

Climate Change Adaptation Research Grants Program

- Social, Economic and Institutional Dimensions Projects

Project title:

Changes to Country and Culture, Changes to Climate: strengthening institutions for Indigenous resilience and adaptation.

Principal investigators:

Dr. Jessica Weir

Lead organisation:

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)

Objectives:

To understand the barriers to and enablers of Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate (RNTBCs) in facilitating community driven adaptation on native title lands and develop best practice for participatory climate change decision-making, specifically through:

- 1) analysing and documenting the role and capacity of RNTBCs in climate change adaptation, through collaborative research partnerships; and
- 2) providing relevant stakeholders with knowledge to develop effective working relationships with RNTBCs, based upon an appreciation of their unique systems of communal land ownership and governance circumstances,

Project design and methods:

The objective is to understand the barriers to and enablers of native title holders in facilitating community driven climate change adaptation, and develop best practice for climate change decision making. The project builds upon existing case studies research and literature reviews conducted by AIATSIS to identify gaps in Indigenous involvement in climate change adaptation. The methodology is focused on case study research with three communities in the Kimberley and north Queensland:

- 1) Bidyadanga (with the Karajarri RNTBC);
- 2) Torres Strait (Torres Strait RNTBC); and,
- 3) Kowinyama (with the Abm Elgoring Ambung AC RNTBC).

Important factors in site selection were Indigenous land tenure (exclusive native title), location, size and resources, and the Indigenous knowledge of those regions. These case studies will provide greater understanding of the interaction between social, economic and institutional dimensions in climate change adaptation in remote Indigenous communities, with a variety of physical risks (such as salt water intrusion, water scarcity, and rising sea levels).

Semi-structured interviews and participant observation will be used to establish face to face forums between researchers and the managers of native title lands. This dialogue will elicit information which is not documented and create opportunities for new information and ideas to develop. We will use Research Action Partnerships that employ local Indigenous people to facilitate communication between researchers and Indigenous communities and ensure that the research is collaborative. The project will encourage a dialogue of shared learning between the researchers and the RNTBCs, focused on identifying institutional barriers that drive or inhibit Indigenous participation in collective action on climate change. Case study experiences will provide insights into climate change decision-making processes, roles and legitimacy on a community level and inform recommendations for best practice institutional design for participatory climate change adaptation.

A total of seven weeks of fieldwork will be conducted at each case-study site, including:

- 1) a one-week visit to develop and confirm research design;
- 2) a five week research trip; and
- 3) a one week end of project visit to present findings and return cultural material (such as interview recordings and images).

All of the information provided by case-study participants will be treated according to best practise research ethics. The case study research will be complemented by a desk top analysis of published and unpublished material, including native title claim documentation. The focus of this will be on academic and grey literature with respect to native title land and water management, climate change adaptation, and intercultural governance. This review will be completed before the case study research is undertaken so that information from existing literature can inform the dialogue between researchers and Indigenous communities. Immediately following the second fieldwork visit to the communities, AIATSIS will hold a workshop at the 2012 Native Title Conference to extend the dialogue with

Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders on the barriers to and enablers of Indigenous community driven climate change adaptation. Community representatives from the three case study communities will be funded to participate in this workshop, and government and other climate change institutions will also be invited as participants. The results of this workshop will be compiled into a workshop report.

A comprehensive report from the case study research will be prepared and consolidated with the desktop literature review and the workshop report. The draft of the report will be reviewed with case study participants, with relevant feedback incorporated into the final report. We will prepare a separate, shorter Community Report for the case-study participants to summarise the results for an ESL (English as Second Language) audience. The results of our research also will be disseminated through at least two international, peer-reviewed academic journal articles in the fields of social and environmental science. All of the written outputs from the project will be publicly available through a project website that we will establish at the outset of the project.

The web content will be hosted on the AIATSIS Indigenous Country and Governance website as part of the new AIATSIS Land and Water Centre.

We also plan to present our research findings through regular invited guest lectures at

- The Fenner School of Environment and Society,
- The Australian National University,
- AIATSIS, and
- The Native Title Conference 2013.

Key deliverables are

- a research report,
- a community report,
- a project website,
- a workshop and workshop report,
- at least two collaborative international journal articles,
- an AIATSIS Native Title Newsletter article and
- multiple presentations for identified stakeholders.