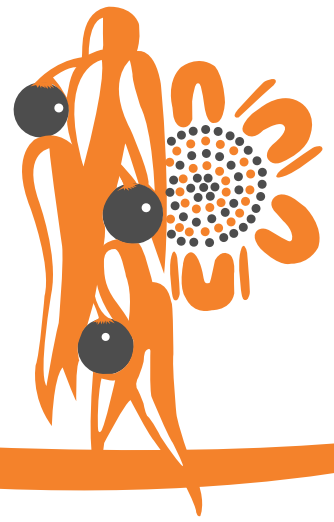


Native Title Checklist for Rangers and other Field Staff



What is native title?

Native title is the term used by the High Court to recognise certain communal, group or individual rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in land and waters according to their traditional laws and customs.

The native title of a particular group will depend on the traditional laws and customs of those people. The content of native title may include a variety of rights and interests, such as living, hunting, gathering, fishing, ceremonial, rights of access, use and occupation, and visiting to protect important places. It may include the right to be consulted about decisions or activities that could affect the enjoyment of native title rights and interests.

Where does native title exist?

Native title can only be claimed in areas where it has not been extinguished (removed). Native title may exist on:

- Unallocated Crown land;
- State forests, national parks, public reserves certain and land reserved for particular purposes or uses;
- Some kinds of Crown-to-Crown grants, including grants from a State/Territory to a local Council (except land validly granted and held in fee simple by Council);
- Land set aside for the benefit of or granted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- Oceans, seas, reefs, lakes and inland waters;
- Some leases, such as non-exclusive pastoral and agricultural leases, depending on the State/Territory legislation under which they were issued.

In most areas where native title is determined by the Federal Court to exist, it will co-exist with the rights and interests of non-native title holders.

Where has native title been extinguished (removed)?

The Australian legal system does not recognise native title rights and interests in some areas where things have been done to extinguish native title. In those areas native title may be partly or wholly extinguished.

Native title has been wholly extinguished on areas such as:

- Privately owned land (including family homes and privately owned freehold farms);
- Residential, commercial, community purpose and certain other leases;
- Areas where governments have built roads, schools and other public works on or before 23 December 1996.

These areas of land cannot be included in an application for a determination of native title. They are generally excluded from the area description in an application.

What are the implications for Rangers and Field Staff?

Rangers and Field Staff may, particularly in rural and non-metropolitan parts of Australia and in some coastal areas, need to consider the impact of their activities on native title. When rangers and field staff are undertaking activities in areas where native title exists or may exist and it affects native title, there are processes that Council will need to follow for the activity to be valid, or for it to be immune from injunctive action. If the proper procedures are not followed, an activity may be invalid and Council may at some time in the future be exposed to an injunction and/or claims for damages and compensation. Compensation may be payable in any event. Even where the activity would be valid notwithstanding that the processes are not followed, native title holders may succeed in getting an injunction to prevent the activity being undertaken.

Council may carry out low impact acts in relation to areas where native title exists or may exist without having to follow any future act procedures under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) or complementary State or Territory legislation. The *Act* operates on the assumption that certain low impact acts will have minimal impact on native title. A low impact act can take place over an area before a determination that native title exists is made without public notice or negotiation with any potential native title holders. Low impact acts cannot continue after such a determination is made. However, after a determination has been made that native title exists in a particular area, such acts may be carried out by agreement with the native title holders. Council will need to discuss these matters with native title holders or claimants and may need to seek independent expert advice on what constitutes a low impact act.

CHECKLIST:

The Australian Local Government Association has developed a six-step Action Plan* to assist Councils in adopting a precautionary approach.

	ALGA Action Plan	An Action Plan for Rangers and other Field Staff
Step 1.	<p>Searching the Registers. Three formal Registers of native title and an informal Schedule of Applications are held by the National Native Title Tribunal.</p>	Rangers may need to know how to ascertain whether a particular area is subject to a determination of native title, an application for a determination by persons claiming to hold native title, a non-claimant application or a registered Indigenous Land Use Agreement. (See pp79-81 of WWNT Guide.)
Step 2.	<p>Analysing Council's responsibility for procedural rights. In certain circumstances native title holders and registered claimants (also known as applicants) are entitled to certain procedural rights. That is, the right to be notified and given an opportunity to comment, the right to be consulted, or the right to negotiate.</p>	Rangers may need to contact the native title claimants or holders. The Native Title Representative Body (NTRB) for your area will be able to assist. Visit the NTRB website at www.ntrb.net to find the relevant NTRB for your area. (See pp88-93 of WWNT Guide.)
Step 3.	<p>Becoming a party to an application for a determination of native title. Being a party means that Council gets to join in the process and be able to participate in mediation and, if necessary, in court.</p>	(See pp95-109 of WWNT Guide.)
Step 4.	<p>Identifying where native title exists or has been extinguished. It is possible to identify in general terms, areas where native title exists or has been extinguished.</p>	Rangers and other Field Staff need to know, in general terms, where native title exists, may exist or has been extinguished, especially for land or waters under Council's care, control or custody. (See pp111-151 of WWNT Guide.)
Step 5.	<p>Future acts: Council's responsibility for validity. Indigenous Land Use There are processes under the Native Title Act 1993 (Cth) for ensuring activities are valid and lawful in so far as they affect native title rights and interests.</p>	Rangers and other Field Staff may need to have an elementary understanding of the due processes under the <i>Native Title Act 1993</i> (Cth) for ensuring activities are lawful and valid in so far as they affect native rights and interests. Different procedural rights apply to different types of activities. Indigenous Land Use Agreements take precedence over the other processes for future acts in the <i>Native Title Act 1993</i> (Cth). (See pp161-200 of WWNT Guide.)
Step 6.	<p>Negotiate agreements. Indigenous land Use Agreements take precedence over all other processes and can be negotiated at any time.</p>	Engineers/Works Managers need to be aware of the opportunities for Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUA) and when it may be appropriate to register an ILUA (See pp214-220 of WWNT Guide.)

* More details on the Action Plan are contained in the ALGA's *Working with Native Title* (WWNT) Guide. Implementing the Action Plan will assist Council in making sure it fulfils its obligations in relation to native title matters.

WHO TO CONTACT FOR ASSISTANCE:

Your State/Territory Local Government Association.

Australian Local Government Association,
Phone 02 6122 9400. Email: alga@alga.com.au
Website: www.alga.com.au/nativeTitle.htm

Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department (in relation to financial assistance),
Phone 02 6250 6770. Website: www.ag.gov.au/aghomet/commaff/flad/legal_aid/ntguide.html

National Native Title Tribunal,
Phone freecall 1800 640 501. Website: www.nntt.gov.au

To find the relevant **National Title Representative Body** for your area visit the NTRB website at www.ntrb.net and click on the map of NTRB's for Australia.



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