



Desert Knowledge Australia Strategic Directions 2016-17

Introduction

These Strategic Directions are part of a new chapter in Desert Knowledge Australia's evolution, as the organisation consolidates its resources and develops new programs in response to changing economic and social needs in remote Australia.

Desert Knowledge Australia (DKA) is a statutory corporation established under the *Desert Knowledge Australia Act 2003 (NT)* to 'encourage and facilitate learning, research and sustainable economic and social development relating to deserts and arid lands...'

DKA is an evolving organisation that has been active since 2003 in creating opportunities to increase the sustainability of regional and remote desert communities. It has done so primarily through aligning public, private and not-for-profit interests in issues that are central to the growth of remote and regional Australia, most of which is categorised as desert or arid, and which occupies over 80% of Australia's land mass.

Its activities are not limited to a particular sector or jurisdiction; the focus on economic and social development in desert and arid lands spelled out in the 2003 legislation is a broad and flexible mandate.

DKA's *objective* is to use strategic alliances to identify and promote development opportunities in remote Australia based on economic and social need and intercultural agreement.

The Desert Knowledge Precinct, DKA's home in Alice Springs, provides a strategic focus for the organisation and a tangible representation of the founding vision of a centre of excellence in education, research, technological innovation, social enterprise and economic development.

Priorities and Programs

DKA's program structure in 2016 is a mix of projects that build on DKA's ongoing commitment to intercultural engagement and a dynamic Desert Knowledge Precinct while developing new programs, such as a Centre of Excellence for Isolated Power Systems to be the cornerstone for an Energy Hub at the Precinct.

The immediate priorities include accelerating the re-development of the Desert Knowledge Precinct following many changes to its membership and priorities, and developing the Centre of Excellence for Isolated Power Systems. At the same time, externally funded pilot projects in intercultural leadership and engagement are under way, providing innovative perspectives for overhauling approaches to intercultural and collective engagement in remote Australia, particularly for the nexus

between Governments and remote communities. As a potential source of support for new DKA programs, the associated Desert Knowledge Foundation will be re-invigorated as a vehicle for collaborative ventures with philanthropic and business interests that have a research component underpinning or embedded in the venture.

Building on its current programs, DKA will explore further the potential of:

- 1) an integrated Energy Hub that includes the Centre of Excellence, a new Solar Cities initiative, the DKA Solar Centre, and other energy research and industrial interests;
- 2) situating a National Indigenous Art and Culture Centre at the Precinct, first proposed and supported by many of the stakeholders in 2003;
- 3) cross-jurisdictional programs for remote community engagement with governments and intercultural leadership facilitation; and
- 4) the Desert Knowledge Foundation in relation to enterprise development that encompasses both social and commercial entrepreneurship in remote Australia.

Program 1- Developing the Desert Knowledge Precinct

Purpose

To make the most of a centrally located, well-established and high quality built and natural environment to promote collaborative ventures for the benefit of remote Australia.

Background

The Desert Knowledge Precinct was declared in the 2003 Act and comprises 73 hectares of serviced land on the Stuart Highway between the town centre of Alice Springs and its airport. It is home to the offices of many organisations, which in 2016 include:

- Desert Knowledge Australia
- CSIRO
- Batchelor Institute
- The Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT) Group
- Regional Arts Australia
- Territory Natural Resource Management
- Central Desert Native Title Services.

The Precinct is also the site of the DKA Solar Centre, dkasolarcentre.com.au/locations/alice-springs, a solar demonstration facility for commercialised solar technologies. It is earning national and international recognition for the data it is generating.

An Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) over the entire area recognises the interests of native title holders while enabling development of the Precinct. This agreement, along with the Indigenous-controlled organisations on the Precinct, has helped to position the Precinct as a space for working with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interests.

The Precinct is zoned for community purposes, directing the choices that can be made about its activities. Precinct policies are developed by a Precinct Management Committee, comprising

representatives of major Precinct organisations and of the Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation, representing Traditional Owners.

The population of the Precinct over 2013-16 has changed significantly due to 1) changes in the Territory and national policy environments affecting the structure and size of major tenants Batchelor Institute, CAT and the CSIRO, and 2) the winding up of the cooperative research centres that have previously occupied the Precinct. Reviewing and replenishing the Precinct's population is part of the current challenge of using the high-quality facilities to full advantage.

Program Objectives

- To develop the Precinct as a hub for eligible business and not- for-profit activities under its community purpose zoning, including the proposed Energy and Land management hubs.
- To be a home for centres such as the proposed Energy Hub or National Indigenous Art and Culture Centre (see <https://nganampa.com/>) to provide a central focus for matters of national interest.
- To foster research and development collaboration in relation to remote regional development issues.
- To provide a high quality environment for organisations and people at the Precinct.

Actions

- Actively promote the Precinct and identify new participants and tenants.
- Update and improve infrastructure, including communications on and about the Precinct.
- Prepare, outsource and implement a Visitor Experience and a Precinct Management Plan.

Program 2 - An Energy Hub

Purpose

Creating a focal point for research, industry, government and non-government interests concerned with improving affordable power supplies to remote areas, providing an opportunity for knowledge sharing, and contributing to the transition to renewable energies.

Background

Ensuring affordable, consistent energy supplies is particularly difficult for remote industries, towns and communities in Australia, as it is for the 1.5 billion people without access to reliable energy around the world. Improving energy supply through technological and regulatory innovation will not only help economic and social development in remote Australia; there is considerable scope to export technology and know-how internationally.

There is already extensive experience in Australia dealing with the challenges associated with development and operation of remote and isolated power supplies. However, the knowledge, expertise, and research are widely dispersed, reducing the potential for impact. This presents an exciting opportunity to create an integrated, multidisciplinary systems approach to help overcome critical technological, regulatory and capacity barriers to advance energy technology, supply and distribution for underserved populations.

In 2015 DKA began to explore the potential of an Energy Hub at the Desert Knowledge Precinct, which would include a Centre of Excellence for Isolated Power Systems, the existing (and expanding) DKA Solar Centre, facilities for the next stage of the Alice Solar City program, and other related industrial and research interests. Although DKA itself is not an energy expert, it sits within a network of expertise that includes its DK Precinct partners specialising in technology and training; large solar installations at the airport and Uterne; NT Government remote services provider; a range of local suppliers and industries; and an actively supportive Alice Springs community. Most importantly, DKA's legislative mandate to contribute to remote economic and social development, which of necessity is underpinned by access to reliable power, means that energy supply is central to its mandate, and it is in a unique position to work productively across the many interests and borders that constitute the remote area power supply sector.

Program Objectives

- To facilitate collaborative research and development with industrial and research partners on isolated power supply problems and solutions.
- To interrogate optimum hybrid solutions incorporating renewable energy and fossil fuel-based systems with regard to long term sustainability and affordability.
- Influence policy, regulatory and financial regimes affecting power systems delivery.

Actions

- Staged ongoing consultation with key stakeholder groups through discussion papers and broad ranging discussion about collaboration and funding needs.
- Develop business case for the Centre of Excellence on Isolated Power Systems following positive responses to discussion paper (circulated June/July 2016).
- Participate in developing Alice Solar City 2.0 (including existing financial and facilities commitment).
- Leverage existing facilities at the Desert Knowledge Precinct and surrounding expertise to create a central energy hub core with anchor investors and national focus.

Program 3 - Intercultural Development and Collective Engagement

Purpose

Improving intercultural and collective engagement practices for working with the complex concerns of remote people, their businesses, governments and communities.

Background

The social, economic and political characteristics of remote Australia are unique. They include sparse and mobile populations, a complex mix of people, cultures and institutions, social uncertainty caused by distance from policymaking centres, lack of control over labour and market movements, and what are known as unconventional 'hybrid' economies that combine Aboriginal and Western forms of exchange.

These characteristics mean that intercultural development and collective engagement are essential to sustainability in remote Australia, and fundamental to DKA. By *intercultural development* we mean an approach that respects equally the multicultural perspectives influencing social and economic development in desert Australia, most particularly Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures.

Intercultural development demands a high level of intercultural knowledge, understanding and skills to strengthen the capacity of Australia's remote people, their communities and representative organisations.

A commitment to *collective engagement* reflects DKA's mandate and capacity to work across organisations, sectors and borders to build constructive relationships for remote Australia. It builds on the knowledge accumulated by a substantial investment in understanding remote governance and government issues through programs such as remoteFOCUS (2012-2016). DKA's continuing drive to promote collective engagement is a response to the ongoing obstacles to development caused by siloed organisations, multiple jurisdictions affecting business development and social service delivery, and multiple levels of government.

DKA seeks to contribute to this complex area by focusing on strengthening the capacity of remote interests to engage with government with an intercultural approach. This can be done in wide-ranging projects such as working with local governments to build the effectiveness of local Indigenous authorities, or exploring the effectiveness of regulatory regimes affecting the installation of new energy infrastructures.

Program Objectives

- Foster increased understanding and use of intercultural and collective engagement approaches in a range of settings.
- Build governance capability, understanding of government and leadership skills with targeted groups and intercultural engagement tools to contribute to economic and social development.
- Promote improved engagement between remote communities and government structures through collective and intercultural perspectives.

Actions

- Implement and complete pilot programs on intercultural skills development with WA and NT Ranger groups (supported by Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2015-17) and disadvantaged Aboriginal men in Central Australia (supported by Office of Aboriginal Affairs 2016-17).
- Develop 'fee for service' programs based on outcomes of pilot programs or other current or emerging issues, including shifting community and political priorities.
- Build innovative, collaborative programs with communities and multiple levels of government that strengthen opportunities for sustainable, intercultural engagement in the business of government.

Program 4 – Desert Knowledge Foundation

Purpose

Extending the range of options for fostering research that contributes to remote social and economic development programs.

Background

The Desert Knowledge Foundation (DKF) Ltd was established by DKA in late 2012 under Commonwealth legislation for the 'public charitable object of undertaking scientific research which

is or may prove of value to desert Australia.’ The Foundation has Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, enabling it to receive funding for research while providing the benefits of DGR status for project partners if required.

The Foundation’s Board is expected to have expertise in scientific research, business or finance, and be advised by a Research Committee. The committee ensures that the work done by the Foundation is scientific and is of value, and decides how research funds are disbursed.

The Foundation strengthens DKA’s attraction to cross-sectoral interests, enabling, for example, investment by commercial interests in Solar Power applied research programs. It has broadened DKA’s capacity to work with large corporate interests, building on its history of attracting millions of dollars since 2004-5 from major corporate sponsors such as BHP Billiton.

Program Objectives

- To enable DKA to broaden its capacity to work with corporate and other interests to extend knowledge and understanding about social and economic opportunities in desert Australia.

Actions

- Establish parameters and potential areas of interest for the Foundation.
- Incorporate DKF in development proposals for programs such as the proposed Energy Hub and Land Management Hub at the Precinct.
- Expand the DK Foundation’s profile, Board and Research Committee to increase its engagement with potential projects.