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**Big end of town meets Indigenous Australia**

A unique partnership between Indigenous Australia and an international law firm has ensured Aboriginal communities have the opportunity to play a central role in any future emissions trading scheme in this country.

Minter Ellison, Australia's largest law firm and one of the largest in the Asia Pacific region, provided pro bono legal assistance to set up the Australian Indigenous Chamber of Commerce and contributed to the Chamber's policy submissions on the Federal Government's proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS).

Over the past year partner Duncan McGregor, who heads the law firm's national climate change team, has worked closely with the Chamber's Board, including former ALP National President Warren Mundine, on the Chamber's set up and its strategic direction.

*"Our firm has been advising Australian companies on the implications of the national and international climate change agenda for almost a decade," Mr McGregor said. "So when we heard about the Chamber's plans to encourage Indigenous communities to become involved in the Federal Government's emissions reduction plan for Australia, we were inspired to help."*

The Chamber is now seeking Government funding for a project which will assist Indigenous communities to undertake carbon sequestration activities through tree planting, and to convert that carbon into Australian Emissions Units under the CPRS. A key plank of that project is to maximise financial and social benefits to relevant communities.

According to the Chamber, up to 13 per cent of Australia's forests are Indigenous owned or managed. Some of this 'Indigenous estate' has the potential to generate carbon credits for local communities under the proposed CPRS – acting as a 'carbon sink', and perhaps also contributing towards renewable energy initiatives.

*"Working on a pro bono basis, we are assisting the Chamber to outline how these lands can be utilised to create real economic and social benefits for Indigenous communities from the Government's green agenda," Mr McGregor said.*

Members of Minter Ellison's tax team, led by partner Gary Beath, have also chalked up a couple of early wins for the Chamber, assisting it to become incorporated and to be recognised as a "Deductible Gift Recipient" by the Australian Taxation Office.

Indigenous Chamber Chairman, Warren Mundine, believes that having a top-end-of town law firm behind it has helped position the Chamber as a leading voice in Australia's carbon debate: *"The Chamber's submission to the Federal Government has put the Indigenous implications and opportunities of the CPRS squarely on the table."*

*"The Chamber is now ideally positioned to develop a detailed business case about how Indigenous communities can contribute to and benefit from the Government's climate change agenda," he said.*

The Australian Indigenous Chamber of Commerce is now preparing for the next stage of development of the proposed the emissions trading debate, with a Federal Parliamentary Committee expected to report soon on the Government's draft legislation.