

Vast Australian reserve represents a 'quiet revolution' in policy toward Aborigines

The original inhabitants of the Land Down Under have been recognized as custodians of roughly 20,500km² of remote wilderness in the Northern Territory

BY NEIL SANDS
AP, KABLURNAMYO, AUSTRALIA



Above, right and center right: Aboriginal dancers and musicians perform last week at celebrations held after the creation of a new nature reserve in Australia's Northern Territory.

Top right: Australian Environment Minister Peter Garrett, center, has his head ceremonially washed by two Aborigine elders at a ceremony held last week to mark the creation of a new nature reserve in Australia's Northern Territory.

PHOTOS: AFP



In the heart of a massive new nature reserve in Australia's far north, Aboriginal elder Dean Yibarbuk gazes reverentially at Dreamtime rock paintings created by his ancestors.

"This isn't just land to us," the dreadlocked indigenous leader says. "It's part of our spirit."

Yibarbuk's people in Arnhem Land, east of Darwin, are part of a government program that aims to ease the poverty and poor health blighting many indigenous communities by rekindling Aborigines' ancient connection to the land.

Under the scheme, the government last week created two adjoining nature reserves covering almost 20,500km² of remote wilderness in the Northern Territory.

As ochre-covered dancers performed celebration rites to the low drone of the didgeridoo, Environment Minister Peter Garrett declared the establishment of the Djelk and Warddeken Indigenous Protected Areas.

He said the declaration formalized management of the reserves by traditional landowners, recognizing them as custodians of their ancestral lands.

Garrett said Aborigines would control feral pests such as water buffalo and pigs and help minimize wildfires, while protecting rock art

and wilderness areas rivaling the nearby World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park.

"Indigenous Protected Areas are one of Australia's most successful conservation stories," said Garrett, the lanky former frontman of rock band Midnight Oil, who is now one of Australia's most prominent politicians.

"They protect Australia's biodiversity while providing training and employment for Aboriginal people doing work that they love on their own country."

Together the reserves cover an area twice as large as America's Yellowstone National Park or almost two-thirds the size of Taiwan.

Yibarbuk said they would create jobs for Aborigines and give them the option to live a traditional nomadic lifestyle "on country," away from the problems affecting many indigenous settlements.

"In too many communities our children run into trouble, a lot of drugs, a lot of violence," he said.

"This is our opportunity for our people to get back to the bush, to live the real life."

The IPA approach to alleviating grinding poverty and endemic ill health among Aborigines stands in marked contrast to the so-called "intervention" launched by the federal government in 2007.

Under that scheme, the government sent troops and police to help curb sex abuse and domestic violence in isolated communities, imposing alcohol bans and restrictions on welfare payments.

The program, which remains in force in many Northern Territory settlements, has been condemned as discriminatory by organizations such as the UN and Amnesty International.

Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation general manager Matthew Ryan said the Djelk and Warddeken Indigenous Protected Areas system gave Aborigines a say in the future of their communities and their land.

"It's about us looking after our country in our way," he said.

"It's not about having someone dictate how we run our country."

The Australian National University's Center for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research described the IPA scheme as a "quiet revolution" in the way remote indigenous communities were managed.

"By providing livelihood opportunities on country, the enormous challenges of improving Aboriginal well-being and health and education are being practically addressed," ANU's professor Jon Altman said.

A return to the bush may not be a practical option for the majority of Australia's 450,000 Aborigines, many of whom live in cities and regional towns.

But Yibarbuk said it was now a possibility for his people, reversing the drift towards settlements that began soon after whites arrived in the area in the 1800s.

"The land's still empty up here, now we want our people to come back," he said.

"We say empty land, empty people — healthy land, healthy people."

With so many options, what's an e-reader to do?

It's VHS versus Betamax all over again, only with hardware, software and file format options

BY PETER WAYNER

NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

Steve Jordan, a self-published science fiction novelist, has to make lots of decisions. Although most of them have to do with plot points, narrative arcs and character development, Jordan has the added burden of deciding how to deliver the stories he creates to his online audience.

Some of those readers own dedicated devices like the Kindle, some plow through his books on smartphones, some use laptops and maybe even a few employ desktop PCs left over from the last century. (In true sci-fi fashion, Jordan doesn't publish his novels on paper.)

The options are proliferating quickly for readers and the authors they love. While devices like the Kindle, the iPhone and the Sony Reader get much of the attention, practically any electronic device capable of displaying a few lines of text can be adapted as a reader. The result has been a glut of hardware, software and e-book file formats for readers to sift through in searching for the right combination.

"I'm already selling six different formats on my Web site," Jordan said. "If they have a particular format they prefer, they can usually get it from me."

The proliferation of formats has come about, in part, because most companies entering the e-book market have created a proprietary version.

This rugged individualism started falling

out of favor several years ago, and today many companies have adopted the ePub format developed by the International Digital Publishing Forum, an industry consortium. Sony announced in August that it was switching to ePub as well.

"In the last two books I've put out," Jordan said, ePub has been the most popular format.

Amazon.com, the dominant player in electronic books, still pushes its own format for the Kindle, its e-book reader. But it now also owns two companies — Mobipocket and Lexcycle — that sell e-books and reader software for smartphones.

Consumers may worry about issues like file compatibility, but publishers and software developers are more concerned over how to divide the proceeds of each sale. Jordan said he used to sell his books in the Kindle format but found the text conversion process onerous and Amazon's high fees difficult to swallow. He now tells his fans who use the Kindle to buy Mobipocket editions, which can be displayed on that device, directly from his Web site.

The proliferation of formats has been a source of confusion and frustration for consumers, but it has been mitigated by the fact that consumers can load their smartphones and laptops with software for the various formats (which most of the major companies give away).

While a printed book has a fixed form, an e-book can change its spots. Even though most

software packages offer similar interfaces, subtle differences exist, and many buyers choose a reader platform based on how they want a book to appear.

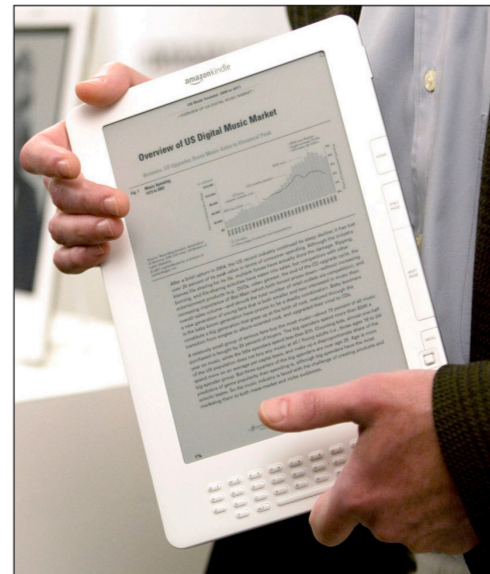
Neelan Choksi, one of the founders of Lexcycle, which developed the popular Stanza e-book reader for the iPhone and iPod Touch, said that was why he and his colleagues worked so hard to give users as many options as possible.

"All of the things that typesetters have done for a very long time," Choksi said, "we mess up." Customers can alter font styles, screen colors and a few other details, and they often have wildly different tastes.

The marketplace is also becoming more crowded as publishers sell stand-alone apps that display just one book. This simplifies the job for occasional e-book readers but doesn't help those who want to build an extensive electronic library, but perhaps the ePub format will change that.

Hardware decisions can also be intensely personal. The Sony Reader and the Amazon Kindle, for example, employ power-saving LCD screens that help stretch out the time between battery charges.

But these dedicated readers compete with cell phones and computers that have brighter full-color displays illuminated by backlighting. The batteries may not last as long, but the screens can refresh much faster, allowing programmers to add animated visual gimmicks



Earlier this year, Amazon, trying to broaden the appeal of its Kindle electronic reader, unveiled a larger version that's designed for newspapers and textbooks.

PHOTO: BL/COMBERG

like simulated page-flipping.

Andrew Herdener, a spokesman for Amazon, said the company did not expect customers to do all of their reading on the Kindle.

"Our plan is to make the Kindle books available on many different devices and platforms," he said. The company distributes a Kindle reader for the iPhone, for example.

Some companies are pursuing broader

markets. Wattpad.com, which describes itself as a "community for publishing, reading and sharing" e-books, says its reader software works on hundreds of phone models. That has helped the company expand even in places like Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines, said Allen Lau, a co-founder of Wattpad.

"In those countries," Lau said, "people are generally poorer and some of the operators don't subsidize the phone. For them to spend a month or two of salaries to buy an iPhone, it doesn't make sense."

Wattpad allows e-books to be read on small, low-end phones that can display just a few lines of text at a time. Yet even in affluent tech-savvy countries like Japan, smaller devices are gaining in popularity because they are easier to carry around.

Lau said people were even writing entire novels on their cell phone, novels that might be 300 pages long as a paper book.

"I don't know how they do it," Lau said, "but they manage to do it."

Writing the book itself is just the beginning. Nick Cave, a rock musician and sometime author, used an iPhone to write one chapter of his second novel, *The Death of Bunny Munro*. He and his longtime musical collaborator, Warren Ellis, then developed an original score for the book.

If more authors follow suit, readers will soon be fretting about the quality of their earphones, too.