



## Case Study

# PARTNERSHIP CONSIDERATION LESSONS AUSTRALIA

*How taking conservation action in a developed country with an important indigenous culture and a strong conservation community dictated a partnership strategy at the outset.*

In the 1990s, two conservation fellows at The Nature Conservancy explored the prospect of establishing an Australia Program. The Australian conservation and philanthropic landscape was changing significantly and the Australian conservation community was enthusiastically courting the Conservancy.

The Australia Program was in some ways an unusual new departure for the Conservancy. Up until the late 1990's, the organization had adopted the view that resources should not be funneled to developed countries like Australia, but rather to countries and regions with fewer resources. Australia was rich in biodiversity, had a well-established conservation sector that had been active since the 1970's and had numerous well-funded government-run environmental programs in operation.

But upon reviewing the vast conservation needs and opportunities in Australia in light of its global mission, the Conservancy decided to explore becoming active on the continent. This reflected a mind-shift in the organization that no longer viewed the stability of Australia as a reason not to invest, but instead as a reason to commit to conservation outcomes thanks to the security of investment that the country's stable political environment provided.

The conservation significance of Australia was also hard to overlook with over half of the plant and 20 percent of the animal species in Australia found nowhere else on Earth. From the ancient rainforests of the coasts to the vast, legendary Outback, the continent is home to over 10,000 distinct plant and animal species and in some regions such as the Kimberley, new species are still be discovered.

Thanks to its 60 years of conservation experience, The Nature Conservancy was well-placed to increase the scale and scope of conservation projects in Australia through raising the vision and building the capacity of partners to engage in larger scale projects and through a leadership role in improving the enabling conditions for conservation in Australia.

In embracing a new vision for global conservation and in acknowledging the conservation landscapes within Australia, the Conservancy was clear that it did not want to become involved in a short-term project. Rather the Conservancy recognized that to achieve long-term conservation outcomes at scale, it needed to work through partnerships with the local Indigenous communities, the Commonwealth as well as the State and Territory Governments, a host of deeply rooted NGO's both within and outside the conservation sector and the business sector. It was only through

partnerships that the vastness of the continent and the associated challenges that this presented could be addressed. The Conservancy also recognises the importance of partnering with Indigenous Australians to develop conservation programs that support them in reconnecting with their traditional lands and deliver cultural, livelihood and health outcomes.

In entering into these partnerships, it was clear to the Conservancy that the partnerships would be long-term in nature, vary between partners, and require a lot of time, energy and shared commitment. At times, the partnerships themselves have been challenging. For example, initially the Conservancy started to work with one partner organization in Australia. However, we soon discovered that partner's aspiration to be the Conservancy's exclusive partner in Australia. This did not fit with the Conservancy's approach of working with the broad range of partners needed to address the conservation issues and presented a challenging start to a partnership approach in Australia.

But these challenges cannot diminish the many successes achieved through this partnership approach which has clearly paid dividends. In 2002, the Conservancy officially launched its Australian Program with the aim of significantly increasing the pace and scale of conservation efforts on the continent. Nine years later, in 2010, over 8.9 million acres have been protected through land acquisitions with partnerships with governments, Indigenous organizations, communities and conservation groups. This is in addition to five million acres that have been protected through the creation of new conservation reserves – once again working with conservation groups, indigenous partners and government.

Through partner relationships, the Conservancy has been able to raise the bar for conservation by providing financial assistance as well as scientific expertise and strategic advice. By partnering with the entire spectrum of the Australian conservation community, including Governments, Indigenous communities and business, the Conservancy has fostered a fresh new approach to conservation as well as new relationships that have increased the quality and quantity of conservation.

For more information about The Nature Conservancy's Australia Program, visit <http://www.nature.org/wherewework/asiapacific/australia/>.