



Image: Michael Douglas

### Who's leading the project?

This project will be led by Associate Professor Poh-Ling Tan from Griffith University with contributions from Jason Field and other consultants.



**Poh-Ling** is a specialist in water law, policy and governance and a member of the Australian Rivers Institute and Socio-Legal Research Centre at Griffith University in Queensland. Her understanding of relationships between policy, law and the management of water resources arises from a research focus in the area since the 1990s. She was commissioned to provide research

reports to Queensland and NSW government agencies on legal issues relating to water reform, and a historical review of water rights in the Murray Darling Basin. From 2006 – 2010 she led two national research projects in water planning. She currently teaches into the Masters of Integrated Water Management run by the International Water Centre based in Brisbane, Queensland



**Jason Field** is a Koori from the Dhurga-Yuin nation on the NSW South-Coast. He spent most of his childhood and adult life in western Sydney. Since 2009 he has lived on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. Jason has worked with community, public

sector and higher education organisations in the areas of policy and research, administration and project management. He has also participated in a number of international fora dealing with Indigenous rights including the negotiations of the Nagoya Protocol on the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of traditional knowledge. Jason is currently a member of the Indigenous Advisory Committee, established under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, and works as a consultant and adviser on Indigenous policy, environmental and international issues.

### Further information

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### Will others be involved?

*Research partners will be chosen based on willingness to participate and timing of water planning activities in the catchment. The project will work with two Indigenous research partners.*

Social and cultural values in water planning



# Models for Indigenous water strategies



Image: Skyscans

*The Northern Australia Water Futures Assessment (NAWFA) Cultural and Social Program aims to improve the understanding of the social and cultural values associated with water in northern Australia. This information brochure covers research undertaken by Sub-project 3 of the NAWFA Social Cultural Project.*



## What are social and cultural values?

Australia's tropical aquatic ecosystems and the rich biodiversity they support are of social, cultural and economic value to residents, visitors and the international community. Not only are these natural areas of value by, and of themselves, but because they are in generally good health they also provide many important ecological services upon which a range of human activities depend. The predominant regional industries - pastoral grazing, mining, Indigenous enterprises, fishing and tourism - all use and rely on the region's water resources and aquatic ecological processes in different ways. These industries, along with people's livelihoods and lifestyle practices such as camping, swimming and fishing, are linked by land and water: they all need to consider issues of access to, quality of, implications of use and changes to the region's resources and biodiversity.

An improved understanding of community views, values and priorities is now recognised as an important objective of contemporary natural resource policy development in Australia. Changes to water policy, such as the introduction of water markets and water resource development strategies, must negotiate the multiple layers of value and meaning attributed to water, rivers, wetlands and floodplains, as well as comprehensively address the range of consequences (social, economic and environmental).

The Northern Australia Water Futures Assessment was established by the Australian Government to inform the development and protection of northern Australia's water resources, so that development is ecologically, culturally and economically sustainable.

The NAWFA has four programs: Water Resources, Ecological, Knowledge Base and Cultural and Social. The objective of the NAWFA Cultural and Social program is to increase our understanding of the socio-cultural values, beliefs and practices associated with water in northern Australia and how they may be affected by changes in water availability.

This project will contribute to the objectives of the NAWFA Cultural and Social program through a set of research activities focused on social and economic values in water planning and location-specific case studies of the values of particular water use sectors, including Indigenous communities, commercial interests, recreational fishers and conservation groups. These activities will be carried out by CSIRO, Charles Darwin University (CDU), James Cook University (JCU) and Griffith University (GU) as part of the Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge (TRaCK) program.

The NAWFA Social and Cultural project is comprised of three research sub-projects that will be run in parallel from March 2011 for a period of 12 months. They are:

- **Sub-project 1 – Social and cultural values in the planning cycle (CSIRO and CDU)**
- **Sub-project 2 – Relative values of water for trade-offs (JCU)**
- **Sub-project 3 – Developing management models for Indigenous water strategies (GU)**

Across the three projects researchers will undertake a number of case studies to understand socio-cultural values, beliefs and practices held by various water using groups, including patterns of usage, ecological knowledge, religious significance, economic activities, and governance issues. Attention will be given to tools and mechanisms to articulate and capture Indigenous social and economic aspirations with respect to water.

- This project builds on the understanding developed through the team's TRaCK research – [www.track.com.au](http://www.track.com.au)
- This project will contribute to an understanding of water planning in areas where water pressure is greatest
- Indigenous knowledge is valued and effective Indigenous engagement is crucial to the project's success

NAWFA is a multidisciplinary program being delivered jointly by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities and the National Water Commission, in close collaboration with the Office of Northern Australia and state and territory government agencies. Through the *Raising National Water Standards* program under *Water for the Future*, the Australian Government has allocated up to \$13 million for projects between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012.



Social and cultural values in water planning

## Sub-project 3 – Developing management models for Indigenous water strategies

### Project aims

The Australian Government's National Water Initiative states that water planning frameworks should recognise Indigenous water needs as they relate to both access and management.

As practices to engage Indigenous owners in water planning change, there is an awareness that present management models for land and water under the Water Act 1992 (NT) may not fulfil Indigenous aspirations, values and beliefs.

This project aims to explore developing alternative management models for implementing water strategies. The development of these new models will be based on comprehensive research of arrangements successfully adopted in other jurisdictions. The project also aims to facilitate Indigenous learning from the benefits and shortfalls of processes adopted by Indigenous peoples elsewhere in negotiating a different management model, be inspired by their success, and thereby build organisational capacity, and assist interested indigenous organisations in achieving their vision of water management.

### Research activities

The following research activities will be undertaken:

- Discussion of the existing management models and the shortcomings of these models for including Indigenous aspirations, values and beliefs, as required by the National Water Initiative;
- A literature review of international co-management models and model development processes, with an emphasis on New Zealand and Canada, including a discussion of the benefits and shortfalls of processes adopted by Indigenous peoples elsewhere and recommendations for how aspects of these models can be used to improve water planning processes in northern Australia;
- Workshops and consultations with Indigenous groups and NRETAS to develop understanding of alternative management models, their strengths and their limitations.
- Develop recommendations, based on the literature review and discussions with NRETAS and Indigenous groups and leaders, on alternate models to be used in the NT and northern Australia more generally. Reveal the benefits, limitations and restrictions for adoption of alternate management options, with particular attention to existing institutional protocols and procedures, existing and required skill sets and resources which will affect how alternate models can be implemented.



### How will this research help?

This projects aims to contribute the following benefits:

- An increased awareness of alternative management models for natural resource management (NRM) by Indigenous owners, NRETAS and other NT agencies
- Facilitated learning from Indigenous groups in Australia and our neighbours as to processes required to increase understanding of management models.
- Facilitated discussion between Indigenous owners and Northern Territory water agencies as to limitations and restrictions for each of the management models developed so as to analyse suitability.

The research will focus on the processes which accompanied the adoption of alternative management models, and identify benefits, challenges and limitations of the various models. The research findings will then be reviewed and assessed through workshops with the Northern Territory Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport (NRETAS) and Indigenous communities and institutions in the Northern Territory who wish to consider alternative water management regimes, and to identify feasible alternative water management approaches. The project will be completed by the end of March 2012.



Sub-project 3 – Models for Indigenous water strategies