

Developing a model for enhanced consultation and collaboration
between indigenous communities and the fishing industry: A case
study between the Northern Prawn Fishing Industry and Carpentaria
Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and Wellesley Island elders

A. Jarrett and M. Barwick. NPF Industry Pty Ltd.

2010/320



This work is copyright. Except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth), no part of this publication may be reproduced by any process, electronic or otherwise, without the specific written permission of the copyright owners. Information may not be stored electronically in any form whatsoever without such permission.

Disclaimer

The authors do not warrant that the information in this document is free from errors or omissions. The authors do not accept any form of liability, be it contractual, tortious, or otherwise, for the contents of this document or for any consequences arising from its use or any reliance placed upon it. The information, opinions and advice contained in this document may not relate, or be relevant, to a readers particular circumstances. Opinions expressed by the authors are the individual opinions expressed by those persons and are not necessarily those of the publisher, research provider or the FRDC.

The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation plans, invests in and manages fisheries research and development throughout Australia. It is a statutory authority within the portfolio of the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, jointly funded by the Australian Government and the fishing industry.

2010/320 Developing a model for enhanced consultation and collaboration between indigenous communities and the fishing industry: A case study between the NPF Industry and Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and Wellesley Island elders

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Annie Jarrett

ADDRESS: NPF Industry Pty Ltd

PO Box 756 Caloundra Qld 4551

Telephone: 0411426469

OBJECTIVES:

1. Consult with the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and Wellesley Island elders to promote a more comprehensive understanding of fishing practices and management arrangements in the Northern Prawn Fishery (NPF)
2. In consultation with the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and Wellesley Island elders, develop and implement a strategy to enhance understanding of indigenous culture and areas of cultural importance in the Wellesley Islands area among NPF operators
3. Develop and communicate a model to enhance effective consultation between fisheries and indigenous communities

NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY:

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED TO DATE (boxed)

This project facilitated enhanced communication between the Northern Prawn Fishing Industry and the Lardil, Yangkaal, Kaiadilt and Gangaliddaa people of Mornington Island. Through this project, NPF Industry members were provided with a better understanding of issues and areas of cultural significance to the Wellesley Island indigenous communities. Equally, representatives of each of the four language groups within the Wellesley Island region have been able to develop a more detailed and accurate understanding of how the NPF operates, and the high standard to which it is managed with respect to sustainability. A process has been developed to enable ongoing sharing of information between these parties, and many of the lessons learned will be useful to similar engagement opportunities elsewhere.

KEYWORDS: Mornington Island, Wellesley Islands, Indigenous, Engagement, Communications, Cultural Education, Northern Prawn Fishery, Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Lardil, Yangkaal, Kaiadilt and Gangaliddaa, Prawn Trawl.

Acknowledgments

The project team would like to acknowledge the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation for their investment and support, the Northern Prawn Fishing Industry and Lardil, Yangkaal, Kaiadilt and Gangaliddaa people for their assistance and patience with each other in helping to explore how to work together more effectively to achieve our common interests.

Background and need

At its meeting on 14 July 2010, the Northern Prawn Fishery Management Advisory Committee (NORMAC) was presented to by a contingent of the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (CLCAC) on a proposed draft sea country plan for the Wellesley Island area. It was made clear at that time that the plan had no formal legislative status, but that the zoning within the plan (some of which help implications for NPF fishing activities), was derived based upon issues and areas of cultural significance to local indigenous communities. Through these initial discussions it also became apparent that among indigenous communities there was a significant lack of information, or in some cases, misinformation surrounding fishing practices in the NPF, which led some to believe that the fishery was unsustainable. There was generally recognised value among representatives of the CLCAC and NPF Industry in developing a process for enhanced engagement, to help exchange key messages, and learn how to exist in a more harmonious state. This project was developed to facilitate this process.

It was recognised that development and implementation of a strategy to communicate fishing practices and management arrangements in the Northern Prawn Fishery (NPF) to Wellesley Island elders would be beneficial, to demonstrate the high level of stewardship exercised by NPF operators for the region and its abundant natural resources. There was also recognised value in developing and implementing a strategy to promote and enhance respect for and understanding of indigenous culture and areas of cultural importance in the Wellesley Islands area among NPF operators.

Objectives

This project sought to facilitate engagement between the NPF Industry Pty Ltd and the countries representing the four languages of the Wellesley Island region (Lardil, Yangkaal, Kaiadilt and Gangaliddaa). It was intended that knowledge gained through this project would be utilised to facilitate improved consultative processes between representatives of other fisheries and indigenous communities with respect to natural resource management.

1. Consult with the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and Wellesley Island elders to promote a more comprehensive understanding of fishing practices and management arrangements in the NPF
2. In consultation with the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and Wellesley Island elders, develop and implement a strategy to enhance understanding of indigenous culture and areas of cultural importance in the Wellesley Islands area among NPF operators
3. Develop and communicate a model to enhance effective consultation between fisheries and indigenous communities

Methods

NPF Industry Pty Ltd staff engaged with representatives of the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation to explore opportunities for knowledge exchange with respect to cultural education and fisheries management. It is recognised that determining the appropriate group/individual to engage with may be a key initial challenge for other fisheries/indigenous communities, however in this case the highly organised structure of the CLCAC and NPF industry body made this stage relatively simple.

A strategy then developed to facilitate this information sharing in a non-threatening and inclusive environment, with the two primary outcomes of ensuring that NPF operators are more culturally aware with respect to the Wellesley Island region and its indigenous communities, and helping to ensure that indigenous communities within the Wellesley Island region are familiar with the range of sustainable management measures in place in the Northern Prawn Fishery.

A series of meetings were held in Cairns, Karumba, Darwin and on Mornington Island, during which representatives of the CLCAC and/or NPF Industry Pty Ltd presented to an assembled audience regarding key messages. This was followed by discussions regarding the content of presentations.

Each meeting was followed by an informal debrief between key representatives of the CLCAC and NPF Industry, in which lessons obtained through this process were identified and discussed, with respect to how they could be utilized to enhance effective consultation in future, both between Wellesley Island indigenous communities and NPF Industry representatives, and between fisheries and indigenous communities elsewhere.

A project summary was developed and published on the NPF Industry Pty Ltd website to help communicate key messages to other interested parties.

Results/Discussion

Through initial discussions between representatives of the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (CLCAC) and NPF Industry Pty Ltd it was agreed that knowledge exchange between NPF staff and representatives of Wellesley Island Indigenous Communities would be optimised through presenting at industry/community meetings. As NPF crew gather for pre-season briefings before each season, this was identified as an ideal opportunity to hold cultural education training. It was also acknowledged that a meeting of the Gulf Regional Aboriginal Corporation (GRAC) would be an optimal time to help communicate sustainability measures in place in the NPF, as these meetings are broadly attended by individuals from all four language groups within the Wellesley Island region. On this basis a strategy was developed in which representatives of the Wellesley Island Sea Rangers would come and present to NPF crew members at their Darwin, Karumba and Cairns NPF pre-season briefings during 2011. Presentations would be tailored to suit key messages required for delivery to NPF operators, based on historical understanding of areas and issues of conflict/misunderstanding. Following each presentation would be an informal debrief between Sea Rangers present and NPF staff, to discuss knowledge shared in more detail, and explore future opportunities for better collaboration. The NPF Projects Manager, Matt Barwick would also present at the Gulf Regional Aboriginal Corporation meeting on Mornington Island to explain management arrangements in the NPF, and discuss ideas for future collaboration with the GRAC.

On 26 March the first cultural education training was delivered at the Darwin pre-season briefing, with additional training events in Cairns on 26 and 28 July 2011. Each of these meetings were well attended by NPF skippers and crew (between 14 and 18 crew members attended each meeting). Meeting 1 (in Darwin) a contingent of Wellesley Island Sea Rangers also attended each of these meetings.

Presentation format

In each meeting the NPF Projects Manager, Mr Matt Barwick, initially presented on management arrangements for the 2011 banana and tiger prawn seasons in the Northern Prawn Fishery. This component of the briefing received a significant level of interest from CLCAC representatives, who indicated they were surprised by the range of measures in place to ensure sustainability of the fishery, such as significant industry-induced closures to protect key habitat types, decision rules for early closure of the fishery in the event of low catches etc. They indicated they would assist in communicating these initiatives to others within their community.

Cultural education presentations were delivered by Mr Tommy Wilson (Wellesley Island Sea Ranger) and Mr Jack Juhel (Chair of the Gulf Region Aboriginal Corporation and CLCAC representative), each time incorporating feedback from the presentation before to assist in delivering a message to NPF operators which was easily understood, interesting and relevant to the fishery. Presentations highlighted the range of land and sea-based ranger activities undertaken to maintain and enhance the health of land and sea country. Over 160 cultural sites were identified and discussed within the Wellesley Island region, and the broad concepts and reasons which result in their significance were described. Carpentaria Land Council representatives present highlighted a number of areas as story places, or to be a part of story lines which preclude visitation from all, indigenous or otherwise. It was generally recognised that operators would be unlikely to knowingly encroach on these areas, and ensuring these areas are understood would help to minimise future interactions.



Figure 1 Carpentaria Land Council and Lardil people representative, Mr Tommy Wilson delivering cultural education to NPF operators during 2011 banana pre season briefing in Darwin

Key lessons acquired

CLCAC representatives present explained the significance of a *Dulmada* for Lardil, Yangkaal and Gangalidda people (*Dulmarra danga* in Kaiadilt). *Dalmada* or *Dulmarra danga* maintain customary control of the environment, and traditionally control the taking and distribution of large sea animals (dugong and turtle), fish and other plant and seafoods. It was traditionally a technical requirement that the *Dulmada* approve the taking of any such resource. The *Dulmada* could also close an area or defer the taking of any resource pending its ripeness or maturity (Memmott and Channels, 2004). As a sign of respect, it was agreed that the NPF Projects Manager would contact the *Dulmada* on commencement and conclusion of each season. The Projects Manager would also act as a single point of contact for the NPF Industry Pty

Ltd. Representatives of the Carpentaria Land Council present identified this as a very significant improvement, which in showing respect to the cultural requirements of Wellesley Island indigenous communities would vastly improve relationships with NPF operators.

Traditionally the *Dulmada* also assured the sharing of the food resource, including between neighbouring groups, minimising waste when large animals were taken. Traditional sharing continues into the present day, and food sharing is regarded as a significant influence on social cohesion. (Memmott and Channels, 2004). Whilst in the past NPF operators had from time-to-time offered prawns to local residents on occasion, many operators were unaware of the significance of this action in fostering a positive relationship with indigenous communities. This was identified as a relatively simple way to build on existing goodwill between fishers and Traditional Owners.

Delivery of cultural education training for NPF crew was assessed as a significant success, with each presentation prompting positive exchange, and a general recognition that this was a good first step in understanding each other's needs, practices and values. A number of misconceptions were identified and easily resolved during these meetings. An example is a misconception held by some in attendance that trawlers were fishing quite close to a particular headland. Through further discussion, it became clear that the vessels in question were trailing their nets on the surface, and so could not be fishing. From this the need was identified to produce a flyer to distribute to all Sea Rangers to help them identify fishing and non-fishing vessels.

The NPF Project Manager subsequently attended the Mornington Island Gulf Region Aboriginal Council (GRAC) to provide a detailed presentation on the management of the NPF. In general this presentation was well received. GRAC members and community members present expressed a desire to explore opportunities for NPF product to be made available within their communities at a price which would enable residents to purchase NPF prawns.



Figure 2 GRAC Chairperson, Mr Jack Juhel providing cultural appreciation training to NPF crewmembers in Karumba.

Applying lessons to future engagement

During a debrief following the final Pre Season Briefing in Karumba, The NPF Industry P/L Projects Manager met with a number of Wellesley Island Sea Rangers to discuss how lessons learned through this project might be useful to inform future engagement between representatives of other fisheries and indigenous communities. Though it was recognised that issues are likely to be heterogeneous in nature and influenced by the type of fishery, nature of native title claims relating to the area in question, habitats/species present, laws, customs and beliefs of resident indigenous communities,

and personalities of individuals involved, a number of key issues/themes have been highlighted which provide a useful basis for development of a process for effective engagement:

Lessons acquired through this project

- The most highly desired outcome for Traditional Owners is to feel that their views, values and needs are acknowledged and respected. Taking time to listen to people's perspective on issues can go a long way.
- Authentic communication is critical, and face-to-face interaction wherever possible is far more successful.
- Identification of a single point of contact is desirable, to facilitate relationship development.
- There may be a need to notify local people (through the designated "estate boss", or dulmada in Lardil, Yangkaal or Gangalidda, of proposed entry into a region on country, communicating your identity and observing traditional laws and customs, both in order to ensure personal safety (as some areas are known to be unsafe by indigenous communities under certain conditions and can be identified as such), and to avoid sites of significance. At the very least it is an appreciated sign of respect.
- It is rare for a dalmada (or equivalent) to hold delegated responsibility for neighbouring countries (though this is the case for the Wellesley Island region), and hence, there is a need to engage with representatives from all countries with which you will interact.
- It is good practice to maintain a respectful distance from outstations or camps when undertaking fishing activities (particularly highly visible activities) to avoid offending such communities, and respect their privacy.
- Individuals from other regions utilising resources from country owned by Traditional Owners is likely to always be a source of conflict. This is because utilisation by others may result in increased scarcity of available resources. Given difficulties presented to indigenous people regarding moving off-country in search of resources elsewhere, this may reduce the capacity of local indigenous communities to survive on remaining resources available.
- Seeking opportunities to give back to local communities, either through:
 - provision of affordable product to local communities to enable them to benefit from resource utilisation,
 - seeking to utilise services/resources offered by indigenous communities (ranger services, businesses, consulting services) where possible
 - creating opportunities for indigenous youths to gain an understanding of fishing practices through provision of training/education opportunitieswill facilitate improved relations, through contribution to the local economy, state of health, education, or social esteem.
- Independence is highly valued, and consequently making opportunities available in a mutually respecting manner is generally appreciated more than giving with no consideration for need.
- Successful outcomes will only be achieved through commitment to ongoing engagement.

Sea Rangers and NPF Industry staff discussed an ongoing process involving continued periodic presentations when developments dictate, exploring opportunities to develop initiatives which address common issues, and using this ongoing collaborative relationship to continue to learn from each other, and respect each other's views and values.

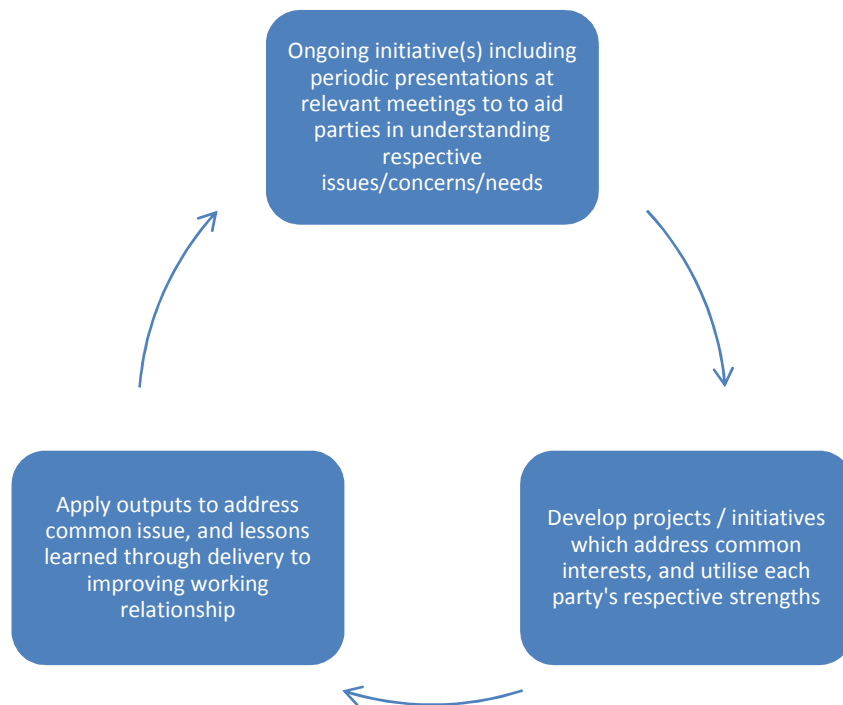


Figure 3 Proposed process for ongoing engagement between NPF Industry Pty Ltd and the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

Further Development

Discussions are ongoing with representatives of the CLCAC and NPF Industry Pty Ltd regarding future collaborative opportunities.

Benefits

Should other fisheries and communities make a commitment to improve relationships as a result of what has been learnt by the NPF through this project, they will benefit in terms of enhanced relations with local communities. Whilst this may not translate directly to benefits which are economically measurable, this project provides non-market benefits, including increased community support and acceptance for fishing, and a valuable potential ally when challenging future developments which may impact on seagrass habitats.

The Wellesley Island indigenous communities will benefit from this project through NPF vessels experiencing a reduced rate of unintentional interaction with sites of cultural significance. This improved level of interaction may also lead to additional benefits such as potential employment opportunities for indigenous people interested in fishing.

Other fisheries and indigenous communities will benefit from this work through gaining a better understanding of a variety of issues which may impact on relationships between these stakeholder groups, and strategies to overcome them.

Planned outcomes

The outputs of this project have been instrumental in achieving the planned outcomes for this project. Seeking to improve relations between indigenous communities and fishers remotely is highly ineffective, and this project has enabled representatives of Wellesley Island indigenous communities and the NPF Industry Pty Ltd to meet face-to-face on a number of occasions, and share information on our respective values, needs and experiences to assist in ensuring that both parties can be respectful of the other.

Conclusion

The objectives of this project were to:

1. Consult with the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and Wellesley Island elders to promote a more comprehensive understanding of fishing practices and management arrangements in the NPF
2. In consultation with the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and Wellesley Island elders, develop and implement a strategy to enhance understanding of indigenous culture and areas of cultural importance in the Wellesley Islands area among NPF operators
3. Develop and communicate a model to enhance effective consultation between fisheries and indigenous communities

This project has successfully achieve objectives 1 and 2, and has provided useful information in pursuit of objective 3. The project has facilitated enhanced communication between the Northern Prawn Fishing Industry and the Lardil, Yangkaal, Kaiadilt and Gangaliddaa people of Mornington Island. Through this project, NPF Industry members were provided with a better understanding of issues and areas of cultural significance to the Wellesley Island indigenous communities. Equally, representatives of each of the four language groups within the Wellesley Island region have been able to develop a more detailed and accurate understanding of how the NPF operates, and the high standard to which it is managed with respect to sustainability. A process has been developed to enable ongoing sharing of information between these parties, and many of the lessons learned will be useful to similar engagement opportunities elsewhere.

NPF Industry Pty Ltd have committed to continued engagement with representatives of the Lardil, Yangkaal, Kaiadilt and Gangaliddaa people, through an ongoing process of information sharing at pre-season briefings, and also relevant meetings within indigenous communities where the need is identified. Through this continued collaboration it is anticipated that common understanding will continue to be enhanced. It is proposed that lessons gained through this project, and in an ongoing manner, will be shared with representative of other fisheries through the development of a project summary highlighting key messages for the NPF website, and disseminating this to interested beneficiaries.

References

Memmot, P. and Channells, G. (2004) Southern Gulf of Carpentaria Sea Country Management, Needs and Issues. National Oceans Office consultation report.