



# YOLŃU FISHING VALUES OF THE CROCODILE ISLANDS

COMMUNITY REPORT FOR THE  
LIVELIHOOD VALUES OF INDIGENOUS  
CUSTOMARY FISHING PROJECT

AIATSIS, February 2018



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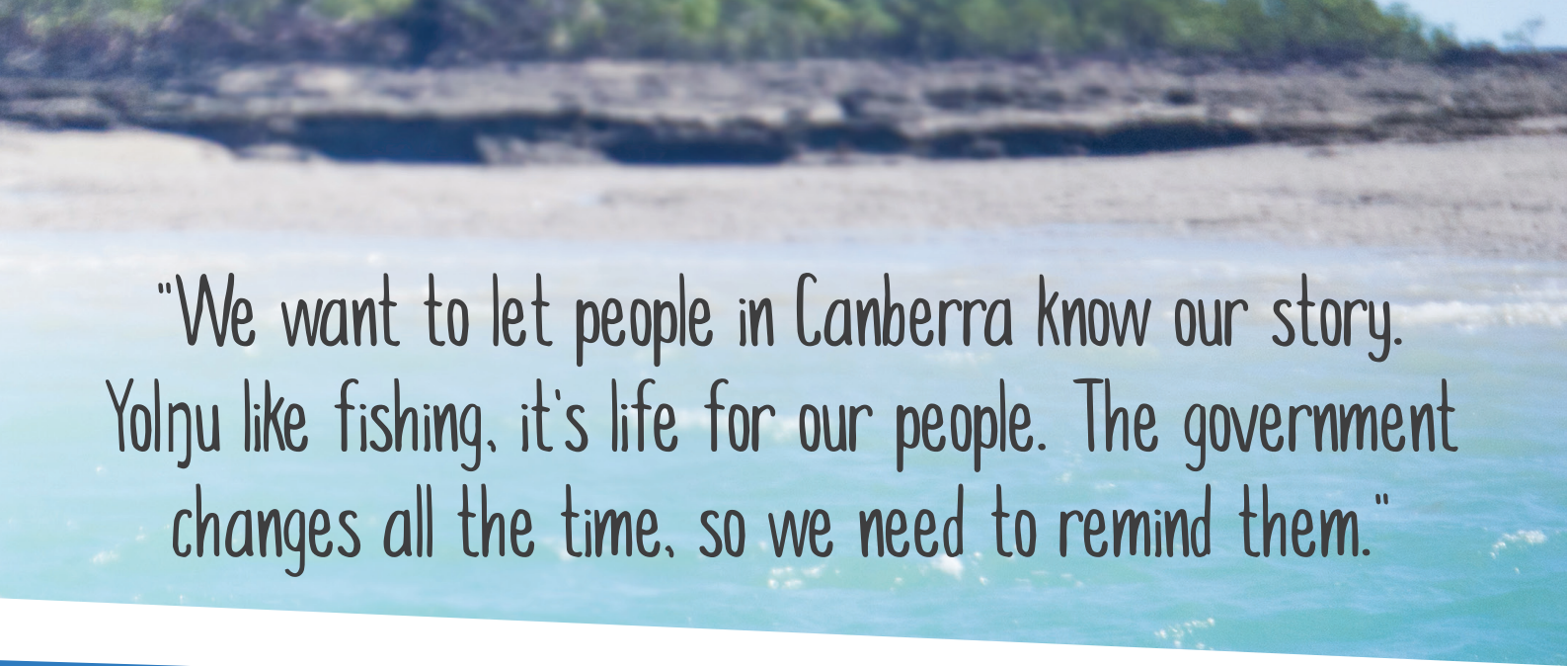
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Front cover image: Neil Djandjan and Jarrod Gingiri pulling in the net.

Photo credit: John Skuja, 2013.

# CONTENTS

About this community report	iv
Who is AIATSIS?	1
Who is the FRDC?	2
What was the project about?	2
What happened during the project?	3
Making a research agreement	4
Interviews	4
Meetings about the project	5
Living Off Our Waters online exhibition	6
Yurrwi fishing meeting	6
What did we learn?	7
Short questionnaire	7
Group interviews	8
Rom and cultural values	8
Social values	9
Economic values	10
Health values	11
Balanda commercial fishing	14
Yolŋu commercial fishing	14
Barriers	15
Barriers for Yolŋu commercial fishers	16
Aspirations	17
Conclusion	18
Recommendations	19
Acknowledgements	20
Contact us	20
Appendix 1: Glossary	21
Appendix 2: Short questionnaire results	22
Appendix 3: Group interview questions	23



“We want to let people in Canberra know our story. Yolŋu like fishing, it's life for our people. The government changes all the time, so we need to remind them.”

## ABOUT THIS COMMUNITY REPORT

This community report is about meetings and interviews that the Crocodile Islands Rangers and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) did between December 2015 and July 2017. It is made for both Yolŋu and Balanda to read, to understand what happened and what we learned.

All these things were part of a research project on livelihood values of Indigenous customary fishing. ‘Livelihood values of Indigenous customary fishing’ means why Yolŋu go to get guya and maypal, and what is important to them when they do.

The project was funded for two years by the Indigenous Reference Group (IRG) of the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) and included three case studies, one in Yurrwi (Milingimbi Island) and the other Crocodile Islands. The other ones were with the Aboriginal Fishing Rights Group on the South Coast of New South Wales, and the Far West Coast Aboriginal Corporation on the Far West Coast of South Australia.

All of this happened when the Crocodile Islands Rangers, NT Fisheries and other

organisations were helping Aboriginal Coastal Licence holders and other Yolŋu get a commercial fishing industry going on Yurrwi.

This meant it was an important time to ask Yolŋu why and how fishing was important to them, and what they wanted commercial fishing on Yurrwi to be like.

The final report for the project, which explains everything that we learned, will be finished early in 2018. AIATSIS will give copies of the report to the Crocodile Islands Rangers, and anyone who has given us their email address when they were interviewed. You will also be able to get it on the AIATSIS and FRDC websites.

This report is in English, but it also uses some Dhuwal words. Some, like waŋarr, bāpurru and Rom, are used because the English words aren't as good at explaining the ideas. Others, like rrupiya, yindi and djāma, are words that many local Balanda will already know and use. Different kinds of guya and maypal are mostly given their Dhuwal names. There is a glossary at the back of the report.

# SUMMARY

## AIATSIS did research with the Crocodile Islands Rangers to find out:

- Different ways that fishing was important to Yolŋu in the Crocodile Islands (values).
- The kinds of things that stop or make it hard for people to fish how they want (barriers).
- What Yolŋu wanted for the future (aspirations).

## Rom and Cultural Values:

- Fishing the Yolŋu way is different to the Balanda way. This includes not taking more than you need, sharing, not taking too much, and only taking guys and maypal when they are in season.
- Making sure stories, knowledge and culture are passed down to the djamarrkuli is important, and guys and maypal are a big part of this.

## Social Values:

- Getting guys and maypal is always social – even if you go by yourself, you share with other people.
- Sharing brings families and communities together.
- Gives people something to do in their time off.

## Economic values:

- Fresh food is expensive to buy, so getting your own guys and maypal means you spend less money on food.
- Through sharing guys and maypal, people support each other. People also trade guys and maypal for different kinds of food.

## Health values:

- Healthy natha, and healthy exercise
- Some maypal and guys work like medicines that help people when they're sick.
- Djarrkuli need to learn the fishing knowledge so they can do it safely.

## Balanda commercial fishing:

- People said Balanda commercial fishers don't ask permission from landowners, take too many guys, are wasteful, and don't give back to the community.
- Suggestions were for Balanda to pay royalties for access, ask permission and tell the

landowners when they are coming, and to share some of what they catch so that their bycatch doesn't go to waste.

## Yolŋu commercial fishing:

- Yolŋu commercial fishers use skills and knowledge that the old people taught them, but they also do some things the Balanda way, like keeping logbooks and selling the guys at the shop.
- People like Yolŋu commercial fishing – they trust the license holders to do the right thing by Rom and hope it will bring more jobs.

## Barriers to fishing:

- Some younger people said fishing can be harder for them because they don't have all the knowledge that the older people do.
- Bad weather, djama and ceremonies stop people from going fishing.
- People not having boats or the right gear.
- People said it was hard to catch ratjuk sometimes, blamed Balanda commercial boats.

## Barriers for Yolŋu commercial fishers:

- Not having money to buy the things they need (boats, equipment), and not having freezers or a place to properly process their guys before they go to the shop.
- Need a clear process for how selling guys in the shop should work.
- Some of the rules for Aboriginal Coastal Licenses that NT Fisheries have made are different to how Yolŋu think it should work.

## Aspirations:

- Making sure that knowledge is passed on to the djarrkuli
- Keep looking after Sea Country and have control over who can come to the Crocodile Islands to fish
- Have fresh guys regularly available in the shop and for school lunches
- More Yolŋu commercial fishers and the ability to export
- For Yolŋu to be in charge of how fishing works in the Crocodile Islands, and to keep protecting their seas and managing their fisheries



## WHO IS AIATSIS?

AIATSIS is the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. We are a research, collections and publishing organisation. Our job is to promote knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, traditions, languages

and stories, both past and present. We are part of the Commonwealth Government, and our offices are in Canberra.

Dr Rod Kennett was the Director of the Native Title, Land and Water at AIATSIS and was in charge of the project. Dr Tran Tran and Luke Smyth worked with Rod on it, and John Paul Janke (JP) came with Luke to the Yurrwi fishing meeting.

## WHO IS THE FRDC?

The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) is a corporation owned by the Commonwealth Government and funded by them and Australian seafood industries. The FRDC's job is to organise research on how to improve and support Australia's fisheries.

The FRDC has an Indigenous Reference Group (IRG), which is a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women with lots of experience and knowledge about fishing and managing fisheries.

## WHAT WAS THE PROJECT ABOUT?

The IRG paid for AIATSIS to do the project. They wanted to:

- Find out about the cultural, social and economic values of Aboriginal fishing
- Look at the differences between what Aboriginal people want and what the fisheries policy and laws say
- Grow fisheries research and management capacity in Aboriginal communities
- Make a set of tools that can be used to explain the value of Aboriginal fishing to the people who make fisheries policies and laws

# WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE PROJECT?

First, AIATSIS met with the Crocodile Islands Rangers to make a research agreement and decide what the project would do and what the Rangers wanted people in the Crocodile Islands to get from it.

AIATSIS and the Rangers then interviewed Yolŋu about why they go to get guya and maypal, why it is important to them, and what they think about commercial fishing.

AIATSIS brought some of the Rangers to meetings in Canberra and Townsville, so they could learn how to do the research themselves and teach other people about the Crocodile Islands and what the Rangers do.

AIATSIS made a document on the Internet (called an 'online exhibition') that explained why fishing is important to Yolŋu and other Aboriginal peoples, to help government and Balanda to understand.



George, Jason, Leonard and Warrick with the AIATSIS researchers and the South Coast NSW mob at the National Native Title Conference 2017. Credit Andrew Turner.

## MAKING A RESEARCH AGREEMENT

Rod came to visit the Rangers in Yurrwi in December 2015 to talk about setting up the project. They talked about how the Rangers wanted to help set up a sustainable commercial fishing industry so there would be more jobs available for Yolŋu. Rod and the Rangers agreed to work together and see how the research project could help the Rangers do that.

In June 2016 some of the Rangers came to the National Native Title Conference in Darwin. They met with the project team from AIATSIS, and people from the other project case study areas. They talked about:

- The different ways that fishing was important to each of their communities
- The kinds of things that stop or make it hard for people to fish how they want
- Different strategies to get around or remove these things

Rod and Luke from AIATSIS met the Rangers at the East Arnhem Ranger Forum at Gulkula after the Native Title Conference. There they talked about what the project was, what the Rangers wanted the project to do for the communities in the Crocodile Islands, and what AIATSIS could do.

They signed a research agreement too, which meant that AIATSIS and the Rangers made promises to each other about what they would do to make the project happen. The Rangers promised to help the AIATSIS researchers when they visited Yurrwi. AIATSIS promised to bring some of the Rangers to the AIATSIS office in Canberra to learn how to do the research by themselves, and to pay the Rangers for helping them.

## INTERVIEWS

Rod and Luke came to Milingimbi in September 2016 and March 2017 to interview people for the project. First, the Rangers checked the questions they wanted to ask to make sure they were asking about the right things and that they would make sense to people. Then they translated everything into Djambarrpuyŋu.

The Rangers, Rod and Luke talked to 55 people from Milingimbi, Bodiya, Murrunga and Lanjarra (Howard Island). Most of the time people were in small groups. They wrote down what they said and audio recorded too if they said that was manymak.

They asked people two different sets of questions. One, called the 'short questionnaire', gave people a list of reasons why someone might go to get guya or maypal, and they had to say how much they agreed with each one. The other set had questions on lots of different things. Both of the sets of questions are at the end of this report.



## MEETINGS ABOUT THE PROJECT

Gerard Morgan and Solodi Buthunguliwuy visited AIATSIS in April 2017. In Canberra they learned about what AIATSIS does, and they learned how to do the analysis of the interview notes and recordings.

They analysed all the recordings and notes that were in Djambarrupyu while they were there. They also spent some time at the AIATSIS Collection looking at photos and videos from Milingimbi.

They did a presentation for AIATSIS staff about the Crocodile Islands, and all the different work that the Rangers do. Most of the people who work at AIATSIS have never been to Yurrwi and didn't know how much work the Rangers do in the community, so it was really interesting for them.

Gerard Morgan, Doreen Collins and Mariah Kennedy came to the National Native Title

Conference in Townsville in June 2017. They had a meeting with the AIATSIS researchers and with people from the other case study areas. At the meeting they talked about:

- Sharing ideas about fishing and ways to help each other
- How Aboriginal fishing rights are different depending on which state you're in, and whether you have native title or land rights
- What they thought about the online exhibition and the project, and what they could use the results for

The researchers, Gerard, Doreen and people from the other case study areas gave a presentation to people at the Conference about what they had found out by doing the project, and why fishing was important to Aboriginal peoples around Australia.



Doreen, Gerard and Mariah at the National Native Title Conference 2017. Credit Bryce Gray.

## LIVING OFF OUR WATERS ONLINE EXHIBITION

Rod, Luke, Nilanthi Abeysekara, Liz Koschel, Dan Norton and Stephen Gill from AIATSIS worked for months to make the Living Off Our Waters online exhibition. The online exhibition is a document on the Internet which tells the story of the project, and also talks about some of the results of the interviews with Yolŋu and other Aboriginal people from the other two case study areas.

The exhibition has parts about each of the case study areas, where we talk about fishing values, barriers, effects, and aspirations.

Bentley James wrote about how commercial fishing worked on Yurrwi in the 1960s and 1970s, and gave us some photos from back then that are also in the exhibition. John Skuja who works with the Rangers gave us some of his photos too.

You can see the exhibition at:

<http://aiatsis.gov.au/exhibitions/living-off-our-waters>

## YURRWI FISHING MEETING

The Northern Territory Government Department of Trade, Business and Innovation organised a meeting in Milingimbi about commercial fishing and fishing jobs in July 2017. The Rangers asked AIATSIS to come and talk about what they found out with the project.

Luke and JP from AIATSIS visited Yurrwi that week, and Luke showed everyone who came to the meeting what they had learned about how fishing was important to Yolŋu and what everyone thought about Yolŋu commercial fishing. There were people from different government departments and other organisations, and they all talked about what can be done to help the Aboriginal Coastal Licence (ACL) holders, and get more people fishing. The people who came to the meeting gave Luke feedback on what AIATSIS had learned from the interviews, and he added the things that they said were missing.



Mowandjil Garawirrtja filleting ratjuk for sale. (Photograph courtesy Bentley James and the Fidock Collection, 1064. Circa 1965)



Everyone at the meeting for Yolŋu commercial fishing. Credit John Paul Janke.

# WHAT DID WE LEARN?

AIATSIS and the Rangers interviewed 55 people in Milingimbi, Bodiya and Lanjarra. Some people from Murrungu also did interviews when they were in Milingimbi.

## SHORT QUESTIONNAIRE

21 of the people who were interviewed did the short questionnaire about the reasons why they go to get guya and maypal. In the table on this page you can see what they thought of each reason. You can find the full results for each question at the end of the report.

This is what the symbols in the table mean:

- ✓✓ Manyak – Strongly agree
- ✓ Ganja manyak – Agree
- ? Yaka marngi – Unsure
- ✗ Yaka – Disagree
- ✗✗ Yakan yan – Strongly disagree

The median response is the response that is halfway when you take all the answers to the question and put them in order from most negative to most positive. We use the median response as well as the most common one, because it gives us a better idea of what everyone thought overall.

For instance, the most common response to 'sell for money / gurrupan doy' was manyak. But, more than half of the people who answered the question said something other than manyak. When we put all the responses in order, the one in the middle was a yaka marngi, so that is the median.

Because only 21 people did the short questionnaire, we can't use these answers to say what everyone in the Crocodile Islands thinks. But the answers can give us an idea of what different opinions there are, without telling us exactly how many people have each of the different opinions.

There were only three questions where the most common response and the median weren't the same: trade/exchange, selling for money, and being alone. This could be because there are lots of different opinions on these questions, or it could be because people thought the question meant different things.

### Median and most common responses to short questionnaire (n=21)

I go fishing and collect shellfish because I want to:	Njarra ga djältirri guyalil ga maypalil bili:	Most common response	Median response
Follow my law	Nhina njarra ga dhiyan rom'dhu	✓✓	✓✓
Teach kids	Marngi gurrupan djamarrkuliny	✓✓	✓✓
Learn	Marngithirr	✓✓	✓✓
Be on my country	Limurr wakiryun wänanjur	✓✓	✓✓
Get tucker	Natha marram	✓✓	✓✓
Get medicines	Walnjagunhamirr	✓✓	✓✓
Share	Gurrupan	✓✓	✓✓
Trade/exchange	Gurrupanmirr	✓✓	✓✓
Sell for money	Gurrupan doy	✓✓	?
Be healthy	Nhini dawala	✓✓	✓✓
Be with family	Rrambanji gurrutumirr	✓✓	✓✓
Be with friends	Rrambanj lundumirriju	✓✓	✓✓
Be alone	Djäl ganañumirr	✓✓	✗✗
Win competitions	Njupanmirr competitions	✗✗	✗✗
Have fun	Wakalgu	✓✓	✓✓
Relax	Rumbal layun	✓✓	✓✓
Be outdoors	Wakiryun	✓✓	✓✓

## GROUP INTERVIEWS

For all of the interviews we wrote down notes of what people told us, and for some of the interviews we did audio recordings, too. We looked at our notes and listened to the audio recordings to find the different things people said, and organised them into the topics we wanted to find out about. This is called coding.

The topics were:

- Values – what things are important, why they are important, and what’s good about getting guya and maypal
- Commercial fishing – what people thought about commercial fishing in the Crocodile Islands, both Yolŋu and Balanda
- Barriers and effects – what stops or makes it hard to go get guya and maypal, and what happens when people don’t go, or don’t go much
- Aspirations – what people want to change, and what they want for the future

Jarrood Gingiri and Jason Mewala sit down for an interview with Luke before heading out fishing.  
Credit John Paul Janke



## ROM AND CULTURAL VALUES

The people we talked to told us that fishing the Yolŋu way is different to the Balanda way. Rom is the permanent law that Yolŋu follow no matter what the Balanda law is. Rom includes laws that help make sure there will always be enough guya and maypal, like:

- Don’t take more than you need.
- If you get more than you need for your family, you should share.
- Don’t take too much from the same spot, and don’t take guya and maypal that are too small.
- Different guya and maypal have their own seasons, and you should only take them when it is the right season. This is so they have a chance to get bigger and breed, and they are fatter and taste better in their season.

- Changes in the plants, animals, tides, winds, moon and the colour and smell of the sea let people know what season it is and if it is a good time to go.

All the seas around the Crocodile Islands have names and owners, just like the lands. People need to respect that when they go to get guya and maypal:

- If you want to go fishing on someone else's Country you need to ask them for permission first; it doesn't matter if you are Yolŋu or Balanda.
- You should share what you catch with the owner of that Country.
- The owner is responsible for you on their Country and they need to make sure that you are safe, that you know where not to go, and that you act respectfully on their Country.
- You can't fish at sacred sites, and sometimes places will be closed because of a death, or for other reasons that the owner decides.
- Some types of guya, like ratjuk and larratjatja, are waŋarr for some bāpurru. This means some people won't eat them, and when you go to catch them you need to do it respectfully.

Stories and knowledge of guya and maypal are big parts of Yolŋu culture in the Crocodile Islands. This includes the stories of different places and waŋarr, and knowledge of what is edible, how to get it, how to stay safe and how to cook or prepare it. Making sure the knowledge and stories are passed down to the djamarrkuli is something people told us they care about a lot.

## SOCIAL VALUES

People told us that fishing, hunting and collecting are things that always involve others. We saw from the short questionnaire that some people go to be alone, but in the group interviews most people told us they usually go with family or friends.

Even when people go to get guya or maypal by themselves, they are going out to get a feed for their families as well. If someone went by themselves and didn't bring anything back to share that would annoy some people.

Sharing is important because it means that people who can't go out themselves can still get a feed. Old people will ask young people to get things for them. People will bring back food for the people who are too sick to go. And people who have boats bring back food from the outer islands for people who don't.

In the past when there was just Top Camp and Bottom Camp people shared guya between the camps because it helped keep the peace and bring everyone closer together. There are a lot more people in Milingimbi now, but lots of sharing still happens; people talked about catching guya with traps and nets and feeding their whole camp and more, and some of the women from Murrunga talked about how they catch guya in traps and then send them to Milingimbi on the plane.

Going to get guya and maypal also gives people something to do in their time off. This is especially important for kids; people told us it's good to take kids to the outer islands to hunt and fish, not just so they can learn, but also so they are away from the 'distractions' in town. This is true for adults too sometimes.

## ECONOMIC VALUES

Guya and maypal can have economic value, even if they aren't being bought or sold. Because there aren't many jobs in the Crocodile Islands and fresh food is expensive, getting your own guya and maypal can be a good economic choice, because you spend less money on food.

People told us being able to get your own guya and maypal is important because it means if you have no money, you can still eat and feed your family. Sharing guya and maypal has economic value then too, because people who are too old or sick to go can still get a free

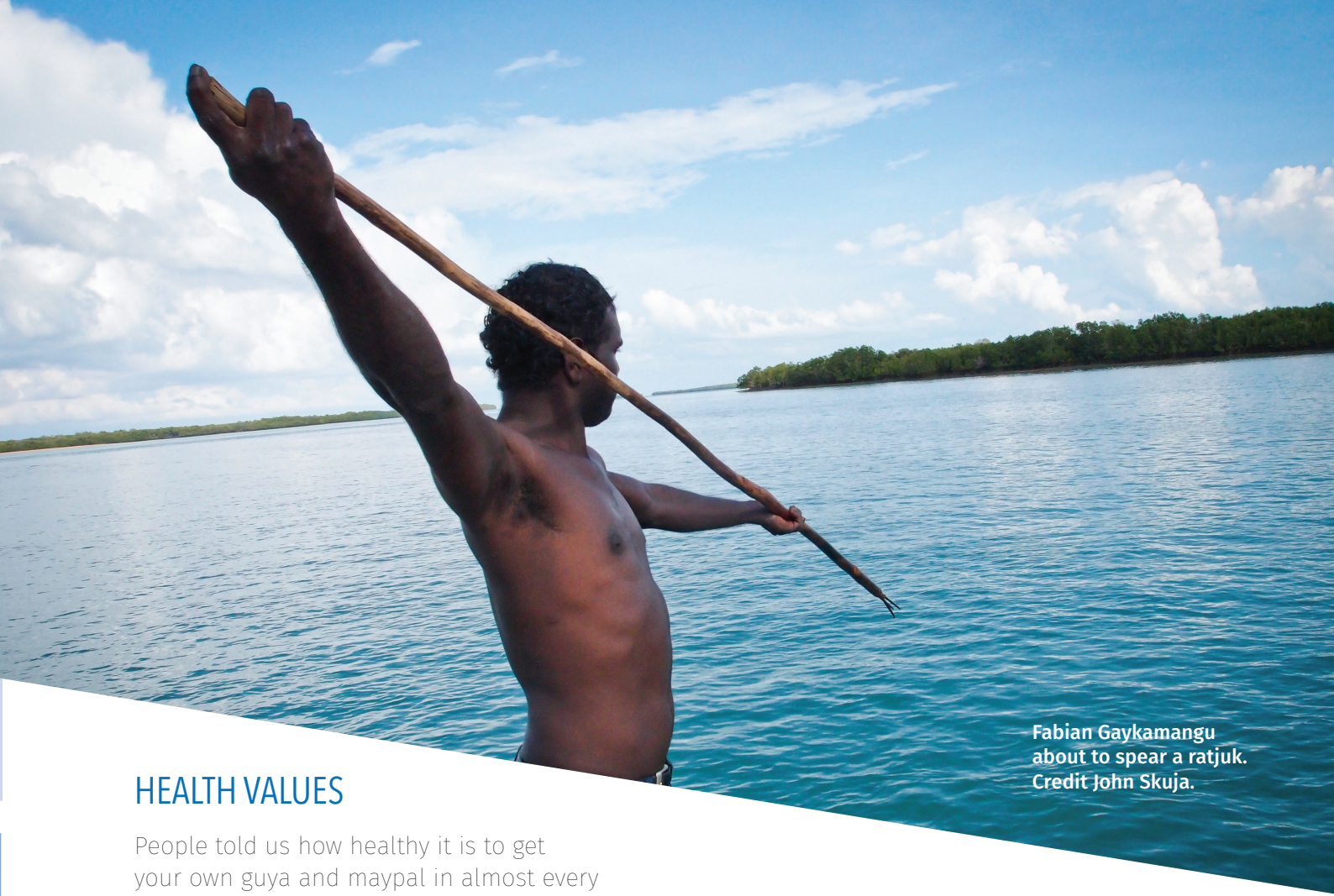
feed. Through sharing, families and the whole community support each other economically, and everyone benefits.

A couple of people told us that they sometimes trade their guya and maypal with other people for different kinds of food, qarali, or money. They said this was good because it meant they could get things they wanted and eat different things, even if they didn't have much money.

We talk about the values of Yolŋu commercial fishing a bit later.



Fabian Gaykamangu, Samuel Wumulul and Robyn Gunupul hauling in gulku, north side of Murrunga. Credit John Skuja



Fabian Gaykamangu  
about to spear a ratjuk.  
Credit John Skuja.

## HEALTH VALUES

People told us how healthy it is to get your own guya and maypal in almost every interview. The health benefits of guya and maypal were something that everyone knew and thought was important.

All the bush *natha* is good for you, and maypal especially give you energy. They are also healthy because you have to walk and work hard to get them. People compared these to food from the shop, which they said can make people sick and weak, and can make you feel lazy.

Guya and maypal don't just keep you healthy; most people told us about how they use them to get better when they are sick, too. People told us about the 'longbum diet', when they go back to eating bush *natha* when they get sick (sometimes from too much shop food). When *djamarrkuli* lose weight because they're sick, people give them guya.

Some maypal will 'clean your whole body out' when you are sick, and are good for people with diabetes and for keeping your blood pressure down. Longbum especially are good for colds. One woman told us that when she is sick her body tells her to eat guya and maypal, and she eats guya when she gets pain in her joints.

Saltwater people, we were told, need saltwater food. It's the food that they've eaten for thousands of years, so that's what their bodies are used to and need to stay healthy. And going to get it yourself, like the old people did, is the healthiest way.

But getting your own guya and maypal can be dangerous if you don't know what you are doing. At the fishing meeting, people said that the report should talk about how safety is an important part of Yolŋu fishing. Lots of Yolŋu fishing knowledge is about how to be safe.

*Djamarrkuli* need to be shown how to do things properly, because there are dangers they need to know about and how to avoid. When the men go fishing they often bring spears with them in case they have trouble with *bäru*. The *djamarrkuli* have to know what things they can't eat, and how to cook and prepare things properly, because lots of things are poisonous or will make you sick. They also need to learn from the traditional owners what places can be dangerous to go to.

# SOME OF THE YOLŃU VALUES OF GUYA AND MAYPAL

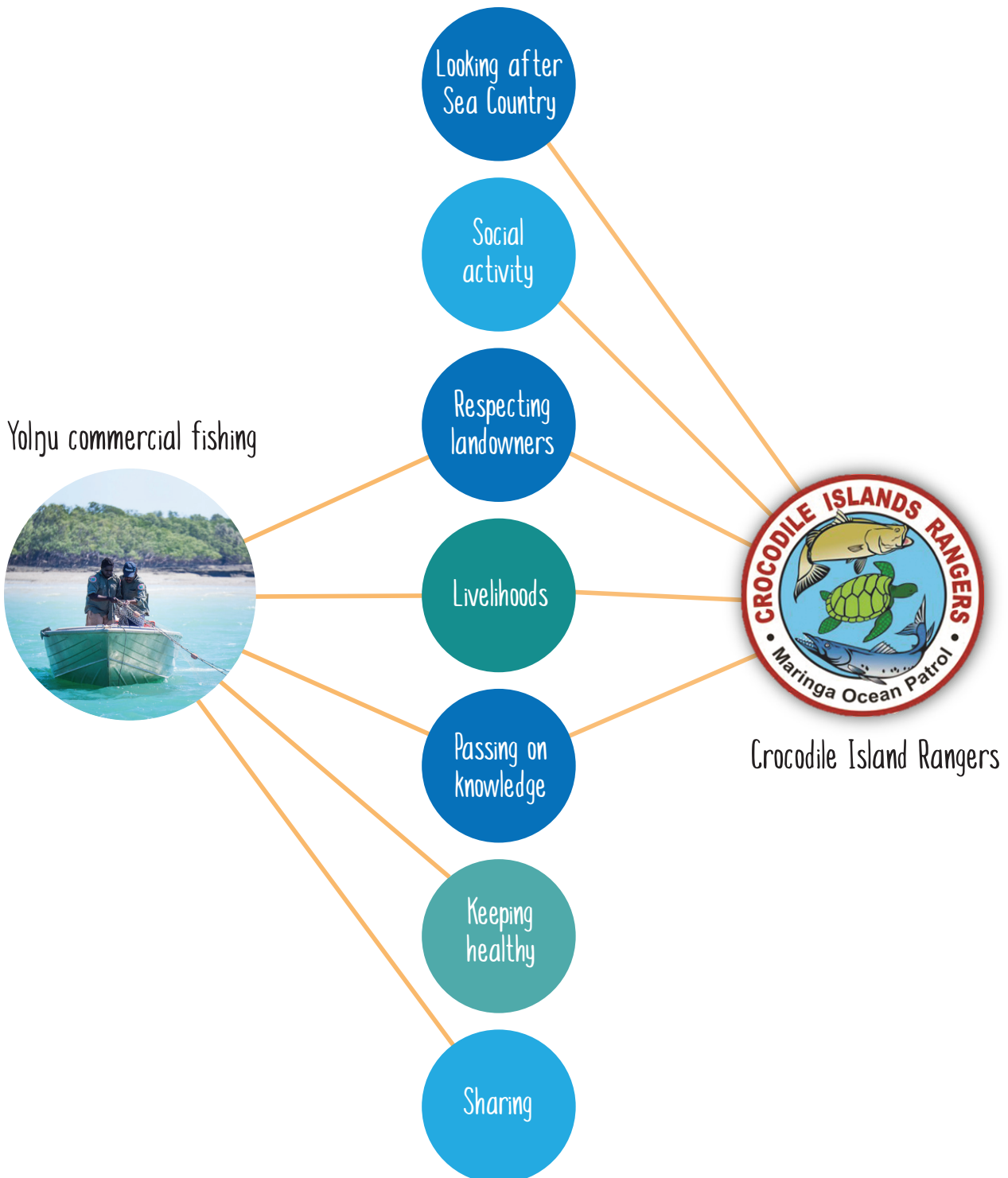


**DARK BLUE:** Culture and Rom  
**LIGHT BLUE:** Social values

**DARK GREEN:** Economic values  
**LIGHT GREEN:** Health values



Together, the Crocodile Islands Rangers and Yolŋu commercial fishing can support all of the main sets of Yolŋu values of *guya* and *maypal*



## BALANDA COMMERCIAL FISHING

There are two sea closures under the *Aboriginal Land Act 1978* (NT) around the Crocodile Islands. These mean that no boats can come within 2km of the coast without the traditional owners' permission. But, there are some Balanda who have licences for catching ratjuk from before the closures. This means they are still allowed to fish in the area.

People we talked to had lots of complaints about Balanda commercial fishing boats near Milingimbi. The most common things people said were that they:

- don't ask permission from the landowners
- don't let anyone know when they are coming or where they will go
- take too many guya
- are wasteful and leave lots of dead bycatch
- steal fish that don't belong to them and sell them elsewhere
- don't give anything back to the community

Not getting permission upsets a lot of people. One reason is that the right way to do it is to ask first, and that shows respect. The other reason is that because they don't talk to the landowners about what they are doing, people worry that they don't know where the sacred sites are and go to places they shouldn't.

Almost everyone said that the commercial boats should ask for permission before they come, and many said that they should give something back for taking guya that belong to Yolŋu. Some of the suggestions were for them to:

- pay royalties for access to Country and taking guya
- share or sell some of what they catch in Milingimbi
- give their bycatch to the community so it doesn't go to waste

We asked people about the local Balanda recreational fishers too. No one had problems with them so long as they asked for permission and shared some of their catch. People are happy with the Balanda visitors that come to Dhipirri Lodge on the mainland, because they share with the landowners, and pay them for catching guya.

## YOLŊU COMMERCIAL FISHING

The two senior men that we talked to who had Aboriginal Coastal Licences both said that they still fish the Yolŋu way when they go to get guya for the shop. They use the skills and knowledge that the old people taught them and do the right thing by their Rom. They mostly catch garkuyi and malmuŋu.

But they also do some things the Balanda way, because they follow the rules of the licence, like keeping logbooks, and they sell the guya at the shop instead of sharing all of it.

In nearly all the group interviews people told us they really liked the commercial fishing happening with the Aboriginal Coastal Licence, for a few reasons:

- People can buy cheap and fresh guya from the shop
- Most people don't have boats, so they rely on the licence holders a lot
- It's a good way for the licence holders to pass their fishing knowledge on to young people
- People hope that commercial fishing will bring more jobs and income, like it did during the mission days
- Everyone trusts that the licence holders will do the right thing by the community and Rom



Women checking out the fresh guya for sale. Credit John Paul Janke.

But, even though nearly everyone told us they are happy with the Yolŋu commercial fishing, “sell for money / gurrupan doy” was one of the things on the short questionnaire that people disagreed the most with each other on:

- A bit under half of the people who answered said it was manymak (8/19, 42%)
- A bit more said yaka or yakan yan (9/19, 47%)
- A couple said yaka marŋgi (2/19, 11%)

This doesn't mean lots of people don't like Yolŋu commercial fishing. In the short questionnaire people were asked why they go fishing, not why other people do. Most people don't sell any of what they catch, so it makes sense for a lot of people to say yaka or yakan yan. Another reason is that some people might have thought of Yolŋu commercial fishing first when they were asked about selling, and others might have thought of the Balanda commercial boats first, and so they had different answers.

## BARRIERS

Lots of people told us there is nothing that stops them from hunting and fishing, other than the weather and if they can't get permission from the land owners. But there were lots of things that made it harder for them.

Lots of people said that because you can get food from the shop now and everyone has fridges, people don't get their own guya and maypal as often as before. They were worried

that some djamarrkuli won't get taught how to do it properly, and they won't be able to feed themselves or look after their families and old people. Some younger people said fishing can be harder for them because they don't have all the knowledge that the older people do.

One problem lots of people had was not having the right gear (like nets or lines), or not having a boat they can use. Boats are too expensive to buy and maintain, but they are important for being able to go to the other islands to get different things, and to take djamarrkuli out so they learn the knowledge for those places. Most people have to wait until they can borrow one.

Some people told us that they don't catch as many ratjuk as before. An old photo of a Yolŋu man with three yindi ratjuk from the Collection at AIATSIS made some of the Rangers wonder why they don't see many yindi ones anymore, either. Some people said they thought it was because of the commercial boats. A lot of people wanted to know what they could do to stop the boats fishing in their waters.

Being sick, or getting old, makes it hard to go fishing and hunting, which is why it is important for people to share. A lot of people said they can't go as often because they are busy with djāma or ceremony, and that makes it harder for them to get enough for everyone who relies on them.

## BARRIERS FOR YOLŪU COMMERCIAL FISHERS

YolŪu commercial fishers told us there was a lot that could be done to make things easier for them. Some of the problems, both for the people who have licences and for other people who want to start selling guya, were about not having money to buy the things they need. The Rangers have been supporting Jason's fishing, but they can't afford to support everyone who wants to get a licence.

It's harder to use a net off the beach in Milingimbi than it is in places like Maningrida, so the fishers need boats. Jason uses the Rangers' dinghy, but they need to use that for other djāma, too. Jason and the other fishers, and anyone else who wants to get their own licence, will need money to buy boats that are just for their fishing businesses. This will mean they can go out whenever they want, and not have to worry about other people needing the boats.

If they are going to get more guya for the shop, and if there are more licence holders, there also needs to be money for new freezers and

other equipment. The fishers will also need a place to properly process their guya before they go to the shop. This has to have facilities for cleaning, filleting and packaging the guya, so that in the future they can use the guya for school lunches and sell them in other places. There isn't much fresh water on Yurrwi, though, which could be a problem.

The fishers also need help from Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA) and other organisations in Milingimbi to work out how selling the guya at the shop should work. The fishers said that they are sometimes confused about whether it is them or the store staff who need to do different things. Sitting down to agree on exactly how things should work will make it easier for everyone.

Another issue is that some of the rules for the Aboriginal Coastal Licences that NT Fisheries have made are different to how YolŪu think it should work. Older men have the licences because they are the ones who can take responsibility, with younger men



Jarrod Gingiri weighing out some of the malmurŪu to sell. Credit John Paul Janke.

fishing with them. This is because the older men already have responsibilities to their bāparru and the land and seas, so they are trusted by everyone to make sure things are done the right way. For example, Leonard and Rose told us that Jason has the licence for all Maringa people.

But the reason NT Fisheries make people get the licence is so they know how many guya are caught and how much fishing djāma happens. So the rules for the licence say the licence holder needs to be on the boat.

This makes sense, but it's hard for the licence holders to always be there. Because they are senior men they often have lots of ceremonial obligations, and their ranger djāma can make them really busy. As they get older it will get harder for them to go out on the boat, too.

## ASPIRATIONS

Making sure that knowledge is passed on to the djamarrkuli is something nearly everyone talked about. This is important, because without that knowledge, they are worried the djamarrkuli won't be able to feed themselves and their families, or look after their old people. They need to learn about their law and the proper way to do things, so they will know how to keep themselves safe. The Rangers already have a Junior Ranger program, where they are working with the school to help make sure this happens.

Something nearly everyone agreed on was that there should be more Yolŋu commercial fishers. More commercial fishers will mean that people will be able to buy guya more often. The men who already have licences want this too; they say they're not interested in getting 'yindi rrupiya' for themselves, but just want there to be lots of fishing jobs for Yolŋu, and for the community to have a regular supply of fresh guya.

It's not all about money, though. Having fresh guya in the shop all the time is something that everyone wants. The commercial fishers and other people also want there to be enough guya for the school to use them to make healthy lunches every day. For this, they would need somewhere to process the guya, which could be a step towards exporting it as well. In the future the commercial fishers also want to be able to sell guya that they can't with the ACL, like ratjuk.

In the mission days Yolŋu ran their own fishing businesses and exported guya and nyoka to Darwin and cities down south. Eventually the commercial fishers want to start exporting guya and nyoka again, maybe starting with other Aboriginal communities. Exporting would give Yolŋu commercial fishers access to larger markets for their guya, which means more fishing jobs than are needed to catch enough guya just for Yurrwi.

The other yindi aspiration that came out of the interviews was for Yolŋu to keep protecting their seas and managing their fisheries. For most people this didn't mean there should be no commercial fishing; it meant that they want Yolŋu to be in charge of how fishing works so they can make sure it is done in a way that is sustainable, respects Rom and benefits their community. Apart from growing their own commercial fishing industry, in the interviews people talked about two different things that are needed for this to happen:

- Anyone who comes to the Crocodile Islands to fish needs to learn about and respect Rom
- The Rangers should be able to tell boats that come without permission or do the wrong thing to leave, and keep them out of sacred sites



Jason Mewala and Jarrod Gingiri heading out from Milingimbi towards Nilpaywa. Credit John Paul Janke.

## CONCLUSION

Being able to get their own guya and maypal is important for people to feed themselves and their families, but it is much more than this. Fishing, hunting and gathering are part of Yolŋu culture, so they are important for passing down knowledge and law. There are also health, social and economic benefits.

Most of these values are found in Yolŋu commercial fishing, too. This means it could benefit the community beyond just jobs and income. The community have used the Aboriginal Coastal Licences as a cultural governance system for commercial fishing, building trust that it will still respect Rom and Yolŋu values.

This means that, with the right support, the new commercial fishing industry in Milingimbi

could create livelihoods that are empowering, culturally appropriate and support other community aspirations.

A strong message from the interviews was the value placed in Yolŋu having control over their own resources. Commercial fishing is also about Yolŋu getting to make the decisions on how to use their guya and maypal to benefit the community, and balancing that with Rom and making sure there is enough left for the future.

The land and sea management djäma that the Rangers do is part of this. Ownership of Country gives the right to use its resources, but also the obligation to look after it and use those resources responsibly. Caring for Country and making a living from it at the same time is not a new idea; it is what Yolŋu have always done.



Samuel Wumulul holding some of the gulku he caught after finishing Ranger djäma for the day at Murrunga. Credit John Skuja

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Most Yolŋu in the Crocodile Islands want to be able to use their guya and maypal to create livelihoods and improve the health and wellbeing of their communities. But, it has to be done in a way that respects their values and Rom, and Yolŋu want to control their own resources.

Together, the Milingimbi and Outstations Progress Resource Association (MOPRA), the Rangers, the Yolŋu commercial fishers and other organisations in Milingimbi continue to work towards these goals. But, they will need help. These are some recommendations on what can be done to support them:

- The Crocodile Islands Rangers program needs stable and long-term funding so it can continue to support the caring for Country and knowledge transfer aspirations of the community, as well as the fishing industry as it grows.
- NT Fisheries, other government agencies and the involved organisations in Milingimbi need to work out a long-term plan for the sustainable growth of the commercial fishing industry. This includes identifying what facilities will be required at different stages of the industry's growth.
- Current and aspiring Yolŋu commercial fishers will need access to grants or loans to buy equipment and boats, and help with business planning and administration.
- The growth of commercial fishing and related ventures will require access to certified training in things like business administration, coxswaining, and food handling and preparation. NT Fisheries has already run limited training in some remote communities; it would be easier for people if training was available in Milingimbi sometimes.
- The long-term cultural governance of the industry needs to be considered. Unless the rules of the ACL can be changed to allow subleasing or similar, it is worth looking at other ways to formalise culturally appropriate oversight to make sure community trust in the industry continues.
- The aspirations of the community are not compatible with Balanda commercial fishing continuing as it does now. Discussions involving key players could dispel any misunderstandings and find a more mutually acceptable way forward. Long term, the Yolŋu commercial fishers want to replace the Balanda commercial boats; future agreements on the transfer of licences to Yolŋu could grow from these initial discussions.

Rod from AIATSIS and the Rangers with the books of old photos of Milingimbi that AIATSIS gave to the Rangers. Credit Luke Smyth



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# APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY

Balanda	White person
Bäpurru	One of the units of Yolŋu social organisation; ≈ clan or tribe
Bäru	Crocodile
Djamarrkuli	Child, children
Djäma	Work
Gaŋga	Somewhat (literally 'carefully')
Garkuyi	Bluetail mullet ( <i>Moolgarda buchanani</i> )
Guya	Any bony fish
Larratjatja	Barracuda ( <i>Sphyraena barracuda</i> )
Longbum	Sea snail found in mangroves ( <i>Telescopium telescopium</i> )
Malmuŋu	Blue threadfin ( <i>Eleutheronema tetradactylum</i> )
Manymak	Good, agreed
Marŋgi	To know, knowledge
Maypal	Most edible invertebrates; ≈ shellfish
Ŋarali	Tobacco, cigarettes
Ŋatha	Food, tucker
Nyoka	(Male) mud crab ( <i>Scylla serrata</i> )
Ratjuk	Barramundi ( <i>Lates calcarifer</i> )
Rom	The Yolŋu way of being, including law, custom, and religion
Rrupiya	Money
Waŋarr	Ancestral creator beings; ≈ totems
Yaka	No
Yakan yan	Definitely not
Yindi	Big

## APPENDIX 2: SHORT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Responses to:

“Narra ga djältirri guyalil ga maypalil bili...”

“I go fishing and collect shellfish because I want to...”

n=(21)

		Manymak	Gan̄ga manymak	Yaka mar̄ngi	Yaka	Yakan yan	No or unclear response
Follow my law	Nhina narra ga dhiyaŋ rom’dhu	18	3	0	0	0	0
Teach kids	Mar̄ngi gurrupan djamarrkuliny	20	1	0	0	0	0
Learn	Mar̄ngithirr	14	2	3	0	2	0
Be on my country	Limurr wakiryun wāŋaŋur	16	1	4	0	0	0
Get tucker	Ŋatha marram	20	1	0	0	0	0
Get medicines	Wal̄ŋagunhamirr	16	2	1	2	0	0
Share	Gurrupan	18	2	0	0	0	1
Trade/ exchange	Gurrupanmirr	8	3	1	4	5	0
Sell for money	Gurrupan doy’	8	0	2	2	7	2
Be healthy	Nhini dawala	19	1	0	0	0	1
Be with family	Rramban̄ji gurrutumirr	19	1	1	0	0	0
Be with friends	Rramban̄j lundumirriŋu	17	3	1	0	0	0
Be alone	Djäl ganaŋumirr	8	1	0	6	6	0
Win competitions	Ŋupanmirr competitions	1	1	1	5	13	0
Have fun	Wakalgu	16	1	2	1	1	0
Relax	Rumbal layun	14	6	0	1	0	0
Be outdoors	Wakiryun	17	1	3	0	0	0

## APPENDIX 3: GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Nhaku nhe lika gyalil ga maypalil marrtji?  
Why do you go fishing and collect shellfish?
2. Nhaliy waluw nhe dhu marrtji gyalil ga maypalil?  
How do you know when to go fishing?
3. Nha njuṅi dhukarr limurru dhu marrtji gyalil ga maypalil?  
What are your rules/laws about fishing?
4. Nhaltjan nhe lika guya ga maypal buma?  
How do you go fishing?
5. Nhaltjan nhe ga guyaṅa warrpamgu marrtji'nharaw gyalil ga maypalil?  
How do you feel about other people coming and fishing here? Like balanda, Yolṅu from other communities, and big commercial boats?
6. Nhaliy nhunany ga gularam marrtji'nharaw gyalil ga maypalil ga nhaliy njuṅu ga dhalthirri nhunhi nhe dhu marrtji?  
Is there anything that stops you from fishing, or makes it hard for you when you do?
7. Nha njuṅu manymak nhe dhu djamarrkuliny marngi gurrupan guyaw?  
Why is it important to teach kids about fishing?
8. Do you have any feedback for us about the interview? Is there anything you want to ask us or tell us? Is there anything we didn't talk about that you think we should?



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