Australian Conservation:

Relationships to Land and First

Nations Peoples

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Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where it is otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents my own original work.

All versions of the submitted thesis (regardless of submission type) are identical.

This thesis received approval from the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee under Protocol 2022/774.

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Contents

Abstract

Australian conservation has seen a proliferation of non-government actors in recent decades, creating an incredibly diverse sector. This thesis seeks to understand how non-government conservation organisations think about the land they work on and the values they attribute to nature. Conservation has historically been informed by a human-nature dichotomy, and protected areas have been linked to the concept of wilderness. This is inherently problematic because it ideologically and physically removes people, including First Nations people, from the land. This thesis provides a recent update to this account by analysing the ways conservation organisations conceive of their relationships to land. This is also analysed in relation to the increasing prevalence of their partnerships with First Nations land and sea management organisations. How do conservation organisations' ideas about land influence their relationships with First Nations peoples? This thesis uses a combination of literature review, grey literature analysis of a range of conservation organisations' websites, and nine semi-structured interviews with employees of conservation organisations. This research finds that conservation organisations demonstrate a range of approaches to thinking about nature. Their relationships with First Nations peoples are similarly varied, with a range of approaches to working partnerships with First Nations land and sea management organisations. This thesis contributes a much-needed update on the way that contemporary mainstream, or settler-led, conservation is conducted in Australia.

Introduction

Australian conservation is currently undergoing a transformation. Previously the domain of government, Australian conservation has become increasingly influenced by non-government actors since the 1990s (Davison et al. 2023; DCCEEW 2021). These non-government actors include non-government organisations and philanthropic organisations (hereafter referred to collectively as 'conservation organisations'), private land-owning individuals, and First Nations peoples.

An interesting development to come out of the rise of non-government actors in Australian conservation has been the growing influence of First Nations actors. Following the recognition of Native Title, large areas of land have been handed back or recognised as being subject to First Nations rights. In total, 57% of Australia is now subject to some form of land rights for First Nations people (ILSC 2023), although many have found it a "protracted" process to obtaining formal recognition (de Villiers 2022, p. 148; First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria 2022, p. 23), and some have been disappointed by the insecurity of their rights to lands, waters and resources (Altman 2002; Langton & Palmer 2003). This increased formal recognition of land rights has also resulted in Australia becoming home to "the world's largest Indigenous conservation estate" (Davison et al. 2023, p. 1759).

Conservation organisations are another major actor in Australian conservation today. The Australian government describes conservation organisations as playing a "critical" role in the nation's environmental management (DCCEEW

2021). Their contributions to the sector include carrying out conservation work, advocacy work, and research. Across the broad field of conservation in Australia, each of these actors (such as conservation organisations and First Nations peoples) are tied in "highly variable associations" to each other and also to government, as well as external actors like international non-government organisations, universities, and community groups (Davison et al. 2023, p. 1744). These associations include a range of formal and informal partnerships based on funding arrangements, shared interests, and information-sharing. This thesis explores how conservation organisations in Australia conceive of their own practices of conservation, how they articulate these practices, and what particular approaches they take. What values do they hold about lands, waters, and the moral practice of conservation in a time of environmental crisis?

Historically, conservation in Australia has been criticised as being informed by the concept of wilderness (Banivanua Mar 2010; Langton 1996, 1998). This idea of 'wilderness' is inherently problematic because it separates humans from nature – including removing First Nations peoples from the land. Globally, conservation is facing intense criticism from academics and Indigenous leaders who argue that conservation continues to operate under the concept of wilderness, using it to justify dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their lands and waters (see for example: Agrawal et al. n.d.; Dowie 2009; Fache, Le Meur & Rodary 2021; Fletcher, Hamilton, et al. 2021; Kashwan et al. 2021).

Nearly three decades ago, Yiman and Bidjara anthropologist and prominent Australian First Nations leader Marcia Langton (1996, 1998) argued that

Australian conservation was informed by the idea of wilderness. There are conservation organisations operating today whose very names include the term wilderness – for example, the Wilderness Society and Gnaraloo Wilderness Foundation. However, a trend began to emerge from the late 2000s among some Australian conservation organisations towards seeking and forming partnerships with First Nations peoples (Davison et al. 2023, p. 1756). In the months during and after the 2019-2020 'Black Summer' bushfires, there was significant interest in First Nations knowledges, particularly fire management practices, in Australian media and society (Bartel & Branagan 2020; Williamson, Provost & Price 2022, p. 11). What impact has exposure to First Nations land management practices and cultural philosophies had on the way Australian organisations approach conservation? This thesis considers whether the concept of wilderness is present in Australian conservation today by analysing the values and concepts that inform conservation organisations' relationships to nature. Conversely, with the prevalence of partnerships in Australian conservation, it is also important to analyse how this may affect those who choose (or do not choose) to partner with First Nations peoples. Do their perceptions of First Nations land management and conservation impact on their relationships with First Nations peoples? And if so, how?

Positionality: tracing my research journey

I am a settler-Australian, a person living in Australia descended from non-First Nations people (Belgian on one side and English/Irish heritage on the other). I

have been – and still am – on a journey towards understanding what settler-colonialism means in Australia. With extractive colonialism – like the Belgians in the Congo – the colony has historically been viewed as a resource for extracting cheap or free labour, and natural resources, which are sent back to European centres (Tuck & Yang 2012; Wolfe 2006). Settler-colonialism, on the other hand, is where the colonisers "come to stay" (Wolfe 2006, p. 388). It is distinctly different from extractive colonialism because land *itself* is the end goal. Land and resources are sought by settler-colonisers to establish a new European society to replace existing Indigenous societies (or 'First Nations'). Settler-colonial societies are thus "premised on the elimination of the native societies" (Wolfe 1998, p. 3). Settler-colonialism is ongoing in Australia. Settlers never left, and the structures of our settler-colonial society remain powerful, enforced with violence. In his song 'Little Things' with Paul Kelly, First Nations artist Ziggy Ramo (2021) describes the deaths of First Nations peoples in police custody as "the casualties of a war that never ended".

On my journey learning about the nature of settler-colonialism in Australia, I never felt so personally confronted as I did when Marcia Langton (1996)'s lecture transcript 'What do we mean by wilderness? Wilderness and *terra nullius* in Australian art'. In this transcript, Langton (1996) argues that viewing Australian landscapes as the 'wilderness' dispossesses First Nations peoples. Supplanting the concept of 'wilderness' onto a landscape that has long been shaped by its relationships with First Nations peoples, imaginatively removes those relationships from the land. It is re-writing of Australian history: wilderness perpetuates the terra nullius myth (Langton 1996, p. 20; 1998).

Where genocides have taken place or people have been forcibly removed from their ancestral lands, viewing the landscape through the lens of wilderness serves to obscure this history (Langton 1996, p. 20). Langton's work on wilderness was the catalyst for this thesis.

But why was this so *personally* confronting? Well, I have used the term wilderness before – many times, in fact. It was a lens through which I comfortably understood the natural world as being separate from the realm of humans.

Wilderness was a term I had positively associated with experiences of nature. When I was a child, my family and I would walk through the local bush down the road nearly every day. I'd look at the trees around me and invent fantasy novels in my head. When I became an angsty teenager, I'd find solace sitting on a rock in the bush. I'd feel tranquillity around me, looking up at the trees and listening to the birds. My relationship to nature – what I saw as wilderness – is deeply personal because of these experiences.

My relationship to nature is also personal because it became part of my identity. I have long identified as a 'greenie' – someone interested in environmentalism (including conservation). I have been involved in environmental advocacy campaigns over the years. I was also a student of ANU Fenner School's environment courses, surrounded by other greenie students. Most recently, since 2020, I have been doing conservation work as a volunteer member of the ACT's ParkCare groups.

As I pull out weeds at Mt. Majura, I look around and start to see that this beautiful 'natural' place is not a wilderness. Or rather – it was *created* into a wilderness, through the dispossession of the Ngambri and Ngunnawal peoples. When I go back to suburban Sydney, and I walk through the same bush I did nearly every day growing up, I no longer see a beautiful 'wilderness'. I now see the damage of settler-colonialism. The tiny parcel of bushland in the middle of suburbia is overrun with weeds, because Dharug people were prevented from practicing their land management.

However, as I have reflected in the time since first reading Langton's lecture, I have come to question whether this critique still reflects the large and diverse environment movement in Australia today. Langton (1996, p. 23) describes the "arrogance" of conservationists over First Nations peoples and their land management practices – citing a successful petition to ban traditional hunting in national parks. Having been a member of different parts of the environment movement over the years, I struggled to reconcile this compelling critique with the attitudes and beliefs of individuals I have met in the disparate environment movement. Whilst acknowledging that the arrogance of settlers is still pervasive and evident in the prioritisation of settler structures and conservation science, there is simultaneously a strong appetite for what First Nations land management can do within the conservation space.

In this thesis, I explore this personal and scholarly interest. Australian conservation today is a diverse space, with a wide range of approaches to conservation work. More and more conservation organisations are seeking to

engage with First Nations peoples in some way (Davison et al. 2023, p. 1756). Whether forming relationships with First Nations land and sea management organisations, or hiring a First Nations employee or board member, a change is taking place in Australian conservation. The fundamental ideas and players are changing – but to what extent? In the context of settler-colonialism, this must be examined through the lens of power. Does the increased discourse towards First Nations peoples and their land management translate to a real shift in the power dynamics between predominantly settler-led conservation organisations and First Nations peoples?

Structure

In the next section I will describe my methodological approach. The first two chapters will explore how conservation organisations think about the lands they work on. Chapter 1 will examine how employees of conservation organisations relate to nature. They view nature as life and perceive their work through the lens of morality. They are increasingly influenced by First Nations philosophies of Country. However, Australian conservation has predominantly been informed by a human-nature dichotomy. In Chapter 2, I explore how the human-nature dichotomy led to the creation of protected areas as important tools for conservation. Protected areas are tied into the problematic history of wilderness and dispossessing First Nations peoples from their land. However, in the last 2-3 decades, the rise of Indigenous Protected Areas has complicated this story through their relative success as a platform for First Nations-led conservation.

The final two chapters will take the ideas explored in Chapters 1 and 2 and examine how they influence the way conservation organisations conduct their working relationships with First Nations people. Chapter 3 explores whether the relationships between conservation organisations and First Nations peoples today are improving from the past. Power dynamics within organisations are explored, as well as the approaches taken to external relationships with First Nations peoples. Chapter 4 continues the analysis of power dynamics within these relationships by analysing the interests of conservation organisations in using First Nations peoples' knowledges to respond to nature and climate crises. Finally, in the conclusion I summarise the main themes of this thesis and reflect on how Australian conservation organisations can improve conservation practice and their relationships with First Nations peoples, as these objectives are deeply interlinked.

Methodology

Decolonising methodology

Throughout my research, I seek to use a decolonising methodology. Research is described by Māori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. 1) as being "probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary." For centuries, scientific and social science research was inextricably linked to colonising objectives. Anthropology has its origins in studying the 'Other' through measuring bodies of the 'Other' to deduce theories of racial hierarchies and development, for example (Prakash 1992, p. 156). The colonising history of anthropology has been reinforced to me in a personal way recently. I currently work with some First Nations people. Upon revealing to some of my colleagues that I study anthropology, one told me of how anthropologists would visit his community and disappear with the information, the community having gained nothing. Similar experiences are shared across Australia and the world; Indigenous peoples typically find themselves to be an "over-researched" population (Bainbridge et al. 2015, p. 2; Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010, p. 37; Smith 2012, p. 3).

My colleague's comments and learning more about the history of anthropology has led me to reflect on what my motivations are in studying anthropology and what kind of research I might like to do. Ultimately, I still feel a call to work towards social and political justice. Can I do so through the research skills I have gained at university? American anthropologist Laura Nader (2018) called for anthropologists to pay attention to how structures interact with our daily lives,

using the term ‘studying up’. This draws attention to the structures and organisations of the powerful, the colonisers, and/or the affluent, rather than the typical anthropology focus on the powerless, the colonised, and/or the poor, that Nader (2018, p. 12) critiqued. This can unlock a wider understanding of the workings of power. In this work I seek to ‘study up’ Australian conservation, focusing on the ideologies and philosophies that inform settler-led conservation. Reflecting also upon the sentiment in many Indigenous communities globally that “We are the most researched people in the world” (Smith 2012, p. 3), here I choose to study mainstream, settler-led Australian conservation.

Privileging the voices of First Nations peoples is a key component of decolonising methodologies. Decolonising research methods requires thinking critically about the assumptions underlying academic research practice. Smith argues that prioritising the voices and worldviews of the Other, whose voices have historically been marginalised, is key to doing so (Smith 2012). This is especially important in Australia where settler narratives about First Nations peoples “foregrounds deficit and victimhood” (Bamblett 2013, p. 13), with dire consequences: low expectations are linked to early deaths (Bamblett 2015). In my work, I draw on the perspectives of First Nations peoples in Australia and international Indigenous scholars to analyse my findings. Another important aspect of using a decolonising research methodology is to recognise that my positionality will influence how I produce research. My “standpoint” as a researcher “shapes what counts as knowledge and as worth knowing” (Coburn et al. 2013). So, as a settler Australian who has long been interested in conservation, I will conduct my research and interpret findings in a unique way.

However, by privileging the voices of First Nations peoples I hope interpret my research in ways that are more meaningful for them.

My research methods

To conduct this research, I used academic literature from Australia and overseas, analysed the 'grey literature' (predominantly websites) of 11 Australian conservation organisations, and interviewed nine employees of five of those organisations. I also incorporate some auto-ethnography.

For both the grey literature and interviews, I sought to represent a diversity of organisations. I approached all 11 organisations I had analysed grey literature from, although due to considerations of confidentiality, I will not list the organisations here. I analysed and interviewed both advocacy and land management organisations. I also analysed and interviewed organisations with larger supporter bases and/or those who work on larger land masses, as well as those with a smaller land mass and/or smaller supporter base. In interviews, I sought a diversity of occupations and experiences within Australian conservation – including campaigners and program managers.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant. I had a list of guiding questions pre-prepared (see 'Interview questions' in appendices) and approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee. These were accompanied by some notes from my analysis of the grey literature of each organisation. All participants demonstrated passion for their work and a strong

interest in the topic of conservation in Australia more broadly – nearly all interviews went over the half hour of their time I had requested.

Research methods: interviewees and Australian conservation organisations

In total, I had nine participants from five organisations. The participants were almost exclusively female (eight of nine) and all settler Australians. There is a variety of occupations represented. Four participants were campaigners (Darcie, Tom – pseudonym, Emily, Claire – pseudonym). Others included a PR/media person (anonymous), an ecologist (Laura – pseudonym), an advisor (Annette), a stakeholder engagement officer for a specific location (Fran), and the Chair (Deborah). Participants were invited to choose whether to use their real name, a pseudonym or be anonymous, and were also asked to nominate whether the organisation they worked for could be named. This was designed to make participants feel comfortable to speak as freely as possible, whilst being interviewed as an employee and representative of their organisation.

Interestingly, four participants worked part-time for their organisation. Three of these four had positions at other conservation-related institutions: one was employed by a state-based national parks organisation, another worked as a campaigner on a different conservation issue, and one worked in conservation science at a university. The fourth, worked "very part-time" (half a day a week), but she had worked at this conservation organisation for around 15 years,

previously full-time, in a range of positions, so offered a longer-term perspective. Two participants were ex-employees of the same organisation. One now worked for a state-based national parks organisation, and the other had gone on to work for an Aboriginal Land Council and was now working in a different field altogether. Thus, interviewees represented a wide range of experiences in conservation, even outside of their non-government employers.

There were a range of experiences represented amongst interview participants: most appeared to be in their 20s or 30s (one of whom had been in the job for just 6 months), but two participants had worked in conservation for a considerable period of time: one for 15 years, another for over 30 years.

Of the five organisations represented in interviews, only one was responsible for carrying out land management work. Bush Heritage is a national organisation which covers a sizeable area of land owned or worked on. It has a wide range of partnerships across First Nations landowners and organisations, private landowners such as farmers, and universities and other research organisations.

The remaining four advocacy organisations were quite diverse. The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) has a national focus, with their remit including community advocacy and government lobbying, working with the corporate world, and community outreach. The Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) is a national advocacy organisation with a specific focus on marine conservation and marine science. The third advocacy organisation – which will remain unnamed – also has a national mandate and campaigns to support First Nations-led land management. Finally, I interviewed the Chair of the Australian

Koala Foundation (AKF), which is a national organisation, based on the protection of the Koala.

It should be noted that all of these organisations are implicated in those “highly variable associations” (Davison et al. 2023, p. 1744). Some have a greater emphasis on partnerships than others, but ultimately all are intwined with other conservation organisations, First Nations land and sea management organisations, governments, and universities, to name a few.

CHAPTER 1: Conservation values and relationships to nature

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine how employees of conservation organisations conceive of nature. As people who work in conservation, what values do they attribute to nature, and how do they perceive their roles in conserving it? I begin with an examination of the literature on First Nations relationships to Country. The human-nature dichotomy that has informed western conservation is then examined. Themes emerging from interviews with employees of conservation organisations are then discussed, including that many perceive of nature as life, and therefore ascribe moral value to their work in conserving nature. Some employees talk between cultural values, including negotiating discourse between utilitarian approaches and references to First Nations philosophies. Conservation partnerships and the role of the media have created increasing exposure to First Nations philosophies.

Country: a distinctly First Nations philosophy of relationships to land

First Nations peoples have held relationships with the lands that now make up Australia since "time immemorial" (*The Uluru Statement from the Heart* 2017; Rose 1996, p. 36). The concepts underpinning these relationships are distinctly different from western concepts. In international Indigenous literature, 'land' is

used as an all-encompassing term that includes “the entire terrestrial and marine environment” – not only physically or biologically, but also its spiritual and social components (McDonnell & Regenvanu 2022, p. 235). The term ‘nature’ cannot entirely encompass the way Indigenous peoples conceive of ‘land’.

In Australia, the term used to describe land by First Nations peoples is ‘Country’. One particularly illustrative definition of Country is:

> “humans, more-than-humans and all that is tangible and non-tangible and which become together in an active, sentient, mutually caring and multidirectional manner in, with and as place/space.” (Bawaka Country et al. 2016, p. 456)

All parts of Country have relationships to each other, including humans with non-human beings. This definition of Country is provided by the ‘Bawaka Collective’. Comprised of settler academics and Yolŋu women, the Bawaka Collective published a series of articles where Bawaka Country is an author – often the first listed author (Bawaka Country et al. 2013; Bawaka Country et al. 2016; Wright et al. 2012). In doing so, the human authors recognise the contribution of Bawaka Country to their work. They describe Country as the ultimate “author-ity” (Bawaka Country et al. 2016, p. 456). Their works demonstrate that it is impossible to separate Bawaka Country’s contributions from their own, just as for Yolŋu people it is impossible to separate Bawaka Country from themselves.

Country is all-encompassing, and so it is part of oneself too. Palyku lawyer and writer Ambelin Kwaymullina (2005, p. 12) explains that Country includes the

ground beneath your feet, waters, sky, animals, humans, trees, and rocks. The ancestors play a major role in continuing this relationship. The ancestors "continue to live in land, water, sky", and thus spirituality is inscribed into the landscape (Kwaymullina 2005, p. 12). Similarly, Tanganekald, Meintagk and Boandik lawyer and academic Irene Watson (2009, p. 40) explains that this relationship is derived from a long, deep connection beyond the present moment:

> "It is our home because it is who we are; it is home to our songs and laws that lie in the land; it is our relative… Our ancestors are alive in the land."

Relationships to Country extend deep into the past and come with the songs and laws the ancestors have passed down. Country is inseparable from humans. Watson (2009, pp. 37, 41) describes that because everything comes "out of the land… caring for the land is equivalent to caring for one's own body". Looking after Country means caring for everything within Country.

Sovereignty is derived from the unique relationship First Nations peoples have to Country. The Uluru Statement from the Heart describes sovereignty as "*a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land… the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty*" (*The Uluru Statement from the Heart* 2017). It is from the ancestors and spirituality that First Nations peoples have sovereignty. In recognising this sovereignty I choose to use the term 'First Nations' when referring collectively to the Indigenous or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. I also recognise that the term 'First Nations' has only recently entered the Australian lexicon, and that it, like 'Indigenous' or 'Aboriginal' and 'Torres Strait Islander', it is not a universally accepted term.

For example, Gunditjmara man and community leader Damein Bell rejects sovereignty as a "European framework" and explains this is why his community use the term 'Gunditjmara People' rather than 'Gunditjmara Nation' (Rigney, Bell & Vivian 2021, p. 37). Evidently, there is some disagreement over the meaning of sovereignty for First Nations peoples.

However, sovereignty or nationhood are still useful terms that have been employed by some First Nations peoples. Academic and citizen of the Ngarrindjeri nation Daryl Rigney explains that Ngarrindjeri people have sovereignty *as* Country:

> "For Ngarrindjeri people, we are being land through our being body: land and waters, body, spirit are all connected. That is, we don't see ourselves as separate and distinct from Country; we *are* Country: we speak *as* Country." (emphasis in original text, Rigney, Bell & Vivian 2021).

Rigney demonstrates that First Nations peoples have sovereignty because they "*are* Country". In a similar vein, Bell explains that land cannot be owned – instead, his people have "ownership of our rights and obligations to care for Country" (Rigney, Bell & Vivian 2021, p. 34). For First Nations peoples, *ownership* of land is not culturally-congruent. The inseparability of people and Country is the source of sovereignty. Although there is debate over what the term sovereignty may mean to First Nations peoples, it is evident that any meaning ascribed to sovereignty, ownership, or relationships, comes from the inextricability of people from Country.

The human-nature dichotomy: western constructs of nature

Western societies' relationships to nature are completely different from those of First Nations peoples. Yuin author Bruce Pascoe (2014, p. 145) suggests our relationships to land are "[o]ne of the most fundamental differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people". Unlike the above relationality between Country and all it encompasses, western societies have constructed Country instead as 'nature' or land, that is separate to humans, a resource to be used, and something one can purchase and own (Li 2014). This dichotomy represents a significant disjuncture between First Nations and western cultural constructions of nature.

Across much of the western world, our relationships to land are underpinned by a human-nature dichotomy. Since the European Enlightenment era, western philosophy has ideologically separated humans from nature (Fletcher, Hamilton, et al. 2021, p. 2). The Enlightenment era had an almost religious fervent for the "rational human mind… over 'non-rational' nature", and empires used narratives such as bringing rationality and order, to justify conquering 'uncivilised' peoples (Adams & Mulligan 2003, p. 3). This supposed superiority of humans over nature was deeply racialized. Europeans were articulated as superior to nature and to non-European peoples, who were deemed "close to nature" (Prakash 1992, p. 156). The ideological separation of European peoples from nature was valorised over centuries. It is through these ideas that land could be deemed to be 'owned' by some but not others.

Land ownership is a major paradigm informing western relationships to land. John Locke proposed that "improvements" made to land would make that land private property (Li 2014, p. 592). Lockean theories of land ownership came to dominate western philosophy. Locke suggested that those who did not 'improve' their land (assessed through a western lens, usually understood as intensive labour) could have their land legitimately expropriated (taken from them) (Li 2014, p. 592). Locke's ideas were extremely influential, and informed colonial policies. Land that was improved became private property. Conversely, the earliest usage of the term 'wilderness' described unimproved, "wasted land", rather than a beautiful natural landscape (Banivanua Mar 2010, p. 75). Western philosophies and knowledge systems typically regard humans as separate from nature, and resources and land as property to be commodified (Li 2014). Highlighting the difficulty of translating First Nations peoples' relationships to Country into western languages and concepts of ownership, Watson (2009, p. 37) poses the question "how can you sell an aspect of your historical ontological self?" The philosophical underpinnings of land ownership highlights a major difference between First Nations peoples and settler Australians. But how do the Enlightenment and Lockean theories of land impact on Australian conservation today?

Throughout this thesis I use the term 'Australian conservation' to refer to the mainstream, mainly settler-led form of conservation. However, when referring only to the work of First Nations-led land and sea management organisations within Australian conservation, I will use the term 'First Nations land management'. I make this distinguishment based on the following definition:

> ‘Conservation is defined here as the *protection* of wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats, and natural resource management refers to the *sustainable utilisation* of major natural resources such as land, water, forests and fisheries.’ (emphasis added, James et al. 2021, p. 860)

The goals of First Nations land and sea management aligns more closely with ‘sustainable utilisation’ than protection. First Nations peoples do not see themselves as separate to Country, so they do not need to ‘protect’ Country from themselves. Thus, the goals and philosophies underpinning First Nations work in the conservation sector align more closely with *management* than protection. Conservation has faced strong criticism for operating under *protection* of nature, because it seeks to separate humans from nature (Agrawal et al. n.d.; Fairhead, Leach & Scoones 2012; Fletcher, Hamilton, et al. 2021; Kashwan et al. 2021). Protection exists under a human-nature dichotomy, which originates from the western Enlightenment philosophies of relating to land.

Nature as life, morality

How do conservation organisation employees conceive of nature today and what values do they place on it? Interview participants were informed by a variety of concepts. Their relationships to nature were articulated in a very personal, passionate manner, revealing that many felt a strong sense of purpose in their work, often strongly tied to their identity. This was especially evident in their descriptions of nature as *life*. Most participants explained this quite literally through using the word life: “it’s fundamental to life on Earth”, “I just value

life", "nature as life", "our lifeline", "respect for all life", "for our lives", "our lifeblood". Essentialising nature as life itself demonstrates that conservation employees place a very high personal value on nature. Caring or advocating for nature through conservation work is thus conceptualised as serving a higher moral purpose, as they conceive to be caring for life itself.

The importance of caring or advocating for nature was articulated by many as a moral obligation they felt. Some felt that this moral obligation was due to the inherent value of nature. Laura, the ecologist, dismissed the more practical reasons some justify caring for nature. Focusing on nature's biological functions and practical purposes for humans is a "utilitarian approach where it's like we need nature to survive, and you know, food, water, clean air, blah blah blah". This scathing tone from an ecologist – someone with a formal science training – reveals her frustration with conservation scientists valuing nature based on what it can do for humans.

For Laura and other employees interviewed, the interest in conservation came from a sense of moral obligation to care for nature. In contrast to a utilitarian approach, Laura instead articulated that various ecosystems and species have "their own kind of intrinsic value, regardless of what they do for me". To Laura, nature inherently holds value, and should not be reduced to the functions it performs for humans. Others shared similar views about the inherent morality of conserving nature:

> "it's what you need to do, for our lives" (Tom);

> "conservation is really about just doing the right thing, because it's about respect for life." (Claire)

Conservation was articulated by participants through a moral lens of obligation. For them, conservation is 'doing the right thing' by nature.

Some also argued that the moral obligation to care for nature arises from the destruction some humans are causing to nature. For some, environmental damage *is* the basis for their sentiment of moral obligation to work in conservation. Darcie references the responsibility she feels to fix the problems other humans create:

> "Species aren't just disappearing, and ecological communities aren't just finding themselves in trouble."

She links human causes of nature destruction to her own sense of responsibility to look after nature. Claire shared similar thoughts about this sense of responsibility:

> "we're literally trying to do it… to appeal to our moral sensibilities of preventing extinctions right now."

Claire expresses the human-caused existential threat of extinctions as a reason she is committed to working in conservation. She, like others, feel strongly, emotionally, and passionately, about this work, because it is so deeply intwined into their sense of morality.

Claire also argued that conservation's goals have shifted due to increased human destruction of nature.

> "So once upon a time, conservationists would have been protecting these areas for the beauty… but it's shifted to this desperation stage where we need to protect habitat for wildlife that will go extinct."

Claire references the idea that protecting beauty used to justify conservation work. Whereas now, she says, conservation is necessitated by an existential threat to the existence of life. Darcie and Claire both spoke to the human causes of environmental destruction that necessitate their work. It must be emphasised, however, that not all humans are equally responsible for this destruction. The roots of the nature and climate crises lie in colonisation and capitalism, which will be explored in Chapter 4.

Whether as moral compulsion, or as penance for the sins of humanity at large, the employees of conservation organisations I interviewed clearly feel a strong pull to do their work. Articulating their field as protecting life itself, they are passionate and compelled to do their work on behalf of humanity (or at least Australians).

However, positioning nature as the 'victim' of human destruction that conservationists must fight to save, can be a problematic construction. Without detracting from the truly critical nature of the current crises we face, portraying nature as victim to humans assumes nature is vulnerable "relative to human supremacy" (Bartel & Branagan 2020, p. 138). Such articulations of nature are the same framings that allow nature to be viewed as a resource to be used and

exploited. Bartel and Branagan (2020, p. 138) argue that whether viewing "nature as a resource, a victim, a threat, or source of the sublime", these constructions all sit within a "normative human/(non-human) nature binar[y]". By perpetuating the human-nature dichotomy, even in defence of nature, some conservationists may be unwittingly maintaining the very societal construction that permits nature destruction by viewing nature as a resource (Picq 2021, p. 3). Stepping back from the human-nature dichotomy is essential to improving western conservation methods.

This is also deeply linked to the return of First Nations land management. Perpetuating the human-nature dichotomy is identified as a "barrier" to returning First Nations land management (Bartel & Branagan 2020, p. 138; Fletcher, Romano, et al. 2021, p. 6). Fletcher, Romano, et al. (2021, p. 7) suggest that instead of framing particular places as:

> "high-value biodiversity regions that must be 'locked up' for conservation…, we need to frame these landscapes as the neglected homelands of Indigenous Australians if we are to arrest the wave of extinctions that are stripping Australia of its unique biodiversity. We need to see biodiversity loss *not as emblematic of the destructive agency of humans, but rather as the result of the poor landscape management of a particular set of human practices.*" (emphasis added)

Instead of viewing environmental crises as the result of an innately human need to destroy nature, we can locate the causes of these crises by recognising the poor foundation of the relationships settler Australians have to this land. The

crises Australian nature faces are rooted in the disruption of First Nations land management practices. Thus, despite good intentions towards nature, the frameworks that some people in Australian conservation use may perpetuate the imbalanced relationship that western societies have to nature.

Internal debates

Some employees in Australian conservation organisations are exploring alternative options to the human-nature dichotomy. Some individuals draw on both western and First Nations frameworks, speaking between cultural concepts, in a search for a more fulfilling relationship to nature. Two participants did exactly this during their interviews with me. They described the value of nature through utilitarian ideas of what it can provide for humans. They both then also made references to First Nations philosophies as something Australian conservation should learn from and aspire to.

Annette first described nature and its importance through utilitarian values: "humans can't exist without it, right down to air and water and everything else." She explicitly references the biological, practical functions nature provides for humans. Later, when explaining how her organisation frames its work, she referred to First Nations philosophies:

> "It's really around country in almost the Aboriginal context of Country – not just physical land, but everything that goes with Country. So it's trying to not just save particular species, but to get to the point where

> Country is healthy. So species, plants, animals, people are healthy within that."

Annette's response here demonstrates engagement with the philosophies underpinning First Nations' peoples relationships to Country. She talks of Country as including humans and non-human living beings, and refers to a more complex relationship. Darcie also referenced the utilitarian value of nature:

> "we know that nature underpins everything for us, literally everything… all of the ecosystem services that we're provided with… the clean air that we breathe, and the water we drink and the soils we grow our foods in and the pollinators that pollinate our plants."

Here, she describes the biological functions that nature performs to make life possible for humans. Like Annette, she also followed up with a reference First Nations peoples' relationships to Country:

> "I think it's important that we think of ourselves as being a part of nature as well. And obviously nobody understands that better than First Nations people in this country. We are not separate from nature. When nature thrives, so do we. And equally when nature's in trouble, so do we."

Darcie refers to First Nations peoples' relationships to Country almost as supportive evidence – a precedent – for the way she is talking about humans as being part of nature. She recognises that describing the human-nature relationship in this way is a departure from western philosophy. Darcie and Annette's articulations of both the utilitarian values of nature and First Nations

philosophies demonstrates some interest in moving beyond the human-nature dichotomy which has underpinned Australian conservation.

Increasing exposure to First Nations philosophies

Australian conservation is increasingly influenced by First Nations peoples. Conservation organisations work in a diverse sector and usually have some relationship with other conservation actors, including First Nations peoples. Davison et al. (2023, p. 1756) note a trend within Australian conservation (including government and non-government organisations) to pursue partnerships with First Nations peoples. Through these partnerships, conservation organisations are interacting with First Nations peoples to varying degrees.

Employees of conservation organisations have also been exposed to information about First Nations peoples and their relationships to Country through media. Media reports increasingly give voice to First Nations advocacy, including on conservation-related themes. Particularly during and following the 2019-2020 'Black Summer' bushfires, interest in First Nations land management, especially burning practices, "exploded" in the media (Williamson, Provost & Price 2022, p. 11). In our interview, Tom pointed to two pieces of popular culture and widely-read literature, namely, Bruce Pascoe (2014)'s *Dark Emu* and Victor Steffensen (2020)'s *Fire Country*, as works that have changed the way settler Australians think about First Nations peoples' relationships to Country and land management practices. Tom suggested people who work in conservation are likely familiar

with these texts. He argued that "that has been a great thing for whitefellas to read and go, 'yeah, Country was absolutely managed'".

My personal experiences of these two works corresponds to Tom's argument. In 2015, my Belgian grandmother – who did not know of the existence of First Nations peoples in Australia until after arriving in the country – gave me a copy of *Dark Emu* by Bruce Pascoe. In *Dark Emu*, Pascoe (2014) questions the hunter-gatherer label for pre-colonial First Nations societies. Instead, he uses the terms 'agriculture' for murnong harvesting, and *aquaculture* for fish traps (Pascoe 2014, pp. 19, 53). This book was revelatory for me, tearing apart the perceptions I had of First Nations peoples' societies prior to colonisation. Rather than cultural longevity being down to 'luck', as the history I was taught in school would suggest, *Dark Emu* told of the existence of a deep, intricate knowledge far beyond anything I could have ever imagined. Although the book has been subject to some controversy, it has been noted by one observer as having found "a ready public audience" (Dalley 2021, p. 359). That is, the Australian public was more open than in previous times to hearing of different ways to think about First Nations land management – as precisely that, *land management*. Certainly, in my first year of university, just two years after *Dark Emu* was published, several classes had the book on their recommended reading lists. The book opened my perspective – and it did the same for others.

In *Fire Country*, published soon after the 2019-2020 bushfires, Victor Steffensen (2020) illustrates the depth of knowledge that First Nations peoples hold about their lands, and the importance of empowering First Nations peoples to regain

control over land management. I was extremely interested in First Nations fire management as I read the many media articles covering it during the 2019-2020 bushfires. These articles helped me to understand that this was not entirely a climate disaster – but also a failure of land management. I used to view the bush down the road where I grew up, 'Northmead Gully', as a beautiful green wilderness. However, after reading this book, I came to understand that the bush down the road was in fact "choking" with weeds (Steffensen 2020, p. 166). Steffensen (2020, p. 162) describes that the absence of First Nations fire regimes results in Country becoming "sick". Nature suffers precisely because of the barriers First Nations peoples face to gaining control of their land management, especially fire management.

Like me, because of our similar interests in nature, conservation organisations employees are often interested in these alternative stories and techniques of land management in Australia. Tom argued that, thanks to campaigning by First Nations peoples, many settler Australians in conservation are on a journey of learning more about First Nations accounts of land use, history and management practices. He suggested that, as a result, conservation organisations are starting to recognise, "respect" and "support" First Nations land management. However, the continued existence of organisations promoting ideas of 'wilderness', such as the Wilderness Society, suggests this is far from a sector-wide shift.

Conclusion

This chapter has delved into the ways that employees of conservation organisations think about and relate to nature. Unlike First Nations peoples' all-encompassing relationships to Country, western conservation has historically been underpinned by a human-nature dichotomy. Conservation employees articulate nature as life and speak of a moral purpose to their work. Some also made references to First Nations philosophies, revealing that conservation organisations are increasingly influenced by First Nations peoples and their philosophies. In the next chapter I will take these ideas and assess how they influence the way conservation work is carried out.

CHAPTER 2: Protected areas and wilderness

Introduction

Protected areas physically embody the separation of humans from nature. They have been a central tool in conservation for centuries. Protected areas are defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as:

> "A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values." (Dudley 2008, p. 8).

The IUCN categories of protected areas range from "strictly controlled and limited" human interaction, to "sustainable use of natural resources" (Dudley 2008, pp. 13, 22).

In this chapter, I will explore how conservation's origins are inextricably tied to colonisation and wilderness. A history of both global conservation and Australian conservation reveal that the creation of protected areas have historically led to the dispossession of First Nations peoples under the idea of wilderness. I examine the varied responses from interviewees about criticisms of protected areas and wilderness. Indigenous Protected Areas are also explored as tools through which First Nations peoples can return to or facilitate formal recognition of their land management practices. I end with a reflection on the expectation for human interaction with nature in Australia even within protected areas, complicating the narrative of human-nature separation in protected areas.

Global origins of conservation

Conservation did not emerge out of altruistic intentions. Instead, western environmentalism arose as a response to concern for colonial resources. In a history of western environmentalism, Grove (1995, p. 15) finds that the environmental movement was motivated by sustainable supplies of timber and water, which were essential to maintain colonial rule. Environmental protection measures were attractive to authorities as another form of control. Creating protected areas required the resettlement of Indigenous peoples which "became a highly convenient form of social control" – although not without "fierce opposition" from Indigenous peoples (Grove 1995, p. 12). This also highlights western societies' extractive relationship with land, where western environmentalism ultimately focuses on resource production.

The western environmental movement also significantly changed 'wilderness' from wasted land, to nature needing to be separated and protected from humans. Western environmentalists had some discontent for the "drastic ecological consequences" of colonisation and the capitalist system they brought with them (Grove 1995, p. 474). Botanic gardens and tropical islands became symbols of the natural world and were used to demonstrate that nature must be separated from humans in order to protect it (Grove 1995, p. 13; McDonnell 2018). Where previously wilderness was understood as 'wasted land', colonial discourse shifted to allocating or creating 'wild places' to protect from the touch of humans. Informed by Christian ideas of morality, these designated 'natural'

places “offered the possibility of redemption” (Grove 1995, p. 13). Separating humans from nature to protect or care for nature – creating wilderness – became the dominant idea underpinning the environmental movement, underpinned by a sense of morality. This bears some parallels to conservation employees today who similarly perceive of nature as needing some protection from the destruction of humans, underpinned too by a sense of morality.

Global origins of wilderness

In settler-colonial contexts, both ideological and physical removal of Indigenous peoples was required to re-make Indigenous spaces into settler-colonial spaces. To do so, settlers superimposed western ways of organising spaces, which were enforced through violence. Mapping tools, such as the colonial geography survey, would allow Indigenous lands be “conceptually remapped as vacant land” to allow settlers to take possession (Blomley 2003, p. 129). Fences would be built around land to validate ownership (Blomley 2003, p. 122). This claim to ownership was enforced through the colonial legal and judicial system, meaning that “violences, either implied or actual, were undeniably present” (Blomley 2003, p. 129). For example, at Waterloo Creek in 1837, there was a massacre of Kamilaroi people after violent conflict between them and settlers, including police, in response to continued spearing of sheep and cattle on settler farms on Kamilaroi land, as well as the spearing of a policeman (Harris 2003, p. 86). The re-creation of First Nations spaces into settler spaces had to be violently enforced. By re-creating space, settlers conceived of themselves as laying claim

to the land – they were "enacting possession" (Banivanua Mar & Edmonds 2010, p. 5; Blomley 2003; McDonnell 2018). Re-making Indigenous spaces into settler spaces legitimated dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land.

The 'natural places' Europeans sought to protect were created by removing human contact with those places. Natural wilderness had to be created "violently, legislatively and spatially… before it could be preserved" (Banivanua Mar & Edmonds 2010, p. 9). Thus, the creation of wilderness spaces in Australia is directly linked to frontier violence (Langton 1996, p. 13). Settler-colonisers "carved" up land by protecting some areas as wilderness or nature – in doing so, they *constructed* a natural landscape, which had to be emptied of people (Banivanua Mar & Edmonds 2010, p. 2; Langton 1996, p. 20). Like with the Kamilaroi and settler farms, most First Nations peoples would not be likely to simply accept their expulsion from Country. So, the establishment of protected nature areas (places of 'wilderness') is inextricably linked to frontier violence.

Wilderness also had to be created and maintained in the minds of settler populations. Langton (1996)'s lecture describes the use of art by settler Australians to produce and reproduce wilderness landscapes, which emptied the lands of First Nations peoples in the minds of settlers. Similarly, the first superintendent of Yellowstone National Park in the US, the world's first national park, spread a myth that Indigenous peoples had "superstitious fear of [Yellowstone's] geothermal features", and so had avoided the area (Kantor 2007, p. 47). Such stories "de-peopled" the land in the minds of settlers, and obscured the violent removal of Indigenous peoples for the creation of the park (Kantor

2007, p. 47). Through such narratives, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples in the creation of wilderness was legitimated. Banivanua Mar (2010, p. 74) suggests that wilderness areas "were essentially empty spaces in the colonial imaginary". Emptied through violence, wilderness is evidently a construction maintained and adapted through settler narratives, that cannot be separated from their colonising intent.

The links between colonisation and conservation are stark when considering that Indigenous peoples were initially envisioned to live in wilderness places like national parks. Isaac Kantor (2007)'s account of the creation of Yellowstone National Park reveals that Yellowstone was initially envisioned as "a last refuge to the Indian", to protect them from the ever-encroaching expansion of settler society (Kantor 2007, p. 45). However, settlers soon adapted the narrative of wilderness to remove Indigenous peoples too. From the mid-19th century, relationships with Indigenous peoples grew increasingly hostile and violent with the westward expansion of settlers, leading the preservation movement to shift its discourse to a more extreme human-nature dichotomy that left no room for Indigenous peoples to live in land demarcated 'nature' (Kantor 2007, p. 48). This was a significant change, as Kantor recounts:

> "In less than a century, conservation advocates had gone from viewing the Indian peoples inhabiting lands they wished to save as a critical, even admirable component to viewing Indian inhabitants as a blight on the landscape of true wilderness." (Kantor 2007, p. 48).

From the time calls for creating a national park began, to the time Yellowstone National Park was established, the very idea underpinning the park (wilderness) was dramatically changed. Enforcing this wilderness narrative with a human-nature dichotomy meant the land would need to be emptied of Indigenous peoples – physically and ideologically.

Australian conservation and wilderness

Australia was home to the world's second ever national park, established just five years after Yellowstone, and so the above ideas strongly influenced Australia's conservation. Early forms of Australian conservation were mainly enacted through national parks to the complete exclusion of First Nations peoples and their land management practices. The Royal National Park was established in Sydney on Dharawal land in 1879, envisioned as a recreation area (Howard 1997, p. 388). Rivers were dammed for boating, and introduced/exotic grasses and trees were planted as the first management tasks of the Royal National Park (National Museum of Australia 2020). Such actions appear totally contradictory to principles of conservation today. In my own volunteer work with ParkCare ACT, nearly all my work has been *removing* introduced/exotic grasses.

The introduction of exotic plants was a common colonial tactic to 'improve' property and lay claim to it, by remaking Indigenous landscapes in the image of settler European homelands. 'Ecological imperialism', a term coined by Alfred Crosby (2004), describes the biological and ecological factors in Europe's

success in colonisation. Settler-colonies are called ‘neo-Europes’, as European flora, fauna, and peoples invade, occupy and change landscapes in ways that make it difficult for Indigenous flora, fauna, and peoples, to survive (Crosby 2004). The early management practices of Australian national parks sought to recreate Dharawal land into a European park. Changing Indigenous landscapes in the image of European landscapes is an effort to legitimate settlement, attempting to supplant a landscape settlers have an existing relationship with (Whyte 2018, p. 135). Similar techniques are used in Palestine, where the Jewish National Fund, and later the Israeli government, have been planting pine trees for over a century to Europeanise the landscape, whilst destroying culturally significant olive trees that symbolise the Palestinian resistance (Braverman 2009, pp. 237, 239). Nature can clearly be used as a powerful tool by settler-colonisers. Ecological imperialism and seeking to ‘improve’ the landscape informed the deliberate alteration of ‘natural’ places in the first version of protected areas in Australia.

Later approaches to national parks would instead focus on creating a native wilderness. Langton argues that conservation uses wilderness as a perpetuation of terra nullius (Langton 1996, p. 20; 1998). The focus on native wilderness continued to explicitly exclude First Nations peoples (Lawrence 1997). In a history of the creation of national parks in Queensland, Banivanua Mar (2010) demonstrates settler-colonial society’s adaptive approach to dispossession. Rugged areas of the Bunya Mountains stumped settler authorities zoning the land – if they could not put the land to productive use, what was their claim over First Nations? Instead, the rugged areas would be preserved – or rather,

produced, created, articulated – as 'wilderness' through the creation of national parks. To maintain control, these rugged areas would become "a form of development that produced wilderness as progress" – precisely because "they emptied Indigenous social spaces" (Banivanua Mar 2010, p. 76). This was successful in the minds of settlers because when First Nations peoples began to be unofficially recognised as "previous owners or inhabitants" in the mid-20th century, their relationships to land were interpreted as "exclusively spiritual": "a less than cultivated, less than human, ownership" (Banivanua Mar 2010, p. 88). Creating areas of wilderness was an extension of colonising land property relations. Conservation in Australia, especially in the form of protected areas like national parks, is inextricably linked to settler-colonialism. In a modern settler-colonial country like Australia, what does this mean for conservation today?

Confronting the past

There is some awareness in Australian conservation today of the problematic nature of wilderness. Some are coming to terms with conservation's colonial origins. In our interview, Darcie reflected on the history of the ACF:

> "sometimes it's really fraught. And I even think about the way that the Australian Conservation Foundation was founded. Way back in I think it was the 60s... Established by Prince Philip, and a group of similarly wealthy, white, colonially-minded males who wanted to establish in Australia a specific version of what at the time, you know, we already had WWF. And I suspect that while there were many great intentions,

> sometimes conservation can also mean protectionism and wanting to keep the things that you and your kind and your group, view as being important, and all of the good and the bad that comes with that."

Here, Darcie articulates her uneasy relationship to the "colonially-minded" origins of the ACF. The ACF was established following a suggestion from Prince Philip in the 1960s, and he was also the President of the ACF from 1971-1976 (ACF 2021). Darcie acknowledges the structural elements of power – wealth, race, colonisation – in having a figurehead of the British empire as a key player in the early years of the national conservation organisation. She makes a direct link from the power held by Prince Philip to the prioritisation of western worldviews – "wanting to keep the things that you and your kind and your group view as being important". Darcie links their viewpoints directly to the prioritisation of western forms of conservation – 'protectionism', or protected areas. How common are such acknowledgements of Australian conservation's colonial origins?

We can explore this through examining conservation organisation employee's discussions of wilderness. When asked whether he thinks Australian conservation operates on wilderness ideas today, Tom said "I would say not anymore". He recognises Australian conservation in the past as using the idea of wilderness, but suggests it is no longer the dominant ideology – though he did also cite the continued existence of organisations like Wilderness Australia. Emily suggested that conservation in Australia has begun moving away from a wilderness paradigm, partly in response to successful campaigns about First

Nations land management. As an example, she cited a “whole campaign around challenging the idea of what the wilderness is” in Queensland, funded by philanthropic organisation ‘Pew’. Ideas of wilderness are being confronted to some degree by some conservation organisations. Darcie also shared her thoughts about the the problematic use of the term wilderness in Australian conservation.

> “I struggle as well with this word ‘wilderness’, because a wilderness implies that it's something out there that's separate from people, and there are no people in it. And Australia has had people in it for a very very very long time, and not just in it, but a part of it. And I think it's impossible to separate the people from the landscapes, from the animals, and the ecosystems and everything else.”

Similar to Langton (1996)’s critique, Darcie here argues that wilderness ideas are counter to the fact of First Nations peoples’ long-held relationships with Country. This is an example of how some employees are confronting terms like wilderness with what they know about First Nations peoples’ relationships with Country.

Some variation on this statement about the longevity of First Nations peoples’ relationships with the land was stated by every participant interviewed. All interviewed demonstrated some degree of awareness of First Nations peoples’ important roles in caring for Country. Tom suggested in fact that “most” conservation organisations are beginning to recognise that wilderness is not an effective ideological foundation for conservation in Australia. Far from a

uniform perpetuation of wilderness as terra nullius, some sections of Australian conservation are coming to expect the involvement of First Nations peoples in both the work of conservation and its outcomes.

Scale of conservation

One particularly interesting argument put forth by Tom was that the scale of a conservation organisation can determine what progress they have made to dismantling ideas of wilderness in their conservation philosophies. Tom suggested larger organisations – "the big, good ones" – are confronting the idea of wilderness. As examples, he named ACF, Pew, The Nature Conservancy, and WWF. He argued that in response to continued campaigning by First Nations peoples for their place in managing Country, these organisations "have been thinking complexly and working with people on the ground". Larger organisations, especially those that are connected to their international global conservation counterparts (such as The Nature Conservancy and WWF) usually have stronger organisational processes and are more clued in to policy debates and trends within conservation (Milne 2022, p. 18).

For example, the ACF demonstrates an active engagement in conversations about wilderness and protected areas. In an article discussing the agreement to a '30x30' goal (30% of lands and waters protected by 2030) at COP15, the ACF explicitly acknowledges the contentious nature of protected areas.

> "[30x30] was also contentious because of the history of protected area conservation trampling First Nations rights and disregarding the important land management approaches Indigenous Peoples have practised for millennia that have delivered good outcomes for people and biodiversity. In the end, the target included recognition and respect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including over their traditional territories." (Pelle 2023)

This article acknowledges the history of wilderness ideas informing protected areas and the effects this had for Indigenous peoples globally. This demonstrates that ACF, as an example of a 'big good one', is engaging with the wider discussion in conservation regarding the place of protected areas and their history of "trampling First Nations rights". Comparatively, Tom argued, smaller organisations were usually created in response to specific issues and so wouldn't see the need, or have the capacity, to engage with wider debates in conservation in the same way.

Tom gave the example of localised anti-logging campaigns some decades ago. Putting himself in their shoes, he said:

> "you can see that if you're combating an extractive industry... basically the opposite story you have to sell is wilderness. And so in that combat, you just had the extreme philosophies on both sides."

Here, Tom argues that simplistic campaign narratives perpetuated wilderness. Having worked for an organisation that campaigns on First Nations land management, he engaged in critiques of wilderness in conservation. However,

he suggested that smaller organisations may be less likely to see the need to engage in wider debates in conservation. “Why would they? … they’re just trying to stop this important forest from being turned into wood pulp.” With a more specific focus either on their particular issue or location, smaller organisations may have less internal capacity to engage with wider conversations in conservation.

Gnaraloo Wilderness Foundation

The Gnaraloo Wilderness Foundation fits this category of a smaller organisation that does not problematise wilderness. The Gnaraloo Wilderness Foundation (GWF n.d.-b) is a small “not-for-profit charity that stands for the natural environment at Gnaraloo”, located on the Ningaloo Coast, WA. GWF works in the conservation of native flora and fauna, with a particular focus on sea turtles. GWF has a campaign called ‘Keep Gnaraloo Wild’, which states: “We deeply believe that Gnaraloo should stay as it is, wild and undeveloped, to protect its biodiversity and wilderness experience.” (GWF n.d.-b). GWF (GWF n.d.-c) describes Gnaraloo as “a unique remaining remnant of wilderness”. Wilderness is a major idea that seeps through all of GWF’s work – it is in their name and is commonly referenced across their website to describe their work and the land and water they work on. Evidently, there has been no engagement with the criticisms of wilderness by GWF.

The importance of protecting this ‘wilderness’ is articulated through its values to tourism:

> **“**Everyone who has been to Gnaraloo will tell you that visiting and exploring the land, ocean and beaches here is a true adventure in a wilderness area.**”** (GWF n.d.-c)

These descriptions draw on similar techniques to tourism campaigns in the Pacific where Indigenous bodies are removed from promotional material, creating “vision of paradisiacal, empty landscapes that function as playgrounds for white people” (McDonnell 2018, p. 413). Photos on the website are mostly uninhabited landscapes, creating an illusion of wilderness (see Images 1 and 2 for example). There are occasionally photos (see Image 3 for example) of white conservation workers, but the invisibility of First Nations peoples from the landscape creates a “terra nullius aesthetic” (McDonnell 2018, p. 430).

Yet, even alongside the explicit employment of wilderness terminology and ideas, GWF has a section on its website titled ‘Aboriginal heritage’ (GWF n.d.-a). This page serves as the sole reference to the Traditional Owners of Gnaraloo, the Baiyungu people. It is an incredibly short page, featuring an unlabelled Aboriginal-style artwork of a turtle, four sentences, and three photos. One unlabelled/uncaptioned photo depicts First Nations people standing on the sand waving up at a drone. A second unlabelled/uncaptioned photo shows a white woman in a GWF shirt standing with a group of First Nations children around a laptop. The third photo is Image 3 again, here labelled as featuring a turtle named for the Traditional Custodians, Baiyungu. The first three sentences briefly reference federal and state legislation and heritage information. The fourth and final sentence states:

> "The Baiyungu people are recognized by the State Government as the traditional owners of the Gnaraloo coastline." (GWF n.d.-a)

The wording chosen here is quite unusual. It is extremely common for other conservation organisations' websites to have a statement at the bottom of their website recognising First Nations peoples – as is fairly common corporate practice in Australia. Instead, GWF states that the *government* recognises Baiyungu peoples, with no reference to GWF's position on the matter. It is also poignant that their only reference to the Baiyungu people is through this page on 'heritage', implying that the place of the Baiyungu people in the management of their Country rests in the past.

GWF's campaign material on their website demonstrates a complete lack of engagement with the critiques of wilderness. Perhaps they conceive of their work in isolation – "why would they" engage in the debates, as Tom suggested, if from their perspective they're just trying to look after sea turtle populations? Whilst GWF does not engage with the critiques of wilderness, others in Australian conservation do.

Indigenous Protected Areas

The creation of Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) demonstrates the influence First Nations peoples can have over the ideas underpinning Australian conservation. IPAs have been described as globally unique for their success as a community-oriented protected area program (Langton, Palmer & Rhea 2014).

The creation of IPAs arose out of the recognition of some land rights for First Nations peoples and the commencement of returning land following the Native Title judgement (Davison et al. 2023, p. 1751). The government held consultations with First Nations people about how they might pursue conservation on their newly formally-recognised lands. In these consultations, First Nations people advocated for their rights and responsibilities to Country and to sustainably use its resources. This in fact led to the re-defining and re-categorising of protected areas in Australia (Davison et al. 2023, p. 1752). First Nations philosophies and relationships to Country are gaining influence in the discourse of Australian conservation, as evidenced by the established of IPAs and their associated redefining of what a protected area means in Australia.

IPAs are probably the most successful form of conservation in Australia for First Nations peoples. Langton, Palmer and Rhea (2014, p. 85) found that the international literature on community-oriented conservation described continual disappointments, despite their potential. Comparatively, this is an area where Australia has "taken a lead role" in conservation (Langton, Palmer & Rhea 2014, p. 90). IPAs have demonstrated great successes in Australia, especially where First Nations have secure access to their land in the form of "exclusive title" (Langton, Palmer & Rhea 2014, p. 102). The authors note that the greatest success in Australia lies with "*community-controlled* protected area initiatives" (Langton, Palmer & Rhea 2014, p. 85, emphasis in original text). Emily echoed their findings, sharing her thoughts from her experience working with an IPA ranger group:

> "I just feel like there is this more holistic and really widespread connection that happens and way of conserving country that happens when it is Indigenous rangers doing it, because that word spreads, and kids want to be Rangers when they grow up. And it drives more people to be going out bush and doing all these sorts of things… brings in so much community and buy-in from so many people in their area. Plus, people's connection to Country for thousands of years."

IPAs can provide a framework within Australian conservation for First Nations peoples to carry out their land management practices, on their own terms. They are also incredibly successful at achieving conservation goals. Global accounts from Indigenous peoples as well as repeated scientific studies have demonstrated that places with Indigenous land management practices have higher biodiversity than land that is not under Indigenous management (Fletcher, Romano, et al. 2021, p. 67; Langton 1998, pp. 28-29; Zanjani et al. 2023). More recently, a landmark study from Schuster et al. (2019, p. 1) found that land under Indigenous management has the same or "slightly more" biodiversity than conservation protected areas. IPAs are incredibly successful from a conservation perspective, as well as for upholding First Nations peoples' relationships to Country.

However, IPAs are not a simple success story. Unreliable and insufficient funding has been a major issue. Funding is usually only offered in the short-term (Langton, Palmer & Rhea 2014, p. 92). In addition, many First Nations-led land management organisations emerged from welfare support. For some time, this

meant the Australian government was paying next-to-nothing for some of the most effective land management they had ever seen (Kerins & Altman 2013; Langton 1998). Tom also highlighted the issue of the disparity in funding received by governments to manage National Parks, compared to First Nations land management. From a rough calculation he did in 2018, he said there was "about a factor of 10 different in funding in IPAs and National Parks". State governments had greater funds available to them than the federal government spent on IPAs. Although I could not find the data to verify these figures, this rang true of other critiques of the underfunding of IPAs (see for example: Kerins 2013, p. 41). There are innate inequities here when First Nations peoples are providing conservation services – sometimes even better than government or conservation organisations – and are inadequately financially compensated for their work. Despite this, the success of IPAs in Australia demonstrates that to some degree, protected areas can be adapted to First Nations land management in a meaningful way.

Expectation of human intervention

Even beyond IPAs, Australian conservation departs from global conservation in that even the most strictly protected areas are still expected to have some human intervention. The significant problem of weeds and the ways in which Country has evolved alongside First Nations land management means that human interaction and intervention is *necessary* to properly care for nature in Australia. In Europe, there is a movement seeking to 'rewild' landscapes. Advocates of

rewilding assume that “nature is fully capable of taking care of itself.” (Rewilding Europe n.d.) Without touching on the verity of this statement in the European context, this principle simply does not apply in the context of Australia. Country needs First Nations land management, having evolved alongside their active management and usage of the land (Fletcher, Hall & Alexandra 2021). The long history of First Nations peoples shaping Country means that nature in Australia *needs* humans. It cannot be separated from humans.

However, since the beginning of colonisation, a new influence on the landscape further necessitates the intervention of humans. As a result of ecological imperialism, non-native invasive species of flora and fauna have spread and some have become major weeds (Crosby 2004). Australian conservation organisations generally demonstrate a good understanding of this. In fact, sometimes it is a large component of their work. In my volunteer shifts at ACT ParkCare, doing work other than weeding has been rare. Chatting with my fellow volunteers, the weeding seems like a never-ending task. A new season brings new conditions, whether rain or drought, and another weed comes back with a vengeance.

Because of the major problem of weeds, a protected area is rarely, if ever, expected to be left to fend for itself. Tom suggested that, regardless of what level of protection is implemented and who it is governed by, people must still manage fire, weeds, and pests: “You’ve got to do it.” It is essential for humans to interact

with nature in order to care for it properly. Tom suggested that regardless of the type of protected area,

> "there has to be work done to increase the biodiversity values, just leaving it doesn't do that. You need to manage the fire regimes of the area… you have to manage the weeds in the area, you have to get rid of… or lower the number of feral animals so natives can still grow. If you're doing those three things in Australia, doesn't really matter what specific type of tenure, you're gonna be increasing the biodiversity values of that area."

Although these tenures may allow different forms of interactions with humans – whether people can live there such as First Nations peoples living in IPAs, or whether tourism is allowed or not, there is rarely an expectation in Australia that nature will be left to fend for itself, completely isolated from humans. In Australia, nature is not 'fully capable of taking care of itself'. When I asked Fran whether she thought conservation organisations believe they shouldn't interact with the environment, she said:

> "I think kind of the opposite, we think we need to take charge of this situation and try and do what we can to stop these impacts."

Conservation organisations in Australia see themselves as playing a vital role in protecting nature – not by shutting First Nations peoples or other people out, but by *managing* it.

Emily shared a story which highlights the necessity of humans to manage nature in Australia. When she worked for an Aboriginal Land Council in remote WA, the people she was working for were handed back a part of their land that had been a nature reserve for a couple of decades. This nature reserve was extremely remote and the roads had not been maintained, so "no one actually went up there". Emily said the lack of human interaction with the nature reserve over the two or so decades had resulted in it becoming a "wilderness". The terminology of wilderness has similarly been used by First Nations man Daly Pulkara in *Nourishing Terrains*, a book from settler anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose on wilderness in Australia. Pulkara describes "the wild" not as a beautiful landscape, but degraded, uncared-for Country (as quoted in Rose 1996, p. 19). Wild Country creates "loneliness" for a Country deprived of its relationships with First Nations peoples (Rose 1996, p. 21). "Quiet [C]ountry", on the other hand describes places where Country has continued to be cared for, for generations under First Nations land management (as quoted in Rose 1996, p. 19).

When the land was handed back to, the community returned to the nature reserve:

> "Following these Dreaming tracks… and burning on the way and the country was just needing to be burned so badly… but a few months later, a huge wildfire went through. It was really hot, pretty bad fire. And so yeah, that was the wilderness, right? It was untouched, it was some of the most pristine desert country with no buffel grass. Maybe there was some

> cats - but it was where bilbies existed and all this sort of stuff. But it was also not being able to be looked after. Because no one could get out there. It'd been a fair while, it'd been 20 years that nature reserve had been there… So that was the wilderness versus all this Country that was looked after, and that didn't have those big wildfires."

Traditional Owners had not had access to the land, and it appears that whoever was responsible for managing the nature reserve – either because of lack of resources and lack of accessibility, or because they subscribed to the idea of 'wilderness' – they had left nature to take care of itself. This wilderness was a destruction of Country. As an unnamed First Nations person describes in Rose (1996)'s *Nourishing Terrains*, "Big fires come when that [C]ountry is sick from nobody looking after with proper burning." It is precisely the lack of First Nations land management, including fire management, that led to this destructive wildfire. This demonstrates that nature in Australia *needs people* – and specifically First Nations peoples.

Conclusion

Australian conservation has historically been informed by the idea of wilderness, a narrative which enabled the dispossession of First Nations peoples from their land. However, recently Australian conservation is beginning to confront the idea of wilderness as a problematic construct linked to colonisation. This confrontation is not uniform across the sector, and there is some indication that organisations of a larger scale may be more likely to reject the concept of

wilderness in Australian conservation. The successes of Indigenous Protected Areas in Australia demonstrates that protected areas can still be used as a tool in conservation, without dispossessing First Nations peoples. In fact, due to the way Country has evolved with First Nations peoples, as well as the enduring problem of introduced weeds, there is now an *expectation* across much of the Australian conservation sector that human interaction with nature is required even in highly protected areas. Which humans – whether this includes First Nations peoples – and under what conditions, is yet another question. The next chapter will explore whether Australian conservation devolves some of its institutional power to First Nations peoples through their partnerships.

CHAPTER 3: Improving relationships, structural changes?

Introduction

My interviews revealed a widely held perception among participants that Australian conservation has better relationships with First Nations peoples today than in the past. In this chapter I explore this belief and analyse whether good intentions have led to better practice. In particular, this is analyse through the structural elements of power in Australian conservation organisations. Australian conservation is a wide spectrum. I discuss examples of Australian conservation organisations recognising First Nations sovereignty in formal statements and by handing back land to First Nations ownership. On the other end of the spectrum, I analyse a campaign against First Nations rights to hunting which reveals some parallels to the global conservation context of 'economic dispossession'.

Perception of improvements, contending with conservation's legacy

Many employees of conservation organisations that I interviewed shared the belief that Australian conservation has been improving its relationships with First Nations peoples, compared to those of the past. Two interviewees suggested it would be bizarre to hear employees of Australian conservation organisations propose to dispossess First Nations peoples in conservation today:

> "I don't think you'll find anyone who I know in conservation, who wants to kick Indigenous people off the land. I don't know anyone! Everyone

> wants to help advance Indigenous interests, allow them to manage the land and the way that they want to, to learn from their knowledge." (Claire)
>
> "I think there's few people who really say we just need to lock up land and remove all people and that's that. My opinion is that mostly comes from sort of environmental advocates and maybe not people really working in conservation." (Laura)

Both Laura and Claire confronted the critiques of conservation today by suggesting dispossessing First Nations peoples lies almost exclusively in conservation's past, not present. But if this is the case, at what point exactly did Australian conservation tick over from wilderness and dispossession to improving its relationships with First Nations peoples? Throughout this research and in particular writing this thesis, it has been a personal struggle to articulate conservation's colonising *past* without appearing to draw a nice, neat line in between now and then. It is common for settler Australians like myself to distinguish between a colonial past and view the present as inherently less colonising. A study of the 'national conversation' on First Nations-related issues found that when discussing the impacts of colonisation, First Nations people would situate these in the present, whilst settler Australians would relegate them to the past:

> "First Nations people talk about children and child removals, heritage, culture, invasion and colonisation as present realities; non-Indigenous

> people tend to frame these issues in terms of the past." (Parkinson, Franco-Guillén & de Laile 2022, p. 35)

Settler-colonialism is, after all, "a structure not an event" (Wolfe 1998, p. 2). Settler-colonialism in Australia is ongoing in the structures of our society. Although, no matter where settlers may attempt to draw a line between Australian conservation as contributing to colonisation, and a time of improving relationships with First Nations peoples, there remains a legacy of conservation's more explicitly colonising past to contend with.

Claire described the "legacy" of conservation's dispossession of First Nations peoples as the second "biggest challenge that NGOs have", second only to dealing with industry. At the time of our interview, she had recently attended an IPAs forum in which she heard from First Nations people firsthand about their perspectives on protected areas and conservation. Of this experience, she said it:

> "was really quite tough, because… there are a lot of Indigenous groups that don't want fully Protected Areas or that have, because of the history, there is mistrust towards National Parks. So it's the place of hurt. And it is this legacy where they haven't been involved in negotiations."

She demonstrates empathy towards First Nations peoples of the "hurt" that conservation has caused them in the past. As an example, Claire spoke of the way this hurt causes tensions in the movement to create the Great Koala National Park, which she has been peripherally involved in. The Great Koala National Park (n.d.) is a campaign to use public forests to allow greater protection of koala habitats. Claire said:

> "the Indigenous community is divided on the concept. And I get it… But because of that hostility around where the concept of parks has come from… it makes it challenging for conservationists to sit down with those individuals who might feel a little bit of hurt or there might be a bit of mistrust. And so it makes it difficult for them to communicate that they do want to work with – it's just hard. …It's hard in small communities to bridge these gaps just because of the hurt that has evolved. And I don't think anyone has like a simple answer to this. And I think it's going to take a long time to get through some of these issues."

Claire's mix of frustration, empathy, and general hesitations, demonstrate the personal experience of a settler conservationist being confronted with the legacy of colonisation. Claire presents this as a *legacy* of conservation's past (rather than the way it operates in the present) creating a major barrier to forming positive relationships with First Nations peoples going forward.

Partnerships between First Nations peoples and conservation organisations have become more frequent in recent years. Although far from "widespread", Davison et al. (2023, p. 1756) identify a noticeable trend in Australian conservation seeking partnerships with First Nations land and sea management organisations. Annette similarly said that in the 15 years working for her organisation, she has seen a noticeable increase in conservation organisations shifting their approaches so that "Aboriginal ownership's front and centre to it all". But are these partnerships effective? Laura had some limited experience working with First Nations people. She said this had been a quite a positive experience:

> "I think mostly, in my experiences, the few times I've been in meetings with the TOs [Traditional Owners] or even on country with the TOs, it's been fairly positive, and they're just really happy to see the land being protected, in perpetuity and not ever opened up… So it's been mostly very, very positive." (Laura, Bush Heritage)

In her experience, the First Nations people she worked with shared the goals of Bush Heritage in conserving and protecting the land, which made the relationship a positive one. But is this a common experience? And what can conservation organisations do to improve their relationships with First Nations peoples?

Do good intentions create structural change?

Political ecology is an academic field which can illuminate the politics and power entangled in human relationships with nature. Adams and Hutton (2007, p. 149) describe political ecology as recognising "that social and environmental conditions are deeply and inextricably linked." Our ideas about nature "are formed, shared and applied in ways that are inherently political" (Adams & Hutton 2007, p. 149). Wilderness is an "inherently political" idea about nature, which was "formed, shared and applied" by settler-colonial society in Australia to justify the dispossession of First Nations peoples from their land. Thus, the social and environmental are linked. Adams and Hutton (2007, p. 147) argue that protected areas in particular are "inherently political". In the context of Australian conservation today, political ecology can be a useful lens through

which to analyse the structural elements of power in Australian conservation. Where does power lie in Australian conservation? Who holds the power to make decisions?

Some Australian conservation organisations are hiring First Nations people within their organisations. Some even have roles specifically designed to advance their progress towards improving relationships with First Nations peoples. For example, in our interview, Darcie said the ACF was wanting to "prioritise" and "always get better at" their relationships with First Nations peoples. She suggested the recent hire of "the amazing Josie Alec" was a step towards this. Alec is a Kuruma Marthudunera woman and the 'First Nations' Lead' at ACF. In an article on ACF's website, Alec (2023) explains her role is to "progress the deep listening, understanding, acceptance and respected to help secure a safe future for all of us". Having a First Nations person in a role to improve their advocacy relations with First Nations people is surely a great start, but it is also a big task for one person to shoulder within an organisation. With the knowledge that Australian conservation's legacy causes deep hurt within First Nations communities, how can just one person address this?

Bush Heritage spruiks its partnerships with First Nations peoples as a core component of their work. But at the level of leadership, decision-making and governance, there is little representation of First Nations people. Bush Heritage has an 'Aboriginal Partnerships Team' of three First Nations women (Thorburn 2019). However, only one out of eight members of the board is First Nations, and there are no First Nations people on their Senior Leadership Team (Bush

Heritage n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Similarly, the ACF's board features just one First Nations person out of ten board members (ACF n.d.-a). They are also governed by a Council of 19, of which none are First Nations (ACF n.d.-b). There is very little representation of First Nations people at the important structural levels where decisions are made within these organisations. This highlights that the good intentions of some individuals are not yet matched by changes within the organisation's structure.

WWF Australia also has a similar approach, with some positions for First Nations people, but little representation at the leadership level. They have two positions, 'Indigenous Engagement Manager' and 'Womens Rangers Environmental Network (WREN) Coordinator', which are filled by First Nations individuals (WWF Australia n.d.-d). There is no First Nations person on the leadership team (WWF Australia n.d.-c). The board of 11 people has one First Nations man (WWF Australia n.d.-a). There are some First Nations people represented in the 74-person group of governors (WWF Australia n.d.-b). Overall, very few First Nations individuals are represented in decision-making roles at WWF.

Comparatively, Country Needs People, an organisation that campaigns for greater funding to IPAs and Indigenous Ranger programs, has four First Nations people out of seven on its Board of Directors (Country Needs People n.d.). First Nations people are the majority on their Board, allocating significant power to First Nations people over the direction of Country Needs People. Claire said that her organisation "is trying to get Indigenous board members… and this is quite

common across the spectrum." There is thus some recognition in Australian conservation that First Nations people need to be represented within their organisations at a higher level to address the structural inequality of their representation in decision-making.

When reflecting more generally on Australian conservation's relationships with First Nations peoples, many interviewees did also express some doubt as to whether their intentions led to meaningful action. Tom believed conservation was changing for the better, but his words betrayed some hesitation as to what degree: "I *would* say things have gotten better." (emphasis added). Tom was not the only one who harboured some doubts about whether these intentions had made an according level of meaningful change in practice. Emily was hopeful, but doubt remained: "I'm sure that things are changing now, right?" An anonymous participant described their organisation's principle of conservation being led by First Nations peoples. When I asked whether they believed this made it into practice, the participant replied "that's the goal. In a wider sense, I'm not sure if that's facilitated." They suggested differing state laws over land management and cultural practices make the work "a bit complicated".

Deborah of the Australian Koala Foundation was also doubtful as to the real impacts of the good intentions of conservation today: "I think there is still a lot of lip service… I see good things starting to happen, but I don't think it's as genuine as I would like it to be." Darcie was also uncertain, but emphasised that the good intentions are there and that conservation organisations are trying: "I wonder if it makes it into practice sometimes, but I do think by and large, the

mentality is there." Claire similarly suggested that people in conservation have good intentions: they are "just trying to do their best". Darcie spoke of improving relationships with First Nations peoples as a work in progress: "I think everyone would agree that it's something that we want to prioritise more and more and always get better at." Some employees of conservation organisations believe that the intentions of themselves and their colleagues are changed from those of the past. However, they remain uncertain as to whether these intentions have improved relationships with First Nations peoples and resulted in better practice.

As for their external partnerships with First Nations land and sea management organisations, there is a wide spectrum of relationships that conservation organisations hold with First Nations peoples. I will detail two very different approaches.

The spectrum of Australian conservation: recognising sovereignty and The Nature Conservancy

Recognition of sovereignty

Sovereignty is a political and legal term. Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck and settler American scholar K. Wayne Yang (2012) wrote the article 'Decolonization is not a metaphor' to argue that in settler-colonies, the meaning of decolonisation was being distorted through metaphors as an easier route to true decolonisation, i.e. the return of land to Indigenous peoples. The use of the term decolonisation to describe better ways to run schools, for example, is described by Tuck and Yang

(2012, p. 3) as “settler appropriation” of decolonisation. Sovereignty is a legal and highly political concept, and should not be interpreted metaphorically. Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 4) argue that the focus on metaphorical versions of decolonisation reflects “settler fantasies of easier paths to reconciliation”. Decolonising conservation therefore must mean a genuine recognition of sovereignty, and ultimately the return of land to First Nations peoples.

In Australia, calls for treaties have been especially visible in recent years and are directly linked to discussions of sovereignty. Momentum for a national treaty or treaties has reached new heights following the commencement of treaty processes at state and territory levels, the publication of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for ‘Voice, Treaty, Truth’, and the announcement of the Australian government to implement it “in full” upon election in 2022 (*The Uluru Statement from the Heart* 2017; Albanese 2022; Davis & Williams 2021; Fredericks 2022; Williams & Hobbs 2020). A treaty is envisioned as the page upon which governments and First Nations peoples would negotiate the terms of continuing co-sovereignty (Rigney, Bell & Vivian 2021, p. 23). Persistent advocacy from First Nations people has pushed this into the national conversation.

In response, some conservation organisations officially recognise the sovereignty of First Nations peoples. The ACF has a page on their website titled ‘Recognition of First Nations rights’, where they state:

> "We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded, and that colonisation was unjust, often violent and continues to adversely impact on First Nations Peoples today.
>
> As Australia's national environment organisation, we understand we have a responsibility to help right this historical wrong.
>
> We support their authority to speak for Country, right to self-determination and recognise that rightful recognition of and genuine reconciliation with First Nations Peoples is fundamental to protecting nature in Australia."

Notably, this statement doesn't explicitly recognise the role of the environment movement in the violence and impacts of colonisation. However, they do note their "responsibility" going forward. This statement recognises the sovereignty of First Nations peoples, but is this statement a form of metaphorical decolonisation? Recognising the sovereignty of First Nations peoples is a powerful statement. Two months after our interview, Claire emailed me to say that the organisation she works for "amended its constitution to recognise Indigenous sovereignty." (personal communication, 4 May 2023) Although, she later corrected herself to say they recognised First Nations *rights*, rather than sovereignty. Conservation organisations may make statements about sovereignty without recognising the real magnitude of such a statement. Is this *metaphorical* sovereignty? If so, they may lose sight of the real purpose of decolonisation:

> "Land is sovereignty. Without Indigenous people holding their land there is no pathway to decolonization." (McDonnell & Regenvanu 2022, p. 235)

Decolonisation is not a metaphor: decolonisation means returning land to First Nations peoples.

The Nature Conservancy's legal transfer of ownership to Nari Nari people

One case where land was returned to First Nations peoples by a conservation organisation is the Gayini property. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) was part of a group with the Nari Nari Tribal Council and others who took over ownership of Gayini in 2018. A year later, TNC "facilitated the legal transfer of ownership of Gayini to the Nari Nari Tribal Council" (TNC Australia n.d.). This is recognition of sovereignty in the least metaphorical sense possible – it is literally decolonisation; the land was handed back to the Nari Nari people. It is unclear based on the website if there were conditions to this arrangement which might detract from total power over decision-making, and it is also unclear whether TNC gained money from this transfer[1]. However, legal ownership of the property rests with the Nari Nari people. They are using the property for conservation, as well as for some economic development initiatives. TNC describes this through the lens of funding conservation work:

> "Managing a property for conservation as vast as Gayini after many decades of agricultural use, is an expensive business. To fund this work

[1] The webpage states that the transfer to the Nari Nari Tribal Council was *funded* by the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation and the Wyss Campaign for Nature. Whether these funds went to TNC, or if they were to support future management of the property, is unclear.

> the Nari Nari owners are demonstrating exemplary food production in balance with nature, through responsible low-impact grazing and, when appropriate, opportunistic cropping.
>
> Responsible low-impact grazing is likely to be the primary driver of income to maintain the property while it transitions over time to a more balanced nature- and culture-based business model." (TNC Australia n.d.)

TNC says it will remain involved through "conducting Healthy Country Planning with the Hay and Balranald Aboriginal Communities", and it appears they will remain involved in future plans the Nari Nari Tribal Council has for Gayini, including carbon farming, establishing the 'Gayini Centre for Two-Way Learning' ("to share traditional ecological knowledge and western science, bridge Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures and generate income"), as well as ecotourism ventures (TNC Australia n.d.). Is this an ideal partnership for both parties: literal decolonisation, but the conservation organisation gets to stay involved with some initiatives led by First Nations people?

The spectrum of Australian conservation: economic displacement and Save The Dugong

Economic displacement

Australian conservation is, however, a wide spectrum. Some campaign against First Nations hunting rights, which is to advocate for the 'economic

displacement' of First Nations peoples. Economic dispossession describes when First Nations peoples are excluded from accessing resources on their land – even if the protected area permits them to continue living on the land (Brockington & Igoe 2006, p. 425). Called "soft evictions" by Dowie (2009, p. xxii) in a study of the global phenomenon of 'conservation refugees', Indigenous peoples may be allowed to remain on their land, but cannot use the land's resources. Cherokee leader Rebecca Adamson suggests that soft evictions are hardly 'soft':

> "you might as well have taken their land from them. It's as bad as outright eviction." (as quoted in Dowie 2009, p. xxii)

Whether economic or physical, dispossession of Indigenous peoples in some parts of Africa and Asia is maintained by the presence of armed rangers – labelled 'militarised conservation' (Kashwan et al. 2021; Menton & Le Billon 2021). The consequences of militarised conservation can be deadly to Indigenous peoples who fight their dispossession. In 1993 in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area in Tanzania, a person was shot and killed on suspicion of farming (Igoe 2004, p. 72). 'Green violence' used against Indigenous peoples to defend the boundaries of protected areas is legitimated by both the state and conservation organisations (Kashwan et al. 2021, p. 10). Cameroonian historian and political scientist Achille Mbembe (2003, p. 11) uses the term 'necropolitics' to assert that "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die." Militarised conservation and green violence are major areas of critique in global conservation today.

Australia is not an exception to the relationships between violence and protected areas, even today. In 2018, Yuin elder Kevin Mason was confronted by a police officer and representative of NSW Fisheries whilst abalone diving at Narooma (Brennan, Burns & Wellauer 2021). Although he was never charged for taking the abalone (as it is his right), he was charged two years after the fact for "resisting arrest and swearing" (Milton, Proust & Carberry 2022). This situation demonstrates the entanglements of the police and the state in the enforcement of conservation ideas. Considering the disproportionate contact between police and First Nations peoples and the alarming numbers of First Nations deaths in police custody (Yoorrook Justice Commission 2022, p. 67), police enforcing economic displacement of First Nations peoples bears some parallels to the experience of green violence and militarised conservation overseas.

Save The Dugong

Save the Dugong is an organisation which actively challenges First Nations peoples' rights to land management, aligning their campaign with economic displacement. This is a small, social media advocacy organisation which has been inactive online since 2019. Save The Dugong's website and social media accounts remain visible online, however, so I write about the organisation in the present tense. First Nations' hunting rights is consistently targeted as one of the major causes of dugong population decline. It is usually listed first, see for example:

> "Since thousands of dugongs are killed every year due to hunting, ship strikes, and pollution, their population is steadily and severely declining." (Dugong n.d.)

There is no recognition of the historical precedence of First Nations dugong hunting, and the relative newness and scale of other threats like pesticides and boat strikes. Where they list "Human causes of dugong deaths", there is a large, very detailed section devoted to hunting, whilst all other human causes have about a paragraph each. This obscures the reality of scale. Identified as a common conservation campaign tactic in the early 2000s, Langton (2003, p. 86) noted that First Nations hunting was often "targeted as being the principle threat to endangered species". Yet pesticides and boat strikes are new threats to dugong populations. People exposed to the campaigns are led to believe that a small group of subsistence hunters could wipe out an endangered species (Langton 2003, p. 81).

Save The Dugong also uses incredibly emotive language to paint a picture of inhumane hunting processes:

> "the dugong is dragged to shore **alive and butchered**, or killed by **hurling rocks at its head**";
>
> **"Hunters also routinely catch young dugong calves…** in order to attract **the mother, who will desperately chase the hunters' boat for hours**… Hunters then spear and/or catch the mother, and butcher both mother and calf, or release the calf to die of starvation alone in the

> ocean." (Dugong n.d., all bold in original text, second excerpt was red in original text)

The use of emotive language in these descriptions echoes the white moral superiority narrative that Kenyan conservationist Mordecai Ogada describes in Africa:

> "African wildlife is in danger, and the problem is that African people don't love the animals like white people do." (as quoted in Kashwan et al. 2021, p. 6).

Save The Dugong is an openly hostile conservation campaign against First Nations land management. It promotes economic displacement in the name of conservation. Although some in conservation are making progress towards improving their relationships with First Nations peoples through literal decolonisation, this is far from a uniform approach.

Conclusion

This chapter has evaluated the perception that Australian conservation is improving its relationships with First Nations peoples today. Many employees I interviewed expressed the belief that many organisations had better intentions with First Nations peoples, although they did also express doubts as to whether these intentions resulted in better practice. Although individual employees may have empathetic intentions towards First Nations peoples, structural changes like leadership roles for First Nations individuals within Australian conservation

organisations are not common. Externally, relationships between conservation organisations and First Nations peoples range from a recognition of sovereignty to promoting economic displacement. These examples demonstrate that there are a variety of approaches to conservation with First Nations peoples. In the next chapter I take a further look at how relationships with First Nations peoples are influenced by the nature and climate crises.

CHAPTER 4: Crises

Introduction

We live in a time of environmental crises: the nature crisis, biodiversity crisis, ecological crisis, extinction crisis, and the climate crisis. In this chapter, I will explore the personal experiences of anxiety that conservation employees feel about these crises. This will be contextualised within a framing of the crises as injustices. I end with a reflection on the possibility of conservation organisations engaging with First Nations peoples in extractive relationships.

Extinction as injustice

Multi-species justice is a new field of academic work which highlights the injustices of the crises we face. Multi-species justice reframes environmental disasters, such as the 2019-2020 bushfires in Australia, as "neither a natural disaster nor a tragedy, but *injustice*". (Celermajer et al. 2021, p. 119, emphasis added). By drawing on Indigenous and other philosophies, academics in this field seek to include the needs of "the-more-than-human" in ideas of justice, rejecting human exceptionalism (Celermajer et al. 2021, p. 129). Multi-species justice acknowledges that "the disrespect shown to Indigenous philosophies' understanding of the more-than-human world has been an intrinsic part of the colonial enterprise" (Celermajer et al. 2021, p. 129). This field of thought highlights the structural factors of environmental destruction, such as extinction, that are sometimes missing from scientific studies. For First Nations people,

extinctions are “offensive to the nature of human existence” (Langton 2003, p. 95). Kwaymullina (2005, p. 14) describes the gravity of the extinction crisis according to First Nations philosophies:

> “The destruction of a species creates not just an absence in the ecosystem, but a hole in the spirit where once another shape of life breathed, flew, danced, lived… Destroy enough of life outside ourselves, and life is destroyed inside us all.”

To First Nations people, extinctions are contrary to law.

The way we manage these extinctions is also incredibly unjust. Which endangered species gets our attention for their plight is inherently social and cultural (Heise 2016; Rose, Van Dooren & Chrulew 2017a). Animals that are cute and ‘cuddly’ get the most attention. Laura complained of the competition for animals that are not cute and cuddly: “nobody cares about insects and nobody cares about plants. And so all those species are just going extinct [because] we don’t care about them.” When I asked Deborah, the Chair of the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF), *why koalas*, she explained that this was more down to coincidence. She said she values “every animal”, but noted the ease of campaigning for the koala:

> “because it does not eat any one, doesn’t trample on your crops, doesn’t maraud through the villages, just sits in the tree, beautifully peaceful, and brings $3 billion and 30,000 jobs every year.”

Which species our society cares about is motivated by social and cultural factors, but also economic factors too.

The root causes of extinctions must be addressed if we are to prevent them in the first place. For much of the western world, this means rethinking the way our societies operate. A former scientific director of TNC wrote in a 2007 paper "that environmentalists should move away from the idea that they need to protect nature from human impact," and instead "should actively shape its human uses" (as quoted in Heise 2016, pp. 10-11). This calls for a new way of doing conservation, or even moving away from conservation and focusing instead on broader changes to our relationships to land. Laura similarly suggested it is important to move away from "business-as-usual conservation", because "just pulling a few weeds here and there" is not making a big enough change. Conservation in Australia must address the bigger picture if it is to stop extinctions.

Deborah similarly shares this appetite for big change in conservation, suggesting conservation needs a "new way of thinking, and new language". One such example put forth by the AKF is the 'Human Plan of Management'. This plan to manage humans flips the script: instead of focusing on management of koala populations, it relocates the responsibility to humans to live in better harmony with our surroundings. In our interview, Deborah said "we've got to change the *humans*". In a media release, she states: "I have seen so many Koala Plans of Management, but what we need is a Human Plan of Management – manage human development and we will have Koalas." This concept changes the

language and the ideas behind conservation. Instead of managing *koala* populations, managing *human* populations. Within the lens of a human-nature dichotomy, it may be more difficult for conservation organisations to shift to a similar approach. Annette referred to human population *growth* ("sheer numbers of people") as one cause of environmental degradation. However, this overlooks who is disproportionately responsible for environmental degradation and climate change – the richer countries that are sometimes experiencing population decline (Farber 2012, p. 994). Alternative approaches to conservation are needed to respond to these ever-growing crises.

Crisis and anxiety: for who?

In our interviews, employees of conservation organisations spoke consistently of *crises*. They understand conservation work is operating against a ticking time bomb of sorts – whether from climate change or from the nature crisis – on a global scale. If conservationists view nature as life, then threats to the existence of nature are threats to the very existence of life itself. This is also supported by climate change science (see for example: Steffen et al. 2018).

Employees of conservation organisations conceive of their work as seeking to resolve these crises. For example, Claire suggested that more protected areas are needed "to save ourselves from a mass extinction". Laura said of the climate crisis, "things are too critical", and "It's confronting. It's very, very real. Distresses me how, you know, we're just not doing anything. We're not doing enough." Deborah of the AKF said that she "can't even read" climate science

reports because “it would stymie my enthusiasm to go to work every day. Because it’s so scary, isn’t it?” People who work in conservation are anxious about the crises our world faces. There is evidently an emotional toll. Such feelings are common. In a book analysing the social and cultural aspects of extinction, it is stated that “many people find themselves overwhelmed with the depressing inevitability and crushing finality of extinction.” (Rose, van Dooren & Chrulew 2017b) Employees of conservation organisations do not just work in conservation for their pay. They feel these crises personally. Their passion conveys a sense of obligation to work in this field.

Underpinning their passion, and outrage, is a sense of urgency: time is running out. For example, Deborah criticised the slow pace at which research is published, saying “the koala and the plants don’t have that time anymore.” Laura suggested that one of the major problems leading to extinctions is that, due to budgetary constraints or political pressures, “we act too late”. Conservationists have a strong sense of urgency to their work. Many vented their frustrations at the lack of action in Australia, arguing the Australian government is not fulfilling its responsibilities. Laura suggested that the government’s focus on the climate crisis results in a lack of funding towards the nature crisis. This is especially worrying, she says, because “the climate debate is very human centric”, and what of the species facing extinction? Here she highlights one of the major problems of the human-nature dichotomy: climate change is perceived as an existential threat to humans, but the extinction crisis is more indirectly linked to humans, and therefore less urgent.

Australian conservationists are concerned because they view Australian nature and climate as being in crisis. But are these entirely new crises? Sarah Jaquette Ray has studied climate anxiety in great detail and recently labelled it a "white phenomenon" (Ray 2021). She suggests "crisis narratives… perpetuate the erasure of [the] legacies" of crises that began with colonisation: extinctions, radical changes to the environment, disruptions to land management regimes (Ray 2020, p. 140). Climate anxiety is a symptom of the status quo being threatened – which, for First Nations peoples, often happened centuries ago. Potawatomi scholar Kyle Powys Whyte (2016, p. 88) describes this succinctly:

> "Climate injustice is a recent episode of a cyclical history of colonialism inflicting anthropogenic (human-caused) environmental change on Indigenous peoples."

The crises we face now are not new: they are an extension of crises that began with colonisation. Whyte (2017, p. 207) suggests that while the Anthropocene (current geological period of human impact on the earth's systems) is increasingly being viewed as a "dystopian future", Indigenous peoples do not see the Anthropocene through the same lens. He argues that for many Indigenous peoples, they are already living through "what [their] ancestors would have likely characterised as a dystopian future" (Whyte 2017, p. 207). Whilst settlers consider the deep sadness of losing species of plants and animals today, Whyte (2017, p. 208) says Indigenous peoples have already been experiencing this since the beginnings of colonisation. Ecological imperialism changed landscapes and settlers forcibly removed First Nations peoples from their land, preventing them

from continuing their land management practices. Since the beginning of colonisation in Australia, more than 100 species have become extinct (Department of Climate Change Energy the Environment and Water 2022). Extinctions are linked to colonisation. In this context, we must consider *why* conservation organisations seek relationships with First Nations peoples.

Extractive relationships

First Nations peoples and their knowledges are now often sought out by conservation organisations as they increasingly recognise their value. A surge of interest in First Nations cultural burning practices followed the 'Black Summer' bushfires. But this interest stemmed from "how to manage the threat to other people's lives or livelihoods", seeking First Nations peoples' knowledges and practices to serve settler needs (Williamson, Provost & Price 2022, p. 15). It is important to ask "whose interests are being served" when conservation organisations seek to harness First Nations knowledges in their work (Dhillon 2018, p. 2). Do organisations' interests in partnerships with First Nations peoples come from a place of supporting decolonisation, or do they seek First Nations knowledges for what they can do for *them*?

The use of First Nations knowledge is often articulated as a positive step in the relationship between First Nations peoples and conservation organisations. As evidence that conservation organisations are seeking more positive relationships with First Nations peoples, Claire stated that "everyone wants to… learn from their knowledge. This was articulated as an example of positive relationships

with First Nations peoples. But First Nations authors Williamson, Provost and Price (2022, p. 18) argue that "the growing reference to Indigenous knowledges in climate change research" is "extractive" rather than inclusive. So, conservation organisations risk engaging in extractive relationships with First Nations peoples when their motivations are "more closely tied to the protection of settler-colonial futures" (Williamson, Provost & Price 2022, p. 18). That is, settler interests in First Nations knowledges may come from a place of self-protection, rather than to support First Nations peoples.

Another way in which conservation organisations risk extractive relationships with First Nations peoples is through uniting narratives in response to environmental crises. Common conservation narratives will use uniting terms like "one Earth", "one world", "the global village", "we are all in this together" (Igoe 2004, p. 1), and "protecting nature for all humanity" (Menton & Gilbert 2021, p. 231). Cori Hayden (2003, p. 7) uses the term "public-ization of nature" to describe nature being made into a public good in Mexico, at the expense of Indigenous people. Hayden's work found that scientists were increasingly circumventing their responsibilities to local Indigenous communities by collecting specimens on the roadside (2003, p. 178). The roadside lies in the public domain, so scientists could more easily acquire the rights to what would otherwise be classified as Indigenous biological materials and would require consultation, negotiation and royalties. When nature is categorised as public, it is discursively removed from Indigenous people and reallocated to all. Making nature into something belonging to the public, and using uniting narratives, enables settlers to take possession.

Regenerate Australia (WWF)

WWF's 'Regenerate Australia' campaign embodies these uniting narratives and the public-ization of nature. The following excerpt, filled with emotive, nationalist language, comes from the webpage for the campaign:

> "The bushfire tragedy of 2019-20 united us all as a nation. Together, we watched, horrified, as iconic landscapes burnt and wildlife, homes and lives were all destroyed. But out of the ashes, we began to roll up our sleeves and work together to restore what had been lost…
>
> [referring to emergency workers and vets] …Their courage, compassion and dedication highlighted the very nature of what it means to be Australian.
>
> …It's time to showcase our Australian nature. Time to call on our generations of knowledge, Time to work together to restore what we have lost.
>
> Because Australian nature needs our Australian nature." (WWF Australia n.d.-e)

The campaign uses nationalism and unifying language: "united us all", "Together, we watched", "what it means to be Australian", "our Australian nature". "Our Australian nature" makes nature the domain of the public, rather than belonging to First Nations peoples and their unique relationships with Country. The campaign itself is somewhat vague, including asking government

for greater protections, calling for more renewables, and 'rewilding Australia' (WWF Australia n.d.-e). Using the term 'rewilding' can be linked to terra nullius – empty land, or the 'public-ization' of nature – as it comes from an understanding of wilderness. A description of one phase of Regenerate Australia says "using science and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge". Alongside this text is a linked video with the longer excerpt above recorded. When the voiceover says "Time to call on our generations of knowledge", an Aboriginal man appears in the video (WWF Australia n.d.-e). WWF is literally calling on First Nations peoples to serve their purposes. Using the language of unity and inclusivity, WWF is calling on First Nations peoples to "serve settler needs" (Williamson, Provost & Price 2022, p. 15). It must be asked, what do First Nations people get out of this? First Nations peoples are often asked to "save the world for the rest of humanity", with so little in return (Weir 2021, p. 175).

If conservation institutions sought instead to heal the legacy of conservation in Australia, they could foster meaningful relationships and genuine partnerships with First Nations peoples. But using First Nations peoples' knowledges as a tool to advance Australian conservation risks engaging First Nations peoples in extractive relationships. Conservation organisations should be more deliberate in reconciling their relationships with First Nations peoples. The legacy must be dealt with if conservation organisations seek the aid of First Nations peoples and their knowledges to respond to these crises.

Conclusion

The crises we currently face weigh heavily on the minds and hearts of employees of conservation organisations. However, the origins of these crises lie with the continuing structures of settler-colonialism and the injustices it brings upon people and Country. In seeking the aid of First Nations peoples and their knowledges to response to these crises, conservation organisations risk engaging in extractive relationships when their motivations lie with protecting their own futures, rather than addressing injustices.

Conclusion

Australian conservation is no longer dominated by a wilderness approach, but this has not directly translated into positive relationships with First Nations peoples today. Australian conservation must grapple with its past. Some organisations and individuals have begun to do so, and some more than others. With the proliferation of non-government conservation organisations in recent decades, Australian conservation today is far from a homogeneous sector. This thesis has explored how ideas of wilderness have been rejected by some organisations, but upheld by others. Australian conservation is still informed largely by a human-nature dichotomy, but this is complicated by the influence of First Nations peoples over the ideas informing conservation.

Across Australia, IPAs demonstrate the possibility of merging protected areas, historically used to separate people from nature, with First Nations philosophies of Country. In external relationships with First Nations land and sea management organisations, some conservation organisations are demonstrating a deep understanding that decolonising conservation ultimately should mean handing land back to First Nations management and ownership. However, Australian conservation has a broad spectrum of approaches to relationships with First Nations peoples. Other organisations continue to seek to dispossess First Nations peoples from their lands.

This thesis has conducted interviews with employees of conservation organisations and analysed their websites, to understand how their ideas inform the practice of conservation, including their partnerships and relationships with

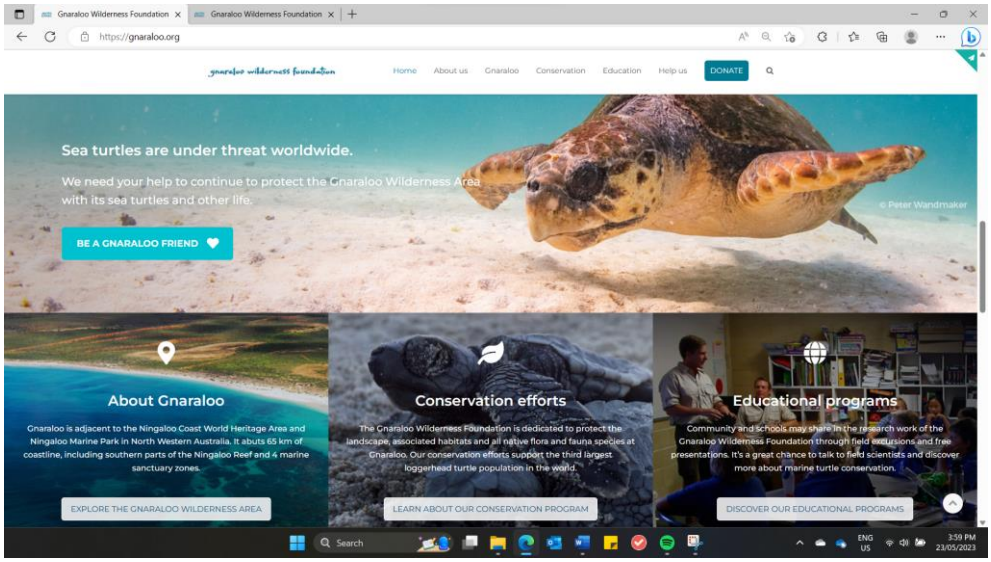
First Nations peoples. Findings suggest that there are some individuals with good intentions and genuine empathy towards First Nations peoples and their roles in conservation. However, this does not necessarily translate to structural changes within Australian conservation organisations. Power and decision-making within these organisations are still largely held by settler Australians.

Faced with the nature and climate crises, conservation organisations are increasingly looking to First Nations peoples for their knowledges to assist in tackling these crises. However, conservation organisations may engage with First Nations partners in an extractive manner if motivated by protecting their own futures. In seeking to harness First Nations knowledges without tackling the structural causes of the crises we face today, conservation organisations risk adding to conservation's colonising legacy.

First Nations advocacy has led to a transformation in the Australian conservation sector in recent decades. More work is required from conservation organisations to address structural barriers within their organisations. Increasing First Nations representation at the leadership levels of conservation organisations may in turn result in better conduct of external relationships with First Nations land and sea management organisations. Increasing First Nations power within Australian conservation will benefit the entire sector, and all of Country across Australia. Returning Australia to First Nations land management and ownership is, after all, the proven best way to manage the crises we face.

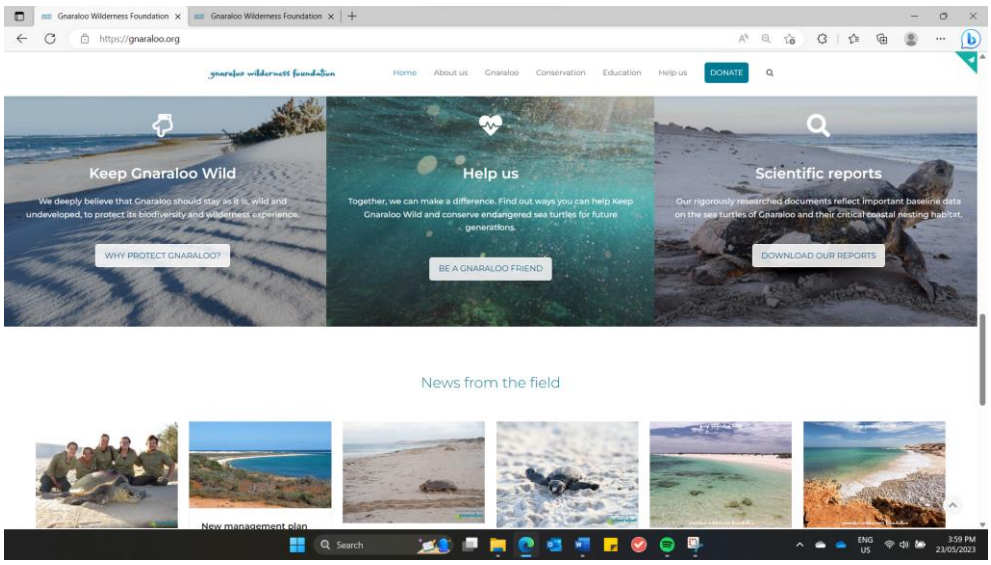
Appendices

Image 1



(GWF n.d.-b)

Image 2



(GWF n.d.-b)

Image 3

(GWF n.d.-a)

Interview questions

Please describe what work your organisation does.

How would you describe conservation and why do you think it is important?

How does your organisation do land management?

Tell me about one of your projects that you think embodies good land management, and why.

Tell me about the places you work on.

How do you build relationships with conservation partners?

How do you think conservation is best carried out?

Do you think land, water, animals are important? Why? Who are they important to?

What are some areas of improvement in Australian conservation generally?

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