

# Capacity-building for Indigenous Inmates Project

NACC NRM Region, Western Australia.



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About 95 per cent of the inmates in Geraldton Regional Prison, located in the NACC NRM Region, are Aboriginal. It is for this reason that NACC has initiated this innovative and highly successful project, first launched in 2013, to offer inmates an opportunity to achieve a nationally-recognised qualification in Conservation and Land Management, while reconnecting them to care for country.

## Connection and collaboration

*The Capacity-building for Indigenous Inmates project aims to train Aboriginal men and women with origins from across Western Australia, in natural resource management, through on-ground NRM works on Aboriginal Heritage and community sites.*

Demonstrating multiple benefits such as connection to country and enhancing traditional ecological knowledge within the region, this project provides participating inmates with a range of useful employability skills in the NRM field, and enhancing their ability to return to work in their own communities upon release.

Presenting a significant win-win outcome, NACC's *Capacity Building for Indigenous Prison Inmates project* involves on-ground work undertaken by the prisoners during day-release periods to deliver land conservation and threat amelioration activities – such as invasive species control – that help protect the region's biodiversity and natural assets.

**“ For some participants, this is the only chance they have had to work on country ”**

Through this project, inmates have the opportunity to study subjects and obtain qualifications in relevant Conservation and Land Management areas that lead to a nationally accredited qualification.

This project is delivered by NACC and Central Regional TAFE in collaboration with the Greenough Regional Prison and the Department of Justice, and to date, has protected about 50 hectares of priority sites throughout the Northern Agricultural Region.

## Getting back to the bush

Greg Burrows, NACC's Aboriginal Participation Program Coordinator, said this project had not only enabled more positive natural resource management outcomes in the NACC NRM Region, but has also helped empower more Aboriginal people to get back on country.

"This project is a chance for inmates to rehabilitate their lives in a more meaningful way which allows them to reconnect with country, care for it and own that sense of responsibility," Mr Burrows said.

"These people have been able to grow, develop, gain new skills and in many cases, have a second chance at life.

"When you reflect back on the lives of some of these people and what they have been through, and the opportunities they haven't had in life, you can start to see a different perspective; and when you work with them on-ground, you see that in some cases, this is the only chance they have had to work on country, or to protect country."

Through NACC's *Capacity Building for Indigenous Prison Inmates project*, 20 inmates have completed units towards a Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management, while two inmates have successfully obtained Certificate II, and have commenced a Certificate III in Conservation and Land Management.

## Planting seeds to a better pathway

Mr Burrows caught up with an inmate who has participated in this project, and though he had to remain anonymous for privacy reasons, here is what he had to say:

"Participating in this project has changed my outlook on life. That's the honest truth, for myself and my kids," the inmate said.

"I feel more appreciative of myself, my life, my family and the bush. I mean, we are all Aboriginal blokes; we care, and love living in the bush; and that's all after just three months in the project.

"Once you see what you are doing and when you get out (of prison), you come back a few years later and you can see what you have accomplished in *yourself* and for *yourself*."

"It's not just, 'we're in jail and we're going out for the day'. A lot of us look forward to doing something like this [environmental restoration works]," he said.

"I want to take my kids, my boys, my wife, daughters to Waggrakine nursery (City of Geraldton Community Nursery) and help.

"Be it chemicals in the water, erosion, run-off, top soils degrading and all that, I like doing something about it. There is nothing better, (and) the more people that can be involved, the more positive it can be for everyone in general, the whole community.

"If you don't care about the land, and look after it, what are they going to have, really? It's an old saying: 'what is the future generation going to have? Nothing'."



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