



Indigenous co-management of biodiversity

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SUMMARY

Australia's wet tropics region encompasses 20 traditional estates of Rainforest Aboriginal peoples. They have been actively working for 20+ years at various levels in asserting Traditional Owner (TO) relationships and rights to manage their country. Land management arrangements in the wet tropics are multi-tiered, involving lease and freehold owners and several state, local and federal government authorities. The National Heritage List (2012) recognised the outstanding significance of Rainforest Aboriginal peoples' cultural values for management of the wet tropics.

Our project (a co-research team of Rainforest Aboriginal peoples, scientists and managers) has identified different pathways that connect cultures and knowledge for co-management.

We identified five components that foster equitable engagement:

- (1) Principles (e.g. self-determined level of involvement);
- (2) Relationships (e.g. good ones enable Indigenous roles);
- (3) Mechanisms (e.g. plans);
- (4) Power (e.g. right to exercise native title);
- (5) Regimes for joint governance (e.g. legislation, policy) (Figure 2).

Our institutional analysis shows significant barriers to equitable engagement.

Queensland human rights institutions do not protect Indigenous cultural, social and economic rights equal to some international institutions. Raising human rights standards is important to support equitable engagement of culture and knowledge through co-management.

FRAMEWORK

Our framework for Indigenous co-management in the wet tropics (derived by the research team through problem co-framing) recognises it as an emergent path-generation process towards equitable relationships developed to manage country.

We identified eight attributes that best represent an equitable process:

- *focus on the parts that make up effective Indigenous co-management;
- *demonstrate the linkages between the parts;
- *show change over time and space;
- *include thresholds;
- *include Indigenous-generation of key concepts;
- *capacity to address dynamic scaled complexity;
- *relevance to the wet tropics problem-framing.

Our literature review identified six frameworks that may support these attributes: linked cultural-biophysical indicators (Cullen *et al.* 2008); empowering biocultural diversity in the Wet Tropics (Hill *et al.* 2011); participatory evaluation of joint management in the Northern Territory (Izurieta *et al.* 2011); Miriung-Gajerrong cultural planning framework (Hill 2011); typology of Indigenous engagement in environmental management (Hill *et al.* 2012); and a modified DPSIR (Drivers-Pressure-State-Impact-Response) Indigenous land management framework (Hill *et al.* 2013).

We concluded that none of these frameworks are capable of representing all eight attributes, so we developed the three part framework depicted in Fig. 1 and 2.

INSTUTIONAL ANALYSIS

How do the Wet Tropics formal biodiversity management institutions (multi-level, regulatory, non regulatory) recognise Indigenous peoples' native title rights, cultural values and role as biodiversity managers?

The analysis shows that the greatest institutional barriers occur at the Queensland State level:

- All regulatory instruments recognise native title rights
- Approximately 50% do not recognise either Indigenous cultural values or the role of Indigenous managers.
- Human rights institutions do not include protection for cultural, social and economic rights (rights that are recognised by other international institutions)

Regulatory instruments at the Australian nation-state level that protect native title rights ensure that biodiversity institutions take account of Indigenous rights to land, rights to practice culture and the right to engagement in land management.

Annual Native Title and Social Justice Reports of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commission provide guidance on recognition of Indigenous roles in, for example, water management and climate change adaptation.

It appears that the process of federation resulted in Queensland retaining its colonial constitution and rights to land management without obligations to protect human rights.

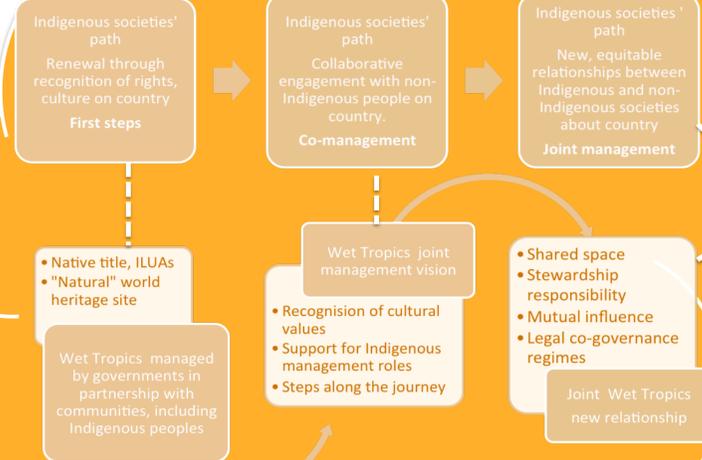


Fig. 1. Indigenous co-management as a process of emergent path-generation towards a new equitable relationship

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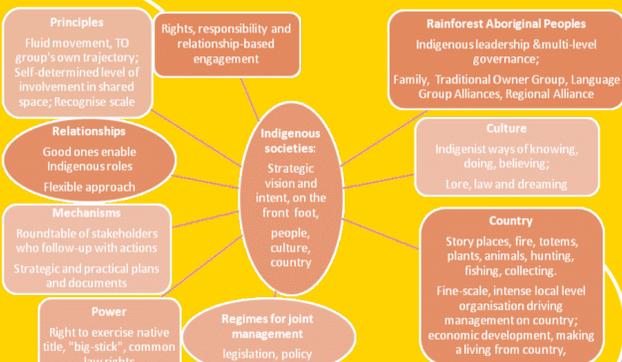


Fig. 2. Indigenous co-management as a process of Indigenous societies' strategic leadership and rights and responsibility-based engagement.

Find this project at <http://www.nertropical.edu.au/project/indigenous-peoples-and-protected-areas>

Theme 3: Managing for Resilient Tropical Systems

Program 12: Managing for resilience in rainforests; Project 12.1 Indigenous co-management and biodiversity protection

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