Coming to terms with the occupation of nature: engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations

Heather Moorcroft

University of Wollongong

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Coming to terms with the occupation of nature: Engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

University of Wollongong

by

Heather Moorcroft

Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research
School of Geography and Sustainable Communities
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Wollongong, Australia
April 2016
Warning

Indigenous Australians are warned that this thesis contains images, names and references of people who are now deceased.
Certification

I, Heather Moorcroft, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Department of Geography and Sustainable Communities, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Heather Moorcroft
15 April 2016
Thesis format

This is a thesis by compilation. Agreement of this thesis format was made between the candidate Heather Moorcroft and supervisors Professor Lesley Head, Associate Professor Michael Adams and Dr Jack Baker. Part two of the thesis is made up of five results chapters. These chapters have been prepared in an article style format. The publication status of each of the results chapters is noted in the table below. For chapters already published, permission regarding copyright has been obtained from the relevant publishers for reproduction of the articles in this thesis. Statements of authorship for these results chapters are found on pages iv and v.

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Statements of authorship

Co-authored chapters


Heather Moorcroft was the lead author of this publication. Heather was responsible for research design, data collection, data analysis and interpretation. Heather prepared the majority of the manuscript and was responsible for submission of the manuscripts for publication and dealing with reviewers’ comments.

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Signed: Associate Professor Michael Adams  
Co-author/PhD Supervisor  
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The publication in this chapter was prepared in accordance with a proposal, and subsequent approval, to include the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project as part of the research (see Appendix 1). Heather Moorcroft was the lead author of the publication. Heather was largely responsible for research design, data collection, data analysis and interpretation. Heather prepared the majority of the manuscript and was responsible for submission of the manuscripts for publication and dealing with reviewers’ comments. The involvement of co-authors John Goonack, Sylvester Mangolomara, Janet Oobagooma, Regina Karadada, Dianna Williams and Neil Waina is covered by the proposal and agreement as in Appendix 1.

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Chapter 4: A spectrum of recognition: Indigenous people and interests in conservation in Australia. Submitted to Environmental Politics in August 2015. Currently in review.

Chapter 6: (Re-)imagining the indigenous in conservation. Submitted to Geoforum in August 2015. Accepted with revisions.

I, Heather Moorcroft, am the sole-author of the publication and manuscripts presented in chapters 2, 4 and 6 of this thesis. I was responsible for the research design, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, preparing the drafts of the manuscripts and submission of the manuscripts for publication. I was also responsible for dealing with reviewers’ comments for the publication presented in Chapter 2, and am responsible for this for the manuscripts in chapters 4 and 6.

Signed: Heather Moorcroft
PhD Candidate
15 April 2016
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Thesis abstract

This thesis explores contemporary engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations. Under a new paradigm, conservation claims to be inclusive of Indigenous people. There is a considerable body of work on this topic stemming from case studies from developing countries, yet little attention has been afforded to developed settler societies such as Australia, where Indigenous people are often considered citizens of the “fourth world”.

Using a multiple case study design and a mixed methods approach of archival research, document analysis, interviews and observations, the thesis investigates the historical and contemporary context of engagements between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector, and how and why Indigenous Australians are recognised in these engagements. The findings demonstrate that Indigenous social justice is becoming increasingly dependent on the conservation agenda, and achievements secured under an Indigenous social justice agenda are being enjoyed by the conservation sector. The thesis confirms that the new conservation paradigm has been embraced in Australia. It reveals new and emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land in Australia, in which conservation organisations use a spectrum of processes to recognise Indigenous people. Conservation organisations use mainly affirmative recognition processes in the scale and territory of their operations, yet they mostly deny recognition of Indigenous people and interests in their governance. A few instances of transformative recognition processes and non- or mis-recognition processes also occur. There is an axis of variability, with affirmative recognition processes being independent of land tenure, but transformative recognition processes being dependent on land being held by Indigenous Australians, or the likelihood of land being returned. The thesis demonstrates that more effective participation or inclusion of Indigenous people occurs when transformative processes are utilised by conservation organisations.

The thesis identifies imaginaries of the indigenous by conservation organisations as being bound to the remote north of the continent with elements of essentialised fantasies, a modernising of indigeneity with the concepts of cultural economies and sustainable livelihoods, and a more complex imaginary that conflates the traditional and the modern. Yet, these imaginaries centre on settler or colonial imaginaries that continue the domination and mastery of the non-Indigenous other. Navigating and negotiating the
imaginaries for Indigenous Australians is fraught with context and conflict, while non-Indigenous Australians have the benefit of more positive consequences. The thesis concludes that contemporary imaginaries of the indigenous in conservation in Australia are inadequate to allow for transformative recognition processes across the conservation sector, and makes suggestions to introduce such processes.

By highlighting the engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations, the research expands the growing body of literature from settler societies, to build a more global account of contemporary engagements between conservation and Indigenous peoples. Conceptually, the thesis contributes to the understanding of the new conservation paradigm. It adds to the literature on justice theory, particularly environmental justice and the concepts of recognition and inclusion, and expands the understanding of environmental imaginaries. Significantly, the thesis informs current and future engagements between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector.
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Part one: General introduction
Chapter 1: Introduction
1.1 Background

On 23 May 2011, in the stifling heat of the remote Kimberley region of Northern Australia, Justice Gilmour of the Federal Court legally determined that the Wanjina Wunggurr Uunguu, the Wunambal Gaambera Indigenous people, held native title to a large expanse of land and sea. The determination was the result of decades of struggles by the Wunambal Gaambera people; struggles for recognition as the rightful owners and managers of their ancestral homelands. And after they wiped away tears of joy and sadness, for those who did not live to witness the result of their struggles, the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project was launched.

The Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project is a conservation framework that facilitates the Wanjina Wunggurr Uunguu as the rightful owners to manage their ancestral homelands in accordance with their customary responsibilities (Moorcroft et al 2012). It is a collaborative project centring on a partnership between the Wunambal Gaambera people and Bush Heritage Australia, a national conservation non-government organisation (NGO). The project, initially a two year planning process to develop a healthy country plan (Figure 1), is now in the middle of a ten year implementation phase.

![Figure 1: Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Plan cover image](image)

The Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project reflects the new paradigm in conservation. International acceptance and promotion of the new conservation paradigm...
has resulted in an increase in the involvement of non-state organisations in conservation, a growth in the number of private conservation reserves and an expanding influence of large international conservation NGOs. Large-scale conservation efforts, such as connectivity corridors, are common and involve numerous organisations and networks. And with a greater awareness of Indigenous rights and an increase in Indigenous land in some countries, Indigenous people and their representative organisations are often promoted as key players under the new paradigm. This thesis explores the engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations under the new conservation paradigm.

In this chapter I introduce and contextualise the research. I outline the research motivations and identify the knowledge gaps that the research addresses. I present the research aim and supporting questions, and situate the research in regards to the ethical considerations. I describe the research design, case studies and methods, and conclude the chapter with an explanation of the thesis structure.

1.2 Research motivations
This research is about two of my life passions; environmental conservation and Indigenous social justice. The research evolved from my personal experience – from knowledge embodied through working with Indigenous Australians in conservation. Having completed an undergraduate degree in ecology in the mid-1980s, I have worked in conservation for more than twenty five years. I have worked in Australia’s iconic jointly-managed Indigenous-owned national parks of Kakadu, Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Booderee, for local and regional Indigenous organisations in conservation projects, for conservation NGOs in partnerships with Indigenous organisations, as well as in the delivery of state-funded Indigenous programs. I am embedded in the conservation sector, and particularly in the area of Indigenous involvement in conservation. This work has taken me to a range of landscapes from remote Northern Australia to the more settled regions of south-eastern Australia. As a non-Indigenous Australian, I have been fortunate to have been exposed to the heterogeneity of Indigenous identities and the diversity of Indigenous cultures in Australia. One common thread I have observed in my work is the desire of successive generations of Indigenous Australians to achieve not only biodiversity outcomes from their involvement in conservation, but to gain economic and social benefits as well from such involvement. I have also observed and been involved in the acceptance and promotion of the new conservation paradigm in Australia.
The motivation for the research was twofold. Firstly, I wanted to know why the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project, which I worked on between 2008 and 2011 as a planning consultant (Figure 2), is considered a model for partnerships between conservation organisations and Indigenous communities in Australia (see Hill et al 2011). I wanted to do this in a way that was collaborative and respected the people I worked with on the project. Secondly, I wanted to investigate concerns, which came to me during my work, that some engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations do not reflect inclusiveness as promoted under the new paradigm. I also wanted to give back by way of contributing knowledge and informing existing and future engagements between conservation and Indigenous Australians. The intellectual stimulation for the research was to challenge the conservation sector’s portrayal of engagements between conservation and Indigenous Australians. I also wanted to investigate engagements that combined Indigenous alternatives to conservation, such as respecting the interrelationship between the ecological and the social. I believe the employment of such alternatives will be critical to help redress the planet’s biodiversity loss.

Figure 2: The researcher discussing aspects of the Healthy Country Plan with Wunambal Gaambera women. (Photo: Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation)
1.3 Literature review and identification of knowledge gaps

To demonstrate the identification of knowledge gaps that the thesis addresses, I review the literature relevant to engagements between conservation organisations and Indigenous Australians under the new conservation paradigm. I adopt a thematic approach to the review. Further review of the literature can be found in each of the results chapters.

1.3.1 Historical context

There is a considerable body of literature on the historical context of Indigenous social justice policy in Australia. Mercer (1987, 1993), Goodall (1988, 1996), Young (1995), Moran (2002) and McGregor (2009) present compelling historical accounts of colonial and settler views, values and social policies relating to Indigenous Australians and their assertions for land and civil rights. Such literature highlights how Indigenous Australians and their assertions for land and civil rights have been viewed as an ongoing problem that has disrupted the colonial project and settler nationalism. These works also stress the injustices that Indigenous Australians have been subject to under the project of colonialism. They also bring to the fore the need of Australian society and of the nation state, to accept and recognise Indigenous Australians, their cultures and interests, as being dynamic, present and central to the re-making of an Australian society.

The body of literature on the historical context of biodiversity conservation in Australia is also substantial. Descriptive publications, centring on historical accounts of specific conservation strategies, such as the declaration and management of protected areas or conservation advocacy, are more prevalent than critical analyses and are often authored by stakeholders. For instance, Goldstein (1979) described the first 100 years of Australia’s national parks, and Hutton and Connors (1999) gave a detailed historical account of the Australian conservation movement, with a focus on particular conservation NGOs. One of the more substantial scholarly contributions is by Goodall (2006), in a comparative history of protected areas in Australia and south-east Asia, which explained the utilitarian motivation of earlier protected area declarations, and noted the marginalisation and displacement of Indigenous Australians by the establishment of such areas. The narrative on the aesthetics of colonial environmentalism presented by Bonyhady (2000), through a review of colonial landscape paintings and laws, also contributes to knowledge on the historical context of conservation.
While many of these works address engagements between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector to varying degrees, none bring the two historical policy landscapes together into a combined narrative.

### 1.3.2 New conservation paradigm

A more detailed review of the international literature on conservation from the late twentieth century-early twenty-first century describes a range of innovative approaches to conservation; the emergence of a new conservation paradigm. The paradigm is characterised by three core features: large-scale approaches to conservation beyond the boundaries of national parks including connectivity corridors; increased roles and influence of the non-state, mainly NGOs; and inclusion of people, the occupation of nature, particularly Indigenous and local peoples, in the conservation landscape.

Large-scale approaches to conservation occur in developed countries of the North and in the developing and predominantly ex-colonial countries of the South, and are promoted by international conservation organisations (Wyborn and Bixler 2013). They include continental and transborder conservation initiatives such as the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative in North America, the Terai Arc Landscape Initiative in Nepal and India, Transfrontier Conservation Areas in Africa and the Danube Carpathian Programme in Europe. Laven et al (2005) reason that large-scale approaches to conservation have developed in response to acknowledgment and recognition of: extensive home ranges and migratory territories requirements of some species; the landscape functional linkages between nature, culture and managed spaces; and the desire to protect cultural landscapes. Examples in the literature support this assertion by Laven et al (2005). For instance, da Silva and Tabarelli (2000), in their influential *Nature* article, urged for the adoption of bioregional planning and a new conservation paradigm to address biodiversity decline in the forests of Brazil because of specific requirements of certain species. And in relation to the linkages between nature, culture and managed spaces, Perfecto and Vandermeer (2008) argued that many tropical agricultural systems have high levels of biodiversity that warrant conservation and stressed the need for a new conservation paradigm that incorporates such systems in a landscape-scale approach. However, Ramutsindela (2007) explains that Transfrontier Conservation Areas in Africa, developed due to a combination of reasons including more political motivated ones than noted by Laven et al (2005), such as the building of a post-apartheid national identity for Afrikaners, influences of globalisation and extensions of community based resource management.
The large-scale approaches in conservation, coupled with the adoption of neo-liberal ideology in many countries, have resulted in an increased role for the non-state and a new politics of scale in conservation. Pasquini et al (2011) demonstrates the increased roles and influence of the non-state, particularly conservation NGOs, by the increase in the number of private conservation reserves. Gorg (2007) explains how landscape-scale approaches are leading to new social- ecological relationships and governance arrangements that accommodate a range of interests and that challenge the historically natural scientific approach to conservation and management of conservation places. Duffy (2006), in a case study from Madagascar, illustrates how large international NGOs and institutions are influencing conservation policy at a national level.

The inclusion of people, particularly Indigenous people, in the conservation space was acknowledged by conservation organisations in the outcomes of the Fifth World Parks Congress in Durban 2003, which recognised that Indigenous people bring diverse and unique knowledge and a commitment to conservation and environmental issues (Vaz and Agama 2013: 141). Kothari (2008) describes how, with a growing international awareness of Indigenous rights and an increase in Indigenous lands in many countries, the role of local and Indigenous communities in conservation is increasingly being recognised. Yet, this feature is also a contested one. For instance, Terborgh (1999) and Oates (2006) contend that for areas of high conservation value, social considerations such as inclusion of Indigenous people should not take precedence over conservation.

The adoption and promotion of the new conservation paradigm in Australia has yet to be confirmed.

1.3.3 Engagements between Indigenous people and conservation

There has been considerable international research into the engagements between Indigenous people and conservation organisations under the new conservation paradigm, particularly on the consequences of such engagements for Indigenous people. This research has helped balance the often ecological focus of conservation research with studies from the social sciences. Although some literature relays positive consequences for Indigenous people in their engagements with conservation organisations, such as the account of conservation NGOs empowering Indigenous and local communities in South America (Alcorn et al 2010), the bulk of the literature portrays negative outcomes for Indigenous people (see Chapin 2004; Brockington and Igoe 2006; Igoe and Croucher 2007; Dowie 2009;
Brockington 2010; Ramutsindela and Noe 2012). This literature focuses predominantly on engagements between Indigenous people and conservation organisations in developing countries. It relays stories of conservation organisations undermining Indigenous and local peoples’ aspirations and governance structures, as well as displacing, excluding and marginalising Indigenous people. Literature on engagements between Indigenous people and conservation organisations under the new paradigm from developed settler societies relate primarily to co- or Indigenous-managed protected areas, particularly in North America and Aotearoa - New Zealand, and describe how perceptions of conservation are being challenged to encompass social and economic development (see Coomes 2007; Berkes 2009; Bennett and Lemelin 2013; Lyver et al 2014; Stronghill et al 2015).

Considerable academic attention has been afforded to engagements between conservation organisations and Indigenous Australians under the old paradigm, when biodiversity conservation centred on the declaration and management of national parks. Adams (2001, 2004) highlighted the inadequacy of state conservation organisations to recognise Indigenous Australians in the establishment and management of protected areas. As mentioned previously, Goodall’s (2006) comparative analysis of protected areas in Australia and south-east Asia makes significant contribution to this body of literature. Smyth (2001) and Bauman and Smyth (2007) explained how Indigenous Australians were often coerced into joint management arrangements with the state in the declaration of national parks. And Horstman and Wightman (2001) described how national parks have been declared without notification or consent from affected Indigenous people. This literature demonstrates that under the old paradigm, conservation organisations, namely the state, inflicted injustices upon Indigenous Australians. Australian Indigenous academic Professor Marcia Langton has also been a strong critic of engagements between the conservation sector and Indigenous Australians. Langton, who has a close relationship with the mining sector, has accused conservationists (or environmentalists) of denying Indigenous Australians opportunities for economic development (see for example Langton 1996, 1998, 2002, 2012). Langton’s criticisms have been controversial and, with her failure to disclose funding from the mining sector in some of her work, have stirred commentary from academics, conservationists and Indigenous Australians (see for example responses to Langton’s ABC Boyer Lecture Series 2012 by Talbot and Sweeney 2012; Vincent 2012; Crook 2013a, 2013b; McClean and Wells 2013; McColl 2013; Rowse 2013). Langton’s work on this topic looks at the nexus between Indigeneity and environmentalism and most of her
criticisms of conservationists (environmentalists) focus on the preservationist views of the old paradigm, such as the wilderness ideal.

However, despite this history, and Australia being lauded as a leader in the involvement of Indigenous people in conservation (Ross et al 2009), there are few examples from the academic literature on engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations under the new paradigm. Langton, mentioned above, has commended the Indigenous Protected Area initiative in Australia (Langton 2012; Langton et al 2005), which comes under the umbrella of the new conservation paradigm. Other notable exceptions are from Pickerill (2008, 2009). Pickerill’s work investigates the use and power of language in engagements between Indigenous Australians and two national conservation NGOs (Pickerill 2008) and commonalities of difference between conservation organisations and Indigenous groups in two case regions (Pickerill 2009). Yet these investigations fall short of getting to the underpinning machinations in the engagements. The lack of interviewee anonymity in Pickerill’s work also raises some questions on the rigour of the research, and whether the reader is being given the corporate line rather than personal views. This latter criticism is supported by Yin (2009), in stressing the need for interviewees to remain anonymous when the research topic is potentially contentious and when the research findings may impact on the interviewees. Otherwise, examples in the literature on contemporary engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations appear indirectly or limited in their scope. For instance, Holmes (2011a, 2011b, 2012) highlighted the complexity of relationships between the conservation sector and Indigenous people in a review of tenure reform processes of the contested landscapes of Australia’s Cape York Peninsula, and Hill et al (2012) found that there is a strong correlation between the amount of Indigenous knowledge integration in environmental management and Indigenous governance structures.

However, these research findings, coupled with the commentary by Langton and opinion pieces on contests between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations (see Fleming 2009 and Kerins 2009), suggest that further research is needed to ascertain whether previous injustices of conservation on Indigenous Australians are manifesting themselves under the new conservation paradigm.
1.3.4 Social justice and recognition

One of the core features of the new conservation paradigm is the occupation of nature; the inclusion of people in the conservation landscape, particularly inclusion of Indigenous people. There is a growing body of literature relating to this aspect of the new conservation paradigm. Most of the literature frames the inclusion of people in conservation as an ethical consideration or an ethical obligation, particularly in relation to poverty reduction in developing countries and North-South relations (see Alcorn et al 2010; Minteer and Miller 2011; Robinson 2011; Miller et al 2011; Sarkar and Montoya 2011). There is only modest consideration of the core feature of inclusion of people under the new conservation paradigm as an issue of social justice (see Perfecto and Vandermeer 2008; Kothari 2008). And surprisingly, there is limited literature on the recognition of Indigenous peoples in conservation under an understanding of environmental justice. The concept of recognition appears obliquely in the literature, for instance, in the work of Hill et al (2012) on integrating indigenous knowledge in environmental governance. Noteworthy exceptions are Adams (2001), Schlosberg and Carruthers (2010) and Whyte (2010). These papers used the concept of recognition to investigate relationships between Indigenous people and conservation, and Indigenous people and eco-tourism respectively. Recognition is a colonial and contested concept, which has drawn criticism from some Indigenous scholars, e.g. Alfred and Tomkins (2010) and Coulthard (2007). However, in Australia the concept of recognition in contemporary national discourse, including national conversations involving Indigenous Australian academics is different. One such academic is Langton, mentioned earlier. Langton’s work centres on issues relating to Indigenous rights and justice, and more recently on the issue of recognition of Indigenous Australians in the Australian Constitution (see Langton 2001, 2011, 2016; Langton et al 2004). Yet despite the work of Adams and Whyte, and Langton’s interests, there is little research under a justice framework that specifically considers the types of processes that conservation organisations employ in their recognition of Indigenous people.

1.3.5 Environmental imaginaries

Recognition is influenced by views and values that need to be articulated and understood in relation to conservation and Indigenous people. Imaginaries are the “the underlying discursive norms that govern communication in social situations” (McGregor A 2004: 594). There is a growing body of literature on imaginaries, crossing several themes, many of which are relevant to the research topic. Connections to the indigenous are a fundamental
element of colonial imaginaries constructed and maintained by settlers (Donaldson and Donaldson 1985; Smith 1985; Thomas 1994; Friedrichsmeyer et al 1998; Prout and Howitt 2009; Bell 2014). The imaginaries of nature, on environmental imaginaries, as initially conceived by Peet and Watts (1996), have been considered by Nesbitt and Weiner (2001) in their investigation into how landed residents of Central Appalachia understand and make use of nature, and Hyndman (2001) in an exploration into differing perceptions of the environmental impact of the large Ok Tedi mine in Papua New Guinea. Andrew McGregor’s (2004) study of environmentally concerned Australians is an important contribution to this topic, and has parallels with “nature-talk” as described by Castree (2004). Further examples from Australia, and the nearby settler society of Aotearoa - New Zealand, explain how environmental imaginaries also highlight understandings of the ontological state (Davison 2008), of national identity (Trigger and Mulcock 2005), and of belonging and attachment to place, having parallels to Indigenous connection to place (Dominy 2001). This concept of environmental imaginaries has been expanded further with the international literature on environmental imaginaries of the indigenous. A number of studies have considered the consequences and impacts of such imaginaries, the environmental imaginaries of the indigenous, on Indigenous peoples in various locations and settings (see Muehlebach 2001; Nadasdy 2005; Valdivia 2005; Swainson and McGregor 2008; Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2013; Harris et al 2013; Pemunta 2013).

Yet this concept of environmental imaginaries on the indigenous in an Australia context arises obliquely, such as the study on suburban backyards by Head and Muir (2006) and in the work of Davison (2008), or is limited to earlier works, such as those by Sackett (1991) and McNiven and Russell (1995). These latter two studies described how conservationists’ views on the idea of wilderness influenced perceptions and images of Indigenous Australians. An understanding of environmental imaginaries on the indigenous from a contemporary Australian context, under a new conservation paradigm, is required.

1.3.6 Scale, territory and governance

Scale, territory and governance are contested geographical concepts (Agnew et al 2003; Agnew 2013). Jonas (2011: 401) contends that the meaning of scale “rises from the context in which the language of scale is deployed by diverse social, political and economic organizations. Scale can be hierarchical, it can be networked and it also can be both”. Most of the theoretical debate relating to scale centres on the concept as an ontological structure. However, Jones (1998) suggests that scale can also be used as an epistemological
structure – an analytical device. Territories are about the negotiated and contested interactions between physical spaces and social processes; they strongly influence and reify power relations (Paasi 2003). Whereas governance concerns the social and political organisation of entities and “extends beyond formal government into the realm of various forms of authority exercised by agents other than states at and across a variety of geographical scales” (Agnew 2013: 1). In the Australian context on co-existence between the nation-state and Indigenous peoples, Professor Richie Howitt has theorised extensively on these concepts, particularly scale (see for example Howitt 2006; Howitt and Suchet-Pearson 2006; Howitt 2012; Howitt et al 2013).

Much of the existing international literature on the engagements between Indigenous people and conservation is framed with the interrelated geographical concepts of scale, territory and governance. For instance, with a case study from Tanzania, Ramutsindela and Noe (2012) examine how large international conservation organisations are developing conservation scales that allow global agendas to dictate local community-designated conservation areas under the auspices of Wildlife Management Areas; Corson and MacDonald (2012) highlight how conservation organisations, both the state and non-state, are expanding the territory of the conservation sector to encompass working landscapes and other land uses; and Sundberg (2006) notes how adoption of neo-liberalist ideologies is resulting in a shifting of governance roles in conservation. And although Howitt and others have written extensively on these concepts in relation to Indigenous Australians and the nation-state, there has been little attention afforded to the specifics of scale, territory and governance of contemporary conservation organisations in Australia and how these specifics relate to or influence engagements with Indigenous people.

### 1.3.7 Maps and mapping

One final concept and literature set that the thesis engages with is maps and mapping. The spatial domains of Indigenous interests in land and of conservation are often discussed with maps. For instance, maps are commonly used by the state and NGOs in portraying conservation and Indigenous-held land. Yet, the use of maps requires caution as they are inherently powerful and misleading, and are therefore problematic. There is a growing body of literature that debates the issues that are inherent in maps and mapping, particularly those based on Western cartographic traditions. Carolan (2009) argued that the use of maps creates a static view that belies the fluidity and dynamic nature of communities and of ecosystems. They also fail to acknowledge the mobility of Indigenous
identities and cultures (Howitt et al 2013). Maps at a national scale, for example, can hide heterogeneity at a smaller-scale.

1.4 Research aim and questions

The aim of the research was to explore engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation under the new conservation paradigm. The research had the premise that effective participation of Indigenous Australians in conservation occurs when conservation is inclusive and just. The research exploration focused on answering the following four questions:

1. What is the historical context of engagements between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector?
2. What is the contemporary context of engagements between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector?
3. How are Indigenous Australians recognised in contemporary engagements with the conservation sector?
4. Why are Indigenous Australians recognised in contemporary engagements with the conservation sector?

1.5 Situating the research and ethical considerations

A number of axiological, ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions are inherent in social research (Guba and Lincoln 2005). These assumptions relate to the motivations and aim of the research. There are also ethical principles relating to the positionality and role of the researcher, particularly as the research centres on engagements with Indigenous people. In order to situate my research, I discuss these assumptions and ethical considerations.

I am influenced in this discussion by the work of Mertens (2007, 2009, 2010, 2012) on the transformative paradigm. I am also influenced by Martin (2003), Louis (2007), Wilson (2001, 2008), Chilisa (2012), Coombes et al (2012a, 2012b, 2014) and Deborah McGregor (2004, 2005), on Indigenous research and decolonising methodologies. These Indigenous scholars have written extensively on Indigenous methodologies, and how such methodologies have developed and/or are promoted in response to the culturally inappropriate methods of non-Indigenous researchers researching the indigenous. Many of them have developed and promoted methodologies that are specific to their own Indigenous identity. In my work with Indigenous Australians in conservation I have become aware of, and learnt to some
extent, Indigenous ways of knowing, understanding and relating to the world, and the
different historical and political context in which many Indigenous Australians lives are
situated. I also understand the need to give a voice to, and empower, Indigenous people in
research that involves them or their lives. In this regard I respected Indigenous research
and decolonising methodologies.

The research was aimed at elucidating and analysing engagements; not collecting
“traditional ecological knowledge”. It was about relationships and it was carried out in a
manner that acknowledged Indigenous knowledge is made up of both social and ecological
relationships that are intertwined and can not necessarily be separated. Deborah McGregor
(2004, 2005), an Anishinaabe scholar from Canada, stressed that relationships are entwined
within such knowledge. Adopting this approach, I was interested in work from the
and Scherrer and Doohan (2013), who highlighted these relationships and stressed the
need to make Indigenous “perspectives visible” (Marika et al 2009: 404) in decision making
processes, governance and partnerships. Where possible, in the research I gave voice to
such perspectives. In my research journey, I also became interested in the emerging work
of Bawaka Country from Northern Australia and the Indigenous ontological concept they
term “co-becoming” and of relational research (see Bawaka Country with Suchet-Pearson
et al 2013; Bawaka Country with Wright et al 2014; Bawaka Country with Wright et al
2015). And although the majority of the field work was completed by the time such works
were published, I tried to respect this concept of relational research during the remaining
part of my journey, particularly as I was analysing, and figuring out my relationship with,
the data.

The research is concerned with ensuring conservation is just. It is informed by critical
theory and post-colonial discourse, and acknowledges and respects the historical context of
the engagements between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector. However,
although the research is informed by post-colonial discourse and acknowledges the
injustices of the past, the research’s emphasis is on new and evolving engagements. Such
engagements not only have the potential to provide alternative ways to achieve
biodiversity outcomes but also to achieve more socially just outcomes. The research is not
about the conflicts over resources (Coombes et al 2012a). It is research “into the
consequences of formal arrangements for implementing Indigenous rights” as called for by
Ethically, the research respects the heterogeneity of Indigenous Australians and diversity of cultures, and respects the specific cultural protocols of Indigenous communities. Through my work with Indigenous Australians in conservation, I have learnt that every family, clan, community and organisation is unique. My work, which has predominantly been in the south-east and the northern regions of the continent, has exposed me to a plethora of different circumstances in which Indigenous Australians live in contemporary society. I have gained a deeper understanding of such diversity from the people, communities and organisations that I have worked with. This understanding formed from being invited into people’s homes, from visiting country together, from sitting for days at meetings and from being instructed on my standing and position in society and how I should relate to others. My research was informed by such understanding and I respected such instructions.

The research was conducted in accordance with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies’ Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (AIATSIS 2012). I negotiated with key organisations and individuals to determine local Indigenous protocols and identify participants. On advice and instructions from participants, each interview was unique as far as setting, timing and the general flow of the conversation. Some interviews were in remote places in the field while others were in city offices. All interviews were conducted in English, although at times some words, particular place names or understandings that do not have an English equivalent, were expressed by the participant in their Indigenous language. During the interviews I would recount from my notes to check I had recorded correctly, which also gave an opportunity for participants to check what they had said and whether they wanted to clarify, add or make changes. I had formal research approval from the Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation, representing the Wunambal Gaambera people, to include the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project as a case study in the research (see Appendix 1).

The rights of participants were respected in the research. All participants, both individuals and organisations, gave permission to be included in the research project, and all interviewees were provided with information on the research and their rights as a participant (see Appendix 2). This information was provided both in written form and verbally. All participants gave both verbal and written consent to the interview and for it to be recorded, and unless otherwise agreed, participants retained anonymity (see Appendix 3). The research project was approved by the University of Wollongong’s Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 4).
The research is based on the social construction of multiple realities. For this research, these constructions are influenced by history, politics, culture and race, as well as by the different values and views on social justice as held by the research participants and by myself as researcher. Ontologically, the research assumes that different versions of reality are privileged over others and that it is important to investigate the power and legitimacy of this privilege. To counter this imbalance, participants determined the research setting, and the research process privileged Indigenous ways of knowing and doing where possible.

Knowledge production in the research was primarily an inductive process that was elucidated by a “dialectical understanding aimed at critical praxis” (Chilisa 2012: 41). The research empowered participants to articulate their views and have a voice. I use these voices in the thesis with the use of quotes, and I ensured that voices included those that are not often heard, such as those from the field. The research process, particularly the data collection, was itself a medium for knowledge elucidation. As knowledge was produced, it was given back to the participants during the course of the research. In accordance with the approval of the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project as a case study (see Appendix 1), the research benefits both Indigenous groups and conservation organisations.

I am embedded in the research topic as an insider, and as such have a connection to the participants and share some commonality with them. These connections manifested in different ways. The participants and I acknowledged and talked about our relationships with mutual friends and our shared experiences, having parallels to Wilson’s (2008) understanding of research as ceremony. I consider that I have the authority and competency to carry out the research because of my professional and personal experiences, my relatedness (see Martin 2003), and my academic practice. This is my embodied knowledge. Yet, I acknowledge that my perspectives of recognition processes may be different from the perspective of Indigenous people. I am aware that as a researcher, I am an agent for social change, and I am relationally accountable (Wilson 2001). I live with that accountability in my continuing work with Indigenous Australians in conservation. I need to be, and am, accountable to the people I work with and spend time with. And my research is contributing knowledge to relationships in my work.

I employed a reflexive approach to the research. I ensured that the process was both transparent and accountable, and was sufficiently reflexive (Probst 2015), so as to promote rigour and not skew the findings. I became more self-aware and critical of my
understandings and views on engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation and discussed my criticisms with my supervisors. I was conscious that I may be identified by some participants as being aligned to Bush Heritage Australia.

Collectively, the assumptions and ethical considerations of the research project situated the research between a transformative research paradigm and an Indigenous research paradigm, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Situating the research between a transformative research paradigm and an Indigenous research paradigm

1.6 Research design

I used an embedded multiple-comparative case study design. Embedded multiple case studies allow for analysis of a single case and a unit within a case, as well as comparative analysis between cases. This strategy allows for multi-level inquiry and for cross-case conclusions to be made. A comparative analysis can elucidate the differences between case studies, and as Castree (2005) noted, investigate the commonalities between them. Yin (2009) explained that the cases must be selected on whether the researcher predicts they will have similar results or contrasting results. For this research, the case studies were selected for the latter.

1.6.1 Introducing the case studies

Taking into account the motivations for the research and my embodied knowledge, the case studies found me. The Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation, representing the
Wunambal Gaambera people, gave permission for the healthy country project to be a case study (see Appendix 1). The additional case study of the Kosciuszko to Coast regional partnership in south-eastern Australia, allowed a comparative analysis with the Wunambal Gaambera project. However, I felt that both these case studies lacked some context. As Mertens (2010) suggested, the researcher might not know all the cases until part way through the research. It was not until archival and spatial analysis of the relevant policy landscapes identified emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land (see Chapter 3), that this context became evident. Northern Australia became the case study for the geography of overlap, where conservation interests intersect with Indigenous-held land, and the Great Eastern Ranges connectivity corridor became the case study for the geography of dichotomy, where there was conservation interest yet little Indigenous-held land. The Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project and the Kosciuszko to Coast then were relabelled as associated partnerships for the respective case studies. These partnerships are the embedded units of analysis in the case studies. Figure 4 illustrates the embedded multiple case study design of the research and Figure 5 shows the location of the case studies and respective associated partnerships.

Figure 4: Embedded multiple case study design of the research (Figure adapted from Yin 2009: 46)
1.6.2 Geography of overlap

1.6.2.1 Case study – Northern Australia

Northern Australia is a place less defined by state boundaries than by remoteness, climate and socio-political landscapes. It is in the wet dry tropics, covering nearly 1.5 million km², crossing three Australian provincial (State/Territory) jurisdictions. It is also a complex and contested place, with conservation and Indigenous interests often dominating debates on its future. It has been the battleground of some of Australia’s most well known environmental campaigns. Despite this notoriety, Northern Australia has a small yet rapidly growing population, and has a proportionately high Indigenous population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). The Northern Australian economy is based on mining and other extractive industries such as commercial fishing, as well as pastoralism, tourism and government services (Woinarski et al 2007). There have also been various suggestions by successive governments to develop Northern Australia as the food bowl for the nation or as the gateway to Asia (Australian Government 2012a, 2015; Law 2013).

Tenure systems in Northern Australia are administratively complex. Over 75% of the land in Northern Australia is held by the Crown, mainly under pastoral lease, and approximately 20% of land is held by Indigenous people (CSIRO 2013). Land rights legislation in the late
1970s and early 1980s resulted in considerable areas of land being returned to traditional Aboriginal owners in the Northern Territory and Queensland. The passing of Australia’s Native Title Act 1993 has seen the majority of successful claims being determined in Northern Australia. For Western Australia, in particular, with no statutory land rights system and most title in the north held by the Crown, native title has been the main mechanism for Indigenous people to gain some control over land. These Indigenous lands are mainly held under various forms of community title, different from other types of land ownership by non-Indigenous Australians. Under native title processes, Aboriginal groups across Northern Australia are also entering into Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) - formal agreements negotiated between native title groups and other parties, usually non-Indigenous land owners, about the use and management of an area of land and/or water. In addition to this complexity, tenure reform in all three jurisdictions is continuing to transform landscapes. For instance, pastoral leases are being converted to longer-term rangeland leases that allow for more diverse uses, including conservation.

The large expanses of Northern Australia’s tropical savannah woodland support a high diversity of plants and animals, affording them global conservation significance (Woinarski et al 2007). Protected areas cover considerable parts of the area, and national parks managed in partnership with Indigenous Australians make up a significant portion of the conservation estate, particularly in the Northern Territory and Queensland. The dedication of a number of Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) in recent years has further increased the size of the conservation estate (Australian Government 2012b). The area’s World Heritage status is also notable with the listing of Kakadu National Park, the Wet Tropics and the Great Barrier Reef.

As well as the involvement of the state in conservation in Northern Australia, there is a suite of conservation NGOs, from large internationals, to national and regional organisations. They are drawn to the area because of threats to biodiversity by development, and because of the area’s national and international conservation significance. The conservation NGOs operating in Northern Australia have varied institutional norms and practices. Some focus on campaigning, lobbying and advocacy, while others work in partnership with land owners and Indigenous communities. A number also acquire and manage land for conservation. Their work is funded by a combination of private donations and public funds. Some work closely with the provincial governments while others also work with the Australian Government. A number also promote alternative
economies for Northern Australia based on conservation and culture, rather than a future reliant on resource extraction and pastoralism (see Hill and Turton 2004; Hill et al 2006; Woinarski et al 2007; Altman 2012). Many conservation NGOs work at a landscape-scale. The state, especially the Australian Government and the provincial governments of Northern Territory and Western Australia, is also promoting and supporting this large-scale approach to conservation through connectivity conservation, developing Northern Australia as a conservation landscape. These state conservation initiatives all involve NGOs, public-private partnerships, and to varying extents, Indigenous communities.

It is important to note that during my research various political processes were being played out in Northern Australia, in relation to both conservation and Indigenous interests. Field work and interviews were conducted during a time that epitomised and affirmed Northern Australia as a complex and contested place. Several large-scale development proposals and planning processes were being negotiated, and most related to the research topic. A number of participant organisations and participants were involved; either objecting to proposals and/or sitting at the negotiating table. This did impact on the research. For instance, a number of interviewees spoke openly of sensitivities surrounding negotiations between and within conservation and Indigenous interests but requested some parts of their interview not be recorded. One potential participant, having verbally agreed to participate in the research, withdrew and declined to be interviewed because of these sensitivities.

1.6.2.2 Associated partnership – Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project

The associated partnership, the embedded unit, of the Northern Australian case study is the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project. The project centres on a partnership between an Indigenous native title group, the Wunambal Gaambera people, and a number of conservation organisations, the main one being Bush Heritage Australia, a national not-for-profit conservation NGO. Wunambal Gaambera Country is in the north-west Kimberley region of Australia. It covers 1.6 million ha of sea and over 900 000 ha of land, and has international, national and regional conservation significance with a rich diversity of plants and animals, including many endemics and listed threatened species.

Today, there are approximately 400 Wunambal Gaambera people. At the outbreak of WWII Wunambal Gaambera people were moved off their ancestral homelands by police patrols and taken to missions in the region. Since that time, it has been difficult for them to return
as there are few roads, a lack of resources and people have become dependent on schools, health clinics and other services in settlements. One extended family lives on their ancestral homelands. In 1999, the Wunambal Gaambera people lodged a native title claim under the *Native Title Act 1993*. The determination process was finalised in 2011.

### 1.6.3 Geography of dichotomy

#### 1.6.3.1 Case study – Great Eastern Ranges

The south-eastern case study, the Great Eastern Ranges initiative, is a conservation corridor that aims to connect a 3,600 km stretch of land with remnant intact native vegetation near Australia’s eastern seaboard. It includes Australia’s most extensive mountain range, the Great Dividing Range, as well as the coastal Great Escarpment. At the time of the research, the initiative was restricted to the provincial jurisdictions of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. The Great Eastern Ranges is one of Australia’s major corridor initiatives listed under the National Wildlife Corridor Plan (Australian Government 2012c). It encompasses several large river catchments, many of which protect the water supplies for the settlements on the eastern seaboard. Conservation interests in the corridor centre on protected areas, natural resource management, such as ecological restoration and revegetation on rural lands, and catchment management. Some areas have been impacted severely by logging, clearing for agriculture and more recently by large coal mines, resulting in considerable areas of total loss or fragmentation of native ecosystems. The corridor contains some of Australia’s largest urban areas and capital cities, as well as their surrounding peri-urban fringes, and regional rural lands. The Indigenous population in the area of the corridor is the highest in the country (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). Yet there is little Indigenous-held land. Most of these lands were returned through land rights legislation rather than by native title determinations.

The tropical and sub-tropical forests and woodlands of the corridor are recognised as some of the “most biodiverse in the continent” (Mackey et al 2010: 19). There are many protected areas, predominantly state owned and managed national parks, including Australia’s first national park, the Royal National Park. Historically, Indigenous people have had to contest some lands with conservation in the declaration of these protected areas (Adams 2004). Many were declared as an outcome of Regional Forest Agreements in the late 1990s. There are also numerous Aboriginal owned jointly managed national parks. The national parks are relatively small in size compared to their northern counterparts. There is a small number of private reserves along the corridor, owned by Bush Heritage Australia,
and several IPAs have also been dedicated. The corridor includes the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

The Great Eastern Ranges initiative was formally established in 2010. It involves a consortium of conservation NGOs and state-based agencies. Supporters of the corridor initiative promote the ecological, economic and social benefits of the corridor including species and ecosystem adaptation to climate change, carbon sequestration and the protection of water catchments (see Mackey et al 2010).

1.6.3.2 Associated partnership – Kosciuszko to Coast

The Kosciuszko to Coast partnership is the embedded unit of the Great Eastern Ranges case study. The Kosciuszko to Coast partnership links the high country areas of southern New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory to the coast 150 km away. The area of the partnership has a long association with conservation in the form of natural resource management programs, primarily through the forest sector and more recently the management of protected areas. It is also an area in which many Indigenous people reside, mainly in small communities along the coast and in the hinterland. Some Indigenous communities are involved in conservation management, either through protected areas or other natural resource management programs such as weed control programs in river catchments. The Kosciuszko to Coast corridor also includes areas of urban and peri-urban settlements, as well as rural lands, some of which are transitioning from a rural productive economy to a multi-functional economy incorporating both production and amenity-oriented lifestyles (see Gill et al 2010).

The Kosciuszko to Coast partnership project was conceived by Bush Heritage Australia staff and others in 2005, when they saw an opportunity to develop a landscape approach to conservation in the region, with a Bush Heritage Australia property as the strategic anchor. The partnership includes Bush Heritage Australia, Greening Australia, provincial and regional conservation NGOs, the relevant government environment agencies, and regional and local catchment management groups focused on ecological restoration and revegetation.
1.7 Methods

This is a mixed methods research project. Mixed methods are suited to the case study methodology (Baxter 2010). The research employs inductive and deductive research methods. The inductive research methods were used to generate new ideas and concepts about engagements between Indigenous people and conservation. They were used in the initial stages of the research project to reveal spatial and policy patterns related to engagements between conservation and Indigenous Australians. Deductive methods were used to ascertain how conservation recognises Indigenous people and interests. Inductive methods were used again at the final stage of the research project to elucidate conservation’s imaginaries of the indigenous. The complexity of the project warranted this mixed method approach.

Historical and contemporary primary source documents and images of participant organisations and other archival material related to the topic were reviewed and analysed. The documents, images and materials included maps, strategies, policies, promotional materials and other publications. As the research had the ontological assumption that the construction of reality is influenced by history, and the epistemological assumption that the production of knowledge is also influenced by history, it was important to include archival material in the research. The archival materials were in their primary form and digital representations in the form of scanned records sourced from libraries. I also examined government grant approval notifications and submissions to state processes.

The documents and archival materials were initially analysed by critically considering them like pieces in a puzzle; carefully and repetitively reading, analysing and interrogating them to elucidate a pattern or formulate a “picture” of their social implications. Such documents and materials have inherent power, reflecting “the outlooks and understandings of the dominant groups in the national context” (Roche 2010: 183) at a particular time.

Contemporary maps were overlain with each other to elucidate the spatial aspect and national scale of conservation under the new conservation paradigm, and the intersection with Indigenous-held lands. The contemporary documents and images were also used later in the research process to validate themes emerging from interviews and observations.

Observations of engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation were made in various contexts. I observed engagements at a symposium on Innovation for 21st Century Conservation convened by the Australian Committee of the International Union for
Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and at an Indigenous Protected Area managers meeting. Although my attendance at these forums was primarily as an observer, I was also a participant. As part of my insider positionality, I am a member of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas. I attended the IUCN 2014 World Parks Congress in Sydney to observe the types of engagements that were being promoted by conservation. I sat in on numerous meetings of the case studies, particularly for the associated partnerships of the Kosciuszko to Coast and the Wunambal Gaambera project. I participated in two multi-day workshops on *Indigenous Values in the Landscape* in the geography of dichotomy (see Figures 6 and 7). These workshops, hosted by a small conservation NGO, Friends of Grasslands, a partner in Kosciuszko to Coast, were co-presented with a local Indigenous man recognised as an Indigenous knowledge holder. They were attended by property owners seeking to investigate alternative ways of managing the land, as well as a number of Indigenous ranger cadets and their mentors. For the associated partnership of the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project, my work on the project prior to and during the research period enhanced the research. I also had a multi-day stay at a private wildlife sanctuary, owned and managed by the national conservation NGO Australian Wildlife Conservancy, in Northern Australia, where I participated in visitor activities. Collectively these observations enhanced my understanding of the contemporary situation, provided further opportunities to discuss the research and the research topic with participants, and helped maintain my insider status.

Figure 6: Photo of field activity during an *Indigenous Values in the Landscape* workshop showing participants and convenor. (Photo: Heather Moorcroft)
Observations were recorded with handwritten notes. As Kearns (2010) noted, such observations are primary observations. Secondary observations were made with review of images and photographs in promotional material of participant organisations. Both the primary and secondary observations complemented other data sources.

Through my work, the initial literature review and documentary analysis, I was aware of the many conservation and Indigenous organisations that operate and are involved in the study areas and associated partnerships. I selected key individuals as well as organisations that reflected the diversity of the conservation activities in the study areas. The organisations included international conservation NGOs, national conservation NGOs, state-based agencies, regional Indigenous and conservation organisations, and local Aboriginal and conservation NGOs. These organisations incorporated those that used advocacy and support as their main *modus operandi*, and those that were land owners and managers.

From the key individuals and organisations, 58 participants were interviewed (see Table 1). The interviewees were: Indigenous and non-Indigenous land owners; Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees of organisations at field, senior and executive level; independent consultants; and those associated with state processes. Some interviewees, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have moved between these roles. Both male and female participants were interviewed. Interviewees included those who had worked in the inter-
cultural conservation space for many years as well as those with recent experience. Thirteen participants identified as Indigenous Australian. This group comprised those living and/or working on their ancestral homelands as well as those who worked away from their ancestral homelands for conservation organisations at various levels. Indigenous participants were keen to represent their employer organisation as well as speak as a representative of their ancestral community. These participants clarified this definition during the course of the interviews. It was important to get a range and balance of views between gender, age, place and level of involvement. It was also important to include voices from the field that might not otherwise be heard. Fourteen interviewees had experience working across both geographies or at a national level.

Paraphrasing Dunn (2010), the main reasons for using interviews were to: (i) fill a knowledge gap that other methods were unable to address, (ii) examine complex motivations and behaviours, (iii) collect a range of meanings, opinions and experiences, and (iv) show respect and empower participants. Interviews were semi-structured and sought to gain information on the interviewee’s background and role, the role of participant organisations, as well as participants’ experiences in and perceptions of engagements between conservation and Indigenous Australians (see Appendix 5).

The interviews were audio recorded and hand written notes were taken. Interviews were 30 to 150 minutes. Interviews were carried out face to face, either in the field or at a place nominated by the participants. However, due to logistical reasons, six interviews were conducted on the phone. These included both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants, all of whom were familiar and comfortable with phone conversations.

The interviews were transcribed and with the observation notes were analysed through coding. Descriptive coding organised data into categories such as who, what and where in relation to engagements between Indigenous interests and conservation. Analytical coding revealed emerging themes on views and perceptions of those involved in engagements. I have used a selection of direct quotes from numerous participants in some of the thesis chapters. Including these participant narratives adds depth to the emerging meanings and understandings. Including narratives of Indigenous participants is also consistent with the Indigenous research and decolonising methodologies mentioned earlier in 1.5 Situating the research and ethical considerations), and the need to give a voice to, as well as empower, Indigenous people in research that involves them or concerns their lives.
Table 1: Participant organisations and individuals interviewed, with date of interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associated case study/unit of analysis</th>
<th>Participating organisation/individual (no. of interviewees)</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GER</td>
<td>ACT Government (3)</td>
<td>Nov 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GER</td>
<td>Greening Australia (1)</td>
<td>Nov 2011</td>
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<td>GER</td>
<td>Independent consultant (1)</td>
<td>Feb 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GER</td>
<td>Nature Conservation Trust (1)</td>
<td>Nov 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GER</td>
<td>NSW Government (1)</td>
<td>Feb 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>GER</td>
<td>OzGreen (1)</td>
<td>Nov 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GER/K2C</td>
<td>Bush Heritage Australia (1)</td>
<td>Apr 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GER/K2C</td>
<td>Friends of Grasslands (1)</td>
<td>Apr 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GER/K2C</td>
<td>Greening Australia (1)</td>
<td>Oct 2011</td>
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<td>GER/K2C</td>
<td>Independent consultant (1)</td>
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<td>GER/K2C</td>
<td>K2C (1)</td>
<td>Oct 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>GER/K2C</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority (1)</td>
<td>Nov 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GER/K2C</td>
<td>Southern Catchment Management Authority (1)</td>
<td>Nov 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>GER/K2C</td>
<td>Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Co-ordinating Committee (1)</td>
<td>Oct 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Australian Conservation Foundation (3)</td>
<td>Jun &amp; Jul 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Balkanu Aboriginal Corporation (2)</td>
<td>Jun 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Birds Australia (1)</td>
<td>Jul 2011</td>
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<td>NA</td>
<td>Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation (2)</td>
<td>Jun 2011</td>
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<td>NA</td>
<td>Environ Kimberley (2)</td>
<td>Jul &amp; Aug 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>GhostNets Australia (1)</td>
<td>Jun 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Girringun Aboriginal Corporation (1)</td>
<td>Jun 2011</td>
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<td>NA</td>
<td>Independent consultant (1)</td>
<td>Jun 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>Jun 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA/WGHCP</td>
<td>Australian Government (1)</td>
<td>Nov 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA/WGHCP</td>
<td>Bush Heritage Australia (1)</td>
<td>Jun 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA/WGHCP</td>
<td>Kimberley Land Council (3)</td>
<td>Jul 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA/WGHCP</td>
<td>Wunambah Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation (4)</td>
<td>Jul 2011</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Australian Wildlife Conservancy (1)</td>
<td>Jul 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA &amp; GER or NAT</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA &amp; GER or NAT</td>
<td>IUCN/World Commission on Protected Areas (1)</td>
<td>Nov 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA &amp; GER or NAT</td>
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<td>Apr 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA &amp; GER or NAT</td>
<td>The Wilderness Society (2)</td>
<td>Apr &amp; Dec 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Northern Australia = NA; Great Eastern Ranges = GER; Kosciuszko to Coast = K2C; Wunambah Gaambera Healthy Country Project = WGHCP; National = NAT
1.8 Thesis structure and chapter description

The thesis is made up of three parts. Part one is this introductory chapter. Part two consists of five results chapters that present the different findings of the research and address the research aim. Part three is the concluding chapter.

In Part two, Chapter 2, I chart the policy landscapes of the two broader themes of the research: conservation and Indigenous social justice in Australia. Using archival analysis, I bring together data sets from these two policy landscapes since the first invasion of the continent in 1788, and discuss the changes over time, highlighting their growing intersection. With additional documentary analysis, in Chapter 3 I, with Adams, focus on the latest paradigm in conservation to examine recent spatial manifestations of the two policy landscapes and identify emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land in Australia. To balance the often ecologically focused character of conservation, we also raise some socially framed research questions related to recognition of Indigenous people and interests in these emerging geographies. With data from interviews, observations and further documentary analysis, in Chapter 4 I begin to ascertain what processes the conservation sector in Australia employs to recognise Indigenous people and interests in the emerging geographies. In Chapter 5, I, with numerous co-authors, present one of the examples cited in Chapter 4: the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project. In Chapter 6 I examine one of the reasons why the conservation sector in Australia recognises Indigenous people and interests by looking at the imaginaries of the indigenous. The links between the five results chapters and the research questions are depicted in Figure 8.

In Part three, Chapter 7, I summarise the key findings of the research, highlight the conceptual advances of the research to the relevant disciplines, and discuss the contribution of the research to on-ground practices and policy development. I also make recommendations for future research and include some personal reflections.

The order of results chapters corresponds with the development of ideas in the research project. One exception is Chapter 5, Conservation planning in a cross-cultural context: the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project in the Kimberley, Western Australia. This chapter was the first chapter written and was co-authored with eight others. The chapter was written with numerous Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors, and was written with field practitioners in mind rather than academics or policy makers. The other results
chapters, i.e. chapters 2, 3, 4 and 6, were written in the order as presented in the thesis. However, they were not initially written as four discrete chapters, as I discuss below.

Figure 8: Flow chart showing the links between the five results chapters

Chapters 2 and 3 emerged from one paper that I prepared looking at the context of engagements between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector. I charted the increase in Aboriginal-held land in Australia and the increase in conservation areas to show how the two policy landscapes were becoming linked. In considering these two policy landscapes, it became evident that particular triggers in both policy landscapes in the latter part of the 20th Century had significant impact on how the link between the two was strengthening, at least in relation to the spatial manifestation. It became obvious that I needed to unpack this contemporary era in further detail. Hence, I separated the research
questions into the historical and the contemporary context and reconfigured the chapter into two; with the first investigating the historical trajectories of the two policy landscapes from settlement to contemporary times, and the second looking at the contemporary context in more detail and the particular triggers that have brought the policy landscapes closer together. These two papers became Chapter 2, *Paradigms, paradoxes and a propitious niche: perspectives on conservation and Indigenous social justice policy in Australia* and Chapter 3, *Emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land in Australia* respectively. Michael Adams co-authored Chapter 3.

Having set both the historical and contemporary policy context of engagements in chapters 2 and 3, I then set about looking at how and why Indigenous Australians are recognised, or not, in engagements. I looked at how conservation organisations recognised Indigenous people and Indigenous interests in the way they operated, such as in deciding where they worked, who they worked with, how they made decisions, how they promoted and portrayed their work and how they went about their *modus operandi*. This necessarily meant looking at the institutional and cultural norms of conservation organisations and their influence on engagements. However, by combining the how and why I limited the attention I could give to either. I knew that little attention had been afforded to how Indigenous Australians were recognised by conservation organisations in engagements under the new paradigm. Similarly, I knew that little attention had also been afforded to the institutional and cultural norms of conservation organisations. I found I was engaging with two different literature sets; one on imaginaries, belonging, identity and world views, the other on social justice. I separated the how and why into two questions and again re-configured the larger paper into two, resulting in Chapter 4, *A spectrum of recognition: Indigenous peoples and interests in conservation in Australia* and Chapter 6, *(Re-) imagining the indigenous in conservation*.  

As mentioned above, the paper which is presented in the thesis as Chapter 5, *Conservation planning in a cross-cultural context: the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project in the Kimberley, Western Australia*, was written first. As this chapter was written prior to the development of ideas about emerging geographies and analysis on recognition processes, the concepts presented are in a different context to the other chapters. However, the project discussed in the chapter represents a transformative recognition process as outlined in Chapter 4, even though the terminology and conceptual framework are
presented differently. Therefore, I presented this paper in the thesis as Chapter 5, directly following the chapter on recognition processes.

There is overlap between the results chapters, particularly in the introduction of each and in the methods sections. Yet they each contribute to conceptual advances and engage with different literature and present different ideas. The results chapters are written in a manuscript style suitable for publication. To assist with the flow of the thesis, section heading and figure numbers have been altered and the reference style has been changed so it is consistent across the whole thesis. Chapters 2, 3 and 5 were published during the course of the research and chapters 4 and 6 have been submitted for publication, with Chapter 6 accepted with revisions and Chapter 4 under review at time of final submission of the thesis. Collectively the chapters document the exploration into engagements between conservation and Indigenous Australians and look at the how and why of engagements under the new conservation paradigm.

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Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Canberra: CSIRO


Part two: Results chapters
Chapter 2: Paradigms, paradoxes and a propitious niche: conservation and Indigenous social justice policy in Australia

Publication details

Chapter note
The chapter is a reproduction of the published article. The text is copied from the published article. The heading and figure numbering and the referencing style have been altered to fit the thesis formatting.
Abstract
In Australia, redressing past injustices and recognising Indigenous peoples’ spiritual and cultural connections to land have resulted in the return of significant amounts of land to Indigenous people. Parallel to this, in attempts to address declining biodiversity, innovative and neo-liberal approaches to conservation under a new paradigm have been promoted. The role and influence of the non-state sector are increasing, and Indigenous peoples’ involvement in conservation is also growing. This paper reviews the history of conservation and Indigenous social justice policy in Australia. It describes how the social justice agenda has been the primary motivator of returning land to Indigenous Australians, and historically has been the driver and catalyst for Indigenous peoples’ involvement in conservation, whilst the conservation agenda has increased conservation on private lands and the role and influence of the non-state conservation sector. The paper reveals how the trajectories of conservation and Indigenous social justice have become intrinsically linked with the emergence of new paradigms, providing opportunities for a propitious niche. Yet it also shows how the two trajectories have manifested themselves with a paradox of disparity; achievements secured under an Indigenous social justice agenda are being enjoyed by conservation under the new paradigm, whilst Indigenous social justice is increasingly becoming dependent on a conservation agenda.

Key words: conservation, Indigenous social justice, Australia, Indigenous land, conservation NGOs, policy, paradigm

2.1 Introduction
In Australia, social justice issues of Indigenous disadvantage and recognition are fundamentally grounded in the rights to land and sea. Colonial processes of settlement ignored and denied Indigenous Australians of these rights, resulting in the majority of the continent being held as private or quasi private land, for example, leasehold, under Australian law. Persistent Aboriginal activism has led to social movements aimed at redressing past injustices of dispossession and to judicial rulings recognising Indigenous connections to land. The policy and legislative processes that have resulted are re-labelling and returning some of the residual lands, the public lands held by the Crown, to Indigenous land. This has resulted in a significant amount of Indigenous-held land under Australian law. Yet despite this, Indigenous Australians remain socially disadvantaged.
As well as the British colonisers imposing their system of land, there was also systematic alteration of the land. The state sanctioned and supported the methodical clearing of vegetation, the changing of waterways and the introduction of new species. This active modification of the landscape and waterways, coupled with the cessation of Aboriginal fire regimes as a result of the removal of Indigenous Australians from their homelands, resulted in significant environmental destruction and species loss. Environmental campaigns urged the protection of nature, particularly for conservation of certain places and species. Yet despite the declaration and management of national parks, the environmental crisis continued. Other approaches to conservation were sought.

Australia embraced the latest conservation paradigm (Moorcroft and Adams 2014). Emerging under the guise of ecologically sustainable development (ESD) in the late twentieth century, this newest conservation paradigm is characterised by concepts such as ecosystem services, working landscapes and collaborations (see Phillips 2003; Perfecto and Vandermeer 2008). It adopts neo-liberalist social and economic ideologies of decentralisation and shrinking state services, resulting in an increase in conservation on private lands and an increase in the role of the non-state sector (see Pasquini et al 2011). Conservation efforts are often carried out at large spatial scales and involve a myriad of public–private partnerships.

Under the earlier approach to conservation, Indigenous Australians’ involvement was predominantly through state-oriented processes, such as jointly managed national parks. Under the new paradigm, the relationship between Indigenous Australians and conservation is changing, and recent literature describes engagements between non-state organisations, particularly conservation NGOs, and Indigenous Australians (see Cooke 2012; Moorcroft et al 2012; Fitzsimons and Looker 2013) and the development of innovative partnerships (Hill et al 2012). The new paradigm has also opened up opportunities for Indigenous people to be supported in their cultural responsibilities of “caring for country”, carrying out their cultural responsibilities in the management of ancestral lands and seas. However, both international and Australian research suggest that not all engagements under the new conservation paradigm are positive for Indigenous Australians (see Kerins 2009, Holmes 2011).

This paper aims to constructively inform engagements with Indigenous Australians under the new conservation paradigm. I review archival records, historical accounts and
publications of state and non-state organisations, as well as the research literature, to analyse the changing policy and legislative landscapes of conservation and Indigenous social justice as they relate to the development of new paradigms. I consider the consequences of the relationship between these paradigms with the increasing involvement of Aboriginal people in conservation whilst highlighting the fickleness inherent in this relationship; a relationship that is fraught with paradoxes as well as the possibility of a propitious niche. I stress the need to consider such perceptions in light of contemporary and potential future engagements. I use maps to represent the spatial aspects of the policy landscapes through a chronology of different eras. The paper covers the time since the beginning of invasion and settlement in 1788 until 2014, and is organised into four eras. The eras reflect Australian policy eras and the evolving paradigms of conservation and Indigenous social justice agendas.

2.2 Utilitarianism and protectionism: 1788 - mid-1900s

With the first invasion in 1788, the colony of New South Wales was founded, and despite engaging with the Indigenous people, the British inaccurately applied the concept of terra nullius, meaning “land belonging to no one”. The application of this “legal fiction” (Howitt 2012: 819) allowed the Crown to acquire and own the land. It allowed the Crown to introduce the feudal tenure system, where private land ownership is dependent on a grant of title from the Crown. This system of land ownership was rolled out across the new self-governing colonies as they were established, and then to the provincial jurisdictions with Federation in 1901.

Policy and legislation concerning land during this era were centred on developing the colonies. The aims of the *Crown Lands Alienation Act 1861* and the *Crown Lands Occupation Act 1861* in the colony of New South Wales were to expand agricultural development and to end the squattocracy monopoly on land ownership (NSW Government 2012). Such Acts transformed land ownership in the colonies. Reflecting the environmental paradigm of this era, they also promoted vegetation clearing, the introduction of new species and the utilitarian purpose of natural resources (Goodall 2006).

This utilitarianism view of the environment was not only promoted by the state. The bushwalking movement used the art of cartography to lobby authorities, explicitly redrawing tenure boundaries to open a space for the new land management category of “national park” (Figure 9). In 1879 “The National Park”, Australia’s first national park, and
the second in the world, now known as Royal National Park, was declared. Within 15 years of Federation in 1901 all jurisdictions in Australia had established national parks and, in keeping with the paradigm of the time, were managed for forestry and recreation. Australia’s first conservation NGO, possibly the world’s first, the Northern District Forest Conservation League, formed in 1888 to lobby the government to protect forests for future use (Bonyhady 2000).

Figure 9: Bushwalker and amateur cartographer Myles Dunphy’s 1933 map of a proposed “Blue Mountains National Park with Primitive Areas”. Much of the area outlined in the map has since become part of the Blue Mountains National Park. Source: Goldstein (1979).
More political space was afforded to the environment with the emergence of scientific conservation in the colonies (Guha 2000). The release of G P Marsh’s publication *Man and nature* in America in 1864, highlighting the destruction of the environment and promoting public ownership and conservation of natural resources, was used in the colonies by prominent activists and the new natural history societies to lobby governments for the protection of resources, and by the late 1800s Australia’s own environment movement was emerging (Hutton and Connors 1999). Some of the first national not-for-profit conservation NGOs, the Australasian Ornithologist’s Union, The Gould League and The Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia, also formed within the first decade of Federation urging environmental protection (Hutton and Connors 1999), and in some cases, the state responded by passing legislation such as the New South Wales *Birds and Animals Protection Act 1918*.

This growing concern to protect the environment for its intrinsic value, particularly certain species and places, reflected a global trend towards a more preservationist paradigm and the term conservation began to be used. For instance, the formation of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1948 arose from interests in protecting nature, particularly certain species (Holdgate 1999), and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) was formed in the USA in 1951 “to save threatened natural areas” (TNC 2012).

Paradoxically, whilst the wider non-Indigenous community of the colonies, and following Federation, the nation, was expanding its horizons, Indigenous Australians, the continent’s first conservationists and protected area managers (see Rose 1996; Worboys et al 2001), were subject to colonial processes of non-recognition, denial, dispossession and marginalisation. Social policy in this era was aimed at upholding colonial interests. As with other settler colonies, society was characterised by a silencing or dismissal of the indigenous (Moran 2002). Under this paradigm in settler colonialism, Indigenous people were exposed to an array of policy incursions aimed at preventing them from interfering or interrupting the colonial project.

With invasions continuing, Indigenous people resisted the settlement of their lands by the British with what would be the beginning of persistent and continuing campaigns (Goodall 1996). The state response to these early campaigns, unlike the response afforded to the opening up of the political space for conservation, was intolerance; Aboriginal people were
hindering the colonial project. Harsh punishments were instituted and in some regions martial law was proclaimed (Goodall 1996).

An Indigenous social justice agenda of protectionism was employed. Acting as an ex-officio of the state, the church was granted lands for the “protection” of Aboriginal people. The first grant was in 1825 when the colonial government of New South Wales awarded 40 km² to the philanthropically funded London Missionary Society to run a mission for Aborigines (Mitchell 2011). Aboriginal people themselves tried to negotiate claims for land during this period. For instance one of these claims, known as Batman’s Treaty, involved members of the Kulin clan claiming an area of land held by John Batman’s Port Phillip Association in 1835. But these attempts were not recognised by the colonial authorities (Attwood 2003). Colonial land title processes were discriminatory, with non-Indigenous peoples’ claims for land favoured over claims by Indigenous people.

Official “Protectors” were assigned to regions to spend time with the Aboriginal people to help them become “civil” and Christian. When this approach failed, the authorities set aside lands as Aboriginal reserves and stations. Many Aboriginal people were confined to these government reserves and stations, as well as to the church-run missions. Such institutions were usually located on the edge of towns, in regional or remote areas close to the expanding pastoral industry (Figure 10), and continued well into the mid-1900s. As part of this protectionist agenda, Aboriginal children were also removed from their families and sent to native schools and children’s homes (Haebich 2000).

One of the most influential pieces of protectionist legislation during this era was Queensland’s *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*. This Act not only controlled the sale and use of opium, but it also allowed for the establishment of reserves, the appointment of “fit and proper people” as “Aboriginal Protectors” to forcibly remove Aboriginal people to such reserves, the regulation of “half-caste” Aborigines and the placement of Aboriginal people into service. Similar legislation was enacted in other jurisdictions.

The reserves, missions and homes, provided cheap labour to the developing regions, reinforcing the imaginary of Aboriginal people being of a lower class, confined to discrete, often remote, places. Invasion and settlement continued, and new legislation, such as the New South Wales Crowns Lands Acts, resulted in further marginalisation, restricting the land available to those Aboriginal people not already held in institutions.
Figure 10: Map showing Aboriginal reserves and the like as in July 1962. This map illustrates the general remoteness of many Aboriginal reserves and missions of the era, as well as the limited geographical area of such places. Source: Minister for Territories for National Aborigines Day (1962).

In contrast to the reserves established under legislation, a considerable number of reserves in the south-east of the continent were initiated by Aboriginal people themselves. Political space for Indigenous social justice occurred with a resurgence of Indigenous land rights campaigns in the mid- to the late 1800s (Goodall 1996). The introduction of new agricultural practices resulted in Aboriginal people being forced off properties where they had worked, reducing their ability to access their ancestral lands – their “country” – and carry out their cultural responsibilities under traditional law. In protest Aboriginal people set up camps on their traditional lands and demanded the authorities grant them the land. The state responded to these campaigns with the establishment of Aboriginal reserves. Some of the reserves were run as successful farms well into the 1900s, allowing people to maintain traditional languages, carry out cultural responsibilities and maintain their own social organisational structures (Goodall 1988; Vertigan 1988; Attwood 2003). However, many of these reserves were later closed when the land was resumed for development.
2.3 The campaigns era: mid-1900s - early 1980s

In the post-Second World War era, wilderness campaigns grew, particularly in opposition to the economic development agenda of conservative governments of the 1960s. Campaigns included saving and protecting “national places” such as Lake Pedder and the Franklin River in south-west Tasmania from inundation with the construction of hydroelectric dams and the Alligator Rivers/Arnhem Land region in the Northern Territory from uranium mining (Figure 11). With these campaigns, more powerful national environmental NGOs emerged, such as the Australian Conservation Foundation in 1966. Adopting pluralist strategies of identifying wilderness areas and urging legislative protection, the environmental movement which had emerged late in the previous century “remobilised and transformed itself” (Hutton and Connors 1999: 3).

Figure 11: Australian Conservation Foundation’s map showing the location of wilderness areas in Australia in 1975. Maps such as this one highlight the focus of the conservation agenda on protecting national places. Source: Australian Conservation Foundation (1975).

Responses to the political space achieved for conservation during this era were influenced by international conventions and declarations, and initially were transformative. In 1970 Australia adopted the IUCN’s definition of a national park (Lawrence 1997). This decision represented a shift from the utilitarian environmental paradigm to one based on the
preservation of nature. Within a decade, all Australian jurisdictions had enacted national park or nature conservation legislation. Further transformative responses came when the socially democratic Labor party, led by Prime Minister Whitlam, was elected in 1972 on a platform of economic development, environmental protection and Indigenous social justice. The Whitlam Government, in office for just short of three years, elevated conservation to the national stage and further entrenched the preservationist paradigm. It upgraded the previous government’s Office for the Environment to a Department of Environment and Conservation. It enacted environmental protection legislation including the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act in 1975, providing for the declaration and management of national parks on federally owned land. This Act, in keeping with the centralist approach of Whitlam’s reforms, also established the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service with provisions to intervene in national and international conservation issues, and fund and assist the provincial governments in conservation activities. These provisions not only allowed the federal government to assume the management of Ayers Rock National Park, now known as Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park, from the Northern Territory Government in 1977 (Goldstein 1979; Hill 1994), but they also would be critical in building the nation’s conservation estate and supporting Aboriginal involvement in conservation.

The non-state sector also responded to conservation’s new political space during this time. It expanded its role from lobbying to include on-ground conservation activities. For instance, Australia’s first provincial nature conservation trust, Victoria’s Trust for Nature, was formed in 1972 (Trust for Nature 2012) and in 1982 Greening Australia was established to undertake on-ground conservation on private lands (Greening Australia 2012). This sector started to acquire and manage properties for conservation, a matter previously considered to be the domain of the state. Land was acquired through donation, such as the Clarkesdale lands in Victoria given to Bird Observation and Conservation Australia in 1975 and 1980 (Birdlife International 2012), or commercially, such as those bought by Earth Sanctuaries, a business that at its peak operated 10 wildlife sanctuaries (Grolleau and Peterson 2012). This acquisition and management of private conservation lands, particularly those of Earth Sanctuaries, reflected a growing alignment between conservation and neo-liberalism (Sydee and Beder 2006).

Campaigns of this era were not restricted to saving and protecting wilderness. Despite Indigenous Australians campaigning for their rights since 1788, it was not until this era that
awareness of the discrimination, inequity and disadvantage they faced galvanised in the wider community. With politics of race foremost in the international post-war psyche, there was a shift from protectionism to assimilation in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Struggles for Indigenous equality then grew to civil rights campaigns and evolved into a broader land rights movement in the 1970s (Goodall 1996).

As with conservation, there have been different responses to the political space for Indigenous social justice. The initial state response was reactionary, with the ruling out of any specific rights for Indigenous Australians and instead adopting initiatives aimed at rectifying Indigenous disadvantage and addressing civil rights inequities. With pressure on the domestic front and growing international recognition of racial discrimination, the federal government introduced The Policy of Assimilation in 1961. Under this meta-policy, in advancement of Aboriginal welfare, Indigenous Australians were to relinquish their Aboriginality and live like white Australians. Although this policy was concerned with race, its intention was to promote a homogenous population. It was about civic nationalism (McGregor 2009). The government adhered to this policy in the face of continuing struggles for Indigenous rights, seeking to improve Indigenous peoples’ ability to assimilate by funding provincial governments in Aboriginal education, health and housing.

Assimilation did lead to the repeal of discriminatory legislation. The conservative Liberal federal government of the 1960s, not wanting the nation to be viewed as racist by the international community, put to referendum in 1967 two constitutional proposals relating to Aboriginal affairs. The proposals, to count Aboriginal people in the census and to allow the federal government to legislate on Aboriginal affairs, were supported by an overwhelming majority, and the Australian Constitution was amended. Paradoxically, assimilation also led to the first pieces of land rights legislation in the nation. Under assimilation many Aboriginal reserves were closed and for some, the title transferred to Aboriginal people under emerging forms of provincial land rights legislation. The Government of South Australia was the first with the Land Trust Act 1966, transferring freehold title of government reserves to Aboriginal people, held by a trust. This Act made good a guarantee given under the Letters Patent Establishing the Province of South Australia in 1836 – the enabling legal instrument of the colony. In Victoria, the long-term residents of the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Reserve resisted state attempts to assimilate them into the wider community, eventually leading to the passing of the Victorian Aboriginal Lands Act 1970 and the reserve title being transferred to the Aboriginal residents (Attwood
However, the non-Indigenous community support for the Lake Tyers residents’ struggles in the south, as well as support for the symbolic campaigns of the Yolngu and Gurindji people in the north, reflected a growing disquiet in Australian society with the inherent problems associated with assimilation, and the reluctance of the federal government to acknowledge Indigenous land rights.

The second response to the political space gained for Indigenous social justice was transformative. The Whitlam Labor Government came to power in 1972 on a platform of reforms, including Indigenous social justice. Under a pluralistic ideology of nationalism, the new government replaced the policy of assimilation with a policy of self-determination, where Indigenous people had the right to maintain and manage their own culture and lands. A new form of settler nationalism was promoted. The new government embraced the indigene and acknowledged the atrocities of the past. As well as wanting to rectify Indigenous disadvantage and inequities in civil rights, it supported the idea of specific Indigenous rights. Moran (2002) refers to this response as indigenising settler nationalism. Whitlam’s reforms would lead to some of Australia’s most enduring social structures, with the first national approach to the return of lands to Indigenous Australians, the enactment of antidiscrimination legislation and the official recognition of Indigenous Australians’ spiritual and cultural connections to land.

Similar to its elevation of conservation to the national political agenda, the Whitlam Government upgraded the Office of Aboriginal Affairs to a Department of Aboriginal Affairs. It established the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee in 1973, later replacing it with the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC), to consult on Aboriginal issues (NAC 1983). Although criticised for being ill-defined and rarely consulted with (Mercer 1987), these forums represented a shift to a more collaborative approach to policy development in Indigenous social justice as well as delineating a path towards self-determination.

However, with Whitlam’s aspirations of national land rights contested by the provincial governments, the federal government took a different approach. In 1973 it commissioned an inquiry to investigate the “means to recognise and establish the traditional rights and interests of the Aborigines in and in relation to land and to satisfy in other ways the reasonable aspirations of the Aborigines to rights in or in relation to land” (Woodward 1973: iii). The Commission, under Justice Woodward, recommended, with other matters, the establishment of a fund to assist Aboriginal people acquire land, the introduction of
Aboriginal land rights legislation for the Northern Territory and the reconciling of Aboriginal interests with conservation (Woodward 1973, 1974). In 1974 the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission became the mechanism for the first national approach to the return of lands for Indigenous Australians. It was replaced by the Aboriginal Development Commission in 1980, having purchased 59 properties (Young 1995). The *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* was enacted by the next federal government following the dismissal of the Whitlam Government in 1975 in a constitutional crisis. The land fund and the land rights legislation resulted in increasing “Aboriginal land”, as depicted in Figure 12.

![Aboriginal land in Australia](image)

**Figure 12:** Map showing “Aboriginal land” in the early 1980s. Source: Hiatt (1985).

As with conservation, international conventions and declarations influenced the Australian Indigenous social justice agenda. The Aboriginal Land Fund and the different types of land rights legislation of the provincial governments were compensatory in character, in accordance with the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. Australia became party to this convention with Whitlam’s *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*. The Racial Discrimination Act would be pivotal to returning lands to Indigenous Australians under new processes and be central to one of the nation’s most controversial Indigenous policies in contemporary history. However, unlike the Aboriginal
Land Fund and the provincial land rights legislation, the aims of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act are not restricted to compensation. They also recognise the spiritual connection Aboriginal people have to the land. In contrast, much of the provincial land rights legislation, such as the New South Wales *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*, has no provision to acknowledge and support Indigenous cultural and spiritual connections to land. The New South Wales Act also has no provision for recognising traditional Indigenous social structures, focusing rather on the economic use of land (Vertigan 1988; Pearson 1993). Most land rights legislation, both federal and provincial, also imposed corporate structures and involved developing a political constituency.

With the election of Fraser’s conservative federal government in 1975, the language of self-determination was replaced with that of self-management, shifting the focus from the special rights afforded to Indigenous Australians, to rectifying Indigenous disadvantage. In support of self-management, the government commenced the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Scheme in 1977, funding employment to support economic development in Indigenous communities (Orchard et al 2003). CDEP became increasingly important to rural and remote Indigenous communities where mainstream opportunities for employment and enterprise development were limited (Altman et al 2005), and would go on to play an important role in processes under a conservation agenda.

The transformative responses of this era aligned the conservation and the Indigenous social justice agendas, with conservation benefitting from achievements gained by Indigenous social justice. For instance in 1975, the IUCN General Assembly adopted the Resolution on the Protection of Traditional Ways of Life, known as the Zaire Resolution. This obliged all member states, including Australia, to devise means of incorporating Indigenous lands into conservation areas, not displace Indigenous people in the creation of conservation areas and consult with Indigenous people affected by the declaration of conservation areas. In Australia, the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act was the catalyst that, when combined with amendments to the federal government’s national park legislation, paved the way for the first part of the Zaire Resolution to become a reality, with the declaration of the jointly managed Kakadu National Park in the Alligator Rivers/Arnhem Land region in 1978. Joint management would become a significant avenue for Indigenous Australians to be involved in conservation, and would bring social and economic gains for Indigenous Australians through training and employment, as well as enabling access to “country”
(Young et al 1991). Other components of the Zaire Resolution have not been consistently adhered to, as discussed later in this paper.

2.4 The mainstream era: mid-1980s – mid-1990s

Between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s, the conservation and Indigenous social justice agendas became mainstream. Wilderness campaigns continued, with the non-state sector continuing to lobby for greater environmental protection. Inventories and maps of wilderness areas (Figure 13) were used to show the inadequacy of the conservation estate. Lobbying efforts were not confined to issues of wilderness protection: conservation NGOs, such as the World Wildlife Fund-Australia, the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Australian Committee for IUCN, also urged legislative protection of biodiversity, particularly for endangered species and other matters subject to international conventions (Kennedy et al 2001). There was growing awareness of the widespread environmental destruction caused by the developmentalism ideology of previous colonial processes, and the economic costs associated with this destruction.

Figure 13: Prineas’ 1986 map of identified wilderness areas. This map was used as a preliminary map of Australia’s wilderness areas and used to develop options for legislation. Source: Robertson et al (1992) (after Prineas et al 1986; Baird Lambert 1988).
Between 1983 and 1996, one political party, the Labor party, held federal office, and under Prime Minister Hawke, the response to the environment movement’s lobbying involved both intervention and cooperation. Having ratified the international World Heritage Convention with the passing of the *World Heritage Properties Conservation Act 1983*, the federal government used its external affairs powers under the Constitution to intervene in provincial matters and stop the construction of dams in south-west Tasmania. The federal government used its constitutional powers for conservation again in response to the ongoing lobbying for protection of endangered species, with enactment of the *Endangered Species Conservation Act 1992*.

Not all provincial governments appreciated this interventionist approach, and by way of reparation, Hawke then instituted a cooperative federalist and consensus approach to conservation (Crowley 2001), as illustrated by the development of Australia’s first meta-policy on conservation, the National Conservation Strategy in 1983. The federal government, in preparing the strategy in response to the 1980 World Conservation Strategy, worked with provincial governments, industry and not-for-profit organisations, to negotiate a compromise between economic development and environmental concerns (Dovers 2002). New environment programmes also came from this new approach, particularly under the Prime Minister’s 1989 Environment Statement, *Our Country Our Future*. The development of a National Reserve System (NRS) was one of the major initiatives of this statement, supported with funds to assist provincial governments in the acquisition of lands for inclusion in the NRS (Hawke 1989). However, both the National Conservation Strategy and *Our Country Our Future* stressed the need to both preserve the environment and develop the economy, representing a shift from a purely preservationist conservation paradigm, to one more closely aligned to neo-liberalist ideology. ESD, off-reserve conservation, collaboration and pricing policies were all important components of these initiatives. New national not-for-profit conservation NGOs, with a focus on property acquisition and management, emerged, such as Bush Heritage Australia and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. Private protected areas would become a significant component of the NRS.

Under the economic revolution spreading across the Western world, neo-liberalist ideologies resulted in an array of new international processes for conservation. One of the most influential of these was the 1987 Brundtland Report *Our Common Future*. Australia’s response to the Brundtland Report, and in preparation for the United Nations Conference
on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992, was the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development. ESD became the overarching framework for environmental policy in Australia, with ancillary sectoral policies providing more detail. One sectoral policy was the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia’s Biological Diversity, developed in 1996 as part of the response to Australia’s ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1993 (Dovers 2002). Under these new policies, national parks became one of a number of conservation strategies.

As with conservation, the legacy of earlier transformative responses for Indigenous social justice would be played out during this era. However, new responses to political space for Indigenous social justice would be, for the most part, reactionary during this era. Hawke promised “to use, where necessary, the constitutional powers of the Commonwealth to provide for Aboriginal people to own the land which has for years been set aside for them” (Hawke 1983). This commitment represented another opportunity for achieving national land rights legislation, particularly with the precedent of federal intervention in conservation issues (Altman and Dillon 1985). Paradoxically, the result was the opposite. National land rights were removed from the political agenda. Hawke, facing provincial governments opposed to national land rights, followed the cooperative federalism approach to nationalism and left land rights legislation to the provincial governments. And although considerable areas of land have been returned under this federalist approach, there is a striking discrepancy across the nation (Figure 14). Under provincial arrangements, Indigenous Australians have had to contest residual public lands with the state, particularly with state conservation efforts (Adams 2004).

Consistent with the retreat from national land rights legislation, Hawke moved away from Whitlam’s pluralist view of recognising Indigenous Australians as a separate people to viewing Aboriginal people as another disadvantaged interest group (Mercer 1993). Under this agenda, the majority of Indigenous social justice policies and programmes stemmed from two inquiries: the 1984 review of Aboriginal employment and training programmes and the 1987–1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The recommendations of these inquiries were aimed at addressing Indigenous disadvantage. However, the return of lands and Aboriginal peoples’ need for land also featured, and the inquiries acknowledged Aboriginal peoples’ activity on Aboriginal lands and the involvement of Aboriginal people in conservation as legitimate forms of employment and economic activity (Miller 1985; Johnston 1991).
A major transformative response to the political space for Indigenous social justice later in this era would result in radical and controversial changes to the nation’s system of land. It would also result in a national approach to securing Aboriginal title under Australian law, yet one that would again result in imbalance and contest. It was the judiciary, rather than the state, that provided the catalyst for this transformation, and once more as a consequence of persistent campaigning by Indigenous people. In a landmark case, five Torres Strait Islanders, led by Eddie Mabo, took the Queensland Government to court declaring their rights to lands that they had continuously used and occupied since settlement. The High Court of Australia found in favour of the plaintiffs, quashing the understanding that Crown lands were unable to be claimed by Indigenous Australians as it was inconsistent with the Racial Discrimination Act. The Court rejected the idea of terra nullius and recognised “native title” (Moran 2002: 1025).

The federal government, now under Prime Minister Keating, responded to the Mabo court rulings in three parts. The first part was with Australia’s Native Title Act 1993, resulting in Indigenous Australians’ traditional and customary rights and interests to land and sea being recognised by Australian common law. With this legislation, lands could now be returned in
recognition of Indigenous Australians’ traditional and customary rights and interests to land and sea. However, unlike the social movements of the previous era that resulted in land rights legislation, these processes occurred during a time when the wider Australian community was not as compassionate on Indigenous rights, and the passing of the Native Title Act “heralded a new era of contest” (Davies 2003: 19) in the return of lands to Indigenous Australians.

The second part of the Mabo response was funding to assist the return of lands to Indigenous Australians. Despite the recognition of Indigenous title under Australian law, the federal government realised that many Aboriginal people would not benefit from the Native Title Act, as large parts of the continent were already held under private ownership, extinguishing native title. It established the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) in 1995 to increase the “Indigenous land base” (Keating 1995). The third part of the response, a Social Justice Package, was never implemented. Keating’s Labor Government was replaced by Prime Minister Howard’s conservative coalition government in 1996.

During this era of renewed nationalism, the link between conservation and Indigenous social justice agenda strengthened, resulting in increased Aboriginal involvement in conservation. And although the conservation agenda benefitted from the achievements gained under the Indigenous social justice agenda, the congenial links between Indigenous “caring for country” and conservation were acknowledged, as illustrated by the following three initiatives.

In 1983, the Indigenous community of Palm Island in Queensland established the first independent Aboriginal ranger service in Australia (Smyth 2011a). This initiative spread to other areas and by the late 1980s, 15 Aboriginal communities in Queensland, using a range of funding programmes such as CDEP, were employing Indigenous rangers to carry out land management activities in their communities (Young et al 1991). The Palm Island initiative was a critical step in the development of an Indigenous ranger or “caring for country” movement in Australia.

A state example of the strengthening link between conservation and Indigenous social justice was the Contract Employment Program for Aboriginals in Natural and Cultural Resource Management (CEPANCRM). Established in response to the recommendations of the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody inquiry, the programme, administered by the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, was a basic employment generation programme. It
funded conservation organisations, particularly provincial national park agencies, to employ Aboriginal people in natural or cultural resource management (Orchard et al 2003). It enabled Aboriginal people to access and work on their ancestral estates, particularly in areas where land had not been returned under land rights.

Another state initiative, this time under a conservation agenda, was the development of the Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) concept. When it became obvious that some underrepresented bioregions of the NRS were in areas of Aboriginal-held land or where land would return to Indigenous ownership under native title, the federal government developed the IPA concept, where Indigenous landholders could voluntarily agree to manage their land for conservation (Smyth and Sutherland 1996; Smyth 2001). The concept was consistent with IUCN’s 1994 protected area definition and the new protected area categories of V: Protected landscape/seascape and VI: Managed resource protected area (IUCN 1994). Like private protected areas, IPAs would become a significant component on the NRS under the new conservation paradigm.

2.5 Neo-liberalism and neo-assimilation: late 1990s - ...

Since the late 1990s, neo-liberal ideologies have been adopted by both major political parties, often resulting in a bipartisan response to any political space afforded to Indigenous social justice or conservation. Three processes have dominated Indigenous social justice. The responses to these have been largely reactionary, with the erosion or reduction of specific rights, the rejection or non-acknowledgement of past atrocities and the removal of anti-discriminative civil rights and self-determination policies. Similar to previous processes, land is a central feature. Altman (2011) refers to these responses as neo-liberalism assimilation.

In 1997, the Howard Government’s views on Indigenous social justice were made clear in its response to the Bringing them home report on the separation of Indigenous children from their families under protectionism and assimilation, referred to as the Stolen Generations. The report reiterated the importance of implementing recommendations of previous inquiries, particularly the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody inquiry, and recommended mechanisms to ensure access and return of traditional lands to Indigenous Australians (Commonwealth of Australia 1997). The federal government responded to this by questioning the authenticity of claims, refusing to acknowledge the atrocities of the past and denying reparation to Indigenous Australians. It was not until a change of government
more than 10 years later that the state said “sorry” to the Stolen Generations, instituting more programmes to address social disadvantage. Yet, the increasing numbers of recommendations to return lands and access land remain to be implemented.

The second process is the return of lands to Indigenous Australians, particularly under native title. Exclusive native title can only be considered if the title has not been extinguished by other interests. With native title extinguished in much of the nation, the Howard Government reduced its application even further with amendments to the Act in 1998, allowing mining and pastoral leases to coexist with native title. This was particularly relevant to remote and rural areas where substantial areas are held under lease. However, there was some compensation. With the same amending legislation, Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) were introduced where Indigenous Australians could negotiate the use and management of land and water, whether or not native title was determined (Native Title Tribunal 2012). Successive federal governments have continued to amend the Native Title Act, further reducing previously held rights.

Despite the erosion of rights under native title, the amount of Indigenous-held land has continued to grow. The most successful return of lands under land rights legislation has come from the federal government’s own Northern Territory Land Rights Act, with over half of the province being transferred to Aboriginal ownership under inalienable freehold title. In contrast, under the New South Wales Land Rights Act, the return of lands has been hindered with administrative obstructions and restrictions on claimable lands. Latest data on the granting of claims under this Act show that of the 17,600 claims made by May 2009, only 2325 have been granted; “the remainder of the land claims have been refused, otherwise finalised or yet to be determined by the Minister” (Office of the Registrar 2013). This equates to just over 81,000 hectares or slightly more than 0.1% of the province being granted as Aboriginal-held land. However, in this era, lands have been returned primarily through native title determinations rather than claims under land rights. At the time of writing, native title has been determined to exist in 241 cases, covering more than 2 million sq. km, or approximately 26% of the continent, and over 900 ILUAs have been registered, covering over 2 million sq. km of land and 11,000 sq. km of sea (Native Title Tribunal 2014). Through a combination of land rights, native title determinations, ILC purchases and provincial tenure reform initiatives, the combined geographic area of Indigenous-held lands, although difficult to reflect accurately at a national scale, covers a significant portion of the continent’s land mass (Figure 15).
The third process dominating responses to Indigenous social justice relates to child abuse. In 2007, within months of the *Ampe Akelyerneman Meke Mekarle: Little children are sacred report* of the Northern Territory’s inquiry into child sexual abuse, the federal government launched the Northern Territory National Emergency Response, known as “The Intervention”. Supported by legislation, The Intervention required Indigenous Territorians of many communities to enter into welfare management programmes under mutual obligation arrangements. Some measures under The Intervention removed civil rights when they were made exempt to the Racial Discrimination Act, including the compulsory acquisition by the government of Aboriginal community leases and the removal of the permit system for entering Aboriginal land, as defined under the federal *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Australian Human Rights Commission 2011). Some saw these measures as an attempt by the state, in this case the conservative federal government of Howard, to reclaim land - a neo-colonial land-grab (Stringer 2007). The Intervention also planned to abolish the CDEP Scheme (Australian Government 2007). Ironically the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples came into effect at the time The Intervention was introduced. With a change of government in late
2007, The Intervention was repackaged as the Stronger Futures Policy, the exemptions to the Racial Discrimination Act were amended (Australian Human Rights Commission 2011) and CDEP was reinstated (Australian Government 2011). State reporting indicates that there has been an improvement in aspects of Indigenous health, education and employment in the affected communities since the commencement of The Intervention (Australian Government 2012).

Parallel to the process with Indigenous social justice, the legacy of responses to political space for conservation continued in this era, and a new conservation paradigm has been embraced. Environmentalism adopted the neo-liberal ideology dominant in the discourse of the state and the business world (Doyle 2010). Conservation issues, both national and international, have been rejected or relabelled, and legislative protection has been repackaged. For instance, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, which came into effect as a response to ongoing lobbying for greater protection of biodiversity and matters subject to international conventions, replaced numerous pieces of environmental legislation, such as the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, the Endangered Species Conservation Act and the World Heritage Properties Conservation Act, and delegated powers back to the provincial governments. This response split the conservation sector, with those believing the Act is weak and delegates too much power to the resource-exploitative provincial governments, and those that believe it is an improvement on what was viewed as an ad hoc approach to legislative protection (Kennedy et al 2001).

This cooperative federalist approach to conservation is not just restricted to legislation. Under the ESD framework, the Natural Heritage Trust was established in 1996 as a major environmental funding programme as well as an investment mechanism (Crowley 2001). It adopted the collaborative model developed during the 1980s and 1990s, and funded provincial governments, local governments and community-based projects through partnerships in the conservation, sustainable use and repair of the environment. The Natural Heritage Trust was replaced by Caring for Our Country under the Labor federal government in 2008, and even though both programmes have been criticised for not addressing the “wickedness” of environmental problems (Robins and Kanowski 2011), collectively they embedded the new conservation paradigm in Australia, focusing conservation on ecosystem services, working landscapes and collaborations, albeit state controlled.
The conservation estate has grown under the new conservation paradigm. Consistent with IUCN’s new protected area categories, the government expanded the NRS to include private land, and in 1998/1999, it started funding conservation NGOs 2:1 to assist with property acquisition for inclusion in the NRS (Australian Government 2013a). This state support has seen a considerable increase in private protected areas, with many owned, leased or managed by national not-for-profit conservation NGOs. Latest data on the NRS show that private protected areas make up nearly 7% of the NRS (Australian Government 2013a). Similarly, markets for carbon sequestration, carbon abatement and off-sets have grown and the non-state sector, as well as some Indigenous groups, is engaging with these markets to fund conservation activities (Heckbert et al 2011; Greening Australia 2013).

Following international trends, connectivity corridors, where viable ecosystems between protected areas are developed and maintained in working landscapes, have gained state support with the federal government’s National Wildlife Corridor Plan, identifying a national network of connectivity landscapes and transcontinental-scale corridors (Australian Government 2013b) (Figure 16). Supporters not only assert the conservation outcomes of connectivity corridors, including meeting the challenges of climate change, but also emphasise the social and economic benefits to society that they will bring (Mackey et al 2010).

Figure 16: Australia’s existing and proposed connectivity corridors. Source: Whitten et al (2011).
Illustrating the extent of the new conservation paradigm is the acquisition and management of Fish River and Henbury stations in the Northern Territory. In 2011 the federal government contributed $9.1M to a partnership with the ILC, TNC, which started operating in Australia in the mid-2000s, and the Pew Environment Group for the purchase of the 178,000-plus-hectare Fish River Station. Then in 2012, the federal government committed $8.6M to a project with a private company, RM Williams Agricultural Holdings, for the purchase of the 500,000-plus-hectare Henbury Station. The intent of these experimental projects was to manage them for environmental outcomes part-funded from the sale of carbon offset credits to private industry (Australian Government 2013a). The Henbury Station collaboration also represents a major expansion of public–private partnerships, venturing beyond the not-for-profit sector, into the commercial market. However, possibly more symbolic of the extent that the new conservation paradigm has been embraced is the cessation of the specific NRS funds after 20 years (Figgis 2012).

Indigenous involvement in conservation has continued to increase in this era, but is largely driven by the conservation agenda, rather than the social justice agenda. Co-managed protected areas, particularly jointly managed parks, have continued to be declared, arising from provincial tenure reforms, new legislation, native title and ILUAs (Zeppel 2010). In 1997 CEPANCRM ceased and the federal government started funding IPAs, with the long-running CDEP Scheme often providing for the employment of IPA rangers. As with private protected areas, IPAs and lands acquired by the ILC on behalf of Indigenous people and managed for conservation have been included in the NRS. The first IPA, Nantawarrina, was officially dedicated in South Australia in 1998 and IPAs have grown to be a major component of the NRS. As of mid-2014, there are 65 dedicated IPAs, contributing over 36 million hectares and making up over a third of the NRS (Australian Government 2013a). Indigenous Australians have utilised the state IPA concept to advance the “caring for country” movement and promote the holistic management of “country” in accordance with Aboriginal law and culture, with the dedication of the first multi-tenure IPA, Mandingalbay Yidinji IPA, in 2011 (Australian Government 2013a). Another state initiative instituted during this era is the Working on Country (WoC) Programme. Building on the Indigenous conservation initiative of 25 years prior, WoC was established in 2007 to fund the employment and training of existing and new Indigenous rangers in the delivery of natural and cultural resource management priorities of Indigenous communities (May 2010).
With IPAs and WoC, there is a growing conservation economy involving Indigenous communities in the remote parts of the nation (Greiner 2010; May 2010). Payments for environmental services, where Indigenous ranger groups are paid a fee-for-service to carry out an environmental service for the benefit of another entity, are used to finance “caring for country” activities, particularly on Indigenous-held lands. Smyth (2011b, 2011c) and others (Greiner 2010; Weir et al 2011) describe this evolving conservation economy utilising “caring for country” initiatives as a propitious niche for Indigenous Australians, a congenial or favourable match, as they connect people to their ancestral estates, utilise cultural skills and knowledge, are valued by Indigenous communities and the wider community, offer employment advantage for Indigenous people because of the requirement for cultural knowledge and can be a catalyst for opening up further employment opportunities (Smyth 2011b).

Despite these initiatives, Indigenous Australians continue to contest lands with conservation. Contrary to the Zaire Resolution, some jointly managed national parks have been established through coercion and/or compromise (Smyth 2001; Bauman and Smyth 2007), and although Indigenous Australians have mostly not been physically displaced by the establishment of protected areas (Poirier and Ostergren 2002; Goodall 2006), national parks have been declared without notification to or consent from affected Indigenous people (Horstman and Wightman 2001; Porter and Meyers 2008). The literature suggests that Indigenous Australians are also contesting lands with non-state conservation organisations and collaborations under the new conservation paradigm. For instance, the Henbury Station purchase caused negative criticisms from Aboriginal people, claiming they were not consulted about the purchase and regretting that they were unable to get financial assistance to buy and manage the property (see Owens 2011). Similarly, the Australian Wildlife Conservancy has been accused of undermining Indigenous conservation initiatives and threatening Indigenous native title rights when it acquired a sublease from an Indigenous pastoral lease holder to operate a wildlife sanctuary (see Fleming 2009; Kerins 2009).

2.6 Conclusion
An analysis of the policy landscapes of conservation and Indigenous social justice serves as a reminder of how the current intersection between these agendas has occurred, and why new and different engagements are emerging between conservation and Indigenous Australians. There are some parallels between the changing paradigms of conservation and
Indigenous social justice agendas in Australia. With first invasion and settlement the paradigms portrayed different trajectories reflecting the settler colonialist and nationalist processes of the state. Persistent activism opened up political spaces for both agendas with state and non-state responses being reactionary and transformative. These responses have aligned the two agendas over time with the policy landscapes now intrinsically linked. In some circumstances, this link is congenial representing a propitious niche where a growing conservation economy is utilising Indigenous “caring for country” aspirations and initiatives, and vice versa. In other circumstances, this link is not congenial, with Indigenous Australians still contesting lands with conservation organisations, and under the new conservation paradigm, these contests are not just confined to the state.

There are also paradoxes in this evolving integration. The social justice agenda has been the primary motivator of Indigenous people regaining control of land, and historically has been the driver of Indigenous involvement in conservation. Numerous conservation initiatives, such as IPAs, the expansion of the NRS and WoC, would not have been possible without the struggles, campaigns and social movements for Indigenous civil rights and land rights of the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly the involvement of Indigenous people in conservation and the recognition of conservation as forms of employment and economic development for Indigenous Australians in a growing conservation economy stem primarily from an Indigenous social justice agenda. Yet, erosion of rights under the Indigenous social justice agenda has seen the conservation agenda now driving an increase in conservation on Indigenous-held lands and an increase in Indigenous involvement in conservation. In a wider context, there is a contemporary paradox of disparity: achievements and gains secured under a social justice agenda are now being enjoyed by the conservation agenda, and Indigenous social justice is increasingly becoming dependent on a conservation agenda.

Under the new conservation paradigm, Indigenous Australians are playing a critical role in addressing the “wickedness” of environmental problems. It is important that under this new paradigm, conservation also delivers positive outcomes for Indigenous Australians as well as for the environment, and supports rather than exploits Indigenous aspirations of “caring for country”. It is also imperative that conservation is not considered the panacea for Indigenous disadvantage.
2.7 References


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Chapter 3: Emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land in Australia

Publication details

Chapter note
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Abstract

International examples of interactions between Indigenous peoples and the new conservation paradigm come mainly from developing countries and suggest divisions over priorities. As a Western settler society, Australia is at a critical time in conservation and Indigenous peoples’ rights. Innovative approaches to conservation are promoted. The role and influence of non-governmental organisations is increasing. Indigenous peoples’ rights to land are recognised and Indigenous involvement in conservation is growing. Yet, despite Australia being considered a leader in these arenas, particularly the latter, there has been little analysis of the relationship between innovative approaches to conservation and Indigenous Australians under the new paradigm. This paper describes how the spatial manifestations of approaches under the new conservation paradigm and Indigenous land in Australia are creating new geographies. We identify geographies of overlap, dichotomy and absence. The paper identifies research needs into these geographies, including: examining the influence of “recognition” in engagements between conservation and Indigenous Australians; investigating the impacts of approaches under the new paradigm such as scaling-up, territorialism and differing governance structures on Indigenous Australians; and questioning the social responsibilities of the non-governmental organisations towards Indigenous Australians.

Key words: conservation, Indigenous people, NGOs, geographies, Australia, settler society, neo-colonial, paradigm

3.1 Introduction

Recent analysis of conservation theory and practice has identified a rapidly evolving conceptual and management landscape. A new conservation paradigm, established in the late twentieth century on the premise that public efforts alone, centring on the declaration and management of state-owned national parks (the old paradigm), cannot solve the biodiversity crisis facing the planet, is driving exploration of innovative approaches to biodiversity conservation. Approaches to conservation under the new paradigm have seen changes to the scale, territory and governance of conservation. Conservation is being carried out on a large scale, with landscape and continental-scale approaches gaining prominence (Worboys et al 2010). Adoption of neo-liberalist ideologies is resulting in a shifting of governance roles in conservation (Sundberg 2006), reflected in the growth of the
involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), an increase in private protected areas (Pasquini et al. 2011) and the emergence of new and varied public-private partnerships and networks. Conservation territories have evolved to encompass not only national parks, but to also include working landscapes where biodiversity conservation is just one of potentially numerous land uses. With a growing awareness of Indigenous rights and an increase in Indigenous lands, the role of local and Indigenous communities in conservation is increasingly recognised (Kothari 2008). In addition, local-scale cultural approaches to conservation, including co-managed protected areas and Indigenous Peoples’ and Community Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCAs) have expanded the conceptual basis for conservation internationally (Kothari 2008; Ross et al. 2011). At least some of these changes were initiated by the outcomes of the Fifth World Parks Congress in Durban 2003, which recognised that “Indigenous and local communities bring special insight, diverse knowledge and active commitment” to conservation and environment issues (Vaz and Agama 2013: 141).

Zimmerer (2006) describes how globalisation and the new approaches to conservation can create “spaces of hope” with positive outcomes for both local and Indigenous people and for conservation. Complacency, lack of support, cost-shifting or inadequate resourcing for conservation and/or Indigenous rights by the state in some countries has led to NGOs assuming governance roles. Supporting this idea, descriptive publications, including those by stakeholders, relay stories of conservation NGOs empowering Indigenous people in decision-making and helping establish revenue streams (see Chicchon 2009), and opposing common threats to biodiversity such as urbanisation and agriculture, industrialisation and deforestation (see Alcorn et al. 2010). There are assertions that returning control of conservation lands to Indigenous peoples will achieve both environmental and social outcomes (e.g. Kothari 2008). Yet, other literature explains that when the trajectories under the new paradigm intersect with Indigenous interests there are often divisions over priorities. Social outcomes may be pitched against conservation outcomes, and local agendas pitched against global agendas. Some contend that in areas of high conservation value, social issues such as those relating to Indigenous people should not take precedence and conservation should be the focus (e.g. Terborgh 1999; Oates 2006). A large literature critiques the engagements of conservation NGOs with Indigenous people (see Chapin 2004; Brockington and Igoe 2006; Dowie 2009). Landscape and continental-scale approaches have also come under criticism, with reports that “scaling-up” of conservation efforts has
adverse consequences on Indigenous governance regimes and claims that international NGOs are linking community-designated conservation areas at scales that allow for global conservation agendas to dominate local aspirations (see Igoe and Croucher 2007; Ramutsindela and Noe 2012).

The majority of research on the intersection of Indigenous interests with the new conservation paradigm stems from case studies in the developing world. Research on these intersecting trajectories from the developed world is modest, particularly from the Western settler societies where the lives of Indigenous people are often represented as “fourth world”.

The aims of this paper are: (1) to highlight the emerging geographies between approaches under the new conservation paradigm and Indigenous land in Australia; and (2) to redress the knowledge gap on these geographies to support a more inclusive and equitable path than that followed by earlier conservation efforts in relation to Indigenous Australians. We use the term “emerging geographies” to identify new spatial and other patterns that reveal a changing landscape in Australia, where there are some new relationships between conservation and Indigenous interests, with potential for both positive and negative outcomes.

3.2 Methods

This paper is one outcome of a larger project that analyses relationships between the new conservation paradigm and Indigenous communities in Australia. The project uses interviews, participant observation and historical research. For this paper, after setting the Australian context, we examined the policy and spatial trajectories of the new conservation paradigm and Indigenous land. We analysed publicly available historical and contemporary documents of the state, particularly the Australian Government, and of seven conservation NGOs working at a national scale (the Australian Conservation Foundation; the Australian Wildlife Conservancy; Bush Heritage Australia; Greening Australia; The Wilderness Society; WWF-Australia; and The Nature Conservancy). The policy analysis identifies specific named objectives of the different organisations, and also reveals attitudes to Indigenous people and interests in Australia.

We used spatial analysis to identify national scale patterns. After adjusting for scale, we compared the contemporary spatial patterns of conservation and Indigenous lands to identify emerging geographic relationships. We are aware that conducting this analysis at a
national scale masks complex smaller-scale geographic heterogeneity. The national scale, however, reveals the broad trajectories and relationships, and it is this scale that is chosen by both the conservation NGOs and the Australian Government in making statements about conservation objectives and achievements.

In our analysis of maps, we are aware that there are many challenging conceptual issues. Carolan (2009: 279) argues that maps have become “an indispensable instrument in environmental science and policy due to their ability to depict aspects of reality that are otherwise difficult to see”, but goes on to say that “we must also not forget that these representations do more than depict reality; they also mask and distort it”. The maps we analyse here have the potential to reflect both these outcomes. Our analysis seeks to acknowledge issues around the “neither neutral nor unproblematic” nature of maps (Carolan 2009: 279), but focus on the on-ground and policy relationships that these maps nevertheless begin to reveal. The maps we explore are not primarily the result of Indigenous “counter-mapping” approaches, although they will sometimes include such mapping as outcomes of land claim and native title processes. Rather, they are maps that fit both conservation and Indigenous claims into established Western cartographic traditions. While we are aware of the need “to problematize the spatial realities represented within the mapping process” (Johnson et al 2006: 90), it is the influence of these apparently fixed maps we focus on here. A final point we acknowledge here is that the cadastral rendering of these territories ignores mobility. As Howitt et al (2013: 132) argue, Indigenous Australian mobilities “nurture their socio-cultural and spiritual identities, and economic livelihoods, and demonstrate their relationships to country”, simultaneously disrupting dominant discourses of a stable cadastral grid.

3.3 National context

In Australia, early colonial processes of Indigenous dispossession have resulted in Indigenous people continuing to be socially disadvantaged. The colonial processes of appropriation and “emptying the landscapes” to fill them with new things (Howitt 2001: 235) has resulted in considerable parts of the continent being held or owned under private or quasi-private tenure, such as leases on lands held by the Crown. Subsequent to the historic, often brutal, dispossession of Indigenous people from their homelands, social movements aimed at redressing Indigenous disadvantage led to legislative processes that have returned some lands to Indigenous Australians. By 2014, the outcomes of this are significant. Indigenous lands returned under Australian law, which Indigenous Australians
own or control, mainly under various forms of community tenure, cover a significant portion of the continent, with 2012 estimates at approximately 23 per cent of the continent (Altman 2012). While there is much heterogeneity in tenure and governance on these lands, and much diversity of Indigenous culture and demography on them, they are distinctly different from other types of land ownership by non-Indigenous Australians.

Achieving this level of land ownership and control has come at a cost. Indigenous Australians have had to contest some of the public lands, the residual lands, with the state. During these historical contests Indigenous Australians have often been excluded and marginalised by state conservation efforts. Indigenous Australians have mostly not been physically displaced by the establishment of protected areas (Poirier and Ostergren 2002; Goodall 2006), as in some other countries. However, they have had to compete for land with conservation (Adams 2004). For example, national parks have been declared without notification or consent from affected Indigenous people (Porter and Meyers 2008), and jointly managed national parks have been established through coercion and/or compromise (Smyth 2001; Bauman and Smyth 2007). Adams (2001) argued that Indigenous Australians were largely denied “recognition space” by conservation organisations during these earlier engagements. Yet, despite the conflicts, contests and coercions, Australia is now seen as a leader in conservation on Indigenous-held lands (see Ross et al 2011: 193). While in some respects this perception is legitimate, it is at least ironic that much of the progress in this area has been achieved by Indigenous protest and litigation, rather than progressive approaches by governments (see, for example, Hibbard and Lane 2004 on Mutawintji and Farrier and Adams 2011 on Booderee, both now Aboriginal-owned national parks).

Reflecting the global trend, Australia has embraced the new conservation paradigm, with various innovative approaches to conservation adopted (Figgis et al 2012). Acknowledging that the government-managed national park system is inadequate to conserve the country’s biodiversity, state-initiated incentives and policies aim to increase the conservation estate not only with publicly owned lands, but also with private and Indigenous owned and controlled lands. Large-scale conservation efforts are promoted. The Australian conservation sector has evolved from dominance and control by the state to that of a multi-faceted sector that includes government, an increasing involvement of NGOs, such as not-for-profit organisations, philanthropists and corporations, as well as Indigenous communities.
Lane and Morrison (2006) highlighted risks associated with this increased role and influence of NGOs, and called for discussion on this issue to ensure public interests are not taken over by private agendas. With the geographical areas of new forms of conservation intersecting with the growing areas of Indigenous lands and increasing Indigenous involvement in conservation, the need for that discussion is pertinent. The emergent, yet still modest, literature on engagements between Indigenous interests and the new conservation paradigm in Australia supports this. As with the global research analysed above, there are mixed messages on the consequences, intended or otherwise, of these intersections.

Pickerill (2008, 2009) explored the use and power of language, and negotiating commonalities of difference, in engagements between Indigenous Australians and a number of not-for-profit conservation NGOs, concluding that although there are still “problematic practices” (Pickerill 2009: 78), there is hope for improved engagements. Highlighting north-south disparities that are explored below, in Pickerill’s research Indigenous engagements by the NGOs were based on the perception that there is “no need to engage with Indigenous politics further south, perpetuating the myth that only those Indigenous people who have a more apparent and historic (according to non-Indigenous adjudicators) connection to their homeland need consultation” (Pickerill 2008: 102).

Reflecting the international literature, a number of descriptive publications by stakeholders indicate some positive engagements between Indigenous Australians and NGOs. Gunn et al (2010) described collaborations between northern Australian Indigenous ranger groups and NGOs in addressing marine debris issues along the coastline. Moorcroft et al (2012) explained how a collaboration between an Indigenous traditional owner group in the Kimberley region of Western Australia and external stakeholders, including the national not-for-profit conservation NGO Bush Heritage Australia, adapted an international conservation planning framework in a cross-cultural context to deliver both social and conservation outcomes.

A small number of research articles, as well as discussion in the media, centre on engagements of contest and conflict between NGOs and Indigenous Australians. Most of these relate to land tenure, planning and management of land and rights to land. John Holmes (2011, 2012) has highlighted the complexity of relationships between the conservation sector and Indigenous people in tenure reform processes of the contested landscapes of Queensland’s Cape York Peninsula. In the media, the controversial
Queensland Government’s Wild Rivers legislation, supported by the national not-for-profit NGO, The Wilderness Society, drew vehement opinion pieces by prominent Aboriginal activist and lawyer Noel Pearson, claiming that the conservation sector and the legislation would restrict Indigenous peoples’ ability to use and occupy their country (see Pearson 2010a, 2010b). Kerins (2009) accused another national conservation NGO, the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, of undermining Indigenous conservation initiatives and threatening Indigenous native title rights when it acquired a sub-lease from an Indigenous pastoral lease holder to operate a wildlife sanctuary.

Particularly relevant to this paper is a typology of case studies of environmental management collaborations with Indigenous organisations, including those involving not-for-profit organisations. The typology categorised collaborations into levels of Indigenous governance and showed that integration of Indigenous knowledge is strongest when the level of Indigenous governance is highest (Hill et al. 2012).

3.4 Trajectories of change

In Australia there is a particular set of conditions leading to the emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land. These include: neo-liberalist governance approaches to conservation and changing Indigenous governance under the native title era; multiple use of space of both conservation and Indigenous land; large spatial scales of conservation and Indigenous land, particularly in some parts of the country; and a redefinition of conservation and Indigenous territories that reflects the interaction of complex spatial arrangements of ownership, management and institutional networks. In this section we set these changes in a historic and spatial context.

Since the 1980s, the state has actively consulted with NGOs in development of environmental policy (Hutton and Connors 1999). The conservation sector changed from a government arena to one that included NGOs. With state support and financial assistance from the emerging philanthropic sector, some NGOs became active in on-ground conservation activities: planting trees; setting up covenanting systems for conservation on private lands; and acquiring and managing property (Figgis 2004; Cowell and Williams 2006).

Consecutive governments at both provincial (State and Territory) and national level in the 1990s provided further opportunities for NGOs to be involved in conservation. In the early 1990s the Australian Government created a framework for a National Reserve System (NRS)
- a “comprehensive, adequate, and representative” system of protected areas (ANZECC 1996). The aim of the NRS is to ensure that the continent’s bioregions, under the planning framework of the Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation of Australia (IBRA), are adequately represented in protected areas (Thackway and Creswell 1995). To help achieve the vision of a comprehensive, adequate and representative protected areas system, the NRS Program, up until 2013, provided funds to assist with the acquisition of land in the under-represented bioregions (Figure 17), for inclusion in the NRS. Tax incentives and concessions, and the funding arrangements under the NRS Program for acquisition of conservation lands, has led to a significant increase in the conservation estate.

![Figure 17: Map showing the under-represented bioregions of the Interim Biogeographical Regionalisation of Australia (IBRA). Source: Australian Government (n.d.a).](image)

One of the results of these government initiatives and incentives was that NGOs which were previously advocacy-focused increased their on-ground conservation effort on private lands. A suite of new not-for-profit conservation NGOs also emerged. These newer NGOs focus on acquisition and management of lands for conservation, as well as partnering with existing land owners, philanthropic organisations and governments. Recent NRS data shows that Indigenous-held or controlled lands and private protected areas have become significant contributors to the NRS (Figure 18) (Australian Government n.d.b).
With the enactment of the first Indigenous land ownership legislation in 1966 in South Australia, the return of lands to Aboriginal people in Australia began. Other jurisdictions followed, as well as the Commonwealth in 1976, so that by the early to mid-1990s all jurisdictions, with the exception of Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, had some form of Aboriginal land ownership legislation (Broome 2010). This legislation was largely framed as compensation for Indigenous disadvantage and dispossession. With land rights came formal governance structures for the management of Aboriginal land under Australian law.

In 1993 the Commonwealth Native Title Act recognised Indigenous peoples’ traditional and customary rights and interests to land and sea under Australian common law where such title has not already been extinguished by the state. This provides Indigenous Australians with another avenue to gain title to land. In some cases, native title has provided clarity for the state and others wishing to consult or negotiate with Indigenous people on issues about land (Davies 2003). Native title, for some Indigenous communities, has provided “recognition space” (Pearson 1997).

In the native title era, other forms of Indigenous governance structures developed. Recognising that native title of many parts of Australia had been extinguished, in 1995 the
Australian Government established the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) to acquire, manage and hold land in trust for the benefit of Aboriginal people (Nettheim et al 2002). Some lands acquired by the ILC have high biodiversity values and are being managed for conservation. In 1998, Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) were introduced, providing a framework whereby some Indigenous Australians could negotiate the use and management of land and water, including conservation, whether there was native title determined or not (Davies 2003).

Support and recognition of conservation on private lands and an adoption of expanded protected area concepts have been critical changes to conservation, as has the use of Indigenous-held lands for contemporary economies and sustainable livelihoods. Recognising the expanded IUCN protected areas categories (IUCN 1994), the NRS allowed for several different types of protected areas including those on private lands and Indigenous lands. The climate change agenda, through the carbon market, is also driving an increase in multiple use approaches on conservation and Indigenous land. As one example, ConocoPhillips, the operator of the Darwin Liquefied Natural Gas plant, as part of both its corporate social responsibilities and to offset environmental impacts of its plant operations, agreed to support Aboriginal land owners and rangers with their work in reinstating fire management and protecting vegetation in western Arnhem Land. The success of the West Arnhem Land Fire Abatement (WALFA) Project has been widely acknowledged for a suite of environmental and social benefits (Whitehead et al 2009).

With an increase in the Indigenous-held and controlled lands has come increased involvement of Aboriginal people in conservation. In recognition that much of the under-represented bioregions of the NRS were on Aboriginal titled land, the Australian Government developed the Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) concept in consultation with Indigenous Australians in the 1990s (Smyth and Sutherland 1996), whereby Indigenous land holders can voluntarily agree to manage their land for conservation. Since the dedication of the first IPA, Nantawarrina, in South Australia in 1998 (Smyth 2001; Muller 2003), IPAs are a major contributor to the NRS, and according to the latest public data there are 60 declared IPAs and 27 in the planning stage (Australian Government 2013a). The concept of protected areas has been further expanded with the utilisation of ILUAs. In 2011, Mandingalbay Yidinji became the first IPA to be declared over existing government protected areas as well as Indigenous land (Australian Government 2013b). In the Northern Territory, amendments to national park legislation in 2003 and 2005 have provided for the Aboriginal ownership and
joint management of 27 national parks and reserves (Northern Territory Government 2014). Aboriginal involvement in conservation has also increased under the Australian Government’s Working on Country Program, where since 2007 Indigenous rangers have been employed to deliver environmental conservation outcomes, often on their own IPAs. At the time of writing there are nearly 700 Working on Country rangers working across Australia (Australian Government 2014). These projects combine customary knowledge of elders with teams of young rangers. This also reflects international developments, with Vaz and Agama (2013: 154) identifying similar outcomes in Malaysia, where potential ICCAs are “built upon a strong base of traditional knowledge from the older generation, and driven by the energy of young Indigenous people ... excited about advancing community governance in a modern context”.

Another change in the use of conservation and Indigenous spaces has been that large areas of Australia, particularly in the northern and western regions of the country, more remote from population centres, are subject to ongoing tenure reform processes. The Government of Western Australia is undertaking a rangelands reform process to develop new forms of land tenures, such as converting pastoral leases to longer-term perpetual leases, redefining leases to allow for conservation purposes and to take account of native title (Government of Western Australia 2014). These processes can change agricultural spaces into multifunctional and multi-tenure landscapes with a mix of conservation, agriculture and Indigenous spaces. Work on Queensland’s Cape York Peninsula (Holmes 2011, 2012), describes the spaces undergoing such reform processes as contested landscapes, where there is often conflict between Indigenous aspirations and conservation goals.

The large spatial scale of conservation and Indigenous-held land is another feature of the emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land. As is the case globally in biodiversity conservation, in Australia there has been a shift from a species-specific approach to a landscape or continental-scale approach. This large-scale approach means that such landscapes invariably contain multiple land uses. Working landscapes, such as rural and agricultural lands, industrial areas, urban and peri-urban blocks, are all encompassed within the larger scale. Many not-for-profit NGOs have adopted this larger scale approach to their on-ground conservation efforts through the acquisition and management of properties for conservation within these landscapes, or through working with existing land holders.
Linked to the large-scale conservation approach is the concept of connectivity corridors: developing and maintaining viable ecosystems on private land to link and buffer protected areas, and to build resilience to the impacts of climate change. The corridors are intended to deliver social and economic benefits as well as conservation outcomes (Mackey et al 2010). The approach has gained recognition with both government and NGOs in Australia, and a proposed national network of landscape and transcontinental-scale corridors has been identified in the National Wildlife Corridor Plan (Australian Government n.d.c). Within each of the corridors there are collaborations with NGOs active in on-ground conservation on private lands. Indigenous-held or controlled lands also feature in the corridors, particularly in northern and central Australia.

Parallel to these changing scales of conservation efforts has been a change of scale of Indigenous land recognised under Australian law. Native title determinations have returned considerable areas of land to Indigenous people in the north and especially in Western Australia. However, rapid and intensive colonisation of south-eastern Australia, and subsequently south-western Australia, resulted in massive forced displacement of Aboriginal people, with loss of their lands and extinguishment of native title in many instances. In these areas while many small parcels of land have been regained, it is at a much smaller scale.

Reflecting the interaction of complex spatial arrangements of management and institutional networks, there has been a redefinition of conservation and Indigenous territories in Australia. Under the new conservation paradigm, the discrete spaces of national parks have been expanded with the adoption of larger-scale and different types of conservation efforts. The specific spatial interests or conservation territories of the NGOs reflect priorities of the NRS, international conservation priorities and/or specific charters of the organisations. The Australian Conservation Foundation has “a sustainable future for northern Australia based on the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples” as a national agenda item (http://tinyurl.com/acf-agenda). The Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) has a concentration of sanctuaries in northern Australia and the south-west (http://tinyurl.com/awc-map1). Bush Heritage Australia (BHA) has its “anchor regions” including the Gulf of Carpentaria to Lake Eyre in northern Australia, the Tasmanian Midlands and the south-west (http://tinyurl.com/bha-map1). Greening Australia has many projects around Australia but its “visionary projects” are focused in the south-west, the east coast and south-east with growing initiatives in northern Australia (http://tinyurl.com/ga-
map1). The Wilderness Society has several geographical areas of interest with a focus on Cape York Peninsula, the Kimberley and the south-east (http://tinyurl.com/tws-12-13). WWF-Australia, under its current strategic plan, has the Kimberley and the south-west eco-region as a focus of its conservation framework (http://tinyurl.com/wwfaustralia-strategic-plan). The Nature Conservancy, who as well as partnering with government, Indigenous groups and funding the efforts of national conservation NGOs such as BHA and AWC, has a focus on regions of international biological significance of northern Australia and the south-west (http://tinyurl.com/tnc-australia-map). A number of the NGOs also have Indigenous partnerships programs.

This concept of national-scale conservation territories is explicit in two of the NGOs that specifically assert the significance of the scale of their operations. The Australian Wildlife Conservancy, at early 2014, has 23 sanctuaries covering over 3 million hectares and “owns and manages for conservation more land than any other non-government environment organisation in Australia” (AWC n.d.). Bush Heritage Australia manages 35 reserves covering just less than one million hectares with conservation covenants, and aims to protect 1 per cent of Australia “by acquiring and managing land of outstanding conservation value, or by working in partnership with other landowners” (BHA 2014).

To show the areas of interest, and the level of interest, of conservation under the new paradigm at a national scale in Australia, we have overlaid maps of the terrestrial geographical interests of the NGOs mentioned above and the connectivity corridors of the National Wildlife Corridor Plan (Figure 19).

As well as the individual conservation territories of the different organisations, at a large scale another outcome is illustrated in Figure 19. The level of interest of the conservation NGOs operating in Australia corresponds with the global phenomena of large conservation NGOs from the “north” or developed countries, operating in the countries of the “south”. From the intensity of shading on the map it is evident that there is a geographical divide also occurring in Australia. Although the south is not ignored, the map in Figure 19 shows a much lower level of interest in the central and western desert regions of the country, and an intense focus on northern Australia.
In 2012, Indigenous-titled land, shown at a national scale in Figure 20, equated to approximately 1.7 million square kilometres (23 per cent) of the continent’s land area (Altman 2012). This includes lands held as “exclusive possession” under native title, as well as lands scheduled or claimed under Aboriginal land rights legislation. If non-exclusive possession under native title is included, 33 per cent of the continent is held under some form of Indigenous titled land (Altman 2014). Although maps at this national scale have limitations (smaller areas of Aboriginal land are not spatially represented and the constant changes to land tenure and title make it difficult to maintain accuracy), the map indicates that most areas of Indigenous-held or controlled lands are in the north, north-west and central regions, with very little in the south-east and south-west. Large numbers of Aboriginal people live in the south-east and south-western areas, with an increasing concentration of Indigenous people in both major cities and regional centres, and nearly one-third of the Indigenous population living in densely settled areas of the east coast (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). With the spatial extent of registered native title claims expanding into some of these more settled regions, particularly the south-west, up to an additional 40 per cent of lands could be held under some form of Indigenous title, resulting in approximately 70 per cent of the continent held under some form of Indigenous titled land (Altman 2014).
In response to these changes in demography and tenure, non-spatial forms of Indigenous relationships are also developing, linking the trajectories of the new conservation paradigm and Indigenous land. Indigenous conservation networks and associations are emerging, such as the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA), a not-for-profit organisation that assists Indigenous people across northern Australia in land and sea management (NAILSMA 2013). These represent another form of governance structure for negotiation and consultation.

Figure 20: Map of the Indigenous-titled lands in Australia, also showing discrete Indigenous communities. Source: Altman 2012 © Federation Press, Sydney.

3.5 Emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land

By overlaying a single shading of the combined interests of the new conservation paradigm map (Figure 19) with the Indigenous titled lands map (Figure 20), a number of spatial patterns are evident (Figure 21). We classify these into three categories, discussed below. There are a number of challenges both revealed by and inherent in this process. As they are at the national scale, they obscure fine-grained heterogeneity. They suggest equivalent management capacity and resources, where there are in fact significant differences within and between Indigenous organisations and NGOs that our interviews revealed. They also compare a static spatial depiction of current Indigenous landholdings with a prospective area of engagement of the NGOs, when both of these are dynamic and contested.
3.5.1 Geography of overlap

There is considerable overlap between the geographical interests under the new conservation paradigm and Indigenous land in the tropical savannas of northern Australia and in the deserts of central Australia. These regions are in the most part remote, with isolated Indigenous communities, large cattle stations, mining towns and conservation estate. Many different tenures are represented, including pastoral leases, national parks, Aboriginal reserve lands in Northern Territory and Queensland and large areas of what was unallocated Crown lands, much of which has been or is being claimed under native title. And as discussed above, much of these regions of overlap are also undergoing tenure reform processes, often resulting in conflict and contested landscapes.

3.5.2 Geography of absence

There are regions of Australia where there is neither much Indigenous land nor geographical interest under the new conservation paradigm. Similar to the geography of overlap above, these regions are remote and are made up of mixed tenures. The arid mid-western region of Western Australia is one such area. Mining in this region is of particular importance (Government of Western Australia 2013), and much of the region is also currently subject to registered native title claims (Native Title Tribunal 2013). Although this
region and others under the geography of absence cover bioregions that are under-represented by the Australian Government’s IBRA, they do not appear as areas of interest under the new conservation paradigm.

### 3.5.3 Geography of dichotomy

There are considerable regions of little or no overlap between the geographical interests of the new conservation paradigm and Indigenous-held land. Such regions include areas where there is either no or little Aboriginal-held land, such as in the east and south-western parts of the country, or where there is no geographical interest under the new conservation paradigm, such as in the central and western deserts. Sizable regions of interest of the NGOs are in areas with little Indigenous-held land, but include areas where many Indigenous people live, for instance in the south-east and south-west of the continent. In some of these regions, there have been conflicts between Aboriginal people and the conservation sector in the past. And although not evident in the maps, in densely settled parts of Australia, competition between Aboriginal organisations and conservation agencies for access to remaining Crown land has resulted in court decisions that have delivered some lands of “high conservation value” to Aboriginal land councils (Adams 2004: 8). Most of the land in these regions is private land. In a number of the regions of conservation interest there are ILUAs, which does mean that negotiation and consultation between land owners and Indigenous Australians on some land issues is required.

### 3.6 Conclusion

Australia is at a critical point in conservation and Indigenous rights. We consider that the role and influence of NGOs in conservation in Australia is likely to increase, as evident from the policies and trajectories of the NGOs and government initiatives and policies. Coupled with this increase in private conservation will be an increase in Indigenous-held lands. The amount of land secured by Indigenous Australians through land rights is likely to slow. However, many native title claims are yet to be determined; the ILC is still purchasing properties with the aim of handing them back to traditional Indigenous owners; and hundreds of ILUAs are being negotiated. Indigenous involvement in conservation will increase with the expected declaration of IPAs that are currently in the planning stages, the implementation of ILUAs and the management of some ILC-purchased lands for conservation. The need for financial support for the ongoing management of IPAs is bringing about partnership engagements between NGOs and Indigenous Australians. Landscape and continental-scale conservation, tenure reform processes and the
increasingly influential climate change agenda will be catalysts for further engagements. The trajectories of the new conservation paradigm and Indigenous-held lands (and lands managed with involvement of Indigenous people) will become even more interwoven. Biodiversity conservation is consequently linked to the challenge of responding to social justice issues for Indigenous Australians.

International literature on the intersection of the new conservation paradigm and Indigenous interests suggests mixed outcomes for Indigenous people, with recognition in some circumstances, and denial in others. Analysis of these emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land is so far limited in the Western settled society of Australia. Yet historically, Indigenous Australians have suffered very significant dispossession and marginalisation, and efforts under the old conservation paradigm have contributed to this. While some elements of these impacts have been addressed for some people, there is a risk that colonial processes and outcomes could be replayed in contemporary scenarios. Indigenous Australians contribute very significantly to Australia’s conservation efforts, through land management of over 23 per cent of the country, through management of a significant proportion of the nation’s conservation estate and through their unique knowledge and customary practices. While Australia has been lauded as a global leader in Indigenous shared governance of protected areas, there are new questions about how approaches under the new conservation paradigm might evolve and their relationship with Indigenous Australians.

To what extent is recognition of Indigenous interests acknowledged in these emerging geographies? Are the historical colonial processes of public conservation efforts manifesting themselves in new kinds of neo-colonial consequences? What is the nature of the engagements between the conservation sector and Indigenous Australians in these emerging geographies? Do the geographies of overlap represent “spaces of hope” (see Zimmerer 2006: 71) as well as spaces of contest and conflict? Are there engagements between conservation and Indigenous Australians in the geographies of dichotomy, or does this pattern deny recognition? Are there engagements in the geographies of absence, or do such absences ignore other conservation and Indigenous issues and opportunities. What are the consequences of these engagements? Through all of these, what is the role of maps: how are particular depictions of reality recruited, and who are they meant to influence?
As noted by Lane and Morrison (2006), increased roles of the NGOs come with issues of representation, accountability and transparency. With significant public funds being used to help NGOs acquire and/or manage conservation lands in aid of developing the nation’s protected area system and conserving the nation’s biodiversity, it is appropriate to question the social responsibilities of these organisations towards some of the most disadvantaged members of the community - Indigenous Australians. Similarly, it seems appropriate to consider whether such public funds could alternatively secure such properties and support the capacity development of the local Indigenous communities to deliver conservation objectives. Howitt et al (2013: 128) also identify the challenge of persistent “intercultural capacity deficits of dominant institutions, processes and knowledge systems” and the need for “intercultural competence and the development of new capacities and competencies in those institutions”.

As has happened elsewhere, it appears that the geographical interests of conservation under the new paradigm in Australia may reflect some complacency, inadequacy or cost-shifting by the state in conservation and/or Indigenous rights. If so, it is important to ask how NGOs assume or are given governance roles in such regions, and what the impacts on Indigenous governance structures and aspirations are. The conclusion of Hill et al (2012), that integration of Indigenous knowledge is strongest when the level of Indigenous governance is highest, suggests that Indigenous knowledge is only considered legitimate when power is held by the Indigenous party. Such interpretations further question the roles of power and legitimacy in engagements between the conservation sector and Indigenous Australians in the emerging geographies. It is important to find out the bases of power in engagements and how they impact on the legitimacy of Indigenous peoples’ views, knowledge and aspirations. Related to this is the impact that the proprietary non-Indigenous relationship to land and the desire of some NGOs to own land to achieve conservation outcomes has on engagements with Indigenous Australians.

From the reports and strategies of the conservation NGOs examined there is not only a geographical divide between north and south in their interests. There is also some form of geographical sharing of the country by the organisations, with some active in some regions and not in other regions. It is important to investigate the driving forces behind these processes of territorialism, and the roles that Indigenous lands and people play, and to encourage a more co-ordinated national strategic approach by the NGOs.
Landscape and continental-scale approaches to conservation being promoted and adopted in Australia have had negative consequences for Indigenous people in other countries. Large international organisations have been accused of linking, or “scaling-up”, conservation efforts across a larger geographical area to meet national or international biodiversity goals and by doing so have undermined and threatened local people’s aspirations. And although the Australian situation may be different to those of developing countries, with the increase in national and international conservation NGOs operating in Australia, the consequences to Indigenous Australians of a “scaling-up” of conservation efforts to meet national or international agendas needs to be understood.

While both conservation and broader Indigenous social justice questions need input from multiple disciplines, we highlight these social perspectives to balance what is often an ecological emphasis in conservation discussions.

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Chapter 4: A spectrum of recognition: Indigenous people and interests in conservation in Australia

Publication details
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Chapter note
The chapter is a reproduction of the submitted manuscript. The heading and figure numbering and the referencing style have been altered to fit the thesis formatting.
Abstract
This paper analyses how Indigenous people and interests are recognised by conservation organisations in emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land in Australia. Under a new paradigm, conservation is promoted as inclusive; both of Indigenous people and of Indigenous interests. Yet inclusiveness requires recognition. Situating the concept of recognition under an environmental justice framework, the paper argues that conservation organisations use a spectrum of processes to recognise Indigenous people and Indigenous interests. Most conservation organisations employ affirmative recognition processes in the scale and territory of their operations, yet deny recognition of Indigenous people and interests in their governance. Transformative recognition processes are more likely to occur when Indigenous people hold secure title to land. The paper asserts that for Indigenous Australians to participate effectively in conservation, transformative recognition processes need to be introduced across the sector. In order for this to occur, there needs to be a re-valuing of Indigenous interests and a de-centring of non-Indigenous interests.

Keywords: Indigenous people, conservation, recognition, social inclusion, NGOs, Australia

4.1 Introduction
Recognition binds and limits the ability of Indigenous people to participate effectively in conservation and for the conservation sector to allow for “inclusive futures” (see Howitt et al 2013: 136). Inclusiveness is one of the central features promoted under a new paradigm in conservation. Emerging in the late twentieth century, the new paradigm acknowledges that people are part of nature not separate from it. Combined with other features of the new paradigm, such as an increased role and influence of non-government organisations (NGOs) and conservation beyond the boundaries of national parks, the scale, territory and governance of conservation has changed. In Australia, these changes, coupled with an increasing amount of land being returned to Indigenous Australians, are resulting in new, emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land (Moorcroft and Adams 2014). This paper aims to address the question posed by Moorcroft and Adams (2014: 499) “To what extent are Indigenous interests recognised in these emerging geographies?”

Historically, the conservation sector has remained distant from justice matters (Gottlieb 1994). Yet conservation work does have “moral implications” (Sikor et al 2014: 529). For
instance, Indigenous Australians were marginalised and compromised by the impacts of some previous state conservation policies and practices (Horstman and Wightman 2001; Porter and Meyers 2008), and have had to contest lands with state conservation organisations (Adams 2001). In the last two decades, research has examined different aspects of the conservation sector’s inclusiveness and recognition of Indigenous peoples under the new paradigm. Numerous accounts relay good news stories from around the world of the sector assisting Indigenous communities in their conservation initiatives (e.g. Alcorn et al 2010). However, there is a considerable body of research from developing countries that suggests that some practices of the conservation sector do not reflect the policies or promises of inclusiveness. For instance, Ramutsindela and Noe (2012) claimed that international conservation NGOs are linking community-designated conservation areas under the auspices of Wildlife Management Areas in Tanzania at scales that allow for global conservation agendas to dominate local aspirations. Corson and MacDonald (2012) illustrated a new era of “green grabbing” by conservation organisations, involving both the state and non-state, which is expanding the territory of the conservation sector, often at the expense or detriment of local and Indigenous communities. And there are examples highlighting how the governance systems of local and Indigenous communities are either ignored or altered in the name of conservation, the latter of which Bryant (2002) described in his account on the role of NGOs in biodiversity conservation in the Philippines. There are fewer examples of lack of inclusiveness from developed countries. Although not framed under a justice banner, these examples mainly concern governance. For instance, Hill et al (2012) analysed the ability of different environmental management systems to integrate Indigenous knowledge in Australia. There are even fewer examples on the impact of conservation’s scale and territory on Indigenous people in settler societies. This paper will address this research deficiency with a snapshot from Australia.

There are a few concepts and terms in this paper that require clarification. The concepts of indigeneity and recognition are constructions of colonialism. I am cautious that this paper does not advance or affirm such colonial processes. Inclusive conservation means conservation of biodiversity and society as promoted under the new conservation paradigm. Therefore, national parks and national park organisations per se, are implicit rather than explicit in this context.
4.2 Recognition, the settler society and environmental justice

Recognition refers to the extent to which cultural differences are respected and accepted as valid. Institutional and cultural norms privilege some people and values over others. Recognition for Indigenous people occurs when these social constructs are changed, by de-centring non-Indigenous values and or re-valuing Indigenous interests. Recognition processes that achieve re-valuing Indigenous interests are generally affirmative processes, while those that de-centre non-Indigenous values as well are transformative. In recent decades in Australia, as in many other settler societies, recognition processes have been instituted in an attempt to overcome past injustices upon Indigenous people. These processes take various forms such as legislation and state policies, as well as engagement policies, reconciliation action plans and positive discrimination criteria in recruitment processes. Native title, land rights legislation and treaties are all products of recognition processes (Pearson 1997; Mantziaris and Martin 2000; Barcham 2007).

As the concept of recognition is a colonial construct, it is also a contested one. While the concept is utilised and accepted by many in academia, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, it has been criticised by some Indigenous academics, including Alfred and Tomkins (2010) and Coulthard (2007). Their criticisms centre on the premise that recognition relies on Indigenous people recognising “the legitimacy of the colonial state” (Alfred and Tomkins 2010: 8). Although these criticisms are legitimate, recognition processes, or at least the discourse on them, continue to be important in the milieu of nation-states. As Smith and Morphy (2007: 7) attest, “the forms of recognition offered to Indigenous Australians and the desire for recognition itself today forms part of the intercultural existence of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders in the context of the nation-state (and, beyond Australia, the international context which is often cited by Indigenous Australians as a source of potential recognition beyond the limited forms offered by Australian governments)”. Additionally, it is worth noting that some measures that are known as recognition processes may serve to reinforce injustices, particularly those based on identity politics. For instance, recognition processes that rely on the recognition of “traditional” indigeneousness, such as Australia’s native title system, do not recognise the dynamic and contemporary cultures of Indigenous people and often result in further marginalisation, particularly for those Indigenous people who no longer have physical connections to such traditions. Such processes can also be seen as processes of non- or mis-recognition.
For this paper, I situate the concept of recognition under an environmental justice framework that also encompasses participation, equity, and “the basic needs and functioning of individuals and communities” (Schlosberg 2013: 40). This understanding, influenced by social theorists Young (1990) and Fraser (1995, 1997) and promoted by Schlosberg (2007, 2013) and others, has recognition at the forefront and allows for an assessment of interactions between Indigenous people and the dominant non-Indigenous other, including the sovereign state and new modes of the state such as conservation. Schlosberg and Carruthers (2010) demonstrated the use of this understanding with the Arizona Snowbowl case in the United States of America where Indigenous Navajo tribes legally challenged a proposal to make and apply artificial snow, made with reclaimed sewage water, on their sacred mountains. The Navajos’ argument was that the proposal did not recognise their spiritual and cultural practices or the ability of the Indigenous community to practise and transfer these to next generations (Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010). The environmental justice framework I adopt for this research allows the impact on customary knowledge and ancestral connections to be considered, and also widens the evaluation from the neo-liberal focus on the self to one that acknowledges the importance of community.

4.3 Recognition as a research tool

The concept of recognition can be used in geographical research to investigate relationships between different cultures. Adams (2001: 62) applied the concept of recognition to explore “the relationships between cultures operating in the same geographic (‘national’) space.” Indigenous academic Whyte (2010) used a recognition-based environmental justice framework to evaluate eco-tourism in Indigenous communities. I used a concept similar to these examples and explored the engagements between conservation organisations and Indigenous people in the emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land in Australia (see Moorcroft and Adams 2014).

To assist my investigation, I developed a typology of recognition processes (Table 2). The typology borrows and modifies recognition categories and terms from the existing literature on recognition and justice, particularly literature pertaining to Indigenous recognition issues in Australia (see, for example, Australian Law Reform Commission 1986; Pearson 1997; Mantziaris and Martin 2000; Barcham 2007; Smith and Morphy 2007). The typology incorporates six recognition processes and, although it necessarily simplifies the
processes and promotes discreteness, it is a useful deductive lens through which processes can be evaluated.

Table 2: Typology of recognition processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognition process</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-recognition</td>
<td>An entity ignores or does not identify another entity or entity's interest.</td>
<td>Declaration of a protected area without consultation with affected Indigenous people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mis-recognition</td>
<td>An entity mis-interprets the interests of another entity as something which it is not.</td>
<td>Indigenous people in more settled regions being expected to continue to have strong physical and cultural ties with their ancestral homelands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement (Affirmative process – re-values Indigenous people and interests)</td>
<td>An entity expresses that it has noticed another entity or another entity’s interests.</td>
<td>Paying respects to Indigenous traditional owners at the commencement of a meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation (Affirmative process – re-values Indigenous people and interests)</td>
<td>An entity adds aspects of another entity’s interests to its operations.</td>
<td>Using both Western science and Indigenous ecological knowledge in biodiversity surveys. Or job criteria requiring knowledge and understanding of Indigenous peoples, societies and culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exception (Transformative process – re-values Indigenous people and interests and de-centres non-Indigenous people and interests)</td>
<td>An entity excludes areas or aspects from its usual operations and allows another entity to regulate these. Aimed at achieving substantive equality, and sometimes called positive discrimination.</td>
<td>“Special measures” that permit only Indigenous people to apply for jobs in an Indigenous-owned national park.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference (Transformative process – re-values Indigenous people and interests and de-centres non-Indigenous people and interests)</td>
<td>An entity refers its operations or aspects of its operations to another entity for decisions or action without the first entity knowing the detail pertaining to the decision making and/or the actions.</td>
<td>Project evaluation is determined by senior Indigenous people using Indigenous knowledge without non-Indigenous partners being party to the evaluation or being informed of the criteria for assessment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4 Research strategy

For this paper, I explored two emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land in Australia. I characterise these as the “geography of overlap” and the “geography of dichotomy” (see Moorcroft and Adams 2014). The locations of the case studies in these two geographies are shown in Figure 22. For the geography of overlap, I looked at Northern Australia, as defined by Woinarski et al (2007), where large tracts of Indigenous-held lands intersect with the geographical interests of the conservation sector. Northern Australia is a place less defined by state boundaries than by remoteness, climate and socio-political landscapes. It is in the wet dry tropics, covering some 1.5 million square kilometres, and crossing three provincial (State/Territory) jurisdictions. International and national conservation NGOs, and various state conservation organisations, are actively operating in the area and it contains several large protected areas. The dominant tropical savannah grasslands of the area are listed as one of World Wildlife Fund’s 200 Global Priority Eco-regions for conservation (Olson and Dinerstein 2002), and many endemic and threatened species also occur (Woinarski et al 2007). Indigenous-held land comprises more than 20% of Northern Australia (CSIRO 2013) with much of this acknowledged as having high conservation value. It is also a complex and contested place, with conservation and Indigenous interests at the centre of debates on its future, and it has been the battleground of some of Australia’s most well known environmental campaigns. Northern Australia has some of the lowest yet fastest growing population in the country, and has a proportionately high Indigenous population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012).

For the geography of dichotomy, I explored the Great Eastern Ranges initiative in the south-east of the continent. The initiative is promoted as one of Australia’s key conservation connectivity corridors (Whitten et al 2011). It incorporates much of Australia’s Great Dividing Range and Great Escarpment near the eastern sea-board, although at the time of the research the initiative was in its infancy and restricted to a southern section of the corridor. It includes some of the most settled regions of the continent and, even though there is little Indigenous-held land, the Indigenous population in the area of the corridor is the highest in the country (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). Within the forests and woodlands of the corridor, there is a large diversity of plants and animals, including a high number of threatened species and endangered ecological communities (Mackey et al 2010). A network of state and non-state partners fund and host various roles of the
initiative, with actual conservation work being carried out under the auspices of regional partnerships.

Figure 22: Location of case studies

4.5 Methods

The research was undertaken between 2011 and 2015. To validate and ensure rigour, I used a mixed methods approach with document review, data from interview transcripts and observations. I identified key organisations participating in the emerging geographies, including various levels of the state, international and national conservation NGOs, and regional and local Indigenous and conservation organisations. Reflecting the heterogeneity of the conservation sector, the NGOs included those that used campaigning, advocacy, lobbying and support as their modus operandi, as well as those that were land owners and managers. From the key organisations, 58 participants were interviewed. The interviewees included: Indigenous and non-Indigenous land owners; Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees of organisations at executive, senior and field level; those involved in state processes; and independent consultants. Both female and male participants were interviewed, as were those with extended involvement with the geographies and those with less experience. Thirteen Indigenous Australians were interviewed and included those working away from their ancestral homelands as well as those who worked on their
ancestral homelands. Where possible, interviews were carried out face to face, either in the field or at a place nominated by the participants. Interviews were semi-structured and followed a series of research themes relating to engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation. The interviews were audio-recorded and hand written notes were taken. The interviews were transcribed and analysed. All interviewees gave their informed consent to participate in the research. Interviewee’s names were suppressed. I have used a selection of quotes from the interviews to add depth to this paper. I am familiar with much of the context of these geographies and know many of the people involved, and in this regard, as Bradshaw and Stratford (2010: 74) explain, the case studies “found me”.

I participated in an IUCN symposium on Innovation for 21st Century Conservation and an Indigenous Protected Areas manager meeting, as well as meetings of specific partnerships in the case studies. To confirm claims made in interviews, I carried out documentary analysis of strategic and promotional materials of participant organisations as well as of other public materials such as government grant approval notifications and submissions to state processes.

From the data, I identified the type and extent of recognition processes in engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations. I did this by considering the degree to which the conservation organisations or practices had re-valued Indigenous people and interests and ways of doing things and de-centred the dominant non-Indigenous views and practices in conservation, as outlined in the typology. As much of the existing literature focuses on the geo-political concepts of scale, territory and governance of conservation, I then categorised the data according to these themes.

The research was guided by the ethical considerations of Indigenous methodologies. Louis (2007) identifies key considerations of Indigenous methodologies as: advocating or accepting Indigenous knowledge systems; situating Indigenous people and communities, and the researcher in the research; determining the research agenda with Indigenous people; and sharing knowledge. I negotiated with key organisations and individuals to determine local Indigenous protocols and identify participants. And although Indigenous knowledge per se was not a component of the research, the research respected different ways of knowing. I acknowledge that my perspectives of recognition processes may be different from the perspective of Indigenous people.
4.6 Results

4.6.1 Scale

The recognition of Indigenous people and interests by conservation organisations is influenced by the multi-scalar character of conservation under the new paradigm, and the practice of scale-framing by conservation organisations. Kurtz (2003: 894) defines scale-frames as “the discursive practices that construct meaningful (and actionable) linkages between the scale at which a social problem is experienced and the scale(s) at which it could be politically addressed or resolved.” Historically, Indigenous Australians were involved in conservation through national parks, and engaged with the state in relation to these discrete spaces. However, conservation now operates at various social, political and spatial scales. With landscape-scale efforts, Indigenous people who are involved in conservation need to operate at different scales; scales that do not necessarily coincide with scales that are accessible or familiar to the Indigenous communities involved.

Scale-framing by conservation organisations is evident in both the geography of overlap and the geography of dichotomy. The Australian Government’s support for the establishment and management of Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs), through its IPA Program, is using local Indigenous conservation efforts to achieve its conservation goal of a comprehensive, adequate and representative national reserve system (Smyth and Sutherland 1996). Conservation NGOs are also playing an increasing role in constructing and contesting scales, restructuring the spatial dimensions of conservation. Projects of the larger NGOs, such as Australian Conservation Foundation’s Indigenous consultation processes and World Wildlife Fund-Australia’s support of northern Indigenous ranger groups’ monitoring of turtle and dolphin populations, are primarily aimed at achieving “bigger picture” conservation goals such as the declaration of marine reserves, declaration of protected areas or listing of national or world heritage.

One example of the multi-scalar character of conservation involves the activities of one large, if not the largest, conservation NGO in the world, the USA-based, The Nature Conservancy. The Nature Conservancy’s initial work in Australia, in the early 2000s, centred on building the capacity of national conservation NGOs, such as the Australian Wildlife Conservancy and Bush Heritage Australia. In more recent years, however, it has aligned its work to the international conservation priorities of Australia’s tropical savannah grasslands in Northern Australia, the mega-diverse region of the Great Western Woodlands in southwestern Australia and more recently the Western Desert Region in Central Australia (The
The Nature Conservancy acknowledges that Indigenous people own much of the tropical grasslands in Northern Australia and it supports Indigenous involvement in conservation across various scales in that area. It works directly with Indigenous communities through funding and capacity building, particularly related to the establishment and management of IPAs, and promotes the use of its own conservation systems. It assists Indigenous groups with the establishment of endowment trusts and provides technical and legal advice. At the regional scale it supports IPAs, provides financial support and advice in relation to carbon abatement opportunities and financially collaborates with other partners, including the Australian Government and national conservation NGOs, in the acquisition of properties for conservation. Indigenous groups across Northern Australia are formally and informally networking with each other through forums facilitated by organisations such as The Nature Conservancy. At the national or continental-scale it works with the Australian Committee of IUCN on projects (including co-hosting the symposium on *Innovation for 21st Century Conservation*), and its Australian Director is the conservation NGO representative on the Australian Government’s Indigenous Advisory Committee IPA sub-committee. It operates at an international scale, which for Northern Australia has included sponsoring overseas study and donor marketing trips for staff of partner organisations, and encouraging information sharing through its global databases. Comments by The Nature Conservancy staff clearly indicate the awareness of this multi-scalar approach:

> If you’re thinking about a Northern Australia business case to support all these entities, you need to have things functioning at all those levels. So we’re thinking pretty clearly about all those levels and how we work effectively with those. (The Nature Conservancy employee, non-Indigenous, 1 July 2011)

This list of The Nature Conservancy’s activities for Australia is not exhaustive, and their activities are changing. Yet it is sufficient to portray the way the organisation is strategically operating in Australia, the multi-scalar approach to its work, and the up-scaling of Indigenous conservation efforts in Northern Australia to help it meet its international goals.

Scale-framing is not as obvious in the geography of dichotomy of the Great Eastern Ranges. There is no Indigenous forum that operates at the same spatial or political scale as the corridor. Indigenous engagement is facilitated through the regional partnerships in the corridor, which are at more accessible scales for Indigenous groups. One specific example of scale-framing under the Great Eastern Ranges initiative involves the Cultural Connections
Model. The model, developed by state conservation staff and Indigenous representatives from one of the regional partnerships, claims to differ “fundamentally from ones where government agencies develop programs and deliver them to communities” (NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change 2010: 2). Under the model, Indigenous land owners identify their aspirations in relation to natural and cultural heritage and the state assists them in preparing various planning documents that they can then use to apply for state conservation funds. Several Indigenous land owner groups are using the model. Each Indigenous conservation project under the model contributes to the state’s relevant regional biodiversity management plan and in turn, these count towards the goal of the Great Eastern Ranges connectivity corridor. However, as there is little Indigenous-held land in the geography of dichotomy, most Indigenous engagements do not revolve around the Cultural Connections Model. Rather, they focus on short-term employment contracts to undertake work such as weed control, Indigenous interpretation of the landscape or cultural heritage assessments of other land tenures. Such short-term programs are not new, with some resembling programs initiated over two decades ago. Indigenous engagements through the regional partnerships appear to happen irrespective of the Great Eastern Ranges initiative, yet they are included under its banner.

This work across scales and of scale-framing raises a number of issues in relation to Indigenous recognition. In both geographies, conservation organisations are using accommodation processes to recognise Indigenous interests in the scale of their operations. They are accommodating Indigenous interests to the extent that it helps them achieve their own goals. For the geography of overlap in Northern Australia, Indigenous communities and organisations are assisting conservation organisations achieve national and international goals. For the geography of dichotomy in the Great Eastern Ranges, Indigenous communities and organisations are assisting the initiative and its partners achieve regional and national conservation goals. In order for Indigenous groups to receive financial assistance from conservation organisations, they are encouraged to fit in with pre-determined projects. Indigenous communities are strongly encouraged to use planning and management models or systems of conservation organisations, rather than the conservation organisations tailoring projects to achieve Indigenous aspirations and goals. With this approach, conservation organisations are using up-scaling of Indigenous conservation efforts to achieve their own conservation goals.
4.6.2 Territory

Territories are about the negotiated and contested interactions between physical spaces and social processes; they strongly influence and reify power relations (Paasi 2003: 110). As mentioned previously, contests over land between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations have occurred in the past, and the present research confirms that such territorial contests are continuing. This was exemplified in 2011 when the Government of Western Australia released its vision for a conservation landscape across the Kimberley region in the north-west of the state. It proposed that the landscape would be achieved through the implementation of the Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy, mainly on the declaration and management of the Kimberley Wilderness Parks, an “interconnected system of marine and terrestrial parks covering more than 3.5 million hectares” (Government of Western Australia 2011). The area of these wilderness parks included existing national parks as well as large areas that were nearing the end of native title determination processes and being dedicated as IPAs by their respective Indigenous native title groups. Yet the strategy was nearly silent on these latter initiatives. From interview accounts, there was very little consultation with the affected groups. There was a sense of unease with this non- or mis-recognition amongst some interviewees, as well as a reluctance to voice such concerns. The state was repeating the colonial processes of non-recognition that it had used years before when it declared national parks in the area without consultation or notification of native title claimants (see Horstman and Wightman 2001).

Territory making in conservation is not confined to the state. Conservation organisations are also involved in making and claiming territories. In 2015, Bush Heritage Australia had 35 reserves covering 960 000 hectares (Bush Heritage Australia 2015) and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy had 23 sanctuaries covering over three million hectares (Australian Wildlife Conservancy n.d.). Both organisations usually recruit or re-locate staff to live and work on the properties and most of the staff is non-Indigenous. Both organisations also use their properties as platforms to expand the spatial domain and scale of their conservation projects through collaborating with neighbouring land owners. However, the organisations have different institutional and cultural norms.

For a number of years Bush Heritage Australia has included partnering as one of its key conservation strategies. It works with and helps build the capacity of existing land owners to carry out conservation activities. It is this strategy that it applies in Northern Australia,
and it has several such partnerships with Indigenous land owners (see, for example, Moorcroft et al 2012). With much of Northern Australia held as Indigenous land, the organisation decided a number of years ago not to acquire any further properties in the area and advocated that it would only work in this space if it was invited:

In the north basically you know that’s why it’s not an anchor region, because it’s primarily Indigenous land, or will be, and is part of that. So we don’t purchase. We’d rather support Indigenous people, the traditional owners, to manage their own country and … rather than thinking the best way to do it is for some white fellas to buy it and then manage it themselves. (Bush Heritage Australia employee, non-Indigenous, 21 June 2011)

Bush Heritage Australia is using a transformative recognition process of exception to influence its territory; it makes exceptions to its normal operations and allows Indigenous interests to determine potential engagement in these spaces. A number of interviewees expressed concern with the use of this strategy as it is based on identity politics. Recognising Northern Australia as an Indigenous domain may be beneficial for northern Indigenous groups, though conversely, it may mis-recognise or not recognise other Indigenous Australians. This approach has been problematic for the organisation, as illustrated by an example from south-western Australia where Bush Heritage Australia was seen to be in competition with an Indigenous group in acquisition of a property:

There was already a number of Bush Heritage reserves that had already been bought without any prior consultation or any focus on talking to the traditional owners or checking whether there was any interests from traditional owners in maybe acquiring that land … there’s been one reserve … where we’ve been challenged and that the traditional owners there feel like, that the country was bought from under them, that they had expressed interests and that Bush Heritage didn’t really didn’t do due process in ensuring that they weren’t competing. (Bush Heritage Australia employee, Indigenous, 14 October 2011)

For Bush Heritage Australia, this situation resulted in “not a lot of engagement” with that specific Indigenous group. Recognition space was denied to those Indigenous people in a geography of dichotomy. Staff claims that the organisation has learnt from this experience and now carries out consultation with Indigenous groups as part of its pre-acquisition property assessment.
A number of interviewees felt that the Australian Wildlife Conservancy did not share the perception of Northern Australia as an Indigenous space. They implied that the organisation had claimed Northern Australia as its territory; that it was “busy there” taking advantage, intentionally or unintentionally, of Bush Heritage Australia’s decision to not acquire properties in the area. “So AWC kind of were able to step into that space and marched on hard purchasing properties.” When it sub-leased an Aboriginal-held pastoral lease in Northern Australia the organisation was accused of undermining Indigenous conservation initiatives, threatening native title rights and seeking “to build a vast conservation empire over Indigenous lands” (Kerins 2009: 29). Some interviewees felt that this strategy of acquisition was strengthening the power of the organisation (as well as confusing a conservation strategy with a conservation outcome!). The organisation has since made similar acquisitions and agreements regarding Indigenous pastoral leases. As one staff member explained:

In terms of Northern Australia, yes, you can still buy properties, buy leases, but some of the better leases, in terms of their conservation value, might be Aboriginal leases ... the income might be more important to the [Indigenous] community and conservation might be more important to us ... I guess potentially you’re more likely to be able to do that with Indigenous communities than you are with white pastoralists, who will tend to want to run their business, which is cattle. But you know Indigenous communities might be, not all of them, but some of them will be looking for alternatives. So I guess you know leasing to a conservation agency is one of them. (Australian Wildlife Conservancy employee, non-Indigenous, 22 July 2013)

Numerous interviewees were critical of the land acquisition processes of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. They were concerned that Indigenous lease holders may have been taken advantage of during lease negotiations. Interviewees felt that the organisation’s acquisition approach is not recognising the Indigenous people and interests in the area, or is mis-recognising Indigenous interests. The organisation is vocal in tenure reform processes, advocating for conservation-specific leases or for pastoral leases to have conservation as a permitted land use (other conservation NGOs, including Bush Heritage Australia, have also advocated for such reforms, although perhaps not as assertively) (Productivity Commission 2001; Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts 2007). Furthermore, the Australian Wildlife Conservancy is active in prioritising and delivering state conservation programs. For instance, it coordinates the five million hectare Eco-fire Project in the Kimberley (Legge et al
2011) and it is a major player in the implementation of the Western Australian Government’s Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy (see Government of Western Australia 2011). The Conservancy’s involvement in these other activities is no doubt expanding the organisation’s territory, spatially and politically.

4.6.3 Governance

Many interviewees expressed concerns with the lack of recognition of Indigenous people and interests in conservation governance. These concerns relate to: (i) transparency and accountability in decisions affecting Indigenous Australians; (ii) legitimacy of Indigenous conservation initiatives and Indigenous partnerships; and (iii) influence and representation in governance. In relation to (i), interviewees were concerned that the allocation of state-funded grants did not take into account recipient’s track records in Indigenous engagements. For instance, many state environment grant programs require reporting of Indigenous participation, yet don’t require Indigenous participation, prompting some to ponder whether grants may be awarded to organisations that are in competition or contest with Indigenous groups. For (ii), some interviewees expressed the view that Indigenous conservation initiatives and Indigenous partnerships were perceived to pose a greater risk than the strategy of property acquisition, despite them being more cost-effective, as explained by one interviewee:

I think people perceive a greater level of risk putting $300 000 into [an Indigenous partnership project] than they do putting $30 million into an acquisition like [name of property]. (Independent consultant, non-Indigenous, 22 September 2012)

However, the main concern relating to Indigenous recognition in governance was (iii), influence and representation. Conservation organisations are seen as influencing, and at times undermining, the governance of Indigenous organisations that they partner with, as illustrated in the following narratives:

As a conservation NGO and as conservationists we all think we’re the good guys but we’re also the devil. For indigenous they’ve only just got recognition you know, got ownership of their land back and at the same time they’re also signing up to long term agreements to manage that for conservation and so there’s certainly compromises. It means conservationists having a say over [Indigenous held-land] too and there’ll be whole sets of expectations around how [Indigenous traditional owners] are going to manage their country because they’re taking that money. (Bush Heritage Australia employee, non-Indigenous, 21 June 2011)
We've quite specifically provided funding to develop governance structures. They're not traditional governance structures. They just were appropriate structures for people to be able to start channelling funds ... One old man and his family who I was particularly close with said, "No, I don't want any of that [ranger program] stuff out here because then white fellas are going to manage it and then I won't be boss for country". ... Unfortunately all of these management structures require “whitegoods” in a sense or people who are experts at that Western management style. ... That does impact on traditional governance structures ... They become reliant on outsiders and those outsiders have a lot of power in that general management, which does undermine traditional structures. That old man I was talking to you [about] he’s answer ... was just saying “No” to everything because then at least when he was on country he was the boss. It was traditional governance structures ... I don’t know how you deal with that but the fact is that people want to move forward and they want adequate resourcing and management and it certainly is part of the compromise.
(Bush Heritage Australia employee, non-Indigenous, both geographies, 21 June 2011)

Conservation organisations’ influence in Indigenous governance is generally not reciprocated. Despite the conservation sector’s increasing reliance on the involvement of Indigenous Australians and the addition of Indigenous-held lands to the conservation estate, documentary analysis and observations showed that there is very little Indigenous representation in the governance of conservation organisations. Over the last few decades, the institutional norms and cultures of many conservation organisations have changed. Many have adopted Indigenous engagement policies and some employ Indigenous staff, albeit in low numbers or in short-term and/or low-level positions. Nevertheless, Indigenous representation at an executive level, for instance as board members of conservation NGOs, is limited to just a few. Interviewees expressed frustration with this lack of recognition of Indigenous people by some conservation organisations, particularly the larger international organisations of The Nature Conservancy and the World Wildlife Fund:

If they’re [World Wildlife Fund-Australia] serious about Indigenous engagement there needs to be some Indigenous governors out of which one or more of those could sit on the board. (Independent consultant, non-Indigenous, 22 June 2011)

They are pretty much the last landholders left where there is conservation estate that hasn’t already been vested in other bodies, and there should be some sort of an Indigenous steering committee or some sort of Indigenous advisor for the project ... as it is apparently at the moment, only dominated by the requirements from TNC [The
Nature Conservancy] and from a Western scientific point of view. (Regional Indigenous organisation employee, non-Indigenous, 7 July 2011)

There were exceptions to this lack of Indigenous recognition in conservation governance. From its purely property acquisition days of the 1990s, with no Indigenous employment and a board of non-Indigenous directors, Bush Heritage Australia has undergone a process of structural change that sets it apart from most other conservation organisations. During the time of the research, the organisation employed a number of Indigenous people across a range of positions, employed social scientists as well as ecologists, had a significant number of Indigenous partnerships, had Indigenous representation on its Board and had an Indigenous Partnership Committee with Indigenous representatives from different regions. By all accounts, navigating this journey was not easy and has been the responsibility of a handful of “champions” (see Taylor et al 2011), both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

So when I first started working for Bush Heritage, we had strong advocates who were non-Indigenous ... on the Board ... they were both strong advocates for Indigenous rights ... as it progressed to develop the conservation on country program and our Indigenous engagement work it was clear that we needed additional support mechanisms and governance structures in the organisation that had Indigenous perspectives and ... so we developed the, an indigenous identified position on the board, and an Indigenous Advisory Group, which has now become the Indigenous Partnership Committee which is a subcommittee to the board. (Bush Heritage Australia employee, Indigenous, 14 October 2011)

The most important thing I ever did in Bush Heritage was employing [Indigenous officer’s name]. No question. Because partly of who she is and partly because until such time as the organisation actually engaged someone who was Indigenous, you know they were never really going to get what it meant to be able to work in that space. So [Indigenous officer’s name] challenged the organization and to her infinite credit didn’t throw her hands up in despair. (Former Bush Heritage Australia employee, non-Indigenous, 22 September 2012)

Bush Heritage Australia’s transformative recognition processes were not restricted to the institutional level of governance. For instance, the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project in the geography of overlap in Northern Australia uses the recognition process of reference for indicators to assess the health of the environment. These indicators include the taste of certain bush foods and the assessment of inter-generational knowledge transfer (Moorcroft et al 2012). They rely on Indigenous knowledge and customs without
specifying exactly what that knowledge or custom is. Although this type of transformative recognition process is unusual, its use appears to be increasing, particularly in the geography overlap in Northern Australia where a number of Indigenous groups have established their own conservation or land management organisations. One example is Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation, whose partnerships with other conservation organisations incorporate strong Indigenous governance structures and reference processes involving Indigenous land owners and incorporating Indigenous knowledge (see Hoffman et al 2012).

4.7 Discussion – a spectrum of recognition

Conservation organisations in Australia use a spectrum of processes to recognise Indigenous people and interests (Figure 23) in their operations. They mainly use affirmative recognition processes of acknowledgement and accommodation, and there are also a few instances of the use of transformative recognition processes. However, there are also processes of mis- and non-recognition, suggesting that the injustices of colonial processes, such as marginalisation and compromise, are manifesting themselves as neo-colonial processes in contemporary conservation.

Figure 23: The spectrum of recognition of Indigenous people and interests used by conservation organisations in Australia

Affirmative recognition processes of acknowledgement and accommodation are employed by most conservation organisations in the scale and territory of their operations. For these matters, conservation organisations have re-valued Indigenous interests yet have not gone as far as to de-centre their own non-Indigenous interests. Significantly, most conservation organisations deny the recognition of Indigenous interests in the governance of their
operations. For this matter, the organisations have neither re-valued Indigenous interests nor de-centred non-Indigenous interests. This is despite conservation being reliant on the involvement of Indigenous Australians and the use of Indigenous-held land to achieve biodiversity conservation outcomes.

Although most conservation organisations used affirmative recognition processes in the scale and territory of their operations, there were only a few instances of the use of transformative recognition processes for these operational matters. The recognition process of exception was employed by one organisation to determine its conservation territory. However, in this instance, the exception process was based on identity politics. So while the use of exception was well meaning and benefited some Indigenous Australians, it had unintended negative consequences for other Indigenous Australians. This suggests the use of exception as a transformative recognition process requires careful consideration.

There were also a few examples of the transformative recognition process of reference being used by the same organisation. Interestingly, and in contrast to the findings above, these examples related to governance. Under an environmental justice framework, the needs and functions of Indigenous customary knowledge and ancestral connections to country are considered valid and legitimate in the process of reference. However, the research showed that there is an axis of variability associated with Indigenous recognition processes. While affirmative recognition processes happen irrespective of land title, the use of transformative recognition processes by conservation organisations is dependent on some form of Indigenous land title (or the likelihood of land title being held by Indigenous people).

4.8 Conclusion and recommendations

Under an environmental justice framework, this paper explored how conservation organisations recognise Indigenous people and their interests in the geo-political concepts of scale, territory and governance in emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land in Australia. It found that conservation organisations in Australia use a spectrum of processes to recognise Indigenous people and interests. It concludes that Indigenous Australians are not participating effectively in conservation and contemporary conservation is neither inclusive nor just.

For conservation to be truly inclusive and just in Australia, transformative recognition processes need to be the norm across the sector. Although, achieving this is undoubtedly
no easy task, both practically and politically, I suggest the following three steps. Firstly, the values that influence recognition need to be understood. Understanding these values will help to ascertain why some conservation organisations do not recognise or mis-recognise Indigenous people and interests. For this first step further research is required. Secondly, informed by the research findings from step one, Indigenous people and interests need to be re-valued by organisations that employ non- or mis-recognition processes. Such processes need to be replaced with affirmative recognition processes. A culture of social responsibility needs to be promoted across the sector. One way to encourage this new culture is with self-regulation. Self-regulation, such as through a code of practice or accreditation, is common in other sectors and at the very least promotes affirmative processes. Another mechanism that may encourage this re-valuing is ensuring state conservation funding is conditional on Indigenous participation, rather than just requiring reporting on Indigenous participation. Thirdly, non-Indigenous people and interests need to be de-centred by conservation organisations. Affirmative recognition processes need to be replaced with transformative recognition processes. This can be done with the use of reference, for instance the appointment of Indigenous people in executive positions and involvement in decision making processes, and the use of social indicators and subjective measures that rely on Indigenous knowledge or customs. In some cases, the careful use of exception may also be employed to help achieve more inclusive conservation.

The typology of recognition processes and the spectrum of recognition processes presented in this paper may provide useful tools in implementing the steps outlined above. They can be utilised by the state and large conservation NGOs in assessing funding applications, as well as by Indigenous organisations in assessing potential conservation partners. And the role of champions will be critical to promote and facilitate the conservation sector’s transition to “inclusive futures”.

4.9 References


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Chapter 5: Conservation planning in a cross-cultural context: the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project in the Kimberley, Western Australia

Publication details

Chapter note
The chapter is a reproduction of the published article. The text is copied from the published article. The heading and figure numbering and the referencing style have been altered to fit the thesis formatting.
Abstract
This article illustrates how a conservation planning approach combined Indigenous knowledge and Western science to support Indigenous Traditional Owners to make decisions about managing their ancestral lands and seas, and communicate more strategically with external stakeholders.

Key words: conservation planning, environmental, non-government organisations, Indigenous knowledge, Traditional Owners, Western science

5.1 An emerging collaborative conservation space
There is growing recognition in the Australian conservation sector that to address national environmental challenges and achieve conservation outcomes, partnerships with Indigenous land owners are essential (Ross et al 2009; National Biodiversity Strategy Review Task Group 2009).

This recognition provides new opportunities for Indigenous land owners. In 2008, the total Indigenous land estate was approximately 20% of the Australian continent (Australian Government 2010). Most Indigenous held land is remote, largely intact and has high conservation value (Altman et al 2007). However, the natural and cultural assets of this estate are facing increasing threats and pressures, many that were not present in pre-European Australia, such as destruction of cultural sites as a result of development actions (Vinnicombe 2002). Managing these vast and largely inaccessible landscapes can be resource intensive, and Traditional Owners and their representative bodies are seeking support from external organisations to help plan for (Figure 24) and manage these areas, particularly for conservation (Dhimurru 2008; Hoffman et al 2012; Preuss and Dixon 2012; Wallis et al 2012).

The Indigenous estate has made a substantial contribution (at least in terms of area) to Australia’s National Reserve System (NRS), mainly through Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs). IPAs are Australia’s equivalent to internationally recognised Community Conserved Areas, which are landscapes of natural or cultural significance, voluntarily managed or conserved by local communities (Borrini-Feyerabend et al 2004). In 2008, the NRS covered 12.8% of Australia (Figure 25). Private reserves, owned mainly by Environmental Non-Government Organisations (ENGOs), contributed to over 4% of the NRS. In contrast, IPAs
made up 19.4% of the NRS and shared management protected areas (includes reserves jointly managed or co-managed with Indigenous Traditional Owners) added another 9.8% (Australian Government 2010). In other words, Indigenous held lands can be considered a cornerstone of Australia’s protected areas.

Figure 24: Traditional Owners and project partners in the men’s group during a planning workshop for the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project. (Photo: Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation).

Figure 25: Diagram highlighting the importance of the Indigenous estate in Australia’s expanding National Reserve System.

1. Australia = 770 million ha
2. Indigenous land estate = 154 million ha, 20% of Australia
3. National Reserve System (NRS) = 98.5 million ha, 12.8% of Australia
4. Indigenous Protected Areas = 20.3 million ha, 19.4% of NRS
5. Shared management reserves = 9.8% of NRS
6. Private protected areas = 4.3% of NRS

Figure adapted from Altman, Buchanan and Larsen (2007). Source of data, Australian Government (2010).
A new conservation approach is evolving in this context, providing opportunities for collaborations between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector. Historically, ENGOs based their conservation efforts on cultural perspectives dominated by non-Indigenous people, “a community of scientists” (Brockington 2010) and a preservationist belief. The Western preservationist view of “wilderness” contends that there is an inverse relationship between humans and the natural environment, a dichotomy of nature and culture (Berkes 2008). By contrast, Indigenous Australians’ relationship with the environment is firmly based on the connectedness of humans and the natural environment, on ancestral association and resource utilisation (Rose 2005). Reinforcing dualistic world views in environmental campaigns and management has sometimes resulted in conflict between Indigenous people and the conservation sector (Herath 2002; Adams 2008; Pickerill 2009). It has also resulted in imposed control and restrictions on Indigenous people’s ability to use and occupy their ancestral estates (Langton et al 2005).

Alcorn (1993) argued that conservation is best achieved through partnerships between conservationists and Indigenous peoples. With a growing recognition of Indigenous peoples’ rights, particularly as owners of areas of high biodiversity, there has also been support to address the social impacts of conservation (Springer 2009). The recognition of the interconnectedness of biological diversity and cultural diversity (Pretty et al 2009) is driving a major paradigm shift among Western conservationists who accept human use and occupation of the environment as integral to finding a common ground of sustainability (Berkes 2008: 237). A number of ENGOs in Australia have developed Indigenous engagement policies, employ Aboriginal people and have Indigenous Australians on their management boards. Many, such as WWF Australia and Bush Heritage Australia (BHA), have Indigenous partnership programmes. Some ENGOs further acknowledge that conservation outcomes on a collaborative project with Traditional Owners can only be achieved if the project also supports cultural, social and economic outcomes, such as sustainable livelihoods for Traditional Owners (Fitzsimons et al 2012).

Castree and Head (2008) ask whether we are reaching a time in Australia when we have passed this dualism of world views, and note the importance of reporting on approaches that challenge this dualism. In this article, we describe the challenges of adapting a widely used “dualist” conservation planning and prioritisation tool so that it respects and privileges Indigenous knowledge and ownership whilst maintaining the benefits of its Western science base.
5.2 Wunambal Gaambera Country and its people

Wunambal Gaambera Country covers approximately 2.5 million hectares of the north Kimberley region of Australia, including land and sea (Figure 26). Wunambal Gaambera Country is part of the Wanjina Wunggurr community. Wunambal Gaambera people call their ancestral estate, their “country”, Uunguu – their living home. Uunguu culture is based on Wanjina Wunggurr Law, and it is unique to, and can only exist in, Wunambal Gaambera Country, as it has for millennia. Its ongoing contribution to the diversity of Australian culture is dependent on Wunambal Gaambera people maintaining their natural and cultural assets on country. Wunambal Gaambera people’s long-term presence is depicted in the extensive rock art sites and in the wealth of Indigenous knowledge that continues to be maintained.

Figure 26: Maps showing the location and area of Wunambal Gaambera Country


The Wunambal Gaambera people (of approximately 400) reside mainly in the Kimberley towns of Kalumburu, Derby, Broome and Kununurra. Today one family group lives permanently on their family group’s ancestral estate (their graa) at Kandiwal on Ngauwudu
Wunambal Gaambera Traditional Owners have striven to ensure that they are respected and recognised as the owners and managers of their ancestral estate. In 1998, the Wunambal Gaambera Traditional Owners incorporated the Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation (WGAC) as the formal governance body responsible to them for management of Wunambal Gaambera Country. The Wunambal Gaambera Traditional Owners lodged their native title determination application under Australia’s *Native Title Act* 1993 in 1999. Subsequently, in 2001 they prepared a management plan for a part of their estate, Ngauwudu, in response to the Western Australian Government’s declaration of four conservation reserves over parts of Wunambal Gaambera Country, which included Ngauwudu. The Traditional Owners believed these declarations were imposed without adequate consent as required by the *Native Title Act 1993*. Despite this, the reserves remained and Traditional Owners have continued their efforts for proper recognition and responsibility.

Coinciding with Wunambal Gaambera actions, public and private sector interest in the north Kimberley region increased through tourism, mining, oil and gas processing, the establishment of further reserves, and National Heritage assessment under the Commonwealth’s *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Along with these increasing external pressures, the passing of a number of Wunambal Gaambera elders who had the vision and strength to pursue recognition and control of their ancestral estates added urgency and significance to the task of seeking respect and recognition as the owners and managers of their ancestral estate.

In 2006, the WGAC, on behalf of Traditional Owners, prepared the Uunguu Tourism Plan (WGAC 2006) to manage impacts and secure benefits from tourism activities on Wunambal Gaambera Country. Development of a “healthy country” (see Rose 1996; Burgess et al 2005) framework to support these activities was identified as a priority under the Tourism Plan.

Consequently, the WGAC sought assistance from a number of organisations to help develop and then implement a “healthy country” framework. That framework, the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project (the WGHCP), was conceptualised in two phases: with a 2-year participatory planning process followed by a 10 year implementation stage, both
formalised by legal agreements between WGAC and their partners. In 2011, Wunambal Gaambera native title was determined over 25000 km² of land and sea.

5.3 The Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project

The Wunambal Gaambera Traditional Owners sought the right to make decisions about their estates, through a voluntary commitment to conservation management and the use of non-Indigenous planning approaches in a “community-centric” way. The WGHCP identifies and articulates the principle values of “healthy country” in modern contexts and maintains those values consistent with Wanjina Wunggurr Law under the direction of Traditional Owners (Vigilante and Mangolomara 2007).

Although the WGHCP is coordinated and directed by the Traditional Owners through WGAC, it is a collaborative project involving a number of partner organisations: BHA – a national not-for-profit ENGO that provides funds, advice, technical support – facilitated the planning process; and the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) – as the regional Traditional Owner representative body that supports Traditional Owners with technical expertise, advice, logistics – promotes Traditional Owner interests as paramount. Other partners include the Australian Government’s IPA Program, which provides funds towards the planning and management of IPAs; the Northern Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA), which provides technical advice; and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), which provided funds in support of the planning process. WWF Australia Program funded the completion of the ethnobiological project during the time of the “healthy country” planning process.

As Sylvester Mangolomara, Wunambal man and Wunambal Gaambera Senior Cultural Advisor, explains:

We got to go back to country and look after our place. That’s where we get more stronger – from the country and from the spirit in our country. We got to work all together now and find somehow to protect them. Not just the land but the islands too, and look after the songs – keep them alive. That’s why we need others to give us a hand to see what to do – business way you know ... When we’re helping each other we can really go out and do it ... I can’t do it by myself – I need support too. From people who maybe want to help us – how to set up and all that.
5.4 The planning process

By working through the structured CAP process (see Box 1), it became evident to the planning participants that the wider socio-economic wellbeing and Wunambal Gaambera capacity is central to achieving conservation outcomes. Biodiversity, within the Wanjina Wunggurr cultural context, would need to include the human element. The planning process and timeframes also had to be flexible. The process had to respect and support Traditional Owners’ local priorities, governance structures, knowledge systems, capabilities and objectives. The following sections outline some examples of how the planning process was adapted to achieve these requirements while trying to maintain the strengths of a “Western” conservation planning tool.

5.4.1 Respecting and valuing the different social constructs

Conservation Action Planning was adapted in two key ways. Firstly, to support meaningful contribution by planning participants, the process, typically driven by conservation planners and facilitators, incorporated Indigenous governance structures, local protocols and priorities. Secondly, core CAP concepts, based on ecological processes and systems, were adapted so they included categories defined by Wunambal Gaambera Traditional Owners and incorporated Indigenous knowledge. These changes, elaborated below, reflect the Karparti approach described by Horstman and Wightman (2001) when commenting on their ethnobiological work with Traditional Owners of the same area.

Although the non-Indigenous facilitators from the partner organisations, who have a Western science background, were well respected by other Indigenous groups they had worked with, they were vetted by Traditional Owners. This was to ensure they had adequate understanding and respect of Indigenous world views, Wunambal Gaambera circumstances and that their approach would be inclusive.

Wunambal Gaambera Traditional Owners and their “healthy country” partners recognised that Wanjina Wunggurr needed to be inherent in the process. This presented some challenges as Wanjina Wunggurr and the chosen planning approach of CAP are very different constructs, as illustrated in Figure 27. Traditional Owners and the partners respected and valued the differences that these two constructs brought to the process and adapted the process to incorporate both ways.
Box 1. Conservation Action Planning

Conservation Action Planning (CAP) is a process for planning, implementing and measuring results for conservation projects developed over the last 25 years by the US-based TNC (http://www.nature.org). CAP guides project teams to prioritise strategies through a consistent process that links targets (assets) to actions and outcomes. CAP is supported by Excel-based software and an extensive global network of practitioners and coaches. CAP is gradually becoming synonymous with three other tools and approaches used for conservation planning globally – the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation (http://www.conservationmeasures.org), the Miradi planning software and the ConPro database.

The Open Standards were prepared to “bring together common concepts, approaches, and terminology in conservation project design, management, and monitoring in order to help practitioners improve the practice of conservation” (http://tinyurl.com/67rzxve). They were developed by the Conservation Measures Partnership, a collaboration of 13 NGOs, including WWF, TNC and Conservation International together with the World Commission on Protected Areas and International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Miradi (http://tinyurl.com/5r8yd7a) is a software tool developed to support the Open Standards. Miradi helps to manage the information relationships between the many objectives, strategies and actions that ultimately go to make up a conservation plan, rather than having to try and do many of these tasks manually.

ConPro (http://conpro.tnc.org/) is a web-based database that records the outputs of either the CAP Excel tool or Miradi and allows other teams/individuals to search those projects based on a range of criteria.

Both CAP and Miradi are increasingly being used in landscape and property conservation planning projects throughout Australia, including well-known landscape projects (e.g. Gondwana Link), and as the primary planning tools for a number of ENGOs. The tools are also increasingly being adapted to support Indigenous community use (http://tinyurl.com/683gedb).
5.4.2 Adaptations for supporting meaningful contribution

We developed adaptations to the typical conservation planning process to support meaningful contribution by participants. Four of these are discussed below.

5.4.2.1 Planning on country

Location was an important part of the planning process, as such, workshops were held on Wunambal Gaambera Country. Several large workshops were run with representatives from all the Wunambal Gaambera family groups. These workshops were held at the dry season ranger camp at Garmbemirri, on the Anjo Peninsula (Figure 24). Following these, a smaller workshop was held at Kalumburu to specifically work on developing objectives, strategies and actions. The final planning workshop was a “travelling road show”, with meetings in Kalumburu, Kandiwal and Derby and visits to country at Munurru (King Edward Crossing), Wandadjingari (Port Warrender) and Punamii-Uunpuu (Mitchell Falls).

The larger workshops and the travelling workshop provided people with the opportunity to visit country and supported the Indigenous protocol of “being on country in order to speak for country”. As Dianna Williams, Gaambera elder, stated:

The most important thing is for people to get in contact with the land - the soil. All them young ones. To take care of country you need to sit on it.

Convening large group meetings on country is logistically challenging and costly. Some Wunambal Gaambera Traditional Owners are quite elderly and immobile, and some require
regular medication. However, despite these challenges and the cost, the large workshops held at the early stages of the project made it easier for people to understand issues and relate non-Indigenous, relatively abstract planning concepts to Indigenous knowledge. Concurrent flora and fauna survey work and recording Indigenous knowledge as part of the ethnobiological project helped to inform workshop discussions, as well as supported transfer of knowledge within the Wunambal Gaambera community. Conducting workshops over a few days also meant that people could visit nearby cultural sites, go hunting or fishing, collect bush foods or paint. As discussed by Walsh and Mitchell (2002), such gatherings are viewed as critical in Indigenous society today where the process can be just as significant as the outcome.

5.4.2.2 Utilising Indigenous governance structures

Local governance structures were supported in numerous ways, including establishing a steering group made up of a majority of senior Traditional Owners and convening a working group representing each family group, to develop objectives, strategies and actions, some of which were specific to each graa. Breaking into men’s and women’s groups during workshops encouraged free discussion and accommodated avoidance relationship restrictions (see Figures 2 and 24). Issues about particular cultural matters were referred to relevant senior people. As Neil Waina, Head Uunguu Ranger and Gaambera man, noted:

... most of the time some women too shy and that encouraged them to speak up... broken into the two groups... feel comfortable with that group so more willing to talk... even our young people had a bit more thing to say too. I don’t like talking over our old people... I take advice from them.

5.4.2.3 Adopting flexible timeframes and providing regular feedback

The process for developing the plan was not hurried and it respected people’s obligations and priorities. Meeting dates changed several times because of cultural responsibilities such as “sorry business” (mourning and funeral practices). This resulted in extensions to the initial planning timeframe.

Regular feedback was given to participants throughout the process. This included revisiting what had been discussed and agreed to during previous workshops, summing up at the conclusion of each workshop, and preparing regular pictorial reports for participants to read between workshops.
5.4.2.4 Using appropriate terms and language

One of the first steps in any participatory planning process is to ensure that participants understand and are familiar with the process. CAP has its own language with terms such as critical threats, situation analysis and stressors. These terms are technical jargon derived from the Western science disciplines of ecology and conservation planning. Such terms had little meaning to Traditional Owners. To address this issue, a plain language glossary was developed and referred to throughout the process (http://tinyurl.com/683gedb). Local Indigenous language terms were also used, particularly for places, plants and animals.

5.4.3 Adapting the concepts

In addition to supporting meaningful contribution during the actual planning process, the concepts within the CAP were also adapted in various ways – from definition of the project area, inclusion of tangible and intangible cultural targets and threats to culture, as well as the incorporation of social and cultural indicators. These adaptations enabled an Indigenous world view and respect for Wanjina Wunggurr to be combined with a non-Indigenous world view and Western science.

Identifying the project area as the whole of Wunambal Gaambera Country, including both land and sea, reflected cultural responsibilities and relationships, rather than biogeographical or other non-Indigenous spatial boundaries.

Conservation Action Planning targets are usually natural assets such as ecological systems. However, the value of an asset for Traditional Owners reflects resource utilisation and/or cultural significance and customary obligations as well as the biodiversity value. Animals such as jebbarra (emu, *Dromaius novaehollandiae*), aamba (kangaroos and wallabies), mangguru (marine turtles) and balguja (dugong, *Dugong dugon*) are valuable food species and were therefore identified as targets (WGAC 2010).

For Wunambal Gaambera people, customary practices passed down through generations honour ancestral obligations. Traditional Owners believe that if such practices are not maintained, then this will impact negatively on the “health” of the country, as these activities interconnect with everything – with Uunguu. In addition to identifying tangible targets such as valuable food species, Traditional Owners also identified customary obligations, which have intangible benefits such as “Wanjina Wunggurr Law” and “right way fire”, as described below. The conservation targets became simply the “really important things about country”. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, a number of the “really important
things” identified by Traditional Owners had parallels to what would be considered standard or usual conservation targets in a non-Indigenous context. The main threats identified were threats to the “really important things about country”, such as “loss of traditional knowledge”, “not being secure on country” and “visitors not being respectful”. These were combined with the more standard ecological threats, such as invasive species, that Traditional Owners recognise as important. Similarly, as well as the usual biological indicators, social and cultural indicators were identified to monitor the health of country.

5.4.3.1 Wanjina Wunggurr Law as a conservation target
Wunambal Gaambera people believe that if they are not on their graa, passing on their Indigenous knowledge and following traditional Wanjina Wunggurr Law, then the Country, including its people, will not be healthy. As Sylvester Mangolomara explains:

Traditional knowledge makes us stronger and shows that we belong to the land. Keeping our culture strong, that makes us the person we are – Wunambal. If we don’t look after country – that makes us nobody. We need to hang onto that and teach our younger generations so they can follow our footsteps. We got to keep it alive all the time.

During the planning process, Wanjina Wunggurr Law was implicit to all decisions made about the “really important things about country”. However, it was not until after the second workshop that it became evident that “Wanjina Wunggurr Law” needed to be the number one conservation target. “Wanjina Wunggurr Law”, as the most important target, anchored the plan to an Indigenous world view, rather than that of a non-Indigenous perspective privileging biodiversity conservation. It clearly demonstrated the cultural reality of Traditional Owners connection to their Country. It supported Traditional Owners’ expertise and primary aspirations to maintain control and ownership of the process and the plan.

5.4.3.2 Right way fire as a conservation target
“Right way fire” refers to burning according to customary responsibilities (including who can burn, when to burn and where to burn) to ensure that cultural sites are maintained and so that there are resources available to hunt and collect, such as animals and bush foods from plants, and so that these foods taste good. When asked how to tell if the Country is healthy, Regina Karadada, Gaambera elder, responded:
Look around you – there’s more animals ... if you’re not burning right there’s no food up that way ... you don’t see them anymore. This last year nothing – too much late burning. Burn it anytime just hot, hot, hot. We got to teach them, they got to know how to burn right way ... Long time ago a person had a job – that was to burn country. They had their own people who went and light up the fire. So they were looking after their animals and plants too – that was their food. It has to be done at certain time you know so you have the right vegetation for the animals – and the people. Our old people passed that on and we got to keep it going.

During the planning process, a number of “right way fire” activities were undertaken, including Uunguu Rangers doing multi-day “firewalks” with Traditional Owners from the relevant graa, walking through country, checking and maintaining sites and carrying out “right way fire” (Figure 28).

Figure 28: Uunguu Rangers Elton Waina and Raymond Waina checking cultural sites while doing a “firewalk”. Carrying out field activities such as “firewalks” during the planning process informed workshop discussions. (Photo: Robert Warren).

5.4.3.3 Loss of traditional knowledge as a threat

The CAP process identifies critical threats to targets. For Wunambal Gaambera people, threats to culture are as relevant as threats to biodiversity. Subsequently, “loss of traditional knowledge” was identified as one of the key threats because the “health” of the cultural and social aspects of people’s lives will impact on achieving “healthy country”. As Wunambal elder Janet Oobagooma explained, contemporary practices are important but it
is also important to make sure that Indigenous knowledge and customs are maintained and passed on.

There’s lots of new ways – sometimes it’s good. Some young ones try to learn the old ways too but they see it’s too hard. The Western things come across their mind – like they brushing it and they put a different view of things there. They see new things and they more interested in the new things than the old things – that of the land.

5.4.3.4 Applying social and cultural indicators
Measures such as species abundance and distribution, species range and diversity, number of hectares burnt and water quality were complemented by social and cultural indicators such as amount of time spent on country, amount of Indigenous knowledge being passed on, the availability and taste of certain foods, the amount of fat on some animals, the number of visits to cultural sites, who is making decisions about management and who is carrying out the management (see Fitzsimons et al 2012). For example, if the bush apple is sweet and juicy, or if there is a good amount of tail fat on a kangaroo, then this can be an indication that burning is being carried out in the right way and that the country is “healthy”.

Some of the cultural and social indicators identified were based on subjective measurements, such as the taste of foods and the amount of Indigenous knowledge being passed on. At the time of writing, an expert panel advising on research and monitoring of biological, social and cultural indicators was being established and will include senior Traditional Owners and knowledge holders as well as experienced ecologists trained in Western science.

5.5 Planning outcomes
Although the WGHCP is ongoing, the finalisation of the first phase, the planning process, has proven to be a powerful tool for the Traditional Owners. The Uunguu Indigenous Protected Area Stage 1 has been declared (Figure 29). The Australian Government has included the planning process and the resultant plan as an example of a participatory planning model for other IPAs (Hill et al 2011). TNC is also using the planning process as a template to support other IPA consultative projects in northern Australia. Funds from the private and public sector have been secured to assist with the project and the WGAC has entered into a 10-year partnership agreement with BHA to assist with implementing the plan, providing a measure of long-term security for the project.
Figure 29: Uunguu Rangers Terrence Marna (left) and Neil Waina (right) with Senior Cultural Advisor Sylvester Mangolomara (centre) installing a sign for the Uunguu Indigenous Protected Area. (Photo: Robert Warren).

The Healthy Country Plan itself, now being implemented, has also been used in negotiations with other stakeholders such as the Western Australian Government and the business sector, with the engagements being defined by Traditional Owner aspirations, as articulated and structured in the plan, rather than those being imposed externally.

As John Goonack, Vice Chair of WGAC, explains:

That Healthy Country Plan is a good thing – we know what direction we are heading in – seen as having one group, all pointing in right direction. Everyone real happy about it. Changed a lot from when we didn’t have [partners] helping us. All good now. Got this IPA set up. Bit more meeting yet.

5.6 Implications for other collaborative conservation planning projects

Historically, conservation planning in Australia has been embedded in a specific cultural context that privileges Western science, linear views of time and bounded notions of space, and asserts particular assumptions about the separation of nature and culture, resource management and human intervention (Howitt and Suchet-Pearson 2004). Application of such planning approaches into an Indigenous context risks impacting on Indigenous governance structures, by constructing and imposing external frameworks that undermine local authority, expertise and knowledge systems. Structural constraints to participatory
planning processes, such as the organisational systems of partners, funding program requirements and accountability, can also impede on delivering outcomes (Trickett and Ryerson Espino 2004).

Although conservation planning processes in post-settler nation states such as Australia have in the past often resulted in the marginalisation of Indigenous groups, planning can achieve positive outcomes for Indigenous groups if it is community-based, and centred on community objectives, capabilities and knowledge systems rather than those imposed by another party (Lane 2006). The Wunambal Gaambera Traditional Owners view Western science as one of the key contributions ENGO partners can offer. Using Western science provides validity to external stakeholders, it supports articulation of “healthy country” principles to a wider audience and it provides for contemporary management in dealing with new threats.

The challenge with the planning process for the WGHCP was adapting a widely accepted conservation planning approach so that it continued to be informed by Western science whilst respecting and complementing Indigenous knowledge. As Jacobson and Stephens (2009) stated, this meant respecting and valuing the differences in the knowledge systems of the partners “without compromising their independence or distinctiveness” (Jacobson and Stephens 2009: 161).

Ensuring the process was controlled by Traditional Owners and incorporated Indigenous language and core concepts respected and supported community integrity. This affirms the assertion that Indigenous-controlled planning can shape a more equitable intercultural conservation space (Hill 2011). The WGHCP planning process supported local governance structures. The success of the planning process was also dependant on open communication between the partners, and a willingness to take a flexible and adaptive approach in terms of timelines for reporting and funding. Results of research into other aspects of the project, including analysis of the engagement between the Traditional Owners and the project partners, will be presented in the future.

The WGHCP has shown that the success of a collaborative conservation planning process in a cross-cultural context requires support of Traditional Owners’ interpretations of “healthy country” as well as the recognition of cultural, social and economic outcomes. Most significantly, the WGHCP demonstrates that Indigenous Traditional Owners’ aspirations to drive the conservation planning agenda for their ancestral estates can be achieved.
5.7 References


Chapter 6: (Re-)imagining the indigenous in conservation

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Chapter note
The chapter is a reproduction of the submitted manuscript. The heading and figure numbering and the referencing style have been altered to fit the thesis formatting.
Abstract
Under the new conservation paradigm nature is occupied. Conservation aims to achieve social as well as biodiversity outcomes, and with increasing reliance on Indigenous-held land and Indigenous people, to be inclusive. To understand why conservation organisations recognise Indigenous people and interests under the ideas of an occupied nature and inclusiveness, this study explored the conservation sector’s imaginings of the indigenous. Focusing on emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land in Australia, the study analysed the conservation sector’s discursive norms on the indigenous. Imaginaries of the indigenous are bound to the remote north with elements of essentialised fantasies reminiscent of colonial imaginaries. Yet the conservation sector is also trying to modernise the indigenous through concepts of cultural economies and sustainable livelihoods. These imaginaries conflate to form a third imaginary. Indigenous Australians negotiate and navigate these imaginaries. The imaginary of the indigenous being bound to the north is causing frustration and unrealistic expectations for Indigenous people living in settled regions of the south-east. In contrast, Indigenous people in the north are facing performance issues with the conflated imaginary of the traditional and the modern. And Indigenous Australians working for conservation organisations are placed in dichotomous positions of having to choose between conservation and their indigeneity. For the non-Indigenous other, re-imagining of the indigenous is resulting in different understandings of conservation and journeys of identity and belonging. It is also helping define niches within the sector. Further re-imagining of the indigenous is required to allow transformative recognition processes across the conservation sector.

Key words: conservation, Indigenous people, Australia, imaginaries, NGOs

6.1 Background
In this paper, I explore the imagining of concepts of the indigenous by conservation organisations in Australia. Following the pioneering work of Peet and Watts (1996), and other significant work on environmental imaginaries of nature, I use the concept of imaginary to refer to “the underlying discursive norms that govern communication in social situations” (McGregor 2004: 594). Appreciating these discursive norms is crucial to understanding the ability of the conservation sector to recognise Indigenous people and Indigenous interests and allow for effective collaborative relationships.
A new conservation paradigm emerged in the late twentieth century (see Phillips 2003; Perfecto and Vandermeer 2008; Moocroft 2015). Key features promoted under the new paradigm are: (i) an increased involvement of non-state organisations, (ii) an emphasis on maintaining ecosystem connectivity across landscapes beyond the boundaries of national parks, and (iii) the inclusiveness of people as part of nature and support for social outcomes as well as biodiversity outcomes. Many countries have embraced the features of the new paradigm, transforming the governance, territory and scale of conservation (Moocroft and Adams 2014). The role and influence of non-state organisations, such as conservation non-government organisations (NGOs), has increased as evidenced by the growth in the number of private protected areas (see Pasquini et al 2011). Landscape-scale conservation approaches are found in many countries with some extending to transnational efforts stretching across continents (Worboys et al 2010). And the third key feature of inclusiveness, much of which arose from the outcomes of the Fifth World Parks Congress in Durban in 2003, has expanded the conceptual basis of conservation with the development of co-managed protected areas, Indigenous Peoples’ and Community Conserved Territories and Areas and Indigenous Protected Areas (Kothari 2008; Ross et al 2011; Vaz and Agama 2013). Expanding this conceptual basis has challenged the pristine wilderness ideal, so influential in settler colonial societies such as North America, Australia and Aotearoa-New Zealand. It challenges the wilderness ideal by illustrating diverse ways in which people live in and with nature and culturally diverse notions of stewardship. And with considerable amounts of land of high conservation value being returned to Indigenous people in some countries, collaborations with Indigenous communities are growing, and Australia is often lauded as a leader in this arena (Ross et al 2011: 193). Yet is conservation truly inclusive of Indigenous people and supportive of Indigenous interests?

Inclusiveness of Indigenous people in conservation is very much tied to how the concept of indigenous, including Indigenous peoples and indigeneity, is imagined in conservation and imagined by the conservation sector. For instance, Hawken and Granoff (2010) found that if parks are understood as heterotopias (after Foucault 1986), that is as imagined places of nature, then the possibility of parks as cultural places or places for forest peoples is denied. It seems that inclusive conservation is a utopian idea (see Levitas 2003) and therefore potentially a transformative idea. The scholarly contribution on this topic is limited, with little published research on how the indigenous is imagined in conservation, particularly in settler societies such as Australia. This paper aims to address this research gap.
The paper has the following aims: (i) to explore the imagining of the indigenous by individuals and organisations in the Australian conservation sector; (ii) to present the contemporary imaginaries of the indigenous as framed, constructed and maintained by the Australian conservation sector; (iii) to consider how Indigenous Australians and their associated organisations navigate and negotiate these imaginaries; and (iv) to look at how imagining, or re-imagining, the indigenous is affecting the non-Indigenous other. The findings are also relevant to other settler societies where the new conservation paradigm is being embraced, and where Indigenous people have been subject to non-recognition or mis-recognition by colonial processes under the old paradigm.

Some concepts and terms require clarification. By indigenous I mean Indigenous people and their characteristics. I variously mean both a noun (Indigenous people) and an adjective (indigenous). I acknowledge an extensive literature on Indigenous identity and indigeneity, and particularly the contribution of Indigenous academic scholars such as Alfred and Corntassel (2005), Paradies (2006), Harris et al (2013) and Hunt (2014). The concepts of indigenousness and recognition are in themselves constructions of colonialism and I am wary that this paper does not further promote or confirm such constructions. Inclusive conservation means conservation of biodiversity, culture and society as promoted under the new conservation paradigm. Therefore, national parks and national park organisations per se are implicit rather than explicit in this wider conservation context.

6.2 Environmental imaginaries, nature-talk and the indigenous

A diverse body of research sits under the umbrella concept of imaginaries. Connections to the indigenous are a fundamental element of many colonial imaginaries constructed and maintained by settlers (Donaldson and Donaldson 1985; Smith 1985; Thomas 1994; Friedrichsmeyer et al 1998; Prout and Howitt 2009; Bell 2014). Relevant to this paper, these colonial imaginaries are often dispelled or complicated with engagement of the indigenous. For instance, Cooke (2015: 14) found that exposure to the indigenous counters, unmakes or undermines the national-cultural imaginary of the “north” in Canada. Prout and Howitt (2009) describe how Indigenous spatialities unsettle the mythologies and imaginaries of the non-Indigenous. Yet Bell (2014) argues that even with engagement, such colonial imaginaries can still persist because of settler desires of domination and mastery, and calls for a more relational imaginary of the indigenous that recognises “autonomy of indigenous identities” and welcomes different ways of being (Bell 2014: 20).
Connections to the indigenous are also often closely entangled with imaginaries of nature (Head 2000; Prout and Howitt 2009). In this paper, I concentrate mainly on these imaginaries of nature, on environmental imaginaries. Initially conceived under the political or liberation ecology banner by Peet and Watts (1996), the concept of environmental imaginaries is used in qualitative empirical research into contemporary understandings of nature. Nesbitt and Weiner (2001) used the concept to investigate how landed residents of Central Appalachia understand and make use of nature. Hyndman (2001) used the concept to look at the differing perceptions of the environmental impact of the large Ok Tedi mine in Papua New Guinea. Particularly pertinent to this paper, McGregor (2004: 594) in his study of environmentally concerned Australians, found the concept useful because “It shifts attention away from the traditional foci of individual values, attitudes and knowledges, towards the social acceptability and social influence of different environmental discourses”. McGregor’s and the other studies have parallels in Castree’s (2004: 191) call for “close analysis of nature-talk in any and all realms of society”. The talk and discourse in these examples exposes underlying social norms and unconscious positions.

Environmental imaginaries, or nature-talk, furthermore often highlight understandings of the ontological state, or of belonging and of self. For instance, Davison’s (2008: 1284) research examines the complex imaginaries of environmental campaigners struggling to break free of the nature-society dichotomy, commenting that the “resistance to dismantling of conceptual boundaries between society and nature may often stem not from failure to appreciate socionatural complexity, but from a strongly felt sense that the self can only truly be found in nature”. This sense of finding self in nature takes on added meanings of belonging and attachment to place, and national identity, for settler societies, as Trigger and Mulcock (2005) found in their exploration of the spiritual significance of forests in Australia.

Yet when people talk about nature and attachments or belonging to place, particularly in settler societies, the concept of the indigenous frequently emerges. It emerges obliquely as in Head and Muir’s (2006) study on suburban backyards, and in Davison’s study mentioned above, when one participant referred to the “contestability” of the pristine understanding of wilderness because of an Indigenous presence (Davison 2008: 1290), and another exempted Aboriginal people from her description of humans as inherently destructive towards nature (Davison 2008: 1291). In her work on belonging for Aotearoa-New Zealand high country farmers, Dominy (2001) highlighted how there were striking parallels to
authenticity and legitimacy of the indigenous in the way farmers’ identity is socially constructed through deep cultural meanings, performances and attachments to a physical place. However, the concept of indigenous is not always oblique in these social constructions. For instance, Miller (2003: 222) cautions against “a negative form of cultural appropriation” of the indigenous by some non-Indigenous people, particularly the well-educated, in their desire to belong. She suggests that “any model of identity that relies upon appropriation of an ‘other’ in order to achieve self-authentication is, by definition, structurally flawed” (Miller 2003: 222). Such processes are about the dominant non-Indigenous other gaining something from the indigenous, i.e., knowledge, rather than the recognition of the indigenous.

Despite a number of these studies originating from Australia, none focus specifically on how environmental imaginaries, or nature-talk, deal with the indigenous. To find Australian studies on environmental imaginaries, or nature-talk, specifically of the indigenous, I refer to earlier works by Sackett (1991) and McNiven and Russell (1995). These works provide an insight into the Australian conservation sector’s perceptions and images of the indigenous at a time when the idea of wilderness, or at least the promotion of it, was being challenged. Based primarily on a literature review, Sackett examines how conservationists portrayed Australian Aboriginals as “environmental exemplars” (Sackett 1991: 240), not dissimilar to Davison’s participant more than fifteen years later. Sackett argued that such representations are problematic as they perpetuate the myth of the “Noble Savage” and disadvantage those Aboriginal Australians that do not meet the authentic traditional image of an Aborigine. McNiven and Russell (1995) looked at non-Indigenous perceptions and management of the Australian landscape. They asserted that Aboriginal agency is denied by the concept of wilderness, similar to Hawken and Granoff’s (2010) findings, and that “‘traditional’ Aborigines with spears, firesticks and stone tools are welcome in wilderness landscapes but ‘civilised’ Aborigines … are not” (McNiven and Russell 1995: 507).

Recent case studies outside Australia identify two separate and sometimes conflated environmental imaginaries of the indigenous in conservation; one based on essentialised fantasies representing the “traditional” Indigenous person and one portraying a more “modern” image of the indigenous. Similar to Sackett’s findings, Valdivia (2005) describes how images of indigeneity, historically symbolic of backwardness and of obstructing national progress, are powerful, with Indigenous people seen as model conservationists and environmental protectors. The more recent “modern” image of the indigenous has
come about with the realization that the involvement of Indigenous people and their lands are critical to achieving global conservation goals. Modernising of the indigenous is closely associated with talk of sustainable development and sustainable livelihoods. This latter imaginary is maintained and utilised by conservation organisations at a global level, as evident at the 2014 World Parks Congress with the concept of sustainable livelihoods or similar derivations cutting across all program areas (see International Union for the Conservation of Nature 2014), and by the United Nations’ Working Group on Indigenous Populations (Muehlebach 2001). It is also apparent in developing countries as shown by Swainson and McGregor’s (2008) exploration of the modernising of Orang Asli in Malaysia’s quest for development. However, as Nadasdy (2005) found in North America’s Yukon and Valdivia (2005) in Latin America’s Ecuador, these imaginaries are not only constructed and maintained by others. Reflecting the reality of existing in two worlds, Indigenous people also use or perform both imaginaries to construct legitimacy; to politically manoeuvre and “navigate between discourses”, changing contexts from local to global, combining a “hybridization of modern and traditional” (Valdivia 2005: 301).

Research has also analysed problems associated with these perceptions, or environmental imaginaries, of the indigenous. Pemunta’s (2013: 353) work in Cameroon highlights how imaginaries maintained by others can be conflated, compounding the consequences for Indigenous people, and describes the plight of the Pygmies who despite having “projects aimed at modernizing them, and achieving sustainability” have been further marginalised and excluded from the benefits of development. In a wider context of identity politics, Paradies (2006) notes that, despite serving the pan-Indigenous community well, essentialised fantasies may inhibit other identities of indigenous, and that indigeneity needs to be de-coupled from such fantasies and acknowledged for its diversity. Yet imaginaries based on essentialised fantasies are also proving to be a double-edged sword for the pan-Indigenous community. For instance, in their investigation into the environmental agency of Indigenous people within the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Arctic Council, Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen (2013: 288) found that “The role of being indigenous, and having a close relationship with nature, relies on the often essentialized features of indigenousness. Hence, the argument for agency through this close relationship with nature requires indigenousness and sustaining what it is.” Similarly, the issue of legitimacy being tied to performance has been raised at the pan-Indigenous community level, at the inaugural meeting of the Working Group on Emergent
Indigenous Identities in Northern Arizona in 2010, with members discussing how they had “felt the need to perform or overly perform their indigeneity to ensure recognition of their identity” (Harris et al. 2013: 7).

6.3 Research approach

6.3.1 Introducing the case studies

I explored the conservation sector’s imagining of the indigenous in two emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land in Australia, where various levels [national, provincial (State/Territory), regional and local] of the state and non-state are represented. I examined the geography of overlap, where national and international conservation interests overlap with considerable amounts of Indigenous-held land, and the geography of dichotomy, where there is Indigenous land and no conservation interests, or where there is conservation interest but little or no Indigenous-held land (Moorcroft and Adams 2014).

For the geography of overlap I focused on the area of Northern Australia. This area encompasses all the catchments of the rivers that flow into tropical seas to the north and equates to nearly 1.5 million square kilometres (Woinarski et al. 2007). Conservation interests in Northern Australia include international, national, provincial and regional conservation NGOs and state-based agencies. I include a detailed look at the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project in the remote north-west. This project involves a partnership between an Indigenous native title group and a national conservation NGO, as well as support from the regional Indigenous organisation and the Australian Government. The project, covering approximately 2.5 million hectares, incorporating both land and sea, facilitates the Wanjina Wunggurr Uunguu as the rightful owners to manage the natural and cultural values of their ancestral homelands in accordance with their customary responsibilities (Moorcroft et al. 2012). For the geography of dichotomy, I focus on the Great Eastern Ranges initiative and its associated partnerships. The Great Eastern Ranges involves a consortium of national and provincial conservation NGOs and state based agencies working together to create and maintain a conservation connectivity corridor along a considerable stretch of land near Australia’s eastern seaboard. At the time of the research, the initiative was relatively new and centred on several regional partnerships in the southern half of the corridor. For the more in-depth investigation under the geography of dichotomy, I examine the Great Eastern Ranges regional partnership Kosciuszko to Coast, which aims to link the high country to the coast, over 150 kilometres away. Partners in
Kosciuszko to Coast include national, provincial and regional conservation organisations, both state and NGOs. The area of this partnership has a long association with natural resource management. It is also an area in which many Indigenous people reside, mainly in small communities, yet where little land is held by Indigenous people under Australian law. Some Indigenous communities are involved in conservation either through protected areas e.g. national parks, or natural resource management programs. The Kosciuszko to Coast also includes urban and peri-urban settlements, as well as rural lands, some of which are transitioning from a productive rural economy to multi-functional economy incorporating both productivity- and amenity-oriented lifestyles (see Gill et al 2010). The location of the case studies and their associated partnerships are shown in Figure 30. I chose these case study areas for a number of reasons. Firstly, I knew they had active engagements between Indigenous communities and conservation organisations. Secondly, other work into engagements between conservation and Indigenous communities in Australia indicated that they would provide a useful comparison. And finally, I am familiar with their context and know many of the people involved.

![Figure 30: Location of the case studies and associated partnerships](image)
6.3.2 Research methods

The research was carried out between 2011 and 2015. I used a triangulation of methods with data from interview transcripts, participant observations and document analysis. Key individuals as well as organisations, active in the geographies were identified. Fifty-eight people were interviewed, including: field, senior and executive level employees, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, of conservation and Aboriginal organisations; members of conservation partnerships; independent consultants; and those associated with state processes. Some interviewees have moved between these roles. Both male and female participants were interviewed. Some had long associations with the geographies while others had limited recent experience. Fourteen interviewees have worked across both geographies or in national roles. Thirteen interviewees identified as Indigenous Australian and comprised those living and/or working on their ancestral homelands as well as those working elsewhere. The interviews were semi-structured and sought to gain information on the interviewee’s background and role, the role of their organisation, as well as their experiences and perceptions in engagements between conservation and Indigenous Australians. Interviewees remained anonymous, despite, as Head and Regnell (2012) noted, probable identification by their colleagues. The interviews were audio recorded and hand written notes were taken. The interviews were transcribed and analysed through descriptive and analytical coding to identify who, what, where and how in relation to engagements between Indigenous interests and conservation, as well as themes on views and perceptions.

Further insight into the conservation sector’s imaginings of the indigenous was gained by personal observations at a number of relevant forums and activities. The forums included partnership meetings of the Kosciuszko to Coast and the Wunambal Gaambera project, a national symposium on Innovative Conservation in the 21st Century convened by the Australian Committee of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a national Indigenous Protected Areas managers meeting and the 2014 World Parks Congress. I stayed at an Australian Wildlife Conservancy sanctuary in Northern Australia for five days and participated in visitor activities. I also participated in two multi-day workshops on Indigenous Values in the Landscape in the geography of dichotomy. These workshops, hosted by a small conservation NGO, Friends of Grasslands, a partner in Kosciuszko to Coast, were co-presented with a local Indigenous man recognised as an Indigenous knowledge holder. They were attended by property owners seeking to investigate
alternative ways of managing the land, as well as a number of Indigenous ranger cadets and their mentors.

To validate claims made at interviews and in observations, and to obtain other types of data, particularly in relation to institutional norms, the organisational structures, promotional materials and strategic documents of participant organisations were examined.

6.4 Contemporary imaginaries of the indigenous in conservation

There are three dominant imaginaries of the indigenous utilised and promoted by the conservation sector in Australia. The first imaginary is of the indigenous being bound to the north with associated elements of essentialised fantasies. The second imaginary is the modernising of the indigenous as promoted with cultural economies and sustainable livelihoods. And the third is a conflated one that occurs when the imaginary of the north is coupled with the modernising of the indigenous, amalgamating and yet blurring the “traditional” and the “modern”.

In conservation in Australia, the image of the indigenous is synonymous with the north. The perception of Northern Australia as an Indigenous domain is reflected in the promotional material of a number of the conservation NGOs, including the major international and national NGOs (see Figure 31).

In some instances, the conservation sector’s imaginary of the indigenous retains the essentialised fantasies of a “traditional” Aborigine – the image of a dark skinned Indigenous person situated in a remote part of the country, sometimes performing a cultural activity. For instance, the images in Figure 31 reinforce a particular representation of the indigenous, and for The Nature Conservancy and the Australian Committee of IUCN the added traditional cultural link of a didgeridoo and traditional spear also appear. The Nature Conservancy’s webpage further embeds the imaginary of the indigenous being bound to the north with its “latest news and features” all emanating from Indigenous partnerships in the northern regions of the continent (The Nature Conservancy 2015). Perceptions of Northern Australia as an indigenous domain were also observed in a number of conservation forums. Similarly, most of the non-Indigenous interviewees expressed the understanding of Northern Australia as an Indigenous space. And the desire to engage with the indigenous, on both a personal and institutional level, was most obvious in the north, in the geography of overlap. Many non-Indigenous interviewees admitted that their previous work, or the organisation’s work in the south-east, did not entail engaging with the indigenous, either at all or not at the same level as it did in the north, as characterised by the comments of one respondent:

With my previous experience, for example in old growth forest conservation in Victoria, it almost, thinking about the Aboriginal context of those landscapes was almost irrelevant. (National conservation NGO employee, non-Indigenous, geography of overlap, 24 June 2011)

Indigenous lives and societies have become sustainable livelihoods and cultural economies in the need to modernise, or make relevant, the indigenous. A number of international and national conservation NGOs, including the Australian Conservation Foundation, Bush Heritage Australia, Greening Australia, The Wilderness Society, The Nature Conservancy and WWF-Australia, use the language of sustainable livelihoods and cultural economies in their promotional materials and in their strategic deliberations. As one participant noted, it has become central to an organisation’s goal:

At its best that’s what the green engagement creates ... our goal is this broad purpose of transforming towards sustainability ... so what are the things in Indigenous people’s lives that are most driving a lack of sustainability? (National conservation NGO employee, non-Indigenous, both geographies, 20 June 2011)
The modernising of the indigenous is often coupled and entangled with the concept of the north (or the “Outback” as depicted in Figure 31), where achieving conservation outcomes relies heavily on maintaining the high biodiversity of Indigenous lands and hence, the goodwill and involvement of Indigenous land owners. This conflated imaginary is exemplified in The Pew Charitable Trust’s report titled “The Modern Outback, Nature, people and the future of remote Australia” (The Pew Charitable Trusts 2014). Another example is provided by the Australian Conservation Foundation, which in the mid 2000s convened two forums on appropriate and cultural economies for Northern Australia (see Hill and Turton 2004; Hill et al 2006). Interviewees from conservation NGOs also spoke of sustainable livelihoods or similar ideas when describing their engagements with Indigenous people, as illustrated by the following quotes:

There is an ideal space there [Northern Australia] where Aboriginal people ... are in control of their land, and they are looking for alliances with people who can help them achieve conservation goals and sustainable economic development goals, and we would play a part in that. (National conservation NGO employee, non-Indigenous, both geographies, 12 December 2011)

Northern Australia is in the best shape, fewest people, least amount bulldozed and flattened. You know, foreign ferals and weeds are the big challenges in that part of the world. And in that part of the world the challenge ... being marginally economical, is finding sustainable livelihoods. (National conservation NGO employee, non-Indigenous, both geographies, 4 October 2011)

It primarily focuses on bringing conservation and cultural values together in many different aspects: trying to bring in economic and social dimensions into conservation; trying to look at conservation from a rights perspective and social justice perspective; trying to incorporate new, different and innovative methods to do conservation with Indigenous people in the Northern Australia region; really trying to incorporate the economic and social dimensions in Northern Australia and Indigenous people and communities. (National conservation NGO employee, Indigenous, geography of overlap, 20 June 2011)

To a lesser extent, and not necessarily utilising the same language, the modernising of the indigenous also occurs in the south-east, in the geography of dichotomy. A number of participants working in the Kosciuszko to Coast partnership appear to be making, or remaking, the imaginary of the indigenous, often represented in the south-east by “cultural
heritage”, into something more relevant to conservation and more modern, as explained below by one respondent:

The idea that perhaps these song lines could be significant in the landscape for biodiversity outcomes, I think it’s clear as day that that’ll be the case. To invest in a corridor for biodiversity outcomes, or for cultural heritage outcomes, and getting the benefit of a biodiversity outcome on the back, or vice versa, whichever way you want to pitch it, bit of bang for your buck... The chances [are] that you’re going to be protecting something of relevance in terms of how those [vegetation] communities survive changes in climates in the past because those song lines are old and they had a value and they had a use. You might be inadvertently protecting something really important to our future survival because they were important to the past survival. (Provincial government employee, non-indigenous, geography of dichotomy, 23 November 2011)

Similarly, the *Indigenous Values in the Landscape* workshops, set within the Kosciuszko to Coast partnership area, were attempts to make Indigenous knowledge relevant to amenity migrants and generational farmers.

### 6.5 Navigating and negotiating the imaginaries by Indigenous Australians

For Indigenous Australians involved in conservation, navigating and negotiating these imaginaries, both the separate imaginaries of the north (traditional) and the modern, as well as the conflated imaginary, is fraught with contest and conflict.

#### 6.5.1 The north-south disparity

One of the consequences of the conservation sector’s imaginary of the indigenous being bound to the north is feelings of disappointment and exasperation by Indigenous interviewees in the south-east. A number of Indigenous interviewees spoke about how they are continually frustrated and “fed up” with their Aboriginality not being recognised or with their indigeneity being defined by unrealistic expectations, as encapsulated succinctly by one respondent:

We’re over being told that everything cultural and everything Aboriginal is to be looked at in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. (Provincial government conservation organisation employee, Indigenous, geography of dichotomy, 22 November 2011)
This north-south disparity reflects the complexities inherent in defining the indigenous by place (the “north”) and by essentialist fantasies (the “traditional”). In Australia, there is no one Indigenous ontology, and attempts to include the Indigenous are enmeshed with issues of non-recognition and mis-recognition. So for Indigenous Australians involved in conservation who are not living in the north and who do not meet the essentialised fantasies, their identity is ignored, dismissed or unrealistically imagined as something that it is not. As discussed later, another side to this is that some Indigenous people do take advantage of this imaginary to help secure support for their conservation or caring for country initiatives.

6.5.2 The perceptions of difference

Indigenous Australians not only find it difficult to navigate and negotiate the imaginary of the north with its associated essentialised fantasies. Respondents talked about how Indigenous communities and conservation organisations had different understandings of the meaning and expectations of “sustainable livelihoods” and “cultural economies”. They found the terms ambiguous. Some interviewees also expressed a level of cynicism at the motivation of some conservation NGOs in regard to helping Indigenous communities achieve cultural economies and sustainable livelihoods. One interviewee went as far as to suggest that, despite the rhetoric of some organisations’ Indigenous partnership credentials, little in regard to sustainable livelihoods had been achieved for Indigenous communities involved in conservation, implying that Indigenous Australians were being used by some in the conservation sector.

Cynicism was also targeted at those conservation organisations that have the multiple objectives of the preservation of nature or wilderness through advocacy work, and facilitating cultural economies and sustainable livelihoods for Indigenous communities. Interviewees thought these two objectives were incompatible. They felt that the idea of nature or wilderness automatically negated anything to do with the cultural or indigenous. A number of participants implied that Indigenous communities do not want to be branded with such organisations. One respondent involved in the Wunambal Gaambera project explained that:

   Many of those that operate in that conservation brokering field come from a political advocacy basis in the main, and for traditional owner groups that’s a difficult situation to handle. (Local Indigenous organisation employee, non-Indigenous, geography of overlap, 12 July 2011)
As mentioned previously, many Indigenous communities are in partnerships with conservation organisations in both geographies, particularly the geography of overlap. The differing perceptions and expectations outlined above have caused tensions between conservation organisations and their Indigenous partners.

6.5.3 The performance of indigeneity

Another consequence faced by Indigenous Australians navigating and negotiating the conservation sector’s imaginaries of the indigenous relates to performativity. Indigenous people are faced with conforming or not to “performances” of the essentialised fantasies of the traditional Aborigine and the modernised imaginary associated with cultural economies and sustainable livelihoods, as well as with the conflated imaginary. Some Indigenous people, particularly older people living in the north, felt conflicted by the need to perform certain activities as part of fulfilling the imaginary of the more modernised indigenous, and carrying out activities because of ancestral responsibilities. One example that illustrates this conundrum is carbon reduction projects. A number of Indigenous groups are investigating or involved in these projects whereby they burn their ancestral homelands using a particular methodology to receive financial incentives (see, for example, Whitehead et al 2009). The methodology for these burning regimes has Western scientific backing and is not dissimilar to traditional burning regimes carried out to fulfil ancestral obligations. The financial incentives for these projects can potentially contribute a considerable amount of money to Indigenous conservation initiatives. However, some older people were worried that the motivation for being on their homelands and burning may be shifting to one more aligned to meet the requirements of carbon reduction and receiving money, rather than for fulfilling ancestral obligations.

Another manifestation of the imaginaries of the indigenous, not necessarily limited to the north, is when Indigenous people are required to perform cultural activities for conservation, e.g. welcome ceremonies, dances and interpretations of country. The Indigenous people are performing and maintaining the imaginary of essentialised fantasies. Yet these issues are not always a conundrum. Indigenous organisations also instigate some of these performances and use images of Indigenous people dressed in traditional costume and use Indigenous words and phrases in promotional material to attract and secure financial assistance for their caring for country initiatives. One respondent, when talking about the obligation to do these activities as part of a conservation partnership agreement,
thought that these acts were an insignificant compromise on their part compared to the financial support they receive in return.

6.5.4 The insider/outsider position

Indigenous Australians who work for conservation organisations, particularly larger NGOs and the state, often found themselves in a position that was at odds with their position as an Indigenous person or as an Indigenous traditional owner:

It was a bit hard at times you know, not to be labelled a trouble maker or be outspoken when you’re pushing against what you know... [They’re] not an awful organisation but they’re a conservation organisation that comes from a particular paradigm of thought. (National conservation NGO employee, Indigenous, 14 October 2011)

It is an obligation, my responsibility to do that for my mob. I am educated. I have a job that allows me to do it. I have a lot of networks that can help support this mob, so I have an obligation to do it ... been really difficult for me ... how do I juggle my hat? My green/black hats are very similar. On the advisory committee, I am there as a conservation representative, but with [conservation NGO], I have told them a million times ... as a TO [traditional owner] I still have a voice as a TO. I can’t deny, I can’t not speak up as a TO. So I will never ever be on any advisory committee just as a conservationist - firstly an Indigenous person, then an environmental scientist or a conservationist ... I can’t not distinguish between those hats. (National conservation NGO employee, Indigenous, 20 June 2011)

The respondents above, who were both tertiary qualified young women, worked for conservation organisations that were considered “not too bad” in relation to their engagement with Indigenous people. Their roles were to promote Indigenous engagements in conservation, including making conservation relevant to Indigenous people, for instance as an alternative economically viable option to other forms of land use. However, the dichotomous positions they found themselves in suggests that the organisations they worked for had not truly embraced a pluralistic understanding of conservation where nature and culture were embedded, and were not truly inclusive of Indigenous people and interests.
6.6 Ontological disruptions of the non-Indigenous other

For the non-Indigenous other, direct encounters with Indigenous people are triggering a re-imagining of the indigenous that then expands the understandings of conservation and acts as a catalyst for journeys of identity and belonging.

6.6.1 Conservation understandings

During the interviews and observations, a number of non-Indigenous participants relayed how their personal journeys of engaging with the indigenous in conservation had led them to a different understanding of conservation – one that they believed embedded nature and culture. Most respondents who relayed such journeys were from the geography of overlap in the north and were early- to mid-career professionals working for conservation NGOs. Most had tertiary qualifications in the natural sciences and since moving up north, for the first time in their careers, had experienced what one interviewee referred to as “meaningful engagements” with Indigenous Australians. They felt that these meaningful engagements had challenged their understanding of conservation to the extent that they had developed a new understanding that included social dimensions, as illustrated by the narrative of one interviewee:

Up here, the concepts of, like, the land needs its people and the people need the land are quite powerful to me … and the interactions between people and biodiversity are kind of inseparable in these landscapes up here and that … social and economic outcomes are just as important as environmental outcomes and can’t really be separated in this context in Northern Australia.

I hadn’t had experience with Indigenous people when I got the job … the journey that I’ve gone from, like, oh okay, we need to save this forest, protect it, national park, no logging, that’s it … to well, the landscape’s far more complex and … if we really want to address biodiversity threats we need to look at it from a holistic point of view … Given that the social issues are quite significant in Northern Australia for conservation to be taken seriously … it’s pretty much got to be something that’s accommodating of the social needs basically. (National conservation NGO employee, non-Indigenous, 24 June 2011)

However, despite a number of non-Indigenous interviewees talking of this new understanding of conservation, some saw inconsistencies with the way the conservation sector portrayed its commitment to Indigenous engagement and reality. Many interviewees, Indigenous and non-Indigenous and from both state and non-state
organisations, felt that the sector, particularly elements of the sector that strongly pushed Western science to sell conservation, had not truly embraced a pluralistic understanding of conservation where nature and culture were embedded, and was not truly inclusive of Indigenous people and interests. One respondent cynically explained that:

I think cultural or certainly indigenous, or bringing culture in at any level to science is threatening, because if you are going to look at things from a cultural perspective everything gets equalled. (National conservation NGO employee, non-Indigenous, geography of overlap, 29 July 2011)

Staff of both state and non-state organisations felt that Indigenous conservation initiatives were perceived within the sector and the wider community as not legitimate, as the respondents below explained:

This idea that the government somehow pays for and employs, you know, five or ten rangers, Aboriginal people, year round to go out, spend time on country and identify cultural sites and, you know, do traditional fire burning and that, I think a lot of people that just sounds like, you know, an easy life or a luxury. But, yeah, there’s these, these sort of perceptions that are hard to sort of crack. (National conservation NGO employee, Indigenous, both geographies, 29 November 2011)

Traditional owners as yet do not have a - probably - an acceptance as conservation managers within the wider community and particularly in the government agencies having full acceptance of Traditional Owners as being conservation managers ... rather than just being employees of conservation agencies. (Local Indigenous organisation employee, non-Indigenous, geography of overlap, 12 July 2011)

These differences in perceptions are not only impacting on Indigenous communities and their ability to undertake conservation initiatives. It follows that they are also potentially hindering the sector and society from achieving greater outcomes in conserving biodiversity.

6.6.2 Identity and belonging

The conservation journey of many of those in the south-east geography of dichotomy epitomised that of the settler seeking to address an emotional and moral need or desire to belong; to belong in and to a country in which they have felt considerable levels of discomfort and unease about. This was observed when attending the Indigenous Values in the Landscape workshops. One older non-Indigenous woman became emotionally
overwhelmed by the awareness of the indigenous during one workshop session, breaking down in tears as she relayed how, throughout her life, she had felt uncomfortable with the silence of the indigenous. This woman experienced an ontological “critical situation” (see Giddens 1979, 1984). She, as with many other attendees, was consciously seeking to address not only her desire to learn about Indigenous perspectives of the landscape and Indigenous ways of managing the land, to re-imagine the landscape, but also to address her needs to identify as an Australian and to belong. For instance, a generational farming family attending the same workshop was exploring the possibility of incorporating Indigenous ways of managing the landscape into their farming practices. This family is framing and constructing their identity and belonging in relation to both the land and the indigenous.

Other stories of identity and belonging arose during interviews with participants involved in the Kosciuszko to Coast partnership. One respondent, a non-Indigenous man who, having retired to the area after a successful career in the state natural resource management sector, and who remained active in conservation forums, felt a need to identify as someone who recognised Indigenous interests and be somehow considered Indigenous, as part of “the mob”:

When [wife’s name] and I lived in the city, the thought of feeling uncomfortable about squatting on Aboriginal land never entered into our heads. The moment we thought about buying a block in the bush, one of my first reactions was, I don’t feel good about doing this. I thought it was at least the minimum one could do would be to ask the local traditional owners how they felt about it ... to actually give us approval to occupy the place and [Indigenous person’s name] did that ... he simply enrolled us in the mob. So by doing that we acquired a legitimacy to live on the place and we obviously acquired obligations as well ... I know lots of people who have had, you know, welcome ceremonies and workings and that kind of stuff, but I don’t know anybody else who has actually asked approval and been given approval [to live in a certain place].

(Connectivity conservation partnership representative, non-Indigenous, 5 October 2011)

This respondent continued with more detail on how he felt connected to the indigenous and how the conservation organisation he was now involved with as a volunteer has had a “strengthening of consciousness about Aboriginal issues” because of his influence. This respondent characterised the settler trying to construct an identity and establish authenticity and legitimacy through borrowing Indigenous performances and attachments.
It appears that the consequences of re-imagining the indigenous, triggered by direct encounters, are profound and more positive for the non-Indigenous other than they are for many of their Indigenous colleagues.

6.7 Defining ontological niches in conservation

Conservation journeys were not confined to the personal. Information obtained from interviews and observations, coupled and verified with documentary analysis, confirmed that over the last decade or so, the norms of many conservation organisations have changed to varying extents. However, as implied above, conservation remains imagined by some in the sector, at both the personal and the institutional level, as dualistic and being synonymous with national parks, or at least solely with the preservation of nature. While many individuals and organisations in the sector have embraced the new paradigm’s features of increased involvement of non-state organisations and conservation beyond the boundaries of national parks, the third feature of the occupation of nature and inclusiveness has not been so readily accepted. This is particularly so for state-based conservation in the south-east, including key people involved in connectivity projects, as well as a number of NGOs working in both geographies. This cohort, both individuals and organisations, are displaying characteristics of “ontological security” (see Giddens 1991). They are adhering to the old paradigm’s notion of wilderness or unoccupied nature and of nature being separate from culture. For some, partnering with Indigenous groups is considered a distraction, a diversion or irrelevant to their conservation work based on Western science. Interestingly though, their ontological security appears to re-affirm and embed their niche in the conservation sector.

6.8 Conclusion

A central feature promoted under the new conservation paradigm is the occupation of nature. The conservation sector espouses that conservation achieves social outcomes as well as biodiversity outcomes, and that it is inclusive of Indigenous people. Satisfying the assertion of inclusiveness of Indigenous people is reliant on the conservation sector imagining the indigenous in a way that allows for transformative recognition processes to occur. Inclusive conservation is a utopian idea and is therefore transformative.

By using the concept of environmental imaginaries, or nature-talk, I explored the conservation sector’s imagining of the indigenous in the emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land in the settler society of Australia. I identified three
contemporary imaginaries of the indigenous by the conservation sector in Australia. The indigenous is imagined by the sector as being bound to the north, with elements of essentialised fantasies similar to those prominent in colonial imaginaries under the old paradigm. The need to make relevant the indigenous, primarily so as to include the significant amounts of Indigenous-held land of the geography of overlap in the conservation estate, has led to the second imaginary of modernising the indigenous with the concepts of cultural economies and sustainable livelihoods. The third imaginary is more complex and is borne from the conflation of the first two. The conservation sector’s imaginaries of the indigenous in Australia resemble to some extent those found in other countries, particularly in settler societies where the new conservation paradigm has been embraced. And they also demonstrate the resilience of the “Noble Savage” myth, as discussed by Sackett (1991) and McNiven and Russell (1995) late last century, as well as the “wilderness” ideal in the psyche of Australian conservationists reminiscent of the heterotopias of national parks under the old paradigm.

For Indigenous Australians involved in conservation, navigating and negotiating these imaginaries primarily constructed by others is complicated and is fraught with contest and conflict. The imaginary of being bound to the north with its associated essentialised fantasies results in a north-south disparity that Indigenous Australians in the south-east geography of dichotomy find frustrating and difficult to counter. As Paradies (2006) and Hunt (2014) assert, such imaginaries prevent the acknowledgement of the diversity of indigenous identities. However, Indigenous Australians in the geography of overlap in the north are also experiencing negative consequences of these imaginaries. They suffer from the conflated imaginary - not knowing whether to perform traditional or modern, being torn between the need to do things for conservation and the need to do things according to their ancestral obligations. Yet the research also found that some Indigenous communities manipulate these imaginaries and alter their performances to their benefit, as documented for Indigenous people of the Yukon in North America (Nadasdy 2005) and Ecuador in Latin America (Valdivia 2005).

The understandings and expectations of ideas like cultural economies and sustainable livelihoods are ambiguous and are not always shared between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector. These differences have resulted in tension between some conservation organisations and their Indigenous partners. Similarly, the idea of preserving nature or wilderness while simultaneously promoting cultural economies and sustainable
livelihoods is difficult for some Indigenous Australians to comprehend. For Indigenous Australians working for conservation organisations, both state and non-state, such differing perceptions place them in dichotomous positions where they feel they are expected either to side with conservation or side with their indigeneity.

The idea of an occupied nature is unsettling for many non-Indigenous others involved in conservation. For the non-Indigenous, grappling with imagining the indigenous is proving to be a disruptive ontological process. It is a catalyst for new understandings of conservation, where those people who had held fast to the understanding of conservation as the preservation of nature, are challenged to accept a more pluralistic understanding. For some non-Indigenous people, engaging with and re-imagining the indigenous is also triggering journeys of identity and belonging, characteristic of settlers struggling to find a comfortable postcolonial understanding of self and what it means to be Australian. And for some, this search, as Miller (2003) cautioned, may be misguided and represent a form of cultural appropriation.

(Re-)imagining the indigenous by the conservation sector in Australia is messy. Colonial, or neo-colonial, imaginaries appear to be resilient even with the promise of inclusion and an occupied nature under the new paradigm. Despite the positive consequences of these contemporary imaginaries and the re-imagining process for many non-Indigenous others, and for conservation organisations, significant negative consequences are felt by some of the Indigenous Australians involved.

Contemporary imaginaries of the indigenous by the conservation sector in Australia are not adequate to allow for transformative recognition processes across the sector. Contemporary imaginaries still centre on settler-colonial imaginaries and are about the continued domination and mastery of the non-Indigenous other. I believe the sector needs to unravel these imaginaries and re-imagine what inclusive conservation should be like. Such re-imagining should include the Indigenous and, as Bell (2014) argues, be more relational. When settler-colonial imaginaries of the dominant non-Indigenous other are de-centred only then is a re-centring of the indigenous possible. It is this process that will allow more space for recognition. I credit those in the conservation sector, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, state and non-state, including many of the participants in this research, for trying to facilitate such a process.
6.9 References


Part three: General conclusion
Chapter 7: Reflections and recommendations
7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, reflecting on the outcomes of the research, I revisit the aim of the research and consider the key findings. I discuss the contribution the research makes to the relevant academic literature, as well as the contribution the research makes to conceptual advances. I examine the significance of the research to related policy fields and on-ground engagements between conservation organisations and Indigenous Australians. I consider limitations and make recommendations for future research. My personal reflections are also incorporated in this chapter.

7.2 Revisiting the research aim and key findings

The research set-out to explore engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation under the new conservation paradigm. This exploration focused on answering four research questions. The first question, *What is the historical context of engagements between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector?*, was addressed in chapters 2 and 3, particularly Chapter 2, *Paradigms, paradoxes and a propitious niche: perspectives on conservation and Indigenous social justice policy in Australia*. This chapter chartered the policy landscapes of Indigenous social justice, particularly matters pertaining to land rights, and conservation, since the first invasion in Australia. It demonstrated that the historical context of engagements is strongly related to the increasing amounts of land being returned to Indigenous Australians under various initiatives and programs, such as land rights legislation, and the increasing amounts of lands having conservation interest, including public lands and lands held in private interests. The chapter showed how the once separate policy landscapes are now intrinsically linked. Importantly, the chapter described the embracement of the new conservation paradigm in Australia, by both the state and non-state, over the last few decades. It also illustrated that historically the Indigenous social justice agenda was the prime motivator of Indigenous Australians’ involvement in conservation, yet with the intersection of the two policy landscapes, Indigenous social justice is becoming dependent on the conservation agenda.

The second question, *What is the contemporary context of engagements between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector?*, was addressed with Adams in Chapter 3, *Emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land in Australia*. The chapter analysed both state and non-state conservation initiatives, and the increasing amount of lands held by Indigenous people, and charted the spatial manifestations of these, to describe the contemporary context of engagements. The embracement of the new
conservation paradigm, with large-scale efforts beyond the boundaries of national parks and the acknowledgement of people in the conservation space, is the context which has resulted in an increasing number of engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations. Importantly, the chapter identified the emergence of new geographies of overlap, dichotomy and absence between Indigenous-held lands and conservation.

The third research question, *How are Indigenous Australians recognised in contemporary engagements with the conservation sector?*, was addressed in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4, *A spectrum of recognition: Indigenous people and interests in conservation in Australia* looked at how conservation organisations in Australia recognise Indigenous people and interests in the geo-political concepts of scale, territory and governance of their operations. With the use of a typology of recognition processes, the chapter described how conservation organisations use a spectrum of processes to recognise Indigenous people and interests. Using the geo-political concepts as analytical devices, the chapter showed that the use of transformative processes, where conservation organisations re-value Indigenous interests and de-centre their own interests, are rare. The research found that most conservation organisations use affirmative recognition processes, where Indigenous interests are re-valued but non-Indigenous interests are not de-centred. There are also instances of mis- or non-recognition, revealing the presence of neo-colonial practices. Having answered the third research question in general, the paper co-authored with numerous others and as presented as Chapter 5, *Conservation planning in a cross-cultural context: the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project in the Kimberley, Western Australia*, looked in more detail at one particular engagement utilising what, if subject to the typology in Chapter 4, could be referred to as transformative recognition processes.

The fourth research question, *Why Indigenous Australians are recognised in contemporary engagements with the conservation sector?*, was addressed in Chapter 6, *Re-)imagination the indigenous in conservation*. The chapter analysed conservation organisations’ norms and practices and showed that the recognition of Indigenous people and interests by conservation organisations is influenced by imaginaries of the indigenous. Indigenous people and interests are recognised by conservation organisations as either being bound to the north, similar to essentialised fantasies reminiscent of colonial imaginaries, as the modern Indigenous associated with concepts of sustainable livelihoods and cultural economies, or as a combination of the two. Such imaginaries are making it difficult for
some Indigenous Australians to be recognised while others are mis-recognised by such imaginaries. The chapter also found that imaginings of the indigenous by conservation organisations can create a niche in a competitive conservation sector and can also manifest in journeys of belonging and identity for some non-Indigenous people.

In answering the research questions, the thesis has explored contemporary engagements between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector.

7.3 Contribution to academic literature and conceptual advances

With this exploration of engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations, the research contributes to relevant academic literature and to conceptual advances. By highlighting such engagements in Australia, the research expands the growing body of literature from developing countries, particularly settler societies, to build a more global account of contemporary engagements between conservation and Indigenous peoples. Conceptually, the thesis contributes to the understanding of the new conservation paradigm with detailed research from Australia. Acknowledging that most environmental problems are human induced, it adds to the modest yet growing cultural analysis of conservation, as called for by Head et al (2005). It adds to the literature on justice, particularly environmental justice and the concepts of recognition and inclusion. It expands the understanding of environmental imaginaries and “nature-talk” (see Castree 2004), and makes this concept more relevant in Indigenous engagements for settler societies. The following sections revisit the literature sets and concepts discussed in the introductory chapter to consider the research contribution to each.

7.3.1 Historical context

Many works address the historical context of Indigenous social justice policy in Australia (see Mercer 1987, 1993; Goodall 1988, 1996; Young 1995; Moran 2002; McGregor 2009). Similarly, there is considerable descriptive literature on the historical context of biodiversity conservation (see for example Goldstein 1979; Hutton and Connors 1999). The work of Goodall (2006) begins to link the two policy landscapes together in an account on the establishment of early protected areas in Australia. However, works bringing the historical policy landscapes together into a combined narrative since the first invasion are lacking. I combined the two literature sets and in doing so, demonstrated the changing paradigms and increasing connectedness of Indigenous social justice and conservation in Australia.
7.3.2 New conservation paradigm

The thesis demonstrated that the various innovative approaches adopted and promoted in conservation in Australia reflect the core features of the new conservation paradigm. The core features of large-scale conservation efforts, beyond the boundaries of national parks, inclusion of people have been adopted by state and non-state conservation organisations and are promoted in various media. For instance, Mackey et al (2010) and Whitten et al (2011) described the large-scale conservation landscapes and connectivity corridors that are both in existence and in development in Australia; Figgis (2004) and Cowell and Williams (2006) provided accounts of the increasing reliance on conservation on private lands in Australia; and Smyth and Sutherland (1996), Smyth (2001, 2011) and Ross et al (2009), explained the various and increasing involvement of Indigenous Australians in protected areas. Importantly, I confirm that the new conservation paradigm is accepted and promoted in Australia.

7.3.3 Engagements between Indigenous people and conservation

Although there is a considerable body of literature on engagements between Indigenous people and conservation organisations stemming from developing countries (see for example Chapin 2004; Brockington and Igoe 2006; Igoe and Croucher 2007; Brockington 2010; Ramutsindela and Noe 2012), and a growing body of literature from the developed settled societies of North America and Aotearoa - New Zealand (see Coombes 2007; Berkes 2009; Bennett and Lemelin 2013; Lyver et al 2014: Stronghill et al 2015), there has been little attention afforded to the contemporary Australian context. This is despite Australia being lauded as a leader in Indigenous involvement in conservation (Ross et al 2009).

Research findings by Pickerill (2008, 2009), Holmes (2011a, 2011b, 2012), coupled with the commentary by Langton (1996, 1998, 2002, 2012) and opinion pieces on contests between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations (see Fleming 2009 and Kerins 2009), suggested that further research was needed to ascertain whether previous injustices of conservation on Indigenous Australians are manifesting themselves under the new conservation paradigm. The thesis established that previous injustices of conservation on Indigenous Australian are manifesting themselves under the new conservation paradigm, as part of neo-colonial processes. The research represents the first in-depth study on engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations under a new conservation paradigm. In doing so it also adds to the growing settled society accounts of
7.3.4 Social justice and recognition

Unlike much of the international literature framing the inclusion of people in conservation as an ethical consideration or obligation (e.g. Alcorn et al 2010; Minteer and Miller 2011; Robinson 2011; Miller et al 2011; Sarkar and Montoya 2011), I considered the core feature of inclusion of people under the new conservation paradigm as an issue of social justice (see Perfecto and Vandermeer 2008; Kothari 2008). Framing the research under a social justice banner, I engaged with the works of justice theorists Young (1990) and Fraser (1995, 1997), and with Schlosberg (2007, 2013) and Whyte (2010) on environmental justice. I adopted a definition of environmental justice that encompassed recognition, participation and equity, as well as “more broadly, the basic needs and functioning of individuals and communities” (Schlosberg 2013: 40).

Taking the environmental justice theme further, I acknowledged the significant contribution that Adams (2001), Schlosberg and Carruthers (2010) and Whyte (2010) have made to the understanding of recognition, and I adopted a similar approach to explore engagements between conservation organisations and Indigenous Australians. However, despite the work of these scholars, there is little research under an environmental justice framework that specifically considers the types of processes that conservation organisations employ in their recognition of Indigenous people. To address this deficiency, I turned to literature from the legal discipline, particularly that relating to the Australian judicial system (see Australian Law Reform Commission 1986; Pearson 1997; Mantziaris and Martin 2000; Barcham 2007; Smith and Morphy 2007), to inform my understanding on this topic and to extend the concept of recognition to conservation. In my deliberations on recognition, I acknowledged that the concept draws criticism from some Indigenous scholars, e.g. Alfred and Tomkins (2010) and Coulthard (2007). However, I used the concept of recognition consistent with contemporary national discourse in Australia, including national conversations involving Indigenous Australian academics, including Langton.

7.3.5 Environmental imaginaries

I considered the concept of imaginaries, as “the underlying discursive norms that govern communication in social situations” (McGregor 2004: 594) to gain insight into why and how those people active in conservation in Australia, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous,
understand the concept of conservation and whether and to what extent is the indigenous incorporated as part of that concept. Acknowledging the growing body of literature connecting the indigenous to imaginaries, I concentrated on the imaginaries of nature, on environmental imaginaries, as initially conceived by Peet and Watts (1996), and the more recent international literature on environmental imaginaries of the indigenous (see Muehlebach 2001; Nadasdy 2005; Valdivia 2005; Swainson and McGregor 2008; Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2013; Harris et al 2013; Pemunta 2013). However, studies from Australia are limited and mainly emerge obliquely, such as in Head and Muir’s (2006) study on imaginaries of suburban backyards and Davison’s (2008) study on urban environmental campaigners, or are from earlier times, such as Sackett (1991) and McNiven and Russell (1995), which looked at conservationists perceptions of Indigenous Australians in relation to the idea of wilderness. With the research, I not only build a more global account of such imaginaries under a new conservation paradigm but also update the Australian context.

In considering the environmental imaginaries of the indigenous by those active in conservation, issues around the ontological state arose, such as belonging, attachment to place and settler identity. With this, the research complements the work of Trigger and Mulcock (2005) on the spirituality of forests, and Davison’s work on environmental campaigners, with the first snapshot of such matters by those professionally active in contemporary conservation in Australia.

### 7.3.6 Scale, territory and governance

In the thesis, I engaged with the contested geo-political concepts of scale, territory and governance. Much of the international literature frames engagements between indigenous people and conservation with such concepts (see Ramutsindela and Noe 2012; Corson and MacDonald 2012; Sundberg 2006). Literature stemming from an Australian context on the topic is lacking. I utilised the concepts to examine the different relationships between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations. Early stages of the research suggested that there were different scales at work in existing engagements. The introduction of large-scale approaches to conservation subsequently also influenced the territory and the governance of such engagements. The research contributes to the international literature on this topic with a contemporary Australian context.

The concept of scale as hierarchical, as described by Jonas (2011), influenced the study design with the embedded case study structure reflecting local, regional and
national/international scales that engagements operate within. Yet I also used scale as an analytical devise similar to Jones (1998), when in relation to recognition processes in Chapter 4, I grouped data and presented results according to these concepts. The research contributes to the literature on scale as an analytical tool.

### 7.3.7 Maps and mapping

In exploring the engagements between conservation and Indigenous people and interests, I necessarily engaged with literature on maps and mapping. As noted earlier, the spatial domain of Indigenous interests in land and conservation is discussed in the thesis with maps. The maps that are presented in the thesis are of the type commonly used by the state and NGOs in portraying conservation and Indigenous-held lands. Yet, the literature cautious the use of maps as they are inherently powerful and misleading. They create a static view (Carolan 2009) and fail to acknowledge indigenous mobility, identities and cultures (Howitt et al 2013). However, I, and Adams for Chapter 3, use maps because of these influences to highlight the imbalance of power and inequities of the social benefits in the emerging geographies of conservation and Indigenous land.

### 7.4 Significance to policy fields and on-ground engagements

One of the key drivers of this research was that it should benefit both Indigenous organisations and the conservation sector. This was explicit in the research proposal and subsequent approval for the inclusion of the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project in the research (see Appendix 1). It was also very important to me as the researcher. I wanted to give back something to existing and potential engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations. I wanted to promote inclusive and just conservation.

The research has contributed to an increased understanding of engagements between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector. During the period of the research, I received numerous requests for the three published articles. These requests came from Indigenous and conservation organisations, policy makers and academics. I received positive feedback on the contributions the articles made to existing engagements and to academic learning. For instance, the paper which is presented in Chapter 2, *Paradigms, paradoxes and a propitious niche: perspectives on conservation and Indigenous social justice policy in Australia* is being used as a centre piece for an undergraduate environmental management unit (email message from Dr Sandra Suchet-Pearson on
February 6, 2015). Additionally, I was invited to participate in a number of select forums related to the topic. I received these requests and invitations from Australia, such as the *IUCN Innovation for 21st Century Conservation Symposium* in 2012 and the *Unstable Relations: Indigeneity and Environmentalism in Australian Today* in late 2015, and from overseas, such as the *Conservation Planning and Evaluation Workshop* in 2015 at San Diego Zoo’s Institute for Conservation Research.

Situating the research under an expanded transformative paradigm with Indigenous methodologies, the research has also contributed to an increased understanding of engagements. The interviews, as well as my attendance and participation at numerous forums for observation purposes, raised awareness of the need to reflect on existing engagements between Indigenous people and the conservation sector, and for those active in this cross-cultural space, to reflect on their role and the norms and operations of their organisations. For instance, Bush Heritage Australia is keen on supporting the development of a booklet on the findings, including committing resources for the booklet production, for use by conservation organisations and Indigenous groups (pers. comm. Gerard O’Neill, CEO, Bush Heritage Australia, September 10, 2015). Such a booklet would mainly focus on the practical outcomes of the research such as the typology and spectrum presented in Chapter 4, *A spectrum of recognition*. The research has also personally informed my ongoing work in conservation with Indigenous people. For instance, during the latter part of the research, I worked on the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area Management Plan for an area in Northern Australia where I used some of my new knowledge.

As well as these general contributions, there have been specific on-ground benefits of the research. The Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation, relevant Indigenous native title holders and the conservation partner organisation Bush Heritage Australia were able to promote the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project through my research. The research and the related articles (particularly the article that is presented as Chapter 5 in this thesis), increased the profile of the project both nationally and internationally. This higher profile resulted in kudos for those organisations involved and potentially influenced the financial security of the project. The project has been used as a model by a number of partnership projects. I have observed through my ongoing work in conservation with Indigenous groups an increasing use of transformative recognition processes as detailed in this case study.
The thesis predicts that engagements and interactions between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations will increase. This assertion is based on the increasing role and influence of non-state conservation organisations, the increase in Indigenous-held lands with the determination of outstanding native title claims and increased reliance on Indigenous-held lands for conservation outcomes. The timing of the thesis outcomes is therefore significant and I hope that the thesis will further contribute to improved engagements between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector, and promote more inclusive futures for Indigenous Australians in conservation.

The thesis will inform policy development in conservation and the institutional structures within the conservation sector and conservation organisations. While the research has an Australian context, its reach and application are much wider. The research is particularly relevant to other developed settler societies where Indigenous people have been subject to injustice by policies and practices under previous conservation paradigms, and to countries where the large international conservation organisations that operate in Australia are also active. The contribution of the research to policy development is primarily through the recommendations to introduce more transformative recognition processes across the conservation sector. The conservation sector needs to unravel its contemporary imaginaries of indigeneity and re-imagine what inclusive conservation should be like. Conservation organisations that employ non- or mis-recognition processes should re-value Indigenous people and interests, and discard their neo-colonial tendencies and practices and relinquish their neo-colonial powers. The thesis proposed the introduction of transformative recognition processes by re-centring the non-Indigenous interests of conservation organisations that employ affirmative recognition processes. It encouraged the sector to introduce measures to promote transformation such as conditional conservation funding and the use of reference for executive positions, in decision making processes and in monitoring of environmental assets. It also suggested the introduction of self-regulation by the conservation sector with a code of practice or accreditation. The thesis stressed that the introduction of transformative recognition processes should not be dependent on land tenure. And importantly, the thesis highlighted the need to promote and foster the use of champions in facilitating the transition of the conservation sector to transformative recognition processes.

Additionally, the typology of recognition processes and the spectrum of recognition processes presented in the thesis are intended to have a life after the research project.
They can be utilised by conservation organisations to assess the recognition processes of their own operations as well as tools for state agencies and large NGOs to assess funding applications. The typology and spectrum can equally be used by Indigenous organisations to assess potential conservation partners.

In summary, the research has deepened the understanding of the new conservation paradigm and particularly the idea of inclusion in conservation. It helps to balance the often ecologically focused character of conservation with a social perspective. It addresses the knowledge gap identified in the literature review by examining inclusiveness of Indigenous people in conservation in the settler society of Australia. It acknowledges the embrace of the new conservation paradigm in Australia and the emergence of new geographies of Indigenous-held lands and conservation. It has elucidated the how and why of engagements between conservation and Indigenous Australians, and illustrated the success of the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project compared with other less successful engagements. The research has given back and has positively contributed to engagements between Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations. In accordance with the research premise, it presents mechanisms to help promote just and inclusive conservation that allows for the effective participation of Indigenous Australians. Significantly, the thesis offers Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations knowledge to improve current and future engagements between Indigenous Australians and the conservation sector.

7.5 Research limitations and recommendations
One of the challenges faced in research is currency. During my research, the policy landscapes of both the conservation and Indigenous social justice agendas in Australia were rapidly evolving. Changes in government at both provincial and national levels resulted in changing priorities and new and different programs for conservation and Indigenous social justice. Land use development issues in some parts of the country, particularly in regions of Northern Australia, resulted in more complex relationships and shifting alliances between and among conservation and Indigenous groups. Although I did not let such changes direct the research, they did impact on it. One of the casualties of this flux relates to the spatiality of the emerging geographies as depicted in Chapter 3. With more land being returned to Indigenous people through native title claims and an expansion in conservation interests, parts of the country that were categorised as being one particular geography at the commencement of the research would now be categorised differently. For instance, The Nature Conservancy now has an interest in the Western Desert Region of Central Australia,
which when the emerging geographies paper was written was predominantly the geography of absence. Although the research did foreshadow such changes, it was impractical to take account of them. However, the concept of emerging geographies remains relevant even as their spatiality remains dynamic.

One of the conceptual struggles I faced in the research was defining conservation. From my experience conservation is a broad church. For the research, I have tended to borrow understandings of these ideas from the literature and from my previous work. Natural resource management, catchment management and ecological restoration are all encompassed by the use of conservation in this research. Deciding what to include or exclude in an understanding of the conservation sector or of a conservation organisation was another challenge. Much of the research focused on NGOs, with many of the interviewees employed by conservation NGOs. However, several interviewees were involved in state processes, particularly in the south-east where NGOs are not as active as in the north, and included employees of state organisations as well as consultants who work with the state in various capacities. Furthermore, under the new conservation paradigm, public-private-partnerships often blur the identification of an entity as state or non-state, and as I have noted, there are also new modes of the state. While I did not specifically examine engagements in state managed national parks (as these have been the subject of other research), engagements related to these conservation spaces were raised in the interviews and in observations at the various forums. I included Indigenous-owned organisations that work in land and sea management, although interviewees from these organisations were encouraged to talk about engagements with other conservation organisations. My definitions of conservation and of the conservation sector and conservation organisations may have resulted in some actions and entities escaping scrutiny or some being included that other researchers may not have incorporated.

Positionality issues challenged me during the research. I am passionate about conservation and Indigenous social justice. My work for more than 25 years has been driven by these passions. Undoubtedly the research was limited by my positionality as a non-Indigenous person. I was mindful during the course of the research, as I am in my work, that I am non-Indigenous. Despite having worked in this cross-cultural space for a long time, my positionality may mean I have interpreted and understood things differently than an Indigenous person and differently than someone who is not embedded in the field of their study. An element of bias is inherent in any research as there is always personal motivation.
to the study. However, my positionality may also have enriched the research in some ways and provided for insightful investigations. For instance, elucidating personal values and views on Indigenous engagement from a non-Indigenous participant may be more forthcoming with me as a non-Indigenous interviewer than those arising if interviewed by an Indigenous person. As I am embedded in the topic of my study, I am also an insider. This position was beneficial to the research in many ways. For instance, I already knew many of the interviewees so the time required building trust and respect with participants under an Indigenous methodologies framework, was expedited. However, being an insider also had its drawbacks. I struggled with how to ensure that the research did not portray me as anti-conservation. The research project pushed me into a process of reflexivity, which at times I found uncomfortable. I do believe that conservation can be a propitious niche for some Indigenous people and I think it offers opportunities that other sectors do not. In the research project, I went down one or two paths with a feeling of trepidation. I was mindful that the research would impact on my future livelihood and my reputation in the sector.

The limitations outlined above form the focus of my recommendations for future research. It would be beneficial to re-visit the case studies to ascertain the dynamics of engagements over time. Most of the engagements that were encapsulated in the research were less than ten years old. Longitudinal studies on some, particularly the associated partnerships, may contribute significantly to the body of knowledge on recognition processes, as would examining the most recent engagements resulting from the changing spatialities of the geographies. It would also be beneficial to explore the changes that are occurring to engagements between Indigenous people and conservation organisations with the introduction of multi-tenured conservation spaces. In some of these spaces, Indigenous Australians and conservation organisations have historical relationships formed under the old conservation paradigm. These newer relationships will require a different approach to meet the new dimensions of scale, territory and governance. And where do all these engagements under the new paradigm leave engagements between Indigenous people and state conservation in Indigenous-owned jointly-managed national parks? How are they influenced by the approaches of the new paradigm that are taking place outside the park boundary? Ideally, these research futures would benefit from an Indigenous lens as well as a non-Indigenous research perspective.
7.6 References


Carolan M S (2009) “This is not a biodiversity hotspot”: the power of maps and other images in the environmental sciences. *Society and Natural Resources* 22: 278-286


Sarkar S and Montoya M (2011) Beyond parks and reserves: The ethics and politics of conservation with a case study from Peru. *Biological Conservation* 144(3): 979-988


Appendix 1: Proposal and related approval for Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project case study
11 August 2010

Esther Waina
Chair
Wunambal Gaamberra Aboriginal Corporation
PMB 16
Wyndham WA 6740

Dear Esther

Research proposal - Wunambal Gaamberra Healthy Country Project as a case study

I am writing to seek permission from Wunambal Gaamberra Aboriginal Corporation to use the Wunambal Gaamberra Healthy Country Project as a case study for research I am undertaking as part of a Master of Science Degree through the University of Wollongong.

Please find attached a research proposal which outlines background information, the aims and methods of the research and how ethical considerations will be addressed. I am happy to provide further information or clarification if required.

Thank you for your time in considering this proposal.

Yours sincerely

Heather Moorcroft
Master of Science (Research) Candidate
School of Earth and Environmental Sciences
University of Wollongong
Research proposal
Heather Moorcroft, University of Wollongong

Purpose of the proposal
To seek approval from the Wunambal Gaambiera Aboriginal Corporation to use the Wunambal Gaambiera Healthy Country project as a case study for the Masters research project above.

Research title
The consequences of engagement between environmental NGOs and Indigenous Australians in the conservation of biodiversity.

Background information
Having worked on the healthy country project with Bush Heritage Australia (BHA) and Wunambal Gaambiera Aboriginal Corporation (WGAC), I started to wonder what other partnerships between environmental NGOs (non-government organisations) and Indigenous communities were around. I thought that such partnerships might be a pretty new thing in Australia. I also started to wonder if there were some things in the partnership that were particularly good and met both WGAC and BHA's aspirations, and whether there were some things that could have been done other ways.

I enrolled at University of Wollongong to do a Masters degree so I could do some research into the topic. I read scientific journals and talked to a few key people to see if there were other studies on such types of partnerships. I found that there haven't been any such studies done in Australia, and that there are only a few studies from overseas, mainly from Africa.

Most of the information written by scientists on environmental management is about the biodiversity or the ecology of the plants and animals. This information is really important but it is also important to look at the people side of environmental management. Conserving biodiversity will only happen with people doing the work. Not a lot of information is written about this side, the social side, of conservation.

Indigenous people are looking for ways to improve their social and economic wellbeing, though ways that can also help caring for country. Environmental NGOs want to conserve biodiversity and are looking for other ways to reach this goal. It seems that partnerships between indigenous people and environmental organisations is one way that is being used to conserve biodiversity and fund caring for country.

Research aims
The aims of the research are:
- to have an Australian perspective on a new approach to conservation management
- to address some of the knowledge gaps on the social side of environmental management so that policy decisions on important conservation management issues are based on not just the ecological information
- to assist environmental NGOs and Indigenous Australians in developing and maintaining effective conservation engagements
- to contribute to improved management of cultural landscapes
Research methods
My research methods are a standard social science approach and include two main components:
- doing a literature review – checking written information from journals, magazines and other reports from Australia and overseas on topics like partnerships with Indigenous people and changes to conservation management approaches
- using case studies – getting an overview of what is happening in Australia, then focusing on the Kimberley at a regional level and then looking in detail at the Wunambal Gaamberra Healthy Country Project partnership between WGAC and BHA

For the case study part of the research, I would like to sit down and talk to people about the partnerships they are involved in. For WGAC this would mean talking to a number of people that are/were involved in the healthy country project. I would take notes and maybe record the conversation with a tape recorder.

Ethics and cultural protocols
I am applying for ethics approval though the University of Wollongong's Human Research Ethics Committee. I will seek formal permission from BHA to use the Healthy Country Project as a case study, if approval is first given from WGAC. BHA has given in-principle support. I will use the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies' Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies and be further directed by Wunambal Gaamberra Aboriginal Corporation's protocols as required.

People who agree to be interviewed will be given information on the research project and will be asked to sign a form that explains their rights and what they agree to e.g. they can withdraw at any time, remain anonymous in the report. Interviews will be for about one hour.

Benefits for WGAC from the research
Some of the benefits for WGAC and BHA will be:
- documentation of the Wunambal Gaamberra Healthy Country Project planning process
- copy of the thesis – detail of findings including lessons learnt for developing new partnerships or improving existing ones
- showcasing the Wunambal Gaamberra Healthy Country Project - written up in published journals and other relevant literature such as indigenous and environmental newsletters
- plain English report for WGAC and BHA
- possible joint papers in journals or at conferences

Supervisors
Professor Lesley Head
Director
Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research
School of Earth and Environmental Studies
University of Wollongong
Ph: 02 4221 3124
Email: Ihead@uow.edu.au

Dr Michael Adams
Senior Lecturer
Woolyunga Indigenous Centre
University of Wollongong
Ph: 02 4221 5392
Email: michael_adams@uow.edu.au

Dr Jack Baker
Honorary Principal Fellow
School of Biological Sciences
University of Wollongong
Ph: 02 4221 4340
Email: j.baker@uow.edu.au

Research proposal to Wunambal Gaamberra Aboriginal Corporation from Heather Moorcroft August 2010

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22nd February 2011

Ms Heather Moorcroft

Dear Heather,


Thank you Heather for your research proposal to include our Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Plan Project as a case study of your PhD research topic.

I advise the Directors have approved your proposal to use the Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Project as a case study of your research.

We believe the case study will benefit Wunambal Gaambera people as a documented record of our Healthy Country Plan Project and how the planning was undertaken. Your recent involvement in planning leadership of our Plan project will provide a valuable authentic link for your research. We hope our case study with others will be of comparative interest and benefit to both Indigenous groups, conservation NGOs and the broader community.

As part of the approval, yourself and University will, prior to commencing, need to formalise the research arrangement, by a research agreement with WGAC. Our standard agreement will be forwarded under separate cover for your consideration.

WGAC wishes you every success in this study. We look forward to meeting you again when you visit our Country as part of your research activities.

 Yours sincerely,

Esther Waina,
Chairperson

Note: WGAC advised that a research agreement was not necessary and that the approval above was sufficient.
Appendix 2: Participant information sheet
Research participant information sheet

Research title: Engagements between Indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs in conservation landscapes.

Researcher: Heather Moocroft - PhD Candidate
Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research (AUSCCER)
School of Earth & Environmental Sciences, University of Wollongong
Email: hmm514@uow.edu.au

Research aims: Recent changes in conservation have resulted in Indigenous people and environmental NGOs playing increasing roles in new conservation landscapes. However, to date there is limited published literature on the nature and extent of conservation landscapes in Australia, or on all of the alleged benefits, particularly those relating to Indigenous Australians. The research aims to explore the arrangements for these landscapes, and investigate the effectiveness and consequences of engagements between Indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs in conservation landscapes.

Research significance: The research will inform discussion and policy development on an important and emerging conservation issue. The social, cultural and economic benefits of conservation landscapes in Australia and the extent and nature of involvement of Indigenous Australians in these landscapes are not yet known. Results of the research will assist government and non-government organisations develop future policy and programs related to conservation and improving social justice for Indigenous Australians. The findings will also assist environmental NGOs and Indigenous communities already involved, or considering being involved, in such arrangements.

Research approach: The research involves a tiered case study approach as follows:
1. an overview of the national conservation landscape
2. a regional analysis of two conservation landscapes – The Kimberley in northern Australia and the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative (GERI) in south-eastern Australia
3. a detailed investigation into a project within each of the selected landscapes – the Wunambal Gatubulsu Healthy Country Project in The Kimberley and the Kosciuszko Coast project in the GERI/south-eastern Australia

Research outcomes: Outcomes of the research will be published by the University of Wollongong as a PhD thesis. Other research outcomes include articles in peer reviewed journal articles and non-peer reviewed journal articles, and presentations at relevant conference and workshops.

Participation requirements, role and rights: As an interview participant, about one hour of your time is required to answer questions and discuss your views, aspirations, perceptions and opinions on the research topic. The questions will be conducted as semi-structured or unstructured interviews with the researcher, Heather Moocroft. Your interview answers will be confidential and with your permission may be recorded on audio-tape and by photos. Participation in the research is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the research at any time without any negative consequences. The interviews will focus on some key themes and will include questions relating to:
- participants history, experience, role and responsibilities, including cultural responsibility for indigenous participants (public information only)
University of Wollongong

- information on existing engagements between Indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs in conservation landscapes
- thoughts, aspirations, opinions and perceptions on existing engagements between Indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs in conservation landscapes, including what are the consequences of such engagements and what makes a good engagement

The information gathered during the research may be used in Heather Moorcroft’s PhD thesis, in journal articles and in other related publications. It may also be used in conference and seminar presentations. Your name or images of you will not be published unless you agree otherwise. All the data gathered during the research will be securely stored and accessible by Heather Moorcroft, as far as the law allows, and will not be shown to anyone else. Copies of the data will also be stored in the University of Wollongong’s secure storage facility. Data will be stored for 5 years.

As a participant you will be asked to give your formal consent to participate in the research by signing a consent form. The consent form outlines your rights, the access and use of information and also provides detail on where you can seek further information or make a complaint about the way in which the research is carried out. Verbal consent to participate in the research will be accepted if preferred. If applicable, Indigenous participants who are not employed at the time of interview will be paid the required standard consultation fee in accordance with relevant community policy.

Research supervisors:
Professor Lesley Head
Director
AUSCER
School of Earth & Environmental Sciences
University of Wollongong
Phone: (02) 4221 3124
Email: lhend@uow.edu.au

Dr Michael Adams
Woolyungah Indigenous Centre
School of Earth & Environmental Sciences
University of Wollongong

Phone: (02) 4221 4284
Email: m.adams@uow.edu.au

Dr Jack Baker
Honorary Principal Fellow
School of Biological Sciences
University of Wollongong

Phone:
Email: j.baker@uow.edu.au

Ethics review and complaints: The research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, you can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research, University of Wollongong, on (02) 4221 4457 or hrec@uow.edu.au.

Further information: If you have any questions on the research please contact me or my supervisors.

Thank you for your interest and for considering my request to participate.

Yours sincerely

Heather Moorcroft
Appendix 3: Participant consent form
Consent form for participation in research

Research title: Engagements between Indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs in conservation landscapes

Researcher’s name: Heather Moorcroft

I, …………………………………………………………………………………………… agree to participate in and be interviewed by Heather Moorcroft as part of her PhD research.

I have read and understand the following:

1. I have been given information on the research that Heather Moorcroft is conducting about engagements between Indigenous Australians and environmental non-government organisations (NGOs) in conservation landscapes.

2. My participation in the research is entirely voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. My refusal to participate or withdrawing my consent will not have any negative consequences.

3. Information for the research will be obtained by interviews and observation of participation. Information will be recorded on audio-tape, in handwritten notes and by photos.

4. Information, including images of me, obtained during the research may be used in Heather Moorcroft’s PhD, in journal articles and in other related publications. It may also be used in conference and seminar presentations.

5. My name will be suppressed in any published material related to the research unless otherwise agreed.

6. Images of me will only be used in public material related to the research if I give specific permission to Heather Moorcroft.

7. All data from the interviews including transcripts, handwritten notes, and images will be securely stored and accessible by Heather Moorcroft, as far as the law allows,
and will not be shown to anyone else. Copies of the data will also be stored in the University of Wollongong’s secure storage facility. Data will be stored for 5 years.

8. If I have any queries about the research, I can contact Heather Moorcroft on or her supervisors Professor Lesley Head on (02) 4221 3124, Dr Michael Adams on (02) 4221 4284, or Dr Jack Baker on (02) 4284 5740.

9. If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research, University of Wollongong, on (02) 4221 4457 or rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
Signature                                                     Date

Thank you for your assistance
Appendix 4: University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee approval notifications
INITIAL APPLICATION APPROVAL IN PART

In reply please quote: GHE/CJ HE11/063
Further Enquiries Phone: 4221 4457

7 April 2011
Ms Heather Moorcroft

Dear Ms Moorcroft,

Thank you for your response 30 March 2011 to the Ethics Manager’s email of 25 March 2011, in relation to the application detailed below. This is to advise that the application has been approved in part.

Ethics Number: HE11/063
Project Title: Engagements between Indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs (non-government organisations) in conservation landscapes.
Researchers: Ms Heather Moorcroft, Prof Lesley Head
Approval Date: 31 March 2011
Expiry Date: 30 March 2012

Please note that the partial approval is explained below:

1. Approval is granted for Wunninbal Gaumbens. Please provide a copy of the research agreement.

2. Approval for the South Coast Indigenous communities is dependent on evidence of consultation and approval from that community and will be reviewed once that information is provided to the committee.

The University of Wollongong/SESIAHS Humanities, Social Science and Behavioural HREC is constituted and functions in accordance with the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. The HREC has reviewed the research proposal for compliance with the National Statement and approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with this document. As evidence of continuing compliance, the Human Research Ethics Committee requires that researchers immediately report:

- proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

You are also required to complete monitoring reports annually and at the end of your project. These reports are sent out approximately 6 weeks prior to the date your ethics approval expires. The reports must be completed, signed by the appropriate Head of School, and returned to the Research Services Office prior to the expiry date.

Yours sincerely

副教授 Garry Hoban
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

cc: Professor Lesley Head, School of Earth and Environmental Science, Bldg 41 G14
Dear Ms Moorcroft,

Thank you for submitting the progress report. I am pleased to advise that renewal of the following Human Research Ethics application has been approved.

Ethics Number: HE11/063
Project Title: Engagements between Indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs (non-government organisations) in conservation landscapes.
Researchers: Ms Heather Moorcroft, Prof Lesley Head
Date Approved: 12 April 2012
Renewed From: 30 March 2012
New Expiry Date: 30 March 2013 *

* Please note that approval will only be given for 12 months at any one time as an annual progress report is a requirement of your approval.

Please note that approvals are granted for a twelve month period. Further extension will be considered on receipt of a progress report prior to expiry date.

This certificate relates to the research protocol submitted in your original application and all approved amendments to date. Please remember that in addition to completing an annual report the Human Research Ethics Committee also requires that researchers immediately report:

- proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

Yours sincerely,

A/Professor Garry Hoban
Chair, Social Sciences
Human Research Ethics Committee

Cc: Professor Lesley Head
RENEWAL APPROVAL
In reply please quote: HE11/063
Further Enquiries Phone: 4221 3386

15 April 2013
Ms Heather Moorcroft

Dear Ms Moorcroft

I am pleased to advise that renewal of the following Human Research Ethics application has been approved. This certificate relates to the research protocol submitted in your original application and all approved amendments to date.

Ethics Number: HE11/063
Project Title: Engagements between Indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs (non-government organisations) in conservation landscapes
Name of Researchers: Ms Heather Moorcroft, Prof Lesley Head
Renewed From: 31 March 2013
Expiry Date: 30 March 2014

Please note that approvals are granted for a twelve month period. Further extension will be considered on receipt of a progress report prior to expiry date.

This certificate relates to the research protocol submitted in your original application and all approved amendments to date. Please remember that in addition to completing an annual report the Human Research Ethics Committee also requires that researchers immediately report:

• proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
• serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
• unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

Yours sincerely

A/Professor Garry Hoban
Chair, Social Sciences
Human Research Ethics Committee

Ethics Unit, Research Services Office
University of Wollongong NSW 2522 Australia
Telephone (02) 4221 3386 Facsimile (02) 4221 4338
Email: rso-ethics@uow.edu.au Web: www.uow.edu.au
8 April 2014

Ms Heather Moorcroft

Dear Ms Moorcroft

I am pleased to advise that renewal of the following Human Research Ethics application has been approved. This certificate relates to the research protocol submitted in your original application and all approved amendments to date.

Ethics Number: HE11/063
Project Title: Engagements between Indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs (non-government organisations) in conservation landscapes
Name of Researchers: Ms Heather Moorcroft, Prof Lesley Head
Renewed From: 31 March 2014
Expiry Date: 30 March 2015

Please note that approvals are granted for a twelve month period. Further extension will be considered on receipt of a progress report prior to expiry date.

This certificate relates to the research protocol submitted in your original application and all approved amendments to date. Please remember that in addition to completing an annual report the Human Research Ethics Committee also requires that researchers immediately report:

- proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

Yours sincerely

Professor Kathleen Clapham
Chair, Social Sciences
Human Research Ethics Committee

Ethics Unit, Research Services Office
University of Wollongong NSW 2522 Australia
Telephone (02) 4221 3386 Facsimile (02) 4221 4388
Email: nso-ethics@uow.edu.au Web: www.uow.edu.au

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RENEWAL APPROVAL LETTER

In reply please quote: HE11/063

15 April 2015

Ms Heather Moorcroft

Dear Ms Moorcroft,

Thank you for submitting the progress report. I am pleased to advise that renewal of the following Human Research Ethics application has been approved.

Ethics Number: HE11/063

Project Title: Engagements between Indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs (non-government organisations) in conservation landscapes

Researchers: Ms Heather Moorcroft, Prof Lesley Head

Renewed From: 31 March 2015

New Expiry Date: 30 March 2016

Please note that approvals are granted for a twelve month period. Further extension will be considered on receipt of a progress report prior to expiry date.

This certificate relates to the research protocol submitted in your original application and all approved amendments to date. Please remember that in addition to completing an annual report, the Human Research Ethics Committee also requires that researchers immediately report:

- proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

A condition of approval by the HREC is the submission of a progress report annually and a final report on completion of your project. The progress report template is available at http://www.uow.edu.au/research/ethics/UOW005385.html

This report must be completed, signed by the appropriate Head of School and returned to the Research Services Office prior to the expiry date.

Yours sincerely

Associate Professor Melanie Randle
Chair, UOW Social Sciences
Human Research Ethics Committee

The University of Wollongong/ Illawarra and Shoalhaven Local Health Network District (ISLHD) Social Science HREC is constituted and functions in accordance with the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.
Appendix 5: Interview themes and elements
Engagements between Indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs in conservation landscapes

Interview themes and elements

The following themes and elements will be used to guide the interviews:

**Introduction**
Providing information:
- introduction of researcher and experience – build rapport and trust
- explanation of research topic and significance - introduce concepts of conservation landscapes and increasing engagements between Indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs – ensure participant knows what the interview is for
- outline of participant role and rights

**Demographic questions**
Seeking information on:
- participant’s history and experience in the organisation
- participant’s experience in working with Indigenous/non-indigenous people
- cultural responsibilities and country for indigenous participants – as long as public information

**Descriptive questions**
Seeking information on:
- participant’s roles and responsibilities within an organisation
- organisations role and goals

Seeking descriptive information on existing engagements with the following as possible questions:
- what engagements exist between Indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs
- who are the engagements between
- where are the engagements
- how are the groups engaged
- why are the groups engaged
Engagement questioning
Seek participants' thoughts, aspirations, opinions and perceptions relating to engagement between indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs in conservation landscapes and particularly:
- whether they know or think there are compromises made
- what the consequences are
- are there any lessons learnt from their experience
Possible questions include:
- What do they know about the engagement(s)?
- Are there any cultural, economic or social benefits arising from the engagement(s)?
- What things are done well?
- How could things be done better?
- Does the engagement impact on local governance of the organisation or community?
- How does community business influence the engagement and vice versa?
- Are indigenous ways of doing things and approaches being utilised?

Good engagement questioning
Participants may be asked to explain what is an ideal engagement between Indigenous Australians and environmental NGOs. This would lead to more in-depth questions about processes and how such an ideal would work.

As well as the themes outlined above, other information I am seeking from NGOs (some could come from written organizational reports) are:
- has the role of the NGO changed - what was it originally and what is it now, and why has it changed
- what are the main ways the NGO carries out its business/role - how does it achieve its aim
- where does the NGO get its money from/how does it get its money
- how does the NGO develop partnerships with Indigenous Australians
- where does the NGO work - how does the NGO decide where to work/commit resources
- what type of people work for the NGO/NGO staff structure/identified positions
- what other NGOs does the organization work with, collaborate with, share resources with etc
- what resources are committed to partnerships with Indigenous groups and how much/what kind - monies, expertise, other resources/equipment

Summing up
Researcher to go over what has been discussed and provide the participant with an opportunity to add to their responses on the matters discussed or on a matter not covered but related.