

Annual Report 2014 - 2015

DKA Annual Report 2014-15

Desert Knowledge Australia (DKA) is a statutory corporation of the Northern Territory Government established to improve harmony, sustainability and wealth creation in deserts and arid lands. DKA works across sectors and State/Territory borders to build collaboration for better ways to deal with key challenges and opportunities in desert and remote areas. We also manage the Desert Knowledge Precinct, fostering innovation and learning, and promoting investment and development of desert Australia.

Under new leadership, 2014-15 has been a year of review, planning and improvement for Desert Knowledge Australia. The NT Government commissioned a review of DKA operations in 2013-14 provided an opportunity for DKA to analyse and improve operations, contracts and organisational structure.

Desert Knowledge Australia Board

The NT Government appointed a new Interim Board to DKA commencing in August 2014. This Board was tasked with developing a new Strategic Plan for DKA, building on the success and lessons of the past 10 years. To do this the Board needed to quickly understand DKA's existing operations, analyse the outcomes of the Review and ensure that the direction of DKA was consistent with the NT Government's development objectives. In June 2015 the Minister for Business, The Hon. Mr Peter Styles received and supported DKA's new Strategic Plan for 2015-18.

The Interim Board of DKA consists of five members:

Ken Johnson (Chair)



Ken moved to the Northern Territory in 1978 as a wildlife research scientist involving biological survey and conservation programs over broad areas on the Northern Territory. Much of this work was done in cooperation with traditional Aboriginal land owners on their lands.

He became Regional Director of Parks and Wildlife in 1991 responsible for the southern half of the NT and also led the team that planned and developed the Alice Springs Desert Park.

Ken transferred to the Department of the Chief Minister in 2001 where he led the early work in establishing Desert Knowledge Australia, and became its CEO from 2003 – 2006. In this time he led the team that planned the Desert Knowledge Precinct.

He is currently the Principal of a sole trader consultancy business, *Desert Connections*.

Ken has a PhD and Bachelor of Rural Science and holds an Order of Australia, Member in the General Division (2008).

Bob Liddle (Deputy Chair)



Bob has a long history in the resources sector, and has been an articulate advocate for empowering Indigenous people. With experience in legislature, environmental planning, strategic negotiations and land access and application approval processes, Bob brings a wealth of experience to the Board.

In 2013 Bob was honoured on the Queen's Birthday List, after a career spent bridging the gap between Aboriginal communities and mining and resource companies.

Scott Lovett



Scott is currently Regional Executive Director, Southern Region for the Department of Chief Minister based in Alice Springs, Northern Territory. Scott leads a team responsible for driving and facilitating social and economic growth initiatives throughout the Central Australia region.

Previous to his current role Scott was Director of Business Events for Tourism NT. This role linked business, community, academia and government through the business events sector. Prior to this role at Tourism NT, Scott was General Manager SA, NT and WA for Staging Connections, a global full service event production company.

Scott has also held senior roles in convention centres and hotels across Australia. He is a current board member of the NT Major Events Company. He is also a past board member at the Australian Association of Convention Bureaux and Meetings Events Australia.

Neil Ross



Neil was born and raised in Alice Spring and has been a shareholder and director of Ross Engineering in Alice Springs since 1983.

He was part of the Centralian executive of the Northern Territory Chamber of Commerce and Industry for over 10 years, serving 3 years as the Chairman from 2000 to 2003. In that role he also served as a board member of the NT Chamber of Commerce.

He was a member of the Charles Darwin University Council from 2004 until 2010 and was on the University's Finance Risk and Review committee, and later the Finance and Infrastructure Development committee.

Mr Ross was the chairman of the Alice Springs Economic Development Committee in 2010-2011 and had previously served on the board of Footprints Forward which preceded the Aboriginal Employment Strategy.

A member and past president of the Rotary Club of Alice Springs he continues to be involved in events such as the Bangtail Muster and Henley on Todd.

Paul Ah Chee



Over the past 20 years Paul has been developing his capacity to contribute efficiently and effectively within the community, with a particular focus on the engagement of Indigenous Australians within the community. His goal is to see Indigenous Australians able to be economically self-sufficient and able to make choices about their future and day to day living.

Paul is currently the Director of the Alice Springs Desert Park. He has held a number of appointments to national boards and committees including the National Collection Council Australia Board, the Australian International Cultural Council Board, Indigenous Tourism Leadership Group, NT Indigenous Economic Development Committee, the South Australian Museum Board and the Australian Tourism Commission Board.

New Strategic focus

Using information and feedback gathered through research and stakeholder engagement, the Board of DKA has set six strategic focus areas:

Energy

Central Australia, and more broadly the Northern Territory, is nationally and internationally recognised for its knowledge and innovative use of Solar in providing energy solutions to towns and communities.

DKA's goal is to work collaboratively with research bodies, service providers and Governments to create an integrated, multidisciplinary systems approach to overcoming critical barriers in order to advance energy technology, supply and distribution across the remote desert regions of Australia.

There is significant opportunity to export this technology and knowledge to other remote regions of the Asia Pacific. DKA currently is working to establish a Centre for Isolated Power Systems as a first step towards the establishment of an Energy Hub at the Desert Knowledge Precinct.

Desert Knowledge Precinct

The Desert Knowledge Precinct is a hub for complementary and like-minded organisations and businesses to be located together, working independently and in partnerships, to help each other achieve their goals.

The Precinct includes a well-established solar demonstration facility, the Desert Knowledge Australia Solar Centre, and hosts several organisations such as Desert Knowledge Australia, Centre for Appropriate Technology, Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education, CSIRO and Ninti One.

DKA is working to further develop the Precinct by actively seeking new development and partnership opportunities that will maximise the collaborative and partnership opportunities for DKA and the other members' onsite and; enhance the local, national and international profile of the Precinct.

Intercultural Leadership

A focus on leadership development within remote communities is a step towards a healthier, more productive and sustainable future for Aboriginal people living remotely on their homelands.

Intercultural leadership has been a focus of DKA's for many years. Building on successful programs such as the Alice Springs Youth and Adult leadership programs previously run by DKA, we are now working to help build appropriate leadership capacity in remote communities through governance support and practical applications.

remoteFOCUS

Recognising the unique economic, social and environmental conditions encountered in remote Australia, remoteFOCUS is a broad initiative endeavouring to build more effective engagement between government structures and regional centres, and improve governance structures and the level of governance capacity within desert regions. We aim to do this by working with communities to enhance leadership and governance capacity and by working collaboratively with government, informing remote policy development and implementation.

Facilitation for Collaboration

DKA is uniquely placed to provide independent rigorous facilitation services to collaborative efforts, aligned with our vision and strategic goals, which maximise delivery on decision making and action.

Desert Knowledge Foundation

The Desert Knowledge Foundation was established by the Board, receiving Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status allowing the entity to receive funding, otherwise unattainable, from business and industry to conduct research which enables DKA to better achieve against its programs. After many years of effort the DKF was finally established in Oct 2013. It is DKA's goal to employ the DKF in supporting scientific research programs and to source new funding opportunities.

DKA Activities

The focus of 2014-15 has been in strategically and operationally rebuilding DKA. The previous CEO, Mr John Huigen, ended his employment on 11 July 2014 and the new Interim Board was instated in August that year. In September 2014, at the first meeting of the new Board, Mr Paul Davis was confirmed as the Acting CEO, supported by a small team of remaining staff to work through what was a transitional phase.

In February 2015 Mr Davis resigned and left DKA for personal reasons and the organisation has been effectively operating without a CEO since then.

The Board considered it critically important to achieve certainty of direction and funding support from the NT Government as a first step. It worked with the Department of Business, the Department of the Chief Minister and other key stakeholders including Precinct members and the local community in developing a Strategic plan that is bold but realistic and consistent with Government policy and direction. With this plan the Board has secured endorsement of the Minister and received some additional funding to assist in rebuilding its operational base.

With this support the Board is now able to consider options for engaging a new CEO to continue leading the organisation.

Despite being without a CEO for half of 2014-15 the Board has been able to support the remaining and dedicated staff in making significant steps towards realising its strategic plan. Below, we proudly report the progress DKA has made through its activities this year:

1. Energy Hub

In mid-late 2014 DKA commenced discussions with a range of parties regarding the establishment of an energy research and development hub, proposed to be located on the Desert Knowledge Precinct. Parties involved in those discussions were the Power and Water Corporation, the Department of the Chief Minister, Department of Mines and Energy, the Centre for Renewable Energy at Charles Darwin University, CAT Projects, and DKA.

It was agreed that DKA would coordinate with key stakeholders to develop a position paper on the proposed Hub, with a focus on an Isolated Power Systems Centre of Excellence. The paper will be presented to the NT Government for consideration and support for development of a full business plan.

Ms Olivia Coldrey and Ms Irene Wyld of Wyld Consulting have been engaged to work with DKA in consultation with potential key stakeholders to develop the position paper. The paper is expected to be completed by the end of October 2015.

2. Desert Knowledge Precinct

To assist in building capacity for the Precinct to attract additional investment and development the Department of Business funded DKA to connect with the sewerage rising main being installed for the new Kilgariff Estate. Previously the Precinct had its own processing facility onsite. Managed by the Department of Infrastructure the works commenced in April 2015 and were completed on schedule in June.

The absence of a clear and unambiguous signage system to enable visitors to easily navigate to desired locations has been a significant issue on the Precinct. Recommendations and a visual concept to improve wayfinding on the Precinct were commissioned and presented to Precinct members at the Precinct Management Committee meeting in April 2015. Implementation of the plan is a collaborative effort between Precinct members and is expected to be finalised in 2015-16.

Funded by the Department of the Chief Minister, a review of the Precinct's property arrangements by Preston Rowe Patterson has been commissioned to provide recommendations on options for

attracting additional organisations and businesses to the Precinct and the appropriate fees and charges that might be levied by DKA.

The 73ha Desert Knowledge Precinct is densely covered with Buffel and Couch Grasses with the latter predominantly located along St Mary's Creek. Both species accumulate heavy fuel loads and present a serious fire risk to both the built infrastructure and the native trees and shrubs. Bringing Buffel and Couch grasses under control will take several years and thereafter require routine maintenance. Desert Knowledge Australia has partnered with a fellow Precinct member, the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT), to deliver Buffel and Couch management. CAT and DKA are working together to design and implement a long term strategy for the works and budget required.

DKA is also in the process of become a member of the Land for Wildlife program ensuring the Precinct has access to the best advice and support to assist in the implementation of the buffel and broader land Management of the Precinct.

In 2013-14 DKA was approached by the Hatzimihail Group, an unlisted company wishing to develop a Technology Park and an International Student Hub in the Desert Knowledge Precinct. The DKA Board agreed to continue discussions once it was in receipt of a detailed business plan. Since that time (February 2015) no further communication has been received from the Hatzimihail Group.

3. Intercultural Skills and Leadership Development

With funding provided by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Desert Knowledge Australia has commenced a program in partnership with the Central Land Council, and Central Desert Native Title Services, to develop intercultural leadership skills in Indigenous Ranger Teams. Three ranger teams (Tennant Creek, Ti Tree and Kiwirrkurra in W.A.) at various stages of development are participating in the program. By working with rangers, as well as Traditional Owner Reference Groups and other stakeholders, to identify and develop the extant and aspirational skill sets will enable rangers to perform and excel in their chosen career of Land Management. We will do this by creating awareness of the value in inter-cultural and leadership skills and empowering people to be leaders in their field using skills that allow them to negotiate between local and mainstream contexts.

An initial workshop with rangers from Ti Tree and Tennant Creek was held in May 2015 during which a range of skills and aspirations were identified. A follow up is scheduled for September 2015 following ongoing engagement with rangers, traditional owners, and other stakeholders regarding skills required and the best way to develop them.

4. Remote Focus – Ngaanyatjarra Lands, WA

In 2013 DKA facilitated a meeting of key stakeholders with interests in governance reform on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands of Western Australia. Funding was secured from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (then FaHCSIA) and the Sidney Myer Foundation for DKA to work with the Ngaanyatjarra Council Board on activities to improve governance processes. At an early stage the Ngaanyatjarra Board resolved to appoint two Independent Directors in addition to the existing representatives from each community. It was anticipated that these two Directors would provide strength in governance and assist other Directors with Board processes. DKA assisted the Board in advertising for and successfully recruiting to the two positions in October 2014, as well as providing assistance and guidance on governance matters to the Ngaanyatjarra Board and Administration during lead-up meetings.

Biennial elections to the Ngaanyatjarra Board occurred in late 2014 and led to deferral of work until July 2015. Discussions were held with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and Sidney Myer Foundation in the interim to extend the remaining project funding (originally due to expire at 30 June 2015) for a further 12 months.