



The mining sector and indigenous tourism development in Weipa, Queensland

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ABSTRACT

A relatively high proportion of Indigenous Australians live in remote areas where a number of mines are located. Indigenous Australians are more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to be unemployed and to be living below the poverty line and in order to overcome this disadvantage it is important for Indigenous people to gain meaningful employment. In these remote areas, in addition to mining, tourism is seen as potentially providing substantial opportunities for Indigenous employment. However many of these Indigenous tourism enterprises will need on-going support to become sustainable. Mining companies have significant resources and infrastructure that could be used to help develop Indigenous tourism and a number of companies, as part of their corporate social responsibility agenda, have directly facilitated the development of Indigenous tourism ventures. This study examined Indigenous involvement in tourism in the Weipa region of north-west Queensland and the role of the then Comalco bauxite mining operation, now called Rio Tinto Aluminium, in assisting this development. The study revealed substantial enthusiasm about market opportunities for Indigenous tourism and potential support from the Comalco mine. However the mine did not see itself as being directly involved but saw itself as a facilitator working with some regional Indigenous organisations. However given the constraints these other organisations face, this approach by Comalco is likely to limit the effectiveness of the mine's efforts.

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1. Introduction

Indigenous Australians are, in general, more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to be unemployed, to be living below the poverty line, to experience lower levels of education and to suffer greater health problems (see *ATSIA, 2004; Fuller, Buultjens, & Cummings, 2005; Ivory, 2003; Norris, 2001*). One important way to address the disadvantage is for Indigenous people to access meaningful employment. However factors such as lack of education, vocational training and business skills have made this difficult. In addition, the fact that a relatively large proportion of Indigenous people live in regional and remote places with few opportunities for employment (*ATSIA, 2004; DITR, 2003*) has exacerbated the problem of gaining employment.

Remote areas usually have a very limited economic and industrial base, with generally only one or two industries providing

realistic employment opportunities for Indigenous people. Mining is one major industry located in remote areas. Since the 1960s, there has been a rapid expansion in mining activity in northern Australia (defined here as the area to the north of the Tropic of Capricorn).

Many of these mining operations are located on, or close to Aboriginal land or communities, and near to pristine natural areas. Historically Indigenous people have had poor relationships with mining companies and while some of the underlying values between mines and Indigenous people may be irreconcilable, most of the larger mining companies with operations in northern Australia are now formally committed to contributing to the social, economic and institutional development of regions in which their mines operate (*O'Faircheallaigh, 1999*). Many mining companies have adopted Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies that emphasise the importance of ethical behaviour and the need for companies to contribute to the sustainable development of the local community and society at large.

Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) are one avenue through which mining operations can promote mutually beneficial outcomes for Indigenous communities. The aims of ILUAs are to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive outcomes from

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economic development, although their creation does not necessarily imply the successful implementation thereof (O'Faircheallaigh, 2002). A number of ILUAs have committed mining companies to supporting local Indigenous employment and training initiatives as well as the development and usage of mining infrastructure to assist Indigenous entrepreneurship.

While mining is an established economic activity in many remote regions, tourism is increasingly being seen as another sector capable of providing economic development opportunities. On a national scale, tourism is a major contributor to Australia's economy, from tourist expenditure through to the provision of infrastructure, employment (both directly and indirectly) and opportunities for cultural exchange.

Tourism can be especially important in rural and regional Australia. More than 25 percent of international tourism expenditure and over half of all domestic tourism expenditure occurs in regional Australia, totaling around \$29 billion in expenditure (Tourism Research Australia, 2008). Therefore, even a modest increase in the growth of tourism could see potentially significant benefits accrue in regional and remote Australia (DITR, 2003).

In addition to providing development opportunities for remote areas, tourism has been identified as one industry capable of providing Indigenous people with the potential for economic development (see DITR, 2003; Eagles, 2001; Pitcher, van Oosterzee, & Palmer, 1999). The perceived potential of tourism has resulted in governments encouraging the development of Indigenous cultural tourism in regional and remote areas of Australia so that Indigenous communities can capitalise on their local natural and cultural assets (National Tourism and Heritage Taskforce, 2003).

The potential that tourism offers Indigenous communities and individuals, combined with the contemporary emphasis of some mining companies on fostering Indigenous entrepreneurship, provide the ingredients for companies to assist with the development of small-scale local Indigenous tourism ventures. Such initiatives would make use of the synergies that sometimes exist between mining, pristine natural areas and Aboriginal communities.

This paper reports on a study that investigated the potential for the mining sector in Weipa, a remote community located on the west coast of Cape York in far north Queensland, to support the local Indigenous tourism industry. The paper begins by providing a brief overview of Indigenous tourism in Australia and the relationship between Indigenous people and the mining sector. The next section provides a description of the methods used for the study. Details of the Weipa region and Comalco are provided in Section 5 and this is followed by a discussion of the Aboriginal communities in the region and some relevant Indigenous organisations. The next sections examine the local tourism industry, the involvement of Indigenous groups in the industry and further opportunities for Indigenous involvement. The paper concludes with a discussion of Comalco's approach to local Indigenous tourism development and a discussion of the findings.

2. Indigenous tourism in Australia

The Indigenous tourism sector received little attention and progressed slowly until the early 1990s. However the 1991 *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: National Report* identified tourism as a potential opportunity for Indigenous economic advancement. In response, the Federal Government funded the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism Industry Strategy* (NATSITIS) (ATSIC, 1997). NATSITIS also encouraged a number of states and territories to develop their own strategies and initiatives (Schmiechen, 2006). Despite these initiatives, difficulties associated with developing appropriate product, limited conversion of demand and a reduction in Federal

government funding resulted in the loss of momentum (Schmiechen, 2006).

The 2000 Sydney Olympics provided a brief resurgence of interest in Indigenous tourism and the release of the *Tourism White Paper* (DITR, 2004) provided a further boost. The *Tourism White Paper* identified Indigenous tourism as a major special interest area and directed the new national tourism marketing body, Tourism Australia (TA) to take responsibility for leadership in this area. Another key initiative was the establishment of Indigenous Tourism Australia (ITA) to spearhead a new national approach to furthering the development of Indigenous tourism.

Yet in 2008, despite the efforts arising from the *Tourism White Paper*, the Indigenous tourism sector remains extremely fragile and tenuous. There are a number of explanations for this fragility. Indigenous tourism businesses experience a number of the same problems faced by all small businesses which result in approximately two thirds of all these businesses failing within the first five years of operation (Fuller et al., 2005; Fuller, Howard, & Cummings, 2003; Ivory, 2003; Zeppel, 2001). In addition, there are problems that apply particularly to Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs and their businesses.

A major obstacle to the development of Indigenous tourism businesses is the lack of access to capital. Personal savings is the predominant source of funding for the establishment of non-Indigenous small businesses, however Indigenous people generally have low savings due to their economic circumstances (Fuller et al., 2003). This is a substantial hurdle to overcome as potential entrepreneurs. The issue of access to capital is exacerbated by Indigenous land tenure. A large proportion of Indigenous land is under communal title and most lending organisations are reluctant to finance projects using community land as security (Ivory, 2003).

Another problem is the lower levels of education and training amongst the Indigenous population (Fuller et al., 2003). Indigenous cultural values and belief systems are also a source of potential problems since they can often conflict with the requirements of operating a business (Dyer, Aberdeen, & Schuler, 2003; Fuller et al., 2005). Furthermore, Indigenous emphasis on consultation and negotiation increases the length of time involved in completing business transactions. Priorities such as these are at odds with the world of commerce, where much value is placed on regularity, reliability and punctuality (Dyer et al., 2003; Fuller et al., 2005).

3. Indigenous people, the mining sector and corporate social responsibility

Historically, the mining industry has been associated with negative social and environmental impacts, and has been blamed for leaving communities in an unviable economic state when they withdraw once the resource has been exhausted (Banerjee, 2001; Hamann & Kapelus, 2004; Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 2007; Jenkins, 2004; Kapelus, 2002; RTA, 2006). The negative impacts from mining have resulted in strong opposition to certain mines and mining practices.

Indigenous peoples have frequently been the group most directly and adversely affected by mining activities (Hamann, 2004; Imbun, 2007; Kapelus, 2002). Furthermore, in Australia, 60 percent of Australian mining operations exist in close proximity to Indigenous communities (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 2007). Uranium mining in the Northern Territory, for example, has had a particularly controversial history. There was strong opposition from the local Mirrar Aboriginal people when the Ranger Uranium Mine began operating in 1981 in the World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park (Jenkins, 2004). Incidences of conflict and corporate misconduct continued to occur until recently (Jenkins, 2004).

Many mining organisations, such as Rio Tinto and Newmont, have become increasingly cognisant of the need to reduce conflict with other stakeholders and to appear more responsible corporate citizens (Black, 2006; Kapelus, 2002). As part of this new approach companies have recognised local Indigenous communities and have tried to negotiate agreements with them (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 2007). The new approach adopted by mining companies has resulted from a realisation that corporations exist within a market setting that is embedded with social and political environments and in order to operate effectively in the market place, firms need to address these social and political environments (Baron, 1995 as cited in Sarkar, 2007). In addition, Indigenous land rights have also made mining companies more responsive to meeting the needs of Indigenous people.

The new approach by many mining companies arises from an acceptance of a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) framework (Wheeler, Fabig, & Boele, 2002). CSR can be defined as “the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large” (Holme & Watts, 2000, p. 8).

Rio Tinto has been a leader in the field of CSR and has effectively developed a global CSR strategy (Hutchins, Walck, Sterk, & Campbell, 2005). For example, in 2001, the only shareholder resolution related to social responsibility in Australia was introduced at the Rio Tinto AGM (Clarke & de la Rama, 2004). Furthermore Rio Tinto was a founding member of the Global Mining Initiative (GMI) which attempted to ensure that mining be conducted in a way that contributes to sustainable patterns of economic development (Rio Tinto, 2008).

The decision of mining companies to engage in CSR is often a strategic response and not an intrinsic moral response (Jenkins, 2004; Kapelus, 2002). Strategic CSR can have benefits for both the company, by contributing to performance, and for society (Black, 2006; Sarkar, 2007). The linking of CSR policies with Corporate-Community Relations (CCR) strategies, whereby organisational philanthropy and public affairs are integrated into corporate competitive strategies (Idemudia & Ite, 2006) can enhance these benefits. The implementation of CSR, while in the self-interest of corporations, can play an important role in building and sustaining the health of a community located near a mining operation (Waddock, 2006).

CSR has become a very important consideration for mining companies in its dealings with Indigenous people, both from a political and reputational perspective, given past tensions (Imbun, 2007; Jenkins, 2004). One company to embrace many CSR principles in its dealings with the local Indigenous community has been the Rio Tinto Aluminium (RTA) Comalco mine. The mine, as part of its CSR strategy, has an Indigenous employment agreement in place and, in 2006, Indigenous employees represented 18 percent of the workforce at the Comalco mine (RTA, 2006), with 13.3 percent being local Aboriginal people. This figure is slightly less than the ratio of Indigenous people in the Weipa population (17 percent) (ABS, 2007). Additionally the mine has provided traineeships for local Indigenous people (RTA, 2007); undertaken cultural awareness training with its employees; conducted cultural heritage surveys with Traditional Owners that recorded 260 archaeological sites in 2005; and engaged with the community through the Western Cape Communities Sustainability Forum (Comalco, 2005).

In addition to CSR strategies of individual companies there have been other partnerships formed between mining companies and other stakeholders with the aim of delivering improved opportunities for Indigenous people. For example, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in June 2005 by the Australian Government and the Minerals Council of Australia documented

a commitment to work with Indigenous people to create prosperous sustainable communities (Australian Government and the Government of Western Australia, 2006; Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 2007). The East Kimberley Regional Partnership Agreement (RPA), created as a pilot under the MoU, was a business development project with the objective to:

Support business development in order to create jobs, enhance the entrepreneurial climate in the community, retain businesses, accelerate local industry growth and diversify local economies. (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 2007, p. 105)

Partners to the East Kimberley RPA included the Argyle Diamond Mine, Voyages el Questro Wilderness Park (a tourism enterprise), employment and training providers, and Indigenous organisations (Australian Government and the Government of Western Australia, 2006). Tri-sector partnerships such as the East Kimberley RPA have the potential to be an important instrument for government, industry and communities to coordinate community development schemes (Hamann, 2004; Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 2007).

The non-renewable nature of mining operations combined with the high economic dependency of host communities means that in order for mining companies' CSR policies to be truly effective for local Indigenous people, they need to secure an economic future independent of mining (Banerjee, 2001; Eweje, 2006). In an international context mining companies have often developed economic independence through the facilitation of small business training schemes (Eweje, 2006). This model could have substantial potential for the application to Indigenous tourism development.

In addition to training schemes, CSR strategies have also involved the effective decommissioning of mines and the utilisation of mining infrastructure. The term ‘mining infrastructure’ refers to those systems and services that a mine operation requires to work effectively. These systems and services can range from hard infrastructure requirements such as power supply and mining equipment through to soft infrastructure requirements, such as logistical transport support and training provisions for mining employees. For example, as part of the Merlin Mine closure, a diamond mine located near Borroloola (Northern Territory), the exit agreement included the offering of infrastructure assets to the Traditional Owners (Fry, 2004). This indicates that to some extent, various arrangements prior to the commencement of mining operations encourage operators to think about post-mining impacts. For example, Social Impact Assessments require the identification of strategies to mitigate negative impacts. ILUAs may also contain provisions for Native Title groups to have first right of refusal to the purchase of certain infrastructure at the termination of mining operations.

There does appear to be a growing industrial heritage tourism movement with various mining related tourist attractions such as museums, underground mining tours, theme parks, gemstone and sapphire hunting tours now on offer (Cegielski, Janeczko, Mules, & Wells, 2000; Edwards & Lurdés, 1996). Given their size and scale, mine pits and associated mining equipment such as 1100 tonne electric rope shovels can in themselves be tourist attractions. There exists considerable opportunity to provide an Indigenous perspective on mining and what it has meant for regions. However, it appears that the involvement of Indigenous people in mine related tourism has been minimal to date (Brereton et al., 2006).

4. Methods

This study consisted of a single case study examining the interface between the Comalco mine at Weipa and Indigenous

tourism in the region. Multiple methods of data collection, including semi-structured interviews, an inventory of infrastructure and examination of secondary data, were used to ensure high internal validity (Yin, 1994). These methods are recognised as typically used in case studies (Eisenhardt, 1999; de Vaus, 2001).

In-situ in-depth interviews were determined to be the most appropriate data gathering technique. Firstly, it is more appropriate to use this method when working with Indigenous people (see Finlayson, 1991) as it allows researchers to develop relationships and gain rich data that provides more insight into participants' thinking. Secondly, the in-depth interviews allowed the researchers to explore emerging issues and themes as they arose during the data gathering phase.

As stated previously, the area selected for this study was the region surrounding Comalco's Weipa bauxite mine on the western Cape York Peninsula of Queensland. This area was chosen because its potential as a tourism destination had been recognised by Tourism Queensland (G. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2004) and Comalco management had indicated a desire to participate in the research.

Once the area had been selected, relevant background documents pertinent to the study were perused in preparation for the site visit. The purpose of the visit was to consult with local communities and mine management, undertake visual inspections and assess infrastructure needs and development opportunities.

Interviews were conducted in August 2004 with the following:

- The Manager of the Balkanu Business Unit;
- The Manager of the Cairns Indigenous Co-ordination Centre;
- Chair, Cape York Land Council;
- Members of the Western Cape Regional Consultative Group;
- Four representatives of Comalco;
- Two representatives of Weipa Multi-Purpose Facility;
- The Executive Officer of the Western Cape Communities Coexistence Co-ordinating Committee;
- The Senior Project Officer of Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries;
- Two representatives of the Aboriginal Co-ordinating Council;
- Four representatives of Mapoon Aboriginal Council, Napranum Aboriginal Council, and Aurukun Shire Council;
- Two representatives of Western Cape Cultural Centre;
- Three representatives of Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service; and
- Various Indigenous entrepreneurs or people with an interest in tourism.

In the semi-structured interviews participants were encouraged to discuss any issues they felt were relevant to Indigenous tourism and its development in the region. Issues discussed in the interviews included current mainstream and Indigenous tourism in the region, potential tourism products, Indigenous desire for involvement in tourism, and possible social and environmental impacts from tourism. The interviews were audio-tape recorded and generally lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Most participants approached the interviews enthusiastically and only one person declined to be interviewed. No reason was given for non-participation.

The interviews were transcribed for analysis and coded to enable the identification of central ideas that emerged from the interviews.

5. Case study: Comalco/Weipa

The study area incorporates the mining town of Weipa, which had a population of 2830 in the 2006 Census of which

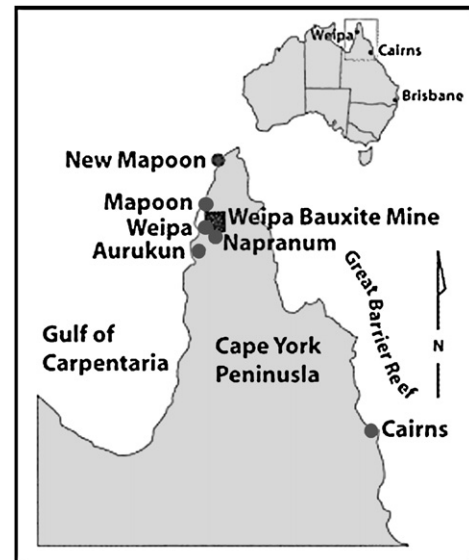


Fig. 1. Map showing the research area of Weipa, Napranum and the Comalco Bauxite Mine. (Source: Comalco Ltd, 2004).

approximately 17 percent was Indigenous (ABS, 2007) and Napranum Aboriginal community (population approx. 1200) situated approximately 10 km south of Weipa (See Fig. 1). Weipa township is located on the western side of the Cape York Peninsula approximately 804 km north-west by road from Cairns (580 air km from Cairns) and 200 km from the 'tip' of Cape York by road (Comalco, 2004). There are 12 km of sealed roads that connect Weipa with Napranum, the airport and Evans Landing. In addition there are unsealed roads that start 8 km out of town and run to the boundary of the Comalco lease area, north to Mapoon, south to Aurukun and east to join up with the road to Cairns. Comalco have responsibility for maintaining many of these roads.

Weipa is inaccessible by vehicle during the wet season (November–April), in which roads become impassable sometimes for months at a time. During this time, Weipa is only accessible by air or boat. Weipa airport is 15 km from the township and, at the time of the study, offered two QantasLink flights a day, five days per week to Cairns, and one flight a day on weekends. Alternatively, visitors could charter a plane with one of the commercial services available.

Weipa is owned by the mining company Comalco, a wholly owned subsidiary of Rio Tinto, and is the site of one of the largest bauxite mines in the world. In 2002, the mining operations generated earnings in excess of \$360 million. Rio Tinto's Weipa bauxite production was 16.14 million tonnes per annum in 2006 (Comalco, 2008), and reserves were 1.224 billion tonnes at the end of 2007 (AAP, 2008). The life of the mine is expected to extend for least another 60–100 years. The Comalco mining lease area is currently 2500 sq km (Comalco, 2008). Comalco have funded the vast majority of the town's infrastructure (Felan Consulting & Events Services, 2004) and in 2006 had 758 employees (Comalco, 2008). The town is managed, and to a large extent, owned and funded by Comalco.

The town relies heavily on the extensive mining infrastructure including an airport, road networks, a port, power, water and sewage facilities, and housing. Much of this infrastructure is utilised by other sectors of the economy including tourism. The airport accommodates QantasLink jets and is of a standard that can easily provide for increased tourism. Mine tours operate from June to October (Comalco, 2008).

The town is also an important regional hub with a supermarket and assorted shops, hospital, ambulance station, police station, administration centre for the Western Cape College and a range of sporting facilities.

5.1. Aboriginal communities

The mid Western Cape region consists of four Aboriginal communities. The nearest community to Weipa is Napranum, 10 km to its south. The Aurukun community is 187 km south, Mapoon is 80 km north, while New Mapoon is located 400 km north. There are 11 different Traditional Owner groups (TOs) recognised as representing the Indigenous people of the region. The vast majority of the land on the northern part of Cape York Peninsula is currently or soon to be under Aboriginal control due to successful native title claims and the creation of many DOGIT (Deed of Grant in Trust) tenures (Felan Consulting & Events Services, 2004). The communities control who visits their country through the allocation of permits.

Napranum is a community of approximately 1200 people governed by the Napranum Aboriginal Community Council. There are some small businesses being operated by the community under the management of Nanum Tawap Ltd, an organisation owned by the five clans of Napranum. At the time of the site visit there was no interest shown by the community in undertaking a tourism venture (P. Solly, personal communication, August 25, 2004).

Aurukun is administered by the Aurukun Shire Council and consists of approximately 1300 people (Aurukun Council, 2004). At the time of the research, a houseboat was being built using CDEP workers who had reconstructed the hull of the boat. The houseboat has been completed and sleeps approximately 10–12 people. A number of tourism proposals were suggested for the houseboat on its completion. Such plans include it being used as a fishing charter, an environmental cruiser for bird watching and croc spotting, or for use in hunting safaris (G. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2004). Aurukun also has an Arts and Crafts Centre which opened in 2001 and functions as a work place for the master carvers and artists of the community. In the past decade or so, the community's arts and crafts have been sold to avid collectors and major galleries and the artists have toured both nationally and internationally to exhibit their work.

Mapoon has a population of 200 people and is administered by the Mapoon Aboriginal Council. A Presbyterian mission was initially established in 1891 however the residents were forcibly removed to the New Mapoon site and elsewhere in 1963. After a number of years of protest, some of the population returned and began rebuilding their original community in the mid-1970s. At the time of the interviews there were two businesses operating at Mapoon, a crabbing enterprise and an art studio. Indigenous artists work at the art studio, displaying their work here as well as at the Albatross Hotel (G. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2004).

New Mapoon has a population of 300 and is administered by the New Mapoon Aboriginal Council. Due to the distance from Weipa, and therefore, the inability to utilise the infrastructure provided by Comalco, New Mapoon was not considered in the study.

5.2. Nanum Tawap and Balkanu Cape York development corporation Pty Ltd

Two local organisations that could assist Aboriginal people in developing tourism initiatives in the western Cape region are Nanum Tawap and Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation Pty Ltd. Nanum Tawap is an Aboriginal-run organisation situated at Napranum. At the time of the study, it was involved in a number of local industries including a laundry, sawmill, brick plant and forest

regeneration program. The organisation was set up by Traditional Owners to facilitate regional development initiatives for both the community and Comalco. Although Nanum Tawap was not presently involved in any tourism businesses some respondents had suggested that it could also focus on tourism ventures, whether directly or indirectly. The organisation, however, was experiencing difficulty at the time in providing a consistent and reliable workforce to keep its present industries operating efficiently.

Balkanu (formerly known as the Cape York Community Development Centre) was initially established by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) to fulfil the role of supporting the establishment of Land and Natural Resource Management Centres in the communities of Cape York. It facilitated negotiations between different stakeholders—including Governments, Traditional Owner groups, industry groups, research organisations and Cape York land holders—in order to provide the best available expertise, services, resources and experience for their clients' projects (Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation, 2003).

The organisation was well positioned to assist Aboriginal people with tourism ideas, and provide professional knowledge and technical expertise from the concept stage through to the operation of a business. For example, the organisation provides mentoring, planning, feasibility analysis, operations, marketing, accounting and strategic development to twenty of the most viable businesses from over one hundred that request assistance in any one year. Every year five new business ventures enter the Cape York Business Development program and new businesses are expected to become self reliant after a five year period (Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation, 2008).

Balkanu works co-operatively with other organisations, such as Westpac, who share their objectives. For example, Westpac has provided Balkanu with 25 experienced personnel a year over four-week periods to assist Indigenous businesses requiring technical expertise in various areas. These periods involved intensive problem solving.

Importantly, a number of interviewees noted that Balkanu recognised the need to provide encouragement and support to Indigenous persons or groups who wished to initiate a business or project. Such support took into account Indigenous people's lack of confidence and knowledge in relation to business skills and resources, which are not generally recognised by mainstream services. The Corporation emphasised that the projects and businesses that worked well were those that were initiated by Indigenous peoples themselves.

5.3. Comalco's indigenous land use agreement

The Western Cape Communities Coexistence Agreement (WCCCA) was initiated in 1997 and signed on the 14 March 2001 by Comalco, eleven Traditional Owner groups, the Councils of Aurukun, Mapoon, Napranum and New Mapoon, the Cape York Land Council and the Queensland Government. The agreement was registered as an Indigenous Land Use Agreement under the provisions of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) in August 2001 and is now known as the Comalco ILUA. The Agreement is a commitment by all parties to focus on issues relevant to the Aboriginal economy, education, employment, culture and training (Comalco, 2004).

The Agreement is managed by a Co-ordinating Committee and four Trusts—Northern, Central, Southern and Main—which oversee the management of community projects and funds. The Main Trust is a charitable trust set up to manage the funds and annual contributions made by Comalco and the Queensland Government, approximately \$4m and \$2m respectively. The majority of these funds, approximately 60 percent of annual contributions, are placed

in long-term secure investments. The remaining 40 percent is distributed to the three remaining regional trusts: Southern (Aurukun), Central (Napranum) and Northern (Mapoon, including New Mapoon). These divided amounts are to be distributed to Traditional Owners and the relevant communities. The trusts are charitable and meant for community, not individual, benefit purposes.

The Comalco ILUA could provide a number of positive outcomes for the 11 Traditional Owner groups involved including the funding of investment and development initiatives and Aboriginal employment and training provided by Comalco. Some of the benefits communities could expect to receive from the funding include outstation development, water and power supplies, toilet blocks, sports and recreation facilities and tourism facilities (WCCCA, 2003).

5.4. The local tourism industry

Western Cape York has been described as one of the last pristine and remote areas of Australia, offering not only spectacular and largely 'untouched wilderness' but also, a rich Indigenous cultural heritage. The attraction is based on the relative accessibility of the region despite its remoteness. Felan Consulting & Events Services (2004) suggest that there are two primary attractions for visitors: fishing and the natural environment. At the time of the research tourism was a relatively small industry in the region but it had grown substantially in the past 10–20 years. For example, in the early 1980s Weipa may have attracted around 5000 people per annum. By 2004, approximately 26 000 tourists were visiting the area per annum which increased to 30 000 in the year ending March 2008 (Tourism Research Australia, 2008).

There are two types of markets coming into Weipa: the land-borne market – 4WD self-drives or 4WD tour groups – arriving by road, and the airborne market – sportfishing visitors arriving in Weipa on a 50 seater QantasLink aircraft or on charter flights from Cairns (Felan Consulting & Events Services, 2004). The self-drive/accompanied market has an average spend of between \$50 and a \$150 per person per day (Felan Consulting & Events Services, 2004) and they tend to stay for 2–4 weeks. However, research undertaken by Ryan and Huyton (2000, 2002) has suggested that this market segment is unlikely to have a major interest in Indigenous tourism (see Tremblay, 2007).

The airborne market offers the best opportunity for tourism in Weipa (Felan Consulting & Events Services, 2004), including the Indigenous market. These visitors, while price sensitive, are willing to pay high prices for tourism in the region. The fly-in market has an average spend of between \$500 and \$1000 per person per day (Felan Consulting & Events Services, 2004) but spend a lesser time on average in comparison to the self-drive market. The generating regions for this market are located on the east coast of Australia and Weipa is considered relatively accessible, in terms of flight frequency and flexibility. This group is likely to have a higher interest in Indigenous tourism products than the self-drive group.

In 2004, the types of tourism facilities and attractions were limited. Tourist accommodation in Weipa was limited to the Weipa Caravan and Camping Ground, the Albatross Hotel/Motel and the Heritage Resort. The Weipa Multi-Purpose Facility, once upgraded will have a number of houses within their complex that could be used for tourist accommodation. At all locations, it is essential that visitors book well in advance to ensure their accommodation needs are met when they arrive in Weipa (particularly in the dry season).

There were ten fishing charters/tours that operated from Weipa, charging anywhere between \$600/day to \$4000/day. Some fishing charters also offered tourists added experiences of fly fishing, croc spotting and wildlife tours. Adventure tours, including jet skis, motorcycles or 4WD vehicles, were also offered to visitors.

A Mine Tour operated from the Caravan and Camping Ground. The Western Cape Cultural Centre used to be incorporated into the Mine Tour, however, the Centre had been dropped from the itinerary at the time of the site visit due to problems with opening hours and staffing at the Centre. In addition to the mine tour there was also a mine museum that showcased historic mining equipment used since the first days of operation in 1963. The museum is located in the Lions Park opposite Nanum Shopping Centre. Finally, houseboats are available in Weipa and operated all year round accommodating up to ten people. Tourists could choose whether to hire a guide, self-drive or charter the boats.

5.5. Aboriginal involvement in local tourism

In the Cape York Peninsula region Indigenous people outnumber non-Indigenous people two to one. In addition, Indigenous people have or will have control of most the land on the Cape and therefore would need to be involved, directly or indirectly, in tourism for the industry to grow in the future. Nevertheless at the time of the study there was very little Indigenous tourism product in the region. However there was a high level of optimism expressed by a number of people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, about the opportunities for the development of Indigenous tourism in the region. Most people interviewed by the researchers suggested that there were exceptional opportunities for the development of Indigenous tourism.

Indigenous involvement in tourism at the time of the study was limited to the three community councils issuing and collecting fees for camping on DOGIT Communities or Aboriginal Shire land. The Mapoon Community Council operated a camping ground at Cullen Point, a popular site with local and Cairns fishers. Basic toilet facilities were provided to campers who paid \$30 per vehicle and \$5 per person per night. Turnover for 2002 was approximately \$20 000 (Felan Consulting & Events Services, 2004). Temporary fishing camps were also established at Duyfken Point.

While not a tourism venture, Thancoupie, a local elder and famous artist ran cultural camps at Bowchat for "at risk" Indigenous children. The site was also used by visiting campers. Bowchat is located across Albatross Bay from Weipa and caters for local Indigenous children on their holidays. This program teaches the children about art and traditional culture. There were no tourism facilities at Bowchat. The Albatross Hotel/Motel had a room in its restaurant area which displayed artwork by Indigenous artists. Artists who sold their work through this outlet received 100 percent of the sales.

In addition to the above mentioned sites there were a number of other sites in the region that are popular for fishing and camping amongst residents and visitors, including the Pennefather region – a designated camping area with no infrastructure facilities.

Clearly, despite the potential and expressed optimism for the development of Indigenous tourism very little Indigenous product existed at the time of the study. The interview participants offered a number of possible explanations for this low level of engagement and these are set out in Table 1.

The most important reason for low levels of Indigenous involvement in tourism identified by participants was a lack of interest in pursuing such opportunities. Other reasons included a desire for privacy, lack of appropriate skills, lack of access to capital and cultural factors. Land tenure and political divisions within the Western Cape's Indigenous communities may also have prevented the development of tourism ventures. For example, a tourism venture had to gain approval from all Traditional Owners whose land was utilised by the business, and as a number of study participants noted, it was often a difficult task to gain unanimous agreement amongst them all.

Table 1

Reasons provided by participants for lack of Indigenous involvement in tourism.

Reasons recorded:
A lack of interest amongst Indigenous people in pursuing such opportunities due to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a strong desire to maintain a comfortable level of privacy within the township and retain community-only access to certain areas (see also Felan Consulting & Event Services, 2004) • many Indigenous people being very shy and wishing to avoid face-to-face interaction with tourists • a perceived lack of importance of tourism compared to pressing issues such as health, alcoholism, domestic violence and education
A lack of appropriate business skills amongst community members
The lack of successful role models
Kinship networks and the existence of reciprocal relationships and responsibilities involving the exchange of goods and services
Indigenous attitudes to economic development, growth, saving, investment, accumulation and acquisition of capital
Land tenure and political divisions within the Western Cape's Indigenous communities
Lack of access to finance
The lack of integration and limited engagement between Aboriginal tourism businesses and the mainstream tourism industry
Unequal relationships between members of joint partnerships resulting in the Indigenous partner often receiving less return from the partnership
Indigenous people engaging in tourism initiatives in an ad hoc manner, demonstrating a paucity of information that would alleviate the lack of business acumen and help them pursue their ideas
The breakdown of Aboriginal society - lack of education, confidence and self-esteem; alcohol abuse; welfare dependence; missionary influence; and the 'lost generation'
The effects of peer pressure - when employed Indigenous people are discouraged from working

5.6. Opportunities for increased aboriginal involvement in tourism

Aurukun and Mapoon were mentioned consistently as ideal locations to establish Aboriginal tourism ventures. The natural beauty of these areas could be combined with local traditional knowledge to develop a range of tourism initiatives such as guided nature walks, fishing tours, managed camping grounds, luxury fishing lodge and so forth. South of Aurukun there exist wetlands which were described by one respondent as being better than those at Kakadu. Aurukun also has a number of outstations and around seven Indigenous languages are still spoken in this area (G. Milgate & P. McCulkin, personal communication, August 25, 2004) indicating that culture remains strong compared to neighbouring communities where missionary influence was stricter. Strong cultural ties combined with the natural beauty of the environment could provide countless opportunities for interested parties.

One respondent suggested utilising the Western Cape Cultural Centre as the office where permits, required for visitors to camp on traditional lands, could be issued. In addition, the Centre could also conduct cultural tours from here as well as having in-house artists who could work and sell their pieces of work at the Centre.

Other areas that were suggested where Indigenous people could be involved were the fishing and crabbing industry, both which have become popular tourism activities. None of the existing ten fishing charter vessels operating out of Weipa had any Indigenous operators or employees.

Another area seen as having potential for Indigenous tourism was the Uningan Nature Reserve. It was suggested that this area could be utilised as both a picnic area with an added focus on bird watching and nature walks. The area had been handed back to Traditional Owners but had not been maintained and therefore, was not currently used as a recreation area. The Indigenous knowledge of the flora and fauna of this area and cultural features such as large shell middens and canoe trees add to the potential of

Table 2

Proposed indigenous tourism developments.

Place	Facility
Bowchat site	Accommodation, catering and ablution facilities (site may not be appropriate for general tourism)
Evans Landing	A camping/caravan park/cabin precinct and fishing lodge
Duyfken Point	A fishing lodge (no road access) & it is suggested that a venture partner, an essential element of any proposal for this site, be based at Weipa
Bushman's Hole on Billy's Lagoon Station	A seasonal tented bush camp (could tie in with a proposed Mapoon Fishing Lodge)
Cullen Point, Mapoon	A very high quality fishing lodge
Ducie River, Mapoon	A high quality fishing lodge that should be leased out to people who would be operating it

Source: Felan Consulting & Event Services (2004).

developing this place into a possible tourism venture which could be conducted by interested local Aboriginal people.

The *Weipa Tourism Needs Assessment* (Felan Consulting & Event Services, 2004) made a number of recommendations about possible future Indigenous tourism developments. These are outlined briefly in Table 2. None of these initiatives involved Comalco directly.

5.7. Comalco's approach to local indigenous tourism

During the interviews all staff from Comalco indicated a keenness to facilitate the diversification of the local economy and as a consequence they were very supportive of the local tourism industry, especially Indigenous tourism. The Company was keen to support the local industry by allowing access to appropriate mining infrastructure as long as this did not interfere with mining operations. It was noted that the tourism industry was heavily reliant on mining infrastructure such as the airport, roads, power, water and sewage. The Company also allowed a tour of the mine and would be very keen for this tour to be provided by a suitable Indigenous person.

Comalco was also particularly enthusiastic about Indigenous involvement in any part of the regional economy. As part of the Comalco ILUA, the Company was trying to ensure that 30 percent of its workforce was Indigenous by 2010. Despite this desire, the company was having difficulty meeting this target because of an inability to attract potential Indigenous employees. Consequently, it had provided a number of training and educational programs to assist Indigenous people in obtaining skills. For example, the company had held workshops focused on Indigenous business enterprises. Young people interested in attending this workshop were brought in from all over the Cape. In addition, there were places for 20 Indigenous people per year to undertake training and education programs in the areas of horticulture, trades and administration. The Indigenous participants had to be Traditional Owners of the region and attend the two year full-time course. The participants were rotated between the different types of work in order to experience and decide which area they most enjoyed or had an aptitude for. Those who completed the course were usually offered a full-time position in their field of expertise.

Despite its enthusiasm for Indigenous tourism and its openness to suggestions from the Indigenous community regarding the development of tourism initiatives, Comalco did not see itself as having direct involvement in developing the industry through the provision of training and/or funding of Indigenous enterprises. Rather, it saw itself as a 'facilitator' of business development. Comalco felt the ILUA trust, Nanum Tawap and Balkanu were better placed to provide the necessary know-how, finance and skills

training for any Indigenous business development in the region. Notwithstanding Comalco's views on its role in Indigenous tourism development, some members of the Indigenous community believed there was a definite role for the company to play in providing direct support (financial, technical, infrastructure and transport) for Indigenous tourism initiatives.

6. Discussion

The situation recorded in Weipa regarding Indigenous tourism is typical of many areas throughout Australia, that is, many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are enthusiastic about its potential but there are very few, if any, businesses capturing the supposed benefits. It is evident that some Indigenous product is being developed in the region but Indigenous people and communities will require substantial support in order to overcome the barriers identified by study participants and other research.

Mining companies, as discussed earlier in the paper, are well positioned to provide support for Indigenous businesses and many mining companies through CSR have provided direct support for Indigenous business development (Eweje, 2006). This involvement has resulted in some mining companies playing an important role in directly stimulating Indigenous tourism opportunities in Australia, such as the Century Mine and Argyle Diamond Mine discussed earlier. In contrast to the Century and Argyle examples, Comalco at the time of the study, while supportive of Indigenous tourism initiatives, had taken a relatively hands-off approach. This approach is at odds with the perceptions of some members of the Indigenous community who participated in this study. These people had a strong belief that Comalco should be directly involved in the development of Indigenous tourism businesses.

The company has justified their hands-off approach to a large extent by suggesting that Nanum Tawap, the Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation Pty Ltd and the WCCCA are better placed to directly foster Indigenous tourism development in the region. While it could be considered understandable that the Company views these other organisations as better placed to offer direct assistance it could also be argued that Comalco's direct involvement could provide substantial benefits to Indigenous economic development. This could be especially true if Comalco was to enter into partnerships with some of these organisations because all these organisations are restricted in some way or another that Comalco would not be. For example, the WCCCA Trust, to which Comalco makes a substantial contribution, can only be accessed for community ventures. The community-focused funding model is problematic since it is much more likely that the desire to start up a tourism venture will come from an individual rather than the community as a group and individual Indigenous entrepreneurs play a vital role in the development of most Indigenous businesses (see Bennett, 2004; Foley, 2004). However, individual entrepreneurs cannot access any funds from the WCCCA.

Nanum Tawap focuses very much on its sawmill and brick plant enterprises and has little expertise in tourism. In addition, Nanum Tawap is focused on community initiatives and also experiences substantial difficulties in staffing its current suite of businesses. It is unlikely that this organisation will have the desire or the capacity to provide substantial support for Indigenous tourism businesses. One employee interviewed suggested that it was unlikely the organisation would enter the tourism industry because of a lack of interest from the local Indigenous community. The participant also noted that given the difficulty in attracting reliable workers for its current businesses it was unlikely to be able to attract workers to staff future tourism projects.

It would appear that Balkanu is best placed of the three organisations to facilitate Indigenous business development in the

Weipa region. However, Balkanu also suffers from resource limitations. The organisation aims to provide assistance to Indigenous people throughout the Cape not just the Weipa region and, as stated earlier, demand for assistance clearly outstrips supply. Only five businesses receive assistance from 100 requests each year.

Clearly the restrictions facing the other organisations suggest that Comalco could make a substantial contribution by directly assisting Indigenous business development, including tourism. For example, the Western Cape Cultural Centre needs funding to become sustainable and it is unlikely the other three organisations would provide this type of funding. Comalco could provide funding as well as training in business practice and governance.

Given that Comalco is supportive of Indigenous economic development and would be aware that it could be more directly involved in providing assistance there could be some underlying reasons for its hands-off approach. Some of these reasons were alluded to but not directly referred to by participants in the study.

Comalco has attempted to increase its employment of local Indigenous people but at the time of the study had been unable to do so because of a lack of interest from the communities. The company has also provided training programs for local Indigenous people however these have met with mixed success. There may be a feeling within the company that providing assistance for Indigenous tourism may be too difficult and that it would have a relatively low success rate. This assumption could be supported by the difficulty in identifying many Indigenous people who expressed a strong desire to enter the tourism industry.

Another major difficulty the company would have to contend with would be Indigenous politics. If the company provided support to individuals it would be important to ensure all the communities in the region felt that they had access to the assistance. This may not be as easy as it seems and could create substantial difficulties for the Company.

Another factor could be that despite the benefits of CSR behaviours, as Wheeler et al. (2002) and Banerjee (2001) argue, many large mining corporations often fall short in implementation at the strategic level. This may be due to a range of reasons including differences between corporate structure and corporate culture (Black, 2006) where the culture of the corporation supports CSR however the structure does not.

7. Conclusion

The mining industry can and, in some instances, has played an important direct role in supporting Indigenous tourism development in remote areas. This study identified that despite limited involvement there was a substantial enthusiasm regarding the potential for Indigenous tourism development in the Weipa region. The Comalco mine currently provides significant infrastructure for the tourism industry and is keen to facilitate the development of Indigenous tourism. However the existence of other Indigenous organisations that can offer assistance to Indigenous businesses has meant the company has taken a relatively hands-off approach. This approach, while understandable to a certain extent, limits the potential benefit the company can make to the development of Indigenous tourism. Despite the difficulties associated with taking a more direct approach to facilitating Indigenous economic development, and more particularly Indigenous tourism development, it is desirable for, and may even be morally incumbent upon, the company to do this in order to maximise economic development in the region. The process may be slow and involve political sensitivities but the company may be best placed to assist in overcoming the identified limitations of lack of interest and difficulties in attracting reliable workers as it is most likely to have the resources and ability to provide appropriate expertise to ensure success in the

longer term. The Century and Argyle mine examples may inform Comalco in this process.

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