



## Indigenous Groundwater Connections, Knowledge and Values Panel

**Dr Anne Poelina**  
Social Entrepreneur

Born in Broome and raised in the Kimberley, Anne is a Nyikina Traditional Owner from the Mardoowarra, Lower Fitzroy River. As one of 12 children, she learnt from an early age, to be guided by nature: 'Listening to land, Country, learning language, stories, hearing songs' (Interview). She comes from a family of leaders that upholds values of community harmony, social cohesion and co-existence. Her Grandmother Emily Watson nee Edgar, 'was very confident in her own skin' and her Mother Dorothy Hunter nee Watson was a strong and wise woman who faced many challenges to keep her identity ([www.nit.com.au](http://www.nit.com.au), May 26 2011). Anne's older sister Glenis Sibosado nee Hunter received international recognition for her work as National Commissioner for ATSIC and Social Justice Commissioner in Western Australia. Her Father, Simeon Poelina, originally from Alor Island, West Timor was a head pearl diver in Broome and ran a variety of successful businesses in Chinatown.

In the last 10 to 15 years Anne has received cultural support from Nyikina Senior Elders Jeanie Warbie and Lucy Marshall who are her sisters and teachers. They have taught her to believe in herself and assisted her in the building of her cultural capital. She is grounded in her own cultural identity. Going on 'Country' has given her the confidence to take on challenges such as local government. 'You have to be secure in yourself to engage and challenge mainstream' (Interview).

Anne has worked hard to be a leader. From being a child who spent more school time out of the classroom than inside, Anne has studied for several 'mainstream' qualifications. She is a registered nurse, a traditional midwife, has three Masters degrees, is a Doctor of Philosophy and is undertaking a second doctoral award. Yet Anne is by no means completely immersed in the world of academia. She is a strong advocate for sustainable Kimberley development. Key environmental and land management issues are of great concern to her as she believes that the Kimberly Region is at a turning point in terms of development.

She is opposed to coal mining on the Fitzroy River: 'Let's get the facts, let's get the science, let's get the traditional ecological knowledge, let's weigh it all up and get a balance and see do we need these sorts of development. What are impacts of mining on the environment and the people? What is the cost of putting a thermal coal mine very close to the Fitzroy River?'

(Interview). She refers to Kimberley as a 'green field area'. 'It has not been fully explored nor fully exploited in regards to mineral wealth. There is not a lot of western science being generated but there is a lot of traditional ecological knowledge. The old people sing songs of how rivers are connected and how water travels underground; they know the connections, the aquifers'. She is worried about the consumption of water, the drilling, the fracking and how toxic material will infiltrate the waterways.

Anne is not standing up as a leader to be a trouble maker but to bring issues to the table. Most recently her work has been with pastoralists, irrigators, government, researchers and education institutions as well as Traditional Owners to generate constructive dialogue about appropriate development in Northern Australia. 'There is wide scope for the development of a culture and conservation industry to engage in a diverse range of co-management practices based on quadruple bottom line factors of social, cultural, economic and environmental sustainability' (National Indigenous Times website). She says her upbringing and personal experiences have made her scrutinise equity, justice, humanity and human rights. Her philosophy is to take things a day at a time, not looking too far ahead.

Anne was a finalist in the WA Rural Woman of the Year 2010, and is a signatory to the Redstone Statement that she helped draft at the 1st International Summit on Indigenous Environmental Philosophy in May 2010 (Redstone statement website; Mardoowarra website). She is the Managing Director of Majala Inc, an Indigenous community organisation with Cultural Education, Research, Training and Evaluation expertise (Madjulla Inc website).