



Desert Knowledge Australia  
Annual Report 2015-16





# Desert Knowledge Australia Annual Report 2015-16

Desert Knowledge Australia (DKA) is a statutory corporation of the Northern Territory Government established in 2003 to 'encourage and facilitate learning, research and sustainable economic and social development relating to deserts and arid lands.... and related purposes.' DKA has the capacity to work across sectors and State/Territory borders to develop new or improved ways to deal with key challenges and opportunities in desert and remote areas. DKA also manages the Desert Knowledge Precinct, working with its member organisations to foster innovation and learning and promote investment in and the development of desert Australia.

## Desert Knowledge Australia Board

A new full Board of DKA was appointed in April 2016 as follows:



**Mr Chris Fry**  
Chair

Chris is CEO of Indigenous Business Australia (IBA), which assists Indigenous Australians to buy their own homes, own

their own businesses and invest in commercial ventures that provide strong financial returns. He joined IBA in February 2011 after an extensive history with the National Australia Bank, working in various roles over 25 years. This saw him work and live in regional, urban and country towns around Australia.

Chris has a longstanding interest and involvement in Indigenous affairs. He was Chair of the Indigenous Land Corporation's Mossman Gorge Development Steering Committee and an inaugural board member of the Indigenous Tourism Leadership Group. He has also completed a secondment with the Miriuwung Gajerrong Corporation in Kununurra.

Chris holds a Bachelor of Agricultural Economics from the University of New England and a Masters of Applied Finance from Charles Sturt University, is a graduate of the Australian Rural Leadership Program, and is a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. He is a fellow of the Australian Institute of Banking and Finance and the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation.



**Ms Leeanne Caton**  
Deputy Chair

Leeanne is a Kalkadoon woman who grew up in Darwin. She has family and cultural connections throughout the NT, WA and Queensland.

Leeanne has worked for the Australian, Western Australian and Northern Territory Governments, as well as in the private sector. She has over 30 years' experience in Aboriginal health, education, employment, social justice, housing and economic development.

Before joining the Office of Aboriginal Affairs as Executive Director Leeanne was Managing Director of Perth-based Aboriginal owned and managed housing company Noongar Mia Mia Pty Ltd.

An Interim Board provided leadership to Desert Knowledge Australia from August 2014 until 31 March 2016. During this period, the Board made progress with the activities outlined in the DKA Strategic Plan 2015-18, endorsed in 2015 by the Minister for Business. The Interim Board of DKA consisted of six Directors:

- Dr Ken Johnson AM - Chair
- Mr Bob Liddle - Deputy Chair
- Mr Neil Ross
- Ms Ngarla Kunoth-Monks
- Mr Scott Lovett
- Mr Paul (Ngala) Ah Chee

Desert Knowledge Australia would like to sincerely thank the interim Directors for their commitment and contributions to providing a secure platform from which DKA can grow and implement its strategic goals.

## Desert Knowledge Australia Board (continued)

### Mr Paul Ah Chee (Ngala)

#### Director



Over the past 20 years Paul has been developing his capacity to contribute efficiently and effectively to 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, the Australian International Cultural Council, Indigenous Tourism Leadership Group, NT Indigenous Economic Development Committee, South Australian Museum and the Australian Tourism Commission.

Paul has served on the Desert Knowledge Australia Board since August 2014.

### Mr Dave Batic

#### Director



David has worked in the Defence and Civil aviation industry for over 35 years. Prior to taking up his current appointment as General Manager Alice Springs and Tennant Creek Airports, David was General Manager Aviation Operations at Townsville International Airport.

David holds a Bachelor of Aviation and is currently a Chartered Engineer through Engineers Australia. As part of a senior management airport corporate

development program, David completed a Graduate Certificate in Business through Southern Cross University as part of an MBA program.

Since taking up the role of General Manager Alice Springs Airport, David has also been appointed as Chairman of Tourism Central Australia, Executive Board Member of the Chamber of Commerce and President of the Alice Springs RSL.

### Mr Steve Brouwer

#### Director



Steve has been a resident of Alice Springs since 1986, and has been involved since then with building development and various commercial businesses, including an airline catering company.

Steve is Chair of the Regional Economic Development Committee, a Member of the Business Advisory Council, and Member of the Correctional Industries Advisory Council.

### Mr Jimmy Cocking

#### Director



Jimmy is an environmentalist and community leader based in Alice Springs. He is Director of the Arid Lands Environment Centre and is passionate about desert Australia.

He has a strong connection to his local community and is keen to represent the issues facing northern and central Australia.

## Desert Knowledge Australia Board (continued)

### Mr Jason Quin Director



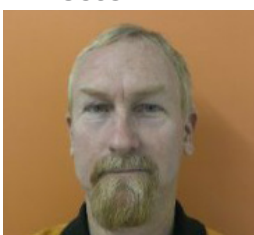
A resident of Alice Springs, Jason Quin has worked for many years to support entrepreneurship with particular focus on ventures with a social and environmental purpose.

Currently representing Many Rivers Microfinance in Central Australia, Jason is also involved in a range of local organisations including Red Hot Arts Central Australia (Chair), Alice Springs Art Foundation (President), Arid Lands Environment Centre (Public Officer) and Tamara

Cooperative/Desert Fruit Company (Director).

Previously, Jason has worked for UnLtd - the Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs (UK), the Australian Centre for Social Innovation (Adelaide), and in Alice Springs, the Centre for Appropriate Technology, the Alice Springs Beanie Festival and the Broadband for the Bush Alliance.

### Mr Rede Ogden Director



Rede started Ogden Power in 2005 and was contracted for Bushlight in 2006 installing remote off-grid power systems. He partnered with SunPower Australia in 2008 installing the largest grid connect system in Australia at Crowne Plaza Alice Springs and installed the ADES tracker at the Desert Knowledge Australia Solar Centre, the largest dual axis tracker in the southern hemisphere.

Ogden Power is now partnered with WINAICO Australia as the NT preferred supplier and is working with WINAICO to develop off-grid solutions for remote Australia.

### Mr Raymond Pratt Director



Raymond Pratt is a proud Western Arrernte man. He is the director of DICE Australia and its group of companies, including Dice Contracting, Dice Renascent and Allgrid Energy.

AllGrid Energy was established to offer renewable technology solutions to Indigenous communities and the broader domestic market. The success of

both DICE and AllGrid Energy is built firmly on Ray's commitment to a collaborative business model that enables the companies to buy, build and develop the solutions needed for sustainable regional and remote enterprise.

Ray is honoured to be a board member of AEMEE, SCTE and DKA.



## Strategic Directions

The strategic plan outlined by the DKA Board in mid-2015 continued to be implemented in 2015-16. The outline included six areas of strategic focus:

### 1. Energy

Establishing an Energy Hub at the Desert Knowledge Precinct that is a focus for research, development and industrial application for power supplies in remote areas.

### 2. Desert Knowledge Precinct

Continuing to develop the Desert Knowledge Precinct as a centre for complementary and like-minded organisations and businesses, working independently and in partnerships, to maximise the opportunities for Precinct members and enhance the local, national and international profile of the Precinct.

### 3. Intercultural Leadership

Supporting intercultural leadership has been a focus for DKA for many years, and focusing on leadership development with Aboriginal residents of remote communities is a step towards a more sustainable future for those living on their homelands.

### 4. Remote Community Engagement / remoteFOCUS

Working with communities to enhance their governance capacity and engagement with government, using the knowledge gained from the wide-ranging remoteFOCUS initiative (2008-16).

### 5. Facilitation and Collective Impact

Building on DKA's experience in facilitation and the collective impact approach, develop and provide independent rigorous facilitation services to collaborative efforts aligned with DKA's vision and strategic goals.

### 6. Desert Knowledge Foundation

Utilising the Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status of the Desert Knowledge Foundation to increase options for partnerships with business and industry to conduct research that enables DKA to better achieve its objectives.



## DKA Activities

In 2015-16 DKA focussed on rebuilding operations while implementing the Strategic Plan 2015-2018. DKA operated with a total of 4 FTE staff for most of 2015-16, with a Senior Programs Manager joining the team at the end of January 2016.

Since the departure of an Acting CEO in February 2015, the organisation has been operating without a formally appointed CEO. A CEO recruitment process was initiated in 2015, but was put on hold until DKA's long-term business and financial profile was more stable, and a new Board appointed. In the interim, DKA made significant steps towards realising its strategic plan due to the strength of a close working relationship between DKA management and the interim Board. The new Board in early 2016-17 will commence refinement of the strategic plan and begin the recruitment process for a new CEO.

### 1. Energy Hub

The vision for the Energy Hub at the Desert Knowledge Precinct is to accommodate a range of energy-related activities that are focused on improving power systems and supplies for off-grid, remote or isolated areas, which would have national and international application. To that end:

1) DKA engaged Ms Olivia Coldrey and Ms Irene Wyld of Wyld Consulting in 2015 to deliver a position paper on the option of developing a Centre of Excellence for Isolated Power Systems at the Desert Knowledge Precinct. Wyld consulted a selection of core stakeholders, including Power and Water Corporation, Indigenous Essential Services, CSIRO, the Department of the Chief Minister, the Centre for Appropriate Technology/CAT Projects, DKA, Ergon Energy and others. The position paper was delivered in December 2015 and circulated to the Board, DKA staff and Department of Business for comment. The paper provided substantial evidence for the value and need for the Centre, but required further textual consolidation while broadening aspects of its application.

Drawing heavily on the position paper, a discussion paper, 'Establishing a Centre of Excellence for Isolated Power Systems in Alice Springs' was written and

circulated to the new Board and a wide network of stakeholders in June 2016. Positive responses and substantial feedback to the paper helped shape the basis for a business plan for the Centre to be developed in the latter half of 2016.

2) Another element of the Energy Hub under consideration is that it be the base for a new Solar City initiative for Alice Springs. The first Alice Solar City project was an enormous success, with significant community engagement and take up of renewable energy options. DKA had been an early advocate for that project. Similarly, DKA is supporting the development of a second Solar City initiative that focuses more specifically on the technical options available to increase the amount of solar power used in the Alice Springs electricity grid. DKA has committed to supporting the initiative with office space and staff assistance in addition to a substantial governance role. If the bid for support and funding from the Commonwealth and NT Governments is successful, work will begin in early 2017.

## 2.

## Desert Knowledge Precinct

Funded by the Department of the Chief Minister, a review of the Precinct's property arrangements by Preston Rowe Patterson was completed, providing some 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 report will be used as a reference for ongoing Precinct development.

Due to St Mary's Creek running through it, a significant portion of the 73ha Desert Knowledge Precinct cannot be developed. With this in mind, in 2015 a vision was developed to establish the Precinct as a **Land Management Hub** and leading example of land management best practices, research and development. For example, in May 2016 a trial to test the efficacy of different chemicals on buffel grass was undertaken between CSIRO, TNRM, NT Weeds Branch and DKA on the Precinct.

In partnership with other leading establishments in Alice Springs such as the Desert Park and Olive Pink Botanical Gardens, it is anticipated that the Precinct will help attract national and international land management conferences and experts to the region and provide a site for educational programs. This would also contribute to a broader Visitor Experience vision for the Precinct.

The **Visitor Experience project** is a collaborative initiative of the Precinct Management Committee, a sub-committee of the DKA Board whose membership consists of DKA Board representatives, the CEOs of Precinct members, and other relevant senior staff of the key Precinct based organisations. The work being done by the different organisations at the Precinct provided an opportunity to develop a program of information sharing and educational activities that would be of interest to visitors, schools and other groups. A Visitor Centre for the Precinct is part of this vision, creating a focal point for these activities. A business plan is to be developed in 2016-17.

New designs for clear **signage at the Precinct**, long an issue for visitors, was completed and approved in consultation with the Precinct members. Installation of Stage One (directional signage) will be completed in mid-late 2016.

The **DKA Solar Centre** has continued to grow with two new polycrystalline silicon modules installed in June 2016, bringing the total number of installations operating on site to 37. Installation of a 40kWp solar module from the National University of Singapore is anticipated for September/October 2016. As an example of active collaboration on the Precinct, the framing for new installations is done locally on-site in the Centre for Appropriate Technology workshop.

In consultation with Precinct members, through the Precinct Land Management sub-committee, and relevant local experts, a **buffel/land management plan** for the Precinct was finalised in late 2015. Working with fellow Precinct member, Centre for Appropriate Technology, the plan has been successfully implemented and as a result we are seeing native flora returning to the landscape and a return of native wildlife.

DKA has been working closely with community land management groups, Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC), Territory Natural Resource Management and the Alice Springs Town Council, in the development and submission of a **multi-project proposal to Green Army**. If approved the Precinct work will include a focus on St Mary's Creek, removing invasive grasses and educating participants with the intention to eventually reintroduce the endangered Slater's Skink in partnership with the Alice Springs Desert Park, which has a very successful breeding program for the species. The Slater's Skink was discovered on the Desert Knowledge Precinct land some 50 years ago.



Desert  
Knowledge  
Precinct

Early in 2015-16 the Precinct Management Committee approved a new logo for the Desert Knowledge Precinct, featuring a corkwood seed pod.



### 3. Intercultural Leadership

DKA continued to implement a program working with Indigenous Rangers focusing on intercultural leadership skills in partnership with the Central Land Council and Central Desert Native Title Services, and Ranger teams from Tennant Creek and Ti Tree in the NT and Kiwirrkurra in W.A. Workshops were held throughout the year to identify skills development needs, and activities that would develop the skills. DKA facilitated the Rangers, with guidance from Traditional Owners to create project plans around the activities, which will be delivered and evaluated throughout 2016-17.



Rangers from Ti Tree and Tennant Creek are facilitated to identify intercultural leadership skills that they will then work to develop through the program.

### 4. Remote Community Engagement, Facilitation and Collective Impact

In 2013, DKA committed to trialling a collective impact approach to working with complex socio-economic issues, testing its suitability for the particular problems of remote desert Australia. The approach was used in two contexts:

#### 1) Remote Focus – Ngaanyatjarra Lands, WA

With funding from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Sidney Myer Foundation to work with Ngaanyatjarra Council on governance reform, DKA used aspects of the collective impact approach to facilitate the appointment of independent Directors to the Ngaanyatjarra Board, and contributed to increased governance capacity and planning for the Board members the latter part of 2015. However, the work was put on hold by the Council and the funders due to priority changes, and the trial remained incomplete.

#### 2) Early Childhood Development – Alice Springs

DKA tested the collective impact facilitation approach in response to a community-driven request for help with an initiative to improve

the conditions for children in the pre-birth – 4 year old range. The initiative contributed to the funding of a substantial early childhood precinct in an Alice Springs suburb; and a workshop organised by DKA in May 2016 re-invigorated support for the program, now called 'Strong Kids. Strong Centre'. While DKA relinquished its role in the program, passing on the backbone facilitator role to organisations directly involved with early childhood, the experience gained in facilitating the process is being adapted for use in intercultural facilitation.

DKA also trialled an intercultural program in late 2015 called 'Codes for Life', which focused on building Aboriginal men's capacity to assume their social responsibilities through better understanding of the multiple cultural codes that affect them, including sporting codes. The success of the workshop was the basis for securing funding to continue to trial the approach in 2016-17 in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.



Props used in the 'Codes for Life' workshop included a shield, coolamon, boomerangs, spears, a payback spear, an AFL football and a measuring tape.