

Land and Culture

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders have, as first peoples, long histories of strong kinship, strength and pride in culture, and a special relationship with place, land, waters and sea which has endured for thousands of years. These continue to be important features in the everyday lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. They are widely regarded as central to the positive maintenance of all aspects of health and wellbeing.

Overview

The Queensland Government acknowledges that to close the gap in Indigenous life outcomes, recognition of the importance of land, culture and history must inform the other areas of action dealt with in this report. To this end, the Queensland Government endeavours to promote and affirm Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures by supporting Indigenous peoples' access to, and management of, land and sea, and encourage their involvement in, and influence on, natural resource management planning and policy. The Queensland Government supports Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders to preserve, strengthen and build awareness and appreciation of their unique cultures, and the development of sustainable arts and cultural industries.

Queensland's commitment under COAG

The Queensland Government supports the COAG targets of improved employment and health outcomes through a range of strategies and programs which fall under the broad area of Land and Culture.

In particular, the **Looking After Country Together Strategy** is a three year (2007–2010) statewide program to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access to traditional land and sea country, and encourage stronger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in, and influence on, broader natural resource planning and policy development. New initiatives to address Looking After Country Together objectives are funded within existing agency budgets.

The Queensland Government also supports Indigenous culture through the Arts Portfolio with programs and strategies including initiatives of the Arts Statutory Authorities.

The **Backing Indigenous Arts** program is a major Queensland Government commitment for 2007–2011 providing \$10.73 million to improve social and economic opportunities

for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the arts and connection with culture.

Please note that Land and Culture is not a COAG building block and therefore has no performance measures attached to it.

Key Queensland Government actions to close the gap

Land and sea country

The **Returning of Land to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples** program provides appropriate recognition of the interests and responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in relation to land thereby fostering the capacity for self-development, self reliance and cultural integrity.

In 2008/09:

- the Queensland Government transferred almost 293,000 hectares on Cape York as either Aboriginal freehold grants or national park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land) to Aboriginal grantees. An area of 24 hectares containing a Bora Ring on Bribie Island in South East Queensland was also transferred to Aboriginal grantees. Significant consultation occurred in regard to progressing the transfer of Badu Island Deed of Grant in Trust, located in the Torres Strait. A handover of the Island to Torres Strait Islander people is expected to occur in mid 2010
- seven Cultural Heritage Bodies were assisted through the Cultural Heritage Body Grants Program.



The **Wild River Rangers** program provides protection for the world-class natural and cultural values of the Gulf of Carpentaria and Cape York, while also creating much-needed employment in remote Indigenous communities. Twenty Indigenous rangers have been employed through contracts with Councils or community organisations. The Wild River Rangers program will be expanded in Queensland with additional funding of \$5 million over four years to employ an additional 10 rangers commencing in July 2009.

In June 2009, the Australian and state governments and Kuuku Y'au Traditional Owners signed **Indigenous Land Use Agreements** for marine parks and island national parks within the Kuuku Y'au Native Title Determination area. Traditional Owners have agreed to restrict their take of dugong and green turtles to sustainable levels. The agreements provide for the exchange of marine resource management knowledge and skills between the parties, joint patrols to the islands and training for Traditional Owners to enhance their land management capacity, for example law enforcement training.

During 2008/09, under the **Improved Future Land Practices (Palm Island) Project**, (a pilot for reforming tenure and improving land management in Deeds of Grant in Trust communities throughout Queensland) negotiation meetings were held with both the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and the Manbarra People, and their respective legal representatives. A Cultural Heritage Study (pursuant to the *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003*) was also initiated to identify key cultural heritage sites or items and provide recommendations for their ongoing preservation and protection.

Promotion and affirmation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

The Queensland Government contributes to strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures through the Arts Portfolio which includes Arts Queensland, the Arts Statutory Authorities and the state's major festivals.

The **Backing Indigenous Arts** program improves arts infrastructure, supports cultural engagement and helps artists to gain broader public recognition and an economic return for their work.

The key initiatives include the Indigenous Art Centre Network, Djumbunji Press: Kick Arts Fine Art Printmaking Centre, the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, and Building Skills and Opportunities. In 2008/09:

- \$1.23 million was provided to support the operations of a network of 15 Indigenous art centres and hubs which provide spaces and materials for art making and opportunities for artists to develop their skills
- Djumbunji Press, KickArts Fine Art Printmaking Centre opened in Cairns. The centre assists artists to pass on traditions and stories through lino cuts, prints and etchings, develop their skills, and increase their income by producing larger print runs of their work
- \$1.27 million was provided through Building Skills and Opportunities for 40 projects that nurture artistic talents, engage children and young people in making art to keep cultural traditions alive. Projects include artist-in-residence and mentoring programs, and professional development projects for aspiring artists
- the Premier officially launched the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, in May held at the Tanks Centre, as part of Festival Cairns in August 2009.

In addition, the Queensland Government funds and supports:

- the **Queensland Museum** which collects cultural material reflecting the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and coordinates a program of return of ancestral remains and sacred objects. In 2008/09, Queensland Museum South Bank ran the Kids Meet Up! school holiday program celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures through storytelling, art activities, music and culture sharing

Land and Culture

- the **State Library of Queensland** works to ensure that Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and cultural heritage are fully and respectfully represented in public collections. In 2008/09, the State Library established a new **Indigenous Knowledge Centre** at Hope Vale to provide traditional library services and a place to capture local history and traditions. Centres are also located in Cherbourg and remote Cape York and Torres Strait communities. The Library's **Keeping Culture Strong** program helps communities to build and manage their own collections of material objects and digital recordings of photographs, videos, stories and song
- the Queensland Government's **Indigenous Regional Arts Development Fund** which supports projects that help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples engage in their arts and culture, pass on traditions, stories and skills from generation to generation, and provide employment and training opportunities for artists. Seventeen Indigenous communities including the Torres Strait Regional Authority received grants under the program in 2008/09
- the **Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art** which plays a leading role in collecting, documenting, exhibiting and interpreting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art. Programs celebrate the contribution of artists, highlight the significance of their work, and affirm the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. A number of 2008/09 exhibitions profiled work by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, including 'Contemporary Australia: Optimism' which featured a retrospective season for Indigenous filmmaker Ivan Sen, 'Gordon Bennett', 'Namatjira to Now', and 'Culture Warriors: National Indigenous Art Triennial'
- the **Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts** (ACPA) which is a not for profit company owned by the Queensland Government. ACPA delivers accredited training in acting, singing, dance and music in a culturally-sensitive environment and works with the arts sector to develop career paths for its graduates
- a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **festivals** that showcase traditional and contemporary arts and culture, and help communities strengthen their sense of cultural identity, pride and belonging
- the **Woomera Aboriginal Corporation** for the Mornington Island dancers, art centre and community cultural activities
- the **Queensland Theatre Company** which has a strong partnership with Western Cape College to deliver its Indigenous Drama and Development program. The program provides opportunities for young people from Aurukun, Mapoon and Weipa to experience live theatre and develop their communication skills. In 2008/09, 560 students participated in the program
- the **Hope Vale Arts and Cultural Centre** which was completed in 2008/09. The purpose-built centre provides a new, functional, architecturally-designed space to make and display art. Through the centre, artists will be able to develop their skills and benefit from training and employment opportunities within their own community
- the **Pacific Film and Television Commission** (PFTC) which delivers funding programs that support the professional development and employment of screen practitioners. In 2008/09, the PFTC provided \$95,853 in funding to Indigenous filmmakers through the Indigenous Development Scheme, Feature Film Initiative, Business Development Scheme and Documentary Production Fund.



Press supports new wave of art stars

Cairns has become a hub for the Far North printmaking movement recognised internationally and nationally by the work of art stars Dennis Nona, Alick Tipoti and Arone Meeks, as well as a new wave of emerging artists.

With such extraordinary talent located in the one city, the need for a dedicated facility to create fine art prints for international collectors and provide training for emerging artists was clear.

In March 2008, this need was met when Arts Queensland and KickArts Contemporary Arts opened Djumbunji Press, a fully equipped printmaking studio offering workshops, master classes, an open access studio, custom printing and an artist-in-residence program.

Djumbunji Press is one of the key components of Arts Queensland's \$10.73 million Backing Indigenous Arts initiative (2007–2010) which supports Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander artists in Far North Queensland from product to market.

KickArts Contemporary Arts Director Rae O'Connell said Djumbunji Press will commission and publish new works that will be distributed to commercial galleries, collectors, public museums, galleries and online.

Artwork from Djumbunji Press will feature in exhibitions curated by KickArts Contemporary Arts and toured nationally and internationally, and was a highlight of the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair in August.

"Djumbunji Press gives artists the opportunity to explore the medium, create new work and be trained by master printmakers," said Rae.

"The feedback from artists is that the studio is the best they've ever worked in."

Djumbunji means 'belongs to scorpion place' in the language of Traditional Owners the Gimuy Yidinji people and honours the location of the press in the area of Bunda Djumbunji's Scorpion Mountain, the traditional name for the Whitfield Mountain range.

Ghost-Net project captures new market

Ghost-nets, the torn nets discarded at sea by fishing trawlers, are at the heart of a cottage industry emerging in the Indigenous communities of Australia's remote Gulf of Carpentaria and Torres Strait.

In a project which poses a unique solution to ghost-net collection, as well as building the income of remote artists, Arts Queensland's Backing Indigenous Arts initiative supported arts worker Sue Ryan to work with local weavers to investigate ways of integrating ghost-nets into the traditional weaving and fibre art forms of their communities.

The results have been spectacular with ghost-net baskets now on sale in galleries and through the Gab Titui Cultural Centre on Thursday Island which cannot keep up with demand for the popular items.

Ghost-net weavers from Aurukun and Yarrabah have also taken workshops in the art form to Cairns and Brisbane.

"Essentially this project takes tradition and stretches it as far as you can using a new material – a modern day edge to a cultural tradition," said Sue.

"It also creates a new craft industry that has the positive benefit of generating income for a community while also encouraging the community to collect the ghost-nets from the beaches and reefs themselves rather than leaving it to rangers."

Sue is looking at rolling out the ghost-net project to other Gulf and Torres Strait communities in coming months.