

INDIGENOUS RANGERS

A Shorten Labor Government will work to close the gap in Indigenous employment outcomes by doubling the number of Indigenous rangers, ensuring more Indigenous Australians have the opportunity to have their land and sea work recognised as paid employment.

The Working on Country program recognises Indigenous Australians' strong relationship and obligations to country.

The conservation work done by these rangers is also invaluable in the protection of our environment. That is why Labor will double the number of Indigenous rangers from 2017 levels by 2020-21. This will mean over 1550 Full-Time-Equivalent ranger jobs.

The Working on Country Program

The Working on Country program builds on the strong relationship and obligations to the land and the environment held by Indigenous Australians. It also allows their land and sea management work to be recognised as paid employment. Activities undertaken by these rangers include the management of cultural sites, heritage values, fire regimes, biodiversity, feral animals, weeds, land disturbance, pollution and climate change impacts.

The program objectives are to:

- Support Indigenous aspirations in caring for country.
- Provide opportunities for Indigenous people to deliver environmental services that protect and manage Australia's environmental and heritage values.
- Provide nationally accredited training and career pathways for Indigenous people in land and sea management in partnership with others.
- Facilitate a partnership approach between Indigenous Australians and others to deliver environmental outcomes.

Research has found that in addition to improving our environment, Indigenous rangers are helping to close the gap of Indigenous disadvantage by helping to achieve a broad range of cultural, social, education, health, employment and economic development outcomes. Due to their high status within their communities and the fact they pay real wages and are considered 'real jobs', ranger positions are highly sought after when advertised. They are considered as the best pathway from welfare to work in remote and regional communities for Indigenous Australians. In addition, 34 per cent of rangers are women.

On 12 November 2015 the Pew Charitable Trust released a review into the Working on Country program highlighting the social and environmental benefits Indigenous rangers

bring to remote communities and advanced the need for increased funding.¹ The same report highlighted national benefits, which include:

- Increased labour productivity through improved Indigenous health.
- Greater workforce participation by helping Indigenous Australians get jobs, leading to increased economic output.
- Cost savings to governments through lower expenditures on public health, policing, corrective services and public housing.
- Economic returns generated by new Indigenous business ventures, including the associated tax component of this revenue that is received by government.

Indigenous rangers are helping to close the Indigenous disadvantage gap by helping to achieve a broad range of cultural, social, education, health, employment and economic development outcomes. This is an excellent program that deserves more support.

Labor's plan

Labor will provide just over \$210 million over 5 years to double the number of Indigenous rangers under the Working for Country program from 2017 levels, this will deliver over 1550 full-time equivalent rangers by 2020-21.

This will ensure Indigenous rangers are able to continue and expand their work in the management of cultural sites, heritage values, fire regimes, biodiversity, feral animals, weeds, land disturbance, pollution and climate change impacts. It will also mean rangers are able to grow their role as role models in local communities, and further leverage off the intimate relationship between Indigenous Australians and the environment.

Specific work by Indigenous rangers has recently included:

- Threatened Species: Over 70 per cent of ranger groups carried out threatened species activities.
- Fire Management: Around 85 per cent of ranger groups conducted fire management activities.
- Cultural site management: Over 80 per cent of ranger groups reported involvement in cultural site management.
- Feral Animals: Over 80 per cent of ranger groups reported managing destructive feral animals.
- Invasive Weeds: Over 85 per cent of ranger groups undertook invasive weed management.

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-12/indigenous-rangers-review-sparks-call-for-more-funding/6935650>

- Environmental monitoring: Over half the ranger groups carried out one or more biodiversity surveys while nearly 80 per cent of groups undertook environmental monitoring.
- Tourism: Over 60 per cent of groups managed facilities for tourists like track repair and maintenance, campground maintenance and other access related work while 50 per cent of groups provided information through signs, ranger talks, websites or pamphlets.

While all Australians benefit through these investments in maintaining our natural environment and heritage, local communities as well as key delivery partners in the Working on Country program stand to specifically benefit from more Indigenous rangers. These include regional natural resource management groups, local, state and territory governments, land managers, industry bodies and community groups, including Indigenous groups, farmers, and Landcare and local environment groups.

Labor's record

Labor has a strong history of acting to protect the environment for current and future generations. It was Labor who initiated the protection of the Great Barrier Reef. It was the Hawke - Keating government that protected the Franklin, Kakadu and the Daintree as well as Antarctica. It was Labor who ended 30 years of conflict over Tasmania's forests and 120 years of disagreement over the Murray Darling Basin.

Labor will continue this proud record of achievement and we will continue to act. Labor will take to this election our solid record of environment achievements together with new, strong environmental policies.

Indigenous rangers are one of Australia's most successful conservation stories. Under Labor over 700 Indigenous ranger jobs were supported under Working on Country around Australia.²

What the Liberals will do

The Turnbull Liberal Government has a poor record of investing in environmental protection and conservation programs.

The Liberals have refused to implement credible and effective climate change policies, instead opting for Direct Action which pays polluters \$2.5 billion of taxpayer money, while pollution levels grow. They have attacked the rights of environmentalists and communities to challenge developments on environmental grounds and they are committed to giving State and local governments responsibility over nationally important environmental issues.

In addition, the Abbott-Turnbull Government cut \$534 million from Indigenous programs in their first Budget.

² See: http://www.alp.org.au/cm8_190813

Financial Implications

2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	Total³
0	- 16.0	-42.9	-64.4	-123.3

Labor will make an additional commitment of \$82.3 million in 2020-21, to double the total number of (Full-Time Equivalent) Indigenous rangers to over 1550 in 2020-21.

³ Totals may not sum due to rounding