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The Australian Rangeland Society

Manta Palyakutu: Ngura kantilya kanyini! Land use and management led by Anangu on Anangu land near Indulkana, APY Lands of South Australia

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Abstract

The land suffered under pastoral management by outsiders across the eastern APY Lands. Grazing management was no better (perhaps worse) than before when we got the APY Act and agistment began. We explain how we are changing this using the EMU™ Process with support from APY Executive, AWNRM Board and others. We plan what can happen and where on our land, protect sacred places and special ecosystems and start planning our own businesses that “fit” our land-culture. This programme we call *Manta Palyakutu* (really healthy/good land): *Ngura kantilya kanyini* (looking after our places really strongly). This is the story of our progress so far on my ancestral land. We are grateful for support from the APY Executive, Commonwealth Government and AWNRM Board.

What I want for my ancestral lands is to look after them as well as my predecessors, for my family and friends to want to do the same and to enjoy old and modern things enabled by our own businesses - not grants and reliance on other people. We must support our land-culture ourselves.

Introduction

My name is Willy Wara Edwards and I am a Martu Yankuntjatjara man. I represent traditional ancestral owners of much of the land from the Indulkana Range southwards down to Mintabie and from the Blue Hills in the west to just east of the Stuart Highway. This is my ancestral land and dreaming story area for which I am responsible. It includes a very big Men’s Dreaming Story and so I can’t tell you too much, but it extends to north of where we are here in Alice Springs. What I want you to understand is that my dreaming and my Ngura are very important to me and I need to look after them for my people and the tjilpis (senior men) from faraway. I want to make culture strong so that this dreaming is looked after again as well as it was by my ancestors. Our culture is still strong; we want to reverse the bad changes that have happened.

We Anangu (people) made up the project name because we wanted our own name for our project and we are now developing our own logo so that it is all ours. We chose “Manta Palyakutu” (really healthy/good land): Ngura kantilya kanyini (looking after our places really strongly) to cover how we feel about our land culture.

Manta Palyakutu (MPK) is the first project that has made us Yankuntjatjara people see a way forward because Hugh Pringle has asked us what we want for our land and helped us map where we want restrictions and where we want to build our own businesses. Without businesses, we will always depend on other people for support to look after our ancestral land and we don’t want that. We want to be self-reliant. Our own businesses will make our culture stronger; not money from other people that can stop suddenly.

We need economic development to enable the strengthening of our land culture.

These are the ordered priorities for my MPK Plan:

1. Culture is most important, especially looking after Wapar (Dreaming), without Wapar, we are lost.
2. Healthy Ngura (our land that supports us to be strong communities again)

3. Strong, harmonious community including people who came from other places
4. Strong businesses that allow us to look after the higher priorities, get us off welfare and provide opportunities for our kids in future.

A brief overview of how we implemented MPK

Through MPK we have travelled over most of my ancestral land and mapped where we want restrictions of access and use, where we want to build different businesses and some important land issues like water flows, fire-prone areas, rubbish plants, how pests like camels use the land and how erosion is sucking the land dry in places. We make a “whole plan” for areas based on Wapar and what the manta needs to be healthy.

No one species or issue will dominate our management and we –not outsiders – will decide what matters and needs special attention. And everything and everyone must respect our Wapar and culture. That is why we start with this overlay. Everything else must “fit” with this overlay – it becomes the key “underlay” for everything else including developing our own businesses and how and where people access our land. We like this EMU™ overlay mapping approach because it allows us to use **OUR** knowledge to map values, threats, key landscape processes and so on and then look at them altogether as a system. This is how we have always looked at our land, so EMU fits well.

The mapping with “EMU man” and APY Anthropologists help us make sure we include all the important places and issues included within the whole plan. The anthros also assess our plans when we want to do anything that involves physically impacting on the land. My family and I have done the mapping and we have then shown it to the tjilpis to get their approval and advice. Because we have talked to them regularly, the tjilpis have readily and strongly supported our ideas and helped make our plans better. They even sometimes complain; “Too slow, too slow”!

Our first MPK initiative is a big one, probably bigger than maybe we should have started with, but there was strong pressure from elders in Indulkana to get horses out of the community and this tied in with my plans to protect many sacred sites in the Mt John Range. There was community support to move horses to Davy’s Bore, right next to the Mt John Range. Thus we built the *Mt John Tjurki Project*. Another really important part of the Dreaming is also the biggest swamp system in the region and we will protect it once we have the Mt John Tjurki Range Project established and under active management. It is planned and ready for implementation. We also have a list of smaller projects I want undertaken in the near future.

Once the Wapar and Manta/Ngura issues are being addressed, I want to start building businesses for my family, but also for other Anangu and especially my people, Martu Yankuntjatjara. My business ideas are mapped by me and recorded by Hugh. He is not a business adviser and we need help to get started. I am now living in my Ngura and I hope to be able to oversee good Anangu culture-land management as well as business development.

Bruce MacPherson from AW NRM Board has helped with the community consultation and finding us funds. The local SkillsHire team have helped us with work and training young Anangu through the Commonwealth Government’s Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP). Donald Grant (a Yankuntjatjara man) is also being helped to develop a contracting business to build infrastructure and employ Anangu with real jobs and money. We also want to talk to the new APY Pastoral Manager. We are all working together to turn Martu Yankuntjatjara visions and dreams into reality. This is what many other Anangu are now asking me about for their Ngura in eastern APY Lands.

The Mt John Tjurki Project

We aim to fence off the whole Mt John Range from near Indulkana down to near Mintabie, because there are so many special places and we want to stop the ferals far enough away from water places that there is no really strong pressure on the fences. We will reduce costs and impacts of

constructing the fence and management access by using existing fence lines and roads where possible. The total area will be over 300 km².

We will also develop a Horse Paddock joined onto the north of the Range enclosure fencing and using Davy's Bore. We want to get the horses out of Indulkana urgently, so this paddock will do for now, but we may use another area with better horse feed in future. We will need to make some "rules" so that horses do not get out of control again once we have them behind wire and many horses will have to be trucked out as we cannot support the numbers we think are there now.

The overarching objectives of this project are to protect currently pressured key cultural values and increase land connection of younger Anangu in cultural awareness and land management. Then attention needs to be paid to economic development options such that we ourselves can sustain management of the "whole". In this process, most "biodiversity values" will be addressed and those that aren't can be included. Support for the Yankuntjatjara language and culture within the wider APY context will be a key part of the project in our traditional lands.

Specific objectives

These objectives are in a general order of sequencing, though some may happen together:

1. Get horses out of Indulkana to protect children from transmittable diseases at watering points, reduce wind erosion and so dust problems in the community and exotic reduce grazing pressure on key cultural assets in the Indulkana Range. People have died in motor accidents involving these uncontrolled horses.
2. Put the removed horses in a controlled area with adequate drinking water and at a reasonable stocking rate based on rangeland monitoring results.
3. Protect the Mt John Tjurki Range from large feral herbivores that foul key cultural sites and degrade habitat quality for native biota. This project is a good example of the major overlap of cultural and "biodiversity" values. We are also looking at feral predator control as there are some important animals suffering from cats and foxes.
4. Develop more detailed plans for managing key values within and adjacent to the Range once the key threat from feral herbivores has been addressed (there are already some candidate areas and activities). We will patch burn like old days to stop big fires.
5. Plan infrastructure rejuvenation/renewal for the economic development of land use areas mapped by senior TOs as "Bullocks Playa" (for instance) in conjunction with APY Pastoral and possibly prospective agistment clients.
6. Support specific multiple enterprise planning within the initial context of cattle business. In this, our first project, we Anangu want more than just cattle pastoralism.

Progress to date

Given that this is our first project, we have experienced several teething problems, which I will mention again later. The key achievements so far include:

1. A new bore has been drilled and equipped with solar set up and tanks at Davy's Bore
2. The yards have been repaired and extended substantially
3. The fence alignments are all now all clear with sighter posts along almost the entire length of proposed fencing
4. Old fences have been removed
5. A trucking road has been established from Davy's Bore to the Stuart Highway

6. The Horse Paddock fencing is well progressed and will be finished in February
7. The work has been done mostly by local Anangu and we hope to set up an Anangu contracting business. SkillsHire have been really strong partners and supporters
8. Major horse muster organised by APY Pastoral.

Key opportunities and challenges

We chose to jump into the deep end with our initial big MPK projects to fit in with the Indulkana elders' urgent concerns about horses and the risk of bringing their pressure to sacred water places in the Mt John Range via Davy's Bore if we had good rain. We will therefore have to catch up with developing ongoing management within the project area and how this is integrated with how internal and adjacent lands are to be used commercially – as I want to happen.

We have been slow in developing the urgent infrastructure to get horses out of Indulkana and clearly, RJCP is helpful – but not a silver bullet. It is not SkillsHire's job to build major infrastructure projects like this for us, but they have made a major contribution beyond their requirements. However, some of the Anangu involved in this MPK project want real jobs and real wages (wouldn't you?) We need to build that into the long term vision of our own businesses that fund Manta Palyakutu-Ngura kantilya kanyini. We have started that with outsiders' support, and will be happy when we fund our own land-culture management through strong local businesses.

I want a sustainable cattle business, perhaps expanded with my people's areas, and a cultural-ecological horse riding business for tourists off the Stuart Highway. I want to train young Anangu how to break horses and manage cattle at Davy's Bore. I see a base for Martu Yankutjatjara culture-land management and perhaps a school for Yankuntjatjara kids to learn their own language as well as English and Pitjantjatjara.

I have my land, but I have no capital to invest and I don't want to rely on handouts forever. MPK has been great in lifting me up to think about how I want my land managed and to rejuvenate culture. Now I need support to develop businesses that will enable the whole story and my vision. We have to fund ourselves eventually.

Afterword

This story was written by Hugh Pringle, the "EMU man", who helped us build Manta Palyakutu (MPK): Ngura kantilya kanyini from the Ecosystem Management Understanding (EMU)TM process.