

Conflict to Co-Management: Eating Our Words

**Towards Socially Just Conservation of Green
Turtles and Dugongs in the Great Barrier Reef,
Australia**

Thesis submitted by

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Environment Science and Geography, Faculty of Science, Engineering and
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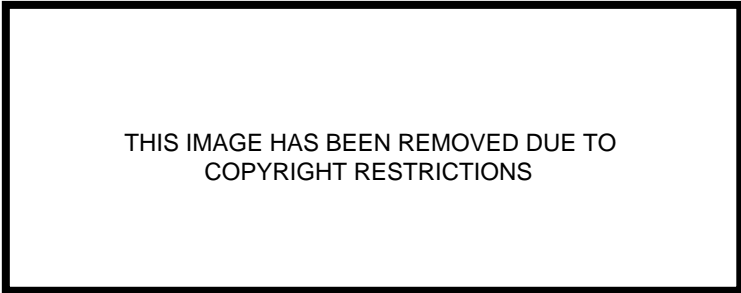
In memory

To my father

Paul Nursey-Bray

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of all the Elders and others who have passed away and also to all those who continue to fight for social justice, environmental sustainability and cultural survival in the modern world.



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Abstract

Indigenous communities worldwide face multiple challenges to maintain their unique cultural identity and value systems. In the natural resource management arena, these challenges include the imposition of western solutions to environmental management and biodiversity protection. This imposition has caused the dispossession or relocation of Indigenous peoples from their lands, a loss of traditional ecological knowledge, social disempowerment and economic inequity.

Indigenous peoples are responding to these challenges by asserting their cultural identity, developing cultural re-vitalisation programs, and actively participating in western political processes for ongoing involvement in the environmental and natural resource management domain. Nonetheless, to date, many of these programs are faltering or have failed in their long-term implementation.

Using a case study approach, my thesis examines this issue through an examination of Indigenous hunting of threatened species in a protected area. My research is based on the contention that language matters, as it is an enabling tool which reveals the knowledge and power relations in natural resource management. To this end, I compare perspectives held by Indigenous people on the one hand and government Management Agencies on the other, about traditional hunting, planning and the management of Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) and Dugongs (*Dugon dugon*) in Australia's Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA). To compare these perspectives I used a combination of discourse analysis, historical analysis and participant observation to analyse the development, implementation and subsequent failure of the Hope Vale Turtle and Dugong Hunting Management Plan, 'Guugu Yimmithirr Bama Wii: Ngawiya and Girrbiti.

My research yielded four key findings: (i) that significant differences exist between Management Agencies and Hope Vale Community about hunting, planning and management (Management Agency discourse for example prioritised biodiversity protection, while Indigenous discourse was primarily about ensuring cultural survival); (ii) that language in resource management does matter because different linguistic

interpretations within such programs have a direct impact on their efficacy (iii) that social justice dimensions must be incorporated within management regimes in order to achieve both cultural survival and biodiversity protection objectives; and (iv) that resource management initiatives can never be divorced from the impact of external events, actors and power regimes.

I thus confirm my *thesis* or argument that the use and understandings of language in resource management reflect power and knowledge relations, which in turn influence and impact upon the effectiveness of natural resource management programs.

Through the integration of these findings my thesis concludes with the presentation of a socially just conservation methodology to guide future collaborations between Indigenous peoples and Management Agencies when addressing the ongoing cultural harvest of wildlife (such as Green turtles and Dugongs) in protected areas.

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