



NGALI WANATHI

"we search together.."

MITHAKA RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Launched July 2017



Care for Country, Care for Culture, Care for Our People

MITHAKA PEOPLE

Mithaka People are the Native Title owners of 33,800km² located in the Channel Country of southwest Queensland, as well as the last claimants to a further 22,000km² west of Cooper Creek. Mithaka Aboriginal Corporation (MAC) RNTBC are the main governing body for all Mithaka business, and are supported by our (soon to be established) Council of Elders, MAC Board of Directors, Mithaka Native Title group members, and MAC CEO and support staff. We actively manage and care for our Country, Culture and People through culturally sensitive governance.



Above: Mithaka research is being carried out in non-exclusive native title determined area (black boundary), and previously claimed area (blue boundary).

Much work is needed to fully interpret and understand the many different stone arrangements in Mithaka Country.



PURPOSE

Under Mithaka Aboriginal Corporation's Strategic Plan (2017-2022) and mission - *To strengthen our individual and collective Cultural identity and language, to successfully participate in local and wider society, grow sustainably into the future, and care for our Country and Culture* - this research framework sets the strategic direction over the next five years for all research involving Mithaka Country, Traditional Owners and their Traditional Knowledge, and establishes the principles of collegiality with partnering researchers and institutions. It works to guide research using culturally inclusive protocols and principles that will form the base from which all research is planned, designed, negotiated, implemented and communicated, and seeks to establish ethically produced research that promotes and uses the benefits of cross-cultural partnerships and epistemologies.

This research framework will support Mithaka Traditional Owners and their research partners to:

- acknowledge, respect and promote the rights and interests of Mithaka Traditional Owners;
- establish trust between researchers and create a neutral platform for effective research;
- protect and sustainably use bio-cultural heritage through a legally binding process;
- implement best practice research using culturally sensitive guidelines and principles;
- promote innovative research that traverses and benefits western and traditional knowledge; and
- create opportunities to develop, promote and engage with Indigenous research.

GOAL

"...Seeking the Truth to understand the past and present for our journey forward..."

We aim to participate in and develop research as a practice that collaborates with Mithaka Traditional Owners to manage Traditional Knowledge so that it benefits our Country, Culture and People.

Coordinated through the Mithaka Research Framework, we will protect and sustainably use bio-cultural heritage through processes that establish trust between researchers and create a neutral platform for effective research, and implement best practice using culturally sensitive guidelines, protocols and principles.

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Produce research on Culture and Country that provides meaningful knowledge and educates Mithaka People and the broader community;
- Use research to support a continuity of Culture for Mithaka People - learning from the past and creating into the future;
- Develop research that is evidence-based and validated, creates baseline data for future research, and fills gaps in current research;
- Recognise Mithaka identity in research processes and outcomes; and
- Create opportunities to develop, promote and engage with Aboriginal research, and promote innovative research that traverses and benefits western and traditional knowledge.

Understanding Culture and Society

- Mithaka Lore and society
- Trade and other exchanges
- How Mithaka People grew into the Country Totems, kinships, skins, and growth influences - young to old
- Mithaka's understanding of European settlement, and its influence

Healthy People and resilient Culture

- Language and stories
- Mithaka Peoples' rights and interests in leading research
- Sports and recreation
- Healthy and sustained living

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The following research priorities have been developed to ensure Mithaka People's rights and interests lead and influence research on Country.

Bio-Cultural Heritage

- Rock formations
- Land formations
- Understanding the sky stories
- Country and Culture
- Art, artefacts and spirituality

Innovative Systems

- DNA - Peopling Mithaka Country and Tribe
- Organic Technologies
- Uses of flora, fauna and medicines
- Aboriginal research and knowledge systems

WORKING TOGETHER

As depicted through Mithaka's research goal and objectives, we view research as a practice that collaborates with Mithaka Traditional Owners to manage Traditional Knowledge so that it benefits our Country, Culture and our People. Our Culture and knowledge is inherently connected to the landscapes and skylines around us, and for generations our People have studied and recorded Traditional Knowledge through our own research systems. For Mithaka, we consider both traditional and western knowledge systems critical and complementary in any research.

We understand that other researchers will work across a spectrum of relevance, Cultural understanding and engagement with Mithaka Traditional Owners. However, this should not get in the way of working together to create mutually beneficial outcomes and respect the rights, interests and needs of *all* involved.

For Mithaka, working together means:

- making sure all parties have the space and time to collaborate throughout all stages of research;
- mutual respect, reciprocity and trust throughout all stages of partnerships; building sustainable linkages, partnerships and joint ventures with researchers and institutions;
- two-way knowledge sharing and capacity building to enhance research and its positive impacts on Mithaka Country, Culture and People;
- understanding and respecting Culture for successful research, including a commitment to local cultural awareness training;
- innovative research that supports local, Aboriginal-led work and other researchers who are embedded in our community; and
- meaningful research that understands and talks to Mithaka People.



PROTOCOLS FOR RESEARCH

The following research protocols are guided by principles set by the *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* and *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and have been expanded on to consider Mithaka rights, interests and cultural governance systems.

These protocols will ensure cultural approval for any research regarding Mithaka Traditional Knowledge, develop trust between research parties, and ensure effective partnerships as they are manifested through research accountable processes, clearly communicated actions, and active relationships. Any research that formally recognises these protocols and principles through a Research Agreement with Mithaka Aboriginal Corporation will have the endorsed support of Mithaka Traditional Owners.

Research Agreement

As part of Mithaka Aboriginal Corporation's research process, a Research Agreement and supporting work plans will accompany all research work between Mithaka Traditional Owners and their research partners. This will provide a formal agreement and shared understanding of proposed research, and act as the 'action plan' that demonstrates *free, prior and informed consent* for research processes with Mithaka. It will also provide an opportunity for non-Mithaka researchers to understand Mithaka rights, interests and knowledge systems relating to the research area.

For any research proposal to be validated and endorsed by MAC, it must also address the following key criteria:

- details of research work undertakings, roles, contributions, obligations, expectations, aspirations and commitments by all parties involved;
- details of information management and communication processes including monitoring, storing, recording and reporting results, and the production of material for public information;
- actions to support and contribute to Traditional Owner research capacity;
- follow requirements as stipulated through State and Federal legislation;
- follow the AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies;
- confirm recognition of Intellectual Property and ethics clearances from a recognised research institution;
- establish processes for probationary periods for new partnerships, conflict resolution, breaches, confidentiality, project governance and other general agreements made between parties;
- plan reviews and performance indicators to communicate and assess research progress;
- address the legacy of research work, including the long-term economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits for Mithaka People and community; and
- researchers participate in understanding cultural and natural heritage, which may include cultural induction or exchange processes.

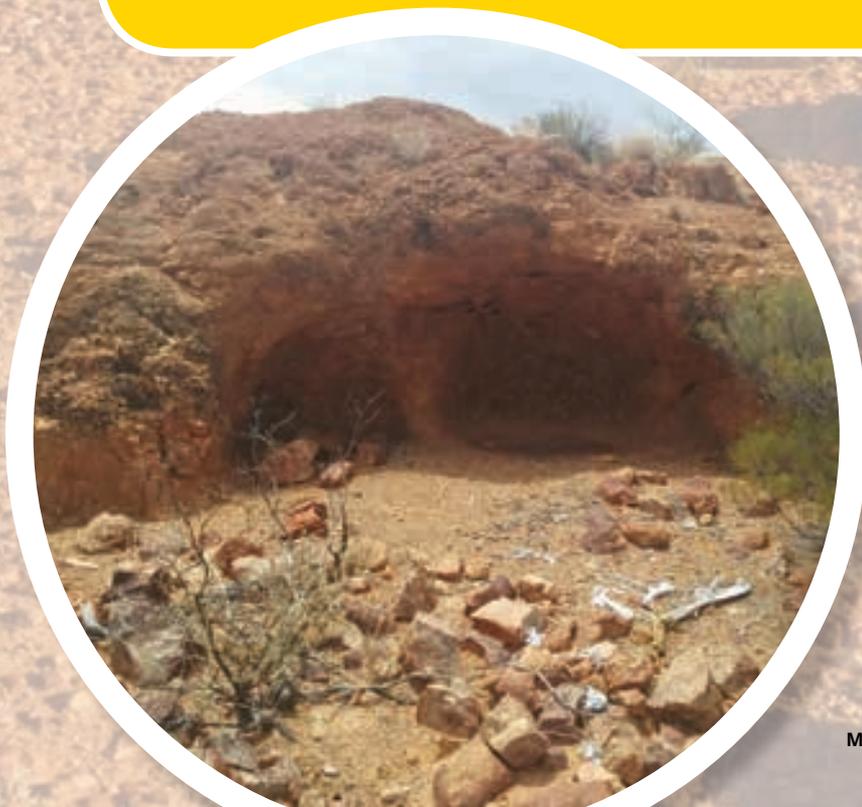
Intellectual Property

Mithaka Peoples' cultural and intellectual property refers to the rights held for Traditional Knowledge possesses through products and expressions of bio-cultural heritage that have been transferred through generations of Mithaka and the bio-cultural landscapes and skylscapes they are inherently connected to. As recognised in Article 31 of the United Nations Declaration On The Rights Of Indigenous Peoples,

“Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and Cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.”

Researchers must respect and support the ownership of Mithaka intellectual property throughout their research work, which will most likely involve the use of Traditional Knowledge at some level and needs to be acknowledging Mithaka rights and cultural protocols. This includes providing the resources and capacity in research to support the recording and use of Traditional Knowledge for Mithaka People and their own benefit, management, and cultural and educational purposes. It also involves Mithaka researchers and their partners to come to an agreement about how and what intellectual property is used and shared, and how this is continuously respected and communicated, throughout research work and resulting publications.

All research proposals will be negotiated to ensure *free, prior and informed consent* for the use of intellectual property, which researchers must work acknowledging that any Traditional Knowledge and information accessed is strictly confidential. As intellectual property of Mithaka Traditional Owners, Research Agreements will also outline how information produced through research is published, reported on and attributed.



Left: Caves sheltered foods, weapons, artefacts, tools and ceremony instruments.

Ethics Approval

As a pre-requisite of all Research Agreements, researchers must gain ethics clearance for research works from a recognised human research ethics committee. Further, to guarantee best practice in research collaborations, researchers working with Mithaka Aboriginal Corporation must be professionally affiliated to a recognised university or equivalent research institution, and adhere to any established standards.



Above: Scarred trees provide information on activities of Mithaka in various areas.

Information management and communicating research

Parties of the Research Agreement must agree to procedures for the storage, access and use of information, materials and artefacts before, during and following research work.

For each Research Agreement, parties must develop and agree on a communication plan that will detail key Mithaka liaisons throughout the research work; how and when research is reported to the MAC Board, broader Mithaka Traditional Owners, policy makers, partners/stakeholders, and the broader public; and the best format for information to be communicated for all identified audiences.

Parties of the Research Agreement must also agree to and observe protocols for the acknowledgement of any Mithaka Traditional Owners involved in the research, including joint or coauthorship of reporting and any public information. Before the publication of any results, a draft copy must be provided to MAC for review and approval for the use of any confidential information. Any information seen as confidential by MAC must be removed prior to publication. Researchers must also gain consent from MAC before any revised material is produced.

MITHAKA RESEARCH PROCESS

STEP 1

Research projects developed from MAC research objectives and priorities. Alternatively, research work is proposed by new and existing research partners and assessed by the MAC Board.

STEP 2

Negotiations and consultations between MAC Board and researchers, including, identifying relevant Mithaka Traditional Owners and setting conditions for a Research Agreement.

STEP 3

Draft Research Agreement developed, with the option to be independently assessed. Research management committee notified/established for the project, including MAC director, MAC support staff member and relevant partners.

STEP 4

Draft Research Agreement approved by MAC Board; final agreement signed and research work commences.

STEP 5

Collaborations, reporting and review throughout the duration of the research work, including ongoing involvement from identified Mithaka TOs.

STEP 6

Final research reported to MAC Board for review.

STEP 7

Research finalised and published as agreed and discussed with MAC Board.

IMPLEMENTING RESEARCH THE MITHAKA WAY

Mithaka Aboriginal Corporation's Research Framework ensures that all stages of research are transparent and accountable, and supported by Mithaka governance and continuous communication between Traditional Owners and their research partners.

Over the next five years, resourcing research will be dependent on a variety of internal and external factors. A flexible process will assess resources against the timeframes of research and Mithaka rights and interests. Sustainable partnerships with researchers, research institutions, governments and private sector will also support building capacities in accessing alternative resources that can benefit Mithaka People.

Mithaka see research as a continuous process that uses knowledge created to feed into new research work, and influenced by learning from the continuous growth of their Native Title Group and the societies within which they live. By reviewing research outcomes, both during and after projects, Mithaka are able to assess information produced and apply it to future research opportunities. This cyclical process will also provide important contributions to the next strategic phase of research.

To ensure that Traditional Owner's rights are continuously addressed, this framework exists as a living document that can be developed as Mithaka research work expands and through culturally sensitive governance systems put in place by MAC.



REFERENCES

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- ² AIATSIS, 2012, *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies*, p.3, available online at <http://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/guidelines-ethicalresearch-australian-indigenous-studies>
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ United Nations Declaration On The Rights Of Indigenous Peoples, 2007, available online at <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples-1>
- ⁵ United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2005, 'Report of the International Workshop on Methodologies Regarding Free Prior and Informed Consent', E/C.19/2005/3, available online at <https://goo.gl/aWYM6v>



For more information about this research framework and its application, please contact Mithaka Aboriginal Corporation directly.

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