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## **Ecosystem services and Indigenous wellbeing - recognizing the links**

**Key words:** Ecosystem Services, Indigenous Wellbeing, Savanna Ecosystems

### **Abstract:**

Understanding and incorporation of Indigenous relationships with 'country' (Indigenous parlance that denotes customary and familial connections to traditional lands) including services from country and people's role in its management, still presents enormous challenges for policy developments in Australia. There is a limited but important grasp within the Environmental policy circles of the practical and customary relationships between Indigenous people and their 'country', manifested in the development of Rangers, Indigenous Protected Areas and Marine Protected Areas for example. There is however no mainstream recognition of this critical co-dependence with 'country' in social, economic, health and education policy arenas – vital to Indigenous resilience and wellbeing.

Australian savannas comprise nearly one quarter of the total landmass, dominated by many Indigenous communities whose care for their country over the millennia has created the environmental values celebrated today. This study proposes an integrated framework to evaluate the role of savanna country and its services, which roughly equates to Ecosystem Services (ES), for people's wellbeing including Indigenous capabilities along with various biophysical and socio-cultural benefits. Our approach will assist in mainstreaming the recognition and role of country and its ES for policy making around Indigenous wellbeing. In conclusion, this research describes an Indigenous specific ES framework, and suggests that an integrated approach is essential for appropriately informing local, regional and global development programs and related policies.