



Outside Tjuntuntjara community, WA



Other initiatives

LawHelp

LawHelp is a pro bono legal scheme designed to assist not-for-profit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations registered under the CATSI Act. It was set up by the Registrar, with the support of the Australian Government Solicitor, volunteer lawyers and major Australian legal firms, in response to a clear need.

Between 1 July 2011 and 30 June 2012 there were 11 participating lawyers and law firms on the LawHelp panel:

- ➔ Allens
- ➔ Ashurst
- ➔ Australian Government Solicitor (AGS)
- ➔ Clayton Utz
- ➔ DLA Piper Australia
- ➔ HWL Ebsworth Lawyers
- ➔ Jackson McDonald
- ➔ Minter Ellison Lawyers
- ➔ Peter Tree SC—Derwent and Tamar Chambers, Tasmania
- ➔ Williams, Love and Nicol
- ➔ Tress Cox

LawHelp is a great service; appreciated the follow up too.

Client response, ORIC client survey



Above: Anton Hermann, Minter Ellison Lawyers; David Hillard, Clayton Utz and Nicola Arvidson, TressCox Lawyers provided pro bono advice through LawHelp

The LawHelp assessment panel consists of three members—the manager of pro bono services from the Australian Government Solicitor, a lawyer formerly from ACT Legal Aid (now in community services) and an Aboriginal lawyer with the Department of Health and Ageing. ORIC manages the LawHelp secretariat and provides administrative support.

Approximately 60 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations are located in remote or very remote parts of Australia and do not have ready access to quality legal services.

Corporations registered under the CATSI Act can apply to LawHelp for assistance with a range of legal matters, from basic tax issues to drafting employment contracts to interpreting the law. The scheme cannot help with matters already funded by government such as native title, criminal matters, or legal action in any court or tribunal, or matters that could conflict with the interests of the Australian Government. LawHelp can only help corporations not individuals.

During the year 14 applications were received. Twelve of these applications were approved and successfully referred to some of Australia’s top law firms. The two remaining applications were pending further action.

Figure 14: LawHelp applications by state and territory, for 2011–12

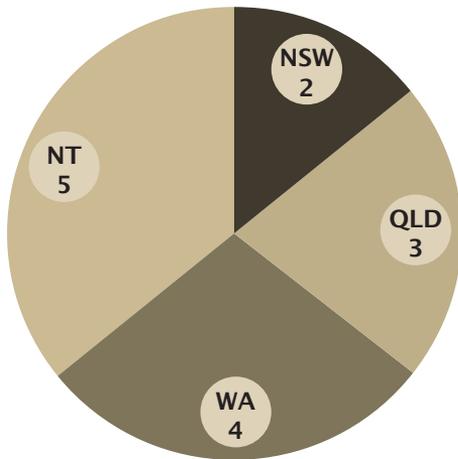
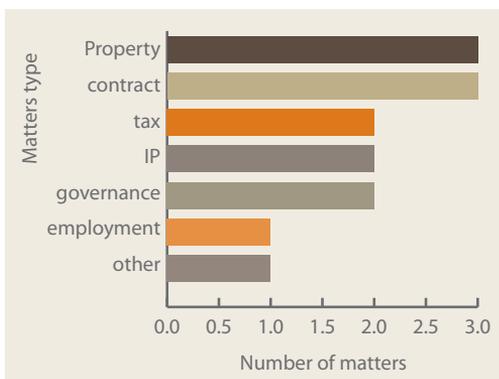


Figure 15: Lawhelp, types of matters received for 2011-12



LawHelp application forms and guidelines are available at www.oric.gov.au or by emailing LawHelp@oric.gov.au or by telephoning freecall on 1800 622 431 (not free from mobiles).

Partnering with the ANU

In partnership with the Australian National University (ANU), ORIC was awarded an Australian Research Council linkage project over a period of three years. ORIC will contribute a total of \$90 000 over the three years as well as in-kind support. The project began in July 2010 and is scheduled to end on 30 June 2013.

The main objective of this project is to evaluate how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations can improve their accountability to government and to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities they represent. The research is conducted by a post-doctoral fellow and a PhD scholar from the ANU. After an initial year of research, collecting data directly from corporations, as well as extracting information contained in ORIC’s databases, this phase is now completed. The data has been analysed and both researchers have written papers on the outcome of the research. The PhD scholar is in the process of finalising his thesis. The research will inform ORIC’s governance training in communities and assist in measuring the effectiveness of ORIC services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Secondment



Former interim CEO David Kennedy (left) and current CEO Jon Rogers flank the Gulaga dancers—Warren Foster Jnr, Trey Parsons, Nicholas Hoskins, Trey Baxter, group leader Warren Foster and Matthew Parsons. Photo: Narooma News



Jon Rogers, CEO of Katungul, meeting members of the community

When a secondment opportunity came up for ORIC's Jon Rogers at the Katungul Aboriginal Corporation Community and Medical Services, he grabbed it with both hands.

Katungul, a CATSI corporation located in Narooma in NSW, was originally established in 1993. The corporation's focus is on delivering culturally appropriate and holistic health care to clients and to ensure that they are treated with dignity and respect. The corporation delivers services to members of Aboriginal communities between Batemans Bay and Eden.

On 12 December 2011 Katungul was placed under special administration after an examination by the Registrar revealed some serious anomalies in the corporation's financial statements.



Reception area at Katungul

A few months down the track of the special administration, it became apparent that there was a need for management support to stabilise the corporation. The members and the community at large were at risk of not receiving essential medical and other services. At the time the special administrator had dismissed some management staff and the corporation had no available funds to hire anyone with the right skills to help the corporation through this difficult time.

The Registrar decided to provide managerial support for the corporation in the form of a secondment opportunity. Jon Rogers, then an ORIC employee and a qualified accountant, applied for the secondment.



Briefing new directors: Alan Eldrige (special administrator), Graham Moore, Anthony Beven (Registrar), Bunja Smith, Melissa Ellis

Jon had some prior dealings with the corporation and its members and was eager to get involved in the process of rebuilding financial and governance capacity at Katungul.



Dr Mike Kelly MP, Melissa Ellis, Anne Greenaway, Graham Moore, Bunja Smith and Warren Snowdon MP

'The biggest challenge was to restore the confidence of major funding providers to give Katungul an opportunity to reinvent itself,' Jon said. 'Another challenge was to reinvigorate the confidence of the community in Katungul so that they could re-engage with the corporation—in short: get the money back and get the people back.'

To get the money back, Jon worked with the special administrator to put in place a range of financial mechanisms to highlight all the gaps in the service provision that needed to be addressed.

Jon's secondment term (23 April to 13 July 2012) was so successful that when the recruitment round came up for a new CEO, he applied for the job and was appointed in August 2012.

'With the Registrar's support and that of my former team members who had to pick up my workload, ORIC could put the corporation's health first. That is powerful stuff when you are trying to make a difference for the benefit of the community.'

Katungul was handed back to its members on 28 September 2012.



Alan Eldridge (special administrator) hands back the keys to one of the directors Melissa Ellis



Warren Foster and Waruu Penrith



Community members at the hand back ceremony



Anthony Beven addressing community members

NAIDOC week

This year's NAIDOC week theme was *Spirit of the tent embassy: 40 years on*. It was held from 1–8 July 2012. This is always a special week in ORIC's calendar and staff participated in the following activities:

- ➔ the NAIDOC ball, black tie event on Saturday evening, 30 June
- ➔ ORIC stall on the Acton Peninsula, Canberra on Sunday, 1 July
- ➔ the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander memorial service at the Australian War Memorial on Wednesday, 4 July—as in previous years, ORIC organised a wreath and an embroidered sash
- ➔ the inter-departmental touch footy competition on Wednesday, 4 July
- ➔ the Aboriginal Hostels Limited luncheon on Friday, 6 July.



Above: ORIC wreath; ORIC staff at the 2012 Family Day NAIDOC stall and ORIC promotional materials



ORIC Geckos touch footy team at 2012 NAIDOC