

Case Study – accelerating Indigenous-led enterprise



Nolan Hunter, CEO Kimberley Land Council, launching the Cultural Enterprise Hub; A Kimberley pastoral station; Wayne Bergmann, CEO KRED Enterprises

Indigenous-led enterprise in West Kimberley

Background

Indigenous-led enterprise creates vital economic and employment opportunities, and often delivers a broader set of gains spanning cultural, social and even environmental value for Indigenous individuals and communities. Across the country Indigenous-led enterprise is gaining momentum, and this is reflected in the Empowered Communities First Priority Agreements for many regions.

The West Kimberley region has a rich history of Indigenous-led enterprise that seeks to balance the natural capital of the region with the employment, economic and cultural aspirations of traditional owners. Its longstanding focus on an ‘equilibrium’ approach can be seen in the 1991 [Crocodile Hole report](#) recommendations and overall vision, and in negotiations around plans for a LNG plant at James Price Point in 2010.

Today, Indigenous leaders in the West Kimberley are energetic advocates of the importance of enterprise. When the Empowered Communities Secretariat used a community consultation approach in the region to validate development focus areas, they described ‘what community tells us’ as, “A desire to participate in the modern economy while maintaining and sustaining connection and respect for country, culture and heritage.”

Two key leaders spearheading Indigenous-led enterprise are Nolan Hunter, CEO Kimberley Land Council, and Wayne Bergmann, CEO of KRED Enterprise’s Aboriginal Charitable Trust. Both key Jawun partners, in recent years they embarked on major new initiatives to support enterprise, using a series of Jawun secondees to do so.

Approach

Since 1978, the **Kimberley Land Council (KLC)** has been supporting Indigenous people in land rights, land management, and the creation of sustainable businesses on country. Secondees have supported different aspects of the organisation and its programs since 2012, and in 2014 began working to realise ideas for a ‘cultural enterprise economy’, supported by a Cultural Enterprise Hub.

KLC’s vision for the Hub is a support mechanism for an empowered and prosperous Kimberley Indigenous community in which there is decreased reliance on government funding, increased job opportunities in remote communities, improved biodiversity across the region, reinvigorated Indigenous culture and improved remote community health outcomes. To achieve this, the Hub will provide expertise and services to Kimberley Prescribed Bodies Corporates (PBCs) and Rangers to build on-country enterprises. As CEO Nolan Hunter articulates, “*The aim of the Hub is to generate self-sustainability and employment in remote communities.*”

Secondees worked with KLC to develop ideas or policy recommendations for new enterprises, and strengthened (sometimes challenged) existing ones. (See more detail in Jawun’s 2015 case study on the [Cultural Enterprise Hub](#)).

They applied professional corporate expertise to the setup of the Hub’s governance structure, financing and staffing plan, and brought specialist skills that were needed. Kane Ford for example, a business and marketing professional from NAB, developed a brand and marketing strategy for KLC to

identify a prospective customer base and develop a premium sales product for the Kimberley Ranger Experiences and other cultural enterprise products and services. Describing his 'dynamic' insights, KLC Manager Ariadne Goring remarked, *"We can now visualise the role of the Hub, ranger groups and PBC's in building a strong Kimberley ranger tours product. We understand our target audience and their interests."*

KLC used Jawun support to define the first focus areas as savannah carbon and eco-tourism products. NAB finance professionals Sally Nagy and Mark Hamilton worked with the Karajarri, Nyul Nyul and Bardi Rangers to develop individual eco-tourism business plans for the Kimberley Ranger Experiences enterprise. In the words of his supervisor Daniel Oades, Mark was able to *"bring together ideas our team had been thinking of for some time, helping us concentrate on what we needed to do next for our project."* Legal skills were utilised: Mark Pangbourne, a legal governance expert from the Australian Securities and Investment Commission, distilled complex legal issues to develop the governance and business options for carbon sequestration projects.

In the last year, secondees helped finalise The Hub's business plan and structure and by mid 2017 it was launched. Having watched the idea become reality through the help of borrowed experts, Nolan Hunter reflected, *"Each secondee brings us one step closer to our goals. We see great value to our organisation in the skills they bring and their "fresh eyes" perspective'."*

Elsewhere in the region, **KRED Enterprises** initiated the Kimberley Agriculture and Pastoral Company (KAPCO) project in 2012. A longstanding idea of CEO Wayne Bergmann, KAPCO builds on and aims to revitalise the long history of Indigenous involvement in the Kimberley's pastoral industry. In the words of key investor Walalakoo Aboriginal Corporation, *"This time, we want our people to be working on and managing successful stations across the region."* KAPCO has been set up as a fully Indigenous-owned pastoral venture comprised of three Indigenous-owned stations in the region: Mt Anderson, Bohemia Downs and Frazier Downs. The vision is for the stations to work together to develop a year-round supply chain and implement breeding, herd management and feed crop technology. KAPCO seeks to create meaningful employment and training pathways on country and in remote communities.

The KAPCO model embodies KRED's commitment to creating independent Aboriginal economic development. This mission was assisted by Jawun secondees, who over four years brought business acumen and enterprise thinking to the development of the concept. Secondee Eleni Boyd from NAB was deployed to KRED in 2013 to provide analysis of why prior Aboriginal consortiums of pastoral stations in the Kimberley and Pilbara had failed. From this, she identified critical success factors to be incorporated into a new consortium model. Acknowledging the complexity of the work, Eleni's manager at KRED said it created *"a sound foundation for building the current model."* Later in 2013, Aaron Greco, also from NAB, worked closely with Wayne Bergmann to create a strategic plan for KAPCO, based on the consortium model recommended by Eleni. Future secondees, including KPMG's Mohammed Zahran in late 2015, and Suncorp's Charlene Goh in early 2016, assisted with the development of a business proposal. Charlene drew on extensive commercial experience to also provide advice on risk management, and on strategies to attract potential investors.

Outcomes

Both the Cultural Enterprise Hub and **KAPCO** have now gone from idea to reality.

After two and half years and 14 secondees, **KLC's Cultural Enterprise Hub** was proudly launched in June 2017. It is managing the Kimberley Ranger Network comprising 14 different groups, employing over 80 people to manage traditional lands. In 2017 it hosted the Kimberley Ranger Forum, attended by 60 ranger groups and 250 rangers from across northern Australia. It also facilitates the internationally recognised North Kimberley Fire Abatement Project, which draws on traditional fire practices to generate saleable carbon credits. It has secured partnerships with The Nature Conservancy and the Australian Conservation Foundation, whose support included fundraising and selling a pilot Kimberley Ranger Experience to 12 eco-tourism enthusiasts from around Australia. With a pipeline of new enterprises in development and partnerships under discussion, the Hub is proving that, driven by a strong strategy, it truly can help Indigenous people in the Kimberley participate in the 'real economy' in ways that also generate environmental, cultural and social outcomes. As Nolan Hunter says:

"Our vision is for a prosperous and thriving community, with Aboriginal people living and working on their country in enterprises that are founded on traditional knowledge, culture and connection to country, The Hub will demonstrate the benefits of a new and innovative funding model for Indigenous

groups across Australia and internationally”

After four years and five secondees, KRED’s KAPCO was established in 2015 with initial investment from Walalakoo Aboriginal Corporation and Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation. While it currently comprises three Indigenous-owned pastoral stations, it is set to grow bigger. The Indigenous Land Corporation is in the process of divesting Myroodah and Lulugui to KAPCO. By standing together as integrated pastoral enterprise under a single management structure, all stations gain from the economies of scale achieved. Over the last sixteen months 42 casual staff have worked across the three stations. In addition to generating jobs and training, KRED is also exploring how one of the KAPCO stations could be used for a Kimberley youth diversionary and preventative program. With a working title of ‘The Marlamanu Project’, this will provide an alternative to current mainstream youth justice programs. KRED has also been investigating investment opportunities, with an Asian delegation of potential investors due to visit in the coming months. Speaking of the future, CEO Wayne Bergmann says:

“Aboriginal people need to be in the strongest position to make their own decisions, fund their own priorities, and to drive economic development in a way that’s aligned with Indigenous cultural and social values. Through KAPCO, we’re working together to create job and training opportunities on country for Indigenous people.”

Next Steps

Through the Hub and KAPCO, Kimberley’s Indigenous leaders and organisations are integrating traditional ecological knowledge and the region’s strong pastoral history to increase Indigenous participation in the economy, and are also leading the way in attracting international investment to North West Australia. Future funding will further secure their aspirations for Indigenous-led enterprise, employment and empowerment. Nolan Hunter describes the vital importance of this:

“The ability to create transformational change starts and ends with us. We must be the leaders of and catalyst for change, developing our own solutions rather than passive recipients of well-intentioned government policy”

Mr Bergmann is equally firm that development on Aboriginal traditional lands needs to align with a triple bottom line of people and culture, the environment and wealth.

“For Aboriginal people in the Kimberley, we have been trying to balance our cultural and environmental responsibilities while finding opportunities to step into the modern economy. We want to walk in both worlds, strengthening our traditional culture and making a place for ourselves in the modern economy. This way we can create widespread social change.”