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CARING FOR COUNTRY - SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF ABORIGINAL LAND

In his encyclical letter, *'Praised be – On the care of our common home'* which focused on climate change, Pope Francis calls for special care for Indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. He also highlights the need for Indigenous communities to be “principal dialogue partners” when large projects affecting their land are proposed.

“For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values,” Pope Francis said. “When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best.”

Caritas Australia, the Catholic Church’s international aid and development agency, works with the most marginalized in 32 countries globally and with First Australian communities. In Australia, communities are feeling the effects of climate change, with longer and more frequent heatwaves. Seven of the ten warmest years on record have occurred since 2002 and there are more extreme fire risk days each year. The Aboriginal Carbon Fund, is one of Caritas Australia’s partners, working to increase the sustainable development of Aboriginal lands. It has attracted significant support in Australia.



The Fund supports traditional landowners to undertake carbon farming to reduce our national carbon emission levels. They then sell these carbon credits to organisations that need to offset their carbon footprint. Payment for carbon credits provides remote communities with a sustainable livelihood.



“The aim was to create a partnership between business and traditional landowners that would reduce climate change effects across the country,” said Rowan Foley, from the Wondunna clan of the Badtjala people, (Traditional Owners of Fraser Island and Hervey Bay in Queensland) and General Manager of the Aboriginal Carbon Fund. Rowan is pictured right.

“We can measure the reduction in carbon emissions that we gain from burning in winter. The amount of carbon saved

through the process can be purchased as a carbon credit offset by the Government or companies needing to reduce their carbon debt.”

“As well as helping the environment, carbon farming is reviving traditional cultural practices, fostering community and putting money in the bank for First Australian communities. About 30 Australian organisations are buying carbon credits also giving the remote communities a sustainable livelihood.”

“Over the last 40,000 years traditional owners in Australia actively managed the land, by making small fires in winter. You can look after country, and it can be economically viable. It’s a realisation of a dream.”

Currently, one of the Aboriginal Carbon fund projects is with the Barengi Gadjin Land Council, operating out of Horsham for the region that covers a large area between Ouyen, Sea Lake, Donald, Stawell and Edenhope.

To take action following the encyclical go to www.caritas.org.au/climate

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Photos credit: Aboriginal Carbon Fund and Caritas Australia