

Report

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Our work is about learning, colleagues, culture and place:

Aboriginal employment at the Alice Springs Desert Park

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Jocelyn Davies



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Top: Alice Springs Desert Park Guide, Leroy Lester, explains timber and stone tools used to gather foods and hunt animals to a visitor group.

Bottom: Interpretative signs at the Desert Park illustrate and describe details of Aboriginal desert life and an Aboriginal skill of tracking game animals that was once essential.

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Shortened forms

ACCI: Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
AFI: Australian Forestry Industry
AGM: Annual general meeting
APY: Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
ASDP: Alice Springs Desert Park
ATSI: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
CAAC: Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (health service)
CAAMA: Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association
CAEPR: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CDEP: Community Development and Employment Project
CLC: Central Land Council
CNRM: Cultural and natural resource management
CoA: Commonwealth of Australia
CRC: Cooperative Research Centre
CSIRO: Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DAFF: Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
DEEWR: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DEWR: Department of Employment and Work Relations
DK: Desert Knowledge

DKA: Desert Knowledge Australia
FCA: Federal Court of Australia
GA: Greening Australia
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
IAD: Institute for Aboriginal Development
IEE: Indigenous Education and Employment, especially in IEE Tool
MoU: Memorandum of understanding
NPY: Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
NPYWC: Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council
NRETAS: NT Department of Natural Resources Environment, Tourism, The Arts and Sport
NRM: Natural resource management
NT: Northern Territory
NTG: Northern Territory Government
NTPS: Northern Territory Public Service
OHS: Occupational Health and Safety
RA: Reconciliation Australia
STEP: Structured Training and Employment Program
T1, T2 etc: Technical Officer Level 1 (base grade); Level 2 etc
TO: traditional owner
UKTNP: Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park
VET: Vocational Education and Training
WCPA: World Commission on Protected Areas

Glossary

Achilpa: spotted quoll (A)
Akngwelye: wild dog (A)
Alhekulyele: Mt Gillen (A)
Altyerre: Often translated from Central and Eastern Arrernte as 'the Dreaming' or 'Dreamtime', see Footnote 5. Synonym: Jukurrpa in Warlpiri; Tjukurpa in Pitjantjatjara
Apmereke-artweye: 'Traditional owner' in Central Arrernte. See Footnote 87 for full explanation.
Atyilpe: rufous hare wallaby (A)
Kwertengerle: custodians of country, in partnership with apmerek-artweye (A)
Mala: rufous hare wallaby (Pit)
Malparara: 'a person together with a companion or friend', Pitjantjatjara, (Goddard 1996)
Marlu: red kangaroo (Pit)
Tjilpa: western quoll (Pit)
Tjukurrpa: Simple translation from Western Desert languages as story, Dreaming, or [Aboriginal customary] Law (Goddard 1996). Synonym: Altyerre in Central and Eastern Arrernte.
Yeperenye: caterpillar (A)
Yeye apme kwerlaye-iperre: rainbow serpent (A)

Summary

The Alice Springs Desert Park has achieved and sustained a high level of Aboriginal employment compared to most other Australian government organisations and the Australian private sector. For more than 10 years, between 20% and 25% of its staff of about 50 people have been Aboriginal people. They include Aboriginal people who have previous work experience, elders with strong cultural knowledge, and young Aboriginal people being introduced to a workplace culture through apprenticeships and traineeships.

Factors that account for the success of Aboriginal employment at the Alice Springs Desert Park (ASDP) are analysed in this report. The research focused on the opinions and experiences of Aboriginal staff, as well as analysing factors identified by ASDP managers that supported Aboriginal employment. The Indigenous Employment and Evaluation (IEE) Tool (Tiplady & Barclay 2007b), developed within the mining industry, was used as an analytical framework, particularly for the views of ASDP managers. The IEE Tool is based on a business planning approach and is designed to aid organisations to develop and manage an effective Aboriginal employment program. It was found to be less applicable to understanding the factors that were important to Aboriginal staff about their ASDP employment.

The practices and processes set out in the IEE Tool form one pathway that helps to account for the success of the ASDP Aboriginal employment. A second pathway derives from the Park's core business of authentically and appropriately interpreting the Aboriginal culture of central Australian environments to visitors. This was the initial reason for the ASDP to develop Aboriginal employment and it continues to be a strong driver. A third pathway derives from the wide involvement of Aboriginal people in diverse roles at the ASDP and in community projects. This contributes to the positive views that Aboriginal staff have of their employment. Apart from Aboriginal staff, Aboriginal people are involved in the ASDP as *apmerekke-artweye* (traditional owners), correctional services inmates on work assignments, artists, school students and visitors. *Apmerekke-artweye* are particularly important. The ASDP mission statement identifies the cultural importance of the land to Arrernte people. This carries through to the workplace through their culturally prescribed roles; traditional owners advise, validate and reinforce the work roles of Aboriginal staff.

Aboriginal staff particularly value the opportunity that employment at ASDP offers them to present, learn and re-engage with their cultural knowledge about land, plants and animals. In the wider context of rapid cultural and language fragmentation, this rationale needs to be more strongly recognised and supported. They also value:

- working in a place that supports learning and professional development
- the congruence between work that involves interpreting Aboriginal culture and natural environments and their own personal life experiences
- the operation of cultural protocols in the workplace, such as respect for *apmerekke-artweye* (traditional owners), and consideration of seniority and gender in work tasks
- effective pre-employment pathways
- a reasonable income.

The policies and practices that underpin strong Aboriginal employment at the ASDP result from strong leadership, a clear and consistent vision and key individuals. Aboriginal staff work across the various departments of the ASDP as guides, horticulturalists, zookeepers and other roles. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff collaborate in the day-to-day park operations with little racial distinction. The main time that Aboriginality is specifically recognised by Park management is for access to government programs and resources that can proactively support Aboriginal people and Aboriginal employment. The Park's Aboriginal staff have generally been recruited into positions that are formally designated

as being for Aboriginal people. A strategic alliance between the ASDP and an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation was critical to development of the ASDP Aboriginal employment program, but recent changes to personnel and policy have challenged the ASDP's capacity to build on this success.

Ideally the ASDP would recruit Aboriginal people who have substantial experience in moving between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds. This is because strong Aboriginal cultural knowledge is a basis for good public interpretation of culture, yet the workplace also requires compliance with Northern Territory government standards and procedures. However, Aboriginal people with bicultural expertise are in high demand, and often have other income options. Hence, the ASDP has needed to nurture and develop the bicultural skills of its recruits. Strong differences and disengagement persist between the different cultural systems within modern central Australia. Some individuals have bridged the differences between Aboriginal and workplace cultures through their ASDP employment and others have not.

Some ASDP Aboriginal staff have stayed for more than 5 years, but many have stayed for much shorter periods. Of 24 recent staff, 34% stayed for less than one year. Aboriginal staff identified challenges in their employment including perceived low pay levels within the Northern Territory Government (NTG) public service, high demands from their public roles, and boredom associated with repetition of tasks. While such challenges may have contributed to the comparatively short retention of some Aboriginal employees, they also affect non-Aboriginal employees. Specific suggestions from Aboriginal staff about how ASDP strategies could change to be more effective for Aboriginal recruitment and retention included developing a formal role for Aboriginal people in ASDP governance and formal benchmarks for Aboriginal cultural knowledge, with recognition for prior learning.

Strategies used effectively by the ASDP to recruit and retain Aboriginal staff may be applicable elsewhere in the public and private sectors. They include:

- a long-term approach with clear strategic objectives on Aboriginal employment regularly articulated by leaders and managers
- employment targets that parallel local demographic ratios of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people
- a relationship-based management style that especially recognises and supports key individuals
- flexible and innovative ways of working cross-culturally, e.g. use of personal networks, elders and community groups
- designated Aboriginal positions and a 'critical mass' of Aboriginal staff
- strong emphasis on pre-employment and work readiness, e.g. a 'buddy' system and cultural mentoring by senior Aboriginal people
- diverse work tasks and career pathways within the organisation and links to other organisations to facilitate career transitions into related sectors
- learning and training approaches that strengthen cultural knowledge as well as introduce new skills
- flexible leave arrangements that include 'cultural' leave options
- recognising and respecting traditional owners of the area
- developing multiple roles for Aboriginal people in the organisation, additional to employment
- a workplace culture that encourages Aboriginal input and cross-cultural collaboration, recognising that non-Aboriginal staff can be enriched by new cultural insights
- long-term, stable and substantial funding levels and programs with capacity to be flexible and responsive to local opportunities.

Future research is recommended to follow up past employees to identify why they left the ASDP and what they went on to do.

1. Introduction

1.1 Aims

This study analyses the employment of Aboriginal people within the Alice Springs Desert Park (ASDP). Its main aim is to identify processes that support Aboriginal employment, as well as challenges and areas for improvement, from the perspective of ASDP Aboriginal staff, managers and non-Aboriginal staff. One reason for doing so is to identify features of the ASDP approach to Aboriginal employment that might be adapted and implemented in other agencies and sectors. The second reason is that the research aims to contribute to understanding of Aboriginal engagement in cultural and natural resource management (CNRM) in central Australia, particularly by identifying linkages between Aboriginal employment in ASDP and other CNRM activity in the region, including management of Aboriginal-owned lands.

This study has been conducted in collaboration with ASDP management. Managers were interested in the research for several reasons: further documentation of their Aboriginal employment strategies, analysis of the effectiveness of these strategies from the point of view of their staff, and identifying areas for improvement. Managers sought to improve corporate memory within the ASDP and extend the resources they have to assist other agencies that are seeking to increase Aboriginal employment, job satisfaction and retention. They were especially interested in identifying factors that are unique to their socio-geographic context and those that might be transferable.

This study was part of the Livelihoods inLand™ core project of Desert Knowledge CRC with CSIRO and other partners (see Davies 2007). The Livelihoods inLand™ project identified principles that can be applied to support improvements in Aboriginal livelihoods through engagement in land-based cultural and natural resource management (CNRM) activities. The Desert Park study has contributed to these broad principles by identifying procedures that support Aboriginal employment in a mainstream CNRM enterprise and linkages between this employment and other CNRM activities in central Australia, including on Aboriginal-owned lands. This study also has a wider relevance to other industry sectors, given its focus on effective processes for Aboriginal employment.

1.2 Report structure

Relevant literature is reviewed in this introductory section. The report then presents the study's analytical framework and methods. Following this, the study's results are presented and discussed. Quantitative data on Aboriginal employment at ASDP are first presented. Then the Park's Aboriginal staff are profiled. Positive factors that support Aboriginal employment, and challenges encountered, are presented first from the perspective of the Park's Aboriginal staff, and then from the perspective of ASDP managers. The latter are structured around the Indigenous Employment and Evaluation Tool (IEE Tool) that has provided an analytical framework for this study. Factors that emerged, particularly from the perspectives of Aboriginal staff, as important to the Aboriginal employment success of the ASDP are then outlined. These relate to the work context of the Park, its business purpose and the varied roles that Aboriginal people have in the Park in addition to employment. In the discussion section, three parallel pathways of policy, planning and action that support Aboriginal employment in the ASDP are identified. Suggestions for improvements to ASDP Aboriginal employment are presented, and applicability of ASDP experience to other sectors and workplaces is considered.

Quotes from ASDP employees are used extensively to provide detail to the analysis and ground it in the real experiences of employees. These quotes are laid out as footnotes at the bottom of the page so that they may be read in parallel to the main text.

1.3 Evaluating Aboriginal employment: themes and gaps in the literature

1.3.1 Economic context

Until colonial settlement, Aboriginal people in central Australia had gainful work in non-monetary economies. Their economies were based on hunting and gathering, resource management and the trade of natural resource products. After colonisation, non-Aboriginal land uses and land tenure acquisition progressively excluded Aboriginal people from their own customary economies and engaged them intermittently in the developing monetary economies centred on missions and pastoral stations (Peterson 2005). Only in the 1960s was there payment of award wages and wider inclusion of Aboriginal people in a modern cash economy. Aboriginal engagement in the monetary capitalist economy involved markedly different forms of work, labour organisation and monetary distribution compared with the preceding thousands of years.

Increasingly over the past fifty years, employment has been widely considered to be a critical need for Aboriginal people: ‘Most government-initiated development projects, Indigenous community plans and statements of community needs, take the requirement for employment as a, if not the, central issue in a better future for remote communities’ (Peterson 2005, p. 7). Some argue that involvement in the ‘real’ economy rather than the passive welfare economy demands employment (e.g. Pearson 2000). Others, notably Altman (e.g. 2005), advocate for acceptance of a hybrid economic model with state, customary and market sectors. However, a widely accepted view is that ‘the optimal prosperous future for Indigenous Australians lies in employment links with mainstream labour markets’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2007, p. 3).

Employment is seen as the key to overcome the financial poverty and multiple disadvantages that remote-area Aboriginal people are considered to experience when compared to the circumstances of other Australians. Employment status is closely linked to education and housing status, and impacts on health outcomes and incarceration (Taylor 2005). Much unemployment among remote Aboriginal people is long-term, chronic and intergenerational.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders’ (ATSI) contemporary participation in the Australian labour force is well below that of other people. In 2004–05, 58% of ATSI adults were employed nationally compared to 78% of other adults (Commonwealth of Australia 2007). Aboriginal people’s engagement in full-time employment decreased with remoteness from urban centres. In remote Australia in 2001, 42% of ATSI adults were employed, compared to 67% of other people (Taylor 2005). Alice Springs, whose population is 25% Aboriginal, is reported to have a major problem with Aboriginal unemployment: 16.3% of the potential Aboriginal workforce is unemployed, compared with 2.9% for the non-Aboriginal population. The Aboriginal unemployment figure increases to 34.9% when Aboriginal Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP) participants are excluded from the totals for employed people. The large and growing percentage of Aboriginal youth, comprising 44% of the school-aged population, has been a major impetus for Aboriginal employment programs (Brown 2003).

Despite increased policy attention to improving Aboriginal employment, and increases in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the Northern Territory, Aboriginal labour force participation is declining in remote regions (Taylor 2005; Young & Guenther 2008). This trend is due to a multitude of factors. Some are challenges for the recruitment and retention of staff in many remote locations, particularly of desert Australia, irrespective of racial background (McKenzie 2007). For example, there has been a high concentration of jobs in a very small number of industries and occupations: pastoralism, mining, and government administration and service. Particular challenges faced by Aboriginal people include competition with workers who have formal qualifications and skills considered to be more relevant and valued in those industries.

Employment or income-generating options that require the skill base that is common among remote Aboriginal people are limited. Such skills include art and craft production, and bush food and medicine production, which do engage with commercial markets, but generate only small, often underreported, incomes for most people. They also include family care, customary ceremonial commitments, representation and advocacy. Some remote Aboriginal people may see themselves as very gainfully employed through such activities, even though they may be formally classified as not in the labour force, or as unemployed.

Modes of social organisation in Aboriginal compared to non-Aboriginal societies impact on employment outcomes. Kin- or family-based relationships are predominant among remote Aboriginal people. In contrast, employment opportunities typically assume or require that individuals are able to transact with the work environment as autonomous individuals acting in circumscribed roles. Consequently there are many differences between the relationship-based values of remote Aboriginal people and the assumptions and requirements of employers about employment roles and modes of behaviour (see e.g. Peterson 2005; Trigger 2005; Davies, Maru et al. 2010).

There are relatively few examples where labour organisation and production is structured around customary Aboriginal kin or family-based relationships. One exception is Aboriginal involvement in small-scale commercial harvest and trade of 'wild'-sourced bush food and seed (NPYWC 2003; Morse 2005; Walsh & Douglas 2009). It is also exceptional in being largely self-motivated by Aboriginal people and almost completely independent of government or non-government institutions. This bush-produce trade demonstrates that certain remote-area Aboriginal people are very capable of highly skilled and hard physical labour.

1.3.2 Strategic action and research on Aboriginal employment

Substantial numbers of policies, strategies, plans and reviews have been generated at Federal, state/territory and local government levels for ATSI employment, economic development or business enterprise in the public sector, in services such as health and education, and in industry sectors such as tourism, agriculture, mining and conservation. At a Federal government level, policies, strategies and programs have focused on addressing Aboriginal economic disadvantage and inequality faced in relation to employment, with many programs creating vocational education and training and employment opportunities (Commonwealth of Australia 2005; ACCI 2006; DEWR 2006). All Australian states and territories have also developed ATSI employment policies. Some have included action plans with annual reporting processes for government agencies, for example, Western Australia (Western Australia Office of Equal Employment Opportunity 2002) and New South Wales (Nelson 2000). Many public service sectors, such as education, military, health and housing, have their own ATSI employment plans.

Private sector employers have increasingly developed Aboriginal employment strategies since the mid 2000s. Peak body strategies include those developed by the Business Council of Australia (2009), the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and major corporations. Reconciliation Australia provides support to Australian business to develop reconciliation strategies that include improvement of employment outcomes for Aboriginal people (Reconciliation Australia 2009).

ATSI employment strategies in natural resource management sectors include those for forestry (DAFF 2005; DAFF & AFI 2007), pastoralism (Josif et al. 2009), horticulture, aquaculture and tourism (e.g. Ah Chee 1999; NTG 2004). The conservation and land management sector has had less strategic attention, though much advocacy for Aboriginal employment (e.g. Altman & Cochrane 2005; Commonwealth of Australia 2007; Gerritsen 2007; Hunt et al. 2009). In remote and regional Australia this sector appears to attract Aboriginal workers who offer themselves for ranger jobs (Peterson 2005, p. 13). By contrast, there is substantial investment in strategies and processes to attract Aboriginal employees into more established natural resource management (NRM) industries such as horticulture.

Another emerging sector that has had some research and strategy development is in Aboriginal employment opportunities in research. This has ranged from strategy development for ATSI people in a national research organisation (e.g. CSIRO 2010) to Aboriginal engagement in field research in remote desert Australia (e.g. Rea & Young 2006). The latter was followed by the development of protocols to guide cross-cultural research collaborations (Orr et al. 2009).

Strategies related to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory (NT) include a framework for employment and business (NTG 2002), an Indigenous Employment Toolkit and check list (NTG 2005) and an Indigenous Employment and Career Development Strategy and progress reporting (NTG 2006).¹ In central Australia, the Alice Springs Indigenous Education, Employment and Training Taskforce has operated since 2006 with active participation by many organisations including the Alice Springs Town Council; Central Land Council; NT Department of Education and Training; Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; Desert Knowledge CRC; Desert Knowledge Australia; and Tangentyere Council. It aims to improve education, training and employment outcomes for Aboriginal youth in desert Australia and change peoples' perceptions of what they can achieve and aspire to (DKA 2010).

Recent research into Aboriginal employment includes Kimberley and Pilbara regional employment patterns (Taylor & Scambary 2005; Taylor 2006; Taylor 2008), opportunities and constraints in Aboriginal tourism micro-enterprises (Fuller et al. 2005), the institutional factors that drive Aboriginal participation in the labour force including education achievement and the role of CDEP (Hunter 2002), the role of CDEP experience and education (Hunter 2002; Hunter & Gray 2004; Gray & Hunter 2005) and the effectiveness of vocational education and training (VET) programs in desert regions, one driver for which is the government push for Certificate III levels that facilitate access to work opportunities (Young & Guenther 2008). Other research has considered educational outcomes, pre-vocational pathways into employment, factors that influence employee retention and loss, and employment within certain sectors, including the mining industry (see below).

The Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (Commonwealth of Australia 2007) inquired into successful initiatives in Indigenous employment from 2005 to 2007. The Inquiry's terms of reference included minimising the view that poor employment outcomes were due to Aboriginal shortcomings. A broad definition of 'successful employment outcomes' was applied wherein a job was seen as something that allowed people to maintain themselves and their family, and included advances in training and work readiness as well as actual employment. Major themes identified through the Inquiry related to self-determination of Aboriginal people, role models, mentors, education and training, cadetship programs, and processes to secure economic independence. Major impediments to Aboriginal employment were summarised as education (numeracy and literacy), work readiness, mobility, homesickness, health (fitness for work, mental health, and substance abuse), housing and transport. Other specified obstacles identified were English–Aboriginal language differences, demanding family relationships, police records, and travel distances from home to potential employers. Fourteen recommendations were made. These included a strong emphasis on the understanding and promotion of best practice models from the private sector, particularly the mining industry.

1.3.3 Lessons and tools from the mining industry

The strongest research attention, in relation to Aboriginal employment strategies and barriers to employment, has been within the mining sector. The challenges associated with increased Aboriginal employment that are summarised above have meant that the pool of 'job ready' Aboriginal people has been very small for all employers. This has been of special concern to the mining industry because many of its operations are in remote regions where substantial proportions of the population are Aboriginal,

1. A new *Indigenous employment and career development strategy* (NTG 2010) was released in May 2010 when this report was in publication. Future research needs to review the NTG report.

and agreements with Aboriginal traditional owners about mining commonly include employment targets (Harvey & Gawler 2003; Taylor & Scambary 2005; Trigger 2005; Tiplady & Barclay 2007a; Taylor 2008).

Rio Tinto's Argyle Diamond Mine Indigenous Employment Strategy (Harvey & Gawler 2003) is a model of best practice (Commonwealth of Australia 2007). Rio Tinto needed to go beyond financial benefit returns to Aboriginal people to compensate for mining impacts. It aimed to boost Aboriginal employment and contribute to robust regional-scale economic development because of the benefits this would bring the company in terms of financial markets, a more secure but flexible regional workforce, and offsetting the high costs of a fly-in/fly-out workforce. Harvey and Gawler (2003) reported that Aboriginal employees comprised 5% of the Rio Tinto workforce in Australian operations, and 20% at its ERA Ranger uranium mine. In 2006, Aboriginal employment at its Argyle Diamond Mine was 23% and Rio Tinto had adopted a 2010 target of 40% (Commonwealth of Australia 2007). From the early 1990s Rio Tinto's Hamersley Iron Aboriginal Training and Liaison Unit implemented a staged approach. Later, MoUs with three government departments committed Rio Tinto's Australian mines to assist in meeting Aboriginal employment milestones. A model for the various processes and steps involved in effective Aboriginal employment was developed and implemented in the early 2000s. Employment support programs included family liaison, cross-cultural education, mentoring, career development and cadetships. Other significant features were a four-day-long hiring and selection process, training programs and requirements on contractors to employ local Aboriginal people (Commonwealth of Australia 2007).

In central Australia, the Newmont Tanami Indigenous Training and Employment Program (2001 to present) is reported to have had nearly 100% success in the transition of 10 trainees to full-time employment (Young & Guenther 2008). This program included training in job readiness, specific work skills, mentoring by elders, cross-cultural training for non-Aboriginal staff, and family support programs. Its apparent success was enabled by strong partnerships with local communities, Aboriginal organisations and training providers, and by a commitment to continuous improvement (Young & Guenther 2008, p. 182).

An Indigenous Employment and Evaluation Tool was developed through the University of Queensland Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining as a framework to assist mining companies and other stakeholders assessing a company's Aboriginal employment and training initiatives (Tiplady & Barclay 2007b). It is structured around six levels of a performance management system: leadership, policy, planning, implementation, monitoring, and review of progress (see Figure 5 in Methods section), with criteria to assess effectiveness.

Taylor (2005) warns that even where a single operation, such as a mine, has made a major and successful investment in Aboriginal employment, the impact on Aboriginal employment across a region may still be relatively small, particularly because of high Aboriginal population growth rates. Hence, even though the mining industry has been making efforts to share learnings and apply best practice strategies to Aboriginal employment, a concerted and sustained investment is needed across other sectors if increases in Aboriginal employment are to be achieved. The context and requirement of other sectors are not likely to be the same as those of the mining industry. Hence it is also important to appreciate where differences may lie and how these might impact on Aboriginal employment. Evaluation of the effectiveness of Aboriginal employment at the Alice Springs Desert Park can contribute here.

1.3.4 Aboriginal perspectives on employment

Aboriginal perspectives on income, employment and unemployment have been poorly reported in the research literature with some exceptions (notably Wakerman et al. 2000; Sithole et al. 2008). Research into Aboriginal experiences as rangers in cultural and natural resource management in northern

Australia (Sithole et al. 2008) shows the interest in this work being strongly linked to Aboriginal people's customary connections to land. Other research shows differences in Aboriginal attitudes to work, conceptions of what work involves and strategies for accessing work. For example, Gray and Hunter (2005) identified that Aboriginal job search success relied predominantly upon family and friend networks rather than advertised positions, as also identified by Davies, Maru et al. (2010). Anthropological analysis has highlighted the differences between Aboriginal conceptions of work, which are often directed at servicing family/kinship obligations, and non-Aboriginal understandings of work roles which often are quite separate from family relationships (Musharbash 2001; Trigger 2005; Austin-Broos 2006).

1.3.5 Strengths and gaps in understanding of Aboriginal employment

The literature contributes in terms of identifying policies, programs and strategies that emphasise improving Aboriginal employment outcomes. However, there is relatively little evaluation of the long-term effectiveness of public- and private-sector Aboriginal employment strategies to assess what is working and not working well. A lead contribution to our understanding of effective strategies has been made by the mining industry. The industry has demonstrated commitment to community engagement, developed innovative practices in human resource management to create pathways to employment, supported employees through training and mentoring, and addressed some issues that impact on employment, such as family/cultural obligations. Nonetheless, there is limited literature to show the effectiveness of employment initiatives from the perspective of Aboriginal employees. The Alice Springs Desert Park study has provided an opportunity to address some of these gaps, and particularly to hear from Aboriginal employees about their own experiences.

1.4 The Alice Springs Desert Park

The Alice Springs Desert Park (ASDP) covers 1,300 hectares of bush land and developed land approximately 5 km west of the Alice Springs town centre. Its core area of visitor facilities and walking tracks is 54 ha (see Figures 2 and 3). The Park's tenure is Crown Parks and Reserves land leased by the Conservation Land Corporation. It is contiguous with the West MacDonnell Ranges National Park. Management is by the Alice Springs Desert Park section of the Northern Territory Government Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport.

The ASDP opened in 1997 with goals that included:

1. increasing visitor appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of arid Australia's natural environment
2. interpreting Aboriginal use of desert plants and animals.

Other goals related to flora and fauna conservation, recreational opportunities and scientific research. The interpretation of Aboriginal culture in relation to biota, resource use and land management has been a core purpose of the ASDP since its inception.

As a new operation, ASDP was able to bring innovative approaches to work with Aboriginal people.^{2,3,4} Throughout its short history, the Park's emphases on issues that related to Aboriginal people expanded through what can be portrayed as five overlapping phases (Figure 1). These phases show a successive expansion from Aboriginal roles as traditional owners and experts in cultural interpretation, to Aboriginal guides, and then expanded to Aboriginal employment in two other sections of the Park's organisational structure (Botany and Zoology).

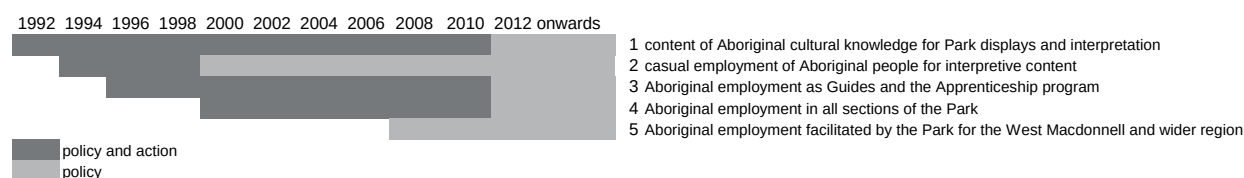


Figure 1: Phases of policy and action related to Aboriginal employment at the Alice Springs Desert Park

The Alice Springs Desert Park is viewed by many as a model of best practice in Aboriginal employment. This recognition has come from long-term Alice Springs residents (see footnote quotes by MK Turner and R Beale), Alice Springs organisations (DKA 2010), the NT government (Kilgariff & Revel 2005) and nationally (Murdoch 2006; Commonwealth of Australia 2007). Aboriginal employment has been a part of the success of the Park that is reflected in numerous awards (e.g. 2002 NT Public Service Award for Equity and Diversity in the Workplace, NT Tourism Brolga Awards to the Park itself, and NT Young Australian of the Year Award (Environment) Apprentice awards to individual staff).

Consultation with traditional Aboriginal owners on the Park's development began in the early stages of preparing the Concept Plan for the Park. The Arrernte Council was contracted to assist with the development of the Concept Plan, which was completed in 1993. Consultation and casual employment of Aboriginal people to develop the content of interpretative signs and other media occurred in the mid- to late 1990s (Clarkson 1999). An apprenticeship program for four Aboriginal guides commenced in 1996 and all four completed their apprenticeships. This program developed into a wider Aboriginal employment program across the Park's various operational sections.



2. The Desert Park is a place in Alice Springs that does a good job in employing young Aboriginal people. They give jobs to young Arrernte people. They work with them in a good way. Often it is hard for our kids, you know. (MK Turner, 7/3/08, OAM, senior Arrernte woman, author and community leader. She volunteered the Park as an example of good employment standards when speaking about businesses unrelated to this research.)

3. The Desert Park originated from a long process of community consultation. In that process they saw the need to work closely with traditional owners. Ken Johnson and Col Fuller worked closely with them. (Raelene Beale, 12/07, long-term Alice Springs resident.)



4. The Park started fresh without the baggage of an old government organisation ... We didn't have the 'That's too hard, that would never work' mentality. [Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people] working together is the way the Park has always been. It attracts people who are interested in this way of working (J Clarkson, Manager, 13/5/08)

Under the terms of the Alice Springs Native Title determination in 1999, the Conservation Land Corporation was found to hold exclusive possession to the ASDP and that native title had been extinguished within the Desert Park (FCA 1999). In spite of this, the ASDP gives particular recognition to Aboriginal custodians, some of whom were native title applicants for the wider Alice Springs region.

From Arrernte perspectives, the lands underpinning the Park are crossed by *Altyerr* tracks with sites associated with *Akngwelye* (wild dog) and *Yeperenye* Altyerr (caterpillar dreaming) and other epic stories.⁵ Most of the sites and features of the Mt Gillen ridge (including the peak Alhekulyele) were formed by the activities of the wild dog (Brooks 2003) (Figure 2). The apmerek-artweye (traditional owners) for these sites live in Alice Springs town and outstations within the region. From the time of the Park's inception, some of these custodians and their families played various roles within the Park and wider area.



Figure 2: Satellite image of the Alice Springs Desert Park

Source: Google Earth 2009

During the period of this research, the Park's interpretative material was predominantly about the secular aspects of Arrernte Aboriginal life such as food, fire, water and medicine. Spiritual aspects were presented only in junior or 'public' level information: sensitive information is not presented. For example, there was a simple interpretation of morals associated with *Yeye apme kwerlaye-iperre* (rainbow serpent) travel and individual Aboriginal guides could choose to explain (or not) elements of Altyerr (Arrernte) or *Jukurpa* (Warlpiri) or *Tjukurpa* (Pitjantjatjara) stories to which they have a cultural right, knowledge or confidence to speak. Plant and animal species identification signs included Central Arrernte names and phonetic spellings. Interactive displays included a life-sized model of a

5. Altyerr ~ 1. the Dreaming, Dreamtime; the creation of the world and the things in it, and its eternal existence (Henderson & Dobson 1994, p. 105). This is one of six definitions given in the Arrernte dictionary.

contemporary Arrernte man whose audio recording recounted his life as a child in the Coolibah country, then later as a stockman. Section 3.4.1 of this report details the content of some verbal interpretations of Aboriginal culture that were presented by Aboriginal guides during the study.

Clarkson (1999; 2005; c. 2007) reported on processes to improve collaboration with Aboriginal experts in the Park's interpretive activities. A central requirement was to contract them in the development and presentation of interpretative material. The intent was to present these cultures as dynamic and living. Hence changes from classical traditions through contact with non-Aboriginal people to modern aspects of Aboriginal life were presented.

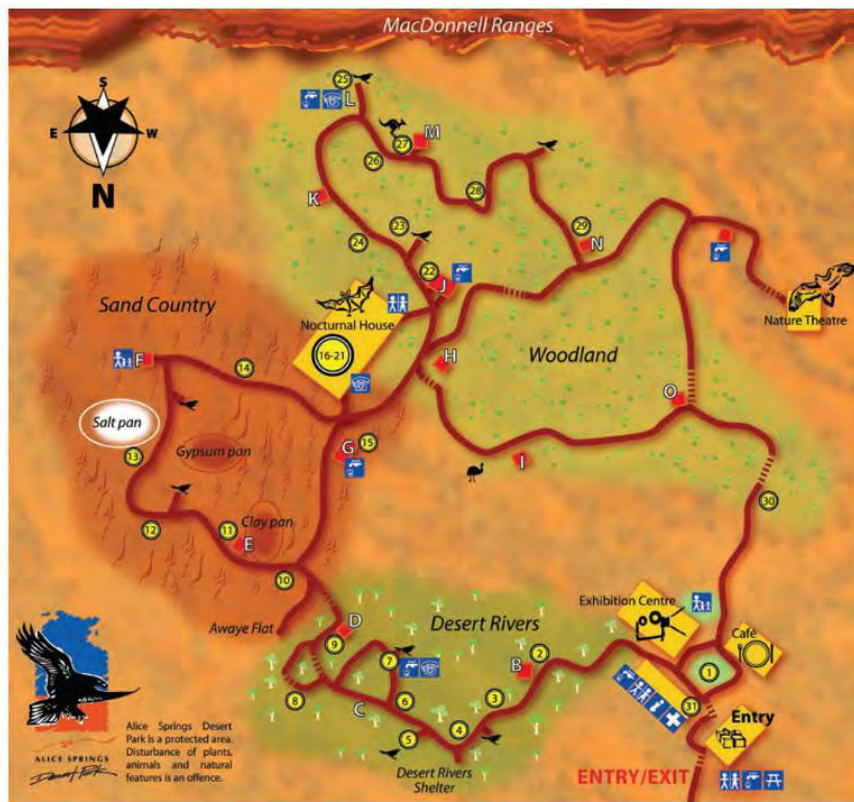


Figure 3: Alice Springs Desert Park visitor map, showing managed natural habitats and facilities
Source: ASDP



Photos 1: Landscape and infrastructure of the Alice Springs Desert Park

Top: Main access road (P. Brown, ASDP); Middle: Forecourt (ASDP images); Bottom: Courtyard and theatrette with MacDonnell Range behind (ASDP images)



Arnernte men in ceremonial dance relevant to Mparntwe (Alice Springs and its lands including the Desert Park) (ASDP images)



Apmereke-artweye involved in developing the Alice Springs Desert Park, proud for their role in winning the 1998 Australian Tourism Award for the Desert Park. From left across the front: Thomas Stevens (deceased), Rosie Ferber (deceased), Frankie Stevens (deceased) and Patrick McMillan, with Southern Region Director of Parks and Wildlife Ken Johnson (behind)



Central Arnernte *Apmereke-artweye* (Senior man who speaks for Mparntwe), Bobby Stuart, explains an Mparntwe *Altyerr* (Dreaming) with associated sites in the Desert Park (Image source: IAD)

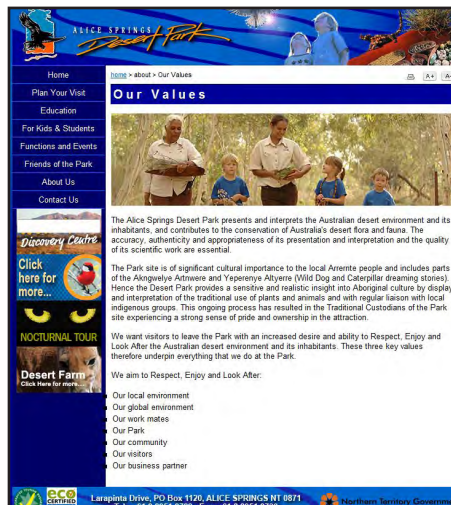
Photos 2: Alice Springs Desert Park Traditional Owners



Photo 3: Alice Springs Desert Park staff
Image source: ASDP



Advertising signs at the
Alice Springs airport



Images and
pages from the
Desert Park
website.

Image source:
ASDP

Photos 4: Aboriginal people portrayed in Alice Springs Desert Park advertising



Photos 5: Interpretative information at the Desert Park that conveys aspects of desert Aboriginal languages, ecological knowledge and culture

Top left: Entrance flag with statement on long Aboriginal occupation of desert environments

Top right: standard plant labels to identify Arrernte names and uses

Left: plant medicines to show visitors

Bottom left: permanent interpretive signs about plant species ecology and water sources



ARRERNTE- <u>computer password-</u> <u>of the month</u> 10/12/07		
ARRENGE		
Arr-unga Father's Father (grandfather)		
Previous words		
Arrernte	Phonetics	English
AKNGEYE	Ar-kngi-ha	Father
MEYE	Me-ya	Mother
ARTNWERE	Eight-n-woora	Dingo
ANWAKERRE	An-wua-karra	Kinship
ALPEWARREWARRE	Alba-warrawarra	Close group of people
IPARRPAYE	E-par-rrbai	Hurry up
KELE MWERRE	Ka-la mwa-rra	Thank you
URREKE	Ur-re-ka	Later / after
ARETYENHENG	Ure-cha-na-nge	See you
PMWARE	p-mwa-ra	small dish or wooden bowl
PMWARE-PMWARE	P-mwah-rup-mwah-ra	Pie- dish Beetle
ATYUNPE	a-choon-pa	Perentie
IRRETYE	Irr-a-cha	Wedge-tailed Eagle
URINGE	oo-reeng-a	Tawny Frogmouth
AHERTE	a-urta	Bilby
KALYAWE	Kil-yar-wa	Central Nettle Dragon
ANTYETYERRE	Un-jid-a-ra	Spencer's Burrowing Frog
UNYERRE	Oon-yim-a	Thorny Devil
IRRARNTE	Ear-ram-da	Red-tailed black cockatoo
AHERRE	A-urra	Red Kangaroo
ALANGKWE	A-lung-wa	Bush Banana
ATYELPE	Ah-chiipa	Western Quoll

Plants	People
Surprising Spinifex	Plant Medicine from the Desert
Wattle Walk	Desert Bush Foods
Desert Gardens Discovery	Plant food & Medicine
Black Food, Black Bugs	Aboriginal Survival in the Desert
Wild Figs	Right Skin Wrong Skin
The Mistletoe Story	Arrernte Language
Mistletoe Magic	Pipe inaye
Living in Dead Wood	Journey through desert art
Desert Gardens Discovery	Find water in the desert
Surviving the heat - plants	Aboriginal languages of Central Australia
Timber Tools & Tucker	Aboriginal use of fire



Photos 6: Aboriginal languages, ecological knowledge and culture 'behind the scenes' at the Alice Springs Desert Park

Top left: Arrernte computer passwords help teach all staff new Arrernte words

Top right: subject lists for the talks presented by guides; the right hand list has topics about Aboriginal culture

Left and bottom: bush food and medicine plants for propagation, research and interpretative materials



2. Methods

The study used qualitative methods, including interviews with staff and management at the ASDP and some participant observation, as detailed below. These were conducted by Fiona Walsh and references in the report that are in the first person refer to Walsh's actions and observations. Interviews were conducted in 2007–08 with some follow-up in 2009. Quantitative data on Aboriginal employment at the ASDP were also sourced from ASDP records. The Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee reviewed the proposal for the study and approved its ethics protocol. Because the detail of the study reflects people and experiences from 2007–08, results are presented here in the past tense. This should not be taken to indicate that the employment processes and outcomes described have not continued, but rather to indicate that there have been changes in staff and in some procedures since the main study data were collected.

2.1 Analytical framework

The initial analytical framework for this research (Figure 4, below) centred on individual Aboriginal employees' experiences within the park. These were expected to be shaped by ASDP Aboriginal employment strategies and processes and would be generalised to give an understanding of 'Aboriginal employment' at the Park. Important inputs to individual Aboriginal employee's experiences were expected to be their prior experiences in cultural and natural resource management (CNRM) outside the park (left-hand side of Figure 4). The research was also concerned to establish how employment at the ASDP related to Aboriginal individuals' later experiences outside the park, particularly in CNRM (right-hand side of Figure 4).

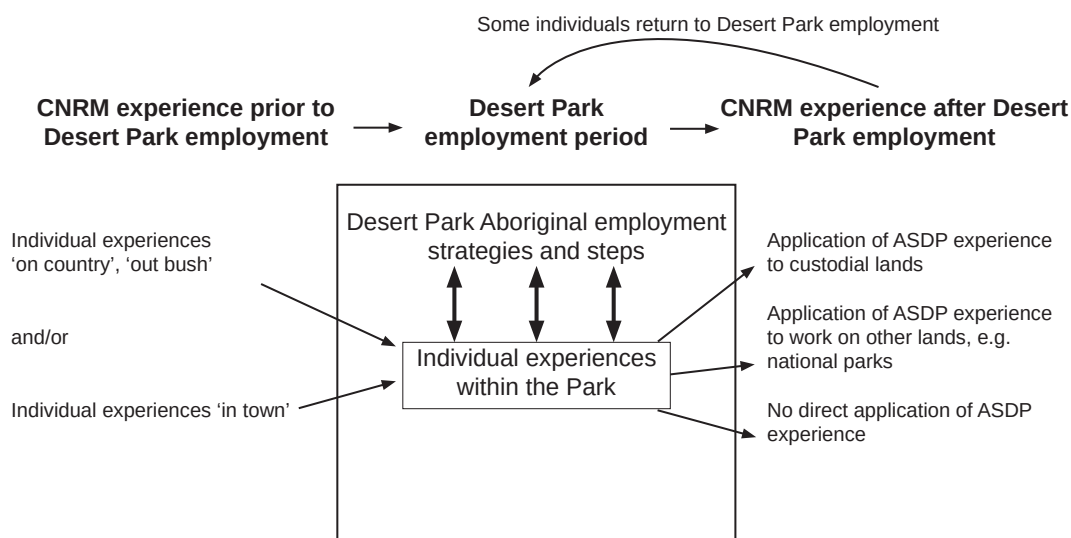


Figure 4: Initial conceptual model for the research

The analysis of Aboriginal employment within the Desert Park (the central part of Figure 4) was refined by reference to the Indigenous Employment Evaluation (IEE) Tool (Figure 5) that had been developed to improve Aboriginal recruitment and retention within the mining sector (Tiplady & Barclay 2007a; 2007b). The IEE Tool provided a conceptual framework for analysis and comparison of the strategies and steps identified by ASDP managers as important to Aboriginal employment. It was found to be less directly applicable to analysis of the opinions and experiences of Aboriginal staff. It is used in this report particularly to structure Section 3.7 which discusses the findings from interviews with managers and other non-Aboriginal staff.

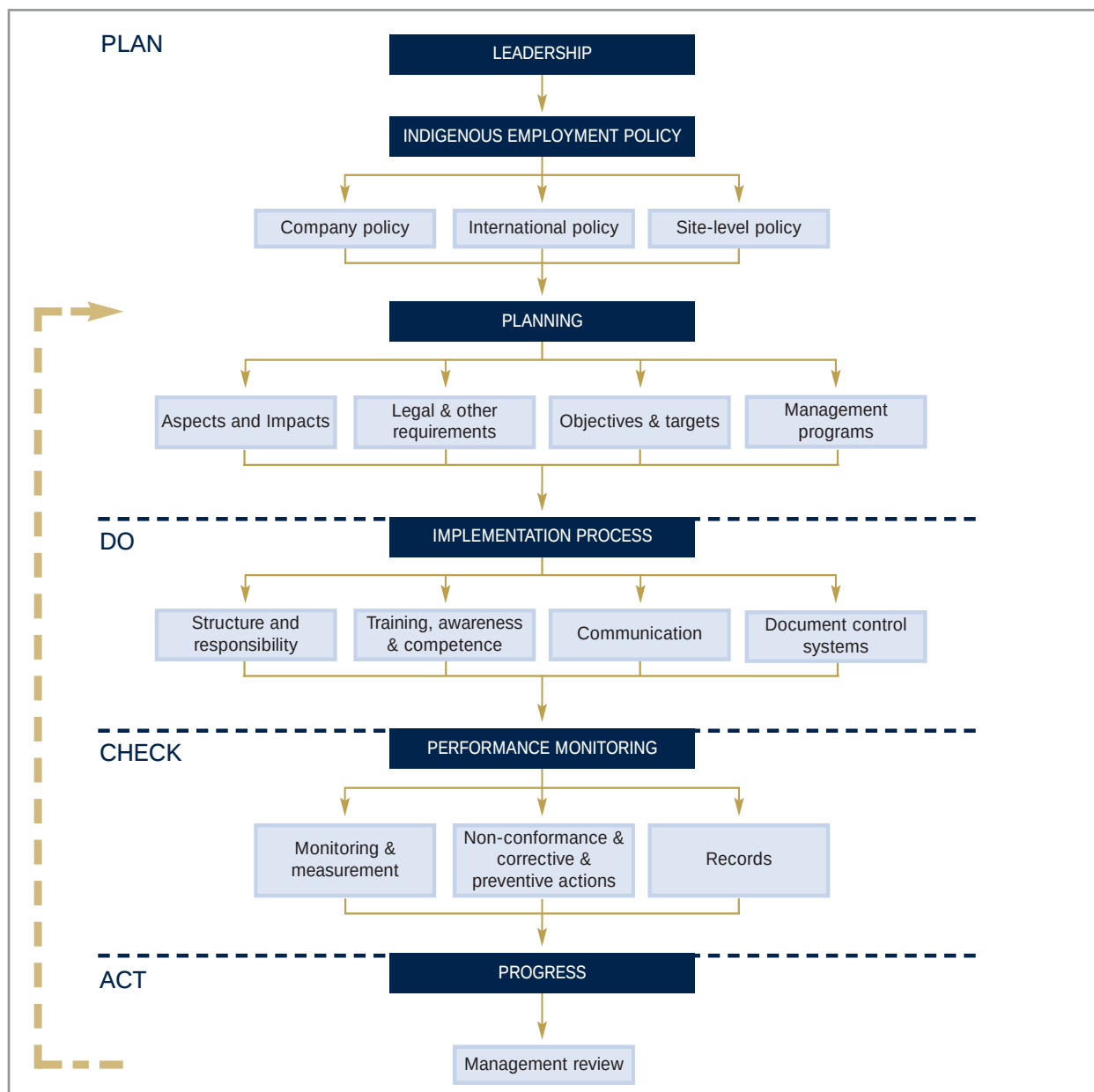


Figure 5: Indigenous Employment Evaluation Framework

Source: Tiplady & Barclay 2007a, p. 56

2.2 Qualitative methods

2.2.1 Introduction to staff

A plain English two-page summary of the proposed project was compiled (Appendix 1). I was introduced by Gary Fry (ASDP manager) at a regular monthly meeting of all available ASDP staff in October 2007. Gary Fry explained the research context and I explained the project's purpose and methods and outlined the potential roles of staff. Staff were invited to be interviewed and four volunteered immediately. Staff of the Botany and Guides sections invited me to explain the project in more detail to their sections. This was done subsequently at two smaller meetings.

One problem encountered early in the research was that the focus of the research on Aboriginal staff contrasted with the work environment at ASDP which had a policy and practice of inclusiveness. It quickly became clear to me that no strong distinction was made between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff in regular Park operations. Further, employees tended to align themselves to other employees in

their section of the organisation (i.e. Guides, Botany, or Zoology) rather than by racial groups. For example, Aboriginal staff tended to sit with non-Aboriginal staff from their section at lunchtime rather than with Aboriginal staff from other sections. It became apparent that it would be important not to destabilise staff relations by undue focus on the Park's Aboriginal staff.

2.2.2 Participant observation

Aboriginal staff asked me to take part on tours and talks with Aboriginal guides. In their view, these activities demonstrated their roles and expertise. I was an observer on three tours and talks and took detailed notes on the content of these talks and the roles of the various guides within them. I also observed several staff meetings and participated by giving updates on the research progress.

2.2.3 Interviewees

To avoid destabilising working relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff, I invited all staff to be interviewed rather than focusing exclusively on the Aboriginal staff. Nine (of a total of 11) of the Aboriginal staff at the ASDP were interviewed in 2007–08. Nine (20%) non-Aboriginal staff were also interviewed, including all middle managers and four other staff. The selection of interviewees was both through self-nomination (4 people) and through requests to individuals (16 people). Interviewees also recommended other staff to be interviewed. Some of these were followed up, but there were several staff who could not be interviewed due to time constraints.⁶ The interviewees are listed in Table 1.

Prior to the interview, interviewees were again provided with a verbal summary of the project. Interviewees were also given the informed consent form (Appendix 1) as per the project's ethics protocol. Most staff chose to sign the form and to stipulate the degree of confidentiality they required after the interview, rather than before it. All but one interviewee chose to be identified by their personal name. Prior to the interview I explained that if there was information that interviewees did not want to be written or audio-recorded, then this was acceptable. On several occasions interviewees asked for recording to stop and this was respected. No references to the points raised in confidence have been made in this report.

I also endeavoured to interview individuals previously employed by the Park, using lists of previous ASDP Aboriginal employees provided by ASDP managers and staff. Two previous staff were interviewed. Attempts were made to contact and arrange face-to-face interviews with other previous employees. However, these attempts were discontinued after interviewees cancelled or postponed proposed arrangements several times. There was insufficient research time to continue this follow up.

2.2.4 Interview format

A semi-structured interview method was chosen as the most appropriate method. Even in an English-speaking context, the semi-structured interview is better suited to Aboriginal discourse patterns than a structured questionnaire or open-ended discovery interview. All interviews were conducted in English. All interviewees were fluent in English. Four were also fluent in a local Aboriginal language.

Forty-three questions were compiled to guide the semi-structured interviews (Appendix 2). Two pilots of these questions were undertaken before the questions were finalised. Some interviewees answered questions directly, while others were broad ranging in their response, addressing several subsequent questions in one monologue. Additional questions were asked of the interviewees as necessary in relation to the topic and the subjects they raised.

Eighteen of the interviews were audio-recorded. These recordings were then emailed to an on-line transcription service. The returned transcripts were then sent to the interviewees for their record and for checking. This verification was found to be important. For example, one interviewee picked up an unfortunate transcription mistake.

6. Particularly, Regena Medhurst (Guides Marketing), Steve Kelly (Guide), Scott Medhurst (Senior Horticulturalist).

Table 1: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff who were interviewed

	Name	Aboriginal (A) Non-Aboriginal (N)	Position	Current staff at time of interview (Yes, No)	Interview date
1	Doug Taylor	A	Specialist Guide, cross-cultural T2 (designated)	Y	31/10/07
2	Leroy Lester	A	Guide T1 (designated)	Y	21/11/07
3	Marie Ellis	A	Guide T1 (designated)	Y	31/10/07
4	Renate Johnny	A	Guide T1 (designated)	Y	19/12/07
5	Terri Unger	A	Apprentice Zookeeping (designated)	Y	21/11/07
6	Ashlee Porter	A	Apprentice Zookeeping (designated)	Y	19/12/08
7	Arnold Baird	A	Trainee Horticulture	Y	13/5/08
8	Ashley Swan	A	Apprentice Horticulture (designated)	Y	19/12/07
9	Chansey Paech	A	Apprentice Horticulture (designated)	Y	9/10/07
10	Veronica Dodson	A	Guide, casual	N	14/10/08
11	Vince Forrester	A	Guide, casual	N	5/3/08
12	Gary Fry	N	Park manager	Y	5/12/07
13	Jodie Clarkson	N	Community Alignment & Product Development Manager	Y	13/5/08
14	Scott Pullyblank	N	Life Sciences curator	Y	12/12/07
15	Gary Dinham	N	Assistant curator, Botany P2	Y	21/11/07
16	Bruce Pascoe	N	Assistant curator, Zoology P2	Y	8/12/08
17	Adam Macfie	N	Guide Manager	Y	10/10/07
18	Tim Collins	N	Nursery manager	Y	7/11/07
19	Dylan Ferguson	N	Nursery horticulturalist	Y	13/5/08
20	Petria Brown	N	Horticulturalist	Y	9/10/07

2.2.5 Interview analysis

All transcripts were formatted and imported to NVivo – a software package – enabling the storage, manipulation and analysis of qualitative data. Interviews were coded for positive factors identified by the interviewees in relation to their personal employment experience or more generally about work in the Park. They were also coded to identify topics that interviewees said were negative, problematic or where improvements needed to be made within the workplace to improve their employment experience. The coding was useful as a first stage in the identification of major themes in the interviews. However, much of the finer-grained analysis of the interviews relied on my informed interpretation of transcripts.

It was important to be clear on the perspective from which an interviewee was speaking. The following perspectives were identified:

1. Aboriginal employees speaking about themselves
2. Aboriginal employees speaking about other Aboriginal employees
3. Aboriginal employees speaking about potential or future Aboriginal employees
4. Aboriginal employees speaking about other employees
5. Non-Aboriginal employees speaking about themselves
6. Non-Aboriginal employees speaking about Aboriginal employees
7. Non-Aboriginal employees speaking about potential or future Aboriginal employees

8. Non-Aboriginal employees speaking about other employees
9. Non-Aboriginal employees speaking about wider government processes in relation to Aboriginal employees.

This report gives strongest attention to Aboriginal voices (1 and 2 above) and to processes used by ASDP upper and middle management to support Aboriginal employees (6 above).

Examples of quotes from interviewees are used in this report to illustrate the primary themes that emerge from the interviews. Quotes are used firstly, to provide detail on the 'real-life' experiences in Aboriginal employment and secondly, to make the report more accessible to a wider readership, including ASDP staff. Individual quotes were chosen because they illustrated specific points, were succinct and/or eloquent. They represent only a small proportion of the full data set and potential quotes from 20 interviews and five meetings. The quotes are placed in footnotes so they can be read either in conjunction with the main text or as a separate narrative.

2.3 Quantitative data on Aboriginal employment

Quantitative data were compiled for various parameters that I considered would be useful in understanding Aboriginal employment patterns. These data were initially sourced from the interviews and tabulated into Excel spreadsheets. They were then sent to ASDP management to be checked and added to. Records were totalled for the numbers of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff, the Northern Territory Public Service (NTPS) classification level held by Aboriginal staff, the age classes of Aboriginal employees, the amount of time per year that Aboriginal staff spent on their homelands and the highest secondary schooling qualification achieved. These data were from current staff during the 2007–08 research period or parts of it.

In addition, records were sourced from the ASDP and NTG of the former Aboriginal employees who had been permanent, apprentices or trainees between 1999 and 2007. Twenty-four names were compiled. Notably this was the first time that ASDP management had been involved in compiling a list of all former Aboriginal employees. Nonetheless, some former staff were still not recorded. These were short-term (< 1 month) apprentices and casual staff, staff for whom there was no NTPS record, and some people who had been contracted through Arrernte Council to work at the ASDP. While data for several parameters were compiled for former staff, only the duration of employment has been used in this study.

2.4 Feedback and meetings with staff

There was regular communication with ASDP managers and other staff by phone and email through the course of the project and write-up. These provided mutual updates on Aboriginal employment matters. Verbal and brief written progress reports were provided to managers and interested staff. In January 2008, the ASDP manager extended an invitation to me to present the results to date to the Central Australian Indigenous Employment Taskforce. This complemented his own presentation.

In December 2008, all staff were invited to a project summary meeting. In September 2009 a draft of this final report was reviewed by ASDP managers (Fry and Clarkson) and their edits and comments incorporated.



Photos 7: Some of the ASDP staff interviewed for this research

Clockwise from top left: Arnold Baird and Ashley Swan; Marie Ellis; Ashley Swan; Leroy Lester; Renate Johnny; Chansey Paech



Photos 8: Some of the ASDP staff interviewed for this research

Clockwise from top left: Doug Taylor (ASDP images); Gary Fry; Dylan Ferguson; Vince Forrester; Veronica Dobson with Fiona Walsh; Tim Collins and Petria Brown

3. Results

3.1 Aboriginal employment data

3.1.1 The Northern Territory Government context

The Northern Territory Government's (NTG) Indigenous Employment Strategies are current for four-year periods. Regular progress reports are made against the strategy. Graphs from the 2006 progress report are presented in Figures 6–8. As the Desert Park is an NTG entity within the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) its employment data is incorporated within these reports. The reports also provide a basis for ASDP Aboriginal employment to be compared to the wider public sector.

Aboriginal employment in the NTG is low relative to the proportion of Aboriginal people in the NT population. From May 2002 to December 2006 the number of Aboriginal employees in the entire Northern Territory public service rose from about 5% to 7% (from ~700 to 1,200 individuals, see Figure 6). Most of the large agencies had a trend towards increased Aboriginal employment. In NRETAS in 2006 about 6.5% of the workforce was Aboriginal (Figure 7). In November 2006 NRETAS had 52 Aboriginal employees.

While the large NTG agencies had an increasing trend to greater numbers of Aboriginal employees, the smaller NTG agencies (<200 staff) exhibited high variation in their percentage of Aboriginal employees over the four-year period from 2002 to 2006 (Figure 8). Although it is part of NRETAS, recruitment to ASDP is relatively independent of that in other parts of the department. The ASDP is comparable in size to the agencies shown in Figure 8. However, unlike these other small NT government agencies, the ASDP had a relatively high and consistent percentage of Aboriginal employees.

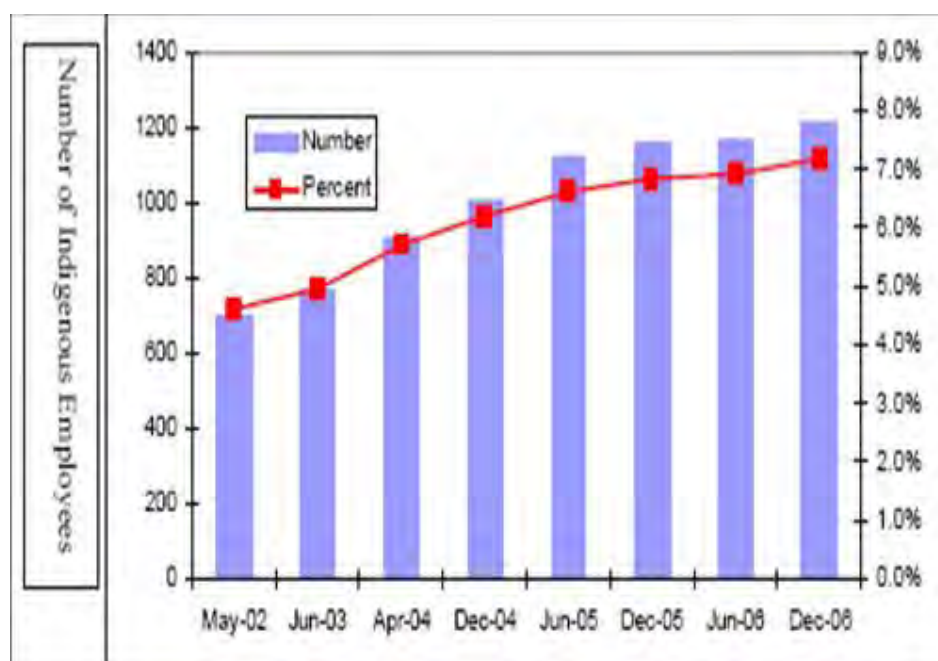


Figure 6: Number and percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the Northern Territory Public Service May 2002 to December 2006

Source: NTG 2006

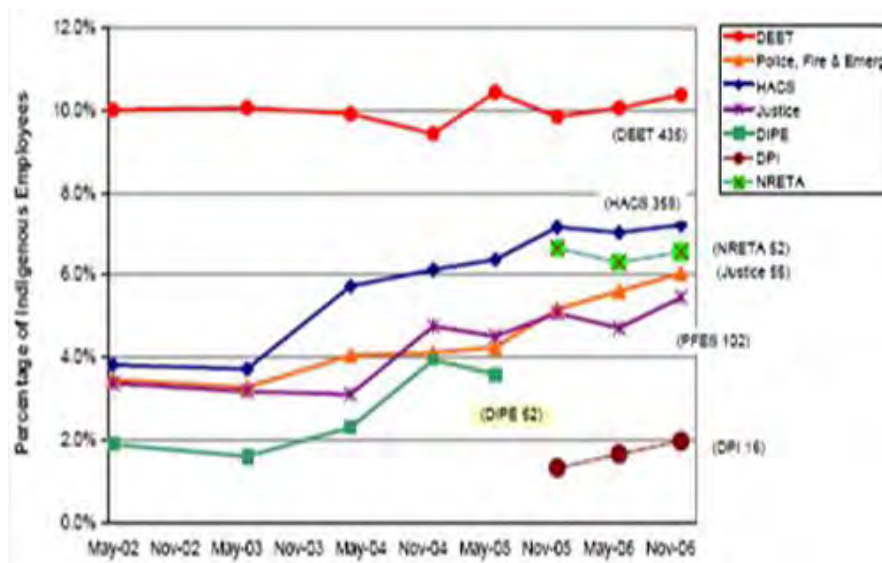


Figure 7: Percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in large Northern Territory Public Service agencies (with >800 staff) May 2002 to December 2006

Source: NTG 2006

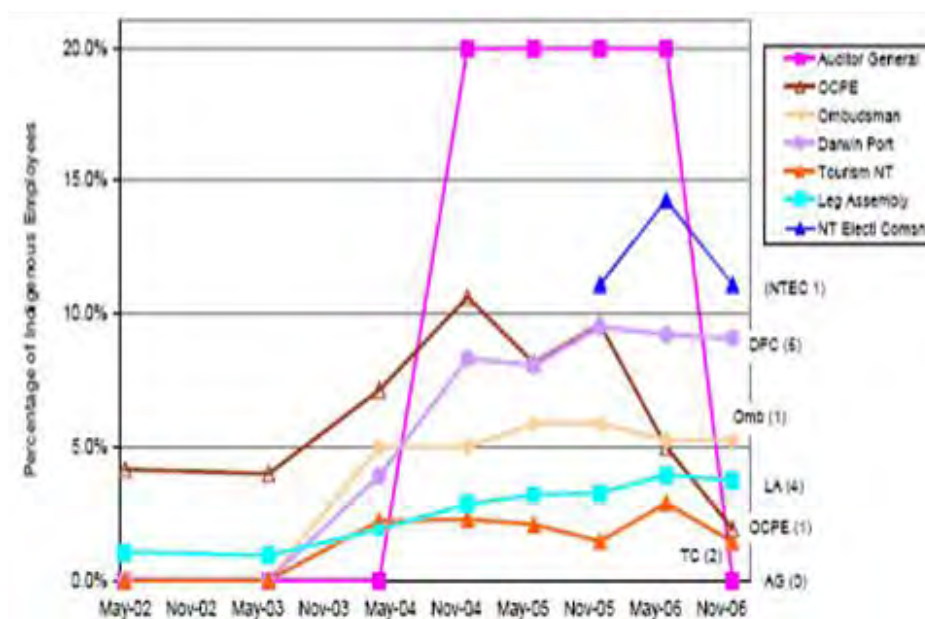


Figure 8: Percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in small Northern Territory Government agencies (< 200 staff) May 2002 to December 2006

Source: NTG 2006. Percentage terms for small agencies may be misleading owing to small total staff numbers

3.1.2 Numbers and classifications of Aboriginal employees at the ASDP

There were 11 (20%) Aboriginal staff and 44 non-Aboriginal staff at the ASDP during 2007–08. The number of Aboriginal staff was at the lower end of the Park's 2007 target range of 20–25% for Aboriginal employment. Aboriginal staff were employed in all sections of the ASDP organisational structure except in the Management and Administration section. The largest number of Aboriginal staff (6) was in the Guide section (see Figure 9). There were three Aboriginal staff in the Botany and two in the Zoology organisational sections.

All ASDP staff were employed by the Northern Territory Public Service and classified according to position, qualifications and experience. These positions include Professional (Levels P1–P4), Technical (T1–T4), Trainee and Apprentice. Salary rates were directly proportional to these levels. The NT Public Sector classification levels held by ASDP Aboriginal staff in August 2007 are given in Figure 10. Aboriginal staff tended to be at the lowest levels, especially T1 and Apprentice. Previously, two Aboriginal staff (Jon Belling and Doug Taylor) had been in middle management roles in T3 and Acting T4 positions respectively.

In 2007, there was a relatively young demographic among the Aboriginal staff. Six of nine Aboriginal employees were in the 15–25-year-old age bracket, with the remaining three being in the 36–45-year-old bracket. Staff indicated in interviews that in the past there had commonly been two or three older Aboriginal staff (>46 yo). The interviewees strongly stated that Aboriginal staff preferred having more older Aboriginal people on staff because of cultural knowledge and mentoring roles. Conversely, relatively high education levels among the 2007 ASDP Aboriginal staff compared to average levels among NT Aboriginal people (see Section 3.3) reflected this relatively young age profile.

The ASDP employs Aboriginal apprentices who work in the Park and study for Certificate level qualifications. Between 1999 and 2008 eighteen Aboriginal staff had graduated with a Certificate 3 as summarised in Figure 11 (Clarkson 2005). The majority of these gained Certificate 3 in Tour Guiding. There had been a steady completion of Certificates in Horticulture. The 18 graduates represented a 62% completion rate by ASDP apprentices. Importantly, 89% of graduates gained further employment (Clarkson c. 2007).

Data on the duration of employment were analysed for all past and present Aboriginal staff from 2001 to 2007 (n=24). Figure 12 shows that the mode duration of employment was 6–12 months. However, the duration of employment had a wide range, with one individual staying more than five years. There was a high turnover of Aboriginal staff, with over 25% staying less than 6 months. At least four of these employees returned, after some years away, to be re-employed by the ASDP. Positive aspects of this turnover were recognised by ASDP managers. They saw employment periods as short as a year as representing stepping stones from inter-generational unemployment to employment experience and then to longer-term commitment to work. Processes to improve employee retention were a major part of the strategic efforts of ASDP in Aboriginal employment.

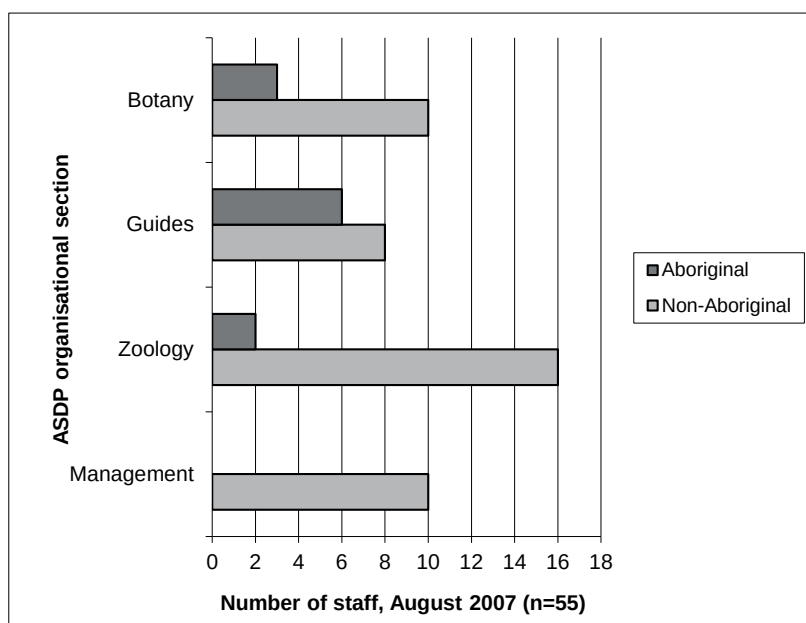


Figure 9: Numbers of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff by organisational section, ASDP August 2007

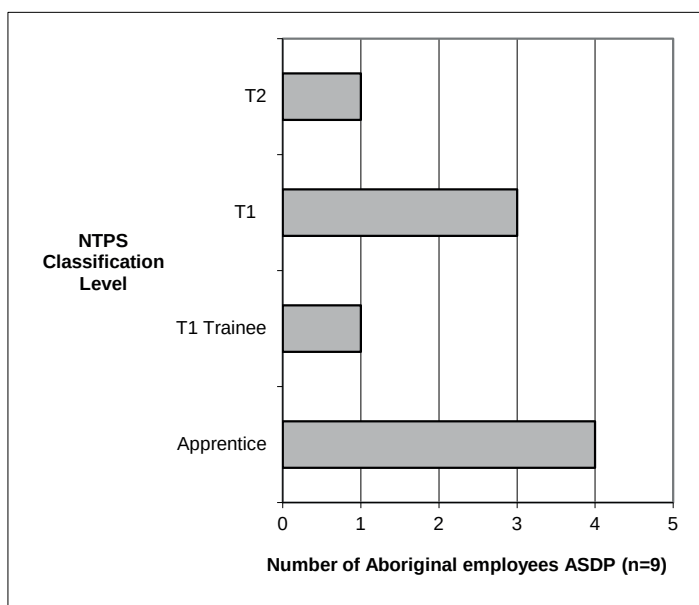


Figure 10: NT Public Service Classification level of ASDP Aboriginal staff, August 2007

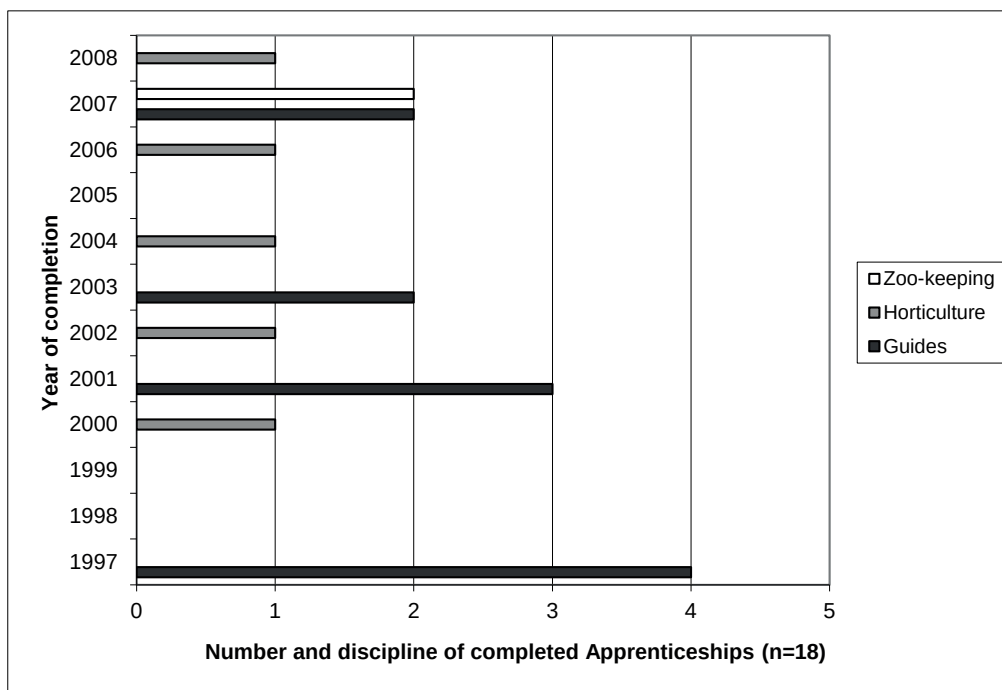


Figure 11: Number and discipline of completed apprenticeships, ASDP 1999–2008

Source data: Clarkson 2005

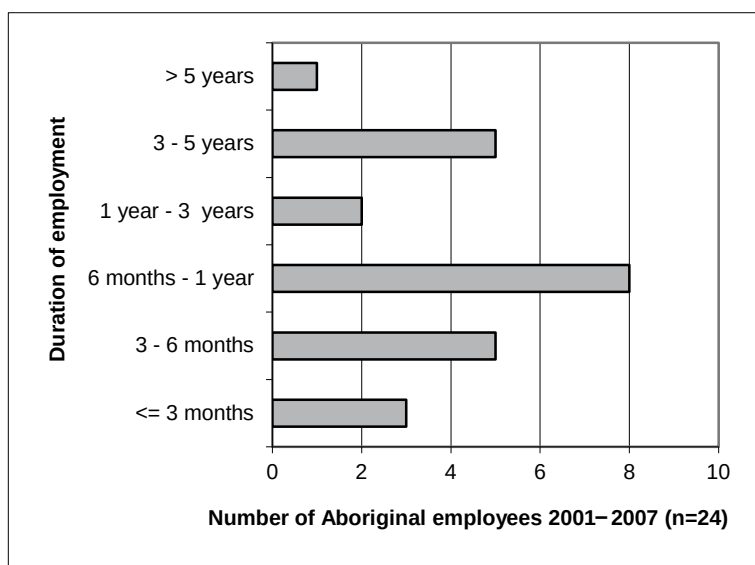


Figure 12: Duration of employment ASDP Aboriginal staff, 2001–2007

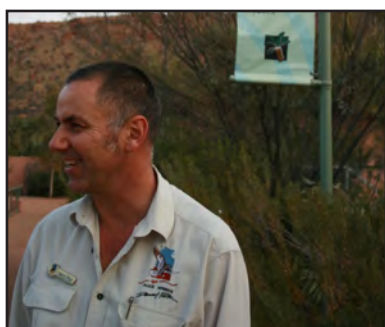
3.2 Identification of staff as Aboriginal

Aboriginal interviewees tended not to see themselves as a group segregated within the Desert Park.⁷ In day-to-day operations, ASDP managers also emphasised people as individuals rather than categorising them as ‘Aboriginal’ people.⁸ They needed to maintain a delicate balance between affirmative employment policies and ensuring a harmonious and cooperative workplace.

The Aboriginality of employees was identified by managers only where this was important in terms of policies of the ASDP and NTG, legal matters, and the opportunities to secure funding to recruit and/or train Aboriginal people (see Sections 3.7.4–5). It was also recognised that there were some issues that were more particular to supervision of Aboriginal staff (see Section 3.7.6.9).



7. The Desert Park doesn’t break people down as to if they are Aboriginal or not (C Paech, Horticulture Apprentice, 9/10/07)



8. [in my interpretation, Aboriginal staff stay at the Park because] we care for each other. We don’t treat anybody differently based on whether they have a dark face or not. It is not about colour, it is about the person we work with. I truly see a level of care across staff; but not exclusively, there are 50 people here. My mantra has always been ‘I don’t expect you to like each other, but you will respect each other’. (G Fry, Park Manager, 5/12/07)

When asked, nine interviewees said they explicitly identified themselves as of Aboriginal origin, while one said they did so according to opportunities available. Nine interviewees explicitly identified themselves as non-Aboriginal. Aboriginal staff had mixed views on whether it mattered or not that co-workers were Aboriginal.

3.3 Personal profiles of ASDP Aboriginal staff

The profiles of the eleven current and former Aboriginal staff who were interviewed are considered here from two perspectives: that of conventional Western employment criteria and that of criteria derived from traditional Aboriginal values. These criteria are important to, respectively, the Northern Territory Public Service (NTPS) and to older Aboriginal staff. ASDP management sought to take into account both sets of criteria in their employment decisions. However, the NTPS criteria were dominant.

Table 2 summarises the life history of Aboriginal interviewees in order to introduce the interviewees, to give examples of their work and life experiences, and to relate ‘real people’ to the statistics presented in the previous section. The interviewees are listed in order of seniority of age, in keeping with their cultural practices of deference to senior people. In interviews they provided the information in the table on their socio-linguistic affiliations, places where they grew up and were schooled, work experience, experiences on their traditional country, formal qualifications and ASDP work roles and durations.

Table 2: Profiles of Aboriginal staff interviewed with personal, cultural and employment information

Name (Position)	Profile
Veronica Dobson (Guide, Casual)	Eastern Arrernte woman, early 60s, grew up at Eastern McDonnell Range, pastoral stations, partial hunting-gathering, school in Santa Teresa, Arrernte-English interpreter, educator; worked hospital, Yipirinya, IAD, CLC; now senior cultural expert and consultant in plants, wildlife and water, author, Alice Springs resident; ASDP casual guide, 2006 – present
Vince Forrester (Guide, T2)	Luritja/Arrernte man, early 50s, born Alice Springs, grew up at Angus Downs, stockman; lived and worked at Mutitjulu, UKTNP, Lilla Tours, CAAMA, CLC, CAAC, Legal Aid; political advisor (incl. with Whitlam), artist, political activist; ASDP T1 to T2 2005–07
Doug Taylor (Guide, Specialist T2)	Arrernte/English man, early 40s, born Adelaide, Alice Springs as child, schooled in Whyalla to Yr 10; worked BHP, mechanic, butcher, hospital; 1998 Cert. 3 cultural tourism Taoundi College, 2003 returned Alice Springs; ASDP Casual to T1 to Specialist T2 2004 – present
Leroy Lester (Guide, T1)	Pitjantjatjara man, late 30s; born Alice Springs, grew up in Mimili – Kenmore Park on APY lands; schooled St Philips Alice Springs then Adelaide to Yr 12; worked stockman, horticulture, tourism 1996–2006, APY Land Mgmt, UKTNP, Angangu Tours, Walatina; Assoc. Dip in NRM Batchelor College, initiated man [identified by other staff person]; ASDP T1 2005–08
Marie Elena Ellis (Guide, T1)	Warlpiri/Eastern Arrernte woman, late 30s, schooled at Amoonguna, Santa Teresa, Yuendumu, Papunya and Yirara College to Yr 12; worked at Yipirinya, Alukera, hospital, aged care coordinator; 3 yr Bachelor degree (Education, Early Childhood); ASDP casual to T1, 2007–08
Renate Johnny (Guide, T1)	early 20s, Garrwa and English parents; born Alice Springs; grew up Alice Springs, Cairns, Aurukun, Doomagee; schooled St Philips to Yr 12; ASDP school-based apprentice 2005, Cert 3 Tourism Guiding in 2007, T1, 2008 – present
Arnold Baird (Botany trainee, T1)	early 20s, Arrernte grandmother; born Broome, schooled to Yr 12; some bush experience at Harry's Creek, Ross River, Arltunga; worked at Tangentyere Nursery, Green Corps, started apprenticeship in graphic arts but left it as too much indoors; ASDP trainee T1 2006–08
Ashley Swan (Botany, Apprentice)	early 20s man; grew up Alice Springs, Finke, school to Yr 10; some bush experience, Cert 2 Horticulture; worked Greening Australia 2004–05, Arrernte Council, ASDP Cert. 3 Apprentice 2007–08
Chansey Paech (Botany, Supernumerary Apprentice)	early 20s man; grandparents E Arrernte/Gurindji; born and schooled in Alice Springs, Yr 12 2004, Cert 1 Horticulture; some bush experience at Arltunga, Todd River Downs, Oak Valley; ASDP 2005 Supernumerary Apprentice – 2007 (Cert. 3 Apprenticeship incomplete)
Terri Unger (Zoology, Apprentice)	early 20s woman; Pitjantjatjara grandmother; born and schooled Alice Springs to Yr 12; ASDP Cert. 3 Apprentice 2006 – present

Name (Position)	Profile
Ashlee Porter (Zoology, Apprentice)	early 20s woman, S Arrernte grandmother, grew up and schooled in Alice Springs, little bush experience; Yr 12, electrician apprenticeship then ASDP CDEP 2007, Cert. 3 Apprentice 2007 – present

The ASDP had a policy of preferential employment for Arrernte people due to their stronger custodial associations with the ASDP site and residence in or near Alice Springs. However, Aboriginal people with other socio-linguistic associations were and had been employed. All Aboriginal interviewees (except one) readily identified their association with a particular Aboriginal language and socio-political group. Interviewees in their 20s identified their socio-linguistic associations through their grandparents or parents rather than themselves. Four of the 11 Aboriginal interviewees were fluent in one or several Aboriginal languages or dialects. Additionally, all were fluent in English. English was the dominant workplace language, except for short spoken examples in guide presentations or written in interpretative signs.

The age profile of the ASDP Aboriginal workforce is important for some work roles because ‘cultural expertise’ is loosely proportionate to age and life experience. The two past employees interviewed were in their 50s and 60s. Three employees were in their 30–40s. The majority of Aboriginal employees were in their early 20s. Notably, there were no employees in the 25–35 age class.

The six younger interviewees (16–25-year-old age group) had been to school in Alice Springs. Four of the eleven interviewees had finished school to Year 10 and the remainder to Year 12. Four interviewees had completed a Certificate at level 1, 2 or 3. A Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) and Associate Diploma (Natural and Cultural Resource Management) were the highest formal qualification achieved by the Aboriginal interviewees. These were high qualifications relative to the wider Northern Territory Aboriginal population, even taking the relatively young average age of the interviewees into account: only 15.5% of Aboriginal people in the NT had completed Year 12 in 2008 and only 21% had a non-school qualification (ABS 2010). Older interviewees tended not to have Certificate level qualifications. All the ASDP apprentices were studying a Certificate 3 course relevant to their work role.

The Aboriginal interviewees older than 30 years had had a diversity of jobs before their employment at the ASDP. Some of these jobs were in sectors related to the ASDP functions, but others were very different (e.g. butcher, hospital worker). Five of the 11 Aboriginal interviewees had worked more in Aboriginal organisations before they commenced at the ASDP than they had in government or private organisations. This indicates an important role that Aboriginal organisations play in providing a bridge to government employment opportunities. Four of the interviewees began to work at the ASDP less than a year after completing school. Five of the six apprentices or trainees had aspired to work as a ranger, with animals or plants or in tourism.

Interviewees identified that their schooling, education and previous work experience had value for their ASDP employment. One man spoke of learning about the routine of preparing to go to work, deadlines and planning.⁹ Four interviewees spoke of their previous work in tourism as contributing to their employment in the Guides section and two spoke of their prior work experience with Greening Australia and Green Corps.

Older Aboriginal interviewees placed a stronger emphasis on bush-based experience and learning in relation to their ASDP role than they did on school-based learning. Experiences living in homelands and remote outstations contributed to the knowledge base from which older Aboriginal staff shared and applied their ‘cultural’ expertise. By contrast, Aboriginal staff in their 20s attributed their cultural knowledge to both life experience and their ASDP employment.

In the interviews, staff were asked about their experience ‘on country’ or in homelands and to estimate how long they spent there per year over 10 years. Two Aboriginal employees had spent 3–6 months per year, four less than 3 months per year and three had spent little or no time out bush (see Figure 13). ‘Country’ or land-based experiences increased people’s opportunities to develop and refine their cultural and Aboriginal ecological knowledge and experience, in contrast to urban or town camp life, which had less overlap with the natural environment. Interviewees reported that the amount of time spent on homelands is an advantage for ASDP employment as it enriches their knowledge. Paradoxically, committing to this time reduced the ability of Aboriginal staff to commit to longer-term employment at the ASDP or other town-based organisations.

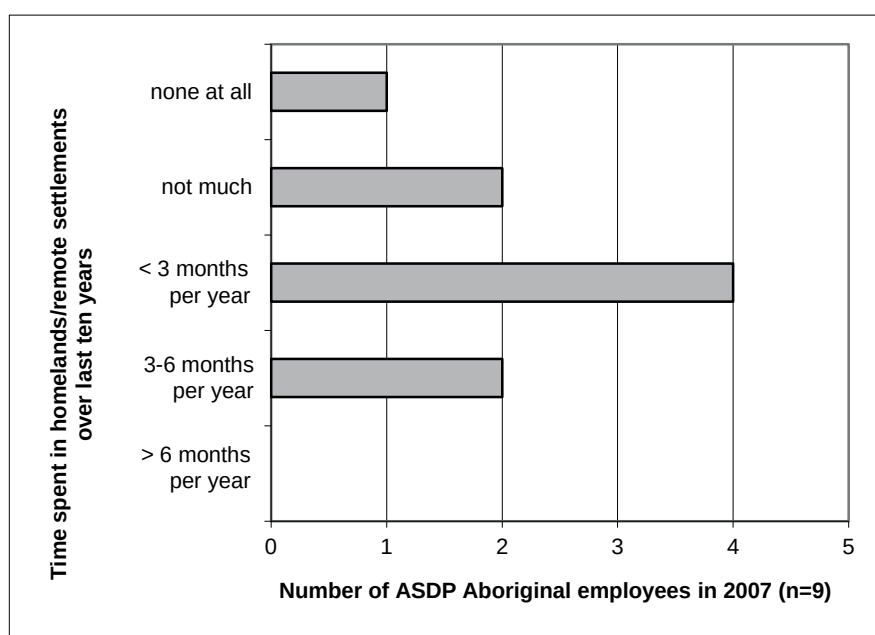


Figure 13: Time spent by ASDP 2007 Aboriginal employees in homelands and/or remote Aboriginal settlements per year over previous 10 years



9. [First] it was just to get up and go to school every day. It started from back then and sometimes at school you get work experience ... what you do, what time you’ve got to do it. And that helped. College at St Philips – up, have a shower, uniform, straight for breakfast, all that routine stuff. It helped heaps. [Also] on the stock camp, waking up before dawn to go and get the horses. Mustering and yarding the cattle before the sun goes down. Get all the cattle in that yard and then supper time. Got those deadlines. That introduced me to the western way of working. (L Lester, Guide, 21/11/07)

Table 2 does not identify the stages of cultural education that interviewees had experienced through involvement in ceremonial activity, including initiation. However, such experiences were noted by four of the 11 interviewees (one from each decadal age cohort). Among the Aboriginal employees these experiences were given a high emphasis, but there was no recognition of them in the formal NTPS criteria or pay levels. The comments by interviewees about ceremonial education stages were made when they were describing the processes used by ASDP guides group to determine the cultural appropriateness of speaking to visitors about various subjects. It was inappropriate under cultural protocols for me to ask further questions about these experiences.

3.4 Job roles of Aboriginal staff

Job roles are explained here to provide contextual information on the tasks undertaken by Aboriginal staff and to show how these relate to Aboriginal cultural knowledge or practices. Aboriginal people were employed in three of the four major organisational sections of the ASDP: Guides, Botany and Zoology. During the study, no Aboriginal people were employed in the Management or Maintenance Units. One reason was that apprenticeships designated as being for Aboriginal people were a significant entry point to ASDP employment (see Table 1) and these sections were too small and highly skilled to appoint apprentices (Phelps & Linn 2003).

Table 3: Key responsibilities of Aboriginal apprentices at the ASDP identified in job descriptions

Section of ASDP organisational structure	Apprentice key responsibilities
Guides	1. Undertake on-the-job training by assisting with the provision of Park Guide Services, including Guide Presentations, orientation of visitors and maintenance of fixed interpretive displays. 2. Undertake on-the-job training at other sites, including field work and work placements on other Parks and Wildlife Commission NT Parks. 3. Complete a Certificate 3 in Tour Guiding.
Botany	1. Undertake on-the-job training by assisting horticulturists with horticultural duties, including propagation and maintenance of nursery plants, maintenance and development of landscapes and maintenance of the Alice Springs Desert Park's collection records. 2. Gain proficiency in all horticultural areas at Alice Springs Desert Park. 3. Complete a Certificate 3 in Horticulture.
Zoology	1. Undertake on-the-job training by assisting zookeepers with husbandry duties for the animal collection, including provision of daily feed and care, minor exhibit maintenance, collection of data. 2. Gain proficiency in all zookeeping areas at Alice Springs Desert Park. 3. Complete a Certificate 3 in Zookeeping.

Source: data compiled from ASDP and NTG n.d.

Job responsibilities for ASDP apprentices are identified in Table 3. The job roles of Aboriginal staff at T1 and T2 levels in the various sections of the ASDP organisational structure covered the duties identified in the first point of the relevant section in Table 3 at a greater level of responsibility than for apprentices. Ongoing formal education is not required in T1 and T2 roles, although it was encouraged. The job responsibilities described by interviewees are outlined and discussed below.

3.4.1 Guides

The major roles identified by the Aboriginal guides interviewed were to welcome, guide and assist visitors, hand out audio guides, give presentations, rove to informally meet visitors, check on exhibits and signs, collect plants to arrange temporary exhibits, and do their own research. Guide apprentices were required to study a Certificate 2 in Tour Guiding (see Table 3).

Five of the six Guides interviewed identified the cultural content they presented as an important part of their role.¹⁰ The T2 Specialist Cross-cultural Guide also had an important role in contributing to the Park management's liaison with traditional owners.¹¹ The roles and responsibilities identified by the guides were consistent with their formally stipulated responsibilities. The interviewees were all clear on the roles they fulfilled. Verbal presentations by Aboriginal guides were complemented by the cultural content presented in other media in the ASDP including audio-guides, signs and displays.

Guides gave presentations at programmed places and times. Half-hour talks were on specific topics. These topics are identified in Table 4. Generally, non-Aboriginal staff spoke on the topics associated with 'plants', while Aboriginal guides spoke on the topics associated with 'people'. When necessary, as a result of staff being unavailable, these topics were interchangeable. However, guidelines for staff are that non-Aboriginal guide talks should restrict themselves to factual information (e.g. about plant use), while Aboriginal guides also interpret the meaning and significance of particular cultural practices and beliefs (Gary Fry pers. comm. to J Davies April 2010).

Usually the Aboriginal guides determined their choice and delivery of topics at the Aweye Flat talk and on pre-booked Aboriginal cultural tours. They spoke on a variety of topics and also responded to visitor questions. Specialist tours were also presented on request such as when medical conference delegates had a tour focusing on bush medicines.

The content of the longest and most comprehensive of the three talks that I heard during the research is identified in Table 4. This was an animated and detailed presentation by Leroy Lester. It was apparent that he was speaking on subjects of which he had a long first-hand experience. In one period, he narrated an account of an older Pitjantjatjara man stalking a *marlu* (red kangaroo). During his two-hour talk, the audience was quiet and attentive and all stayed for the full talk, indicating their close engagement with the experience.



10. I'm a guide covering all the talks here. My specialist main role as Anangu staff is the cultural views of the Park or the desert, explaining that to tourists. More on the cultural side of things. Explaining all that. Tell tourists, other groups like big special groups, school groups as well, different uni groups. There is a lot of doctors, university doctors come through. We talk about bush medicines. Some [other] mob came here with CLC with [Aboriginal] group who wanted to start their own tourism. They asked me to talk about how the Park works, the bird aviaries, walking down through the habitats, showing them the setup so they could do it back home. (L Lester, Guide, 21/11/07)



11. I deal with Traditional Owners of the Park. Consult them about different things that happen here. There's a lot of new plans and ideas going to happen in the future and that's going to involve traditional owners so it involves me as well. The traditional owners are always using the Park or special events are on. They have the power of veto ... If they're not happy with a new construction or something they can say, "Well, no, we don't like that", and management follows the line which is a really good thing I like about the Park. They are consulted and the Park listens. They don't have the attitude of "We are going to do it anyway". The traditional owners are consulted every step of the way. It was set up through the Park guidelines. [For example] there are certain places to avoid, other areas that might be deemed sensitive, it is quite a powerful area here, a lot of strong [Jukurrpa] stories ... I thought that was really good. I'm glad to be a part of it, the consultation with them. (D. Taylor, Guide, 31/10/07)

Table 4: Themes and topics presented by Leroy Lester to 32 visitors at Aweye Flat in a two-hour talk and demonstration

Theme	Topics	
Child raising in traditional times	- childcare by grandparents - experiential education	- intergenerational learning - respect and deference to elders and their knowledge
Tools and implements: types, their construction and use	- grinding stones, sources and their uses - ochres, sources and their uses - stages in making a bark bowl - purposes for which three types of bowls were used - three types of boomerangs and their uses	- types of spears and their uses - use of spear thrower, nulla nulla, boomerang - collection and preparation of spinifex resin to adhere tools - shields, their designs and uses - head bands and hair string
Seed harvesting and food preparation	- examples of eight different edible plant species - winnowing, yandying and grinding of seed foods - edible dampers and pastes	- five different fruit food species, their harvest and preparation - identifying poisonous foods and their treatment
Hunting, animal foods and preparation	- tracking, stalking and spearing a Red kangaroo - butchering tools and techniques	division of parts among kin
Spear-throwing demonstration	- timber species and procurement - production techniques	throwing methods, aim, balance, wind, target
Demonstration of men's and women's artefacts	- timber species and procurement - production techniques	methods of use

I observed that the content and flair of the three presentations were very variable. Variations in content were confirmed in some of the interviews when the Aboriginal guides described the subjects they presented. For example, Veronica Dobson gave presentations on Aboriginal languages and also skin and kin relations, while Vince Forrester's talks included *Tjukurrpa* (Dreaming) with analogies to Old Testament and New Testament biblical stories. Guides spoke on the subjects for which they had strongest expertise and about which cultural protocols of custodianship permitted them to talk. All guides also spoke of Aboriginal history, the changes that had taken place up to contemporary times, and the varied lives of Aboriginal people in central Australia. Several of the guides made strong use of metaphors to find parallels that aided cross-cultural understanding. I noted their rich cultural knowledge, partly derived from fluency in their own languages, good skills in English verbal presentation and strong work ethic.

3.4.2 Botany

The major roles identified by the Aboriginal Botany employees interviewed were to install and repair sprinkler systems; plant seedlings; manage pests and weeds; cut or prune plants; and do landscaping under the guidance of senior staff. The apprentices were required to study a Certificate 3 in Horticulture (see Table 3).

The Aboriginal cultural content in the work of Botany employees was more limited than in the guides' work. Interviewees said that Aboriginal knowledge was important in Botany in relation to the selection and growth of plant species with bush food or medicine values, the non-public bush food and medicine garden, and the development of 'thematic' public gardens, both at the Desert Park (in future) and off site, for example, at the Renal Dialysis Unit (Lollback 2008a).

Aboriginal interviewees in the Botany section did not identify any roles that involved them in consultations with traditional owners. However, Chansey Paech spoke of his apprenticeship position's link with people in communities, as his role included providing support to horticultural research trials by Desert Knowledge CRC at Oak Valley, John Holland North, Areyonga and the Alice Springs Correctional Centre. This support included explanations to Aboriginal people when they visited the

ASDP's bush food and medicine garden and nurseries. It had also entailed visits to the horticultural trials at two of these locations.

3.4.3 Zoology

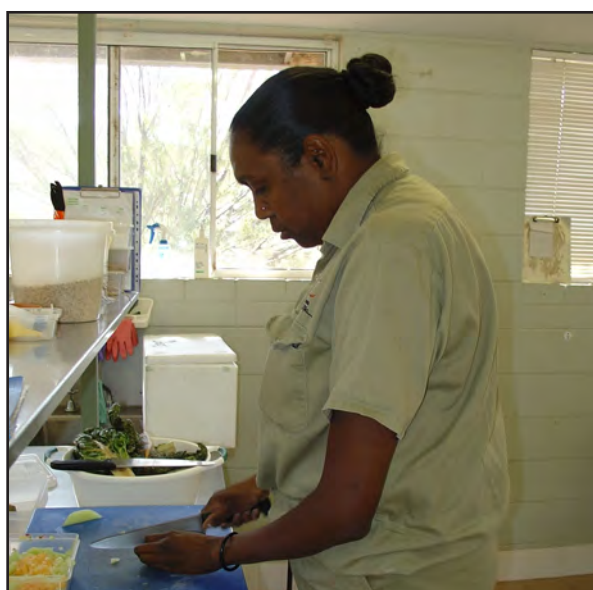
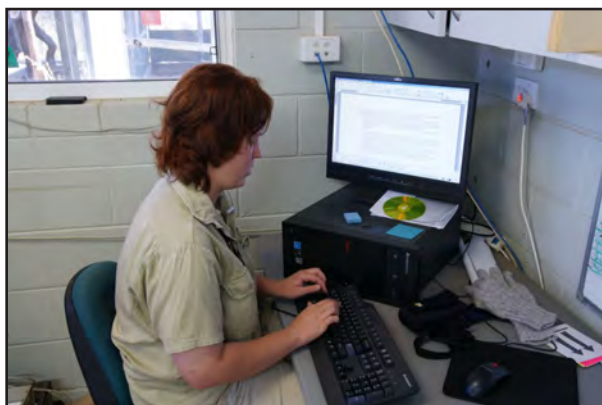
The major roles identified by the Aboriginal Zoology employees interviewed were to provide daily husbandry to animals, such as to feed, clean and care for them; gain experience working in the birds, mammals, reptiles, nocturnal and nature theatre departments; and contribute to records on the animals. The apprentices were required to study a Certificate 3 in Zookeeping (see Table 3).

The two Aboriginal interviewees from the Zoology section did not identify any roles that required consultation with Aboriginal people or Aboriginal cultural content and processes in their work.



Photos 9: Alice Springs Desert Park Aboriginal guides at work

Clockwise from top left: a) Leroy Lester explains the functions of artefacts to a visitor group; b) Doug Taylor demonstrates a spear-throwing technique (ASDP images); c) Doug Taylor shows bush foods to Prince Charles (ASDP images); d) Vince Forrester on a guided walk with visitors (ASDP images); e) a guide illustrates the variety of food species found at the Park (ASDP images); f) Leroy Lester (right) and Marie Ellis (centre) with a casual guide and visitor (ASDP images)



Photos 10: Desert Park Aboriginal staff at work

Clockwise from top left: a) Terri Unger studies for her Certificate 3 in Zookeeping (Peter Nunn, ASDP); b) Terri Unger cares for a native mouse; c) Maryanne Fisher (right) watches as Anthony Molyneux removes a bird from a mist net (ASDP images); d) Maryanne Fisher prepares food for captive animals (ASDP images); e) Arnold Baird and Ashley Swan with vehicle used for landscaping (ASDP images); f) Ashley Swan, Gary Dinham and other Botany staff weeding Buffel grass (ASDP images)



Photos 11: Aboriginal apprentices, trainees and Jodie Clarkson (Indigenous Employment and Training Coordinator)

Jodie Clarkson (left hand side of top right image) has been a key individual in the development and implementation of the Park's Aboriginal employment programs.

3.5 What is good about working at the Desert Park? Important factors identified by Aboriginal staff

Interviewees were explicitly asked: ‘What is good about working at the Park?’ All but one of the Aboriginal interviewees were very positive about their employment at the ASDP. Overall, the Aboriginal guides were more positive about their roles than Aboriginal staff in the Botany and Zoology sections. The value of the guides’ work role is illustrated by the words of two of the Aboriginal guides.^{12, 13} Similar sentiments were expressed by other interviewees, including those in Botany and Zoology sections, in more succinct ways.¹⁴



12. [Working here] has been a life-changing experience. This is not an exaggeration, it has changed my life. I was just static for a while, but this has really allowed me to move forward in my life and not just professionally, but also spiritually. Because I’ve got that connection back to the country again. I can go on presentations and I can talk to, you know, a group of people, fifty or so, and when they leave my talk, they come up and say, “That was fantastic, we’ve never heard that before,” and I’ve changed their perception of what Aboriginal people are about. You just understand the complexities of Aboriginal culture and that’s what I really like about Desert Park, it allows me to do that. As well as, and it’s an equal thing here, it’s not just expressing what I believe should be expressed in a way of explaining Aboriginal culture, but the way it’s progressed me in my professional life. Yeah, it’s been the best ... I’ve become much more calm about myself, if you know what I mean. I’ve got a far greater sense of wellbeing now, to what I ever had before. It’s just allowed me to do the things I wanted to do now because my mind’s not so cluttered up with other things; I’ve got more of an understanding of what life’s about. (D Taylor, Guide, 31/10/07)



13. What’s it like working here? I’ll just put it all together in one word. It’s incredible; it’s the job that I always wanted. Working here is sort of bringing me back to life ... I get that adrenaline rush. I give it all I’ve got ... It’s like every day, something different happens. Something funny or something amazing will happen to an animal, or, you know, the flowers and stuff. Just being out there is just amazing. It’s really like for the first time I see my country for what it is, you know? I see it every day, like if you’re a local, “Yeah, yeah, that’s just a Alangkwe tree and that’s just a Atwakeye tree”, you know? But to really sit down, look at it and observe something that, it’s like flowers and trees and stuff. I really appreciate what we’ve got here, what I’ve got here in the desert ... coming here really focused me on what our environment is all about ... I’ve taken everything for granted before. Now I just appreciate everything. I am the luckiest person in here, in the world, that I live in this unique place ... To really look at [the environment] and learn, like the scientific names of the plants and the animals. I know that’s, we eat that, we collect that. It is like you sit back and you go to read this book that you haven’t read for so long and you need to catch up and read it then once you’ve picked up that book you never want to let it go, you don’t want to put it down. It’s always that sort of feeling. (ME Ellis, Guide, 10/10/07)



14. [Compared to where I’ve worked before] the Desert Park is a lot better. It makes you feel like you’ve got a job. Like you are going somewhere. (A Baird, Horticulture Trainee, 13/5/08)

It was apparent that Aboriginal staff experienced important and substantial psychological outcomes, notably greater confidence, from their experiences of working at the ASDP.¹⁵

This confidence was apparent in the passion and commitment to the work that was strongly expressed by at least seven of nine Aboriginal interviewees. Other positive psychological outcomes were associated with intellectual stimulation, calmness and wellbeing, quiet and peacefulness. These are apparent in many of the quotes from Aboriginal interviewees that are used to illustrate this section. Such positive feelings about a workplace and the working experience undoubtedly contribute to longer employee retention and a more harmonious and productive work environment.

Analysis of the interviews showed that the features that ASDP Aboriginal staff identified as important to this positive work environment were different from the factors identified in the IEE Tool (see Figure 5). The positive features of work at the ASDP most commonly identified by interviewees are summarised in Figure 14. On average, each interviewee identified thirteen positive features of their ASDP work. The eight most commonly identified features are discussed in turn below.

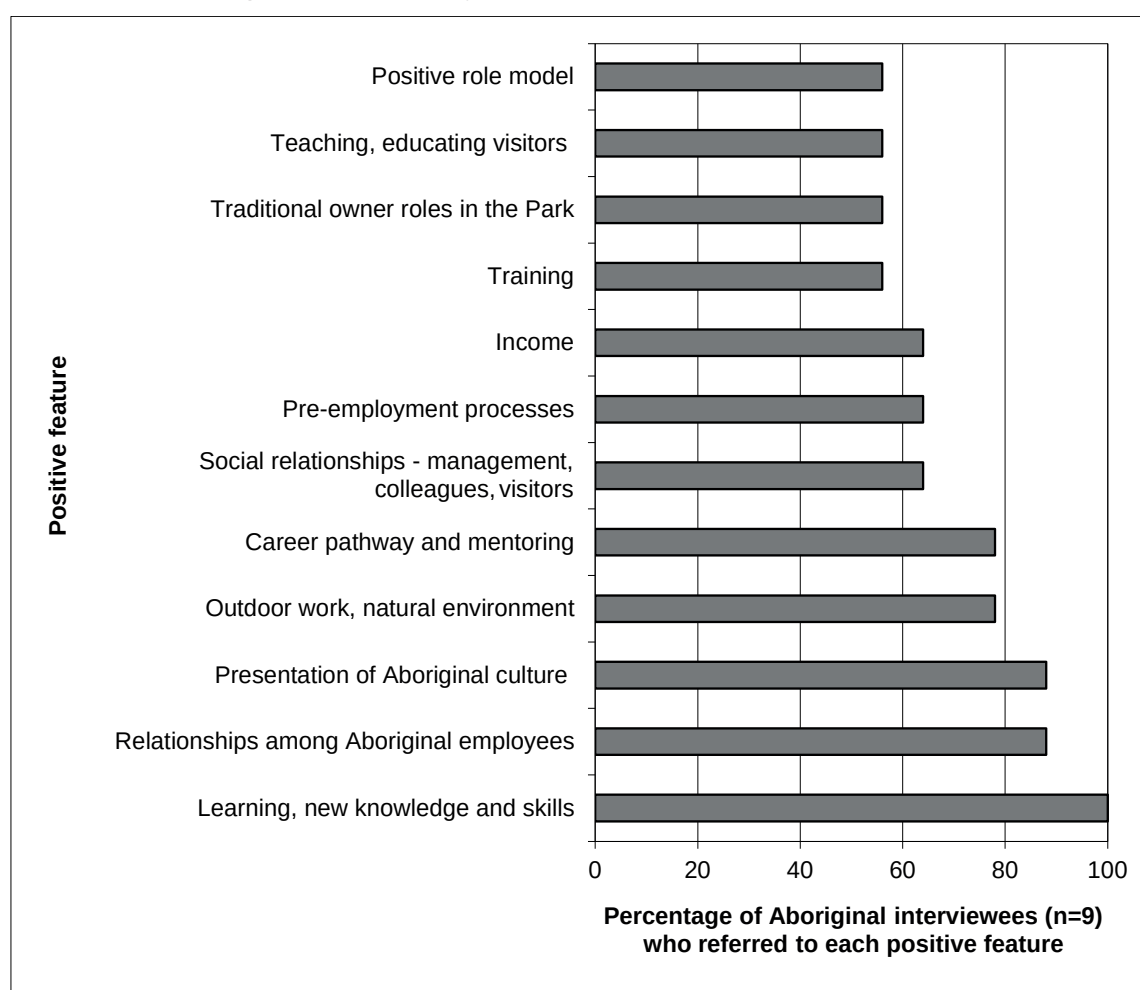


Figure 14: Positive features identified by Aboriginal interviewees in relation to Desert Park employment



15. When I started I was younger, I was so shy. By working at the Desert Park, I've built up my self-esteem, my confidence. Even when I am not always talking to the same people, like my colleagues, I've worked around [my shyness], when doing presentations [to a visitor group] I don't hide my face. I just do it. Now being out here it is great. (R Johnny, Guide, 19/12/07)

3.5.1 To learn and acquire new knowledge and skills

The most important positive feature of employment at the ASDP that was identified by Aboriginal staff was the opportunity it provided them to learn and gain new skills and knowledge (Figure 14). They saw this opportunity for themselves, their colleagues, countrymen, rangers, visitors and/or others. The result demonstrates a strong desire by Aboriginal employees to acquire new experiences and information. By contrast, repetition and boredom was identified as a negative feature of their employment (see Section 3.6.3).

Staff in their 20s emphasised learning processes and their importance for stimulation and for reward in the workplace. Among all younger staff, this learning was through formal study as well as self-initiated and experiential processes.^{16, 17, 18} Additionally, the younger guides had the opportunity to learn through mentoring which was also strongly valued. The guides in the Botany and Zoology sections also had small libraries of relevant texts. I observed that the texts were frequently used.

The three interviewees in their 30s or 40s stressed the importance of the Aboriginal cultural content of their learning. Their work at the ASDP built upon and expanded their cultural knowledge. Two interviewees referred to learning about plant species, their identification by Arrernte, English and Linnaean names, the uses of plants, and the processes used to harvest and prepare plants.¹⁹ A third interviewee emphasised learning about the differences between wildlife of his homelands compared to wildlife in the Arrernte lands where the Park is located. This learning stimulated and boosted them personally. It also contributed to their professional development and the quality of their presentations to ASDP visitors.

16. “[The Park is a good workplace because firstly] I like learning things. There is a lot to learn. Being outdoors there are things to learn. In the Certificate [too] and that Certificate is world recognised. It’ll give me an option to travel. (Anon, junior ASDP staff member)



17. I have to learn every day, otherwise I get bored. Learning new things makes me feel good – makes me feel like I’m learning, doing something and I’m learning it the right way. (A Baird, Horticulture Trainee, 13/5/08)



18. I’ve always got my pen and paper down there [when roving] just writing some notes or a bit of research ... Everyone [in guides] has got a task that they want to do. Recently we put out the Desert Park ‘Explorers for Kids’, an activity, a whole day activity program so when the kids come out, we give those out. Everyone in guides did a section on it, whatever we wanted to do. (R Johnny, Guide, 19/12/07)



19. My knowledge about the country has expanded immensely since I’ve been here. As far as my knowledge of, like, plant uses, we have a supermarket garden, hardware store and a chemist here in the plants. I learnt more about that, it became deeper. I had the understanding before but I started to grow so I then see how diverse the country is here. The Desert Park’s a fantastic place to learn because it’s all in the one area. It’s allowed me to take things I’ve learnt here back out to country. I’d walk past a plant and say, “I wonder what that’s called?” Now I know exactly what it is, scientifically and culturally. I learnt a bit from plant uses while I was younger, but to actually find out how incredibly knowledgeable our people, our traditional folks [are], and even now today, made me appreciate that more as well. (D Taylor, Guide, 31/10/07)

There was also significant learning by Aboriginal interviewees about the operations and culture of a workplace. This was particularly identified by the younger Aboriginal interviewees (and also by non-Aboriginal interviewees). Older Aboriginal interviewees also commented upon it in relation to their own past experiences and in relation to new potential Aboriginal employees. Aspects of these operations that were identified included daily attendance, work timetables and plans, staff meeting attendance, wearing uniforms, notifying bosses about leave and organisational structure. One interviewee in his 30s noted that he valued the training the ASDP provided in First Aid and other Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) matters.²⁰

The oldest Aboriginal interviewees (Dobson and Forrester) identified the importance of the ASDP as a place that linked older and younger Aboriginal people to learn about Arrernte culture, particularly through their employment, mentoring and observations of the natural environments within the Park.^{21, 22} They said this was important because of rapid loss of cultural knowledge and youth disengagement among Aboriginal people of the region. In traditionally derived Aboriginal views reflected by these older interviewees, ‘country’ and ‘culture’ are intertwined and inseparable (e.g. Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al. 2008). However, the younger ASDP employees expressed a stronger separation between Aboriginal ‘culture’ and the natural environment. Intergenerational links among Aboriginal people were reinforced by the Park’s implementation of a mentor or buddy system (discussed in Section 3.5.5).



20. [I have learnt] mainly on the business side of things and the tourism side. Speaking, using big words and how to say it better. Big words to get my message understood. OHS issues like food, keeping it fresh for tourists, snake bite, how to treat it ... It has sharpened me up on my cultural knowledge because there are differences between Arrernte and Pitjantjatjara. So I learnt about these differences – bush tomatoes, different reptiles and monitors around here. (L Lester, Guide, 21/11/07)



21. We’ve got the knowledge. We’d like to hand it on. We are not going to live forever. Young people are losing this knowledge. We need to pass it on. (V Dobson, Guide, 14/10/08)



22. I really like the Desert Park because they are proactive in employing Aboriginal people. They go out – they ask – when I was working there – ‘Who would make a good tour guide?’ ‘Who’s good up front?’ We’d give them a little bit of a hand to find young people and then they’d have a go too. They would encourage young people to apply for these positions out there. There’s quite a lot of training. (V Forrester, Guide, 5/3/08)

Older staff learnt, as well as being involved in teaching younger ones. Dobson noted that her learning came from day-to-day observations and monitoring of plants and animals. Conversely, Forrester said he was learning very little relative to the amount of information he gave to Park staff and visitors.²³ Like all guides interviewed, learning/teaching was a central and important part of these two people's work roles. They especially valued their role in teaching younger staff.

During the research, I observed that Park management cultivated a learning environment for all staff. This was encouraged by informal processes such as individuals sharing significant observations of wildlife at staff meetings and formal processes such as the apprenticeship program with book- and internet-based learning or sponsorship of individuals to pursue training opportunities.

Importantly, the steady, sometimes relaxed work pace at the Park supported the informal learning processes said to suit Aboriginal employees. This tempo could be described as steady and consistent, rather than frenetic. The gradual learning pace suited people who were new to a Western work ethos and work environment. It gave newer staff time to learn and understand the operation of the workplace.²⁴

3.5.2 Relationships among Aboriginal employees

Aboriginal staff identified their relationship with other Aboriginal staff as the second most frequently cited positive feature of working at the Desert Park. Paradoxically, all interviewees emphasised that day-to-day Park operations were not racially based. While Aboriginal staff appreciated each other as co-workers, they also did not overtly distinguish Aboriginal co-workers from other co-workers. Their appreciation of each other was due to similar life and work experiences and familiarity with each



23. [No, I wasn't learning much]. I was giving knowledge. A little bit I learnt, just a little bit, but I was giving mainly ...When we talked about the *mala* [Rufous hare wallaby] and [other animals] I knew just as much as young [anonymous], because I knew it from an Indigenous perspective not the scientific perspective. I knew that mala could have two in a pouch, they hardly drink any water and they've got to live under the ground to control their body and all this type of thing – temperature and whatever. I knew all that, but just confirming with a person that's got a science background and studied that specific thing. I did learn quite a lot at the Desert Park. I learnt more about the bloody birds in the area. But I gave more anyway than I received. (V Forrester, Guide, 5/3/08)



24. One of the things that I think that is done well in the Park and I think is a really good thing is the flexibility in allowing for us to come in at a gradual pace rather than they get to you and we hurl them into the work straight away. (D Taylor, Guide, 31/10/07)

other's families, rather than because they were 'Aboriginal' per se.^{25, 26} The guides were unified by their discussions with each other about 'Aboriginal issues'²⁷ which were likely to be more intense than such discussions by Botany or Zoology Aboriginal staff due to the topics raised in the guides' interactions with park visitors.

It was important to Aboriginal staff to have a critical mass of Aboriginal employees at the ASDP. One interviewee reflected on his early training as a guide at Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park, saying how the trainees there supported each other. However, the critical mass of staff needed to be of an appropriate social composition, particularly in terms of gender and age. For example, it was speculated by several staff that a young Arrernte Botany apprentice stayed at the ASDP only a few weeks because she was the only Aboriginal woman apprentice, and one of only two women, in the Botany section of ASDP. Nevertheless, it should not be presumed that all Aboriginal employees can readily work together. For example, in other organisations with large numbers of Aboriginal staff, there have been occasions when individual staff cannot work together because of feuds between families that transfer into workplace hostility between individuals.

The research found that there were culturally derived social processes within the Aboriginal guides' group that did not parallel ASDP organisational structure. These social processes were relationship-based and determined by seniority and custodial affiliations with sites of significance to Aboriginal



25. People treat me just the same [if I identified as an Aboriginal person or not]. They say "Hello, how's it going?" ... I do hang out with Aboriginal workmates like the prisoners, I work with them and Arnold. Them three blokes. [I do prefer working with them] I can have a yarn and everything; just have a good talk without worrying about saying the wrong thing ... Me and Arnold grew up together then we worked at Greening Australia. (A Swan, Horticulture Apprentice, 19/12/07)



26. When we want to mix in, we mix in and if we sit around [at breaks] by ourselves, we feel comfortable around each other. We mix in when we need to ... It is easier when there are other Aboriginal people here ... But even if the person is a whitefella I feel comfortable if I knew them beforehand. It doesn't matter if he is Chinese or anything. It is just getting to know the other person. (A Baird, Horticulture Trainee, 13/5/08)



27. It varies, depends on the subject, like, if we're talking amongst each other about an issue that we as Aboriginal people understand, we are careful not to divulge too much [to non-Aboriginal people]. If it is a specific Aboriginal issue then we might be in a separate group. But generally in the Park we are all together. (D Taylor, Guide, 31/10/07)

people within the ASDP.^{28, 29} Under these relationships, Aboriginal staff who were custodians and/or senior were ‘the bosses’, by contrast to the organisational hierarchy in which, for example, a Technical Officer 2 was senior to a Technical Officer 1. These cultural relationships played out in various ways. For example, within the guides’ group the staff person who was a local custodian was given the option of speaking first in visitor presentations. In addition, in decision making on subjects related to Aboriginal cultural interpretation, the views of custodians or senior Aboriginal people were influential even when that person was ‘just’ an NTG casual appointee.

Gender-based processes were said by interviewees to shape relations among Aboriginal staff. Traditional gender alignments of men with men and women with women were sometimes followed, but not exclusively so. It was considered to be more appropriate for senior women to mentor junior women and similarly for men. However, this was varied when suitable staff were not available: e.g. Doug Taylor and then Regena Medhurst were assigned as ‘buddies’ to Renate Johnny when she started working at the Park. The Aboriginal cultural content that guides presented to visitors was also influenced by gender.³⁰ These relationship-based processes were particularly strong for traditionally oriented Aboriginal staff. Two interviewees noted that it was difficult for them when the social composition of the staff group that was rostered to a work shift or to visitor presentations did not allow these processes to take place.

3.5.3 Presentation of Aboriginal culture to visitors

All Aboriginal interviewees identified the presentation of Aboriginal culture to visitors as a highlight of their employment at the Desert Park. They referred to the presentation of Aboriginal cultural information in interpretive visual signs and audio guides, talks, and the species composition of



28. Vince and Dougie, they’ve got more say than me because they associated with the [Desert Park]. I’m a southerner, they are my bosses. Marie, she’s my boss ... I’m from the south ... So we two [one other Aboriginal staff person] are outsiders. Dougie, Vincent and Marie, they’re inner circle. We’re outer circle. So I wouldn’t really have any say or change in the Park or whatever. It’s up to the TOs [traditional owners] and those who I work with and come from here. (L Lester, Guide, 21/11/07)



29. When I came here I was really pleased when I saw the way Aboriginal people were treated. It was with respect, particularly with the staff here. It was all respect. Especially for the older folk who are the elders and that is exactly the way we think. The more grey hair, the smarter you are, that’s the way it is in most cases. (D Taylor, Guide, 31/10/07)



30. I am a senior Arrernte person but not an elder. I want young Aboriginal people to learn about their culture. It is good that I can mentor and teach young people here. (V Dobson, Guide, 14/10/08)

landscaped gardens. Topics in the cultural content of verbal presentations are identified in Section 3.4.1. Examples of the cultural content of interpretative visual signs are shown in Photo 5. A succinct statement about the importance of Aboriginal cultural content was made by Guide Marie Ellis.³¹

All guides expressed a strong sense of pride in their cultural knowledge and their skill in telling, demonstrating and teaching it.³² The guides appreciated and expected a reasonable level of detail in the cultural content at ASDP relative to what they had seen in other cultural centres or parks, gardens and public venues where Western scientific knowledge dominated³³, and said that ASDP interpretations were more sophisticated than at such other venues. For guides who had substantial traditionally derived knowledge and experience, the content of their presentations drew upon their life experience and hence was relatively easy for them to present.³⁴ By contrast, their challenges were in overcoming shyness to present this content as an individual speaker in clear English to large audiences. Younger Aboriginal guides with less traditional experience said their role at the ASDP gave an impetus and access to resources to learn and increase their knowledge of Aboriginal culture.



31. I don't want to be telling the history of Captain Cook, I want to tell our history (ME Ellis, Guide, 10/10/07)



32. I've had a lot of experience, extensive experience, guiding in this land here, central Australia, over many, many, many years. I went to the Desert Park to get a job there, I've been giving out all my information and training the young people, training the young Aboriginal people how to speak to people, how to prepare your talks and all this sort of thing and tell them a yarn and tell the tourists about plant identification, [Jukurrpa] storylines and this type of thing. This comes from my cultural knowledge – that's my knowledge, that's not book learning, that's my knowledge. I was taught by grandparents and all the old ladies about the plants and that type of thing. So that's ours. (V Forrester, Guide, 5/3/08)



33. I've been to plenty of tourism places in Australia where there are scientific explanations about plants. But at the Desert Park, all the plant uses by Aboriginal people were explained; it was done by the traditional owners of the place as well. [Here's] the first place I'd ever seen that had that type of interpretation. But also the way the presentations were presented with a lot of cultural detail in them, which was perfect for me because that's what I've been training to do – interpret culture. Also the way we could present it across was excellent as well. When I was working in Adelaide we were in a very structured type of format with designated tasks, whereas at Desert Park you had more freedom to express it from our knowledge. This really appealed to me. (D Taylor, Guide, 31/10/07)



34. Of course it is easy for me to talk about my Aboriginal culture. I already know it. I'm obviously more familiar with it. (L Lester, Guide, 21/11/07)

Four of the Aboriginal guides interviewed described themselves as ‘ambassadors’ with a vital role in educating visitors about Aboriginal people. The guides spoke to visitors on a much wider array of topics than presented in interpretive displays about Aboriginal use and management of the natural environment. In ‘Question and Answer’ sessions with visitors, they were potentially asked about any facet of past and contemporary Aboriginal life. This included what they described as ‘political’ questions, that is, questions on topics that were related to government policy or were politically contentious, where Aboriginal people often had different views from policy makers, or where there was current media interest. Guides reported that political questions were frequently asked by visitors during the start of the Federal Government’s NT Emergency Response or ‘Intervention’, which was receiving substantial media attention in 2007 and 2008.

Among the Aboriginal guides, there were marked differences in how they chose to respond to ‘political’ questions. Contrasting views were expressed by two guides, Vince Forrester and Marie Ellis. Vince sometimes took visitor’s questions as an opportunity to explain aspects of political history in central Australia from an Aboriginal perspective that was often under-reported, such as describing the land rights movement or explaining the cultural logic behind Aboriginal people’s need for land ownership. By contrast, Marie Ellis chose not to respond to ‘political questions’ in her work role.³⁵ Notably, both these guides were personally active in representing their communities in meetings with politicians and public servants outside their ASDP work roles.

The Aboriginal cultural content of their workplace was important to four of the five Aboriginal interviewees from the Botany and Zoology sections of the ASDP organisational structure. The importance to them was in relation to the Aboriginal customary uses and values of bush food plants and the Arrernte names for plants and animals.^{36, 37, 38}



35. I am open for questions from the audience but I say really loud and proud and mean it when I say it, “No political questions, please”. If one comes up, any question that’s really inappropriate and not relevant for my part of my talk, I will say, “Look, that’s a very inappropriate question and it’s not relevant to my presentation. Enjoy the scenery and appreciate what we’ve got here. Just ask me questions about the Park.”... I set my boundary. That’s my own decision. I make myself clear before talking more. (ME Ellis, Guide, 31/10/07)



36. It’s more important to me [when I know that plant]. It feels to me that I and those plants have got a connection too from a long time back – back whenever, back in my childhood or whatever, I knew that plant. So it just feels like we’ve got a connection [I say to it] “I’ll use you one day to fix my sores like that”. I know it is a valuable plant. (A Baird, Horticulture Trainee, 31/5/08)



37. [The bush food garden] reminds me of being out bush. When I go there and weed and I am by myself I feel like I’m out bush. It’s just really comforting to sit around, smelling all the different kinds of bush tucker and taste all that. (A Swan, Horticulture Apprentice, 19/12/07)



38. I’m learning a lot from the talks on bush food and all the other Aboriginal talks as well ... I’d love to go around and talk to the Aboriginal guys that have been here for a while. All of them know a lot as well, I just talk to them about bush tucker ... I just find the Desert Park is really helping me in the sense of finding who I am as an Aboriginal person. (T Unger, Zookeeping Apprentice, 21/11/07)

However, Zoology and Botany section employees had fewer opportunities to engage with visitors than guides, and they rarely or never gave public interpretations of Aboriginal culture. One interviewee from the Zoology section declined to comment on Aboriginal cultural content in relation to his role.

Further to the ‘ambassador’ role, Aboriginal staff expressed a strong awareness that they were role models. They deliberately presented themselves to non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal audiences in ways that countered negative and prevalent stereotypes of Aboriginal people. In particular, four interviewees singled out their willingness to demonstrate the capacity of Aboriginal people to work in the same ways as are conventionally valued by non-Aboriginal people.³⁹

3.5.4 Outdoor work and the natural environment

Aboriginal interviewees frequently referred to outdoor work and the natural environment as a positive feature of their work. Responding to the question “What is the Desert Park like as a place to work?”, two guides, Doug Taylor and Leroy Lester, gestured out the open double window to the Park landscape and to Alhekulyele (Mt Gillen) with the synchronised reply: “It is the best office in the world”, then laughed at the resonance. Later, in the semi-structured interviews, each of them emphasised the positiveness of outdoor work in contrast to predominantly indoor work. This was echoed by the majority of Aboriginal interviewees.^{40, 41, 42}



39. There is the whole concept that Aboriginal people don’t like to work, they just want to sit down and get money. By working here I am showing that we’re good workers and can do a lot of work. (C Paech, Horticulture Apprentice, 9/10/07)



40. [What makes the Park a good place to work?] the outdoors I reckon, the landscapes, different habitats. (L Lester, Guide, 21/11/07)



41. I like being outdoors. The Desert Park, it’s out of town, it’s nice and quiet out here. I don’t like being indoors all the time, not always stuck inside, I like being outdoors even when it’s a really hot day, I don’t really care. We’ve got a good surrounding here. It’s great to work out here; it’s really quiet and peaceful. (R Johnny, Guide, 19/12/07)



42. A major part is the environment, it brings a positive energy, and people enjoy it. This has a big impact on how I feel. The environment makes you feel good. It is the natural environment that is important; the surroundings here are pristine and fresh. It is relaxing outside, your head clears. (C Paech, Horticulture Apprentice, 9/10/07)

All staff had substantial opportunities in their work to be outdoors. The interpretation of the natural environment was established as the major purpose of the ASDP (Land Systems EBC 1994). All ASDP staff were involved in this either by direct interpretation to visitors or supporting that interpretation through creating and maintaining species and habitats. Staff duties in the explanation and/or maintenance of plants, animals, habitats and environmental processes stimulated their learning and enjoyment (see quotes in Section 3.5.1).

For Botany staff, outdoor work was fundamental to their landscaping and horticultural activities. Zoology staff were responsible for large landscaped animal enclosures that were located across the Park. The guides predominantly gave their talks outdoors or in open shelters. Additionally, one major responsibility of guides was ‘roving’, which required them to walk around the Park seeking visitor interaction and observing the condition of flora, fauna and their environment. Zoology and Botany staff also had responsibilities to work off the Park and on rare occasions this involved visits to natural areas to survey or collect fauna and flora.

While outdoor work was a major workplace feature, all staff had access to and use of indoor work environments such as the Botany propagation room or the Nocturnal House. All staff had indoor offices and desks. They also used tea rooms or veranda spaces in breaks. Thus there were choices in the spaces they could frequent.

3.5.5 Career pathways and mentoring

Younger and middle-aged Aboriginal interviewees said a career pathway within the Park was a positive feature of their workplace. By contrast, two older Aboriginal staff were concerned about limits to their career development within the Park. However, they were positive about career path options beyond the Park in NRETAS and elsewhere.

Aboriginal guides stated that the ASDP’s mentoring or buddy system was important to their early career development. Mentoring complemented the formal training and apprenticeship programs. Mentoring between older and younger Aboriginal staff was consistent with traditionally derived Aboriginal educational practices. This system was recognised and valued by both junior and senior staff.⁴³ For example, Veronica Dobson noted that, as a senior woman, her role in mentoring younger Aboriginal women staff was very important to her, as it provided a rare opportunity for inter-generational transmission of traditional knowledge.⁴⁴ Mentoring has a parallel within traditional desert Aboriginal cultural institutions, wherein senior people guided and instructed younger people, particularly people one generation removed from them (i.e. grandparent–grandchild relationships).



43. When I first started we did a buddy system. I was working [mainly] with Doug Taylor so I did a 4-day with him [identified others too] ... [the buddy system] was a bit like when you’re at school ... Year 12s and Year 7s, we had to team up with a group of people, but this was different, it was one-on-one so when I first started I tagged along and went to the different things that Doug did. So if he had a presentation I’d go down to it so he was teaching me and just doing a bit of one-on-one work. (R Johnny, Guide, 19/12/07)



44. The Park provides a good chance to share, explain and learn. Younger people are now well educated [in the Western system]; they need to understand living in both worlds ... I want to push young people. They are the ones who should be employed. They can work to learn both sides. We [old people] have got the knowledge. We’d like to hand it to them. We are not going to live forever. We have got to pass it on. (V Dobson, Guide, 14/10/08)

Mentoring was arranged and supported by some of the ASDP managers. One Guide, Leroy Lester compared the ASDP mentoring approach with the *malparara* approach.⁴⁵ The *malparara* approach has been operational for some years in the cross-cultural work environment of central Australian Aboriginal organisations such as Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council (NPYWC) (Woods et al. 2000) and to lesser extents in Anangu Tours and Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park. In Pitjantjatjara ‘malparara’ means ‘a person together with a companion or friend’ (Goddard 1996). In the context of NPYWC, *malparara* means two workers working together on a project, one of whom is (typically) a non-Aboriginal woman employed for her specific professional skills and the other an Anangu (NPY Aboriginal) woman, usually a senior women with local authority and respect and a strong communicator in local languages but less confident in speaking English in public (Woods et al. 2000). The *malparara* approach thus provides mentoring between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers and can, as Leroy Lester comments, support Aboriginal staff to learn management roles, thereby assisting in career development. In contrast the ASDP mentoring processes supported on-the-job learning and development of cultural knowledge among younger staff. They were not as institutionalised as the *malparara* approach has been in these other organisations.

3.5.6 Social interactions – management, colleagues and visitors

Relationships, interactions and social engagement with non-Aboriginal managers, colleagues and visitors were frequently cited by the interviewees as positive aspects of their ASDP workplace. This complemented the importance of relationships among Aboriginal employees.

The roles of key ASDP managers, both the individuals involved and the organisational positions they held, were valued by Aboriginal interviewees, especially guides. Jodie Clarkson and Gary Fry were identified by Aboriginal interviewees as individuals of particular importance. Clarkson had been employed at the ASDP since 1996 and took a position equivalent to the guide manager in 1998. Fry became Park manager in 2004.⁴⁶ Interviewees identified the relationships with these managers or ‘bosses’ as based on respect and collaboration, support to individuals in the workplace, encouragement to apply for new positions, knowledge of Arrernte language and culture, genuine commitment to involvement of traditional owners, and strengthening of relationships by doing ‘country visits’ away from the workplace.



45. [At ASDP] I’ve hit a brick wall, you can’t go up to be a manager. There’s no career path. Because at Uluru, all the walls were flat. Everyone was communicating with everyone. We used to call it *malpa*, where the Anangu was actually sitting down with manager, learning the ropes. So if the manager was sick or left to go away on holidays, that Anangu steps straight in and takes over the reins. That might’ve been just trial running it at Uluru. That might happen here too. (L Lester, Guide, 21/11/07)



46. The bosses are pretty bloody good [at the Park]. They’ve got a lot of interest like young Jodie [Clarkson] and Gary Fry and that mob there. The bosses are good there. ... Jodie she looked after the TOs [traditional owners], she can speak the language [Arrernte], everything like that – that’s what you call a boss, taking a lot of interest in what you do, but that’s an individual. If there was any meeting, they always went and got the TOs. That’s a bloody good thing about Jodie ... She’s got understanding – she’s a bloody smart woman ... [She] got the [Arrernte] women involved in the women’s side of things too ... She’s a very smart woman. (V Forrester, Guide, 5/3/08)

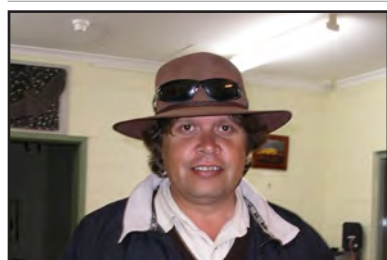
Collaboration among ASDP colleagues was identified by five of the nine Aboriginal interviewees as a positive workplace feature. Interviewees spoke of being accepted and appreciated for their skills and/or personality.⁴⁷ While staff mostly collaborated with others within their own organisational section, some made a particular effort to join other sections at tea breaks.⁴⁸ Only one interviewee commented about feelings of isolation within the workplace.

Positive social interactions with visitors were also identified by the guides as a valued part of their role.^{49, 50} As well as sharing their knowledge of Aboriginal culture and the natural environment (Section 3.5.3), the guides each identified that they like to learn about the visitors, for example, where they came from, what it was like in their country. Thus staff–visitor interactions were sometimes a two-way exchange that reinforced the social aspect of the guide’s work.

3.5.7 Pre-employment processes

All Aboriginal interviewees said their previous work or training experience prior to being employed at ASDP were important steps to their Park role. Most interviewees referred to the socio-economic context in which they had gained their ASDP employment.

The four apprentices interviewed each volunteered advantages of their prior experience for transitioning to ASDP employment. Renate Johnny had initially been a school-based apprentice. The three other apprentices had started at the ASDP within 12 months of leaving school. All four apprentices planned to pursue careers related to their ASDP work in tourism, animal care or horticulture, although not necessarily at the ASDP.



47. We have a mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff but we all get on together as one. That is what I like. That is within the guides’ department but the general consensus is that people in other departments all work together as a team. (D Taylor, Guide, 31/10/07)



48. The social environment, Zoology, Guides, is the other good feature. Our main interactions are at smoko or lunchtimes. Guides have tea up top [in their section]. So there is a choice of places for smoko. I feel it is important to interact as we all work for one organisation. At smoko I meet new staff. (C Paech, Horticulture Apprentice, 9/10/07)



49. I like to talk with visitors. Teach them, let them know. Give them a good idea of the habitat and the country and the people. When they leave satisfied then you’ve achieved something ... That is the best thing again too, talking to people. Just educating them. Some people tell you: “I learnt a lot. I had no idea. I learnt a lot today”. Tourists say that to you. It is rewarding. (L Lester, Guide, 21/11/07)



50. Visitors, we’ve always got different people and you’ll have your occasional day when there might be someone that will [annoy you], but everyone that I’ve had here has been good, talking to them ... you’d always have a good conversation. (R Johnny, Guide, 19/12/07)

Botany staff, Baird and Swan, noted the importance of their experience in, and support from, Green Corps, an Australian Government youth development and environmental training program for 17–20-year-old people (DEEWR 2009). Volunteering with Green Corps through the Alice Springs Green Corps host organisation, Greening Australia (GA), was a major step in securing their ASDP positions.⁵¹ Concurrent with their volunteer work through GA, they were supported to do Certificate 1 and 2 training through Centralian College. This experience and training pathway contributed to them securing ASDP positions. The important role of these pre-employment pathways and the links to other agencies that established them was well recognised and nurtured by ASDP management (see Section 3.7.6.1).

3.5.8 Income

A wage or salary was noted by some Aboriginal interviewees as a positive aspect of their work. Conversely, relatively low pay levels were the most frequently cited negative feature of ASDP work (see Section 3.6.1).

3.6 Challenges for Aboriginal staff in working at ASDP

Aboriginal staff were explicitly asked in interviews what they did not like about their work, and what could be improved to better support their employment at the Park. They raised a small number of concerns or criticisms about their employment experience at the Park compared to the number of positive factors they raised. On average, each interviewee raised four challenges related to their work, compared to thirteen positive features. Five factors identified by several employees and a suite of minor factors raised by only one interviewee are summarised in Figure 15. The commonly identified factors are discussed below, together with strategies that interviewees used to overcome the challenge. However, some interviewees left ASDP within a year of interview, indicating that they could not overcome such challenges.

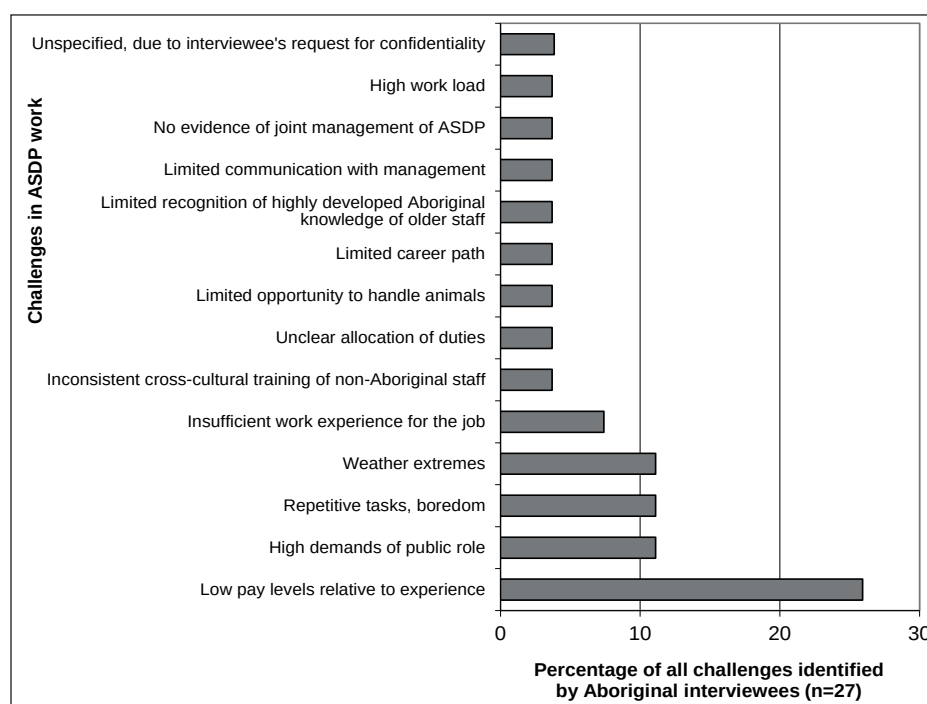


Figure 15: Challenges identified by Aboriginal staff in relation to Desert Park employment



51. I reckon Green Corps is a good thing ... when I was in Green Corps they showed me how to go for interview for a job and they get you to write up your resume ... They get you in a job search ... they take you to the places where, if you're going for an interview – they'll take you there. They'll help you out. They'll help you write out what you want to say. It gives you more confidence. (A Baird, Horticulture Trainee, 13/5/08)

3.6.1 Low pay levels relative to experience or living costs

The most common criticism that Aboriginal interviewees had of their ASDP employment was about low pay levels. Pay levels were said to be low in relation to various factors: a) the duration of their employment, b) living expenses, c) their specialist knowledge and expertise, or d) incomes that they thought they could achieve in other jobs.

One interviewee, in his mid-50s, who had been employed at T2 level, identified pay levels as too low relative to his long knowledge and experience in traditional desert Aboriginal cultural practices and tourism. He believed that traditional cultural knowledge, which he shared through his work as a guide, was undervalued in terms of pay at the ASDP, and more generally in the NTG and in the wider Australian context.⁵² Two interviewees said that greater economic value was attributed to university education than to the cultural education received by Aboriginal staff through practical experience and the expository teaching by elders.

Three of five apprentices or trainees identified pay levels as too low. This was relative to their family living costs or lifestyle needs.^{53, 54} The three-year duration of an apprenticeship, at a low salary level without increments or the opportunity to move up to other employment levels, was also identified by one apprentice as a limiting factor.

3.6.2 High demands of public role

A negative aspect of work that was often cited by Aboriginal guides was the demand of consistently playing a public role. While they generally valued their interactions with Park visitors, four of six guides interviewed spoke of the challenges in maintaining a role where they were often in demand from visitors. Initial shyness and then over-exposure to the public were a part of these demands.

Four Aboriginal interviewees had felt very shy in the early stages of their work (both at the ASDP and in previous employment). At the ASDP they felt shy in interacting with other ASDP employees and with members of the public. The strategies they had used to manage and overcome shyness included observing presentations by fellow guides, having co-workers present during visitor presentations to give support, getting experience in leading tour groups around on guided walks before doing group talks to



52. The main issue that I put in the whole interview is the monetary value of the cultural capital I hold ... I am now earning more by selling one painting than in a fortnight pay as a T2 guide ... I have a long experience in guiding. I've trained many young people. My knowledge was taught by my grandparents. I got paid at a low rate yet I was [working in] tourism before they [some ASDP staff with uni degrees] were born. This devalues my cultural knowledge. (V Forrester, Guide, 5/3/08)



53. I want to go overseas. My income is very low. If I was not living with my parents I could not afford to live on \$19,500. I couldn't afford to upgrade vehicles. I could work 2 days a week for a different organisation and earn that much. I have done study so I should get paid higher. I know other people who've equivalent training and experience who get \$38,000. (C Paech, Horticulture Apprentice, 9/10/07)



54. I've got to put a roof over my family's head, put in the money like every man does, help the family out. That's what wakes me up from bed and gets me here ... It's coming to the stage where I have to find a job with more money ... I'm nearly 30. (A Baird, Horticulture Trainee, 13/5/08)

a stationary audience, and receiving support from the ASDP training officer. One guide recollected that ‘being thrown in the deep end’ by a training officer had forced him to overcome his hesitation in front of audiences.

The constant and sometimes intense exposure to public enquiries was a consistent challenge requiring guides to overcome shyness and a feeling of being burnt-out, and also to overcome feelings of shame because of the types of questions asked.⁵⁵ One analogy from an older male guide was that when he presented to an audience ‘it felt like taking his clothes off, exposing himself and his inner soul’. Three other interviewees independently recounted his analogy. The main way to overcome these challenges was by taking advantage of breaks from public engagements that occurred when interviewees were in the guide office doing administration or research. Research that was intellectually stimulating extended the knowledge of guides and could enliven presentations and counter challenges in their public role. This ‘down-time’ away from the public eye was important to guides. It was recognised and supported by ASDP management.⁵⁶

3.6.3 Repetition and boredom

Eleven per cent of the workplace challenges cited by staff were associated with repetition and boredom within their work (Figure 15). Two of the three Botany interviewees volunteered that they were bored doing the same tasks or that the work was insufficiently stimulating. This negative or challenging aspect of the workplace contrasted to the stimulation of ‘learning’ and ‘acquiring new knowledge’ which was said by all interviewees to be a positive feature of their work (see Section 3.5.1). Interviewees did suggest strategies to overcome boredom; for example, Botany staff suggested increasing the creativity of their role through habitat and garden design.

3.6.4 Weather extremes

As noted above, most Desert Park employees had work roles that required a substantial amount of outdoor time. The challenge of working in extreme heat and extreme cold (the lowest and highest average monthly temperature ranges from 4°C to 35°C respectively) was identified by three Aboriginal employees.



55. Sometimes it wasn't right for me to talk to visitors about certain subjects with [that male guide] there. This was when the visitors asked me questions about women's stuff. I felt uneasy with him there. Women and men didn't talk about these things together, like when talking about babies or being pregnant. (V Dobson, Guide, 14/10/08)



56. The management here's fantastic because they say when you're exhausted, "Look, if you're feeling like this slow down". They can be flexible in their approach and may give you a break in between to recharge and so forth. (D Taylor, Guide, 31/10/07)

3.6.5 Insufficient work experience for the job

Two Aboriginal interviewees believed that one challenge of their work was that they had insufficient experience to understand and do their job. The emotional consequence was expressed by one who had been an apprentice at the Park for 10 months.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, this employee continued to work there over 2 years and was highly regarded by ASDP managers and staff for his skills and capabilities. The importance of pre-employment experiences and pathways was specified by all Aboriginal interviewees.

3.6.6 Other work-related factors

Figure 15 shows some of the suite of other workplace challenges that were identified by only one of the Aboriginal staff interviewed. These included inconsistent cross-cultural training for non-Aboriginal staff; unclear allocation of duties; a hands-off approach to animals in the park, so that opportunities to handle animals were limited; limited career pathways; limited communication with management; and no evidence of joint management approaches in the park. Confidentiality was requested by interviewees for a small number of other factors identified. Many of these challenges have a counterpart in the positive factors that were more commonly identified by interviewees.

3.6.7 Wider life issues

Interviews with Aboriginal staff and former staff of ASDP identified particular issues and commitments in their wider lives that impacted on their work lives and on decisions about staying in the job or leaving. Such factors impact on regular employment in any workplace, not only the ASDP.

These factors included commitments to extended family (e.g. child care and funeral or sorry business), to ceremonial activities (e.g. men's initiation ceremonial cycles), and to political advocacy. The latter were particularly intense for some Aboriginal interviewees in 2007–08 during the Federal Government 'Intervention' in Northern Territory Aboriginal affairs. At least three interviewees said they were involved in related advocacy and actions.

Aboriginal interviewees made choices to move into and out of paid employment. They deliberately devoted time and resources to priorities other than work, such as to maintain and expand social relationships and family networks. It was not simply that these commitments made work difficult, but rather the time required to maintain them was seen by individuals as essential to the life they wanted to live.

3.7 Important factors supporting ASDP Aboriginal employment, as identified by managers and non-Aboriginal staff

Results from the interviews with ASDP non-Aboriginal staff and observation of their employment practices are presented here. This section is structured around major themes that emerged from interviews with the ASDP managers. These are presented in a comparable format to themes identified in the IEE Tool (Tiplady & Barclay 2007b, see Figure 5). Table 5 compares the themes from these two sources. Themes related to workplace processes have been used as subheadings in this section. Themes related to workplace context are described and discussed in the following section, Section 3.8.

The comparison in Table 5 shows that most of the themes related to workplace processes that are identified in the IEE Tool were recognised and noted as important by ASDP managers and the other non-Aboriginal staff interviewed. Many of these were also covered in ASDP plans and policy



57. When I signed on at the Desert Park I was freaked out – it was a shock. (A Swan, Horticulture Apprentice, 19/12/07)

documentation, as outlined below. However, the extent of systematic documented planning and monitoring of Aboriginal employment processes at the ASDP is less than what the IEE Tool proposes should occur in mining corporations and at mine sites.

Table 5: Comparison between Aboriginal employment processes used at the Alice Springs Desert Park and those identified in the Indigenous Employment Evaluation Tool

Themes	Desert Park	Indigenous Employment Evaluation Tool*
Workplace processes		
Leadership and vision	- Strong, consistent leadership - Public commitment to Aboriginal employment	Public commitment to Aboriginal employment
Aboriginal employment policies	- NTG policy - NRETAS policy - ASDP policy - Staff aware of policies	- Corporate policy - Site policy - Staff aware of policies
Planning	- ASDP Master Plan (1994) - ASDP Development Plan (2009 in prep.) including Aboriginal employment processes - Plus Action Plans (and 'just doing it') - Targets: 20–25% increasing to 40% Aboriginal employee targets - Indigenous Employment Toolkit – 'two way'	- Assets and impacts register - Database of legal and other requirements - Targets with time frames; consistency with Agreements, demography - Management programs identify impact on Aboriginal employment
Aboriginal designated positions	Anti-discrimination Commissioner-approved designated Technical and Apprentice positions	not identified
Financial resources	- ASDP budget allocations to designated positions and training - NTG and Federal government programs for Apprenticeships	not identified
Implementation	- Pre-employment partnerships - Extended advertising and face-to-face recruitment - Induction and training - Mentoring and coaching - Culturally appropriate work processes - Cross-cultural experience, training and workplace practices - Relationship-based management style - Home/work processes and leave options - Career development - Exit interviews	- Work readiness/pre-employment - Face-to-face recruitment - Recruitment database and support to individual applicants - Well-resourced competent training - Traineeships and apprenticeships - Cultural awareness - Career path development - Exit interviews - Formal communication processes in organisation about Aboriginal employment - HR systems reward performance against Aboriginal employment targets
Organisational progress	- No formal ASDP review - Monitoring within NTG processes	- Monitoring and measurement - Documented audit process - Corrective action planning register - Management review including minuted meetings and actions achieved
Workplace context		
History	Recognised as important (e.g. relationship with traditional owners)	Not specifically identified, but employment to be consistent with Indigenous Land Use Agreements
Place-based focus	Park area as 'managed' natural habitats	Mine-site focus, but not recognised as an eco-cultural landscape
Culture-based interpretative framework	Aboriginal cultural interpretation focused on plants, animals, habitats, and multiple functions in cultural systems and desert ecosystems	not identified
Aboriginal community interactions	Involvement of Aboriginal community members in multiple roles, including traditional owners, visitors, community extension	not identified
Interface with management of Aboriginal lands	Two-way interaction in skills, knowledge and career/life pathways	not identified

*For detail on descriptors within the IEE Tool see Tiplady and Barclay (2007a; 2007b).

3.7.1 Leadership

During the study, about one third of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interviewees identified strong and consistent leadership as a factor in the Park's relative success in Aboriginal employment. This leadership reinforced and developed the commitment to improve Aboriginal employment and engagement across the Park.

The ASDP had a public statement of values and of its commitment to Aboriginal employment as 'core business' (see Figure 16 and Figure 17). Learnings from the development of Aboriginal employment were also included. Notably, the values statement was not specifically for or about Aboriginal people, but deliberately had a wide inclusiveness.

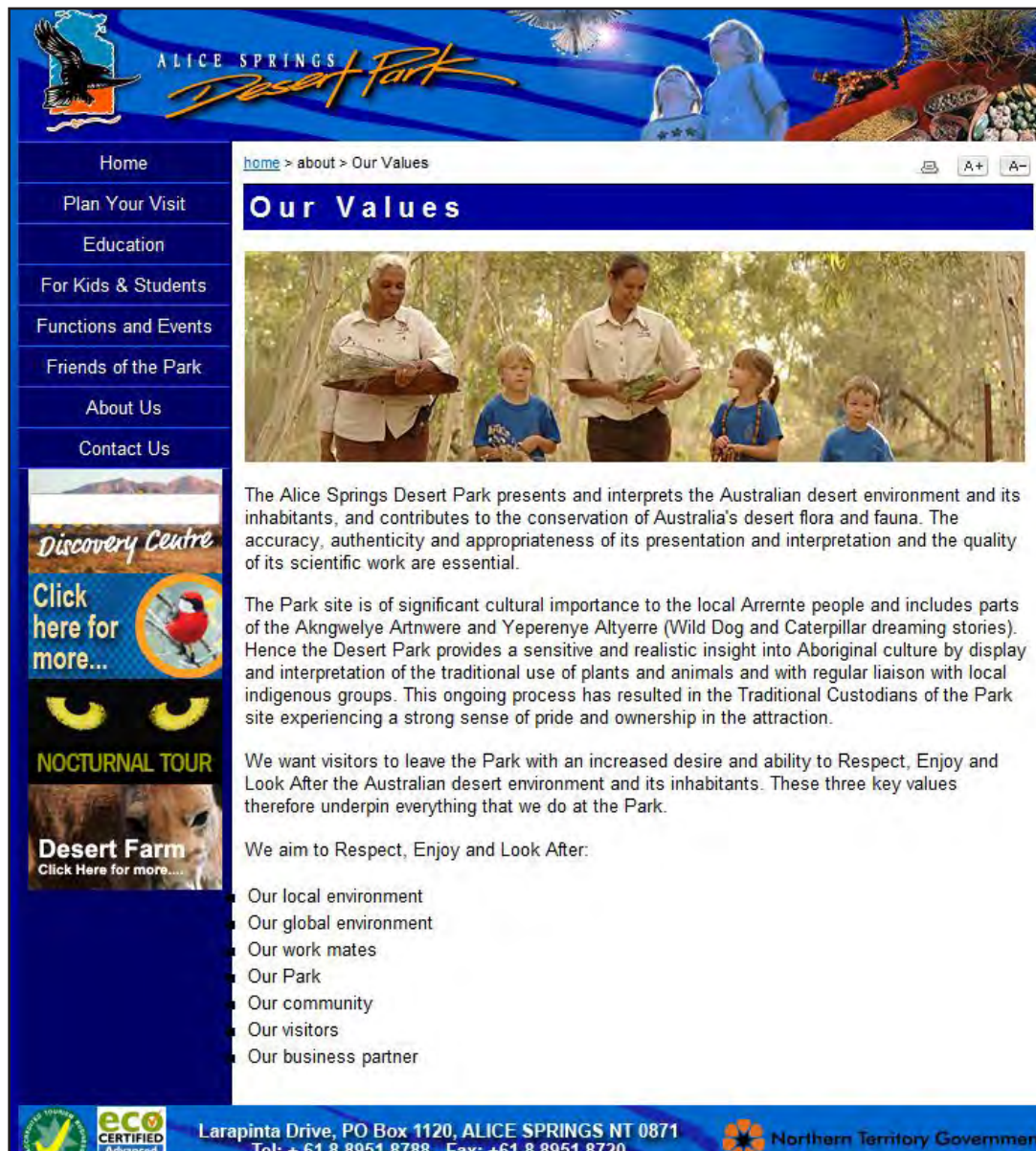


Figure 16: Values statement Alice Springs Desert Park

Source: NTG 2007

Aboriginal Employment @ the Alice Springs Desert Park

The Alice Springs Desert Park showcases to visitors, Central Australia's unique fauna and flora, in a series of natural habitats. Our Park is a key tourism attraction, providing economic outcomes for the region and the Territory by attracting more visitors and encouraging them to stay longer.

We contribute to conservation outcomes by breeding threatened species and delivering environmental education through interpretation and education to the public and schools. We also deliver social outcomes through Aboriginal employment and improving cross cultural understanding.

It is in our best interest to ensure our Aboriginal Employment Program is a success. Employing local Aboriginal people enriches us as individuals, as storytellers and as an organisation.

Aboriginal Employment is core business at the Alice Springs Desert Park. We have had a very successful program since 1996 prior to the Park opening in 1997. 22% of our staff are local Aboriginal people and we regularly contract Apmereke-artweye (Traditional Owners) and other local elders as contractors for advice, guidance, permission and training.

We are working with Desert Knowledge CRC not only to better understand the success of this program, but more importantly, to be able to build upon and share those successes. There is more information at this [site](#).

The success of our program has built self esteem within individuals which has had a flow on effect to their families and our community. We believe some of the keys to our success have been our creative recruitment, relationship style management, flexible employment arrangements and the development of real career pathways & opportunities

Below is a snapshot of some of the things we have learned so far:

[2010 Aboriginal employment models that increase access and sustainability: A framework for success](#)

[1998 Training of Aboriginal Tour Guides at the Alice Springs Desert Park.](#)

[2000 Consulting with Central Australian Aboriginal people about cultural Interpretation.](#)

[2002 Ministers Award – New Apprentices at the Alice Springs Desert Park.](#)

[2003 Aboriginal Apprenticeships Program at the Alice Springs Desert Park.](#)

[2003 Hugh Woodbury Testimonial](#)

[2003 Indigenous Employment and Training at the Alice Springs Desert Park.](#)

[2005 Inquiry into Indigenous Employment - ASDP Submission](#)

[2006 Cultural Mentors Work](#)

Figure 17: Aboriginal employment statement, Alice Springs Desert Park

Source: NTG 2010

Park management had looked beyond mere technical proficiencies to seek leadership qualities that include the creation and guidance of teams of people through recruitment processes and within Park operations. The Park wanted leadership qualities that included the nurturing and support of individuals. It was recognised that practical people who could maintain animals and gardens needed to be complemented by people with strong skills in social interactions and support to staff, including Aboriginal employees. This balance had to be achieved across the Park as a whole and within its sections.

Key individuals in the ASDP management had played pivotal roles in the engagement of Aboriginal employees, the development of practical systems to support them, and then policy formulation. Jodie Clarkson was widely recognised as one pivotal individual by both Aboriginal employees and ASDP managers.^{58, 59} She had progressed from a volunteer to a guide, to a guide manager, then Community Alignment and Product Development Manager. Thus, Clarkson moved from a role of supporting guides and developing their training into a position of management influence that formalised policy and procedures associated with Aboriginal employment and Aboriginal community relations.

Jodie Clarkson attributed the development of her role to the Park managers, particularly Graham Phelps and then Gary Fry. She spoke of the complementarity in personality and staff management approaches between Phelps and herself. This was essential to the development of Aboriginal employment practices and policy that balanced social imperatives with business ones. Clarkson also spoke of her role in relation to key Aboriginal staff. She named John Spencer (the first ASDP guide) and John Liddle as important mentors to her.

Relations with key individuals external to ASDP were also critical in leadership. Three upper and middle managers independently specified the importance of Tony Linn of Arrernte Council. He managed the Arrernte Council–ASDP partnership for apprentices (see Section 3.7.6.1), had well-established and cooperative relations with many younger Aboriginal people in Alice Springs, and was widely respected.

Key ASDP leaders had sustained a high commitment to Aboriginal employment that was recognised by other staff. Nevertheless, they found the ongoing role challenging.⁶⁰ The required commitment was demanding given scarce resources, and many factors distracted from it.

Despite strong leadership in Aboriginal employment practice, it was noted by two Aboriginal employees that the Park had no formal Aboriginal management or leadership. This was seen to be a shortcoming, which to some extent detracted from these two interviewees' positive experiences of employment at the Park. Not coincidentally, both had previous experience with an employer organisation where joint management boards with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members provided leadership and management direction.



58. Jodie made us [guides] and TOs part of the team, she can speak the language [Arrernte] and everything – that's what you call a boss, taking a lot of interest in what you do – that's an individual, she's bloody good. I've got to say that about Jodie. And if there was any meetings, she always went and got the TOs. (V Forrester, Guide, 5/3/08)



59. Jodie Clarkson was a main part; she took it upon herself, then became charged with programming the guides. One reason why [The Park] has been successful [in Aboriginal employment] is that she nurtured Aboriginal staff, all staff, caring for each other. (G Fry, Park Manager, 5/12/07)



60. [After 12 years here, I find] recruiting and retaining Aboriginal people is always going to be challenging. It needs to be kept clear that this is a Park priority and a government priority. You need a huge commitment and huge time to make [Aboriginal employment] happen. All staff are being asked to do more and more. Then they get asked: "What about the Indigenous employment program?" "Well, this week we had to fix lawns at Araluen so didn't have time to go and find [Aboriginal] staff person". We need resources, commitment, clear work programs and to be well-organised plus, for some, a willingness to work more than 8 to 5; it is weekends out bush with MK [a senior Arrernte woman] ... It's not just a job, it's something I am really passionate about and believe in. (paraphrased J Clarkson, Manager, 13/5/08)

3.7.2 Aboriginal employment policies

Business, political and social justice imperatives have driven the ASDP Aboriginal employment policies. The rationale for the ASDP Aboriginal employment policies and targets, as articulated by Park manager Gary Fry during this research, were:

- maintenance of advanced ecotourism accreditation-rating criteria that interpretation is accurate, authentic and appropriate
- Aboriginal people to interpret Aboriginal culture
- Aboriginal people and their culture as an attraction for Park visitors
- locally sourced employees to reduce staff relocation costs
- Aboriginal staffing to be proportional to the Alice Springs demographic
- affirmative action to counter racism and Aboriginal disadvantage.

These rationales affirmed and extended the benefits of an Aboriginal employment training program that had been identified by the previous Park manager, Graham Phelps. The benefits headlined by Phelps & Linn (2003) for the ASDP were:

- a more diverse workplace
- engagement with our local community
- social justice and reconciliation
- economic benefits
- sharing in the returns from wildlife tourism
- conservation through education
- conservation outside of the gates of the Desert Park
- building healthy human communities as part of healthy ecosystems.

Phelps had acted to secure these benefits by supporting senior staff, particularly Jodie Clarkson who led the practical work of employing and training Aboriginal guides, and by negotiating with Aboriginal organisations, Territory and Federal agencies to fund and resource Aboriginal staff and apprentices.

The ASDP policies associated with Aboriginal employment were cross-referenced to a plethora of Territory and national policies, plans and strategies (NTG 2000; NTG 2002; NTG 2004; NTG 2005; NTG 2006). These related to Aboriginal employment within the Northern Territory government and also to sectors such as tourism development, Aboriginal tourism, ecotourism and regional development.

Aboriginal employment policies were regularly articulated by senior and mid-level ASDP managers to all staff. They were introduced to ASDP position applicants, to new staff and informally endorsed by many of the staff.^{61, 62} ASDP employees who recognised the constant negativity and racism within which Aboriginal people had to live and work especially endorsed and acted to support the Aboriginal



61. When I applied for my job I was immediately told in the interview, “We do actively discriminate and employ Indigenous people”. So I was aware of it from the beginning. I think that is very unique. From my previous experience in Adelaide, I’m sure there were people discriminating in the opposite direction, who didn’t employ Aboriginal people. (D Ferguson, Nursery Horticulturalist, 13/5/08)



62. [The Park] puts European and Arrernte culture side by side ... I think if you’re an Aboriginal person in Alice Springs where there is constant low level racism like in shops, people looking at you strangely or talking: “Ah, drunken Aboriginal person”, and the newspaper is full of negative stuff. Whereas at the Desert Park people see Aboriginal culture as a really positive thing. In my interpretation, Aboriginal staff here feel like: “This is a place where I can be me”, where to be an Aboriginal person is a positive not a negative. (T Collins, Nursery manager, 7/11/07)

employment policy. I consistently heard from different interviewees that the Aboriginal employment target was 20–25%, with longer-term aims for a higher percentage. This indicates that the vision and policies of the leadership were well recognised among staff.

3.7.3 Planning

Planning for Aboriginal employment at the ASDP has been manifested by both practical actions and written documentation. While there are a number of documented plans, much of the development of Aboriginal employment has been through actions of individuals with ideas and commitment who secured the resources and put proposals into action with little documentation: that is, they just ‘did it’ (their work related to Aboriginal employment) rather than wrote about it. This was appropriate to the relatively scarce staff resources.

The early conceptual plans and vision for the ASDP focused upon the interpretation of Aboriginal culture in relation to wildlife and habitats (Land Systems EBC 1994; Green & Dale Associates 1996). These plans were not explicit about policies for employment, including for Aboriginal employment. The policies were developed from 1996 with the first designated Aboriginal positions (see below). They were further formalised and received national recognition in 2005 during an official visit by the Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, as part of its national investigation of Indigenous employment (Commonwealth of Australia 2005; 2007). By contrast to presentations in Alice Springs by predominantly non-Aboriginal people about Aboriginal employment, ASDP managers Jodie Clarkson and Gary Fry arranged for about eight Aboriginal staff and senior male apmerek-artweye to speak directly to the Committee.

The training of Aboriginal tour guides was the subject of the earliest recorded procedural document related to Aboriginal employment (ASDP 1998). In about 2006, an ‘Indigenous Employment Toolkit’ was prepared for application within four NTG Parks and Gardens (Clarkson c. 2007). It was developed and trialled within the ASDP. This Toolkit compiled ASDP and NTG processes for Aboriginal recruitment, apprenticeships, apprentice induction, apprentice training and mentoring and early-career retention, providing an aid for ASDP middle and upper managers, particularly those new to or unfamiliar with Aboriginal employment processes (see Section 3.7.6.3).

A Desert Park Development Plan was in preparation from 2007 to late 2009, to complement the 1994 Master Plan. Unlike the Master Plan, the Development Plan had specific content on processes to maintain and improve Aboriginal employment (G Fry pers. comm. 21/10/09).

3.7.4 Aboriginal-designated positions

The NT Anti-Discrimination Act (s.57) provides for special measures to be taken to discriminate in favour of any group of people who are disadvantaged or have a special need because of an attribute. This is the basis on which the ASDP has developed a pool of positions that are designated for local Aboriginal people. In 1996, the ASDP presented a case to the NTG Commissioner for Public Employment to argue for these designated Aboriginal positions. Their core argument was that local Aboriginal people were the people most appropriate to interpret culture of central Australian Aboriginal people, thus they needed to be recruited to designated positions.⁶³ In 1996, the first four positions were designated and filled from the original group of four apprentice guides. By 2007, a total of ten designated Aboriginal positions had been established at the ASDP. The position levels and conditions are presented in Table 6. Not all these positions were filled during the entire period of this research in



63. It’s most appropriate that Aboriginal people tell Aboriginal stories. The corollary is that it’s inappropriate for other people to tell those stories. It goes back to our value statement – authentic, accurate and appropriate. (G Fry, Park manager, 05/12/07)

2007–08; some were vacant, and/or unable to be filled because of lack of funding. These designated positions have been very important in ASDP addressing its Aboriginal employment target. In 2007–08, no Aboriginal staff held competitive positions (i.e. non-designated positions); all Aboriginal staff were either in designated positions or were casual employees.

Table 6: Designated positions for local Aboriginal people approved by the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner

Position	No. of positions and conditions
Technical 1 Guide (T1)	three full-time
Technical 2 Guide (T2) Specialist Cross-cultural	one full-time
Apprentice Guide	two 12-month
Apprentice Horticulture	two 3-year
Apprentice Zookeeper	two 3-year

Source data: Clarkson c. 2007

3.7.5 Financial resources

The ASDP operates as a commercial or business entity, an imperative that was constantly stressed by the Park manager to the ASDP staff. Its budget derives from visitor entry fees and from NTG fiscal allocations. The salary components of the designated Aboriginal Technical positions and of any competitive positions held by Aboriginal people were annually funded from within the ASDP's budget. When financial constraints existed, due to reduced NTG allocations or declines in visitor numbers, all staff positions were vulnerable to cut backs, including those held by Aboriginal people.

Securing funding to resource the ASDP apprenticeship program has required considerable effort by the Park's senior and middle managers, particularly since the funding programs have varied between departments and over time.⁶⁴ In 1999, the ASDP had been successful in getting funding through a Regional Tourism Program to train four Aboriginal tour guides. This had been one of the larger training grants and intakes in the previous decade. In the early 2000s, Park managers spent several years investigating funding options from five different government and private sector agencies (Phelps & Linn 2003). In 2003, an MoU between the ASDP and Arrernte Council (see Section 3.7.6.1) resulted in three horticultural apprentices and four Guide apprentices being employed at the Park. Funding was from a Federal Government Community Development and Employment Project (CDEP) and a Structured Training and Employment Program (STEP) (which ran for 46 weeks) with the ASDP covering 6 (of the 46) weeks of salary, equipment and on-the-job training as the host organisation (Brown 2003). This arrangement was only possible due to the negotiation of special provisions between the Department of Employment and Work Relations (DEWR), Arrernte Council and the ASDP (Phelps & Linn 2003).

After the cessation of the Arrernte Council MoU in 2005, ASDP managers have at times been unable to apply for funds or were unsuccessful in their applications. Variability in these programs and/or failures to secure apprenticeship funding had negative repercussions for the whole ASDP Aboriginal



64. The processes to secure funding for apprentice positions are cloudy as the carriage of these programs changes from department to department, individual to individual, before an election and after, over time ... so we [managers] must be vigilant, keep our ear to the ground, to seek and find options ... I remind the managers that we all have to find the funds (G Fry, Park manager, 20/10/08)

employment program.⁶⁵ The deleterious consequence of hiatus or delays in funding and thus positions was identified by Clarkson to have two stages. Initially, there were fewer Aboriginal employees. Consequently Aboriginal training was not factored into the workload of non-Aboriginal staff. Thus, when Aboriginal people were re-employed, the non-Aboriginal staff were less familiar with the support required. The impetus for Aboriginal employment declined as a result of these factors. Further difficulties came in the aftermath of the 2007 Federal Government NT Emergency Response ('Intervention') and the 2008 Federal election; significant policy changes relating to Aboriginal people, CDEP and other employment programs were extremely rapid. Changes continued through to 2009. This made it extremely difficult for staff in small organisations with limited resources to keep abreast of funding options.

3.7.6 Implementation

3.7.6.1 Pre-employment partnerships

Strategic alliances between the ASDP and Alice Springs agencies with Aboriginal employment programs were effective and provided additional resources for ASDP Aboriginal employment. The strongest and most effective partnership had been between ASDP and Arrernte Council, an Aboriginal organisation providing services to Arrernte people in and around Alice Springs, including through CDEP and STEP. This finished when Arrernte Council went into administration. That partnership was followed by interaction between ASDP and Greening Australia, which ran a Green Corps program. The ASDP also liaised with Group Training NT to identify and provide support for applicants and to select potential apprentices. Unlike the Arrernte Council partnership, these interactions were short-term. They were also less comprehensive and not grounded in an Aboriginal community-based organisation. Thus they were less fruitful.

During the ASDP–Arrernte Council MoU, the Council had identified candidates on their CDEP program who were interested in ASDP work.⁶⁶ These people had a 4–6-week work trial period at the ASDP while being paid through Arrernte Council's CDEP program. Interested people who undertook the trial could then formally apply for ASDP apprenticeship positions. The joint program provided supervisors and mentors in different roles. In general, ASDP supervisors worked with the apprentices within the ASDP workplace. The Arrernte Council helped the apprentices address life matters that inhibited their jobs. This included assistance with accommodation, solving transport problems, negotiation to engender family support, and financial management of the apprentices' incomes. These roles continued beyond the work trial and new apprentice period, as needed by the individual apprentices (Phelps & Linn 2003).



65. The entry level program has been working pretty well but there has been years where we might ask for an apprentice and not get one. That affects the dynamics of teams and the whole Park. We need to continuously have the apprentices here so that it is a consistent part of everyone's job. If the apprentice is not here, then people fill up their job doing other stuff. It has to be ongoing to be effective and it is not at the moment. (J Clarkson, Manager, 13/5/08)



66. We had a Memorandum of Understanding with Arrernte Council. They funded [a horticultural apprentice] position through the CDEP program. We were the host organisation, the employer, and Arrernte Council recruited and supplied the apprentices, they did all that work. Tony Linn used to oversee that program. It worked really well. An advantage was that if the trainees were failing or having trouble ... [Arrernte Council had social networks to] get another one relatively easily ... But Arrernte Council fell over and [CDEP was cut. Now the ASDP has] to get the funding, go through the recruitment and the public service process. This formalises it a lot more, which probably gives the apprentice more security but there was a lot more flexibility with the Arrernte Council scheme. (G Dinham, Assistant Botany Curator, 21/11/07)

3.7.6.2 Extended advertising and face to face recruitment

In spite of high Aboriginal unemployment in Alice Springs and designated Aboriginal positions at the ASDP, the number of Aboriginal applicants for ASDP positions was often small: fewer than four applicants and sometimes no applicants (four manager interviews; also Phelps & Linn 2003). The ASDP developed various strategies to attract and guide Aboriginal applicants through the application process, as summarised in Table 7. Some of these strategies were different from NTG or Federal recruitment standards. All required committed staff and dedicated resources. For example, some ASDP staff visited basketball stadiums frequented by younger Aboriginal people to put up job advertisements.

Table 7: Comparison between recruitment processes for Aboriginal people at Alice Springs Desert Park and mainstream government

	ASDP strategies (from Clarkson 2005 and this research)	Standard NTG strategies
Positions	- designated positions - description and advertising stipulates 'Identified Aboriginal position' or 'Identified local Aboriginal position'	
Job descriptions	- input from traditional owners - written in plain English	- generated by management - high English
Advertising	- local Aboriginal radio stations, local newspaper - promotional posters at youth centres, Aboriginal councils, sporting venues, educational institutions - single position advertisements - networking with training providers including Arrernte Council, Green Corps - word-of-mouth, telling others about job options - face-to-face invitations from staff to individuals to apply 6-week application period and not in December – January	- advertise in newspapers and on websites - advertising in block government ads with several positions 2-week application period
Application	- apprentice application template for hand-written submission - short an/or hand-written paper copy accepted - guidance to assist with stronger written application	- applicant provides resume and application letter - letter or e-form submission
Short listing and selection	- direct contact even if poor written application as verbal communication skills stronger - informally ask others who know the applicant's abilities - inviting potential applicants to look around the Park with recruitment staff person/s	- assess applications - telephone interviews and reference checks
Interviewing	- panel with gender balance, > 1 Aboriginal staff member and/or traditional owner - applicant offered questions prior to interview - interview conducted outside or in room with windows - scenarios to draw out applicant - assessment of interest, commitment and attitude	- telephone and fly-in/fly-out interviews - reference checks
Feedback	- provide verbal feedback to all applicants after interview - verbal and written offer to successful applicant	- unsuccessful applicants informed by letter - successful applicants informed by letter or phone call

There were some tensions between these ASDP procedures and the standard NTG procedures that applied to ASDP apprenticeship positions funded through ASDP's head agency, NRETAS, or through other NTG sources. Two managers mentioned that flexibility and local applicability had been lost when the pre-employment partnership with Arrernte Council ceased.

Another area of tension identified by various interviewees was the significant mismatch between the NTG standards for qualifications required at particular employment levels and the expertise needed for ASDP positions. Several interviewees spoke of incompatibility between Aboriginal expertise and public

service qualification requirements.⁶⁷ This incompatibility also underpinned the frustration about low pay rates relative to life expertise (rather than formal Western qualifications) that was voiced by Vince Forrester and other Aboriginal staff (Section 3.6.1).

3.7.6.3 Induction and training

Induction and training procedures for ASDP Aboriginal employees were developed between 1996 and 2005 and were documented in the Indigenous Employment Toolkit that was developed in draft form in 2007 (Clarkson c. 2007). The Toolkit had a strong focus on apprenticeships. It was ‘two-way’ in that it outlined what information supervisors needed to provide to apprentices and what supervisors needed to do to learn about each apprentice (see Table 8).

Table 8: Topics forming part of introduction procedures ASDP Indigenous Employment Toolkit

Supervisor to apprentice: The apprentice getting to know their job	• Welcome • Expectations (including ‘behaviours at work – inappropriate, dangerous or illegal’ table) • Roles and responsibilities • Roles of other staff • Desert Park objectives • NRETAS strategic plan
Apprentice to supervisor: The supervisor learning about the person	• Getting to know your apprentice (including learning about their priorities and interests) • Giving feedback: ‘How am I going?’ (including punctuality and appearance, energy and application, relationships, communication, training table)

Source: Clarkson c. 2007

A formal and extended induction process for apprentices introduced their ‘on-the-job’ training and preceded formal Certificate training. On-the-job training occupied about three days of an apprentice’s full-time week, with weekly and daily work programs designed to develop particular competencies. Ideally, apprentices worked alongside current staff. Checklists were developed to ensure all aspects of training were covered with the apprentice. Training on- and off-the-job were intended to be complementary; for example, Certificate modules were chosen to complement the practical on-the-job training.

Apprenticeships also included study in a Certificate 3 subject relevant to the ASDP section, for two days a week. These courses were provided by local (based in Alice Springs) and distance education providers (see Table 9). The certificate levels were chosen to ensure that graduate apprentices could compete for permanent positions, a clear objective of the apprenticeship program (Phelps & Linn 2003).

Table 9: Certificate courses of ASDP apprentices 2002–2008

	Certificate level	Duration	Certificate training providers	Comments from interviewees
Botany	Cert. 3 Horticulture	3 year	CDU Alice Springs	effective as CDU relatively well-organised, Alice Springs based, good lecturers
Zoology	Cert. 3 Zookeeping	3 year	Boxhill TAFE, Victoria	as external students with little lecturer contact, stronger ASDP supervision and support needed with work plans, motivation and tutoring
Guides	Cert. 3 Tour Guiding	1 year	IAD, Centralian College, Alice Springs	inconsistent, reliant on calibre of individual lecturer, better when class was taught at ASDP onsite



67. [A major constraint on greater Aboriginal employment levels are the] bureaucratic processes and the base training requirements. Recruits are supposed to come in at particular levels with specified skills and qualifications. The NT government requires training frameworks. Literacy is a huge obstacle. By contrast, at the ASDP, it is cultural experience and mentoring skills that are more valuable in our Aboriginal employees. Ironically, the people with the ability to explain their culture and the natural environment come from out bush [with lower formal literacy and qualifications], whereas town people have less knowledge to underpin cultural interpretation. (A Macfie, Guide Manager, 24/10/07)

One role of the section managers and training officer was to regularly oversee the work plans and assignment submission within the courses. The ASDP provided the apprentice with an office space, computer, reference books and other resources to support study. Apprentices needed to develop their self-motivation to study. In her interview, Jodie Clarkson noted that supervisors also needed to ensure the appropriateness of training and recommend changes to training practices or change training providers as needed.

The Botany and Zoology apprenticeships were three years long, whereas the guides had only a one-year apprenticeship. The longer courses were due to the relatively higher competitiveness in the job market for zookeeping and horticulture positions. The longer duration at low salary of these courses had contributed to some apprentices failing to complete the courses. Relative inequities in apprentice pays were recognised by some ASDP managers.⁶⁸ However, these pay levels were constrained by the funding provider standards.

The on-the-job training provided in about 2000 was reasonably structured. For example, it covered about fifteen topics over 20 weeks (see Table 10). However, by 2007 this structured on-site training had decreased because some topics were covered in certificate courses and because the availability of ASDP staff to provide training had decreased.

Table 10: In-house training to be provided for Aboriginal tour guides

Internal course	Time duration
Senior first aid	3 days
Cultural awareness course	1 day
Arrernte language course	1 week
Interpretation techniques course	3 days
Familiarisation with Parks and Wildlife Commission	1 week
Familiarisation with Regional Parks and Scientific Services Units	9 weeks
Plant identification	1 week
Animal identification	1 week
Introduction to traditional custodians	1 week
Introduction to Aboriginal organisations	1 week
Introduction to local Aboriginal tour operators	1 week
Tour guiding at the Territory Wildlife Park (Darwin)	1 week
Uluru–Kata Tjuta tour operators course	1 week
Four-wheel-drive course	1 week
	~ 20 weeks

Source data: ASDP 1998

When interviewed, the Zoology curator was specific that more financial support was needed to provide more effective on-the-job training. He explained that this was because the time demands required to train Aboriginal staff had to be prioritised against regular duties involving animal care and husbandry. Animal care was non-negotiable: it had to be done or animals died.



68. The whole apprentice award rate system is disgusting. One apprentice would have been earning only \$30 more than his mates who were on the dole. Then we also had two apprentices who had finished Year 10 and 12 respectively so with a pay difference of \$150 between them. This was a huge inequity. There's nothing worse than two people doing the same job and getting paid remarkably differently. [We had to make some adjustments there]. (J Clarkson, Manager, 13/05/08)

For guides, the ASDP encouraged culturally appropriate training between the guides and local Aboriginal experts in addition to Certificate-based and on-the-job training. On- and off-site bush food collection trips, to learn about methods of food-gathering and preparation or tool-making, provided experiences that were incorporated into guide presentations. These trips strengthened relations between ASDP staff and local Aboriginal custodians. These trips had been held regularly, about every six months in the early 2000s, but had become less frequent by 2007.

Ideally the ASDP sought block funding to allow them to take on three to four apprentices concurrently. This number also contributed to a balance of gender. Three apprentices provided a critical mass to support to each other and the option that if one person left, then two would remain for mutual support. There had been times when four apprentices were training concurrently and effectively in an organisational section.⁶⁹ However, two mid-level managers noted that three apprentices per ASDP section was an ideal number and that four apprentices was too many, considering the support time required from the training officer, the number of other staff in each section available to provide peer support and training in conjunction with their other duties, and the needs of the individual apprentices. Peer support was recognised as a vital factor for the continuity of employment of individual apprentices.

3.7.6.4 Mentoring and coaching

Mentoring and coaching were encouraged by ASDP management. This was largely done informally through workplace processes rather than formal training courses for supervisors of Aboriginal staff. An explicit intention of mentoring and coaching (and training) was to build self-esteem and trust. Clarkson (2005) recognised that many young Aboriginal people had low self-esteem; consequently they were mistrusting of ‘strangers’ and non-Aboriginal organisations. Her approach was to capitalise on what people were good at and to build on existing skills and interests. This included giving equal status to ‘bush skills’ compared with Western scientific knowledge.

The separation of workplace processes into small, manageable steps that were then reiterated and expanded upon over time was necessary. ASDP supervisors were encouraged to have high, but realistic, expectations of all staff. Regular and honest feedback was stressed as being essential in building confidence and trust. This feedback was both informal and more formalised through a form template (see Clarkson c. 2007).

ASDP policy and management recognised that mentoring or coaching needed to be flexible around workplace or life–work issues that required attention.⁷⁰ For some issues, mentoring was best done in



69. In 2001 in the Guides section, there had been four apprentices, four designated Aboriginal positions, three non-designated staff, a training officer and a manager. There was a whole team, that’s why it worked well. It included John Spencer and John Liddle. They were mature men, very worldly, experienced in both worlds, fantastic mentors. Then Regena who is nurturing, incredibly organised. The younger staff could remember their time as apprentices, so were good mentors too. It was a lot of work and a lot of fun. We got all apprentices through. Then they went off and got other work. (J Clarkson, Manager, 13/5/08)



70. What really needs to happen is employ someone as the Aboriginal mentor or coach. Their job would be to get involved in these young people’s lives. They’d say: “Well, you’ve lost your work boots or you’ve lost your keys. Let’s look at how to prevent this from happening”. Rather than: “Here’s some more boots or another key”, and just handing it out. When you start a job there’s a lot to learn. There’s technical stuff – plant tube stock, potting mixes ... But also: “I need to set my alarm this much ahead, do some shopping so I’ve got lunch”. These are life–work skills that few Aboriginal people here have had the chance to develop. Not everyone needs that level of support but we need the flexibility to respond to individuals ... We had one apprentice, intelligent, really into plants, he could have been really good but he struggled. His home life didn’t support his work life. The place he lived was a hovel, yet he was expected to come to work with a neatly pressed uniform. Eventually he quit ... their self-esteem is fragile, unless they’re very single-minded it’d be easy to think: “Oh work, it’s too hard”. (T Collins, Nursery manager, 7/11/07)

gender-based groups and ideally between culturally senior and junior Aboriginal staff. For example mentoring of Renate Johnny, a young Aboriginal woman, by Veronica Dobson, a senior woman, was culturally appropriate and highly effective. However, the numbers and availability of staff and their location often precluded optimal partnerships. At times, the resignation of younger Aboriginal staff was attributed to ineffective partnering.⁷¹

3.7.6.5 Culturally appropriate work processes

Work processes among Aboriginal staff at the ASDP were partially shaped by culturally appropriate or culturally derived processes. These included gender separation and deference to seniority, to traditional owners and to those Aboriginal staff with closest custodial associations with the land that comprises the Park. Aboriginal guides preferred to operate with these procedures as much as possible. However, these procedures were often eclipsed by workplace conditions. ASDP managers were aware and supportive of these cultural procedures but also clear that the culture of a workplace had to be dominant. Focused discussions between supervisors and Aboriginal staff had been necessary in some instances to establish appropriate workplace behaviours.⁷²

3.7.6.6 Cross-cultural experience, training and workplace practices

The experience of the cross-cultural workplace at the ASDP was seen by the non-Aboriginal interviewees to be an attraction to non-Aboriginal applicants. All of the non-Aboriginal staff who were interviewed said that their work experience had been enriched by having Aboriginal colleagues and through the Park's presentation of Aboriginal cultural content.^{73, 74} In their experience, the Park's



71. [In the Botany section] I was involved in supervising a young Aboriginal apprentice in her [initial] period of employment ... there is no supervising written in my job description but I felt she was unsupported. She really needed to work more closely with female staff members than be surrounded predominantly by men. She was capable but didn't stay on at the Desert Park. Support and the majority of time with female staff could have improved her experience. [Formally the young female apprentice] was being mentored by a woman in another building, who was new to Alice Springs and possibly with not much cross-cultural experience. She did her best but was limited by being in another space. (D Ferguson, Nursery Horticulturalist, 13/5/08).



72. There's been times where we've had to manage Aboriginal culture and work culture in the workplace. For example, we had a senior Arrernte person working beneath someone who was their cultural junior. This was challenging. Communication sorted it out. We say: "When you come through the front gate, you're coming into work culture; we respect other cultures, but this is the behaviour to abide by. It is inappropriate to tell someone to get you a cup of tea. It's not about throwing your cultural weight around in a workplace". Always we think and discuss – "This is the situation, this is what we expect, this is where you're coming from, how are we going to deal with this in the workplace?" These issues become a discussion rather than directives. (J Clarkson, Manager, 13/05/08)



73. Working with Aboriginal people enriches my work. I talk to people and see they are different. People look at a plant and have a relationship with it. Whether it is, "That's going to put a burr in my sock and annoy me", or "that's a plant I can make medicine from because my grandfather showed me". Aboriginal people's very different insight into plants enriches my experience. (T Collins, Nursery manager, 7/7/07)



74. Many things make the Desert Park special. It has diversity and with diversity is creativity. You can open your mind to a completely different world. I came here knowing little about deserts. Now I see the world in different ways. When I go out bush with MK [a senior Arrernte woman], she sees bush bananas hanging on hakeas – 10 miles away. How the hell can she see that? It's a matter of knowing what to look for, having your eye tuned to this country. This opportunity to be exposed to experiences like this is extraordinary and changes your world. It changes your life. (J Clarkson, Manager, 13/5/08)

Aboriginal employment program made the Park a better place to work. This indicates that jobs for Aboriginal people can not only benefit those people, but can also improve the work experience of their non-Aboriginal colleagues. This rationale has been poorly recognised in planning and reporting on Aboriginal employment.

However, the non-Aboriginal staff who held this view all had some cross-cultural experience prior to work at the ASDP. This experience was predominantly in Western-shaped workplace environments with Aboriginal colleagues, though two of these staff had spent between several months and three years 'on-country' with Aboriginal people or in remote Aboriginal settlements, and one had worked cross-culturally for 20 years. It is presumed that the length and depth of cross-cultural experience would contribute to improved engagement with Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal knowledge at the ASDP. One interviewee observed that ASDP job descriptions stated as desirable that applicants have some cross-cultural understanding, appreciation and/or experience. However, the 25 non-Aboriginal ASDP employees who were not directly involved in this research (since they were not managers or volunteers for interview) probably had little or no cross-cultural experience other than at the ASDP (G Fry pers. comm. 2007).

Non-Aboriginal ASDP staff were required to do a one-day cross-cultural course and had the option of repeating it. The importance of a course was widely recognised by interviewees.⁷⁵ However, the need for 'two-way' training was also identified by interviewees, so that Aboriginal people could have a systematic introduction to non-Aboriginal culture and to workplace expectations and systems in particular.

Since about 1998, courses have been delivered by an Alice Springs-based company (Jajirdi Cross-Cultural Consultants). The course explained the similarities and differences between desert Aboriginal (particularly Warlpiri) and European people (see Clarkson 1999), centred on the personal experiences of the two presenters and their family. It explained the multiple cultural identities of Aboriginal people across central Australia and drew out the implications of these inter- and intra-cultural differences for the ASDP workplace. The course had been an important aspect of training for all ASDP staff, with much 'new' learning embedded within it (Clarkson 1999). The course was an introductory one and the ASDP had not developed a formalised iterative cross-cultural training that allowed staff to progressively build their knowledge and understanding.

The quality of cross-cultural training was critical to its effectiveness among ASDP staff. However, there was a critique by one interviewee about the content, style and appropriateness of the cross-cultural course presented by Jajirdi in 2007. In this person's view, the style of delivery provoked feelings of guilt and anger among staff attendees which jeopardised the understanding and empathy that should have been engendered.

ASDP managers also encouraged staff to attend seminars on aspects of Aboriginal culture, for example, presentations of the poster by MK Turner (2005) that showed how Arrernte people are related to each other and connected to country. An online intranet induction course, of about 3.5 days duration, which included Aboriginal cultural material and Aboriginal employment processes, was also being developed for new staff. Additionally, staff were encouraged to develop personal relationships with each other, including Aboriginal employees and traditional owners. This was facilitated by occasional staff



75. There must be a cross-cultural course for non-Indigenous people coming there. If you're going to get into Parks and Wildlife management and work at the Desert Park they've got to have a cross-cultural course. Teach them cross-cultural courses. That is going to develop the non-Indigenous staff person as an individual and it's also going to develop the value of the park. (V Forrester, Guide, 5/3/08)

barbeques to which traditional owners were also invited. ASDP management also recognised that the richest cross-cultural experiences came when staff and traditional owners went on overnight camping and hunting trips.

English is the dominant language of ASDP interpretation and operations. However, the local language is Central Arrernte. Annual courses in Arrernte language and culture were available to any ASDP staff. Some staff, such as Jodie Clarkson and Steve Kelly, were noted by other staff for their relative competency in Arrernte. Cultural and biological interpretation at the ASDP used some Arrernte words, albeit a tiny proportion of a very big lexicon. However, even this limited use was an attraction to most of the Aboriginal staff interviewed, even though only two of them were fluent Arrernte speakers. ASDP managers said they also endeavoured to incorporate Arrernte into Park operations, particularly where Arandic concepts did not translate neatly into English, although *apmereke-artweye*, place names, plant species names and *Altjerre* were the only Arrernte terms cited in the interviews. Attempts were made to bring more Arrernte learning into the workplace, for example, Steve Kelly selected Arrernte words for staff computer passwords (Photo 6).

3.7.6.7 Relationship-based management style

ASDP managers including Gary Fry and Jodie Clarkson spoke of a ‘relationship-based’ management style.⁷⁶ These managers deliberately used terms such as ‘nurture’ and ‘care’ when speaking of their support for staff. This management style suited the emphasis that Aboriginal employees placed upon relationships and social processes within their workplace. It promoted Aboriginal employment and retention through their knowledge of staff as individuals, concern for individual staff, and tailored efforts to support individual staff members.

All non-Aboriginal interviewees stated or implied that the inter-personal relationship between an Aboriginal employee and their direct supervisor was a key factor in Aboriginal employee retention. This relationship was built through trust and similar values and good communication processes. It relied upon the manager’s interest in the employee as an individual with a family and wider life context. The relationship needed to offer knowledge through explanation and sharing. It required time to nurture the development of a collaboration.^{77, 78}



76. There is a deeper layer to the Desert Park that what is initially apparent. There’s a whole bunch of people that come to work each day from different backgrounds; as part of our value statement we aim to respect and look after our workmates, our work colleagues. There’s an understanding that sometimes we need to go an extra mile for people at different times, whether they be whitefellas or blackfellas. (G Fry, Park Manager, 5/12/07)



77. [Managers and colleagues have] got to build the trust [with Aboriginal staff] and build the relationship. They need to find out if they do really want to be here or whether their family wants them to be here. You have to get to know the people. In the Aboriginal world, everything is about family, everything is about relationships – that is where the power of humans comes from – each other. We’re not separate entities, we need each other spiritually and socially, and in the workplace it’s really important that people feel as if they’re comfortable and feel as if they are part of the place. They have got people around that they can talk to and they trust and are comfortable with and that it’s appropriate for them to talk to, if they’re initiated men or whatever, or women. (J Clarkson, Manager, 13/5/08)



78. What makes Aboriginal employment work? It comes down to relationships. The relation between the direct supervisor and the staff person. If it is good it works, if not we lose people. In that relationship we have to be prepared to mentor, supervise, explain. Time to do this is a factor but not the only [one]. We need to give knowledge, not just pass on information. There needs to be understanding and cultural sensitivity. We in Zoology haven’t had issues lately as the staff are quite European in outlook. Aboriginal staff with a more traditional orientation have strong family demands and commitments ... they might need to drop everything and go to sorry camp without knowing when they might be back. (B Pascoe, Assistant curator, Zoology, 7/12/08)

At times, this relationship needed practical actions and support, for example, for following up out of hours and at home with Aboriginal staff who had been absent⁷⁹ (see Section 3.7.6.9). While strong support to build and maintain relationships was recognised, in reality this was constrained by commitment, time, resources or caution in respect to equity for all staff.⁸⁰ The dynamic tension between specific support for Aboriginal staff and responsibilities to non-Aboriginal staff and the wildlife collections had to be regularly negotiated by managers. If particular managers had let this priority slip, then senior management reminded them of the ASDP's employment objectives.

3.7.6.9 Home–work processes and leave

The development and/or support of a work ethic was stated by managers and non-Aboriginal staff as essential to workplace employment (also Clarkson 2005, c. 2007). This was well-recognised by Aboriginal staff too (see footnotes 82 and 102). The cultivation of a work ethic was particularly needed for younger Aboriginal staff who had not grown up with a workplace culture in which parents and grandparents had fixed, regular work hours.

Managers and other non-Aboriginal interviewees considered that processes to support Aboriginal employees' daily transition between home and work were important to developing this work ethic. However, Aboriginal staff put a greater emphasis on the importance of developing a work ethic through pre-employment, recruitment and initial experiences at the ASDP.

Non-Aboriginal interviewees identified several strong and unpredictable demands upon Aboriginal employees in their lives outside of work. These were interpreted to detract from the time Aboriginal staff could give to work. The demands identified included poor health, poor housing conditions, high family commitments, cultural obligations, and limited transport options. Transport between an employee's workplace and residence was identified as a major challenge to work attendance.⁸¹



79. In one case, two blokes were away for six weeks on 'leave without pay', one came back to work but not the other. Tim went to his house, asked if he wanted to come back to the job. The bloke was ashamed about being away but after Tim reached out to him he did come back. It [Aboriginal employment] needs this extra effort. That was Tim; [other staff member] might not do that as they keep home and work separate or they don't make the time. (P Brown, Horticulturalist, 9/10/07)



80. In Zoology, we have to run a tight staff level for our collection size. Animals need to be fed, cleaned. If no one turns up we have dead animals. If someone is unreliable for whatever reason this causes friction with other staff, especially on weekends when it is a skeleton staff. Staff are relying on each other. Even when there is an understanding of cultural issues, repeated absences means the other staff work harder. Understandably, some staff get frustrated and resentful when others don't show up. (B Pascoe, Assistant curator, Zoology, 7/12/08)



81. Transport has always been a big barrier ... We've lent people bikes. We've lined up the Desert Park transfer bus [for employees]. There are other buses too. With things like bikes, if you're living on a town camp ... you take the bike home and it's gone, you don't have it the next day or you have to give it to your cousin because you're obliged to – you can't say "no", even though it's not yours. That's just a different concept. (J Clarkson, Manager, 13/5/08)

Consistent attendance and punctuality was needed at the ASDP with its small, team-based workforce and precise demands for services to visitors and the tourism industry, and care of animals and plants.⁸² To aid punctuality, a watch was considered part of the ASDP uniform and was provided to employees if necessary.

If staff were late or did not go to work, then they were asked to notify their supervisors as soon as possible, with an explanation, so that supervisors could then plan for the absence. This encountered problems where Aboriginal employees did not have a home telephone.

Certain ASDP staff had taken the initiative and role of providing considerable out-of-hours support to Aboriginal staff to aid their development of a work ethic. At times, this involved picking them up for work in the morning, helping with the preparation of their clothes, making arrangements for transport, or assisting with personal financial management like setting up their bank account. These staff faced the challenge of finding the line between support and dependency. It was not expected that all ASDP staff would invest this out-of-hours effort, but it was noted when they did.

Absenteeism was considered a challenge by some managers in relation to certain Aboriginal staff. Sometimes, staff had been absent without advising supervisors, then had become ashamed and/or afraid they would lose their job, so they delayed contacting their supervisors. This placed some onus on supervisors to 'chase up' staff, then 'invite' them back to work.

ASDP managers recognised that all staff needed leave for particular purposes and sometimes special provisions were needed for Aboriginal staff. 'Cultural demands' were loosely understood by ASDP managers and other non-Aboriginal staff, but were recognised to include the need to attend funerals for a wide suite of family relatives. A presumption was that Aboriginal people wanted to work for as long as their non-Aboriginal colleagues or as the NTPS required. However, as identified in Section 3.6.7, Aboriginal employees had, at times, made deliberate decisions to put a higher priority on social and cultural capital than on paid work.

Two mid-level managers argued that the ASDP leave arrangements should be more flexible than the NTG standards. They proposed that Aboriginal staff should have the same total entitlement as other staff, but pointed out the need for greater flexibility between types of leave in order to facilitate Aboriginal staff using it to cover their particular circumstances, which might include cultural learning and ceremonial commitments⁸³ (see Table 11).



82. With the Arrernte Council MoU, apprentices had six weeks then eight weeks cultural leave, eight was too much. A trouble with the public service system is that it doesn't account for cultural needs enough. The NTG should keep the amount of leave that [all public servants are entitled to, but allocate] it in a way that's more culturally sensitive for Aboriginal people. Rather than divide it, free it up but when it's gone it is gone. [Also modify provisions], it might be a cousin-brother dies and they can use those three days rather than it's got to be a direct family member ... Still keep the same amount of leave, but have more cultural sensitivities to it. We try to drum into the young kids, the apprentices: attendance. It's a key thing, attendance. It is a difficult and challenging one. I say: "If you're not going to attend, ring and let us know". They can go missing for a few days then they come in and you're annoyed, you bring them in and they've got a fair dinkum excuse, and you just go, "Well, if you'd told me everybody knows then". So it's something we really try to drum into them. But then poor attendance for apprentices is nothing unique to Aboriginal kids. It's just a teenage thing. Also developing a good work ethic is nothing unique either. There is plenty of staff we've had with poor work ethic at Desert Park. We try to instil attendance from the start then everything else sort of flows, if they're keen they will be trained. (G Dinham, Assistant Botany Curator, 21/11/07)



83. On two occasions I got permission for Vince Forrester to go away on cultural leave. It took a year to get that permission. We put forward the argument that his leave was essential to his development and cultural responsibilities. These contributed to cross-cultural understanding in the Park. I drew the analogy to attending residential school at a university whilst on study leave. (J Clarkson, Manager, 13/5/08)

Table 11: Comparison between standard NTG leave allocations and ASDP staff recommendation

NTG employee leave entitlements (leave types and approximate numbers of days)	Proposal from mid-level ASDP managers
Annual leave (30 days/6 weeks)	Aboriginal staff entitled to 48 day leave allocation as for all staff but without need to distinguish leave type, thereby giving flexibility for multiple purposes
Sick leave (15 days)	
Bereavement leave (3 days)	
Study leave	

3.7.6.8 Career development

The career development of ASDP staff was determined by the procedures of the NTG, with some flexibility at the discretion of ASDP managers. Staff were recruited to a particular level and progressed through increments at that level. There was no automatic progression to the next seniority level. Rather, staff had to wait for a vacancy at a higher level, which may happen rarely due to limited staff turnover in higher level positions. When a vacancy occurred, they had to apply in a competitive process, unless they were an Aboriginal staff member applying for a designated position at a higher level.

This situation constrained and frustrated some Aboriginal employees in developing a career within the Park (see footnote 45). Conversely, there had been Aboriginal trainees who could have applied for vacant positions and did not. It was the view of some non-Aboriginal staff that Aboriginal staff needed to get more encouragement to move on from Apprentice or Trainee positions to Technical 1 and then to Technical 2 positions.⁸⁴ Notionally there was ‘automatic progression’ (direct appointment) from Apprentice to T1 if both managers and the trainee or apprentice concurred. However, this did not always occur.

3.7.6.9 Exit interviews

Exit interviews were encouraged between managers and employees to clarify the reasons why an employee was planning to leave. These were taken by ASDP management to be an opportunity for reflection on processes that could have been improved or else establish that the employee was genuinely no longer available for the position. Aboriginal staff turnover was relatively high; from 2001 to 2007, 33% of Aboriginal staff were employed for only six to twelve months (Figure 12). There were complex and multiple reasons for these short periods, influenced by both employer and employee situations. However, no formal comparison could be undertaken with non-Aboriginal staff turnover.

Several Aboriginal staff had returned to ASDP employment a few years after their previous contract. ASDP management had an informal policy to ‘keep the door open’ for employees who had left. This required that they had ‘clean’ closure on an individual employee’s work period. Gary Fry noted that this was especially important where staff did not come to work without explanation for weeks. Rather than terminating the employee because they had not complied with required NTPS practices, efforts were made to encourage the employee to submit a formal resignation. However, where misconduct had been involved, it was appropriately recorded.



84. [ASDP has] no Aboriginal-designated T1 positions. T1s in Zoology are competitive recruitment positions. Aboriginal people can’t compete with the large number of highly qualified zookeeper applicants. Our new strategy is to bring in Aboriginal casuals and school them up so making them more competitive for T1 positions. (B Pascoe, Assistant curator, Zoology, 7/12/08)

3.7.7 Organisational progress

ASDP has worked in accordance with the 2006 NTG Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategy (NTG 2006). For example, it has increased the number of Aboriginal people recruited and had adequate representation of Aboriginal people in the workforce. In particular, the ASDP has developed a range of local employment entry points, has provided pre-employment assistance, has increased non-Aboriginal staff's understanding of Aboriginal culture and heritage, and has increased the understanding of Aboriginal staff about NTPS and workplace policies, practices and processes.

The ASDP has innovatively developed beyond the NTG strategy, which is why it is considered a leader within the government sector in sustaining Aboriginal employment levels. It has implemented other strategies to attract and retain Aboriginal staff, particularly in establishing that Aboriginal employment is core business. Notably, it has established a target of Aboriginal staff that reflects the local demographic, implemented flexible work practices, and actively supported staff learning and development. Further, as discussed below, the ASDP has extended the cultural diversity of its workplace through extensive involvement of the local Aboriginal population in various roles, not only employment. Aboriginal staff who were interviewed indicated the high value they placed on these factors, particularly learning new skills, peer support mechanisms, career pathways, working in culturally inclusive ways, and, as further discussed below, high involvement in presenting Aboriginal culture.

3.8 Workplace context

Several distinctive factors about the ASDP that were important in the satisfaction expressed by Aboriginal employees about their work at the Park go well beyond workplace or employment practices. They relate to the particular business functions of the ASDP and its place in the Alice Springs region and community. As noted in Table 5, such factors are not recognised well, if at all, in the IEE Tool.

The first factor is recognition of history and of the negative impacts of historical events on Aboriginal people with custodial rights and responsibilities for the Park. As noted above (Section 1.4), native title was found to have been extinguished over the land in the ASDP. Nevertheless, the ASDP gives particular recognition and respect to the Park's traditional owners. Consistent with the cultural protocols explained by Aboriginal interviewees and senior Park managers, principle authority in the Park's interaction with Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture was given to *apmerekke-artweye* (traditional owners).

The second factor is the place-based focus of the ASDP and its management. This is integral to the business of the ASDP. A strong sense of place is generated by the combination of a stunning landscape setting and the Park's business in displaying managed natural environments to visitors, conserving plant and animal species, and interpreting cultural values and perspectives to Park visitors. This comes through strongly in the comments of Aboriginal employees about what is good about working at the ASDP (see Section 3.5).

Three other important factors discussed below are the policies and processes that the ASDP has developed for the interpretation of Aboriginal culture in the Park's business activities, the multiple diverse interactions between the park and the Aboriginal community of Alice Springs and the surrounding region, and the connections between Aboriginal employees' work in the Park and their engagement in cultural and natural resource management elsewhere, including on lands where they have custodial responsibilities.

3.8.1 Cultural interpretation

The maxim ‘accurate, appropriate and authentic’ was central to processes and policies that ASDP follows in presenting and interpreting the Park landscapes and displays to park visitors. This included the interpretation of Arrernte and other Aboriginal cultural information. Cultural interpretation was intended to attract and engage Park visitors but was also a very positive feature of the Park for Aboriginal staff.

The Park has a focus on the local in its cultural interpretation, recognising that “it is important to interpret local past and present life from a local’s point of view, in order to preserve cultural integrity (Forrester 1998 pers. comm., cited in Clarkson (1999). As the Park had also become a learning environment for local Arrernte people and for other Aboriginal people, the onus on accuracy of information was particularly high. If Aboriginal staff found inaccuracies in the interpretative material, it would increase their scepticism of the ASDP and possibly reduce their employee satisfaction.

The original Master Plan (Land Systems EBC 1994) outlined the ethnobiological content that was to be presented. The overall theme for the Park was a scientific or Western perspective that emphasised the wide spatial scale of desert Australia, the richness and diversity of species and habitats and adaptations to rainfall variability and unpredictability. The supporting theme was Aboriginal people’s relationship with the deserts. The cultural content that was to be presented by the ASDP was described in more detail in the Park’s interpretative plan (Green & Dale Associates 1996). A revised plan has been used to guide more recent interpretative materials (J Clarkson pers. comm. 2007). There was short-term Aboriginal employment in the preparation of semi-permanent and permanent displays at the Park. Appropriate processes to engage Aboriginal knowledge experts in interpretation within the Park have been detailed (Clarkson 1999). These included processes for the engagement of Aboriginal people in relation to consultation, photography, copyright and payment.

As noted above (Section 3.7.4), recognition that the achievement of authenticity required that Aboriginal cultural material be presented to visitors by Aboriginal people has been an important driver for the Park’s employment policies. In turn, the learning that is associated with presenting Aboriginal culture accurately and innovatively is a significant attraction of the ASDP workplace for its Aboriginal guide staff (Section 3.5.3).

3.8.2 Aboriginal community interactions

The initial aims of this research related only to Aboriginal employment in the ASDP. However, interviews with Aboriginal employees established that the many other roles that Aboriginal people have within the ASDP contributed greatly to the satisfaction that Aboriginal employees had with working in the Park. Aboriginal employees of the ASDP said they were validated and cross-reinforced by the Aboriginal people fulfilling these roles. They particularly identified the vital role that amereke-artweye (traditional owners) played in affirming the workplace and their own position as staff. They also made many statements about the breadth of Aboriginal involvement as something that made working at the Park a comfortable and positive experience.⁸⁵



85. The Park’s hugely interested in involving the community here. That’s actually allowed me to feel really comfortable here, because I need the support coming from the top down, support-wise, through the Aboriginal people. I’ve never been in a place where that’s actually been the case ... I think the Park is like a shining beacon as far as the involvement with the Aboriginal community in this particular place. (D Taylor, Guide, 31/10/07)

The various roles that Aboriginal people have in the park, in addition to employment, were identified and grouped from information gathered through interviews and on-site observations. Table 12 identifies and summarises these many different roles. These are further outlined and discussed below.

The wide range of interactions between the ASDP and its staff with Aboriginal people and organisations has opened opportunities for the ASDP to link more broadly with the tourism and conservation sectors, promoting Aboriginal involvement in these.

Table 12: Aboriginal community interactions with Alice Springs Desert Park

Aboriginal group	Summary of role
Apmereke-artweye (Arrernte traditional owners)	Consultation about park developments, right of veto, 'authorisation' to non-Arrernte employees to be present on and interpret cultural information about their lands, presentation on special tours (e.g. royalty, conference groups)
Correctional services personnel (Community service day-release)	Labour crew, e.g. for weeding, ground works, under direction of ASDP senior staff, especially in Botany section
Aboriginal knowledge experts	Provision of interpretive information for permanent and temporary displays (signage, audio)
Artists	Ceramic plaques by Hermannsburg potters, NPY painters of ASDP scooters
Exhibitors at public workshops and events	Art in the Park, Tjanpi Desert Weaving workshops, 'Beanies, Basket & Bush tucker' events, Ngurratjuta Arts demonstration
Visitors	Aboriginal clients or students e.g. Bindi Centre, schools, potential Aboriginal tourism groups
School visits and partnerships	ASDP 'adoption' of Yipirinya bilingual school, other school children's programs and visits to ASDP
Aboriginal organisations	Workshops, meetings, often hosted at ASDP using public facilities e.g. CLC national park joint management meetings, Waltja AGMs
Community extension	<i>Mala</i> release at UKTNP, planned quoll release at Ipolera on Western Arrarnta land, ASDP services to Ampilawatja Health Service, Renal Dialysis Centre including plant stock provision and horticultural advice for bush medicine gardens
Aboriginal ranger and tourism trainees	Lhere Artepe native title holders and Tourism NT 12-week program (Lolback 2008b)

3.8.2.1 Apmereke-artweye (Arrernte traditional owners)

Aboriginal people who were custodians of the ASDP area were referred to by ASDP management as apmerek-artweye. Colloquially they were known as 'traditional owners' or 'TOs', but apmerek-artweye⁸⁶ was the preferred term. The identity of apmerek-artweye were established as part of the Alice Springs Native Title claim. Although the Native Title determination of May 2000 found that Native Title had been extinguished over the ASDP, senior managers recognised the apmerek-artweye as key decision makers for the lands on which the ASDP was established.⁸⁷ During the Park's development and up to the early 2000s, the main apmerek-artweye with whom the Park liaised included Rosie

86. The term apmerek-artweye is derived from the words *apmerek* meaning place, and *artweye*, which has a range of meanings covering concepts of ownership, belonging and relationship ... Apmerek-artweye are holders of an estate and have particular responsibilities for looking after it and authorising what goes on there, although this is always done in terms of ancestral precedent. This implies a relationship between current apmerek-artweye, the ancestors themselves and the landscape in which they have come to be embodied. People who are apmerek-artweye refer to the estate as their own country ... While apmerek-artweye are often designated as owners of an estate, they take care of it in partnership with others known as *kwertengerle*. The English term 'boss' is sometimes applied to apmerek-artweye but may also be used for *kwertengerle*. Other English terms used to convey the meaning of *kwertengerle* include 'manager', 'boundary rider', 'policeman', 'spokesman', 'prime minister' and 'fixer'. (Morton in FCA 1999)



87. The apmerek-artweye were the key decision makers for this country. I've worked with them since 1996. Unfortunately, most of the old people have passed away. There are three left, then they've got their kids coming up behind them. I maintain the Park's relationship with those families, develop opportunities for them at the Park. These are employment then business opportunities that provide economic benefits to the families. (J Clarkson, Manager, 13/5/08)

Furber (deceased), Bobby Stewart (deceased), Thomas Stevens (deceased), Patrick Stevens and Elaine Peckham. As these people aged or died, Park staff developed relations with other appropriate family members. Certain apmerek-artweye had viewed the Park very positively.⁸⁸

Up to at least 2006, there had been formal and informal interactions between the Park staff and apmerek-artweye, who visited the Park at least once a month (Fry 2006). Traditional owners were recognised as having a right of veto over decisions within the Park. This included decisions on species in captivity or propagation.⁸⁹ They provided advice on and guidance for the Park's development. They had assisted in the interpretation of Arrernte culture, in complement with more formal cross-cultural training of staff. On occasion they had been contracted for short-term or casual periods to provide more substantive input to the management of the Park.

The substantial paid and voluntary time investment by apmerek-artweye into the ASDP was noted by several interviewees. Interviewees considered that there were multiple motivations for this input. For some traditional owners, the ASDP validated their role as a 'boss' of the land.⁹⁰ This cultural authority is generally not acknowledged or is ignored where there is no legal requirement to recognise it, and sometimes where there is a legal requirement.

Another recorded outcome from apmerek-artweye involvement in the ASDP was that the Park continued the legacy of individual apmerek-artweye after they had passed away. This was particularly important in the context of premature deaths, oral traditions that had been little documented, and rapid cultural loss.^{91, 92} An increasing sense of urgency is driving collaborations between senior traditional owners and people who can record their experiences, views and opinions (V Dobson pers. comm. 17/4/09). Involvement of apmerek-artweye in ASDP has included such collaborations.

88. The Park is really important in giving animals a chance to live on; their life to be created and the generations continued. Having it in Alice Springs where the language is spoken and every name of every animal is strong is important – the elders are still here. How the animals are related in the land of the Park is important to the Aboriginal people of central Australia. It is historical land which creates the species, who are connected to the land ... The influence of the Aboriginal people and our involvement at the Park is very strong. The Park leads the Aboriginal people to work as a team with the National Parks. We have the opportunity to work in a team – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people together. We have strong ties and rights in the Park ... Aboriginal people are very grateful to have the opportunity for this Park to happen for our generation to live on to the future. (Turner 1999)



89. For example, honey ants could not be kept in captivity so the Park would buy wild harvested honey ants when needed; hakea trees cannot be chopped down. (G Fry, Park Manager, 5/12/07) (Fry 2006)



90. Senior traditional owner, Thomas Stevens, used to meet new staff here. He'd say: "It's great to have you working for me". He was telling them this is his country, he is an owner, and you're helping to look after it. He meant it too. (G Fry, Park Manager, 5/12/07)



91. On the visitor audio guide Rosie Furber is speaking. Before we recorded her, Graham [Phelps] and I asked Rosie what would happen if she got sick and passed away. After talking to her kids, she decided that she still wanted to make the recording. (J Clarkson, Manager, 22/9/09).



92. When Rosie got really sick, her daughter asked [on the Park's behalf]: "Mum, your name is all over the place, what are we going to do about that?" Rosie answered: "The words are really important; just because I am gone don't take them away. I must exist as Rosie. Don't stop the voice". Perhaps she was happy the Park continues to tell her stories. (G Fry 05/12/07) [Rosie's preference was a reversal of cultural protocols that limited public portrayal and naming of deceased Aboriginal people.]

Informal interactions between some Park staff and the families of apmerekke-artweye and other Arrernte people had been encouraged and resourced. For example, there were weekend trips ‘out bush’ to places in the MacDonnell Ranges region. Such trips had cultivated stronger relationships and good working relations between Park staff and traditional owners. The ASDP had also provided support to traditional owners in ‘off-Park’ aspects of their life, such as making a significant financial and personnel contribution to the funeral of a key apmerekke-artweye in May 2009.

3.8.2.2 Correctional services personnel

The Desert Park regularly hosted a few people from NT Correctional Services who were on a community service day-release program. These were generally middle-aged Aboriginal men who were low-security prisoners. They worked at the ASDP for up to several months, providing additional labour for the Park. The wider purpose was to give them experience outside of gaol and build their confidence in a work environment. It was said that the outdoor environment was well-suited to them. Some Aboriginal staff valued their presence at the Park.⁹³ It was observed that some of the Correctional Services prisoners shared tea and lunch breaks with Aboriginal ASDP staff.

3.8.2.3 Aboriginal knowledge experts

Aboriginal knowledge experts were contracted in the early stages of the Park’s development of its interpretative material (Clarkson 1999). They provided oral information that was selected and transcribed into signs, installations and audio guides. This recording was facilitated by non-Aboriginal people experienced in cross-cultural interpretation, for example, Meg Mooney and Kaye Kessing. Central Arrernte language names and terms were recorded, an activity that brought many challenges as the language had only been a written language since the late 1970s and not all wildlife terms were in the dictionary (Henderson & Dobson 1994).

Local Aboriginal experts also provided training in bush resource collection techniques to guides and other staff, both on and off the Park. This improved the guide’s interpretative presentations to visitors. Sometimes these experts were paid for this training role and at other times it was in exchange for transport to visit their custodial lands and food.

3.8.2.4 Artists

The Park had an ongoing commitment to the purchase and incorporation of public art into its exhibits. At times it commissioned Aboriginal artists or art centres for specific products. For example, the Hermannsburg potters were commissioned to create large-scale mosaic and ceramic pieces for permanent exhibition. On another occasion, there was a collaborative project between the Park and NPY Health involving artists who had journeyed to Alice Springs to access health services. They painted the scooters that were used by park visitors who needed motorised transport to get around the Park. Such activities added to the ongoing presence of Aboriginal cultural content within the Park.



93. Ashley and I work with prisoner fellas too. Before there was Sammy and Clifford, Cliffy, we work alongside of them a lot – it’s good. They got released. Now, there’s two new fellas. (A Baird, Horticulture Trainee, 13/5/08)

3.8.2.5 Exhibitors at public workshops and events

The ASDP had a calendar of ongoing, annual and intermittent events that brought large numbers of Aboriginal people into the Park. Many of these events were focused on art, for example, ‘Beanies, baskets and bushtucker workshops’ run by NPY Women’s Council (see ASBF 2009), Ngurra Tjuta painting workshops in the courtyard, and ‘Desert Mob’ art sales by regional Aboriginal art centres. Aboriginal people, their art and skills were a major presence at these events.

3.8.2.6 Aboriginal visitors

The Park is open to all public visitors – international, Australian and local. Its management actively encouraged and supported Aboriginal visitors. Some Aboriginal visitors were active in their engagement with Park staff and many were self-guided. For example, during the study I unexpectedly observed staff of the Bindi Centre Incorporated give a plaque of thanks to the Park management in recognition of Park support to people with disabilities. Aboriginal people involved with Bindi regularly visited the Park with Bindi staff. Park staff also hosted visitors who had particular interests in their operations. For example, at various times members of the Merne Altyerr Ipenhe (Food from the Creation time) Bush Foods Reference Group of senior Aboriginal women and individuals from Areyonga community were introduced to the Park’s work in bush food horticultural production. These specific tours introduced a wider group of central Australian Aboriginal people to the Park and its operations. Aboriginal ASDP staff were invited to host such visitors where it was possible and appropriate.

3.8.2.7 Schools visits and partnerships

The Park was a popular venue for visits by schools in Alice Springs and the region (Photo 13). Aboriginal employees placed a principal emphasis on the ASDP as a learning environment for themselves and other people. Some saw the Park itself as a school – a continuation of the traditionally derived concept of country as a learning environment.⁹⁴ Several Aboriginal ASDP staff specified that an important part of their job was sharing their expertise with young Aboriginal children.

From about 2007 the Park partnered with Yipirinya School, a bilingual and bicultural Alice Springs school for Arrernte and other Aboriginal students, in an ‘Adopt-a-School’ program. This allowed school children ten years and older to learn about careers and have regular experience of a workplace (Clarkson 2005). The intent was to broaden the career options of these Aboriginal children. The steps involved some work experience, followed by potential admission to a VET program at 16 years old, then a school-based or workplace-based apprenticeship, and finally a job. Thus the Park offered real employment pathways, especially through what were recognised as difficult teenage years.⁹⁵



94. So, like all the little lemongrass they’ve got there come from King’s Canyon. You’ve got Curlybark mulga from South Australia, got different sorts of plants ... We also got to look at how the Desert Park got to be education – it is education – I call it the school. It is a school. Our young kiddies go out to Desert Park from the town schools here and they’re learning all the time, so it is a school and we’ve got to treat it as a school and a research area. (V Forrester, Guide, 5/3/08)

95. We want to show school children there are different choices they can make. Just because they have grown up in a world where you might have a baby when you’re 16, get some government money, have a horrid boyfriend, get bashed so you drink to feel better. That’s what some kids are exposed to, that is one option. We want to show there are other options. (Anon, senior Park staff member).

3.8.2.8 Aboriginal organisations

The Park was preferentially chosen by many of the major Aboriginal organisations in Alice Springs and central Australia as an event venue. This choice was made because of its good facilities, open outdoor environment, setting of interest to Aboriginal people and its location at the edge of Alice Springs, distant from town distractions. For example, during this research, the Park hosted a series of meetings arranged through Central Land Council between senior male traditional owners about joint management negotiations for national parks. In addition, the Aboriginal family resource centre Waltja Tjutangkū Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation held its AGM at the Park, involving about 30 representatives from about fifteen remote communities. ASDP Aboriginal employees commented that such meetings increased Aboriginal visitor numbers to the Park and improved their own experience of working in the Park.

3.8.2.9 Community extension

The majority of Aboriginal ASDP staff and all ASDP managers expressed a commitment to community extension activities that benefited Aboriginal people and communities at locations across central Australia. Several interviewees discussed the interconnections between the Park and its wider surrounds. They described this from a cultural perspective in which sacred sites within the Park were points along Altyerr tracks that ‘travelled’ and connected places, species and people over long distances. Similarly, species housed within the Park were also seen to be ‘connected’ to habitats distant from the Park.⁹⁶ These perceptions have also been expressed by Anangu traditional owners in relation to species and ecosystem management at Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park. This is analogous to the protected area concept of ‘off-park management’.

One project in which the ASDP played a role was the re-introduction of mala (Rufous hare wallabies) to Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park. This followed a lengthy series of Aboriginal community and scientific workshops. The ASDP was responsible for the care of captive animals prior to their release. In 2005 they were released into a 170 ha enclosure at Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park. The Aboriginal owners of the park and other Aboriginal people welcomed the animals back to their lands. The ASDP played an ongoing role in monitoring and sampling the population from released animals. The importance of this work was emphasised by ASDP Guide and Luritja man, Vince Forrester. Another project at planning stages in 2008 was the reintroduction of *tjilpa* (western quolls) to an enclosure near Ipolera, about 150 km southwest of Alice Springs, with support from Western Arrarnta people including Mavis and Herman Malbunka. Herman Malbunka was very knowledgeable about the *tjilpa* and its ecology, presumably through a totemic responsibility for the species. However, the first time he saw the animal was in the Desert Park in 1997 (J Clarkson pers. comm. 22/9/09).

Other examples of community extension services include the ASDP donation of 80 seedlings to establish a bush medicine garden at the Ampilawatja Health Service in an Aboriginal community about 350 km north-east of Alice Springs in 2007 (Fry 2006). They also offered to provide on-ground horticultural support. The ASDP management offered further seedlings conditional on the successful establishment of the seedlings provided. In 2008 ASDP staff created a specialised bush food and medicine garden for patients with chronic renal disease. They landscaped and planted gardens for the



96. The Desert Park is connected to Watarrka, Uluru and a much wider area of land than just the Park. The Desert Park’s got plants from their country. The little lemongrass – that’s come from King’s Canyon. The Curlybark mulga has come from South Australia. The Mala from the Tanami. Thank heavens for the NT Parks and Wildlife or we’d have no Mala left. [NTPW] and the Desert Park took a colony back to King’s Canyon then Uluru ... At least my grandchildren are going to see the Mala or the Bilby. That’s why I’m always relating to Park back to the land where [the animal or plant] has come from ... I can’t praise the Park enough for what they’re doing, it’s magic. (V Forrester, Guide, 5/3/08)

Western Desert Nganampa Walytja Palyantjaku Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation, an organisation that cares for patients from remote communities who have to relocate to Alice Springs for dialysis treatment (Lollback 2008a). Park staff provided ongoing maintenance to the medicine gardens.

3.8.2.10 Aboriginal ranger and tourism trainees

The ASDP had been a host venue and also provided Aboriginal staff to train Aboriginal rangers from other organisations and locations in central Australia (Lollback 2008b). Intermittent courses lasted between a few days and 12 weeks. For example, 15 Lhere Artepe native title holders took part in a 12-week training program at the Park, run by Tourism NT, the ASDP and NTG (Lollback 2008b).

ASDP managers saw considerable potential for greater Park and Aboriginal involvement in tourism developments within the region.⁹⁷ This was partially due to its geographic location in relation to the West MacDonnell National Park and the Red Centre Way tourist drive to Watarrka and Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Parks (NTG 2008). In 2007–08, a major new proposal to increase the numbers of Aboriginal people associated with the ASDP was to establish an Aboriginal business hub at the Park. Aboriginal tourism enterprises were being encouraged to establish and link into the ASDP who would provide marketing and other support. Other smaller ventures were being explored by ASDP management too, such as support to Aboriginal guides at Olive Pink Botanic Gardens and the cultivation of food for ASDP animals by men who had spent periods in Correctional Services custody.



97. I'm a firm believer in Indigenous tourism as an option to help Aboriginal people actively engage with their country. The Park has a key role in capacity building and potential future involvement in tourism, especially with joint management and enterprises. The Park gives people an overview of tourism in a non-threatening and supported environment. People get paid work experience, have a job, work with public with less risks. By contrast, \$100,000 goes to one tourism project and people make uninformed decisions. Central Australia has a problem in getting traction in Indigenous tourism. The Park is a key player in providing people with experience before they embark on their own enterprises. (A Macfie, Guide Manager, 24/10/07)



Photos 12: Activities of Aboriginal people in diverse roles and events within the Desert Park

Clockwise from top left: NPY women demonstrate how to make tjandi baskets; Members of the Bush Foods Reference group are shown the bush food garden; Aboriginal artists are contracted to paint scooters for Park visitors (A Lynch, NPYWC) (2 photos); Members of Waltja have a break from their AGM to paint; Irrkerlantye Arts Centre stall holders on an open night (M LaFlamme).



Photos 13: School activities at the Alice Springs Desert Park

The Park is a popular venue for Aboriginal school children in environmental and cultural education. Here, students from Ntaria (Hermannsburg) and other schools tour the Park.



Photos 14: Alice Springs Desert Park community extension activities

The Park has community extension activities including to Aboriginal communities, lands or facilities. Clockwise from top left: ASDP staff contribute to the training of Aboriginal rangers (Lollback 2008b); the Desert Park supplied bush medicine plants to a remote health centre; Traditional owners with *Atylpe* (Rufous Hare Wallaby) (bottom right) and *Achilpa* (the Spotted Quoll) (bottom left) in preparation for their re-introduction in a cooperative program with the Desert Park (Photos ASDP).

3.8.3 Interface with management of Aboriginal lands near the Park and more widely

The ASDP is in a region where Aboriginal people's ownership of their traditional lands has been widely recognised. This raised the question of how the Park's Aboriginal employees applied skills and expertise gained through their ASDP employment in cultural and natural resource management of their own custodial lands and other Aboriginal lands. It proved too difficult to interview most of the former ASDP employees and assess the extent to which they had applied their ASDP experience in management of their custodial lands or elsewhere (see Section 2.2.3). However, many of the Aboriginal staff I interviewed volunteered the aspiration that their work experience could be applied in the future to work on 'their country'. Several said they did want to work on their custodial lands. They had considered commercial options such as small-scale tourism, as well as customary activities with no commercial dimensions. Some noted that their ASDP experiences would be useful, such as through the familiarity they had gained with Occupation Health and Safety issues and refinements to their knowledge about plants and animals. However, not all Aboriginal employees were keen to work on their family's country.⁹⁸

As Clarkson stressed in interview, the ASDP was interested in enriching Aboriginal people's lives, not just their careers.⁹⁹ The importance of the steps before, within and beyond the Park was emphasised. By the early 2000s ASDP managers had recognised that there was congruence between the strong desire among many Aboriginal people to work on their custodial country and the training and experience that employment at the ASDP offers. Employment at the ASDP was an entry point into careers in cultural and natural resource management (CNRM) for at least five of 23 Aboriginal people who worked there up to 2003, some of whom had previously been long-term unemployed (Phelps & Linn 2003). From 2000 to 2007 the ASDP provided work experience ranging from a few weeks to several years for 36 Aboriginal people. While some of these people went on to employment in sectors unrelated to CNRM or tourism, and others have pursued full-time family duties, several later circled back into employment within the CNRM sector. For example, one graduate of the horticulture apprenticeship program who left the ASDP in 2004 returned to work there in 2009.

Aboriginal staff from the Guides section of the ASDP have been more successful in securing continuous employment outside the Park in the CNRM sector than those who had worked in the Park's other organisational sections. Three reasons explain this. First, this section has employed the largest number of Aboriginal people and over a longer period than the Zoology or Botany sections. Second, job competition in zookeeping and horticulture are high, particularly in central Australia. By contrast, guides jobs in Aboriginal tourism are abundant. Further, because the ASDP is part of NRETAS, it has been relatively easy for ASDP employees to get short-term transfers for work experience as park rangers in NT national parks. This has contributed to former ASDP Aboriginal staff being successful in gaining jobs elsewhere in the CNRM sector: at least three (including Hugh Woodbury and Gareth Forrester) have worked for NRETAS as national park rangers; one (Pat Loughton) has worked as an Aboriginal Land Management Facilitator, and another (Shane Bloomfield) has held a position in NT Tourism.

98. I can't handle isolation; I wouldn't want to work there [on grandmother's country near southern Aboriginal settlement]. It's too small for me. [It] is a dry town. But you go past the fence and everything [animals, plants] around it is destroyed, rubbished, there is nothing preserved. (Anon, junior ASDP staff member)



99. [That anonymous employee] he reckoned he was on his way to prison before getting a job here, now he's got responsibilities. He went on to work at Uluru [Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park] as a ranger then Tanami Mines. That is not a bad U-turn for a bloke. With the nurturing atmosphere and lifestyle of the Desert Park, people like him got used to going to work each day, having a uniform, accountability, dollars in the bank, confidence. These skills were passed on to other Parks ... After here, they take employability [to] the next step. It is about preparing people so they can work more effectively in our dominant culture, employment in a whitefella way. (G Fry, Park manager, 5/12/07, clarified by J Clarkson, Manager, 22/9/09)

3.9 Increasing the Aboriginal employment target

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interviewees were asked if the number of Aboriginal staff at the ASDP should be increased and the reasons why. From the early 2000s to 2008, ASDP management had maintained a target for Aboriginal employment of 20%–25% of the ASDP workforce. In 2008 management set a 40% Aboriginal employment target for the next five to ten years.

Seventy per cent of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interviewees were unequivocal that the numbers of Aboriginal people at the Desert Park should be increased.¹⁰⁰ Only 10% of interviewees could identify no particular reasons why the percentage of Aboriginal employees should be increased. The views are not necessarily representative of all ASDP employees since the non-Aboriginal staff who volunteered for interview had a particular interest in Aboriginal employment.

The reasons why interviewees thought there should be more Aboriginal staff were:

- the opportunity that ASDP work provided for Aboriginal people to learn and re-engage with their cultural knowledge about land
- the strong congruence between Aboriginal experience and cultural and environmental work
- building of pride and self-esteem
- improvement of Aboriginal people's future employment prospects through ASDP work
- Aboriginal staff numbers should reflect the demography of the Alice Springs population
- appropriateness and authenticity of Aboriginal people presenting Aboriginal culture
- a need to improve Aboriginal wellbeing and livelihoods through employment and income
- greater support with existing staff workloads.

All interviewees identified challenges for achieving and maintaining higher Aboriginal employment percentages. In contrast to those who identified that more staff were needed to cope with work loads, several interviewees said there was not enough work available for additional staff to do at the ASDP. However, they saw potential for an expanded ASDP role in Alice Springs and in the region's national parks, which would generate a need for increased numbers of ASDP staff.



100. Yes definitely, there should be more Aboriginal people here. Not just from the local community but also from the wider community as well. They should have involvement in the Park ... I encourage and tell the young fellas: "If you come to the Park you get skills. What could be better than an Aboriginal person interpreting his or her own country?" It brings self-esteem. If you have pride in yourself and what you are you feel it in your heart. It fulfils you as a person. The hard part is getting over that first barrier of talking to people. That's difficult. Why should someone else talk about Dreaming stories and they're not even Aboriginal people? We could stop that by us doing it. (D Taylor, Guide, 31/10/07)

Challenges identified by interviewees for increased Aboriginal employment at the ASDP included getting applicants through interviews,¹⁰¹ developing a work ethic among local Aboriginal people,¹⁰² and achieving consistency in attendance.¹⁰³ Strategies to improve Aboriginal employment that were identified by Aboriginal interviewees included:

- stronger links between Aboriginal communities and the ASDP so community people learn of the ASDP as a potential employer
- getting work experience through Green Corps or similar programs
- instruction and support in job application and interview processes
- support for new staff in overcoming shyness to give them greater confidence in speaking with visitors
- training new staff about time management and priority setting in relation to other life interests (e.g. going to bed early, alarm clocks, getting to work on time)
- training for consistency of attendance
- presence of staff who are mates to stimulate work ethic and commitment
- strong support from training officers and peer trainees
- professional network and training between ASDP staff, and Aboriginal NRETAS rangers and Aboriginal community rangers.

Four younger Aboriginal interviewees emphasised the importance of pre-employment pathways into the ASDP, either through school or training programs.

Significantly, three of the Aboriginal staff (all >40 years old) argued for the need to improve Aboriginal employment across all government and non-government sectors. They stated that, compared to other work roles, rangers and national park and protected area management were ideally suited to the socio-

101. Interviews are the worst. If it's hard to understand what the questions mean, it's not comfortable, they're the hardest thing. You feel uncomfortable, that can be a big threat. (Anon, junior ASDP staff member)



102. [Doug and I] were thinking, "How come there are no locals here?" ... [There is a] lack of knowledge of a work ethic. It's not enough to employ someone, educate him, he needs a work ethic. Up at 8, put your watch on, brush your teeth, brush your hair, put your uniform on. Don't stay out drinking until two in the morning. That's just a common-sense work ethic. That's why all the on-the-job training is really good. I was a job trainee, and you got your friends saying, "Come on, let's go man." You can encourage one another. That's what we used to do at Mutitjulu. Keep telling them about the time because it always goes back to time. Give them a watch. Buy them a watch, because they're not used to time. They go by the shadows. So get them into the swing. (L Lester, Guide, 21/11/07)



103. [How to get more Aboriginal staff employed at the Desert Park?] This is where it gets hard because attendances are a really valuable thing in government – your attendance. They [new employees] could do courses to see what their attendance is like, if they are dedicated to work. Or if, like me, they gave me a three-month contract to see how I went. It depends how the person himself does. (A Baird, Horticulture Trainee, 13/05/08)

cultural context and experiences of many Aboriginal people in central Australia. Vince Forrester expressed the most refined and visionary proposal. He suggested that the ASDP be a hub for a ranger training network that linked Aboriginal rangers from national parks and community lands.¹⁰⁴

While Aboriginal interviewees identified strategies that the ASDP and other agencies could implement to improve ASDP Aboriginal employment, most interviewees also referred to the need for individuals to take personal responsibility for their own ongoing employment to complement the work-based processes and support. Several said that the Aboriginal employment percentage at the ASDP would be best maintained by working on better staff retention and countering the relatively high Aboriginal staff turnover.

4. Discussion

The Alice Springs Desert Park, a small government entity, demonstrated a concerted, multi-faceted and sustained approach to improvements in Aboriginal employment. It drew upon and extended key strategies outlined within the NT Government Indigenous Employment and Career Development Strategy (NTG 2006). It was seen as an example of best practice within the NTG. Its recent establishment as a business unit with relatively autonomous management allowed for this innovation. There was also consistency of the ASDP Aboriginal employment program with current NT Government priorities (c. 2005–2010), for example, the ASDP was taking account of the aspirations of Aboriginal people in the development or evolution of employment programs. The NTG Indigenous Employment Toolkit (NTG 2005) drew upon that compiled by the Park. These toolkits not only identified ‘what works’, but also identified barriers to employment and ways to minimise them, including reasonable assistance with home–work transitions such as transport.

The Park’s articulated policy was of a workforce that included and integrated both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The aim and general practice was for all staff in an organisational section to work together on a day-to-day basis, and to work cooperatively with other sections as required. At the same time, Park management identified which of its staff were Aboriginal for purposes of policy, legal matters, funding, and affirmative action, such as supporting staff with particular issues impacting on their employment. A delicate balance had to be maintained between inclusiveness and difference.

Interviewees commented that having Aboriginal employees in a work team generally improved the satisfaction of non-Aboriginal employees. Thus Aboriginal employment outcomes have flow-on benefits across the workforce. The prior cross-cultural experience of non-Aboriginal staff at the Park contributed to their capacity to work with Aboriginal staff and to their effectiveness at being part of an inclusive workplace. This experience engenders non-Aboriginal people’s capacity for self-reflection about their cross-cultural capability and relationships, which is important for an inclusive workplace. Cross-cultural training of non-Aboriginal staff was not enough in itself to ensure this. Similarly, in the



104. You’ve got to train your rangers ... have a block release, four weeks out at Simpson’s Gap, King’s Canyon. Bring the Devil’s Marbles mob [community ranger group] – bring all those young people together, so you know who you talk to on the phone, you work together and you’ve got the same objective, get more unified in the whole approach. Get a budget of \$5 or 6 million over three years to put this mob through training. Then there is a big mob of people to draw upon. At the moment, they’re having problems recruiting staff in the East Macs. [With] my idea you can have that whole resource ... They’ve got the resources there – whether it be physical resources or human resources. [For example] I need to know more about the death adder – “Right, Hughie, you’re in charge of the death adder, come over and you give us a bit of a talk”, it might be just for an hour or two. You want to know more about the bilby habitat – you got the zoos here [at ASDP]. Or this plant ... Just bring them experts in. You’ve got your human and physical resources – you’ve got classrooms, you’ve got DVDs, you’ve got access to people coming in and out of town. Surely if David Attenborough comes along, you’d get all those young people to listen to him for an hour. (V Forrester, Guide, 5/3/08)

mining sector, cultural awareness training alone has been found to be insufficient to improve relations between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal staff (Tiplady & Barclay 2007a). Culturally competent people are required to communicate effectively, including with local families in the community.

ASDP employment was most straightforward for those Aboriginal employees who had bicultural expertise, derived from experiences on their custodial lands, together with education and/or employment in urban settings. Strong Aboriginal ecological knowledge was a basis for good public interpretation of Aboriginal culture, the original business purpose for ASDP Aboriginal employment. However, experience in non-Aboriginal workplaces was also an advantage, as ASDP employment required compliance with NTG standards and procedures.

The Park was an important venue for Aboriginal staff to learn, revise or revive Aboriginal ecological knowledge. The engagement of young people with elders as mentors was singled out as a positive feature in training. The practical work of Park employees contributed to the ecological and cultural protection of specific sites within the Park and off park through 'community extension' projects. ASDP also provided a context in which Aboriginal staff could learn about western ecological understandings and science-derived perspectives.

The workplace and organisational processes of the ASDP have been effective in maintaining its Aboriginal employment target and in completing apprenticeships at a significant rate, especially given the small size of the organisation. The strong focus on learning in the ASDP has been important to the satisfaction of Aboriginal employees. Nevertheless, the relatively high turnover of Aboriginal staff indicates that retaining staff continues to present problems, requiring ASDP to regularly invest effort in recruitment. Various factors contribute to low retention. They affect different Aboriginal people differently, depending on their age, career stage and aspirations. One factor is the time trade-offs made by Aboriginal people between work schedules and family, community and cultural interests and commitments. Frustrations expressed by Aboriginal staff, particularly older people, about low recognition in pay scales for Aboriginal cultural knowledge and authority are also pertinent to their decisions about continuing employment. Low pay scales in apprenticeship positions, which affect younger employees as well as some mature-aged people, are frustrating. Difficulties associated with progression through career paths in a small organisation are also relevant, particularly for older staff with a strong knowledge base from Aboriginal culture. Balancing this, there is some evidence that Aboriginal people with strong employment experience from the ASDP are in demand for other employment and that ASDP managers work effectively to support such career transitions.

Other factors that inhibit ASDP's retention of Aboriginal staff are related to the high degree of disengagement by many younger Aboriginal people from the culture of work in a non-Aboriginal dominated government institution like the ASDP. The ASDP workplace is very intimidating to young Aboriginal people with low self-esteem (Clarkson 2005; c. 2007, p. 3). Through pre-employment programs and then through ASDP employment, some individuals have been willing and/or able to bridge the differences between the workplace and their own cultural setting and behaviours. Others have not. It is notable that the younger Aboriginal people who were on staff in 2007–08 had on average achieved higher levels of education than is typical for their age cohort in central Australia (see Section 3.3), while the older people among the current and former staff interviewed had well-developed cultural knowledge and strong work experience. Such records of achievement are likely to be important for effective engagement with the demands of the ASDP workplace.

Career transitions and pathways were apparent from the ASDP to other arenas of cultural and natural resource management. The efforts of ASDP managers to support these transitions are consistent with Taylor's (2006) recommendations that coordinated regional approaches are required to increase Aboriginal recruitment and retention and promote Aboriginal employment. The natural resource management sector and cultural tourism sectors that the ASDP operates in are well suited to the skills, interests and experience of Aboriginal people (Gerritsen 2007; Sithole et al. 2008; Hunt et al.

2009). The psycho-social benefits that ASDP Aboriginal staff report from their work (e.g. confidence, stimulation) indicated personal wellbeing was enhanced and these benefits have been identified elsewhere from Aboriginal engagement in natural resource programs (Burgess et al. 2005; Hunt et al. 2009; Davies, Campbell et al. 2010).

Due to difficulties in engaging with a wide cross-section of past ASDP Aboriginal employees, this study was not able to establish the extent to which Aboriginal people applied their ASDP workplace experience in management of their custodial lands. A number of Aboriginal employees aspired to do this and they recognised how their ASDP experience would be valuable, but they had had few opportunities to do so.

Understanding of factors that impact on staff retention and career transitions was limited by the data available for this study. Data from which to analyse the impact of employment experience in the Park on the life and career trajectories of Aboriginal people were difficult to access. One reason was the logistical difficulties of locating people who were known to be former employees and getting their interest and cooperation for involvement in the research. Another more structural reason was that there are no precise records for the total number of Aboriginal people employed over time at the ASDP; the ASDP does not keep any detailed record of past staff and NTG staff records make it difficult to identify which former NTG staff were ASDP Aboriginal employees. While Aboriginality is recorded by the NTG for statistical purposes, privacy requirements mean that information on the Aboriginality status of individual employees is confidential. Indeed, the parameters that are monitored for Aboriginal employment allow the number of Aboriginal employees in the NTG to be tracked over time, but little else. They do not allow questions of retention to be readily analysed (E. Ganter pers. comm. to J Davies). Yet in a situation like that of the ASDP, and in the NTG as a whole, where the aim is to grow the size of the Aboriginal workforce, it is critical to understand whether the Aboriginal people on staff are the same people over time, and how rapidly the identity of the workforce is changing. For example, retention rates impact markedly on resource requirements for recruitment and training, as well as on the overall morale of workplaces. Summary data on past Aboriginal employment at the ASDP needed to be compiled for this research by first talking with ASDP managers about their recollections of former employees and then by ASDP managers sourcing selected information from NTG staff records for those people identified by those staff as being relevant. Analysis showed that, over the seven years to 2007, most ASDP Aboriginal employees actually remained in ASDP employment for less than a year, notwithstanding the fact that 25% were employed for at least three years.

Suggestions and ideas that would improve the policies and procedures for Aboriginal employment at the ASDP are summarised in Box 1. These are derived from or in response to issues raised by ASDP staff in interviews for this research. Box 1 also presents some potential directions for applied research that would extend understanding about the effectiveness of the ASDP Aboriginal employment program and the broader role that ASDP has in regional Aboriginal employment and in Aboriginal engagement with CNRM.

Box 1: Suggestions for improvements to ASDP and NTG policies, processes and applied research for Aboriginal employment

Policies and processes for ASDP Aboriginal employment

- Develop processes to balance ASDP workplace challenges identified by Aboriginal staff: low pay levels, high demands of public role, high repetition and boredom, and extremes of outdoor conditions.
- NTG and federal governments should stabilise Aboriginal employment and apprenticeship funding programs so that ASDP staff can more readily access them.
- Greater financial and human resources should be allocated within ASDP to support on-the-job training.
- Maintain and develop internal learning environment through mentoring, training programs, certificates.
- Reinforce and expand on content and processes from which Aboriginal staff can reclaim, restore and/or apply traditional cultural knowledge.
- Maintain mix of senior and junior Aboriginal staff within guides, particularly through the retention of senior Aboriginal staff in casual positions.
- Arrange rosters and presentations for appropriate age mix and gender alignment.
- Block 43 days leave available for use by Aboriginal staff for multiple purposes, rather than division of leave into sick, special, ceremonial, etc.
- If staff are absent without explanation for extended period then follow up to find out why, what their plans are, invite them back, explain possible consequences.
- Establish a clear position that, when leave is finished, it is finished and processes for resignation or termination should be considered where the employee has already had explanations and support in attendance.
- Introduce Malparara system for guide positions so Aboriginal staff can learn of roles undertaken by non-Aboriginal staff, especially Managers.
- Retain grouping of peers/cohorts of Aboriginal employees who can provide support to each other.
- Establish periodic forums with senior cultural experts brought in to provide cultural training to younger Aboriginal staff.
- Establish a cross-cultural training course that introduces inexperienced Aboriginal people to workplace systems and expectations.
- Build a better understanding of retention and re-employment by maintaining records of all past employees (e.g. age, gender, cultural affiliation, education, including cultural expertise, prior work experience, reasons for leaving), subject to privacy requirements.
- Develop ASDP as a ranger hub to link Aboriginal rangers on regional parks and Aboriginal rangers on remote lands.
- Develop ASDP as a gateway that supports Aboriginal tourism enterprises along the Red Centre Way tourist loop from Alice to Uluru.

Applied research to extend understanding of effectiveness of ASDP, including in regional Aboriginal employment and Aboriginal engagement with CNRM

- Follow up with past staff to identify the reasons why they left Park employment.
- Follow up with past staff to identify career and life pathways since Park employment, especially related to their custodial lands.
- Interview apmère-artweye, kwertengerle and their children as to their roles and relationships to the ASDP as an institution on their custodial lands.
- Analyse trends in ASDP Aboriginal employment statistics (e.g. employee ages, subsequent employment history).
- Interview staff (current and former) and analyse differences in employment experience by age cohorts.
- Analyse financial sources from internal ASDP budgeting, and Territory and Federal sources that have supported Aboriginal employment at the ASDP, their requirements and the costs.

4.1 Application of the IEE Tool

The IEE Tool was found to be a useful framework to guide the structure and analysis in some, but not all, parts of this research. It was also useful as a tool to understand stages and elements behind the effectiveness of the ASDP employment practices with their strengths and weaknesses. The IEE Tool was most useful in relation to interviews with ASDP managers about the effectiveness of ASDP Aboriginal employment practices. It was least congruent with the opinions of Aboriginal staff.

Aboriginal staff identified a series of factors that support Aboriginal employment and retention that were not addressed in the IEE Tool. The highly prescriptive approach of the IEE Tool sits in contrast to the findings from this research that emphasised the need for a flexible approach to Aboriginal employment that was responsive to the needs of individuals, based on values of learning, trust, and open and honest communication (Clarkson 2005; Commonwealth of Australia 2007).

Nevertheless, many of the processes for Aboriginal employment in the ASDP are comparable in general terms to those recommended by the IEE Tool for mining companies and mine sites. There are, however, two clear differences:

1. When compared to the workplace and organisational processes set out in the IEE Tool, ASDP puts more emphasis on relationship-based management and less emphasis on formal systems of monitoring and auditing of progress in reaching Aboriginal employment targets. For example, interviews with ASDP managers did not identify any monitoring or use of Aboriginal employment targets as a measure of personnel performance and/or in staff reward and remuneration systems, such as are identified in the IEE Tool as being important to relevant staff accountable for Aboriginal employment. A significant factor here is that human resource management at the ASDP operates within NT public sector workplace practices and agreements. The recent NTG strategy to increase Aboriginal employment and retention recommends that Aboriginal employment outcomes be incorporated into business planning, workforce strategies and the performance reviews of executive officers and senior managers (NTG 2010). While the ASDP has demonstrably been managing well in Aboriginal employment without such monitoring, its sustained Aboriginal employment remains contingent on key individuals in management and emergent policy. Private sector experience, particularly in the mining industry (Tiplady & Barclay 2007a, 2007b), has shown the importance of embedding accountability for Aboriginal employment outcomes into the human resource management systems of organisations. Arguably, implementing such changes in overall NT public sector employment processes and practices is important to address its considerable challenges in building effective Aboriginal employment in a coherent and sustained way (E Ganter pers. comm. to J Davies).

ASDP management recognised the importance of periodic review of its Aboriginal employment program. However, the kinds of formalised monitoring processes that the IEE Tool recommends as important, such as keeping records of all past employees, were not being systematically implemented in the Park. The lack of emphasis on formal monitoring and evaluation processes in the ASDP compared to the IEE Tool is not unexpected, given that the ASDP has smaller staff and management resources than would be expected at most mine sites. Scarce financial resources of the ASDP are arguably better allocated to supporting more Aboriginal employees, mentoring, training and cross-cultural exchanges than to reporting and monitoring systems. However, as discussed above, the NTG human resources management processes that ASDP operates could address such issues better than they apparently do.

2. The workplace context of the ASDP is different from that in the mining company and mine site workplaces at which the IEE Tool is targeted. The workplace context of the ASDP generated the business case for Aboriginal employment in interpreting Aboriginal culture so as to provide accurate and authentic information and experiences for Park visitors. This cultural interpretation role is foundational to many of the employment practices that are particularly valued by Aboriginal staff, such as culturally appropriate mentoring for Aboriginal guides. This, together with scientific knowledge underpinning the display and management of the natural environment displays in the Park, also underpins the wide engagement of Aboriginal people in various roles in the Park, which in turn contributes to positive employment experiences for Aboriginal staff.

4.2 Three concurrent pathways supporting Aboriginal employment at the ASDP

The elements of the workplace context of the Park that have been developed by park managers and other key individuals in ways that support Aboriginal employment form two pathways for effective Aboriginal employment at the ASDP that are additional to the IEE Tool pathway. One pathway was about Aboriginal culture and the steps to interpret and present Aboriginal culture that was available and facilitated through the ASDP. The other major pathway related to the different roles of Aboriginal people within and around the Park, especially the initial step of traditional owner engagement. Stages and elements in the three pathways are shown in Table 13. They are brought together in Figure 18, with the IEE Tool pathway in the middle, paralleled by the culture and Aboriginal community engagement pathways on the left and right sides of the diagram.

The foundation in the ASDP for each of the three pathways in Figure 18 is recognition by ASDP management and Aboriginal staff that the land within the Park is Arrernte customary lands, notwithstanding that title is held by the NTG and that native title has been extinguished (see top of diagram, Figure 18). This recognition of customary authority demonstrates consistency with deeply entrenched Aboriginal cultural protocols in which there is deference to traditional owners of specific areas of ‘country’. It establishes a foundation for Aboriginal employees to feel comfortable and develop confidence in the work environment of the Park. This presents a major contrast to the pathways and elements that the IEE Tool presents as important to effective Aboriginal employment and that are focused almost exclusively around corporate processes and accountabilities. Some companies in the mining sector do certainly recognise that the socio-cultural context of their relationships with Aboriginal people is wider than employment and have made investments in community projects or preferential contracting to Aboriginal groups (Taylor & Scambary 2005). Further, the provisions of the IEE Tool do also recognise that Indigenous Land Use Agreements and other agreements with Aboriginal parties that relate to a mine site need to be taken into account in employment practices. Nevertheless, their dominant focus is on the employment practices themselves and supporting policies and corporate processes.

Table 13: Pathways, stages and key elements for Aboriginal employment outcomes at the Alice Springs Desert Park

Pathway	Stage	Key elements important to managers and non-Aboriginal staff	Key elements important to Aboriginal staff (elements that need improvement are in italics)
Underpinning	Land tenure and history	Recent establishment of the organisation allows for innovation	<i>Respect for and recognition of prior Arrernte custodianship of land</i> - The Park as a place of cultural significance
IEE Tool	Leadership	Long-term, sustained approach with clear overview of strategic objectives	<i>No co-governance by relevant skilled Aboriginal people</i>
	Planning	- Designated Aboriginal positions - Realistic Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal staff ratios	<i>Critical mass of Aboriginal employees</i>
	Pre-vocational stage (part of implementation in IEE Tool)	Networks, partnerships and strategic alliances with pre-employment agencies	Pre-employment experience of recruits
	Implementation processes	- Application and recruitment support - Relationship-based management style - Workplace teams with mixed personality balance - Key individuals important - Mentoring by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff - Non-segregated workplace except where affirmative action required - Home-to-work support	- Application and recruitment support <i>Application of customary socio-cultural organisation within the workplace (i.e. seniority, gender, localness – either traditional owners or related to traditional owners)</i> - Sustained support of key individuals - Learning and training opportunities - Natural and outdoor workplace environment <i>Task diversity</i> - Good relationships with non-Aboriginal staff and managers <i>Recognition of prior learning for prior cultural expertise and knowledge</i> <i>Relative pay levels</i>
	Progress	- Retain good staff - Encourage past staff to return - Non-Aboriginal staff commitment to Aboriginal employment	Career pathways in and outside the Park
	Performance monitoring	- Outreach to absent staff - Encouragement to resign not terminate - Exit interviews	
Aboriginal culture		Origin and purpose centred on accurate and authentic interpretations of cultural landscapes	- Aboriginal cultural interpretation within workplace <i>Strong learning and training opportunities especially in Aboriginal culture</i> - Interpretation of natural environment, plants, animals, habitats
Aboriginal role diversity		- Proactive inclusion of Aboriginal people in multiple roles beyond employment - Apmereke-artweye right of veto powers	- Genuine consultation with apmerek-artweye, respect for them, their power of veto <i>Cross-reinforcement by other Aboriginal roles in Park</i>

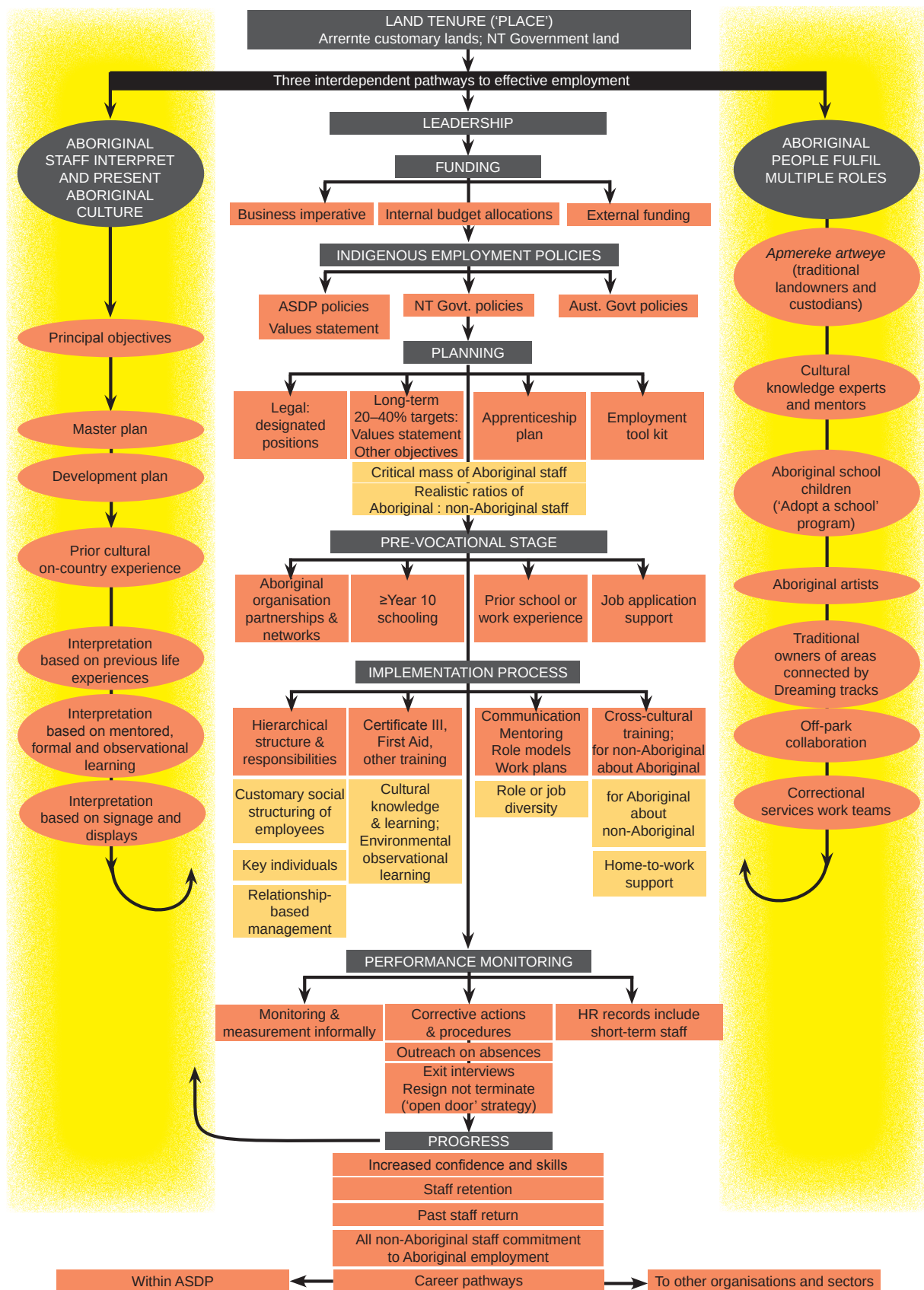


Figure 18: Summary of Alice Springs Desert Park Aboriginal employment pathways and elements

4.3 Transferability of ASDP experiences

The workplace context and business purpose of the ASDP have a clear and distinctive relationship to Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal values about place and the natural environment. This presents some conceptual challenges for the transferability of the Aboriginal employment experience of the ASDP. Yet the ASDP approach is fundamentally similar to the approach of many other leading corporate and government agencies in that they are embedding Aboriginal employment in a broader set of actions and processes that are directed at reconciliation between their business and Aboriginal people. These efforts indicate that key elements that have been important in ASDP's attractiveness to Aboriginal employees, such as a collaborative relationship with traditional owners; engagement with Aboriginal community groups, artists and schools; and alliances with Aboriginal organisations for pre-employment programs do not depend on organisations having a business purpose that has as close a relationship as the ASDP does with Aboriginal culture. Rather, the wide engagement between Aboriginal community groups and the ASDP is paralleled in the corporate sector and other government agencies by sponsorships, community projects and educational outreach that are re-shaping their public profile and business practices to be inclusive of Aboriginal people. Leading examples include those organisations engaged in Reconciliation Australia's reconciliation action planning (Reconciliation Australia 2009).

Within the NTG, important opportunities to learn from the ASDP experience include appreciation that Aboriginal perspectives or 'Aboriginal culture' are pertinent even within 'mainstream' functions such as education, where there are Aboriginal ways of teaching and Aboriginal content that, when empowered, can promote Aboriginal community engagement with schools and with literacy education (Douglas 2011). Another lesson from the ASDP experience is that Aboriginal people are not simply potential employees or clients, but are people with multiple skills and expertises who can be involved in diverse roles within a sector.

More general lessons for Aboriginal employment from the ASDP experience that are supported by literature from the public and private sector as applicable in a wide range of contexts are summarised in Box 2.

Box 2: Lessons from ASDP experience with Aboriginal employment that are widely applicable

- Take a long-term view and approach to Aboriginal employment and have a clear overview of the strategic objectives.
- Present a strong business case for Aboriginal employment: this is seen as being essential for improved outcomes.
- Ensure Aboriginal people have the opportunity and support to be able to engage effectively and in culturally secure ways and that the workplace values cultural knowledge and cross-cultural respect.
- Have a strong organisational commitment to Aboriginal employment: an inclusive culture, people with a shared purpose who are enthusiastic and passionate about making a difference.
- Build a two-way understanding of Aboriginal culture and workplace culture.
- Ensure core values are articulated regularly by the leaders and that actions are consistent with this message. Aboriginal employment needs to be seen as core business; there needs to be a focus on cultural diversity and regular and honest communication in the workplace about these values.
- Build a broad understanding of Aboriginal employment throughout the workplace and commitment among staff to take the extra step, 'whatever is needed' to achieve the outcomes.
- Develop a workplace culture that both encourages Aboriginal people's input and development, and enriches the development of non-Aboriginal staff, by encouraging creativity and innovation in practices to meet targets in employment.
- Develop flexible and innovative ways of working, for example, informal approaches to promote employment opportunities through personal networks, community groups, Aboriginal elders.
- Have positions designated as positions for Aboriginal people and a 'critical mass' of these.
- Set targets in Aboriginal employment and have targets that, over time, relate to the demographic of the local community.
- Have a diverse range of opportunities within the organisation and career pathways, and links to other organisations/ related sectors for pre-employment programs, learning and career development opportunities. Monitor people's career progress and present opportunities that can assist people with career progression.
- Adopt an approach that is based on learning, receiving feedback and being responsive to feedback to improve practices. Consider diverse learning styles and needs.
- Build relationships with the Aboriginal community. Provide opportunity for broader Aboriginal involvement in the organisation, and keep in regular contact with senior Aboriginal people in the community.
- Have a strategic approach to Equal Employment Opportunity and Human Resource Management and flexible processes and practices. Ensure there is a focus on pre-employment and work-readiness opportunities, have a 'buddy' system for new employees, and cultural mentoring with senior people who provide intergenerational transfer of knowledge. Incorporate cultural leave into leave provisions.
- When employees leave, celebrate that the workplace has provided opportunities for them to develop skills, confidence and pride, and that they leave with greater employability. Find out what factors have contributed to their leaving and any learning for the workplace from this, for example, in terms of strategies to improve retention.
- Monitor strategies with a view to ongoing improvement.
- Work to ensure that funding levels are responsive to the realities of local requirements. Long-term funding is important to an effective strategic approach.

Source: Adapted from review of this research report by Margaret Johnson, J2 Consulting

5. Conclusions

Australian Federal, State and Territory governments and the private sector have introduced a range of policies and programs to address Aboriginal disadvantage and improve employment outcomes for Aboriginal people. While the available literature in this field has contributed enhanced understanding of policy and program initiatives to increase the level of Aboriginal employment, there is limited literature available that evaluates the outcomes of these initiatives. Within the evaluation literature there is also little evidence of the voice of Aboriginal people in their opinions of their employment. Evaluation and Aboriginal opinions are both important, given commitments made by the public and private sectors to improve employment outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Relatively high levels of Aboriginal employment at the Alice Springs Desert Park had been sustained for more than a decade. This study analysed the strategies and steps that contributed to these employment outcomes. It also sought to identify the prior and post-employment implications for cultural and natural resource management on Aboriginal lands. And it aimed to identify the applicability of the ASDP experience to other organisations and sectors. The analysis of interviews with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff of the Alice Springs Desert Park was complemented by observation of Park staff interactions and visitor interactions.

It was found that the creation of a 'place' recognised to be on Aboriginal custodial land (although now owned by the Northern Territory Government) was the foundation upon which the Park built its interpretation of Aboriginal culture, its employment of Aboriginal staff, and its involvement of Aboriginal people in the Park in multiple roles. This combined approach of the ASDP to Aboriginal employment, along three pathways, underpinned the Park's relatively good Aboriginal employment outcomes.

One pathway was about the interpretation and presentation of desert Aboriginal culture, especially Arrernte culture, and its relation to desert environments. This interpretation pathway included action planning and documented planning steps and then the recruitment of Aboriginal staff to interpret and present Aboriginal culture. Aboriginal staff were skilled as interpretative guides principally through their life experience, but they also learnt through mentored and observational learning and trained through Certificate courses. Aboriginal staff placed a strong emphasis upon learning about traditional and contemporary cultural and ecological knowledge to extend themselves both professionally and personally. Aboriginal staff were important contributors to the Park's interpretative materials.

A second pathway was framed by processes akin to those set out in the IEE Tool (Tiplady & Barclay 2007a) developed for use in the mining industry and derived from a business planning model. Within the ASDP this pathway was applied through strong leadership by senior managers. There was funding from internal allocations and external sources. Inclusiveness in the workforce was a core value articulated in policy. Policy also made a commitment to social outcomes through Aboriginal employment and improving cross-cultural understanding. Strategic planning steps particularly identified legally designated Aboriginal positions, relatively high targets for the proportion of staff who were Aboriginal, and a critical mass of Aboriginal staff. Park managers and Aboriginal employees placed a high emphasis on pre-employment training and developmental processes for potential Aboriginal employees. Strategic alliances with Aboriginal organisations were seen as essential enablers and contributors to these. At the ASDP, implementation was the most important part of the business planning pathway for Aboriginal employment that is represented by the IEE Tool. Implementation was supported by an Indigenous Employment Toolkit developed for the Park that included procedures for recruitment, induction and training. As well as planning, a 'just do it' ethos was strongly supported by Aboriginal staff and most managers. Performance monitoring was followed for individual staff and the importance of a periodic review was recognised for the Aboriginal employment program as a whole. Compared to the processes set out in the IEE Tool, the ASDP and NTG placed less emphasis on formal processes of accountability

of managerial staff for Aboriginal employment outcomes and on monitoring indicators of employment. Understanding turnover of Aboriginal employees, as well as re-employment of former employees after a period away from the workplace, was difficult in the absence of such monitoring and yet is important to the sustainability of Aboriginal employment programs, especially where targets for Aboriginal employment are increasing as they are at the ASDP.

The third strategic pathway found to improve Aboriginal recruitment and retention at the Park involved Aboriginal people in multiple roles other than as employees. Apmereke-artweye were the most important of these roles. Aboriginal cultural experts, mentors and artists brought stronger cultural expertise into the Park. The Park management strategically sought to engage with Aboriginal people through off-Park extension activities around tourism, wildlife introductions and bush medicine gardens on or near distant Aboriginal communities. This potentially improved employment levels and community standing. It also has some congruence with Aboriginal perceptions of the Park's land area being linked through Dreaming tracks to distant places.

While improved Aboriginal employment was an objective of the Park, this study found that Park managers and Aboriginal staff consistently wanted 'more than a job'. The ASDP program enriched Aboriginal people's lives as well as improving employment outcomes. The findings also showed an apparent contribution to Aboriginal employment elsewhere in the region, particularly since the ASDP provided a stepping stone for some employees to the tourism and national park sectors. However, further tracking of the careers of past employees is required to more clearly substantiate this.

In comparison to Aboriginal employment studies from the mining sector, it is the first and third pathways that appear to be unique to the ASDP and are poorly recognised in the IEE Tool developed for the mining sector and used in this research. Although the workplace context of the ASDP, with its core business purpose of interpreting Aboriginal culture, is very different from most other workplaces, key elements of the third strategic pathway that supports ASDP employment are applicable in many other corporate and government contexts. Indeed, they are being developed in organisations that are approaching Aboriginal employment as a part of a much broader agenda of Aboriginal reconciliation. A wide number of other practices and processes for Aboriginal employment that are important in the ASDP experience also have applicability in other organisations and sectors.

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Appendix 1: Staff notice informed consent form

WORKING AT THE ALICE SPRINGS DESERT PARK – WORKING ON COUNTRY ACTIVITY WITHIN LIVELIHOODS INLAND™ PROJECT, OCTOBER 2007 – OCTOBER 2008

I am from CSIRO and Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre in Alice Springs. My name is Fiona Walsh.

I would like to talk with you about working at the Desert Park (see attached summary).

I will ask you, if we can take photographs, videos or make tape recordings.

Drafts of material to be publicly circulated will be sent to you for comments, changes, deletions or corrections.

You may choose to be cited anonymously or by personal name.

You may want to say some things but remain unidentified. We will respect confidentiality when you request it.

We also ask if we can forward information from interviews to a colleague for use in Livelihood modelling (see attached summary).

If you do not want to take part in this work you do not have to. You do not have to sign this form. You may withdraw from the project at anytime.

Contacts:

Fiona Walsh, CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, Alice Springs, Ph: 08 8950 7100

Gary Fry, Alice Springs Desert Park, 08 8951 8713

Complaints or concerns:

Jocelyn Davies, CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, Alice Springs, Ph: 08 8950 7100

Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee, Alice Springs, Ph: 08 8951 5844

PTO

I have read/heard an explanation of the project - **YES NO**

I will help with it – **YES NO**

My interview information can be used in the livelihood modelling
YES NO

My photo can be taken and used in publications & presentations
YES NO

I want to be cited in papers and reports as –
anonymous personal name (please circle)

The name I want used is _____

Signed: _____ *Date* _____

My address is _____

My phone number is _____

Do you have any questions or matters to raise? _____

Appendix 2: Interview questions

WORKING AT THE ALICE SPRINGS DESERT PARK – WORKING ON COUNTRY

Interviewee:

Date:

Interview nos:

Interview location:

Audio recorded:

Hand written record:

Overall questions

What is good about your job at the Desert Park? [what do you value about it? what works well?]

How is the Desert Park relatively effective at employing and keeping different staff?

What do you think the Desert Park values in you as an employee?

Background questions about your life before you worked for the Desert Park – Learning on country and in town

Summarise your life history i.e. where you grew up

About how much time did you spend 'out bush' in a remote settlement and traveling on country in past 10 years?

all time, $\frac{3}{4}$ time, $\frac{1}{2}$ time (heaps, >6 months/yr), $\frac{1}{3}$ time (fair bit, few weeks/yr), not much (none last year)

Did you hunt, get bush foods, learn about plants and animals? In how much detail? [e.g. language names for spp]

From who or where did you learn most about wildlife and the bush?

Previous cross-cultural experience – Non-Abl staff:

What school year did you finish? What training have you done?

What other paid jobs have you worked in?

How long have you lived in central Australia?

all your life, 15 – 25 years, 10 – 15 years, 5 – 10 years, 2 – 5 years, < 2 years

The Desert Park

What do you do at the Desert Park? What is your job here?

Section: Guides; Botany; Zoology, Management and administration

Why did you get a job at the Desert Park? Was this a place you particularly wanted to work at?

How long have you been in training and/or employment at the DPK?

<0.5 yr, 0.5 – 1yr, 1-2 yr, 2-5 yr, 5 – 10 yr, don't know, unassigned, not applicable

What is it like to work here?

If it's a good place to work, why?

When you think about these reasons more closely is it because of:

income; exercise, walking, better health; talking about culture; outdoor environment; good workmates, like visitor interaction; interesting

If you were to photograph features of the ASDP that best illustrated good aspects of your work, what would be in the photos?

Where is your favourite place at the Desert Park?

What don't you like about working at the Desert Park? or What could be done to improve work at the Desert Park so it is better?

Have you asked if these changes can be made? What happened?

Being an Aboriginal employee at the Desert Park

Do you identify yourself as an Aboriginal person?

Aboriginal Non-Aboriginal

Do you supervise or work with Aboriginal staff?

Do Aboriginal staff meet as a group?

Is there a common sense of identity?

How does the Desert Park support Aboriginal employees?

Should the Desert Park increase numbers of Aboriginal people here? Why? To what % In what roles?

What would be the best ways to do this?

What are the constraints on this?

Working at the Desert Park in the context of your wider life

In your/their wider life, what enables you to work at the Desert Park?

In your/their wider life, what factors make it hard to work at the DPk?

Is your life better or worse because of being at the DPk?

If you worked at the Desert Park and then left it, why did you leave?

Working at the Desert Park compared to at other places

Order your choice between working at the: Desert Park; Olive Pink Botanic Garden; Strehlow Museum; Granites Gold Mine, K-Mart; Commonwealth Bank

And explain them [to draw out factors that make the DPk relatively attractive or not]

If you had a choice between working at the Desert Park and working on your custodial lands which would you choose? Why? What reduces opportunities to work on your own lands?

What has been the best place you've worked? Why?

What would be your ideal work? Why?

Life on your lands/country after or in parallel to your Desert Park job

Where is your country? Where do you go out bush?

Do you spend much time there? (visit each: week, month, year)

Do you apply what you have learnt in your Desert Park job to your experiences on your custodial lands? How? Give some examples?

What do you want to do when you leave the Desert Park?

Concluding

Is there anything else that seems important to share with this research?

DKCRC Partners

