



Sustainable Land Sector Development in Northern Australia

Indigenous rights, aspirations, and
cultural responsibilities

edited by Jeremy Russell-Smith, Glenn James,
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This book sets out a vision for developing North Australia that differs substantially from a business-as-usual preoccupation with large infrastructure and agriculture development. Despite an overlay of just 150 years of European settler colonialism North Australia supports resilient Indigenous cultures and knowledge systems spanning tens of thousands of years. Outside small numbers of scattered urban centres, the population is substantially Indigenous; 28% of the 1.2 M km² region is under Indigenous title and a further 30% and rapidly growing area under non-exclusive Indigenous title arrangements. Despite many Indigenous groups owning vast areas of land they have been excluded from policy development processes that shape land and resource use, resulting in Indigenous peoples experiencing significant social and economic disadvantage.

The book is a collaboration between leading regional Indigenous policy advocates and recognized specialists from a range of development studies disciplines. Amply illustrated with maps and case studies, the book comprises eight chapters:

- the opening chapter sets the critical challenge for inclusion of Indigenous peoples' aspirations to deliver equitable sustainable regional prosperity.
- Chapter 2 gives voice to Indigenous people's ongoing connections with, and the fundamental importance of, maintaining law, culture and *country*—one's *country* is not real estate which can be simply sold or traded. The remainder of the chapter characterizes the region's defining geographic features, 65,000 years of human occupancy in the context of significant landscape change, and contemporary patterns of settlement, land use, and socio-political organization.
- Chapter 3 addresses the grim recent history of Indigenous dispossession and, in response, the ongoing assertion of Indigenous rights.
- Chapter 4 provides a critique of recurring historical and contemporary short-sighted regional socio-economic misadventures.
- Chapter 5 presents the case for developing a diversified land sector economy that recognises the generally poor economic and environmental performance of the predominant land use sector, the pastoral industry, and which takes advantage of novel, emerging ecosystem services (e.g. carbon farming) markets and Indigenous land management enterprise development opportunities.

The final three chapters address associated governance challenges to sustainable development:

- Chapter 6—bottom-up cultural requisites for empowering community-based resilience for developing robust and prosperous enterprises.
- Chapter 7—a regional case study addressing the magnitude of the challenges involved and potential solution pathways
- Chapter 8—priorities for governance reform, from effective grass-roots processes to genuine cross-jurisdictional cooperation on policy and investment priorities.

The book highlights the importance of Indigenous, First Nations, and local community perspectives to contemporary sustainable development contexts globally.

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