



2018 NATIONAL LANDCARE AWARDS

11 October
Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre

Nominee: Spinifex Land Management, WA
Category: Rio Tinto Indigenous Land Management Award

Anangu Pila Nguru (Spinifex People) are the original managers of the Spinifex Lands and have been caring for the area for thousands of years. Across such a long history, it is only in very recent times that new threats have developed in these lands. As such, a combination of traditional and contemporary land management practices have needed to evolve to reduce these threats and keep the Spinifex people, culture and land healthy. The Spinifex Land Management (SLM) Program is the product of that evolution: an Indigenous ranger team and a Healthy Country Plan (HCP) developed by local rangers and the community, to provide direction, technical support and resources.

SLM is based in Tjuntjuntjara, the second most remote community in Australia. The program works on the northern fringes of the Nullarbor Plain and deep within the Great Victoria Desert. Every ranger patrol is a logistical feat and an adventure on country requiring careful planning to ensure appropriate cultural and ecological outcomes and the safety of participants. The SLM HCP has identified nine key projects including reducing the threats of buffel grass, camels, altered fire regimes, and introduced predators.

In May 2017, the SLM team worked with the entire Tjuntjuntjara community, Tjuntjuntjara Remote Community School, Spinifex Health, Spinifex Art Project and the Ilkurlka Roadhouse to take almost the entire community back to Country at Ilkurlka in the central Spinifex Lands. The purpose of the trip was to provide an opportunity for cultural and ecological information exchange through a process of the Spinifex elders returning to their extremely remote cultural sites via helicopter, accompanied by an appropriate SLM ranger. The project took six months to plan, with the Spinifex elders and rangers visiting 44 sites over the six days with a total of 2,640 kilometres of flight paths.

The following month the SLM team organised and facilitated the inaugural Southern Indigenous Rangers Forum, where over 70 rangers from eight other Indigenous land management groups gathered in Ilkurlka to share their skills, experience, and knowledge on Country.

A major challenge successfully being addressed by the SLM has been the management of rock holes. For many decades, rock holes – natural formations which hold water essential to both people and animals – were regularly cleaned of debris.

However, in 2016 a general discussion with the Spinifex 'tjilpi' (old men), brought to light the fact that cleaning out rock holes to allow more water to be collected was, in fact, a practice of early white explorers and settlers for themselves and their domestic animals. It became clear that existing practices of cleaning the deeper rock holes were a result of confusing 'white fella' ways with traditional methods. Rock hole management has since been amended and the deeper holes are being refilled with the same coarse soil that was taken from them years ago. Without these deep sources of free-standing water, feral animals are not attracted and the integrity of rock holes is maintained. Water remains available to the Spinifex people, simply accessed through traditional digging methods. The process and impact on animals that currently use the rock holes is being monitored using motion cameras.

This program is supported by Landcare Australia and the National Landcare Network, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.





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The Spinifex ranger team currently consists of five permanent part-time male rangers, a pool of 23 casual male and female rangers including community elders, a bushranger program through the Tjuntjuntjara Remote Community School, a men's ranger coordinator, and an ecologist/project manager/women's ranger coordinator. The formal participation of women in the Spinifex Ranger program was identified as a priority during the development of the HCP and the Spinifex women's ranger team officially commenced in August 2016 using a small grant from Landcare Australia.

Landcare is a grassroots movement that harnesses individuals and groups to protect, restore and sustainably manage Australia's natural environment and its productivity. Groups that fall under the Landcare umbrella work on a diverse range of environmental projects and include farmers embracing sustainable farm management and any community group that partakes in volunteer environmental activities. To find out how you can become a Landcare volunteer and for full details on all 2016 National Landcare finalists, visit www.landcareaustralia.org.au

Ends

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Web Summary

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