

# To explore ways to engage successfully with indigenous communities on fisheries R&D issues

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## **Non-technical Summary**

There is no simple or single answer to effective engagement with indigenous communities. History, prejudice, assumptions and stereotypes abound. Significant cultural differences exist between indigenous communities and between indigenous communities and mainstream Australian society. The topic is emotionally charged. Added to this the complexity of indigenous fishing interests, which range from commercially focussed to families fishing for food, for cultural reasons or simply for enjoyment.

The Project Team from Course 16 of the Australian Rural Leadership Program has endeavoured to distil from this complexity a set of guidelines that can assist anyone wishing to engage with indigenous communities and individuals in a respectful manner. The guidelines are a summary of the findings of a small group of volunteers over a short time frame, with the project commencing in May 2010 and culminating in January 2011. This is not the definitive text on indigenous engagement. No disrespect or offence is intended by any omissions or generalisations in the guidelines; the group does not presume to have been able to do more than scratch the surface of this complex issue given the time and resources at our disposal. Our intention is to provide some guidance to others who may also have limited experience interacting with indigenous communities, to encourage an appreciation of cultural differences and to highlighting the similarities that exist in all human interactions. If these guidelines can assist non-indigenous individuals gain more insight, find a level of comfort and dispel some anxiety or fear when interacting with indigenous communities and individuals they will have achieved their purpose.

The advice gathered through this project can be summarised as follows:

### **There is no single set of cultural guidelines.**

- Be aware of the cultural differences.
- Find an advocate to assist with understanding social and cultural aspects of particular communities

### **Engage at an appropriate level**

- Decide on the level of engagement required

### **Consider motives and assumptions**

- Be clear of personal and professional motivations and assumptions

### **Speak to the right people**

- Find a cross cultural broker
- Find people who are genuinely interested

### **Develop relationships**

- Invest in long term relationships, short term projects and programs and personnel changes are often counterproductive

### **Be adaptable**

- Be as flexible as possible.
- Accept last minute changes with good grace and focus on building the longer term relationship not the short term meeting agenda.
- Do not to have too many back to back meetings or a fly-in fly-out agenda. Have a plan B, and a plan C.

### **Communication and language barriers**

- Consider the need for an interpreter.
- Minimise jargon and technical language
- Brochures and documentation may not be effective communication
- Beware of assumptions about the acceptability of words like “blackfella”
- Make time to have conversations and consider what is of interest to the community rather than what is of interest to you.

### **Plan meetings**

- Engage the support of a cross cultural broker to help organise and promote the meeting.
- Dress appropriately. Be prepared to sit on the ground with people rather than standing and delivering a formal presentation.

### **Getting something happening**

- The idea must come from the community.
- The idea must be thoroughly tested.
- Linkages with other organisations to address the complexity of issues and community needs will increase the potential for lasting outcomes.

## **Acknowledgments**

The Project Team recognises the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation and the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation for encouraging a project investigating issues related to indigenous fishing and for the opportunity to put the leadership lessons from the Australian Rural Leadership Program into practice. The Project Team also acknowledges the willingness and generosity of all of the people interviewed and visited during the project. Without the support, patience and insight of these people this report would not have been possible.

## **Background**

This project has been developed following discussions with FRDC representatives Neil Garbutt, John Wilson and Crispian Ashby, regarding an “indigenous fishing” project to be undertaken as part of Course 16 of the Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP). The meeting with FRDC staff highlighted the desire of FRDC to engage further with indigenous communities with the aim of more clearly understanding what indigenous communities want in terms of fisheries research and development, the opportunity to identify barriers indigenous communities have to successfully receiving financial support from FRDC and the potential to build capacity amongst the ARLP team through investigating these issues.

The FRDC is currently supporting an initiative investigating engagement with the fishing community (Empowering Industry II). The ARLP project team met with one of the consultants to this project, Chris Calogeras, C-AID Consultants, to further explore issues specifically related to indigenous engagement. This meeting highlighted the need for further capacity building amongst industry leaders and the development of guidelines to engagement. Chris also emphasised the scale of the engagement and the need for multiple strategies and realistic expectations.

The project scope was refined following discussion with Chris Calogeras and has been further discussed with Neil Garbutt in December 2009 and January 2010.

## **Need**

FRDC have conservatively described engagement with indigenous communities as challenging. Indigenous fishing is one of three core topic areas within FRDC priority areas and, despite significant opportunity, has received limited interest from the target market.

This project aims to develop and test guidelines for engagement with indigenous communities and individuals and to test the current FRDC funding application process for its “user-friendliness” to this target audience.

Testing the guidelines for engagement involved people with limited experience with indigenous communities supported by more experienced team members.



## **Objectives**

The project has four objectives:

1. to explore ways to engage successfully with indigenous communities
2. to develop guidelines for engagement with indigenous communities
3. to build capacity amongst Course 16 of the Australian Rural Leadership Program to effectively engage with indigenous communities
4. to build capacity with FRDC staff to effectively engage with indigenous communities

## **Methods**

### **Guidelines for Engagement**

The guidelines for effective engagement with indigenous communities were developed through a two stage process. The methodology was adapted from the initial plan in response to findings and opportunities that emerged during the course of the project.

The first stage involved a literature review and development of a set of draft guidelines for effective engagement.

The second stage included a number of meetings and conversations with individuals actively involved with indigenous communities, and culminated in visits to indigenous communities in the Northern Territory to validate the draft document.

### **Identifying networks**

Accessing appropriate networks for engagement with indigenous communities, such as Applicants, local Land Councils and community fishing organisations was identified as a key component of effective engagement. The project aimed to investigate the ease with which this information could be obtained and appropriate organisations / individuals contacted.

### **Development of indigenous research proposal**

At the suggestion of the FRDC, the Project Team was also challenged to further test the guidelines through assisting an indigenous community engage with FRDC and submit a funding application by November 2010, should such an opportunity be found by the Project Team.

## **Results / Discussion**

There is no simple or single answer to effective engagement with indigenous communities. The topic is emotionally charged. History, prejudice, assumptions and stereotypes abound. There are significant cultural differences between indigenous communities and mainstream Australian society, and there are significant cultural differences exist between indigenous communities, such as the differences between ceremonial communities and indigenous communities living in regional and metropolitan Australia. Added to this is the complexity of indigenous fishing interests, which range from commercially focussed to families fishing for food, for cultural reasons or simply for enjoyment.

The Project Team from Course 16 of the Australian Rural Leadership Program has endeavoured to distil from this complexity a set of guidelines that can assist anyone wishing to engage with indigenous communities and individuals in a respectful manner. The guidelines are a summary of the findings of a small group of volunteers over a short time frame, with the project commencing in May 2010 and culminating in January 2011. This is not the definitive text on indigenous engagement. No disrespect or offence is intended by any omissions or generalisations in the guidelines; the group does not presume to have been able to do more than scratch the surface of this complex issue given the time and resources at our disposal. Our intention is to provide some guidance to others who may also have limited experience interacting with indigenous communities, to encourage an appreciation of cultural differences and to highlighting the similarities that exist in all human interactions. If these guidelines can assist non-indigenous individuals gain more insight, find a level of comfort and dispel some anxiety or fear when interacting with indigenous communities and individuals they will have achieved their purpose.

The Project Team recognises that much of the validation and development of the guidelines was based on experiences in northern Australia and may not be appropriate for indigenous people living regional or metropolitan environments.

### **Draft guidelines for engagement**

A draft set of guidelines for engagement were developed based on review of literature. This information provided a solid background for further validation during the remainder of the project. The draft guidelines deviated from the original project plan, in that our initial expectation had been to establish a set of questions that could be used for engaging with indigenous communities and individuals around specific topics, such as determining the research and development interests of a community or exploring the potential to develop a

commercial fishing operation. On reflection, the initial project proposal highlighted the task focus adopted by the Project Team and is a clear example of one of the approaches to be avoided if successful engagement with indigenous communities is to occur.

The draft guidelines were as follows:

- *Need to gain prior 'informed' consent of the indigenous people affected*
  - *This consent will not be gained in a single meeting so don't be in a hurry*
  - *This consent may be retracted at any time so it is vital to keep the people updated*
- *People must be involved in design and development so that participants understand the implications*
- *Employment and training for Aboriginal people should be a large focus in any project*
- *Acknowledge and use existing expertise of the people*
- *There needs to be a demonstrated benefit of any project for the people otherwise you are unlikely to gain buy-in.*
- *Engagement and consultation will be more effective when there has been support for indigenous processes, rather than simply inviting indigenous people to join pre-determined agency processes. Indigenous processes can include, for example:*
  - *Funding meetings of Traditional Owner groups*
  - *Funding a separate Indigenous planning process*
  - *Devolving Indigenous engagement to existing Indigenous organisations*
- *Involve the people in any promotion or presentations*
- *Use of 'story telling' may be a valid communication tool*
- *The use of existing Aboriginal organisations to facilitate meetings is good practice*
- *Build relationships and trust. Don't be in a hurry*
- *Expect to pay for peoples' time at standard rates*
- *An important element in relationship building is appreciating that Aboriginal people value opportunities to visit country and kin who may live elsewhere. Consideration should be given to including extended family on any trips onto country.*
- *Cultural and intellectual rights remain the property of the indigenous people*
- *External (arbitrary) time constraints which limit or pressure indigenous people are counter-productive*
- *Indigenous funding submissions lack the 'grantsmanship' required in a competitive funding environment and therefore can be disadvantaged*
- *Good indigenous engagement processes inherently build capacity of the indigenous groups and of any other stakeholders involved. This requires particular attention being*

*given to cultural awareness programs to help agencies and others broaden their understanding of indigenous culture and interests. The best cultural awareness programs involve a variety of activities, including visits to country with Traditional Owners, factual information about local histories and contemporary indigenous life, as well as shared social events*

- *Good facilitators may be the most significant asset for achieving effective indigenous engagement. Dedicated resources (funds and specialist staff) and a strategic approach are essential to effective indigenous engagement. The engagement process must be deliberate and adaptive, facilitated by personnel committed to indigenous empowerment, priority setting and decision-making*

*Regarding effective communication, the following advice was gathered:*

- *Make use of all or any Aboriginal organisations in your region, ask their advice and keep them informed*
- *Communicate with who you can – don't wait till everyone is ready to talk because this may never happen*
- *Don't try to control the discussions or the outcomes*
- *Meet when and where indigenous people want to meet*
- *Accept criticism, it usually isn't personal*
- *Be prepared to adapt your approach as you go*
- *Sometimes the process of consultation and negotiation is as important as the outcomes*
- *Be available and responsive;- establish reliable points of contact on all sides*
- *Delivering a message does not mean that it has been received you may have to deliver it several times and in different ways*

*And finally, it will be the long-term commitment to engagement and the measurement of the practical outcomes that will show any real change, not what is spent on this or any other individual project.*

## **Identifying networks**

Attempts were made to obtain a list of Applicants. Access to the information proved to be difficult to obtain. As a consequence this step was postponed. The issue of who to contact was also raised at the Indigenous Aquaculture Forum and appears to be a systemic issue, with the Forum calling for some sort of centralised contact point to provide a means of contacting communities. Given the resources available to this project and complexity of

developing and maintaining and useful list of indigenous networks this component of the project has been abandoned.

### ***Recommendation***

***There is merit in developing a network, and for this network to extend beyond those directly involved with fishing related activities or services.***

Linkages with other organisations such as health, education and the network should be very broad including organisations working with indigenous communities in connection with fishing and in areas including, but not limited to, health, education, cultural heritage and land rights.

### **Representative organisation**

Finding a single organisation that can represent the many and varied views, interests and priorities of indigenous communities is a significant challenge. The project team were unable to find an organisation that represented the fishing interests of indigenous communities. The merit of such an organisation, particularly given the flourishing “indigenous industry” of consultants and short term programs / projects was well supported. Whether or not an organisation could be established to represent indigenous communities to the FRDC is unclear. There are many organizations working with and for indigenous communities, and as with non-indigenous groups there are often natural tensions and differences between many of these groups. Consideration should also be given to the potential for such an organisation or structure becoming a “gatekeeper” for indigenous communities, and whether insisting on a formal structure may be potentially offensive, particularly if the organisation’s membership is predominately non-indigenous.

That said, there are examples of effective regional indigenous organisations such as Miwatj Health and AMSANT (Aboriginal Medial Services Alliance of the Northern Territory) that provide models worthy of further consideration.

One of the recurring suggestions from project participants was for the FRDC to consider linking with other organisations that are already working with and in indigenous communities. Through this approach information could be provided to and gathered from communities using existing networks. This approach has inherent efficiencies as well as benefits for local communities by establishing a “one-stop-shop” for information and advice. Perhaps the most compelling argument is the complexity of the issues facing indigenous communities.

Fishing and fishing related activities can be affected by and in term affect issues such as health, education, cultural heritage and land rights.

A more traditionally western view would be to establish a multi-tiered structure based on regionally relevant committees which feed into a national organisation. This approach is often ineffective in truly representing the needs of individual communities. However it is a popular mechanism for prioritising and consolidating information. A more consensual approach may be possible, but is likely to require significant resourcing and patience.

Any organisation established should be skills based as well as being representative of regions / communities. Many representative organisations, be they indigenous and non-indigenous, suffer from a narrow skills base and can be dysfunctional through the pursuit of local benefit rather than taking the broader view.

Ultimately the communities from which information is being sought and for whom services are to be delivered should be actively involved in the discussion of how best to develop a representative organisation / structure.

## **Recommendations**

***Ensure the Indigenous Research and Development Reference Group is representative and request their input and advice on the formation of a representative body.***

***Explore opportunities to link with organisations already active in indigenous communities.***

## **Testing the guidelines for engagement**

The guidelines were tested through conversations and meetings with a broad range of people, culminating in a series of meetings with indigenous people on Groote Eylandt and at Nhulunbuy. Meetings were also held in Darwin with government representatives, Fellows of the ARLF, an author and the Northern Land Council. Three members of the project team participated in this phase of the project from 11 to 16 July 2010 and were accompanied by Chris Calogeras as the FRDC representative during the Groote Eylandt leg of the trip. The guidelines were also tested in Cairns with a representative of Balkanu. Details of visits are in Table 1.

**Table 1. Conversations, visits and events associated with testing of the guidelines for effective engagement with indigenous communities.**

| Name  | Organisation / background   |
|---|---|
| Dr Kate Auty  | Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Victoria, founder of first Victoria Koori Court and inaugural Koori Court Magistrate. |
| Will Bowman   | Trepang research scientist, Tasmanian Seafoods  |
| Lindsay Bridge  | Senior Project Officer – Indigenous Communities, Department of Local Government and Regional Development, WA, FARLF                 |
| Grant Burgoyne and Nancy Lalara   | Cross-cultural Consultants, Anindilyakwa Land Council   |
| Chris Calogeras   | C-Aid Consultants   |
| Bo Carne  | Northern Territory DPI  |
| Vanessa Drysdale  | Sea Country Facilitator, Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation  |
| Scott Gorringe  | Coordinator, Teaching and Community Leadership, Stronger Smarter Institute, Queensland University of Technology, FARLF              |
| Gilbert Hanson  | Northern Land Council   |
| Keith Hanson  | Aminjarrinja Enterprises Aboriginal Corporation   |
| Phillip Kerr  | Victorian Indigenous Seafood Corporation  |
| John McIntyre   | Balkanu Economic Development Officer  |
| Andrew Mcmillan   | Author, “An Intruders Guide to East Arnhem Land” and “Strict Rules”   |
| Deon Munumggurr   | Sea Country Ranger, Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation   |
| Gathapura Munumggur   | Sea Country Ranger, Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation   |
| John Paterson   | Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, FARLF  |
| Senator Nigel Scullion  | Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Deputy Leader of the Nationals, FARLF   |
| Professor Peter Shergold  | Macquarie Group Fdn Professor the Centre for Social Impact, ex CEO ATSIIC, Chair of ARLF  |
| Joaz Wyrramurra,  | Community Liaison Officer, Andilyakwa Land Council  |
| Indigenous Aquaculture Forum, Hobart, Tasmania, May 2010  |   |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> World Indigenous Women and Wellness Conference, Darwin, Northern Territory, August 2010 |   |

Based on this further testing of the Guidelines for engagement have been refined and are detailed below.

### **Guidelines for effective engagement with indigenous communities**

The following guidelines are a summary of the findings of a small group of volunteers over a short time frame. This is not the definitive text on indigenous engagement. No disrespect or offence is intended by any omissions or generalisations in the guidelines; the group does not presume to have been able to do more than scratch the surface of this complex issue given the time and resources at our disposal. Our intention is to provide some guidance to others who may also have limited experience interacting with indigenous communities, to encourage an appreciation of cultural differences and to highlighting the similarities that exist in all human interactions. If these guidelines can assist non-indigenous individuals gain more insight, find a level of comfort and dispel some anxiety or fear when interacting with indigenous communities and individuals they will have achieved their purpose.

### **There is no single set of cultural guidelines.**

There were over 260 different languages or communities in Australia prior to white man arriving. Each community had its own rules and behavioural frameworks. In modern day Australia there are also non-ceremonial and ceremonial communities, communities that are living a more western lifestyle and communities that are living in a manner more closely aligned to a traditional lifestyle.

It is therefore not possible to come up with a single set of cultural guidelines that will be appropriate for all interactions with indigenous communities.

However, there are a number of key considerations the Project Team believes should be considered and can assist in approaching conversations and interaction in a respectful manner.

### **Recommendations**

#### ***Be aware of the cultural differences.***

Cultural differences exist between indigenous and non-indigenous communities and between different indigenous communities. For instance:

- The dominant Australian culture is based on the individual, and individual gain. Indigenous people focus more on the collective and sharing. Indigenous communities are family and kin centric, while non-indigenous Australians are more career and financially driven.



- Decision making in indigenous communities is often “slow, slow, quick” – slow to develop a relationship, slow to develop projects and reach decisions and then quick in delivery, while in the dominant Australian culture it is “quick, quick, slow” – quick to develop a relationship, quick to reach a decision and develop a project and then slow in the delivery.
- The intensity and directness of non-indigenous Australians can cause discomfort. Direct questions, direct eye contact, fast, intense conversations may not be appropriate.
- The social structure and interpersonal relationships of indigenous communities can be very complex. Meetings with groups of indigenous people may be affected by relationships between those in the group. For example certain people may not be able to participate in group meetings if certain other individuals are present, mother-in-laws may not be able to speak to son-in-laws and vice versa. Gender may also need to be considered. There may be certain topics that are best discussed with indigenous women, while other topics should be discussed with men. Indigenous men may not be able to discuss or work with non-indigenous women.
- In some communities there is no impersonal debate. A criticism of someone else’s idea is seen as a personal criticism. This may render traditional discussion and facilitation techniques used in non-indigenous communities irrelevant and ineffective when dealing with indigenous communities.

***Find an advocate to assist with understanding social and cultural aspects of particular communities***

Find out what the particular cultural guidelines are for the community you want to talk to. Ideally find an indigenous advocate who can help you with the particular community you wish to engage with. This person can help you navigate what is acceptable and unacceptable to that community and with practicalities when visiting communities, such as setting up meetings, advising you if there are things you cannot look at, places you cannot go.

**Engage at an appropriate level**

Through the effects of colonisation and for example, establishment of missions, modern day indigenous communities can be a mix of tribes, clans and languages. This can present issues with regard to who actually can speak on behalf of the community.

Working to gain consensus with a whole community can be too difficult given its diversity. Therefore it may be more beneficial to work with individuals or family groups. This may result in jealousy within the community.

## **Recommendation**

### ***Decide on the level of engagement required***

The most effective level of engagement will depend on the particular community and the desired outcome of the interaction. If there are limited resources available then engaging with a smaller group, be that a family or individual, may be more appropriate.

## **Consider motives and assumptions**

Much has been written about the “missionaries, mercenaries and misfits” who have worked with indigenous communities. It appears many projects, though well meaning, are ineffective, unneeded and even unwelcome, because they are based on assumptions or focussed on the benefits for the service deliverer rather than benefits for the recipient.

Examination of the personal and professional motivation behind engagement is required:

- is the approach driven by a feeling of guilt or intellectual superiority?
- is there an assumption of cultural deficit?
- is change actually wanted or needed?
- is a “non-indigenous” solution appropriate?
- is there an assumption that the non-indigenous lifestyle is an improvement?

## **Recommendation**

### ***Be clear of personal and professional motivations and assumptions.***

Be clear of personal and professional motivations, identify and test assumptions.

## **Speak to the right people**

Finding the “right people” appears to be essential to finding a way into a community. For a variety of reasons, many communities and individuals appear to be wary and weary of non-indigenous people wanting to interact with communities. There is no simple way to identify who the “right person” is, and this person may vary depending on the question or issue wanting to be discussed. The “right person” is generally someone who is well known to the community, and is trusted, for example this could be a Community Liaison Officer or General Business Manager within Land Councils

Music and Australian Rules football are well regarded in communities and can be ways to aid initial access and gain interest. Any access so gained must be respected and not subject to abuse.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Find a cross cultural broker***

People who can act as a bridge between indigenous and non-indigenous communities can be subject to burn-out due to the heavy reliance often placed on a single person. They may act as the go-between for many different projects, and people. Their assistance and any time limitations should be respected.

### ***Find people who are genuinely interested***

The success of any initiative will depend on finding people in the community who are genuinely interested. If these are not the most senior people in the community or the community leaders, it may be necessary to get the support of the senior people before progressing.

Genuine interest is likely to be related to the origin of the idea or initiative. See “Getting something happening”.

## **Develop relationships**

Effective engagement requires commitment and time. It also requires genuine conversations. Trusting relationships are not formed overnight and are not necessarily transferrable; in fact these relationships may take years to develop. Non-indigenous people may develop relationships with a “position” and therefore a relationship with whoever is filling that particular position. Personnel changes hamper progress of indigenous projects and programs as the trusted relationship is lost and a new relationship must be re-established. When working with indigenous communities a succession plan should be developed to deal with changes in personnel.

Similarly succession plans within indigenous organisations are required to maintain relationships with individuals and the community

## **Recommendation**

***Invest in long term relationships, short term projects and programs and personnel changes are often counterproductive.***

## **Be adaptable**

Priorities of indigenous people and communities are often different to the priorities of non-indigenous people; communities can be closed due to deaths, individuals may be absent because of celebrations or cultural activities, meetings may not take place or may take place with different people than originally intended. Indigenous people and communities may not be used to the discipline or imperative of time as non-indigenous people and society. Flexibility is required to manage the new opportunities that may appear or to reschedule meetings.

## **Recommendation**

***Be as flexible as possible.***

***Accept last minute changes with good grace and focus on building the longer term relationship not the short term meeting agenda.***

***Do not have too many back to back meetings or a fly-in fly-out agenda. Have a plan B, and a plan C.***

## **Communication and language barriers**

Effective communication is essential to effective engagement. To achieve this requires consideration of the group or person you are talking to or communicating with. For many ceremonial indigenous people English is often a second language, access to and progress through the formal western educational system may also be limited.

Cultural differences in the structure of conversations may also exist, for instance non-indigenous scientists and researchers are accustomed to transparent, direct conversations. By contrast many indigenous conversations are not transparent. Non-indigenous language includes “imponderables” such as “if” or “maybe”, which may not be understood in indigenous cultures. Adding these qualifiers to conversation can result in misunderstandings, failure to deliver and loss of trust.

Communicating through the written word can be ineffective, particularly if documents are long or the language is technical or contains jargon.

The “Koori grapevine” is generally how information is passed around communities. Chatting or “yarning” with indigenous people who have trusting relationships with the community is

often the most effective means communicating and understanding the thoughts and concerns of the broader community.

Indigenous people generally have genuine curiosity about things and are naturally efficient and effective. Conversations that connect with this interest are likely to be well received.

Language can be divisive. What one indigenous person is comfortable with may not be acceptable to others. For instance, Midnight Oil can have the “Whitefella – Blackfella” tour, but that does not mean that terms like whitefella and blackfella are broadly accepted or appropriate. In addition, words should be chosen that are used and understood by the community. It is important to build from an existing knowledge base to minimise confusion and isolation due to lack of comprehension. Put simply, do not put your cleverness in front of communication. “Guidelines for effective communication with indigenous communities” is an example of the sort of language to be avoided.

## **Recommendations**

***Consider the need for an interpreter.***

***Minimise jargon and technical language***

***Brochures and documentation may not be effective communication***

***Beware of assumptions about the acceptability of words like blackfella.***

***Make time to have conversations and consider what is of interest to the community rather than what is of interest to you.***

## **Meetings**

Holding meetings with indigenous communities requires forward planning. Meetings should be set up well in advance rather than “phoning from the airport” and expecting people to be available.

A successful meeting with a community draws on all of the guidelines already mentioned, and relies heavily on the help of a cross cultural broker. Land Council or Community Liaison people are good primary contacts. Having preliminary discussions with these people about the aims of meeting and enlisting their support to promote and translate your aims into locally relevant language and context is important.

An appropriate venue and consideration of transport to and from the venue need to be considered, particularly if indigenous community members need to travel to the meeting.

In establishing a meeting consider:

- a draw card, such as a BBQ
- promoting the meeting about a month before the intended date
- send out flyers a week before the meeting
- remind people the day before the meeting

## **Recommendations**

***Engage the support of a cross cultural broker to help organise and promote the meeting.***

***Dress appropriately. Be prepared to sit on the ground with people rather than standing and delivering a formal presentation.***

## **Getting something happening**

The need to find out what is wanted by the community and not just peddle the latest program or project was the most commonly identified requirement for effective engagement. It is fair to say indigenous communities are tired of being told what they need or what is best for them.

Successful projects are based on organic ideas that come from the community or from families / individuals in the community.

The need for genuine conversations to identify and test community desires is critical. Having these conversations includes identifying the motivation and agendas of the individuals involved. It involves talking about the detail of the idea:

- who is going to do each activity
- do the skills exist
- do people really understand what is involved?

As part of testing this desire, establishing a “work experience” program could be useful. This could involve working in a similar business or on a similar research project for a few weeks before determining if there is real commitment and interest in the project.

Projects related to indigenous fishing should also invest in a wider range of values, not just return on investment, but broader issues such as converting to longer term employment or

addressing deeper social or cultural challenges. While not necessarily the remit of FRDC, consideration of these other issues are required for longevity of the project outcome. This would involve FRDC partnering with other organisations to deliver a more “complete package”.

## **Recommendations**

***The idea must come from the community.***

***The idea must be thoroughly tested.***

***Linkages with other organisations to address the complexity of issues and community needs will increase the potential for lasting outcomes.***

## **Application process**

Indigenous organisations spend upward of 50% of their government funded contract time looking for more funding as the original funding is inadequate for the real costs, short term and the lengthy development and application process of government response is too onerous for indigenous organisations.

While testing the guidelines for engagement with people on Groote Eylandt the team identified an indigenous non-for-profit organisation that was establishing a fishing venture and could benefit from the Project Team assisting with submitting a funding application to FRDC.

Project Team members spent the day with the Numayanga Aboriginal Corporation to discover what the challenges were for them in establishing the fishing venture. The team felt that the Numayanga could benefit from, and meet the criteria for FRDC funding. It was decided that the Project team would assist Numayanga to submit an application to FRDC for funding.

One of our team members went through the process of submitting an FRDC application on behalf of Numayanga. The FRDC website and Fishnet were found to be hard to follow and the application process very scientific in nature. The fact that the application process is completely internet based is also an issue. Identifying timelines for submission and the exact application process were very confusing. Timelines for submission to FRAB's and the whole process around the role of FRAB's was not clearly defined. In order to apply for funding through the Fishnet process it appeared that you had to be in the know with FRDC and involved directly with the fishing industry.

## **Recommendations**

***FRDC need to re-evaluate their funding process to be more user friendly, clearly defining the process and making it more accessible.***

***Many indigenous people don't have internet facilities and need to be able to visualise and discuss applications, so the application needs to be able to be printed off easily.***

***Consider creating a modified application template for indigenous applications.***



## **Benefits**

Anyone wishing to engage with indigenous communities or individuals, regardless of the particular topic or agenda, stands to benefit from this project.

## **Further Development**

The guidelines and recommendations of this report will be discussed with the Interim Indigenous Research and Development Reference Group before finalisation.

Once finalised it is recommended that FRDC produce a brochure capturing the key elements of the guidelines and make this document freely available in both electronic and hard copy.

It is also recommended that the FRDC Board and staff involved with indigenous projects participate in cross cultural training and visits to indigenous communities. It is the opinion of the Project Team that exploring issues of effective engagement with indigenous communities is best done in person.

## **Planned outcomes**

The majority of the planned outcomes of the project have been met through the development and testing of the guidelines for effective engagement of indigenous communities. In achieving this output Project Team members were provided with an opportunity to expand their understanding of indigenous issues and particularly effective engagement with indigenous communities in the context of fishing research and development. Insights from this project and a summary of the guidelines have also been shared more broadly through the ARLP Course 16 Symposium held in Alice Springs in September 2010.

The project design included capacity building within the FRDC by including a FRDC staff member in the visits to indigenous communities as part of the validation of the guidelines. Unfortunately this did not occur. It is hoped that through conversations with FRDC staff and their involvement in a planned meeting with the Interim Indigenous Research and Development Reference Group that some of the experiences of the Northern Territory visits.

## Presentation of Project Results

In March 2011, the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) sponsored a forum “Shaping advice for Indigenous fishing and aquaculture RD&E”, with a view to improving engagement with its indigenous fisheries stakeholders and to start working towards better identification of key Fisheries RD&E priorities for the indigenous sector. Project team member Brooke Rankmore, attended the forum with Nesman Bara, an indigenous representative for the Numayanga Aboriginal Corporation, who as discussed previously are actively establishing a fishing venture on Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory.

Brooke presented the major findings of this report at the forum and Brooke and Nesman presented an overview of the Numayanga fishing venture. Both presentations were well received with a large amount of discussions with fellow participants taking place throughout the forum. Indeed the forum was a positive step forward for FRDC, with FRDC representatives having the opportunity to engage directly with indigenous people from across Australia, and be part of the discussions that took place. The forum showed that FRDC has taken notice of the recommendations in this and other similar commissioned reports.

The forum achieved the following outcomes;

- A large and diverse range of issues requiring RD&E investment were identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Based on issues identified by participants, eleven key RD&E needs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were developed.
- A revised Indigenous Reference Group (IRG) was formed whose immediate role is to;
  - develop a terms of reference
  - work towards a process for engaging/consulting more broadly
  - Shape forum outcomes into a ‘futures plan’ that can provide more solid actions for progression.
  - facilitate a process for getting the forum group back together to review the IRG outcomes and processes
- In the immediate timeframe two of the IRG members have been nominated as interim members of the National Priorities Forum

- FRDC is working with the IRG to resource the processes in the short term.

## Conclusion

Three of the four project objectives were met, namely:

1. to explore ways to engage successfully with indigenous communities
2. to develop guidelines for engagement with indigenous communities and
3. to build capacity amongst Course 16 of the Australian Rural Leadership Program to effectively engage with indigenous communities.

Exploration of ways to engage successfully with indigenous communities lead to the development of draft guidelines for engagement, which were then tested through a series of conversations, meetings and site visits to indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

In terms of building capacity amongst participants of Course 16 of the ARLP, this was achieved to varying levels. A small group from the Project Team undertook community visits on Groote Eylandt and at Nhulunbuy, other group members participated in meetings with indigenous organisations or participated in the literature review. . Insights from this project and a summary of the guidelines were also discussed at the ARLP Course 16 Symposium held in Alice Springs in September 2010.

In terms of guidelines for effective engagement with indigenous communities, the lessons from this project can be summarised as follows:

There is no single set of cultural guidelines.

- Be aware of the cultural differences.
- Find an advocate to assist with understanding social and cultural aspects of particular communities

Engage at an appropriate level

- Decide on the level of engagement required

Consider motives and assumptions

- Be clear of personal and professional motivations and assumptions

Speak to the right people

- Find a cross cultural broker
- Find people who are genuinely interested

Develop relationships

- Invest in long term relationships, short term projects and programs and personnel changes are often counterproductive

#### Be adaptable

- Be as flexible as possible.
- Accept last minute changes with good grace and focus on building the longer term relationship not the short term meeting agenda.
- Do not have too many back to back meetings or a fly-in fly-out agenda. Have a plan B, and a plan C.

#### Communication and language barriers

- Consider the need for an interpreter.
- Minimise jargon and technical language
- Brochures and documentation may not be effective communication
- Beware of assumptions about the acceptability of words like “blackfella”
- Make time to have conversations and consider what is of interest to the community rather than what is of interest to you.

#### Plan meetings

- Engage the support of a cross cultural broker to help organise and promote the meeting.
- Dress appropriately. Be prepared to sit on the ground with people rather than standing and delivering a formal presentation.

#### Getting something happening

- The idea must come from the community.
- The idea must be thoroughly tested.
- Linkages with other organisations to address the complexity of issues and community needs will increase the potential for lasting outcomes.

## Recommendations

A number of recommendations have arisen from this project that relate to the ability of indigenous communities to engage with FRDC and vice versa.

### 1. Review the means for applying for support from FRDC.

FishNET is complicated, not user to access to the internet, which is often intermittent and slow in remote and rural Australia. Applications for funding are not easy for indigenous community members to fill in due to the format of the application process and the language / jargon used. One of the lessons from this project is that in many cases indigenous people prefer to “have a yarn” to someone rather than complete paperwork to develop a project. Further, as was evident in all organisations and communities visited

in the course of this project, there is invariably a non-indigenous “layer” between the community and the money. This layer can effectively be disempowering and build reliance on non-indigenous service providers and consultants. Simplifying the FRDC application process would improve the likelihood of applications from indigenous communities.

**2. FRDC Board to visit indigenous communities involved with fishing.**

Appreciation of the complexity of effective interaction is best developed by actually visiting indigenous communities. The FRDC Board should include holding Board meetings in a range of locations that reflect the diversity of the fishing related interests in Australia. Further value would be added by participating in cross cultural education in these regions.

**3. Review the composition, terms of reference and resourcing of the Interim Indigenous Research and Development Reference Group.**

In light of the absence of an existing organisation that can act as the conduit between indigenous communities and the FRDC it is recommended this group be empowered to fill this void in the short to medium term. One of the agenda items for this group should be to identify or develop a structure / organisation / linkages to disseminate information about the FRDC to indigenous communities and to assist in the prioritisation of indigenous fishing research and development needs.

**4. Review and more clearly articulate the FRDC offer to indigenous communities.**

This needs to be undertaken to increase the level of awareness of the FRDC with indigenous communities and with regard to the sorts of activities that could attract FRDC support. Advice from the Interim Indigenous Research and Development Reference Group should also be sought to encourage the development of “organic” ideas driven by indigenous community as opposed to tightly defined predetermined programs.

**5. Develop longer term programs**

Financial support is generally easier to attract for projects that have quick financial return, rather than projects that are beneficial to the community in the longer term. Consider the wastefulness of short term projects particularly for indigenous communities where trusted relationships are paramount and strive to ensure support beyond the 3 year political cycle.

**6. Develop linkages with other service delivery organisations working with indigenous communities.**

It appears that for effective outcomes in many indigenous communities the longer term view is needed and also the capacity to collaborate with other organisations such as health, education, cultural heritage and land rights to develop a more holistic approach.

**7. Take advice from indigenous cross cultural brokers and spokespeople regarding the potential to develop a representative body.**

This could be achieved through a workshop or series of workshops to talk about the issue. The workshops should be designed, organised and lead by indigenous people. Whatever is established needs to have longevity and it will take time to create the correct structure and develop trusting relationships.

**8. Continue to encourage capacity building and understanding by supporting interaction between indigenous and non-indigenous people.**

Review, and if deemed appropriate, make available the Guidelines for effective engagement with indigenous communities – and change the title!

## **References**

None.

## **Appendix 1 – Intellectual Property**

The information contained within this report has been freely sourced from all the contributors in the interest of fuelling the progress of humankind. As such there are no intellectual property rights but it is requested that any information used be in the spirit in which it was given.

*Nicholas Lambert November 2010*

## **Appendix 2 - Project Team members**

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