Chapter 4.

Bush lemons and beach hauling: Evolving traditions and new thinking for protected areas management and Aboriginal peoples in New South Wales

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Abstract. *Aboriginal communities in New South Wales currently are engaged in negotiating with government agencies about cultural activities focussing on access to and harvest of wild resources on and off protected areas. These are 'co-management' situations in the broadest sense, where both Indigenous peoples and protected area management agencies actively are engaged in the same landscape. Aboriginal peoples are using adaptive approaches to continue millennia of cultural traditions in social and physical environments that are significantly changed and changing. Some protected area managers are seeking to understand and adapt agency responses, so as to engage and support Aboriginal interests. These contrasting perspectives on using, managing and protecting country are explored through two case studies: the harvesting of bush lemons and honey by the Bundjalung people of northeastern New South Wales; and the traditional beach fishery of the Yuin people within a marine park in southeastern New South Wales. These case studies, involving collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers and Indigenous communities, reveal the need to respect continuities of ancient cultures, practices and knowledges, while also recognising that adaptation to environmental and social change is a key element of cultural continuity. Adaptation is also a key ingredient of successful co-management, which is best regarded as a process rather than an outcome.*

4.1 Introduction

For millennia prior to colonisation, Australian environments co-evolved with Aboriginal peoples. Two hundred and twenty years after colonisation, these environments are not 'pristine'. Achieving appropriate conservation management in the hybrid and recombinant ecosystems of the present day requires innovative and adaptive approaches. Aboriginal persons in many places are actively involved, or seeking to be actively involved, in these approaches. There is accelerating social and environmental change at global and local levels, and a consequent increasing policy focus on sustainability and social equity agendas. A recent Australian Government (Anon. 2007:v) enquiry into the management of protected areas stated: 'the committee recommends that all governments give greater priority to Indigenous knowledge and participation in park management generally'. Such partnerships in all aspects of conservation and protected area management have the potential to highlight effective solutions.

The recognition and acceptance of the changed nature of Australian environments – for example, new species established, some previous species now missing – is a common characteristic of many Aboriginal peoples' contemporary approach to caring for Country. This contrasts with some protected area managers, who strive to preserve their view of 'natural' landscapes, meaning pre-colonial ones. The compartmentalised nature of the government approach, reflected in a landscape compartmentalised into protected areas and other tenures, also contrasts with holistic Aboriginal perceptions of Country and its inhabitants.

In this chapter we describe instances of ongoing negotiations between Aboriginal communities and conservation agencies about cultural activities focussing on access to and harvest of wild resources in New South Wales. These are 'co-management' situations in the broadest sense, where both Indigenous community members and protected area management agencies are actively engaged in the same landscape. They are 'adaptive' in the sense that it is learning-by-doing, with both groups acknowledging that there are changing social and environmental circumstances that require attention. Aboriginal peoples are using adaptive approaches to continue millennia of cultural tradition in social and physical environments that are significantly changed and changing. Some protected area managers are seeking to understand and adapt agency responses, so as to engage and support Aboriginal interests.

4.2 Resilience and co-management

The Resilience Alliance (n.d.) defines 'adaptive co-management' as an emerging approach for the governance of social-ecological systems:

> [The] novelty of adaptive co-management comes from combining the iterative learning dimension of adaptive management and the linkage dimension of collaborative management in which rights and responsibilities are jointly shared. Key features of adaptive co-management include: a focus on learning-by-doing; synthesis of different knowledge systems; collaboration and power-sharing among community, regional and national levels; [and] management flexibility.
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> These features can promote an evolving, place-specific governance approach in which strategies are sensitive to feedback (both social and ecological) and oriented towards system resilience and sustainability. Such strategies include dialogue among interested groups and actors (local-national), the development of complex, redundant and layered institutions, and a combination of institutional types, designs and strategies that facilitate experimentation and learning through change. Other important themes in adaptive co-management include improving evaluation of process and outcomes, additional emphasis on power, the role of social capital, and meaningful interactions and trust building as the basis for governance in social-ecological systems.

There is now extensive research from various disciplines focussing on co-management, and a growing literature on the principles of resilience and adaptive management.

4.3 Indigenous knowledge and government practice

In the relatively recent past, State conservation agencies have considered Aboriginal culture and tradition to be fixed in the past (Byrne 1996; Adams and English 2005). More recently, many such agencies have begun to acknowledge Aboriginal culture as contemporary, mutable and evolving (e.g. Byrne et al. 2003; Grieves 2006). However, there continue to be assumptions at all levels of government agencies about Aboriginal traditions which tend to define and limit Aboriginal cultures in ways unacceptable to contemporary Aboriginal peoples.

Historically, most of the changes in government policy and practice have been forced by Aboriginal initiatives and claims, and sometimes legal or other protest actions. There is, however, evidence in New South Wales that conservation agencies are beginning to 'lead from the top' in engaging with Aboriginal groups, with policy formulation explicitly acknowledging living Aboriginal cultures, and structural change designed to foreground the need to question the longstanding Western nature/culture division.

An ongoing issue is the challenge of considering Aboriginal culture as holistic and integrated, rather than a collection of components that can be separated and used as useful adjuncts to Western management approaches (Berkes 1999). 'Indigenous environmental knowledge' is increasingly discussed and sometimes used in conjunction with Western management activities, but very seldom is it contextualised to acknowledge the breadth of Indigenous cultural practices and beliefs (Eriksen and Adams in press). The Aboriginal concept of 'Country' situates humans as integral parts of the landscapes and ecosystems in which they live, in fact as family to other species, and is a central element of the knowledge about place. In Aboriginal worldviews, persons have responsibilities to care for particular Country, and when individuals are given knowledge by Elders it comes with a responsibility to be careful about that knowledge, and a commitment to their Country. In contrast, Western notions of conservation management situate human managers in command-and-control situations. These managers are pursuing careers or shorter term jobs; they are paid to undertake management by the State, and often relocate to different places – they don't have a responsibility to *care* for Country, beyond the requirements of their job (Russell Couch personal communication 20 October 2008; Adams et al. 2007).

4.4 Protected areas and Aboriginal peoples in New South Wales: some policy context

Indigenous Australians are the most socio-economically disadvantaged group in Australian society (SCRGSP 2007). New South Wales, the most populous State in Australia, also has the largest Aboriginal population at approximately 150 000 (DAA 2008). While land-rights and native-title legislation has returned significant areas of land to Aboriginal peoples in various other parts of Australia (Altman et al. 2007), in New South Wales significantly less than one percent of land is under the control of the Aboriginal population (Adams 2004). Accordingly, meaningful access to and involvement in the management of 'public' lands, including protected areas, is very important for many Aboriginal peoples in New South Wales.

In federal Australia, each State has responsibility for the creation and management of its own protected area system, with overall co-ordination achieved through the Commonwealth National Reserve System. In New South Wales, the agency responsible for terrestrial protected areas and conservation issues is the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC). This agency has existed, under various names, since 1967, and was originally modelled closely on the National Parks Service in the United States. The New South Wales system, like many others, was essentially based on the 'Yellowstone model' of protected areas: government-owned and managed, with precise boundaries, and with people present only as visitors or rangers (Stevens 1997). Protected areas in marine situations ('marine parks') are governed by the New South Wales Marine Park Authority (MPA), established in 1997. There are six marine parks in New South Wales.

In the last three decades, there has been increasing interaction and overlap between Aboriginal issues and conservation. Today, the concept of joint management or co-

management between conservation agencies and Indigenous groups is well established in some jurisdictions, and Aboriginal peoples continue to push for greater involvement and control in conservation and protected area issues.

For terrestrial situations, the latest published DECC Annual Report (2007a:84) states that

> … as at 30 June 2007, there were a total of 15 formal co-management arrangements in place with Aboriginal communities covering 97 areas across more than 1.5 million hectares (or 23%) of the reserve system.

Co-management and other partnership arrangements between Aboriginal groups and DECC can be in various forms, including:

- Lease-back agreements under the 1997 amendments to the *National Parks and Wildlife Act*, where DECC legally 'returns' a protected area to its Aboriginal owners, and then leases it back from them;
- Indigenous Land Use Agreements under the Commonwealth *Native Title Act* about the management of protected areas in the area covered by a native title claim or determination;
- Non-statutory Memoranda of Understanding; and
- Various informal agreements between Aboriginal communities and DECC.

Under many of these arrangements, there is a long process of negotiation to achieve significant outcomes for Aboriginal owners, and those fifteen formal agreements are of a total of more than 700 protected areas in New South Wales.

Because the process to establish meaningful formal outcomes is often so long, and in part stimulated by the changes in the legislation, numerous situations have developed where Aboriginal groups are negotiating 'informal' arrangements directly with DECC reserve managers, and also with marine protected area managers. These can vary widely, sometimes focussing on a particular activity (such as annual 'culture camps'), and sometimes encompassing a broader range of activities (DECC 2007b). While there are no formal co-management arrangements in marine parks in New South Wales, local Aboriginal communities near both Batemans Marine Park and Jervis Bay Marine Park, are negotiating with MPA.

In response to these initiatives, DECC and MPA are developing new policy and practice. Here we examine recent examples of both Aboriginal and agency perspectives revealed through collaborative DECC-university research, and recent DECC and MPA policy consultation.

In 2002, the *New South Wales Threatened Species Conservation Act* was amended to include the following clause in Section 57(3):

> Director-General is also to consider, when preparing a recovery plan, any special knowledge or interest that indigenous people may have in the species, population or ecological community concerned and in the measures to be contained in the plan (including the likely social, cultural and economic consequences of the making of the plan).

This clause was the first legislative acknowledgement that Indigenous peoples may have interest or knowledge about threatened species in New South Wales. Managers in some parts of DECC realised that the department may have little idea how to respond to this, and instituted sponsorship of a series of Bachelor of Science Honours research projects to explore aspects of this new challenge. A very open and inclusive approach was taken to the selection of possible research topics. The two collaborative DECC-university

research projects by Cavanagh (2007) and Edmunds (2008) were funded through this DECC initiative and are discussed below.

4.5 Bush lemons and honey: significant species in the Bundjalung Aboriginal Nation

Using Section 57(3) of the *New South Wales Threatened Species Conservation Act* as her starting point, Cavanagh (2007) examined assumptions about 'native' and 'feral' species in the Country of her mother's family, Bundjalung people of northeastern New South Wales. Cavanagh's work is unusual in that she is a young Aboriginal woman, a geographer and an employee of DECC, giving her unique access to Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in her study. While she has a specific right to ask her Elders about Country, Cavanagh (personal communication 20 October 2008) pointed out that there are responsibilities attached to those rights:

> [M]y identity allows me exclusive opportunities (for example, access to the Bundjalung mob) but it is not without significant responsibility on my part. What was said to me in those interviews was said to me for my knowledge and future management of that knowledge: there will continue to be a responsibility and risk I take when discussing that Bundjalung knowledge in the wider world, and it is not something that I take lightly. So completing my Honours thesis is a small but significant part of continued belonging to my mum's Bundjalung mob and my commitment and responsibility to that Country.

While the conservation philosophy of DECC managers (then known as 'DEC'), generally focusses on maintaining landscapes in their pre-European condition, Cavanagh's extended family demonstrated an engagement with the hybrid and recombinant ecologies[1] of the twenty-first century. Culturally significant species included naturalized lemon trees and honey from 'feral' European honeybees as well as native bees.

Cavanagh (2007:73-74) argued that:

> The ideas and definitions of nature and threatened species from the perspective of the Bundjalung community members vary from the DEC perspective. Bundjalung community members are aware of this disparity and the problems this poses when being involved in nature conservation with non-Indigenous people and organisations. For example, Bernie Walker [Bundjalung Community member] says: 'But what does "conservation" really mean. It's a different thing from an Aboriginal person's perspective to the white perspective. To us, it's things like keeping culture, and the things that Granny taught us, without having to spell it out as being "conservation". Conservation is a white man's word.'
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> Similarly, Poppy Harry Walker [Bundjalung Community member and Elder]. points towards different understandings of nature conservation. 'So the definition is different. What is a threatened species to national parks anyway? What makes it so important for them? We know what is important to us. I would tell them that they need to understand the way that Aboriginal people feel about the bush, the way we see it. They need to see it from our side and feel that way too. Not just from their way.'

In Cavanagh's interviews with her Bundjalung family, all of the discussion about nature related to wild harvest, and most people linked the collection of honey with the harvest of bush lemons. The importance of the continuity of Bundjalung language terms was stressed by some elders (Poppy Harry Walker quoted by Cavanagh 2007:75):

[1] Whatmore and Hinchcliffe 2002 have provided a discussion of these terms.

> … Jumbalung and 'Gubai' was the other one [bee]. Jumbalung is small one, small, the black one, like a fly, and the Gubai is the other one, small insect-like, longer one. You get the honey, and that was good for cold, flu, fix you up. But even the bees, you don't see them so much anymore. And they were the best thing, if you got sick, they were the best thing. Honey and bush lemons … . Walking on to property to get lemons or to look for bees, we used to follow the bees, walk anywhere following them, can't do that now. All the food is [scarce].

Cavanagh highlighted the differences between a DECC concept of 'nature' and a Bundjalung one. Bush lemons and European honeybees are not indigenous to Australia and would be classified as weeds and pests, and would not be a priority for conservation. They may in fact be a target for removal, and DECC would not necessarily consider it appropriate or necessary to consult with Aboriginal communities about this. These species fit a particular Western nature conservation category of introduced species. For Bundjalung community members, they are living part of contemporary cultural heritage, as well as natural heritage, with clear links to the past. There is no distinction between pre-European species and native ones, but rather an acceptance that two hundred and twenty years after colonisation Australia has many hybrid environments.

Cavanagh's interviews (2007:76) also revealed that the process of collecting and distributing bush lemons is

> … a continuation of a Bundjalung custom, where wealth (in this case food) is shared amongst community members. The social significance of this practice was spoken about by Uncle Baulkie and Aunty Phyllis: 'You get them [lemons] and share them around, that's what it's about … they get [kangaroo], only one that's usually enough, and they will share it around too. Not greedy see!**'** [Uncle Baulkie (Tim) Torrens, Bundjalung Community member and Elder].

Figure 4.1: Rocky River, Tabulam, Bundjalung Country.
Photograph © Vanessa Cavanagh

In analysing the relationship between Bundjalung custom and departmental policy and practice, Cavanagh also interviewed Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff members of the agency. Their responses are revealing about the gap between black-letter law and the practicalities of Western conservation management. All staff commented that while the amendment to the Act sounded positive, it was ambiguously worded, and could only lead to real changes if there is appropriate resourcing to implement the intent, which they argued was not the case. Cavanagh (2007:105) asserted that:

> Not only is the wording of section 57(3) of the TSCA Act 2002 insufficient; but the premise in which Indigenous knowledges are sought to be included in threatened species management is flawed, with Indigenous knowledges of nature being secondary to Western scientific knowledges. The DEC participants advocate that current policy requires transformation to meaningfully empower Indigenous knowledges. Indigenous values of nature need to hold authority at the conceptual level. Indigenous voices need to be heard to identify and define threatened species priorities prior to, and during conservation practice. This is so that Indigenous worldviews are incorporated throughout the strategic planning process, not only of threatened species, but conservation holistically.

Threatened species management is approached at the 'landscape' level, that is, not restricted to protected areas or any other particular tenure. Cavanagh's research indicated that Bundjalung interests are also at the landscape level. They perceive a historic contraction of their ability to access the bush, with greater levels of regulation and management impeding customary activities. Private property is probably the most exclusive of tenures, and consequently access to, and influence in, State-managed protected areas has increasing importance for Bundjalung and other Aboriginal peoples.

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Protected areas in the sea are a relatively new phenomenon, and create a particular series of tensions by applying new regulatory frameworks over areas previously used in a variety of ways. For many coastal Aboriginal peoples, there are long histories of wild harvest and use in these areas. In the next section we examine customary practice and policy evolution in one of these places.

4.6 Yuin beach hauling in Batemans Marine Park

Research by Edmunds (2008) has identified continuities of tradition among Aboriginal fisher families from the Yuin Aboriginal Nation working within a marine protected area in New South Wales. For these communities, changed social and economic conditions have induced adoption of new technologies and adaptation of traditional practice to build upon customary knowledge and belief in a unique, local artisan-scale fishery.

Terrestrial protected areas have generally strictly divided 'productive' and 'conservation' tenures, with one outcome being that the excluded 'productive' tenures usually have little connection to conservation goals. In contrast, marine protected areas, partly because they are usually imposed over areas previously regarded as open-access regimes, often have a mix of conservation and productivity goals. Indigenous understandings of Country, which includes sea-country, challenge both the production/conservation dichotomy, in that all country is obviously productive of all sorts of things, and the terrestrial/marine dichotomy. The New South Wales Marine Parks Authority has developed four generic zones in marine parks – sanctuary zones, habitat protection zones, general use zones and special purpose zones (MPA 2001); in contrast to most terrestrial parks, these protected areas are 'multiple use parks'.

The Batemans Marine Park in southeastern New South Wales was established in 2006, and the zoning plan formalized in 2007. The park covers an area of 85 000 ha and is divided into the four zones listed above. Of these, the general use zone covers about a third of the park, and allows most recreational fishing as well as commercial beach-haul fishing (MPA 2006; Edmunds 2008).

Figure 4.2: View from a traditional lookout point on Broulee Headland toward Moruya River Mouth (facing south). The Brierlys and Nyes watch for schools of migrating fish coming along the beach from Moruya. Photograph © Bridget Edmunds 2008

As Cavanagh's work in the previous section highlights, a central aspect of many partnership approaches in protected areas is the acknowledgement and use of Indigenous environmental knowledge. Historically, this has often meant the extraction of 'environmental' knowledge from a broader context of cultural and social knowledge and practice. It has also often been underpinned by assumptions about 'traditionality' and authenticity that ignore the reality that all cultures are dynamic and evolving.

In the case of Batemans Marine Park, the new fisheries and conservation regulations mean that there is a conflict between notions such as 'customary' and 'traditional', and the realities of 'commercial' fishing. For many local Aboriginal peoples, the development of the beach-haul fishery (in this region now exclusively carried out by Aboriginal families) is a clear continuity of Aboriginal environmental knowledge and practice.

Many Yuin see themselves as 'saltwater people'; local histories and archaeological evidence confirm that Aboriginal occupants have harvested South Coast waters for millennia (Egloff 1981, 2000; Cruse et al. 2005). In Edmunds' interviews, Aboriginal fishing families argued that 'access to sea resources is their traditional right' (Edmunds

2008:x). The beach-haul fishery[2] is the activity that these families are now primarily engaged in within the boundaries of the new Batemans Marine Park. The technique of beach hauling as it is practiced at Batemans Marine Park was introduced to Aboriginal fishers by British colonists (Edmunds 2008).

Figure 4.3: Shark Bay, Broulee (between Broulee Island and Broulee Head). Mullet are commonly harvested here by the commercial beach haulers in the mullet season. 'They duck in behind them bays for protection' on their migration north (Andrew Nye personal communication 2008). Photograph © Bridget Edmunds 2008

Prior to the increasing regulation of fisheries activities (both commercial and recreational) in the last two decades, many Aboriginal fishers targeted a wide range of species across different marine ecological zones. Target species were chosen according to seasonality, weather conditions, and other circumstances, and attempted to ensure a sustainable supply (Edmunds 2008). There are clear relationships between the forms of knowledge transmission used in these Aboriginal fishing families today, and practices documented from many groups of Indigenous peoples, including oral transmission of information, highly localized or regional knowledge, long-term empirical observation, knowledge of ecological disturbances or impacts, and the development of knowledge embedded in the practical engagement with everyday life (Berkes 1999; Edmunds 2008).

The traditions of these Aboriginal fishing families are under threat from increasing regulation, and in particular the licensing of fishers. While in the past, fishing had been a family practice, new rules prevent many members of fishing families from actively participating, and hence learning, orally and experientially, the skills of their forebears. Many fishers spoke of strong links with past practice, such as observing the sea from

[2] Beach hauling uses a net, towed from the shore by a boat, to circle fish swimming along the coast. The fish are pulled into the shallows, where they are harvested and transferred to a truck to deliver to the nearest market (Edmunds 2008).

strategic lookout points, and the sharing of the catch with participants, and emphasised how the social and cultural aspects were embedded within the economic activity of harvesting fish; Edmunds (2008:67) quoted Andrew Nye as saying:

> We all learn it by doing it with our fathers and grandfathers, not by sitting in a classroom or office.

A local non-Indigenous resident remembers how the Aboriginal fishing families would exchange fish for bread at her parent's bakery (Judy Filmer quoted by Edmunds 2008:82):

> My family is from Moruya and we know the beach hauling fishers well. My parents used to give them bread in exchange for fish, because we owned the bakery in town. I see them on the beach and ask them how they spot the fish, and they wave their hands in motion with the water where the school is, but I can't tell the difference from that patch of water from another! It is their knowledge that has been taught to them by their fathers and grandfathers and it is very remarkable seeing them practice it.

Contemporary bureaucracies construct fishing as either commercial or recreational, and focus on the impacts on the fish stocks, rather than the social and cultural aspects.

Reflecting many similarities with Cavanagh's research, the families Edmunds interviewed argued that the bureaucratic insistence on compartmentalising activities creates barriers to cultural practice. While there may be public statements supporting Aboriginal culture, departmental policy and management actively impede and deny the contemporary practice of culture and tradition (Andrew Nye quoted by Edmunds 2008:74):

> So even though we're all family, they're not really even allowed to come and touch the net. No family members, nephews and nieces, uncles and aunties, are allowed to touch the net and help us pull them in unless they have a licence. But even if you have a license it's still hard. I said to them [Fisheries] 'my son Craig he's got a license, but what if he just wants to work for me?' They said he can't, unless he got a business too. And I think it's wrong.

And (John Brierly quoted in Edmunds 2008:75):

> Fishing is a good way of life. And if it was managed properly it is a very good income, it is a traditional way for local Aboriginal people … . But now, in Fisheries management, there's no room in there for Aboriginal culture.

Different departments have different sets of rules depending on whether fishers are on land or sea, and fishers may be subject to three simultaneous sets of regulation (Marine Parks Authority, Department of Primary Industry, and Department of Environment and Climate Change). The intensity of regulation is perceived as increasing restriction of Aboriginal access (John Brierly quoted by Edmunds 2008:76):

> But now all our land and everything is gone, it's fenced off and we can't go anywhere. And it's the same with our sea country now. And they say 'we want you to continue your ways' but how can you?

This family-based, artisan-scale fishery has a strong social and cultural base, with an ongoing tradition of environmental awareness. Aboriginal families argue that their traditions of changing target species on the basis of seasonality, weather and observation are sustainable, and that modern management focussing on single-species fisheries creates unsustainable and damaging fishing practices (Edmunds 2008).

Where Cavanagh found an Aboriginal community adaptively responding to post-colonial hybrid 'natural' environments, Edmunds found an Aboriginal community adapting their traditions to respond to a post-colonial hybrid economic environment. In

both cases, Aboriginal interviewees argued strongly for departmental recognition of cultural continuity, and their ongoing right to engage with resource harvest in these places. In both cases, the communities said that departmental definitions and understandings are too limited, and risk actively excluding Aboriginal participation in resource management and caring for Country.

4.7 Agency Consultations – an Aboriginal perspective

As the marine protected area system is still relatively new, there is not a long history of consultation between Aboriginal communities and the MPA. The Batemans Marine Park Authority has commenced discussions with local Aboriginal families to negotiate access to both commercial and customary fishing opportunities within the protected area. Much of this discussion is centred on the beach-haul fishery. In a unique initiative for New South Wales marine parks, the MPA Aboriginal Liaison Officer has supported the development of an Aboriginal Advisory Group with representatives from the six Local Aboriginal Land Councils within the Batemans Marine Park region.

However, approximately simultaneous to the research by Cavanagh and Edmunds reported above, DECC has carried out several consultation processes with Aboriginal people (e.g. DECC 2007b; Adams et al. 2007). In these processes, particular issues were repeatedly raised by Aboriginal groups.

In New South Wales many Aboriginal families and individuals are already involved with DECC and other land-management agencies in a wide range of activities strongly consonant with Aboriginal concepts of traditions of caring for Country. These include 'natural-heritage' management activities such as bush regeneration and weed control, pest-species management, threatened-species management and fire management; Aboriginal groups also collaborate with DECC on 'cultural heritage' activities such as preparing cultural maps, repatriation of ancestral remains, care of sites, and interpretation and education about Aboriginal heritage. Increasingly, they also wish to undertake activities such as culture camps and wild harvest. Many or most of these activities can be relatively easily incorporated into protected area and other conservation management programs, and there are many examples of this (DECC 2007b).

But embedded in these interests there are often a suite of broader issues, some of which are focussed around power and address improved social and economic outcomes for Aboriginal communities. These include capacity building, housing, employment and other income opportunities, training and education, and collaborative research opportunities. An ongoing challenge for government is how to respond appropriately to these requests for 'holistic' management approaches. Governments typically compartmentalise issues into different departments, so DECC, for example, does not see, under its enabling legislation, how it can engage with housing issues for local communities. Aboriginal groups, conversely, consider that such avoidance is 'passing the buck'[3]. Similarly, when Aboriginal representatives to agency negotiation meetings request payment for their participation, this is often considered somehow inappropriate and greedy, despite the fact that every government representative present is being paid a salary and supported with travel and office infrastructure.

Another point consistently raised by Aboriginal staff members of DECC (and probably by extension, the MPA) is the difficulties of being a paid employee of the

[3] There is an interesting research question, not explored here, about socio-economic standing and interest in environmental issues: Aboriginal persons have the lowest socio-economic standing of all social groups in Australia, and yet actively and regularly engage with these issues, often categorised as 'middle-class' concerns, in contrast to many other social groups.

agency, and then going home to live within Aboriginal communities who are actively engaged in discussions with the department. They point out that, effectively, they are never 'off-duty', as members of their communities want to continue discussions and access 'inside knowledge' about issues which are very important to them in ways well beyond the environmental interests of many non-Indigenous groups. This point links to the fact that, as Aboriginal persons, they may have responsibilities to care for Country that are beyond their professional duties. Balancing the demands of paid environmental and cultural management with cultural responsibilities can stress individuals.

As Carlsson and Berkes (2005) argued, there is a suite of issues in co-management situations that focus on power relationships, social capital, and trust building. It is essential that these issues are acknowledged and actively examined in co-management processes if real relationships are going to be established which lead to real outcomes.

4.8 Evolving traditions and new thinking

Connection to Country, including Sea Country, has long been considered a key characteristic of Aboriginal culture and post-colonial aspirations. Recent analysis argues that these connections, including access to Country and caring for Country, are central to individual Aboriginal and community wellbeing (SCRGSP 2007). Protected area managers are in a key position to facilitate connection and caring, and since 1997 (and earlier) many negotiations have been conducted by DECC in New South Wales.

That decade of negotiations has led to a clear understanding that co-management should be seen as a *process* rather than an *outcome* (Carlsson and Berkes 2005). This process needs to acknowledge that the outcomes are uncertain and may remain that way. The process is likely to challenge significantly the most fundamental understandings of protected area managers. All environments in Australia, rather than 'pristine', are clearly 'hybrid'; ecosystems include persistent novel components and/or processes, including introduced species and changed climates. In some circumstances it is appropriate to instigate control of the 'feral' components of these ecosystems. In others, it is more realistic to acknowledge that they are now recombinant environments and adapt attitudes and management, including harvest, accordingly. Also, as has been long acknowledged, all environments in Australia have co-evolved for many millennia with Aboriginal occupants. The ongoing participation of those Aboriginal peoples, including use of contemporary technology, is socially just and likely to be environmentally appropriate.

A major challenge for non-Indigenous protected area managers and policy makers is the process of reconsidering the underlying theories of Western conservation and protected area management. Our current context of hybrid environments and rapid social and environmental change means that adaptive, creative management responses, and openness to new thinking, are basic criteria. In jurisdictions like New South Wales, which do not have protected areas large enough to include the entire homelands of Aboriginal groups, moving beyond park boundaries may be a necessary step. Landscape-level or ecosystem-based management has been discussed for decades, but not successfully implemented. Linking landscape-level management with caring for Country might lead to innovative solutions. For Aboriginal groups, caring for Country is likely to make most sense when an entire cultural region is included. A DECC Director, Russell Couch (personal communication 20 October 2008), suggested:

> A new-style New South Wales Indigenous Protected Area might exist as an umbrella co-management structure across these multiple tenures, include existing protected areas as 'nodes' within these landscapes, out from which the rest of the tenures radiate, to allow use and management as production, conservation and culture warrant.

The protected area may persist as a node in this model, but potentially with quite different management processes and aims: moving beyond the Yellowstone model, to an approach that includes human presence in the landscape (or rather, acknowledges that humans have always been part of the landscape). The surrounding matrix of other tenures may also be re-examined, acknowledging the cultural significance of what are now production landscapes, and recognizing the heritage of shared histories between Aboriginal and other Australians.

4.9 Conclusions

In many places in Australia, Indigenous peoples are engaging in negotiations with protected area managers and resource-management agencies. In many of these situations, Aboriginal families display resilient and adaptive responses and sophisticated understandings of the reality of the recombinant and hybrid environments of settler States in the twenty-first century. In their eyes, these responses are a clear continuity of social and environmental traditions practiced by their forebears for millennia. They also make sense in contemporary economic and environmental circumstances, finding ways to continue to care for Country and adopting and adapting technologies as appropriate.

From the agency side, partnerships with Aboriginal groups are likely to mean both demanding work situations and opportunities to explore new ways to think about contemporary environmental challenges. Protected area managers in co-management situations question the nature/culture divide, and rethink landscapes as places with simultaneous and multiple natural and cultural values.

Here we present outcomes from a series of collaborative research projects: between non-Aboriginal researchers and Aboriginal communities; between an Aboriginal researcher and both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interviewees; and between academic researchers (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) and a government conservation agency. From the perspective of the Aboriginal participants, making the transition from oral tradition to academic text can be fraught with risk. But in situations that are explicitly *about* the relationships between Indigenous traditions and Western cultures, such a transition is a necessary step in communicating with all sides in the negotiations.

Acknowledging connection to Country, recognising that co-management will always be a process rather than an outcome, and understanding the recombinant nature of modern Australian landscapes will be key criteria for successful partnerships between Aboriginal groups and conservation agencies. The various ways in which those partnerships evolve will reflect the learning-by-doing of adaptive co-management, and how readily participants can learn from each other about the limitations of their own paradigms, and the opportunities that might come from a complementary vision.

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