

MINING AND INDIGENOUS TOURISM IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

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ABOUT THE STUDY*

This study was funded by the Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism and Rio Tinto. The aim of the study was to investigate the opportunities for mining operations to support the development of Indigenous tourism ventures in remote and regional Australia.

Many Indigenous communities have cultural traditions and local heritage sites that are of interest to tourists. Especially when they are located close to national parks, World Heritage Areas and other pristine landscapes, these areas have considerable tourism potential.

While remote destinations and iconic natural and cultural landscapes are attractive to many visitors, a certain level of infrastructure is required to develop the tourism potential of these areas. Accommodation facilities, sewage and water services, transport corridors and vehicles (hard infrastructure) are basic requirements, as are people with the skills to run stores and motels, act as tour guides and maintain facilities (soft infrastructure).

One way to develop the tourism potential of northern Australia is for Indigenous communities and mining companies to collaborate in using 'soft' and 'hard' mine infrastructure to support tourism ventures. Developing synergies between Indigenous communities and mining companies can have a range of benefits, including:

- The development of sustainable regional industries that will continue beyond the life of the mines
- Opportunities for Indigenous people to develop skills, qualifications and business knowledge
- Increased tourist awareness of Indigenous culture and perspectives

- Greater investment in the management and protection of natural resources and environmental conservation.
- Practical demonstration of the commitment of mining companies to sustainable development in the communities and regions in which they operate.

To investigate these synergies, a multi-disciplinary study was conducted by a research team comprising researchers from the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSRM) and the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre (AERC) at the University of Queensland, Southern Cross and James Cook Universities.

This study is the first of its kind. The research team has expertise in the areas of mining, communities and sustainable development, tourism, anthropology and cultural heritage, and natural resource management. This allowed for a genuinely cross-disciplinary approach to the investigation of complex social, environmental and economic issues.

Other Resources

A list of useful resources related to Indigenous tourism is provided at the end of this report.

Further Information

For those interested in further information about the study, go to the CSRM website at www.csr.uq.edu.au and follow the links to the full report, *Mining and Indigenous Tourism in northern Australia*.

Alternatively, a copy of the report can also be sent to you. Please contact:

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*We wish to thank all participants who gave their time to this study.

OBJECTIVES

Three key objectives were set for the study. These were to:

- assess the potential to develop existing natural and Indigenous cultural tourism resources in areas proximate to mining operations
- identify how mining infrastructure can be used to promote tourism activities
- assess the willingness of mining companies and Indigenous communities to cooperate in tourism initiatives.

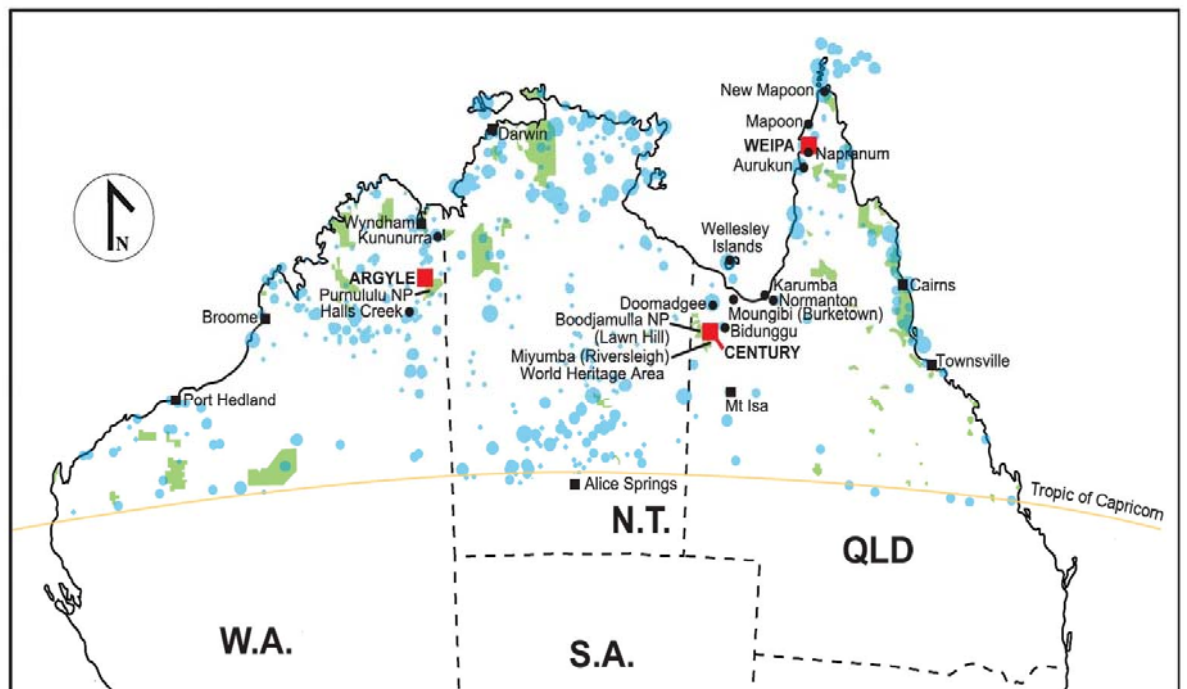
The project incorporated an extensive review of academic literature and company documentation, wide consultation with representatives of mining companies, Aboriginal communities and tourism agencies and the preparation of three case studies.

The case study sites were the regions surrounding:

- Comalco's Weipa bauxite mine on the western Cape York Peninsula of Queensland
- the Century mine in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria, North West Queensland; and
- the Argyle Diamond mine in Western Australia's East Kimberleys.

These sites were chosen because the mines were located in or near areas with considerable tourism potential, substantial Indigenous populations, and mine management was formally committed to supporting Indigenous enterprise development. The sites were also proximate to national parks, World Heritage Areas and other scenic and extensive national areas.

The study area, including case study locations



- Aboriginal communities in the vicinity of the selected mine sites.
- Selected regional centres
- National Parks
- Mine sites
- Aboriginal communities (size of dots indicative of population size)

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

There can be mutual benefits for mining companies, Indigenous communities and management agencies, in developing local tourism activities.

Indigenous communities and mining companies need to adopt a partnership approach to the development of tourism ventures to ensure they are appropriate for each site. This should be done in consultation with other stakeholders such as Government and protected area management bodies.

Potential benefits to Indigenous people of increased participation in the tourism industry can include:

- economic opportunities, especially access to employment and training
- opportunities to promote awareness and understanding through cross-cultural exchange
- the preservation of traditional cultures
- a means of encouraging natural resource management by Indigenous groups.

Benefits to mining companies can include:

- being able to meet some of the requirements of the Land Use Agreements under which they operate
- a way of giving practical effect to their commitment to promoting sustainable community development
- improved relations with Indigenous communities
- enhanced reputation, by demonstrating their commitment to sustainable development and corporate social responsibility.

These benefits can only be realised if companies and Indigenous groups work in partnership with each other.

Benefits of the above to natural resource management and cultural heritage management can include:

- The development of visitor interpretations of landscapes and partnership arrangements with Traditional Owners and extractive industries.

Tourism potential

There appears to be a growing market for Indigenous cultural tourism, especially among international tourists. These visitors are interested in enjoying a range of outback experiences that include visits to wilderness areas, World Heritage Areas and national parks, cultural heritage sites and the mines themselves.

Further research is required to determine the size of the market and consumer preferences.

Tourists who visit Australia's rural and remote areas are interested in:

- experiencing the beauty of Australia's natural environment (national parks, World Heritage Areas)
- viewing cultural heritage sites and landscapes
- experiencing Indigenous culture, and
- touring mine sites.

Visitor information surveys indicate there is a market for tourist attractions that provide greater exposure to Indigenous culture. International visitors, in particular, appear keen to experience Indigenous art and culture as part of their complete tourism experience. They are interested in authentic cultural experiences that include interactions with Aboriginal people, viewing cave paintings and rock art sites, seeing Indigenous ceremonies and performances. However, these need to be incorporated into a broader tourism experience.

The case study sites for this project are all located near areas that boast impressive natural attractions. The combination of cultural and natural experiences could form the basis for sustainable, small-scale, tourism projects involving local Indigenous people, subject to the availability of suitable infrastructure support.

The tourism industry in northern Australia is still in its early stages of development, however. This is exemplified by the Weipa case study, where there are pristine natural landscapes, but little in the way of tourism infrastructure. The Kimberley and Gulf regions, on the other hand, already have a substantial regional tourism industry, as indicated by the growing visitor numbers to Boodjamulla (formerly Lawn Hill) National Park, Mi-yumba (Riversleigh World Heritage Area) and the Bungle Bungle Ranges (in the World Heritage listed Parnululu National Park).

For Indigenous tourism ventures to be successful, proposed initiatives will need to be reviewed carefully and a business case developed to demonstrate their economic viability. Further research is needed to:

- quantify the demand for Indigenous tourism products and services
- identify the tourism preferences of the target market segment (international visitors)
- determine the impact of competition from existing eco/nature-based tourism operations.

Cooperation between mining companies and Indigenous communities

Most of the larger mining companies with operations in northern Australia are formally committed to supporting development that minimises negative impacts and promotes mutually beneficial outcomes for their operations and Indigenous communities.

The development of economically viable Indigenous tourism ventures will depend on building effective partnerships between Indigenous communities, mining companies, protected area management bodies and government.

Historically, there has often been an antagonistic relationship between mining companies, Indigenous people and environmentalists, which has derived from divergent values associated with 'country' or landscapes. However, there has been an enormous change in attitudes in recent years. Most of the larger mining companies with operations in northern Australia have formally acknowledged the rights of Indigenous communities and are committed to supporting the development of these communities.

Argyle Diamond Mine is an example of how even very strained relations between mining companies and Indigenous communities can be improved over time and with effort. Argyle sees the tourism industry as a potentially significant employer of Aboriginal people and as one of the key elements of the post-mining economy of the East Kimberleys. Argyle has also indicated that it is committed to providing training to Aboriginal people to enhance their capacity to work in, and ultimately run, tourism businesses. Similarly, Century mine is supportive of the development of local Aboriginal tourism enterprises and views them as part of a range of possible strategies for leaving a positive post-mine legacy.

The mining companies participating in this research project each indicated their interest in encouraging Indigenous tourism ventures. However, establishing these ventures will require negotiations between multiple Indigenous organisations, groups and individuals, protected area management bodies and government agencies.

Existing infrastructure with Indigenous communities is often inadequate and access to funding is critical to develop the appropriate skills and facilities. This will require the cooperative efforts of all stakeholders to ensure that Indigenous tourism enterprises are adequately resourced. Longer term initiatives, in particular, will depend on building capacity in Indigenous communities, and are likely to require substantial equity from Government or private investors.

Mining infrastructure and Indigenous tourism

Adequate infrastructure is essential to developing an indigenous tourism industry. This includes *hard* infrastructure (transport corridors, vehicles, accommodation) and *soft* infrastructure (a suitably trained workforce).

The greatest contribution mining companies can make to Indigenous tourism ventures is to invest in *soft* infrastructure, by providing access to education, training and work experience for Indigenous people interested in establishing, or being involved in, local tourism ventures.

Mining infrastructure refers to those systems and services that a mine operation requires to work effectively. This includes hard infrastructure requirements such as power supply and mining equipment, and soft infrastructure requirements, such as employment, training and mentoring.

There are ongoing opportunities for local communities to benefit from hard mining infrastructure both during and after the operational phase of a mine. For example, during the operational phase, communities may benefit from improved roads and access to airstrips at fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) mining operations. The existence of planes and airstrips may also create an opportunity to fly in tourists to visit surrounding areas. Operating mines can also be tourist destinations in themselves. The Argyle Diamond Mine, for example, has been successfully marketed as a tourist attraction, with around 8-10,000 tourists a year taking a guided tour of the operation.

Hard infrastructure has typically been dismantled and removed at the conclusion of mining. Today, however, mining companies are increasingly encouraged to think in terms of a whole of life plan for any mining development, including sustainable community development initiatives that will survive mine closure. Leaving infrastructure such as power lines, water and sewage connec-

tions and accommodation blocks intact is one way mining companies can provide some of the infrastructure requirements necessary for tourism operations, assuming of course, that a business case has been established.

As noted building capacity in Indigenous communities will be critical to the success of tourism ventures. Mining companies can assist here by providing soft infrastructure in the form of access to training, employment, business and management expertise. For example, Century is using hospitality training in its camps to build the capacity for quality service delivery, Argyle Diamonds has taken steps to ensure that companies operating its mine tours employ Indigenous guides. Argyle also provides hospitality training for Indigenous employees at its camps.

CONCLUSION

The key messages for mining companies from the study are:

- Commitment to Indigenous tourism enterprises is one way a company can demonstrate its commitment to sustainable development and corporate social responsibility. Forward thinking companies are already taking a lead in this area.
- Tourism opportunities should be a consideration in the long-term planning of a mine. This includes looking for ways to retain and maintain mine infrastructure, using the company's collaborative networks to foster relationships between Indigenous people and local tourism operators, and providing access to training and work experience for those interested in participating in Indigenous tourism activities.
- Partnerships between Indigenous groups, mining companies, protected area management bodies and government are essential for sharing knowledge, building communities and providing access to necessary resources. Open communication and information sharing are

needed to identify opportunities for tourism ventures and bring them to fruition. Success in the industry relies on accurate information about how the tourism market operates.

FUTURE ACTIONS

Mining companies

Mining companies should:

- Assess the potential for their operations to facilitate greater Aboriginal involvement in the tourism sector, both during the life of the mine and post-closure.
- Be aware of the opportunities to provide both hard and soft infrastructure support to assist Indigenous involvement in tourism.
- Be aware that the issue of Indigenous ownership and control is vital to how a tourism initiative will be perceived within the relevant communities. There needs to be full and frank engagement with communities around these issues.

Indigenous Organisations, Groups and Individuals

- Regional Aboriginal organisations, in consultation with their local communities should consider partnering with mining companies, protected area authorities and other relevant sectors of Government, to build Indigenous tourism ventures.
- Regional Aboriginal organisations, should consider establishing centres like the Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation, which facilitates negotiations between different stakeholders, Governments, Traditional Owner groups, industry groups, research organisations and Cape York land holders. Initiatives such as Balkanu provide support to entrepreneurial individuals or groups by giving them access to the best available expertise, services, resources and experience for their projects.

Government

Governments have a key role to play in building the capacity of Indigenous communities to operate successful tourism venture, for example, by providing business skills training and assistance.

Protected area management bodies

Protected area management agencies and authorities should consider more innovative management and partnership arrangements, particularly for protected areas close to mining operations.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Federal Government Agencies and Programs

Business Ready Program for Indigenous Tourism: AusIndustry

- This program encourages Indigenous participation in the tourism industry by funding selected business mentors to develop and work with Indigenous tourism ventures in their region.
- Phone: AusIndustry hotline on 13 28 46
- Email: hotline@ausindustry.gov.au
- Web: <http://www.ausindustry.gov.au>

Indigenous Business Australia (within Department of Employment and Workplace Relations)

- Indigenous Business Australia aims to promote business participation amongst Indigenous people. The organisation delivers the 'Indigenous Business Development Programme' and sponsors 'First Australians Business'.
- Phone: 1800 804 754
- Web: <http://www.iba.gov.au>

Indigenous Partnership Program (within Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources)

- This program aims to promote partnerships between the mining industry and Indigenous communities.
- Phone: 02 6213 7227
- Web: <http://www.industry.gov.au/Indigenouspartnerships>

Indigenous Tourism Australia: Tourism Australia

- Indigenous Tourism Australia (ITA) focuses on the development and implementation of policies and programmes to encourage Indigenous tourism ventures.
- Phone: 02 9360 1111
- Web: <http://www.tourism.australia.com/>

Indigenous Land Corporation

- The Indigenous Land Corporation functions include enterprise and regional development.
- Phone: 1800 818 490
- Email: ilcinfo@ilc.gov.au
- Web: <http://www.ilc.gov.au/>

Steps to Sustainable Tourism (within Department of the Environment and Heritage)

- This report outlines a 10-step planning process to guide the development of sustainable tourism which considers the natural and cultural features of a region as core values. A tailored report for Indigenous communities titled 'Stepping Stones to Tourism' is also being developed.
- The full report can be downloaded from the following website: <http://www.deh.gov.au/heritage/publications/sustainable-tourism/>

State and Territory Tourism Organisations in Northern Australia

Northern Territory Tourist Commission

- Phone: 1800 808 666
- Email: nttc@nt.gov.au
- Web: <http://www.nttc.com.au>

Tourism Queensland

- Glen Miller - Manager Market Development
- Phone: 07 3535 5455
- Email: glen.miller@tq.com.au
- Web: <http://www.tq.com.au/Indigenous>

Tourism Western Australia

- Industry Development
- Phone: 08 9262 1760
- Web: <http://www.westernaustralia.com/en/Industry/>

Indigenous Tourism Associations

Aboriginal Tourism Australia

- Phone: 03 9654 3811
- Email: ata@aboriginaltourism.com.au
- Web: <http://www.aboriginaltourism.com.au>

Western Australia Indigenous Tourism Operators Committee (WAITOC)

- Phone: 08 9262 1746
- Email: waitoc@westernaustralia.com
- Web: <http://www.waitoc.com>

Regional Tourism Network

Australian Regional Tourism Network

- Phone: 02 6620 3505
- Email: artn@scu.edu.au
- Web: <http://www.regionaltourism.com.au/artn/>

Indigenous Tourism Enterprises

Aboriginal Tour Operators

- <http://www.aboriginaltouroperators.com.au>

Research Organisations

Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism

- Phone: 07 5552 8172
- Email: info@crctourism.com.au
- Web: <http://www.crctourism.com.au>

Tourism Research Australia

- Phone: 02 6213 6940
- Email: tra@tourism.australia.com
- Web: <http://www.tra.australia.com>