

# Production from marginal lands: Sustainable Indigenous development and commercial use of wildlife

- Location:** Top End of the Northern Territory
- Region:** Northern Territory
- Industry:** Numerous potential new wildlife-based industries
- Group:** Charles Darwin University and others
- Issue:** The use of natural resources has been identified as one of only a few business enterprise options available to remote Indigenous communities.
- Key Outcomes:**
- Desktop analysis ranking Northern Territory fauna for commercial use potential according to a set of social, ecological, economic and logistical criteria;
  - Documentation of existing and potential wildlife utilisation projects within study communities;
  - Determine and identify options for overcoming institutional barriers halting the progress of natural resource based sustainable use enterprises.

## Background

Recent studies have documented much interest from Indigenous groups in small-scale enterprises based on wild plants or animals. But moving from expressions of interest to business development has been slow. This project was developed with many partners and links to explore the options and identify opportunities for business development and identify the obstacles to realising them. Using its extensive networks, Charles Darwin University worked to identify the gaps in support and other barriers influencing progress.

## The Project

To identify new options a desktop analysis was undertaken and a database established which ranks wildlife suitability for commercial use by applying a weighting system based on apparent cultural, social, ecological, economic and logistical criteria. The most favourable options identified in this way were then used in discussions with traditional elders in case study communities to further investigate new and existing options. Animal products with most potential were explored in detail and many issues in markets, harvest, handling and storing, regulations, sustainability, processing, and labelling, were clarified.

## Outcomes

Existing and potential wildlife utilisation projects within the study communities have been documented. Barriers to existing and potential industries were identified, together with responses. Policy changes, areas requiring Northern Territory Government or other support, and training, to overcome these institutional barriers will be recommended.

## The Future

Most Aboriginal entrepreneurs initially seek to build small businesses at a modest pace. This strategy is congruent with the realities of the most obvious opportunities, which involve relatively low levels of use of seasonally available niche products. It is also important to develop models for business development inclusive of the many varied participants/interests and which Aboriginal entrepreneurs can adjust to suit their local circumstances. Striking balances among constraints on local capacity, access to capital, effective use of infrastructure and maintaining obligations to country and clan remain important challenges. This project helps all participants to make realistic appraisals of the most favourable options and the most effective paths to realising opportunities.



(Photos: Julian Gorman)