



The Fitzroy River, photo Michael Douglas.



Northern Australia
Environmental
Resources
Hub

National Environmental Science Programme

Indigenous water needs for the Fitzroy River

Start-up factsheet

The challenge

Aboriginal people have a long-standing and strong connection to the Fitzroy River. The river forms an integral part of their way of life and is the foundation of various social activities such as family interactions, ceremonies, and hunting and gathering. Native Title has been

recognised over many parts of the Fitzroy River catchment and this guarantees protection of rights to hunt, fish, and gather other foods and resources.

With increased interest in the expansion of irrigated agriculture in the catchment, these important values could be put at risk. Understanding how they could be impacted by increased development and incorporating new information into water planning rules will reduce that risk.

How will this research help?

This research aims to improve knowledge of Indigenous water requirements within the Fitzroy River catchment and to inform plans for future water use. It will identify customary uses of water and waterways, reveal links between Indigenous values, practices and water regimes, and elicit knowledge, as well as objectives for the future management of land and water resources. Emphasis will also be placed on advancing the field of Indigenous water planning by trialling social assessment methods and showing the value of community participation in environmental flow assessments. It is hoped that the information generated from this project will be of use to Indigenous ranger groups, Native Title organisations and the Kimberley Land Council, and to state and federal government natural resource management agencies.



This project will be focused on the Fitzroy River catchment in Western Australia. Most activity will be concentrated around Fitzroy Crossing and the lower Fitzroy catchment.

How will the research be carried out?

The project has four main steps:

- Facilitate Indigenous participation.
- Draw on current information about environmental water requirements and develop initial conceptual models that will link the social and ecological needs and goals of Indigenous people with the potential impacts of water resource development.
- Target new research with communities to determine water requirements of environmental assets and cultural features valued by Indigenous people (such as fish, pools in the river and riverside vegetation).
- Revise conceptual models with new information and make recommendations on ways of meeting and monitoring Indigenous water requirements in water plans and other natural resource management plans and programs.



Fitzroy River, photo Michael Douglas.



Bush tucker, photo Glenn Campbell.



Traditional resources, photo Glenn Campbell.

Who is involved?

This project is being led by [Professor Sue Jackson](#) from [Griffith University](#).

Professor Jackson will be assisted by additional researchers from Griffith University and [The University of Western Australia](#).

Bunuba Dawangarri Aboriginal Corporation, Gooniyandi Aboriginal Corporation, Jaru Claimant Group, Kija Claimant Group, Tiya-Tiya Aboriginal Corporation, Walalakoo Aboriginal Corporation, Warrwa Claimant Group, Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation and Yanunijarra Aboriginal Corporation/ Yi-Martuwarra are collaborators in this research.

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For further information and project updates, visit the project webpage at www.nespnorthern.edu.au/projects/nesp/indigenous-water-needs



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