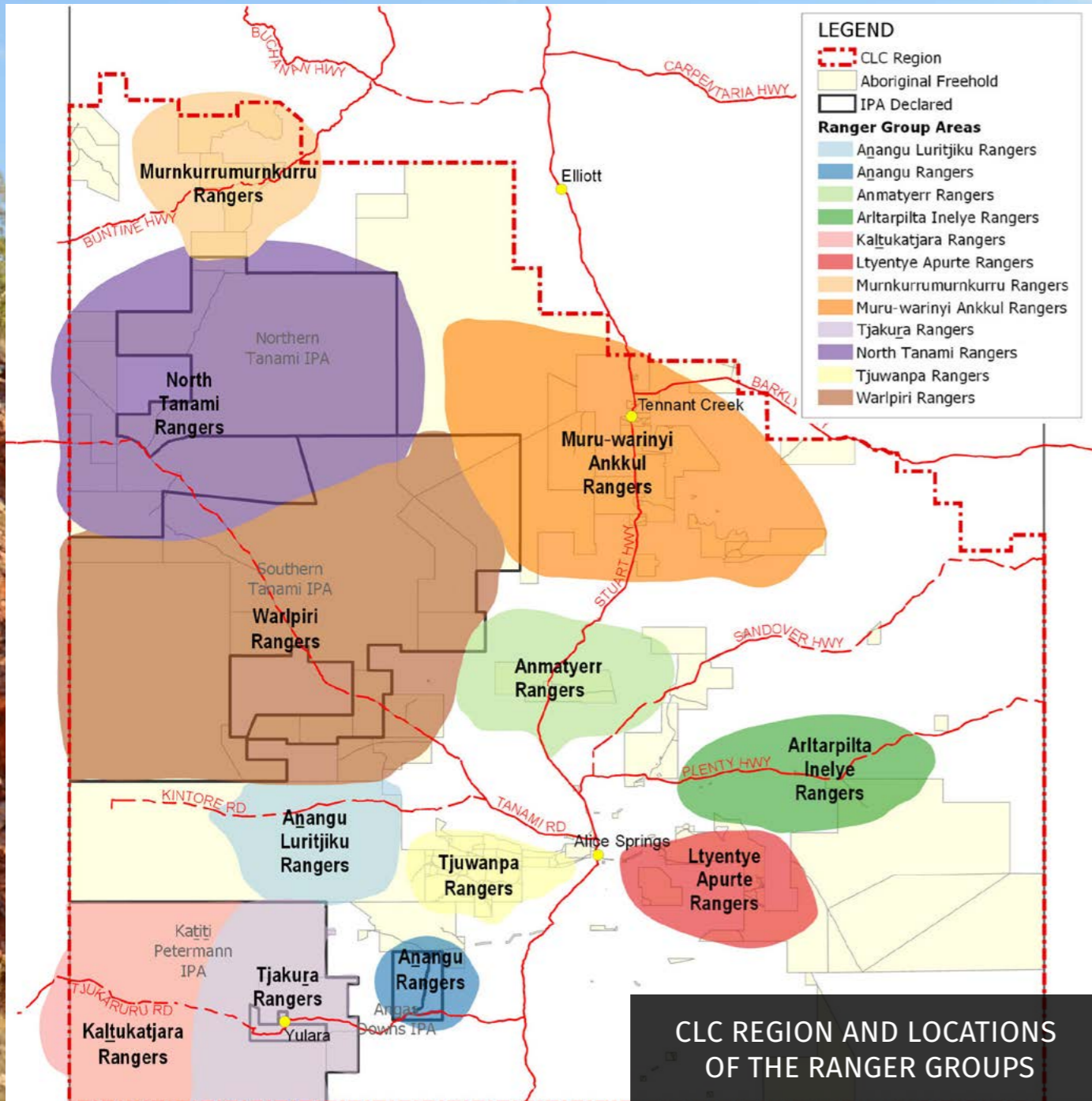




“The most important job in my community.”

CLC RANGERS

The benefits of ranger work



Aboriginal people in central Australia have managed their country for at least 60,000 years. Prior to colonisation, small family groups had the responsibility to look after particular sections of country. They cared for sacred sites, burnt country, harvested bush foods and cultivated bush medicines. Post-colonial Aboriginal land management was supported by the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976* which resulted in the return of significant amounts of land to traditional owner groups. The Central Land Council (CLC) set up its first Aboriginal ranger group in 2000 and, four years later, negotiated the joint management of 20 NT national parks across the CLC region by their traditional owners and the NT. In 2018, the CLC's 12 Aboriginal ranger groups employed 76 men and 29 women to manage feral animals, weeds and fires under the guidance of traditional owners. They also protect native plants and animals and important sites. In central Australia, Aboriginal rangers work on Aboriginal land including four Indigenous protected areas (IPA), on pastoral stations and in national parks.

Ranger work benefits: building an evidence base

Aboriginal rangers, their communities and the CLC believe the benefits of their work extends far beyond the obvious environmental outcomes. Ranger employment also creates significant social, cultural and economic benefits.

In 2017, the CLC partnered with independent research groups to test the scientific evidence for these claims. The National Centre for Epidemiology and Population at the Australian National University (ANU) undertook an epidemiological study of rangers (epidemiological study), while two anthropologists with extensive experience in central Australia qualitatively evaluated the program's progress and opportunities for improvement (qualitative evaluation).

“Being a ranger is the most important job in my community. It keeps me occupied and it keeps our culture strong.”

Barbara Petrick, Arltarpilta Inelye Rangers, Atitjere²

Arltarpilta Inelye ranger Barbara Petrick enjoys the view at the 2016 CLC ranger camp at Ross River.



The epidemiological study

The researchers developed a survey instrument in partnership with rangers and other CLC staff and used it to collect data from the rangers and a comparison group of Aboriginal people from central Australia. The rangers also participated in follow up discussions of the findings with the researchers and jointly presented them in 2018 at a seminar at the Australian National University in Canberra.

The qualitative evaluation

Two anthropologists worked with the rangers to develop and implement participatory research methods that enabled many rangers to take part, regardless of their literacy and numeracy. Six of the CLC's 12 ranger groups (a total of 30 rangers) and 12 community members and traditional owners participated in workshops and semi-structured interviews. The CLC and the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) funded the research.

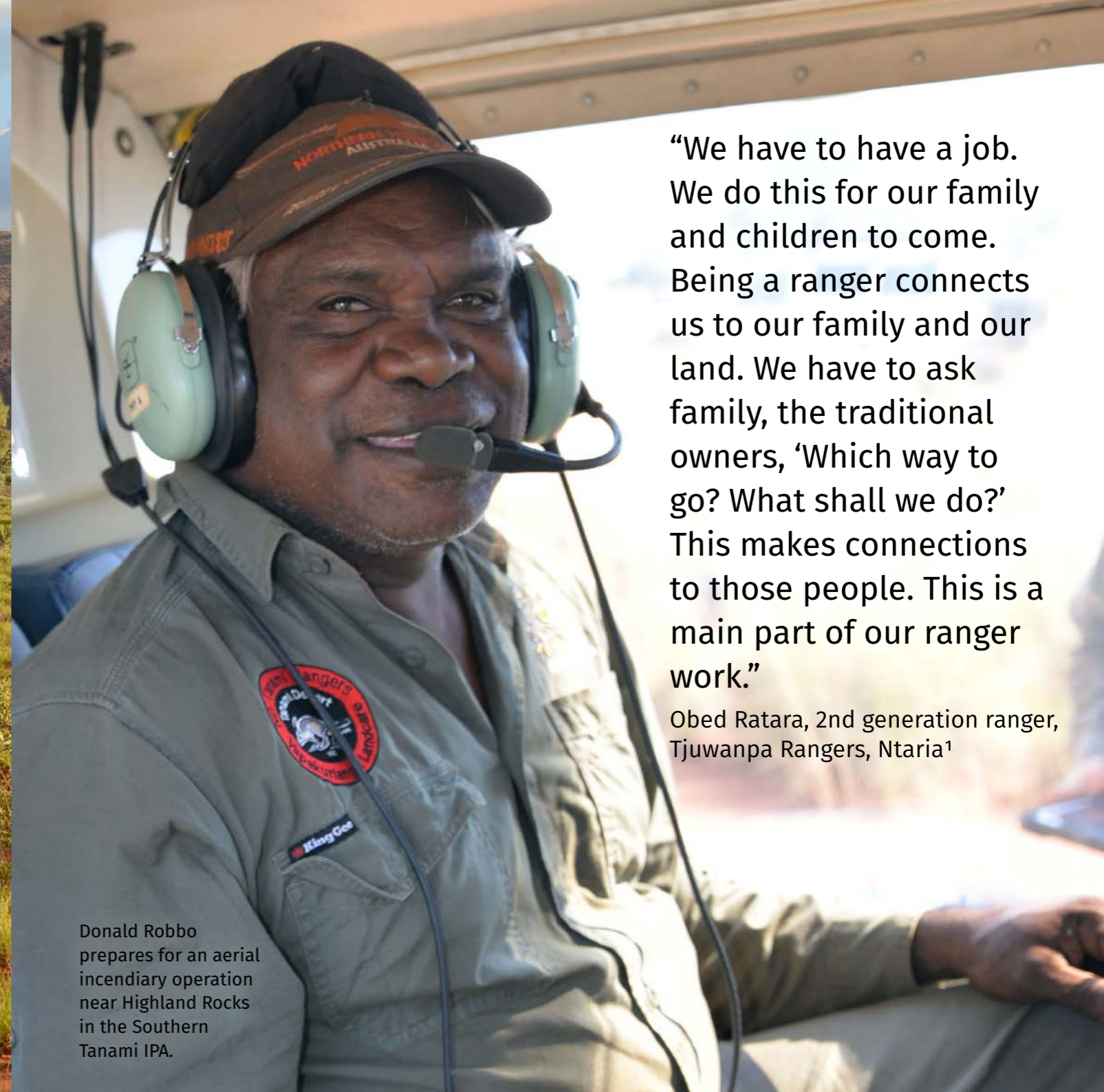
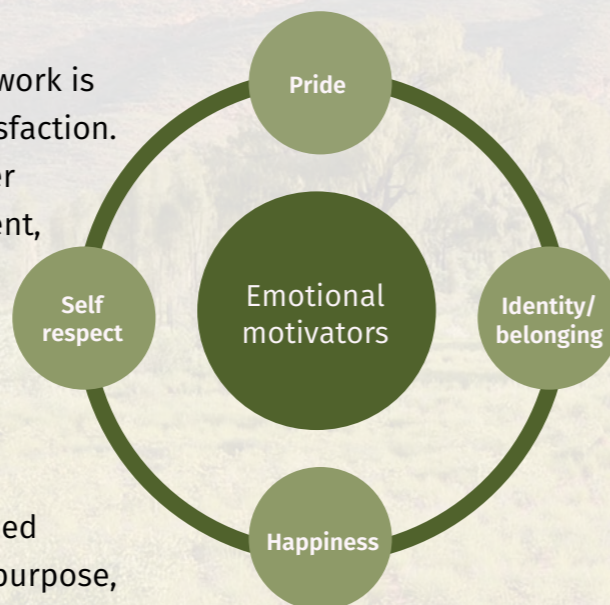
This brochure is a summary of what we learned.

THE BENEFITS OF RANGER WORK

Finding: rangers have higher levels of wellbeing

The epidemiological study found that ranger work is linked to higher family wellbeing and life satisfaction. These positive links were significant even after taking peoples' education, income, employment, health risk factors and health conditions into account. The findings indicate that health and wellbeing benefits are likely to be independent of the employment and income benefits associated with ranger employment.

In the qualitative evaluation, rangers responded positively to interview questions about their purpose, self-worth, value and feelings. This is significant given the considerable social, economic and cultural stresses that many Aboriginal people and their families report. Further, it challenges the dominant world view that sees Aboriginal communities as problematic, dysfunctional and hopeless.¹ In workshops rangers said that their work was the source of pride, self-respect, identity and belonging, and happiness.



“We have to have a job. We do this for our family and children to come. Being a ranger connects us to our family and our land. We have to ask family, the traditional owners, ‘Which way to go? What shall we do?’ This makes connections to those people. This is a main part of our ranger work.”

Obed Ratara, 2nd generation ranger, Tjuwanpa Rangers, Ntaria¹

Donald Robbo prepares for an aerial incendiary operation near Highland Rocks in the Southern Tanami IPA.

THE BENEFITS OF RANGER WORK

Finding: rangers like to learn from traditional owners

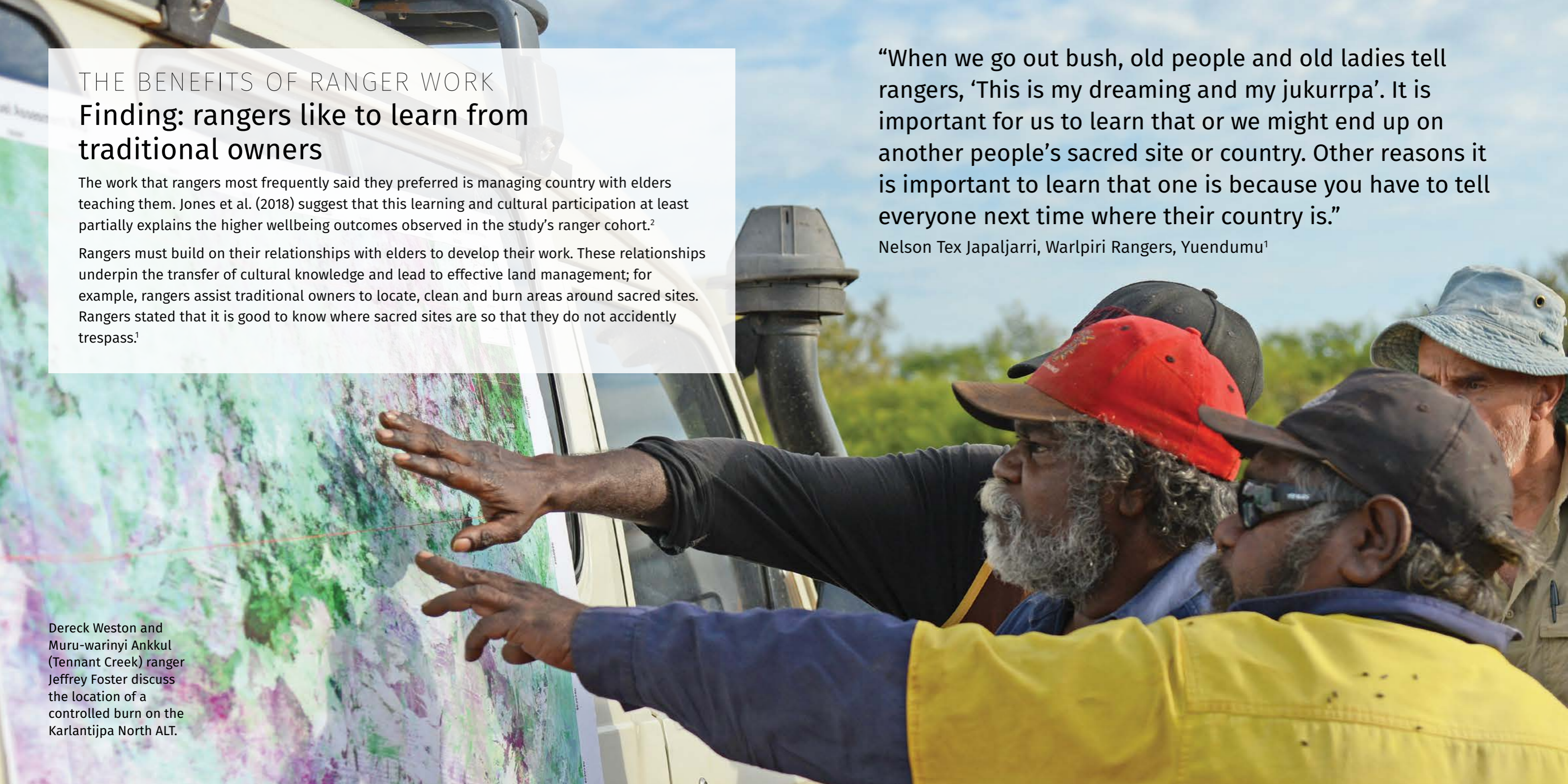
The work that rangers most frequently said they preferred is managing country with elders teaching them. Jones et al. (2018) suggest that this learning and cultural participation at least partially explains the higher wellbeing outcomes observed in the study's ranger cohort.²

Rangers must build on their relationships with elders to develop their work. These relationships underpin the transfer of cultural knowledge and lead to effective land management; for example, rangers assist traditional owners to locate, clean and burn areas around sacred sites. Rangers stated that it is good to know where sacred sites are so that they do not accidentally trespass.¹

“When we go out bush, old people and old ladies tell rangers, ‘This is my dreaming and my jukurrpa’. It is important for us to learn that or we might end up on another people’s sacred site or country. Other reasons it is important to learn that one is because you have to tell everyone next time where their country is.”

Nelson Tex Japaljarri, Warlpiri Rangers, Yuendumu¹

Dereck Weston and Muru-warinyi Ankkul (Tennant Creek) ranger Jeffrey Foster discuss the location of a controlled burn on the Karlantijpa North ALT.





CLC ranger Josephine Grant displays the artwork of the Tracks app's starting screen.

“I like to work on country to keep culture alive. This makes me feel strong. It is good to go out to our area and to see other places we are related to.”

Darren Petrick, Arltarpilta Inelye Rangers, Atitjere¹

“We are doing this work for our ancestors. They are keeping us strong in country, through their knowledge and their way of life. It makes me strong when I use our law.”

Murnkurrumurnkurru ranger, Daguragu¹

THE BENEFITS OF RANGER WORK

Finding: rangers use cultural knowledge and keep it strong

The epidemiological study and the qualitative evaluation found that rangers learn and apply cultural knowledge, therefore maintaining and strengthening such knowledge. Traditional owners play an important role in directing ranger activities.

The epidemiological study asked rangers what they liked about their work. The most dominant responses, by far, were learning and using cultural knowledge. Rangers also reported higher levels of cultural participation, expression and knowledge than a non-ranger control cohort. Rangers were more likely than the control group to report that they knew their dreaming; take part in ceremony and community decision making; know their mob; and live on or visit their country.³

Almost all ranger participants in the qualitative evaluation reported that the most important aspect of their work was using cultural knowledge (the technical and practical knowledge needed to manage land and people):¹ Currently, all cultural learning occurs outside of formal education and training. The evaluation encouraged the CLC to consider greater recognition of this knowledge transfer in the professional development activities and training of its rangers.



Jay Creek area residents, past and present, joined a large crowd who marked the 75th anniversary of the Jay Creek church and cemetery in May 2017.

“We see ourselves as role models. We have to help young people. They end up in town, unemployed and on the booze. Hanging around town. Hanging around Coles. They lose self-esteem and interest in themselves. We need to get them involved in culture trips. Show them country. Show them how to live on country. Show them ceremony. My old man taught about country first. All this was planned for us. Country gives us power and strength to go on. Some family don't have a chance to do this work. They go off the rails.”

Anthony Petrick, Arltarpilta Inelye Rangers, Atitjere¹

THE BENEFITS OF RANGER WORK

Finding: rangers strengthen their communities

Aboriginal communities in central Australia are sparsely populated and offer limited services and employment. The CLC's ranger program provides jobs for the adults and role models for the children in these communities.

The qualitative evaluation found that rangers saw their work as an important service to their community and family. Work such as cleaning grave yards, taking older people and kids on bush trips, and sharing knowledge about country and dreaming stories enables them to build and maintain relationships and networks that support their communities. Rangers frequently reported that they are doing it for “the old people, for traditional owners or for the children”.

“School children need to know cultural knowledge. This has been passed on generation to generation. The children need to keep this going. It is for their children and their children’s children.”

Charles Lechleitner, Ltyentye Apurte ranger¹

THE BENEFITS OF RANGER WORK

Finding: rangers pass on knowledge to the next generation

Rangers provide work experience and share knowledge during bush trips with traditional owners, children and school groups. They highly value such work and learning opportunities, not just for themselves, but for future generations.



Who benefits from ranger work?
The ranger perspective¹



The annual ranger camp is a chance for information sharing. Here, ranger coordinators (left to right) Craig LeRossignol (Tjuwanpa Rangers), Benji Kenny (Kaltukatjara Rangers) and Willy Lane (Anmatyerr Rangers) share their experiences over morning tea.

THE BENEFITS OF RANGER WORK

Finding: rangers learn and speak Aboriginal languages

In both the epidemiological study and the qualitative evaluation, rangers talked about the value of language to their wellbeing and to their work. More than 75% of rangers involved in the epidemiological study said things like: “It is important that I use language”, “I feel good when I use language” and that both their family and community were interested in strengthening Aboriginal languages. The study found that a similar proportion in the control group of non-rangers reported speaking Aboriginal languages. The qualitative evaluation found that rangers identified as important the learning and sharing of Aboriginal language names of flora, fauna and country. The researchers recommended that rangers partner with linguists and schools to extend the use of Aboriginal language in their work.¹



Optometrist Jo Murphy checks the eyes of ranger coordinator Benji Kenny at the 2018 ranger camp at Hamilton Downs.

THE BENEFITS OF RANGER WORK

Finding: ranger work is linked to feeling healthier

Ranger work is often physically demanding. The epidemiological study found that self-reported health was better in rangers compared to non-rangers (despite some chronic conditions being higher in the ranger group), although no significant associations were identified. The surveys also revealed that many rangers had one or more health risk factors and/or chronic conditions. Managing these is critical to building a stronger and healthier workforce and positive outcomes. If the research can continue longitudinally, researchers will be able to better measure and understand the relationship with health outcomes.

“Stability and expansion in policies that facilitate the development, implementation and sustainability of rangers are likely to lead to improved wellbeing, health and other gains for Aboriginal people.”

Summary report for CLC: Ranger wellbeing³



THE BENEFITS OF RANGER WORK

Finding: rangers are better off

CLC rangers are employed in fulltime, parttime and casual positions. The number of hours worked varies depending on each ranger group's work program. The epidemiological study found that rangers were less likely to report financial hardship for themselves and their families than the control group of non-rangers.³

However, rangers ranked financial and economic benefits last in their qualitative evaluation, and placed social and communal benefits higher.¹ Some rangers reported flow-on benefits of income, such as supporting extended family. This finding suggests that the work has more than just financial rewards for rangers.

“Sometimes I share money with my brothers and cousins so they can get food. They might pay me back. They are satisfied, I’m satisfied, everyone is satisfied.”

Ltyentye Apurte ranger, Ltyentye Apurte¹

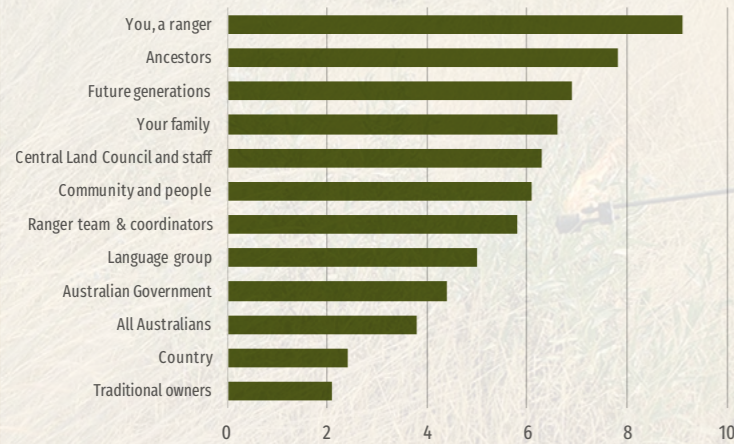


These CLC rangers were part of a record number of of land management graduates of the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in 2017.



Conclusion

The epidemiological study and the qualitative evaluation researched the many benefits Aboriginal individuals, families and their communities derive from the CLC's ranger program. Ranger work generates significant wellbeing for individuals and their families, increased income, and supports community activity across the CLC region. It supports the learning and use of cultural knowledge which is important to many Aboriginal lives in central Australia. The research was conducted in 2017. If the CLC continues to build on these findings, a fuller picture of the benefits of ranger work will emerge over time. The CLC will continue to conduct robust and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of its ranger program.



How rangers rank the benefits of ranger work¹

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The CLC's newest ranger group, Muṯitjulu community's Tjakura Rangers with CLC chair Francis Kelly (right).



Planning for the future

- Increase the number of ranger groups, particularly in regions and communities where there currently are none.
- Initiate a junior ranger program to support visits to country and knowledge transfer to school children.
- Increase the opportunities for transferring knowledge between traditional owners and rangers, for example, through professional development activities during the CLC's annual ranger camps.
- Strengthen ranger engagement with traditional owners.
- Improve on-the-job learning and training to ensure skills are exchanged within each ranger group.
- Increase the number and proportion of women rangers.
- Maintain and expand country-focused cultural learning through bush trips.



“I feel honoured to do this work. I know I am doing it for my grandmothers and my children. I am keeping the country strong and using their knowledge to do this. It makes me proud and my family are proud of me.”

Tjuwanpa ranger, Ntaria³



Mayi Kuwayu

The National Study of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing

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The CLC ranger program is proudly funded by the Australian government through the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Indigenous Land Corporation. This funding has enabled many Aboriginal people to enjoy a regular income and professional development and realise their career aspirations for the first time in their lives.