Indigenous communities are taking bold steps to manage land more sustainably than ever before, protecting it for future generations.

Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) are changing the face of land management across Australia. Today there are 51 declared IPAs across Australia covering over 36 million hectares.

The declaration of Willinggin IPA in the Kimberley earlier this year heralded a much anticipated success for local natural and cultural resource management. Last month, the completed construction of a new ranger base at Gibb River Station in the heart of Willinggin country was also an important step in creating a complete land management hub for the area.

The declaration and new ranger base allows Wunggurr rangers to manage their country to a world recognised standard, incorporated into the National Reserve System. It has also created much-needed employment opportunities for local Indigenous people, allowing them to remain on their country instead of having to look for work in larger towns hundreds of kilometres away. You can read more about this exciting project on page 14.

Another great example of recognising and restoring cultural heritage is ‘Mawonga’ station in rural NSW. Mawonga will be a hub for reconciliation, hosting training and cultural camps for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups. It is also hoped Mawonga will be declared an IPA, and be an example of best practice rural property management that can be adopted by Aboriginal owned properties across Australia. You can read more about Mawonga’s journey on page 6.

So many exciting things are happening in Indigenous communities across Australia. I’m privileged to work for an organisation which responds to their needs in the most culturally appropriate way. And I’m humbled by the thousands of Australians, just like you, who share ICV’s vision of helping make their dreams come true.

I hope you enjoy this latest edition of Stepping Stones, and you take a moment to reflect on the amazing things you are helping Indigenous communities achieve.

“Indigenous communities are taking bold steps to manage land more sustainably than ever before, protecting it for future generations.”
Out and About

In a bid to build healthier homes and improve young women’s health education, Canteen Creek (Orwaitilla) women Elders reached out for help. ICV volunteer Michaela provided culturally appropriate information, support and guidance on a wide range of issues including skincare, puberty, pregnancy and relationships. The program was so well received that the community has requested further education and support for both younger and older women.

Young Women’s Health Education, Canteen Creek

‘Males in Black’ (MiB) is a volunteer organisation which aims to improve the physical health, social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal males in the Port Augusta and Northern Flinders Ranges region. To meet the increasing need for its services, MiB approached ICV for help to develop a business plan and source funding to create employment opportunities and build capacity in the organisation. Ultimately this will result in greater support for Aboriginal males in Port Augusta.

‘Males in Black’, Port Augusta

The Palm Island Community Company (PICC) is the peak body for provision of community and human services to Palm Island residents. To ensure continued funding for its men’s diversionary services, PICC is required to report to its respective funding bodies. ICV was approached to help PICC improve its reporting capabilities. ICV volunteer Bruce worked with PICC staff to establish appropriate information collection tools and implement record management systems.

Helping secure ongoing funding for services, Palm Island
Breathing life in to a cultural treasure: ‘MAWONGA’

‘MAWONGA’ is a sprawling 22,350 hectare property to the north of Hillston, New South Wales. It is located on traditional country of the Ngiyampaa people and holds enormous cultural significance.

Winangakirri Aboriginal Corporation (WAC) acquired it in late 2011 with the aim of restoring the property to its original habitat, so it can be declared an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) for future generations. It is hoped Mawonga will be an example of best practice rural property management that can be adopted by Aboriginal owned properties across Australia.

Mawonga will be a hub for hosting training and cultural camps for both the Ngiyampaa people and other Aboriginal groups. Eventually it will host cultural awareness training for non-Aboriginal Australians too.

The first step towards realising this dream was to establish the necessary environmentally sustainable infrastructure on the property.

Homestead and shearers’ quarters upgrade

WAC approached ICV for help early last year. ICV volunteer and qualified electrician Carlos undertook a complete assessment of the homestead and its existing solar power system. Carlos went on to design and install a new solar power system for the shearers’ quarters with help from WAC members, delivering environmentally friendly accommodation, a kitchen and amenities.

Water for Life project

One of the major concerns for the property in the summer months is the threat of bush fire. No permanent water exists on Mawonga, so the final piece of the puzzle was to provide a constant and reliable water supply for fire management, native animals and revegetation.

ICV volunteer Alexander, qualified in Agricultural Management, assessed and guided the complete refurbishment of the Kabina mill which, now operational, fills a 22,000 litre tank for fire management purposes.

Imparting new skills

Imparting new skills and knowledge was a secondary but equally important objective of the Mawonga project. The WAC members who worked with Carlos and Alex learned the importance of environmentally sustainable power generation and resource management. They learned skills in rewiring, bore assessment and restoration, and how to maintain the infrastructure. These skills will be shared with younger generations to ensure the property thrives for many future generations.

“The solar power and bore refurbishment would not have been possible without the support from ICV. Words really can’t describe the gratitude and sincere thanks to volunteers Alexander and Carlos whose composure, patience, expertise and good humour made tough work seem easier. I have the greatest admiration for ICV and hope to work with the organisation and volunteers on more projects.”

Steve Meredith, Secretary, Mawonga Management Committee
Caring for Country

Indigenous people the world over play an instrumental role in managing and enhancing the natural environment. Australia’s unique Kimberley Ranger Program is a leader in the conservation of heritage resources by combining the wisdom of Elders with modern resources.

In May 2013, Kimberley Aboriginal people and the Comcáac people of Sonora Mexico held an International Ranger Forum at Gambanan on the Dampier Peninsula, WA. A network of Indigenous Protected Areas was declared, the largest connecting area of Indigenous conservation land in Australia.
Danielle Pogos’ journey began with ICV after being inspired by Ian Thorpe’s work with Aboriginal communities. She volunteered on school holiday programs in the Martu Lands, remote WA, and enjoyed the experience so much, that her career has taken an exciting new direction as a result.

We asked Danielle to share some special memories of her time in the Martu Lands.

Why did you first volunteer with ICV?

I saw an article in a women’s magazine about the volunteer work in Aboriginal communities done by Ian Thorpe, and immediately realised that was what I wanted to do. I jumped on the internet to look up opportunities and found the ICV website.

What inspired you to help with the school holiday programs in Martu Lands?

I had heard about the unacceptable conditions in some Aboriginal communities, and wanted to help out in some way. Outside of my neuropsychology studies, I work in childcare, so I was really keen to use these skills and have an adventure at the same time!

How do you think the school holiday programs have helped the Martu community?

The school holiday programs really gave the kids a chance to have fun. For two weeks, they could just be children and run around and have a good time.

The programs also helped develop the skills of local community workers, which could enable future school holiday programs to be run entirely by the community.

What are your best memories of the school holiday programs?

One day during my first week, to everyone’s surprise, several NASA 4WDs drove into the caravan park. They were in Nullagine preparing for a future Mars expedition. The team was studying stromatolites from 3.5 billion years ago to learn more about life on Mars at that time. Given the similarities between the environment of the Nullagine region and the surface of Mars, they were also testing out a spacesuit for the expedition. They were really interested in our school holiday program, so we set up an excursion so the kids could watch the spacesuit experiment.

The next morning we rounded the kids up and drove off to the NASA site, 60 km away. They had a ball watching NASA try out the spacesuit, and the NASA team were fascinated by the kids, particularly their ability to walk around Spinifex barefoot.

That night NASA put on a presentation and half the town showed up! In a town where there is almost nothing for kids to do, other than ride bikes missing brakes and seats, the visit from NASA was really special. The kids and our program have now become part of the Mars expedition story.

How has your experience with the school holiday programs impacted your own life and outlook?

My experiences sparked an interest in Indigenous health. As part of my Masters of Clinical Neuropsychology course, I am working on a research project to assess treatments for alcohol-induced cognitive impairments in the Northern Territory. A career as a neuropsychologist in Indigenous communities is now something I’d love to pursue.
A big THANK YOU to everyone who took part in our annual supporter survey this year. We received almost 2,500 responses which gave us a real insight into which issues are most important to you and how you would like us to communicate with you.

Here are just a few of the many interesting things we found out:

• Your top two reasons for supporting ICV are a strong belief in reconciliation and ‘closing the gap’, and because ICV works on projects owned and driven by communities

• Supporting ICV makes you feel happy and thankful to be part of an effective way to create positive change for Indigenous communities

Where your support goes
Your support helps transform the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban, regional and remote parts across Australia. You’ve helped 141 communities take steps to realise their dreams. And ICV volunteers contributed 3191 days of their time and expertise to communities, worth $896,990 in the last financial year alone.

We are delighted you share our commitment to helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. None of ICV’s work would be possible without you, so thank you again for your generosity and support.
Caring for Country: Wunggurr Rangers return home

Wunggurr Rangers building their new base

Stretching over 6 million hectares of wilderness and ancestral lands in the Kimberley region, WA, Willinggin country holds immense cultural and environmental value to the Ngarinyin people.

The Wunggurr Rangers’ territory covers an area the size of Tasmania, some 60,150 square kilometers, incorporating the renowned Gibb River Road in the heart of the Kimberley.

Until recently, the Rangers’ headquarters was based in the town of Derby. This presented enormous challenges to managing such a wide area of country and mitigating threats such as fire, weeds and feral animals, and loss of traditional knowledge. To overcome these challenges and the social and wellbeing issues of town based living (Derby has one of the highest suicide rates in Australia and drug and alcohol abuse is widespread), Wunggurr Rangers had a vision to return home and move their base back on country, at Gibb River Station in the community of Ngallagunda.

ICV was approached to help establish the new Ranger base which will become a land management hub for the area. Gibb River Station is already well resourced with an airstrip, a school, a clinic, a pastoral station and essential services. ICV volunteer Allen drove all the way from his home in Perth, with his tools, to work with local Rangers and set up a purpose-built office, garage, Ranger accommodation and supporting infrastructure.

The new base provides valuable headquarters for eight full time Rangers and an army of casual workers across three communities. It also enables better land management services to the four clan groups of Arrawarri, Burri, Werangarri and Wurlajaru.

This year will see the Wunggurr Rangers and the Willinggin Traditional Owners declare much of their country as an Indigenous Protected Area. This means they will be managing their country to a world recognised standard, incorporated into the National Reserve System. Together with the emerging carbon abatement market, the recent National Heritage Listing and the State Government’s Kimberley and Science Conservation Strategy, this makes it one of the most exciting places in the world to be working in Indigenous land management.

The long term vision is to create smaller seasonal bases in the remote corners of Willinggin Country. Next year a dry season base at Karunjie Station will be established to draw more people from town into land management – a healthy lifestyle option.
Please give what you can. Thank you.

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