

Learning together



“wanggaljarri
nhantharriyandu
ngurrayi talk for our
country”

Sylvia Allan, Yindjibarndi Elder

Indigenous community members
and conservation managers in the
Pilbara are working and learning
together in national parks,
producing many positive outcomes.

by Ross Kermode, Ken Sandy, Kingsley Woodley and Judymae Napier

There is depth and ageless beauty in the Pilbara. This is a landscape of diverse environments. It comprises idyllic islands, hidden shores and coastal waterways. A vast array of ranges and gorges are interspersed with spinifex country and contrasted by the tranquillity of palm-lined natural springs. Snappy gums stand before a backdrop of mountains floating in the heat haze. Deep inland is a sea of red desert dunes.

It is a living contrast of colour and texture, commerce and culture, escapism and adventure, labour and lifestyle, beneath seemingly endless blue skies. There is a mystique in this land that writers, artists and poets can only try to make us understand.

Perhaps here, where there exists knowledge, ancient language, stories and songs passed down through generations, we can hope to gain some insight into a deeper understanding and appreciation of our natural environment. Anyone who has shared time with traditional owners may agree; when community opens up country and shares stories of the significance of sites, you begin to see and feel the people and country in a new light.



Whether it is the old man in the back of a Land Cruiser softly singing his way through country, or the laughter and tears of the old women reminiscing about their childhoods beside a mirrored pool, it is a deeper connection to country that is heartwarming and real. Australia is a very old place; full of very old stories in hundreds of languages.

Within national parks in the Pilbara, the formation of park councils and joint management policies are allowing Indigenous communities and the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) to work together to care for country.

“Nhaarndu ngurra uncle-yarndu nhaarndu yabijiyarndu Jinagurduthunha. Ganagarri nhaawayi nhaa ngurra.

This is my country belonging to my uncle and my grandfather Jinagurduthunha. This is our knowledge in this place; we have feeling in this country.”

Dora Solomon, Yindjibarndi Elder

Joint management through park councils

Throughout the Pilbara, Aboriginal people are involved in the management of conservation lands, especially national parks. This is achieved through the establishment of park councils. Park councils include representatives of local Aboriginal language groups and CALM staff.

Park councils are the forums by which local Aboriginal language groups take part in the decision-making processes on national park management issues, and contribute

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Main Millstream-Chichester National Park. Photo – Simon Nevill/Lochman Transparencies.

Inset Children have an active role in their own future at the park council.

Above Creation story spoken by Sylvia Allan along the Fortescue River. Photos – Ross Kermode

Left Wildflowers at Mount Bruce, Karijini National Park. Photo – Rob Olver





Above Jirndawurrunha (the lily pool) is a very special place in the Pilbara for us all.
Photo – Karen Prosser

their knowledge of the areas to direct and assist CALM. Four park councils are established in the Pilbara region: Karijini Park Council, Ningaloo/Cape Range Park Council, Jirndawurrunha Park Council (Millstream-Chichester) and the Karlimilyi Park Council (Rudall River).

Park councils meet on a regular basis. Topics of discussion include feral animal and weed control, protection of historic and cultural sites, new park developments (including improved signage and the establishment of new visitor facilities like walktrails, lookouts and campgrounds) and, importantly, Indigenous employment opportunities.

Aboriginal Elders contribute significantly to park councils. They share stories of their past, including changes that have taken place to the surrounding landscape and wildlife. This information can help scientists analyse wildlife population stability and changes that may have led to the extinction of some species, and to other species becoming threatened. Many Aboriginal people were born on land that is now vested as national parks. There is significant value in providing the opportunity for Elders and younger generations to return to their ancestral country, meeting up with family and friends, talking about

the old days, sharing their concerns for the future of the land and their people, and just spending time in their country.

An example of the type of outcome generated by park councils includes the development of the visitor centre in Karijini National Park, in which the local Aboriginal communities provided their cultural knowledge and artefacts to drive the design and final product, which is now an award-winning visitor interpretation facility. Aboriginal people manage the visitor centre, giving visitor information and advice about the national park. Opportunities exist for the general public to interact with local Aboriginal people and learn about their association with the country.

Aboriginal rangers are employed by CALM in the Millstream-Chichester and Karijini national parks. They contribute their knowledge of culture and their cultural responsibility to care for the country, and incorporate this into their broader role as conservation managers of State lands and waters.

Common ground

“Engaging at a meaningful level.”

Dave Whitelaw, CALM

On the ground, at the interface with Indigenous communities, it is a

constant learning curve. Cross-cultural awareness is a necessity on all sides. Government language is often as difficult to translate as traditional language. Communication and understanding require time.

Consultation is dynamic and can involve a myriad of stakeholders: multiple Native Title claimants, industry, legal representatives, numerous government agencies, and Indigenous corporations and foundations. There often exists a history that may not always encourage openness of communication.

The key to the success of park councils is in finding common ground and mutual interest. At the simplest level, the common ground is the country itself. The process is in meeting the people, learning the protocols, respecting them, building trust and finding a path forward. In reality, this takes a number of years of building relationships to achieve outcomes, making occasional mistakes but learning from them and sharing with community the challenges as well as the rewards.

The Millstream-Chichester National Park Council is a collective of two Ngarluma and 10 Yindjibarndi representatives. It's all about time on the country, learning together.

People and places

The park council has assisted in appointing trainee rangers Ken Sandy and Kingsley Woodley, who undertake daily management of the park, engage with visitors and continue their study programs in conservation and land management. Park council members also provide the trainees with knowledge, cultural training, mentoring and the support they require to be able to confidently speak about country.

Both Ken and Kingsley live in Millstream on the land of their people, the Yindjibarndi. Their connection to the land runs deep. Ken lives at Millstream, where his mother was born, and Kingsley's grandfather's father, Wimiya King, walked and travelled through this land, teaching his children techniques in hunting and gathering bush foods, bush medicine and the cultural ways and understandings of his people.

"My knowledge of this land has been passed on to me by my father. The knowledge was passed on to him by his father and grandfather," says Kingsley.

Ken and Kingsley were selected by their people to become trainee rangers

at Millstream. Ken says that he is proud to be working for CALM and Yindjibarndi people on the park council and joint management team. He knows he was chosen because of his knowledge of the land and his ability to do what is expected for his people.

A vital role Ken and Kingsley play is to lead the discussions at park council. "At these meetings, it is good to be able to get up in front of my country's people and put it in ways that are easier for them to understand where and what CALM is trying to make out of this whole land and national park. Being able to confront matters on both sides is a challenge, and nobody told me it would be this hard, but it has been such a success," says Kingsley.

Importantly, Ken knows his role in Millstream is to protect the land and cultural sites from damage, by speaking with tourists about country and ensuring sites are not damaged by vehicles or people.

As Aboriginal trainee rangers, Ken and Kingsley are an important link in the chain of joint management. Kingsley is sure "there are others like us somewhere who can talk with Elders and make it right and make it better for the younger generation".

"When the door swings open, it's your turn to walk right through and make something of yourself and your people. Joint management is great because it is good for societies, black and white, to have a greater respect for each other and their countries, no matter where they are from," he says.

Many members of the community were born in this area and, having lived and worked on the homestead, are able to give visitors a deeper insight into the natural, cultural and historical importance of the area, in particular, the pastoral days, as well as pre-settlement significance.

Left CALM trainee rangers Ken Sandy and Kingsley Woodley and men at a Welcoming Ceremony in 2005.
Photo – Ross Kermode



Right Children at the park council create banners to celebrate their culture.
Photo – Ross Kermode

Below A native fig at Weano Gorge in Karijini National Park.
Photo – Alex Bond

Shared vision for the future

“Garrimarda nhaa Wimiya wangganha nhauwayi Jirndawurrunha! Mirda gundi! Nyindawa barni. Banggarrima nhauwayi!

Used to stand here and my old uncle of mine, Wimiya, used to say; go see Jirndawurrunha (lily pond)! Don't forget it! All of you are the next carriers, stay. Go and see! We are getting old now our generation, but we got the young generation—want to teach those too.”

Dora Solomon, Yindjibarndi Elder

Joint management at Millstream has enabled developments that add value to the national park and generate opportunities into the future. Elders have identified a real need for kids to be able to learn about their culture on their country and have helped Roebourne Primary School hold cultural lessons at Millstream, with Elders leading the traditional welcome. To encourage ongoing involvement with schools, a new campground near the Millstream homestead has been developed to accommodate the requirements specific for school camps.

We have been able to develop accommodation for park council and community members in the form of men's and women's camps, and identify



future living areas and sites that need to be protected.

Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation has facilitated cross-cultural awareness courses for schoolteachers from Roebourne and Karratha. The Cossack Artists and Indigenous art groups are actively involved in the future look of signage for the park. Gallery pieces will be included in an upgrade of the visitor centre, creating enterprise initiatives for the community.

Park councils are also assisting in the implementation of cultural walktrails, with the view of establishing guided and self-guided tours, along with other community and visitor-based opportunities that are being placed in the management plan for Millstream-Chichester National Park.

We are all working and learning together. Communication is open, we are on a journey and the direction is positive.

“We love our country, it's in our hearts.

Beautiful country trees, marba (silver

cadjeput), bawa (water), yidjirri wilarnu (waters running), ngarli garri wangarrayi (water lily standing alive). We used to walk with the old people here telling us stories about our country; thalu bawangga barni (sites in the water), potatoes... wild potatoes growing in the water. But we can't see them anymore now. Mirda nhau nhangtharri nhaluwayin wagarrayi bawangga bunggarimarda nhunggirila (we don't see any more wild water chestnuts alive in the water always going with them). Not this road been here before; we used to walk anywhere here. Sit down marlungga (in the shade), listen to the old people wanggayiyangu shownngarli marda nhantharri warndayi (talking always showing us the tree). Old people, old fella, used to show us the rainmaking tree there, Yundu Thalu (rain site). But it's still there, Yundu Thalu (rain site). It's beautiful country. We all come here, have a meeting here, sit down and wanggaynjarri nhantharriarndu ngurrayi (talk for our country).”

Sylvia Allan, Yindjibarndi Elder



Ross Kermode, a CALM officer, was involved with joint management at Millstream-Chichester National Park for the past 12 months. He enjoyed the challenges and rewards of working together with the community to conserve the environmental and cultural significance of the country and is now sharing the culture of the south-west, based at Yanchep National Park.

This article is a collaborative effort by CALM staff, Jirndawurrunha Park Council members, the Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, the Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi communities, rangers and Aboriginal trainee rangers involved with Millstream-Chichester National Park.

Thanks to Judy Mae Napier, Ken Sandy, Kingsley Woodley, Craig Faulkner, Tony Coyle, Wendy Bebbington, Dave Whitelaw and park council members Elsie Adams, Jimmy Horace, Maudie Jerrold, Joyce Hubert, Sylvia Allan, Bruce Woodley, Jill Tucker, Dora Solomon, Bruce Monadee, Lyn Cheedy, Trevor Solomon and Ricky Smith. Special thanks to Michael Woodley and staff at Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation for assistance with linguistics and translation and ongoing involvement with park council and community engagement at Millstream, Jirndawurrunha. For more information about the Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, visit www.juluwarlu.pilbara.net.