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Ningaloo Client Outreach Community Report

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1. NINGALOO CLIENT OUTREACH COMMUNITY REPORT

This document is a summary of the Ningaloo Client Outreach research project. Client Outreach was established as a small research project that has evolved to consider the way in which groups interact in working towards the sustainable management of the Ningaloo Marine Park.

A technical report is also available which similarly gives an account of the project and its findings, but gives more detail on the science and the theory used to design the project and interpret the findings.

The project helped us understand the various roles that people have in the overall management of the Ningaloo Marine Park. The findings are important as they provide a way for considering relationships in the future. Of particular interest is the relationship between scientists and researchers, and, the communities that their research is designed to benefit.

1.1 What did the research set out to do?

Initially the Client Outreach Project performed to find ways to ensure the science was used. In this way it was to provide a resource to scientists and researchers working in the Ningaloo Collaboration Cluster. The Cluster itself was formed to help researchers and scientists working on Ningaloo related projects to be connected and help coordinate research efforts. Performing an outreach role meant that if there were any concerns by scientists, government or the community, associated with the implementation of the projects two of the primary researchers of the Client Outreach project could act as a source of expert advice. Initial interviews with scientists prompted us to think about who the 'client' is, and resulted in greater emphasis in the project being about the roles that people serve and how they interact with the Ningaloo community. We learned that much of the success of the science and research being conducted would rest on the roles and relationships of all stakeholders. To explore this we held interviews with participants, where we learnt about how they perceived their role in the overall sustainability of the Ningaloo Marine Park. We were particularly interested in seeing if there were patterns in the current interaction that could help explain what is working well and less well. The motivations of various Ningaloo stakeholders for ensuring the sustainability of the Ningaloo Marine Park are broad ranging and include some of the following reasons:

- Ningaloo is their home and the region is important to them
- For the generation of income, in particular tourism dollars
- For scientific and research purposes – the Park and adjacent communities are really interesting
- For conservation purposes, and a feeling of responsibility to take care of Ningaloo

Irrespective of participants' motivation, there was a consistent recognition that the Ningaloo Marine Park is something that is worthwhile protecting. There was also awareness that despite having the same goal there can still conflict because people have different ideas about how sustainability can and should be achieved.

We were particularly interested in exploring how people identified their role in contributing to the sustainable management of Ningaloo, and also, how they saw themselves connected to and working with others in the management of the Marine Park. To learn more we asked participants to draw a mental map, termed a sociogram, of their role in the sustainability of the Marine Park. Sociograms are diagrams consisting of nodes and connecting lines. For this study the nodes represent groups or particular roles of people and the lines indicated how they are connected. The lines had arrow heads so that participants could indicate the direction of the interaction between the groups or roles. The arrows allowed us to discriminate whether a line indicates that the participant depended on a particular group, or, whether the group depended on the participant in ensuring the sustainability of the Marine Park. Figure 1 is an example of a sociogram from the study.

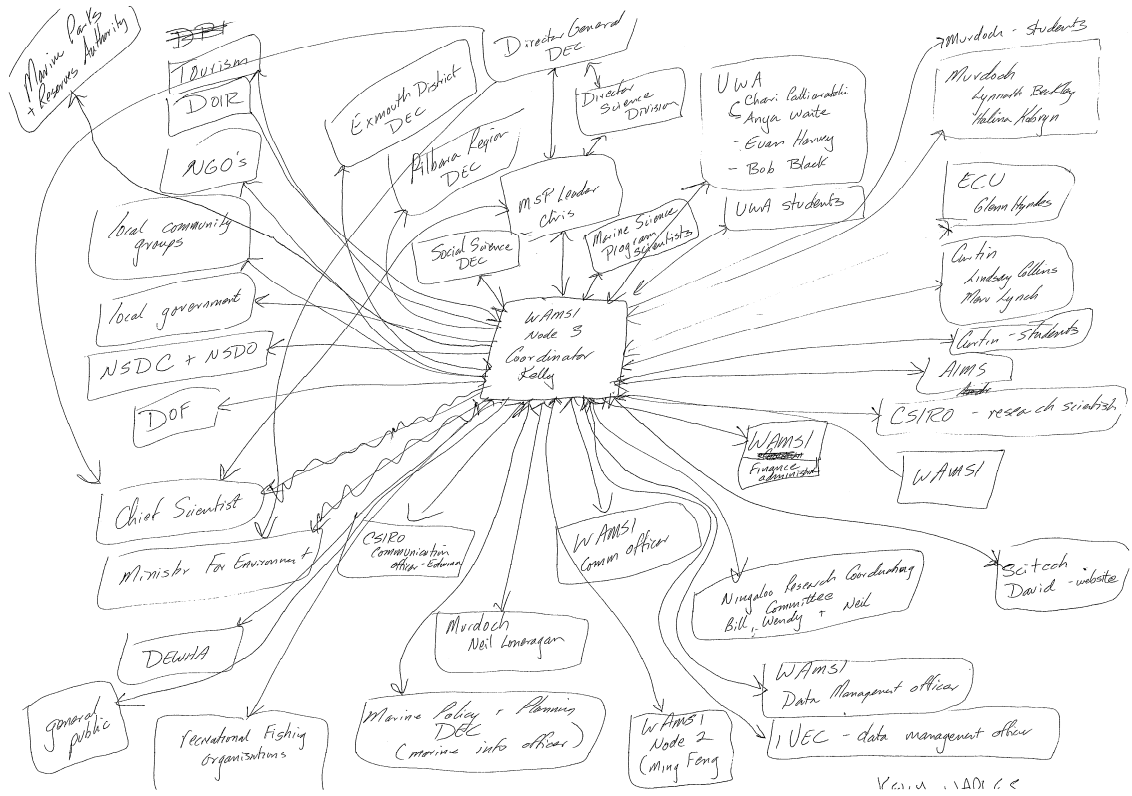

Figure 1. Example of a participant's sociogram. Thanks to Kelly for sharing her sociogram.

1.2 Who did we engage with?

We talked with a broad range people who would have an interest in the long term sustainability of the Ningaloo Marine Park. The people we engaged with included;

The Community: local community members in Carnarvon, Coral Bay and Exmouth which included business holders, and representatives from community groups.

Governance, Industry and Service: participants whose occupation is characterised by governance, industry and service delivery duties.

Research and Advisory: scientists and researchers from the Ningaloo Collaboration Cluster and the key advisory groups that they engaged with.

1.3 What did we learn?

The interviews and drawing exercise were invaluable in gaining an understanding of the dynamic between the regional communities, the research agencies and government bodies that are either engaged in, or, reside in Ningaloo. Here is an overview of what we learnt, for more detail please refer to the Ningaloo Client Outreach Final Technical report.

1.3.1 Different groups perform different roles

The sociograms that participants drew were interpreted using a statistical program which analyses social networks. Below is a “whole of network” diagram, which captures the data from all the participants’ sociograms. Each node (circle) represents a different group of people however each individual group is not so important here. We were more interested in seeing if there were any patterns in the way in which particular stakeholder groups engaged with other stakeholder groups. The different stakeholder groups are represented by different colour nodes which are explained in figure 2.

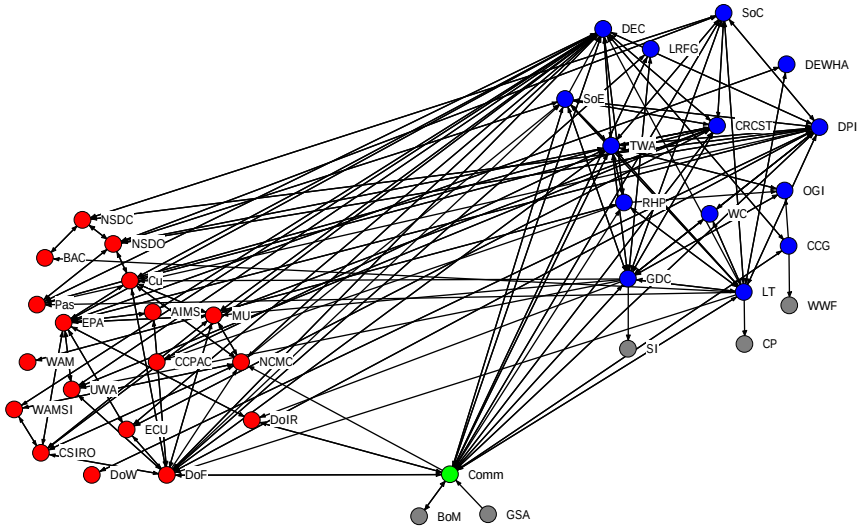

Figure 2. Whole of network sociogram with stakeholder group definition

Figure 2 illustrates some interesting findings regarding the way that the different stakeholder groups engage when considering the sustainable management of the Ningaloo Marine Park:

1. researchers and advisors tend to interact with each other (they are represented by the red dots or nodes)

2. government and service organisations tend to interact with each other (they are represented by the blue dots or nodes)

3. the community (represented by the green dot or node) does not interact much directly with the scientists and researchers, but they do with government and service organisations (represented by the blue dot or node)

4. the scientists and researchers (red) and the government and service (blue) interact with each other

These findings suggest that the dominant way that scientists and researchers interact is with each other. The findings suggest that the dominant way that scientists and researchers to reach the communities in which they work, is through engaging with the government and service organisations. This means there is very limited direct engagement between scientists and researchers and the communities in which they conduct their research.

Observing this, we decided to look at the roles of these groups a little more thoroughly. Again using the statistical program which looks at social networks, we explored whether each of the different stakeholder groups engage with others in a particular way. Figure 3 describes the different ways people can interact with each other and features diagrams of what the interactions look like. The arrows indicate the direction of interaction. The different sorts of interactions are also termed ‘brokerage’.

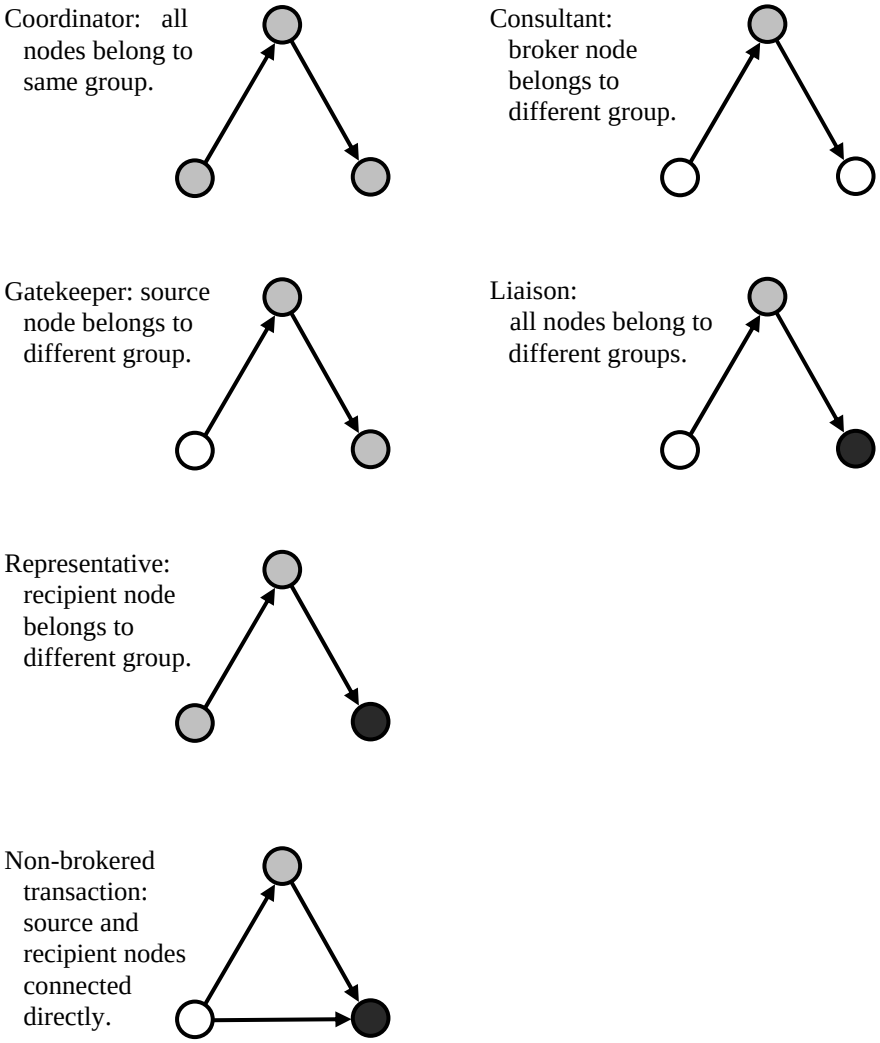

Figure 3. Illustrations of brokerage relationships. The different shadings represent different groups. The node at the top of each diagram is the "broker".

We identified the dominant brokerage relationship for each stakeholder group. We found that the community tends to serve the role of the liaison followed by the consultant, Government and Service tend to serve the role of the coordinator followed by the representative and Research and Advisory tend to serve the role of coordinator and gatekeeper.

What this implies is that the Research and Advisory Cluster Group did not illustrate any liaison role within the network (the relationship between three nodes that are all from different groups). The absence of this form of interaction within the Ningaloo Network poses an interesting quandary. The lack of this role suggests that there is a need to consider the sorts of relationships and interactions which scientists and researchers are performing. For instance, if it is argued that there is a need for a balance in roles per group, it could be said that the Research and Advisory Cluster Group is severely underperforming in the liaison role. Alternatively, it could be argued that certain types

of roles best suit particular groups. As to whether liaison is an appropriate dominant role in the scientific and research domain can be debated.

Interviews with researchers and scientists did point to changes in the way that scientists and researchers conceptualise their roles. It appeared that some scientists and researchers are critically considering their current roles, particularly in relation to engagement with the general public and reflected that there is a growing need within the scientific and research community to be more active within the communities in which their research has impact. This was seen as achievable either through direct engagement with communities, or, through engagement with Government agencies that would essentially perform a liaison role for scientists and researchers.

1.3.2 Communities and scientists and researchers feel distanced from each other

Participants expressed concerns regarding the on ground applicability of science that had been conducted in their community and more generally along the Ningaloo coastline “no practical application on the ground. Purely scientific, although valuable data, the fundamental question is where does that value help the people on the ground?”. Furthermore there were concerns as to who had responsibility in the implementation of research findings, with particular reference to the future use of the modelling work and “no group’s going to drive and hold hands with the community...no drive what is the point of it?”

Some participants reflected that the local community can be distanced from research.. For example it was stated, “have to have community buy in – not the seagull mentality”. In this instance, the participant compares scientists and researchers to seagulls, drawing parallels between the way in which scientists and research ‘swoop’ into communities, scavenge for information and data they require and then leave again. This approach was heavily criticised across all communities and consequently there was an expectation of the researcher or scientist to appropriately engage the local community. The issue of engagement was also considered in depth by some participants, whereby the integrity of the participatory process by some parties in the past was described as “tick box consultation”. In such instances, this form of participation was equal to or more damaging to the community than had no consultation occurred at all.

There was a general perception that science tends to pose problems but fails to suggest solutions. There was also a sense that there is an “assumption that people (scientists and researchers) are expecting the worst of people”. In part, this appeared to be related to the way in which community members articulated a power differentiation between themselves and the scientific and research community, for instance, one participant reflected, the feeling that “he’s the scientist, I am just a yobbo”.

1.3.3 Scientists and researchers are thinking about how to best engage with the community

This research provided the opportunity to explore the challenges and opportunities that scientists and researchers experience. Two of the most significant issues related to engagement and pressures associated with determining their role.

How do we best engage with the communities we work in?

The engagement process was raised by some participants as being a complex component of their research. Some researchers and scientists found this particularly difficult if they were not from a social science background and found themselves acting in roles that would traditionally constitute social research. Given the scale and multitude of the research projects within the region, appropriate engagement is particularly critical. The number of researchers in the region at any one time and the expectations regarding community involvement varied widely.

Engagement also emerged as an issue when more traditional science was being conducted, for instance scientific activities that occurred on the reef, or terrestrial projects that did not explicitly entail social engagement with community members. Some community members and regional based government or community groups lamented over some of the scientific conduct observed by research institutions that visited the region for research purposes. Particular concern related to inappropriate use of anchors, poor sharing of the waterways or general inappropriate interaction with the reef. Some participants were particularly perturbed by the non-compliance to preferred practice on the reef by scientific researchers. The concerns expressed by locals related to both violations of laws such as those pertaining to appropriate conduct within the Marine Park, and also social customs and rules. Such customs and rules, although not necessarily explicit in the form of publicised laws were related to expectations of visitors based on mutual respect. For instance, it was reported that at times, there was an air of arrogance amongst the scientists and researchers who visited the town. This arrogance was seen in instances of impatience or criticisms over service or facilities within the town.

As part of the sociogram exercise, one participant reflected directly on the relationship between the scientific, research and bureaucratic community and the regional communities and is illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Participant sociogram. Thanks to Doug for encouraging the research team to communicate this message.

This sociogram tells us a lot about how the relationship between communities and scientists and researchers, and, concurs with what we learnt from other parts of the research. The term “them” is used to describe the roles of scientists, researchers and bureaucrats, whereas the term “us” is used to describe the role of the communities. There is a lot of symbolism used in the sociogram. Firstly, ‘**THEM**’ is written in a dark, bold pen; the symbolism associated with the scale of the term is important. “**THEM**” has a foreboding presence over “us” and further contributes to the sense of domination over the community, as does its positioning above the term “us”. Comparatively “us” is written in finer and smaller print, contributing to the symbolic sense of being small, or lacking in power. The direction of the arrow is also indicative of the direction of influence and power over the community by governance, scientific and researcher agencies. The multiple arrow heads further suggests that there are multiple pressures that are imposing on the community. Further interpretation of the associated symbolism of the diagram is in the way in which “us” has been enclosed in a square box suggesting that the community is confined and boxed in. “them” while still enclosed is circular and as a shape suggests freedom.

This sociogram illustrates an important point, namely that despite all parties perceiving they have a common objective or outcome e.g. working towards a sustainable Ningaloo, there are procedural issues that have led to the communities experiencing a sense of disempowerment. The dynamic of such relationships between community and research raises an interesting paradox. The functional role of researchers/scientist has the capacity to both enhance or assist a community, but the processes in which this engagement process occurs also has the propensity to disempower the community. This sociogram serves as a critical reminder of the implications of poor engagement with local communities.

Issues and anxieties regarding the engagement of traditional owner's in research were raised by both researchers and community members. Here researchers expressed frustration in not being able to engage with aboriginal community members, with many researchers expressing concerns that they felt ill-equipped to engage effectively and sensitively with the local Aboriginal community[1]. As a consequence, engagement with Aboriginal community members across research projects has been limited. Instances where engagement has been successful provide the opportunity for learning about engagement processes in the future. Such success stories have pointed to specific social processes displayed by scientists and researchers as being important, for instance, a prolonged and genuine presence within the community, efforts at minimising community fatigue and burnout in multiple research processes, evidence of cultural competence, researchers of both genders available for contact, and, understanding of Indigenous knowledge as expert knowledge. Understanding needs to be supplemented by appropriate use of Aboriginal expert knowledge, appropriate processes such as payment for learning from and engagement with Aborigines, and appreciation of non-Western based conceptualisations of time. Time was often a particular frustration within the scientific and research community, whereby timelines and deliverables for scientific or research purposes would not necessarily coincide with the time required to be invested within Indigenous communities that is required for genuine engagement.

1.3.4 What happens after the project?

In part, this project emerged in response to experience from the North West Shelf Study whereby there were limited mechanisms to support or house research findings post research program. The lifetime of a research project emerged as a serious issue for the Ningaloo Collaboration Cluster work and has largely only been informed by the findings of this project. Notably, there are limited resources available within the community – both social and in terms of infrastructure within the towns. It was recognised by the scientific and research community that there are limited mechanisms written into projects to mark a transition between data collection and interpretation and then into the implementation phase. For some researchers/scientists this was not deemed an important part of their role, or their role at all. For others, it was recognised as being a critical flaw in the way in which research is conducted and perceived as detrimental to their own cause by not being able to ensure that their work has utility in 'the real world'. Participants with governance roles also recognised this limitation within research and appeared challenged as to viable ways in which this could be resolved. This was particularly the case for regional settings where there was a pre-existing sense of being physically and socially removed from city settings where the vast majority of researchers and management agencies are based. The tyranny of distance in this sense also contributes to a sense of disempowerment.

[1] Unfortunately a project to engage with aboriginal communities collapsed after the researcher involved resigned from CSIRO.

1.4 What does this all mean?

This research project has contributed to understanding the different roles that all stakeholders have the in the Ningaloo research, some of the challenges that stakeholder groups experience, but most importantly some of the drivers that can make research in the future more successful. Key drivers for positive research outcomes include:

- Genuine and coordinated engagement with local communities.
- That tangible outcomes from research are valued within local communities, and, communities want to learn about what scientist and researchers have learnt.
- Genuine and coordinated engagement with traditional landholders, in a culturally sensitive manner which sees Aboriginal knowledge as expert knowledge in its own right.
- Awareness that scientists and researchers are beginning to think differently about their research and are considering the implications of their research beyond that of the project.
- That different stakeholder groups perform different roles and engage in different ways. Understanding that groups engage differently can help manage some of the expectations that people have of others.
- An understanding that sometimes scientists and researchers are confused about how to engage with communities. This is understandable, particularly in instances when processes such as engagement and participation are not part of their expertise. In such instances, it is highly valuable for scientists and researchers to ask for help. Times when this has occurred has resulted in some really pleasing outcomes within the Ningaloo Collaboration Cluster.

There have been some favourable formal outcomes from the Client Outreach project Currently CSIRO Communications are using some of the findings to help inform their communication strategy. They similarly have recognised the importance of roles, interactions and relationships in ensuring beneficial processes during and outcomes from science.

There have also been some favourable informal outcomes. A particularly exciting part of this project is that some changes have been occurring though out the duration of the science and research at Ningaloo. We have seen scientists and researchers take an increasing interest in the implications that their science and research has on the local communities. There have also been changes in the way in which scientists and researchers think about their roles, eagerness to ask ‘social questions’ and enthusiasm in collaborating more with local communities and other disciplines.

1.5 Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge a myriad of groups and individuals who have generously shared with us their time and expertise. All parties engaged within the Ningaloo Collaboration Cluster were central to the success of this project; we are particularly appreciative of the endeavours of Bill de la Mare, Beth Fulton, Fabio Boschetti, Wendy Steele, Tod Jones, Kelly Waples and Neil Loneragan. We also extend much gratitude to the communities of Carnarvon, Coral Bay and Exmouth, who provided us with rich insights. We value the opportunity to have been involved in this project and appreciate the willingness of all parties to be involved in a piece of atypical marine park management research.

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