Reference No. 35

Summarising: Cochrane (2005), *The Djelk Ranger Program: An Outsider’s Perspective*
Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990–2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

Title of Research:
The Djelk Ranger Program: An Outsider's Perspective

Research Publication:
CAEPR Working Paper No. 27, 2005

Name of Researcher(s):
M.J. Cochrane

Time period:
2003

Geographic location:
Maningrida and the surrounding region of north central Arnhem Land.

Methodology:
This is a descriptive study of the Djelk Ranger Program based on information from meetings with the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) and different groups of Djelk rangers working on BAC wildlife projects, and included site visits to projects.

Aims:
This paper provides an overview of the Djelk Ranger Program by describing:
• The purpose and management of the program
• The activities undertaken by rangers
• Educational and training requirements for rangers involved in program activities
• Employment opportunities arising from the program
• Links to the local community.

Selected findings and insights:
The Djelk Ranger Program started in 1991 grew significantly after 1998, when it received funding from the National Heritage Trust program and on-going support from the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation (BAC). BAC had responsibility for the management of services to some 800 people living on 35 outstations in the region surrounding Maningrida as well as regional economic development.

The BAC and the Djelk Ranger program for men and women focused on wildlife utilisation and management as a potential avenue for greater regional engagement with the market economy.

• This was achieved by providing an employment program that incorporated education, training and collaboration with researchers, was culturally and socially appropriate, and focused on commercialisation of wildlife harvesting to provide environmental and economic outcomes and benefits to the community.
The study documents an extensive array of training needs associated with the development, implementation and ongoing management of commercial wildlife activities.

- For example, literacy and numeracy skill development was highlighted as well as the capacity to integrate in a meaningful manner Traditional Ecological Knowledge with Western Scientific Knowledge if commercial wildlife activities are to be sustainable. Rangers were enrolled in Certificate I-IV courses in Natural Resource Management and in Horticulture. Regular attendance at these courses was a problem identified in the paper.

Activities included plant and feral animal management, fire management and sustainable harvesting enterprises such as the sustainable harvesting of crocodile eggs and the harvesting and development of long-necked turtles.

The program had well established links with the Maningrida Community Education Centre, which provided primary and secondary schooling - through school excursions or as part of a more formal Junior Ranger program.

Educational implications:

This program, which is a highly ‘educative’ program, is tightly connected to the goals and aspirations of the local Indigenous community, including the creation of meaningful and sustainable employment within a culturally relevant context. The importance of matching community and individuals’ aspirations with participation in culturally relevant training is a clear indication of the direction for training provision aimed at developing pathways for remote communities. Furthermore such training strategies will need to take account of cultural practices which will require greater attention to flexibility and practicality. Therefore the development of appropriate training must be based upon close collaboration with those Indigenous organisations representative of the community and involved in overall regional development. [culture]

As well as being culturally relevant, training needs to include literacy and numeracy as well as the more specialist areas of resource management and planning and possibly the development of some scientific expertise. With the growth of ranger programs across the Top End, there may be opportunity to develop generic courses to address the needs of the various projects—and this is already happening with Certificate Courses in Natural Resource Management. The challenge for training providers will be in meeting the local expectation of the immediate relevance of those courses to their individual projects and in their delivery which culturally ‘fits’ with local circumstances. [curriculum]

This type of project has the potential to make the local secondary school very much the centre of the community but will raise significant governance issues for the school, including the level of involvement of and responsibility taken by local Indigenous organisations. Similarly, training providers who generally are not based within the community will likewise be challenged as to what form of management the training provision might take. [school governance]
Relevance:

Domain 4: Quality Teaching
   Significance of curriculum

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education
   Student aspirations and key transition points
   Pathways and strategies for remote locations

Related papers: