

# When the Wattle Flowers

## An investigation into the future of Aboriginal Ranger groups in Australia

by

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# Recognition

**When the Wattle Flowers** is an expression that I learnt during my time working with the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers. It is symbolic of the relationships Ngannawal people have with their Country. I first heard this expression from Senior Ngannawal Ranger Adrian Brown, who learnt it from his father Carl Brown, a *Murringie* (Senior Cultural Man). I thank them for allowing me to use this expression as the title of my thesis.



**Image A: Mr Carl Brown, Murringie, Ngannawal**

## Candidate's Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of the author's knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

Bhiamie Wahn Eckford-Williamson

Date:

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# Abstract

This thesis asks the question, 'What is the future of Aboriginal Ranger programs in Australia?' It explores the links between Caring for Country and Environmental Stewardship by contrasting the experiences of Landcare with the Aboriginal Ranger movement. It draws out key differences between these initiatives whilst learning from common experiences. Through three case studies, this thesis seeks to deepen our understanding of the activities and working realities of Aboriginal Ranger groups. It details in practical terms, what Caring for Country is, to those people who are actively involved in these programs. The results highlight that across these case studies, education, environmental care and cultural practice intersect on Country to create complex yet highly valuable programs. Investigating these three programs clearly shows that Aboriginal Ranger groups are highly effective mechanisms for employment, education and cultural practice. In addition, it demonstrates that Aboriginal Ranger programs are misunderstood, making them vulnerable to changing political and economic circumstances. Exploring future pathways of these Ranger groups through case studies demonstrates that Aboriginal Ranger staff identify moving to independent organisations as the next progression in the life of these programs. It highlights also the integral role young Aboriginal people play in the success of these initiatives. This thesis finishes by recommending investing in these future leaders in order to create sustainable organisations.

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## ***List of acronyms and abbreviations***

ACT – Australian Capital Territory

ANPS – Australian National Parks & Wildlife Service

ALT – Aboriginal Land Trust

ALRA – Aboriginal Land Rights Act

ACT – Australian Capital Territory

ANPWS – Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service

CFC – Caring For Country

CFoC – Caring For our Country

CFCU – Caring for Country Unit

CNRM – Cultural Natural Resource Management

DHCS – Department of Housing and Community Services, ACT Government

GIS - Geographic Information Systems

IPA – Indigenous Protected Area

IRP: Independent Research Project

NHT – National Heritage Trust

NLC – Northern Land Council

NRM – Natural Resource Management

NT – Northern Territory

QLD – Queensland

SEWPaC – Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Populations and Communities

WoC – Working on Country

## Preface

In discussing the relationship between Aboriginal Peoples, their Countries, customs, lores and traditions, meaning is sometimes lost through the use of words and phrases that historically have been developed to reflect western philosophies of people, lands and cultures. This preface will first define key concepts from which the rest of this thesis is based.

Many terms have been used to detail peoples interactions with the natural environment, for example, natural resource management, conservation, degradation and rehabilitation of land. Some academics have begun the task of reconceptualising words that sometimes misappropriate Aboriginal Peoples' relationship to lands and waters. Kerins (2012: 6) has consistently advocated for the use of a modified term, 'cultural and natural resource management' (CRNM) when discussing natural resource management (NRM) in the Indigenous domain. The obvious purpose of this is to enunciate the clear cultural component that Aboriginal Peoples have always insisted is necessary when considering their relationship to the land.

Environmental Stewardship is another term that has been used to define peoples' relationships to the natural world. The term itself comes from the term *sty-ward*, which is someone whom cares for farm animals (Worrell et al. 1999: 264). The term also has a philosophical tradition where it is used primarily to describe the responsible and sustainable use of resources (Worrell et al. 1999). In both historical contexts, the term implies responsibility of the person in question to a higher order of moral conduct. Worrell et al. (1999: 265) describes that '[T]he literal meaning of the term would require the existence of a steward who is appointed by and answerable to a higher authority, and undertakes management in a way that reflects the wishes of the authority'. Worrell et al. (1999) goes further in explaining the authority figure in question as something or someone larger (such as society), or a religious figure (such as a God). Another interpretation is that a Steward is responsible for holding something 'in trust' for someone else, such as future generations (Worrell et al. 1999: 266).

There are two differences that set the notion of Stewardship apart from others such as natural resource management. The first is the emphasis on relationship with, rather than agency over; and the second being the idea of

responsibility. It is for this reason that this essay will use the term Stewardship when discussing peoples' interactions with the environment.

The use of 'Aboriginal' in this thesis is reference to First Nations Peoples in the Australian mainland context. In the international context I will refer to 'Indigenous' Peoples. Specifically, this essay will deal with the role of Aboriginal Ranger groups as the fieldwork is carried out with Ranger groups from the Australian mainland.

The final term that I define is the term Country. Country is an Aboriginal English term frequently used in discussion of where people are from, caring for the environment, dreaming stories and identifying family groups. People talk about Country in much the same way as they speak of, and to, another person. People talk to Country, visit Country and sing to Country (Bird-Rose, 1996). People often describe Country as having feelings and emotions. This is eminently important when engaging with sayings like 'keeping Country healthy' as will appear later in this thesis. Bird-Rose identifies:

*Country is not a generalised or undifferentiated type of place, such as one might indicate with terms like "spending a day in the country" or "going up the country". Rather, Country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life (1996: 7)*

The use of Country in this sense is used to describe both a living entity and a geographical place. Not as a place brought like a pastoral station, but inherited and something they will one day give on to their children. Country is land, water and sky. For an Aboriginal person to stand in their Country is to be immersed in the entire space that is around. Very few people can talk for and on behalf of Country, and the people that can are known in today's vernacular as 'Traditional Owners'.

# Chapter 1: Introduction



**Image 1: Sunrise on the McArthur River, NT**

In 1787 Australia was a settled nation, or more accurately, a collection of settled Aboriginal Nations. There existed vast and complex systems of ownership, and equally vast and complex systems of land and water management. Each person 'belonged' to a place, tied through lore, which exists in perpetuity. These relationships can still be observed in various places through many different songs, ceremonies, languages, stories and kin networks.

The arrival of the first fleet in Botany Bay in 1788 signalled a change to this order. What ensued remains one of the most rapid colonial expansions in history. The populations of these Aboriginal Nations declined rapidly with the introduction of numerous diseases and, in many cases, violent frontier conflict. Those who survived were often moved from their lands to camps and missions. This process had devastating effects on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies, which still reverberate generations later. In spite of this violent and tragic history, customary lore and religious philosophies persevere.

Post-contact, ancestral lands and waters of Aboriginal Peoples have been transformed into towns, farms, dams, and every other form of 'development'. New systems of law and land tenure were imposed. But as Australia has grown and matured as a nation, various legislative regulations have been created that acknowledge pre-colonial ownership rights (Appendix 1). As more and more Aboriginal Peoples have their rights to lands and waters recognised they have returned to their homelands.

However, the reality for many of these Aboriginal Peoples is that much of their ancestral lands and waters have been severely degraded and damaged. 'Development' legitimised the unsustainable use of natural resources and in many cases, the destruction of cultural landscapes through land clearing and deforestation. A report commissioned by the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service (ANPWS) identified soil erosion and compaction, weeds, feral animals and loss of biodiversity to be of specific concern on lands that had been returned to Aboriginal people (Young et al., 1991). Many of these lands are located in rural, remote and very remote areas of Australia<sup>2</sup> (Allen Consulting Group, 2011; Holmes, 2010; Altman & Jackson, 2014). Furthermore, it is well recognised that Aboriginal Peoples have difficulty in accessing funding from mainstream land management programs, which is symptomatic of broader economic isolation

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 7 for further discussion on the perceived issue of 'remoteness'

experienced by these communities (Young et al, 1991; Baker, 1997). The three factors of geographic remoteness, environmental degradation and economic isolation make it extremely difficult to create sustainable economic activity in these rural and remote communities.

In 1994, Community consultations undertaken by the Northern Land Council (NLC) identified strong and consistent community aspirations to develop regionally based environmental strategies that also provided meaningful employment for community members (Northern Land Council, 2006). These consultations directly led to the formation of some of the first Aboriginal Ranger programs in Australia (Northern Land Council, 2006).

Beginning with two pilot programs in 1995, over 93 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ranger groups now exist throughout Australia<sup>3</sup> (Sustainability, Environment, Water, Populations and Communities, 2013). In 2011, these programs employed some 781 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, creating an estimated \$8,800,000 in direct local benefits for regional and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (Allen Consulting Group, 2011). These initiatives have also addressed a large number of environmental issues, including land clearing and managing invasive weeds, implementing appropriate and effective fire management regimes, wildlife protection and research, cultural heritage monitoring and establishing local enterprises (Northern Land Council, 2006). In a short period, Aboriginal Ranger groups have significantly improved the health of ecosystems and created tangible economic development outcomes for not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, but also the wider community (Allen Consulting Group, 2011; Northern Land Council, 2006).

With this growing movement, various organisations, government departments and academics have invested significant time and resources in researching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ranger programs (Allen Consulting Group, 2011; Altman & Kerins, 2012; Morrison, 2007; Sustainability, Environment, Water, Populations and Communities, 2013; Smyth, 2012; Walter Turnbull, 2010; Urbis, 2012). Research includes data collection on the size of the workforce, gender distribution, the monetary value they create and also the

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<sup>3</sup> The data collected by the Federal Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Populations and Communities (SEWPaC) does not include Aboriginal Ranger programs administered through co-managed national parks in Australia (Appendix 2)

broader social and economic benefits of these programs (Walter Turnbull, 2010; Urbis, 2012). However, to date, little attempt has been made to place these programs in a wider social, cultural and political context. There seems a widely held acceptance of these programs as valuable environmental, community and cultural assets, but the same could be said for many mainstream community-based environmental programs. Little research has been completed that explores how this unique movement differs from other community-based environmental campaigns. Filling this research gap and building on the body of literature, this thesis has two objectives:

1. To investigate the working realities of Aboriginal Ranger groups through three case studies and;
2. To explore future pathways for these three Aboriginal Ranger groups.

Each of these research objectives presents major challenges. The first objective addresses the lack of awareness about the working realities for Aboriginal Ranger groups. It is grounded in the principle of investigating what Caring for Country looks like in real terms to Aboriginal Rangers. The second objective reflects on the processes that have led to the formation and maps future pathways for these three Ranger groups, linking these pathways to Aboriginal Ranger groups more broadly.

Chapter 2 is a literature review that compares and contrasts Western notions of Environmental Stewardship to that of Caring for Country. I apply these theoretical concepts by considering the experiences of Landcare with that of Aboriginal Ranger groups. This comparison allows me to draw out and discuss similarities and differences between the two.

Chapter 3 details the methods used in this research. I show how I have utilised both Western and Indigenous research methods and discuss the underlying philosophies that inform the design and implementation of this research.

Chapter 4 introduces the three Aboriginal Ranger programs in this study: The Waanyi/Garawa Rangers; Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers and Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers. I present the historical experiences of the Aboriginal groups that make up these programs and detail the processes that led to their formation.

In chapter 5 I reflect on my experiences in the field with each Aboriginal Ranger group before synthesising this data in chapter 6. I draw together common experiences across all three groups, creating a conceptual model of Aboriginal Ranger programs and mapping future pathways.

I conclude by reflecting on key findings, drawing together the experiences of all three Aboriginal Ranger groups and proposing recommendations that will promote the sustainable growth of these programs.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review



**Image 2: Gibraltar Rocks, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, ACT**

This chapter begins by discussing the foundations of Environmental Stewardship. I will then apply these by discussing the formation and historical experiences of the hugely successful environmental program, Landcare. I will then evaluate the theoretical basis of Caring for Country before examining the experience of Aboriginal Ranger groups throughout Australia. Making these distinctions between the two closely related initiatives will allow me to contrast the experiences of Landcare with Aboriginal Ranger groups. I will draw out common experiences whilst highlighting key distinctions between the two programs.

## ***2.1 Environmental Stewardship***

The Environmental Stewardship movement can be broadly defined as having a moral underpinning of co-existence, rather than domain over, the natural world (Worrell et al. 1999). In this sense, environmental stewardship detaches itself from other notions of management that exist ultimately to control resources. Stewardship can be thought of as being answerable to a higher authority or being responsible to an 'other', such as future generations or to other plants and animals (Worrell et al. 1999).

Many Environmental Stewardship groups develop in small towns and communities, often in rural and remote locations (Curtis, 2003). This makes sense as people living outside of urban centres tend to be involved at higher levels in industries that utilise land, such as farming, grazing, mining or conservation. Many of these industries experience the direct effects of land degradation and in some cases, are the causes of land degradation. But even in these small communities, many of these groups form within even smaller sects of that community. Sporting clubs, community organisations, work places and schools tend to be the foundation (Carr, 2002). This is an interesting observation as many of these groups appear to begin through organisations that have nothing to do specifically with the environment.

These Environmental Stewardship groups vary widely in their scale, roles, responsibilities, personnel and effectiveness (or perceived effectiveness). Due to their wide ranging features, a broad definition must be adopted that highlights consistent principles and processes that are shared between organisations.

Carr identifies that Environmental Stewardship groups can broadly be defined as:

- A group of people working together for a common goal through common achievements to rectify problems
- People within a defined area working toward one cause
- A group that involves the community - run by the community rather than driven by someone else
- People who work together to get something done that needs to be done
- Socially stimulating - convivial, a lot of conversation not all serious business (2002: 41)

Carr (2002) goes further to define what it is that these groups actually do. She states that there are three common objectives of Environmental Stewardship groups share:

- Enhancement
- Rehabilitation
- Conservation (2002: 42-43)

Another important factor to consider when gaining an understanding of Environmental Stewardship groups is how they start out. Environmental Stewardship groups are formed to address a specific problem. As long as the pre-conditions for that problem endure, the group is likely to persist and continue efforts to make gains to address it (Carr, 2002). These groups however 'are time dependent and will exist only for as long as the principles, which led to its formation, maintenance and survival, are present' (Carr, 2002: 18).

A key strength of Environmental Stewardship groups has been the ability to bring together multiple stakeholders, some with very different world-views, political opinions and cultural persuasions, in order to address a common issue (Carr, 2002). This supports the claim that Environmental Stewardship groups feel answerable to a higher authority, beyond peoples' own personal circumstances and world-views (Worrell et al., 2000: 265). A shared problem is a powerful driver in determining the ability to work together. Having the right people and processes to facilitate cooperation on a longer-term sustainable basis is cognisant also to the issue of leadership. Carr identifies that 'almost all Stewardship groups have a clearly defined set of leaders' (2002: 72). Having an established leadership system, including developing and grooming future (or

potential) leaders is a sign of mature Environmental Stewardship groups (2002: 75).

Finally, meeting these initiatives not from a top-down approach, but a mutually definable middle-ground, is of utmost importance in the design and implementation of policies that support Environmental Stewardship groups (Carr, 2002). Carr identifies that 'middle ground is about careful listening and clear communication (2002: 220).

## ***2.2 The Landcare Experience***

Prior to the 1980s, Australian farmers and community groups were taking action, although in isolation, to address land degradation. Erosion, declining water quality, invasive weeds and feral animals were some of the issues identified that was impacting biodiversity, public health and agricultural productivity (Curtis & Nouhuys, 1999). Governments have instituted a range of policies in addressing environmental issues, with the most effective option being increased investment in participatory action groups (Curtis & Nouhuys, 1999). These groups are defined as being from a defined region and formed in response to a specific environmental problem (Carr, 2002).

Landcare was a program that facilitated community-based Environmental Stewardship initiatives. The first Landcare initiatives began in Victoria during 1986, before being adopted by the federal government as a national environmental program (Baker, 1997; Curtis & Nouhuys, 1999). This program represented a coming together of the farmers and conservationists to address land degradation and create sustainable agricultural practices (Curtis, 2003; Curtis & Nouhuys, 1999). This supports observations in section 2.1 that Environmental Stewardship groups are able to form strong partnerships across multiple varying stakeholders.

Officially launched in 1988 through a number of small-scale environmental groups, Landcare quickly became a ground breaking national program (Youl et al. 2006).

The core goal of Landcare was to achieve ecologically sustainable land-use in Australia (Baker, 1997). This would be achieved through harnessing community knowledge and empowering communities to address their own problems in their own ways (Baker, 1997). Although ecologically sustainable land-use was the ultimate goal, the role this program played in promoting rural

development is a long-lasting legacy (Curtis, 2003). Landcare also supported community action through other means, including supporting agents for change, investing in cooperative efforts by stakeholders in an area, and allowing community members to challenge social and economic structures (Curtis, 2003; Baker, 1997).

Landcare emphasised harnessing the skills and knowledges of people within a community (or defined area) to identify problems and implement strategies to rectify these local environmental issues (Baker, 1997). Once a group had been formed, broader connections were made with larger organisations (both government and private), which had resources that were valuable in addressing an identified problem (Youl et al., 2006).

A notable result of these initiatives was the strengthening of community relations. This was achieved by handing agency to residents to solve locally identified environmental problems (Youl et al., 2006; Curtis, 2003). As many people involved in these community-run programs were landowners, devolving responsibility to the local citizenry was possible. Groups that formed the vast majority of Landcare organisations were connected culturally more than geographically (Baker, 1997). In allowing this agency to develop, a cultural shift that had been developing in these local communities since establishment, matured. This cultural shift largely redefined how Australians, in particular, rural landholders including farmers and graziers, saw their landscape (Baker, 1997). Through these actions, communities took accountability in redressing environmental problems. This is not to say these organisations were, or could be, adopted as government units or departments. They could (and were) however, adopted as policy instruments to address environmental degradation and rural development (Carr, 2002). At this point, it is important to recognise the very limited participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Landcare (Baker, 1997). Any involvement by Aboriginal and people was generally restricted to projects run by Aboriginal organisations over Aboriginal Lands (Baker, 1997).

Landcare can be conceptualised as a gradual application of rural development theory. This application was redefined and applied to address a uniquely Australian context (Curtis, 2003). Landcare groups were established with no broad structure or process. Learning by doing, local autonomy, empowering

local agents of change and mobilising community participation was a consistent outcome of this national strategy (Curtis, 2003; Baker, 1997).

Perhaps the most significant and long-lasting outcome of Landcare was the cultural shift that it engendered. Landcare created a climate where caring for the environment was no longer the domain of 'greenies' (Baker, 1997). Bringing farmers and landowners together to talk about environmental concerns, whilst sharing ideas about how to address land degradation, created a 'culture in which it is accepted, even expected, to consider sustainability issues' (Baker, 1997).

Carr identifies the phases that broadly define the life cycles of these groups:

1. Emergence
2. Establishment
3. Action
4. Expansion or Extinction (2002: 91)

Drawing on the lessons learnt from Landcare, we can begin to understand Environmental Stewardship in practice.

## **2.3 Caring for Country**

Caring for Country defines the relationships between Aboriginal Peoples and their environments. It can generally be understood as the philosophical approach in managing and co-existing with the natural world (Altman et al., 2007; Bird-Rose, 1996; Weir et al., 2011). Caring for Country actively reinforces peoples connection to place, kin, culture and lore (Weir et al., 2011). The term 'Country' (as described previously) is understood as having its own consciousness and will to life (Bird-Rose, 1996; Weir et al., 2011). Country encompasses both a defined geographical area and is understood as possessing knowledge, much the same as a person possesses knowledge (Bird-Rose, 1996). This alternate method of understanding and interpreting 'knowledge' is a shared philosophy between Indigenous groups throughout the world (Nadasdy 2003, Ross et al., 2011; Weir et al., 2011). Ross et al. states that:

*Indigenous knowledge is owned and shared asymmetrically – often only certain individuals have the right to speak about certain aspects of local knowledge – such knowledge is put back together as a whole when the community gathers on practical and ritual occasions (2011: 32)*

This creates an environment where the sharing and promotion of knowledge is inherently social. These knowledge systems are not only kept in individual people, but in songs and dances that are performed at such gatherings (Ross et al., 2011; Weir et al., 2011). These ceremonies form a vital thread that connects generations of peoples (Ross et al., 2011). These distinct knowledge systems are also pragmatic rather than abstract and theoretical, more of a, *know how* than a, *know of* or *know about* (Ross et al., 2011: 34). Nadasdy captures this stating that: 'It's not really "knowledge" at all, it's more a way of life' (2003: 60). Building on this *know how*, and by taking part in local cultural traditions and gatherings while being surrounded by, and connected to identified knowledge holders, Aboriginal Peoples have created a system where knowledge of Caring for their Country in a holistic and sustainable manner, has been possible for thousands of years (Ross et al., 2011). Morrison reflects on these systems, and places a new model of Caring for Country as 'based on Indigenous knowledge, but using supportive Western science' (2007: 253).

Use of the term 'Care' in this context, compels the ethical and moral responsibility of people to remain connected and look after their Country (Weir et al., 2011). The term also recognises the reciprocity between Aboriginal people and their environment (Weir et al., 2011). This is captured by Weir et al. when she finds that Caring for Country:

*Is a reciprocal relationship, as reflected in the familiar saying 'if you look after the Country, the Country will look after you' (2011: 3)*

This relationship can be found most profoundly in the connection of Aboriginals Peoples health to the health of their Country (Burgess et al., 2005; Burgess et al., 2007; Ganesharajah, 2009; Morrison, 2007; Urbis, 2012). It is well recognised that Country plays a central role in the lives and livelihoods of Aboriginal peoples and an active connection to Country promotes positive health outcomes (Burgess et al., 2005; Burgess et al., 2007; Ganesharajah, 2009; Urbis, 2012).

Opportunities to Care for Country though are identified and limited to the northern and central Australian contexts (Burgess et al., 2005; Morrison, 2007). This is highlighted by Burgess et al. when stating that:

*Knowledge about 'Country' presents policy-makers with an opportunity for a very practical reconciliation no longer available in southern Australia (2005: 121)*

I will discuss this further in sections 3.3 and 6.1.

Rarely stated in the literature but vitally important, is the role Caring for Country plays in legitimising basic terms and concepts used every day by Aboriginal Peoples. In doing so, mainstream society and government bureaucracy are engaging with Aboriginal Peoples on their terms (Morrison, 2007; Nadasdy, 2003). This need stems from fundamental misunderstandings between Aboriginal Peoples and mainstream Australia. The purpose of this subtle ambition is to create an even and mutually understandable ground from which to build a discourse about how to care for the environment (Nadasdy, 2003). It is to correct (in a small part) the historical wrongs that have been imposed by Western society that have suppressed Aboriginal Peoples (and Indigenous voices throughout the world) through the use of an officially accepted, or formal, way of speaking (Nadasdy, 2003). By not promoting this shared understanding of these programs, they become vulnerable to changing political and economic circumstances.

## **2.4 The Aboriginal Ranger Experience**

Inspired by the Landcare movement, the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) was established in 1997 to adequately resource local communities to address their own environmental problems (Hill & Williams, 2010). Aspirations of Aboriginal Peoples to care for their country have been poorly, if at all, accommodated in these mainstream Australian environmental programs (Baker, 1997; Hill & Williams, 2010; Young et al., 1991). Aboriginal environmental organisations received less than 3% of the NHT funding between 1996 and 2005 (Hill & Williams, 2010). A compelling case was established that Aboriginal interests were poorly understood and inadequately represented on local, regional and national panels responsible for implementing national environmental strategies (Hill & Williams, 2010; Young et al., 1991).

As parcels of land throughout Australia were handed back to Aboriginal Peoples, many organisations began to think about how to best use this asset for community and economic development (Altman et al., 2007). The vast majority of lands handed back to Aboriginal peoples were former cattle stations and unalienated Crown Lands that had been severely degraded and damaged (Altman et al., 2007). Aboriginal Peoples were left with the proposition of creating an economic base from these degraded lands.

It was within this context that the NLC created a Caring for Country Unit in 1995 (Kerins, 2012). The original focus of the Caring for Country Unit (CFCU) was to support land owning groups and their local organisations to strengthen customary skills and practices to enable them to continue to care for their country (Kerins, 2012). Aboriginal Ranger groups have found expression through the need of Aboriginal groups to Care for Country and promote economic development opportunities (Morrison, 2007).

Aboriginal Ranger organisations carry the responsibility to care for country and to practice cultural and religious beliefs in an effort to keep their culture strong (Morrison, 2007; Weir et al., 2011; Urbis, 2012). These Ranger programs have been funded largely by the Federal Governments Working on Country (WoC) program (Department of Sustainability, Water, Population and Communities, 2010; Walter Turnbull, 2010; Urbis, 2012). In a recent WoC Evaluation report, work in land and sea management through community-based organisations 'has been recognised as one of, if not the most appropriate means of

promoting employment and economic wellbeing within an Indigenous community' (Walter Turnbull, 2010: 4).

A widely recognised outcome of Aboriginal Ranger groups is the capacity to collaborate with scientific and non-government organisations (Morrison, 2007; Walter Turnbull, 2010; Weir et al., 2011; Urbis, 2012). This increased capacity provides important networks and forums through which Aboriginal Ranger groups can engage with mainstream Australia on their own terms and promote their work.

Another significant outcome of Aboriginal Ranger groups is the engagement of young Aboriginal people, through employment or non-employment capacities (Morrison, 2007). Morrison states:

*From the cultural point of view, Ranger work means that young Indigenous people can interact with their elders and their estates, garnering important knowledge about Country, strengthening their language and receiving direction from their Elders. This work also invigorates their obligations to their Country and extended family, at a time when the values (2007: 254)*

## **2.5 Comparison**

In many respects, Aboriginal Stewardship initiatives share common principles and practices as non-Aboriginal Environmental Stewardship programs. Both groups consist of people within a defined area working together for a common goal. The groups are administered by people within the community and are undertake socially stimulating activities and programs. These initiatives are also undertaken to enhance, rehabilitate and conserve the environment. Both Environmental Stewardship and Caring for Country groups advocate for a 'middle-ground' approach when engaging specifically with government. Respecting and appreciating the contributions of others through a mutually defined and understood language is a shared commonality.

There are some key differences though that must be recognised and considered. Whilst both types of group operate to fulfill a key objective, this key objective differs. Whilst Environmental Stewardship groups form to address a specific environmental problem, that problem is always to do with a specific

environmental service that requires attention. For Aboriginal groups, Caring for Country is interwoven with the notions of cultural renewal and religious practice. By looking after Country, Aboriginal groups are able to remain connected culturally to their landscapes.

This difference has a flow on effect at the administrative level. Landcare initiatives were more successful in the immediate period as there were few (if any) cultural barriers between administration (usually a Government department) and the program volunteers and coordinators. This returns to Nadasdy's (2003) notion of using language, formal and bureaucratic, as a barrier for Aboriginal groups to access resources to implement these initiatives. It is supported by the limited access Aboriginal peoples have historically had to mainstream environmental programs in Australia (Baker, 1997; Hill & Williams, 2010; Young et al, 1991). Landcare in many respects was an easier program to understand and therefore, administer.

The above two mentioned differences as symptoms however of a fundamental cultural divide between Western and Aboriginal societies. This divide is highlighted in this context with the world-view of relationship with versus domain over the environment. There is a fundamental epistemological divide between grassroots conceptions of nature as co-equal relatives and structural conceptions of natural resources' (Ross et al. 2011).

There are other notable differences between these programs that must be observed. The first is the general makeup of the program staff and volunteers. It has been shown that many Environmental Stewardship groups are members of a non-related society or community, such as a sporting club (Carr, 2002). These groups although tight and often clique, are not exclusive, anyone with an interest in the group's activities are able to become involved. Many Aboriginal Rangers groups also have social links outside of the programs, although these are often family connections.

The second is that Environmental Stewardship groups persevere for as long as the environmental problem, which led to its inception, exists (Carr, 2002). This is not the case with Aboriginal Stewardship groups. In many ways, these groups have formed to assume agency over lands that they have been detached from through colonisation. The need to address this agency (or lack of) is starkly different to non-Aboriginal environmental programs.

The third and most surprising, is the absence of developing leadership and community capacity in specific relation to Caring for Country programs such as Aboriginal Ranger groups. As outlined in section 2.2, developing leadership and capacities within is of particular relevance to Environmental Stewardship groups. Whilst there is a large body of literature on the importance of developing leadership within Aboriginal communities and organisations, this is largely spoken of in general terms of developing leadership and not tied to Caring for Country programs. But leadership in Aboriginal communities is severely inhibited by other social and economic factors. One particular importance is the state of health of many Aboriginal people. This is highlighted by Taylor when he states that:

*Before capacity building and leadership processes can take hold in the Indigenous community context, there must be a greater commitment to addressing the current deplorable state of Indigenous health (2003: 5)*

It would appear sensible then, that as Caring for Country programs have been widely acknowledged as having positive health outcomes for Aboriginal people, developing leadership in this domain is a natural progression. Section 6.2 will speak more of developing leadership through Aboriginal Ranger groups, with recommendations on how to expand these programs.

Finally, I highlighted the participative action model for Landcare groups outlined by Carr (2002: 91) in section 2.2. This type of model has not yet been applied to the life cycle of Aboriginal Ranger groups. Drawing on the evidence provided in this chapter, I have devised the following action model or life cycle of Aboriginal Ranger groups:

1. Access
2. Community meeting/Cultural gatherings
3. Establishment
4. Normalisation
5. Expansion

The question now is what comes next? The first Aboriginal Ranger programs were developed in 1995 (Kerins, 2012). Clearly many of these groups are in their infancy with the well-developed groups only moving now to maturity. This research has been designed to investigate what the next progression is the life

cycle of the Ranger groups in this study, with wider implications for Aboriginal Ranger groups throughout Australia.

# Chapter 3: Research Methods



**Image 3: Nathan Morrison, Waanyi/Garawa Rangers,  
Waanyi/Garawa Aboriginal Land Trust, NT.**

One night while travelling and working with the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers, I conversed over a campfire with younger Ranger staff. They shared a story about working with another university researcher about a month prior in Bourketown, QLD. This particular researcher was conducting formal interviews about their land management practices. This process included having to be seated in front of a camera while answering prepared questions. Later that night after many cups of tea, I began asking the Rangers questions about their activities and why they enjoyed it. They answered with the following buzz terms; 'Caring for Country'; 'looking after Country'; 'keeping Country healthy'; 'continuing tradition'. It became apparent to me that even young Rangers, some whom had been working for only a twelve-month period, developed a collection of buzz terms they roll out when dealing with outsiders. I asked if these terms were mentioned for their previous interview in Bourketown, which they were. These terms are usually understood as having a deep philosophical meaning. In this instance though, these terms felt hollow, an automated answer that Rangers have been conditioned to respond with. I was presented with a challenge of mining these buzz terms in an attempt to get to the core of what these programs are, in real terms, to the people that serve in them. It was my mission to find out what Caring for Country actually means; is it observable? Can I take photos of it? What does a 'healthy Country' look like? Can they show me an unhealthy Country and a healthy Country and explain the difference to me?

To answer these questions, I have utilised both Indigenous research methods (employing an applied Indigenous research methodology) and Western research methods (utilising case study methods).

A major component of the research involved fieldwork carried out from May to October 2014. The research methods included formal and informal interviews, focus groups, direct observations and participant observations. The circumstances in all three case study groups varied significantly, necessitating multiple research methods. The goal of these methods was to gain (as much as possible) an insider's perspective of the lived experiences of these three Aboriginal Ranger groups.

In this chapter I first introduce Indigenous research methods, explaining why it is important to apply these methods and how they manifest in the research. Secondly, I discuss case study research methods and clarify why such

methods are appropriate to the research. Thirdly, I discuss the research process, noting previous research collaborations with the Ranger groups and highlight the importance of reporting back research findings, or the transfer of knowledge, from the researcher to Indigenous research collaborators.

### **3.1 Indigenous Research Methodologies**

I (the researcher) am a Euahlayi man from the Narran Lakes in northwest New South Wales. My formal Western education conditioned me to adhere to a set of rules and regulations that provide a platform for my research to be accepted within a non-Indigenous domain. But what am I to do when the rules of Western research conspire to privilege a set of knowledges and perspectives that I do not always prescribe to? What am I to do when people who read this thesis may disparage the knowledges and perspectives of Indigenous Peoples?

As an Indigenous researcher, this experience is not new. Throughout the world, Indigenous Peoples have responded to these questions by developing our own set of research methods. Pualani Louis, an Indigenous academic, argues that ‘our voices may have started as a low murmur from the margin, but have now become a distinct and unified cacophony of resistance’ (2007: 130).

Historically, Indigenous Peoples’ voices have been excluded from formal Western education and research institutions (Smith, 2012). Research *about* and even *for* Indigenous Peoples was done by non-Indigenous academics. This led, in part, to the political, social, economic and cultural isolation of Indigenous Peoples from the institutions that have helped define the rules that we (Indigenous Peoples) in-turn must live within. Indigenous research methods were developed in response to these asymmetrical power relationships.

Indigenous Peoples’ historical experiences with research have been overwhelmingly negative. Smith argues that “‘research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary’ (2012: 1). As more and more Indigenous people became fluent in the language of research, mostly through pursuing careers in academia, there was an identified need to promote our own system of research. The primary aim of these new research methods was to value and legitimise Indigenous systems of knowledge and to conduct research in a respectful manner. Indigenous research methods do not make Indigenous Peoples subjects of scientific inquiry, as with a botanist and plants, or physicists and

particles. These methods are grounded in a fundamental understanding that Indigenous Peoples are indeed people. The research I have conducted for this thesis is founded in this principle.

What is an Indigenous research methodology? Pualani Louis argues that 'Indigenous methodologies are alternative ways of thinking about research process, with fluid and dynamic approaches that emphasise circular and cyclical perspectives' (2007: 133). It is a method designed to ensure that research is carried out in a mutually beneficial and ethically sound fashion (Howitt & Stevens, 2010; Pualani Louis, 2007; Smith, 2012).

Pualani Louis highlights commonalities that exist across all instances where Indigenous research methods have been applied (2007). She identifies four principles that are fundamental to an Indigenous research method: relational accountability, respectful representation, reciprocal appropriation and rights and regulations (Pualani Louis, 2007).

*Relational accountability* describes the philosophies Indigenous people share about existing and being mutually inter-dependent in the world. It speaks to the relationships people share with their environments, including land and seascapes, animals, plants and the sky (Weir et al., 2011; Pualani Louis, 2007). It acknowledges that all parts of research are connected and these connections must be acknowledged and appreciated (Pualani Louis, 2007).

*Respectful representation* examines the manner in which the researcher is positioned in the research context. Respect, in this instance, is an acknowledgement of the history of people and places, and how this history has formed the living experiences of Indigenous Peoples. It is an in-depth understanding that our actions have consequences and that these consequences can be and often are, felt (as they have been in the past) disproportionately by Indigenous Peoples (Pualani Louis, 2007).

*Reciprocal appropriation* requires mutual benefits on both sides of the research relationship. It acknowledges that Indigenous Peoples choose to participate in research, and that any research outcomes must be useful and beneficial (Pualani Louis, 2007).

*Rights and regulation* explain that the researcher must consider the impacts of the anticipated research. It is designed to ensure that research follows local protocols, has clearly defined parameters, and acknowledges the ownership

of the Indigenous knowledges shared with the researcher (Pualani Louis, 2007). Furthermore, this allows Indigenous Peoples to maintain control over the use and publication of their intellectual property rights (Pualani Louis, 2007).

I have adapted these principles in the context of my collaborative research with Aboriginal Ranger groups. I detail in the following sections (3.2 and 3.3) and fieldwork (chapter 5) where these research principles have informed my practices.

### **3.2 A Case Study Methodology**

Case study research is recommended when investigating contemporary phenomena within its real life context (Yin, 1993). Yin posits case study research as 'appropriate when an investigator's desire is to define topics broadly, cover contextual conditions and rely on multiple sources of evidence' (1993: xi). Such an approach is necessary for this research as Aboriginal Ranger groups cannot be isolated from the historical, social and cultural circumstances that have led to their formation and administration. Aboriginal Ranger groups are a lived experience and contribute significantly to the health and wellbeing of local Aboriginal people.

Kerins highlights that 'a major strength of case study research is that it provides the opportunity to use various sources of data from various research methods that can be considered together to provide a rich description of a community and its institutions over time' (2010: 51). Case study research also places particular importance on the role of theory. It allows the researcher to develop theoretical propositions around which the work will proceed before using these theories to 'generalise a case study's results' (Yin, 1994: xiii).

Information gathered through case study methods is varied and includes:

- Direct observations
- Participant observations
- Formal interviews
- Informal interviews
- Focus groups

Such was the variety of circumstances that I found myself in during the research multiple methods were necessary to obtain the broadest and richest data sets. These methods, along with Indigenous research methodologies, provided ample

opportunity for Aboriginal Rangers to be involved in the research process and allowed them to question and seek clarification about the information they offered, including stipulating the information could be used. This is an active application of respectful representation and reciprocal appropriation as outlined above.

*Direct observation* explains the activity of travelling with Aboriginal Ranger groups. I did so in order to witness first-hand the actions and practices of the Rangers.

*Participant observation* describes the action of working with Rangers throughout their daily activities. In doing this, I was able to gain insight into the real-life working realities and environmental conditions that people experience.

*Formal interviews* were conducted one-on-one with Aboriginal Rangers, allowing me to gain a deeper understanding of the lives of individuals working in Aboriginal Ranger groups. It allowed me to collect information about their age, education, personal motivations and views about the future of their Aboriginal Ranger group.

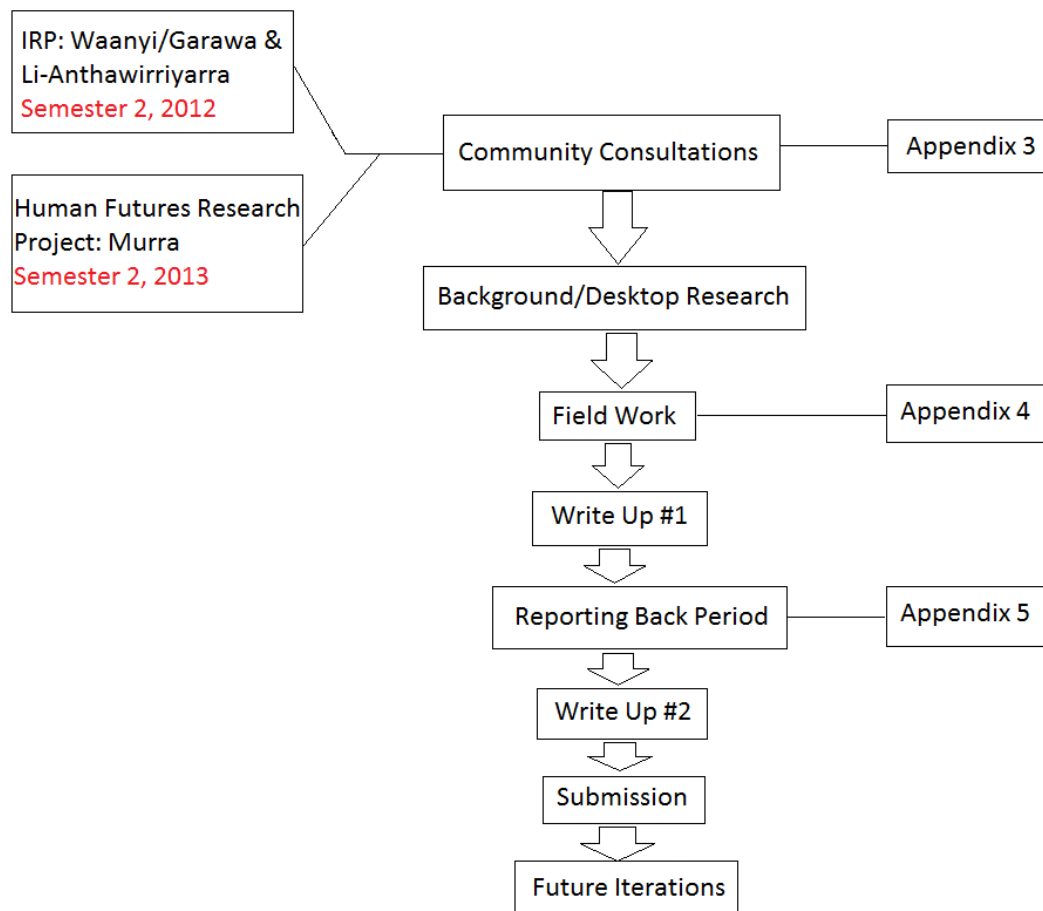
*Informal interviews* were conducted when travelling and working with Rangers on their Countries and in their Communities. These interviews were often utilised to clarify practices that I had observed.

*Focus groups* explain the action of speaking with two or more Rangers about specific aspects of their work or lives. In most instances, these focus group sessions occurred while in the field at the end of a working day.

These research methods will be detailed further in chapter 5.

### **3.3 Research Process**

Figure 1 displays the research process.



**Figure 1: Research Process**

The development of this research project has occurred since Semester 2, 2012. The varying nature of working activities as well as different geographic areas of each Ranger group were contributing factors in the selection of each Rangers. Of particular importance was the inclusion of the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers. As highlighted in 2.3, there is a widely held yet misinformed opinion that Caring for Country programs such as these Ranger groups exist solely in northern and central Australia. Inclusion of such a program in southern Australia was a key selection criterion. A more detailed discussion on case study selection is provided in Appendix 6.

There are three steps in this process that warrant further explanation. Community consultations allowed me to first gain the in-principle support from the three Aboriginal Ranger groups. This was done through consultation with Senior Cultural Advisors and Ranger Coordinators. Once they had expressed their support for the project, I prepared a semi-structured presentation where all groups freely expressed their ideas on possible areas of investigation. This process was first done in Borroloola, NT in November 2013 and then with Murumbung

Yurung Murra in January 2014. It is through these processes that this research project was designed. The initial consultations observe the Indigenous research methods of *respectful representation* and *reciprocal appropriation*. Directly consulting with the Ranger groups allowed them to make free, prior and informed decisions about 'buying-in' or declining to participate. This 'buy-in' enhanced the level of engagement throughout fieldwork, as all groups had a vested interest in the presentation of accurate and quality data. Appendix 3 discusses this step in more detail.

Secondly, in order to engage with the realities of the Ranger groups, it was essential for me to work with them. I did so voluntarily, and during my time the groups obtained a free and capable volunteer, further reinforcing the mutually beneficial manner of the research. Travelling and working with Rangers on their Countries presented many opportunities to discuss their work. Many of these conversations happened in cars and on breaks during the working day. It was during this time that many informal interviews were undertaken, which I discuss in chapter 5. Appendix 4 highlights the dates that I spent with each Ranger groups in the field.

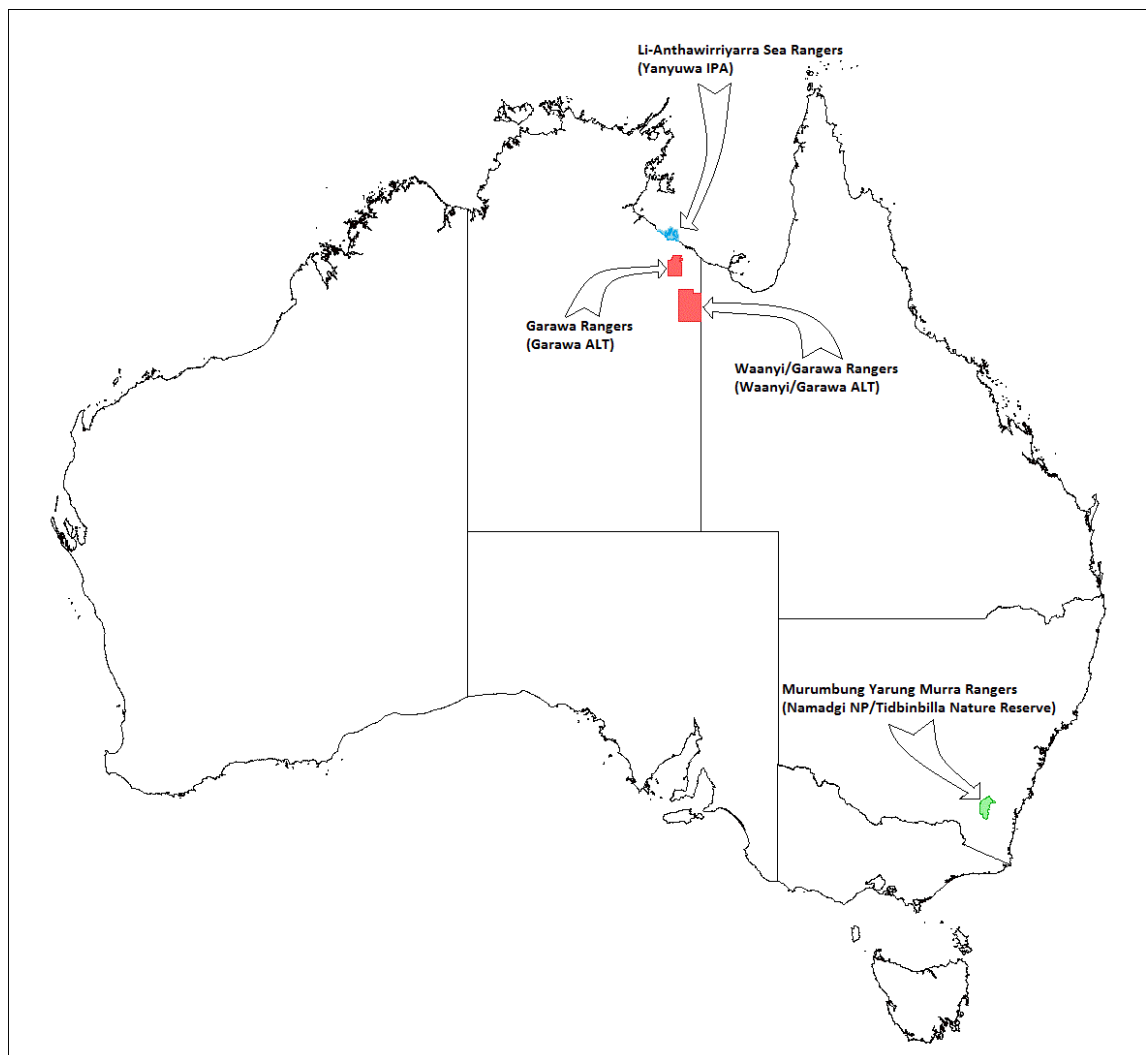
Lastly, the reporting back ensured the transfer knowledge, clarification of ideas and concepts that are presented in chapter 6. During this time, I reported back and sought permission to use images and ensured that all information was appropriately referenced. I also provided Rangers with the opportunity to comment on findings, including amending results. This satisfied *reciprocal appropriation*, *respectful representation* and *rights and regulation* outlined in section 3.1. Appendix 5 explains the reporting back processes in more detail

## Chapter 4: History of Aboriginal Ranger groups



**Image 4: Grahame and Gloria Friday, Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers,  
Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands, NT**

The following chapter explains the conditions and historical events that have shaped the circumstances of the Aboriginal groups in this study. Figure 2 displays the areas of operation for each Ranger group. I have detailed a short history of the regions that the three Ranger groups operate throughout in Appendices 6 and 7. The depth of analysis of their histories will only be discussed as it pertains to the context of this study. As the Waanyi, Garawa, Yanyuwa and Marra Countries are located within the same geographical area; the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria, I consider their history together in Appendix 6. I also discuss a brief history of the Australian Capital Territory and its surrounds in Appendix 7.



**Figure 2: Map of Aboriginal Ranger groups areas of operations**

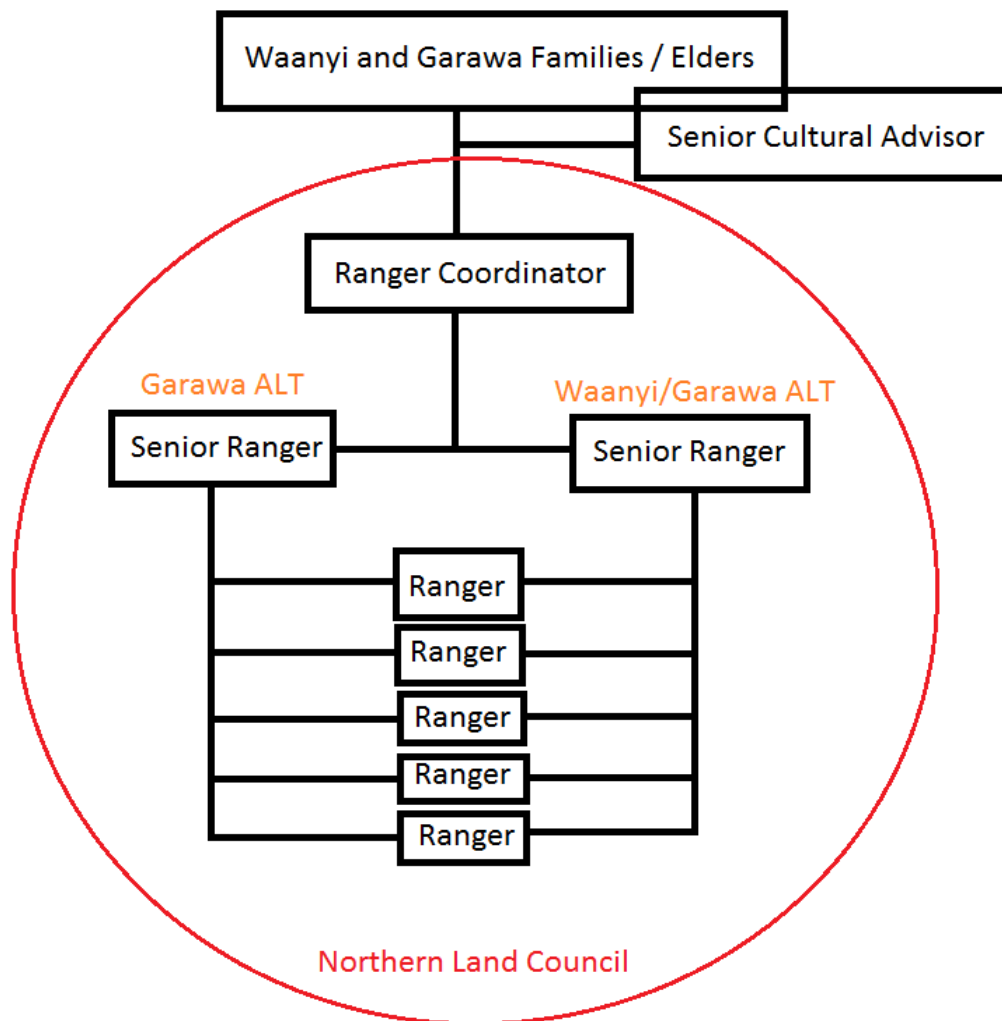
## 4.1 The Waanyi/Garawa Rangers

In 2005, at the request of Land Owners, the Northern Land Council (NLC) Caring for Country Unit (CFCU) facilitated a land management meeting at Jilundarina (Siegel Creek). This meeting was held to establish a 20-year vision for land management over the Waanyi/Garawa Aboriginal Land Trust (ALT) (Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 2011). Whilst this vision involved developing pathways to achieve both sustainable land management and community development, the primary aim was to allow Waanyi and Garawa families to get back to Country (Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 2011). Many Waanyi and Garawa Elders expressed deep concern that young people were becoming disconnected from their cultural heritage (Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 2011). The Waanyi/Garawa: People on Country, it is reported:

*There was great concern by traditional owners that a generation of young people had never been on country, they had not learnt about country, its songs, stories, sites of significance or its abundant resources and how to care for them. Along with the erosion of biodiversity from the hot late season fires, Traditional Owners were also witnessing the erosion of Waanyi/Garawa ecological knowledge as their connection to country was slowly being lost (2011: 3).*

Through this process the Waanyi and Garawa Peoples identified an opportunity to address both the degradation of their lands and getting people, particularly youth, back to Country. This was in the form of establishing their Ranger programs. A second meeting was held at Robinson River, which involved the landowners of the Garawa ALT, where they set out a similar vision to care for their lands. The Waanyi/Garawa and Garawa Rangers were subsequently created to look after Waanyi and Garawa lands while facilitating 'back to Country' initiatives.

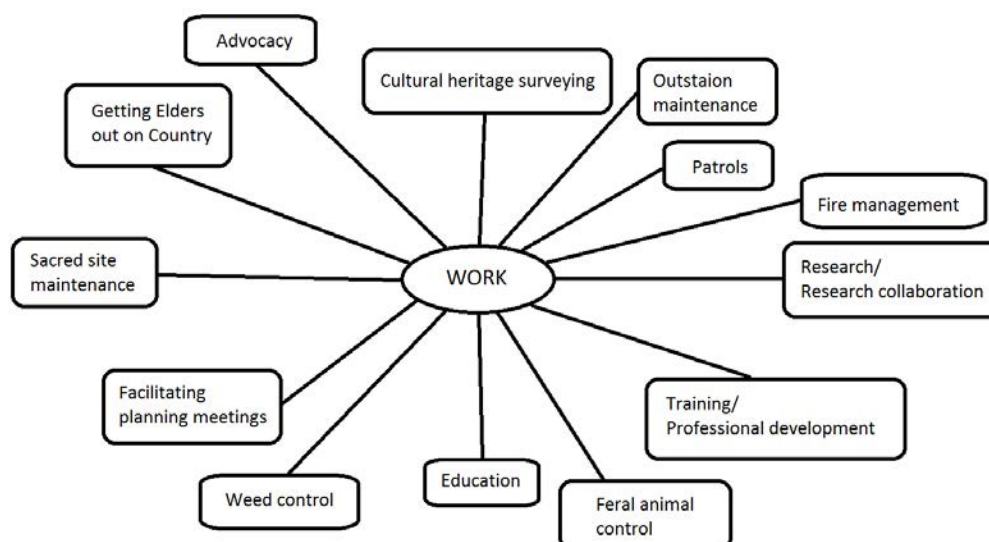
The Ranger groups operate from Borroloola, and are made up of descendants of both the Waanyi and Garawa Peoples (Gambold, 2011). The Rangers are administered through the NLC, whose head office is located in Darwin. Figure 3 displays the governing arrangements of the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers.



**Figure 3: Waanyi/Garawa Rangers Governance Structure**

The primary activity of the Rangers is land management. The Rangers utilise traditional ecological knowledges of the landscape, biota and climate to create sophisticated fire management regimes reflecting their customary practices. Fire management was a priority as huge late season wildfires were severely affecting the health of ecosystems on the ALTs. Since beginning operations in 2007, the Waanyi/Garawa and Garawa Rangers have created over 5,800kms of firebreaks. From 2007-2010 there was an 87% reduction in wildfires throughout Waanyi and Garawa lands (National Environmental Research Program, 2013b). The Rangers are currently seeking to expand their operations and have developed an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) plan of management (National Environmental Research Program, 2013a). This IPA plan is currently being reviewed by the Federal Department of Environment.

The Rangers also perform a number of other Caring For Country (CFC) initiatives such as feral animal management, invasive weed control and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping. They also provide valuable support to outstations located on the two ALTs and facilitate back to Country programs. Figure 4 displays the full range of activities performed by the Ranger Groups.



**Figure 4: Working Activities of the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers**

## ***4.2 The Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers***

The Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers began through Community meetings held in Borroloola during 2001 (Northern Land Council, 2006). The local Mabunji Aboriginal Corporation<sup>4</sup> facilitated these discussions about land and sea management over the Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands (Northern Land Council, 2006). A grant from the Northern Territory (NT) CFC program led to the establishment of the Sea Rangers in late 2001 (Northern Land Council, 2006).

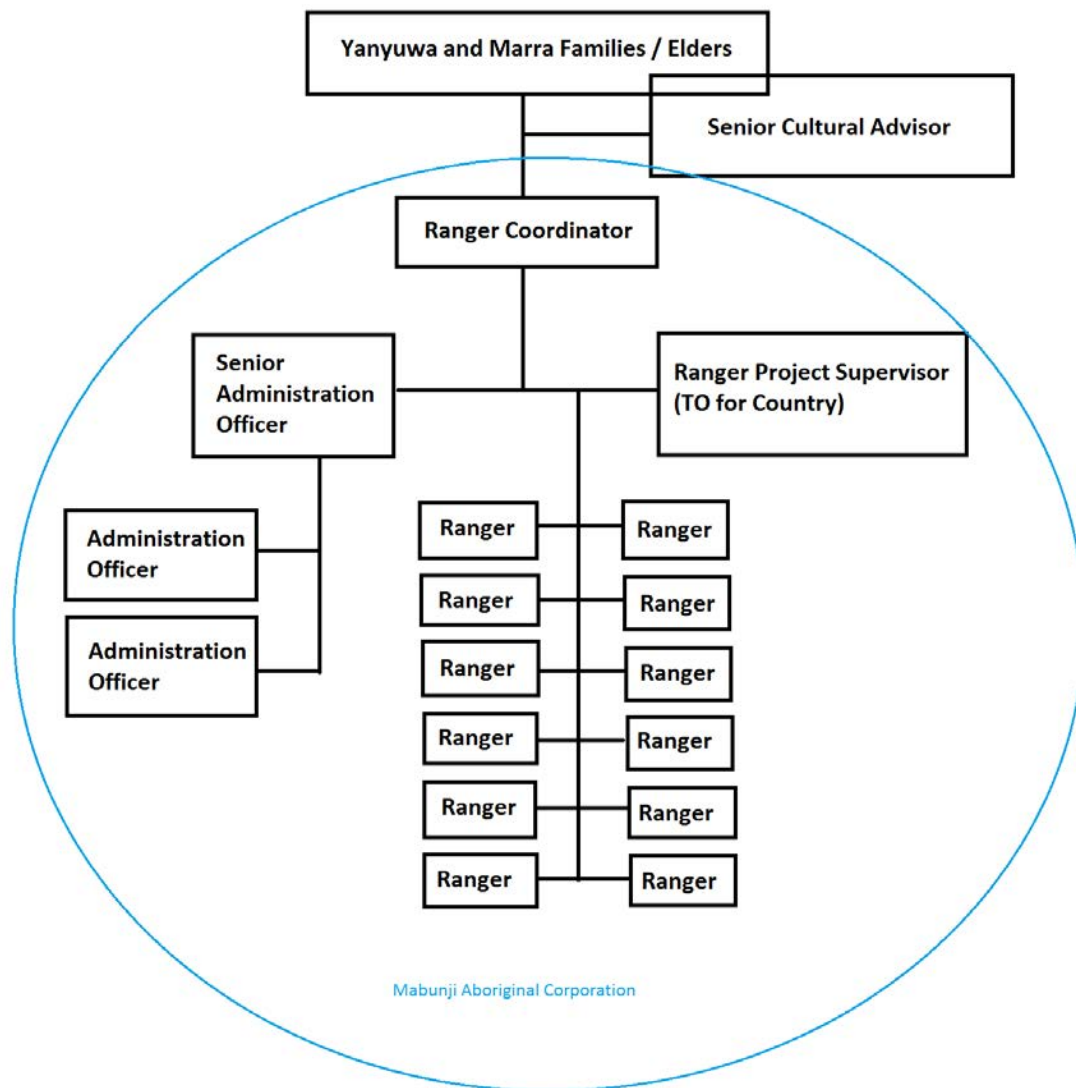
The Ranger group is made up of members of the Yanyuwa and Marra Peoples who are the Traditional Custodians of the Sir Edward Pellew group of Islands and much of the Southwest Gulf coastline. The Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers are administered from Borroloola, with depots located on Vanderlin Island, West Island and Black Rock on the McArthur River.

On my first trip to Borroloola in 2012 David Harvey, a Senior Ranger and Cultural Custodian, explained the meaning of Li-Anthawirriyarra: 'All the

<sup>4</sup> Mabunji is a local Aboriginal Resource Centre established in 1983 that services south west Gulf Aboriginal communities. These include Borroloola where Mabunji's head offices are located and outstations throughout the region (Mabunji, 2014)

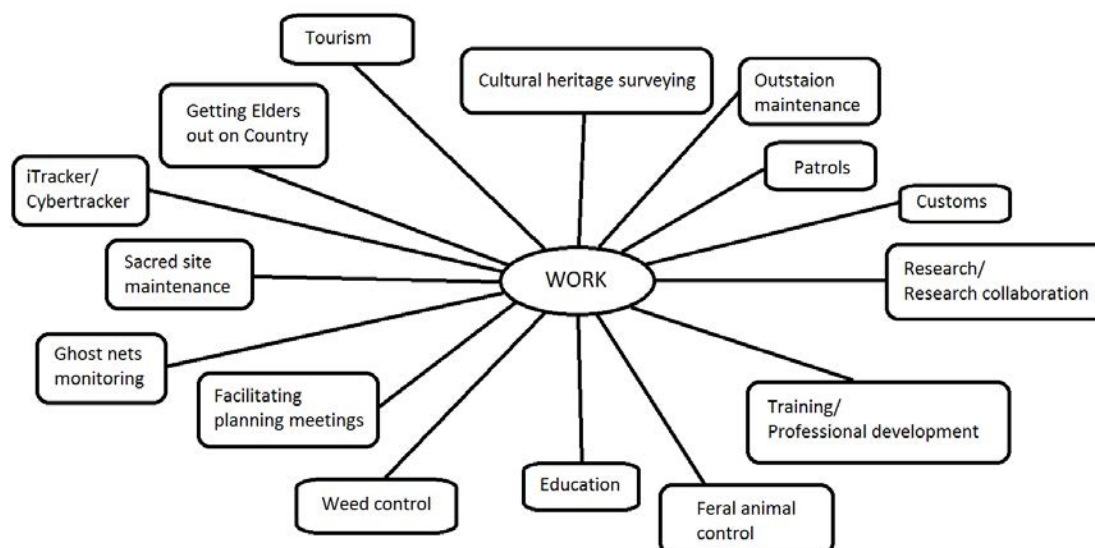
things; trees, water, rocks, people, the sky, everything. All the things connected together and living together' (David Harvey, Senior Ranger and Cultural Custodian, Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers, 2012).

Figure 5 displays the governing arrangements of the Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers.



**Figure 5: Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers Governance Structure**

The primary activity of the Sea Rangers is conservation of the Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands and the surrounding Sea Country. They utilise modern technology such as cybertracker to monitor and record their activities. The conservation activities are largely determined by Yanyuwa and Marra families who meet regularly to set working priorities and evaluate progress. Figure 6 displays the working activities of the Sea Rangers.



**Figure 6: Working Activities of the Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers**

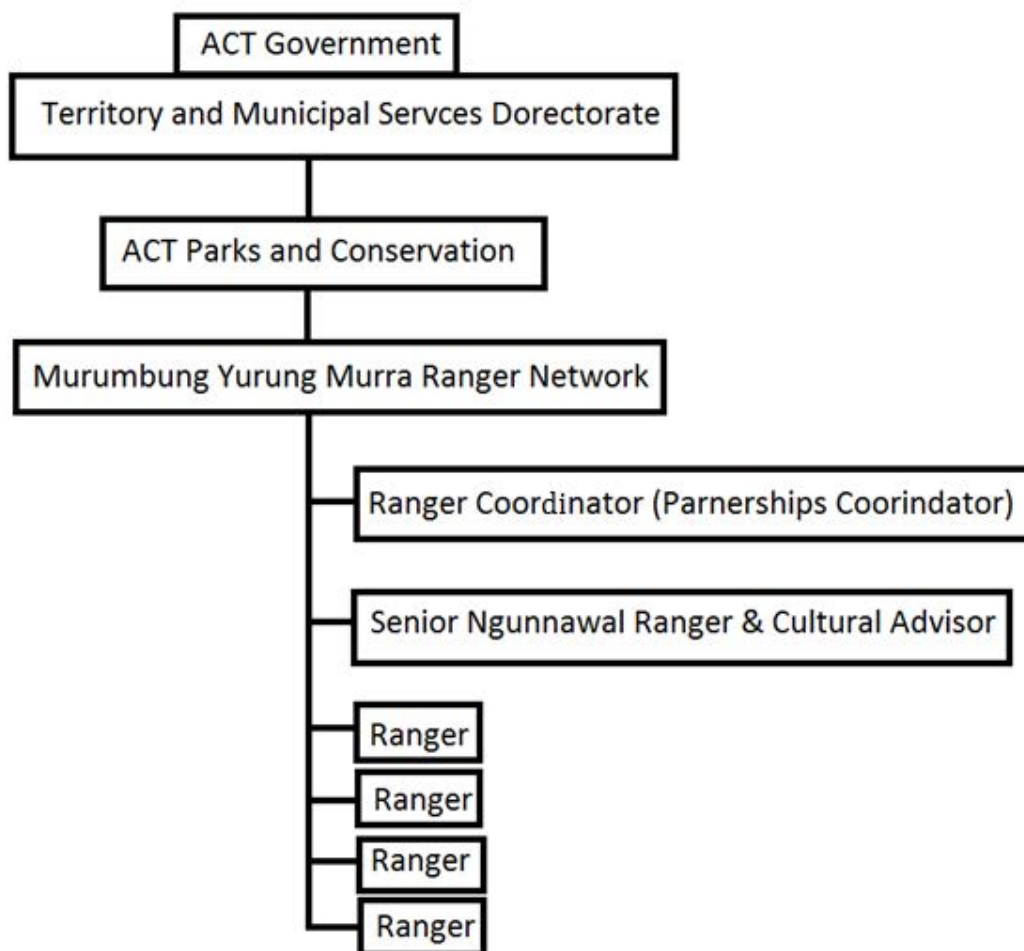
### ***4.3 The Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers***

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) government recognises the Ngunnawal people as the Traditional Custodians of the ACT region (Maher, 2013). ACT Parks and Conservation Services are responsible for the protection and management of national parks and conservation reserves throughout the ACT (Maher, 2013). The primary objective of the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers is to enact terms of reference utilising traditional custodians and Elders for input and consultation on issues relating to the cultural maintenance and environmental protection of parks and reserves throughout the ACT (Maher, 2013). This will be discussed further in chapter 6.

Beginning in 2009, Murumbung Yurung Murra now have six Ranger positions. Two of these positions are located at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, with the other four located at various bases throughout the ACT.

The group is administered through ACT Parks and Conservation services with a Ranger Coordinator and Senior Ngunnawal Ranger and Cultural Advisor providing direction on day-to-day activities. As the Rangers are part of the larger ACT Parks and Conservation Services system, they have a larger degree of legislative authority than the Waanyi/Garawa and Li-Anthawirriyarra Ranger groups. This will be discussed further in section 6.2.

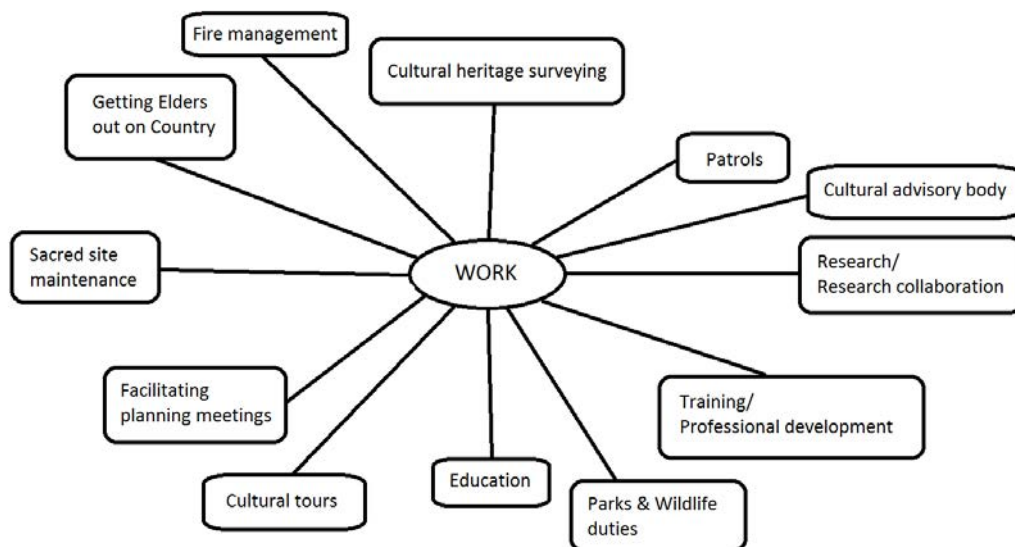
Figure 7 displays the governing arrangements of the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers.



**Figure 7: Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers Governance Structure**

It is important to note the absence of a governing Board of Elders and Traditional Owners. This will be discussed further in section 6.2.

Figure 8 details the work activities of the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers. Much of their work is concerned with cultural maintenance and visitor education with Rangers hosting various cultural tours and events throughout Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Namadgi National Park.



**Figure 8: Working Activities of the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers**

There are many similarities and differences between the Ranger groups. Closer inspection of the three Ranger groups details common activities that all three groups perform. This has implications in the designing and implementation of Ranger training programs and transferable skills between groups. This is discussed further in Appendix 7.

I have detailed the historical circumstances that have led to the formation of each Aboriginal Ranger group, as well as their governance and working activities; where they have come from, the structures within which they operate and their current activities. I will now discuss my experiences in the field with each Ranger group.

# Chapter 5: Fieldwork



**Image 5: Adrian Brown, Senior Ngunnawal Ranger, Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers, Yankee Hat, Namadgi National Park, ACT.**

**Credit: Act Parks and Conservation**

## 5.1 The Waanyi/Garawa Rangers

My first trip with the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers began at the regional Northern Land Council (NLC) in Borroloola. The timing of this particular trip was carefully selected as weather forecasts supplied by the Bureau of Meteorology showed this particular week to be cool and have constant low strength winds (Appendix 8).

After being severely delayed due to administrative constraints with the NLCs head office located in Darwin (which in the end prevented a Ranger attending this particular trip), our convoy of 4WDs travelled six hours before



**Image 5.1.1: Nathan Morrison with a bush turkey**

stopping at a campsite on the side of one of the main roads en route to the Waanyi/Garawa Aboriginal Land Trust (ALT). Comments were made by some of the Ranger staff about my hire vehicle; that it was 'flash' and 'new'. I wondered if this placed me on an outer before the trip had really even begun. But it wasn't an attempt to isolate me from the group, rather an honest observation by these Rangers. As the night progressed this thought stayed with me as I looked and re-assessed the vehicles and equipment of the group. One of the vehicles was significantly battered and the other, which was in better condition, was the personal car of the Ranger coordinator, Jimmy

Morrison. I would come to learn later that the Rangers other vehicle which he would have usually driven was not roadworthy and unsafe to travel in, with the only other available transport being Mr. Morrison's own 4WD.

The following morning, it was decided that the convoy would look for a bush turkey on the second leg of our trip. It wasn't long before one was located and shot (Image 5.1.1). After this, we continued through a number of stations when I was called for over the two-way radio. Mr. Morrison explained to me that around the

next bend in the road was an area that was forested by a particular type of gum tree. I was told over the radio that this particular part of Country, where these particular trees grew, is the dreaming line of the 'Big Serpent'. I was told that this dreaming line travels from near Borrooloola, through to the central desert, winding through Garawa Country. The journey continued on to the adjacent Benmara station where I parked my car undercover, as the road beyond was too dangerous for a 'flash' SUV. After filling up with water and petrol, the convoy then moved towards the Waanyi/Garawa ALT but not before stopping for lunch. At lunch Mr. Morrison showed me how to prepare bush turkey (Image 5.1.2). We continued on



**Image 5.1.2: Preparing bush turkey**

for another two hours, through some of the most rugged road I had ever experienced (some parts I would not describe as road). This trip took us past some ancient rock formations where I was told people used to live. The convoy stopped and Ranger staff got out to inspect the site. I was taken by a Ranger to a rocky overhang where I was shown some ancient rock art. The feeling of

being in such a place created a sensation I can only describe as terrifying. I felt as though this was somewhere that I didn't belong and that my presence was disturbing. Perhaps sensing my trepidations, the Ranger, a senior cultural man, came to me and started explaining the meaning and history of the painting and the site. His presence abated my feelings and it became evident to me that this was a place that was of immense pride to these Rangers. They were happy to show me around and even happier to show how they had insulated the site with surrounding burns in previous years.

Following this we arrived on the Waanyi/Garawa ALT. From here, a road was created to a nearby creek, where the staff and I made our own campsite with shovels and rakes. That night after reflecting on the previous two days of travelling, I came to realise the true meaning of remote. Two days into the trip, we had only just reached our destination. The hardships of this work were there to be seen. From bureaucratic restraints, uncomprehendable distances, old and battered transport, derisory roads and absent infrastructure (such as camp sites), some

meaning was beginning to populate the working realities of this particular Ranger group. I also began to comprehend why Rangers continue this work and love their job. The two days of travelling was not a monotonous affair of



**Image 5.1.3: Billy Hogan burning**

driving, but rather a packed journey of travelling through a culturally rich landscape. Telling stories, hunting, checking on cultural sites, these were all being facilitated through being on, and travelling through, Country. There were also observable changes in the Rangers demeanour from when I had spent time with them in town. They spoke a considerable amount more of their language, they seemed to laugh more and be far more relaxed.

The following two days were spent performing the last of the early season burning (Image 5.1.3). The south and west borders of the Waanyi/Garawa ALT had recently been graded and it was along these borders that we begun conducting burning. Using a combination of fire starters and drip torches, the Rangers and I burnt along approximately 50km of fence line. The work was long, hard, hot and arduous. Watching and being attentive to the Rangers, it was obvious that these men understood fire in these lands and were capable of not just controlling it, but manipulating and encouraging the fire to behave the way they wanted it. The Rangers were not just vigilant about the fire though. Careful and casting eyes were scanning constantly for goannas that would be seen running from any one of the fires.

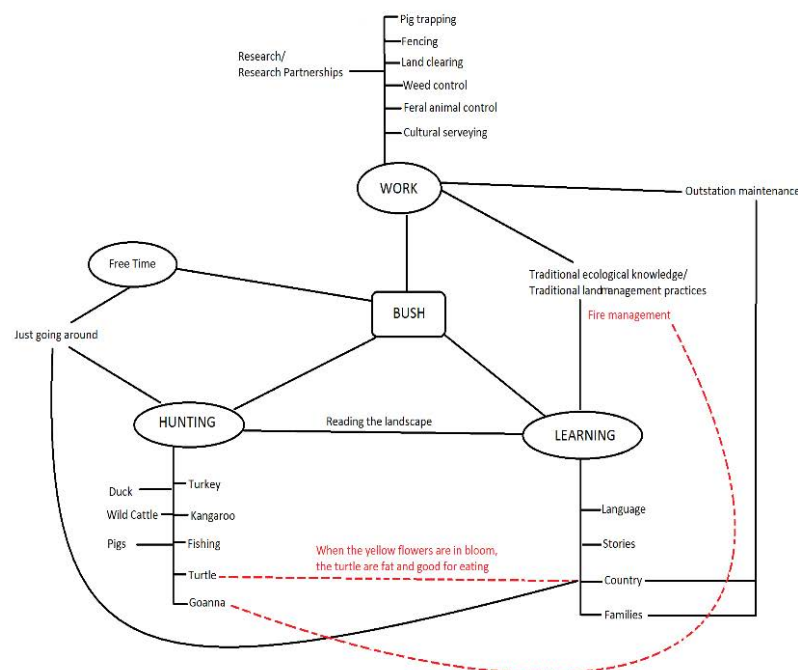
At the end of these two days, the Rangers hired the services of a local chopper equipped with a Raindance<sup>5</sup> machine. For the following two days, the chopper carried Rangers as well as Traditional Owners from outstations, over the Waanyi/Garawa ALT. They strategically lighted larger fires by dropping incendiary

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<sup>5</sup> National Environmental Research Program, 2013b. Viewed 22 October, 2014  
<http://www.nerpnorthern.edu.au/news/2013/gulf-carpentaria-rangers-reduce-wildfires-through-early-burning-work>

devices from the machine. These fires burnt from a few hours to a few days. The larger fires burnt through to the firebreaks that we had created in the days prior. Upon inspecting some of the sites of the larger fires, it was obvious that they were low severity and low intensity with very little crown scorching.

For six days I worked with the Rangers performing this burning. However, the burning itself constituted only one activity that the Rangers carried out. Towards the end of the trip, I asked young Ranger staff to detail their activities when they are out working. After passing over my sketchbook, three of the Rangers drew the following activity map (Figure 9).



**Figure 9: Activity Map of Waanyi/Garawa Rangers**

This map displays the activities that are performed by Ranger staff. It is obvious that ‘working’ constitutes one part of a much bigger picture. To engage in a conversation about the nature of work conducted by Aboriginal Rangers, a wider understanding of what is entailed in this work is required.

There are deeper meanings behind many of these activities, for instance the young Ranger staff (all male) view ‘hunting’ as a distinct and important activity they perform while on Country.

This is significant as hunting is a cultural role that these people would have always performed. The fact that they see this as an important and unique role that they play suggests that these programs foster a sense of identity in these young people. Many of their activities, including burning, are seen as an extension



**Image 5.1.4: Yellow shrub on Waanyi/Garawa ALT**

of hunting. It was pointed out that there are important ecological indicators that define hunting seasons. Throughout my time on the Waanyi/Garawa ALT I was shown a yellow shrub by Nathan Morrison (Image 5.1.4). Although he did not know the name of the shrub, he knew that it played an important role in

identifying the season when 'the turtles were fat'. This is the time of year when fresh water turtles can be hunted.

Within this experience there exists different systems of learning, of knowing, and of working. Figure 9 highlights this with young Rangers pointing out 'Learning' is a distinct role that a Ranger performs. They point out that a Ranger is an active listener, learning from old people about their land and culture. These learnings have practical applications such as reading the landscape as well as conjectural such as learning ones' own language. This is not to say that knowing language does not have practical applications though, more so that one can practically and readily apply knowing the connection of a plant to the seasonal patterns of turtles.

Systems of education and practicing culture are interwoven in this context. They exist in mutual benefit and are widely applied. But the important distinction in this context is where they come together. What permits learning, hunting and working to come together so effortlessly is that it happens on Country - on their own Country. These systems of education could not be transplanted in to a classroom and come together such as they do. This supports conclusions in chapter 2 where it was identified that Aboriginal Ranger programs exist to address a lack of agency. The active connection of Waanyi/Garawa people to their traditional lands is the glue that bonds this program together and makes it not only a success, but very, very enjoyable.

## **5.2 Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers**

The first trip I took with the Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers was to Vanderlin Island, the largest in the Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands. This trip involved ten Ranger staff, five Junior Rangers (from the local high school) and



**Image 5.2.1: Ghost net on Vanderlin Island**

three female Elders. Among the Ranger staff was Anthony Johnston, a long serving Ranger staff member and Traditional Owner of Vanderlin Island. The trip was designed around two activities: marine debris research (ghost nets monitoring) and restoration of a Macassan site on Little

Vanderlin, a small Island adjacent to Vanderlin Island.

The marine debris research is an activity to locate and record abandoned fishing nets. This was done using a helicopter to reach remote parts of the Island. I travelled with Mr. Johnston and Senior Cultural Advisor, Grahame Friday on the first helicopter trip, using my 'flash camera' to take photos of the nets that we came across. This is an example of *reciprocal appropriation* outlined in section 3.1.

There were only a few abandoned nets spotted at the beginning of the flight, however as we progressed to the north, hundreds of nets were seen (Image 5.2.1). They ranged in size from small fishing traps to large trawler nets.

For the following ninety minutes we flew around Vanderlin Island coast and over some of the outlying smaller Islands. Grahame Friday told me stories that belong to different parts of the Island. These stories appeared to bring the land to life as it morphed from an Island to a living breathing entity. This supports the claims by Bird-Rose that Country is a living being with a will of its own (1996: 7).

When we arrived back at the campsite, other boats carrying Rangers, Elders and Junior Rangers had arrived. The Junior Rangers wasted no time in casting fishing lines and begin the search for mud crabs in the estuaries and along the rocky beach promenades.

That evening the female Elders enquired about me. I introduced myself and they asked who my family was and where I was from. After this introduction, one of the Elders turned and spoke in her language. The other Elders turned to me and said, '*She is just introducing you to the Country, She telling them spirits who you are*'. This is an example of *Relational Accountability* outlined in section 3.1.

Over the following days I worked and spoke to a number of Rangers and Junior Rangers. One Junior Ranger had been selected to participate on this

particular fieldtrip, as he was the younger brother of Mr. Johnston, the Traditional Owner of Vanderlin Island. He explained to me how he fits into the wider social and cultural group and how one day he would like to be a Ranger as he will be responsible for Vanderlin Island. This process of selection presents a very different interpretation to that of the Western construct of job applications. Rangers are selected according to a culturally appropriate and informed process. The number of long-serving Rangers suggests that this model of recruitment warrants further investigation in relation to Aboriginal employment and retention outcomes. This will be spoken about further in section 6.2.

The second trip was to what is popularly known as ‘Turtle Camp’, which occurs annually during the last week in September and the first week in October. It represents the peak season of the annual migration of flat back turtles that return to West Island to lay their eggs. This particular event has always been a significant occasion for Yanyuwa people. This particular part of the turtle-nesting season was accompanied by ceremony in which Yanyuwa people would travel to Mamadthamburra (North Beach, West Island), to sing songs, dance and monitor the turtles.

The Rangers spend up to one month on Mamadthamburra, monitoring the turtle-nesting season by tagging turtles, counting the population and checking nests. This has been done in conjunction with the Ceremony that continues to be performed by Yanyuwa families. More recently, Turtle Camp has become an ecotourism venture, which involved the construction of eco tents on Mamadthamburra allowing tourists to stay and experience the turtle-nesting season and Ceremony.

I camped on Mamadthamburra for three nights, travelling with the Rangers on their patrols and assisting in the collection of data (*Reciprocal Appropriation*). During my time, there were many young children on Mamadthamburra. In the camp kitchen a poster was exhibited that showed the Dreaming tracks throughout Yanyuwa Country. I noticed many young children reading and pointing to various Dreaming lines and locations.

At night a bush cinema was erected using a computer, projector, screen and speakers. The children and their families, along with the Rangers and tourists, gathered after dinner and watched as a number of films were shown. They were animations designed and produced by Dr. John Bradley, a Professor with Monash



**Image 5.2.2: Yanyuwa women dancing**

University, and showed some of the Dreaming stories of the Yanyuwa people, in their traditional language<sup>6</sup>. I watched two stories: Wandayuka kulu jujuju (the Turtle and the Osprey) and a-Kuridi (The Groper). These stories featured many Yanyuwa people speaking as the voices of the

characters, including some Rangers.

For half an hour each night the children and families sat and watched these movies. The intensity of engagement was evident as all views, particularly involved themselves in these movies. This was significant as it represents traditional storytelling through modern technology. This combination presented the right combination for all children to become utterly absorbed.

On the last night, after watching a-Kuridi, the gathering moved to the beach around a bonfire. Young and middle-aged Yanyuwa women danced, accompanied by female Elders singing opposite them (Image 5.2.2). For nearly two hours, old women sang and young women danced.

For three nights and four days, I was immersed in cultural and scientific education that has translated into an economic venture that has succeeded in adapting to a cross-cultural audience. It is unique and lived experience that is now offered to everyone.

### ***5.3 The Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers***

My first trip with the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers was to a local reserve known as Mulligans Flat in north Canberra. The Rangers were hosting a field day with Professor Jim Trappe, a world expert on fungi, which includes mushrooms and truffles. The day was designed as a 'two-way' learning session between Prof. Trappe and the Rangers. Ngunnawal families and other ACT Parks staff were invited to attend.

I travelled with Senior Ngunnawal Ranger, Adrian Brown, Mr. Brown's daughter and Carl Brown, Ngunnawal Elder and Mr. Brown's father. As we drove

<sup>6</sup> These films are part of the Monash Country Lines project and are available online at Monash University website: <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/countrylines-archive/>

through the suburbs surrounding Belconnen and Gungahlin, I was shown a number of scar trees that have endured, despite years of urban development. Stories were told about people who used to live throughout where the suburbs are now, the travelling routes people used to take and also the different family groups that make up the region. As these stories were being told I felt each member in the car was receiving and interacting with these stories differently. These local Traditional Owners educated me about the history of the landscape and its people. There was a different dynamic between Mr. Brown (who was the main story teller) and his father. Throughout telling stories, Mr. Brown often turned to his father, seeking validation that the stories were accurate. Sometimes, Mr. Brown's father corrected him about particular details and also added things. I believe that the intended recipient of this information was Mr. Brown's daughter. Through this process of storytelling, knowledge was being transferred through and between three generations. This confirms the conclusion in section 2.3, that within Aboriginal groups, 'the sharing and promotion of knowledge is inherently social' (Ross, 2011: 32).

We arrived at Mulligans Flat where for two and a half hours, we were told about truffles by Prof. Trappe, both in Australia and throughout the world. He focused his attention on one particular species of truffle that grew in the vicinity and we attempted to locate some. While volunteers assisted in digging and moving soil, uncovering a number of these truffles, I observed Mr. Brown, with his father and daughter, conversing with Prof. Trappe. Prof. Trappe spoke about how certain birds are able to sense the presence of truffles and that it constitutes a large part of their diet when in season. Mr. Brown replied by noting to Prof. Trappe how the same birds he mentioned were connected with other animals and grasses in the region through traditional Dreaming stories. Mr. Brown explained that these stories belonged to the local Ngunnawal People through families and individuals being associated (through totems and Dreamings) with different animals, grasses and trees. He explained that many Ngunnawal People were married through traditional lore to each other, creating an ecological chain that ensures they govern each other.

Towards the end of the trip, a volunteer found an unusual mushroom (Image 5.3.1). Prof. Trappe spoke about how Native American Communities used this mushrooms' cousin (in the northern American context) to heal wounds. Mr.

Brown responded by explaining that this mushroom was used throughout the region to keep mosquitos away by throwing it on the fire, creating a scent that was a natural deterrent.

Mr. Brown, his father and Prof. Trappe spoke in a mutually respectable manner, with the two parties appreciating each other's information as genuine, despite the differing epistemologies underpinning the knowledge.

This exchange of knowledge was fluid due to an unspoken acknowledgement that each party's viewpoint was unique and could be collaborated to promote a holistic perspective. This supports conclusions reached in section 2.1 and 2.5, whereby I argued that a middle ground is necessary to proceed in a meaningful way for both Environmental Stewardship and Caring for Country groups.

The second trip was to the Orroral Valley in the southern region of Namadgi National Park. On this particular trip we were joined by two Aboriginal staff members from ACT Parks and Wildlife, a Ranger and cultural heritage officer. These two staff members have family connections throughout the ACT and surrounding regions however, do not identify as Ngunnawal. I would later find out that Mr. Brown is the only identified Ngunnawal Ranger in the wider Murra Rangers network. This will be spoken about in section 6.2. This particular trip was organised in response to the finding of cultural artefacts by Aboriginal Rangers during boundary clearing which was part of the ACT Bushfire Operation Plan, 2014-15.

Upon reaching the site, we began looking around for more artefacts. It wasn't long before we found more. These artefacts included grinding stones and spearheads. The artefacts were catalogued and moved off the firebreak to the base of a nearby tree. The Rangers and cultural heritage officer then began discussing the artefacts and why they would be found in this particular area. They mutually agreed that it must have been a camping site for people moving through the Orroral Valley. They turned their attention to a rocky escarpment adjacent to the site (Image 5.3.2). The area had a number of covered shelter areas and it



**Image 5.3.1: Mushroom from Mulligans Flat**

became obvious why Aboriginal people would have frequented this particular area, with sweeping views throughout the Valley.

Mr. Brown began telling stories of the Namatj people who use to live in this area (and whom the National Park is now named after). Through this process; the finding of artefacts and re-telling of stories, these Aboriginal staff members began piecing together information about the travelling routes and activities of the local people prior to settlement. This corroborates the theoretical assertions stated in 2.3 that information and knowledge is stored in people and places. The furthering of these systems of knowledge occurs through the uniting of these people and places.

Throughout the trip, the three staff members asked questions of me, not necessarily relating to my research, but of me personally. They began by establishing who I was which was largely informed by where I am from and where my roots are as an Aboriginal man (*Reciprocal Appropriation*). Once these connections were made, there was a notable change of atmosphere within the group. All staff member (and myself) became more relaxed and we began swapping stories about our heritage, families and Country (*Relational Accountability*). Of particular importance was not only the content of the conversations, but the manner in which they were carried out. There was a significant element of Aboriginal English and I wondered if, even though we were speaking the English language, whether a non-Aboriginal person would have been able to understand what was being said. These conversations continued throughout our trip but seemed to happen most notably when we were standing throughout the rocky site on top of the Orroral Valley.

On the trip back to ACT Parks and Conservation offices, I enquired with Mr. Brown about local fishing spots. He detailed to me a few locations but we had mutually agreed that this would be best suited for a day trip. As we were discussing this, Mr. Brown pointed out a wattle tree that had begun to flower. He went on to detail to me, '*When the Wattle Flowers, there's Yellow Belly in the river*'. Yellow Belly is a staple food for Aboriginal people throughout various regions of southeastern Australia. This was similar to my experience with the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers and the connection of a flowering yellow shrub to the turtle-hunting season.

The work of the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers is varied and they act as a resource to not only ACT Parks and Wildlife, but the wider Canberra community. They occupy a very unique and distinct cultural space as the custodians of the area now known as Canberra. Being the capital city, there are many interest groups and external pressures applied by outside actors, which has included other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups. Mr. Brown explained the real challenge in their work during an excursion to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander War Memorial on Mt Ainslie:

*We have to be mindful all the time that a lot of people, including other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, come here as the new national meeting place. We have to think about making these people welcome and comfortable here, making sure that they are acknowledged here, but without giving away that which makes us the rightful people of this place*

(Adrian Brown, Senior Ngunnawal Ranger, Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers, 2014).



**Image 5.3.2: Adrian Brown at Orroral Valley**

# Chapter 6: Synthesis



**Image 6: Evening burning, Waanyi/Garawa Rangers,  
Waanyi/Garawa Aboriginal Land Trust, NT**

Chapter 4 introduced the three Aboriginal Ranger groups in this study, their governance structures and activities. Chapter 5 reflected on my experiences in the field, discussing how the Ranger groups operate on the ground and what it means to be an active member in these programs. This chapter synthesises the data through analysis of the working realities of these Ranger groups.

The first section identifies education, cultural practice and environmental care as the core working components of each Ranger group. I organise these components into a conceptual model through which the Aboriginal Ranger groups can be understood as acting through and within. I also discuss the importance that access to Country plays in the success of this model, linking this to themes identified in chapter 2.

Section 7.2 will discuss forward pathways for the Ranger groups. I combine some of the Rangers' own ideas on future directions with my thoughts on the future of these programs. These pathways will be applied to the theoretical model developed in section 2.5, which displays the life progression of Aboriginal Ranger groups.

## ***6.1 Towards a conceptual understanding***

The following discussion examines the principles that guide both the aims and objectives of the organisations and the manner in which the work is carried out. This will be assessed against the theoretical conceptions of these programs.

### **6.1.1 Environmental care**

*It's good to get out, get rid of plants and animals that don't belong. And also seeing how Country recovers from burning – watching the Country become healthy again*  
(Billy Hogan, Ranger, Waanyi/Garawa Rangers, 2014).

Chapter 2 identified that Aboriginal Peoples have intricate methods of keeping and promoting knowldges. These knowldges are founded in the relationships and connections that different parts of the environment share. These

linkages in ecosystem services<sup>7</sup> determine the timing and nature of any work that needs to be done to maintain and enhance the health of that environment. This supports Ross et al. assertion that knowledge in this context is a *know how* more than a *know of* (2011: 34).

This was seen in the early season fire management carried out by the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers. Firstly, priority burn areas are identified by the larger cultural group, including landowners who live on the Aboriginal Land Trusts (ALT) and Traditional Owners who live in the surrounding towns such as Borroloola and Doomadgee. These meetings also discuss the specific time of burning and fire management strategies, which is informed largely by Traditional Ecological Knowledges. As stated by Morrison, during the burning period discussed in section 5.1: ‘we been burning for centuries, that’s how our ancestors use to do it and we just continuing that tradition’ (Nathan Morrison, Waanyi/Garawa Ranger, 2014). These burning strategies include fire stick farming and placing incendiary devices to trigger larger fires. In this context the use of scientific technology enhances traditional practices.

Scientific methods are also used by the Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers alongside cultural practices. During Turtle Camp, the Rangers used tagging and microchip monitoring to track turtle populations (as there are different species of turtles that nest during this time). Although Turtle Camp is run annually according to the Western calendar, Rangers begin tracking and monitoring nesting turtles much earlier. As discussed in section 5.2, the start of this work is largely determined by the presence of indicator species, such as certain plants that flower on the mainland.

The use of plants as indicator species was also observed with the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers. The connection of flowering wattle to the presence of an important species of fish in the river is a practice that continues. So too is the ability to identify scar trees. These trees have immeasurable value to Traditional Owners throughout the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the ability to identify them, coupled with the authority to protect them, is a vital role that the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers carry out.

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Ecosystem services are the benefits provided to humans through the transformations of resources (or environmental assets, including land, water, vegetation and atmosphere) into a flow of essential goods and services e.g. clean air, water, and food’ (Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts 2009: 2)

The wide varieties of environmental work all three Ranger groups undertake are informed by Traditional Ecological Knowledges. Aboriginal Ranger groups are an effective mechanism for the application of these knowledges on a sustained and meaningful basis. They are also well positioned to identify new scientific methods and implement this technology to continue improving the health of ecosystems and enhance traditional cultural practices.

### 6.1.2 Cultural practice

*It's really good going out, seeing them kids dance. We got to sing them turtles too*

(Aunty Jemima Miller, Yanyuwa Elder, 2014).

Language, stories, ceremonies and land management are expression of Aboriginal Peoples culture. Throughout my time in the field, the observable practice of culture underpinned the work conducted by the Rangers.

Travelling with the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers through their Country was filled with expressions and practices of their culture. From hunting and preparing bush turkey, to visiting and caring for sites of cultural significance, the transition from town to the bush allowed for the immersion of these Rangers in their own culture and heritage. This had a flow-on effect of Rangers, in particular young men, further engaging in their culture by speaking more of their own language. These different expressions of culture allows Rangers to engage meaningfully with their history, strengthen their identify and reinforce their sense of place and belonging.

Section 4.1 discussed the governing arrangements of the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers. It clearly shows that authority is invested in Elders and Traditional Owner families who make up the governing Board. This actively reinforces the models of traditional governance that have always existed in Aboriginal societies.

This is also the case for the Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers, as detailed in section 4.2. Operating within this governance structure reinforces that culture is not stagnant; it is a dynamic and lived experience. This is amplified when travelling to, and working on Country, as detailed in section 6.2. Taking school-aged children away from Western constructs of formal education and onto their Country

compelled the active practice of their culture. As soon as these young people were able, they were hunting and gathering, speaking their first language and listening to and taking instructions from their Elders. These cultural practices are deeply rooted and radiate from young people when placed in circumstances that permit the active practice of their culture. This was seen again at Turtle Camp through singing and dancing. The relationship between Elders and young people during Ceremony is a powerful expression of culture. As detailed in section 2.4, songs, dances and Ceremonies are widely accepted as ways of connecting generations and transferring cultural knowledges.

Section 5.3 details some of the cultural practices the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers actively engage with through their working activities. Of particular interest is the rejuvenation of cultural knowledge, such as connecting oral histories with archaeological evidence. This is a unique yet highly valuable activity they perform and is consistent with the historical experience of the Ngunnawal People.

For all three Ranger groups, work and the practice of culture cannot be separated. These cultural practices are expressed differently, such as hunting, speaking language, telling stories and revitalising cultural knowledge. These are legitimate expressions of their cultures and engaging in work as a Ranger necessitates active contribution in cultural activities.

### 6.1.3 Systems of education

*When kids come out here, white kids, black kids, we tell them the old stories. We like sharing those stories cause it keeps them alive. If we didn't tell them, they'll die and apart of us dies. That's why we offer them freely to everyone*

(Adrian Brown, Senior Ngunnawal Ranger, Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers, 2014).

There is little doubt that education plays a vital and inextricable role in Aboriginal Ranger groups. Given the prevalence of Elders that participate in these programs (both employees and Traditional Owners) as well as young people

(including Rangers and Junior Rangers) the potential for cultural education is vast. Chapter 5 also highlighted some Western experiences of education and training, such as coxswain assessment and fisheries training (section 5.2). I also discussed hybrid systems of education as seen with the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers' fire management strategies (section 5.1).

Learning was identified in section 5.1 as a specific role the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers perform. Being on Country with the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers showed first-hand how these systems of learning and teaching take place. For example, Nathan Morrison was taught that he will be the Traditional Owner of the Country we were travelling through in the future. Furthermore, the young Rangers were taught how to effectively manage fire through fire stick farming techniques.

This was also experienced with the Junior Li-Anthawirriyarra Rangers working on Country. One Junior Ranger expressed, 'we like coming out, learning from old people, listening to old people tell stories and learning our own language'. The Junior Rangers were observed, shown and taught about their Country and the roles that they currently play, the roles they will play in the future and caring for and belonging to Country. These learnings challenge Western notions of education due to their holistic nature and positioning young people as individuals within the broader system of education. This was not restricted to Junior Rangers; many Rangers have an important responsibility to learn about their heritage, kin systems and how they connect to Country. While Elders are the primary teachers in these instances, they are also active learners, as observed with Aunty Mavis Timothy in section 5.2. While on Vanderlin Island, she expressed how much she likes getting out to different parts of the Country and learning new stories. Education in this context is a life-long experience. It is understood as such and harboring these educational experiences is a primary objective in these Ranger groups (in this instance, Li-Anthawirriyarra). These systems of learning are not restricted to culturally specific knowledges. Many young Rangers are constantly learning new scientific knowledges that are directly relevant to their work. This was observed when six of the Li- Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers travelled to Darwin to participate in a fisheries course after obtaining their coxswain licenses.

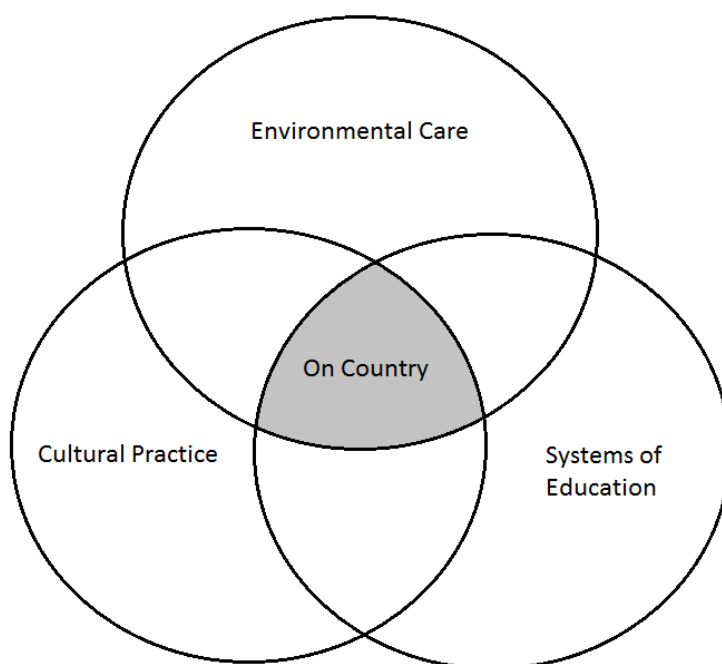
The Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers are also highly trained in their educational roles and responsibilities. They are required as ACT Parks and

Conservation staff to be trained in identifying invasive weeds and animals, and bushfire response and management. The Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers also carry out many cultural education programs as discussed in section 5.3. These include tours of Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, and cultural exchanges as seen at Mulligans Flat. They have an important role in the active transfer of knowledge across generations. Cultural Custodians in the ACT play a unique role in rejuvenating cultural knowledges as seen in the field trip to the Orroral Valley. In all three instances, these Aboriginal Ranger groups are effective mechanisms to train and develop culturally knowledgeable and professionally trained staff.

Whilst in the field, Rangers (including non-employed Junior Rangers and Elders) expressed that learning about their heritage, including stories, kinship and language is a source of immense and unqualified happiness. Systems of education were found in every experience I encountered in the field. Each Aboriginal Ranger group in this study is facilitating these education systems. As observed on Turtle Camp, these educational systems involve the combining of culturally specific knowledges (such as traditional stories) with modern techniques. The 'bush cinema' on West Island proved to be an extremely effective mechanism to engage not only young people, but all people, in cultural education. It is an unwavering component of these programs and must be acknowledged when engaging in a conversation about any Aboriginal Ranger group.

#### **6.1.4 Conceptual understanding**

By combining these three essential elements of the work of Aboriginal Rangers we can begin to form a conceptual model of these groups. Figure 10 demonstrates the intersection of the different components of their work. The Rangers carry out their duties in a middle space, incorporating all three in every aspect of their work.



**Figure 10: Conceptual model of Aboriginal Ranger groups**

What makes this model successful is not how it combines the three core principles of work, but rather where they come together. It would not be possible to supplant this model of environmental care, systems of education and cultural practice into a classroom, town or department. This model works because it is done on Country. If the three principles are *what* Ranger groups do, then access to Country is *how* they do it. This supports the conclusion in chapter 2, where access to Country was shown to be one of the dividing principles that set Aboriginal Ranger groups apart from mainstream Environmental Stewardship programs. The model of these Aboriginal Ranger groups works because they have access to Country; they are supported to be, and work, on Country. It is the base essential element that enables success in these Ranger programs.

This model has implications for the expansion of Aboriginal Ranger groups throughout Australia. In all three case studies, Aboriginal groups have access to their Country albeit some more than others. Li-Anthawirriyarra possess the greatest access to their Country, with Waanyi/Garawa and Murumbung Yurung Murra possessing varying degrees of access. Of great importance here is that Murumbung Yurung Murra are the only Aboriginal group in this study with no formal rights to access their lands. This research shows that even though an

Aboriginal group may not have formal rights under Australian law, establishing an Aboriginal Ranger group is still possible. With enthusiastic people and a supportive administration, Aboriginal people can have representation in the conservation about their ancestral lands and waters.

The Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers also show that Aboriginal Ranger programs are not the exclusive domain of northern and central Australia (as outlined in 2.3). This thesis dispels erroneous assertions that opportunities no longer exists for Aboriginal peoples to remain connected to their Countries in southern regions of Australia. Murumbung Yurung Murra operates throughout one of the more developed and urbanised landscapes in Australia. Even with the vastly different experience of colonisation, they employ the same framework as Waanyi/Garawa and Li-Anthawirriyarra. Supplanting the association of Caring for Country as the exclusive domain of northern or remote Australian Aboriginal groups is a necessity when thinking about further support for these initiatives nationally.

## ***6.2 Thinking about the future***

Using the theoretical model of the life cycle of Aboriginal Ranger groups developed in section 2.5, I will now discuss possible future directions for the three Aboriginal Ranger programs in this study. I will draw on first-hand information gathered during fieldwork, and add to this by applying my own ideas on potential pathways, with the aim of creating sustainable organisations.

Firstly, it was evident by working with all three groups that the Rangers themselves have clear aspirations for their future directions. They are also reflective, looking to change what has not been successful or improve what is currently not working. The Ranger groups explain these ideas both from an individual perspective and also as part of a larger group. While working and discussing future directions with Rangers, four key themes emerged. These are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Key themes for the future of Aboriginal Ranger groups

| Quote                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Future direction |           |          |                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------|----------|-------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Independence     | Authority | Autonomy | Training/<br>Upskilling |
| <i>I would like to be Ranger Coordinator one day, but only if I had lead-up training first. I don't want to be here in 10 years time doing the same thing. But I'd want to do it my way too, not worrying about Mabunji<sup>8</sup></i><br>- Kurtley Harvey,<br>Li-Anthawirriyarra                                            | ■                |           |          | ■                       |
| <i>We put up a sign telling people not to climb there [Gibraltar Rocks], but they do anyway. If we had our way, people wouldn't be allowed to climb that place, it's a very special place</i><br>- Adrian Brown,<br>Murumbung Yurung Murra                                                                                    |                  | ■         |          |                         |
| <i>We want to be independent, not tied to Mabunji</i><br>- Grahame Friday,<br>Li-Anthawirriyarra                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | ■                |           | ■        |                         |
| <i>We don't want to have to go through the NLC to get people approved. It takes too long and they all the way up in Darwin</i><br>- Jimmy Morrison,<br>Waanyi/Garawa                                                                                                                                                          | ■                | ■         | ■        |                         |
| <i>We operate within the larger structure [ACT Parks and Conservation] and the people up top see the Murumbung Rangers as just another staff member, but they aren't. They have additional cultural responsibilities and obligation to abide by as part of their daily work.</i><br>- Deb Melaluca,<br>Murumbung Yurung Murra | ■                |           | ■        |                         |

<sup>8</sup> See section 4.2

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |   |   |   |   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| <p><i>We want authority! We want to be able to go out and search people's boats and kick them out if we need</i></p> <p>- David Barrett,<br/>Li-Anthawirriyarra</p>                                                                                                                                                 |   | ■ |   |   |
| <p><i>It's hard because anything we want to do, we have to get approval first [from the NLC]. We want to be able to just do things ourselves - you know? If the weather is good, then we go burning. Don't have to mess around with forms and getting approval</i></p> <p>- Donald Shadforth,<br/>Waanyi/Garawa</p> | ■ | ■ | ■ |   |
| <p><i>I like being able to tell white fellas what to do. You know - If they somewhere they shouldn't be, I'll tell them to leave. They reckon I can't, but I do it anyway</i></p> <p>- Anthony Johnson,<br/>Li-Anthawirriyarra</p>                                                                                  |   | ■ |   |   |
| <p><i>It's hard cause some of the money that the Murumbung Rangers make from the cultural tours goes back in to Parks. That money should be put back in to our programs so we can determine where that money is spent</i></p> <p>- Adrian Brown,<br/>Murumbung Yurung Murra</p>                                     | ■ | ■ | ■ |   |
| <p><i>I would like to work full-time here. Maybe run the joint one-day. But there's not enough work. That's why I'm only casual. If they had full-time work and trained me up, I'd stay</i></p> <p>- Nathan Morrison,<br/>Waanyi/Garawa</p>                                                                         |   |   |   | ■ |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |  |  |   |   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| <p><i>That young fella [pointing at a young Ranger], he dropped out of school so I just grabbed him and put him to work. Before he got use to just sitting around, you know? We already put him through some training and he's been real good. That's what we should be able to do more</i></p> <p>- Grahame Friday,<br/>Li-Anthawirriyarra</p> |  |  | ■ | ■ |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|

While these four categories are broad, they can be understood as having practical applications in the running of each group. I will briefly explain what each category means in the context of this research:

- *Independence*– The self-governing of each Aboriginal Ranger group. This relates specifically to the administrative arrangements that each group is tied to (Li-Anthawirriyarra with the Mabunji Aboriginal Corporation, Waanyi/Garawa with the NLC, Murumbung Yurung Murra with ACT Parks and Conservation). Independence in this sense means a self-administrating organisation.
- *Authority* – The level of legal power given to Aboriginal Rangers over their ancestral lands and waters. This relates specifically to the interaction between Rangers and ‘outsiders’. Authority in this context is the ability to tell people what to do when travelling on or through Aboriginal peoples’ lands and waters.
- *Autonomy* – The abilities of Ranger groups to perform their tasks without bureaucratic constraints. This includes the identification and prioritisation of tasks. In this sense, *Autonomy* does not relate to *Independence*. A Ranger group can have more *Autonomy* without being *Independent*.
- *Training/Upskilling* – Developing the skills and capabilities of Rangers. This can be thought of in practical terms as gaining new qualifications (such as a coxswain license or a business administration certificate). It also relates to the investment of time and resources into developing leadership skills and opportunities.

The scope of this thesis limits an in-depth exploration of each of these themes. For instance, laws that govern management and access to specific lands and waters largely inform the issue of *Authority*. I recommended that further research should be undertaken into how Aboriginal Ranger groups can increase their authoritative capacities to ensure that people entering their ancestral lands and waters abide by rules, recognised in Australian law, that are determined by the larger Aboriginal group.

*Autonomy* and *Independence* can be thought of as two sides of a coin. I deal first with the issue of *Autonomy*. Being tied to larger governing bodies (such as ACT Parks and Conservation, NLC and Mabunji) has both strengths and weaknesses. In these instances, all three groups are expected to engage with the general expectations that their parent organisations have of their wider workforce. This includes submitting forms, performance reviews and reporting. In the experience of the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers, this creates a deal of friction and angst. Protocols established by NLC relate specifically to staff located in Darwin. Applying these same expectations to Waanyi/Garawa staff is impracticable and impacts on the working outcomes of the Rangers. This was seen in 5.1 when the early season burning trip was delayed by almost a day due to the requirement of lodging forms with Darwin.

*Autonomy*, as highlighted in Table 1 by Donald Shadforth, relates to the ability of Waanyi/Garawa Rangers to act in a timely fashion. In turn, this will enhance their working practices, as many of their tasks are time and weather dependent. Being tied to larger organisations also creates an atmosphere of vulnerability for these Ranger groups. Much of the funding supplied to bodies such as the NLC is not guaranteed and determined by government budgets. These expenditures are aligned with government priorities. Should these priorities alter, through the changing of ministers or governments, the real prospect of cuts to funding will directly affect groups such as the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers. This lived reality supports findings in section 4.4, which describes how Aboriginal Ranger groups are vulnerable to changing political and economic circumstances.

There are strengths of being tied to these larger bodies. For example, designated staff that deal specifically with administrative duties, such as tax, payroll and human resources, means these Ranger groups do not have to provide their own staff to perform these essential business operations. They also provide

facilities to hold assets of these groups such as holding yards for boats and vehicles and accounts to hold monetary assets. For the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers, being an extension of ACT Parks and Conservation affords them legislative authorities as Rangers within a National Park that neither Waanyi/Garawa nor Li-Anthawirriyarra have. However, their authoritative capacities only extend in so far as they do for other ACT Parks and Conservation Rangers. They do not have legislated authority to enforce cultural protocols, for example ensuring visitors do not climb Gibraltar Rocks.

Every Aboriginal group has their own desires and visions as to how best position their Ranger program to achieve local objectives. Should they not be able to reach an appropriate working relationship between their Ranger group and a larger organisation to achieve a desirable level of *Autonomy*, the issue of *Independence* arises.

Throughout my time interviewing people about the future of these Ranger groups, *Independence* surfaced as the preferred way forward for both the Waanyi/Garawa and Li-Anthawirriyarra Rangers. These Aboriginal groups are seeking total control over their operations. Whilst larger organisations, such as the NLC and Mabunji, have provided assistance in the establishment of Ranger groups, future aspirations may result in breaking away from these larger bodies.

Table 2 identifies some of the opportunities and threats to the independence of Aboriginal Ranger groups.

**Table 2: Opportunities and Threats to Independent Aboriginal Ranger groups**

| <b>Opportunities</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Threats</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-determining</li> <li>• Self-governing/administrating               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holding of own assets</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Re-investing in own program</li> <li>• Insulation from outside threats</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing administrative processes               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacities of staff</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Leadership capacities               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resourcing</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Funding opportunities</li> </ul> |

There are equal opportunities and threats in the move to *Independence*. For these Ranger groups it is not a question of *if*, but *when* they actively move to become *Independent*. Ultimately, these are decisions for Elders and families that

govern the Ranger groups. It is my firm view that steps can be taken now to minimise risks, positioning these Ranger groups to make the leap to *Independence*.

The Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers identified that establishing a functioning Elders or Traditional Owners Advisory Council, such as those for the Waanyi/Garawa and Li-Anthawirriyarra Rangers, was their next step. This would progress objectives outlined in section 4.2 to enact terms of reference utilising traditional custodians and Elders for input and consultation on issues relating to the cultural maintenance and environmental protection of parks and reserves throughout the ACT (Maher, 2013).

Having only one identified Traditional Custodian in their organisation (Adrian Brown, Senior Ngunnawal Ranger) makes them vulnerable to cultural aspersions. It also places an immense degree of pressure on one person to provide cultural legitimacy for the group. Establishing a functioning Elders or Traditional Owners Advisory Council would abate these vulnerabilities.

In all three instances, the steps forward involve better harnessing what each Ranger group already possesses: an active and willing body of young people, ready and willing to take on more responsibility.

Table 1 highlights that *Training/Upskilling* is an identified priority for future investment. However, the exposure that I have had to these training opportunities suggests that they are centred largely on increasing the abilities of Rangers to perform their daily tasks, such as obtaining a coxswain license, identifying fish and marine species and fire management training. I am not suggesting that these are not important training opportunities; they do increase the capacities of Rangers to perform their tasks effectively. However, to train Rangers in specific skills that are transferable between organisations as far away as Borroloola and Canberra will greatly assist in the formation of a national uniform set of skills and capabilities, as highlighted in Appendix 7.

It is my recommendation that *Training/Upskilling* form part of an overarching strategy that seeks to increase the self-management capacity of each group. Section 2.4 identified that leadership is an integral part of the success of Aboriginal organisations and communities, yet is absent from the literature tying leadership to Caring for Country programs. Section 2.2 showed that Landcare invested significantly in developing leadership and this strategy had enormous success in transforming these groups into effective land management programs.

Throughout my time in the field, I observed a significant number of young people (mostly men) employed and actively engaged in these initiatives. It is obvious that Aboriginal Ranger groups are an effective mechanism for attracting and retaining young Aboriginal staff. They provide meaningful employment and allow these young people to remain living and working throughout their ancestral Country. Section 6.1.3 showed that these young people are constantly learning about their cultural connections and apply these learnt principles in caring for their Country. Through these groups, young Aboriginal Rangers are developing into culturally legitimate leaders, accepted and embraced by their communities as appropriate people to manage and work throughout Country. Enhancing their development as both cultural and industry leaders will have far reaching and long lasting benefits.

It is clear that immediate steps need to be taken to identify young people, capable and willing to participate in a development program (or collection of programs). This need was established in section 2.5 where I highlighted that leadership is not specifically addressed in Caring for Country initiatives. Yet with increased health outcomes for Rangers and non-employed volunteers (such as Elders), they are well placed to facilitate meaningful leadership development. Table 1 highlights that some of the young Rangers are ready and willing to participate in leadership and professional development programs already. These programs would be most effective if formed as part of an overarching strategy to future proof these programs by investing in long-term leadership. This strategy in the end will develop both participants into leaders and the Ranger groups into sustainable organisations. Investing strategically would alleviate the threats posed to independent Ranger groups such as establishing administrative processes, capacities of staff and the development of leadership as displayed in Table 2.

So whose responsibility is it to take these immediate steps and how can these young people be identified? Aboriginal Ranger groups consult widely and regularly with their own cultural groups as highlighted in chapter 4. Any investment in leadership pathways must begin with these governing bodies. Through this process, careful selection of potential candidates could also be done through these groups. Many of the Rangers are descendants of the families and Elders that constitute these groups, with the educational and working background of young Rangers widely known. These circumstances allow for a culturally

appropriate and informed nomination process. I have shown these processes already take place in the recruitment of Junior Rangers in section 5.2. Developing leadership pathways for willing and capable staff is a process where meaningful collaboration between Ranger groups and outside institutions such as governments, non-government organisations and tertiary institutions is required. Mapping specific pathways to nurture leaders within these programs is beyond the scope of this thesis. I recommend further research investigating this topic by canvassing current programs that develop Indigenous leadership and map appropriate pathways to connect these Ranger groups and their staff to these programs.

Adding to the conceptual model developed in section 2.5, I propose the following future phases in life cycle of these Aboriginal Ranger groups:

**Table 3: Future directions for Aboriginal Ranger groups**

|              | Waanyi/Garawa                           | Li-Anthawirriyarra | Murumbung Yurung Murra                                             |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Group Phases | Access                                  |                    |                                                                    |
|              | Community meetings/cultural gatherings  |                    |                                                                    |
|              | Establishment                           |                    |                                                                    |
|              | Normalisation                           |                    |                                                                    |
|              | Expansion                               |                    |                                                                    |
|              | <i>Investment in (youth) leadership</i> |                    |                                                                    |
|              | <i>Independence</i>                     |                    | <i>Establishing Elders and Traditional Owners Advisory Council</i> |

Investing in youth leadership will ensure that when these Ranger groups move to *Independence*, they are well placed to be entirely locally run and operated. This method supports the direction towards *Independence* and while these young people are developing and in training, investment can be made to investigate pathways to *Independence* and how to facilitate this transition. I recommend the appropriate place to start is updating the mission statements of these Ranger groups. They should reflect the growing body of young people in

their groups and openly show support for developing them into future cultural, community and industry leaders.

# Chapter 7: Conclusion



**Image 7: Sunset on Vanderlin Island, Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands, NT**

In chapter 1, I placed Aboriginal Ranger programs as one element in a broader social and cultural movement of Aboriginal people seeking to return to their traditional lands. I highlighted the initial impact colonisation had in mobilising people from their lands and waters, and showed the subsequent degradation of these lands and waters through the unsustainable use of natural resources.

Chapter 2 contrasted Caring for Country with wider mainstream notions of Environmental Stewardship. By juxtaposing these concepts, I was able to identify the differences between Indigenous and Western philosophies of connection to, and caring for, the environment. These theoretical concepts were then applied to show how they manifest through the landmark environmental program, Landcare. Comparing the hugely successful national Landcare program to Aboriginal Ranger groups indicates that while there are many similarities in their make-up and administration, there exists a fundamental epistemological divide in how the members of these groups see the world. I revealed that while both of these programs address environmental degradation, Aboriginal Ranger programs at their core, address a much deeper purpose of resolving a lack of agency that has been created through colonisation. I also revealed that Landcare is a well understood and widely accepted program, with clearly defined goals and objectives, which allowed Landcare to be expanded nationally and become well supported by successive governments. This presents a huge challenge for Aboriginal Ranger programs, as they are not well understood and are often misinterpreted. This misunderstanding makes Aboriginal Ranger groups vulnerable to changing political and economic circumstances. This research project has helped build an in-depth understanding of how these Ranger groups operate, abating some of this misunderstanding. Chapter 2 finished by explaining that Aboriginal Ranger programs are widely acknowledged as being effective mechanisms that address a huge number of environmental problems. However, they operate in a system that privileges Western notions of knowledge, thinking and process, making them highly vulnerable.

Chapter 3 discussed the research methods used in this project, including the use of a hybrid research model, incorporating both Western and Indigenous methods of enquiry. A key aim of this thesis was to investigate the working realities of Aboriginal Ranger programs.

Chapter 4 introduced the three Ranger groups that have collaborated with me in investigating this question. I reflected on the historical experiences of colonisation for each Aboriginal group and discussed the formation of their Ranger programs.

In chapter 5, I reflected on my experiences in the field. I discussed working with, and observing, Aboriginal Rangers and presented my results from both formal and informal interviews.

Chapter 6 organised this information and presented a conceptual model of Aboriginal Ranger programs. Education, environmental care and cultural practice are the three pillars of these programs. But it is where these pillars come together, on Country, which makes these programs so successful.

Following this, I explored future directions, incorporating the views and opinions of Ranger staff. I discussed each Ranger groups' aspirations for future directions of their organisations. I explored the opportunities and threats to these ambitions and presented arguments for and against pursuing independence, a study that requires further investigation.

To conclude, I argued that while the moves to independence are pursued, re-investment in youth is a necessity. A significant finding of this thesis is that there exists a large cohort of young Aboriginal people (mostly men) actively involved in these programs. It is in this demographic that enormous potential exists to invest in an entire generation of leadership. It is my position that as these programs continue to mature, efforts to support these initiatives must include a strong element of identifying future leaders, and providing meaningful and appropriate opportunities to develop these young people, should they wish to become future leaders. By investing in this way, these programs will be well placed to mature into sustainable organisations, under the control of local leaders who not only understand how to engage with national and international environmental and bureaucratic systems, but have the ability to challenge the inherent Eurocentric discourse in such systems, a need that was identified in Chapter 2. Should these organisations be empowered with strong local leadership, they will be well placed to map their own pathways for ongoing development, rooted in their own definitions and developed for their own aims and objectives.

There exists a common and widely held opinion that young Aboriginal men are passive victims of entrenched social dysfunction. Substance misuse and

abuse, unemployment and incarceration are prevalent words that are often attached to this demographic. At the conclusion of this thesis, I cannot think of more inappropriate words to describe these young people. It is my belief that young people are the greatest asset to Aboriginal communities. The question now is how to best assist in the development of these future leaders, while promoting their work and encouraging and incorporating their contributions. In time, they will grow to challenge long-established philosophies on the environment, health, education, work, and every other aspect where their lives, and the lives of their families and communities, are influenced by wider institutional frameworks.

Furthermore, this thesis has demonstrated that Environmental Stewardship programs have a transformative potential. The legacy of Landcare is that conversations about the environment are no longer the domain of 'greenies'. Landcare became a hallmark initiative and showed that 'scaling up' and 'rolling out' can be done successfully on a national scale. This same potential exists for Aboriginal Ranger programs. They present the best opportunity for Aboriginal people to return to their lands and rejuvenate cultural ties, whilst providing meaningful and long-lasting employment and educational opportunities. As the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers have shown, these programs can and do operate over lands where there exists no formal recognition of the rights of Aboriginal people to access their lands. In the future, I believe every Aboriginal group throughout Australia could and should have a Ranger program of their own.

All three case studies have demonstrated that successful Ranger groups are symptomatic of a healthy, actively lived culture. This thesis has proved that a healthy Ranger program is intrinsically linked to healthy culture, just as there is yellow belly in the river *when the wattle flowers*.

## Appendix 1: Legislative regimes for returning traditional lands and waters

The extent to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have had their rights recognised over their ancestral lands and waters varies significantly. This diversity stems from the complex nature of land ownership between different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, the varying experiences of forced removal from their ancestral lands and the considerable variations of different legislative and grant mechanisms of returning lands to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Altman et al., 2007).

There are over thirty separate pieces of legislation at the state and federal levels related to Traditional Owners' access to lands and waters (Altman et al., 2007; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2010). These different land tenure regimes range in strength, with the Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act generally seen as the strongest, and non-exclusive Native Title as the weakest (Altman et al., 2007). They identify five key areas that bind each legislative and grant mechanism:

- Creation of Aboriginal Reserves
- Land Rights legislation (passed since 1960)
- Land legislation which allows for the transfer of ownership to Indigenous groups
- Land acquisition programs
- Native Title (Altman et al., 2007).

However, this list does not include National Parks that are co-managed with Traditional Owners. Although co-managed National Parks are not exclusive forms of tenure, they are designed to recognise and incorporate the interests of each Aboriginal group that is party to these arrangements.

Table A demonstrates the range of legislative frameworks that exist to return, in varying capacities, ancestral lands and waters to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It has been created from the information available at the time of this publication from the Native Title Resource Guide (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2010). Worth noting is the absence of Western Australia (WA) in this table. The State of WA to date does not have any legislation that deals specifically with the return of Aboriginal Lands. All lands

claimed in WA by Aboriginal peoples have been done so through federal legislation such as the National Native Title Act (1993).

| Table A. Legislation that deals specifically with returning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestral lands and waters <sup>9</sup> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Jurisdiction                                                                                                                              | Legislation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Federal                                                                                                                                   | National Native Title Act (1993)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| ACT                                                                                                                                       | Aboriginal Land Grant<br>(Jervis Bay Territory) Act 1986 (Cth)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| NSW                                                                                                                                       | Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW)<br>Aboriginal Land Rights Amendment Act 2001<br>Aboriginal Land Rights Amendment Act 2009<br>National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NSW)                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| NT                                                                                                                                        | Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)<br>Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Amendment Act 2006 (Cth)<br>Coburg Peninsula Aboriginal Land Sanctuary & Marine Park Act 1981 (NT)<br>Crown Lands Act 1992 (NT)<br>Pastoral Land Act 1992 (NT)                                                                                                                  |
| QLD                                                                                                                                       | Community Services (Aborigines) Act 1984 (Qld)<br>Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984 (Qld)<br>Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (Land Holding) Act 1985 (Qld)<br>Aboriginal Land Act 1991 (Qld)<br>Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991 (Qld)<br>Land Act 1994 (Qld)                                                                                                        |
| SA                                                                                                                                        | Aboriginal Land Trusts Act 1966 (SA)<br>Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Rights Act 1981 (SA)<br>Maralinga Tjarutja Land Rights Act 1984 (SA)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| TAS                                                                                                                                       | Aboriginal Lands Act 1995 (TAS)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| VIC                                                                                                                                       | Aboriginal Lands Act 1970 (Vic)<br>Aboriginal Lands (Aborigines Advancement League) (Watt Street Northcote) Act 1982 (Vic)<br>Aboriginal Land (Lake Condah and Framlingham Forest) Act 1987 (Cth)<br>Aboriginal Land (Northcote Land) Act 1989 (Vic)<br>Aboriginal Lands Act 1991 (Vic)<br>Aboriginal Land (Manatunga Land) Act 1992 (Vic)<br>Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 (Vic) |

<sup>9</sup> Source: Native Title Resource Guide, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2010  
[http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/\\_files/ntru/resources/NTRG/National2010.pdf](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/_files/ntru/resources/NTRG/National2010.pdf)

## Appendix 2: Map of Working on Country funded Indigenous Ranger projects throughout Australia

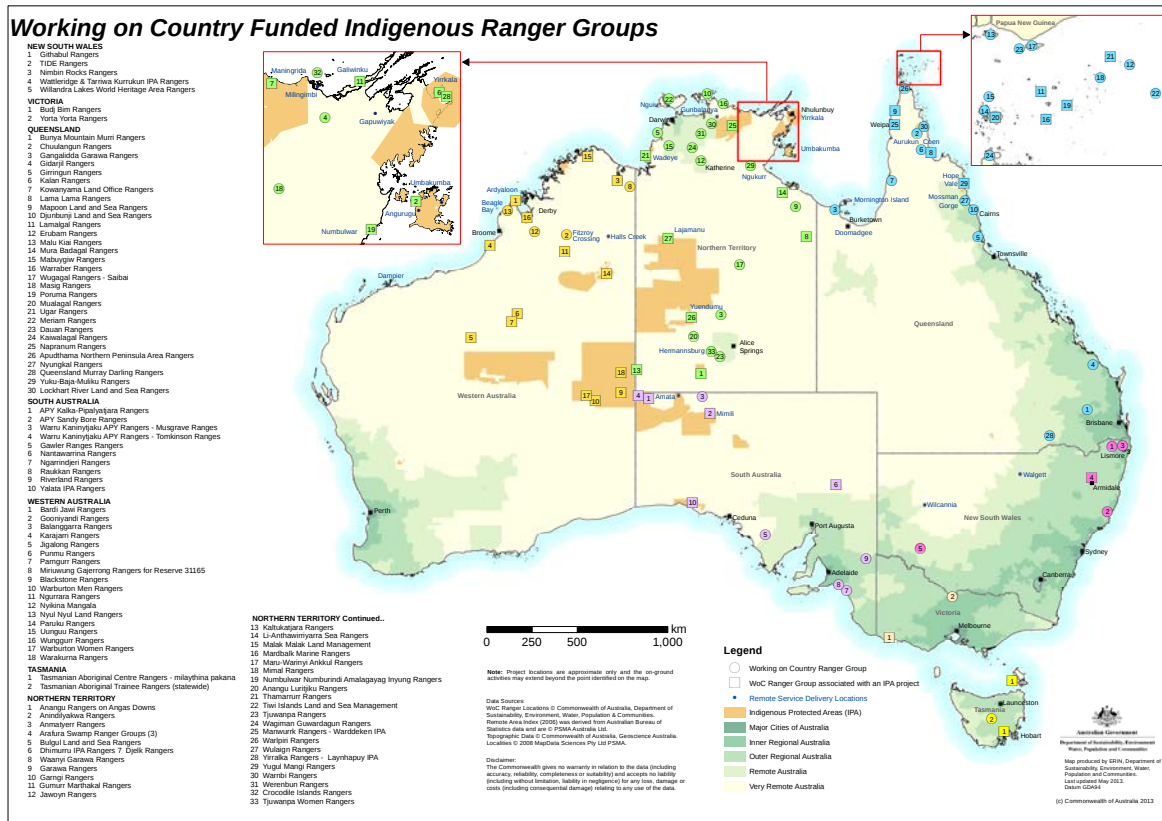


Figure 11: Map of Working on Country Funded Projects throughout Australia<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Viewed 22 October, 2014

<http://www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/workingoncountry/projects/>

## Appendix 3: Community Consultations

Community consultations explain the period prior to this research project when I travelled to Borroloola NT, in November 2013. For one week I spoke to staff from both the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers and Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers about this prospective research project. I explained that I had not yet applied for this additional research year and that I was keen to collaborate with both groups, as I had done in 2012.

In particular, I spoke to the Senior Cultural Advisors of both of Ranger groups: Jack Green of the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers and Grahame Friday of the Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers. I explained in-depth the expectations from the university for the upcoming year and how this project differentiated from the previous Independent Research Project in 2012. It was vital for me to get the in-principle support from both men for this new project.

In the following days I organised a meeting with both Senior Cultural Advisors at the local Northern Land Council offices (Image 8.1). At this meeting we



discussed the new research project. Both men expressed their views and opinions as to what should be investigated. Of particular concern was the future of young people in Borroloola. They both spoke about young people in Borroloola as 'lost' and that incorporating the views of young people should be a component of this undertaking. Grahame Friday noted that throughout my time spent researching with Li-Anthawirriyarra, many of the

**Image 8.1: Meeting with Senior Cultural Rangers Jack Green and Grahame Friday, Borroloola, NT (November 2013)**

young Rangers (mostly men) responded favourably to my presence and 'opened up'. He suggested that I was well placed to continue these relationships and use them in this research project.

The views of both men and my own academic interests were discussed at a workshop, where an investigation into the role of young people in Aboriginal Ranger groups was decided upon as an appropriate topic (Image 8.2).

This research topic was then discussed further with Deb Melaluca and Adrian Brown of the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers; both expressed support for this project. I then discussed contributions that I could make to the enhancement of Murumbung Yurung Murra including working on the development of their fire management framework.

These community consultations took place before the commencement of this research undertaking. Engaging in a meaningful way with all three Ranger groups, and incorporating their views and opinions, created an appropriate research topic that has scope to meaningfully contribute to these Ranger groups. By engaging from the outset also created a 'buy-in' from each Ranger groups. This 'buy-in' created a positive atmosphere and when I did return it assisted greatly to the timely completion of fieldwork.



**Image 8 2: Workshopping research topics with Jack Green and Grahame Friday, Borroloola, NT (November 2013)**

## Appendix 4: Fieldwork

The following section details the time I spent in the field working with all three Aboriginal Ranger groups throughout 2014.

The first field trip occurred between Sunday June 1 and Sunday June 22. During this time, I spent four nights and five days on Vanderlin Island working with the Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers (Monday June 9 – Friday June 13). The following week was spent working with the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers throughout the Waanyi/Garawa Aboriginal Land Trust (Monday June 23 – Saturday June 28).

When I returned to Canberra, I began my fieldwork with the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers. There were a total of four days spent in the field with the Rangers. The dates and locations were as follows:

- July 14 – Mulligans Flat
- July 16 – Mt Ainslie
- August 12 – Orroral Valley
- August 14 - Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve

I then travelled back to Borroloola, NT for the reporting back period outlined in section 3.4. This occurred from Sunday September 21 – Monday September 29. I completed this same action in Canberra on Monday October 20 with the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers.

## Appendix 5: Reporting Back Period

I travelled back to Borroloola, NT for the reporting back period outlined in section 3.4. This occurred from Sunday September 21 – Monday September 29. During this time, I spent three nights on West Island outlined in 5.2, reporting back to the Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers. During this time and the days both prior to and following the period on West Island, I consulted with the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers. Upon returning again to Canberra, I arranged a reporting back meeting with the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers, which occurred on Monday October 20.

The purpose of these meetings was to inform the Ranger groups of my key findings and recommendations. I stipulated how I have used their information in the context of this thesis and provided all Rangers the opportunity to comment and amend their information. This was particularly important in gaining permission to use specific images and quotes. Amendments were made through this process and all data presented in this thesis is a product of these consultations.

## Appendix 6: Case Study Selection

The selection of Aboriginal Ranger groups for this study is a complex process to detail, as there were many factors that led to our collaboration. A major factor for choosing these geographically diverse groups was the varying nature of their work and working realities. As I outline in chapter 5, all three Ranger groups participate in a wide variety of activities relevant to their local cultural, political and environmental circumstances. All three groups have different rights to access and work in their ancestral lands, as I discuss in chapter 4. The variety of activities and circumstances presented an opportunity to investigate significant differences and similarities between their operations and aspirations, while allowing me to generalise findings more broadly.

It is important to note the geographic diversity of the groups. All three operate over vastly different bioregions as I discuss in chapter 4 and 5. Geographic diversity was of particular importance when incorporating the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers whose ancestral lands are located in the area now known as the Australian Capital Territory. There exists a common misconception that Caring for Country is a philosophy that has become extinct (or at least, no longer a lived reality) in Australia's southern states. This misconception is symptomatic of a more general misunderstanding that *real* Aboriginal people only live in northern Australia. Collaborating with the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers refutes these spurious notions of Indigeneity and highlights that the Aboriginal practices of Caring for Country persevere and continue to inform the way in which Aboriginal people throughout the ACT and its surrounds live their lives.

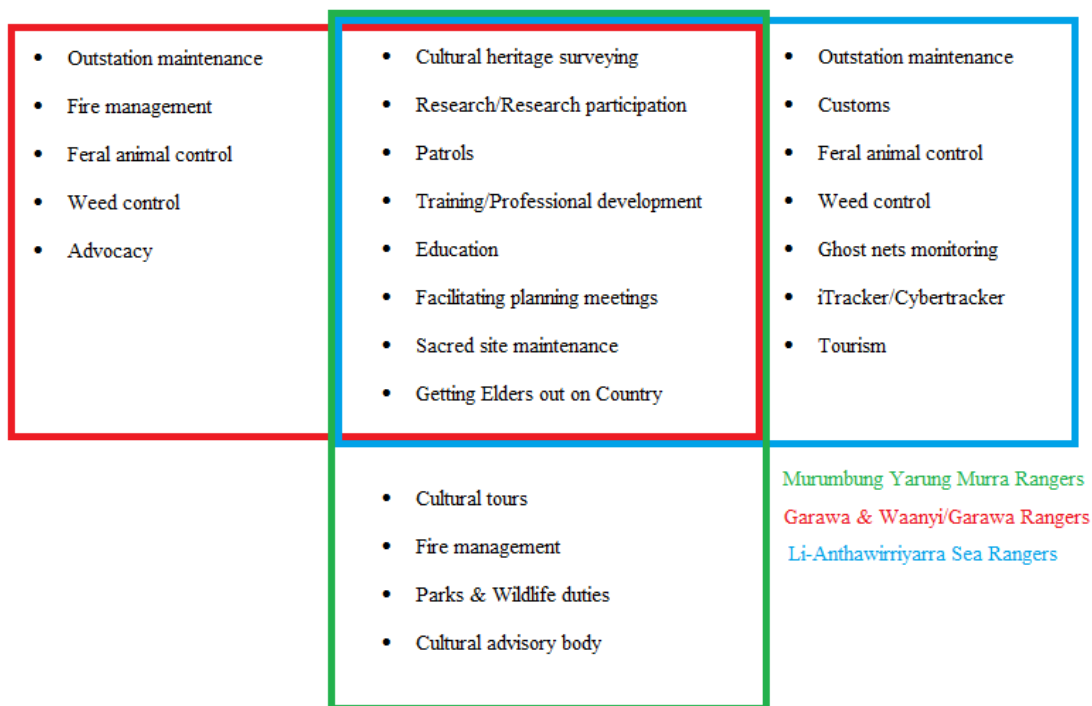
Furthermore, I had collaborated with all three Ranger groups prior to undertaking the current research project. Having already established strong working relationships, including community and family connections, allowed me to freely consult with each group throughout every phase of the research process. In turn, this afforded more time for undertaking fieldwork, as I did not need to invest in establishing working relationships. The following section will explain this research process in more detail.

## Appendix 7: Combined Activities of Aboriginal Ranger Groups

Data collected on the activities performed by all three Ranger groups shows a vast array of roles and responsibilities. Many of these activities were observed during fieldwork discussed in chapter 5.

Looking closer at all three figures shown in chapter 4, there are activities that are shared between all three Ranger groups. Figure 12 highlights these core activities, which are mainly culturally specific. Cultural Heritage surveying, education, Sacred Site maintenance and getting Elders on Country are all culturally specific activities that would not be undertaken in other mainstream environmental programs. This is not to say that the work itself is the same. For instance the cultural heritage surveying carried out by the Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers involved restoration of a Macassan campsite. While the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers conduct surveys over rock formations that were used as shelters and dwellings prior to settlement, and the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers conduct surveys at similar sites that have rock paintings and cultural meeting places. Many of the non-core activities however, deal specifically with the environmental work. This makes sense as all three Ranger groups operate over very different landscapes with different environmental concerns.

Identifying these core and non-core activities has implications for any formal vocational courses that may be offered for people wanting to become an Aboriginal Ranger within their local community. This information is useful also when considering transferable skills between different programs and any formal training or national discussions about the roles and responsibilities of Aboriginal Rangers.



**Figure 12: Combined Activities of Aboriginal Ranger groups**

## Appendix 7: A History of the Southwest Gulf of Carpentaria

The Aboriginal groups in the southwest Gulf region are closely linked, sharing many ceremonies, songs and lore. Their lands and waters spread from the Sir Edward Pellew group of Islands, through to the Gulf Coastal and Gulf Fall Bioregions (Department of Environment, 2013). The Gulf region has a monsoonal climate pattern with over 80% of the annual rainfall occurring between November and March (Department of Environment, 2013).

The early history of sustained European contact with the Aboriginal groups in the southwest Gulf began in the early 1870s, when the Borroloola Township became an important post for drovers moving cattle between Queensland, the Northern Territory and northern Western Australia (Baker, 1999). Following this period and after the northern areas of the NT were stocked with cattle, this overland trade route (for the large part) ceased and the European population declined to very few (Baker, 1999).

Borroloola's isolation from larger urban centres such as Darwin, Adelaide or Cloncurry (Cloncurry was the major north-west Queensland centre during this time), created a unique set of circumstances whereby Aboriginal Peoples incorporated 'White Fellas' into their worlds, not the other way around (Baker, 1999). During this time, the Aboriginal Peoples developed a sense of independence from European society and continue to remain suspicious of remote authorities (Baker, 1999). It is important to note here, that Borroloola's isolation is a perceived issue. For the Aboriginal groups from this area, Borroloola is not isolated from larger centres; these centres are isolated from Borroloola.

Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, large cattle stations were developed throughout the region. However, the moving of great numbers of cattle through the Country decimated many traditional hunting and gathering areas and severely damaged water sources (Baker, 1999). The effect of this process forced traditional groups to move to town or camp on the outskirts, in order to continue living in the area (Baker, 1999). This era was also the time when violent conflict occurred between Aboriginal Peoples and station owners, with the assistance of white authorities. People from the area identify this period as the beginning of the loss of control over their lands (Green & Morrison with Kerins, 2012: 190). This

era became known to local Aboriginal people as the 'Wild Times' (Baker, 1999). 'Police Times', 'Cattle Times' and 'Welfare Times' are other significant eras in the region (Baker, 1999). Due to the nature of this thesis, an in-depth analysis of these periods will not be considered. This thesis will consider the era named 'Gough Whitlam Time'<sup>11</sup> from the 1970s as it pertains directly to understanding the current political and economic climate that Aboriginal Ranger groups operate in (Baker, 1999; Baker, 1992).

Aboriginal people in the area remember 'Gough Whitlam Times' the beginning of the return of some of the land they had been dispossessed of nearly one hundred years earlier. It is important to first acknowledge that there is no common experience of Aboriginal Land Rights but many, with some Aboriginal groups in this area receiving much of their traditional land back while others received little or none at all (Baker, 1992).

The first parcels of land that Aboriginal Peoples were granted through the ALRA were the two outer Islands in the Sir Edward Pellew Islands (West Island and Vanderlin Island), as well as a coastal area of land through a negotiated process between Aboriginal groups and Mount Isa Mines (Baker, 1992). The remaining Islands in the Sir Edward Pellew Group have since been handed back to the Yanyuwa People.

In 1984 a parcel of land known as the Nicholson River was handed back to the Waanyi and Garawa Peoples as an Aboriginal Land Trust (ALT) (Green & Morrison with Kerins, 2012). Following this, the Aboriginal Land Fund bought another pastoral property known as Robinson River for the Garawa People. This land was purchased before being turned into Aboriginal Freehold Land; it is now known as the Garawa Aboriginal Land Trust. It is over these land trusts and sea Country that the Waanyi/Garawa Rangers and Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers operate today.

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<sup>11</sup> Aptly named after the Prime Minister who is given credit for introducing the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT)

## **Appendix 8: A History of the Australian Capital Territory and its Surrounds**

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) has a long and rich history of Aboriginal occupation dating back over 25,000 years (Maher, 2013; Territories and Municipal Services, 2010). Aboriginal groups travelled throughout the region, making use of seasonal foods and medicinal sources (Territories and Municipal Services, 2010). The area is largely categorised as having two geographic features: tablelands in the north and mountain ranges in the south (Department of housing and Community Services, 2012). Whilst there is a small degree of conjecture about which Traditional Ownership groups have specific rights and interests in different areas, there is a wide held acceptance that the Ngunnawal People are the Traditional Custodians of the region. The ACT and surrounds remain a significant meeting area for Aboriginal people with a large Ceremony ground located adjacent to the Kamberry creek system (now known as Sullivans Creek). This Ceremony ground has since been cleared and developed into the parking area for the National Botanical Gardens (Kabaila, 1997).

The most common shelters used by the Ngunnawal people were overhanging rocks. Many of these shelters still exist throughout the Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (Territories and Municipal Services, 2010). There were extensive connections with Aboriginal Peoples located in the surrounding regions, including the southern coast and along what is now the Snowy Mountains.

European contact first occurred in 1823 when Joshua Munro Moore established a station at the area now known as Acton Peninsula (National Capital Authority, 2014). A later and much more significant station was established by Robert Campbell. The Commonwealth then brought this property, named Duntroon, in 1910 and the station has been converted into the Royal Military College (National Capital Authority, 2014). Subsequent settlements occurred in the years that followed, including Yarralumla, Tidbinbilla, Lanyon and along the Murrumbidgee River (National Capital Authority, 2014).

As more European settlers moved to the area, Aboriginal Peoples were dispossessed from their lands (Department of Housing and Community Services,

2012). Developed in 1838, the first town in the area was Queanbeyan, after which the number of Europeans swelled (Department of Housing and Community Services, 2012). Following this decade of rapid settlement, the number of Aboriginal people diminished rapidly (Department of Housing and Community Services, 2012). Aboriginal people initially established small camps on the outskirts of Queanbeyan and along rivers and creeks, working as stock hands and house servants, often without pay (Department of Housing and Community Services, 2012). From the 1870s, Aboriginal people were forced onto missions; the largest of which included Brungle Mission located outside Tumut and Hollywood Mission outside Yass.

The ACT was officially created in 1913 and by the mid 1990s many Aboriginal people began moving back to the towns and cities located on their ancestral lands, such as Queanbeyan and Canberra (Maher, 2013). Today, Canberra is mostly an urban setting with outlying rural estates. The Namadgi National Park makes up the southern mountainous region on the outskirts of Canberra (Maher, 2013).

In 2000, then Chief Minister of the ACT John Stanhope indicated that Namadgi National Park was to become joint-managed in conjunction with the Ngunnawal People<sup>12</sup>. In these negotiations a commitment was made to a long-term employment strategy through an Aboriginal land management traineeship program. In the following years negotiations broke down concerning the joint-managed national park, resulting in the Ngunnawal People not having formally recognised legal rights over their ancestral lands, within or outside of the ACT. The commitment to the traineeship program however, was honoured. Through this program the number of Aboriginal Rangers employed in ACT Parks and Conservation increased.

With the increasing number of Aboriginal Rangers, there was an identified need to create a network that supported these staffs. Through the initiative of these Aboriginal Rangers, the Murumbung Yurung Murra Rangers network was formed.

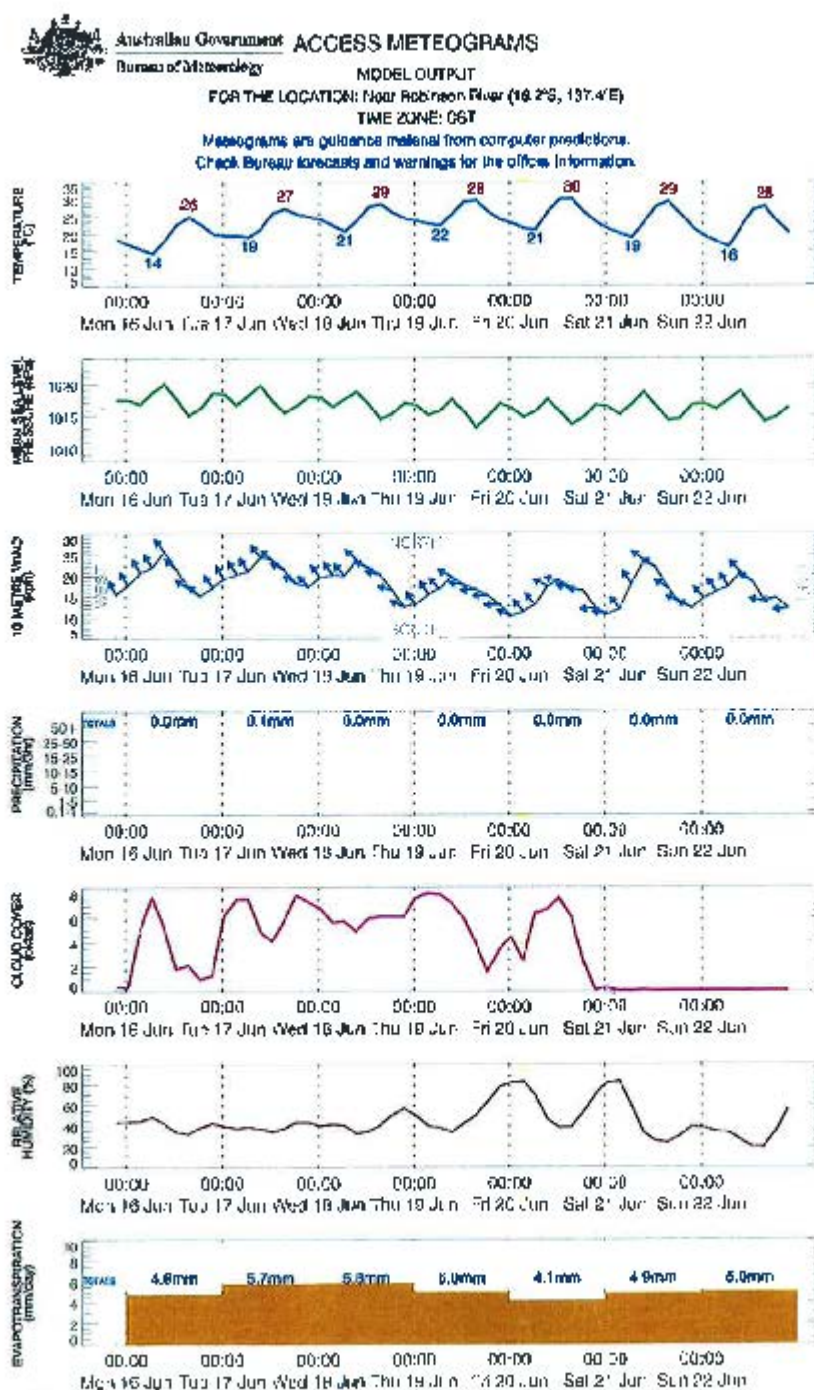
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<sup>12</sup> The Ngunnawal people were in this instance represented by five family groups that were signatories to the establishment of the joint-managed national park. There were however, more Ngunnawal families that were not represented in this process. This process remains a matter of contention within the wider Ngunnawal community.

## Appendix 9: Access Meteogram for Early-Season Burning, Waanyi/Garawa Aboriginal Land Trust

Meteogram for Near Robinson River

Page 2 of 3



<http://reg.bom.gov.au/products/reg/access/meteograms/meteogram.php>

16/06/2014

# Appendix 10: Li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers Vanderlin Island Marine Debris Research Information Sheet



## Vanderlin Island Marine Debris Research

**Date ;** 02/06/2014

**Location ;** Survey/Research location is predominately the east coast of Vanderlin island.

**Sea rangers, Junior rangers and TO's attending;**

**Rangers;** Graham Friday, Leonard Norman, David Harvey, Anton Johnson, Stanley Allen, Kenrick Douglas, Lester Timothy, Steven O'Keefe, Shoyanne Anderson and Joanne Miller.

**TO's;** Billy Miller, Dinah Norman, Alma Anderson, Jemima Miller, Roddy Harvey and Mavis Timothy.

**Junior Ranger Program participants;** Josie Davies, Tyrell Green, Cyrus Thomson and Sallie Raggatt.

**Dates /duration;**

Depart Wednesday am 11/06/2014- return Friday pm 13/06/2014.

**Assets and equipment;**

- I-Trackers
- Sat Phones
- Cameras
- Chargers for all electrical equipment
- Vessels- Stabcraft, Renegade and Dory - Master and crews to TBC on patrol sheets.
- Helicopter 44- Airborne solutions Clinton- 08 89713232
- Keys to Centre Island- pick up generator
- AVGAS helicopter fuel pick-up from airstrip Borroloola transport by boat to Vanderlin Island

**Supplies;**

- Food for 18 people – 2 days campout, 1 day breakfast and lunch.
- Extra fuel for vessels
- Fuel for helicopter – available from Borroloola airstrip 1 drum 44 gal \$750 able to pay by PO, Jenny-0411055039

**Administration;**

- PO's – food and fuel.
- reporting

#### **Trip plan;**

#### **Rangers,**

Tuesday 10/06/14 rangers will organise assets and equipment for marine operations and all stores will be purchased for campout. Wednesday 11/06/14 ranger vessels will transport staff and equipment out to Vanderlin Island leaving from King Ash Bay approx 9am. Rangers will conduct marine debris survey/research along the eastern coast with multiple flights throughout the afternoon. Rangers will pack up and aim to be back in Borroloola early afternoon Friday 13/06/14.

#### **Helicopter,**

Wednesday 11/06/14 Airborne Solutions helicopter (Bell 44, 4 passenger) will leave Katherine approx 6am and arrive Borroloola airstrip approx 9.30am to re-fuel and pick up 3 passengers (Billy Miller, Dinah Norman and Jemima Miller) for transport to Vanderlin Island, leaving Borroloola approx 10am. Helicopter will leave Vanderlin Island late afternoon camping at Borroloola and returning to Katherine early Friday 13/06/14.

#### **Senior TO's,**

TO's will be picked up by rangers and taken to the Borroloola airstrip approx 9am. Wednesday 11/06/14 morning and picked up Friday 13/06/14 afternoon on arrival from Vanderlin Island.

#### **Junior Rangers,**

Junior rangers will be picked up from school/home on Tuesday 11/06/14 and will assist with preparations and leave with rangers Wednesday 12/06/14 travelling by boat to Vanderlin Island.

#### **Overview of project;**

As part of our on-going Marine Debris work we frequently visit Vanderlin Island as it has been identified as a 'hot spot' for debris. Recently rangers have undertaken work in conjunction with Bruce Lansdown from AQIS who provided valuable marine debris training on Vanderlin Island. This trip we have invited TO's to accompany us with our work on-country, and to help with the IEK (Indigenous Ecological Knowledge) transfer between the older and younger generations. Graham Friday is the Mentor for the Junior ranger program and has invited four secondary school children from the CEC (Community Education Centre) to join Sea Rangers for Cultural knowledge sessions over the 3 day period. Graham and I (ranger coordinator-Ray) have had a meeting with Ken Duncan (deputy principle) and have discussed appropriate protocol for student field trips.

Our intended location for Debris survey is the east coast of Vanderlin Island which is only partly accessible by land and weather dependant by sea. As rangers are always trying to maximise our efforts on-country, we will hire a helicopter to undertake work in the more remote parts offering senior TO's a chance to see country from the air and to minimise the rough trip by sea.

Ray Ulinovich

Coordinator

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