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Passing Muster: Aboriginal Cattle Jobs and Enterprises under Review

Aboriginal pastoral employment and enterprises across Northern Australia are coming under the spotlight as part of the most thorough review of the industry ever undertaken.

Cattle for Country is a new Desert Knowledge CRC research project that brings together pastoralists, Aboriginal organisations and enterprises, government departments and industry groups all over northern Australia.

It is the first time the cattle industry, hard hit by the national skills shortage, is funding research into Aboriginal employment initiatives.

The three-year project will find out how to best strengthen Aboriginal cattle enterprises, build productive partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cattle companies and create and sustain employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal people in the industry.

The CRC's Managing Director, Ms Jan Ferguson, said research benefits will go beyond helping to create job-ready local workforces and more viable cattle businesses.

"It's also about learning how the industry can best realise a range of cultural, environmental and social benefits."

"Strengthening existing initiatives will lead to improvements in the governance and business management capacity of remote communities, more collaborative management operations such as joint musters between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cattle enterprises, easier access to country for traditional owners through better roads and infrastructure and a healthier environment through the control of weeds, feral animals and fires."

Cattle for Country has three components:

- Review of Aboriginal employment in the pastoral industry
- Evaluation of the Indigenous Pastoral Program
- Evaluation of Kimberley Indigenous Management Support Services (KIMSS)

In the first of these, Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) and the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) are co-funding the Desert Knowledge CRC to conduct a 12-month review of Aboriginal employment initiatives in the mainstream pastoral industry.

The review will document and analyse case studies of successes and failures to develop best practice employment models.

"Many northern beef producers are struggling to source labour yet many have a potential Indigenous workforce in close proximity. The question is how best to upskill and train them to meet the needs of the industry," said Wayne Hall, MLA's Manager of Northern Production Research.

A second component of the project will evaluate the Indigenous Pastoral Program (IPP), an on-going initiative of the Central and Northern Land Councils, the ILC, the NT Cattlemen's Association, the NT Government and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR).

The IPP has achieved increases in cattle numbers on Aboriginal land, as well as in Aboriginal people's participation in traineeships, governance training and other pastoral training initiatives.

The ILC is putting funding towards a participatory evaluation of the IPP in the Northern Territory. The IPP evaluation will work with different Aboriginal pastoral enterprises, ranging from small herds and emerging pastoral enterprises to fully operating Aboriginal cattle businesses to find out what works, what doesn't, and how the IPP can build on its considerable success to date.

The IPP evaluation will draw on the experiences of both Aboriginal pastoralists, non –Aboriginal pastoralists involved in the IPP, and project officers to provide advice on how to best turn “start up” cattle businesses into strong and sustainable commercial enterprises.

ILC Chairperson, Shirley McPherson, said it is hoped to create 1,000 new Indigenous jobs in the NT cattle industry over the next 10 years.

“With all key players recently signing on for a five-year extension to the IPP, the evaluation will be crucial in helping us to ensure that the program delivers long-lasting and sustainable benefits to Indigenous people,” Ms McPherson said.

“The IPP has a big focus on providing training and skills development so people can take up real jobs in both the Indigenous and mainstream pastoral industries and this will be closely looked at in the evaluation.”

The Desert Knowledge CRC has also won a tender to evaluate the Kimberley Indigenous Management Support Service (KIMSS), an award-winning project jointly funded by the WA Agriculture Department and the ILC over the past three years.

The \$6.5 million project, which has a further four years to run, has increased commercial pastoral activity on 10 Aboriginal-owned cattle stations in WA's Kimberley region by developing the technical and management skills of station directors, managers and workers.

Mark Chmielewski, the Manager Indigenous Agriculture of the WA Agriculture Department and a Desert Knowledge CRC board member, says the evaluation will inform policy around the nation.

“The Pilbara and the Albany/Esperance regions have already adopted KIMMS. Knowing how to improve the delivery of the project to Aboriginal pastoralists will help expand it to other areas as well.”

Cattle for Country is part of the Desert Knowledge CRC's broader *21st Century Pastoralism* core research project. Led by Mr Mark Ashley, the project is finding research solutions for sustainable desert pastoral enterprises.

For more information go to www.desertknowledgecrc.com.au.

Contacts:

Jan Ferguson, Desert Knowledge CRC, 08 8950 7162 or 0401 719 882
Shirley McPherson, Indigenous Land Corporation, 08 9420 6300 or 0417 801 255
Damon Whittock, Meat and Livestock Australia, 02 9463 9368 or 0404 489 376
Mark Chmielewski, WA Agriculture Department, 08 9420 6300 or 0417 801 255
Elke Wiesmann, Desert Knowledge CRC, 08 8950 7142 or 0427 009 240