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Community Based Management Initiatives for Marine Turtle and Dugong

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Introduction

Contemporary Indigenous interests in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area arise from long standing cultural association with, and use of, the coastal and marine environments of the World Heritage Area (Benzaken et al. 1997). However most external focus on Indigenous use is centred on Indigenous utilisation of critical resources such as turtle and dugong.

Cultural Significance

For Indigenous peoples turtle and dugong, like other traditional resources, fill different needs. Turtle and dugong have a cultural value due to tradition and keeping culture alive through the act of hunting. They also have a social value for special occasions which require traditional foods and provide subsistence for survival. These social, cultural and economic values that Indigenous peoples place upon resources such as dugong and turtle give strength to culture and demonstrate affiliation with tradition and traditional areas (Hunter & Williams 1997).

The general view held by the broader society with respect to Indigenous hunting is a negative one. This often affects the involvement of Indigenous peoples in management. There are also other relevant factors which compound the issues of management and indigenous involvement. These factors are a result of the above mentioned values of Indigenous peoples conflicting with: calls by conservation groups to mitigate hunting on conservation grounds; applied pressure upon the resource from other sectors; displacement of hunting activities by tourism; and culturally inappropriate management programs of government.

Management



Management under traditional customary law has been carried out for a long time however recent developments such as increased technology, and the disruption of culture, has affected the balance. Customary law has a role to play as a management constraint. Cultural practices enforce correct protocol such as who can catch turtles, restrictions on take numbers of turtles and eggs, seasonal closure of hunting areas and traditional owners regulating their traditional areas

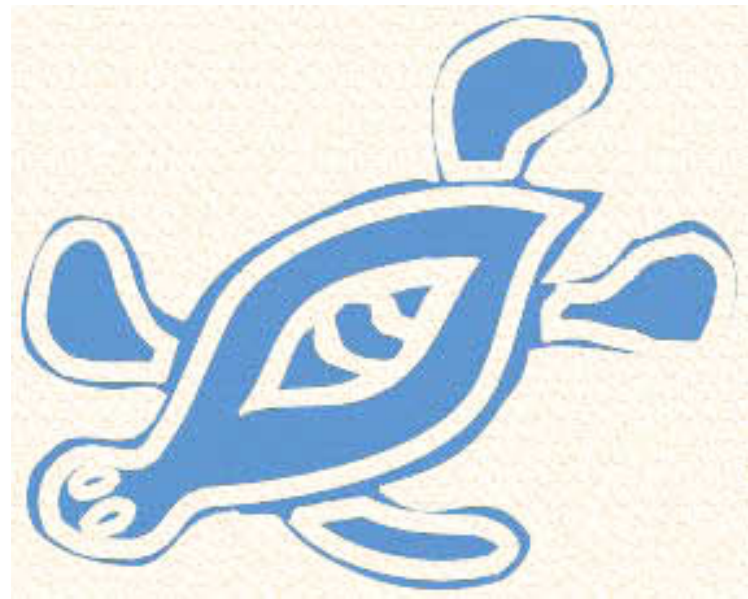
(Hunter & Williams 1997).

For management to work in communities it must be compatible to the needs of each individual community and these needs have to be analysed and understood, must maintain flexibility for the dynamics of Indigenous society and most importantly be initiated, monitored and maintained by the communities themselves—thus empowering Indigenous communities (Hunter & Williams 1997).

Community-based management can prove to be effective. This process provides the means for community monitoring at a grassroots level and invests control in the hands of the traditional people via a management mechanism which is community driven. Not only do traditional owners regulate who, if and where people can hunt, their role has also had a major influence on illegal hunting and the education of both Indigenous and non-indigenous communities (Hunter & Williams 1997).

The Future

Cooperative management between government and Indigenous communities is appearing as a legitimate and effective management mechanism. Effective because it offers control, monitoring and enforcement at a grassroots level. Enforcement by government management agencies can play an effective and productive part as a support to management but not necessarily as a solution. Prosecutions may only have a limited effect on people and serve to slow an individual's activities but it will not address the dugong decline or help turtle research and management. The merits of working with communities may effectively isolate individual offenders through a community monitored approach. The benefits of working with people far outweigh the difficulties associated with the big stick approach, although at times prosecutions may be necessary (Hunter & Williams 1997).



The critical component of education and information will help displace the levels of ignorance and

complacency on all sides and should serve as a two-way flow. The fact remains that for people to come up with a solution they first must know and understand the problem. The outcome of an education and information program will isolate the blatant and illegal hunters and bring forward the most appropriate and effective management practices (Hunter & Williams 1997).

Management Initiatives

The following is a list of initiatives taken by various Indigenous communities in sea turtle and dugong management within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Mossman

- Kuku Yalanji: The traditional owners of the Mossman area established a Marine Resource Committee for the management of traditional hunting permits issued by the Queensland Park and Wildlife Service (QPWS) and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA).
- The primary purpose of the Committee is to regulate the government permits issued for hunting of turtle within their traditional hunting area.
- The group has been engaged in turtle research and monitoring.
- The Kuku Yalanji have strongly stated that no permits for the hunting of dugong be approved off shore their traditional area. This was prior to any recognition of a decline in dugong numbers and before the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Council decision, of June 1997, to not issue permits for traditional hunting in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Hopevale

- The Hopevale community north of Cooktown are in the process of implementing their management program for turtle and dugong with a strong focus on education, community participation and ownership of the process outcome.
- The focus of the development of management plans is to have the Marine Park Authority's and QPWS' legislative and regulative requirements fit into community law. The community's main aim is to work towards cooperative management with QPWS and GBRMPA on the community's terms.

Bowen

- The Girudala people of the Bowen area established a Council of Elders to manage their traditional hunting permit. This program, which has had a level of success in the past, has been stalled in recent times, mainly due to a lack of resources.

Shoalwater Bay

- The Darumbal Noolar Murree Corporation representing the people around the Shoalwater

Bay region, which happens to be an important dugong habitat, have taken the initiative to enter into a formal agreement to cease traditional hunting activities until such time that the next survey is carried out and/or dugong numbers reach sustainable hunting levels. The Corporation are also looking at playing a more effective role in the day-to-day management of the area.

Tip of Cape York

- The Wuthathi people who represent the area around Shelbourne bay in Cape York have indicated that they would like to increase their level of monitoring and control Indigenous hunting activities within their community.

A number of communities are aware of concerns in relation to turtle and dugong management and many are starting to explore options for cooperative management.

Each region has different traditions and cultural constraints, mixed and diverse Indigenous representative groups, issues and environmental concerns. The conservation of the turtle and dugong and the management of impacts, represents the same collective goal of all interest groups. It should be understood Indigenous peoples have an obligation to be involved in management of dugong and turtle for if these animals disappear then this also means that another aspect of culture is gone (Hunter 1999).

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