Around the Campfire:
Connecting Our People

Flinders University

Regional, Rural and Remote Strategy 2025 - 2035

Message from the Vice-Chancellor

Flinders University is committed to working collaboratively with regional, rural and remote (RRR) communities and industry stakeholders to improve health, social, economic and environmental outcomes. We achieve this through authentic partnerships, and by ensuring excellence in RRR education and research.

Flinders has a long history of successfully delivering research, education, and partnership development in RRR communities in both South Australia (SA) and the Northern Territory (NT). This geographic footprint across the Australian Central Corridor is a defining feature of Flinders University. While current investments are primarily focused on supporting the medicine, nursing and allied health workforce needs through the Discipline of Rural and Remote Health (RRH) within the College of Medicine Public Health (CMPH), there is strong evidence of relationships and diverse RRR activities being planned and implemented by other disciplines, Colleges and Portfolios in RRR locations as well. There is also a strong overlap with Flinders deep commitment to advancing the health, social and economic outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living and working in RRR communities.

Flinders currently delivers medicine, nursing, paramedicine, allied health and remote health practice courses in RRR locations across SA and the NT. These courses have been co-designed with local stakeholders over many years and have involved strategic partnerships with local services and organisations to meet community needs. This has been complemented by the delivery of a broad range of targeted online courses to meet the needs of RRR communities. We also facilitate medical, nursing and allied health student placements through Australian Government Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training (RHMT) program funding, which supports our SA and NT University Departments of Rural Health (UDRH) and Rural Clinical Schools. Flinders also offers education placements in RRR sites, often with the support of philanthropic funding in the form of student travel and accommodation scholarships. This means Flinders is experienced in supporting students undertaking placements in RRR settings, including the provision of cultural education, place-based learning, and pastoral care. In addition, Flinders also partners with multiple Regional University Study Hubs (RUSHs) across Australia, which provide infrastructure, administrative and academic support services, and student support services to enable better access to education for RRR students.

Flinders has also shown a commitment of co-designing RRR and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research with communities across the Australian Central corridor and more broadly across Northern Australia. The evidence-building and knowledge translation activities led by Flinders researchers has made a significant contribution for achieving positive health, social, economic and environmental impacts for these RRR communities. We remain committed to furthering research excellence in RRR and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander over the coming decade.

These achievements outlined above provide a rich tapestry from which to learn and grow Flinders future contributions and to plan for carefully planned and incremental investments across our existing RRR footprint over the next 10 years. This includes extending Flinders RRR commitment beyond health disciplines. In alignment with Flinders 10-Year Strategic Plan, the Australian Government prioritisation of RRR higher education through the Australian Universities Accord, and within the context of an increasing focus on RRR research, this 10-year whole-of-university strategy provides the contemporary vision and contextualised road map that Flinders requires for advancing our growth and impacts in RRR settings across Australia.

Professor Colin Stirling

Professor James A. Smith and Professor Chris Brebner
Office of the Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor
Flinders University
September 2024

Introduction

At Flinders University, we consider Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) communities to be vital to Australia's social, cultural and economic fabric.
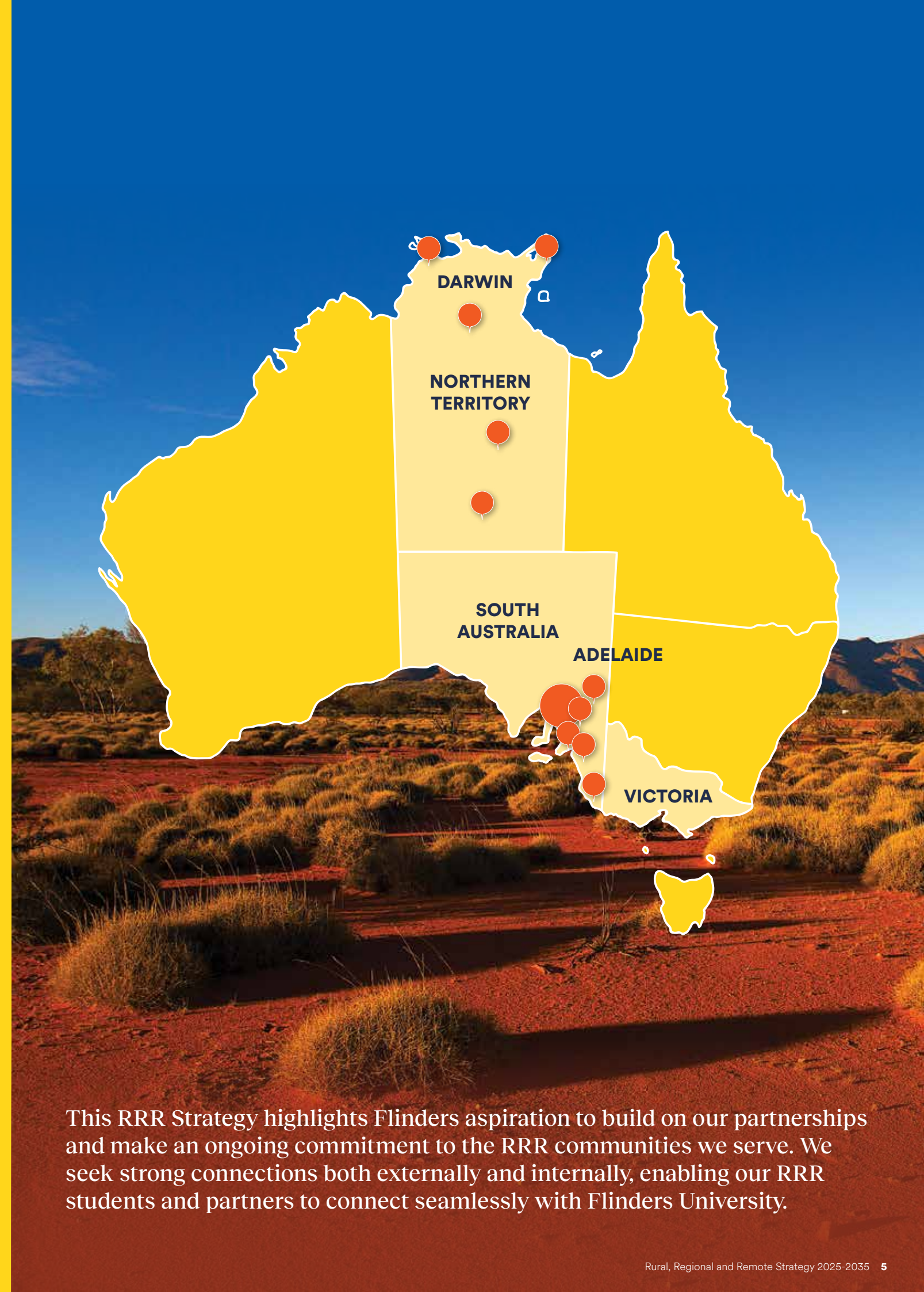
Flinders commitment to RRR communities is reflected in the Northern Territory Medical Program, its rural and remote education programs in medicine, nursing and allied health, interdisciplinary research endeavours, facilitation of two-way learning and cultural immersion with Indigenous communities, and future workforce development. It is from this foundation that the RRR will grow.

As part of our commitment to RRR communities across Australia - especially within our established footprint across South Australia (SA) and the Northern Territory (NT) - we aim to increase access to, and success in, higher education. We also aim to undertake research that directly responds to RRR community needs and priorities. Our ethos is to work in partnership with local stakeholders and organisations that are familiar with RRR place and context.

The University acknowledges Indigenous communities' ownership and connection to the locations where Flinders operate. In collaboration with community stakeholders, we will co-design strategies that meet community aspirations and needs. This includes acknowledging the cultural responsibilities, kinship relationships and connection to country that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff have within their RRR communities.

As well as partnering with many key stakeholders across the footprint, including Regional University Centres, Flinders has 13 sites located across 11 RRR locations in SA and NT. This includes the permanent presence of six sites in regional and rural SA, and seven sites in regional and remote NT. These include:

- Alice Springs, NT (x 2) – Arrernte country
- Berri, SA – country of the First Peoples of the River Murray and Mallee region
- Darwin, NT (x 2) – Larrakia country
- Katherine, NT – Dagoman, Wardaman, and Jawoyn country
- Mount Gambier, SA – Boandik country
- Murray Bridge, SA – Ngarrindjeri country
- Nhulunbuy, NT – Yolngu country
- Nuriootpa, SA – Ngadjuri country
- Renmark, SA – country of the First Peoples of the River Murray and Mallee region
- Tennant Creek, NT – Warumungu country
- Victor Harbor, SA – Ngarrindjeri and Ramindjeri country

This RRR Strategy highlights Flinders aspiration to build on our partnerships and make an ongoing commitment to the RRR communities we serve. We seek strong connections both externally and internally, enabling our RRR students and partners to connect seamlessly with Flinders University.

Vision

Our vision is to foster a connected university RRR presence through sustainable partnerships that enrich local lives, drive RRR growth and create a lasting impact.

Building on the strengths of current RRR operations, the RRR Strategy uses a metaphor of 'around the campfire'. This phrase aims to capture a vision of connectedness, possibility and opportunity. It also aims to acknowledge and celebrate the strength of metaphor use in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the current Flinders RRR footprint. When we sit around a campfire it is often perceived as place of warmth and connectedness. It represents an opportunity to engage with each other, share stories, reflect, laugh and learn – both individually and collectively. It serves as a place of nourishment and growth.

Symbolically, each of our RRR sites will be connected by their own campfire.

Our aim is to set a series of 'campfires' across each of the communities where we work. The intent is for each campfire to burn as brightly as the others. The desire is to have multiple campfires burning brightly, where the smoke from the fire represents the networks and learning that travels between them. The campfires act a catalyst for positive change.

We thank Professor Simone Tur and Uncle Murphy Yunupingu for their insights in developing this metaphor.

The intention of RRR Strategy is to provide an environment that resembles a welcoming campfire:

The act of lighting the campfire represents new beginnings filled with a vision of aspiration, hope, exploration and shared understanding.

The fireplace represents both the infrastructure we use, and the environment we create, to nurture our students, staff and community stakeholders.

The kindling used to start the campfire represents community strengths and needs – a foundation for success.

The logs used to sustain the campfire reflect the primary building blocks of education, research, partnerships, and genuine engagement.

The flames of the campfire represent tangible outcomes and impacts from working collectively through partnerships and collaboration.

The stoking of the campfire creates ideas and reinvigorates thinking in the form of strategic projects and activities that serve community needs.

The sparks from the campfire reflect excellence and innovation that capture our attention and which we use to shape future strategies and actions.

The embers from the campfire reflect the legacy that Flinders and its partners leave in the community, including new knowledge and skills, and a foundation for future learning.

Principles

Our principles will be the foundation for the success of our work with Regional, Rural and Remote communities.

Flinders University will:

1. Genuinely engage with our RRR communities in a way that is culturally safe and responsive.

2. Enact a whole of university approach that optimises opportunities for partnership and collaboration.

3. Commit to supporting student access and success, no matter where students are located.

4. Deliver courses that meet RRR community needs, match existing strengths, and that align with available resourcing.

5. Undertake research that addresses RRR community priorities and develop local partnerships that optimise research design, implementation and impact.

6. Work with community and industry partners to identify and pursue external funding opportunities.

7. Respect the cultural connection and kinship ties that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have with RRR locations where Flinders operates.

8. Be accountable, through effective whole of university governance, evaluation and reporting on RRR initiatives.

Goals and Objectives

Connection with our communities is central to Flinders' mission to improve lives and to address the needs of society.

We will positively impact outcomes through engaging in co-development and implementation of place-based strategies that reflect the unique needs of our regional rural and remote communities and stakeholders. We will also continue to support and grow connection in to our metropolitan campuses.

Flinders University will engage, educate, research and innovate with our RRR communities.

Genuinely engage

with our RRR communities

Engage

Goal 1: Promote authentic engagement that responds to regional, rural and remote community needs.

At Flinders University we believe that a shared sense of purpose, together with a common set of values, is fundamental to a rewarding culture. Understanding RRR community needs is particularly important, and ideally should be informed by genuine and robust engagement. We will do this through:

Objective 1.1: Connect through respectful community and stakeholder engagement.

Objective 1.2: Respond to RRR community needs and priorities.

Goal 2: Foster collaboration and partnerships that achieve optimal impact for regional, rural and remote communities.

Flinders has always endeavoured to work collaboratively with industry partners and communities to improve health, social and economic outcomes. This has been particularly important in RRR locations, where context and place are critical considerations.

Objective 2.: Foster mutually beneficial partnerships with local communities.

Objective 2.2: Enable people to connect with Flinders University with a 'no wrong door' approach

Objective 2.3: Promote and celebrate intra-College and cross-University relationships that increase connectivity within Flinders.

Objective 2.4: Bridge the gap between academia and industry in RRR settings.

Connect through respectful community and stakeholder engagement.

Educate

Goal 3: Enhance access, participation and success in higher education for regional, rural and remote communities.

The University's current footprint across South Australia and the Northern Territory is unique and positions Flinders to be an education leader in these jurisdictions. We will strive to increase access to, and success in, higher education.

Objective 3.1: Increase accessibility to higher education for students from RRR areas to study in-place, online or through metropolitan campuses.

Objective 3.2: Increase participation, progression and completion in higher education among RRR origin students.

Objective 3.3: Promote post-secondary education and career pathways to RRR origin students.

Research

Goal 4: Lead research excellence in regional, rural and remote contexts.

Flinders will proactively engage with RRR businesses, industries and communities to co-design and co-deliver research that meets community needs and makes a positive impact.

Objective 4.1: Enhance research capabilities in RRR contexts

Objective 4.2: Develop impactful research collaborations with RRR industry and community partners

Innovate

Goal 5: Create a culture of innovation, agility, and transformation through Flinders regional, rural, and remote footprint.

Flinders is a national leader in the delivery of RRR higher education and research. To achieve a contemporary vision Flinders must maintain an agile culture that responds to community needs and priorities. This requires a transformative mindset.

Objective 5.1: Incrementally consolidate Flinders footprint in RRR SA and the NT

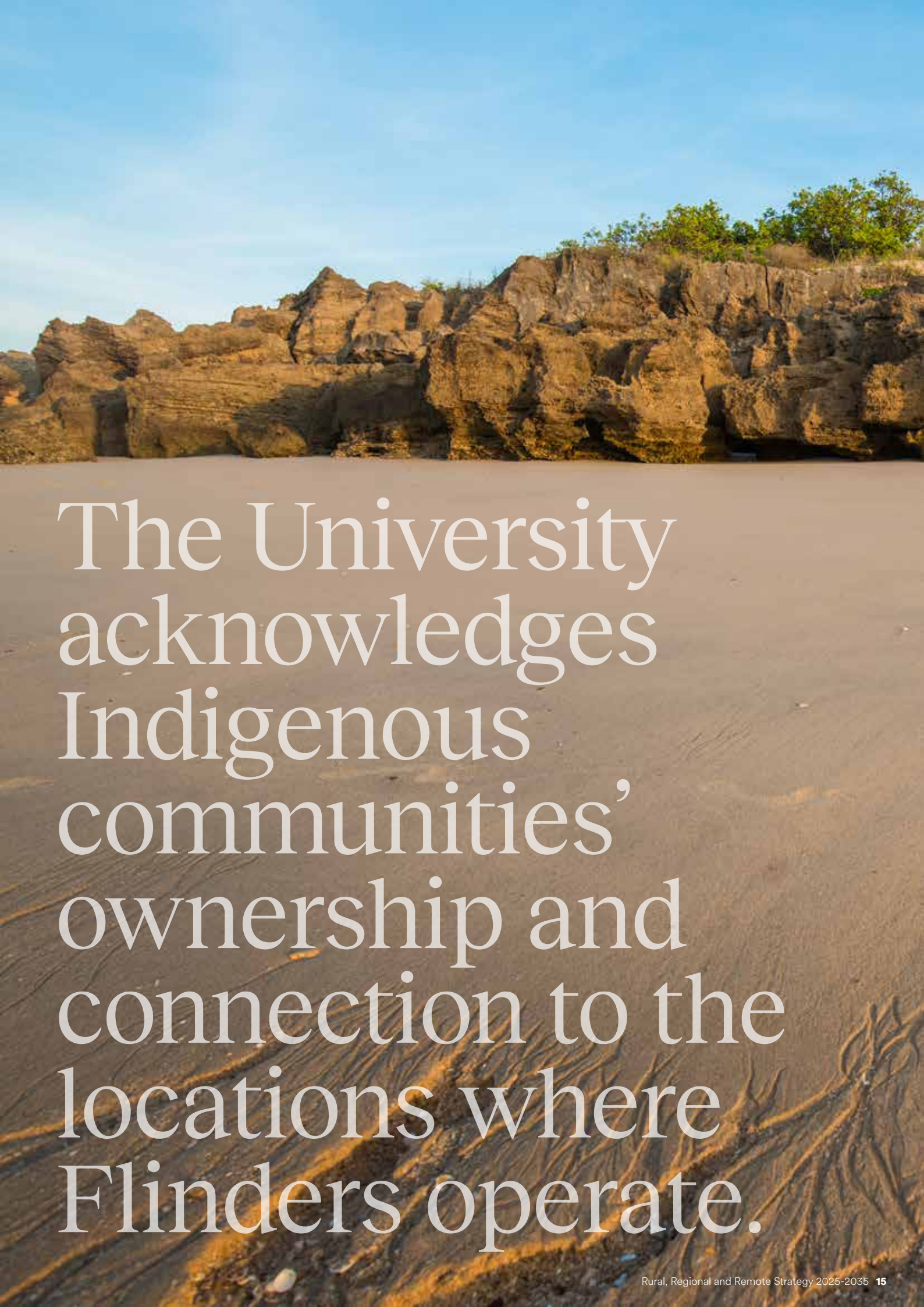**Objective 5.2:** Develop agile systems that enhance responsiveness and impact in RRR settings

Objective 5.3: Celebrate RRR successes

Develop impactful research collaborations with RRR industry and community partners.

Regional, Rural and Remote Strategy Implementation

The RRR Strategy will be accompanied by sequential Implementation Plans (12 months to initiate the Strategy then 3-4 yearly).

An Implementation Working Group has been established under the auspices of the Officer of the Senior DVC. This group will ensure that strategies aligned with each of the goals and objectives outlined above are appropriately timed, resourced, and identify who is responsible for their achievement. The monitoring and evaluation of each Implementation Plan will iteratively inform the development of the next.

The University acknowledges Indigenous communities' ownership and connection to the locations where Flinders operate.

Flinders
University