriginal community members being involved in small scale bushfood-related activities.

Important social and economic outcomes that have been achieved as a result of NRM South's program activities include;

- Improved communication and collaboration within Aboriginal communities,
- The financial resources for Aboriginal businesses and community groups to attend and deliver services at NRM South forums, workshops and/or events,
- More engagement between Aboriginal community groups, businesses and local and state government bodies. This engagement has led to contractual services and project funding for local Aboriginal groups and businesses for land management, education and events services,
- Knowledge transfer between Aboriginal knowledge holders and Aboriginal community groups, and with the NRM sector on management of cultural and natural resource assets,
- Improved cultural competency within southern Tasmania's NRM sector through social engagement opportunities.

Changes are occurring within processes for local government and businesses that indicate a greater commitment to engaging with Aboriginal organisations and communities, and to committing financial resources to increasing Aboriginal economic and social capacity.

It is clear the region is hungry for opportunities to improve engagement practices, policies and planning. NRM South's relationship-building activities with Aboriginal community members and organisations have broadened engagement across the NRM sector, local government and community groups, and forged new relationships or rekindled past ones within local Aboriginal communities.

NRM South's Working On Country program has met or exceeded planned activity targets and outcomes through the delivery of a range of events.



Kathie Fletcher, NRM South's Aboriginal NRM Support Coordinator (2015-2017), played a pivotal role in advancing collaboration, knowledge sharing opportunities and cultural competency both within NRM South and beyond.