

AIATSI CONFERENCE – JUNE 2009

PARTNERING FOR PROSPERITY

Partnerships between indigenous communities, businesses and governments are being seen more and more as a path to a prosperous future. But partnering between these sectors poses many challenges and is not an easy path to follow.

In this session we will explore what some of these challenges are and how we can overcome them and achieve real outcomes from our partnering efforts.

The session will be facilitated by Ian Dixon and will include a presentation followed by an interview and panel session with Parry Agius, CEO of SA Native Title Services and Raina Savage, Indigenous Relations Adviser (VIC/NSW) with Iluka Resources.

PRESENTATION

Welcome/Introductions – Ian Dixon

- Ladies & Gentleman, welcome
- My name is Ian Dixon and together with Parry Agius and Raina Savage, we will be presenting this session on 'Partnering for Prosperity' to you this afternoon
- I would like to first acknowledge the Wurundjeri people on whose land we are meeting today and pay our respects to the elders.
- Partnerships are very popular at present, particularly between indigenous communities, business and government. They are often promoted as a new way of doing business and a way of getting better outcomes for communities - but are they actually delivering better results? And if not why not?
- Partnering in any context is very complex and for this reason it doesn't just happen and there are many challenges that partners will face as they go through any form of partnering process
- For that reason we have brought together three people who have had extensive experience in partnering and with backgrounds from within each of the different sectors to address some of these key questions and challenges about partnering and to share some learning's and insights.
- Parry Agius, would be known to many of you here today and is the Chief Executive of South Australian Native Title Services and someone who has had extensive involvement in partnering both within the aboriginal community and between communities, governments and businesses, particularly over the last 10 years.

- Parry has been a leader in the Aboriginal Community for many years and his influence has had a substantial impact in building partnerships and bridging the gap of understanding between Indigenous and other Australians.
- Raina Savage is currently Indigenous Relations Adviser (Vic/NSW) with Iluka Resources. Prior to this role Raina was the senior Regional Legal Officer with for the Yamatji Land & Sea Council in Western Australia.
- Raina has a background in native title negotiations, aboriginal cultural heritage and working between business, government and communities. Raina has very kindly agreed to step at short notice for Christine Charles who is an apology for this session due to illness
- For my part, I have been in my own business for the last 10 years as an independent partnering specialist, working to help communities, business and government's partner together effectively, and one of my key roles has been Independent Chair of the South Australian Native Title Resolution Initiative for some 9 years. Prior to that I had extensive experience in state government as a Chief Executive in areas such Mines & Energy, Industry & Trade and Local Government
- So we come to this session with a wide range of perspectives, experiences and knowledge and with the aim of exploring some of the challenges of partnering between indigenous communities, business and government and how we can make sure that real benefits are delivered.

Session Outline

- The session will be divided into three parts
 - First I will give a presentation highlighting some of the key challenges for partnering
 - Then I will ask Parry and Raina to answer some questions so we can gain some of the practical insights and learnings from their partnering experiences, and
 - Following that we will open up the discussion to all of you in the audience to raise questions or issues of your own about partnering and partnerships in the context of indigenous communities
- **Presentation – Ian Dixon (30 minutes)**
 - So lets start at the beginning
 - The term partnership is used everywhere at present – particularly in the political arena to describe every type of working relationship you could imagine

- We have public private partnerships, we have regional partnership agreements, we have working arrangements, framework agreements, MOU's – you name it we have it.
- 'Partnership' has become the new language to cover just about everything from funding arrangements, delivery of services to all forms of working together.
- The word 'partnership' and 'working in partnership' has been used many times during this conference and is in many of the documents available – but does it have the same meaning to all in these different situations?
- There seems to be an assumption that everyone knows what “working in partnership” means and everyone knows how to do it.
- But if we are really going to achieve results everyone needs to be clear about **'what'** is intended and just **'how'** they are going to work together
- So we need to ask some fundamental questions, like:
 - Just **why** would we want to partner with others in the first place?
 - **'What'** are the challenges we are going to face?, and
 - Just **how** do we actually partner effectively
- **So Why should we partner?**
 - If we look at challenges worldwide – partnering is being seen as a new way of tackling complex social, economic and environmental issues because one sector operating alone cannot achieve the desired outcome or solve a complex issue
 - It is seen as a way of achieving greater benefits overall – both for individual parties and collectively
 - But partnering is complex and time consuming and generally will involve many people from differing organisations – all with different ways of working
 - There have now been many examples of various partnering approaches around Australia in recent years but the question remains – have they been effective and have they delivered results? Have they met everyone's expectations
 - But one thing is clear and that is partnerships should be seen as a means to an end not an end in themselves – they should be used to achieve something – to create an improved social or economic benefit – not just create a 'partnership' for its own sake.

- There is no doubt that there are many potential benefits for indigenous communities, business and governments in partnering approaches, such as:
 - Building skills, knowledge and expertise
 - Accessing resources
 - Developing business opportunities
 - Improved health and well being of communities , and many more
 - And these benefits are not just one way – they can apply to all sectors so there is a great opportunity for mutual benefits for all
 - But in exploring the potential benefits of partnering these need to be weighed up against the risks and the time and effort involved
 - There are many people involved in partnering so it can become very complex
 - This can result in high transaction costs – peoples time, travel , meetings etc
 - Structures set up to manage partnering activities can become unwieldy if not handled correctly
 - Overall the potential benefits should outweigh the risks and costs involved, if partnering is to be the preferred way forward for a particular initiative, project or relationship.
 - But if you do decide to partner – just what are the challenges you are likely to face and how will you handle these effectively
- **What are the challenges of partnering?**
 - There are many challenges that partners will face but today I would just like to raise what I see are some of the very critical ones and others will no doubt get raised in our discussions a little later
 - **Building and maintaining relationships**
 - One of the areas that often gets overlooked is taking the time up front to establish solid relationships as a foundation for the partnership
 - How do you get all the people who will be involved to participate in relationship building activities given the very large numbers of people that are often involved in partnering?

- Time spent early to build trust and mutual respect between the partners is essential – but also need to be aware that people come and go – so relationship building needs to continue throughout the process – not just at the start

- **Managing expectations**

- Getting clear on just what we mean by a particular partnership approach is fundamental. It is so easy to raise expectations early in the process when people are coming together to partner but then if there is no action or delivery – frustration and disappointment can result
- I remember a situation when I was asked to review a particular partnership process and people spoke of the initial enthusiasm and excitement at the signing of a partnership agreement – only to see very little result from this agreement over the next few years

- **Having a clear purpose**

- Ensuring that all involved have a very clear idea of just what you are trying to achieve.
- Why are you partnering – what is the ultimate outcome you are seeking?
- Sometimes partnering processes can become very complicated issues and make it difficult to monitor just what is intended
- And as time goes on people come and go and it is very easy to lose sight of the original intention and purpose – this needs to be continually revisited

- **Building and maintaining support**

- Getting internal buy in - How do you get internal support and maintain this throughout the life of the partnership
- This is by far one of the biggest challenges that I come across in all of my partnering work with organisations and one that needs to be thought through very carefully

- And not only is it internally but how do you maintain support externally as well
- **Understanding the other partners and how they operate**
 - Each sector operates differently and has different drivers
 - Take the business sector – this is often perceived as profit orientated, innovative and fast thinking
 - While Government can be seen as slow, bureaucratic and often remote from where the community is located
 - Communities can have various decision making processes in place which can take time
 - How each sector works – how and who makes decisions? What are the planning and financial processes in each sector and how will they impact on the partnership? are all challenges for working together
 - One situation that often occurs is that there may be several partners at the table but not all are empowered to make decisions. Some have to report back to other levels within their organisations – this takes time and can be frustrating – understanding the constraints on people at the table is crucial
- **Getting the real issues out on the table**
 - Being able to get the real underlying issues out on the table in a safe environment so that they can be discussed and worked through rather than partners taking fixed positions
 - It is all about asking the right questions at the right time as you move through a partnering process
- **Managing the partnering process**
 - Who is going to make sure that meetings take place?
 - Who is going to manage the actions that need to be taken?

- Who will provide the leadership and what type of leadership is required

- **Ensuring adequate resources**

- How do we get the right amount of financial support to be applied to the partnership?
- Who contributes the \$ or in kind support and how is this recognised within the partnership
- Adequate resources are crucial to sustaining some form of partnering arrangement – this may not be just \$ may be key people to manage and drive the partnering process

- These are just a few of the challenges which need to be addressed in any form of partnering process if it is going to be successful

- **How can we partner effectively?**

- After talking about just a few of the challenges you may all well wonder whether business, government and community can actually work together in partnership? So with widely varying ways of operating and doing business just how can we truly create a partnership that will work and deliver outcomes
- This is where partnering becomes a balance between art and science
- But you do need to have a clear process in place – and take it step by step, not rush into an agreement when you are not sure what it really means and not understanding what will be different.
- One simple model that I use to follow has three stages:
 - Creating – where we explore and scope the partnership, and decide whether there is any value in partnering – what's in it for the partners individually and collectively?
 - Once we have some form of agreement to progress we move to the developing stage where we design, plan and get the partnership up and running
 - After it is operating we then need to consider just how we are going to sustain the partnership – how will we keep it on track, when will we end it and move on

- At each of these stages key activities need to be addressed so that you start to build engagement > commitment > and shared ownership of the partnership between all the partners

OK so let's hear from Parry and Christine about some of their experiences

- **Interviews with Parry Agius and Raina Savage**

- 1. Parry – perhaps you could tell us a little of your partnering experience – and how you became involved in partnering?**
- 2. And Raina – likewise could you give us some background into some of the partnering projects and initiatives you have been involved with?**
- 3. So what were some the biggest partnering challenges you have come up against in your experiences and how have you tackled these challenges?**
- 4. Do you feel all the partners involved had a clear idea of just what your partnerships were intended to achieve?**
- 5. In your experience do you think there is enough discussion up front about everyone's expectations of partnerships?**
- 6. How did you get buy in within your own organisation or community?**
- 7. What were some of the key obstacles you have found in partnering with others?**
- 8. In the partnering process did you have any help or did one partner take the lead?**
- 9. In your experience how equal has the partnership been?**
- 10. What would be your top 3 tips for people about to enter into some form of partnership?**
- 11. In conclusion, do you think that partnering has a future and can provide real benefits for indigenous communities as well as business and government?**

Open Discussion with audience

Ask for questions or comments about what people have heard this afternoon.

How easy have they found partnering and all the rhetoric that surrounds it?

Ask people to look at the sheet that was handed out prior to the session?

So what are some other peoples experiences – what would they like to share?

Conclusion:

- Recap on session objectives and key messages
- Partnering is just one option to achieve outcomes – it is a means to an end not an end in itself – but if we do go down this path lets make sure that we make it work not just give lip service to it
- I would like to thank all of you here today for attending and participating in this session. We hope that it has helped clarify some issues or concerns for you and it may help you should you get involved in partnering activities.
- In particular I would like to thank Parry Agius and Raina Savage for sharing some real insights from their practical experiences. And for AIATSI in supporting this session
- Thank you