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# Improved data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fisheries resource use to inform decision-making

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FRDC PROJECT NO 2018-016

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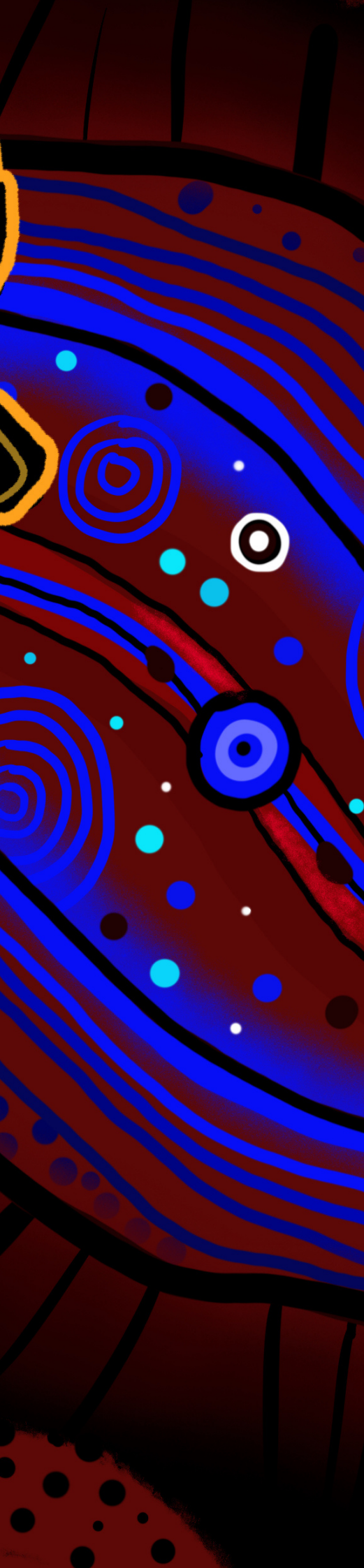
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**We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land and water.**

**We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.**

FRDC-IRG funded projects use ethical methodologies and take place on Country with the consent of Traditional Owners.

This summary booklet was prepared by Leila Alkassab of Land to Sea Consulting Pty Ltd.

Artwork by Beau Pennefather Motlop

# Background

In 2011 the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) sponsored a national Indigenous fisheries forum to discuss and identify issues impacting the involvement of Indigenous people in Australia's fisheries. An Indigenous Reference Group (IRG) then collated this work and developed a set of research priorities to guide research, development and extension.

These research priorities were subsequently endorsed in 2012 by the original national forum. Using these research priorities the FRDC-IRG have supported a number of projects focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fisheries.

## 1 PRIMACY FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Indigenous people have certain recognised rights associated with and based on the prior and continuing occupation of country and water and activities (e.g. fishing, gathering) associated with the use and management of these.

## 3 SELF DETERMINATION OF INDIGENOUS RIGHTS TO USE AND MANAGE CULTURAL ASSETS AND RESOURCES

Indigenous people have the right to determine courses of action in relation to use and management of aquatic biological resources.

## 5 CAPACITY BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ARE ENHANCED

Indigenous people have the right to access capacity building activities to further their aspirations in the use and management of aquatic biological resources..

## 2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF INDIGENOUS CULTURAL PRACTICES

Indigenous people have the right to maintain and develop cultural practices to address spiritual, cultural, social and economic needs associated with aquatic resources and landscapes.

## 4 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES ARISING FROM INDIGENOUS PEOPLES CULTURAL ASSETS AND ASSOCIATED RIGHTS

Indigenous people have the right to engage in economic activity based on the use of traditional aquatic biological resources and/or the right to share in the benefits derived from the exploitation of aquatic biological resources.



# About the Project...

The project aimed to develop a framework (Fig. 1) for collecting data to address the significant knowledge gap about Indigenous fishing participation and catch dynamics across Australia.

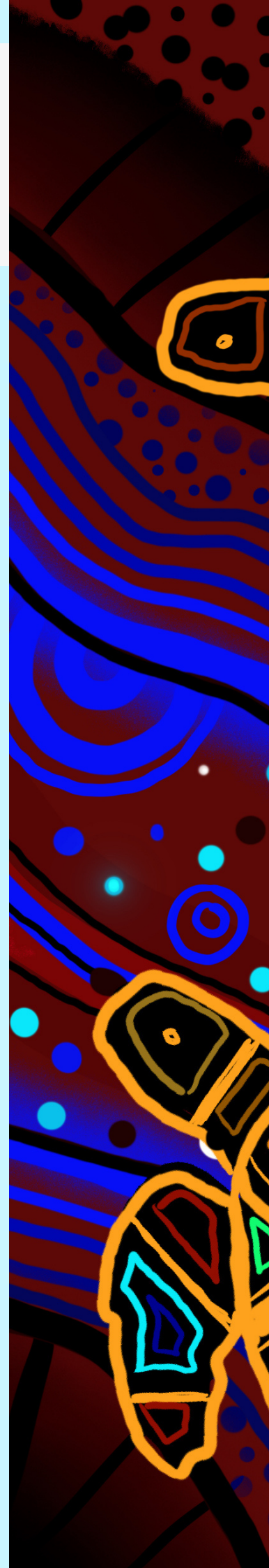
Developing ways to improve the availability of this information supports culturally appropriate fisheries and resource management, protecting Indigenous fishing rights and interests, and the sustainable, fair and equitable determination of resource allocation and management, that includes the needs of Indigenous communities.

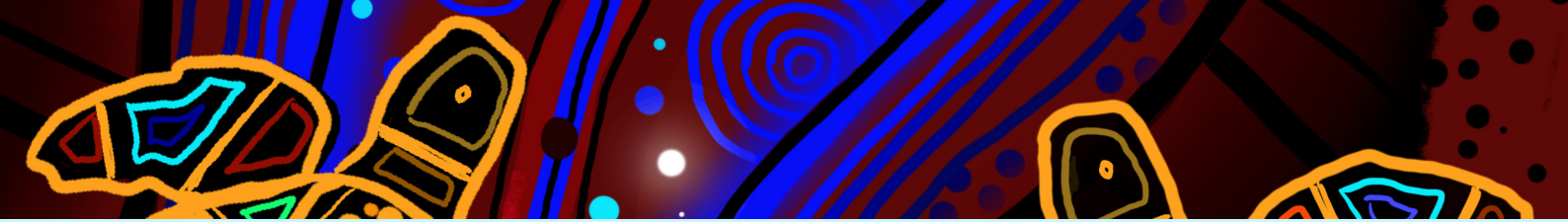
## PROJECT OBJECTIVE 1

Identify appropriate methodologies for collecting spatially and temporally resolved catch and effort information for a range of Indigenous fisheries.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVE 2

Investigate and evaluate approaches for assessing the relative importance of key species to customary fishing to inform multi-sectoral decision-making processes.





Two national workshops brought together Indigenous participants, government agency representatives and researchers from across Australia to discuss challenges, issues and opportunities around collecting, sharing, using and the ownership of Indigenous fishing data.

### Workshop 1

- Participants introduced themselves and learned about the project.
- Discussed why data are needed and how it can be used.
- Discussed issues around collecting and using the data provided.
- Discussed the importance of Indigenous Knowledge.

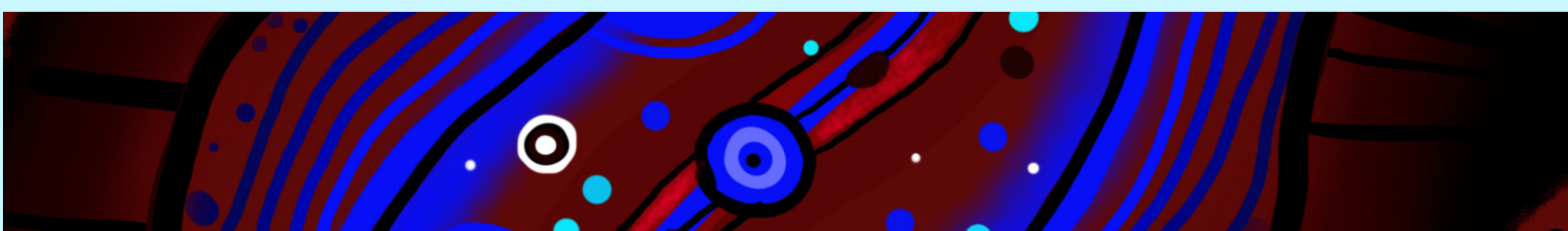
### Workshop 2

- Participants reconnected and progressed the outcomes from Workshop 1.
- Participants identified next steps.

## What they found...

### AGENCY PERSPECTIVES:

- There is a gap in knowledge about Indigenous fishing leading to little consideration of this within resource assessments.
- Fractured relationships hamper the ability to collaborate.
- If agencies had better data and greater awareness, they could take better account of Indigenous participation resulting in greater security and access for community.



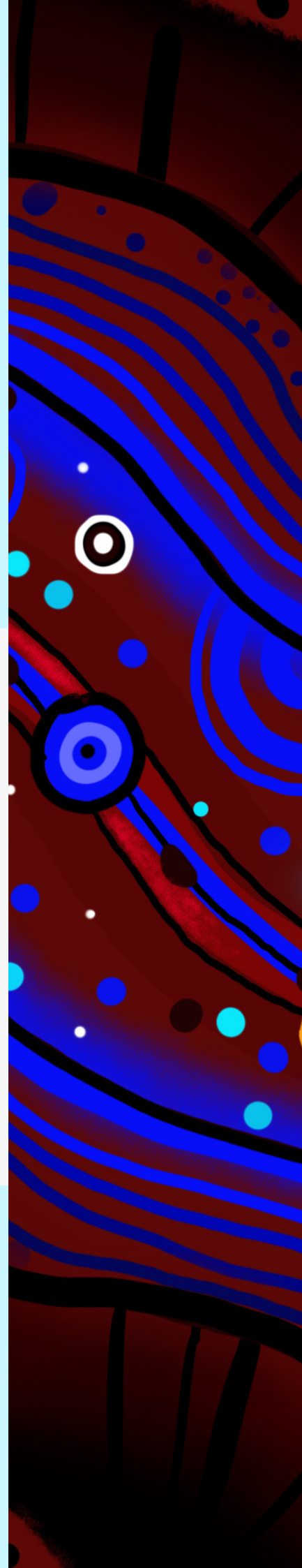
## INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES:

- Agencies need to better understand the cultural significance of species.
- Consideration needs to encompass the whole environment rather than single species.
- There is mistrust around the use of data, and more broadly around the lack of engagement in fisheries management (noting differences across jurisdictions).
- Stronger relationships, clarity of purpose, and agreement on how data would be used for mutual benefit is needed. Only then, would the conversation on data be able to progress.

Workshop 1 highlighted the opposing views between agencies and communities about Indigenous fishing data collection.

These opposing views led to a shift in the project objectives towards a focus on developing a framework (Fig. 1) focusing on:

- Mutual understanding and recognition of the importance of data and how they can be a tool for communities and agencies for mutual benefit.
- Developing a foundational process for building relationships and trust.
- A partnership approach that is informed by workshop participants through collaborative discussion.



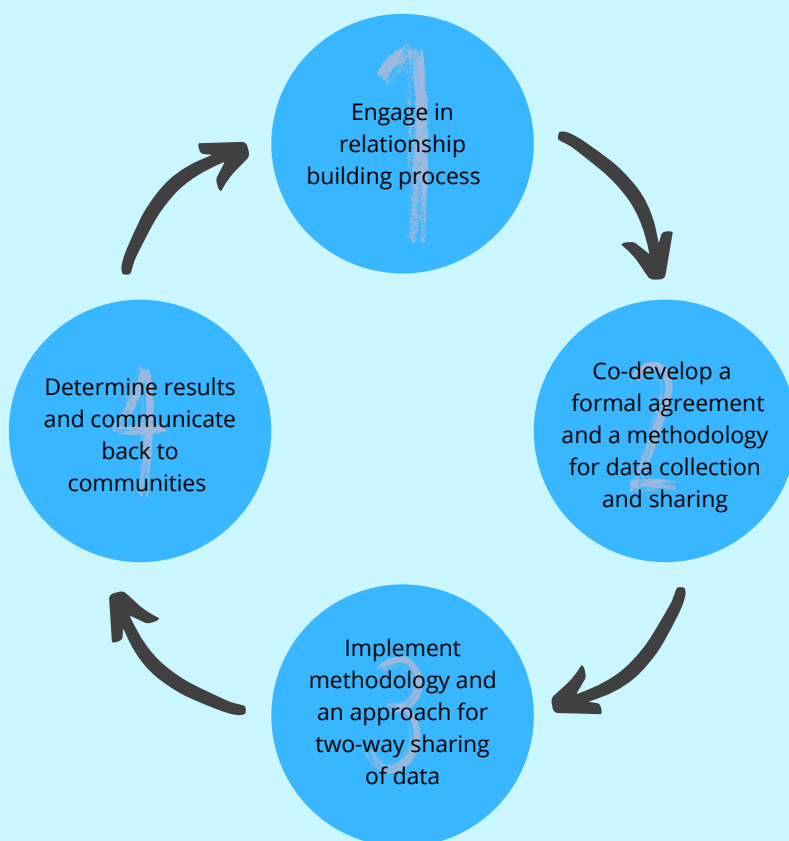


Figure 1: Data collection and sharing framework for improving data collection and availability on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fisheries resource use.

## CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- Partnership and collaborative approaches.
- Well established governance structures.
- Resources and support.
- Identifiable contacts (both Indigenous and agency).
- Clear purpose for data collection/ sharing.
- Individuals (both Indigenous and agency) with the capacity to implement the framework.

## OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

- Genuine partnerships and on-going engagement towards a shared vision.
- Co-development and implementation of data collection process driven by communities and inclusive of capacity building and / or economic opportunities.
- Communities involved in data collection methodology, management of data and decision-making.
- A formal agreement prepared and signed.
- Community to decide what data is to be shared, particularly in terms of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and cultural information.
- Agencies to have trust in Traditional Owners and communities in regards to sensitivities about cultural information and ability to manage resources.
- Data collection methods kept as simple as possible.



## Project outcomes...

1

A process to strengthen relationships between Indigenous community representatives and agency representatives across Australia.

2

A recognition from all participants of the value of data and how it can be used for mutual benefits.

3

A series of overarching principles and success factors that underpin successful implementation.

4

A process that guides engagement and relationship building.

5

Steps to consider when co-developing data collection and sharing methodology.

6

A pathway for implementing the framework at various scales, from local to national.



## Recommendations...

- Gain advocacy at a National Level through the Australian Fisheries Management Forum (AFMF).
- The formation of a national steering committee incorporating agencies and Indigenous community representatives from all jurisdictions.
- Facilitate a local-jurisdictional-national two-way approach to progress project outcomes.
- Look at how Traditional Ecological Knowledge can be considered in management decisions.
- Develop the project outcomes into a series of useable tools for different audiences.
- Test and refine the framework, including input from a broader national range of Indigenous communities.

## Conclusions...

The framework and overarching principles should:

- Enable communities and agencies to engage appropriately and effectively, have greater understanding of each other's needs and build trust,
- Recognise the importance of data as a tool to provide benefits for both communities and agencies.
- Guide Indigenous community representatives to get support from their communities and for agency representatives to get broader agency support to implement the process.
- Better support Indigenous communities to be clear on outcomes being sought through data sharing and participating in co-management.
- Provide an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to identify their needs and how they want to organise nationally to progress traditional fishing opportunities.