Cultural Enterprises - Kimberley Land Council
The Kimberley region is a vast, wild and ancient place with a strong Aboriginal culture dating back more than 50,000 years. Aboriginal culture is embedded in the spirit of the Kimberley landscape with its rugged coastline, rocky outcrops, sandy deserts, rushing tides, deep gorges, waterfalls and rivers.

The Kimberley is a biologically diverse region that has been recognised on the National Heritage List as an Aboriginal cultural landscape. It is home to eight Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) that are managed by Traditional Owners who draw on their traditional knowledge to conserve unique cultural sites and ecosystems creating an interconnected habitat corridor across the region.

The Kimberley covers approximately 423,000 square kilometres and with an estimated population of just 35,000 people, it has fewer people per square kilometre than almost any other place on earth. Kimberley Traditional Owners, who make up over 43% of the region’s population, have a deep and intrinsic connection to country.
The Kimberley region is a vast, wild and ancient land with a strong and significant Aboriginal culture dating back more than 50,000 years.
Kimberley Aboriginal people have used their strong governance models to develop regional organisations that represent their interests in land, law, culture, language and economic development.
In 2012, the United Nations Human Development Index ranked Australia the second most developed nation in the world. In the same year, the Aboriginal youth suicide rate in Australia was one of the highest in the world.

On every social indicator Indigenous people are significantly behind their non-Indigenous counterparts in areas of education, income, housing, mental health, chronic disease, and more. Although efforts are being made to close the gap, change is slow or non-existent, as highlighted in the Federal Government’s 2014 Closing the Gap progress and priorities report.

In the Kimberley region, Traditional Owners are taking responsibility for their future and are creating a sustainable economy through economic participation and cultural enterprise development. Kimberley Aboriginal people have created strong regional organisations that represent their interests in land, law, culture, language and economic development. These organisations were formed by Kimberley Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people and are founded on cultural values and governance structures.

Formed in 1978 as a land rights organisation, the Kimberley Land Council works with Aboriginal people to get back country, look after country and get control of the future. Developing sustainable business opportunities through the establishment of the cultural enterprise hub is pivotal to achieving our vision for the future. The Kimberley Land Council’s sister organisation, KRED Enterprises, engages with the corporate sector to create economic development opportunities as a way to improve Indigenous socio-economic circumstances and drive social change.

KRED Enterprises has two wholly owned subsidiary companies: Environmental Heritage and Social Impact Services (EHSIS) and KRED Legal. EHSIS provides staff and logistics to carry out heritage surveys and cultural heritage monitoring while KRED Legal, Australia’s first legal company owned by native title groups, focuses on commercial agreements, native title law, litigation and governance work. KRED is owned by Ambooriny Burru Charitable Foundation, a structure that ensures its members benefit from economic activity.

Through implementing innovative yet viable solutions, we are aiming to strike a balance between cultural and environmental conservation and economic development. Through informed decision making, Traditional Owners are able to use resources sustainably and build strong communities while protecting our core values of country and culture.
Across northern Australia, a cultural enterprise economy has emerged. Founded on the core principles of looking after country and protecting Indigenous cultural values, it is proving to be a successful social enterprise model.

Kimberley Traditional Owners are using their cultural values to stimulate economic activities in their communities, ignite social change and enrich ecological biodiversity.

Cultural enterprise economies are based on four pillars: recognition, cultural governance, sustainable enterprise and conservation.

• Recognition and respect for Indigenous culture, rights and title;
• Development of strong Indigenous cultural governance models for decision-making and guidance;
• Increasing meaningful employment opportunities to generate income and wealth in communities through sustainable enterprises; and
• Conserving and restoring the environment.

Within the cultural enterprise economy, Indigenous culture and knowledge does not conflict with modern economic principles but complements and enhances business development opportunities.

The Kimberley Land Council has been delivering cultural and natural resource management projects across the region for the past 10 years and is drawing on this extensive knowledge and expertise to develop a cultural enterprise economy. The vision of Kimberley Aboriginal people is to live and work on their traditional lands to develop enterprises that build capacity, create employment and are founded on traditional knowledge, culture and connection to country. This model, while empowering Aboriginal people to manage their country, is also proving to be a solution to reduce entrenched socio-economic disadvantage, welfare dependence, political marginalisation and poverty. It is creating revitalised communities, empowering Indigenous leadership, driving social change and delivering remote community development.
In the Kimberley, Traditional Owners are successfully implementing and operating cultural enterprises including environmental management services, carbon abatement, Indigenous Protected Areas, on country research projects, biodiversity surveys, data collection and management, and cultural immersion experiences.
Creating Indigenous enterprises based on the strong relationship Aboriginal people have to their country is proving to be a successful cultural business model.

The Kimberley Ranger Network integrates ecological, social and cultural values to generate sustainable economic growth in remote Kimberley communities.

The ranger initiative is supported by the Australian Government and works to realise Indigenous aspirations to look after and manage country using a combination of traditional cultural knowledge, western science and modern technologies.

It has not only created jobs in remote communities, but established long-term career paths in the cultural and natural resource management sector.

The Kimberley Ranger Network has significantly improved community wellbeing, is working to reduce poverty through creating economic opportunities, and is building communities while enhancing connection to culture.

The Network’s interconnected structure is founded on shared cultural values and promotes the distribution of information and skills across independent ranger groups. Elders direct long-term conservation management plans, promote the transfer of traditional knowledge to younger generations, and provide guidance, leadership and authority. The governance model connects ranger groups together to ensure that community goals are achieved at a local level as well as delivering strategic regional objectives.
The Kimberley Ranger Network works to look after and manage country using a combination of traditional cultural knowledge, western science and modern technologies.
The Kimberley is a vast landscape that covers an area of approximately 423,000 square kilometres. The Kimberley Ranger Network covers 12 native title estates covering an area of 378,704 square kilometres, including management of eight Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) across more than 90,000 square kilometres.

The Kimberley Ranger Network is comprised of 13 ranger groups employing more than 200 full-time and casual rangers and cultural advisers on an annual basis. The Network enables Kimberley Traditional Owners to proactively manage the threats to their country while delivering strategic landscape-scale management plans.

The ability of Kimberley Aboriginal people to take the lead role in the management of their country has been further facilitated through the establishment of eight IPAs across the Kimberley. IPAs not only produce positive environmental outcomes but deliver strong cultural and social results as well. The Kimberley Ranger and IPA Networks provide the foundations from which cultural enterprise development will grow across the region.
Indigenous Protected Areas

“The world’s Indigenous people are leading a new frontier in developing large landscape conservation initiatives as a way to manage global environmental threats. There are approximately 370 million Indigenous peoples worldwide. They make up just five percent of the global population, but they hold nearly 25 percent of the world’s lands and waters, representing 80 percent of the earth’s biodiversity.” – The Nature Conservancy

Indigenous people are in a unique position to deliver cultural heritage and biodiversity protection for the benefit of the global community. In Australia there are 63 Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) covering almost 500,000 square kilometres. IPAs make-up over 40% of Australia’s National Reserve System and assist the Australian Government to deliver on their international targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Within the Kimberley region, Traditional Owners have declared eight IPAs, covering more than 90,000 square kilometres, which when combined create the largest Indigenous-owned conservation corridor in northern Australia.

Establishing IPAs requires Traditional Owners to develop plans of management that set out cultural priorities, ecological targets and identify threats. This engagement and management model, known as Healthy Country Planning, is founded on cultural governance and promotes Indigenous knowledge and leadership.

The success of the IPA program can be directly linked to the recognition and respect of Indigenous rights to manage country.

The emergence of eco-system based markets provides an opportunity and urgency to connect the world’s Indigenous people so that experiences, skills and information can be shared about ways to access opportunities for socially, environmentally and culturally sustainable development. For this reason the KLC has engaged with Indigenous groups about cultural enterprise development at international events like the 2013 World Indigenous Network conference in Darwin; the WILD10 Conference in Spain; through hosting a side event with the Nature Conservancy and Equator Initiative at the 2014 UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York; and presenting at the World Parks Congress in Sydney 2014.
Kimberley Indigenous Protected Areas are the preferred land management model for maintaining the ecological integrity of country while fulfilling the need to develop cultural economic enterprises.
The Kimberley Ranger Network ensures the regional, national and international conservation values of the Kimberley region are managed using traditional ecological knowledge and cutting edge science.
Kimberley Indigenous ranger groups are providing high quality conservation and land management services to a range of stakeholders and government departments wanting to protect the natural and cultural values of the region.

The Kimberley Ranger Network has:

• Developed and applied best-practice adaptive management plans to protect natural and cultural values on native title land;

• Implemented a regional monitoring and evaluation framework to quantify and measure the success of Indigenous land management initiatives;

• Undertaken inventory and species specific biodiversity surveys for nationally threatened and culturally important species;

• Managed invasive species on native title lands; and

• Initiated and supported research activities that assist to fill knowledge gaps about species and ecological communities.

The services provided by the Kimberley Ranger Network ensure the regional, national and international conservation values of the Kimberley region are managed using traditional ecological knowledge and cutting-edge science to achieve best practice outcomes.
Indigenous participation in the carbon market provides a unique opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, limit the effects of climate change, pursue positive environmental investment and support Indigenous cultural enterprise opportunities.

In Australia, Indigenous fire management projects use traditional burning methods and modern scientific practices to reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions released into the atmosphere from unmanaged and potentially dangerous wildfires.

Traditional Owners in the north Kimberley have registered carbon projects across their exclusive possession native title lands, signalling a new era for income generation in remote communities.

Through the North Kimberley Fire Abatement Project (NKFAP), Traditional Owners have prevented approximately 290,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions from entering the atmosphere by undertaking early dry season savannah burning. The NKFAP generates Australia Carbon Credit Units which can be sold to private business and are eligible to be sold into the Australian Governments Emission Reduction Fund.

Profits from the sale of carbon credits under the NKFAP provide the Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation, Dambimangari Aboriginal Corporation, Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation and Balanggarra Aboriginal Corporation with the financial resources to continue undertaking healthy country right way fire management.

The NKFAP is delivering social and environmental outcomes through improved biodiversity and landscape health, reinvigorating social and cultural traditions, strengthening climate change adaptability, reversing socio-economic disadvantage and increasing employment opportunities.

The Kimberley Land Council has facilitated a multi-stakeholder approach to transform the NKFAP into a successful cultural enterprise. Through partnerships with the Australian Government, The Nature Conservancy and Rangelands NRM, fire management within the Kimberley has continued to improve and is producing significant environmental, social and cultural results. In addition, these initiatives continue to drive the market with new carbon abatement methodologies under development which will expand the opportunities for carbon abatement on Indigenous lands.
Indigenous fire management provides a unique opportunity to reduce carbon emissions, improve biodiversity and landscape health and support sustainable Indigenous business opportunities.
Indigenous peoples across the world are implementing innovative yet practical ideas to help them resist, survive and adapt to the global threat of climate change.
Climate change stands to be one of the biggest global threats to the wellbeing of Indigenous people in modern times.

Global climate trends indicate that temperatures will continue to rise resulting in more extreme weather conditions such as increased floods and droughts, changes to seasonal indicators, extinction of flora and fauna and higher levels of disease and health issues.

Indigenous people are likely to be disproportionately affected by climate change due to their dependence on and interconnected relationship with the natural environment. Lower socio-economic circumstances will make it more difficult for Indigenous people to adapt and respond to climate change. This is particularly true within the Kimberley.

In the desert region of the Kimberley, the intimate knowledge the Ngurrara people have of their country is telling them the seasonal indicators of their homeland are changing.

The vital water sources of the desert have started drying up while the times when plants bloom, animals breed and fruits ripen have shifted from traditional and historical patterns.

With a cultural responsibility and mandate to protect their diverse ecosystems, the Ngurrara people are proactively managing climate change impacts through the development of a seasonal database to analyse weather patterns and climate change data.

Scientific information and traditional ecological knowledge about changes to country is stored on the database and analysed to inform adaptation strategies. This tool is being used to assist the Ngurrara Rangers make informed decisions about the best seasonal times to conduct on-ground land management activities.
Kimberley Aboriginal people are living and working on country in enterprises that build capacity and create employment and are founded on traditional knowledge, cultural values and connection to country.

The KLC has extensive experience in both commercial undertakings and in developing and implementing land and sea management projects. The KLC is drawing on these two streams of experience to develop a concept plan for a Kimberley Cultural Enterprise Hub (Hub).

The Hub will stimulate social enterprise development across the region by providing the pathway for Kimberley Traditional Owners to access emerging eco-system based markets. The Hub would act as a broker for the sale of carbon credits; facilitate the provision of environmental services to the mining sector; engage with the pastoral industry to provide rangeland monitoring and fire suppression; and provide expert advice on cultural tourism experiences within IPAs.

Over the past five years the KLC has worked in partnership with the Kimberley Ranger Network and affiliated native title corporations to develop small enterprises like carbon farming, environmental service contracts, permit systems, small scale tourism ventures, cultural immersion experiences and research surveys. The KLC is now looking to consolidate this experience through the establishment of the Hub as a new way to increase cultural enterprise initiatives across the region into the future.

Our aim is to develop innovative solutions which empower our leaders to drive enterprise development on their country. Success builds success and we are confident that as cultural enterprises grow the demand for these products and services will increase.
The Kimberley Cultural Enterprise Hub will stimulate social enterprise across the region by providing the pathway for Kimberley Traditional Owners to access emerging eco-system based markets.
The KLC would like to acknowledge the strong partnerships we have forged with the following organisations: