

Old and New: Indigenous *Caring for Country* in contemporary landscapes

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Caring for Country is one of the most successful social and environmental movements in Australian history. *Caring for country* refers to the reciprocal physical, cultural and spiritual relationship between Indigenous peoples and their lands - a millennia-old relationship that survived the dispossession and dislocation of colonisation. Enabled by the return of land and access to resources and funding, albeit in adhoc and limited way, Indigenous peoples have reshaped and reasserted millennia old *Caring for Country* custodianship responsibilities to match their contemporary circumstances. These contemporary circumstances include high levels of social and economic disadvantage, and landscapes facing a wide range of new environmental threats including climate change. The most visible agents of *Caring for Country* are the multitude of Indigenous ranger programs that have emerged from community level decision making across Australia. In addition to providing environmental management services, ranger programs are increasingly providing the social, intellectual, physical and economic capital to catalyse new livelihood options in remote Australia. This paper examines the range of cultural, social and environmental roles of rangers, the ways they have adapted new technologies including digital tools, and possible future directions of *Caring for Country*.

Bio

Dr **Rod Kennett** is Director of Native Title, Land and Water at the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Originally trained as a biologist, Rod now leads a multidisciplinary research team addressing legal, cultural, economic and environmental issues around Indigenous ownership and management of land and water. He has written over 50 research papers and articles, and led numerous research and natural resource management programs in universities, non-government and government organisations. He worked in marine and terrestrial science and management in tropical north Australia for over three decades where much his work has focused on increasing Indigenous participation in research and management.