Aboriginal People and the Land

- At the core of Aboriginal people’s cultural heritage is the land. Land is vital to the well-being of both Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people. It is a complete environment that sustains and is sustained by Indigenous people and culture. It is the core of all spirituality. This is because it includes the places of their Dreaming spirits.
- Aboriginal people know the land does not belong to them — they belong to it. The hills, mountains, valleys, rivers and deserts were all inherited by them from their ancestors. The land is shared with their entire kinship group and any future generations.
- In ancient times, it was unthinkable to sell or trade your kinship or tribal lands. Why would you give up land that your very survival depends on, or give up the place your Dreaming is kept for you?
- Aboriginal people nearly always stayed within the boundaries of their own land. It was the place the ancestors were buried, and it was where their Elders had shown them the secrets of the earth.
- They did not know the stories of other language groups, and it was the stories and language that showed each person where their country started and ended.

Caring for Country

- For Indigenous Australians, the phrase ‘caring for country’ means a deep spiritual attachment to the land, to creation beings, plants and animals, to the source of rules for living and stories, to dance, songs and art. Indigenous Protected Areas create jobs for Indigenous men and women doing what they want to do — working and looking after their land in a healthy environment.¹
- Indigenous Protected Areas [cultural sites, etc.] help Indigenous communities continue their cultural traditions while caring for country and promoting community well-being. Many Indigenous Protected Areas are also in regions of high unemployment, so the rangers and managers become role models for their communities. Indigenous rangers are also engaging with on-the-job training programs in literacy and numeracy, law enforcement, coxswain’s licence, business administration and Indigenous leadership.²

Traditional Owners

Statutory definition of the term ‘traditional owner’:

The term ‘traditional owner’ seems to have come into common use following the passage of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth), which established mechanisms through which Aboriginal people could claim unalienated Crown Land in the Northern Territory on the basis that they are the ‘traditional Aboriginal owners’ of the land.³
The definition of ‘traditional Aboriginal owners’ in the Act is

... a local descent group of Aboriginals who:

(a) have common spiritual affiliations to a site on the land, being affiliations that place the group under a primary spiritual responsibility for that site and for the land; and

(b) are entitled by Aboriginal tradition to forage as of right over that land.⁴

Cultural Definitions by Aboriginal Communities’ Traditional Owners

Traditional owners are recognised as members of the ‘tribal’ groups whose lands lie within the region [with identified boundaries]; that is, they are accepted as belonging to one of the relevant ‘families’, primarily through socially validated genealogical connections. They are the ones who can legitimately ‘talk for country’, and thus should be consulted about its use.⁵

REFERENCES


3. Ibid.


5. Ibid.