

WORKING ON COUNTRY PROGRAM

Announcement of policy made 8 May 2007

Policy announced by the Federal Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Joe Hockey

The *Working on Country* program is a Federal Government initiative designed to build on the (formally and financially unrecognised) history of protection and management of Australian lands by Indigenous people. The program aims to provide a mechanism for increased levels of employment for Indigenous people, including those associated with the Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP).

The Federal Government announced that \$47.6 million will be channeled into the initiative over a period of four years. The initial focus will be on Indigenous-held lands.

Projects on land or sea country owned and/or managed by the Australian, state, territory or local governments will not be eligible for funding. Funding for projects on private property will be considered in certain circumstances. The specific projects that are eligible for funding include those relating to keeping country healthy, looking after sea country, and protecting heritage.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma welcomed the program: 'While non-Indigenous rangers and land managers have been formally employed to care for country, Indigenous people have been doing this for their lifetimes, often assisting those employed to do the work, without being paid'.

Traditional owners and their representatives stated that the importance of caring for land, living on land, and the recognition of ownership of land and seas, had priority above all other purposes and activities. Prior to *Working on Country* funding available for land management was often directed towards the payment of non-Indigenous people because they held the requisite educational qualifications.

However, as noted by Commissioner Calma, *Working on Country* constitutes recognition by the Federal Government of the importance of traditional knowledge in land management practices, which in turn supports the right of self-determination through economic development that is consistent with cultural practices.

Full details of the *Working on Country* program are available at: <<http://www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/workingoncountry/index.html>>.