

Who are we

The Indigenous Water Policy Group (IWPG) is an initiative created and facilitated by NAILSMA. The IWPG is the only construct in the north of Australia examining Indigenous water policy and coordinates across state and territory jurisdictions.

The IWPG was formed in 2006 to continue the work of the Lingiari Reports¹ that address Indigenous rights, responsibilities and interests in water. In addition to this, a scoping study of Indigenous interests in tropical river management² identified an extremely low awareness of the National Water Initiative (NWI) amongst Indigenous people in the north of Australia. The NWI is the federal government's plan for national water reform. It has significant implications for future Indigenous land and sea management given that the Indigenous estate is about 40% in the north of Australia.

What we do

The primary goals of the IWPG are to:

- provide policy advice to its members based on research on water reform initiatives as they affect Indigenous communities and their land holdings;
- provide advice and representation on all matters concerning water resources in terms of the social, economic, environmental and cultural interests of Indigenous people in the north of Australia;
- ensure that Indigenous interests are appropriately engaged in all regional water planning in the north of Australia, providing
 - equitable and secure access to water for domestic and commercial purposes;
 - recognition and protection of the wide range of interests in water by developing collaborative relationships among a wide range of stakeholders.

¹ **Lingiari Foundation** (2002) *Offshore and Onshore water rights discussion booklets*. Lingiari Foundation, Broome.

² **Jackson & O'Leary** (2006) *Indigenous Interests in Tropical Rivers: Research and Management Issues. A Scoping Study for Land & Water Australia's Tropical Rivers Program*. CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, Darwin.



Some delegates that attended the 6th IWPG meeting in Kununurra, 2008.

Objectives

The IWPG has two main objectives.

The first objective focuses on improving Indigenous people's awareness of water reform under the NWI so that:

- informed decisions are made about water planning and management as it affects communities in the north of Australia.

The second objective is to engage in research relating to Indigenous rights, responsibilities and interests in water resources in northern Australia so that:

- Indigenous knowledge of customary and traditional water use are identified (such as high value cultural and ecological water systems and areas);
- Indigenous knowledge, customary practices and intellectual property in water are recognised, valued and protected;
- Indigenous people are engaged in consumptive and non-consumptive water planning and policy development;
- the economic future of Indigenous people is secured in the development of water reforms (in both the present and the emerging industries).

Our structure

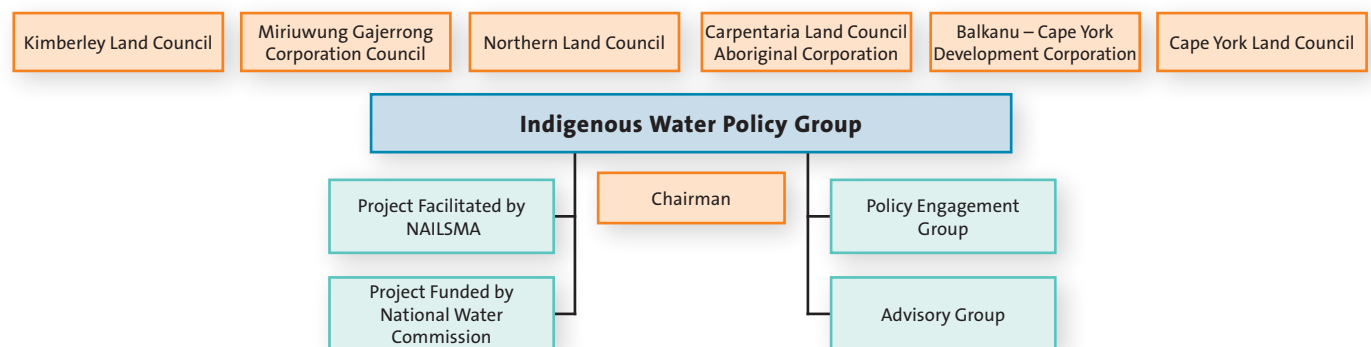
The IWPG is made up of key Indigenous representatives from major regional organisations in the north that represent a large number of Indigenous communities and Traditional Owners. Core partners include:

- Kimberley Land Council (KLC);
- Northern Land Council (NLC);
- Balkanu – Cape York Development Corporation;
- Cape York Land Council (CYLC);
- Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (CLCAC);

although key stakeholders external to the major land councils may be co-opted onto the IWPG. It is assisted by a number of people from non-Indigenous organisations. The Yawoorroong Miriwung Gajerrong Yirrgab Noong Dawang Aboriginal Corporation is a key stakeholder and member of the IWPG.

The IWPG is supported by an Advisory group and a Policy Engagement Group (PEG). Advisors act independently to provide strategic recommendation to the IWPG on matters concerning research and policies as they affect Indigenous communities in the north. Advisors belong to research institutions and relevant organisations.

PEG is made up of key representatives from state (WA and QLD), territory (NT) and national (NWC) water agencies. PEG may act to support the IWPG to engage Indigenous positions on water resources in the north of Australia with development initiatives at the state, territory and federal levels. The approach for engagement between PEG and the IWPG is two-fold. Foremost, it provides for meaningful Indigenous integrated policy development. Secondly, it provides for a coordinated approach that crosses jurisdictions to the management and security of water resources unique to the north of Australia.



Outcomes

The principal outcomes from the IWPG include:

- research outcomes from selected catchment area case studies in the north of Australia;
- a series of issue papers on the economic, social and cultural implications of the NWI on Indigenous people in the north of Australia;
- policy documents for government, industry, research and non-government sectors on a range of issues, including best-practice in Indigenous participation in water resource planning and other standards for working with local Indigenous communities.
- communications that provide project partners, Indigenous communities, wider communities, government and NGO agencies information, and, offer advice and collaboration among national and international Indigenous groups.

Stakeholders

The IWPG work with many stakeholders including Indigenous communities, organisations and institutions; north Australian water resource managers, research organisations and policy advisors; north Australian economic development policy officers; other government and non government organisations; as well as potential investors.

Project Support

The IWPG was initially funded for one year (2006-07) by Land and Water Australia to develop institutional arrangements for Indigenous participation in the NWI. The IWPG is currently funded by the National Water Commission (2007-10) under its Raising National Water Standards Program.