Process behind La Grange allocation plan a unique engagement

The process behind the drafting of the La Grange groundwater allocation plan has been universally declared a winner by participants and those who have assessed the outcomes of the consultation process spearheaded by the department's Indigenous Services Unit.

Kepa Wangki features the La Grange negotiations.

The Kimberley can be a daunting place to try and do business.

Firstly, everything is so far apart. Just getting people together at any one time in the one place is a task and a half in itself.

To get all the parties to understand sufficiently to agree on something that is legal, ethical and the result of a true consultative process – is rare and unique.

When the department started the La Grange allocation process, staff knew that they faced several hurdles to make it a true process, and a strategy that was community-owned.

Calls for irrigated agriculture in the Kimberley region led to feasibility studies into use of ground and surface water resources for such purposes, and the impact this would have on stakeholders in the region – which in this case included the area’s traditional Aboriginal owners.

“Being a big remote region with a lot of Aboriginal stakeholders, we have to carefully choose our approach to engaging people in

“Not only is it a communication tool, but it is also another way for government and non-government organisations to engage with Indigenous people on the ground to talk about water while respecting Indigenous law and culture,” natural resource management officer Dean Mathews discussing the La Grange DVD.

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Traditional owners with bush fruit from Nita Downs Station in the La Grange subarea where a proposal has been developed for irrigation of fodder.
Communicating about water

I am an Indigenous trainee based in Kununurra with the Department of Water.

I have mainly been working in the water planning area with a focus on the West Kimberley more recently. As part of my work I have been working with people at Bidyadanga community on understanding a water management plan for the La Grange groundwater area.

At a meeting held at Bidyadanga community, it became clear that terminology and concepts used by the presenter were not being understood. We wanted to be sure our department was fully engaging with members of the community and that...
Heritage workshops

"In a regular series, department staff talk about how the Indigenous heritage workshops helped transform their perspectives."

Peter Parolo – Manager Finance and Administration:
“This was a deep experience for me in terms of understanding the culture and the connection with the land and the water,” Peter said.
“It gave me an understanding of the importance of engagement with Aboriginal people regarding land and environment.
“It’s a form of courtesy and respect. If I treat you with disrespect, I’ll get that back.
“We learnt some background. I thought that if you were on a mission you automatically went to school.
It must have been disempowering for those denied education – and treated as second-class citizens.
“I realised how important it is to bring respect into dealings with Aboriginal people.
“All of my team’s managers have done the training course and I hold it as a high priority area.
“Finance and administration is engaged with Human Resources and ISU to take on an Indigenous trainee – the first outside regional operations.”

management in language gets it right

Peter Parolo – Manager Finance and Administration with Indigenous heritage workshops coordinator Charon Ryder.

The traditional owners were prepared for public comment time when the plan was released, so we developed the idea for making a DVD translation of the management plan.
I took out the main points from the State water plan and the draft La Grange water plan and simplified them into plain English.
Then, working with the Kimberley Interpreting Service and Karajarri traditional owners Mervyn (Mupil) Mulardy and Anna Dwyer, the plan was translated into a Kriol/Karajarri language mix.
We then took this translated script and went out on country in La Grange to film Mervyn speaking about the water plan in language.
I blended this footage with some photos and maps and also added local Karajarri music.
The DVD has already been a valuable communication tool to help the Karajarri native title holders understand the La Grange groundwater management plan released for community comment by the Department of Water.
The greatest challenge for me, as well as simplifying concepts and terminology of both water plans, was learning the technology to edit and create a DVD with such a tight time frame.
Not only is it a communication tool, but it is also another way for government and non-government organisations to engage with Indigenous people to talk about water while respecting Indigenous law and culture.
It is also an example that can be used when communicating future water management plans for other communities in Western Australia – especially in the Kimberley region.
Another outcome of this process has been establishing a strong working relationship with the Kimberley Interpretive Service for advice on the use of interpreters for other consultative work.
Department purchases new painting

The work by Nyungar artist Athol Farmer is one of several paintings the department has purchased to increase awareness and understanding of Aboriginal cosmology.

The department recently bought a painting by Nyungar artist Athol Farmer to add to its collection of paintings.

Indigenous affairs coordinator David Collard, said the painting was very typical of modern Nyungar art that often depicted landscapes. David said this style sometimes confuses non-Aboriginal people, who often think quite incorrectly, that all authentic Aboriginal artwork has to be dot paintings or depictions of spirits.

“Nyungars more often than not paint landscapes,” David said. “The feedback we have had shows we continue to break down stereotypes, and further the education process regarding Aboriginal people,” he said.

The painting is of the Porongerups area, where the painter’s family comes from.

Two other paintings that are a part of the Department of Water’s collection of Aboriginal art. On the left is Burlong (the Avon River near York) by Shane Pickett. On the right is Tjinanginy koombakep (Look big water) by Graham (Swag) Taylor.