



Australian Government  
Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation



The ILSC GROUP

PEOPLE. COUNTRY. OPPORTUNITY.

# Our Country Our Future

## PROGRAM GUIDELINES

OCTOBER 2024



## How can we help you?

*Our Country Our Future* is the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation's principal funding program where we work with Indigenous groups across Australia to own and manage land and water interests.

These guidelines will help you decide whether *Our Country Our Future* is a good fit for you and your project.

## Acknowledgement of Country

In all our activities we pay our respect to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands, waters and skies on which we live and work. We honour the resilience and continuing connection to Country, culture, and community of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia. We recognise the decisions we make today will impact the lives of generations to come.

## What we offer

We offer a wide range of assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups seeking support for their projects including:

- **Direct funding** for purchasing, managing and/or developing land or water-related interests
- **Advice and capability support** for property owners including information, knowledge and training to assist with project development and delivery
- **Facilitation, advocacy and negotiation** to develop partnerships, markets and other opportunities.

## Who we work with

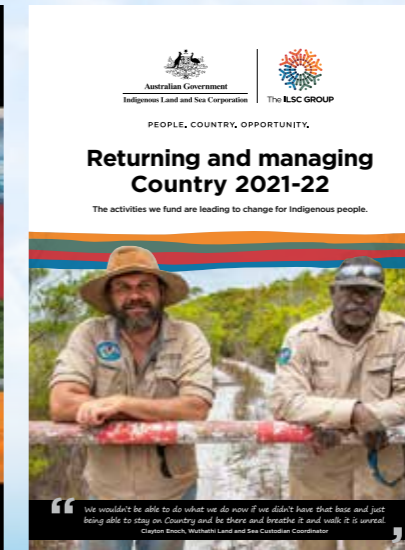
We partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups\* across the broad diversity of Indigenous Australia:

- from cities to regional and remote areas
- from inland to coastal environments; and
- across a range of sectors including cultural and eco-tourism, renewables and energy, fisheries and aquaculture, caring for Country, carbon and environmental markets, health and wellbeing, and water-based enterprises and assets, etc.

\*see eligibility criteria (page 04)

## Need some inspiration?

Check out our *Returning and Managing Country* publication available on our website [www.ilsc.gov.au](http://www.ilsc.gov.au) where we report on the variety of projects that we have recently supported through *Our Country Our Future* funding.



## What do you want to do?

### If you want to...

- Purchase a land or water-related interest
- Commence or expand a land or water-based enterprise
- Undertake planning and/or feasibility assessment
- Build or upgrade infrastructure, plant or equipment
- Improve your organisation's service delivery
- Conduct on-ground management activities to Care for Country (land, water, biodiversity, cultural heritage)
- Enable or improve access to Country with cultural significance
- Maintain, support and revitalise culture
- Develop opportunities for formal and informal training and/or employment
- Address urgent health and safety issues on Country (people, livestock, environment)

...and these activities will lead to Indigenous people:



Growing the value of Country



Owning & managing Country sustainably



Driving policy & opportunity



Preserving & protecting culture

...we may be able to help. Read on for the application steps, eligibility criteria and full guidelines.



Boola Boornap Tree Nursery,  
Noongar Boodja Country, WA  
Image credit: Noongar Land Enterprise Group

# How to apply

Our Country Our Future is flexible, so you can apply at any time by following these three easy steps.

## 1. Make your initial enquiry

- Call your local office – our details are on the back cover
- Confirm your eligibility with our staff – you must be able to answer ‘yes’ to the following criteria:

Does your project involve the acquisition or management of land and/or water-related interests?	
<b>For projects that involve acquisition:</b> Are you an incorporated entity (or in the process of becoming incorporated) and are you Indigenous controlled <sup>1</sup> ?	
<b>For projects that involve management:</b> <i>Are you one of the following;</i> - An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander holder of land or a water-related right <sup>2</sup> - An organisation interested in investing in Indigenous-held land or waters	
Does your project have the support of the Indigenous land/water holders and have they provided their consent for its use?	
Will Indigenous Australians enjoy access, opportunities and benefits from land or waters as a result of your project?	
Are you compliant with your incorporating legislation and any agreements you currently have with the ILSC?	

- Discuss your project proposal and find out how we can assist with your project development
- Request an Application Form

<sup>1</sup> The ATSI Act permits the ILSC to make grants of land and water-related rights to ATSI Corporations which are:  
 - Corporations incorporated under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006*  
 - Corporations where all members are Indigenous persons (e.g. Associations, Companies limited by guarantee)  
 - In the case of Corporations limited by shares, where a controlling interest is held by Indigenous persons.

<sup>2</sup> The ILSC can only fund management projects:  
 - where an interest in the land is held by an ATSI Corporation or Indigenous person/s (e.g. freehold, lease, licence, management agreement, native title etc.)  
 - where water-related rights are held by an ATSI Corporation or Indigenous person/s (e.g. rights to take water, fishing licences, native title rights).

## 2. Develop your application

- Fill in the Application Form
- Gather and supply the necessary supporting documentation\*  
 - *see Supporting documentation (page 07)*  
 \* Failure to provide necessary documentation may result in your application assessment being delayed or discontinued
- Ask for support from the ILSC if required

## 3. Submit your application

- We will confirm receipt of your application
- Your application will be submitted to the ILSC’s National Assessment Panel for prioritisation, assessment and recommendation
- We will keep you informed as your application progresses

# How we prioritise and assess applications

Our Country Our Future is a competitive funding program with a fixed budget. Our prioritisation and assessment criteria ensure we invest in the projects that deliver the highest possible outcomes to Indigenous Australians.

We prioritise projects:

- that provide nations with access to Country (land/water) who previously have had no, or limited, access to their Country
- that support Indigenous leadership in priority sectors (renewables and clean energy, inland water, fisheries and aquaculture, carbon, and environmental markets)
- based on the degree of change they create – the outcomes and opportunities they generate for First Nations peoples and communities.

Projects are also assessed objectively against the assessment criteria (below) and relatively against other project proposals we receive.

Opportunity and Outcomes	Project Viability
<p>What is the need/opportunity, how will this be addressed, and what outcomes will be delivered as a result?</p> <p><b>We will consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• your project’s key activities, objectives, milestones, timeframes</li> <li>• progress already made in developing your project</li> <li>• the extent to which your project activities align with/ contribute to one or more of the ILSC’s four <i>long-term outcomes</i> (page 02)</li> <li>• the Indigenous people/groups most likely to benefit from your project and in what ways</li> </ul>	<p>Will the proposed activity have sufficient funds to meet its operating (expenditure) requirements and therefore deliver the projected outcomes?</p> <p><b>We will consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether your proposal is realistic and achievable</li> <li>• whether the project is sustainable beyond the life of ILSC funding</li> <li>• any financial or in-kind contribution your organisation will make to the project</li> <li>• whether there is sufficient co-investment (financial or in-kind partnerships) to support the project</li> </ul>
Financial Health	Capability
<p>Has your organisation demonstrated sound financial performance and is it currently in a solid financial position?</p> <p><b>We will consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• financial performance (income, expenditure, profit/loss) over the past three years</li> <li>• financial position (assets, liabilities, liquidity, debt, equity)</li> <li>• stability of your income/funding streams</li> <li>• financial managements processes and controls</li> </ul>	<p>Can you effectively demonstrate the ability to manage, implement, monitor and report back on the project?</p> <p><b>We will consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether the organisation demonstrates good governance and operates effectively</li> <li>• your experience and past performance with similar projects/activities</li> <li>• skill levels and experience of staff and project partners (if applicable)</li> </ul>

## What we won’t support

Our Country Our Future will not fund:

- activities that do not align with the ILSC’s statutory purposes, or do not generate any benefits for Indigenous people
- activities that are the responsibility of another agency
- any ongoing service delivery/program costs
- any ongoing operational costs such as insurance, rates, power, water, etc.
- administration/sitting fees
- livestock (if applicable)

**This list is not exhaustive.**

We will also consider whether any previous funding has been received by a given applicant and if the ILSC is the most appropriate funder for your project. We may decline applications on this basis.

**For further detail please contact your ILSC office.**

## What you can expect from us

### During the application and assessment process we (the ILSC) will:

- work with you to develop and submit your application
- clearly communicate so you understand what is required at each step of the application process
- follow up in a timely manner, including:
  - letting you know how your application is proceeding once it has been submitted
  - giving you an opportunity to clarify any concerns or questions if your application is at risk of not being funded
  - providing you with specific feedback in the event your application is not approved.

## What we expect from you

### For all projects

During the application and assessment process, regardless of whether you are applying to manage or acquire land/water, we (the ILSC) expect you (the project applicant) to:

- submit your application form in full with all necessary attachments and supporting documentation (see *Supporting documentation*)
- provide, on request and in a timely manner, any other documents that may be required to enable the ILSC to make an informed and efficient assessment.

### If you are applying to manage Country

Where you are applying for **the management** of land and/or water-related interests you will be required to:

1. enter a **contract** describing how the project will be implemented and how and when funding payment(s) will be provided
2. carry out the **project activities** and deliverables as agreed in the **contract**
3. submit half-yearly **progress reports** to demonstrate how you are completing contracted activities and working towards intended outcomes
4. complete an **evaluation report** on project completion
5. submit a financial acquittal report to confirm funding has been spent.

### If you are applying to acquire Country

Where you are applying for **the acquisition** of land and/or water-related interests you will be required to:

1. be an **incorporated, Indigenous-controlled** entity permitted to hold assets (according to your constitution/rules of incorporation) and therefore eligible to sign a lease and/or be granted the property or water-related rights
2. work with the ILSC to define an agreed strategy for negotiating purchase, and:
  - where the property is to be directly acquired by the proponent with ILSC funding, enter into a **contract** describing how and when the **project activities** and deliverables will be implemented and how and when the funding payment(s) will be provided **OR**
  - where the property is acquired by the ILSC on your behalf, enter into a **contract** to lease the property and develop an agreed pathway to ownership in collaboration with the ILSC
3. carry out the **project activities** and deliverables as agreed in the **contract** and, if relevant, in the pathway to ownership
4. submit half-yearly **progress reports** for five years to demonstrate how you are completing contracted activities and working towards intended outcomes, and complete an **evaluation report** when requested
5. where the property is acquired by the ILSC on your behalf – once conditions are met, enter into a new **contract** to be granted the property or water-related rights.

**For all projects – management and acquisition – the ILSC may also conduct field visits to check the progress of your project.**

## Supporting documentation

The ILSC is committed to maximising the success of the projects it supports and therefore undertakes a high standard of commercial-level due diligence. This means your application will require supporting documentation.

### This might include:

- a business/feasibility plan, including detailed, three-year financial forecasts
- evidence of formal project partnership arrangements
- evidence of financial/in-kind support
- a property management plan for acquisition projects

### For capital works/building/infrastructure projects:

- cost estimates/quantity surveyor report
- detailed drawings or concept plans
- asset lifecycle management plans.

During the application process we will discuss which documents will be required and if you may need support to fund some of these items.

We will also advise if there is a requirement to undertake an engagement and consent process with relevant Traditional Owners in accordance with the ILSC's Traditional Owner Engagement and Consent Policy.

The ILSC reserves the right to discontinue applications where requested information is not forthcoming.

## Complaints and feedback

The ILSC is committed to partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to deliver their aspirations for Country.

If you are not satisfied with your experience with the ILSC, first raise your concern with your contact and we will seek to resolve it immediately. If you are not happy with the resolution, please submit your complaint in writing for formal assessment through the ILSC's complaints process.

If you do not want your complaint handled by your nearest ILSC office, you may write to the Chief Operating Officer care of the ILSC's Head Office in Adelaide. In circumstances where you are not satisfied with how the ILSC has dealt with your complaint, you may have a right to request the Commonwealth Ombudsman to investigate the matter.

Our commitment to customer experiences is reflected in our Service Charter located on the ILSC website [www.ilsc.gov.au](http://www.ilsc.gov.au). The charter sets out additional detail on the ILSC's feedback and complaints process.

## Privacy

Through the *Our Country Our Future* application process the ILSC collects personal information from the applicant and partners and, in some cases, personal information about other members of the applicant's group.

This information is accessible only to ILSC staff.

Additional guidance on how we manage your information is included in the OCOF Application Form and Guide and in our Privacy Policy located on the ILSC website.

# Strategic context

The *Our Country Our Future* program is the ILSC's chief delivery mechanism for meeting our strategic priorities – **Returning Country and Managing Country** – identified by our National Indigenous Land and Sea Strategy (NILSS) 2023-28. Available at [www.ilsc.gov.au](http://www.ilsc.gov.au), the NILSS 2023-28 reaffirms the ILSC's key role as the lead national agency responsible for returning and managing Country.

Through the commitments we made in the NILSS – and the priority actions outlined in our associated Regional Indigenous Land and Sea Strategies (RILSS) – we will continue to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to expand Indigenous rights and interests in Country and grow Indigenous-led initiatives on Country.

## ILSC purpose

### ATSI Act

To assist Indigenous people to acquire land and water rights and to manage land and water so as to provide economic, environmental, social or cultural benefits

## Our vision

Indigenous people enjoy the rightful entitlements, opportunities and benefits that the return of Country and its management brings

## Our long-term outcomes

### Indigenous people are:

- > maintaining and growing the value and productivity of Country
- > owning and managing Country sustainably
- > influencing policy and opportunity for Country
- > strengthening culture through reconnection to Country

## Our strategic priorities

### Returning Country

*Expand Indigenous rights and interests in Country*

### Managing Country

*Grow Indigenous-led initiatives on Country*

### Sector Leadership

*Increase Indigenous influence on priority sectors*

### Meaningful Connection

*Build beneficial partnerships*

### Excellent Service

*Provide high-quality services*

### Cultural Leadership

*Step up as a culturally capable leader*

## Enabled by

- > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land and Sea Future Fund
- > Social and human capital, staff, stakeholders, expertise, partnerships, relationships and knowledge

## Legislated performance standards

### PGPA Act

Guides the ILSC's governance, planning, accountability and reporting

## Strategic documents

Statutory strategies, plans, reports and frameworks for achieving our purposes and measuring our success

- > NILSS, RILSS, Corporate Plan, Portfolio Budget Statement, Performance Framework, Annual Report (Annual Performance Statement)

## Our guiding principles

- > Caring for Country
- > Self-determination
- > Partnership



Collecting bush medicine for Bush Balm®, border of Pitjantjatjara / Arrernte Country, NT  
Image credit: Purple House



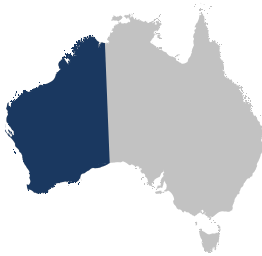
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**Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation**



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**Western Division  
(WA)**

Level 20, 140 St Georges Terrace  
Perth WA 6000

PO Box 7502 Cloisters Square  
Perth WA 6850

**T** (08) 9420 6300

**F** (08) 9467 2800

**E** westernoffice@ilsc.gov.au



**Central Division  
(SA, VIC, TAS, NT)**

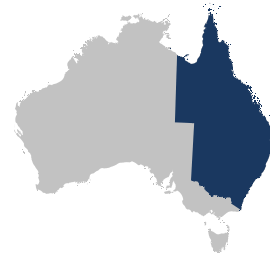
Level 7, 70 Franklin Street,  
Adelaide SA 5000

GPO Box 652  
Adelaide SA 5001

**T** (08) 8100 7102

**F** (08) 8100 7150

**E** centraloffice@ilsc.gov.au



**Eastern Division  
(QLD, NSW, ACT)**

Level 18, 100 Creek Street  
Brisbane QLD 4000

GPO Box 5212  
Brisbane Qld 4001

**T** (07) 3854 4600

**F** (07) 3056 3394

**E** easternoffice@ilsc.gov.au



[www.ilsc.gov.au](http://www.ilsc.gov.au)  
**FREECALL 1800 818 490**

Established in 1995 under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act*, we provide for the contemporary and future land needs of Indigenous people, particularly those unlikely to benefit from Native Title or Land Rights.

We work with our Indigenous partners to grow their economic, environmental, cultural and social capital by supporting their acquisition and management of land and water. In redressing dispossession, we provide for a more prosperous and culturally centred future for Indigenous people.

The ILSC is a Commonwealth entity under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.