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# Indigenous Employment in NRM

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## June 2010 Workshop Report

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Prepared for the  
Victorian Catchment Management Council

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KISMET  
FORWARD





June 2010

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Kismet Forward is a Victorian-based consultancy specialising  
in the areas of strategy, community engagement, facilitation,  
evaluation, park planning, project management and  
leadership coaching.

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extensive background in natural resource management at  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2010 the Victorian Catchment Management Council (VCMC) invited representatives from catchment management authorities and relevant federal and state agencies to attend a workshop to consider opportunities for increasing levels of Indigenous employment in natural resource management activities.

Through presentations of three diverse case studies and discussion, the forum provided opportunities for participants to learn about successful Indigenous employment programs elsewhere in the state, and to draw on the lessons learnt from these.

Participants identified that the Indigenous facilitators have been instrumental in building positive relationships between CMAs and Indigenous communities, and have facilitated the building of cultural awareness within their organisations.

However, it was felt that levels of support for Indigenous facilitators need to be increased, and that longer-term approaches to relationship-building and funding of programs are required. Ensuring that program priorities and approaches better reflect Indigenous community needs and expectations was also considered important.

The workshop also included useful discussion on other programs and activities that can contribute to the knowledge generated; identification of opportunities for funding outside traditional avenues was also helpful.

The majority of participants commented on the value of the workshop in the sharing of ideas and experiences, as well as the establishment of common goals. They also appreciated the dialogue with their future 'merge partners' about opportunities and risks, and felt that this had opened the door to future engagement.

However, the need for support and leadership at the statewide level was revealed.

VCMC representatives undertook to communicate workshop messages as appropriate at the statewide level, and to attempt to find a sponsor/s to progress the issues raised throughout the day.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In June 2009 the Victorian Catchment Management Council (VCMC) convened a forum of CMA-based Indigenous facilitators and/or their managers to identify barriers and solutions to Indigenous engagement and participation in CMA-led NRM activities.

The 2009 workshop was undertaken with the support of the Australian Government Caring for Our Country facilitator – Indigenous Land Management, and built on the VCMC's Position Paper on Indigenous Engagement in Victoria,

Both the Position Paper<sup>1</sup> and the report from the July 2009 workshop<sup>2</sup>, identified Indigenous employment as a high priority. Following consultation with the CMA CEOs at their February 2010 meeting, VCMC supported a follow-up workshop in 2010 to look at opportunities for increasing levels of Indigenous employment in the regions.

This report documents the discussions that took place among the 28 participants of the 2010 Workshop on Indigenous Employment in NRM, held in Melbourne on 29 June 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> VCMC (2006) *VCMC Position/Perspective Paper on Indigenous Engagement in Victoria*, State of Victoria

<sup>2</sup> Kismet Forward (2009) *Enhancing Indigenous Participation in CMA-led NRM Activities* – Report of June 2009 workshop outcomes

## 2. OPENING OF THE FORUM

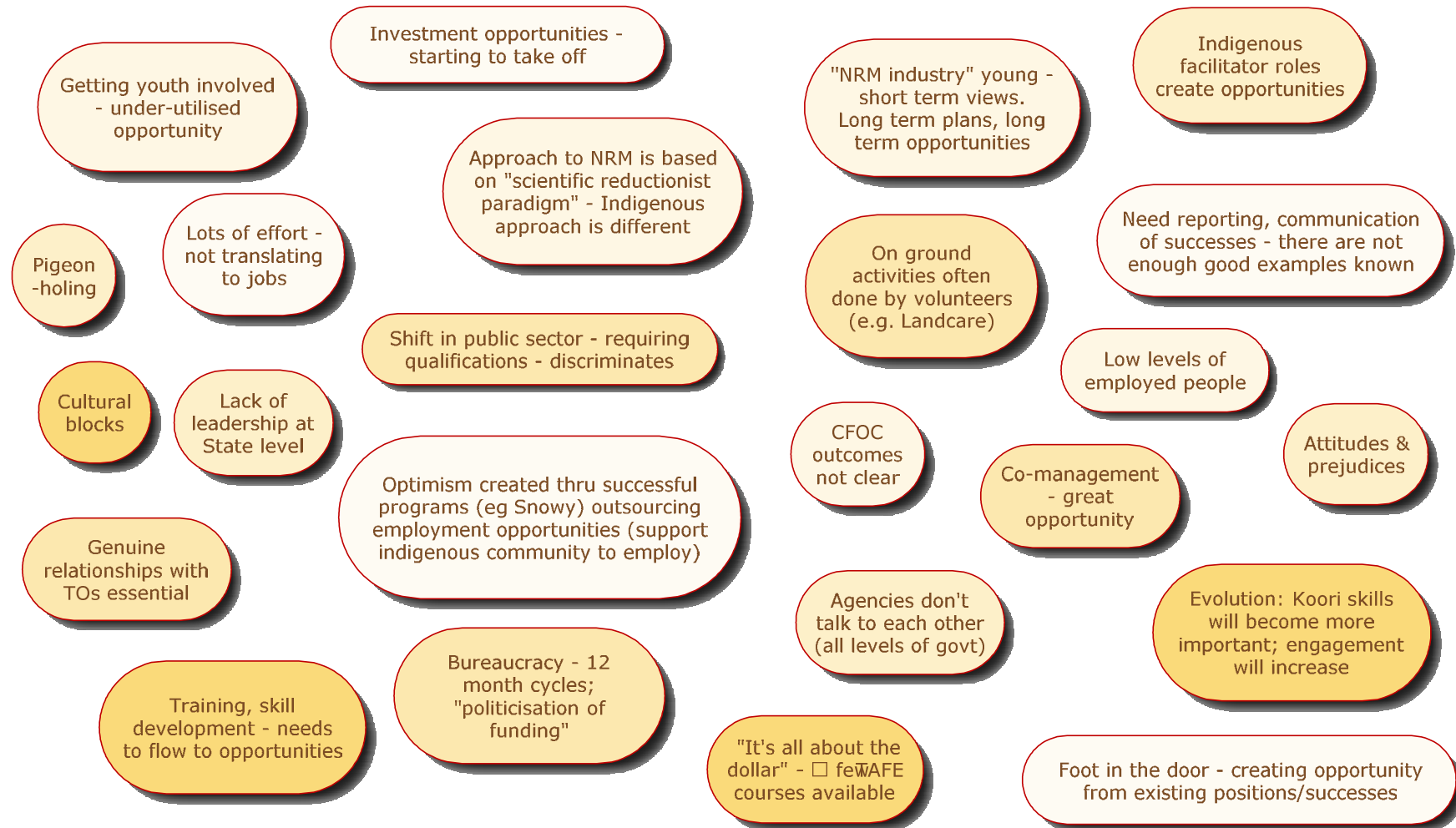
The forum was opened by Wurundjeri Elder Dianne Kerr welcoming participants to Wurundjeri Country. Dianne challenged the group to "come up with good ideas" for improving Indigenous employment opportunities, noting that this would require attendees to "understand each other, know each other, and listen to each other".

In his opening address, VCMC Chair Mick Murphy highlighted the need for statewide policy to deliver on the employment of Indigenous people in NRM in the regions. He challenged participants to ensure that the new NRM Plan for Victoria includes a focus on Indigenous employment. Mick said that it was up to this group to raise awareness around Indigenous employment at the regional level and spoke of the importance of cross-cultural learning opportunities.

Patricia Geraghty (Executive Officer, VCMC) stated that VCMC's charter includes the promotion of community awareness and engagement activities on a range of NRM matters; this includes engaging with Indigenous communities. Patricia said that what happened beyond this forum was in the hands of participants. She hoped that, by looking at what is working across the state, participants would feel empowered to make a difference in their own regions.

### 3. INTRODUCTORY QUESTION

Participants were asked to consider how effective Victoria has been in facilitating Indigenous employment in NRM activities. All participants provided a rating of between 1 and 5 out of 10, citing the following reasons for their score:



## 4. CURRENT PROGRAM AND INVESTMENT OVERVIEW

Will Philippiadis (Caring For Our Country Facilitator) provided an Australian Government perspective on enhancing Indigenous employment opportunities.

In particular, he highlighted the National Partnership Agreement (Indigenous Economic Participation), which seeks to recognise and build on the strength of Indigenous culture, ensuring that there is appropriate engagement and effective partnerships built with Indigenous Australians. This includes integration and collaboration between and within governments at all levels and their agencies to coordinate programs and services.

## 5. CASE STUDIES

Given the workshop's objective to share knowledge and learning across the state, presentations were provided on the following case studies:

### 5.1 An Honest Approach to Returning to Country (Trent Gibson, North Central CMA)

Trent Gibson introduced the pest plant and animal management project within the Kerang Ramsar Wetlands, which is delivered by an Indigenous works crew and a range of environmental contractors.



Trent spoke candidly about the challenges that he and Mark Pietzsch had met throughout the project, most significantly

- Different aspirations within the CMA: was the project about NRM outcomes, or Indigenous engagement?

- Different views about what is meant by (and expected from) Indigenous engagement
- Limited organisational experience in engaging Traditional Owners and working with Indigenous crews
- Unrealistic project timelines
- Unrealistic demands placed on the Indigenous facilitator
- The need to (as part of the project planning process) document the agreements between, and expectations of the various parties involved
- Working with pre-determined attitudes regarding Indigenous crews: the project provided a great opportunity for the crew to prove the critics wrong
- The need to ensure that training is relevant to the participants and their skills, including literacy levels

Nonetheless, Trent was proud of the fact that the project had led to

- Four crew members completing their Cert II in Conservation and Land Management
- The crew working closely with other government agencies and contractors
- Raised awareness about Indigenous culture
- Positive role models for other Indigenous people
- Empowered individuals who were planning for the future.

Finally, Trent spoke of his dream of continued employment and challenge for the crew, working on Country, where one of the participants takes over the role of project manager.

## 5.2 North West Indigenous NRM Traineeship Program (Joanne Eastman, DSE)

Joanne opened her presentation by confirming Trent's observations about the challenges for Indigenous facilitators – most significantly the breadth of their role and the lack of support – and acknowledged that they need to be recognised and looked after.

Joanne described the aims of the NW Traineeship Project being to

- Build capacity and confidence of long-term unemployed Indigenous people to identify and successfully access ongoing employment opportunities
- Develop skills, experience, qualifications and networks through project work for DSE and a number of other potential employers
- Focus on “triple bottom line +1” – achieving environmental, economic, social *and cultural* outcomes

She described the project as being based on the Lake Tyers Land Management Traineeship Pilot Project Model, which acknowledges the difficulties for Indigenous people who strongly identify with community, to successfully access mainstream economic and employment opportunities.

Joanne indicated that the project is designed to address the gap between aspiration and achievement by ‘scaffolding’ supports for people until they have the skills, experience and confidence to access mainstream employment opportunities.

This is done by bringing a range of ‘partner NRM’ agencies together to design worthwhile project work that reflects the



agencies normal operations, and that contributes to learning outcomes for trainees to achieve nationally accredited (i.e. transferable) qualifications in the NRM area.

Joanne highlighted the importance of local support for participants and for the Indigenous facilitator – support from agency staff and from local communities.

She stated that DSE recognises that short-term projects do not yield long-term benefits.

Joanne also mentioned a major challenge for the project: getting the different agencies to work together.

### **5.3 Gunditj Mirring Partnership Project (Mary Johnson and Leonard Cooper, Glenelg Hopkins CMA)**

Mary and Leonard described this project as the first in Victoria to develop indigenous ecological knowledge into an extension program. It is funded by Caring For Our Country for 4 years, and is a partnership between Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and Glenelg Hopkins CMA.

The project is about assembling and building Indigenous knowledge and capacity, and incorporates two 2-year stages:

- Stage 1: employ staff, establish Reference Group, identify and collect Indigenous ecological knowledge, develop an extension toolkit using this knowledge, protect habitat and provide training and mentoring.
- Stage 2: trial the Indigenous ecological knowledge and extension toolkit on Aboriginal owned and managed land, and extend it to non-Indigenous land managers, while continuing the mentoring and training.

Mary and Leonard agreed with previous comments about timescales: a program approach is needed, rather than dividing opportunities into 'convenient investment chunks'. Timeframes must reflect community needs and be sufficient to build sustainable outcomes.

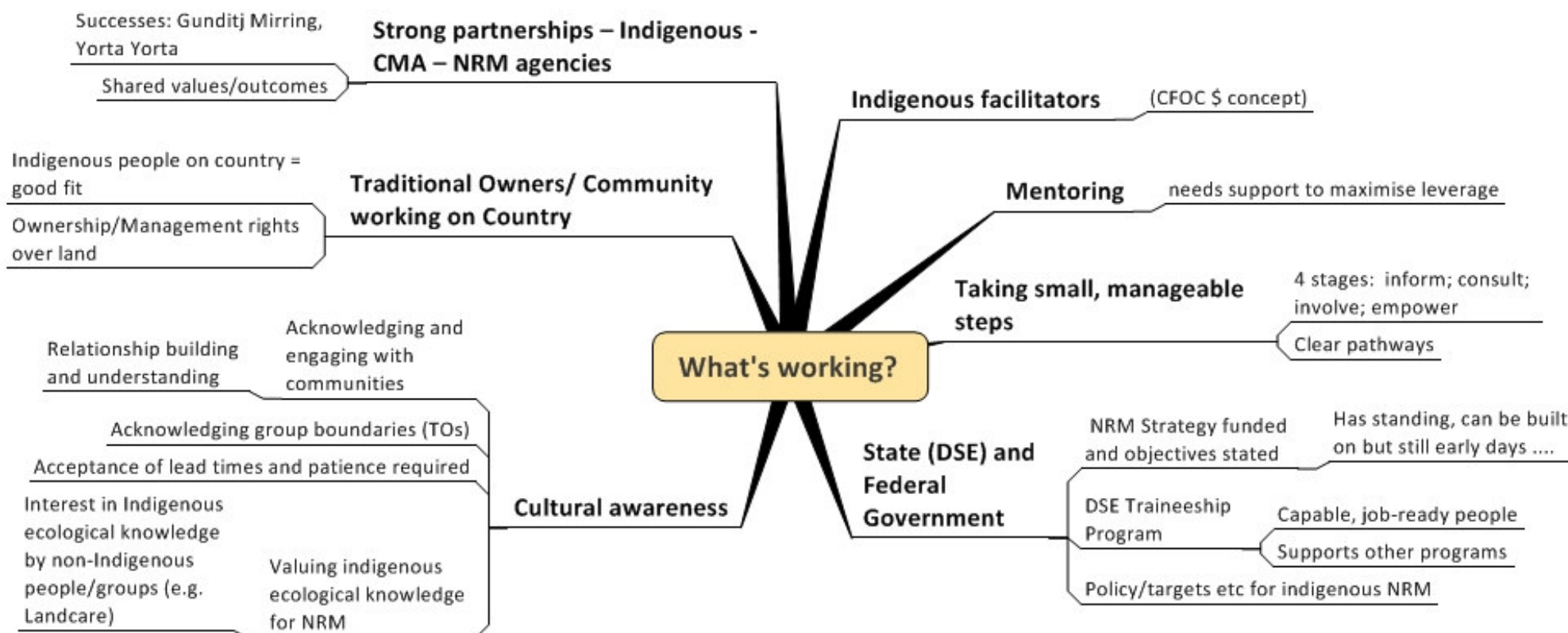


Copies of the three presentations can be obtained from [Marian.Pernat@dse.vic.gov.au](mailto:Marian.Pernat@dse.vic.gov.au).

After the presentations and some discussion with the presenters, small groups answered the following questions:

## 5.4 What is working with current programs (and can be built upon)?

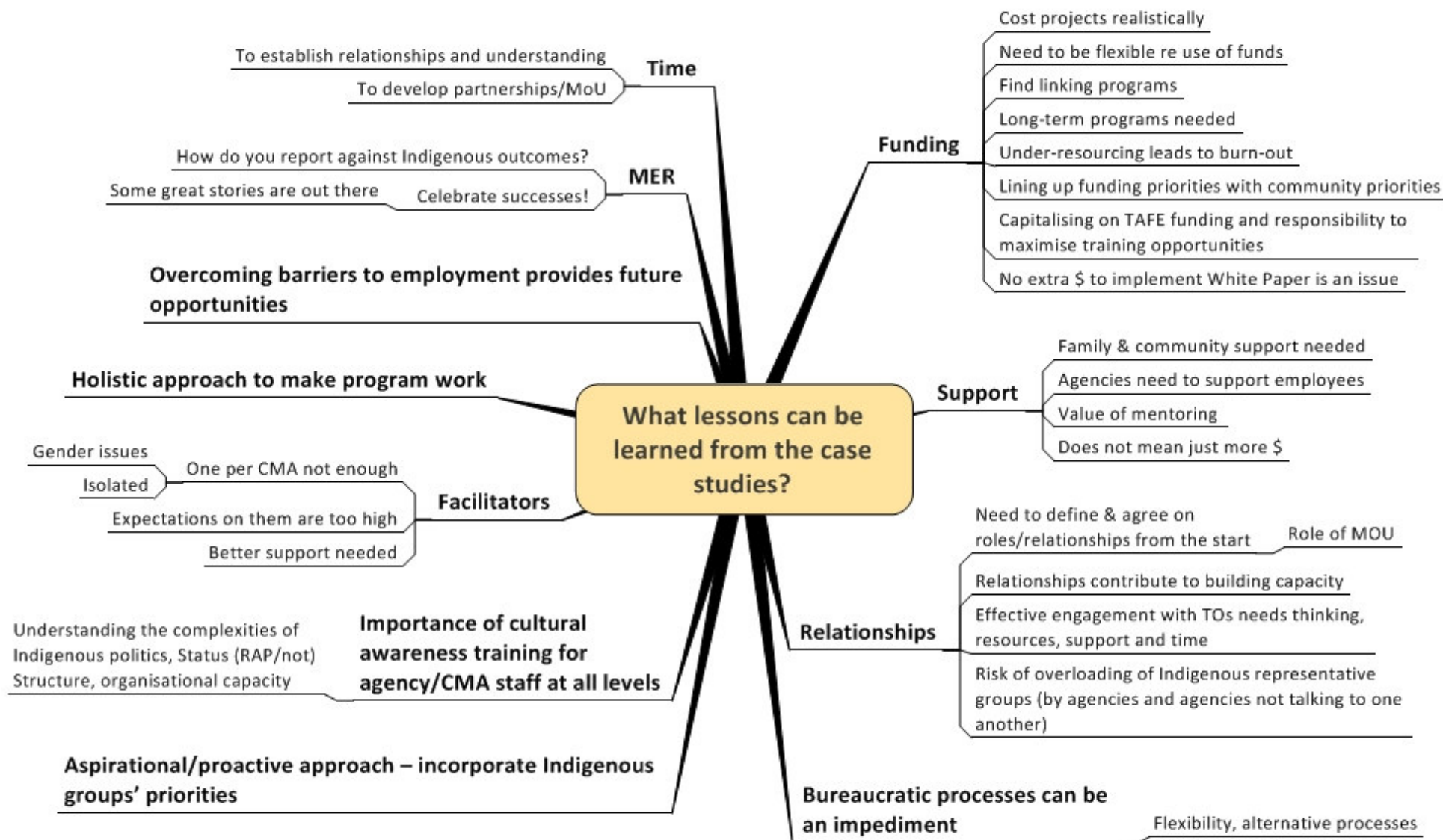
Participants collectively identified the following program components as being successful. These are great building blocks for future programs.



There followed some discussion regarding Memoranda of Understanding. It was felt that the process of developing an MoU is an important starting point for a relationship in that it helps to clarify expectations, roles and responsibilities (etc). MoUs provide a useful reference to remind all parties of the 'ground rules'.

Notwithstanding this, some participants felt that the value of MoUs is in the short (rather than long) term: they are not needed once there is a solid relationship based on trust.

## 5.5 What lessons can be learned from the case studies?



## 5.6 What other programs/activities can contribute to this bank of knowledge?

Participants suggested the following:

- Facilitator network (but need appropriate support)
- Employment programs
- PV Indigenous employment program
- Caring For Our Country: working on country
- Victorian Investment Plan
- Aboriginal Affairs of Victoria
- Native Title Settlement Framework
- Educational groups
- Social Economic Groups DHS/DPCD
- Dedicated Funding
- Local government
- Non-government organisations
- Indigenous community organisations
- Community of Practice
- Learning from other sectors eg health, youth, sport, arts etc
- Wurundjeri Country Plan (different ways to approach: CFOC funded in PPWCMA – Wurundjeri councils delivers)

- Moogji Snowy River Project (River Health) employers (working as contractors)
- Canoe Tours: scope for business development to link cultural awareness as a tourism opportunity
- Gear up to capitalise on merger opportunities e.g. Gippsland Gunaikurnai RAP area will be in one CMA region under new institutional arrangements.

One group wondered how the information that had come forward in this workshop should be more broadly communicated across Victoria, and whether any organisation in particular should play an advocacy role in this regard. The absence of leadership in Victoria to champion and facilitate involvement of Indigenous communities in NRM activities was frequently mentioned as a key impediment.

This matter was raised again at the end of the workshop, with VCMC agreeing to attempt to find a sponsor/s to provide such leadership (see page 18).

## 6. THE TRANSITION TO NRCAS

Participants formed groups according to the proposed NRCA regions to consider the transition to the new structures, in particular opportunities and risks to efforts to increase Indigenous employment in NRM activities. Their thoughts are as follows.

Opportunities for increasing Indigenous employment (as a result of transition to NRCAs)	As suggested by the following regional groupings:				
	Western Districts	Melbourne	Gippsland	Northern Rivers	Wimmera Mallee
Increased accountability			👍	👍	👍
Building Indigenous employment as part of 'core' business / develop IE strategy			👍	👍	
More collective resources / sharing combined knowledge and experience / one Indigenous employment team (dedicated critical mass) / more horsepower / building stronger networks			👍	👍	👍
Commitment through Moonda Wurrin Gree policy – starting late 2010, across public sector agencies by 2015 – up to 2700 people by then. (Very significant for MWCA: large work-force)		👍			
Longer-term corporate funding for flagship projects ( <u>branded</u> ) → potential for Indigenous employment / Corporate and Philanthropic investment	👍	👍			
Lots of money!		👍			
Connection through current CfoC project 'Wurundjeri Country Plan' to MW (and other partners) through training, dialogue, Indigenous employment		👍			
Benchmarking: Identify stakeholders, previous work, opportunities / joint planning Pre-NRCA					👍
Look at strengths and weaknesses of current CMA approaches to enhance collaboration					👍
Encouraging/incorporating 'closing the gap' commitments into NRCA business					👍
Getting appropriate Indigenous input into new RCS / Statewide NRM plan	👍				👍
Training opportunities / accredited training (Cert 1, 2, 3, 4 in NRM)	👍		👍		
Policy makers: resource the policy not just projects / funding through Program not Project	👍				
Indigenous employment and enterprise			👍		
Link to COAG preference providers → ↑ Indigenous businesses			👍		
Lake Tyers Land Management Model being used for GLaWAC native title; follow Moogji example e.g. with Gunai Kurnai (especially given land area)			👍		

Risks to efforts to increase Indigenous employment (as a result of transition to NRCA's)	As suggested by the following regional groupings:				
	Western Districts	Melbourne	Gippsland	Northern Rivers	Wimmera Mallee
Combining existing roles – greater workloads	👎			👎	
The new organisation may have different philosophy re Indigenous facilitator funding	👎				
Current relationships are accepted, new ones may not be (risk to Facilitators) / disenfranchising / lack of engagement or damage to partnerships / breaking down alliances/partnerships as different approaches by new NRCA impacts on existing relationships	👎		👎	👎	
Clash of organisation culture	👎		👎	👎	
Loss of ownership / commitment because of larger organisation's size			👎		
Timeframes / readiness / overloading / disruption (as with any organisation in change)			👎	👎	
Confusion with contacts during/post change				👎	
MoUs/current agreements need to be changed to recognise new NRCA entity				👎	
Rush to complete RCS may not see true IE with input captured				👎	



## 7. A REGIONAL INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Still in their regional groupings, participants reviewed all of the discussions over the last few hours to identify components that a regional Indigenous employment should, and should not, include.

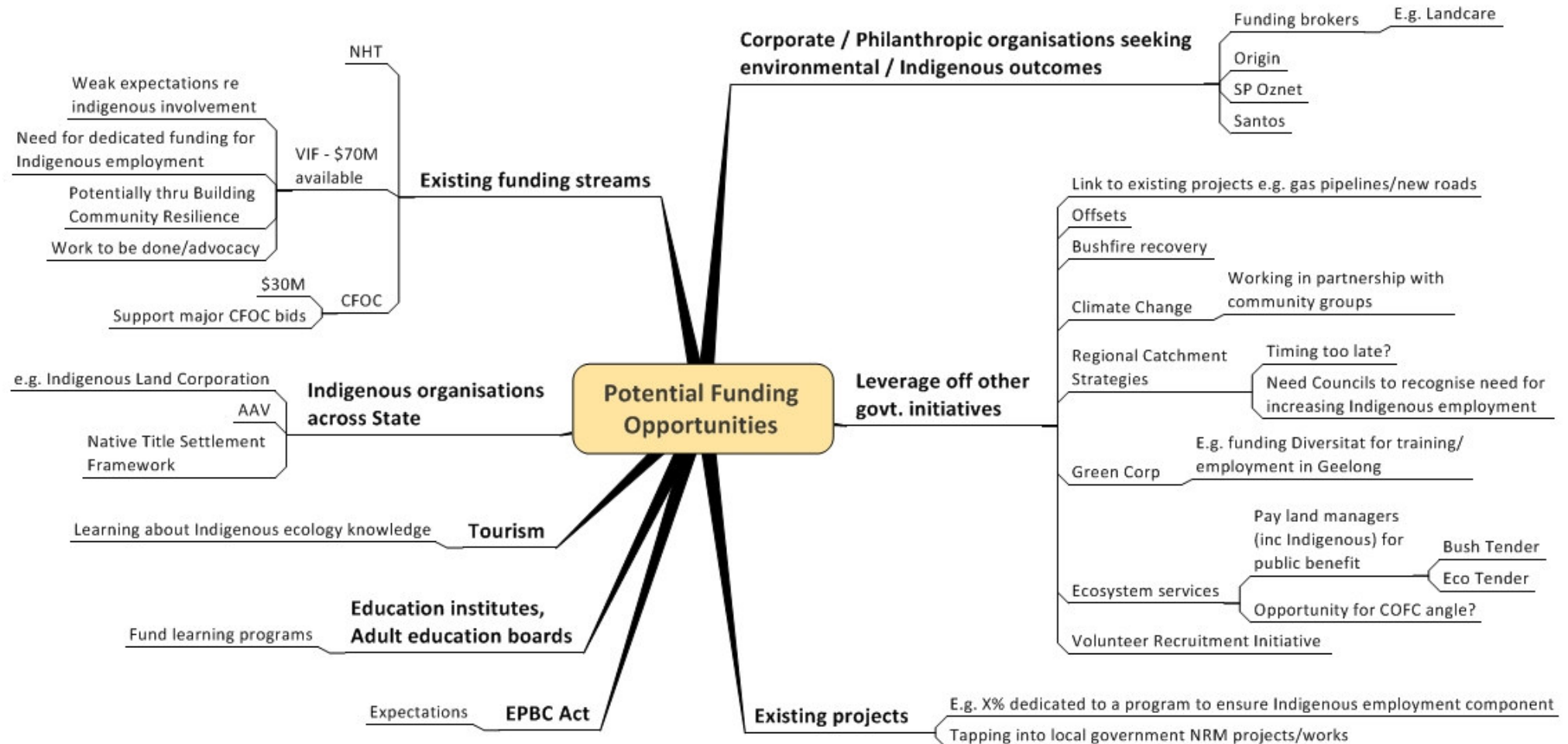
A regional Indigenous employment program should include:	As suggested by the following regional groupings:				
	Western Districts	Melbourne	Gippsland	Northern Rivers	Wimmera Mallee
Training / mentoring / traineeships, cadet programs, graduate programs	✓			✓	
Job security / building 'employable people' / pathways into 'mainstream' employment / career path	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Flexibility / job-swapping / transfers across sectors / potentially working in communities one day per week	✓	✓		✓	
Connection to Country / working on Country	✓		✓		
Compulsory cultural awareness training for all involved / recognition of the value of the work	✓			✓	
Relationships with Aboriginal communities / TOs / let Indigenous communities take a lead role / community support / facilitator to help build relationships		✓			✓
Support Aboriginal enterprises: alternative sources of revenue / support for business development / provide work for contractors. i.e. sustainable opportunities – beyond NRM		✓	✓		✓
Establish regional employment entity?					✓
Indigenous capacity & resources → core business			✓		
Programs properly costed upfront and funded / funding streams (long-term), including for capacity development to ensure all can be involved			✓	✓	✓
Clear outcome statement(s), inc contribution to improvement of the land – but not limiting the learning to NRM and/or Cultural Heritage			✓	✓	
Agreed protocols for engagement / open dialogue between all players				✓	
Long-term support post any program				✓	
Flexibility for true development rather than driven by time-bound outputs				✓	
Targeting youth / gender equality and focus				✓	

A regional Indigenous employment program should avoid/ NOT include:	As suggested by the following regional groupings:				
	Western Districts	Melbourne	Gippsland	Northern Rivers	Wimmera Mallee
Politics! (do not take sides)	x	x			x
Unrealistic targets, timeframes		x	x		
Over-work, burn-out		x			
Unclear roles		x			
Being exclusive not inclusive (one size fits all) / trying to fit Indigenous people in the one box (need for flexibility) / trying to cut people to fit the cloth / assuming all NRCAs have the same issues			x	x	
Short-term funding / lack of commitment to long-term funding / under-resourcing	x			x	x
Technical (scientific) language/terminology				x	
Meetings in sterile, time-bound environments				x	
Drop-outs from training through lack of support (\$, time, flexibility)				x	
Expectation of volunteerism / providing time for free				x	
Over-consultation (Departments/bodies sharing their data, not re-asking)				x	
Being driven by 'the deal' / fitting things around what the program wants/top down / tokenistic approach		x	x		x
Looking at outcomes in a traditional sense – 'tick the box' / being limited to NRM outcomes			x		
Piecemeal / ad-hoc approach / lack of flexibility			x		x
Lack of data (no reporting at State or Federal level as to number of Indigenous people in NRM employment)			x		
Marginalisation of Indigenous people through an Indigenous specific program					x
Lack of leadership and support at executive level					x
Career stagnation / menial tasks	x				
Losing what we have built so far	x				



## 8. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Workshop participants 'brainstormed' the following suggestions for future funding opportunities:



## 9. WHERE TO NOW?

Discussion ensued about further work that could be done following the workshop to enhance levels of Indigenous employment.

Ideas included:

- Continued engagement with participants' counterparts in the new NRCAs
- Better support arrangements for Indigenous facilitators, including reviews of position descriptions and expectations
- Broadening of Landcare support (for example, by Melbourne Water) to include Indigenous participation in NRM
- A potential conference to bring Traditional Owner groups to identify their needs and expectations and to discuss what is happening interstate
- Provide more (practical) project ideas to the CMA CEOs forum
- NRCA/NRCC Transition Committees and the CMA CEOs forum should be advised about the workshop and its outcomes
- VCMC to communicate workshop outcomes at the statewide level
- VCMC to attempt to find a sponsor/s to progress the issues raised throughout the day. It is important that there is broad scale leadership in engagement and employment of Indigenous Australians in NRM, otherwise it will continue to be piecemeal in approach.

It was felt that the project based approach to NRM funding doesn't fit well with improving the involvement of Indigenous communities in NRM. Until the engagement and involvement of Indigenous communities is an objective of NRM rather than a 'side salad' in projects, Victoria will continue in the same paradigm that currently exists.

## 10. APPENDIX 1: WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Belinda Parkes	Land and Coasts	Australian Government
Ben Wurm	Senior Project Officer - Native Title Unit	DoJ
Chris Norman	CEO	GBCMA
Christopher McKay	Project Officer, Caring for Our Country Victorian Team	DAFF
Doug Evans	Regional Landcare Coordinator	PPWCMA
Greg Edwards	Indigenous Cultural Heritage Protection Officer	CCMA
Joanne Eastman	Senior Project Officer - Capacity Building	DSE
John Young	Member	VCMC
Leigh Dennis	Program Manager, Community and Partnerships	CCMA
Leonard Cooper	Indigenous Community Coordinator	GHCMA
Marian Pernat	Research and Policy Officer	VCMC
Mark Pietzsch	Indigenous Facilitator	NCCMA
Marlon Parsons	Indigenous Facilitator	MCMA
Mary Johnson	Strategic Partnerships Manager	GHCMA
Max Skeen	Regional Landcare Manager	WCMA
Mick Murphy	Chair	VCMC
Mikaela Power	Stakeholder Engagement Coordinator	WGCMA
Mike Nurse	Regional Program Coordinator	World Vision
Patricia Geraghty	EO	VCMC
Ralph Cotter	Project Manager - SD	DPI

Ray Ahmat	Indigenous Partnership Facilitator, North East	DSE
Richard Kennedy	Indigenous Landcare Facilitator	NECMA
Rob Andy	Community Partnerships Officer and Indigenous Land Management Facilitator	WGCMA
Rob Willersdorf	Major Projects Manager	EGCMA
Stephen Walsh	Regional Indigenous Facilitator	DSE
Tracey Koper	Project Officer	VCMC
Trent Gibson	Project Manager Kerang and Gunbower Wetland Enhancement Project	NCCMA
Will Philippiadis	Caring for Our Country Indigenous Land Management Facilitator	Australian Government

## 11. APPENDIX 2: FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

### How valuable was today?

- Today was valuable because it provided increased understanding of issues across the state, enabled communication with a range of stakeholders, and created opportunities for future engagement
- I feel today was immensely valuable for Indigenous staff from different agencies to sit through a workshop with other staff members such as CEOs, managers, supervisors and VCMC representatives. To see perspectives from both sides as well as the case studies was very important
- Valuable! – case studies and opportunity to talk to presenters afterwards; conversations; opportunity to catch up with people and meet new people
- Process was very good
- Very valuable. It helped broaden and deepen my understanding of what can be done to facilitate ↑ Indigenous employment. It also helped establish some personal connection that I expect to have use of
- Quite valuable for sharing information
- Some uncertainty about how meeting outcomes will be followed up and how we will be kept informed
- Great to have a CEO here
- Very valuable to hear the case studies and expose the 'real issues' and barriers to furthering Indigenous employment in NRM. As someone relatively new to these discussions it provides a good foundation of knowledge and impetus to learn more
- Today was very valuable. We can all learn from each others' wins and losses; we all need to get together much more often
- Good but need more of these discussions
- Pretty valuable as I hope the CMAs are aware of appropriate engagement
- Raised my awareness of Indigenous employment in NRM in Victoria
- Well facilitated and very interactive
- Very: it gave me the opportunity to listen to the practitioners and understand all the difficulties. There is tremendous capacity in the regions – but it does need support and leadership at State level
- Today was valuable to me in progressing last year's workshop in a more focussed way
- Good exercise capturing everyone's contribution is a non-threatening way. Would have been good to have captured a summary of all Indigenous employment activities across all CMA's to complement the presented case studies, and enhance the sharing of learnings
- This will enable me to identify what opportunities are available to Indigenous employment in my region
- Provided additional information we can use to improve the Indigenous facilitator position and how it functions/supports Indigenous people
- Interesting to see where Victoria is going with Indigenous engagement for employment outcomes. Useful
- Very valuable sharing ideas and experiences, establishing common goals, opportunities to work together and get better outcomes

- Useful. Good to hear of other regions' experience and compare with our own
- Very valuable forum to listen to others, exchange ideas and information. Hopefully the VCMC will take the learnings from this forum and develop realistic recommendations for the State
- I learned a lot today about Indigenous participation in NRM. This was not difficult as I come from a low level of understanding – presently I am not heavily involved in this aspect of NRM so the value of today may be questionable but I did enjoy the experience

**Will today lead to any change in your region/organisation?**

- It may change the way we are currently developing projects and programs. Will provide greater clarity with regard to what may happen with NRCA's
- I hope that it does lead to changes in all regions across the state, as well as improve on areas that already work well
- Yes. Ideas to follow up and act on
- Hopefully it will lead to some change – it will certainly add a new dimension to negotiations leading into the merger
- Not sure leading to change in the organisation but I will feel more empowered in terms of asking questions
- Not large scale but the feedback may affect the way individuals approach and view this issue. Hopefully individuals will become more motivated
- I don't know, I have been to many days like today that just don't go anywhere
- All we can do is hope
- Hoping it will; but I'm working with a strong opinionated group both Indigenous and non Indigenous
- Greater awareness of opportunities for Indigenous employment in NRM and informed NRCAs
- Greater awareness of opportunities to factor in Indigenous employment commitments into Native Title framework settlements
- Yes – need to recommend that through the transition committees , new NRCAs undertake ICAP training earlier in their new terms
- My organisation will take on relevant messages from today
- Will stimulate increased discussion with our IE unit and through our CMA Board (at their next meeting)
- Hopefully the transitional change will enhance employment in our organisation
- Will help shape future projects and partnerships with Indigenous groups
- Confirms existing strategy for Indigenous development across Australia
- Helps understand my agency's role in supporting Vic CMAs
- Hopefully more working together – networks (and knowledge banks) are fundamental to improved programs
- Yes, will approach other regions doing similar initiatives to ones we are doing or planning
- Not immediately – however, again, the learnings should become part of the broader dialogue and may influence the establishment and look of the NRCAs
- I will be speaking to a senior Indigenous policy advisor for DPI in the next couple of days. Hopefully this will result in a push towards greater Indigenous employment in DPI. I will also find out if there are currently any DPI policies with regard to Indigenous employment

**What one thing will you take back after today to move this along?**

Participants were invited to make and keep their own notes regarding this question. Some offered to share their thoughts:

- My supervisor/manager who accompanied me to this workshop will push for this concept to be strengthened within our organisation
- Opportunity to meet with new NRCA partner organisation
- Opportunity to follow up on case studies → site visits
- Not a great deal
- Support for a network of Indigenous facilitators
- I will take the great stories from today with me – to move the issue of Indigenous employment in NRM along
- Getting involved with the employment strategy
- Allow time for discussion and decisions with Indigenous communities
- Initiate a dialogue with merge partner on potential partnerships
- Contacts and ideas