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GHD Pty Ltd and
Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation

A Biobanking Partnership with the Indigenous Community: A Case Study



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The Project: Minimbah Bank Third Track

- 11 km of rail track between Whittingham and Minimbah built to increase capacity of the coal freight system
- First project of a number on Hunter network to build capacity and support coal industry
- Consent issued under Part 3A of EP&A Act, 1979;
- Constructed 2009-2010



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Minimbah Bank cont.

- Project undertaken by Hunter 8 Alliance: ARTC, GHD, and John Holland Group
- Clearance of 6 hectares of native vegetation, including 4 Endangered Ecological Communities, and habitat for 1 threatened species
- Condition of consent to provide permanent mechanism of compensatory habitat



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Offsetting options

- Find land with the same vegetation communities and purchase to provide the offset; own and manage biodiversity in perpetuity and place covenant over the land to provide permanent conservation
- Find suitable site adjacent to the National Parks estate and give to the Crown, including funds for management of biodiversity. Land added to National Parks Estate.
- Use biobanking to provide the offset. As no suitable biobank sites existed at the time, this would involve finding an interested landowner with a suitable site.



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Why we chose biobanking

- Undertook cost-benefit analysis of options
- Also considered the social benefits
- ARTC did not wish to own and permanently manage land
- Biobanking an effective way to provide the offset: to purchase and retire the credits, with no further responsibility
- Having found an interested Aboriginal group to partner with, could also provide financial, social, and economic benefits in the process



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Why the partnership with WNAC?

- A progressive group based in Singleton with a number of landholdings, including a property with suitable vegetation
- An enthusiastic CEO, Laurie Perry, passionate about the idea
- With Hunter 8 Alliance assisting in the establishment of the biobank, and purchasing the credits, WNAC, as biobank owner, now have money from the Biobank Trust Fund every year to manage their land. Aboriginal youth will be employed to do this work.



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How did it work?

- Hunter 8 Alliance (GHD) prepared the biobanking assessment, management actions plan, and biobanking agreement in partnership with WNAC. This included all negotiations with OEH and DoP&I.
- We have also been the interface between ARTC and WNAC in the credit transactions. The cost of this work has been deducted from the overall ecosystem credit purchase price.



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What were the challenges?

- Helping everyone to understand the biobanking scheme and processes, including legal, taxation, and financial. This included ARTC, WNAC, and DoP&I.
- A long process – approx. 2.5 years.
- Technical – refinements made to biobanking methodology over time.



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How could it work for the mining industry?

- An alternative means of offsetting impacts on biodiversity to those that involve long-term management commitment – can be of benefit, depending on the land available.
- A means of combining Aboriginal and community funding programs with biodiversity programs.
- Provide funds to establish the biobank, and train young Aboriginal people in land management – provides capacity building in community.



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Advantages?

- Biodiversity offsetting requirement of development consents satisfied through the purchase and retirement of biobank credits. The costs are variable, depending on the demand for the credits.
- A means of encouraging and supporting Aboriginal enterprise through biobanking – to have funds to manage their land and employ people.



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Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation (WNAC) history

- Established in 1999 and represents the Wonnarua people. It focuses on nurturing the history and culture of the Wonnarua Nation, improving the health and education of its members and managing investments to sustain the Corporation's work.
- The Wonnarua people are traditional landowners in the Hunter Valley of New South Wales.
- It is led by a Board of 8 Wonnarua people, and has over 300 members.



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Why biobanking?

- WNAC approved the decision to biobank their property 'Valley Arm', preserving part of our traditional country and creating employment for our people.
- There has been a lot of mining and more mining being developed across our traditional lands across the greater Hunter region, and biobanking gives us an important say in terms of providing offsets as part of development consents for all types of projects, not just for mining.



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What it gives us

‘Valley Arm’ is a special place to our mob because of its surroundings and peaceful connection to us. We will manage this property forever now and preserve it for many generations to come.

All Aboriginal People across NSW especially Land Councils who own land should seriously look at biobanking as a means of preserving the land they own but also protecting it with the aim of creating training and employment. It's a win-win for the environment, developers and the Government.



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The biobank: 'Valley Arm'



- 74 hectares at Paynes Crossing
- Owned by WNAC
- Contains one endangered ecological community, one threatened plant, and ten threatened animals
- Feral animals and weeds



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Major challenges

- Understanding the BioBanking scheme and how it would work for the WNAC.
- Getting clear information from OEH on the process of setting up the biobank site, and how each step would work.
- Setting the credit price in a new market.
- Patience with the fact that OEH were also going through the process for the first time.



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The partnership

The Partnership Between WNAC and Hunter 8 Alliance has been great. There's been respect from both sides throughout the proposal and right down to the end can't be faulted. The highlight was the Environment Minister Robyn Parker coming to meet our board at Biame Cave, a sacred place for us, when we celebrated the signing of the biobanking agreement.



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Members of WNAC Board with Env. Minister Robyn Parker, and GHD partners



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The Future?

- The Mining Industry and the local Aboriginal People have been dealing with offsets for many years with little success in terms of managing offsets in the Greater Hunter region.
- There needs to be a new kind of thinking on how we can better understand if an offset proposal as part of a development consent for mining can be achieved through biobanking.



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