

Having a Yarn: Engaging with Indigenous Communities in Natural Resource Management

Nursey-Bray M*

Australian Maritime College, Australia[#]

Abstract

Across Australia, Indigenous peoples have responsibility for managing country.¹ Increasingly, partnerships between management agencies, mining companies, conservation groups and the pastoral industry are being brokered with traditional owners of land and sea. The successful outcome of these partnerships necessitates the implementation of participative and culturally appropriate and professional processes of engagement with Indigenous communities. This includes addressing local modes of governance and community relations. In 2002 in the Hinchinbrook section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park World Heritage area, Giringun, a traditional owner representative body for that area, developed a co-management agreement with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA). In 2004 the Wuthathi people, traditional owners of Shelburne Bay, Cape York Peninsula, Australia, launched a Land and Sea Management Framework.² The Giringun and Wuthathi initiatives illustrate the necessity of developing coherent practices of community engagement. They provide an interesting contrast as the Giringun initiative was a co-management enterprise whereas the Wuthathi Framework was constructed as a community based enterprise. This paper compares these two initiatives with a view to helping promote understanding of the concept of engagement and participative practices in Indigenous communities. It argues that engagement processes need to go beyond 'having a yarn' (talking) and address deeper issues of social justice and equity in order to achieve conservation outcomes. It concludes with a framework for engagement based on the principles of social justice and biodiversity protection.

Key words

Co-management, Indigenous, social justice, conservation, Australia

[#] The author is currently a Lecturer at the Australian Maritime College, Launceston, Beauty Point, Tasmania and has been a consultant to both the Wuthathi and Giringun peoples in the last five years. Her contacts are mnb@qld.chariot.net.au or (mob.) +61 (0) 437 738 635.

¹ 'Country' is a term used by Australian Indigenous peoples for their traditional land and sea regions and denotes spiritual, physical, cultural, environmental and familial values. For more information see Bird-Rose's (1996) excellent book 'Nourishing Terrains'.

² The author has permission from the Wuthathi and Giringun groups to present this information.

1. Introduction

Across Australia, Indigenous peoples have responsibility for managing country. Increasingly, partnerships between management agencies, mining companies, conservation groups and the pastoral industry are being brokered with traditional owners of land and sea. The successful outcome of these partnerships necessitates the implementation of participative and culturally appropriate and professional processes of engagement with Indigenous communities. However, management frameworks and community engagement mechanisms that aim to protect the environment and its resources are increasingly being attacked for simultaneously compromising human rights. While we are facing a biodiversity crisis of unprecedented proportions,³ social and economic indicators show that issues of poverty, health, education and employment are also at crisis point. By 2050, when the world's population is expected to be approaching nine billion, 90 per cent of these people "will be living in the world's poorest regions where the greatest indices of biodiversity are found" (Wilhusen 2003, p. 4). Social justice issues will escalate and lead to environmental degradation. The implications of this are vast, not least for the world's Indigenous peoples.⁴

According to UNESCO (1993), 4000–5000 of the 6000 languages of the world are spoken by Indigenous peoples. This means Indigenous groups still constitute most of the world's linguistic and cultural diversity (Wilhusen 2003). Many Indigenous peoples also live in the world's remaining areas of high biodiversity. The pressure is urgent to redress inequalities and craft pathways that will lead to both social justice and environmentally sustainable outcomes. In particular there is a need to broker engagement processes and practices that will enable Indigenous peoples to protect their culture while maintaining high value biological resources.

This paper considers this challenge in the context of two case studies along the Great Barrier Reef in north Queensland, Australia; (i) a sea country co-management initiative developed by Giringun, a traditional owner representative body; and (ii) a Land and Sea Management Framework developed by the Wuthathi people, traditional owners of Shelburne Bay, Cape York

³ Data from the 1996 and 2000 International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species currently indicates that over 1000 species are lost each year, with habitat loss and degradation the most severe threat (IUCN 1996, 2000).

⁴ As United Nations estimates show (and numerous authors point out) there are almost 300 million people worldwide who are Indigenous. While there is a substantive debate on the nature of 'definition' of Indigenous peoples, a good summary is that of Posey who states "Indigenous people are defined as people in countries who are regarded by themselves or others as Indigenous on account of their descent from populations which inhabited the country or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain, or wish to retain, some or all of their own social, economic, spiritual, cultural and political characteristics and institutions" (Posey 2002, p. 26).

Peninsula.⁵ Both programs necessitated the implementation of participative and culturally appropriate and professional processes of engagement with Indigenous communities. This included addressing local modes of governance and community relations. In exploring these challenges through the forums of engagement each group used, this paper argues that the lessons learned are not only crucial to ensuring effective community engagement with Indigenous peoples but have relevance to ensuring effective natural resource management outcomes overall. It concludes with the presentation of a socially just conservation framework which incorporates some of these challenges and suggests a way forward that will secure not only effective processes of community engagement but socially just conservation outcomes.

2. The Wuthathi Land and Sea Management Framework

In 2004, the Wuthathi people, traditional owners of Shelburne Bay in the Cape York Peninsula, Australia, launched the Wuthathi Land and Sea Management Framework: Integrating Culture and Conservation. This area of the Cape York Peninsula has high conservation and cultural significance; it is internationally recognised as one of the most biologically diverse regions in Australia, including wetlands, systems of perched lakes, and outstandingly beautiful sand dunes that are internationally recognised significant value and rare (Stanton 2001). It lies adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park World Heritage area, a region of exceptional marine floristic diversity. Eight species of sea grass are found in the Shelburne Bay and Margaret Bay regions and are essential habitat for juvenile prawns and commercial fish species, as well as food for resident populations of dugong (*Dugon dugon*) and Green Turtle (*Chelonia midas*).

Despite ongoing native title claim processes, management of the Shelburne region overall has been bedeviled by a 30-year history of political wrangling for management and control of the region. These events have included a long-term campaign by Wuthathi and non-government conservation groups against the threat to mine the region for silica by the Shelburne Silica Joint venture, opposition to a proposal by the Cape York Space Agency for a potential space base on their country and ongoing negotiations to achieve clarity in relation to tenure. A multiplicity of regional, state and commonwealth jurisdictions and institutional arrangements has also meant that the Wuthathi have been involved in all ongoing conservation policy processes in the region.

With the potential of resolution of native title, the Wuthathi people became increasingly aware of the need to build a firm basis on which to anchor these negotiations and assert their rights to not only speak *about* and *for* but *manage* their country. With funds from the Natural Heritage Trust

⁵ The author has used these two examples because as the consultant employed on behalf of these two groups to develop these initiatives she has been able to reflect upon and summarise the lessons learned as she tried different forms of engagement and communication in order to achieve an effective community based and representative outcome.

(NHT), an Australia wide natural resource management funding initiative, the Wuthathi developed a Land and Sea Management Framework (Table 1).

This framework not only reflects the aspirations of the Wuthathi for cultural protection of their country but also now the forms the basis for negotiations with management agencies about the country's ongoing management. Importantly, the Wuthathi Framework presents a conservation model designed to integrate conservation and culture in ways that pragmatically reconcile and facilitate the multiple objectives held by all vested interests in the region. The Framework is an Integrated Conservation and Culture Program (ICCP) a model that is aligned with and built within existing cultural guidelines. The model embraces three core aims: (i) to permanently return to and manage the country within established conservation and cultural guidelines; (ii) to build a small and environmentally and economically sustainable community; and (iii) to protect its biological and cultural values in perpetuity. Moreover, the Wuthathi Framework deliberately embeds and offers many mechanisms for shared stewardship of the region's exceptional cultural and environmental values. For example, the Framework aims to provide direction on institutional arrangements as well as operational directions and provides suggestions and projects to achieve long and short-term goals. Collectively, these proposals establish a basis for a solid and sustainable cultural and natural management regime. The development of partnerships between all key, current and possible managers of this area is built into the Framework. This partnership process will entail the reconciliation of the rights, aspirations and contested authorities of the many interests over the area.

Table 1. A synopsis of the Wuthathi Land and Sea Management Framework (Nursesey-Bray and Wuthathi Land Trust 2004)

Vision			
To control our own destiny as our elders before us; in caring for Wuthathi country, culture and community			
Biodiversity aims	Culture and policy	Day-to-day management	Community development
1. Clarity in conservation goals and objectives, participation and partnerships) 2. Appropriate incentives for biodiversity valuation	1. To develop a range of approaches, including consideration of legal options for secure protection of areas and cultural values under traditional	1. To establish ongoing and collaborative whole-of-government management approaches 2. To ensure the protection of the	1. Integration of social, cultural and environmental considerations into economic development 2. Development of participatory process involving community in all stages

<p>and conservation</p> <p>3. Supportive policies (local, national and international)</p> <p>4. Sufficient awareness knowledge and capacity to conserve biodiversity</p>	<p>owner of native title control</p> <p>2. Involvement of traditional owners in the process of identifying areas of cultural significance</p> <p>3. The protection and management of cultural heritage sites</p> <p>4. The reinforcement of the use of traditional knowledge and management systems in contemporary resource management</p> <p>5. The establishment of management plans and principles for hunting and subsistence activities</p> <p>6. The establishment of policy directives and forums on joint and co-management initiatives</p> <p>7. The development of model conservation areas within Wuthathi country with full TO participation.</p> <p>8. Establishment of links with regional and international</p>	<p>natural and cultural values of the Wuthathi country</p> <p>3. To work with management agencies to ensure the protection, wise use, and environmental sustainability of the region, including all national parks, marine parks and protected areas</p> <p>4. To ensure that native title rights and cultural heritage values are maintained and protected and not compromised</p> <p>5. To ensure the recognition and involvement of indigenous people in protected area and wildlife management</p> <p>6. Where appropriate, ensure the environmentally sustainable use of wildlife for the long term benefit of the community</p>	<p>3. Development of community development plan</p> <p>4. The promotion of ecotourism and other small business alternatives that are sustainable and do not harm the environment.</p> <p>5. Sustainable management</p>
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	biodiversity programs being run by governments and NGOs		
Framework Outputs			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A management plan for country • Establishment of identified conservation areas within Wuthathi country with full traditional owner participation including consideration of legal options for secure protection of areas under traditional owner of native title control • Full involvement of Wuthathi in management of country • Establishment and promotion of ecotourism and other small business alternatives that are sustainable and do not harm the environment. • The use of traditional knowledge and management systems in contemporary resource management at Shelburne and surrounds • Establishment of small community on country. 			

3. Giringun Sea Country Co-Management Initiative

In 2002 Giringun, an Aboriginal Corporation representing the land and sea interests of nine traditional owner groups developed a co-management proposal for a saltwater ranger unit to look after sea country (Nursey-Bray and Rist 2002). This proposal was consistent with the objective within the 25-Year Strategic Plan for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, (GBRWHA), that recognises the need "to establish cooperative management arrangements between Indigenous people and stakeholder agencies in the area" (GBRMPA 1998).⁶ This area of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) has high conservation and cultural values, and includes Hinchinbrook Island, one of the prime tourist destinations for overseas visitors to the GBR. It is characterised by highly diverse mangrove communities, marine and sea grass habitats that sustain populations of green turtle and dugong, a diversity of coral reef systems, significant geological and geomorphologic features and nationally significant freshwater wetlands. Giringun sea country also contains important fish traps, shell middens, rock shelters, carved trees and many culturally significant sites. Given the high visitation to the area, and as part of progressing aspirations for caring for country Giringun members wanted to participate in resource management for the area.

⁶ Giringun was advancing co-management at a time when reef policy initiatives were positively reflecting on this issue as highlighted in reports and discussions on co-management by Smyth (1993), Bergin (1993) Appleton (2000), George et al. (2002) and Ross (2004).

Girringun members made a conscious effort to develop a two-way proposal that attempted to encapsulate an understanding of the needs and priorities established by both the Indigenous community and an understanding of the priorities identified by the agencies for their day-to-day management for the Great Barrier Reef as documented within the annual work program, 2002–03 for GBRMPA and Day to Day Management (DDM). This was manifest in the document by the inclusion of a full budget proposal and work program consistent with the budget and work programs of the relevant management agencies. The content within the Girringun Sea Country proposal reflects this collaborative approach as highlighted in Table 2.

Table 2. Girringun Saltwater Unit Co-Management Country proposal (Nursey-Bray and Rist 2003)

<p>Vision</p> <p><i>To establish ongoing and collaborative whole of government management approaches to ensure effective and holistic management of the Girringun community of land, sea and people</i></p>
<p>Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop an ongoing and effective land and sea management regime, through the establishment of partnerships and collaborative programs between Girringun and relevant management agencies • To build local capacity and initiatives in the Girringun/Cardwell/Hinchinbrook region, to address specific land/sea management needs and aspirations of traditional owners • To facilitate mechanisms and programs that will ensure the ongoing protection and management of the cultural and environmental heritage and values of the area • To have Indigenous management rights and interests recognised by government • To be integrally involved in the management of Girringun country and be a core part of the on the ground management presence in the Cardwell/Hinchinbrook marine area.
<p>Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal Values and Cultural Heritage • Day to Day Management • Training and Development • Community Planning • Fishing • Research, Planning and Special Projects • Weed and Feral Animal Control • Water Quality Issues and Management in the Region • Incidental Response • Fire Management.

Girringun also presented its work programs in a manner consistent with departmental guidelines and management 'speak'. For example, each program identified management strategies and activities, defined outputs and performance indicators. Within each of these programs, Girringun also made a consistent effort to identify the gaps in existing departmental work programs and try to fill them. For example, while cultural heritage management was identified as a key management agency responsibility, it was not one fully developed or expedited within existing management briefs. Girringun proposed as a key part of its work program to undertake to fill this gap, and develop further momentum into cultural heritage activities and management in the Cardwell/Hinchinbrook Shire region; thus adding value to and supporting existing management regimes. Girringun members also wanted to ensure traditional owner involvement in management was more than token. The proposal therefore presented an iterative and staged co-management process designed to build capacity, skills, joint expertise and mutual trust over time; and one in which a suite of co-management activities could be undertaken (Table 3). The approach taken by Girringun was received very positively by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the Day to Day Management unit, and state agencies such as the Queensland Environment Protection Authority resulting in a suite of agreements and negotiations over Girringun's involvement in management of sea country.

4. Processes of engagement

The production and implementation of the Wuthathi and Girringun initiatives necessitated the implementation of community engagement strategies at multiple levels. First, an equitable internal consultation process amongst the traditional owners needed to be negotiated. With the Wuthathi this was uniquely challenging as the Wuthathi people live in three different areas: Injinoo, Lockhart River and Cairns, thus presenting some logistical and fiscal challenges; for Girringun it was important to ensure that the nine traditional groups were involved and represented fairly. Given the overall high profile of the GBR region and their specific areas both the Wuthathi and Girringun also had to implement processes for external engagement with the *communities of interest* vested in their country. This necessitated the adroit employment of strategies that both involved and managed multiple political agendas. In both cases, the internal and external processes were conducted simultaneously, but each group tailored an approach appropriate to their needs.

Table 3. Co-management spectrum and co-management activities, Girringun Saltwater Unit (Nursey-Bray and Rist 2002)

Stage One — Primary co- management (1-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Establishment of Unit • Identification of collaborative program initiatives • Potential projects identified • Cultural Heritage work • ‘Service Agreements’
Stage Two — Secondary co- management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On - the job training • Pilot project implementation • Collaborative Program Initiative trials
Stage Three — Tertiary co- management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trained rangers • Collaborative work program implemented • Ongoing independent and co-managed projects identified and established with GBRMPA, QPWS and other relevant agencies • Cultural heritage function and focus
Management activity	Example
Shared management activity	Patrols, education work, construction work, incident response, monitoring, surveys
Independent activity	Cultural heritage, project activities, research
Assistant function	Fire management, compliance
Shared function, separately allocated geographic area	Feral weed and animal programs

4.1. Internal engagement processes

The Wuthathi Land Trust hosted a series of meetings where the key cultural groupings from the different regions were brought together to reflect on the draft Framework and make amendments and changes until agreement was reached. The Wuthathi Land Trust also funded a number of community visits where, as their consultant, the author spoke directly and independently to Wuthathi people on the ground in order to clarify what the community wanted in the Framework and later on, what changes were required. Similarly, Girringun adopted an iterative engagement process, but given the co-location of the traditional owner groups, it was a more streamlined process. In this case, the author was directed to work primarily with the CEO of Girringun, who in turn conducted an iterative feedback process on the document between the traditional owner groups and the author. When the product was nearly complete, the author was asked to present it formally to the full Girringun membership at a public meeting on country. At this meeting, the

broader community was informed about the detail and direction of the co-management proposal and then had the opportunity to give input. From this broader group, a smaller select group volunteered to work collectively on finalising the document consistent with Giringun aspirations.

These internal processes were characterised by some similarities. Firstly, it was crucial that all knew who the consultant was working with and responsible to, and to agree on a process of engagement at the outset. In each case it was also important to clarify the role of the consultant/planner and the respective traditional owner group/individuals. This was particularly relevant in the cases where, outside parties such as a management agency or conservation group had to be engaged with in order to obtain information; the writer had to be very clear she was negotiating *content* not a political *outcome*, even in the face of the temptation and invitation to do otherwise. In each case, the use of cultural mentors was invaluable; the author was able to be informed and directed in cultural matters when necessary.

These processes also enabled the author to determine what principles were held in common across all traditional owner sub-groupings and what specific aspirations characterised each sub-group. This process also demarcated different management domains for the different groupings. For example, negotiations with the Wuthathi revealed that one group was particularly interested in developing on ground, day-to-day management programs, the second group focussed on cultural protection and survival activities, the third on the development of political mechanisms for advancing Wuthathi goals, particularly economic ones within Western management forums. Finally, the internal engagement process adopted also embedded community ownership of the product, in the body of the planning documents through the use of images, art work and quotes about country *by* the Wuthathi and Giringun. In this way the Wuthathi and Giringun members were *seen by* and *spoke to* external readers.

4.2. External engagement

Simultaneously, representatives from both Giringun and Wuthathi were proactively involved in negotiating external political processes that would help maximise the impact of each initiative respectively. For the Wuthathi this was but another stage in a very long-term and ongoing plethora of negotiations about their country with native title representative bodies, conservation groups and Queensland state and federal environmental management agencies. The Framework in this instance provided an effective focus to anchor these discussions and was seen by Wuthathi as challenging the rhetoric of external interests that had previously articulated support for Wuthathi aspirations with respect to country. Wuthathi used the Framework as a tool to argue for community based involvement in the management regimes for their lands and seas. These ideas were presented in public forums at which Wuthathi invited key external parties to contribute

their viewpoint and ideas for the Framework. This process was designed to build trust in the Wuthathi process, and through ensuring ongoing communication and information dissemination, build towards future management partnerships.

Girringun took a slightly different approach. As theirs was a co-management initiative, Girringun concentrated on developing a program consistent *with* rather than contra-distinct or separate *to* existing programs. Girringun members also concentrated more fully on negotiating the technical aspects of management; such as ranger employment and training, infrastructure support and support in-kind that could be within reason immediately or potentially expedited. Moreover, negotiations with external parties were restricted primarily to marine management agencies at state and federal levels, rather than the wider and more diverse communities of interest the Wuthathi were engaged with. This was underpinned by the fact that Wuthathi were negotiating over land and sea country, whereas the Girringun proposal focused only on sea country.

5. Key challenges

Both the Wuthathi and Girringun groups applied a suite of community engagement processes that enabled both effective internal consultation on content and outputs and involved external communities of interest in their programs. At the point of implementation, however, the good faith and rhetoric that typically accompanies the launch of these documents was put to the test. All parties now had to reconcile in practice the dialectical choices and questions about management embedded in the documents: choices between statutory vs. non-statutory management, traditional or contemporary management regimes and economy, culture or environment. These dialectical choices also cast shadows on the potential for productive dialogue between traditional owners and other parties by revealing the actual inability on the part of external (and often all) the parties to action their rhetoric; this would necessitate a 'letting go' or sharing of essential power and knowledge domains. The ways in which societal relations were constituted mean that inequities prejudicing Indigenous rights and responsibilities were embedded within any power/knowledge interface and reflected in the Wuthathi and Girringun initiatives.

For example, the Wuthathi made an early decision to develop a Framework that would exist independently of existing statutory options, as current statutory frameworks did not meet their needs. In meeting to negotiate fora for Wuthathi involvement in management of country, management agencies and conservation groups exposed their preference for statutory regimes. Neither the Wuthathi people nor external parties working on their own could achieve their objectives for protection for Shelburne Bay. Thus there was a clear imperative to negotiate these issues together to achieve mutually agreed outcomes.

The issues of self determination linked to equity, employment and economic livelihoods were also key foci in all discussions about country. For example, both Wuthathi and Giringun wanted to incorporate and build in mechanisms enabling traditional and contemporary methods of managing country. Thus the importance of Wuthathi and Giringun rangers being able to have equal access, funding support for and entry into courses that would give them equal status under the law as department personnel to implement patrol enforcement, surveillance and monitoring programs was reiterated constantly. The right to be employed and *paid* to manage country was seen as an important motivator for traditional owners to be involved in management programs. Within the Wuthathi Framework, while *all* Wuthathi were committed to the protection of the natural and cultural values of their country, some equally wanted the right to develop economically sustainable businesses on country and to establish a small community there. Giringun members had aspirations to develop cultural tourism enterprises as a means of developing some economic self sufficiency while looking after cultural sites within their sea country (Nursey-Bray 2005). Management agencies however find supporting these aspirations *in reality* politically challenging and often legislatively impractical. This position is often overlain with a general view that economic development in regions of high environmental or protected area value is inappropriate and unviable. These dilemmas reflect the lived reality of Indigenous peoples today — who still experience lower socio-economic conditions in relation to health, education, employment, housing (and all other indices) than any other group of Australians. The expression of the need to develop economic self-sufficiency is the legacy of this tragic reality. The Wuthathi and Giringun experiences show that it is not enough simply to negotiate best practice processes of engagement in conservation endeavors; engagement processes must also address and incorporate the deeper issues of equity, economy, history, politics, power and knowledge that are embedded within the dialogue about caring for country.

6. Engaging communities: Social justice and conservation

Brechin's view (Brechin et al. 2003, p. 251) that "we have yet to fully articulate the procedural and distributional aspects of social justice as they relate to the goal of nature protection" is very useful here. He conceives conservation processes as the process of seeking an answer to a series of moral questions yet notes that currently, core approaches addressing biodiversity conservation still focus on objectives, i.e. 'the what', but do not comprehensively consider the social and political processes by which conservation initiatives are undertaken: the 'how' (Brechin 2003, p. 251). He proposes instead socially just conservation enterprises that fulfill the three criteria of being ecologically sound, politically feasible and socially just (Brechin 2003). In this context and in reflecting on the writer's experience of different Indigenous Australian resource management initiatives, the writer has developed a model of socially just conservation appropriate for ensuring

effective community engagement processes within Indigenous resource management initiatives, while addressing these deeper issues (see Figure 1).

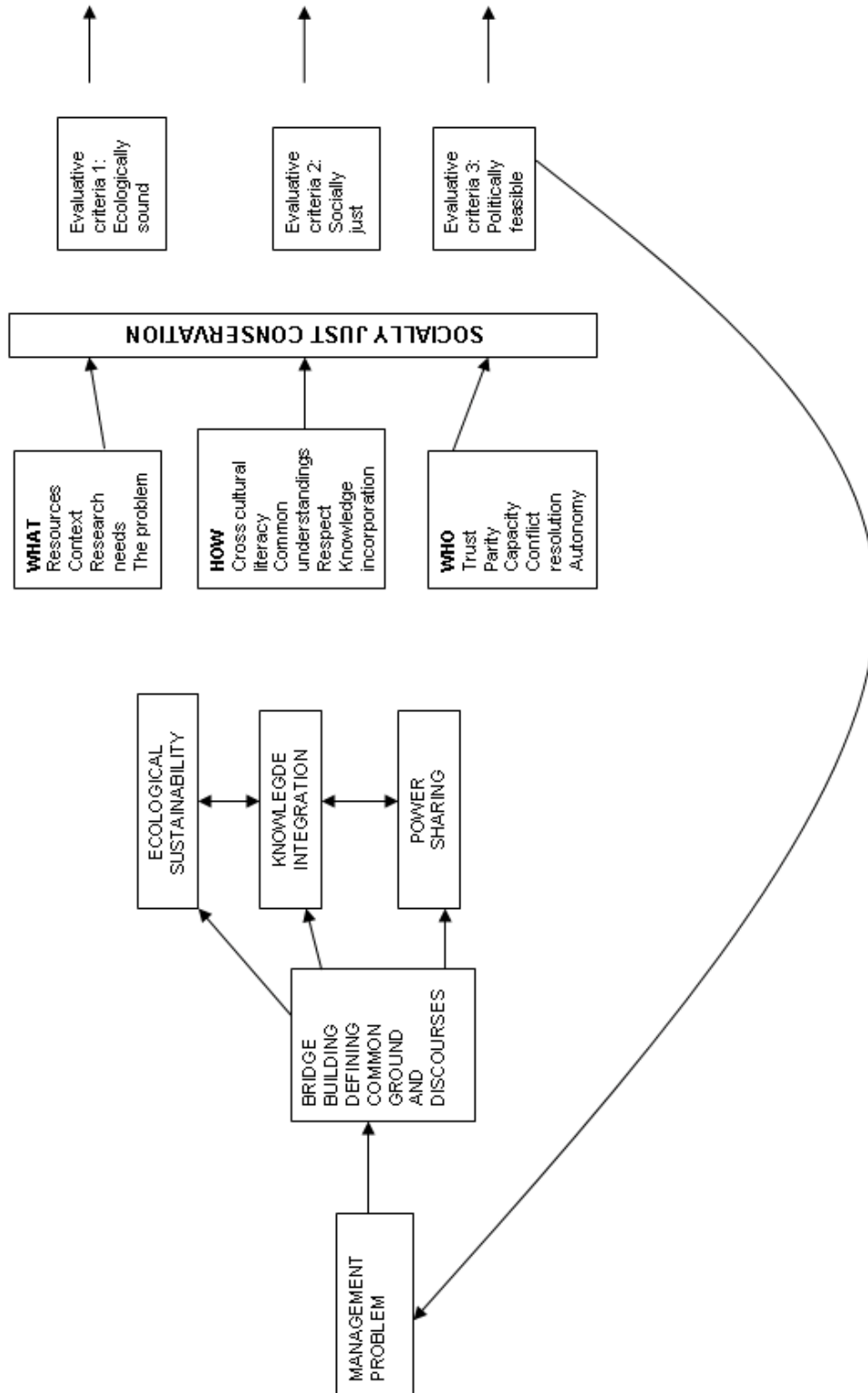


Figure 1. A Socially Just Conservation Framework for Engagement

7. Components of a socially just conservation framework

7.1 Management problem

This framework takes a problem-based approach, where the first step lies in the definition of the problem that needs addressing. This might be an actual problematic, such as how to achieve both biodiversity protection and address social/economic issues, or it might be the exploration of how to achieve certain outputs in management.

7.2 Defining and bridge building

Having determined what the management problem under consideration is to be, (e.g. developing the Giringun co-management agreement or how to incorporate both community development and natural and cultural resource protection imperatives for Shelburne Bay), the parties involved must then come together and determine that they are all working to the same understanding of the definition and dimensions of this problem. This is the bridge building phase, where important differences in understanding can be drawn out through processes of negotiation and debate. The parties involved in the management exercise can then proceed to discussing the next process, that of determining their respective management commitments. Knowledge of each other's cultural context and understanding about the issue in this way will then guide the parameters within which each party can make their respective management commitments. These management commitments have been presented as three separate kinds of commitment that each party can make in the areas of: (i) ecological sustainability; (ii) knowledge integration; and (iii) power sharing. This separation is important because it is crucial to disaggregate each dimension from the other, for the entangling of them all together can have devastating consequences for both people and the environment within the management domain.⁷ However, parties must commit to them *all*, as these commitments will effectively constitute the *how, why and what* needs of management. Once a mutual platform of needs and discourse understandings relating to the realisation of these components is developed, each party must then articulate its own specific commitment to them. This commitment must be based on a realistic assessment of capacity and literal preparedness to contribute. The commitment in each case might range from a large or small manifestation, depending on the outcome of the negotiations. This process of iterative negotiation and commitment provides the opportunity to develop a management program that will *always be* achievable and that over time can build up (or contract depending on circumstances); rather than a management program framed by a discourse of rhetorical commitment based on different understandings and unrealistic expectations of fulfillment.

⁷ This dynamic is illustrated in full in the writer's doctoral thesis (Nurse-Bray 2005) investigating Indigenous hunting of turtle and dugong and a Turtle and Dugong Hunting Management Plan (Hope Vale Council and Nurse-Bray 1999), which was undertaken to address the issue of traditional harvest by Hope Vale Aboriginal community, north Queensland.

7.3 Management commitment 1: Ecological sustainability

In order for this commitment to be made, each party to the negotiation needs to define the needs or components of the management endeavor that will ensure that ecological sustainability will happen and be incorporated within the program. These needs at the minimum must include: (i) identification of resources needed; (ii) awareness of the existing scientific and knowledge basis of the problem; (iii) evaluation of the education needs to heighten skills and understandings; (iv) knowledge of existing management solutions for the problem; and (v) evaluation of research needs to further build knowledge about the problem.

This management component addresses the *what* in management. It is the component that management agencies conventionally focus on, and instituting this component is brokered by the production of documents that present a program of how to achieve ecological sustainability. The Wuthathi Framework is a good example of this approach, for in its aims, vision and objectives it attempted to reconcile both culture and environmental protection to achieve ecological and cultural sustainability overall. However, while the Wuthathi did outline a number of projects and outputs that other agencies could collaboratively invest in, the Framework did not include an assessment of what resources would be needed to achieve these outputs nor any suggestion about who could resource them.

It is also vital to determine what comprises the suite of management options available to each party in order to implement and achieve this component. In some cases the management options available may necessitate investment in new technologies, which may or may not be feasible. In other cases, some of the management mechanisms may only be available to one or the other party; e.g. traditional hunting management practice or Western law enforcement programs, and there will be a need to negotiate mutually in these areas. In other cases, conventional Western management practice may be culturally inappropriate, an area that must be navigated sensitively. Working through all these processes will then enable each party to determine what they can offer and within what parameters they will be working.

7.4 Management commitment 2: Knowledge integration

Respecting Indigenous people's knowledge and contributions to management is crucial. A socially just engagement process must include an equitable process of re-embedding local knowledge systems into management and integrate, where possible, different knowledge systems for the common goal. This component relates to developing the *how* in management and, as illustrated above, it is the least acknowledged in contemporary management. When working in an Indigenous context, the integration of Indigenous knowledge into management has

particular relevance as this integration maximises the benefits of both knowledge frames, and addresses the more intangible dimension of how to achieve an equitable negotiating forum. This respect for traditional knowledge is especially important within biodiversity protection initiatives such as the Girringun co-management agreement which relied on various forms of collaborative decision making.

Moreover, mechanisms must be embedded within management commitments that recognise gender as a crucial aspect of the knowledge sphere in management. The influence and role of different genders must be consistent between participatory parties. This perspective partly entails trying to understand, without generalising, the different ways in which women may view the world and to recognise added cross-cultural dimensions. In this 'gender' context Wohling (2001) argues for the need for reciprocity in engaging with Indigenous peoples so that management outcomes are maximised and involvement and ownership by and for Indigenous peoples in the project is secure. Davis (1999) argues that many Indigenous women today actually claim the dominant role in management and this must be incorporated within management programs. Finally, it is important to recognise and construct forums from which Indigenous people can manage the land and enact their roles as stewards of knowledge and therefore management. Bird-Rose (1996) shows how Indigenous people construct themselves as guardians and stewards of nature. Or as Bradley (2001) notes the Indigenous landscape is a 'sentient' land-spiritualised landscape. Sillitoe (2002) takes this further with his reflection on Indigenous sacred knowledge within notions of connectedness.

7.5 Management commitment 3: Power sharing

The final component that needs to be negotiated as part of a socially just engagement process is the determination of how power is going to be shared as part of the management initiative. This component is one of the most influential in the success or failure of any management initiative and unsurprisingly addresses the *who* in management. In any management partnership there is usually an uneven balance of power between parties, which *must* be acknowledged at the beginning. The marginal party, however, may also possess a set of small but important discrete contributions that it could make in this area. In turn, the entire management domain may be overlaid with a discourse of collaboration or sharing and it may be implicitly suggested that collaboration would embed a suite of power sharing mechanisms. This again is where a common understanding is invaluable. If each party at the management table is clear on the dimensions of power it has, the actual willingness to share power in a management context, and the capacity of each party to effectively use what power resources it has will render the entire process of management more equitable and transparent. These recognitions will enable a clearer answer to the moral questions within management such as *who* benefits from conservation. There are many

aspects to consider when determining commitments to this component. They include (i) establishing what capacity is available and needed to implement the management program; and (ii) how to build trust and respect as part of the process and how to resolve conflict. In this context, the development of cross-cultural literacy will address these issues and enable the commitment to and implementation of power sharing mechanisms. To facilitate power sharing there is a need to develop multicultural literacy (Nursesey-Bray 2003) to avoid the trap of reducing traditional value systems and perspectives into fragmented 'facts' of utilitarian value for 'appropriation' and exploitation as seen fit by respective participative parties. Howitt (2001) notes that this approach will need to include an acknowledgment and practice of each parties 'ways of seeing', 'ways of thinking', and 'ways of knowing'. The need to develop flexible mechanisms that take into account differences in cultural perspective is thus crucial. This includes engagement with and incorporation of the *entire cultural perspective* of each party. In future for instance, management agencies must come to accept and understand practices that are culturally uncomfortable to them, such as community development in world heritage areas, while Indigenous peoples, in turn, must recognise that undertaking this development will have some impact and take appropriate actions, although these actions may be similarly culturally challenging. Power sharing will also need to include a shift in management understanding of what 'local' and 'cultural' knowledge is and the role knowledge plays in fuelling decision-making processes. This shift will entail a restructuring and renegotiation of the different layers engrained within 'knowledge,' such as sacred/secret knowledge, male/female knowledge, traditional ecological knowledge, song, stories, experience, laws (tribal or otherwise), cultural mores and social traditions and ideological orientation (Johannes 1989).

Power sharing also needs to embed a commitment to conflict resolution mechanisms. Conflicts are rife in the field of natural resource management, arising from injustices and inequities, unequal power structures, environmental or social pressures or ideological differences. The reality is that collaborative resource management is difficult and challenging. Power sharing management commitments must recognise conflict as part of the social and political environment and build in mechanisms to address it. These mechanisms might include revealing and working on sources of underlying tensions or addressing and recognising conflict at different scales. However, as Buckles (1999) notes, we must also recognise the value of conflict as 'a catalyst for positive social change' and 'an intense experience in communication and interaction with transformative potential' (Buckles 1999, p. 4).

An appreciation of the historical context within which many power sharing processes are being framed is crucial. This appreciation will include a commitment to 'decolonised' approaches to management, which are built to genuinely incorporate other perspectives within decision making,

and not to fall back on tokenistic gestures of reconciliation. In Australia, for example, any cross-cultural engagement in management cannot help but be informed by an awareness of the history of racial division and the current social and economic conditions prevailing in Indigenous communities which significantly influence environmental management regimes. Drawing a curtain over the past does not make it disappear, and serious engagement and power sharing processes enacted by management need to accept the history and politics from which these initiatives have burgeoned.

Finally, a fundamental aspect of the commitment of parties to this component will lie in achieving and working on the provision and sharing of resources, and building capacity to ensure that power sharing can occur. This may necessitate developing cross-culturally appropriate ways of building capacity or adopting culturally different modes of decision making. As with the Giringun initiative, this might mean lending the weight of one party's resources at the request of the other, who lacks them. Power sharing can be developed in many ways: through developing forums for decision-making; by developing processes of information transfer, communication and development and by sharing resources and capacity. Achieving parity, however that is conceived by each participant in the management exercise, is the key challenge and commitment in this context.

7.6 Evaluation

Given that parity has been achieved the entire management program can then be evaluated against the following three criteria: (i) ecological soundness; (ii) social justice; and (iii) political feasibility. These criteria encompass the core dimensions with which, in a real world, contemporary managers need to engage. These criteria work by measuring the what, how and who of management to see whether management commitments have been met and to determine where the stumbling blocks lie. The process can then be rerun with the incorporation of lessons learned.

8. Conclusions: Socially just conservation management

Having worked through this management framework, the parties involved will be able to establish and be engaged in the production of socially just conservation processes and outcomes. There are a number of advantages to this engagement process. First it ensures that, prior to any management process getting underway each party has a clear understanding of each other's perspective, their differences and similarities. Ensuring that everyone is 'singing from the same song book' and is on common discourse ground is vital to ongoing engagement. Secondly, this framework does not define a required scale for the management outputs. They may be large or small in scale depending on the iteration of each of the steps along the way. Implementing this

process will also ensure that it will be culturally appropriate, and within the ambit of each party to deliver on their mutually agreed responsibilities. Another advantage is that there is no defined timeline for implementation of this process, rather it depends on how parties commit to work with each other at any given time, and the commitments they are prepared — or not — to make to the process and outcome. The socially just framework for engagement also has the advantage that it embodies both *structure* and *process* and can be applied to any management problem or system. Most importantly, it enables the development and implementation of all kinds of conservation management programs, whether a land and sea management framework, traditional hunting plan, co-management agreement, enforcement program or simply the generation of environmental information about a problem.

9. Summary

Both the Wuthathi and Giringun have adopted innovative and practical approaches to achieving multiple objectives in the domain of natural resource management, which will have interesting outcomes and lessons for natural resource practitioners worldwide. For those interested in the development of community engagement strategies that lead to socially just conservation of values and realistic implementation of cultural and natural protection regimes, the framework provides a mechanism that goes beyond conventional processes to address the core issues of biodiversity, culture and economy. It enables the incorporation and reconciliation of the moral, social and political imperatives that so often not only underpin conservation endeavors, but drive their ultimate success or failure.

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⁸ A co-authored article on the issue of socially just conservation of turtle and dugong will be forthcoming.

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