

FOREWORD

Looking back in Tiwi history and looking forward into the Tiwi future there is one thing that does not change. It is our land.

How we use the land does change – why we use the land does not change.

Always we use it to support the lives of our people. Once it was only the fruits of the ground and the trees and the animals that live throughout the land and along the beaches. We still use the land in this way, but not as much as we did in the past.

Now we need to use the land in other ways to support our people. For jobs and income to benefit our new generation of Tiwi.

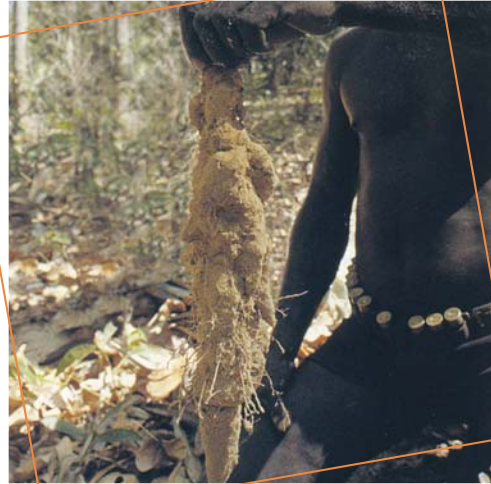
It is not enough to hope that the land will look after itself. Using the land for jobs and our own economy requires us to manage the land properly. We must bring together our knowledge of the past with the new scientific information about the land. Why the soils behave like they do; how the water reserves work; the way the animals and plants work together to keep the land healthy; the impact of fire and erosion and foreign weeds and pests.

Just as Tiwi traditional owners understood and cared for our land when we used it for the traditions in the past, the new generations of Tiwi land managers need to understand and care for it now and into the future.

Our ceremonies of reliance on the land now include reliance on new information. This Strategy is part of the new information story. It is the story of our communities and new industry that uses our land; it is the story of why our land is so precious; of the information we must have to keep it healthy; and the new ways we must develop to care for it.

The land information story is both an old story and a new story. Most of all it is an important story affecting all our lives.

Frederick Mungatopi
Chairman
30 September 2003



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Tiwi Islands logically form a discrete region for natural resource planning and management, from both social and biophysical perspectives.

There has been an unbroken history of occupation and ownership of the Tiwi Islands by Tiwi people, and the current population in the region is over 90% Tiwi. Historically, family or clan groups met continually for ceremony and to determine unified joint responses to external threats. The Tiwi were noted for their unification, which is reflected in the translation of 'Tiwi' as 'we, the only people'. There is no question that the permanent residents consider the Tiwi Islands a distinct region, and they have strived over a number of years for a system of governance that provides true regional authority over all aspects of their lives.

Separated from the mainland by a sea barrier, the two main Islands of Melville (5,788 km²) and Bathurst (1,693 km²) are large enough to develop a distinct regional weather pattern within the tropical monsoonal zone. In terms of total rainfall, the region has the highest in the Northern Territory.

The underlying geology is also unique to the region, with the large extent van Diemen sandstone providing high water storage capacity, numerous freshwater springs and very high quality water.

Although the Tiwi Islands support a distinctive biota, many of the species and environments also occur on the mainland. 'Tiwi-Coburg' is a nationally recognised bioregion that comprises the Tiwi Islands, Croker Island and Coburg Peninsula. The Tiwi Islands do, however, contain a number of species that are endemic, and are regarded as having great importance for biodiversity conservation.

The importance of place values to residents of the region cannot be overstressed: *the ownership, allocation and expression of land and natural resources provides the definition of who a person is, and where they fit within society.*

Additionally, the region provides traditional values through the use and associations of plants and animals, and economic values through rich food resources, particularly within the marine and coastal environment.

The region is also recognised as having economic potential in terms of enterprise development. This is supported by Tiwi leaders who have identified an urgent need for the creation of an independent Tiwi economy not reliant on destructive welfare influences. To date two enterprises being pursued to achieve such independence are plantation forestry and sea cage aquaculture. Identification of other sustainable industries is one of the underlying thrusts of this Strategy. The other is the long term protection of natural resource and cultural values.

Sixteen key issues have been identified for the protection of natural resource and cultural values. These fall broadly under headings of Planning and Regional Management, Managing the Risks, and Capacity Building.

Issues associated with planning and regional management have been identified as:

- Information: availability, management and ownership.
- Areas of high value to Tiwi people, and areas of shared value.
- Biodiversity.
- Freshwater resources.
- Coastal management.
- Economic resources.

Issues associated with managing risk include:

- Communities and outstations.
- Construction and infrastructure.
- Economic development.
- Weeds.
- Feral animals.
- Land clearing.
- Soil erosion.
- Fire.

Capacity building issues involve:

- Creating and building local capacity to manage natural resource issues.

Each of the sixteen issues are discussed separately in the Strategy, and addressed through the identification of a range of desired outcomes and



objectives. Linkages are also provided between the objectives in the Strategy and the nine key areas identified for natural resource management in the Tiwi Land Council Environmental Policy.

One hundred and five recommended actions have been identified to achieve the outcomes and objectives of the Strategy. Each has been allocated a responsible body for implementation along with potential partner organisations, an estimated funding requirement and a key performance indicator. For the purposes of implementation they have been placed under the categories of:

- Institutional processes;
- Processes that develop local capacity;
- Research;
- Regional planning processes;
- Processes that protect and restore regional natural resource values, and
- Processes that protect and restore local natural resource values.

The proposed timeframe for implementation has been staged depending on the urgency of the existing or potential threat to natural resource values, and the contribution to strategic outcomes:

Current – action is already being carried out, and should continue;

Immediate priority – action within the next 12 to 18 months;

High priority – action within the next 3 years;

Moderate priority – action within the next 5 years.

Ongoing monitoring, amendment and review is crucial to Strategy implementation, and will be achieved through assessment against the key performance indicators. Three formal review processes have also been proposed that complement the implementation timeframe:

- Review activity 1 carried out 12 to 18 months after Strategy implementation –focus on performance to date and re-evaluating time-lines and resourcing.
- Review activity 2 carried out after three years – assessment of whether the actions are meeting the objectives and outcomes, and updating the recommended actions where required.

- Review activity 3 carried out after five years – a review and update of the Strategy to ensure that the objectives remain valid.

Due to the identification of a number of agencies and organisations with a role in natural resource management in the region, monitoring and review will be a consultative process, and recommendations for change will be considered from all stakeholders.

Overall Strategy implementation will be guided by the principles of:

- Coordinated and cooperative planning;
- Recognition of majority stakeholders;
- Achievement of economic, social and environmental outcomes;
- Full utilisation of existing structures and procedures;
- Oversight at the regional level; and
- Responsive monitoring and review.



Keith (Jacko) Miller





INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

The Tiwi Land Council is pleased to present the Tiwi Islands Regional Natural Resource Management Strategy. While the Strategy has been developed over three years of consultation between Tiwi organisations, members of Tiwi communities, industry and government, the underlying tenets of regional management have always been integral to Tiwi decision making.

There has been an unbroken history of occupation and ownership of the Tiwi Islands by Tiwi people for thousands of years. Traditionally, the natural resources of the region were used for food, shelter, medicine, weapons, tools and spiritual purposes. From the late 1800's the natural resources were seen as a source of wealth by outside developers, culminating in the 1960's and 1970's with Melville Island being selected as the focus for a major plantation forestry industry for the Northern Territory.

In later years Tiwi leaders identified the urgency of developing an independent economy as a viable means of improving social outcomes through business and employment opportunities, especially for youth. The greatest assets of the Tiwi Islands are their natural resources and the people, and natural resource utilisation has been identified as a key area for economic development. It is also an area with high potential for providing long-term employment and training opportunities that are attractive to Tiwi residents.

The Tiwi Islands have also been recognised for their high contemporary conservation values, and the challenge is to consider the interests of non-residents while acknowledging that it is those who rely on the region for their daily living that will be most affected by natural resource management actions both now and into the future.

In response to the different interests within the region, this Strategy has been prepared on the principle of sustainable development. Together with the Tiwi Geographic Information System, it compiles and presents baseline information, identifies and defines regional values, and identifies and prioritises issues that need to be addressed. It also recommends activities that need to be carried out in order to protect and manage environmental values.

Ultimately, however, the underlying purpose of the Strategy is to support the lives of the permanent residents of the Tiwi Islands.

The document itself grew from recognition by the Tiwi Land Council that a strategic approach to natural resource management was a prerequisite for progressing sustainable industries with minimal adverse environmental impact. In 2001 Land Council Managers developed an Environmental Policy that identified a vision for natural resource management within the region, and nine key areas for natural resource management.

This Strategy is the next step to implementing the Environmental Policy. It aims to bring together all natural resource management projects already completed or underway, and to provide a template for long term planning and decision making. It will also embed the responsibility for informed natural resource management in Tiwi leaders.

This is the first regional natural resource management strategy for the Tiwi Islands. Contemporary regional natural resource planning and management is an evolutionary process, and monitoring, amendment and review are an integral part of strategic implementation. Since the Strategy recommends direction for government, industry, communities and other land users, the review process will be consultative, and recommendations for change will be considered from all stakeholders.

It is also the intention of the Land Council to circulate the Strategy widely among communities, government and industry. In this way it can be consulted when resource use proposals are being developed to ensure that they conform to the desired outcomes of the major stakeholders.

The authority for strategic natural resource planning and management is vested in the Tiwi Land Council under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, primarily to faithfully and responsibly represent the interests of their people in respect to the management of, and their various interests in, land. This has increasingly expanded to include carrying out specific actions that address natural resource management issues, a trend that is expected to continue into the future.



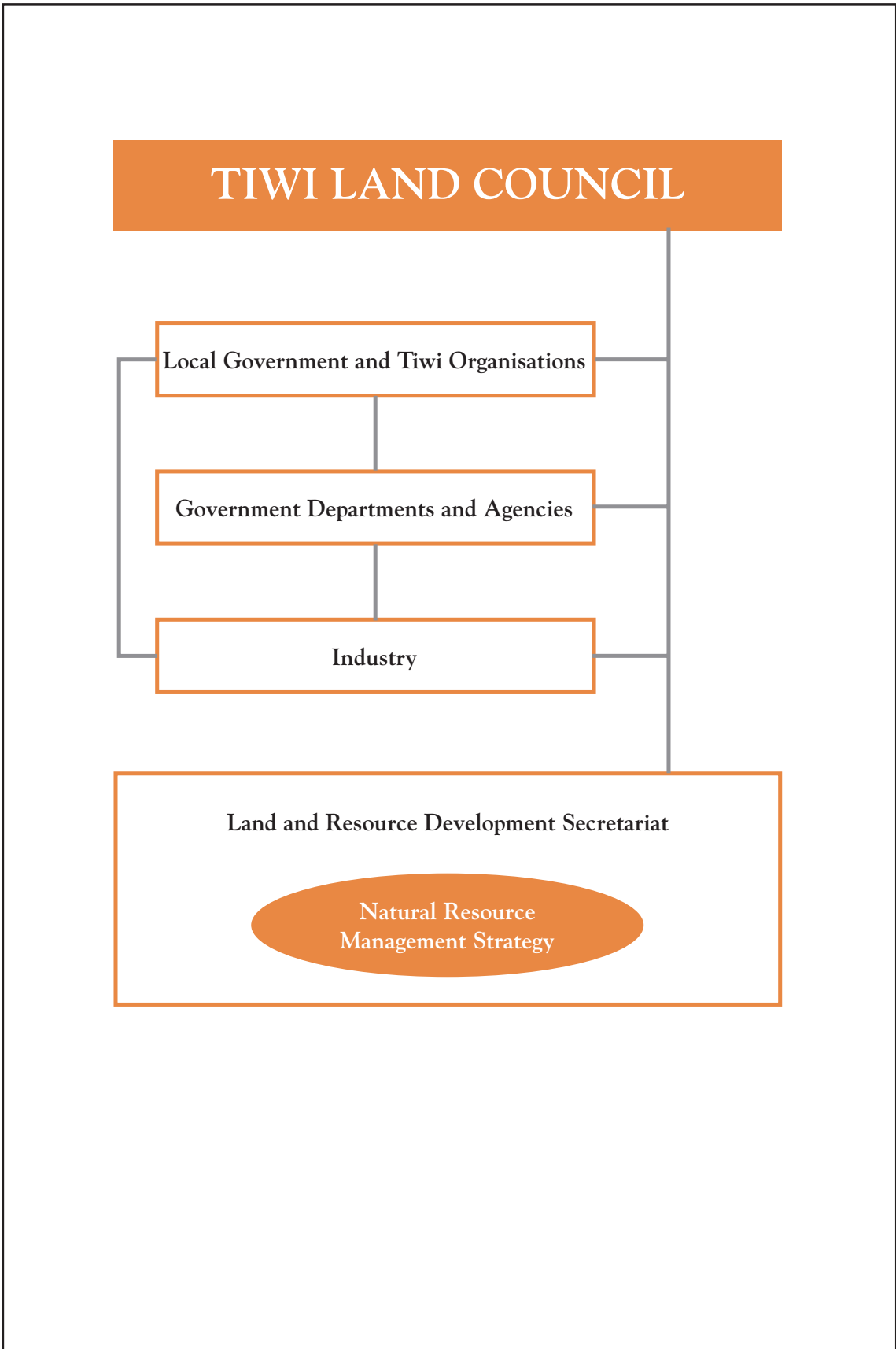


Figure 1: Relationships between organisations that affect natural resource management on the Tiwi Islands.