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Livelihood values of Indigenous customary fishing

FRDC PROJECT NO 2015/205

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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.



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 and Hanna Gallagher of Land to Sea Consulting Pty Ltd. as part of FRDC-IRG project 2018-183 'Identifying and synthesising key messages from projects funded by the FRDC Indigenous Reference Group.'

Artwork by Leanne Brook

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.

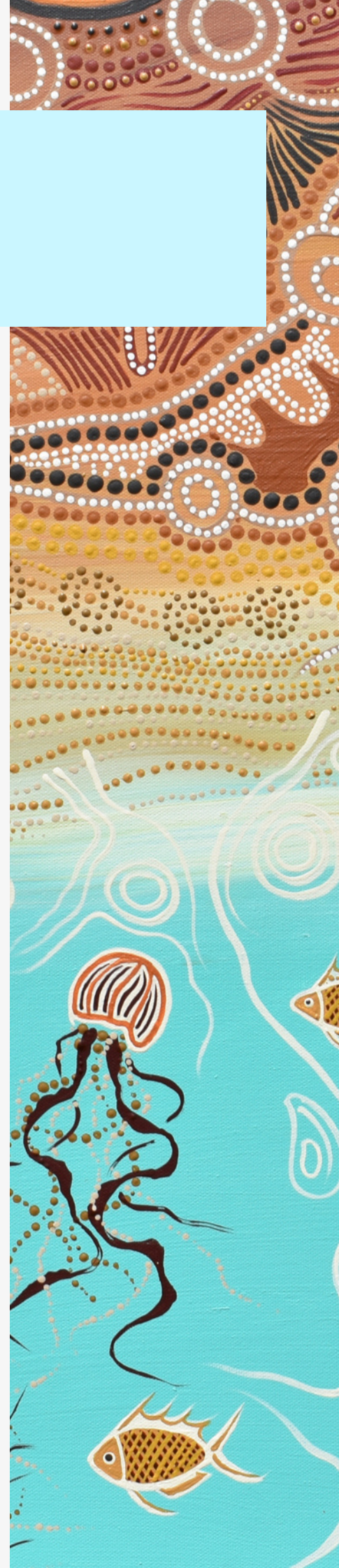
About the project...

For Indigenous peoples, the harvest and utilisation of aquatic resources is deeply rooted in every aspect of their lives. Therefore, their access to sea country has a profound impact on community and individual well-being.

This project looks at how and why customary fishing practices influence the social, health, economic and cultural values of Indigenous individuals, families and communities within three distinct regions of Australia (NSW, SA and NT). The project team explored 'value' as a measurable benefit (i.e. economic) and 'value' concerning people's beliefs and world views. Linking these two concepts provides for a better perspective through which to view customary fishing and its contribution every aspect of Indigenous livelihoods.

The project team partnered with 3 regional organisations:

- Far West Coast Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (FWCAC), the Registered Native Title Body Corporate (RNTBC) of the traditional owners of southwest SA.
- NSW Aboriginal Fishing Rights Group (AFRG), an unincorporated community group advocating for greater recognition of Aboriginal cultural fishing on the South Coast of NSW.
- Crocodile Islands Rangers, an Indigenous land and sea management program of the Milngimbi and Outstations Progress Resource Association (MOPRA).



What they found...

1 Motivations for fishing

5

VERY IMPORTANT

- Follow cultural law
- Teach and pass on knowledge
- Be on your country
- Food
- Medicinal reasons
- Be healthy
- Be with family
- Relax and unwind
- Be outdoors
- Be alone (SA & NSW)
- Share (NT)
- Barter/trade (SA & NSW)
- Learn (NT)
- Assert rights (NSW & SA)
- Fun (NT)

4

IMPORTANT

- Sell (NSW)
- Barter/trade (NT)

3

UNSURE

- Sell (NT)
- Sport (SA)

2

NOT VERY IMPORTANT

- Sell (SA)
- Be alone (NT)
- Sport (NSW)

1

NOT IMPORTANT

- Fishing competitions (NSW)





2 Shared fishing values

Fishing is embedded in the socio-cultural and economic lives of many Indigenous communities. Fishing values are interconnected so one value cannot be substituted without affecting another.

CULTURAL

- Governed by cultural law.
- Living and practicing culture.
- Maintaining connection to country.
- Passing on cultural and ecological knowledge.

ECONOMIC

- Relied on for subsistence and income.
- Providing skills and jobs where individuals can stay connected to country.

SOCIAL

- Sharing catch.
- Strengthening social ties.
- Providing for many people.
- An important social and leisure activity.

HEALTH

- Used medicinally
- Providing healthy foods
- Increasing physical activity
- Relaxing and introspective.
- Giving people a sense of pride.
- Part of people's individual and cultural identities.



3 Selling catch

Attitudes towards selling catch varied greatly between and within regions. Participants on the South Coast and in the Crocodile Islands showed more interest in the cultural-commercial fishing than participants on the Far West Coast. This could be attributed to a stronger history and involvement in commercial fishing and aquaculture enterprises.

Some participants believed that selling catch should be considered a part of cultural fishing, as it is a continuation of pre-colonial trade. Others believed that it was best to avoid the use of traditional knowledges and practices being put towards economic purposes.

These community discourses are important to consider in decision-making around Indigenous fisheries management. Engagement with these various views will be necessary for community support.



4 Barriers and Aspirations

BARRIERS


- Regulations that did not properly accommodate the methods and values of customary fishing (potentially leading to their effective criminalisation).
- Unfair targeting and harassment of Aboriginal fishers by enforcement officers.
- Lack of respect for and understand of the rights of native title holders.
- Long term declines in local fish stocks by commercial operators.

APIRATIONS

- Significant interest in greater Aboriginal involvement in commercial fishing, aquaculture and other on-water industries.
- Encouraging existing Aboriginal-owned commercial ventures.
- Greater involvement in management of local seas and fisheries (i.e. management positions, more Aboriginal fisheries, enforcement officers and more Indigenous land and sea management rangers).

Recommendations...

CUSTOMARY FISHING

- Better recognition of its value and contribution to Indigenous communities by fisheries managers.
 - Legal restrictions to be made in consultation with customary fishers and communities.
 - Formalised recognition of successfully self-managed cultural laws and practice through resourced Indigenous seas ranger programs or similar.
 - Management that includes input from Indigenous peoples and knowledges.
 - More genuine opportunities for Indigenous engagement and employment that incorporates Indigenous fishing values and ways of fishing.
- 



Conclusions...

There has been limited success in communication attempts between local fisheries and fisheries management in the case studies examined where Indigenous values have not been fully understood or have been underestimated.

Two-way communication will be improved with a more developed understanding of cultural values at both local and organisation levels.

Elements of the recommendations mentioned exist to varying degrees throughout the Commonwealth, States and Territories, however there is much more work required in most jurisdictions.

Research in line with the recommendations will help to facilitate the necessary negotiations between governments, fisheries managers, local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and non-Indigenous recreational and commercial fishers.

By establishing a broad baseline data set of values it is hoped that with greater appreciation of the impacts that customary fishing can have on the wider socio cultural and economic environments, Indigenous fishing values can be better supported and acknowledged in fisheries management regimes.