



SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

GISERA | Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance

Pathways for Indigenous socio-economic development in the Beetaloo, NT

This project will collaborate with rights-holders and stakeholders in the Beetaloo region of the Northern Territory to explore how economic opportunities from major projects can support the priorities of Indigenous communities.

Key points

- The development of a shale gas industry in the Beetaloo Sub-basin in the Northern Territory brings potential social and economic opportunity to the region.
- Historically, Indigenous people in the region have faced barriers to socio-economic development.
- This project will explore how economic opportunities from shale gas and other projects, including agriculture and renewables, can support the aspirations and values of Indigenous communities.
- Project outcomes will identify opportunities and benefits that can be pursued, including what sorts of governance arrangements can best support aspirations, and providing a platform for some of the locally driven initiatives and enterprises already underway and how others can be scaled-up.

This project, conducted through CSIRO's Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance (GISERA), will explore pathways for Indigenous socio-economic development in the Beetaloo region, with a focus on the potential of shale gas, renewable energy and agriculture.

The University of Queensland has been engaged by CSIRO to conduct field research and analysis for this GISERA project. This reflects The University of Queensland's long experience and established expertise in this area.

UQ researchers will consider existing governance instruments (including local decision-making frameworks, community strategic plans and Indigenous land use agreements) to understand what mechanisms for economic engagement currently exist, their implementation status, and their alignment with self-determination objectives.

Comparisons will be made with similar Indigenous-controlled development strategies in resource regions in Australia and worldwide.

The Beetaloo Sub-basin

The Beetaloo Sub-basin is part of the greater McArthur Basin and covers an area of about 28,000 square kilometres in the Northern Territory. Located about 500 kilometres south of Darwin; the region is sparsely populated, with Daly Waters and Elliott the most populated settlements in the region.

The estimated gas resources for the Beetaloo Sub-basin are of similar size to other major gas producing basins in Australia, such as the Surat Basin in Queensland and the Bonaparte/Browse basins in Western Australia.



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Experience in other regions has shown that the development of resources can bring significant economic and social benefits to local communities. However, there are also many examples showing that this transition is not always smooth and that local communities can be disenfranchised.

Identifying how community self-determination could be supported in the Beetaloo may be an important way to maximise benefits and strengthen communities over the long term.

Project background

The region has a high proportion of Indigenous people living in remote communities in a mobile and dispersed population. According to the 2021 ABS Census, 67% of the Barkly local government region and 75.2% of the Roper Gulf local government region identify as Indigenous – compared to 26% across the rest of the Northern Territory.

While many Indigenous communities in the region have articulated a desire to increase their economic opportunities, there is also a desire to preserve the social, cultural and environmental values of the Beetaloo.

This project will apply an Indigenous-led socio-economic development approach to the Beetaloo region. It builds on previous research, including:

- The *Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy for the Beetaloo* conducted by Charles Darwin University in 2020.
- The recommendations of *Indigenous participants in the Social, Cultural and Economics (SCE) SREBA studies in 2023*, led by Associate Professor Kathy Witt at the University of Queensland.

Project objectives and methods

A significant gap remains in understanding how Indigenous-led development models can be effectively applied in the Beetaloo Sub-basin. Addressing this gap is essential to ensuring that development in the region delivers benefits that genuinely support Indigenous self-determination and sustainable outcomes.

The objectives of this project are:

- To explore what Indigenous-led development would look like for Aboriginal communities in the Beetaloo region.
- To provide opportunities for rights holders and stakeholders (including the broader community in the region) to share their socio-economic development visions and support shared discussions and dialogue.
- To identify the types of social and economic opportunities that align with the visions of local communities in the Beetaloo region.

- To explore mechanisms that enable these opportunities to be captured, including governance mechanisms and the negotiated agreements (ILUAs).
- To provide evidence-based options for policies, programs and industry reform.

The project is multi-method and cross-disciplinary, with several stages building on each other. Key tasks include:

- Preparatory work and ethics approval – to ensure the project focuses on accountability, transparency and benefit sharing.
- International literature review on Indigenous-led development – to identify successful models, frameworks and lessons learned elsewhere that may inform approaches in the Beetaloo.
- Beetaloo regional scan – an assessment to identify existing capacities, plans, organisations and networks related to socio-economic development.
- On-the-ground collaborative fieldwork and engagement with rights holders and stakeholders – ongoing engagement to collaboratively design the research process, including methodologies, data gathering and collaborative analysis.

The project team anticipate that the research will result in options for tangible outcomes, including evidence-based government policies and institutional frameworks that could increase the likelihood of sustainable forms of development.

To ensure the report findings align with the understandings and expectations of local and regional stakeholders and rights holders, researchers will return to the region for a final check-in and confirmation of the findings in a ground truthing exercise.

The final report will then be shared with government, NGO and industry representatives to support informed decision making.

More information

Read more [about this project](#)

Learn about [other GISERA research in the Northern Territory](#)

Find out about [GISERA's other social and economic research](#)

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GISERA is a collaboration between CSIRO, Commonwealth and state governments and industry established to undertake publicly-reported independent research. The purpose of GISERA is to provide quality assured scientific research and information to communities living in gas development regions focusing on social and environmental topics including: groundwater and surface water, greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity, land management, the marine environment, and socio-economic impacts. The governance structure for GISERA is designed to provide for and protect research independence and transparency of research.