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Business opportunities  
and impediments for  
Aboriginal community  
development in  
supportive fishing  
industries in the Roper  
River to Robinson River  
area of the Northern  
Territory

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FRDC PROJECT NO 2016-201

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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 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...

Yanyuwa Country is located in the south west of the Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory. Yanyuwa hold exclusive ownership of their land and sea estates under their respective Narwinbi, Wurralibi and Wurralibi (no. 2) Aboriginal Land Trusts.

This project was conducted on behalf of the Northern Land Council. It presents the outcomes of Participatory Action Research carried out by the Yanyuwa-led Wurrhiliba Management Committee and other stakeholders to identify Yanyuwa rights, interests, and ideas around business and employment opportunities in sea Country-based industries.

Participatory Action Research was implemented through a range of community-based workshops, meetings and structured interviews involving Wurrhiliba Management Committee members, interested stakeholders and members of the Yanyuwa People.

The objective was to build the capacity of the Wurrhiliba Management Committee by:

- Identifying opportunities to grow local fishing sector economies.
- Determining the impediments to Aboriginal community development.
- Developing a strategy of steps to bring opportunities to fruition.



# What they found...

Yanyuwa identified the impediments to their participation in the Wurrahiliba Management Committee, the project and economic development as:

- 1.The lack of an active Yanyuwa decision-making authority for the purposes of ensuring appropriate Yanyuwa governance and
- 2.The need for a process to develop and implement a strategy for their own economic development using their land and sea estate.







# ASPIRATIONS, BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

TO ENABLE YANYUWA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SUPPORTIVE FISHING INDUSTRIES.

## ASPIRATIONS

- A process to develop and implement a strategy for economic development using Yanyuwa land and sea state.
- Development of an equitable and collaborative co-management body.

## BARRIERS

- Lack of an active Yanyuwa decision-making authority for the purposes of ensuring appropriate Yanyuwa governance.
- Yanyuwa participation within the Wurrahiliba Management Committee does not determine partnerships for economic development.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Commonwealth Government Community Development Program (CDP) and job readiness.
- Fisheries skills and management.
- Tourism, recreational fishing and cultural management.
- Customary management using ranger programs.
- Biosecurity.
- Aboriginal coastal fishing.
- Barramundi, coastal line and coastal net fisheries.
- Mud crab fishery.
- Aquaculture and trepang.
- Research.



## YANYUWA PRIORITIES RAISED DURING THE SEA COUNTRY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT

### **Healthy land and water**

Before any business is developed, Yanyuwa People want to make sure the resources these businesses rely on – the fish and water – are healthy. This includes having more Yanyuwa Rangers looking after Country and making sure those others using Country's resources are also looking after Country.

### **Strong governance**

Opportunities for Traditional Owners in the industries across Sea Country need to be driven by Traditional Owners themselves. This requires building strong Yanyuwa governance to support Traditional Owners driving their own businesses and employment.

### **Business knowledge**

Many fishing business opportunities for Yanyuwa People were talked about but, before there is any commitment to establish a business, Yanyuwa People want to continue building business knowledge.

## Recommendations...

- The supported establishment of a culturally appropriate Yanyuwa governance arrangement to participate in decision-making processes of government and industries associated with fisheries.
- The Northern Territory Fisheries to establish a process with Yanyuwa to develop an appropriate fishing enterprise model.
- Northern Territory Fisheries to support Yanyuwa economic development in supportive fishing industries.
- Provisions made for the development of an equitable and collaborative co-management body.
- Acknowledgement of the differences in co-management and economic development collaboration and develop appropriate frameworks to facilitate these differences.
- Explore opportunities in supportive fishing industries for Yanyuwa economic development in the Roper River to Robinson River area.
- Support provided for the fruition of the strategic actions of Yanyuwa to pursue economic development in supportive fishing industries as well as to address impediments.



# Conclusions...

By calling for their own empowerment through institutional parity in the form of a Yanyuwa decision-making authority, Yanyuwa seek assurance that their participation in collaborative arrangements such as the Wurrahiliba Management Committee, and strategies and projects occurs under equitable conditions through informed consent.

This project has emphasised that Aboriginal community development and economic development programs that only engage Aboriginal participation as job seekers or training in local fishing sector development programs will leave inherent tensions unaddressed.

Participatory Action Research proved to be a major strength of this project as it allowed for the collective enquiry into fisheries development.

Participants reflected on next steps, set priorities and planned the strategic actions for future development. They also identified and gained a deeper understanding of the current barriers, opportunities and aspirations of economic development of the fisheries.

