

Indigenous engagement in a WA marine parks planning process

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Background

Current planning processes are being undertaken in a context where indigenous custodianship and native title is substantial. Developing appropriate, inclusive and transparent engagement with indigenous people is essential for new marine parks and reserves to succeed.

In December 2006, the then Government announced an initiative to expand the marine conservation reserve system in the Pilbara and Eighty Mile Beach regions. To provide opportunities for input to planning for this initiative, DEC developed an indigenous engagement program for groups with native title claim and determination areas in the vicinity of 'study areas' for proposed marine parks.



Members of the Nyangumarta working group sharing a story with DEC at Eighty Mile Beach (J.Lloyd/DEC)

The engagement program

DEC's indigenous engagement program has included several key components, namely the preparation of a draft negotiation protocol, production of the 'Big Book', and meetings and on-country visits.

With the Nyangumarta people, DEC facilitated a 3-day 'country visit' at Eighty Mile Beach and conducted follow-up meetings in the regions. DEC provided information on the area's ecological values, existing and potential pressures. Site visits were made to important cultural areas as a way of building rapport and understanding how the Nyangumarta people are connected with their coastal and sea country. A variety of participatory techniques such as ranking and visioning, were used to help provide for input from the Nyangumarta people into the planning process.

Results of a ranking exercise showing key components of any new marine park (Nyangumarta perspective)

Components of a new marine park at EMB	Score
Protecting species and habitats	● ● ● ● ●
Protecting cultural sites, stories and songlines	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
Sharing information (learning) about species and habitats	● ● ●
Indigenous employment and revenue-making opportunities	
Observing numbers and health (monitoring) of plants and animals	● ● ● ● ● ●
Involvement in designing signage and interpretive materials (e.g. brochures)	
Representation on a park council or management committee	● ● ● ● ●

Conclusions

Feedback on the program from the Nyangumarta people has been extremely positive. Lessons learned should inform fellow protected area planners and managers. Engagement efforts with indigenous people in the regions should continue.

Lessons learned

A number of successes, challenges and limitations, can be identified from engagement efforts with the Nyangumarta and DEC's indigenous engagement program. Lessons learned are listed below:

- Recognise indigenous people as more than stakeholders;
- Need for a framework for consultation;
- Provide opportunities to listen to each other;
- Share information to allow open discussion and understanding;
- Agree on values to be managed and develop a common vision;
- Build relationships;
- Allow adequate time and resources; and
- Some things are beyond the control of protected area staff and indigenous people.



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